

# Pastoral assessment of and response to divorced Catholic families in Vietnam today

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**BOSTON COLLEGE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY**

**PASTORAL ASSESSMENT OF AND RESPONSE TO  
DIVORCED CATHOLIC FAMILIES IN VIETNAM TODAY**

**A Thesis of S.T.L. Degree**

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## PASTORAL ASSESSMENT OF AND RESPONSE TO DIVORCED CATHOLIC FAMILIES IN VIETNAM TODAY

### INTRODUCTION

Family life in Vietnam has faced numerous crises in recent decades. The most significant crisis is an increasing rate of divorces.<sup>1</sup> In fact, divorce among married Catholics is increasingly common.<sup>2</sup> For many people, divorce may free them from unhappy marriages.<sup>3</sup> However, the Church believes that divorce causes deep and long lasting suffering to families and society.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is necessary to promote pastoral care for divorced Catholic families in Vietnam today. This is my principal reason for writing this thesis as a partial requirement of my S.T.L. degree. Besides, I write on this issue for the following reasons:

First, the society and the church in Vietnam are too overloaded with other social problems to care for divorced families nowadays. According to Mr. Ngoc D. Le, head of Family Care Service, under the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism of Vietnam, the State has not yet promoted appropriate education of skills for family life.<sup>5</sup> With regard to the Church, pastoral care for the family remains present in preparing for marriages and celebrating marriage rites. However, there are no programs to minister to those in early married life or those in crises, let

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<sup>1</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter," 2008, <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org> (accessed Oct 20, 2014, at 14:00).

<sup>2</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter," 2013, <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org> (accessed Oct 20, 2014, at 14:00).

<sup>3</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, Committee of Family Ministry, "Những Thách Thức Cho Mục Vụ Gia Đình Ngày Nay," (Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today), 2014, <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org> (accessed September 14, 2015, at 14:00)

<sup>4</sup>"Relatio Synodi" of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014), n. 45.  
John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), n. 42, 49.

<sup>5</sup>"Thực Trạng Nguyên Nhân Giải Pháp Của Hiện Tượng Ly Hôn Trong Các Gia Đình Việt Nam Hiện Nay" (Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions), 2011, <http://www.lyhontai vietnam.org>, (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00)

alone divorced couples. Therefore, many divorced Catholic spouses have suffered terribly from physical, emotional and spiritual challenges. They are “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Hence, as the mystical body of Jesus, the Church should have practical compassion for them. Given this, pastoral care of divorced Catholic couples should become an urgent need.

Second, despite their woundedness, divorced Catholic people are still members of the church by their baptism. Therefore, they should be loved, embraced and welcomed in our faith communities. Pastoral care for the divorced should be strongly promoted to strengthen their Christian identity and encourage them to contribute their part to the life of the church. Their presence and contribution are always valuable in the life and mission of the Church regardless of their unique situation. Such pastoral care is most needed in Vietnam where divorced Catholic couples are strictly judged as sinners and marginalized from many rural parishes.

Third and similarly, numerous children of divorced families have suffered from physical, emotional and spiritual loss. They may lose the facilities and conditions contributing to their well-being, especially for their health and education. They may lose relationships with their loved ones, especially their parents. They may lose their trust and hope in others, and eventually in God. Consequently, many children affected by divorce become depressed and stressful. Others drop out of school, disoriented, and misbehave. An increasing number of other children are reported to be involved in juvenile crimes and child prostitution. Free sex and abortion have become increasingly common among teenagers of divorced families.<sup>6</sup> Painfully, as Vietnam is a developing country, most of them are neglected by society and become street children. Like their parents, they are “sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). They are truly the least and the poorest in society (Matthew 25:34-45). For this reason, the church must take the greatest care of

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<sup>6</sup> Archbishop Paul Doc Bui, “Những Vấn Đề Gia Đình Tại Việt Nam,” (The Problems of Families in Vietnam), 2014, <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org> (accessed Oct 20, 2014, at 14:00)

these children to follow the divine will of Jesus' loving mission. Therefore, pastoral care of the affected children is necessary more than ever.

Finally, as members of the church, divorced Catholic families have somehow hurt the body of the church by their very brokenness. As a consequence, the life and mission of the church have been weakened to a certain extent. Similarly, as “the vital cell of society,”<sup>7</sup> divorced Catholic families have caused many negative effects on society in Vietnam today: poverty, injustice and alienation of human dignity. To share the “hopes, grief and sufferings”<sup>8</sup> of society, the church in Vietnam should closely cooperate with the government in promoting appropriate care for divorced Catholic families.

Given all of this, my thesis will be developed in five chapters. The First chapter will introduce the geographical, historical and cultural background of Vietnam, which has created the traditional values of Vietnamese families: respect for nature and life, harmony and hospitality in social relationship, strong family ties and filial piety. The second chapter will present challenges to Vietnamese family life from the social and economic context of Vietnam today. Among them, the increasing number of divorces is the most critical challenge. The third chapter will analyze the consequences of divorce for divorced Catholic families, society and the Church in Vietnam. The fourth chapter will reflect theologically on pastoral care for those affected by divorce. Finally, the fifth chapter will propose a pastoral care for divorced Catholic families.

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<sup>7</sup>FC, n. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 1.

## CHAPTER I- VIETNAMESE FAMILY IN ITS CULTURE

### Geography and History

To understand the Vietnamese family in its culture, let us first have general knowledge of Vietnam regarding its geography, history, and then culture.

Geographically, Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country. It covers about 331, 211.6 square kilometers.<sup>9</sup> The country is bordered on the west by Cambodia and Laos, on the North by China, and on east by the China Sea.<sup>10</sup> “The S-shaped country has a north-to-south distance of 1, 650 kilometers and is about 50 kilometers wide at the narrowest point.”<sup>11</sup> Vietnam also has a long coastline of 3,260 kilometers,<sup>12</sup> which has been very important to the international navigation. Besides, Vietnam has two principal geographical regions, the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong River Delta in the south. Territorially, the country curves like a capital S. The principal cities are Hanoi (the capital) in the north, Hue (the former imperial city) in the center, and Ho Chi Minh City (former Saigon) in the south.<sup>13</sup> Because of its geographical characteristics, Vietnam has opened to Chinese, Southeast Asian and Indian cultures.

Additionally, Vietnam has a painful but heroic history. It can be summarized in a single verse: “A thousand years of Chinese domination, a hundred years of French rule, twenty years of daily war (between North and South).”<sup>14</sup>

Vietnam has suffered a longstanding love-hate relationship with China. In 111 BC, the Han dynasty occupied Nam Viet<sup>15</sup> as a part of its desire for territorial aggrandizement. Chinese

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<sup>9</sup> “Geography of Vietnam,” <http://www.en.wikipedia.org> (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00).

<sup>10</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 3.

<sup>11</sup> “Geography of Vietnam,” <http://www.en.wikipedia.org>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>15</sup> *Nam Viet* is the ancient calling which Chinese emperors addressed to Vietnam. *Nam* means “in the South of China.” *Viet* is the Viet ethnic and the Vietnamese. *Viet* also means being located. Given this, *Nam Viet* means the *Viet* people and their country in the south of China.

domination over Vietnam lasted 1,050 years, interrupted by periodical insurrections, until Vietnam's independence in 939. During the following nine hundred years China kept invading Vietnam again, especially during the Yuan (Mongolian) (1260- 1368) and the Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasties (1644-1912). However, their invasions were defeated. Under the Ming dynasty China was able to reconquer Vietnam between 1407 and 1428.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, along with their domination, the Chinese tried to impose their culture and customs on the Vietnamese. Therefore, the Vietnamese culture has been unavoidably influenced by Chinese culture. However, at the same time, there stood up numerous Vietnamese heroes, both women and men, leading their people to fight against the Chinese for their freedom.<sup>17</sup> Their heroic spirit has "instilled in the Vietnamese a deep love for their country."<sup>18</sup>

After Vietnam's independence from China (939), eleven Vietnamese dynasties took turn to ruler the country.<sup>19</sup> Among them, the Ly (1010-1225), the Early Tran (1225-1400) and the Later Le (1428-1788) developed the country the most in all aspects of life.<sup>20</sup> Especially, they expanded the territory to the south by conquering the kingdoms of the Chams and the Khmers between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding the French colonization in Vietnam (1862-1954), there was a complicated relationship between the Vietnamese kings and Christianity which France took advantage of in invading Vietnam in 1858.<sup>22</sup> Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, "Portugal, Holland, France and England looked upon Asia as the place where they could expand their political influence and from whose inexhaustible resources they could enrich themselves. On their part, the Vietnamese

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<sup>16</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 10

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 10.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

rulers sought to take advantage of foreign trade and military assistance to vanquish their political rivals in their internecine wars.<sup>23</sup>

In his fighting against the Tay Son dynasty (1788-1802), Nguyen Anh (called King Gia Long later), the founder of the last Vietnamese dynasty in 1802, was greatly assisted by French Bishop Pierre Pigneau de Béhaine (1749-99). When Gia Long's successors persecuted and executed French missionaries, France used this persecution as an occasion to invade Vietnam in 1858.<sup>24</sup> As a consequence, thereafter Vietnam became a French colony for almost one hundred years.

The French colonization was ended by Vietnam's defeating France at the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Consequently, an accord was signed in Geneva on July 20, 1954, with an agreement that Vietnam would be temporarily divided into areas: the North under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam; the South under French Union until 1956 and then becoming the Republic of Vietnam.<sup>25</sup> However, with Americans' increasing military involvement, the war between the North and the South of Vietnam kept going for twenty years.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the communist forces from the North conquered the South on April 30, 1975. In 1976 the Vietnamese communists controlled Vietnam. From then on, the whole country has become the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.<sup>27</sup>

Given this, the Vietnamese persevering fights against their far more powerful enemies, especially China, have enabled the people to be amazingly resilient in the face of hardships and challenges.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 15.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 16- 17.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 10.

## Vietnamese Culture

According to Hoang Sy Quy, S.J.,<sup>29</sup> despite suffering from French colonization and American political interference most recently, Vietnamese culture is not significantly affected by Western civilization. In fact, it has been dramatically influenced by cultures from China, Southeast Asia and India.<sup>30</sup> Besides, just as other Asian cultures are assimilated to religions, so Vietnamese culture is uniquely perceived as “the norms, standards, notions and beliefs.”<sup>31</sup> For this reason, like religions, Vietnamese culture is normally considered as a way of life.<sup>32</sup> Here, because of the restriction of my paper’s topic, the above mentioned cultures will not be studied in their broad sense. Instead, we will try to explore what values they brought about for the Vietnamese, especially to their family life.

### Respect for Nature and Life

First, Vietnamese culture has been unavoidably influenced by the Chinese philosophical systems or religions like Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Fortunately, by the Vietnamese’s deep sense of their “original religion,”<sup>33</sup> these traditions were absorbed and have produced certain values to the Vietnamese social and family life.

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<sup>29</sup> Hoang Sy Quy, S.J. is a well-known Vietnamese philosopher. He received his Ph.D. in Indian philosophy in India. Hoang has published a number of books in Indian philosophy, spirituality theology, sexuality in Eastern view. He has recently done a deep research on inculturation and the Vietnamese profound psyche. In a particular way, Hoang explores a wide range of interreligious dialogues and inculturation in Christianity in Vietnam.

<sup>30</sup> Hoang Sy Quy, S.J., “Hội Nhập Văn Hóa và Tầng Nền Tâm Hệ Việt,” (Inculturation and the Vietnamese Profound Psyche), <http://www.dongten.net> (accessed September 19, 2015, at 11:00 a.m)

<sup>31</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 20-21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 21

<sup>33</sup> According to Peter Phan, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism entered Vietnam not as a land without any religious sense. Instead, there had been already a system of religious beliefs and practices as ancient as the Vietnamese people themselves.” [Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 24]. Besides, for Léopold Cadière, “this cult of spirits” is the Vietnamese people’s original religion based on which the three afore mentioned religions were embedded and inculturated [Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 24].

By its doctrine, Buddhism has deepened the Vietnamese's religious sense, compassion, and profound reverence of life. From China Mahayana Buddhism (as a branch of Buddhism)<sup>34</sup> entered Vietnam in the first century AD<sup>35</sup> with two forms: Zen and Pure Land.<sup>36</sup> The former stresses meditation as a channel to attain enlightenment and the need of fulfilling ordinary tasks of the present moment.<sup>37</sup> The later emphasizes one's belief in Buddha Amitabha (Immeasurable Light) and one's purpose of being reborn in Buddha's Pure Land, which can be considered as 'Western Paradise.'<sup>38</sup> Besides, for Mahayana Buddhism, each living being has the Buddha nature, and so it can achieve Buddhahood. Also, to become a Buddha is simply to devote to the Buddha in faith and to be compassionate to all living beings. Coming to Vietnam, values of Mahayana Buddhism were transformed into the Vietnamese spiritual values.<sup>39</sup> Given that, the Vietnamese family embraces wonderful traditional values like deep spiritual sense, being compassionate and respecting life.

### **Harmony and Hospitality**

Additionally, the Vietnamese family life has been enriched by Taoism with its values like harmony, interpersonal relationship, and gender equality. Taoism arrived in Vietnam in the first century AD.<sup>40</sup> For Taoism, every reality is composed of two opposing elements as *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* implies heaven, activity, masculine; *Yang*, earth, receptivity, femininity.<sup>41</sup> Despite being mutually opposing forces, *yin* and *yang* do not destroy but complement each other. There is

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<sup>34</sup> Buddhism is known with the two following branches like Mahayana (the Great Vehicle) and Theravada (the Lesser Vehicle). Theravada Buddhism highlights the humanity of Buddha. Also, it stresses that the path to Nirvanais possible only for the saintly sage like monks and nuns. By contrast, Mahayana Buddhism states that each living being has the Buddha nature, and so it can achieve Buddhahood. Therefore, to become a Buddha is simply to devote to the Buddha in faith and to be compassionate to all living beings (Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 44).

<sup>35</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 35

<sup>40</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 28.

always a balance or harmony in the universe, maintained by the Tao (Way),<sup>42</sup> which is believed to be the principle and reality of humanity and nature.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, to be is to be in harmony. To exist is to be in relationship. Besides, male and female, despite their difference, are equal in human dignity. Given this, the Vietnamese family highly values harmony out of differences. This harmony also takes place between humans and nature. Humanity is expected to live with and care for this universe. Furthermore, ethically speaking, human conduct should not go against “the spontaneity of the Tao.”<sup>44</sup> Instead, it should flow from “intuition” as naturally as water flows.<sup>45</sup> Its flowing is never stopped by any obstacle, even rock. This way of managing one’s behavior keeps one from his (her) internal conflict, and families from violence.

### **Interpersonal Relationship**

Moreover, Vietnamese family life benefits from Confucianist values like self-perfection by doing good, family ties, public service, social relationship and corresponding duties and obligation. Confucianism came to Vietnam at the same time with Taoism (the first century AD).<sup>46</sup> It was adopted by the Vietnamese as a system of morality and politics. This morality primarily aims for the public service, based on one fulfilling one’s duties and obligation to one’s family and to state. However, one is expected first to begin with one’s personal cultivation of virtue.<sup>47</sup> The key virtue is *nhan*, which means “humaneness, humanity, benevolence, virtue, kindness, and goodness.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 28.

<sup>43</sup>Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 16.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Strong Family Ties and Filial Piety**

Besides, for Confucianism, family bonds are highlighted as one of three basic social relationships (*tam cương*): the relationships between king and subject, between husband and wife, and between parents and children. Filial piety is especially stressed as the most fundamental obligation of children to their ancestors and parents. It is considered as “the all-encompassing virtue in Vietnamese morality.”<sup>49</sup> By this virtue, children are grateful to their ancestors and parents, and family members are strongly bound to one another.

To put it simply, the Vietnamese have absorbed Confucianism to bring about wonderful values of their family life like self perfection by doing good and commitments to public service, family ties, especially filial piety.

However, Confucianism does not highly appreciate the role of women in society. This unfortunately results from a male-dominated mentality. Accordingly, a good woman is expected to fulfill three types of obedience (*tam tông*) and four virtues (*tu đức*). That is, when she is still single and remains with her parents, she should obey her parents. Once she is married, she should rely on her husband. When her husband dies, she depends on her sons, especially the eldest son. Nevertheless, traditional obedience of women to their husbands and sons is no longer accepted today by those who promote the dignity of women and gender equality. Instead, open discussion and mutual understanding is highly recommended between couples. And yet, the aforementioned obedience is still taken advantage of by conservative people. This eventually produces injustice for many women in their marriage and divorce. In addition, the male-dominated culture resulted in polygamy during the feudal time. However, this custom was mainly practiced by powerful and well-to-do men. Fortunately, it was abolished by law many decades ago. This injustice will be discussed further in Chapter III.

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<sup>49</sup>Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 21.

In term of the four virtues, a woman is always greatly valued by her talents of household management (cong), physical and spiritual beauty (dung), wise communication (ngon), and appropriate behavior (hanh).<sup>50</sup> Personally, I think that these virtues should be promoted and developed more than ever for the sake of women and the well-being of their families amid today's crises.

Thus far, we have noticed that Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism did not come to Vietnam as to a land without any religion. In fact, the Vietnamese culture had been rooted deeply in their original religion<sup>51</sup> of which the central feature is ancestor worship.<sup>52</sup> This worship results from “a deep sense of gratitude to those who have given life to, nurtured and educated their children.”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, descendants should love and respect their ancestors in return. For the Vietnamese, this love and respect is seen as “one of the most sacred duties of filial piety.”<sup>54</sup> Such loving respect is considered to be a wonderful value of the Vietnamese family life.

