

The Spiritual Director for the Married and Family Life in the Light of *Amoris Laetitia* 313-324

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ABSTRACT

Among the many areas that the married and family life is not receiving adequate attention is spiritual direction due to either ignorance of its need or lack of specialised personnel to serve as their spiritual directors. Sometimes many married people and families refer to the whole act of counseling they receive in their troubled moments as spiritual direction and the one who counsels them as their spiritual director. However, a careful consideration shows that while counseling at troubled moments with some spiritual supports may be spiritual care, it is different from spiritual direction. Counseling is about life problem solving but spiritual direction is about guiding a soul in the spiritual life towards attaining perfect union with God. Pope Francis in his Post Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* talks about the spirituality of the married and the family life. In this light, this article studies who is a spiritual director for the married and the family life? What form of training such a person should receive to qualify him/her as their spiritual director? What role he/she should be playing in their lives in the light of their spiritual life as the married and as a family. The paper states clearly that the phrase “spiritual director” in general and in particular for the married and family life should be used for one who guides them in their spiritual growth to union with God. The role of such person is not that of a counselor even if in the course of his/her ministry may need to offer counsel. He is one who knows the condition and state of the married and the family life with regards to their spiritual journey towards perfect union with God.

KEYWORDS: spiritual director, the married, family, spiritual life, spiritual journey

1. INTRODUCTION

The awareness of the spirituality of Christian marriage and family life is growing fast since the second Vatican Council especially through her teachings on the Universal call to Holiness and on the Laity. John Paul II increased the level of this awareness especially through his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. The most recent teaching of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia*, is so clear on the spirituality of Christian marriage and Family life that it calls greatly to study the type and role of spiritual director that fits the married and the family life. This is very important more so as spiritual direction and spiritual directors are still very much focused on the priests and the religious especially in

most countries of Africa. Though in the history of the Church, the lay faithful have been receiving spiritual direction, the particular and specific attention as needed by the married and the family life is yet to be fully given as deserved. What is largely done that respects the state of the married and the families are pastoral counseling in their troubled moment, given the impression that their state or life is not so much a path to spiritual growth. Consequently, many married people and families lack the support of a proper spiritual director needed in their spiritual growth as it suits their states. This may have explained the rate at which people seek divorce without much reference to its implication on their spiritual journey. With the

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teaching of Pope Francis on the spirituality of the married and family life, this study is done first by discussing the spirituality of the married and the family life especially in the light of *Amoris Laetitia* 313-324. Then, a brief study on the nature of spiritual direction and spiritual director in general, the unique nature of spiritual direction and spiritual director for the married and family life would be done. Finally, the definition of the role of the spiritual director for the married and the family life would be done before conclusion.

2. Clarification of some terms

Among the terms that need to be clarified is spiritual life. This is also known as spirituality. There are lots of definitions of spirituality. One of these to which this study prefers is definition from its Latin root *Spiritualitas*. It refers to a life related to the spirit and directed entirely by the spirit. Within the context of this study, spirituality refers to a Christo-centric life in which the spirit of God-incarnate directs and determines everything including values, vision and motivations and the ends to which one seeks. The Christo-centric spiritual life begins with conversion, then baptism, and grows through ascetical practices and mystical experience to perfect union with God as its final end that is attained fully in heaven. The spiritual journey refers to this growth in spiritual life which normally is a process of transformation.

Then, spiritual director refers to the helper who assists the individual in this spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit is the principal spiritual director providing both the light and the assistance to an individual. But this assistance of the Holy Spirit is given and recognized with the aid of a fellow human being who is physically present to the individual, to help in facilitating the relationship between him/her and the Holy Spirit. Within the context of this study, "Spiritual director" refers to this spiritual facilitator.

The married is a term gotten from the noun "marriage" to refer to the people who enter into a marriage union. Within the context of Christian faith, this marriage is normally monogamous and a sacrament, though in this study, it may include the non-sacramental marriage union as well. Family goes beyond the two people in marriage union to include children of the union either through biological process or by adoption. Sociologically, family is normally made up of husband, wife and children even though in some cases there may be no children in case of infertility of either of the married or due to some other factors. Both the two people in marriage union and the entire make-up of a family are the focus and the factors for the definition of the spiritual director in this study.

