

From *Familiaris Consortio* to *Amoris Laetitia*: Pope Francis' Renewed Vision of the Pastoral Care of Families

MIECZYŚLAW POLAK 

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, mpolak@amu.edu.pl

Abstract: The anthropological, cultural, social and religious changes taking place over the last decades have strongly influenced the shape of marriage and family life. By reading “the signs of the times,” the Church undertakes a reflection on issues related to marriage and the family. In the dimension of the Catholic Church, this reflection is made especially during synods of bishops which yield apostolic exhortations presenting renewed visions of pastoral care. Regarding marriage and family, they are found in John Paul II's exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* and Francis' exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. This article addresses the issue connected with mutual relationships between the pastoral concepts contained in these documents. Its presentation revolves around three parts which correspond to the methodology of pastoral-theological reflection: evangelical discernment of the situation of marriage and the family (cairological premise), establishment of pastoral paradigms (criteriological premise) and directions of pastoral solutions (pastoral-praxeological conclusion). The article shows both *Amoris Laetitia*'s continuation of the concept of pastoral care of families presented in *Familiaris Consortio* and the originality of thoughts and change of pastoral paradigms in the teaching of Pope Francis.

Keywords: *Familiaris Consortio*, *Amoris Laetitia*, pastoral care, marriage, family, pastoral paradigms

The teaching of the Church on the pastoral care of families, which is the subject of these analyses, is included in the post-synodal apostolic exhortations. Therefore, it is substantially related to the synods of bishops that preceded them and is the fruit of a synodal reflection on the mission of the Church in the contemporary world.¹ “The *convenire in unum* around the Bishop of Rome – as taught by Francis – is indeed an event of grace, in which episcopal collegiality is made manifest in a path of spiritual and pastoral discernment.”² Thus, both synodal discernment and exhortations resulting from it have the character of pastoral reflection, or more precisely, pastoral-theological reflection.³ This reflection includes both the discernment of the cultural and social situation and doctrinal-normative reflection, as well as the formulation

¹ VI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, September–October 1980 (*Familiaris Consortio*); III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 2014 and XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, October 2015 (*Amoris Laetitia*).

² Francis, “Address.”

³ Cf. Rozkrut, “Znaczenie Synodu,” 235–239.

of praxeological-pastoral conclusions.⁴ Pastoral reflection concerns the daily growth of the Church in the power of the Holy Spirit through “the word, sacraments and the service of love.” It shows faith-derived “principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history [...]. Among these principles and criteria, one that is especially important is that of the evangelical discernment of the socio-cultural and ecclesial situation in which the particular pastoral action has to be carried out” (PDV 57).⁵ This study will feature a comparative analysis of exhortations *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* in the pastoral-theological context. In this light, it will be possible to clearly observe the development of the Church’s Magisterium concerning the pastoral practice of the Church in the area of the pastoral care of families.

1. Discernment of the Socio-Cultural and Ecclesial Situation

Both *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* perceive the need for the discernment of the current cultural, social and ecclesial situation “to understand the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today” (FC 4). The purpose of this discernment, however, is not a sociological description, but understanding “the signs of the times.” God’s calls are also contained “in historical events,” as noted by both documents (cf. FC 4; AL 31).⁶ However, they formulate the purpose of this discernment slightly differently. John Paul II points to the need to show the truth about marriage and the family. He states that “the discernment effected by the Church becomes the offering of an orientation in order that the entire truth and the full dignity of marriage and the family may be preserved and realized,” because “it is the task of the apostolic ministry to ensure that the Church remains in the truth of Christ” (FC 5). In relation to it, he speaks about the need for an “evangelical discernment” of modern family life (cf. FC 4). A sociological diagnosis is therefore carried out only in order to find out to what extent the present shape of family life deviates from God’s thought and will to correctly determine “an orientation in order that the entire truth and the full dignity of marriage and the family may be preserved and realized” (FC 5).⁷ On the other hand, Francis, not forgetting the need to present the Church’s integral teaching on marriage, states that today “what we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them” (AL 35).

⁴ Cf. Bajda, “Etyczny profil,” 7.

