

FAMILY RELATIONS IN THE RECENT MAGISTERIUM AND IN FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Keywords: Family, Franciscanism, Authority, Ecology, fraternity.

Schlüsselwörter: Familie, Franziskanertum, Autorität, Ökologie, Brüderlichkeit.

Slowa kluczowe: Rodzina, franciszkanizm, autorytet, ekologia, braterstwo.

Current theological research recognizes the family as the foundation of society and often proposes it as a model for expressing theological concepts and human values. This is especially evident in the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and in Franciscan spirituality. Pope Francis insists that we need to strengthen family life to move towards a more fraternal world, “shaped by interdependence and shared responsibility”¹.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing a crisis of the family and a global breakdown of the free, fraternal, and affectionate relationships that characterize it. John Paul II states that “the decline of the culture of marriage is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills,” including the crisis of “human ecology”².

The term “family” is often applied not only to the nuclear family, usually based on marriage, but also to the family of believers³, to the universal human family and to the cosmic family⁴. It is also associated with the concept of “fraternity,” which Pope Francis relates to Franciscan spirituality. Concretely, he affirms that “it was the

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¹ Francis, “*Fratelli tutti*”. *Encyclical letter* (Oct. 3, 2020), [FT], LEV: Vatican City 2020, 127. Cf. ID, “*Amoris Laetitia*”. *Post-synodal apostolic exhortation* (Mar. 19, 2016), [AL], AAS 108/4(2016), n. 194.

² Francis, *Address in the international colloquium on the complementarity between man and woman* (Nov. 17, 2014), AAS 106/12(2014), n. 2.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, LEV: Vatican City 2019, n. 854. Cf. John Paul II, “*Familiaris consortio*” *Apostolic exhortation* (Nov. 22, 1981), AAS 74(1982), n. 74.

⁴ On the ecological approach to the family: M.P. Andrews, M.M. Bubolz , B. Paolucci, *An ecological approach to the study of the family*, “*Marriage and family Review*” 3(1980), pp. 29-49.

evangelical witness of St. Francis, with his school of thought, that gave this term the meaning it then preserved over the centuries”⁵.

The first part of this presentation will focus on the importance of the family in the recent Magisterium. The second part will study how the Franciscans have assumed it in their legislation and their way of understanding authority and their own identity. Finally, the third part will present the Franciscan vision of creation as a cosmic family⁶.

1. IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY IN THE RECENT MAGISTERIUM

The Second Vatican Council reevaluates familial and fraternal relations at all levels. The Church, it says, “is to be renewed in Christ and transformed into God’s family”⁷. With regard to consecrated persons, the Council encourages a more fraternal lifestyle and asks that legislative texts be interpreted not with a casuistic mentality, but in the light of what the founders lived and wanted to express.

It thus promotes a transition from “common life” to “fraternal life,” that is, a change towards a more familiar and less regulated lifestyle. This is evident when comparing the Code of Canon Law (CIC) of 1917 with that of 1983. The first insisted on “regular observance” and uniformity, which resulted in strict compliance with rules, schedules, and external elements (food, clothing, utensils)⁸. The 1983 CIC, instead, insists on fraternal communion⁹, on the spiritual dimension of relationships and on the bonds of charity: “A religious institute is a society in which members [...] lead a life of brothers or sisters in common” (CIC 607, 2).

Following these indications, the Franciscan Rule ceased to be seen primarily as a normative text and was put in relation to the vital and fraternal dynamism it promotes. Likewise, the current OFM General Constitutions take over again the term “fraternity,” so dear to Saint Francis, to identify the Franciscan Order¹⁰, but which had ceased to be used after the approval of the Later Rule, except for a brief appearance in the Constitutions of Perpignan (in 1331).

⁵ Francis, “*Fraternity as the governing principle of the economic order*”. *Message to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*» (Apr. 24, 2017), OsRom 99 (29.04.2017), p. 7, n. 1.