3. Spirituality of the married and family life in Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* 313-324

The Church has a lot of teachings on marriage and family life especially since the Second Vatican Council. The spirituality of marriage and family life echoes within the context of lay spirituality by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. They taught that the spirituality of the Lay people is to be lived within the circumstance of their state in life which includes the state of married and family life. Married and family cares are integrated in the spirituality of the lay faithful.¹ Lay faithful have been established by Christ as witness to His gospel in their state of life. They are to allow the light and power of the Gospel to shine in their marriage, family and social life. It is by that they show themselves as the children of the promise who wait in hope and patience for the future glory.² John Paul II in giving much attention to marriage and family life taught much through his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. He concentrated much attention on the vocation and mission of marriage and family in the modern world.³ His teaching on its spirituality was largely within the context of its sanctification⁴, and the pastoral cares⁵ that enable it to fulfill its vocation and mission. But profound teaching on its spirituality in relation to Christian spiritual journey to perfection is through Pope Francis in his Post-Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. Marriage and Family life are presented as path for spiritual growth and they are neither distractions nor what do not have anything to offer within the context of spiritual journey to perfect union with God.⁶ This fact should inform those seeking marriage partners on the choice of partner to make. It is only when this is ascertained that they may proceed for marriage as James J. Bacik puts it in his letter advising an intending couple thus:

¹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November, 1965), 4.

²² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (21 November, 1964), 35.

³John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio* (London: Incorporated Catholic Trust Society, 1981), 2.

⁴John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio*, 56-64.

⁵John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio*, 65-85.

⁶Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia* (Ibadan: St. Paul Publications, 2016), 316.

Art and Peg....My Advice is based on what I have learned from observing successful marriages and from counseling troubled spouses. A good starting point is the conviction you both share that you will be better together than you could ever be alone. You clearly believe that you will be more mature, more fulfilled and more effective persons walking the path of a life together, than if you journeyed alone. It seems obvious to you that marriage will enable you to grow closer to God, to become more Christ-like and to be more responsive to the Spirit within. Falling in love has rooted these convictions deep in your hearts. As lovers, you see potential and discern possibilities that are otherwise hidden. Your wondrous feelings of communion, liberation and integration, which you describe with such delight, have understandably convinced you will have a happy and fulfilling life together.”⁷

Apart from discussions on Spirituality of marriage and family life in various chapters of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, especially in Chapters 3 and 4, a Chapter was dedicated to it in which Pope Francis gave the various spiritualities of marriage and family life based on the nature of their state. These spiritualities serve dual purposes. They take cognizance of their spiritual life here on earth in a manner that they live in the consciousness of God who is ever present in their lives, sustaining and guiding them to be what they ought to be, fulfilling their vocation as family of God on earth in the midst of challenges that confront them. They equally take cognizance of their journey to eternal perfect union with God in heaven. Integrating these various spiritualities would enable an adequate definition of the spirituality of marriage and family life. These various spiritualities as taught by Pope Francis are titled as “A Spirituality of supernatural communion” (AL 314-316); “Gathered in prayer in the light of Easter” (AL 317-318); “Spirituality of Exclusive and Free love” (AL 319-320); “A Spirituality of care, consolation and incentive” (AL 321-324). A spirituality of supernatural communion is living in awareness of the presence of the Blessed Trinity in the marital and family communion. The Triune God dwells in their love and felt in a concrete family in “all their daily struggles and troubles, joys and hopes”. God dwells in all their encounters and it is He who is the source and strength for their communion and the deepening of it. God’s presence did not start only after their marriage was contracted, He has been

⁷ James J. Bacik, *Catholic Spirituality, Its History and Challenge* (New York: Paulist press, 2002), 140.

