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Article

The Evangelizing Mission of the Christian Family in the Light of *Amoris Laetitia*

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Abstract

The Christian family is a fundamental institution that contributes to the development of societies by transmitting both human life and cultural heritage. However, it faces various internal and external challenges that hinder its role and well-being in society and the Church. It is within this context that this study is conducted. It is a qualitative, theological type of research that analyzes the Church document Amoris Laetitia and elaborates on the Christian family's mission in the Church's life. The study emphasized that this mission is significant so that the family can address the challenges they face in the present time. This mission is to be: (1) A community of love where spouses are called to live their marital love in lifetime fidelity and extend to their children. (2) A community of life where spousal love finds its fullness in transmitting life not only to their children but the sharing of life with the wider community of the Church (3) A community of faith where they are able to carry their evangelizing mission of educating their children in the faith, forming them according to virtues, and educating them to be responsible in the exercise of sexuality. By embracing this mission, the Christian family not only fulfills its role in the Church but also becomes a vital force in the renewal of society.

Keywords: *Amoris Laetitia, Christian Family, Mission, Witness*

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Introduction

The family is a universal reality that uniquely contributes to the development of societies. It is born from the natural communion and permanent commitment of husband and wife through which human life is transmitted, and it is the social institution through which the spiritual heritage of the community and the cultural legacy of the nations are transmitted as well (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004). Today, however, it is continuously confronted with challenging situations, making it difficult for the family to exercise its significant role in society and the Church. Some of these challenges are internal, happening inside the family, like domestic violence, child abuse, and poverty. Others are external, such as the effects of media, the culture of individualism, and consumerism, which negatively influence family values.

Despite the challenges, the family's vocation and mission remain critical for society's well-being and the Church's good. According to the functional theory of the family, it plays four central functions essential to the proper development of societies, without which, it will affect the good of humanity. These are the regulation of sexuality, the process of procreation, the socialization of children, and economic cooperation within and outside the family. From the perspective of the Christian faith, the family, according to *Familiaris Consortio*, is called to exercise the four essential tasks of being the seat of communion, the sanctuary of life, an agent for social development, and a leaven for the evangelizing mission of the Church (*Familiaris Consortio*,17). These tasks are rooted in the family's nature as a community of life and love.

Almost ten years ago, after the convocation of the Synod on Family in October 2015, Pope Francis came out with the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation entitled Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love), a document enlightening the Christian faithful about the vocation and mission of the family and how we as a Church can address the different challenges that families are faced today. This paper aims to elaborate on the family's evangelizing mission in the light of Amoris Laetitia. Specifically, the author seeks to recapture the Christian family's value in the Church's life and how it can exercise its mission. By analyzing Amoris Laetitia and other pertinent documents and studies related to marriage and family, the author draws the mission of the Christian family in its role as a community of love, life, and faith.

Theoretical Framework

Family in Society

Most researchers today agree that understanding family requires different approaches and perspectives. There is no unilateral definition of the family, especially today, when it continuously evolves because of cultural and social changes affecting family dynamics. Traditionally, the family is understood as a social institution found in many societies and cultures, generally recognized as a unity of people oriented towards the reproduction and education of children. Kinship bonds are created according to blood, marriage, or adoption, joining individuals into families (Masionis

& Plummer, 2012). As a social institution, it provides a relatively stable cluster of statuses, roles, or norms. It helps transmit culture over generations and serves as an agent of socialization, which assists us in learning about the structure, customs, beliefs, standards, and laws of our society and helps us prepare to be functioning members of society. (Miller and Vandermey, 2011)

From a symbolic interactionist approach, families, on the other hand, are constructed through daily interactions, while roles are shaped not by structure alone but by how family members interpret and negotiate family communication. This theory argues that the family's meaning is not predetermined but is actively created and maintained through the interaction of its members. What it means to be a "father," "mother," "child," or "sibling" is not fixed but is constantly being negotiated and redefined. Family members interact and negotiate roles that shape their identities within the family unit. This can involve discussion, agreements, or even disagreements about who does what and how decisions are made, and responsibilities are shared (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993).

Another approach to understanding the family is the post-modern and pluralist perspective. It rejects the idea of a single and normal family form. It subscribes to the "transformation of intimacy," where family relationships are increasingly based on emotional satisfaction and negotiation rather than duty and compliance with societal and cultural norms (Giddens, 1992). It emphasizes the "individualization" of family life, where traditional roles are replaced with personal choice and flexibility. In post-modern society, family is no longer a given structure but a project to be actively constructed (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). From this perspective, we can cite same-sex parent families and those in cohabitation as examples of alternative forms of families. These kinds of families break from the traditional understanding of family and are formed based on the individual choices of partners, especially those that bring them more personal happiness and satisfaction.

