

The Joy of Love (*Amoris Laetitia*): The Papal Exhortation in Its Context

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Abstract

This article summarizes the teaching on marriage and the family offered by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and by the 1981 post-synodal, apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*. Against this background, the content and language of *The Final Report* issued at the end of the second session of the synod on the family (October 4–25) are examined. These considerations lead to an evaluation of the continuity and change in teaching found in Pope Francis's post-synodal, apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia)*.

Keywords

Amoris Laetitia, *Familiaris Consortio*, love, marriage, parenthood, remarriage, Second Vatican Council, Synods of Bishops

The *Final Report* from the synod of bishops on the vocation and mission of the family in the church and the contemporary world completed its second session (October 4–25, 2015).¹ The text was fashioned and published against a background that embraced two major sources: (1) the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) on marriage and the family; and (2) the post-synodal, apostolic

1. *The Final Report of the Synod of Bishops to the Holy Father, Pope Francis* (October 26, 2015) (hereafter cited in text as *FR*), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html.

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exhortation of John Paul II on The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981).² This exhortation drew on the conclusions of a synod of bishops held in Rome (September 26 to October 23, 1980).

Now *The Final Report* has been followed by Pope Francis's post-synodal, apostolic exhortation on Love in the Family, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), at 256 pages in the English translation easily the longest exhortation (or encyclical) ever produced by a pope.³ Like *The Final Report*, *Amoris Laetitia* draws from the documents of Vatican II and *Familiaris Consortio*. It also quotes frequently and at length the text of *The Final Report* and, very occasionally, simply refers to *The Final Report* without quoting its words. Sometimes the quotations from *The Final Report* run to a whole page (e.g. *AL* 299).⁴

I take up in turn here the teaching on marriage and family offered by Vatican II, *Familiaris Consortio*, and *The Final Report*, before examining in greater detail *Amoris Laetitia*. *Amoris Laetitia* is a story not only of basic continuity but also of significant development in the material treated, the conclusions reached, and the sources on which it draws.⁵

The Second Vatican Council

Various documents from Vatican II offer teaching on marriage and the family: in chronological order, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*),⁶

2. Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981) (hereafter cited in text as *FC*), http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.
3. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016) (hereafter cited in text as *AL*), https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.
4. In all, *The Final Report* is quoted or referred to 75 times by *Amoris Laetitia*: 1, 32, 33, 40, 42, 44 (twice), 45, 46, 47 (twice), 48, 49, 53 (twice), 55, 56 (three times), 57, 64, 66, 68, 71, 77 (twice), 78, 79, 81, 83, 87, 158, 176, 180 (twice), 191, 192, 200 (twice), 202 (twice), 203, 216, 222 (twice), 236, 238, 243, 244, 247, 248 (twice), 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 278, 279 (twice), 281, 287 (twice), 290, 292, 294 (twice), 296, 299, 301, 302.
5. For background material see German Martinez, "Matrimony, Sacrament of," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2003) 9:233–39; David M. McCarthy, *Sex and Love in Home: A Theology of the Household* (London: SCM, 2001); Theodore Mackin, *What is Marriage?* (New York: Paulist, 1982); Mackin, *Divorce and Remarriage* (New York: Paulist, 1984); Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1989); "Matrimony," *The Christian Faith*, ed. Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, 7th rev. and enlarged ed. (New York: Alba House, 2001) 763–89; "Matrimony," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2005) 1060–2; William E. May, "Marriage (Philosophy of)," *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2012–13: Ethics and Philosophy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2013) 3:960–3; *Perspectives on Marriage*, ed. Kieran Scott and Michael Warren (New York: Oxford University, 1993).
6. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (December 4, 1963) 77–78, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

the Declaration on Christian Education (*Gravissimum Educationis*),⁷ the Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*),⁸ and the Declaration on Religious Liberty (*Dignitatis Humanae*).⁹ Almost inevitably such teaching is concentrated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*)¹⁰ and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*, which offers an entire chapter on “fostering the dignity of marriage and the family”).¹¹

Gravissimum Educationis insisted that parents “should be acknowledged as the primary and principal educators” of their children (3).¹² A long article from *Apostolicam Actuositatem* developed a spiritual vision for married and family life, calling the family “the first, vital cell of society”¹³ and “a domestic sanctuary of the Church” (11). These two documents built on what had been stated a year before by *Lumen Gentium*: “in what is as it were the domestic Church, parents, by word and example, should be the first heralds of faith for their children” (11). John Paul II’s 1981 exhortation was to pick up this image of the family as “the domestic Church” (*FC* 21, 51, 59, 61); so too did *The Final Report* (*FR* 4, 42, 43, 94) and Pope Francis’s 2016 exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* (*AL* 67, 87, 88, 200, 227, 292, 318, 324).