Interestingly, according to Hoang Sy Quy, Vietnamese life has been also influenced by the Southeast Asian culture.<sup>55</sup> It is acknowledged to have arrived in Vietnam far earlier than the Chinese did.<sup>56</sup> One of the typical characteristics of the Southeast Asian culture is matriarchy. Matriarchy has been respected in the Vietnamese social and family life. In the fifteenth century,

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<sup>50</sup> Correspondingly, men are expected to become ideal persons (quan tu) or a gentlemen [Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 21]. For this expectation, they must be characterized by five virtues: *nhan* (compassion, benevolence, love for one's fellow human beings, *nghia* (justice, righteousness, sense of moral duty), *le* (propriety, social appropriateness), *tri* (knowledge, wisdom), and *tin* (sincerity, truthfulness) [Peter C. Phan, *The Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 31]. Given this, I am convinced that men should also develop these five virtues for their personal growth and for the sake of their families and society.

<sup>51</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 24.

<sup>52</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face*, (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 132.

<sup>53</sup> Peter C. Phan, *The Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 52.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26

<sup>55</sup> Based on Hoang's in-depth research, the Southeast Asian culture covers from the north part of Southeast Asia [like the Lingnan Mountain (núi Nam Lĩnh) and the Yangtze River (sông Dương Tử) in China] downward to the south of Southeast Asia [including Malaysia, Indonesia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Melanede]. Besides, it is also traced from the Vietnam east coastline across to the far east of India, even to the south of India. Therefore, Vietnam has been influenced by the Southeast Asian culture as well. (Hoang SyQuy, S.J., *Inculturation and the Vietnamese Profound Psyche*, <http://www.dongten.net>)

<sup>56</sup> Hoang Sy Quy, S.J., *Inculturation and the Vietnamese Profound Psyche*

King Hong Duc (1442- 1497) issued codes to protect women's right. For example, daughters and sons inherited the same fortune from their parents. Besides, if there was not an eldest son in a family, then an eldest daughter would take care of her family's cult-portion of entail. Besides, a mother plays a crucial role in Vietnamese family life by her love, care, affection, and tenderness. There goes a Vietnamese proverb: "A husband builds a house, but a wife creates and nurtures home." Additionally, maternal love has provided unlimited inspiration for numerous poets and folk songs. Given this, the Vietnamese society and family highly values the gender equality and the harmony of husband and wife.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore, Vietnamese culture has also been influenced by that of the Chams and Khmers (in the south of Vietnam) since the Vietnamese people merged their lives with these nations in the fourteenth century. According to Hoang, these cultures were Indianized a very long time ago.<sup>58</sup> They were characterized uniquely by the cult of solemnly worshipping *linga* (man's penis) and *yoni* (woman's vagina)-both seen as sources of life.<sup>59</sup> Given this, men and women are to be respected equally; their union is a harmony of the sexual being and brings about

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<sup>57</sup> Based on Hoang's careful research, matriarchy is rooted deeply in the Vietnamese culture which has been influenced by the Southeast Asian culture. Also for Hoang, this Southeast Asian culture had come to Vietnam far earlier than the Chinese culture did. For this reason, the women's rights issued by King Hong Duc are incidents of acknowledging role and privileges of women in the Vietnamese culture and society. Unfortunately, under China's domination for so long time (for 1,000 years), the Vietnam culture has eventually been dominated by the Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, which has promoted patriarchy. However, this patriarchy should be reflected not simply according to Confucianism, but it should be investigated also in the whole context of the Vietnamese culture which has long promoted matriarchy. In light of this, women and men should be treated equally in term of their unique roles and contribution to their families and society. Therefore, the aforementioned obedience of women should be understood in relationship with the five virtues of men as ideal persons (*quan tu*). That is, on one hand, women are expected to fulfill three types of obedience in order to build up peace, harmony and love in their families. On the other hand, men should develop the five mentioned virtues to sustain and foster the well-being of their families and society. To put it simply, both women and men, in each one's unique ways, contribute their part to their families and society. In Christian view, this should be further enlightened by what Paul mentioned about a woman's and a man's role in one's family in light of Christ's love for the Church. We shall cultivate this idea in chapter IV, section A.

<sup>58</sup> Hoang SyQuy, S.J., *Inculturation and the Vietnamese Profound Psyche*, <http://www.dongten.net>

<sup>59</sup> Tran Nhu Y Lan, *Moral Discernment for Family Planning in the Context of the Vietnamese Catholic Church*, (S.T.L. diss., Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola School of Theology, 2001), 120- 123.

life. Even today one can find these symbols in formerly Cham areas like Nhatrang, Binh Thuan, and Ninh Thuan.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, Vietnamese culture has been positively impacted by Christianity since the seeds of the Gospel were first planted in this land in 1533,<sup>61</sup> though its influence was not so significant as that of the other religions. Regarding marriage, Christian teaching concerning indissolubility and monogamy was greatly accepted by numerous men who had practiced polygamy. Many of them, after conversion to Catholicism, remained with only one wife.<sup>62</sup> To a certain extent, Christianity succeeded in bringing them back to fidelity as a good traditional value of family life. Up to now, Christianity is valued as a religion which promotes fidelity and lessens the number of divorces.<sup>63</sup>

**In summary**, inspired by the Vietnamese original religion and absorbed by Asian cultural traditions as well as Christianity, the Vietnamese family life has wonderful values like respect for nature, reverence of life, filial piety, deep family ties, harmony, hospitality, and social relationships; in spite of some negative influence like male-dominant mentality. Interestingly, the Vietnamese's adoption of foreign cultures is primarily reflected "in their folk oral literature and in ethical and religious practices."<sup>64</sup> All of this constitutes a wonderful cultural heritage.

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<sup>60</sup> Tran Nhu Y Lan, 120- 123.

<sup>61</sup>Peter C. Phan, *The Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 84.

<sup>62</sup> Do QuangChinh, S.J., *Sống Trong Xã Hội Con Rồng Cháu Tiên*, (Living in the Society of Lac Hong's Descendants), 2001.

<sup>63</sup> "Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions", 2011, <http://www.lyhontaivietnam.org>

<sup>64</sup>Peter C. Phan, *The Vietnamese- American Catholics*, 24.

## CHAPTER II-CHALLENGES TO FAMILY IN VIETNAM TODAY

The traditional values of Vietnamese family have been critically challenged by the socioeconomic changes between the modern and post modern time in Vietnam.

### **Challenges from Anti- Religious Mentality**

First, these values have faced challenges from rejection of religions. Since 1945 the North of Vietnam has been under a communist regime. In 1975 the communists from the North took over the whole country. Thereafter, the whole country has become socialist. For Karl Marx, one of the founders of socialism, “religion is the opium of the people.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, religions just psychologically comfort people and enable them to forget their real sufferings. They do not offer any meaning to human life. This anti-religious attitude seriously violates the Vietnamese’s religious sense that reserves the most honorable veneration to their ancestors and parents.<sup>66</sup>

Besides, in the daybreak of Vietnamese socialism, the people were taught to live for an ideal collectivism. They were educated to sacrifice their personhood and families for the sake of this collectivism. As a consequence, numerous families became victims of the Land Reform (1949-1956) in the North during which many households of landlords were incited to fight one another publicly to reserve their properties for the state. Their fighting was seen as good edification of socialist love for the country. Unfortunately, it has left behind long-lasting trauma to society, especially to the victims. Given this, filial piety and family ties have been attacked in their very foundation.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, the mentioned values have been distorted by an education focusing on grades and technical skills, not on human integrated growth. Under pressure of material needs,

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<sup>65</sup> “Religion is the opium of the people.” <http://www.en.wikipedia.org> (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00).

<sup>66</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 26.

<sup>67</sup> Vu Van Luan, “Chum Tho Vu Van Luan,” (Series of Poems by Vu Van Luan), [http:// www.boxitvn.net/](http://www.boxitvn.net/) 2016/02/19.

this training stresses high grades which would bring fame and benefits to both teachers and students. Besides, to gain competent formation for highly-paid jobs, students put all their energy into developing their skills. They are not trained to explore and sustain their cultural values like love, truth, justice, and commitment to the public good. In other words, the young generation has gradually lost sense of others, their families and society.

### **Challenges from Globalization**

Secondly, the aforementioned values have been shaken by globalization that fosters individualism, selfishness, greed and social isolation.

Since 1986 Vietnam has opened itself to the world for business opportunities. At the same time, the country has accepted globalization as a reality. On one hand, globalization has promoted a dominant culture which has enabled many people to achieve knowledge, new ideas and values across the world. This achievement has increasingly brought them well-being. However, at the same time this culture has excluded many others who are poor and not well educated to use technical advances. As a reality, there is a big gap between the rich and the poor. This contradiction has caused competition in social and family life. The following saying becomes increasingly common to the youth's life: "*Nhanh chan thi con, cham chan thi het*" ("The faster you run, the more you will get; the more slowly you go, the more you will lose"). To put it simply, this competition has produced selfishness and greed. These negative attitudes go against the traditional values of family life like understanding, compassion, love and care for others.

Besides, the so-called culture has produced individualism and alienated people from the traditional values. Through advanced mass media, people have increasing chances to access a huge mass of information. They are free to choose and think of whatever information without

any social control. Such a freedom has eventually enhanced individualism among people, especially young persons. Also, people are exposed to world-dominated cultures which can assimilate and even damage their own culture. As an example, pornographic materials of sex culture are freely accessed by the youth in Vietnam today. It is promoting a variety of sexual misbehaviors. Cyber sex and adultery have threatened young couples. Consequently, these sexual misconducts violate chastity and fidelity as virtues of the Vietnamese, especially of married partners.<sup>68</sup>

Additionally, the so-called dominant culture has created social isolation. By instant communication and digital technology, family members are being pushed into paradoxes. On one hand, they have increasing opportunities to have relationships beyond their family. However, they are also trapped in their own world by technical advances. Communion among family members is cut off. Family gatherings and common prayers are less often.<sup>69</sup> Consequently, their house is like a renting apartment, instead of being their home. People feel lonely even in their home. They do not have concern and care for one another. In other words, globalization has damaged traditional values such as harmony, family ties, and hospitality.

### **Challenges from Market Mentality**

Moreover, the aforementioned values of family life are challenged by the pragmatism of a market-oriented society.<sup>70</sup> The free-market system has offered people, especially young ones, chances for competent training and highly compensated occupations. However, this system and its marketing have brought them insecurities as well. They get neither allocated jobs nor benefits

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<sup>68</sup> Archbishop Paul Doc Bui, *The Problems of Families in Vietnam*, 2014

<sup>69</sup> Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, “Thư HĐGM VN Gởi Dân Chúa về Môi Trường Giáo Dục Gia Đình Công Giáo,” (Pastoral Letter of Episcopal Conference of Vietnam to Catholics on the Educational Setting of Catholic Families), 2008, <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org> (accessed Oct 20, 2014, at 14:00).

<sup>70</sup> Nguyen, P.A., *Relationship Based on Love and Relationship Based on Needs: Emerging Trends in Youth Sex Culture in Contemporary Urban Vietnam*, 289- 291.

from the state. Therefore, they have to compete fiercely to obtain qualified education and high salary jobs. This competition born out of “the importance of money” has become a principle that negatively affects all social relationships, including family life. Married life is considered based on financial security rather than crucial values of the family life like love and fidelity.<sup>71</sup>

### **Challenges from Migration**

Finally, the mentioned values have been challenged by migration. Due to industrialization, numerous people have left their rural areas to work in urban cities. Apart from their home towns, they likely lose their identity and give up their own traditions because of secularism and materialism. This value crisis and identity alienation are implied in the following Vietnamese proverb: “Gio thoi chieu nao cay xieu chieu ay” (“The weak trees easily fall toward the same direction of the strong winds”). Besides, working under financial pressure, they have accepted pragmatic life style. As a consequence, there are emerging among migrant workers sexual misbehaviors like premarital sex, cohabitation and multiple dating. Also, the number of Vietnamese employees overseas is rising significantly. They have left behind their spouses and families. Their separation for the long term has increasingly brought about adultery. To put it simply, the young generations’ view of marriage has been distorted, and marital and familial stability is shaken.

### **Divorce in Vietnam Today**

Given that its traditional values have been shaken by anti-religious mentality, globalization, marketing, and migration, the contemporary family life in Vietnam is facing crises. Among these crises (like abortion, domestic violence, drug addiction, prostitution) is an

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<sup>71</sup> Nguyen, P.A., *Relationship Based on Love and Relationship Based on Needs: Emerging Trends in Youth Sex Culture in Contemporary Urban Vietnam*, 309.

increasing rate of divorces, especially divorces of those in the early years of married life.<sup>72</sup> In this part I would like to present data about number of divorces between 1977 and 2010, especially an increasing rate of divorces in early married life, and the church's acknowledgement of divorces between Catholic couples.

### **Data about Number of Divorces in Vietnam Today**

Based on different research on divorces in Vietnam, the number of divorces has risen seriously in Vietnam since a few decades ago. Between 1977 and 1982 Vietnamese courts recorded a total of about 28,000 divorces. This number remarkably went up to 29,000 divorce cases in 1986, the first year of the dramatic economic reform.<sup>73</sup> It continued growing to 32,000 divorces in 1992.<sup>74</sup> It kept rising to 35,658 divorces in 1995.<sup>75</sup> Significantly, 44,000 divorces were reported in the following year (1996).<sup>76</sup>

Besides, a careful research done in Thai Nguyen University (Vietnam) in 2011 showed that the country witnessed a sharp increase of divorces throughout the last decade. It reached to the peak of 126, 325 divorces in 2010, while the divorce counted just 51,361 cases in 2000. The details can be traced in the following table.<sup>77</sup>

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Divorces	51,361	53,250	57,800	59,350	61,500	65,929	67,123	67,514	80,563	102,932	126,325

<sup>72</sup> Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, *Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today*, 2014, <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org>

<sup>73</sup>Elsa C. Arnett, "Divorce in Vietnam No Longer Taboo," 2011, <http://www.divorceinvietnam.net> (accessed September 14, 2015, at 10:00).

<sup>74</sup> Linh D Pham, "Thực Trạng Ly Hôn Sớm trong Giới Trẻ," (*Divorcing in the Early Married Life of Young Couple*), 2014, <http://www.lyhontai vietnam.org>, (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00).

<sup>75</sup> "Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solution", 2011, <http://www.lyhontai vietnam.org>

<sup>76</sup>Elsa C. Arnett, "Divorce in Vietnam No Longer Taboo," 2011, <http://www.divorceinvietnam.net> (accessed September 14, 2015, at 10:00).

<sup>77</sup>"Những Yếu Tố Ảnh Hưởng Tới Tình Trạng Ly Hôn ở Việt Nam," (Factors Leading to Divorces in Vietnam), <http://www.cinet.gov.vn.org> (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00).

### **Young Divorced Couples**

According to Professor Hoa M. Nguyen, the number of divorces kept jumping in this decade, especially for young couples in their early married life.<sup>78</sup> Professor Minh H Nguyen had the same statement.<sup>79</sup> Based on Hoa's recent research, the number of divorces has constituted 34.4% of married couples. Unfortunately, divorces of young couples (between 23 and 30 years old) have constituted 60% of all divorces. Based on the research, 70% of them have sustained their married life just for seven years and bore children. This ending of marriage is getting increasingly common in urban Vietnam.<sup>80</sup> Given this, the age of divorced couples is decreasing, and married life is shortened.

### **Reasons for Divorces**

There are different reasons for divorces. Based on research from Thai Nguyen University (2011) and another from Hanoi University, 27.7% of divorces come from conflict of partners' life style, while another 25.9% result from adultery. Besides, 6.7% of divorces are from domestic violence. Though Vietnam is a developing country, poverty is not a major cause of divorce. Only 13% of divorces are because of the couple's low income.<sup>81</sup> According to some observers, it can be expensive to divorce, which may lead some low income couples to stay married. However, for many people, the radical reason for divorcing is the crisis of the traditional values of Vietnam family life amid socioeconomic changes.<sup>82</sup> This claim is reasonable. Out of a loss of religious sense, married people cannot explore, deepen and make meaning in their life. Without self-

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<sup>78</sup> "Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions", 2011, <http://www.lyhontai vietnam.org>

<sup>79</sup> Linh D Pham, *Divorcing in the Early Married Life of Young Couple*, 2014, <http://www.lyhontai vietnam.org>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Linh D Pham, *Divorcing in the Early Married Life of Young Couple*, 2014;

"Factors Leading to Divorces in Vietnam," <http://www.cinet.gov.vn.org>

<sup>82</sup> Linh D Pham, *Divorcing in the Early Married Life of Young Couple*, 2014.

giving love, couples cannot commit to the well being of each other. Without fidelity, one betrays his (her) spouse and destroys his (her) family.

### **The Church's Acknowledgement of Divorces of Catholics**

There is no available data about the number of Catholic divorces in Vietnam for the following reasons. First, according to Rev Louis Tuan A. Nguyen, General Secretary for the Committee of Family Ministry in the Bishop Conference of Vietnam, the church lacks human resources to research such data. Second, also according to Nguyen, divorced Catholics do not want to report their divorces to pastors in order to avoid social pressure from parishes. Finally, it is not safe for the church to do the aforementioned research, since any government-uncontrolled survey on social issues may be seen as means to threaten the government's prestige. Nevertheless, based on her pastoral experience and practices, the church is certainly aware of an increasing amount of divorced Catholics, especially those in early married life.<sup>83</sup>

The Episcopal Conference of Vietnam has addressed the erosion of traditional values and the rise of divorce through their pastoral letters. In these letters, they strongly reaffirm human dignity and values of marriage and family life based on the Christian faith, critically analyze the present socioeconomic challenges to family life, and propose guidelines of family care.