The conflict theory of family offers another way of understanding the family. It claims that the family is where problems most often occur, which can lead to broader societal challenges, including generational cycles of poverty and systemic inequality. For example, according to this theory, the family as an institution perpetuates social inequalities. The family's economic status determines its social status, whether it belongs to the poor, middle class, or rich. The wealth of the family, or the lack thereof, provides its children with social identity, reinforcing society's system of stratification. Further, the family, in many cases, is also a source of domestic violence and child abuse, affecting the health and well-being of its members. As a consequence, society suffers from a host of social problems like broken families and juvenile delinquency (Little, 2016).

While conflict theorists emphasize the inequalities within the family structure, functionalists view the family as essential for maintaining social stability by exercising certain functions. In a survey he conducted of 250 societies, anthropologist George Murdock identified these general functions as the regulation of sexuality,

reproduction, the development of socialization skills, and the promotion of economic cooperation (Little, 2016). Horwitz explains that, as part of a more extensive structure system such as the Church, the State, and the economy, the family plays these functions, without which the whole structure of society would likely collapse because it serves the purpose of developing the larger social structure (Horwitz, 2005).

By regulating the practice of sexuality, it is within the family that sexual roles and norms are defined. The family determines the valid sexual relationships limited to spouses. The avoidance of incestuous relationships among members of the family is one example of regulation because when this is violated, it usually results in conflict. This also allows people to marry outside their immediate families, extending their family alliances (Masionis & Plummer, 2012). The following function of the family is the process of reproduction. Family facilitates procreation since marriage provides the institutional arrangement through which not only sexual loyalty between spouses is assured, but it also conditions the proper environment through which children receive the appropriate care they need in order to grow as individuals. Socialization follows reproduction, which ensures children's growth and maturity. In the family, children learn the basics of social interaction. Parenting involves instructing children on general concepts of right and wrong and explaining appropriate behavior in various social situations. The personal interaction between parents and children provides the intimacy necessary to transmit these social rules and norms. The last of the functions is economic cooperation. Families are economic units because they contribute to producing and allocating essential goods and services necessary for their well-being and that of society. Living in a community can commonly share goods, increasing the family's economic resources for just and equitable distribution. The unity of material resources assures the proper functioning of the whole household (Horwitz, 2005).

The web of relationships in the family also provides the key component of the "social capital" necessary for the proper functioning of civil societies. Relationships serve as the mechanism where members acquire virtues like generosity, self-sacrifice, trust, and self-discipline, promoting the well-being of social life. Further, the human and social capital that comes from the family adds to the development of the nation's economy. Generating productive workers and taxpayers from the family is a key ingredient in the growth of the national economy (The Witherspoon Institute, 2006).

Aside from playing an essential function for the good of society, studies explain that marriage and family also confer crucial benefits for the well-being of husband and wife, their children, and the whole family. Family relationships offer a sense of support and meaning, which promotes the well-being of family members. While stressors can undermine their mental health, social support in the family protects them from its detrimental effects. Receiving support enhances a feeling of greater self-esteem, which, in turn, becomes a psychological factor that encourages optimism and better mental health (Thomas et al., 2017).

It is also known that marriage-based families are far more beneficial than non-marital relationships, such as those in which one cohabits. The institutional character

of marriage provides a normative and legal structure specifying rights, responsibilities, and standards of appropriate behavior for both husband and wife and their children. It also offers guidelines that help couples to know their marital roles, thus facilitating their interaction on how to be a good wife or husband. Because responsibilities are defined, the husband and wife can develop moral and personal discipline, promoting a stable domestic life within the family (Musick & Bumpass, 2012).

Marriage-based families also help children to grow, mature, and flourish. The married family satisfies the children's need to know their biological origins, connecting them to a mother and a father. It also establishes a framework of love for nurturing them, which includes providing their education and personal development, and supporting their identity. The economic resources of spouses assure the economic well-being of children as well (The Witherspoon Institute, 2006).

Studies also reveal that relationships with parents characterized by low conflict, high levels of support, and open communication help teens navigate adolescence's physical and emotional stages. For example, constant dialogue and close ties with parents are associated with less drug use, including less drinking and smoking among teens. High-quality marital relationships that translate to good parenting practices also positively affect adolescent well-being. Even frequent family meals also result in positive outcomes for their well-being (Shaw, 2014).

The religious environment inside the family can also promote the emotional and overall quality of family life. For families with disabled members, religion gave them strength and helped them make sense of the events in their lives. Faith enabled them to overcome the challenges they faced in everyday life. Being part of a religious community also helps them to share and develop their Spirituality with others (Poston and Turnball, 2004). This is affirmed by another study, which reveals that family strength depends on how the whole family practices spiritual/religious values. A strong family is built when there is an atmosphere where spiritual needs are addressed by a shared set of spiritual/religious set of beliefs. An awareness of God or a Higher power also gives a family a sense of purpose and increases family support and strength. (Ghaffari et al., 2013)

Related to this is another study that reveals that religious involvement in the family lowers the rate of divorce and increases marital satisfaction. Religious practices are linked with family satisfaction, closer father-child relationships, and lower incidences of domestic violence. Family religiosity is also important to children's growth and faith maturity. It is linked with how parents frequently talk about faith with their children, how often they join in family devotion, and how their children see them serving in the Church. The most important social influence on adolescents' religious and spiritual lives is their parents (Roberto, 2007).