⁵ Cf. Polak, *Od teologii do eklezjologii*, 17–19.

⁶ Cf. Faggioni, “Teologia małżeństwa,” 136.

⁷ Cf. Zuberbier, “Znaczenie doktrynalne adhortacji,” 71–72.

Presenting the situation of marriage and the family in the contemporary world, John Paul II points to “bright spots and shadows for the family today,”⁸ and Francis, in turn, to “the experiences and challenges of families.”⁹ In the description of this situation, they devote most attention to the difficulties and threats that result from contemporary anthropological and cultural changes and from the living conditions in which the call to life in marriage is realized.¹⁰ John Paul II and Francis see the situation of marriage and the family in a similar way, which presents itself “as an interplay of light and darkness” (cf. *FC* 6). However, in this description of the situation, the negative aspect definitely prevails, i.e. an indication of threats to marriage and family life by contemporary anthropological, cultural and social changes.¹¹

As the main cause of the negative aspects of changes in the area of marriage and family life, John Paul II and Francis point to the incorrect understanding of the use of freedom. “At the root of these negative phenomena there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom” (*FC* 6), or confusing genuine freedom “with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily” (*AL* 34). Other cultural phenomena are described in a similar way, which on the one hand are an opportunity to improve the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, promote the dignity of women or responsible procreation, but on the other hand, they become the cause of disturbing symptoms of degradation of some fundamental values for marriage and family life (cf. *FC* 6). For Francis, the individualization and personalism of life is a chance for “authenticity as opposed to mere conformity [...], but if misdirected it can foster attitudes of constant suspicion, fear of commitment, self-centredness and arrogance” (*AL* 33).

Understanding the situation of marriage and the family in the contemporary world presented in *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* also has some differences which indicate the development of pastoral and theological thought regarding the pastoral care of families. First of all, one can notice a marked difference in the size of the description. While John Paul II shows this situation essentially in one point (cf. *FC* 6), Francis devotes to it as many as twenty-six points (cf. *AL* 31–57). Such a considerable size of the description is due, among other things, to the fact that Francis takes much more account of the contribution of the Synod Fathers, who “examined the situation of families worldwide” (cf. *AL* 31) and the teaching of bishops from local Churches: Spain (*AL* 32), Korea (*AL* 42), Mexico (*AL* 51), Colombia (*AL* 57). However, the difference here is not only quantitative. Devoting much more space to the analysis of anthropological, cultural and social conditions is also associated with a more detailed and in-depth description of various phenomena and their

⁸ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, part I.

⁹ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, chapter II.

¹⁰ Cf. Yastremskyy, “Wyzwania duszpasterstwa rodzin,” 285–293.

¹¹ Cf. Yastremskyy, “Wolne związki,” 124–126.

impact on marriage and the family, as well as with searching for the sources and causes of these phenomena. Woven into the description are also pastoral challenges which result from reading these phenomena as “the signs of the times.”¹²

Another difference in the pastoral discernment of the situation results from its extension to aspects that are not present in *Familiaris Consortio*. Among them, a special place is occupied by the analysis of the influence of the Church’s activities in the area of the pastoral care of families on the contemporary understanding and practice of married life. Here, Francis points to the need of “a healthy dose of self-criticism” (cf. *AL* 36). He draws attention to various pastoral errors that have become one of the causes of the current state of affairs. Among them he lists: reducing the purpose of marriage solely to procreation, insufficient support of young spouses, presenting a far too abstract and artificial theological ideal of marriage which is far removed from the concrete situations, stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues without encouraging openness to grace (cf. *AL* 36–37). Such a situation created a pastoral attitude of defensiveness and a negative assessment of the world, resulted in focusing on errors and inappropriate situations, and led to a clearly negative assessment of anthropological and cultural changes and distance from marriages and families (cf. *AL* 38).¹³

The pastoral discernment of *Amoris Laetitia* has also developed and deepened such issues as: the impact of migration on marriage and family life, feminism and violence against women, and the question of *gender*. These issues were signaled in John Paul II’s document, but the anthropological and cultural changes that have taken place since *Familiaris Consortio* was published required a wider reference to them in pastoral understanding. John Paul II lists “the families of migrant workers” as one of difficult situations. In this situation, the families of migrants “should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. This is a task stemming from the nature of the Church, as being the sign of unity in diversity” (cf. *FC* 77). Francis sees migration very clearly as “the sign of the times.” This phenomenon affects in various ways “whole populations in different parts of the world” (cf. *AL* 46). It is connected, on the one hand, with the natural historical movement of peoples and, on the other hand, with forced migrations as a result of wars, persecution, poverty and social injustice. Such a situation “needs a specific pastoral programme addressed not only to families that migrate but also to those family members who remain behind” (*AL* 46).

