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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

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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)

‘1) *Time is greater than space* (initiating processes of change is more important than maintaining spaces of power). 2) *Unity prevails over conflict* (unity presupposes diversity, it does not cancel it out. Differences should not diminish unity). 3) *The whole is greater than the part* (the whole exists as an organic unity composed of parts. The whole cannot exist without the parts and the parts cannot exist without the whole). 4) *Realities are more important than ideas* (the concrete, specific, and existent must be at the center).’⁹

Recently, Pope Francis has affirmed that „conflicts, tensions and even groups once considered inimical can attain a multifaceted unity that gives rise to new life.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 245)

1.2. Unity in diversity

Universal fraternity will be possible if we maintain the polar opposition between universal/particular, global/local, difference/complementarity, essence/existence, avoiding any type of excluding contradiction. „Unity prevails over conflict,” (Francis, 2015d, n. 198) but this should not lead „to opt for a kind of syncretism, or for the absorption of one into the other, but rather for a resolution which takes place on a higher plane and preserves what is valid and useful on both sides.” (Francis, 2013, n. 228)

The polar contrast also applies to the „existential triad” made up of the transcendentals: truth, beauty, and goodness, (Francis, 2015c, n. 11) Catechesis and evangelization must show that to believe in and to follow Christ „is not only something right and true, but also something beautiful,” (Francis, 2013, n. 167) thus uniting mind and heart, truth and mercy. Indeed, „it is not enough for our truth be orthodox and our pastoral work be effective. Without the joy of beauty, the truth becomes cold and even merciless and arrogant.” (Bergoglio, 2018, p. 1013)

In the exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, (Francis, 2020b, n. 29) the Pope invites us to go beyond the analysis of the facts that have provoked the ecological crisis. In order to adequately manage polarities, we need to awaken “our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense,” (Francis, 2020b, n. 56) so as to expand “horizons beyond conflicts.” (Francis, 2020b, n. 104)

⁹ “1) *El tiempo es superior al espacio* (iniciar los procesos de cambio es más importante que mantener los espacios de poder). 2) *La unidad es superior al conflicto* (la unidad presupone la diversidad, no la anula. Las diferencias no deben mermar la unidad). 3) *El todo es superior a la parte* (el todo existe como unidad orgánica compuesta de partes. El todo no puede existir sin las partes y las partes no pueden existir sin el todo). 4) *La realidad es superior a la idea* (lo concreto, lo específico y lo existente debe constituirse como centro, más allá de las abstracciones o las imposiciones de ideas).” (Martínez-Carbonell, 2019, p. 144) [Numbers, italics and translation are mine]

1.3. The image of the polyhedron

Pope Francis proposes the image of the polyhedron, „which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness.” (Francis, 2013, n. 236) The whole prevails without nullifying the polarity with each of the parts. The model is not the sphere, because „the global need not stifle, nor the particular prove barren.” (Francis, 2013, n. 235) The image of the mosaic is also significant, for each element contributes in it to the beauty of the whole without losing its own particular characteristics.

Referring to human relationships, the Pope invites us to enhance the individuality of each person and to integrate it harmoniously into the group. In this way, we can overcome”division and antagonism, and restore the fabric of relationships.” (Francis, 2019b, p. 8) In fact, a fraternal society makes it possible for equals to be different, that is, for each person to contribute to the common good while remaining fully himself/herself.

2. The technocratic, homogeneous, and unidimensional paradigm

The technocratic paradigm, homogeneous and unidimensional, defends „that every increase in power means an increase of progress itself; an advance in security usefulness, welfare, and vigor; an assimilation of new values.” (Guardini, 1958, p. 83) However, experience shows that human beings are not prepared to use correctly the enormous technological power they possess. Technology tends to absorb everything. Quite often, it does not serve „the well-being of the human race” but power. (Francis, 2015d, n. 108; Guardini, 1958, pp. 83–84)

2.1. Disembodied spiritualism

Disincarnated spiritualism and secularized activism are two extremes that nullify the polar dialectic between faith and justice, thus sterilizing the dynamism of the Word. (Francis, 2013, n. 233)¹⁰ We cannot fully resolve unjust realities without the inspiration and the power of the Spirit. On the other hand, we cannot serve faith without defending justice.

Some tendencies of liberation theology have over-privileged the pole of justice, falling into pragmatism and Marxist ideology. On the contrary, spiritualist currents have exaggerated the other pole, thus favoring resignation in front of the evils of our „valley of tears,” instead of stimulating people’s commitment to overcome the structures of domination.