The Christian Family in the Church

The well-being of individuals and the Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of the family. Despite difficulties and social changes, it remains a significant institution necessary to foster the well-being of couples and their children. Therefore, we cannot undermine its value, for its power and strength remain relevant in society and the Church. (Gaudium et Spes, 4, 7) In the Church's view, Christian marriage and family are goods, for they introduce a human person to the human family and the family of God. Through these natural institutions, "a human person is brought into being, is reborn through baptism, educated in the faith, and introduced to God's family which is the Church" (Familiaris Consortio, 15). Grafted into the Church, the family discovers its identity and mission. Knowing what family is, they become aware of what it can do according to God's ordinance:

> *The role God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is. The family must go back to the beginning of God's creative act to attain self-knowledge and self-realization through the inner truth, not only what it is but also what it does in history. And since God's plan has established it as an intimate community of life and love, the family has the mission to become more and more what it is: a community of life and love in an effort that will find fulfillment in the kingdom of God. Love, in the final analysis, specifies the family's essence and role. Hence, the family has the mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love. (FC, 17)*

Pope John Paul II identified what it means for the family to be a community of life and love. The family is called to fulfill the following tasks: (1) to form a community of people, (2) to be the sanctuary of life, (3) to participate in the development of society, and (4) to participate in the Church's mission of evangelization (*Familiaris Consortio*, 17).

To form a community of people, the primary task of the family is to build communion between spouses and their children. Being the first social community, the proper way of existing and living together is by living in communion, the purpose of which is acceptance and love for each family member. This is built upon the conjugal communion of husband and wife, which is expected to be absolute, total, faithful, and indissoluble, reflecting the love of Christ for His spouse, the Church (*Familiaris Consortio*, 18).

As a sanctuary of life, the family is also called to be at the service of life. The marriage between husband and wife attains its fullness when they are disposed to transmit human life (*Familiaris Consortio*, 28). "In marriage, the mutual self-giving of husband and wife reaches its totality when they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person" (The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 15). Since parents confer life on their children, they also have the most solemn obligation to educate their offspring (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 3).

The family also contributes to social development. Being the basic unit of society, "it is from the family that people are born and within the family that they are humanized and socialized by learning the basic values such as love, respect, and

justice" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 42). The Trinitarian structure of communion serves as the theological basis for the social and solidarity dimension of the family. Just as the Trinitarian God is a communion of persons, the human person, based on his nature as created according to God's image, is also called to live in communion with others. When we act in solidarity with our neighbors, we make the solidarity and communion in the Trinitarian mystery visible (Anderson, 2009).

In its unique role as a community of love and life, the family also partakes in the Church's mission of evangelization, expressed in a specific way as the Domestic Church, which is the privileged place for fulfilling the mission of the wider Church. As a Domestic Church, the vocation of the husband and wife is to be in their conjugal and family life, a credible sign of the love of God for humanity and Christ for the Church.

Married couples realize their true vocation as a sacrament of love when they become authentic witnesses of the Gospel by reflecting the Trinitarian love in the world. Being witnesses, the family becomes an agent for proper human development and can participate authentically in the Church's mission of evangelization (Vives, 2010). The family also fulfills its missionary task when it extends its communion to reach out and build welcoming, inclusive communities outside the confines of its home (De Mesa, 2000). As a Domestic Church, the Christian family also makes visible the contemplative and prophetic nature of the Church. It is called to dialogue with God in prayer and celebrating the sacraments. As prophets, we are challenged to advance the kingdom of God by serving the cause of truth, justice, and peace. (Gomez, 2003)

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive theological research approach focused on a critical review and analysis of Amoris Laetitia to elucidate the Christian family's unique mission within the Church. To contextualize and strengthen this exploration, the researcher also examined other key Church documents, including *Familiaris Consortio*, alongside relevant interdisciplinary studies from sociology and psychology. This broader review provided a theoretical foundation for understanding the family's positive contributions to societal life. Based on insights from these sources, the researcher developed an interpretative framework highlighting the family's mission as a community of love, life, and faith. This framework guided the theological reflection and synthesis that underpins the study's findings and conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

The Christian Family in Amoris Laetitia

The story of the creation of humans provides a biblical background for understanding the nature and purposes of marriage and family. It offers a human prototype of what it is and how God envisions it. It reveals that the creation of humans as both male and female according to the divine likeness was to unite them in

marriage. Their differences as men and women imply that they are meant to complement each other and are ideally suited to their need for companionship and the purpose of procreation. The story affirms that marriage is divinely instituted and endowed with specific purposes intended for the good of the spouses, their children, and society (USCCB, 2009).