First, affirmation of the foundation for Christian family is presented in the Vietnamese Bishops' pastoral letters of 2008 and 2013. Per the proclamation of the letters, human beings, male and female, are created in God's image. They are equal before God. As sexual beings, they go themselves to love God and other by their loving capacity. In the divine plan of creation, men and women are called to marriages defined by selfless love and lifelong commitment. Their marital covenant reflects God's covenant with humanity. By the dignity of the sacraments of

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<sup>83</sup> Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, "Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today", 2014.

baptism and matrimony, their family becomes the domestic Church.<sup>84</sup> In addition, their married and family life opens to their own well-being as well as that of their family members, the Church and society. This is an unchangeable truth of Christian marriage and family.<sup>85</sup>

In this affirmation, the bishops have courageously identified challenges to family life today. The self-focused education is repeatedly criticized as the most serious challenge to the younger generations and, eventually, to families. By its rejection of religions, human dignity and fundamental human values, the education has focused on fake fame and selfish benefits for students and teachers. For this reason, holistic human development has gone missing. Worse still, traditional values of family life and human conscience have been eroded.<sup>86</sup> The bishops have wisely attributed these negative effects on family life to socioeconomic situations like globalization, immigration,<sup>87</sup> corruption, unjust collectivism, injustice in interpretation and creation of laws, and incompetent leadership.<sup>88</sup> All of these factors have weakened the Vietnamese society and state as a whole system, threatening the stability of marriage and family life.

Considering all of this, the Episcopal Conference has called for a new, focused pastoral response to Vietnamese families. Their plan includes Christian education oriented toward the whole society, but especially in the family context. The basis must be holistic human growth based on the divine will. It should develop not only knowledge but also spiritual formation of faith and love. Plus, it should help people grow in formed conscience, human universal and

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<sup>84</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter," 2008.

<sup>85</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter," 2013.

<sup>86</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letters," 2007, 2008, 2011;

Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, Committee of Justice and Peace, "*Discernment on Situations in Vietnam Today*," <http://www.hdgmvietnam.org> (accessed Oct 20, 2014, at 14:00).

<sup>87</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letters," 2008, 2011.

<sup>88</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, Committee of Justice and Peace, "*Discernment on Situations in Vietnam Today*."

traditional values, especially values of truth, life and justice.<sup>89</sup> Christian perspective of marriage and family must be given to the younger generation, especially to couples preparing themselves for this life. For the bishops, this need of formation is more urgent than ever.<sup>90</sup> Also, the pastoral accompaniment of young married couples, especially those in challenges, is extremely necessary.<sup>91</sup> However, because of the shortage of ministers of family care, especially competent ones, parishes have tried their best only to give pre-marriage courses for those preparing for their married life. Even so, trainers in this regard in many parishes lack qualified training in psychology and family dynamics.

For this reason, the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam has highlighted the need of strengthening family care by training ministers of family care (lay, religious and ordained ministers, especially would-be priests), building up a cooperation of formation and trainers of this ministry among parishes and dioceses.<sup>92</sup> Pastoral counseling is also considered to be significantly helpful for family life today.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter," 2008.

<sup>90</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter," 2013.

<sup>91</sup> Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, "Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today," 2014.

<sup>92</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letters," 2011, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, "Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today", 2014.

## CHAPTER III- THE CONSEQUENCES OF DIVORCE FOR DIVORCED CATHOLIC FAMILIES, THE SOCIETY, AND THE CHURCH IN VIETNAM TODAY

### A. For Divorced Catholic Families

As mentioned before, the Church in Vietnam is aware that divorce has caused deep pains for divorced Catholic families, both to parents and their children.<sup>94</sup> In particular, the affected children suffer from serious difficulties. In this chapter let us consider the negative effects of divorce on spouses, their children between ages of 6 to 11 years old<sup>95</sup> and adolescents in Vietnam. According to pastoral writers Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, these loss in general may be understood as occurring in the following six categories: material loss, relationship loss, role loss, systemic loss, functional loss, and intrapsychic loss.<sup>96</sup> We will consider how these categories of loss may be manifested in the experience of divorce in Vietnam.

#### 1. Material Loss

First, divorce causes material loss, namely economic problems, because of the decline in income. Generally, people face a critical challenge to rear their children in Vietnam, a developing country. Both husband and wife have to work very hard to earn just enough for their household expenditures. Besides, the state does not offer any public benefit for families, even those struggling with low income. Because of economic pressure, every family usually has at most two children. Therefore, decrease in household income when a couple splits up is significant. Expenses for child rearing, healthcare and schooling become a burden in the aftermath of divorce. Such material loss gets worse by the process of “splitting property,

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<sup>94</sup> Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, “Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today”, 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, *Divorce: Causes and Consequences*, (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>96</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, *All Our Losses- All Our Grievs*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 36- 46.

household goods, and personal items in addition to finding new house and relocating.”<sup>97</sup> As a fact, “with the termination of the joint household,” parents’ sharing in working and income also ends.<sup>98</sup>

In the context of Vietnam, divorced women usually suffer much from material loss. Based on a social article on divorces in Vietnam, 87.6% of divorced women remain single.<sup>99</sup> However most of them have to take care of children. According to a study on this issue, 65.6% of the affected children live with their mothers; whereas only 12.9% of others are cared by their fathers; 11.5% of others remain with their grandparents or relatives.<sup>100</sup> Nevertheless, divorced women are not respected, even humiliated by a male-dominated society.<sup>101</sup> Also, divorced husbands are generally not responsible for rearing children, even though they have been forced to pay alimony and custody. Numerous ex-husbands pay little or nothing for child support.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, the affected children do not get any financial support from the government. This economical situation is increasingly difficult for women who have not worked during marriage. It truly challenges them to find a new job while also caring for children.

Thus, divorce clearly results in material loss that affects the wellbeing of children. This loss basically comes from economic decline due to parents’ divorces. It also includes loss of facilities like houses, rooms and other things. In Vietnamese culture, after getting married, a

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<sup>97</sup> Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 59.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid

<sup>99</sup> “Mật Đắng và Trái Ngọt sau Hôn Nhân,”(*The Bitterness and the Sweetness after Getting Marriage*), <http://www.suckhoegiadinh.com.vn>, (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00).

<sup>100</sup> “Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions”, 2011, <http://www.lyhontai vietnam.org>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

As I have mentioned in chapter I, as a consequence of a male-dominated culture, to be a good woman, one is expected to obey her husband no matter what he is. Therefore, a divorced woman would be criticized if she were not subject to her husband or did not strictly observe the traditions. If so, she would be looked down to. This judgment is very common in rural areas where people have not yet benefited from formation of human dignity and gender equality.

<sup>102</sup> “Quyền Nuôi Con sau Ly Hôn,”(*Child Custody in the Aftermath of Divorce*), <http://www.tritueluat.org>, (accessed December 7, 2015, at 9:00).

woman usually comes to live with her family-in-law. Once divorce happens, she usually leaves the in-law's home to go back to her parents' family, temporarily or permanently, to avoid mistreatment or violence from her husband.<sup>103</sup> Besides, given that a divorced wife generally becomes a custodial parent, children have to follow their mother. This leads to the fact that the kids have to leave their house, room, toys, and schools. Psychologically, the more children are attached to these accommodations, the more they miss them. Also, given that toys are normally given by their loved one, the children's missing gifts means missing those who have so loved them. Such loss may create painful experience of missing their loved ones.

Furthermore, a custodial parent's economic hardship eventually deprives children of entertainment conditions. They are only provided with essential supplies like clothes and food. Rarely will their mother be able to afford to take them on recreational outings. Sports training and musical equipment are examples of luxuries to them. In other words, the affected kids suffer more from the loss of recreation facilities than those of two-parent families.<sup>104</sup>

## **2. Relationship Loss**

Secondly, the end of marriage creates relationship loss between spouses as well as between themselves and others. Despite separation, one who has lost his or her spouse misses the intimacy that used to be between them.<sup>105</sup> In the deepest meaning of sexual life, the divorced spouse misses "the physical intimacy of hugs, shared laughter or tears, or activities in which they once took part as a couple."<sup>106</sup> This is especially true when it comes to care for children; the spouse left alone with the children experiences the loss of having no partner to share the joys and

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<sup>103</sup> "Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions", 2011, <http://www.lyhontavietnam.org>

<sup>104</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, *Family Ministry*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 22.31.

<sup>105</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 22.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

sorrows of daily parenting with.<sup>107</sup> This experience is likely the same for a non-present parent who also misses his or her ex-spouse and children.

By the same token, divorce usually decreases each spouse's social relations. Normally, marriage extends people's social networks by joining extended family and friends of both spouses, enabling the couple to relate with other married people. By contrast, divorce often deprives the couple of such social contacts.<sup>108</sup> As mentioned before, in the Vietnamese context a divorced wife usually leaves her former in-laws to go back to her parents' family.<sup>109</sup> Also, due to pride stemming from a male-dominated culture, divorced husband tends to avoid contact with his former in-laws. In other words, divorce negatively affects relationship between each divorced spouse and the family and friends of her or his former partner.

Similarly, the divorced are likely to lose friends. This loss of friendship may be caused by self-imposed isolation. This withdrawal may be caused by the fear of not fitting at gatherings any longer, feeling upset by seeing others' joyfulness, or worry about facing criticism for their behavior. It is particularly difficult for a divorced person to socialize with their former spouse if they are embarrassed by the ex-spouse's behavior. It is also challenging for them if painful memories are recalled by the appearance of the ex-spouse.<sup>110</sup> Also, loss of friends comes from the separation of companions who seek to avoid taking side with either husband or wife. Other friends withdraw from divorced couples to avoid troubles which may come up from the divorce.<sup>111</sup>

Even worse, plenty of Catholics stop worshipping in their parishes because divorce is seen as a serious sin in many of Vietnam's rural communities. This avoidance makes them feel

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<sup>107</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 60.

<sup>109</sup> "Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions", 2011, <http://www.lyhontavietnam.org>

<sup>110</sup> Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 70.

<sup>111</sup> Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 70.

excluded from faith communities. Consequently, they feel more isolated and lonely than married couples. This is especially painful to them.<sup>112</sup>

Similarly, the affected children suffer from the relationship loss between themselves and their noncustodial parent because of his (her) departure. Given that this parent is a potential source of support for them, children may lose their sense of safety. They lose the parents who are supposedly available to protect them from any harm.<sup>113</sup> In other words, offspring experience a lack of their noncustodial parent's love, affection and care. This painful feeling can greatly impact a child's emotions and behavior.

Besides, due to the traditional structure of extended family in Vietnam, being apart from noncustodial parents also means weakening bonds across generations for children. This includes relationships with grandparents, relatives and cousins. For many children, these beloved ones have contributed significantly to their lives through love and care. In Vietnamese culture, children are tended not only by their mother but also by their grandmother, aunts and other female relatives. These persons become very dear to children. Therefore, it would mean extreme loss, even grief, for children to lose relationships with extended family.

Another social loss for children is missing their best friends. Good friendship (or peer group) is considerably supportive to kids of broken families. Friends can understand, assure and care for them with sincerity and compassion.<sup>114</sup> These friends may be schoolmates, classmates, group-mates, and teammates. They have had good times together. Therefore, it would be very sad for children to depart from their friends because they are forced to move with a divorced parent. Also, to miss one's friends is to miss one's schools, classes, clubs, and so on.

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<sup>112</sup>Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 60.

<sup>113</sup>Evon O. Flesberg, *The Switching Hour*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 5.

<sup>114</sup>Robert E. Emery and Mary Jo Coiro, "Divorce: Consequences for Children," *Pediatrics in Review*, Vol. 16, No 18, (August 1995): 308.

### 3. Role Loss

Third, divorce causes the loss of traditional gender roles which spouses used to play in their former marriage. For instance, a role as a mother is gradually changed when a divorced wife has to work hard for her family finances after divorce. Such emphasis on working to provide needed money makes her the “breadwinner,” rather than “homemaker.”<sup>115</sup> In other words, out of exhaustion and tension from full-time jobs, a woman cannot spend enough time to be with and to care for her children. She would miss the time she used to have for her children and family. This can result in feeling “guilty about not being with her offspring.” However, at the same time she may feel “angry and frustrated about her work responsibilities.”<sup>116</sup>

Likewise, in the Vietnamese culture which is characterized by patriarchy, the brokenness of a family is seen as the failure of a divorced man in caring for his family. He loses his role as a head of his family. It would be a humiliation for a divorced husband to be responsible for house duties like child care and cooking. He is supposed to be a primary resource of laboring for finances, instead of doing household chores. Moreover, in a Confucianism-influenced culture, a man’s inability to sustain his family stability is considered a failure in governing his family (te gia).<sup>117</sup> Given this, he loses the image of the ideal person (ngươi quan tu)<sup>118</sup> in terms of the Vietnamese morality based on Confucian ethics.<sup>119</sup>

Similarly, the affected children experience the role loss in many ways. For instance, leaving his noncustodial parent’s extended family, a boy loses his role as a son and grandson. In a male-dominated society, being a male child and grandchild is very important to a big family. This importance is the same for an eldest son or daughter in relationship with their family,

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<sup>115</sup> Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 71

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*, 21.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

especially with their younger siblings. A child may also lose his (her) particular role as a friend, a leader or facilitator in his (her) school, class, club, group, sport team, and so on. Thus, this role loss may disrupt a child's self-perception.

This role loss also affects children's behavior orientation. When children have to leave a familiar social group, they are forced to adjust themselves to a new one. For many children, this adjustment may enable them to grow. Conversely, this experience may be disorienting and distressing for other children who have lacked self-esteem and confidence. A majority of children become confused, anxious and tense in a new environment. These negative feelings can bring about children's behavior disorientation.<sup>120</sup> As a consequence, these feelings may be acted out by lying, cheating, stealing, and so on.<sup>121</sup>

According to Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, to a certain extent, one's loss of role is related to one's loss of selfhood.<sup>122</sup> If this is indeed the case, then the described role loss can lead members of divorced families to feel a loss of their personhood. A divorced individual feels losing one's identity as a partner to the other, as a mother and a father to one's children, as a member of one's extended family, community and society. Likewise, an affected child feels losing one's role as a beloved offspring of their parents and family, as a unique member of one's group, school and team. This feeling may eventually bring about depression and low self-esteem to divorced people.

#### **4. Systemic Loss**

Fourth, divorced persons may suffer from systemic loss. "To understand it, we must first recall that human beings usually belong to some interactional system in which patterns of

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<sup>120</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 43.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

behavior develop over time.”<sup>123</sup> Considering this information, divorced spouse’s departure leaves behind an irreplaceable piece of the family, especially to the other spouse. Such a loss means family life will never be the same. The presence of such a void is bound to cause the remaining parent to miss the departing one to some extent. The one with whom he (she) may share the joys and sorrows of parenting. The parent with primary care for the children would worry about “the effect of the lack of a parent of opposite sex on their children’s development.”<sup>124</sup> In other words, the custodial parent would be concerned about the adequacy in her (his) children’s development.

This loss also happens to the affected children. For many, this experience is characterized by mourning for the departing parent. For instance, they may manifest as wishing the non-present parent was with them. For many children, their family life would completely change if the absent parent was with them. In other cases, children may “idolize the absent parent and demonize the remaining one.”<sup>125</sup> This attitude may hurt the present parent, causing her (him) to feel guilty or inadequate. Even worse, it would negatively affect the offspring’s long-term personal growth.

## **5. Functional Loss**

Fifth, divorced spouses may suffer from functional loss which decreases physical or neurological functions.<sup>126</sup> In comparison with married persons, the divorced face more “physical health problems.”<sup>127</sup> They are even believed to die earlier.<sup>128</sup> This impairment of health likely results from working overload relating to financial burden. Furthermore, this problem is amplified by the fact that a single parent must take care of all household chores and children as

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<sup>123</sup>Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 44.

<sup>124</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 32.

<sup>125</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>126</sup>Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 41.

<sup>127</sup>Alison Clarke, Stewart and Cornelia Brentano, 76.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

well.<sup>129</sup> The divorced no longer has another partner to share parenting responsibilities and worries. Besides, he (she) has difficulty finding time to care for himself (herself) or engage in healthy recreational activity. In other words, doing the work of two parents inevitably causes great stress for a single parent, negatively impacting their physical health.

Additionally, divorced individuals may be challenged by emotional problems. These challenges result from common reactions to divorce like shock, anger, grief, guilt, self-doubt, loneliness, sadness, and depression.<sup>130</sup> To deal with stressors of divorce, many divorced persons become workaholic. However, based on a study in Vietnam, numerous divorced people suffer from declining working capability, creativity and memorization.<sup>131</sup> Others act out “through substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, or eating disorders.”<sup>132</sup> These responses gradually damage their psychological and emotional well-being.

Likewise, the affected children are challenged by functional loss because of the following reasons. First, divorce generally decreases income of a single mother. Second, given a father as the primary source of financial support, his departure lessens a household’s income significantly. Third, husbands are generally not responsible for supporting their offspring financially. All of this poorly affects the children’s well-being. Such consequences may force them into a situation where their nutrition and health are jeopardized.<sup>133</sup> Losing weight, diminished energy, and irritability are common characteristics of the functional loss in children. Malnourished children

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<sup>129</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 30.

<sup>130</sup> Andrew J. Weaver, Linda A. Revilla and Harold G. Koenig, *Counseling Families across the Stages of Life*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 110.