present with them before they came together and He is the one responsible for their coming together as Francis de Sales in his counsel to married persons said: “It was God who brought Eve to our first father, Adam, and gave her to him for his wife: it is also God, my friends, who with His invisible hand has tied the knot of the sacred bond of your marriage, and who has given you one to the other.”⁸ In this awareness, God enables them to handle the challenges and troubles of their daily lives. It is not in all families His presence is felt but in one that their lives is inspired by love. This spirituality enables the daily sanctification of the family and as well spiritual mystical growth to deeper union with God. Pope Francis teaching about this spirituality said: “A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God. The fraternal and communal demands of family life are an incentive to growth in openness of heart and thus to an ever fuller encounter with the Lord.”⁹ It means the union in the marriage and family life is meant by God (who is present) as divine instrument for their sanctification, and for their encounter with the Lord. It is meant to lead them to fuller encounter and union with the Lord. It is within this context that Francis taught that marriage and family is a spiritual path, a path to loving God and neighbor in a concrete way. Through this, “Spirituality becomes incarnate in the communion of the family. Hence, those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union.”¹⁰ This unique spiritual teaching of Pope Francis offers a spiritual vision of marriage and family that in line with the teachings of Francis de Sales and the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council on the Universal Call to Holiness, members of the married and family life are to view it positively and settle for their unique spiritual path to perfect union with God. Pope Francis’ second teaching on their spirituality which is “Gathered in prayer in the light of Easter” is about the Christo-centric nature of the spirituality of married and spiritual life. Their life is of Christ in whom all about their lives and ways of dealing with daily situation, and challenges are to be defined. So centred, they find the light of Christ and guidance to

⁸ St. Francis De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life: A Masterpiece of Mystical and Devotional Literature* (Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2013), 236.

⁹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 316.

¹⁰ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 316.

live Christian married and family life, and as well to handle their challenges in response to and in line with their Christian spiritual journey to holiness. Pope Francis teaches that:

If a family is centered on Christ; he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord's cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them. In the darkest hours of a family's life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a breakup. Gradually, 'with the grace of the Holy Spirit, [the spouses] grow in holiness through married life, also by sharing in the mystery of Christ's cross, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love'.¹¹

In this spirituality, Jesus is the definition of the life of the married and the family, conforming them to Himself and as such enabling them in holiness and perfect union with God. Then, a spirituality of Exclusive and free love defines the unique nature and pattern of their spiritual life. By virtue of their union which is a covenantal relationship between two people, their love is exclusive to the two of them in the marital union. It is not a forced love but free from the heart. This love together with special consecration according to Charles Chukwunedum Anene is the gift of the Holy Spirit given through the sacrament of matrimony. The Holy Spirit which enables them to live chastity as required in marriage life.¹² Francis teaches that: "Marriage is also the experience of belonging completely to another person. Spouses accept the challenge and aspiration of supporting one another, growing old together, and in this way reflecting God's own faithfulness."¹³ It is a spiritual devotion to each other in love for the support of each other. However this devotion to each other is meant to mature to a point of realizing that only God can fill their true needs. Pope Francis said:

No one but God can presume to take over the deepest and most personal core of the loved one; he alone can be the ultimate centre of their life. At the same time, the principle of spiritual realism requires that one spouse not presume that the other can completely satisfy his or her needs. The spiritual journey of each- as Dietrich Bonhoeffer nicely put it-needs to help them to a

certain 'disillusionment' with regard to the other, to stop expecting from that person something which is proper to the love of God alone. This demands an interior divestment. The space which each of the spouses makes exclusively for their personal relationship with God not only helps heal the hurts of life in common, but also enables the spouses to find in the love of God the deepest source of meaning in their own lives.¹⁴

By this spirituality, one's spouse has an exclusive right to his/her love and it is as such divine for the good of each other. However, the end of this love is realization of God, who alone can fill the space of one's need for love. Closely related to this spirituality is "A spirituality of care, consolation and incentive". This takes relationship beyond the spouses to include the children or all the members that forms the family. They are expected to be a reflection of the love found in the Blessed Trinity where each is for the other, present, supportive and caring for the other. Pope Francis teaches that 'Christian couples are, for each other, for their children and for their relatives, cooperators of grace and witness of the faith'. God calls them to bestow life and to care for life, for this reason the family 'has always been the nearest 'hospital'. So let us care for one another, guide and encourage one another, and experience this as a part of our family at spirituality."¹⁵ By this spirituality, the family should be a home to find needed support and care all times. It should be a place to find God acting through members to meet their needs. Members by this spirituality make themselves divine agent for the other as the Pope Francis teaches: "For this reason 'to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone.'"¹⁶ This is not hoped to end with just the family members alone. It is hoped that it grows beyond the family to caring for the poor. This brings out the social dimension of family spirituality in which their love reaches out to the members of the larger human society. The Pope teaches that:

When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is 'a symbol, witness and participant in the Church's motherhood'. Social love, as a

¹¹Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 317.