In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis revealed the deepest marriage identity, mainly rooted in the Divine Trinity. In the light of the Sacred Scriptures, married couples embody the primordial divine plan created in the image and likeness of God. As a unity of male and female, they serve as the living icon revealing God's fruitfulness and love as Creator and Savior. In their ability to generate life, they participate in the unfolding of salvation history, becoming an image for understanding the mystery of God, who is contemplated as Father, Son, and Spirit of love. As a living reflection of the Trinity, the family is thus related to God's very being (*Amoris Laetitia*, 11).

With the community of the Trinity as the basis of the identity of the Christian family, *Amoris Laetitia* further explained that the mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father's infinite love revealed in Christ who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst. He reestablishes its goodness and giftedness when "he reaffirmed the indissoluble union between man and woman, at the time of creation and how what God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19-6-8). Moreover, how this should not be seen as a burden "but as a grace granted to those who are joined in marriage because God's indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 63)

By restoring the original form of marriage, marriage and family have been redeemed by Christ and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which all true love flows. The spousal covenant originating in creation and revealed in the history of salvation now finds meaning in Christ and His Church. He bestowed on marriage and family the grace necessary to bear witness to God's love and live a life of communion. "Thus, the Gospel of the family spans the history of the world, from the creation of man and woman in the image and likeness of God (Gen: 26-27) to the fulfillment of the mystery of the covenant in Christ at the end of time with the marriage of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9)" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 63).

Amoris Laetitia further emphasized how Jesus is the pastoral model in caring for and valuing marriage and family. He began his ministry with the miracle at the Wedding of Cana (John 2: 1-11). He shared everyday moments of friendship with the family of Lazarus and his sisters (Lk 10: 38). He sympathized with grieving parents and restored their children to life. (Mk 5:41). In this way, he demonstrated the true meaning of mercy. This is clear from his conversations with the Samaritan woman and with the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), where the consciousness of sin is awakened by an encounter with Jesus' gratuitous love (*Amoris Laetitia*, 64).

Despite families' many challenges, Amoris Laetitia affirmed that they could become a light in the world's darkness. The covenant of love and fidelity lived by the

Holy Family can give light to families and enable them to face life's difficulties better. The Holy Family in Nazareth is the paradigm that "teaches us the meaning of family life, its simple and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character and how fundamental and incomparable its role in the social order" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 66).

The Mission of the Family

Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, husband and wife embark on their vocation and mission. Elliot postulates that when husband and wife mutually consent to give themselves to each other, they accept and cooperate in God's work of creation and redemption. Their mutual consent is their obedience to God's act of uniting them as one flesh, which has the purpose of being co-creators with God. They also consent to a conjugal union that is indissoluble and faithful, mirroring Jesus' own espousal of the Church (Elliot, 1997).

The Holy Spirit transforms the hearts of the conjugal pair, enabling them to manifest love in the same way Christ loves. Their love reaches perfection, for it shares in the fellowship of the Spirit and participates in the charity of Christ, who entirely gave himself out of love on the Cross. Through the Spirit, husband and wife who entered into a covenant received the grace of assistance, enabling them to live faithfully their conjugal union as a visible reflection of Christ's union with the Church. They are empowered to live in such a way that their relationship recreates, incarnates, and embodies the love of God to His people (Elliot, 1997).

Consequently, through the Sacrament of Matrimony, the couple can carry out their vocation and mission in the Church. Through their mutual covenant reflecting Christ's covenant, they manifest Christ's living presence in the world (Gaudium et Spes, 48). Pope John Paul II explains that the family community is also born from the communion brought about by the conjugal covenant. Husband and wife transcend their communion and move towards a "society," a community of persons that opens them to a lasting communion of love and life brought into completion with the procreation of children. However, creating a lasting communion of love and life is a challenge and a task. It involves the spouses living out their conjugal covenant and the children consolidating that covenant, enriching and deepening the conjugal communion of their parents (*Gratisimmam Sane*, 7).

In Amoris Laetitia, this task was emphasized in the essential dimensions of marriage and family as a community of love, life, and faith. For this purpose, three chapters were devoted to explaining how to exercise this task in concrete ways: Chapter Four, "Love in Marriage," Chapter Five, "Love Made Fruitful," and Chapter Seven, "Towards a Better Education of Children." The following are the essential dimensions of marriage and family:

1. **Community of Love**

One of the challenges families face today is the tendency of individualism, which "weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as

an isolated unit." It is a culture characterized by the pursuit of possessions and pleasures, sometimes leading to the breakdown of family bonds. It promotes distrust, fear of commitment, and self-centeredness. Most often, choices are made for one's interests, which does not help the person to give generously to others and is one reason why more and more people are choosing to live alone. Too much concern for oneself and the fear of commitment also leads to the ephemeral culture, where people move from one affective relationship to another and are treated as objects, as if they are disposable (Amoris Laetitia, 33).