¹⁰ Intimisms, fundamentalisms, and gnosticisms nullify the dialectic between the poles of faith and justice.

The polar tension between transcendence and immanence is also necessary in the political and economic spheres. Indeed, „openness to the transcendent can bring about a new political and economic mindset which would help to break down the wall of separation between the economy and the common good of society”. (Francis, 2013, n. 205)

Disembodied spiritualism despises everything material as an obstacle that hinders our ascent towards God. To attain holiness, it proposes to „subordinate” and subdue the body. Instead of „coordinating” all that we are, soul and body, it prefers to accentuate the separation between matter and spirit, giving full priority to just one of the two polar elements. In this way it makes us fall into „depersonalized experiences which are nothing more than a form of self-centeredness”. (Francis, 2013, n. 90)

Likewise, the value of marriage has been reduced to the spiritual union. However, *Amoris Laetitia* reminds us that „a love lacking either pleasure or passion is insufficient to symbolize the union of the human heart with God.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 142) The incarnate Word, in fact, does not redeem us *from* matter, but *with* matter and *with* the body.

2.2. The necessary personal balance

Dualistic anthropological conceptions focus on only one of the two fundamental dimensions of the human being. Guardini rejects these dualisms.

‘I do not know that there is in man any ‘purely spiritual’ act. Everything I find is, beforehand and constitutively, corporeal-spiritual, that is, human. On the other hand, I also do not know that there are merely biological states or processes in man. Already the very living form of man is permeated with spirit.’¹¹

„Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history” (Francis, 2015d, n. 98) and they are still present in our society.

2.2.1. Identity and sociability

When the polar tension between person and community is not respected, society is reduced to a sum of individuals completely autonomous (capitalism) or completely absorbed in the collectivist machinery. Authentic democracy,

¹¹ “Yo no sé que haya en el hombre ningún acto ‘puramente espiritual’. Todo lo que encuentro es, de antemano y constitutivamente, corpóreo-espiritual, es decir, humano. Por otra parte, tampoco me consta que haya en el hombre estados o procesos meramente biológicos. Ya la misma forma viviente del hombre está penetrada de espíritu.” (Guardini, 1996, pp. 171–172) “Il nucleo autentico dell’individualità umana è insieme autonomia e relazione alla totalità.” (Guardini, 2007, p. 179)

on the contrary, avoids the irreconcilable confrontation between individual and community, citizen and people.

Identity and sociability demand each other. The balanced development of our own identity – personal and collective – is only possible if we belong to a people and cultivate social friendship. That mature identity makes fraternal encounter possible, and vice versa. „There can be no dialogue with ‘others’ without a sense of our own identity, so there can be no openness between peoples except on the basis of love for one’s own land, one’s own people, one’s own cultural roots.”¹²

Unfortunately, the current technocratic paradigm favors homogenization and indifference, (Francis, 2013, n. 54)¹³ hinders sociability, and makes it difficult for us to develop our identity. We risk being reduced to mere „items of consumption.” (Francis, 2014c, p. 623) Indeed, „less and less will people be called by name, less and less will this unique being be treated as a person with his or her own feelings, sufferings, problems, joys, and family.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 193)

The Pope invites us to value and enhance the uniqueness of every human being, loving him as a brother „as if there were no one else in the world but him.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 193)

2.2.2. Privacy and exhibitionism

The encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* speaks of „the illusion of communication,” (Francis, 2020a, n. 42) which only offers an appearance of sociability. (Francis, 2020a, n. 43) We are more connected, but more alone.¹⁴ In fact, „as society becomes ever more globalized, it makes us neighbors but does not make us brothers.” (Benedict XVI, 2009, n. 19)

There has been notable progress in valuing and protecting personal privacy but, at the same time, we see that exhibitionism and the commercialization of the intimate sphere have increased. (Francis, 2020a, n. 46) The human being is often reduced to a simple object and „everything has become a kind of spectacle.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 42) In this context, it is difficult to establish serene and

¹² “I cannot truly encounter another unless I stand on firm foundations, for it is on the basis of these that I can accept the gift the other brings and in turn offer an authentic gift of my own. I can welcome others who are different, and value the unique contribution they have to make, only if I am firmly rooted in my own people and culture.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 143)

¹³ Ignatius of Loyola speaks of another type of spiritual indifference that is desirable because it allows us to freely follow the divine will without becoming too attached to material realities and, at the same time, without ceasing to love them tenderly. This polar tension between contemplation and action, between separation and realism, doesn’t deny either the self or material reality. Everything is good, but relative.