Among the positive aspects of social changes related to marriage and family life, John Paul II and Francis mention promoting the dignity of women and a clearer recognition of women’s rights (cf. *FC* 6; *AL* 54). Francis, however, made it clearer that in some countries there is still “much to be done” on this matter. This is especially true of shameful violence that is sometimes used against women, domestic abuse and

¹² Cf. Nadbrzeźny, “Sens i wartość sakramentu,” 32–40.

¹³ Cf. Barth, “*Amoris laetitia*,” 29–30.

various forms of enslavement. This violence can be verbal, physical or sexual. Sometimes it is expressed in “the reprehensible genital mutilation of women practiced in some cultures, but also of their lack of equal access to dignified work and roles of decision-making” (AL 54). Francis considers the diagnosis that makes feminine emancipation responsible for these problems wrong. “This argument, however, is not valid – he says – it is false, untrue, a form of male chauvinism” (AL 54). While not all forms of feminism can be considered appropriate, the tendency to more explicitly recognize the dignity of women and their rights is certainly the fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work. For there are still many areas where past inequalities have not been overcome. This also applies to the specific area of family life. In it, “a widespread social and cultural tradition has considered women’s role to be exclusively that of wife and mother, without adequate access to public functions which have generally been reserved for men” (FC 23). Various forms of discrimination against women require that “vigorous and incisive pastoral action be taken by all to overcome them definitively so that the image of God that shines in all human beings without exception may be fully respected” (FC 24).

Another new issue by which *Amoris Laetitia* broadens the pastoral discernment contained in *Familiaris Consortio* is the issue of various forms of *gender* ideology.

Yet another challenge – Francis says – is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that “denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female. Consequently, human identity becomes the choice of the individual, one which can also change over time” (AL 56).

Undoubtedly, the issue of “*gender* ideology” has become a new pastoral challenge, which is read today as a clear “sign of the times,” demanding a multifaceted response from the Church. Pope Francis clearly distinguishes “understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life” from accepting “ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality” (cf. AL 56).¹⁴

Summarizing this part of the analysis, it should be stated that the apostolic exhortations *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* have the character of a pastoral-theological reflection. Therefore, as a starting point, they take the understanding of the anthropological, cultural, social and ecclesial situation in which the salvific mission of the Church is realized. Some elements of this discernment are very similar in both documents. Nevertheless, the almost forty-year time gap between them has caused new challenges to appear, which Francis notes together with the Synod

¹⁴ Cf. Olczyk, “Problematyka *gender*,” 131–151.

Fathers and thus broadens and develops the pastoral discernment presented by John Paul II. Thus, there is agreement as to the pastoral method, which takes the discernment of the situation as a starting point, but there are differences with regard to the detailed issues of this discernment and its purpose. As the aim of this discernment, *Familiaris consortio* seeks to establish a pastoral orientation “in order that the entire truth and the full dignity of marriage and the family may be preserved and realized” (cf. FC 5). On the other hand, *Amoris Laetitia* is more inclined to acknowledge diversity, because “the Synod’s reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems. The situations that concern us are challenges” (AL 57).¹⁵

2. Establishing Pastoral Paradigms

Pastoral activity results from the adopted pastoral-theological concept. Not all active pastors are aware that the initiatives they undertake and the methods and means used result from the adopted principles and specific objectives of pastoral activity. Pastoral documents of the Church are also created on the basis of certain general principles and pastoral concepts. The apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, like many other exhortations resulting from post-conciliar synods, reflected on a certain area of the Church’s pastoral activity, namely the pastoral care of families. This resulted from noticing new challenges related to marriage and the family and the crisis of this pastoral care. Pope Francis, having written his exhortation nearly forty years after *Familiaris Consortio*, recognizes that this pastoral crisis does not only concern marriage and family life, but the entire life and mission of the Church in the contemporary world. Therefore, the pastoral-theological principles of his exhortation result more from reflection on pastoral care *in genere*.