Lumen Gentium also brought the family, albeit briefly, into the scheme of sharing in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly “office” of Christ: “married and family life has a special importance in the *prophetic office*.” “Married couples,” it explained, must be “witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The

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7. *Gravissimum Educationis* (October 28, 1965) 3, 5, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html.
 8. *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965) 11, 30 (hereafter cited in text as *AA*), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.
 9. *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965) 5, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.
 10. *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964) 11, 31, 34, 35, 41 (hereafter cited in text as *LG*), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.
 11. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965) 47–52 (hereafter cited in text as *GS*), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html. On this chapter see Philippe Delhay, *L’Église dans le monde de ce temps*, ed. Yves Congar and Michel Peuchmard (Paris: Cerf, 1967) 2:387–453; Bernard Häring, *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (London: Burns & Oates, 1969) 5:225–45; Hans-Joachim Sender, *Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil*, ed. Peter Hünemann and Bernd Jochen Hilberath (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2005) 4:770–9.
 12. *Familiaris Consortio* was to devote considerable space to this issue (36–41), and Pope Francis has even more to say in “Toward a Better Education of Children” (*AL* 259–90). I have made my own translation of the Vatican II documents directly from *Sacrosanctum Oecumenicum Concilium Vaticanum II, Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarationes* (Vatican City: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1966).
 13. In 2015 *The Final Report* also used the theme of the family as the “first cell of society” (*FR* 12, 92). Pope Francis wrote of the family as “a vital cell for transforming the world” (*AL* 324).

Christian family proclaims aloud both the present virtues of the kingdom of God and the hope for the blessed life” (35; emphasis added; see 41 on the “witness” of married couples and 79 on parents).

Vatican II wished Catholics at large to relearn the long-neglected and even forgotten truth that each of the baptized shares in the dignity and responsibility of Christ’s triple redemptive office. They are all priests, prophets/teachers, and kings/shepherds; some of them are ordained to ministry as deacons, priests, and bishops. *Lumen Gentium* taught that all the baptized in their own “proper way share in the one priesthood of Christ,” which is a “royal priesthood” (10; emphasis added). The constitution completed the threefold schema when it moved on to say that “the holy people of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office” (LG 12).¹⁴ The final session of Vatican II was to apply again the triple “office” to the family, as well as describing more fully the nature of marriage.

The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People of November 18, 1965 affirmed succinctly that the laity “share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ” (AA 2). When the decree reached “the various fields of the apostolate,” it once again stated that the baptized faithful all “share in the office of Christ, priest, prophet, and king” (AA 9, 10). It pointed out that “the apostolate of married persons and of families has a special importance for Church and civil society” (AA 11). Without developing this expressly, the council indicated here that married persons and their families have a share in Christ’s priestly, prophetic, and kingly role.

It was left to the final and longest document of Vatican II to dedicate a chapter of six articles to the “the dignity of marriage and the family” (GS 47–52). In his 1930 encyclical *Casti Connubii*, Pius XI had described marriage as “a complete and intimate life-partnership.”¹⁵ The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World followed suit and, significantly, added “love”: “the intimate partnership (*communitas*) of life and married love established by the Creator” (GS 48). This fuller description of marriage in terms of love was to flourish in the 1981 exhortation of John Paul II (FC 11, 17, 50), in *The Final Report* (e.g. 42), and throughout *Amoris Laetitia* (e.g. 80 and then 89–164, an entire chapter on “Love in Marriage”).

Familiaris Consortio

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World gave a special stress to “dignity” when expounding marriage, married love, and the family (introducing “dignity” ten times in GS 47–52). The 1981 exhortation picked up that language when it proposed to set out “the entire truth and full dignity of marriage and the family” (FC 5). It went on to speak of “the lofty dignity of marriage” (FC 29), “the dignity to which God has

14. For more on *Lumen Gentium* and the triple office, see Gerald O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2014) 40–3.

15. Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (December 31, 1930), https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html.

deigned to raise marriage and the family” (*FC* 51), and “the dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church” (*FC* 59).¹⁶

But it is “love” rather than “dignity” that pervades the teaching of *Familiaris Consortio*. It describes “the family, which is founded and given life by love,” as “a community of persons.” Its “first task” is “to develop an authentic community of persons.” “The inner principle of that task, its permanent power, and its final goal is love: without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow, and perfect itself as a community of persons” (*FC* 18). In an article dedicated to “the plan of God for marriage and the family,” the exhortation uses the language of “love” 14 times when portraying the family as an “intimate community of life and love willed by God” (*FC* 11).

Another way in which *Familiaris Consortio* proved to be in creative continuity with the Second Vatican Council concerned sharing in Christ’s triple office as prophet, priest, and king. For the exhortation, “the Christian family fulfils its *prophetic* role by welcoming and announcing the word of God: it thus becomes more and more each day a believing and evangelizing community” (*FC* 51; emphasis original). After setting out this prophetic mission of evangelization or what it called “the Christian family as a believing and evangelizing community” (*FC* 51–54), *Familiaris Consortio* presented “the Christian family as a community in dialogue with God” (*FC* 55–62): that is to say, “the *priestly* role which the Christian can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way the Christian family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world” (*FC* 55; emphasis original). The exhortation spent more time (eight articles rather than four for the prophetic role) in spelling out this “priestly vocation and mission for the spouses and family” (*FC* 59). *Familiaris Consortio* completed the triple scheme by picturing (more briefly) “the Christian family as a community at the service of human beings” (*FC* 63–64). The family fulfils its “*kingly*” mission “in accordance with the gift and new commandment of *love*” (*FC* 63; emphasis added). Briefer than the sections on the prophetic and priestly functions, this account of the kingly function of married people and their families nevertheless managed to picture this function 13 times in terms of love (“the evangelical law of love,” “the service of love,” etc.). Love vividly colored the kingly role of the Christian family.