¹⁴ “One of the most common diseases in Europe today is the loneliness typical of those who have no connection with others. (Francis, 2014c, p. 623)

respectful relationships, which always require a fair balance in revealing/hiding one's own inner self.¹⁵

We also need to recover the right balance between privacy and the affectionate closeness to others, which is expressed in „physical gestures, facial expressions, moments of silence, body language” (Francis, 2020a, n. 43). As we „remove our sandals” before „the sacred mystery of the other” (Francis, 2020a, n. 43), we must also avoid leaving him/her in solitude, indifference, and anonymity. (Francis, 2020a, n. 277)¹⁶

2.3. Polar tension between global and local

The polar tension between global and local must be adequately maintained, so that the globalizing process does not harm the rich cultural and religious diversity, impoverishing the human capacity to interpret and face life.

„The global dimension has to be considered without ever losing sight of the local. As a reaction to a «spherical» notion of globalization, one that levels differences and smooths out particularities, it is easy for forms of nationalism to reemerge. Yet globalization can prove promising to the extent that it can be «polyhedral», favoring a positive interplay between the identity of individual peoples and countries and globalization itself, in accordance with the principle that the whole is greater than the part.” (Francis, 2019a, p. 6)

„A conception of unity seen as uniformity strikes at the vitality of the democratic system, weakening the rich, fruitful and constructive interplay of organizations and political parties.” (Francis, 2014c, p. 630; cf. Benedict XVI, 2009, n. 21–22) We need to promote a multifaceted globalization that respects the uniqueness of each person, people, and culture. That means to integrate the polar tension between universal and particular, also at the local level and inside each single country.

Becoming a people is much more than just putting individuals together. It implies a process of integration in which two types of categorization converge: the logical and, above all, the historical/mythical. Real democracy does not nullify polar tensions, but rather tries to ‘overcome the confrontations that impede the common good’ by creating a space for compromise. ‘We cannot divide the country, in a simplistic way, between good and bad, righteous and corrupt, patriots and stateless.’¹⁷

¹⁵ The author has developed this topic in several publications, for example: Carbajo Núñez, 2021, pp. 449–534; Carbajo Núñez, 2004, pp. 101–128; Carbajo Núñez, 2007, pp. 637–675.

¹⁶ “We have to remove our sandals when standing on the «holy ground» of our encounter with the one who speaks to me.” (Francis, 2016d, p. 7)

¹⁷ “No podemos dividir el país, de manera simplista, entre buenos y malos, justos y corruptos, patriotas y apátridas.” (Bergoglio, 2011, p. 4)

2.4. Man-nature polarity

Western philosophy has postulated an ontic rupture between man and the rest of creation. The thesis of the human exception defends „a radical separation between human beings and other forms of life,” (Schaeffer, 2009, p. 24) which would belong to another order of being. (Cf. Carbajo Núñez, 2017, pp. 59–78)

The current technocratic paradigm, „undifferentiated and one-dimensional,” (Francis, 2015d, n. 106)¹⁸ annuls the man-nature bipolarity,¹⁹ favoring uniformity and reducing everything to a formless object, „completely open to our manipulation.” (Francis, 2015d, n. 106) Nature is not seen as a network of relationships in which every being is important, but as an inexhaustible storehouse of resources totally available for us. (Francis, 2015d, n. 190)²⁰ Despotism and compulsive consumerism are seen as „reasonable and just.” (Guardini, 1958, p. 87; Francis, 2015d, n. 203)²¹

3. Restoring family relations

The great human family is built by fostering unity in diversity. The other must not be seen as an adversary that I have to defeat, because his diverse identity enriches my own and, therefore, I can establish with him a concrete and dynamic unity while preserving diversity. Thus, competition regains its etymological meaning (*cum-petere*) of seeking together the best solution, the most suitable response.

Unfortunately, „our societies are characterized by growing individualism” (Francis, 2014a, n. 3) that weakens interpersonal relationships and „distorts family bonds.” (Francis, 2013, n. 67) „The loss of the ties that bind us, so typical of our fragmented and divided culture, increases this sense of orphanhood and, as a result, of great emptiness and loneliness.” (Francis, 2014a, p. 7) We speak of universal love, but using inadequate understandings that „destroy the rich gifts and uniqueness of each person and each people.” (Francis, 2020b, n. 100)

¹⁸ R. Guardini had criticized the technocratic paradigm mainly in his works: *The end of the modern world*, ISI, Wilmington 1998 (original 1950) and *El poder: un intento de orientación*, Cristiandad, Madrid 1982 (original 1951).