In a society that is becoming more individualistic, Pope John Paul II mentioned the important role of the family in building the civilization of love. This is due to the particular closeness and intensity of bonds in the family, which facilitates love among members. He cited St. Paul's hymn to love in his first letter to the Corinthians as the Magna Carta of the civilization of love. According to him, it is essential to rediscover the demanding character of love, especially today, when it increasingly influences our society. This is the kind of love that is both rooted in God and Christ. It is truly necessary, for love is the firm foundation of the family (*Gratisimmam Sane*, 14).

In Amoris Laetitia, Pope Francis cited the lyrical passage of St. Paul from 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 as the concrete essentials to cultivate in the daily life of couples and their children. According to him, in practicing the different attitudes necessary in love, it is first helpful to think that people are not perfect. The human person is a complex mixture of strengths and weaknesses, lights and shadows. Despite this, we are called to accept the person. Possessing their dignity, rights, and perspectives, we are called to respect and love them. Therefore, we cannot force them to act how we want to because doing that violates their freedom. This is why the lyrical passage of St. Paul calls us first to be patient with people and not to be annoyed about how different they are from us, because if we are impatient, it becomes impossible to live together (Amoris Laetitia, 92).

In loving, we are called primarily to serve our family in generosity and assist them in their needs because love is more than a feeling; instead, it is shown in deeds. (Amoris Laetitia, 94). True love is also being happy and concerned with the good of others, rather than being envious of their achievements. Love inspires sincere esteem for every member of the family and the recognition of his or her right to self-worth (*Amoris Laetitia*, 96).

Those who love are also focused on others and must refrain from being the center of attention by highlighting their superiority. Arrogance has no place in love. It is always ready to embrace the weak and build them up. The inner logic of Christian love is not about importance and power, but humble service (*Amoris Laetitia*, 97-98). Because we must avoid pride in relationships, we are called to be gentle and kind with others. Love abhors making others suffer. Loving kindness facilitates the building of bonds and relationships. Those who love can speak comfort, strength, consolation, and encouragement (*Amoris Laetitia*,100). It is not irritable and does not react harshly to the weaknesses and faults of others (*Amoris Laetitia*, 103).

The opposite of resentment is forgiveness, which is rooted in a positive attitude that seeks to understand and excuse people. We are liberated from discord, violence, and conflict through forgiving others. To pardon is to find peace and reconciliation (*Amoris Laetitia*, 105-106). Love is also disposed to be generous. For St. Thomas Aquinas, charity is the desire to love rather than to be loved. Generously serving and loving others is more noble than loving ourselves (*Amoris Laetitia*, 101-102). Generosity is not only the openness to share one's material resources, but an openness of the Spirit where we can rejoice in the well-being of others. When something good happens to one of its members, the family is a place where they know that others will be there to celebrate it with them (*Amoris Laetitia*, 110).

The Pauline text on love ends with four phrases: love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. It is an exhortation for couples to believe in the power of love to overcome all odds. This could be one's capacity to bear the weaknesses of one's spouse and family because to love is to "bear all things and can hold its peace before the limitations of the loved one" (Amoris Laetitia, 111-113). It is learning how to trust and respect the freedom of people and believe in what they can do (*Amoris Laetitia*,115). It also hopes in people's unseen potential to change and become better (Amoris Laetitia, 116). Finally, love endures all things and does not give up when facing challenges. It bears every trial with a positive attitude and does not allow itself to be defeated by evil but instead rises to the level of love, to its great beauty and power (*Amoris Laetitia*, 119)

In marriage, couples grow in conjugal charity in a dynamic process where husband and wife are not expected to perfectly reproduce the covenant between Christ and the Church. Their relationship advances gradually as the couple slowly evolves towards maturity. To grow in charity, Pope Francis reminded that marriage is the "greatest form of friendship," characterized by concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability, and the sharing of everyday life. It is also a lifelong commitment because the nature of conjugal love is to be definitive, and marriage is indissoluble. Pope Francis thus warned couples not to yield to the culture of the ephemeral, where relationships are seen as utilitarian and temporary (*Amoris Laetitia*, 121-124).

Likewise, Amoris Laetitia mentioned the importance of passion, the cultivation of joy, and the recognition of the person's sacredness, worth, and beauty beyond their physical limitations. Conjugal charity must also be tangible in the words spoken, in the openness to listen, and in dialogue when there are differences. "Fraternal communion is enriched by respect and appreciation for differences within an overall perspective that advances the common good" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 141).