¹²Charles C. Anene, *Spiritual Theology Based on Liturgical Spirituality* (Owerri: Edu-Edy Publications, 2013), 49.

¹³Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 319.

¹⁴Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 320.

¹⁵Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 321.

¹⁶Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 321.

reflection of the Trinity, is what truly unifies the spiritual meaning of the family and its mission to others, for it makes present the kerygma in all its communal imperatives. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world.¹⁷

The spirituality of the married and of the family life is meant for the building of the Kingdom of God here on earth leading to its full realization in the next world. Those in the marriage vocation are called to participate in this task. They are to do this by assisting each other to grow in it, and as well jointly contribute to its growth among members of their families and in the world as a whole.

Based on these teachings, the spirituality of marriage and family life can be defined as a christo-centric spirituality that is rooted in the loving communion of the Blessed Trinity, fostering the union of members of marriage and family life for mutual care and support of each other to live true to their earthly life and vocation as well as to aid them to accomplish their spiritual journey of perfect union with God in eternity. Marriage and family Spirituality though exclusive of anyone outside the union is inclusive of all members of the union in such a way that it is not a solitary life. All the members share in each other's life such that dealing with one is dealing with all. This does not compromise the uniqueness and the individuality of each member but it is an individuality that is of the marriage and family and not vice-versa. What this implies is that each grows with the support of the others both temporally and spiritually. By the very fact that spirituality of marriage and family life opens members to relationship with each other, and also being a lay faithful spirituality whose mission is in the secular world,¹⁸ it has a social dimension as taught by Francis¹⁹ and social effect as John Paul II teaches:

The very experience of communion and sharing that should characterize the family's daily life represents its first and fundamental contribution to society. The relationships between the members of the family community are inspired and guided by the law of 'free giving'. By respecting and fostering personal dignity in each and every one as the only basis for value, this

free giving takes the form of heartfelt acceptance, encounter and dialogue, disinterested availability, generous service and deep solidarity

Thus the fostering of authentic and mature communion between persons within the family is the first and irreplaceable school of social life, an example and stimulus for the broader community relationship marked by respect, justice, dialogue and love.²⁰

When embraced, the spiritual life of marriage and family life enables the building of an earthly human family, human community into the Kingdom of God.²¹

4. Spiritual direction and spiritual director in general

There are lots of definition of spiritual direction and spiritual directors by spiritual writers like F Antonisamy²², William Barry and William Connolly²³, and Grey Helyin.²⁴ What runs through these definitions and also tells their authenticity is that spiritual direction is a guide towards deepening relationship with God. While the Holy Spirit is the principal guide, a fellow human being who helps one to be attentive to this guidance and encourages one to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit is the spiritual director. For this study, the definition of spiritual direction and spiritual director as given by Chester P. Michael is found more useful. He said:

Spiritual direction is usually a one-to-one relationship with another individual for the purpose of obtaining spiritual guidance. By obtaining the help of an interested and wise human being, we are assisted on our journey of faith toward the kingdom of God. A spiritual director or soul friend will encourage, guide, advise, confront, and challenge us on the path toward holiness. The goal of spiritual direction is to help us fulfill our God-given destiny on Earth, to carry out the purpose of our existence, to fulfill all the duties of our state in life, to save

¹⁷Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 324.

¹⁸Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

¹⁹Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family *Amoris Laetitia*, 316.

²⁰John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio*, 53.

²¹John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio*, 49-54.

²²F. Antonisamy, *An Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2003), 171.

²³William A. Barry & William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 0-86683-951-8), 8.

²⁴Greg Heylin, *Work and Spirituality: finding the balance* (Dublin: Veritas publication, 2007), 70.

our souls after death in heaven, and to become saints.²⁵

This definition is found most useful especially for those in the state of marriage and family life that have their place of fulfilling the Christian mission more in the human society. They are called to be holy in their daily life and tasks. Their spiritual director needs to know this fact of the nature of their vocation and spiritual journey. At this juncture therefore, it is good to discuss the nature of their spiritual direction and spiritual director.