¹⁹ Biocentrism also annuls this bipolarity but accentuating the pole of nature and reducing the human being to an undifferentiated element of it.

²⁰ “It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit.” (Francis, 2015d, n. 106)

²¹ “Il francescano ha aperto un’altra strada, segnata dal primato assoluto della libertà o della gratuità.” (Todisco, 2020, p. 462)

Instead of integrating polarities,²² the global system seeks only a superficial unity that eliminates differences and local traditions.

Avoiding the friend-enemy contradiction, which absolutizes differences, the Pope invites us to be neighbors, like the Good Samaritan; (Francis, 2020a, n. 67) i.e., to recover those family relationships that make an inclusive and integrating society possible. (Francis, 2020a, n. 97) It is not enough to be fellow citizens who are physically close or virtually connected, but are not familiar to each other.

3.1. God is a family

God is a family, „since he has in himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love.” (John Paul II, 1979, p. 182) He is familiar, „closer to us, by his countenance.” (Francis, 2016c, p. 5) Scripture and Tradition reveal the Trinity „with the features of a family.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 71)

The Trinitarian God (tri-unity) is communion in plurality, (1Jn 4:8; cf. Augustinus, 1841–1864, vol. 50) the source of all unity and of all difference.²³ Based on Guardini, the Pope affirms that God the Father loves Christ as the „concrete-living” and, in him, he also loves each human being as unique and unrepeatable. All of history finds its full unity in Christ. Thus, universality becomes concrete, living, situated.²⁴

3.1.1. Constantly going forth

We need to maintain a constant tension between the concrete situation and the ideal we have embraced; between our securities and the call that God addresses to us here and now. „This tension takes us out of ourselves continuously, pushing us to fulfill our mission better”. (Francis, 2016b, p. 5)

God the liberator listens to the cry of his people (Ex 3:7) and invites us to be in „a constant desire to go forth” (Francis, 2013, n. 27) and to reach existential peripheries. He wants to be the center of our life and our activities. However, any ecclesial institution that „looks too much in upon itself” considering that it

²² “La vita obbedisce alla relazione indissolubile tra Concordia e Discordia, [...] la relazione complementare, antagonistica, indissociabile tra, da un lato, tutto ciò che spinge verso l’unità – *Eros* – e, dall’altro, tutto ciò che spinge verso il conflitto – *Polemos* – e tutto ciò che spinge verso disunione e morte – *Thanatos*.” (Morin, 2020, p. 26)

²³ La unidad divina “será tanto más evidente cuanto más clara sea la distinción de las personas, y viceversa.” En efecto, la total comunión de las tres personas “no excluye, sino que afirma, la existencia de tres ‘yo’, pero al mismo tiempo elimina radicalmente la posibilidad de un ‘tuyo’ y un ‘mío.’” Esa unidad se expresa en “la mutua inhabitación o perichóresis de las mismas.” (Ladaria, 2002, pp. 128–129)

²⁴ “Il «concreto vivente» di Guardini corrisponde all’«universale concreto» di Maurice Blondel (molto diverso da quello hegeliano) o a quello che il filosofo argentino Mario Casalla denomina «universale situato,» la cui universalità è vera, non astratta, bensì concreta, vivente, situata e analogica secondo i tempi storici, gli spazi culturali e le singolarità personali.” (Scannone, 2017, p. 11)

is „a very solid, very well ‘armed’ structure, [...] runs the risk of feeling safe and self-sufficient,” (Francis, 2016b, p. 5) thus beginning its decline.

The Pope also warns against the extremes of Pelagianism and Gnosticism. The first „leads us to assume a controlling, harsh, and normative manner;” the second „leads to trusting in logical and clear reasoning, [...] staying within pure idea and decaying into intimisms that bear no fruit.” (Francis, 2015a, p. 4)

3.1.2. Tension between theology and pastoral care

The bipolar tension between theology and pastoral care should be maintained and strengthened, without overemphasizing one of the two poles.