In addition to developing Vatican II teaching, *Familiaris Consortio* looks back to Christian history, as well introducing new reasons for excluding contraception. It cites some glowing lines on the greatness of Christian married life from *Ad Uxorem*, the tender and remarkable work Tertullian addressed to his wife (*FC* 13). It picks up what Ambrose of Milan said to husbands about profoundly respecting the equal dignity of their wives: “You are not her master but her husband; she was not given to you to be your slave, but your wife . . . Reciprocate her attentiveness to you and be grateful to her for her love” (*FC* 25). The exhortation endorses what Thomas Aquinas wrote

16. The translation of this exhortation comes from London: St. Paul’s, 1982. For a commentary on *FC*, see Michael J. Wrenn, ed., *Pope John Paul II and the Family* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1983).

about the ministry of Christian parents going beyond that of ordained priests, who “propagate and guard only spiritual life by a spiritual ministry.” Parents “do this for both the corporal and spiritual life” of their children (*FC* 38).

With regard to responsible “regulation of birth,” *Familiaris Consortio* recognizes “the many complex problems that couples in many countries face today” and “the serious problem of population growth in many parts of the world” (*FC* 31). It reiterates the message we find in *Gaudium et Spes* 50 and in the 1968 encyclical of Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*: “love between husband and wife must be . . . open to new life” (*FC* 29). Then in a footnote it quotes the teaching of the encyclical (*HV* 11): “each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life” (*FC* 29). Yet, where *Humanae Vitae*, in the name of “the natural law,” based its teaching more, albeit not exclusively, on a biological, “physicalist” moral viewpoint, *Familiaris Consortio* justifies its opposition to contraception in the light of John Paul II’s theology and philosophy of the body. God “has inscribed in the being of man and woman” an inseparable link between the unitive and procreative meaning of married love. This “innate language” expresses “the inner truth of conjugal love.” Contraception falsifies this truth (*FC* 32), the truth of “the nuptial meaning of the body” (*FC* 37). The pope goes on to maintain, but without specifying the evidence which could be discussed, that “the experience of many couples” and “the data provided by the different human sciences” argue for a difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception (*FC* 32) and “natural methods of regulating fertility” (*FC* 35).

The Final Report

The Final Report of October 2015 provides the immediate context for interpreting *Amoris Laetitia* (March 2016). We can begin by comparing and contrasting some of *The Final Report*’s language and content with the teaching of Vatican II and with that of *Familiaris Consortio*.¹⁷

The Final Report can echo teaching that goes back through *Familiaris Consortio* to Vatican II: for instance, the image of the family as a “domestic Church.” We saw above how the 1981 post-synodal exhortation picked up this language from *Lumen Gentium*. *The Final Report* follows suit and uses the image at least four times (*FR* 4, 42, 43, 94). Likewise it endorses Vatican II’s picture of marriage as an “intimate communion of life and love” (*FR* 42).

Above all *Familiaris Consortio*, as noted, retrieved teaching about marriage and the family from *Gaudium et Spes*. *The Final Report* also establishes that, even 50 years later, that final document from Vatican II has not lost its importance; *The Final Report* cites or refers to *Gaudium et Spes* at least eight times (1, 5 [twice], 11, 42, 47, 63 [twice]).

We observed the place of the language of “dignity” and “love” in the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World and in *Familiaris Consortio*. Without abandoning this language, *The Final Report* introduces repeatedly another theme that we do not

17. I have translated directly from the (original) Italian text of *The Final Report*, available on the Vatican website.

find in Vatican II and find only marginally in *Familiaris Consortio* (apparently only 2 and 13): the beauty of marriage and family life. It champions “the beauty of family love” (FR 56), “the beauty of sexuality in love” (FR 58), and “the beauty of Christian marriage” (FR 69).

In highlighting the beauty of marriage and family life, *The Final Report* takes a cue from the 2013 exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, which attended to “the way of beauty,” because “a renewed esteem for beauty” is “a means of touching the human heart” (EG 167).¹⁸ Two years later, the pope’s 2015 encyclical on ecology and climate, *Laudato Si’*, began by reminding its readers that the earth is “a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us” (LS 1) and ends by praying that “we may protect life and beauty” as we wait for the coming “Kingdom of justice, peace, love, and beauty” (LS 246).¹⁹ *The Final Report*, while not neglecting the themes of dignity and love, echoes Francis and stresses “the beauty of the family and of matrimony” (FR 45; see also 50, 51 [twice], and 62).

The Final Report from the synod on the family cites *Evangelii Gaudium* (e.g. FR 14, 46) and *Laudato Si’* (e.g. FR 16 [twice]). But it reveals a much broader dependence on Francis, quoting or at least referring to what Pope Francis had said and written at least 36 times—not only more “solemn” statements from him but also homilies and addresses in which he gave such simple advice for family life as being willing to say often, “Please, thanks, I’m sorry” (FR 87).

Appearing in 2015, *The Final Report* reflects changes of various kinds, both good and bad, that have taken place in our world since the Second Vatican Council ended in 1965 and since *Familiaris Consortio* was published in 1981. The use of email and other social media can help to keep families united (FR 67). The report notes also the sale of embryos (FR 27), the recruiting of children as soldiers (FR 26), and the possibility of surrogate mothers (FR 27). It calls for “zero tolerance” regarding the sexual abuse of minors (FR 78). *The Final Report* highlights the traumatic experiences of millions of families driven into refugee camps, facing extreme poverty, and broken up in ways that can lead them “even to sell their own children for prostitution or for traffic in organs” (FR 23).