5. Spiritual director and spiritual direction for the marriage and family life

The pursuit of Christian holiness and spirituality were largely seen in the past as the primary concern of the priests and religious. However, many lay faithful have striven in Christian holiness making use of the means provided by the Church such as spiritual direction. Despite the teachings of St. Francis de Sales with special interest on the spirituality of the lay faithful, laity including the married and the family, it is the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council that gave considerable teaching on their spirituality especially through their teaching on the laity²⁶ and the Universal call to holiness. In the universal call to holiness for instance, the Fathers brought out the unique nature of the spirituality of married and family life as a spirituality of mutual support in grace, all through life with faithful love between the two partners in marriage and of care and training of their children lovingly received from God in the Christian doctrine and evangelical virtues.²⁷ Subsequent popes taught on marriage and family life but their teachings were largely limited to their pastoral care and when their spiritual life and care are discussed little or nothing is discussed about their specific spiritual direction.²⁸ Spiritual direction was still largely limited to priests and religious and aspirants to these states of life. When the married and families seek for spiritual direction, the nature of their state is often not given significant cognizance. It has really not been well understood that their state of life is a path to perfect union with God along which they should be properly

guided. With Pope Francis' teaching therefore that brought out this fact clearly, it has opened the door to develop their specific spiritual direction and a clear understanding of their suitable spiritual director based on the nature of marriage and family life and the unique nature of their spiritual path to perfect union with God.

Spiritual direction for the married and family is one for the lay faithful who neither share in the sacrament of holy order nor share in evangelical counsel. It is for people of the domestic Church. Their spiritual life concerns their relationship with each other in the family and with God who is present in their union as the guide, protector and the source of life of the union, constantly leading them to perfect union with Himself. The spiritual direction deals with the joint and the individual spiritual journeys of the members of marriage and family as the need arises. It deals with the mutual life of members as well. Spiritual issues that may arise often may be very much from their relationship with each other and how to be of help spiritually to each other. Their spirituality is the type that calls for joint mission of building the kingdom of God both within the family and in the world through the peculiar nature of their life and vocation. It is among them that Christian spiritual life is meant to be celebrated loud and clear in their encounter with each other in the family and with others in the world.

Since they engage more in the temporal affairs, spiritual direction for them deals very much with how to remain faithful to their spiritual journey within the challenges often posed to their faith and spirituality by the world order that does not respect and sometimes even contradict their faith and spirituality. Consequently, spiritual direction for them, is the type that embraces issues which sometimes may be more pastoral and even secular in design.

Within these contexts, their spiritual director is to be well formed in the nature of the married and family life. In this case, he/she becomes knowledgeable in especially, developmental psychology and emotional issues, economic and social issues, the domestic issues and challenges of marriage and family life in the world. The knowledge include both of the individual members and the joint life of members in marriage and family life. He is also knowledgeable about the secular order within which they dwell with its challenges. Finally, he/she needs to know much about the Christian spirituality according to Francis de Sales which fits them as the married and family in

²⁵Chester P. Michael, *An Introduction to Spiritual Direction: A Psychological Approach for Directors and Directees* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004), 7.

²⁶Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

²⁷Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 41.

²⁸John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World *Familiaris Consortio*, 49-86.

the secular order that would not constitute a problem of conscience for them.²⁹

Dealing with the married and family life, He needs to acquire the skills of dealing with the married and the family. He/she is not dealing with one person but more than one in which each, though belonging to marriage and family life, needs to have the feeling of being recognized in his/her person and needs to be carried along as their marriage and family life is recognized.

He/she needs to have the skill and ability to journey with them spiritually in their individual spiritual experiences as well as in their joint spiritual experiences as married or as a family. In this case the spiritual director's power of presence to each and all is very important. While the members of the married life are the husbands and the wives, the membership of the family life includes the children who must be given adequate recognition. This, the spiritual director must not lose sight of. They deserve equal attention in their spiritual journeys too as given to the husband/father and mother/wife.

Added to this, is that he/she needs emotional maturity especially as most issues even spiritual that often emerge in marriages and families, are emotionally related. This maturity is very important so as not to fall into temptation of seeking to supply for the marriage and family life what he/she should not do. Added to this is the ability to remain detached and not won over to any side of the union in the process of directing them spiritually.