„Not infrequently we identify doctrine with the conservative, the retrograde; and, on the contrary, we think that pastoral care is an adaptation, a reduction, an accommodation. As if they had nothing to do with one another. Thus, we create a false opposition between the so-called “pastorally-minded” and the “academics,” those on the side of the people and those on the side of doctrine. We create a false opposition between theology and pastoral care; between the believer’s reflection and the believer’s life; life, then, has no space for reflection and reflection finds no space in life.” (Francis, 2015e, p. 8)

The Pope recalls that „the great Fathers of the Church, Irenaeus, Augustine, Basil, Ambrose, to name a few, were great theologians because they were great pastors.” (Francis, 2015e)

3.2. The human person is a familiar and intrinsically social being

Human beings, *imago Dei*, are invited to „make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them.” (Francis, 2015d, n. 240) Their vocation to unity in diversity is concretely expressed in sexual difference and in marriage. In fact, „the family, which originates in the love of man and woman, ultimately derives from the mystery of God.” (John Paul II, 1994, n. 6, 8) This companionship of male and female „produces the primary form” (Second Vatican Council, 1963, n. 12) of our intrinsic sociability.

There is a certain analogy between Trinitarian communion and the communion lived in marriage. „The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection;” (Francis, 2016a, n. 11) that is, „the family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 71)

3.2.1. Normativity and personal conscience

The intrinsic human sociability leads us to open ourselves to others. By self-giving, we develop our own identity. We need to be fraternal and familiar, but also autonomous and responsible, for only by being ourselves we can

communicate in authenticity. Hence the importance of following one's own conscience as the ultimate norm of morality.

Guardini affirms that conscience is the place where we listen to God and welcome his will.²⁵ Conscience allows us to discern and know the good that God expects of us at every moment and, in this way, it moves us to conversion.²⁶

Amoris Laetitia invites pastors to make room for the conscience of the faithful and to help them develop their own discernment, so that they „are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations.” Indeed, pastors „are called to form consciences, not to replace them.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 37)²⁷ Unfortunately, at times „we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 310)

There is a polar tension between essential and existential truth, between moral principles and „the circumstances of place, time and people” in which those principles must be incarnated. (Francis, 2016b, p. 5) This dynamism between „the universal and the particular” must be maintained, for example, in discerning about divorced couples, (Francis, 2016a, n. 298) since general norms cannot cover all particular situations. On the other hand, a practical discernment made in particular circumstances cannot „be elevated to the level of a rule.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 304)

„It is reductive simply to consider whether or not an individual's actions correspond to a general law or rule, because that is not enough to discern and ensure full fidelity to God in the concrete life of a human being. [...] A pastor cannot feel that it is enough simply to apply moral laws to those living in 'irregular' situations.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 304–305)

We must „avoid a cold bureaucratic morality” (Francis, 2016a, n. 312) that makes judgments without taking into account „the complexity of various situations” (Francis, 2016a, n. 296) and without discernment. (Francis, 2016a, n. 298) The bipolar tension between truth and mercy allows us to combine the universal value of truth with a charitable attention to each person in his/her particular situation.

²⁵ La coscienza è “l'intesa dell'uomo internamente vigile e pronto col volere divino, quale si precisa continuamente nell'attimo che passa [...]. Il termine significa dunque non soltanto che l'uomo stia in ascolto, accetti ed obbedisca, perché quello che gli vien comandato è giusto; ma significa che l'uomo si è inteso con Dio, che Questi gli faccia sapere che cosa è il bene, dichiarandosi da parte sua pronto ad ascoltare e ad agire.” (Guardini, 1977, p. 42)

²⁶ “Esser consapevoli a se stessi, al cospetto di Dio, del bene, inteso come un comandamento della santità di Dio.” Questo “intendere” (*Verstehen*) non è solo “conoscere” ma “piuttosto un penetrare, un avanzare in profondità e in interiorità.” (Guardini, 1977, p. 42)

²⁷ Pastors “are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations.” (John Paul II, 1982, n. 84)

3.2.2. By taking care of others, we take care of ourselves (and vice versa)

The Bible frequently uses the literary figure of paradox to present two truths as seemingly opposite poles and thereby reveal a superior truth. For example: „Whoever loves his life loses it;” (Jn 12:25) „If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all;” (Mc 9:35) „Whoever exalts himself will be humbled” (Mt 23:12). Pope Francis uses oppositions often, with the objective of ‘opening space to the Spirit so that we can walk, instead of imposing ideas.’²⁸

Biblical paradoxes express a logic of gratuitousness that we find difficult to accept. Instead of giving graciously, we prefer to ensure the result that suits us best. We privilege our interests and business over interpersonal relationships, forgetting that by taking care of the needy, we take care of ourselves and grow in humanity.