<sup>131</sup> “Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions”, 2011, <http://www.lyhontavietnam.org>

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Paul R. Amato, “Life-Span Adjustment of Children to Their Parents’ Divorce,” *The Future of Children* 4, no.1, Children and Divorce (Spring, 1994), 151.

have to struggle greatly in order to succeed in their endeavor, especially when it comes to academic performance.<sup>134</sup>

Furthermore, since one's autonomy is connected to the functionality of their body,<sup>135</sup> then the collapse of physical and emotional health in members of divorced families threatens their personhood. It hurts their deepest perceptions of their identity (selfhood).

## **6. Intrapsychic Loss**

Finally, divorce may also inflict intrapsychic loss upon the divorced. This loss seriously affects innermost feelings towards one's self, others, values of life, especially values of marriage.<sup>136</sup> For instance, early in married life spouses may enjoy an image of marriage as a wonderful picture. It is said in Vietnam that young married couples usually think about their marriage as "bright and sunny days full of romantic dreams." However, such a romantic image of marriage totally collapses after strong arguments, serious fights, and struggles of family life set in. The potential disappointment at discovering the reality of marriage may lead couples to early divorce. As a consequence of divorce, many people face shock and psychological and emotional crises.

Based on a study on divorces in Vietnam, numerous divorced individuals cannot overcome feeling of failure regarding their former married life. In fact, 25% of divorced men and 33% of divorced women suffer from critical psychological difficulty related to accepting the reality of their brokenness. Many others are doubtful about the traditional values of marriage like

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<sup>134</sup> Paul R. Amato, "Life-Span Adjustment of Children to Their Parents' Divorce," *The Future of Children* 4, no.1, Children and Divorce (Spring, 1994), 151.

<sup>135</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 41.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

fidelity and loving commitments. This feeling is usually described by the following saying: “A shot bird is afraid of broken branches.”<sup>137</sup>

Faith of divorced Christian people may be particularly shaken in the aftermath of divorce. Doubts may arise within themselves that are similar to the following questions about God’s presence and love. “Why did God let me marry this loser?” “Why did God let this brokenness happen to my family?” “Why did God let my folks break up?” “Why did God put me in such a challenging situation?”<sup>138</sup> It is not easy to answer these questions. In the deepest level of the intrapsychic loss, the divorced may doubt the divine and loving care of God for themselves and their family in crisis.<sup>139</sup>

Intrapsychic loss, likewise, may be the most challenging inward experience for children. It challenges adolescents to think of their existence. If one’s parents are believed as the biological foundation of a child, and if original family is considered as a primary relational community where the life of a child is protected and cared for, then parents’ divorce and broken family produces his (her) sense of collapsed personhood.<sup>140</sup> The adolescents may wonder who they are and where they belong.<sup>141</sup> In very strong words, Andrew Root states: “The barriers that help create a sense of existential protection and ontological security are shattered, and the child is left completely exposed to face the existential abyss of non-being alone.”<sup>142</sup>

Besides, intrapsychic loss may greatly affect how children have thought about the world, other people and things. Also for Root, having experienced parents’ divorce, a child may wonder

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<sup>137</sup> “Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions”, 2011, <http://www.lyhontaivietnam.org>

<sup>138</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 25-26.33

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>140</sup> Andrew Root, “Divorce, Young People and Youth Ministry: The Loss of Family As the Loss of Being,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 10, no. 1 (09/01, 2011), 68.74

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>142</sup> Andrew Root, 70.

“if the rest of the world as he knows it will remain the same.”<sup>143</sup> Similarly, the adolescent may doubt traditional values like self-giving love, loving commitment, forgiveness, fidelity, especially marital and family stability. Additionally, mistrusting their parents as primary care givers, children may not trust in other persons. At a deepest level, they question about the presence, love and power of God. They are in risk of losing trust in God. Intrapsychic loss is also manifested in children’s loss of courage, faith and hope.<sup>144</sup> To put it simply, intrapsychic loss may affect seriously children’s identity, their mindset, religious belief, and life style.<sup>145</sup>

Considering that an external event and “a significant sense of inner loss” may be closely connected,<sup>146</sup> divorce that causes the intrapsychic loss challenges the deepest feelings within members of divorced families. For Christians, this loss is considered as that of faith and hope in God.

## **B. For the Society**

Since family is “the first and vital cell of society,”<sup>147</sup> divorce has produced many negative effects on modern Vietnamese society. Undeniably, a significant number of broken families are creating the instability of the society. An increasing number of children from divorced families are forced to live on the streets. As a matter of fact, there are approximately 50,000 children of divorced families only in Ho Chi Minh City every year, and 30% of them are living without families.<sup>148</sup> Under these circumstances, numerous children end up dropping out of school. Plenty of them are reported to be victims of drug addiction, child prostitution and sex tour; many others, juvenile offenders. A growing amount of abortions are committed by teenagers as a consequence

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<sup>143</sup> Andrew Root, 69.

<sup>144</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 40.

<sup>145</sup> Andrew Root, 77.

<sup>146</sup> Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 40.

<sup>147</sup> FC, 42

“Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions”, 2011, <http://www.lyhontavietnam.org>

<sup>148</sup>“Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions”, 2011.

of their casual sex.<sup>149</sup> Tragically, many children committed suicide out of depression and hopelessness.<sup>150</sup> This entire calamity creates deep trauma for families and the whole society.<sup>151</sup>

Additionally, the rising rate of divorce negatively changes the Vietnamese adults' view of marriage today. Many young people no longer believe in marital values like fidelity, loving and lifelong commitments, and sacrifices for one's spouse and family.<sup>152</sup> Many public figures in mass media are now people who have divorced and remarried many times. The youth's acceptance of marital instability implies that divorce is not a taboo any longer for the younger generation. As a consequence, sexual misbehavior like premarital sex, cohabitation, and adultery are gradually becoming common among the young people, rather than committed marriages.<sup>153</sup> Varied forms of sexual misconducts like these threaten the stability of family life and, therefore, the society.<sup>154</sup>

Furthermore, the divorced themselves also contribute to the instability of society. The challenging conditions faced by the divorced make it difficult for them to sustain healthy families. On account of this, their children are not receiving appropriate formation. This in turn leads some of the affected children to misbehave and become juvenile offenders, creating the criminal cycle.<sup>155</sup> Increased crime threatens the safety of society and consumes national resources to address these problems. Besides, suffering from physical and psychological health, the divorced may struggle to contribute to the good of the public in terms of economic growth and social services. Instead, they may become burdens to society because of their problems.

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<sup>149</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter of Episcopal Conference of Vietnam to Catholics on the Educational Setting of Catholic Families," 2008.

<sup>150</sup>"Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions", 2011.

<sup>151</sup>Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, "Pastoral Letter of Episcopal Conference of Vietnam to Catholics on the Educational Setting of Catholic Families," 2008.

<sup>152</sup>"Divorce in Vietnam Today: Reality, Reasons and Solutions", 2011.

<sup>153</sup> Nguyen, P.A.,308.

<sup>154</sup> Archbishop Paul Doc Bui, *The Problems of Families in Vietnam*, 2014,

<sup>155</sup> Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, "Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today," 2014

### **C. For the Church**

Moreover, divorced Catholic families hurt the life and mission of the Church. First, divorced individuals may personally experience the shattering of their selfhood as Christians due to the aforementioned losses. Second, their shaken faith may poorly affect their offspring's faith development, making it more difficult for them to become authentic Christians. Since a Catholic family is defined as the domestic Church (Lumen Gentium 11), once broken, it also means the Church is divided. Also, it fails in bearing witness of the divine communion. Divorced spouses are unable to witness the loving covenant between Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32). This is a testimony they have been called to give by virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony (Lumen Gentium 11). Such a witness is more necessary than ever in the present context of Vietnam, where the sacred family values are being eroded by anti-religious attitude, individualism and pragmatism. In other words, the image of the loving God through the Church is distorted by the fracturing of her members.

## **CHAPTER IV- THEOLOGY OF PASTORAL CARE FOR DIVORCED CATHOLIC FAMILIES**

Based on what has been presented, what is needed in the Vietnamese Catholic Church is an attractive catechesis of marriage, which needs to be developed by pastoral theologians. To do this, I will offer systematic theological reflections derived largely from the Bible, Walter Kasper, and John R. Sachs. I will also cultivate a theology on divorce itself to bring about special pastoral attention to the divorced. Finally, a pastoral theology is highly needed to deal with those affected by divorce.

### **A. Theology of Marriage and Family**

First, let us discuss a theology of marriage and family. Generally speaking, marriage preparation in Vietnam has not yet helped people understand fully the dignity of marriage and family. In many parishes, this training is given as a compulsory requirement for those about to marry. In many others, it simply focuses on the liturgical rites of the celebration. Therefore, it does not inspire couples to acknowledge and live out the genuine values of married and family life. As a consequence, in facing challenges, numerous married couples easily fall into crisis and then divorce in the early stage of their marriage. Hence, to decrease divorces, the mentioned formation should be grounded on a theology derived from the biblical faith in terms of human dignity as well as the dignity of such a life. In other words, by being rooted in this faith, the would-be spouses will be able to live this life fruitfully, despite challenges.

#### **1. Human Sexual Differentiation: Capacity of Communion and Power of Procreation**

Seen in this way, let us first reflect on human dignity according to Scripture. In light of the Bible, human beings, male and female, are created in the image of God:

Then God said, 'Let us create human beings in our image, according to our likeness; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air (...) So God created human beings in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he

created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea (...) upon the earth (Gen 1:26- 28).

This narrative of creation gives the deepest meaning of human sexuality. It is not simply a biological characteristic which identifies one as male or female. Rather, it is an essential aspect of personhood which enables humans to enter into relationship with others. This other-relatedness, as a capacity for sharing oneself with others, is at the very heart of God. In other words, sexuality makes humans become like God, and so achieve personal fulfillment in their relating with and loving of others.<sup>156</sup> Besides, sexuality leads to procreation as well. This is based on God’s blessing to humans, man and woman: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). In other words, with their sexuality they are given power to sustain, develop and bring God’s creation to completion. To put it simply, sexuality not only opens towards interpersonal communion, but also enables people to produce the goodness for this universe.

## **2. Married Love: Open to Others, Open to God**

Particularly, out of married love, sexual differentiation leads spouses into the most intimate unity. This intimacy does not simply remain in sexual affection or genital pleasure. Rather, it is rooted in and sustained by spouses’ self-giving contribution and care for each other. Spouses are invited to trust and commit themselves to each other with all their hearts and resources. In this way, spouses live out the deepest meaning of love. According to Karl Rahner, their mutual love is understood as a transcendent experience. In other words, by being created in the likeness of God who shares himself with creatures,<sup>157</sup> spouses are called to live this divine self-giving love when loving each other unconditionally. In this line of reasoning, spouses are also invited to commit themselves to the transmission of life; that is, to rear and care for

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<sup>156</sup> Francis J. Mugavero, “Sexuality- God’s Gift: A Pastoral Letter,” in *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family*, ed. Paulinuskechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp., ( Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>157</sup> John R. Sachs, S.J., *Christian Vision of Humanity*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 38.

offspring. In this way, spouses bring new human beings into this world.<sup>158</sup> For this reason, their family comes to exist “as a primordial institution of humankind.”<sup>159</sup>

### **3. Marriage as Covenant and Symbol of God’s Covenant with Human Beings**

In addition, the Yahwist tradition highlighted God’s creation of the woman as the completion of man:

“It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him. (...) Therefore, a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body” (Gen 2:18. 24).

The term “one body” here has deep meaning. It implies the intimate love between a man and a woman. Their thoughts, ideals, hopes and destinies become intertwined. This deep intimacy creates their covenant of love or vice versa. It is grounded in their life-lasting commitment to each other. Walter Kasper calls such a covenant a mystery of God’s creation: This mystery is so deep in the Bible that the human covenant symbolizes God’s loving covenant with humanity.<sup>160</sup> This is described many times in the Bible:

“I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord.”(Hosea 2:19- 20)

“Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed... For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name...For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in Spirit, says your God.”(Isaiah 54:4- 6)

### **4. The Brokenness of the Divine Covenant with Humanity out of Sin- The Promise and fulfillment of Salvation in Jesus Christ**

Unfortunately, the divine covenant was damaged by original sin (Gen 3:1-7). By its nature, sin alienated humans from God and from one another.<sup>161</sup> This alienation has violated the original intimacy between man and woman (Gen 3:10). It caused suffering and death to families

<sup>158</sup> Evelyn Eaton Whitehead and James D. Whitehead, *Fruitful Embraces*, (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2014), 40.

<sup>159</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>160</sup> Walter Kasper, “The Sacramental Dignity of Marriage,” in *Sexuality, Marriage, and Family*, ed. Paulinuskechukwu Odozor, C.S.Sp., ( Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 340.

<sup>161</sup> Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 12.

and humanity (Gen 3:12-19).<sup>162</sup> And yet, God promised to save this world (Gen 2:15). This promise was fulfilled in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17).

According to Matthew and Luke, Christ entered this world through an imperfect genealogical line (Matt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38).<sup>163</sup> Jesus joined a family history. He grew up in the family of Nazareth (Luke 2:5f).<sup>164</sup> He shared all human experiences like joy, sorrow, terror, despair, distress, and ultimately death (Hebrews 4:15; 5:8). In Jesus' Paschal mystery, God definitively revealed God's love to humanity and completed God's promise of salvation.

### **5. Marriage: a Sacrament**

In the Gospels, Jesus clearly identified the meaning of marriage in his teaching. In reply to the Pharisees' questioning him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, Jesus confronted them by turning them back to God's original will in creating humanity:

From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined with his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let no one separate. (Mark 10:6-9; Matthew 19:3-9)

By this confrontation, Jesus appealed to the original will of God: "From the beginning of creation, it was not so" (Matthew 19:8). For this reason, the indissolubility of marriage does not remain at the level of law. Rather, it originates from and symbolizes the divine fidelity found in God's covenant with humanity. In other words, God's faithful love is the foundation of indissolubility. It is ultimately revealed in Christ's self-giving love: the genuine sign of God's communion with humanity.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup>Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 12-13.

<sup>163</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>164</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>165</sup>Walter Kasper, "The Sacramental Dignity of Marriage," 341.

Inspired by Jesus' teaching on marriage, Paul discusses a marriage "in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39).<sup>166</sup> This thinking developed long later "by means of the decretal *Tametsi*" of Trent (1563).<sup>167</sup> Besides, the "household codes" (Col 3:18- 4:1; Eph 5:21- 6:9; 1 Pet 2:18- 3:7) disclosed that the concept of "in the Lord" positively influenced all relationships and aspects of the family life: the relation of man and woman, of parents and children, of masters and slaves. These codes not only assimilate patriarchal house rules but also modify them "in the Lord."<sup>168</sup> They gradually become examples of "the norm-altering and norm-making power of Christian faith."<sup>169</sup> Based on this adjustment, there was no more one-sided subordination of woman to man. Instead, there developed a mutual relationship of love between male and female, and it was expected to become a standard of all the other family relations. This development truly opened to the gender equality, since men and women are seen as "one in Christ" (Gal 3:28).<sup>170</sup>

Furthermore, in his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul relates the covenant of the spouses to Jesus' self-giving love to the Church (Ephesians 5:21-33). As presented previously, Jesus' love fulfills the divine covenant with humankind. For this reason, the married covenant becomes a sacred symbol for the divine covenant with humanity. It also becomes "a visible sign of the

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<sup>166</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 17.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

According to John C. Dwyer, "In each of the sacraments, a human and worldly reality which already enjoys its own meaning and possesses its own symbolic power, is taken beyond itself, to point to and effect a new kind of relationship with God. Marriage is an effective sign of God's love for the world- a love which is manifest in his sending of Christ and in the founding of the Church- and it is this which keeps marriage, precisely as a commitment to sexual love, from being a purely private matter. It is an act of the church, not primarily because a priest or other representative is there to witness it and record it in the church register. It is an act of the church because the two Christians *who are real ministers of the sacrament to each other*, are acting here *as church* and are constituting a new community of believers (the family, which will initially be composed of the two of them). Marriage is personal, but it is also public; it is a *covenant* which is a sign of God's covenant with his people, and in making such a covenant, husband and wife are making an intensely personal statement to each other and a very public statement to the whole world." [John C. Dwyer, *Human Sexuality: A Christian View*, (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1987), 83- 84.]

mystery of Christ and the Church” (Eph 5:32).<sup>171</sup> Based on this theology of Paul, in the twelfth century the Council of Trent developed Christian marriage as a sacrament.<sup>172</sup>

## 6. The Sacrament of Marriage and Family as Domestic Church

By virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, which enables Christian married couples to share in the loving unity between Christ and the Church, spouses continually develop their conjugal communion and openness to life. Also by baptism, their offspring become the children of God. In this way, God’s people keep growing throughout the ages.<sup>173</sup> Besides, as a community who believes in Christ, a Christian family becomes the “Domestic Church,”<sup>174</sup> which shares all the characteristics of the universal Church. Given this, let us contemplate some characteristics of a Christian family as the “domestic Church,” drawn primarily from the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*) and John Paul II’s apostolic exhortation on the role of the Christian family in the modern world (*Familiaris Consortio*).

### 6. a. Christian Family: Community of Love

First, by the grace of baptism and matrimony, spouses become one in the sacramental bond of marriage. They create a Christian family as a unit of the people of God. In this way, spouses are strengthened by the dignity<sup>175</sup> and responsibilities of their married life. Besides, by virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, spouses are immersed with the Spirit, who fills their lives

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<sup>171</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 18

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Vatican II, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, n. 11.