When we compare *The Final Report* with *Familiaris Consortio*, we see that in at least two areas it differs from what John Paul II proposed in his post-synodal exhortation. (1) First, it declines to follow him in developing, on the basis of Vatican II teaching, the

18. On beauty in *Evangelii Gaudium*, see *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013) 14, 24, 34, 35, 36, 42, 257, 265 (hereafter cited in text as *EG*), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

19. Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home* (May 24, 2015) (hereafter cited in text as *LS*), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html. Along the way, *LS* constantly introduces the theme of divine and created beauty: 11, 12 (twice), 34, 53, 97 (twice), 103 (three times), 112 (twice), 215, 235, 243. The encyclical argues in the name of what is “good, true, and beautiful” (205).

theme of married couples and their families exercising a prophetic, priestly, and kingly “office.” *The Final Report* does not deny sharing in the triple function of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. But it simply does not refer to this teaching on the threefold “office.” (2) Second, it cites John Paul II’s language about “the spousal significance of the human body” (FR 44). It also echoes Paul VI’s teaching about the “intrinsic link between married love and the generation of life” (FR 43) or the “unbreakable connection between the unitive and procreative value” of such love (FR 50). But *The Final Report* does not follow John Paul II in going further and repeating, like him, Paul VI’s insistence that “each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life.”

A section of *The Final Report* spells out “generative responsibility” (FR 63) in a way that echoes but without citing an examination of conscience for married people proposed in 1977. The Patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Albino Luciani (to become Pope John Paul I the following year), and the archbishops or bishops of 14 neighboring dioceses put these three questions to married couples: “In agreement with my spouse, have I given a clear and conscientious answer to the problem of birth control? Have I prevented a conception for egotistical motives? Have I brought a life into the world without a sense of responsibility?”²⁰ These questions tested the loving and responsible decision of the two spouses. But nothing was asked about the methods used to prevent what they together judge would be an “irresponsible” pregnancy. Such a decision was left to their conscientious agreement.

In *Gaudium et Spes* the Second Vatican Council simply dismissed divorce as “a plague” (GS 47). *Familiaris Consortio* (83–84) and *The Final Report* (69–86), however, present the pastoral help that the divorced who may have remarried civilly should receive from various members of the church. Both documents display a positive stance toward divorced persons, but with a difference. *Familiaris Consortio* reaffirmed the traditional ban on the divorced who have civilly remarried receiving Holy Communion (FC 84). *The Final Report* refrained from repeating such an unqualified ban (FR 84–86). We will see below how Pope Francis shows theological insight and pastoral concern in dealing with this issue.

Before leaving *The Final Report*, let me register some unease over three themes. First, it declined to address the huge issue of a world heading for overpopulation, simply observing in passing that married people may be affected by a “fear of overpopulation” (FR 7). Pope Francis repeats this phrase (AL 42), refers cryptically to “demographic realities” (AL 167), and simply notes the decline of population in some parts of the world and a high birth rate in other parts (AL 42). The world population passed the six billion mark in October 1999, and by March 2016 had risen to 7.4 billion, even if it may be moving toward negative growth rate. But *The Final Report* and *Amoris Laetitia* pay little attention to demographic issues.

Second, *Familiaris Consortio* spoke of the ground in which married communion can grow: namely “the natural complementarity that exists between man and

20. *Libro di preghiera per le diocesi della regione Triveneta*, 2nd ed. (Turin: Elle Di Ci, 1977) 418; translation mine. *The Final Report* echoes this language by speaking of “consensual dialogue” and “responsibility” (FR 63).

woman" (*FC* 19). *The Final Report* repeated this notion of complementarity (*FR* 1, 56, 65), which it also called "the natural reciprocity of man and woman" (*FR* 8). This involved affirming "the specific quality of the masculine nature" (*FR* 28). Notoriously such a position needs to face such questions as: What is due to nature or to nurture? To what extent are some or many "male" characteristics due to cultural conditioning or to an innate heritage? Moreover, what kind of complementarity do we face: symmetrical complementarity or a complementarity that to some extent is asymmetrical?²¹

Francis in an earlier passage of *Amoris Laetitia* writes of God "setting the father in the family, so that by the gifts of his masculinity he can be close to his wife and share everything . . . and close to his children as they grow" (*AL* 177). The pope, while recognizing "the genuine reciprocity incarnate" in matrimony, also appreciates that "masculinity and femininity are no hard and fast categories." He opposes any "rigid approach" that "turns into an over-accentuation of the masculine or feminine" (*AL* 286). Here he qualifies happily what he read about "natural reciprocity" in *The Final Report*.

Third, where "complementarity" between men and women proves a more "theoretical" question, dismissing "homosexual unions" as "not even remotely analogous" to marriage between man and woman (*FR* 76) enters an area in which wide experience of gay and lesbian intimacy and family life suggests otherwise to many people. Governments have been holding referenda and parliaments have been legislating in favor not merely of civil unions or partnerships but also of same-sex marriage. It could seem "overkill" to deny even a remote analogy between "homosexual" unions and marriage between men and women. What of some points of similarity: for instance, the existence of a permanent, intimate, and exclusive relationships between two adults entered into by free consent? One could argue that there is no close analogy. Yet some analogy should be recognized, even by those opposing same-sex marriage. To deny even a remote analogy does not seem persuasive.