The Pope reminds us „that we are responsible for the fragility of others” (Francis, 2020a, n. 115) and that we need „to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 95; Francis, 2014d, p. 22) This type of fraternal, welcoming, and unconditional relationship presupposes that we also take care of ourselves. We need to mature our way of relating to one another, (Francis, 2016a, n. 239) to treasure „an interior richness nourished by reading, personal reflection, prayer and openness to the world around us.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 141; cf. Salonia, 2017, p. 178)

„When I am weak, then I am strong” (2Cor 12:10), said St. Paul. Acceptance of our own limitations and failures helps us to grow without trauma and makes us more merciful in dealing with the fragility of others. In fact, „an awareness of our own limitations and incompleteness, far from being a threat, becomes the key to envisaging and pursuing a common project.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 150) The family is the most appropriate environment for initiation into this way of seeing oneself and others.

3.3. A universal, united, and pluriform family

Openness to God’s gratuitous and unconditional mercy²⁹ makes lasting change and universal fraternity possible. We need to open ourselves joyfully to fraternal encounter beyond our own group, (Francis, 2020a, n. 90) appreciating and promoting „the rich gifts and uniqueness of each person and each people,” (Francis, 2020a, n. 100) because by helping others, we are also enriched.

²⁸ “Abrir espacio al Espíritu para que se pueda caminar, en vez de imponer ideas.” (Spadaro, 2016, p. XIX)

²⁹ Pope Francis quotes Guardini’s book *The Religious World of Dostoyevsky*, where the starec says to a repented woman: “If only your penitence fail not, God will forgive all. There is no sin, and there can be no sin on all the earth, which the Lord will not forgive to the truly repentant! Man cannot commit a sin so great as to exhaust the infinite love of God.” (Francis, 2015b, p. 8)

„Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds,” (Francis, 2015d, n. 219; Guardini, 1958, p. 93) for „our own cultural identity is strengthened and enriched as a result of dialogue with those unlike ourselves.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 148)

The Franciscan tradition has expressed the polar tension between unity and diversity using the concept of fraternity.³⁰ Franciscans affirm that „while solidarity is the principle of social planning that allows the unequal to become equal; fraternity is what allows the equal to be different people.” (Francis, 2017a, n. 7)³¹

3.3.1. Collective identity and openness to universality

Using polar opposition, Bergoglio affirmed, in 1989 that good politics helps the community to recover a horizon of synthesis and unity, (Bergoglio, 1989, pp. 173–189) adequately managing the tensions between particular/common good and also between personal/collective identity.

People can be really open to universality only if they have assumed their own collective identity and try to promote it further. Indeed, „to be part of a people is to be part of a shared identity arising from social and cultural bonds.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 158) At the same time, „a living and dynamic people, a people with a future, is one constantly open to a new synthesis through its ability to welcome differences.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 160)

The family has a fundamental role in this. Indeed, „the family itself introduces fraternity into the world,” because it is in the family where we have „the initial experience of fraternity.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 194)

3.3.2. Global and local are „two inseparable and equally vital poles” (Francis, 2020a, n. 142)

The local is indispensable, because it is capable „of sparking mechanisms of subsidiarity,” (Francis, 2020a, n. 142) but it also requires „being sincerely open to the universal.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 146) Therefore, a balance must be achieved between appreciation of one’s own culture and openness to universality. This also applies to life in the Church.

‘Catholicity demands, asks that there be a polarity between the particular and the universal, between the one and the many, between the simple and complex. [...] To break the relationship between Tradition handed down and practical reality would be to endanger the faith of the People of God.’³²

³⁰ “It was the evangelical witness of St. Francis, with his school of thought, that gave this term the meaning it then preserved over the centuries.” (Francis, 2017a, n. 1)

³¹ “Fraternity allows people who are equal in their essence, dignity, freedom, and their fundamental rights to participate differently in the common good.” (Francis, 2017a, n. 7)

³² “La catolicidad exige, pide esa polaridad tensional entre lo particular y lo universal, entre lo uno y lo múltiple, entre lo simple y lo complejo. [...] Romper la relación entre la Tradición recibida y la realidad concreta, pone en riesgo la fe del Pueblo de Dios.” (Francis, 2015e, p. 8)

„Universal does not necessarily mean bland, uniform, and standardized, based on a single prevailing cultural model.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 144) Peoples must preserve their own peculiarity (Francis, 2013, n. 236) and citizens must not suffer „an authoritarian and abstract universalism.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 100) They must also avoid turning „into a museum of local folklore, a world apart, doomed to doing the same things over and over.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 142) Politics must help people to maintain the right balance in this.

