

VERDAD Y VIDA

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SUMARIO

Editorial	213-216
I. ESTUDIOS	
Martín Carbajo Núñez <i>L'économie fraternelle: Une perspective Franciscaine</i>	219-236
Martín Carbajo Núñez <i>From Amoris laetitia to Fratelli tutti: The importance of family relationships</i>	237-253
Pilar Sánchez Álvarez <i>Relación de la fe con la ciencia en el pensamiento de Olegario González de Cardedal</i>	255-272
José Manuel Fanjul Díaz <i>El Padre Atanasio López Fernández, una inestimable aportación bibliográfica del Apóstol Santiago</i>	273-285
Josep Serra i Sales <i>La evangelización como reto para el franciscanismo del siglo XXI (¿solamente Cataluña?)</i>	287-318
Francisco Javier Elizari Basterra <i>Acentos actuales en la crisis de los abusos sexuales en la Iglesia..</i>	319-371
II. NOTAS, COMENTARIOS Y DOCUMENTOS	
José Luis Parada Navas <i>“Misión cumplida” – Aventura final de la revista Moralia</i>	375-382
III. BIBLIOGRAFÍA	383-393
IV. ÍNDICE DEL VOLUMEN	397-400

FROM AMORIS LAETITIA TO FRATELLI TUTTI: THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

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ABSTRACT:

In the light of the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, this article studies “the gospel of the family” and the importance of family relationships in social life. Today, there is an “omnipresent need for a healthy injection of family spirit” (AL 183). The encyclical *Fratelli tutti* takes up this need and invites all to promote fraternity and social friendship in our globalized society, that “makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers.” This article asserts that the family is fundamental in the development of our four fundamental relationships (1st part) and in education (2nd part). Furthermore, the family introduces fraternity into the world (3rd part) and it is the principal agent of integral ecology (4th part).

KEYWORDS: Family, Marriage, *Amoris Laetitia*, Fraternity, Social Friendship, Integral ecology.

SUMARIO:

A la luz la exhortación post-sinodal *Amoris Laetitia*, el presente artículo estudia “el evangelio de la familia” y la importancia de las relaciones familiares en la vida social. Hoy se siente la necesidad “de una robusta inyección de espíritu familiar” (AL 183). La encíclica *Fratelli tutti* recoge esa necesidad y aboga por favorecer la fraternidad y la amistad social en nuestra sociedad globalizada que “nos hace más cercanos, pero no más hermanos.” La experiencia de familia es fundamental en el desarrollo de las cuatro relaciones fundamentales del ser humano (1^a parte) y en la educación (2^a parte). Además, la familia introduce la fraternidad en el mundo (3^a parte) y es el agente principal de la ecología integral (4^a parte).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Familia, Matrimonio, *Amoris Laetitia*, Fraternidad, Amistad social, Ecología integral.

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In the light of the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*¹, this article studies “the Gospel of the family”² and the importance of family relationships in social life. Pope Francis states that today people everywhere feel the need for “a healthy injection of family spirit” (*AL* 183). The encyclical *Fratelli tutti*³ takes up this need and invites all to promote fraternity and social friendship in our technological and globalized society that “makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers.”⁴

AL calls for the pastoral care of the family, which is the vital cell of society.⁵ It also asserts that this care is of great importance for the whole social body and for the harmonious development of its members.

The Pope understands *Amoris Laetitia* “as an invitation to Christian families to value the gifts of marriage and the family, and to persevere in a love strengthened by the virtues of generosity, commitment, fidelity and patience. [...] It seeks to encourage everyone to be signs of mercy and closeness where family life is not perfectly fulfilled or does not develop with peace and joy” (*AL* 5).

Pope Francis hopes that, reading *AL*, “all will feel called to love and cherish family life” (*AL* 7) and “to treat the weak with compassion.”⁶ It is thus clear that this exhortation is meant to affirm the importance of relationships and loving

¹ FRANCIS, «*Amoris Laetitia*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation» (March 19, 2016), [*AL*], n. 186, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (AAS) 108/4 (April 1, 2016) 311-446. *Amoris Laetitia* gathers the reflection of two Synods of Bishops which were held in 2014 and 2015: the Third Extraordinary General Assembly, focused on «Pastoral challenges of the family in the context of evangelization» (Oct. 5-19, 2014); and the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly (Oct. 4-25, 2015), on «The vocation and mission of the family in the church and the contemporary world.»