Also, the ability to maintain and manage confidentiality is very important. This will determine the level of trust he/she will enjoy from both individual members and the family. He/she should not take things for granted but seek to know from every member what he/she wants to be revealed and what should not and when appropriate to do so.

He/she should be for all, owned by everyone yet not belonging exclusively to anyone. He/she needs the skill and maturity on how to maintain these relationships without giving a serious hurt that may frustrate his/her spiritual direction.

Finally is the question of who can be spiritual director for the task of marriage and family life. Spiritual direction in the first place is not a sacrament like Sacrament of penance. This therefore removes the barrier of ordination and gender to qualify for it. Like any other form of spiritual direction, anyone can be spiritual director for the marriage and family life as

long as one meets the necessary requirements for competence to carry out the ministry.

7. The Role of Spiritual director for the married and family life

Among the roles of spiritual director in the married and family life is enabling them to grow and live in the awareness of the Blessed Trinity in their lives. He/she is to help them to know that this God has been present with them individually before they knew each other whether they were aware of Him or not and He has been involved in their coming together. He is the one that brought one to the other and the other to one according to Francis De Sales.³⁰ He is to help the members to grow in the awareness of God's presence in their lives even before they knew each other, guiding them towards perfect union with Himself. This means the goal of their lives is not their marriage but eternal perfect union with God. The Spiritual director is to help them to know that marriage is only a means to attaining union with God that they have found suitable as their way and vocation to pursue this union with God.

The task of a spiritual director does not begin only after a marriage is contracted. It begins before it, during the processes of discernment of one's vocation especially vocation to marriage and family life and the choice of the suitable partner. This means therefore that spiritual directors for marriage and family life, need to be involved in the whole process of guidance towards discerning the suitable marriage partner to living the vocation of marriage and family life. Cosmas Aluede Ojemen, speaking from a canonical perspective on preparation for marriage, spoke about the need to engage experts in various areas of marital life during the pre-marriage counseling.³¹ Spiritual directors who specialize in marriage and family spirituality would need to be engaged too at pre-marital stage. It is his task to educate the young ones that are contemplating marriage, to know that marriage is a path of spiritual journey and their choice of it and partner should be informed by this fact such that they only accept marriage and a partner when they are convinced that such is really their spiritual path to perfect union with God. In this direction, the spiritual director should be versed in the knowledge of the people and situation of pre-marital age.

³⁰ St. Francis De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life: A Masterpiece of Mystical and Devotional Literature*, 236.

³¹ Cosmas Aluede Ojemen, *Marriage Consent in Canon Law: The Constitutive Psychological Factors* (Benin City: Floreat System Publications, 2016), 269.

²⁹ St. Francis De Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life: A Masterpiece of Mystical and Devotional Literature*, 40-41.

It is the task of the spiritual director to enable people in marriage and family life to know the Christocentric nature of their lives and live as such for their holiness and growth to attainment of their eternal goal of perfect union with God. This is important especially in moments they encounter challenges of life in which they easily give in to other options that contradicts Christ's path. Then for both intending marriage couples the married couples, it is for him to constantly draw their attention to the implication of living marriage and family life as path to God's Kingdom and on how to make use of all the Church's spiritual provisions such as the sacraments, the Eucharistic celebration to support themselves on this path and also how to carry their crosses daily, in union with Jesus Christ.

It is the role of the spiritual director to guide the married and family on how to respond to the call to live the Christian love based on the nature of their vocation. They have been called to love God through their partners in marriage and their children as parents. From them would be asked by God how much they have loved Him through each other in the different situations of their lives.

8. Conclusion

The involvement of spiritual directors in marriage and family life has become paramount in our contemporary world that is fast losing touch with God and failing to involve Him in all their lives. This loss of touch is shown on how marriage is contracted, and decisions are taken about the living of the marriage and family life with poor or no reference to God at all. Divorce cases are on the rise today for every challenge that in the light of spiritual journey could be appreciated and managed for their eternal good. Many families are broken because of poor appreciation of spirituality of marriage and family life which a spiritual director can help them to appreciate. Pope Francis' teaching in *Amoris Laetitia* is calling for development of interest in the ministry of spiritual direction for marriage and family life to salvage the state of this noble vocation that is highly in distress today.

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