Indispensable to marital love is also the recognition of the beauty of sexuality as both the physical and spiritual expression of love, not as a means for gratification but as an interpersonal language where couples mutually discover the sacredness and the giftedness of their partners. The gift of sex is not meant to depersonalize the other person and be treated as an object for one's domination. However, it allows the couple

to mutually recognize each other's dignity and thus enhance their relationship (*Amoris Laetitia*, 150-151).

Finally, to encourage the endurance of conjugal love even during times of challenges, Amoris Laetitia suggested the constant renewal of marital commitment. Pope Francis advised couples to view their marriage as a shared and lasting life project where both partners are reminded of their commitment to the union as a lifelong decision of the heart (*Amoris Laetitia*, 163-164).

2. Community of Life

In 1995, Pope John Paul II wrote *Evangelium Vitae* to address the increasing threats and violations against the dignity of human life. According to him, there seems to be a cultural climate of indifference against the value of human life and how, for example, practices like abortion, contraception, immoral experimentation on human embryos, and euthanasia are becoming socially acceptable and justified. He called this the "culture of death." The same concern for practices of abortion and contraception was raised by Amoris Laetitia, identifying the politics of Reproductive health and consumerism as some of the reasons deterring couples from having children in order to maintain a certain freedom and lifestyle.

How to address the "culture of death" Pope John Paul II cited the unique contribution of the Christian family as the sanctuary of life. Being the community where human life is first generated, it is essentially the place where we could build the "culture of life." Flowing from its nature as a community of love and life, they can participate in God's love through which parents collaborate with God to transmit human life. (Evangelium Vitae, 92)

Amoris Laetitia, in the same manner, affirmed the family's identity as the sanctuary of life. The family is where life is welcomed as a gift of God. The birth of children reveals the gratuitousness, the primacy, and the beauty of God's love: "Because they are loved even before they arrive, they are loved before having done anything to deserve it." Having mentioned this, Pope Francis in Amoris Laetitia reminded parents not to reject, abandon, and rob their children of their childhood and future. Children are the living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unit, and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother. "If a child comes into the world in unwanted circumstances, the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept that child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 166).

In the process of procreation, Pope Francis told mothers that pregnancy may be a difficult time. However, it is an excellent opportunity for them to collaborate with God in bringing forth the miracle of a new life. Each child has a place in God's heart from all eternity; once he or she is conceived, the Creator's eternal dream comes true. With that, he also affirmed the great value of an embryo at the moment of conception. He also reminded parents to avoid employing scientific advances to know the genetic

traits of their children beforehand. Each child is unique and irreplaceable. "We must love children because they are children, not because they are beautiful, or look or think as we do, or embody our dreams" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 168-170).

Amoris Laetitia also mentioned that the shared parenthood between the Father and mother is integral to a child's growth. It is the right of a child to receive love from his or her mother and Father because both are necessary for his or her harmonious development. They show their children the maternal and paternal face of the Lord. Together, they teach the value of reciprocity and respect for differences. Their presence in the child's life, especially during the early stages, provides children with the necessary identity and stability in their growth. A mother teaches Children the value of selflessness, tenderness, dedication, and faith in God. The Father taught them how to be open to life's challenges and the value of hard work and authority (Amoris Laetitia, 172-175).

When it is not possible for couples to have children, Amoris Laetitia suggested the adoption method. Adopting a child is an act of love, offering the gift of the family to someone who has none. It is a generous way to become parents. Those who accept the challenge of adopting and accepting someone unconditionally become channels of God's love (*Amoris Laetitia*, 179). Fruitfulness in marital love is not only through procreation and adoption; families can also open their doors to the poor, bind the wounds of the outcast, and collaborate in the works of justice. Open and caring families offer a place for low-income people and build friendships with less fortunate people. They are called to interact with the broader family of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and even neighbors to reach out to people who need assistance, companionship, affection, and consolation amid suffering (*Amoris Laetitia*, 181-183).

Amoris Laetitia also reminded families of the relationship between children and parents. Children must always show honor and respect to their parents. A society with children who do not honor their parents is a society without honor. When sons and daughters, however, have to leave the home to create another family, Pope Francis advised them to prioritize their families but not neglect their relationships with their parents, especially in their older years. Just as God asks us to be his means of hearing the cry of the poor, he also wants us to listen to the cry of the elderly. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, appreciation, and hospitality, which makes older people feel like a living part of the community. We must challenge the throw-away culture by not breaking ties with them (*Amoris Laetitia*, 189-191).

Another way to manifest fruitfulness in the family is to cultivate relationships between brothers and sisters. The bond of fraternity developed within the family is the same bond that introduces fraternity in the world. A big fraternal family is a gift to society (Amoris Laetitia, 194-195). In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II cited that this is essential in the development of society. The very experience of communion and sharing within the family can serve as a stimulus for broader community relationships. From this perspective, families can shape a community order characterized by justice and solidarity (*Familiaris Consortio*, 43).