² “It is important that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that fills hearts and lives” (*AL* 200). Cf. KASPER W., *El evangelio de la familia*, Sal Terrae, Santander 2014; TEJERO E., *El evangelio de la casa y de la familia*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2014.

³ FRANCIS, «*Fratelli tutti*. Encyclical letter» (Oct. 3, 2020), [*FT*], LEV, Vatican City 2020.

⁴ BENEDICT XVI, «*Caritas in veritate*. Encyclical letter» (June 29, 2009), [*CV*], n. 19, in AAS 101 (2009) 641-709.

⁵ “The family is a good which society cannot do without” (*AL* 44), one of the values that “are not negotiable.” BENEDICT XVI, «*Sacramentum Caritatis*. Post-synodal apostolic exhortation» (Feb. 22, 2007), n. 83, in AAS 99 (2007) 105-180.

⁶ *AL* 308. We need to accompany people “with mercy and patience,” [...] above and beyond their faults and failings.” FRANCIS, «*Evangelii gaudium*. Apostolic exhortation» (Nov. 24, 2013), [*EG*], n. 44, in AAS 105 (2013) 1019-1137; “To treat the weak with compassion” (*AL* 308); cf. BONFRATE G. – YÁÑEZ M. *Amoris Laetitia, la Sapienza dell’amore. Fragilità e bellezza della relazione nel matrimonio e nella famiglia*, Studium, Roma 2017; CAPANTINI L. - GRONCHI M., *La vulnerabilità*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo 2018.

care over the rigid compliance with rules, even if, in the process, our “shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.”⁷

In different documents, Pope Francis has further developed this relational perspective that can fill human beings with the joy of the Holy Spirit. In fact, God’s loving initiative⁸ leads us to the joy of the Gospel (*GS* 236), to the joyful experience of love in the family (*AL*), to the joy of truth,⁹ and to exult with joy for having been called to holiness.¹⁰

Pope Francis’ last encyclicals develop the theme of family relationships from complementary perspectives. The human family that *FT* presents is part of the cosmic family promoted by the encyclical *Laudato si’*,¹¹ because in the common house, we are all related (*FT*) and “everything is related” (*LS*). These two encyclicals invite us to listen to the cry of the earth and to the cry of the poor (*LS* 38), although the *LS* focuses on the former and the *FT* on the latter. Both cries are inseparable, and one cannot be heard without listening to the other.

The first part of this article clarifies the concept of family and highlights its importance in the development of our four fundamental relationships: with God, with ourselves, with others, and with creation. The Trinitarian God is a family. Humans, created in his image, are family beings who develop their intrinsic sociability in the affectionate encounter with other members of society and with all of creation. In the second part, the article’s author presents the family as our first school and highlights the importance of relationships in university education. In the last two parts, he affirms that the family introduces fraternity into the world (3rd part) and is the main agent of integral ecology (4th part).¹²

⁷ *AL* 308. Human relationships take precedence over norms. Even in the Old Testament, “the Ten Commandments take on their deepest truth” in the relationship of trust that God establishes with his people, whom he invites to let themselves be embraced by his mercy. FRANCIS, «*Lumen Fidei*. Encyclical letter» (May 29, 2013), n. 46, in AAS 195 (2013) 555-596.

⁸ “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.” BENEDICT XVI, «*Deus caritas est*. Encyclical letter» (Dec. 25, 2005), [*DC*], n. 1, in AAS 98 (2006) 217-252.

⁹ FRANCIS, «*Veritatis gaudium*. Apostolic constitution» (Jan. 29, 2018), [*VG*], n. 3, LEV, Vatican City 2018 [in *Regno-Documenti* 63 (2018/5) 137-165].

¹⁰ FRANCIS, «*Gaudete et exsultate*. Apostolic exhortation» (March 19, 2018), [*GE*], n. 14, LEV, Vatican City 2018.

¹¹ FRANCIS, «*Laudato si’*. Encyclical letter» (May 24, 2015), [*LS*], in AAS 107 (2015) 847-945.

¹² Original version of this article in Spanish: CARBAJO NÚÑEZ M., «De la Amoris Laetitia a la Fratelli tutti. La importancia de las relaciones familiares.» in *Perspectiva teológica* 53/1 (2021).