Pope Francis begins by stating that, like de facto unions between men and women, "same-sex unions" "may not simply be equated with marriage" (*AL* 52). Then he repeats what *The Final Report* (citing an earlier document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, dated June 3, 2003) had said about there being "absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God's plan for marriage and family" (*AL* 251).²² One might well agree that such unions "radically contradict" the "ideal" of Christian marriage (*AL* 292). But does that rule out a remote analogy to such marriage? Here the exclusion of even a remote analogy may fail to convince many readers.²³

21. See Lee Trepanies, "Egalitarianism," *New Catholic Encyclopedia: Supplement 2012–2013* 2: 431–33.

22. See "Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons," June 3, 2003, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html.

23. See George P. Klubertanz and Paul Symington, "Analogy," *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2012–13* 1:59–66.

Amoris Laetitia

Against the background of Vatican II (1962–65), *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), and *The Final Report* (2015), I now turn to present and evaluate some major themes from *Amoris Laetitia*. These include its sources; a sense of beauty which highlights love; procreation and responsible parenthood; marriage counseling; and the pope's pastoral concern for those in second marriages.

Sources. Francis cites abundantly the Scriptures: above all, Genesis, the Gospels, and Saint Paul. He draws 16 times on Vatican II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,²⁴ and cites *Familiaris Consortio* 23 times.²⁵ In a collegial way that respects the global nature of the church, he quotes statements coming from bishops' conferences in many parts of the world: Australia (AL 172), Argentina (AL 51), Chile (AL 101, 134), Colombia (AL 57), Italy (AL 207), Kenya (AL 215), Korea (AL 42), Mexico (AL 51), and Spain (AL 32). He also draws on the *Aparecida Document* (June 29, 2007) from the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops (AL 178). Finally, as we noted (n. 4), *Amoris Laetitia* quotes or refers to *The Final Report* 75 times.

Francis also calls on classical Christian theological and spiritual writers to clarify and establish different points: Thomas Aquinas (frequently), Robert Bellarmine (AL 124), Charles de Foucauld (AL 65), Dominic (AL 257), Francis of Assisi (AL 65), Ignatius Loyola (AL 94), John of the Cross (AL 231), Teresa of Avila (AL 65), and Thérèse of Lisieux (AL 57). But then Aristotle (AL 123) turns up as a classical philosophical authority, alongside a Catholic existentialist, Gabriel Marcel (AL 322). The Protestant martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer is pressed into service (AL 320). A long quotation from Martin Luther King Jr. on nonviolence takes up a whole page (AL 118). Francis appeals to the classic book by a Jewish psychologist Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving* (AL 284).

A quotation from the renowned Argentinian writer Jorge Louis Borges (1899–1986), “every home is a lampstand,” illuminates the opening of chapter 1 (AL 8). Francis cites the Mexican Octavio Paz (1914–1998) to expound courtesy as “a school of sensitivity and disinterestedness” (AL 99). He quotes two verses from the Uruguayan poet and Nobel laureate Mario Benedetti (1920–2009) in order to show how married couples should have “a clear awareness of their social obligations,” an awareness that does not, however, “diminish” their love for one another but floods it “with new light” (AL 181). To expound the constant growth of love to which couples are called, Francis asks them not to forget that “the best is yet to come” and so parallels (perhaps unconsciously?) “Rabbi Ben Ezra” by Robert Browning (1812–1889): “Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be.” The “generous cook” in *Babette's Feast* exemplifies the way that “it is a joy and great consolation to bring delight to others” (AL 129)—the first time any film has ever been cited by a papal apostolic exhortation or, for that matter, an encyclical.

24. See AL 3n, 67, 77, 80 (twice), 125 (twice), 126, 134, 142, 172, 178, 222, 267, 298, 315.

25. See AL 23, 31, 69, 72, 77n, 106, 120, 122, 176, 192, 196, 222, 223, 241, 247, 295 (twice), 298, 301, 318, 319, 324 (twice).

The Nature of Love. We recalled above how “beauty” and “the way of beauty” characterize the first two major documents published by Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si’*. In his latest exhortation he introduces the theme of beauty at least 15 times.²⁶ “The mystery of Christmas and the secret of Nazareth” continue to “exude the beauty of family life” (*AL* 65). As for married couples, “through their union in love,” they “experience the beauty of fatherhood and motherhood” (*AL* 88). But in *Amoris Laetitia* it is the theme of love that proves paramount. It figures right in the title “the Joy of Love” and in the opening indication of the exhortation’s content, “On Love in the Family.” Like John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio* of 1981, it is “love” that pervades Francis’s post-synodal exhortation of 2016.

The pope dedicates, for instance, to “Love in Marriage” a whole chapter (*AL* 89–164), which opens with a wonderful meditation on 1 Corinthians 13, St Paul’s hymn to love (*AL* 91–119). This chapter and other passages of *Amoris Laetitia* express at least seven essential characteristics of authentic love.