‘A good politician should not occupy spaces but initiate processes; he or she is called to make unity prevail over conflict, based on «solidarity in its deepest and most challenging sense.» Politics thus becomes «a way of making history in a life setting where conflicts, divisions and oppositions can achieve a diversified and life-giving unity.»³³

It is necessary to „start from below and, case by case, to act at the most concrete and local levels.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 78) That means to respect each human being in his/her concrete individuality, and thus unite the collective with the individual, the local, and the regional. (Francis, 2020a, n. 151) Accordingly, the desired governance of globalization „must be marked by subsidiarity, articulated into several layers, and involving different levels that can work together.” (Benedict XVI, 2009, n. 57)

A healthy balance must also be maintained between the public and the private. Charity is the principle not only of micro-relationships in the private sphere „but also of macro-relationships: social, economic, and political ones.” (Benedict XVI, 2009, n. 2) Indeed, „charity is at the heart of every healthy and open society.” (Francis, 2020a, n. 184) The nuclear family has also a fundamental role in this, since it is „a hub for integrating persons into society and a point of contact between the public and private spheres.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 181)

3.4. The great cosmic family

The ecological crisis is a family crisis,³⁴ produced by the crisis of the parental family.³⁵ We have thus reached a rupture, at a global level, of the

³³ “El buen político no debe ocupar espacios, sino que debe poner en marcha procesos; está llamado a hacer prevalecer la unidad sobre el conflicto, que tiene como base «la solidaridad, entendida en su sentido más hondo y desafiante». Esta «se convierte así en un modo de hacer la historia, en un ámbito viviente donde los conflictos, las tensiones y los opuestos pueden alcanzar una unidad multiforme que engendra nueva vida.» (Francis, 2019a, p. 8)

³⁴ On the ecological approach to the family: Andrews – Bubolz – Paolucci, 1980, pp. 29–49.

³⁵ “A human ecological crisis.” (Francis, 2014b, n. 2)

gratuitous, fraternal, and affectionate relationships that characterize family life. (Carbajo Núñez 2020, p. 36; Carbajo Núñez, 2018, p. 105)

We need to overcome the conflicting vision (Darwinism) that has prevailed in the Western world. Recent studies confirm that, both physically and biologically, interdependence and interaction prevail over struggle. Plants are a clear example of the predominance of symbiosis and collaboration. (Coccia, 2019, prologue e-book) Besides, the species of animals that are best adapted to the environment are not the most aggressive ones, but those most capable of collaborating with others.³⁶

All beings have been created according to the divine model, „to complete each other, in the service of each other.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2019, n. 340) We need to discover and strengthen this interdependence, building together the great cosmic family. The path begins in the nuclear family, since the experience of brotherhood that is lived there has the capacity to radiate fraternity „like a promise upon the whole of society.” (Francis, 2016a, n. 194)

Conclusion

We have seen that Pope Francis often uses the dialectic of polar opposition to describe the fundamental structure of reality. In this, he follows closely the thought of Romano Guardini, whom he quotes eight times in the encyclical *Laudato si'*, while no other contemporary author is quoted more than once. He defines Guardini as a universal author who can serve as a basis for fruitful dialogue in the political, cultural, and scientific spheres.³⁷

We have described some of the polarities that the Pope uses, but our study could be extended to many others, for example, the polar tensions between contemplation/action, past/present, hierarchy/synodality, masculine/feminine,³⁸ etc.

The family opens us to a culture of encounter and dialogue, (Francis, 2020a, n. 216) making equality possible without renouncing difference. It is, in fact, a school that enables people to respect and enhance polar oppositions at all levels.

³⁶ Le specie più adatte non sono le più aggressive bensì le più solidali. [...] Al cuore di ogni vita starebbe una fraternità o sororità originaria.” (Morin, 2007, p. 69)

³⁷ “Guardini is a thinker who has much to say to the people of our time, and not only to Christians.” Thus, it is important to bring “Guardini’s thought into a polyphonic dialogue in the spheres of today’s politics, culture and science.” (Francis, 2016b, p. 8)

³⁸ Speaking about the Society of Jesus, the Pope invites all to be contemplatives in action and to love the Church, both as “people of God” and “holy mother the hierarchical Church.” (Francis, 2016b, p. 5) We have indicated some of Pope Francis’ teachings on synodality and on the importance of the feminine presence in the life of the Church. (Carbajo Núñez, 2020, pp. 41–63)