Finally, the family is called to create wider bonds of communion where extended family and relatives, teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers, people with disabilities needing affection, the unmarried, separated, or widowed are welcomed and considered part of their community (*Amoris Laetitia*, 196-197). Cahill affirms this inclusive dimension of the Christian family. If the family is a school of intimacy, empathy, and love, then the family, as the Domestic Church, practices this virtue in consideration to the least of Christ's brethren. The family manifests this compassion when members feel each other's pain, resonate with each other's sorrow, and strive to lighten each other's burden (Cahill, 2000).

3. Community of Faith

According to Pope Francis, weakening faith and religious practices in some societies might hurt families. It could leave them powerless and hopeless to face certain socio-cultural realities that often crunch families. This is very clear in situations when parents find it challenging to raise children, in hesitancy to welcome new life, and in the increase of domestic violence (*Amoris Laetitia*, 43). In this context, it is essential to emphasize that when faith weakens, it is in the family itself that faith and religion must be strengthened. This is possible when the family becomes a community of faith in which the central role of parents is the cultivation of faith and its transmission within their community.

Marriage and conjugal love are by nature ordained for the begetting of children and their education. Parents should regard transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted as their proper mission. They are cooperators with the love of God and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). "The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. However, to fully flower its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds, the joint deliberation of spouses, and the painstaking cooperation of parents in educating their children" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 52).

Parents are responsible for enabling the person to be fully human, which means every effort must be made to develop the person's capacity to live a life of "truth and love." This task is rooted in the married couple's vocation to participate in God's creative activity of engendering a new person toward becoming human. It is also a mission and a ministry that they share with the Church. By initiating children into the Church's sacramental life, they learn to worship God in Spirit and truth and conduct their lives holily as children of God (*Familiaris Consortio*, 39). In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis identified the three essential aspects of the family's educational mission: the education of children in the faith, their moral and social formation, and their education in the responsible exercise of sexuality.

Transmission of Faith

Parents have an essential role to play in transmitting faith to their children. They are the first witnesses of the Christian faith to their children. Ordinary family life is the

context through which they can do this because the home continues to be where we appreciate the meaning of faith and learn to pray and serve our neighbors. Included is the initiation of children into the sacramental life of the Church. It starts with baptism, where, according to St. Augustine, mothers are significant in the sacred birthing of their children. We owe God the gift of faith received in baptism, yet parents are God's instruments in developing their children's faith (*Amoris Laetitia*, 287).

An attractive testimony of consistent family prayer and other religious devotion is a powerful example that parents can model for their children. Symbols, actions, and stories can also explain faith more effectively than the usual authority and rules that parents impose on the family. Nonetheless, being the principal witness of faith, *Amoris Laetitia* mentioned that parents should be appropriately appreciated as active agents of catechesis. They facilitate the expression and growth of faith and help the whole family in its evangelizing mission (*Amoris Laetitia*, 288-289).

Moral Education and Socialization

In children's education, it is necessary to emphasize that while developing their children's faith, the family must also cultivate their children's intellectual, moral, and social capacities. Parents can provide the necessary human and spiritual environment where children can acquire the foundation of culture, such as language, values, justice, and religion. The family is not only the physical womb through which children are born; it is also called the spiritual womb through which children nourished by love and discipline grow towards the fullness of their humanity. Bourg affirms that the family environment is best positioned to train children in moral and virtuous living. The family's more personalized and intimate relations can facilitate moral and emotional persuasion and make in-depth role modeling easier to learn (Bourg, 2004). This could be why Amoris Laetitia mentioned that though families rely on school for the basic instruction of children, parents can never completely delegate the moral formation of their children to others. They are still responsible for shaping the will of their children. We should not impose and make demands on them but enable and empower them to develop good habits in childhood so that they learn to internalize the values and moral principles that can be understood in practical everyday situations (*Amoris Laetitia*, 264).

One of the challenges *Amoris Laetitia* mentioned that families need to address is the increasing influence of media on the socialization of children. In their different forms, today's media are becoming a source of socialization for children, changing how relationships are shaped in the family. Today, adolescents spend significant amounts of their leisure time in the privacy of their bedrooms rather than in communal family spaces. Children are more likely to communicate with a virtual world than adult household members. The solitary use of media indicates an individualization of media use in the home and a fragmentation of domestic leisure among young people and adults. New patterns of family association are being identified and described as living together but separately (Chambers, 2012).

In this context, *Amoris Laetitia* cited the importance of parents teaching their children the critical use of media. They need to determine the form of leisure their children are exposed to and the cultural influences they receive in these spaces. The way to exercise this is not through the obsessive control of children in all their actions. It is to teach them lovingly how to make responsible choices and guide them in understanding the issues intelligently so that they can form their convictions and values. This is the most necessary knowledge they can receive rather than simply controlling their choices. (*Amoris Laetitia*, 274).