First, love “opens our eyes and enables us to see, beyond all else, the great worth of human beings” (*AL* 128). In other words, the eyes of love let us see the truth and recognize the real value of those we love. As Thomas Aquinas said with laconic brevity, “ubi amor, ibi oculus” (where there is love, there is vision).²⁷

Second, authentic love exists only in freedom and respects freedom. Hence Francis quotes from the *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas to teach that love depends on its being given “freely” (*AL* 127). He writes of “the utterly gratuitous dimension of love, which never ceases to amaze us” (*AL* 166). It sees the worth of the one who is loved (*AL* 128), and is bestowed freely, that is to say, gratuitously (*AL* 166).

Third, love, Francis insists, “always gives life” (*AL* 165). We might render this observation in a new Latin phrase: “ubi amor, ibi vita” (where there is love, there is life). As well as the mutual love that results in the new life of children being born, the pope thinks of the need for growth in love between the parents themselves: “Marital love is not defended primarily by presenting indissolubility as a duty . . . but by helping it to grow ever stronger . . . A love that fails to grow is at risk. Growth can occur only if we respond to God’s grace through constant acts of love” (*AL* 134). The Latin phrase could be expanded to read: “ubi amor, ibi vita et auctus” (where there is love, there is life and growth).

Elsewhere Pope Francis writes of how “love benefits and helps others”; it “does good.” He presses on to cite what St. Ignatius Loyola said in the *Spiritual Exercises* (*AL* 230): “love is shown more by deeds than by words” (*AL* 93–94). Classically this aspect of love went under the name of *amor benevolentiae*, love inasmuch as it reaches out to advance the welfare and life of others or love as “concern for the good of the other” (*AL* 123).

Fourth, love prompts lovers into revealing their true selves. John’s Gospel catches nicely this dimension of love. Jesus’s loving friendship leads him to disclose to his disciples his life’s greatest treasure, the eternal relationship with his Father (John 15:15). Francis notes how married couples are challenged by love’s call to “reveal

26. See *AL* 58, 65, 86, 88, 127 (twice), 148, 155, 164, 172, 174, 184, 195, 232, 288.

27. Thomas Aquinas, 3 *Sent.* 35.1.2c.

themselves and come to know who the other person really is" (AL 210). Self-disclosure belongs to the challenge of true love.

Fifth, Francis draws on Aquinas's language of "affective union" to highlight the union involved in conjugal love. This union "combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside" (AL 120). Here one can call into play the pope's reflections about the family as being an image of the Blessed Trinity (AL 29, 71). The three divine persons live united in a communion through which they give themselves to each other in an infinite ecstasy of love. They live with each other and for each other, but never at the expense of each other. The Trinity offers a divine image of the union of love to which married couples and families are called. To echo the biblical language about being "holy, for I [your God] am holy" (1 Pet 1:16; see Lev 11:44–45 NIV), we can say to every married couple and every family, "Be lovingly united as your tripersonal God is lovingly united."

Sixth, love involves a truly "lifelong sharing"; it aims at proving itself a love that will never end. With classic understatement, Francis remarks, "lovers do not see their relationship as merely temporary." They want it to "pass the test of time" (AL 123). Popular sayings (e.g. "diamonds are forever") and popular songs (e.g. Irving Berlin's "I'll Be Loving You Always") acknowledge that love is a long-term pledge and a lifetime commitment, or it is nothing.

Seventh and finally, the parable of the lost son (Luke 15:11–32), while not explicitly speaking of love, remains unintelligible unless we think in terms of the parent's love for his two sons. The parable reflects numerous aspects of love and, not least, a central "spin-off" of love: deep joy (Luke 15:23–24, 32). Pope Francis effectively highlights this aspect of love by calling his exhortation "the joy of love." He might have given the document another name: for instance, "the beauty of love," "the gift of love," or "the union of love." But "joy" points to something that he sees to be active in a loving Christian marriage and family.

Joy pervades the exhortation. "When loving persons can do good for others, or see that others are happy, they themselves live happily," and "rejoice in the well-being of others" (AL 109–10). Francis knows that "in marriage, the joy of love needs to be cultivated" (AL 126). He dedicates pages to growing in married and family joy (AL 126–30). He appeals to experience: "Since we were made for love, we know that there is no greater joy than that of sharing good things." He recalls the generous chef in *Babette's Feast*: it is "a joy and a great consolation to bring delight to others, to see them enjoying themselves" (AL 129).

Responsible Parenthood. Pope Francis spends a whole chapter on married love being made "fruitful" through responsible parenthood (AL 165–98). Here, of course, we reach the vexed question of birth control.²⁸ The teaching of *Amoris Laetitia* resembles that of *Familiaris Consortio* but only up to a point.

28. See John T. Noonan, "Contraception," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 4:218–23; John T. Noonan and Janet E. Smith, *New Catholic Encyclopedia Supplement 2009* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 2010) 1:170–6.

In the name of “the natural law,” Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* based its opposition to contraception on a largely biological, “physicalist,” moral viewpoint. *Familiaris Consortio* argued primarily from John Paul II’s theology of the body. *Amoris Laetitia* has followed suit and quotes teaching from John Paul II’s catechetical teaching on the theology of the body: that “sexuality is . . . an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity.” Through “the nuptial meaning of the body,” sexual desire expresses love “in which the human person becomes a gift” (AL 151). The “bodily union that consummates marriage” becomes “an eloquent language of faith” that “expresses and realizes the mystery that has its origin in God himself” (AL 213).