⁶ This article develops the content of a lecture given by the author at the 7th International Symposium of Familiology, held on 2.06.2023 in Elbląg (organiser: University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland). It also includes some ideas that he developed extensively in his book: M. Carbaño-Núñez, *The universal fraternity. Franciscan roots of Fratelli tutti*, TAU publishing: Phoenix (AZ) 2023.

⁷ Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et spes*”. *Dogmatic constitution* (Dec. 07, 1965), [GS], AAS 58(1966), n. 40.

⁸ “In the common life of each religious [institute] there shall be accurately observed by all those things that pertain to food, dress, and furnishings”. “In quavis religione vita communis accurate ab omnibus servetur etiam in iis quae ad victum, vestitum et ad supellectilem pertinent”: *CIC 1917*, can. 594,1, in *Pontificia Università Gregoriana. Facoltà di Diritto Canonico* [on-line], <https://www.iuscangreg.it/cic1917.php?lang=EN> (access: 21.09.2023).

⁹ *Code of Canon Law*, ed. E Caparrós et al., Wilson & Lafleur: Montréal 1993, c. 602.

¹⁰ “The Order of Friars Minor, founded by St. Francis of Assisi, is a fraternity”: OFM, *General Constitutions*, art. 1, in Id., *The Rule, the General Constitutions, The General Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor*, OFM General Curia, Rome 2016, 21.

1.1. God has in Himself the essence of the family

The post-conciliar Magisterium has frequently used the concept of the family, applying it analogically to God's very essence. John Paul II affirms that God is a family, "since He has in Himself fatherhood, sonship, and the essence of the family, which is love"¹¹. The Father is the Lover, the Son the Beloved, the Spirit is Love.

The Trinitarian God (tri-unity) is communion in plurality¹². Everything has been created according to this divine model and, therefore, "bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure"¹³.

There is a certain analogy between the Trinitarian communion and the communion that is lived in marriage. "The triune God is a communion of love and the family is its living reflection" (AL 11); that is, "the family is the image of God, Who is a communion of persons" (AL 71).

"Human fatherhood and motherhood, while remaining biologically similar to that of other living beings in nature, contain in an essential and unique way a «likeness» to God which is the basis of the family as a community of human life, as a community of persons united in love (*communio personarum*). [...] The family, which originates in the love of man and woman, ultimately derives from the mystery of God¹⁴.

This analogy is also found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition, which reveal the Trinity "with the features of a family. Moreover, Christ "raised marriage to the sacramental sign of His love for the Church" (AL 71 & 73).

1.2. The human being grows, matures, and learns in the family

Human beings have been created in the image of the Trinitarian God (Gn 1,27) and, therefore, they are intrinsically social beings. Sexual difference and the companionship of male and female are the primary forms of that intrinsic sociability (GS 12). By relating, they develop their own identity, making "their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them" (LS 240).

In the family, we express and potentiate our intrinsic sociability, since it is there "where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one" (AL 276). In this area of primary socia-

¹¹ John Paul II, *Homily - Puebla de los Angeles* (Jan. 28, 1979), in *InsJP2*, II(1979), pp. 180-185, here 182.

¹² 1Jn 4:8. Cf. Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, XV, c. 16, PL 226, 42. This divine unity "is expressed in "the mutual inhabitation or perichoresis" and "the clearer the distinction of the persons, the more evident the whole unity. *Ibid.*

¹³ Francis, "*Laudato si*". *Encyclical letter* (May 24, 2015), [LS], AAS 107(2015), n. 239; "Creatura mundi est quasi quidem liber, in quo reluctet et representatur el legitur Trinitas fabricatrix": Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, II c. 12, in *Id.*, *Opera omnia*, vol. 10, Typ. Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi 1882-1902 [*Quaracchi*], V 199-291, here V 230a.

¹⁴ John Paul II, "*Gratissimam sane*". *Letter to Families* (Feb. 2, 1994), AAS 86(1994), nn. 6 and 8.