Individuals and institutions need to carry out a continuous discernment about their own vocation and mission, analyzing the polar tension that exists between the core of their own charism and the concrete way in which they have incarnated it. „When you express too much, you run the risk of being misunderstood.” For this reason, the Pope says that we can discern „only in narrative form, not in a philosophical or theological explanation”, which allows us only to discuss. (Francis, 2016b, p. 5) Therefore, he invites us to give priority to discernment over discussion and to mysticism over rigid instructive-ascetic thinking. „The mystical dimension of discernment never defines its edges and does not complete the thought.” (Francis, 2016b, p. 5)³⁹

We should not be discouraged by the difficulties and tensions that this process of discernment can cause. „Disagreements may well give rise to conflicts, but uniformity proves stifling and leads to cultural decay”. (Francis, 2020a, n. 191) With the help of the Holy Spirit, source of all unity and of all difference, we are invited to strengthen family relationships without nullifying the polar tensions they entail.

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³⁹ Pope Francis “più che ‘comunicare’ crea ‘eventi comunicativi’, ai quali chi riceve il suo messaggio partecipa attivamente.” (Spadaro, 2013, Section 8)

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Relaciones familiares y oposición polar: Ser iguales sin dejar de ser diferentes

Sumario: En el quinto aniversario de *Amoris Laetitia*, este artículo analiza la importancia de las relaciones familiares en nuestro mundo globalizado. La familia parental hace posible que todos se sientan iguales sin dejar de ser diferentes. En sintonía con Romano Guardini, el Papa Francisco usa la dialéctica de la oposición polar para describir la unidad en la diversidad, que es típica de la vida familiar auténtica (1ª parte). Hace notar, sin embargo, que el actual paradigma tecnocrático, homogéneo y unidimensional, anula esa dinámica, abriendo así la vía a la cultura del descarte (2ª parte). En la tercera parte, se ofrecen algunas indicaciones del Papa sobre cómo recuperar las relaciones familiares y la oposición polar en nuestros cuatro niveles fundamentales: espiritual, personal, social y natural.

Palabras clave: Familia, Fraternidad, Oposición polar, Diálogo, *Amoris Laetitia*.

Relazioni familiari e opposizione polare: Essere uguali senza smettere di essere diversi

Sommario: Nel quinto anniversario dell'esortazione *Amoris Laetitia*, questo articolo esamina l'importanza delle relazioni familiari nel nostro mondo globalizzato. La famiglia parentale permette a tutti di sentirsi uguali pur rimanendo diversi. In sintonia con Romano Guardini, Papa Francesco usa la dialettica dell'opposizione polare per descrivere l'unità nella diversità che è tipica della vita familiare autentica (Parte 1). Fa notare, tuttavia, che l'attuale paradigma tecnocratico, omogeneo e unidimensionale, annulla questa dinamica, aprendo così la strada alla cultura dello scarto (Parte 2). Nella terza parte, vengono offerte alcune delle indicazioni di Papa Francesco su come recuperare le relazioni familiari e le opposizioni polari nei quattro livelli fondamentali della vita umana: spirituale, personale, sociale e naturale.

Parole chiave: Famiglia, Fraternità, Opposizione polare, Dialogo, *Amoris Laetitia*.

Relacje rodzinne a biegunowe przeciwieństwo: jedność w różnorodności

Streszczenie: W artykule ukazano refleksję, która zrodziła się w ciągu pięciu lat od podpisania *Amoris laetitia*, nad ważnymi kwestiami związanymi z relacjami wewnątrzrodzinnymi, zachodzącymi we współczesnym świecie. Rodzina pozwala, aby jej członkowie czuli się zjednoczeni z jednoczesnym zachowaniem różnorodności. Idąc za Romano Guardinim, Papież Franciszek używa dialektyki biegunowego przeciwieństwa do opisania jedności w różnorodności, typowej dla rodziny (część 1). Zauważa jednak, że technokratyczny paradygmat, jednorodny i jednowymiarowy, odrzuca tę dynamikę, a zatem otwiera drogę do zglobalizowanej obojętności i kultury odrzucenia (część 2). Dlatego też Papież zaprasza do odbudowania relacji rodzinnych i zachowania biegunowego przeciwieństwa na czterech płaszczyznach życia: duchowej, osobowej, socjalnej i przyrodniczej (część 3).

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, braterstwo, biegunowe przeciwieństwo, dialog, *Amoris laetitia*.

Abbreviations

AAS – Acta Apostolicae Sedis
 OR – „L'Osservatore Romano”
 LEV – Libreria Editrice Vaticana