

Martín Carbajo Núñez OFM*

Pontifical University *Antonianum*, Rome (Italy)

Pontifical Academy *Alfonsianum*, Rome (Italy)

FST – University San Diego, California (USA)

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND POLAR OPPOSITION: BEING EQUAL WHILE REMAINING DIFFERENT

Summary: On the fifth anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia*, this article focuses on the importance of family relationships in our globalized world. The family allows everyone to feel equal while remaining different. In tune with Romano Guardini, Pope Francis uses the dialectic of polar opposition to describe the unity in diversity typical of authentic family life (part 1). He notes, however, that the technocratic paradigm, homogeneous and one-dimensional, cancels out this dynamic, thus opening the way to globalized indifference and the throwaway culture (part 2). Therefore, the Pope invites us to rebuild family relationships and preserve polar opposition at our four fundamental levels: spiritual, personal, social and natural (part 3).

Keywords: Family, Fraternity, Polar opposition, Dialogue, *Amoris Laetitia*.

On the fifth anniversary of the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, (Francis, 2016a, n. 186) this article analyzes the importance of family relationships in our globalized world. In the parental family, diversity does not hinder human relationships, but rather makes them more authentic, because it creates the right environment for everyone to feel equal while remaining different. Pope Francis describes the unity in diversity, typical of authentic family life, using the dialectic of polar opposition. In this, he takes inspiration from Romano Guardini, who affirms that all reality is structured in the form of contrast. During the Synod on Consecrated Life (1994), J.M. Bergoglio explained this dynamic:

‘A tension, for its life to be maintained, cannot be resolved by assimilation of one of the poles to the detriment of the others, nor by a synthesis (of a Hegelian type) that annuls the polarities. The tension (in this case the ecclesial tension) must be

*Adres/Address: Prof. dr. Martín Cabajo Núñez OFM, ORCID: 0000-0002-2814-5688; e-mail: mcarbajon@gmail.com

resolved on a higher level, that would not be a synthesis, but a resolution that virtually contains the tensioned polarities.¹

In the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis asserts that the unity „we seek is not uniformity, but a «unity in diversity.» [...] We need to free ourselves from feeling that we all have to be alike” (Francis, 2016a, n. 139). This is experienced particularly in the family founded on marriage, where human beings develop their own identity, open themselves to diversity, and become part of a common project. „The mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities.” (John Paul II, 1991, n. 39) In this welcoming space, children can learn „what it means to love and to be loved” (John Paul II, 1991, n. 39); that is, they can be in unity with others without ceasing to be themselves.

In the first part of this article, we will present the dynamics of polar opposition in Pope Francis’ teachings, noting that his approach is close to that of Romano Guardini. In the second part, we will see that the current technocratic paradigm, homogeneous and one-dimensional, overrides this dynamic, thus opening the way to globalized indifference, despotic domination, and the throwaway culture. In the third part, we will present some of Pope Francis’ guidelines for recuperating family relationships at the four fundamental levels of human life: spiritual, personal, social and natural.

1. Polar opposition

Romano Guardini proposed a dialectic of polar opposition to explain the original structure of reality and the dynamism that characterizes it². In all life, he says, there is a tension between two poles which are bound together, united and indissociable.³ ‘It is not a «synthesis» of two moments into a third. Nor is

¹ “Una tensión, para que la vida que tiene se mantenga viva, no se puede resolver por asimilación de uno de los polos en desmedro de los otros, ni por síntesis (de tipo hegeliano) que anule las polaridades. La tensión (y en este caso la tensión eclesial) debe resolverse en un plano superior, que no sea síntesis, sino que la resolución contenga virtualmente las polaridades tensionantes.” – Intervención en el Sínodo sobre la Vida consagrada», (Rome, Oct. 13, 1994), n. 3. (Bergoglio, 1995, p. 204).

² Bergoglio explains Guardini’s eight pairs of opposites in (Bergoglio, 1989, pp. 173–189; Bergoglio, 2011).

³ Cada uno “no puede ser deducido del otro, ni ser hallado a partir del otro.” (Guardini, 1996, p. 90). Guardini identifica ocho pares de opuestos que constituyen la estructura fundamental de la realidad y los presenta en dos grupos: transcendentales y categoriales. Los dos pares transcendentales (afinidad-distinción; unidad-pluralidad) penetran indistintamente todos los demás opuestos. Los categoriales se dividen a su vez en dos subgrupos: intraempíricos (acto-estructura; plenitud-forma; singularidad-totalidad) y extraempíricos (producción-disposición; originalidad-regla; immanencia-transcendencia). (Guardini, 1996, pp. 83–125).

it a whole, of which the two moments constitute «parts.»⁴ (Guardini, 1996, p. 90)

‘The two opposites are not annulled. One pole does not destroy the other. There is no contradiction and no identity. For him [Guardini] oppositions are resolved at a higher level. In that resolution, however, the polar tension remains. The tension remains, it is not cancelled out. Limits must be overcome, not negated. Oppositions are helpful. Human life is structured in oppositional form. And we see this happening now in the church as well. The tensions are not necessarily resolved and ironed out, they are not like contradictions.’⁵

In this dialectic, the two elements remain linked and mutually presuppose each other, forging a unity that does not cancel out the difference. This unity can only be understood as polar tension – not contradictory – between opposites; that is, ‘as unity of contrast.’⁶

Polar opposition must not be confused with contradiction. For example, ‘evil is not the counterpart of good, as gnosis would have it, but it is its negation.’ Therefore, ‘it demands a decision, a choice’ (Borghesi, 2017, p. 122; Borghesi, 2018)⁷ you have to choose one or the other, not both.

1.1. Four oppositional principles

The four oppositional principles that the Pope presents in the exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (Francis, 2013, n. 222–225) are drawn from the never-completed doctoral thesis that he was drafting on Guardini.⁸ These principles respond to three bipolar and innate tensions: fullness/limitation (principles 1 and 2), ideas/realities (3) and globalization/localization (4). (Bergoglio, 2011, p. 13) A brief reference to these principles:

⁴ “Todo el ámbito de lo humano parece estar dominado por el hecho del contraste. [...] La relación especial, en la que dos elementos se excluyen el uno al otro y permanecen, sin embargo, vinculados e, incluso, se presuponen mutuamente.” (Guardini, 1996, pp. 79–80).

⁵ “I due opposti non si annullano. Non avviene neanche che un polo distrugga l’altro. Non c’è contraddizione né identità. Per lui [Guardini] l’opposizione si risolve in un piano superiore. La tensione rimane, non si annulla. I limiti vanno superati non negandoli. Le opposizioni aiutano. La vita umana è strutturata in forma oppositiva. Ed è quello che succede adesso anche nella Chiesa. Le tensioni non vanno necessariamente risolte e omologate, non sono come le contraddizioni”. Il linguaggio “se non è creativo è sterile.” (Spadaro, 2016, p. XIX).

⁶ “Como unidad nacida del contraste.” (Fayos Febrer, 2010, p. 310).

⁷ Questa distinzione “consente di pensare alla *communio* cattolica non come una unità piatta, uniforme, ma come una figura mobile, poliforme, che non teme per questo, di perdere la sua unità. (Borghesi, 2017, p. 122).

⁸ The topic was Guardini’s first book of philosophy, *Der Gegensatz*, “Polar opposition.” – Francis, «Grabación audio,» (Sept. 3, 2017), quoted in: (Borghesi, 2017, footnote 274, p. 120). “Tutta la parte sui criteri sociali [in *Evangelii Gaudium*] è tratta dalla tesi su Guardini.” (Cámara – Pfaffen, 2016, p. 185).