<sup>174</sup> *Familiaris Consortio* (FC), n. 21.

<sup>175</sup> As detailed above, the dignity of the married life is based on God’s creating human beings, males and females, in God’s image and culminated by Jesus Christ. In God’s will of creation, a man and a woman are called into an intimate love which creates a loving covenant and then a family. Their covenant **symbolizes the divine covenant with humanity**. Besides, it is ultimately fulfilled by Jesus and **his self-giving love (to the Church)**. For this reason, married life - by being grounded on and orienting to Jesus’ love to achieve the fulfillment- is sanctified. In addition, out of the married love, spouses open to procreation and education of offspring. This creates their family as a community of believers through baptism, and therefore it becomes a **domestic Church**. All of this creates what is called dignity of marriage.

with faith, hope and charity.<sup>176</sup> This transforms their family as a community of love: the love between spouses, between parents and children, among family members, and between these members and society. Family members accordingly become witnesses of God's love for humanity and Christ's love for the Church.

### **6. b. Community of Grace**

Second, created in God's image, every family member is called to share in the divine life. In a particular way, authentic conjugal love enables spouses to integrate their sexuality with the most intimate love between themselves. This mutual love is expressed in spouses' caring of each other and permeates their whole lives. Similarly, all family members are invited to care for one another with self-giving love. In the most profound way, such love is rooted in the deepest communion within God's self (John 16: 15).<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, since being gifted with God's love by the Spirit, Christians are able to love God and one another.<sup>178</sup> Seen in this light, a Christian family exists as a community of grace; that is, partakers in the divine love and life.

### **6. c. Community of Faith**

Third, as a community of faith, a Christian family opens to the Word of God to be transformed. By this opening, it becomes a sign of the Reign of God: solidarity, loving, caring and living. In faith, spouses gratefully embrace the dignity of their married life as a sign of the divine covenant with humanity and Christ's love to the Church. In faith, all family members become the Lord's disciples. In other words, this dignity and discipleship comes from their deepest faith in Christ. This faith is professed not only in their celebrating the sacrament of matrimony, but it should be carried on throughout their family life. To put it simply, family

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<sup>176</sup> Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 48.

<sup>177</sup> "All that my Father has is mine; that is why I said that the Holy Spirit will take what I give Him and tell it to you." (John 16: 15)

<sup>178</sup> "God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us." (2 Corinthians 13: 13)

members should deeply experience God's presence with them that is calling them to share God's love in Christ. Such experience becomes tangible through their self-giving love for one another in the Spirit of Christ.<sup>179</sup>

#### **6. d. Community sharing Christ's Paschal Mystery**

Fourth, considering married love as a sacrament of Christ's self-giving to the Church (Eph 5:25)<sup>180</sup> and the family love as the Lord's commandment,<sup>181</sup> Christ's paschal mystery should be the primary model of love among family members. They are called to die to their selfishness in order to give life for each other. Moreover, the paschal mystery enables them to reconstruct the meaning of their suffering individually and collectively. This requires them to be united with Christ in his Paschal mystery.

#### **6. e. Community of Reconciliation and Healing**

As mentioned previously, as a domestic church, a Christian family shares the characteristics of the universal church. Besides, given that the Church is "the pilgrim church"<sup>182</sup> which is affected by movements of this passing world,<sup>183</sup> a Christian family is endangered by a contemporary secularism and pragmatism which threatens their holiness, communion and life. As a consequence, numerous families become wounded by divorce, separation, domestic violence. For this reason, a Christian family needs to be healed and reconciled, and this need becomes more urgent than ever. They are expected to come back to God, who is gracious, merciful and rich in kindness (Joel 2:12- 13). Once they benefit from reconciliation with God, they may become witnesses of God's love, and then agents of healing and reconciling to others,

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<sup>179</sup> FC, n. 51.

<sup>180</sup> "Christ who loved the Church and gave himself up for her." (Ephesians 5: 25)

<sup>181</sup> "Love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay one's life for one's friends." (John 15: 12 ff)

<sup>182</sup> Vatican II, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, n. 48.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

especially to family members. In this way, a Christian family is considered to be a community of reconciliation and healing which is so needed in the world today.

#### **6. f. Community of Eschatological Vision**

Finally, as wounded as it is, a Christian family is invited to believe that God will bring all creatures to fulfillment. This belief is grounded in the completion of Christ's paschal mystery. In this eschatological vision, despite their present challenges, a Christian family orients their lives to the everlasting end. This enables them to sustain their lives with strength, courage and hope. In communion with God and with one another, they strongly believe in and hope for the "eternal marriage feast" with the Lord (Matthew 22:1-14; Luke 14:7-14). Seen in this light, they are not discouraged while facing suffering. Instead, they become witnesses of hope and hold fast to what endures, even while walking amid passing things. For this reason, a Christian family may contribute their part in building up (creating) a society of justice and love as a projection of God's Kingdom.<sup>184</sup>

**In summary**, based on the biblical faith, human beings, male and female, are created in God's image. In a unique way, their sexual differentiation enables them to commit themselves to a married covenant. This covenant is so beautiful that it symbolizes the divine covenant with humanity. Furthermore, it is ultimately fulfilled by Christ and his paschal mystery; in other words, by his self-giving love to the Church. Besides, grounded on Jesus' teaching on marriage, especially on his love, Christian marriage becomes a sacrament. For this reason, it is not simply a commitment of sexual love or a private matter between spouses. Instead, by mutual loving commitment between the two believers, Christian marriage becomes an effective sign of God's love for the world. Moreover, the married commitment constitutes a family, since as a community of believers, this family becomes a domestic church which shares in the identity and

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<sup>184</sup>FC, n. 16.

mission of the universal church. Seen in this light, married and family life has a wonderful dignity in God's will which is fulfilled by Jesus. It is a vocation of love, rather than an earthly institution. Once those preparing for marriage are trained to understand fully such a dignity, they may live out this life fruitfully with the help of the divine grace.

### **B. Theological Reflection on the Divorced and Remarriage**

Considered as a sacrament and the domestic church, Christian marriage has a sacred dignity that should be protected in the Christian faith. Therefore, the rapidly increasing rate of divorced Catholic couples is truly a serious pastoral challenge to the Church in Vietnam, since it damages the mentioned dignity and possibly leads to civil remarriages after divorce. Though there is not accurate data of these cases, this reality is believed to become gradually common in Vietnam today.<sup>185</sup> The point is how this issue relates to the indissolubility of a sacramental marriage and the impossibility of one divorced spouse's commitment to a civil remarriage during the other's lifetime. This is indeed a complex problem. In this section I wish to reflect theologically on the divorced and remarried in the vision of the divine mercy which should be the core value of pastoral view toward those in concern.

First, the mentioned indissolubility should be understood through the divine will which Jesus reconfirmed and fulfilled by his teaching and self-giving love. Accordingly, God creates a man and a woman in God's likeness. Their sexual differentiation is destined for interpersonal relationship, and particularly for a marriage covenant. Because of its deep intimacy, this covenant becomes a symbol of God's covenant with human beings. This is lovely and vividly described in the Bible (The Song of Songs 1:1- 8:7; Hosea 2:19- 20; Isaiah 54:4- 6):

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<sup>185</sup>Rev Tuan A. Nguyen, "Challenges to Family Ministries in Vietnam Today", 2014.

“Set me like a seal on your heart  
 For love is strong as Death,  
 passion as relentless as Sheol.  
 The flesh of it is a flesh of fire,  
 a flame of Yahweh himself.  
 Love no flood can quench,  
 no torrents drown.  
 Were a man to offer all his family wealth  
 to buy love,  
 contempt is all that he would gain”(The Song of Songs 8: 6- 7)<sup>186</sup>

Furthermore, this sacredness of married covenant as God’s eternal plan is firmly highlighted by Jesus in his reply to the Pharisees’ questioning about the possibility of divorce (Mark 10:6- 9; Matthew 19:3-9). Moreover, in accordance with Pauline theology, it is ultimately fulfilled and empowered by Jesus’ self-giving love to the Church (Eph 5:21-33). Based on this theology, the Church tradition developed Christian marriage as a sacrament. In other words, it becomes a sacred sign of the divine covenant with humanity and Christ’s love for the Church. For this reason, God’s faithfulness in Christ’s unconditional love is the foundation of marital fidelity. This is the dignity of marriage. Seen in this light, the bond of marriage should not be broken. Besides, the so-called indissolubility and impossibility of divorce should not be seen purely in a legal light. Rather, it should be considered as a commitment of faith and love in accordance with God’s desire and Christ’s unlimited love. Given this, the more deeply spouses root themselves in God’s love in Christ, the more faithful they are to each other, and the more fruitful their married and family life becomes.

However, the indissolubility may be broken and eventually create the need for civil remarriages due to unavoidable reasons. One may break it because of the selfishness and infidelity of the other partner. Others have to do it to protect their lives; for instance, to escape from some long lasting abuse (physically or sexually) or horrible domestic violence. These

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<sup>186</sup>*The New Jerusalem Bible*- Standard Edition, (New York: Doubleday, 1999)

situations are very common in remote areas of Vietnam. Other divorces may happen as a result of the failure of reasonable attempts to save their marriages. Others end their marriages soon because of their ignorance and lack of consent before committing to the sacrament. For example, plenty of Vietnamese young people get married only for economic benefits. Many Vietnamese females, when pregnant from premarital sex, rush to marriages just to save their families' reputation. In many cases, the divorced have to struggle alone the rest of their lives with the burden of parenting and household care. Many others have to depend on new partnerships and civil marriages for the sake of their children. Furthermore, they feel safer and happier than they did in previous marriages; even they may grow in new married commitments significantly.

Given this, there is a challenging dilemma in dealing with the individuals under discussion. Should they be totally blamed for their divorces and civil remarriages? Should they be seen as sinners and excluded from communities? Perhaps, they should not be. However, should the mentioned indissolubility of marriage and impossibility of divorce be overlooked and not strictly observed? Definitely not because it is God's will. It is fulfilled by Jesus, his teaching, especially his self-giving love as the ultimate revelation of God's unfailing love in God's covenant with humanity. Furthermore, it has been tied closely to the Church's faith tradition.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, it should not be ruled out easily. Nevertheless, each individual in concern should be also considered as a unique person with her (his) particular context, with all her (his) suffering, terrors and distress, but with full human dignity as well.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 26.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

To resolve this dilemma, the Church should go back to the mercy of God, since it is “the most amazing attribute”<sup>189</sup> of God and the “most important message of Jesus.”<sup>190</sup> The Old Testament speaks of God as gracious and merciful God:

“The Lord, the Lord,  
a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love  
and faithfulness (Exod 34: 6)

But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love  
and faithfulness” (Ps 86: 15)

Furthermore, the divine mercifulness and graciousness is tremendously greater than the shortcomings, weaknesses and sins of humanity. Though humans turn away from God, still God never fails to love them:

“How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
How can I make you like Admah?  
How can I treat you like Zeboim?  
My heart recoils within me;  
my compassion grows warm tender.  
I will not execute my fierce anger;  
I will not again destroy Ephraim;  
for I am God and no mortal,  
the Holy One in your midst,  
and I will not come in wrath” (Hosea 11:8- 9).

For Paul, God is mercy because God remains faithful to God’s self as a loving God (2 Tim 2:13). In God, mercy and fidelity belong to each other. In other words, no matter how a person may fall into an abyss of sinfulness, (s)he never falls deeper than God’s mercy can reach.<sup>191</sup> In Jesus the divine mercy is ultimately revealed to the world (John 3:16-17). During his public ministries, by his words and deeds, Jesus proclaimed God’s desire for mercy (Matthew 12:7) and God as a merciful Father (Luke 15:11-32). The key message of his Gospels is

<sup>189</sup> Pope Francis, *The Name of God is Mercy*, (New York: Ransom House, 2016), 7.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>191</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 26.

salvation, restoration, forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and encouragement, not condemnation (Mark 2:17; Luke 19:10; John 8:11). Even in his death, Jesus remained faithful to his teaching of the divine mercy when forgiving those who put him to death (Luke 23:34) and loving the sinners and marginalized (Luke 23:43). To put it simply, no human sinfulness can hinder the divine merciful love in Jesus.

In light of this, the divorced and remarried should be loved, healed and encouraged in their challenges. This special attention should be grounded on God's love for them. In a practical way, a declaration of nullity of previous marriages should be possible to those under discussion, so that they may be freed from burdens to live a second married commitment joyfully and fruitfully. Such a declaration should result from the Church's claim of invalidity of their previous marriages. This should be considered in their whole living context, not simply based on general rules which may neglect their hardships. In other words, every individual should be counted as a unique person in God's sight with all of his/her concrete challenges. That is, they may have suffered from some pressures, fear, less freedom, immaturity and ignorance when they had previously married. Besides, they may have tried their best to save such marriages, but they failed. All of these factors constitute the invalidity of marriage that they may not be aware of. Given this, an appropriate understanding and compassion should be required in dealing with those in concern, so that they may benefit from the care and healing of God's mercy out of their brokenness.<sup>192</sup>

However, God's mercy should not be perceived as cheap grace, and so overlook the indissolubility of marriages which spouses have broken out of their full knowledge and consent. In other words, the indissolubility which is the truth and dignity of Christian marriage should not be applied to marriages in which the validity has clearly existed: For the Church, "proclaiming

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<sup>192</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 26- 29

the truth in love is itself an act of mercy.”<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, even in these cases, the divorced and remarried should not be abandoned by God’s mercy. Instead, it still reaches out to them as sinners. As an explanation for this, Pope Francis said: “Mercy is not contrary to justice but is the behavior of God toward sinner (...). God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as foundation of true justice” (Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, n. 21). In addition, Jesus reveals fully the face of the mercy of God the Father (John 3:16-17). In light of this, the Church should consistently love and give them opportunities to come back to God. First, no matter what situation they are living in, they are still members of the Church by the grace of their baptism. They are called to continually participate in the life of the faith community. Besides, their perseverance in participating in the Sacrifice of the mass and listening to the Word of God nourishes and strengthens their trust in God’s love. Furthermore, they are encouraged to contribute their parts in building up the church as a community of faith and love.<sup>194</sup> Moreover, the Church should always inspire them with the grace of repentance. This contrition must be grounded on God’s untiring forgiveness (Isaiah 1:16- 18) which was disclosed in Jesus’ unconditional love (Mark 2:17; Luke 19:10; John 8:11). This opens to God’s healing, reconciliation and life. To put it simply, despite their own weaknesses, they are invited to trust in God’s graciousness. This trust requires one’s formed conscience and heart which always seeks and desires to fulfill God’s will in one’s life.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *The Roman Missal*, the Opening Prayer for the 26<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

<sup>194</sup> FC, n. 84

<sup>195</sup> Synod of Bishop, XIV Ordinary General Assembly, “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World,” Vatican City, 24 October, 2015, n. 53

### C. Theology of Pastoral Care for Divorced Catholic Families

In addition, since my thesis aims to propose pastoral care for divorced Catholic families in Vietnam, here I would like to reflect theologically on this care based on the biblical faith. The aforementioned consequences (in chapter III) may lead those wounded by divorce to raise many “why” questions about God.<sup>196</sup> The divorced may ask: “Why did God let me marry that loser?” “Why did God let my family break up?” “Why did God put such a burden on my shoulders?” Likewise, the affected children, especially the adolescents, are critically challenged by similar questions. Like those who lose their parents out of death, the children of divorced families may suffer from serious difficulties. Moreover, while a parent’s death sometimes happens unexpectedly, divorce is a free choice of at least one parent. Hence, this free-willed divorce deeply hurts the offspring.<sup>197</sup> The children’s questions may be the following: “Why did God allow my parents to marry then let them split up?” “Why did God not get them remarried?” “Why did God abandon me?” “Why did God punish my family?” Besides, many other Christians come to ask: “Why did God not prevent these couples from divorcing?” “Why did God not protect the wholeness and holiness of the Church?” Also, society may question: “Why did the Catholic God not decrease the number of divorces to reduce social problems?”

Psychologically, these questions disclose feelings of pain, anger, fear, terror, despair, hopelessness, and so on.<sup>198</sup> However, beneath these feelings lies the people’s longing for God’s love and solidarity with them in the midst of crises. Though these questions are not easily answered, still the innermost desire for God calls for a theological reflection on the meaning of the wounds and on the pastoral care for the wounded: individuals, the Church and society.

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<sup>196</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 25-26.33.

<sup>197</sup> Paul R. Amato, 144.

<sup>198</sup> Patricia D. Fosarelli, 25-26.33.

Such theological thinking should come from biblical faith. Based on this faith, God has revealed God's self in human history not only as the Creator but also as the Savior of the world.<sup>199</sup> As a compassionate God, God saw and understood the suffering of God's people; God heard the cry of their misery; God decided to save them (Exodus 3:7-10). This passage of Exodus is a wonderful Jewish reflection on divine love when God freed Israel from slavery in Egypt and made them "a people of the Covenant."<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, God's communion with the suffering is ultimately expressed in Jesus, especially in his healing the sick and the wounded who were believed to be under the devil's domination.<sup>201</sup>

Jesus' many healings are evident throughout the Gospels. Along with his proclamation of the good news of the Kingdom, Jesus "cured every sickness and disease" (Matthew 9:35). Besides, he instructed his twelve disciples to do the same (Matthew 10:1; Mark 4:14, 6:7; Luke 9:1). For Jesus, announcing God's reign should never be separated from healing the wounded, physically and spiritually. He exhorted his disciples: "As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The Kingdom of heaven has come near,' Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleans the lepers, cast out demons" (Matthew 10:7-8; Luke 10:9). In ancient Jewish belief, all kinds of illnesses came out of the chaos which was against the reign of God: lameness, disfiguration (leprosy), wounds, and especially death. The oppressions were from demonic powers, and so they threatened people.<sup>202</sup> In light of this, Jesus' healing reveals the loving God who communicated with the wounded, liberated them from the demonic oppression, cared for them, and restored their life. It was by his healing that Jesus enabled the reign of God to come (Luke 11:20).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> John R. Sachs, *The Christian Vision of Humanity*, 6-7.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>201</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus of Nazareth: What He Wanted, Who He Was*, (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2012), 134.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 57- 58.