For example, social media can help us create a network of relationships. Still, the physical presence and direct communication with family members remain irreplaceable in building relationships. In this context, it is necessary to emphasize family as the primary setting for socialization, where children can be introduced to the basics of social life. The intimacy of the family between the husband and the wife, parents and children, and brothers and sisters provide the natural space where values are communicated through words and actions. The closeness within the family facilitates learning social values because of the openness and love between the family members. We become free from self-absorption and open our eyes to recognize the value of human persons and relationships. The task of the family is to teach children that beyond their families, the world and society are also our homes, where we are called to live alongside others (*Amoris Laetitia*, 276).

Education in Human Sexuality

In the document, The Truth and Meaning about Human Sexuality, the Pontifical Council for Family specifically emphasized that in creating human beings according to God's image and likeness, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation to love and communion. Part of a human's capacity to love is expressed in our self-giving, both in the unity of body and Spirit. We call this fundamental component of personality sexuality, where both the femininity of woman and the masculinity of man are complementary gifts to each other, integrating in itself our love for God and our love for someone. Human sexuality, then, is a good that God himself designed in the framework of our humanity. It is a way of relating and being open to others with love at its end. In general, it refers to everyone's capacity to give oneself wholly in love with others. However, our capacity and growth in love need to be responsible. Discipline and self-mastery are necessary because love is powerful and often involves feelings, passions, and emotions. Specifically, it implies learning and cultivating the virtue of chastity. Chastity is the spiritual power that frees love from selfishness and aggression. To the degree that a person weakens chastity, their love becomes increasingly selfish, that is, satisfying a desire for pleasure and is no longer self-giving (The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, 10, 17).

Pope Francis mentioned that developing a healthy sense of modesty is also essential in sexual education, even if, nowadays, some people no longer believe in it. By being modest, we can protect our privacy and prevent ourselves from being used

as sexual objects. Modesty calls us to be responsible and become aware that the gift of sexuality finds its natural end, specifically in marriage. Outside of marriage, we are called to discover meaningful expressions of loving respect and care for others, which help us prepare for an absolute and total gift of self in a public commitment like marriage (*Amoris Laetitia*, 282). The appreciation of sexual differences is also an important element in sex education. This is to help young people overcome self-absorption and be open to accepting others of the opposite sex. When we are aware of our bodies as male or female, we can become more open to encountering others different from ourselves (*Amoris Laetitia*, 285) The difference between sexes, however, should not be seen as rigid categories because being male can also be a way to exhibit the feminine qualities of gentleness and grace, and being female can also express masculine qualities such as leadership and strength (*Amoris Laetitia*, 286).

To encourage the families to live in communion, Pope Francis, as a final word, exhorted them to live the Spirituality of love and communion. To do this, they are constantly called to center their life in Christ's paschal mystery, where they can learn to love, bear sufferings, shepherd each other in mercy, and overcome life's challenges. No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed. Families, therefore, need to grow and mature in their ability to love constantly (*Amoris Laetitia*, 325). Because with the practice of charity, it is possible to "illuminate a world grown dim" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 316). "This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and His Church, and the community of the Holy family in Nazareth" (Amoris Laetitia, 325). Living this vocation means the family as a Domestic Church becomes a vital cell for transforming the world (*Amoris Laetitia*, 324).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The family's welfare is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church. As a basic unit of society, it performs certain functions necessary for the effective working of the social order, like the regulation of sexuality, the transmission of life, the socialization of children, and the economic cooperation among family members. Without these essential functions, the overall common good of society is affected. The family is also significant because of the benefits it brings to its members' well-being. A good, harmonious family environment improves the quality of life within the family. Specifically, practicing spiritual/religious values strengthens the family and helps them overcome challenges in everyday life. For the above reasons, we cannot overemphasize how important it is for the family to carry out its vocation and mission in the life of the Church. The reason for its being points to its evangelizing mission, which is to become: (1) A community of love where spouses are called to live their marital love in lifetime fidelity and also extended to their children; (2) A community of life where spousal love finds its fullness in transmitting life to their children and sharing life with the broader community of the Church; and (3) A community of faith is one where they can carry out their evangelizing mission of

educating their children in the faith, forming them according to virtues, and educating them to be responsible in the exercise of sexuality. When the Christian family can respond to this mission, they truly become authentic witnesses of the Gospel. For this reason, the study also recommends the following: (1) The Church must constantly accompany the family towards the path of conversion; (2). It should enable and empower the family by educating them about their vocation and mission; and (3) There is a need for a family to collaborate with other Catholic institutions, such as schools and the parish, for the constant updating of their formation as a family.

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