Yet, unlike what John Paul II taught in *Familiaris Consortio*, *Amoris Laetitia* does not quote the teaching of Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* and say that each and every marriage act must remain open to the transmission of life. Admittedly, *Amoris Laetitia* moves in this direction when it says that “no genital act of husband and wife can refuse this meaning [a love open to a fruitfulness that draws it beyond itself], even when for various reasons it may not always in fact beget a new life” (AL 80). Yet Francis has already left matters more open when, in commenting on *Humanae Vitae*, he wrote of “the intrinsic bond between conjugal love and the generation of life” (AL 68; emphasis added). Later he will also leave matters more general by stating that the marriage “union is exclusive, faithful, and open to new life” (AL 125; emphasis added). Finally, while encouraging natural family planning, he relies on Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* to insist that, where decisions concerning such planning are concerned, “the parents themselves should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God” (AL 222). In this same article, Pope Francis cites what *The Final Report* had said about “generative responsibility” (FR 63)—a passage that, as we saw above, recalls teaching by the future Pope John Paul I and some of his fellow bishops in the northeast of Italy.

Marriage Counseling and Spirituality. Pope Francis closes his exhortation with a rich chapter on “the spirituality of marriage and the family” (AL 313–25). But right through *Amoris Laetitia* he makes practical observations on married and family life, and offers helpful advice. Over and over again he addresses realistically the conditions faced today by innumerable married couples and families. He takes as his starting-point the actual experience of married life—an approach that resembles the experiential method that Vatican II adopted in *Gaudium et Spes*.

The longer life span now found in many countries around the world means that “the close and exclusive relationship” of marriage must last “for four, five, or even six decades; consequently the initial decision has to be frequently renewed.” Francis adds, “While one of the spouses may no longer experience an intense sexual desire for the other, he or she may still experience the pleasure of mutual belonging and the knowledge that neither of them is alone but has a ‘partner’ with whom everything in life is shared” (AL 163). These pages on “the transformation” of married love (AL 163–64), among the most sensitive in the whole exhortation, fit into the pope’s vision of marriage as being “a dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment,” along which couples can “advance gradually” (AL 37, 122).

Francis is nothing if not realistic about the “current realities” that confront and condition married and family life today (AL 31–57). Some of the challenges arise when families lack affordable housing, adequate health care, and proper employment (AL 44). Innumerable families “are forced to endure long periods of time in refugee camps” (AL 46). Families may suffer from drug abuse and domestic violence (AL 51).

Francis encourages married couples to spend “quality time” with each other (AL 137) and spells out the “dialogue” needed to make a marriage grow and flourish (AL 136–41). “Crises,” he writes, “need to be faced together . . . At these times, it becomes all the more important to create opportunities for speaking heart to heart” (AL 234). He is not above offering very basic “tips” that can contribute to the lifelong project that is a healthy marriage. He knows the importance of frequently saying “please,” “thank you,” and “sorry” (AL 133). His exhortation must be the first papal document to appreciate “the pastoral value” of celebrating St. Valentine’s Day (AL 208).

Pastoral Concern for the Divorced and Civilly Remarried. As we all know, media interest has concentrated on what Francis has written in *Amoris Laetitia* about “the divorced who have entered a new union” (AL 243). On his April 2016 visit to the refugees on the island of Lesbos, he explained to journalists how his pastoral concern extended not only to such persons but also to dysfunctional families, young people unwilling to enter marriage, a reluctance to produce children which has drastically reduced the birth rate in Europe, and other such challenges. Nevertheless, he is also deeply concerned with those in second marriages.

They remain, he insists, “part of the ecclesial community,” “should be made to feel part” of it, and “should be encouraged to participate in the life of the community” (AL 243; see 246). This requires that the whole church, and not just her official pastors, become open to discerning a great variety of irregular situations and ready to “help each person [in such irregular situations] find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community” (AL 297).

Francis develops a case that involves three steps. First, he pictures, for instance, those whose “second union [has been] consolidated over time, with new children, proven fidelity, generous self-giving, [and] Christian commitment.” He cites what *Familiaris Consortio* had to say about the “serious reasons” (e.g. “children’s upbringing”) which militate against the separation of spouses in such a second marriage (AL 298), and quotes in full a long, relevant passage from *The Final Report* (AL 299).

Second, the pope leaves behind the traditional solution to such a situation adopted in *Familiaris Consortio*: if for serious reasons civilly remarried couples cannot separate, they should “take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence” (FC 84). Francis will not endorse this solution of living together as “brothers and sisters.” He draws on *Gaudium et Spes* (51) to observe that, “if certain expressions of intimacy are lacking, it often happens that faithfulness is endangered and the good of the children suffers” (AL 298n329).