Furthermore, Jesus' acts of healing are beneficial not only for individuals but also for society. Contemplating Jesus' touching the ill and the wounded when healing them (Mark 1:41. 6:5. 7:33. 8:23; John 9:6-7), people can see how dearly Jesus communicated with those who were broken. Jesus dissolved the separation between the wounded and God as well as between the wounded and other persons.<sup>204</sup> In addition, since the sicknesses of society are behind individual illnesses, when healing the sick and wounded individually, Jesus brought back life and perfection to humanity as a whole according to God's eternal plan of creation.<sup>205</sup>

As the culmination of God's love, Jesus healed the wounded by his wounds in his paschal mystery.<sup>206</sup> According to the letter to the Hebrews, though being the Son of God and a holy man, Jesus became like humans in every respect, except sin, to share their experiences and their wounds (Hebrews 4:15). By his passion, Jesus was with those in suffering. As a true man, Jesus experienced loneliness from the abandonment of his friends (Matthew 26:40). He underwent extreme distress and agitation while facing what would happen to him at the end of his earthly life: arrest, trials, scourging, crucifixion and death (Matthew 26:1-27: 62; Mark 14:32- 15:42; Luke 21:22- 23:56; John 17:18-19:42). And yet, Jesus entered his passion with the deepest love for God and humanity, completely aware that the passion was an inevitable consequence of his proclaiming God's reign (Matthew 16:21-23. 17:22-23. 20:17-19; Mark 8:31-33. 9:30-32. 10:32-34; Luke 9:22-45; 18:31-34; John 13:1; 17:1). In light of this reflection, the meaning of wounds of all people is reconstructed by the wounds of Jesus. Human wounds should not be simply seen as sources of grief and loss. Instead, through unity with the wounds of Jesus, people's wounds open their hearts to love God and others.

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<sup>204</sup> Gerhard Lohfink, 121.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>206</sup> Luis Antonio Tagle, "Family as Home for the Wounded Heart," [http:// www.catholicv.com](http://www.catholicv.com)(accessed October 3, 2015, at 10:00 AM)

Interestingly, the wounds of Jesus did not disappear after his resurrection (John 20:19-29). They still remained in his risen body as witnesses to his powerful love: Such a love is so strong that it could not be overcome by any earthly and demonic power. Even dying and death could not put out the fire of this love. In other words, the wounds of the risen Lord manifested the triumph of God's love. In this way of reflection, the wounds of individuals are totally transformed. They open to a new life of blessings. That is, the wounds make people "avenues of understanding, compassion, solidarity and love."<sup>207</sup> To put it simply, no matter how people are wounded, they are never deprived of the capacity to live fruitfully and to love unlimitedly. This is a new meaning for one's wounds. It is enlightened by the saving meaning of the Lord's wounds. In this way, one's wounds are transformed in faith.

Given all of this, the meaning of humanity's wounds is explored in Christ's Paschal mystery of which the heart is God's love. By means of this love the ultimate meaning of one's wounds is restored and regained completely.<sup>208</sup> It is God's unconditional love for every person in the divine gift of God's begotten Son: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believed in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16). This love is culminated in Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection (Philippians 2:6-11). It was his deepest love of God and his proclaiming God's Kingdom that enabled Jesus to willingly accept the paschal mystery and bring salvation to the world. Seen in this light, on one hand, suffering is an unacceptable reality in humans' lives. However, once deeply experiencing the divine love in Jesus, the wounded will discover that God so loves them in their wounds. In addition, once united with Jesus the wounded attain the ultimate meaning of their pains: God's self-giving love.

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<sup>207</sup>Luis Antonio Tagle, "Family as Home for the Wounded Heart," [http:// www.catholicTV.com](http://www.catholicTV.com)(accessed October 3, 2015, at 10:00 AM)

<sup>208</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 89.

Now, from the healing of Jesus comes the healing of the Church. According to the Gospels, Jesus did not heal the wounded alone. He also entrusted his disciples with the ministry of healing (Matthew 10:1; 7- 8; Mark 4:14, 6:7; Luke 9:1; 10:9). Jesus' healing is not only for people's bodies, but also for their spirit and soul. In other words, "Jesus sought healing for the entire person."<sup>209</sup> Therefore, this ministry has been continued by the Church, the Body of Jesus, throughout the ages: "Jesus' preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless effort to comfort them" (CCC 1503). Therefore, through the Church, Jesus keeps healing all the wounded.<sup>210</sup>

Amazingly, wounded as she is by her broken members, the Church is still a healing community. Just as the risen Lord's wounded body is the source of healing, so can the wounded Church cure the wounded. Her healing is expressed by her solidarity and compassion, being with one another in joys and sorrows.<sup>211</sup> This should be the mission of the Church in the present context which is shadowed by family crises. More than ever, the Church should become the sacrament, the sign and instrument of the intimate communion between God and humanity as well as between persons.<sup>212</sup> Only by being rooted in the divine love can the Church reach out to the wounded. Only by being deeply inspired by the Lord's merciful love can the Church break through any judgment to embrace the wounded. Only by carrying the Lord's self-giving love can the Church restore the life of the wounded fully. The Church here is present in faith communities like dioceses, parishes, religious congregations, and apostolic societies. Most especially, the

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<sup>209</sup> Bishop Charles V. Grahmann, DD: *Pastoral Letter on the Church's Care for the Sick and Dying*, 2002. <http://www.stannparish.org> (accessed April 24, 2015, at 14:00)

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Luis Antonio Tagle, "Family as Home for the Wounded Heart," [http:// www.catholicv.com](http://www.catholicv.com)(accessed October 3, 2015, at 10:00 AM)

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

Church is every Christian family despite its pains and suffering. In summary, no matter how the Church is wounded, she is always the sacrament of God's unconditional love and healing. This is clearly indicated by Pope Francis' saying: "Not only is the Church a field hospital, the family too is a field hospital, where it is necessary to bind many wounds, dry many tears, and establish reconciliation and peace time and again."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, 14.

## CHAPTER V- PASTORAL CARE FOR DIVORCED CATHOLIC FAMILIES

Considering the suffering of divorced Catholic families and the theological reflection on pastoral care, I would like to offer some insights from recent developments in psychology which have relevance for pastoral care for the wounded people. Accordingly, I wish to present the cultivation of resilience as a pastoral response to the wounded after divorce. This presentation will focus on the meaning and source of resilience. Besides, I will mention about narrative understanding of how such resilience may be challenged by divorce. Then I would like to propose attachment theory and its concept of “secure base” as a way to build up and sustain this resilience. In other words, my hope is that this concept may help us deal creatively with psychological issues and problems. However, beyond such a psychological approach, I wish to go further and speak of the practice of “finding God in all things” in Ignatian spirituality, one of the Church’s rich spiritual traditions, which I know and find helpful to many troubled people. In a practical way, based on Ignatius’ spiritual exercises,<sup>214</sup> this practice should be adapted in the form of weekend retreat(s). Hopefully, such retreat(s) may enable the wounded to experience God’s loving care in every detail of their lives, and so they increase their trust in God as the “secure base” of their lives. As a consequence, they may be able to reconstruct meaning of their life narratives.

### A. Resilience

First, let us explore the meaning and the source of resilience. According to Mary Patricia Van Hook, resilience is “the process by which people manage not only to endure hardships but also to create and sustain lives that have meaning and contribute to those around them.”<sup>215</sup> Besides, for Stewart, Reid and Mangham (1997), resilience is a capacity which is “changed over

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<sup>214</sup> This will be discussed closely later on.

<sup>215</sup> Mary Patricia Van Hook, *Social Work Practice with Families: A Resiliency- Based Approach*, (Chicago: Lyceum Book, 2008), 3.

time and is enhanced by protective factors in the individual and the environment.”<sup>216</sup> For Van Hook, protective factors are primarily perceived as agents who can give people a feeling of safety in an abyss of harm and damages. Furthermore, these factors can transform negative effects in aversive situations. Moreover, by changing circumstances, these factors prevent what could have happened.<sup>217</sup> Given this, the protective factors play a role of creating a secure foundation in resilience. This foundation enables people to feel safe, to make meaning, and thus to grow even in the midst of their stressors and threats.

### **B. Narrative Understanding of How Divorce Challenges Resilience**

However, resilience is not always taken for granted for everyone. For many affected people, it is challenged by divorce and their way of narrating their life stories is threatened.<sup>218</sup> Experience of loss after divorce may critically impact the deepest feelings of the divorced individuals about self, others, values of life, especially their ideal of marriage. For instance, one’s anticipated belief in fidelity and lasting commitment in married life is collapsed, and their dream of a happy family is ruined after divorce. Besides, if one’s autonomy is valued by the stability of one’s marriage and family, then its brokenness may entail the shattering of their selfhood. In other words, it may produce low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence in the divorced. This may also deprive the wounded of trust in others. Consequently, they may not believe in the presence of a loving God. Similarly, the affected children may be challenged about their being seriously. Since parents are considered to be a child’s foundation, a broken family may cause the breaking down of his (her) personhood. Furthermore, being hurt by their parents’ divorce may make the children doubt human love, forgiveness, and fidelity. Moreover,

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<sup>216</sup> Working on Stewart, Reid and Mangham (1997), quoted in Mary Patricia Van Hook, 3.

<sup>217</sup> Mary Patricia Van Hook, 5- 6

<sup>218</sup> Everyone creates his or her own life story. When reflecting on their lives, people often do so “in the form of stories.” Their stories usually reflect the meaning they have learned from family, culture, faith and belief. All of these produce a meaning system (Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief*, 80- 81).

mistrusting in their parents may lead to mistrust of other people. At the deepest level, like their parents, they risk losing trust in God. This loss of faith may eventually cause loss of their hope and courage.<sup>219</sup> All of this may disrupt their life narratives and shake the meaning of their stories.<sup>220</sup>

Given this, the point is how the wounded are helped to retell their stories in a hopeful way and reconstruct meaning of such stories. Since not everyone retells their stories in a way that leads to greater resilience and hope, they need to be assisted to rediscover God's presence and caring providence throughout their lives, especially in the midst of their suffering. In this way, they may regain faith and hope, and so reframe the meaning of their life stories. Seen in this light, the Ignatian concept of "finding God in all things" may help the wounded to experience God's love in their lives and so increasingly trust and hope in God. This may eventually enable them to reframe meaning of their lives. Practically, this belief may be reflected in the context of Ignatius' spiritual exercises. This will be discussed later on. To prepare for this practical approach, let us explore attachment theory which closely relates to the concept of "attachment to God" as one's "secure base."

### **C. Attachment theory**

Attachment theory was initiated and developed with regard to human development by British psychiatrist John Bowlby (1907-1990). Based on his observational studies of young children separated from their primary care givers, typically their mothers, Bowlby classified their specific behaviors into three types: protest, despair, and detachment. Children in the protesting phase expressed deep distress. Those in the despairing phase lost hope for their mothers'

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<sup>219</sup>Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson, 40.

<sup>220</sup> Robert A. Neimeyer, "The Language of Loss: Grief Therapy as a Process of Meaning Reconstruction," in *Meaning Reconstruction & the Experience of Loss*, ed. Robert A. Neimeyer, (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2001), 263.

returning. Others in the detachment category opened to other caregivers when reengaging the environment. Bowlby described these behaviors as attachment behaviors.<sup>221</sup>

Based on similar observations, Mary Ainsworth indicated three different styles of infants' responding to being apart their mothers. Ainsworth named these styles as *secure*, *avoidant*, and *ambivalent*. Infants of the secure style expected caregivers' accessibility and response to their needs. Besides, they were increasingly self-confident to be active in their surroundings. Those of the avoidant pattern lacked responsiveness from caregivers and suppressed attachment behaviors. Others of the ambivalent type feared rejection and thus worried about their security.<sup>222</sup> According to Ainsworth, infants' ways to respond to particular situations resulted from their "expectations regarding presence and availability" of caregivers.<sup>223</sup> A primary caregiver is also understood as an attachment figure and, ideally, as a "secure base."<sup>224</sup> Ainsworth's term of "secure base" was appreciated and elaborated by Bowlby.<sup>225</sup>

For Bowlby, "secure base" plays a crucial role in parenting and an individual's personality growth. If a child enjoys positive care from his parents- physically, psychologically and emotionally- (s) he will develop a sense of safety and self-confidence. This sense enables her (him) to operate and most adaptively respond to her (his) surrounding world and challenges. Besides, it becomes a key factor for her (his) continuing development of personality in the long run.<sup>226</sup> In other words, one's sense of self-worth from feeling loved and cared for makes her

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<sup>221</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, "Loss Through the Lens of Attachment to God" in *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 2009, 89.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

(him) increasingly resilient in facing “transition and stress.”<sup>227</sup> This is vividly disclosed by Bowlby:

This brings me to a central feature of my concept of parenting- the provision by both parents of a secure base from which a child or an adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened. In essence this role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary ... In the case of children and adolescents we see them, as they get older, venturing steadily further from base and for increasing spans of time. The more confident they are that their base is secure and, moreover, ready if called upon to respond, the more they take it for granted. Yet should one or other parent become ill or die, the immense significance of the base to the emotional equilibrium of the child or adolescent or young adult is at once apparent.<sup>228</sup>

Practically, Bowlby developed a vision for psychoanalysts based on role of “secure base.” In accordance with this model, one who has experienced woundedness throughout one’s life will be able to deal with one’s suffering if she (he) benefits from a “trusted companion” that understands, supports, encourages and guides her (him) graciously and lovingly.<sup>229</sup>

### **Attachment to God**

Interestingly, the notion of “secure base” is also used to refer to God. Regarding characteristics usually attributed to God, theologian Gordon Kaufman has proposed that God may function as an “absolutely adequate attachment-figure.”<sup>230</sup> For Philip Bennett, a pastoral psychotherapist, if God acts as the ultimate secure base, people may get over their loss successfully.<sup>231</sup> Besides, based on their research of 93 persons who experienced a significant death in a particular year, M. M. Kelley and K. T. Chan stated that people’s depression and grief

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<sup>227</sup> Susan M. Johnson and Alison C. Lee, “Emotional Focused Family Therapy: Reconstructing Attachment,” in *Children in Therapy- Using the Family as a Resource*, ed. C. Everett Bailey, (London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 115

<sup>228</sup> John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent- Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 11, quoted in Melissa M. Kelley, “Loss Through the Lens of Attachment to God,” *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, 2009, 91.

<sup>229</sup> John Bowlby, 138, quoted in Melissa M. Kelley, “Loss Through the Lens of Attachment to God,” 92.

<sup>230</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief*, 59.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

were buffered by a secure attachment to God and that people could make meaning and thus grow amid their grief and loss.<sup>232</sup>

Additionally, the belief in God as a “secure base” is expressed in religions. According to Andrew J. Weaver and others, religions play a crucial role across the “life spans” of families, especially in facing challenges. Faith and worship enable families to cope with their loss.<sup>233</sup> In a study on families with children with severe birth-defects in 1992, parents reported that their belief in God was the most important strategy to cope with stress. Also, participating in worship was one of the most helpful practices.<sup>234</sup> In a study (by Samuelson and others in 1992) on fathers with children under treatment for cancer, the fathers believed that prayer was “the most common and the most helpful” strategy among 29 others in coping with their challenges. Based on this study, these prayers and worshipping derive from their “having belief in God.”<sup>235</sup> In reading these studies, one might intuit that the God to whom people turned in their need was a loving and available God. This was closely related to the healing and hope they experienced.

Furthermore, religious beliefs are also essential for bringing hope to many people amid their stressors. Studies (by Koenig and Weaver in 1997) indicated that in facing their poor health condition, senior adults had found faith and its practices helpful for coping with stress. Other hospitalized old patients who practiced their belief were less likely to be depressed than their non-religious counterparts. Moreover, they recovered more quickly.<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>232</sup>M. M. Kelley and K. T. Chan, “Assessing the Role of Attachment to God, Meaning and Religious Coping As Mediators in the Grief Experience,” in *Death Studies*, 36: 199–227, 2012.

<sup>233</sup> Andrew J. Weaver, Linda A. Revilla and Harold G. Koenig, 21.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

According to William A. Barry, “no one is attracted to a snoop or a tyrant.”<sup>237</sup> Once one experiences being loved personally and deeply, (s) he feels safe and belonging to those who have loved her (him). This feeling frees one from all fears and makes her (him) grow. In the vision of faith, experience of God “who really is attractive”<sup>238</sup> enables people to reconstruct the meaning of their narrative. It is also understood as an “enjoyment of God” which the British psychiatrist J. S. Mackenzie described as the following:

*The enjoyment of God* should be the supreme end of spiritual technique; and it is in the enjoyment of God that we feel not only saved in the Evangelical sense, but safe: we are conscious of belonging to God, and hence are never alone; and, to the degree we have these two, hostile feelings disappear ... In that relationship Nature seems friendly and homely; even its vast spaces instead of eliciting a sense of terror speak of the infinite love; and the nearer beauty becomes the garment with which the Almighty clothes Himself.<sup>239</sup>

#### **D. “Finding God in All Things” in the Context of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises: A Way of Narrative and Meaning Reconstruction**

In this section I will present an overview of the Spiritual Exercises and suggest how they are an excellent resource for cultivating resilience in the divorced.