Third, without saying so, Pope Francis follows an option offered but not adopted by *Familiaris Consortio* when it ruled out admitting to the Eucharist divorced people in a second marriage: their situation “objectively contradicts that union of love between

Christ and the Church which is *signified* and *effected* by the Eucharist” (*FC* 84; emphasis added). What if we take the stress off “signifying” a union that already exists and think more of the growing union of love “effected” by the reception of the Eucharist? Back in his 2013 exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, the pope had already written of the Eucharist as “not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (47, and now repeated in *LA* 305n351). In *Evangelii Gaudium* he had retrieved, without expressly saying so, insights into the “medicinal” and “nourishing” power of the Eucharist, which go back to the teaching of Ignatius of Antioch about “the one bread which is the medicine of immortality,”²⁹ and to classical liturgical prayers about the healing effected by the Eucharist.³⁰ In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he cited what Ambrose of Milan and Cyril of Alexandria taught about receiving the Eucharist for the forgiveness of sins (*EG* 47n51).³¹

In making his call in *Amoris Laetitia* to practice a responsible discernment of particular cases—a discernment which involves not only the couples themselves but also their bishop, parish priest, and/or other spiritual guides—the pope appeals at length to passages from Thomas Aquinas, *Familiaris Consortio*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the International Theological Commission, and other sources. They all provide help towards discerning, on an individual basis, appropriate access to the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist for the divorced and civilly remarried (*AL* 300–12). The key theological argument for accepting such an access comes from ancient Christian teaching about the forgiving, healing, and nourishing power of the Eucharist. In three steps Pope Francis has encouraged us to share this conclusion.

Francis never says in so many words that “in some, justifiable circumstances, those in a second marriage may receive the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist.” To say that would clash with his refusal, in the light of “the immense variety of concrete circumstances,” to produce “a new set of general rules” (*AL* 300). He would need to

29. *Epistle to the Ephesians*, 20.2, trans. Maxwell Staniforth, *Early Christian Writings: The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Penguin, 1968) 82.

30. The post-communion prayer for Monday of the Second Week of Lent asks that the Holy Communion in which we have just shared “cleanse [us] from our offence [*purget a crimine*],” and the post-communion prayer for Tuesday of the Fourth Week of Lent asks that “the reception of this sacrament, Lord, may purify us from [our] offence [*huius nos, Domine, perceptio sacramenti mundet a crimine*].”

31. In a talk to seminarians in Oviedo (Spain), reported by the Catholic News Agency on May 12, 2016, Cardinal Gerhard Müller argued that if Pope Francis had wanted to reverse the traditional ban on the divorced and remarried receiving Holy Communion, Francis “would have said so clearly and presented supporting reasons” for it. See <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/mler-on-amoris-laetitia-the-church-is-called-to-promote-a-culture-of-the-family-62360>. But, as we have seen, he did give reasons for this change. According to the cardinal in the same speech, n351 does not refer to the specific case of the civilly remarried divorcees. But one should respond that this footnote occurs in an article dealing with “those living in irregular situations” (*LS* 305), and Francis uses “irregular” primarily with reference to the divorced and remarried (*LS* 297, 298).

spell out those circumstances and produce detailed legislation that took account of reasons for the collapse of the first marriage, length of time since the second marriage was civilly contracted, the number of children involved, and so forth. He leaves such “discernment” to the local authorities (*EG* 16)—something that in fact for the last 15 years the Archdiocese of Vienna has practiced in its pastoral care of the divorced and civilly remarried.³²

Francis makes quite clear his two central convictions. On the one hand, he insists that the church must continue to “propose the full ideal of marriage” (*AL* 307) and “clearly express her objective teaching” (*AL* 308). The “integrity of the Church’s moral teaching” requires nothing less than that (*AL* 311). On the other hand, to those who press for “a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion” (*AL* 308), the pope responds that if “we put so many conditions on [God’s] mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance,” we will be indulging in “the worst way of watering down the Gospel” (*AL* 311).

What Francis proposes about discerning and mercifully helping those in “irregular” married situations invites us to remember past changes in church teaching and practice and be open to new ones. Any list of such developments and even reversals (which do not encompass the essentials of faith professed in the Creed) concern, for instance, what happened to official teaching about slavery, torture, the death penalty, religious freedom, sharing prayer with other Christians and with followers of other faiths (*communicatio in sacris*), and the anointing of the sick.³³ Apropos of the last example, although the Council of Florence and the Council of Trent taught that only the dying should receive “extreme unction,”³⁴ the Second Vatican Council removed this limit and opened the sacrament up to those who are seriously ill or advanced in years. Francis has done something similar, albeit not identical, by opening the door for the divorced and civilly remarried, after due discernment and in appropriate circumstances, to receive the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist.

All in all, *Amoris Laetitia* celebrates the grandeur of married love and lovemaking, which can even “be experienced as a sharing” in advance “in the full life of the resurrection” (*AL* 317). The exhortation leaves far behind the trivialization of Alex Comfort’s 1972 book, *The Joy of Sex*. Pope Francis has an immeasurably more important message to convey in *The Joy of [Married and Family] Love*.

32. See Christopher Lamb and Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, “New Possibilities for Divorced and Remarried People,” *The Tablet*, April 23, 2016, 25.

33. See John T. Noonan, *A Church That Can and Cannot Change: The Development of Catholic Moral Teaching* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005).

34. In 1439 the Council of Florence taught that “extreme unction may not be given except to a sick person whose life is feared for” (ed. Neuner and Dupuis, *The Christian Faith* 663). In 1551 the Council of Trent called this sacrament “the sacrament of the dying,” to be administered to “those who are so seriously ill that they seem near to death” (*ibid.* 676).

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