##### **1. Ignatius of Loyola and the Spiritual Exercises**

Inigo (Ignatius) of Loyola was born in the Basque county, northern Spain, in 1491. At fifteen, Inigo was trained to become a courtier. Thereafter, he became a warrior with a fiery temper and a romantic love of chivalry. Badly wounded in a battle against the French in Pamplona, Loyola, Inigo was taken back to his brother’s castle of Loyola where he suffered two excruciating operations to set his shattered leg. During his convalescence he had two sets of vivid daydreams. In one set he dreamt of doing great deeds of chivalry and of winning the favor

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<sup>237</sup> William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 31.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Henry Guntrip, *Psychotherapy and Religion* (New York: Harper, 1957), 194- 195, quoted in William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 31.

of a great lady, perhaps a princess. These daydreams would last for hours and gave him great pleasure. However, he also began to dream of following Christ in great hardship and of imitating the saints after reading a life of Christ and a book of the lives of saints. One day he realized a difference in experience of these different daydreams. When finishing the former, he felt sad and out of sorts. Nevertheless, when finishing the latter, he continued to feel joyous and content. He concluded that the latter were inspired by God (the good spirit) and the former, by the bad spirit. This discernment of different spirits initiated his conversion.

At twenty six, Inigo left his brother's castle and journeyed to the little town of Manresa, not far from the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat. Here, Inigo, as a theologically illiterate layman, spent about eight months in intense prayer and ascetic practices. This period of time transformed him from a self-centered person to the one who trusted that God was leading him toward an apostolic life of helping others to find God as he had done. During his own "spiritual exercises" he had begun to write down notes, and he continued to expand on these notes as he directed others through various exercises. These notes eventually became the book *The Spiritual Exercises (SE)*. According to Ignatius, these exercises aim to free exercitants (retreatants) from whatever hinders them from communion with God, so that they can seek and find the divine will in their lives for the sake of their salvation:

So we call Spiritual Exercises every way of preparing and disposing the soul to rid itself of all inordinate attachments, and, after their removal, of seeking and finding the will of God in the disposition of our life for the salvation of soul.<sup>240</sup>

The Exercises are divided into four "weeks," each division referring to a dynamic that may take more or less than a week's time to happen. The first "week" is taken up with the dynamic of letting God reveal to the retreatant her (his) sins and sinful tendencies in order that

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<sup>240</sup> Working with Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises (n. 1), drawn from Michael Ivens, S.J., *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1998), 2.

(s) he might repent of them and realize that despite them (s) he is a loved sinner. The second “week” is devoted to following Christ, getting to know him better in order to love him more and to follow him more closely. In the third “week” the retreatant desires to share with Jesus the suffering of his passion and death, and in the fourth “week” (s) he desires to share Jesus’ joy of his resurrection. Each “week” lasts as long as it takes for the retreatant to obtain from God the grace desired.

Since Ignatius’ lack of theological training got him into trouble with the Inquisition of the time, he decided to get a formal education in philosophy and theology at the University of Paris. Here he met and became friends with others among whom were Francis Xavier and Peter Faber. He directed each of them individually through the Exercises, and each of them decided to follow Christ unreservedly as did Ignatius. They became the founders of the Society of Jesus. It was approved by Pope Paul III in September 1539, and Ignatius became the first general superior of the Society. Finally, after suffering from serious stomach ailments, Ignatius passed away on July 31, 1556. Ignatius was beatified by Pope Paul V on July 27, 1609, and was canonized by Pope Gregory XV on March 12, 1622.<sup>241</sup>

## **2. “Finding God in All Things” in the Context of the Spiritual Exercises**

One of the characteristics of Ignatian spirituality is the belief that God can be found in all things. For Ignatius, human beings can communicate with God “at every moment”<sup>242</sup> of their life. Besides, the Spiritual Exercises offer many different ways to help people to become increasingly aware of God’s presence and love in their daily lives. This can be explained by Ignatius’ experience of God as the following.

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<sup>241</sup> Here I rely on William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, (Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 1991), 11- 13; and Ignatius of Loyola, *A Pilgrim’s Journey- The Autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola*, trans. Joseph N. Tylenda, S.J. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 13- 27.

<sup>242</sup> William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 20.

First, Ignatius experienced that the Trinitarian God communicates through interpersonal communion within God's self (the person of Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and as a community (the community of the three holy persons). This divine other-directedness is revealed in God's act of creating this universe. In other words, God wants to relate to every creature by sharing God's life with them. God not only creates but also continually cares for this universe and human beings. Seen in this light, God tends to get in touch with everybody as their "creator, sustainer, dear father or mother, and the Spirit who dwells in their hearts."<sup>243</sup> Whether one is aware of this communication or not, God keeps drawing her (him) into God's relationship at every moment of their existence.

In addition, one's "finding God in all things" may be traced in one's desire to gain and develop one's awareness of God's relationship. This longing is embedded in everyone's heart, and it may be explored in prayerful context of doing the spiritual exercises. This practice is not hindered by one's sinfulness or brokenness, since Ignatius who had run after the earthly things succeeded in finding God in his life. It is not also obstructed by one's limited theological formation, since Ignatius- as a theologically illiterate person- was able to experience God's personal love in his first practice of the spiritual exercises. Furthermore, this practice is doable by everyone no matter what states of life they are in, since Ignatius was a lay person, not a priest or religious, during his first time through the exercises. In brief, out of their desire for God, Christians may find God through the spiritual exercises.

Furthermore, God may be found even in one's desolations while doing the exercises. Based on Ignatius' experience, this spiritual journey is considered as a battle ground. Given this, not only does God try to communicate with people, but the evil one also attempts to draw them away from God's communion. This may cause "spiritual distress" which is "the darkness of

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<sup>243</sup>William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 15.

soul, disquiet of mind (...), all restlessness (...) different temptation tending to destroy faith, hope and charity; the condition in which the soul finds itself listless, apathetic, melancholy, like one cut off from its Creator and Lord” (SE, n. 307).<sup>244</sup> Therefore, this journey is not smooth. However, in the prayerful context of the spiritual exercises, people may bear fruits out of the desolations. For instance, the challenges may increase one’s self- awareness and humility before God (SE, n. 322, 324). This may intensify one’s trust, love, hope, and longing for God by intense prayers (SE, n. 319, 321). Besides, one may become more grateful for all God’s blessings which (s) he has taken for granted (SE, n. 320, 324). Finally, their painful experiences may also enable them to sympathize with those in suffering (SE, n. 322).

Finally and practically, God may be found by various means of prayer like examination of conscience, meditation, contemplation, vocal and mental prayer, or other spiritual activities (SE, n. 1). In other words, one’s experience of the divine loving presence may be accessed in accordance with one’s conditions and capacity. For instance, many people may easily realize the “finger of God”<sup>245</sup> when contemplating the wonders of the nature. This contemplation may also be used to pray over spiritual passages which are full of dramatic figures and events to discover God’s message. Similarly, this experience may happen to others when reflecting on some biblical texts to see God’s will for themselves. Other persons may be inspired deeply by listening to and reading scriptural passages, even enjoying liturgical chants which bring them closely to God and God’s love. To put it simply, people may sharpen their consciousness of God’s loving presence through their faculties in different ways.

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<sup>244</sup>Here all these distresses may be assimilated with the aforementioned painful experiences of those affected by divorce.

<sup>245</sup>William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 15.

### 3. The Role of a Spiritual Director

On an Ignatian retreat, for those who have experienced divorce, a spiritual director (who is also called a caregiver) can help the retreatants to discern their desire and various emotions (joys and sorrows) to experience God's presence and care. The director should first be trained in Ignatian spirituality and the spiritual exercises. (S)he should be the one who loves and practices the spiritual exercises. Besides, (s)he needs to have an intimate relationship with God by her (his) deep prayerful life. This also supposes (her) his experience of God's personal love. Particularly, (s)he should also have undergone and coped with these desolations by God's graces and other competent directors' guidance. In other words, (s)he should be a skilled director due to (her) his spiritual experiences and those of others. Furthermore, since one's desire and the painful feelings belong to the directees' inner lives, the director should be a compassionate and trustworthy person, that they may open themselves and their feelings. Moreover, the director should help them to explore these inner experiences and recognize God's will for their lives.

Additionally, the director needs to attain understanding of the attachment theory, which may form her (his) heart to be increasingly compassionate to the wounded. In other words, by her (his) great compassion for them, (s)he may help them to experience deeply God's personal love, and so they may discover God as their "secure base." In this way, divorced retreatants may regain faith and hope. Therefore, they may develop their resilience and reconstruct the meaning of their life stories. Given this, first the director should learn how to listen to their stories attentively. This listening may offer the deepest sympathy to the suffering and manifest loving communion. Furthermore, the caregiver should help the wounded to create new meaning of their narratives by inspiring them with Christian stories<sup>246</sup> which reveal God's love and care for them.

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<sup>246</sup> One of these stories is that of Joseph who was sold by his brothers in Egypt because of their jealousy and hatred (Genesis 37: 12- 28). However, he became a powerful man in Egypt later (Genesis 41: 37- 57). Afterwards, when

Therefore, they may no longer feel abandoned and lonely. Their encounter with this love may shape a new theme for their stories: A theme of love, healing, and saving. This possibly leads them toward a hopeful future. Of course, this meaning reconstruction needs God's grace and patience of the caregiver and the careseekers. Moreover, following up retreat(s), the minister may sustain and foster the wounded's resilience by frequent spiritual accompaniments. This may help them to review and nourish, and strengthen their trust in God. Such resilience may be increasingly empowered by the caregiver's facilitating potential sources of the faith community.<sup>247</sup> Through the community's consistent witness of the divine care, the individuals may develop their feeling of security in attachment to God. This may increase their trust in the

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the famine spread throughout the lands, the famished brothers came to Joseph for bread, since he ministered all the storehouses of grain at that time (Genesis 41: 53- 57). With his great forgiveness and compassion, Joseph saved them (Genesis 42: 1- 25). The story ended with a family union between Joseph and his father and brothers (Genesis 44- 46). Joseph's narrative is a piece of the whole story of Israel, in which God continually revealed God's caring for God's people in challenging circumstances. As the culmination, the story of Jesus' paschal mystery reveals God's love for God's people. By his suffering, death and resurrection, God totally loves humanity (John 3: 16- 17). Jesus' passion was not a failure, but a victory of the power of love. This love brings wonderful meaning to human suffering. That is, God is with them in their suffering. God so loves them through Jesus' suffering. Simply speaking, Jesus' self-giving love is the most radical security of the divine love for everyone, especially to those in the abyss of suffering (Roman 8: 31).

<sup>247</sup> The minister may cultivate the faith community's support to sustain and foster family resilience in many ways in the context of Vietnam. First, the community's prayer for the wounded is always believed to be the most necessary. Second, faith sharing groups in parishes may significantly help them deepen their experience of God's love. Third, the exploration of the good values in Vietnamese culture regarding family life may support the wounded considerably. For instance, due to the strong ties of Vietnamese families, divorce breaks marriage but may not fracture extended families. Therefore, the love of one's extended families may continually accompany and encourage the wounded to cope with and grow during their challenges. Besides, the Vietnamese spirit of harmony may be developed to build up units of reconciliation and healing: prayer groups and social networks. Appropriate visits of the mentioned groups express the community's solidarity with them. Their practical assistance in the affected partners' household management would lighten their burden of parenting and family caring. Also, the close cooperation with Vietnamese social organizations (like the Association of Vietnamese Women, the Vietnamese Organization of Protecting Rights of the Women and Children) may protect and promote the wellbeing of the affected women and children. Additionally, teaching domestic skills in pastoral institutes and parishes may enable them to become increasingly competent in dealing with challenging situations. Education in social skills may improve their psychological adjustment and family and social relationships. Particularly, counseling services may dramatically help the wounded to understand their pains and cultivate their strength to carry on their lives and families.

divine love. It is by this trust that the meaning of their stories will be reconstructed. That is, they are so loved by God despite their brokenness.<sup>248</sup>

Finally, considering the flexibility of the spiritual exercises, the director should adapt the exercises to the needs and the conditions of the individual. The spiritual exercises may be directed in an intensive time (like 30- day or 8- day retreats) or during weekends as continual renewals. The latter may be doable for those who are busy with their business or household commitments. Besides, these retreats may take place wherever people may encounter God.

#### **4. The Graces of Finding God in All Things**

Here I would like to introduce some of the graces of finding God in all things based on Ignatian spirituality.

##### **4. a. Finding God in Creation**

First, the wounded may find God in creation. All creatures are not only works of God's creating, but they are also media by means of which God continuously communicates God's self to the whole universe. God tries to communicate God's self in creation so that one can realize God. For John R. Sachs, creation is not only an expression of God; but more than that, it is God's self.<sup>249</sup> In other words, in creation God desires to be with and care for the whole cosmos.<sup>250</sup> With a heart of contemplation, the wounded may enjoy the beauty and the goodness of God in nature.

As an example, Pearl Tull, a character in Anne Tyler's novel *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*, felt deeply peaceful in facing her death when recalling her amazement of the wonder of nature before in her life. In a scene from the novel, Pearl was an old, blind and dying woman. She was abandoned by her husband. Therefore, she had to care for three children alone. She spends the final stage of her life with Ezra, one of her sons. Everyday Ezra has to read to Pearl

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<sup>248</sup> Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief*, 90- 92.

<sup>249</sup> John R. Sachs, S.J., *The Christian Vision of Humanity: Basic Christian Anthropology*, 13.

<sup>250</sup> William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 34.

some of her childhood diary. Most of the readings are fairly boring to her, and she asks Ezra to rush her story. However, in the last hours of Pearl's life, Ezra came across some of her narration and started to read:<sup>251</sup>

“Early this morning I went out behind the house to weed. Was kneeling in the dirt by the stable with my pinafore a mess and perspiration rolling down my back, wiped my face on my sleeve, reached for trowel, and all at once thought, Why I believe that at just this moment I am absolutely happy.”

At this point of time, Pearl is found calm and still, and Ezra continues to read:

“The Bedloe girl's piano scales were floating out her window, and a bottle fly was buzzing in the grass, and I saw that I was kneeling on such a beautiful green little planet. I don't care what else might come about, I have had this moment. It belongs to me.”

Ezra paused, falling into the silence.

“Thank you, Ezra,” Pearl said, “There's no need to read anymore.”

Given this, Pearl truly wanted to keep in her heart “that foundational experience once more” before she passed away.<sup>252</sup>

In fact, Pearl's experience is not necessarily interpreted as an experience of God. However, as a universal human experience, it makes one surprised at the wonders of the creation. This greatness embraces the wounded with its beauty, love and care. In other words, such an experience is understood as “a feeling of great well-being.”<sup>253</sup> This feeling enables humans to enjoy safety and peace in the midst of the creation.<sup>254</sup> For believers, it is an experience “of the creative touch of God.”<sup>255</sup> To put it simply, God reveals God's self as a God who keeps creating and caring for this creation in the present.

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<sup>251</sup>William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 35- 36.

<sup>252</sup>Anne Tyler, *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (New York: Berkley Books, 1983), 284, quoted in William A. Barry, *Finding God in All Things*, 36.

<sup>253</sup>William A. Barry, S.J., *Finding God in All Things*, 34.

<sup>254</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>255</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

#### 4. b. Finding God in One's Existence

Secondly, the wounded may experience God in their being. Just as they were amazed at the wonder of creation, so they are astonished at their own existence as a wonderful creature. Based on scientific evidences of a human's development since conception,<sup>256</sup> the director may help the wounded to recognize the wonders of their very lives. This is beautifully described in Psalms 8 and 139. In the very beginning of one's life, every part of one's body was "knit together" within her (his) "mother's womb" (Psalm 139:13); one's being has been made, "intricately woven" and continually cared for by a gracious creator who is believed to be God or the Super Being (Psalm 139: 15- 16). Seen in this light, the wounded's existence is a language by means of which God reveals God's self as the foundation of their lives. Moreover, by knowledge and freedom, each of the wounded is a "transcendental subject" with his or her transcendent experience.<sup>257</sup> By this experience, on one hand, the wounded realize their being finite and dependent on God. Nevertheless, at the same time, they reach out of themselves towards the absolute<sup>258</sup> and the inconceivable mystery.<sup>259</sup> This mystery is God who is "the ultimate basis enabling absolute love and responsibility to exist."<sup>260</sup> Given this, in the experiencing of themselves, the wounded can touch God as the origin of their existence and the end for which they long.

#### 4. c. Finding God in One's Painful Experiences

Third, the wounded may experience God's presence amid their painful feelings which initiate a deepest desire for God. For instance, the loneliness in the aftermath of divorce brings

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<sup>256</sup> Richard Dale, *The Human Body*, DVD, A BBC and The Learning Channel, 2012.

<sup>257</sup> Karl Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigation*, Vol. 13 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 125.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 125

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 125- 126.

about a longing for intimacy. In its deepest meaning, this longing is their desire to go beyond themselves to be with others: with other human beings and with God. Based on the biblical faith, being created in the likeness of God who is communion by God's nature (Genesis 1:26), human beings are called into God's union and inscribed with the divine nature of communicating with others. Given this, through their intense longing for a deepest partnership, the wounded profoundly experience the divine-inflicted communion by means of which God inspires them to yearn for God's self who fulfills all humans' desire for peace and happiness.<sup>261</sup> In this way, the loneliness becomes a chance for them to encounter God. People can add that the more intense their longing is, the closer God is to them by God's enflaming their desire for God.<sup>262</sup>

Similarly, the wounded may find God even in their anger. As mentioned previously, the divorced may normally get angry with God because of their brokenness and burdens. The affected children, likewise, may be angry with God due to their parents' separation. God seems unfair to their families. For many people, such anger is a negative feeling, even a sin. However, for many others, anger is seen as a channel of the divine communication. Psychologically speaking, anger often results from one's feeling hurt and being unfairly treated. Those who are angry may become aggressive in hurting other people to protect themselves from being hurt. Other angry persons end up blaming and damaging themselves. And yet, beneath such aggressive reactions, if understood radically, lies the deepest desire of the wounded to be cared for deservedly. This desire is placed in everyone through God's care for them. This divine care creates one's human dignity. Therefore, aggression may actually be a defense of one's dignity from being violated by unjust treatment. In a broader sense, it is a longing for fulfillment of families and society. According to William Barry, this aggression, once fueled by anger, is the

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<sup>261</sup> William A. Barry, S.J., *Letting God Come Close*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2001), 66.

<sup>262</sup> This darkness reminds us of "**Song of Songs**" where the dark night is symbol of absence and longing for the beloved, once present in deeply felt love and now gone.

divine gift to enable people to face and to live fully amid challenges.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, while angrily wondering about God's presence in their challenges, the wounded may question their faith. Seen in this way, faith is not taken for granted. Instead, their faith is purified and strengthened by their cooperating with God in building up a world of love and justice. As a consequence, their faith becomes increasingly genuine and vibrant. To put it simply, God is present and acting as the power of love through anger.

Moreover, the wounded may experience God in their distress that is understood as extreme deep grief. For many people, distress is the most painful and unacceptable feeling. However, it is accepted as a mystery by many others: the mystery of suffering. This mystery may bring about a deepest trust in God's saving power. Seen in this light, the wounded are invited to surrender themselves to the divine freedom and power. This surrendering discloses their deepest relationship with God. According to Karl Rahner, this occurs based on one's deepest loving trust in God. The question of their suffering is answered only by entrusting oneself to God.

(...) this answer can be heard only if we surrender ourselves in unconditionally adoring love as answer to God. If we do not achieve this love, forgetting itself for God, or, better, if we do not accept it as given to us, there is nothing left but naked despair at the absurdity of our suffering (...). There is no blessed light to illumine the dark abyss of suffering other than God himself. And we find him only when we lovingly assent to the incomprehensibility of God himself, without which he would not be God.<sup>264</sup>

**In summary**, in the prayerful context of doing the spiritual exercises under a competent minister's<sup>265</sup> direction, the wounded may find God in every detail of their existence, no matter how they are wounded. They may discover God's mighty love in the wonders of this creation by which they are embraced. Furthermore, they may experience God's personal love in their very

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<sup>263</sup> William A. Barry, S.J., *Praying the Truth*, (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2012), 59.

<sup>264</sup> Karl Rahner, "Why Does God Allow Us to Suffer," in *Theological Investigation*, Vol. 19 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 208.

<sup>265</sup> As mentioned afore, such a minister should be well trained in terms of Ignatian spirituality and his spiritual exercises as well as the attachment theory.

being throughout their life journeys, beginning with the very moment of their conception. God brings them into existence and sustains their living in any flowing of their breath and rhythm of their beating hearts. Besides, God keeps caring for them through many others to enable them to grow continually. In a special way, in their painful experiences God is with them as a source of their trust, strength and hope. Particularly in Jesus, God totally reveals God's love for them in their suffering. Jesus' self-giving love is the ultimate security of the divine love for them in challenging situations (Roman 8:31). In light of the prayerful reflection, they are expected to experience God and God's love as a "secure base" for their lives. Rooted in this base, the meaning of their life stories is marvelously transformed, since God eternally desires "everyone to be saved." (1 Tim 2:4).

#### **E. Weekend Retreat(s) as an Adaption of Doing Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises**

Given all of this, the divorced Catholic family members may develop their resilience by discovering God's love as their "secure base" in every detail of their lives. Based on Ignatian spirituality and the spiritual exercises, this experience is one's capacity of "finding God in all things."<sup>266</sup> For this reason, here I wish to propose weekend retreat(s) as an adjustment of Ignatius' spiritual exercises to help them recognize God as the "secure base" of their lives, increasingly trust in God, so that they may be able to reframe the meaning of the life stories.

Practically speaking, since most of the wounded are very busy with their business and family commitments throughout the week, retreat(s) during weekends are more doable for them. Basically, they will be directed to pray over scriptural passages which may inspire them to experience deeply God's personal love, that they may increase their trust in God as the foundation of their lives, and hence to be able to reconstruct meaning in their life narratives.

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<sup>266</sup> Brian Braman, "Stories Shape Who We Are, Where We Come from, How We Understand Ourselves," in *C 21 Resources*, Boston College, Fall 2015, 5.

Also, their ways of praying may be adjusted in accordance with their situations and capacities. For instance, they may pray many times over different topics during the weekend. Each assigned praying time may not be too long. Additionally there should be spiritual accompaniments between prayer periods. Furthermore, group sharing of their reflection may enrich one another regarding the experience of God's love, then build up their friendship in the Lord, and support one another. Of course this experience must be essentially inspired by the Spirit. Finally, it is not achieved once and for all. Instead, it should be renewed continually. The more intensive the renewal is, the deeper it becomes.

### **1. A Restful Time with God**

First, let us discuss how to help the divorced (mostly adults) process a retreat. At the beginning, they are encouraged to enter a retreat with a deep trust in God and God's care. Seen in this way, a retreat is their restful time or vacation with God. They are invited to enjoy prayerful reflection on scriptural passages. In an abyss of their worries and fear, they are called to seek God as their refuge (Psalm 27):

“The Lord is my light and my salvation;  
whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is my stronghold of my life;  
of whom shall I be afraid?  
When evil doer assail me  
to devour my flesh-  
my adversaries and foes-  
they shall stumble and fall (...)

One thing I asked of the Lord,  
That I will seek after:  
to live in the house of the Lord  
all the days of my life  
to behold the beauty of the Lord,  
and to inquire in his temple, (...)

(Psalm 27)

### **2. Coming before God with One's Woundedness**

Besides, the wounded are inspired to long for God out of their painful feelings. They do not necessarily have to eliminate their sufferings. Instead, they can bring their sorrows before

God and make them a prayer of trust in God. In other words, the deeper their distress is, the stronger their hope should be in God. This can be meditated through Psalm 42:

“As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.  
My soul thirst for God,  
for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold  
the face of God?  
My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
While people say to me continually,  
Where is your God? (...)

By day the Lord commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life (...)

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.” (Psalm 42)

In fact, this longing is found in human beings, since they are created in the likeness of God who is communion (Gen 1:26-27). Moreover, God communicates with humanity not only in creation but also in salvation. This is narrated in the encounter between God and Moses in Exodus (Exodus 3:7-12). In accordance with this narration, God revealed God’s self to Moses while he was escaping from Pharaoh’s persecution and keeping the flock in the wilderness. Despite Moses’ shortcomings, God called and entrusted him with a mission of liberating Israelites from slavery in Egypt, since God felt compassion for their misery. Seen in this light, like Moses, the wounded are inspired to discover the divine graciousness approaching them in their brokenness and desertedness.

### **3. Experience of God’s Love in Creation and One’s Existence**

Moved by this divine communion, the wounded immerse themselves in God’s love by recalling their life stories and their abundance of blessings. First, they are invited to contemplate God’s creating this cosmos and human beings (Genesis 1:1- 2:4; 2:5- 24; Psalm 139), God’s plan for their relationships with all creatures (Gen 1:28-29; Psalm 8). God does not create this universe once for all, but God cares for them in every moment:

"O Lord, our Lord  
 How majestic is your name throughout  
 the earth,  
 You who have covered the heavens with  
 your splendor!  
 From the mouths of infants and  
 sucklings  
 You have founded strength on account  
 of your foes,  
 to put an end to enemy and avenger.  
 When I behold your heavens, the work  
 of your fingers  
 The moon and stars that you set in place,  
 what is man that you take note of him,

that you have made him little less than  
 divine,  
 and adorned him with glory and  
 majesty;  
 You have made him master over your  
 handiwork,  
 laying the world at his feet,  
 sheep and oxen, all of them,  
 and wild beasts, too;  
 the birds of the heavens, the fish of the  
 sea,  
 whatever travels the paths of the seas.  
 O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your  
 name throughout the earth!" (Psalm 8)

Second, the wounded can deepen their experience of God's personal love out of the  
 divine providence throughout their lives according to biblical texts; for instance, Isaiah 43: 1- 7:

"But now thus says the Lord,  
 he who created you, O Jacob,  
 he who formed you, O Israel:  
 Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
 I have called you by name, you are  
 mine.  
 When you pass through the waters, I  
 will be with you;  
 and through the rivers, they shall not  
 overwhelm you;  
 when you walk through fire you shall  
 not be burned,  
 and the flame shall not consume you.  
 For I am the Lord your God,  
 the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.  
 I give Egypt as your ransom,  
 Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

Because you are precious in my sight,  
 and honored, and I love you,  
 I give people in return for you,  
 nations in exchange for your life.  
 Do not fear, for I am with you;  
 I will bring your offspring from the east  
 and from the west I will gather you.  
 I will say to the north, "Give them up,"  
 and to the south, "Do not withhold;  
 bring my sons from far away  
 and my daughters from the end of the  
 earth-  
 everyone who is called by my name,  
 whom I created for my glory,  
 whom I formed and made."  
 (Isaiah 43: 1- 7)

Based on this text, God was the foundation of the existence of Israel, for God created and formed them. God also called them by their names. Moreover, God protected them from death (waters, fire, rivers). Because of God's love, Israel became valuable before nations. This love gave them a wonderful dignity. Therefore, God never forsook them. In light of this passage, the wounded can consider how God cares for them. By dynamic remembrance, they recall particular times when they lived in some places, interacted with other persons, and dealt with significant events. This prayerful recalling allows them to remember what threatened them and how God saved them spectacularly; otherwise, they must not have been sustained. Besides, as shattered as they are, each of them is unique in God's sight. For the sake of God's honor, they are never lost. Instead, they belong to God, and they are in God's heart.

#### **4. Experience of God's Presence in One's Woundedness**

Enlightened by this faith, the wounded also experience the divine presence in their challenges. This can be reflected according to the book of Job. In the book's first 37 chapters, Job argued with his friends and God regarding his sufferings. Despite being a righteous man, Job complained to God many times about his grief and loss:

“Let the day perish in which I was born, (...). Why did I not die at birth, come forth from the womb and expire? (...). Why is light given to one in misery, and life to the bitter in soul (...)? Why is light given to one who cannot see the way, whom God has fenced in?” (Job 3:3-26)

“I will say to God, Do not condemn me; let me know why you contend against me” (Job 10:2)

“Why do you, like God, pursue me, never satisfied with my flesh?” (Job 19:22).

Instead of answering Job directly, God spoke to him in a loving way (Job 38-42). God invited him to contemplate the wonders of all creation: the earth, the sea, the cloud, the light, the darkness, the rain, the thunderbolt, the mountain, the animals, humans, all creatures serving humans. Then God questioned him about the reasons for their being:

“Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimension?” (Job 38:4- 5)

“Tell me, if you know all this. What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places?” (Job 38:19- 20)

“Can you know that all I can and have done?” (Job 39:1- 30)

By this way, God inspired Job to realize God’s provident caring of all creatures. As a consequence, Job came to believe in God’s wisdom and love for the universe: “I had heard of you by the hearing of my ears, but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5).

In a similar way, the wounded are not separated from God out of their grief and loss, though they might be angry with God. Instead, the suffering challenges their faith in God. This challenging prods them to seek God. Then by the faculty of reasoning, they touch the mystery of God’s wisdom and love which is realized through the universe. To put it simply, their pains become chances to deepen their trust in God’s loving care. And therefore, they can entrust themselves to God more intensely.

### **5. Discovering God’s Love in Christ’s Paschal Mystery**

Finally, the wounded are expected to realize God’s wisdom and love in Jesus’ paschal mystery (1 Corinthians 1:17-25). In this mystery, God ultimately reveals God’s love to humanity: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16). God’s gift of Jesus is a “secure base” for everyone, especially for those facing challenges (Roman 8:31). In this mystery, as a true human being, Jesus became like humans “in every respect, and yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He was tested in all ways. He underwent all painful feelings like loneliness, abandonment, grief, distress, and even despair and terror of a torturous death (Hebrews 5:7). In this way, he completely sympathized with the wounded. Moreover, it is out of his deepest love of God and humanity that Jesus freely entered his passion and death as an inevitable consequence of his proclaiming the Kingdom of God. By this powerful love Jesus overcomes all suffering and

death. In other words, grief, love, and even death could not defeat Jesus' love. Through this love God reveals the divine glory by raising Jesus from the dead.

By this reflection, the wounded discover the divine unconditional love in Jesus. Besides, they are not lonely, for Jesus is with them in their grief and loss. Additionally, being one with Jesus in their sufferings, they live out the deepest trust and love in God. By this way, they are freed from bitterness and hatred. Moreover, they can love unlimitedly. This is the joy and salvation that comes from Jesus' paschal mystery. For this reason, their lives become fruitful and joyful.

**In summary**, given all of this, by doing weekend retreats based on Ignatius' spiritual exercises, through prayerful reflection on biblical texts, the wounded experience the divine love for them in creation, their being, and their deepest desire for God, even their painful feelings, especially God's ultimate love in Jesus and his paschal mystery. Undoubtedly, this experience makes them feel safe and saved by God. They are not lonely and abandoned; instead, they belong to God. Therefore, God is the "secure base" for their lives and source of their resilience. For this reason, they are capable of reconstructing the meaning of their life stories. In this way, new themes of these stories are given: Healing, Love, Salvation, and Self-giving Commitment.

What has been presented can also be applied to help the affected children discover God as their "secure base." However, the way of giving retreats should be adjusted to be accessible to the children. First, the Bible can be introduced to them by means of videos and pictures, followed by a short interpretation and questions for personal reflection. Then they are invited to reflect on scripture stories for a short time and then share their reflection with one another. This sharing would positively affect their spiritual growth. Besides, recreational activities during retreats would help children to discover their talents and talents of others as God's gifts. This

will increase their self-esteem and respect for others. Also, the children's serving during retreats would train them how to care for one another. Sometimes retreats should be held in places where the children can enjoy the natural wonders, so that they can realize God's provident caring of the creation. They are also encouraged to reflect on their challenges in relationship with others. For this reason, they might be less self-focused and more open to the need of others. To put it simply, all these activities aim to deepen children's experience of the divine love, and so they increasingly believe God to be the "secure base" for their lives. God so loves them, and they belong to God. Based on this belief, they can reframe the meaning of their life stories.

Additionally, retreat directors (as caregivers) play a crucial role in helping children to reconstruct meaning from their stories. Based on attachment theory, they should understand different types of psychological dysfunctions found in children. These dysfunctional behaviors definitely come from feelings of insecurity because of their parents' divorce. Also, they are expected to accept what and how the children communicate with themselves and others, especially with God. Quick judgment on the children's inappropriate perception of God should be avoided. Instead, the retreat directors should learn how to understand the deeper meaning and desires behind such perceptions. In other words, through their loving acceptance, they enable children to experience God as their safe haven. Moreover, caregivers can bring them hope. This hope should come from one's belief that gracious God takes care of our life. God is the source of one's security and safety.<sup>267</sup> Through this, the retreat directors become channels leading the children to God as their "secure base." For both adults and children, these reconstructed narratives and renewed meanings, grounded in a trust in and experience of God as their loving secure base, is the ultimate source of resilience for those affected by divorce.

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<sup>267</sup>William A. Barry, S.J., *Letting God Come Close*, 65- 66.

## CONCLUSION TO THE THESIS

In conclusion, having been critically challenged by anti-religious mentality, globalization, marketing, and migration in recent decades, the contemporary family life in Vietnam is facing crises. Accordingly, the most remarkable crisis is an increasing rate of divorces. As a consequence, divorce has caused significant loss to many divorced Catholic families, physically, psychologically, emotionally and spiritually. In a particular way, such loss may seriously impact the affected individuals' deepest feelings of their identity and values of life, especially their trust in God. Therefore, this may disrupt their life narratives and shake the meaning of their lives. As a pastoral response, they should be helped to experience God's personal love for them, since this experience may increase their trust and hope in God, and so enable them to reconstruct meaning of their lives. Seen in this way, the concept of "attachment to God" as "secure base" should be developed in accordance with attachment theory in order to create resilience in the wounded. Based on Ignatian spirituality, this resilience may be nourished and empowered by their capacity to discover God's presence and care in every detail of their existence, even in an abyss of their suffering. This practice may be accessed by means of Ignatius' spiritual exercises. However, it should be adapted in form of weekend retreat(s) to fix the situations of the wounded people who are busy with their business, household care, and other commitments. This experience should be primarily inspired by God's grace and attentively earned by the retreatants themselves. Besides, it should be reviewed and renewed frequently by the retreat directors' assistance like spiritual accompaniments and other pastoral care. Finally, the mentioned resilience should be continually fostered by faith communities' support through prayers, faith sharing, solidarity and social resources.

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