Comparing the pastoral-theological concepts of *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia*, one can formulate a thesis that John Paul II conducts his reflection in the context of the “new evangelization” paradigm, while Francis follows the “pastoral conversion” paradigm. These pastoral paradigms are not contradictory, but contain many common pastoral challenges. It can be said that Francis’ postulate of “pastoral conversion” continues and develops the idea of “new evangelization” promoted by John Paul II.

The pastoral paradigm of “new evangelization” under no circumstances means and can mean the proclamation of a “new Gospel” – “new” primarily in the sense of such an interpretation that would soften its radicalism. John Paul II states, “It is,

¹⁵ Cf. Schockenhoff, “Theologischer Paradigmenwechsel,” 18.

in fact, to the families of our times that the Church must bring the unchangeable and ever new Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as it is the families involved in the present conditions of the world that are called to accept and to live the plan of God that pertains to them” (FC 4). However, the essentially unchanging message of the Gospel enters human history, and thus the spatial and temporal conditions of human existence. The life of individual people who are the addressees of the Gospel runs “here and now” and not “always and everywhere.” Such a state of affairs imposes the need for an appropriate adaptation of the evangelizing mission entrusted to the Church, that is what John Paul II called “new evangelization.” Without this *novelty*, that is, without taking into account the socio-cultural dynamism of human existence, evangelization would never be complete. In other words, “novelty” belongs to the very essence of evangelization, and thus constitutes its internal and permanent element, which, however, must be revealed and realized in concrete action, as a response to the needs arising from the historical, social and cultural situation. “New evangelization” is therefore nothing else than the verbalized form of God’s requirements relating to the necessary historical “rooting” of the Gospel message of salvation, which – although essentially unchanged – is subject to the “law of incarnation”: the Word of God, in order to “dwell” among people, must become flesh in every age and place (cf. John 1:14). Hence, the term “new evangelization” – although it has appeared recently – does not characterize only the modern age.¹⁶

Taking into account the anthropological and cultural challenges, and especially the importance of freedom for modern man, the pastoral paradigm of “new evangelization” includes education towards freedom. Its most basic component is helping to form a properly responsive conscience. “The education of the moral conscience – states John Paul II – which makes every human being capable of judging and of discerning the proper ways to achieve self-realization according to his or her original truth, thus becomes a pressing requirement that cannot be renounced” (FC 8).

As a fundamental issue in pastoral work aimed at the formation of conscience, *Familiaris Consortio* accepts the instruction about the moral order of human life and behaviour established by God. This instruction is a special task of the ecclesial hierarchy, which should help “the People of God to gain a correct sense of the faith, to be subsequently applied to practical life.” This is done through “fidelity to the Magisterium,” which “will also enable priests to make every effort to be united in their judgments, in order to avoid troubling the consciences of the faithful” (cf. FC 73). The exhortation, therefore, strongly links the discernment of conscience with the knowledge of the Church’s Magisterium and with the need to bring this teaching closer to the faithful in order to properly shape their consciences, because the faithful “do not always remain immune from the obscuring of certain fundamental values, nor

¹⁶ Cf. Polak, *Prezbiterologia pastoralna*, 66–67.

set themselves up as the critical conscience of family culture and as active agents in the building of an authentic family humanism” (cf. *FC* 7).¹⁷

The teaching of *Familiaris Consortio* about the need for the formation of conscience is also confirmed by *Amoris Laetitia*. Making the right decisions regarding, for example, responsible parenthood requires a formed conscience, and then “their decision will be profoundly free of subjective caprice and accommodation to prevailing social mores” (*AL* 222). Francis, however, sees a certain threat in this context, when the formation becomes a “replacement for consciences.” He states: “We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them” (*AL* 37).¹⁸ Hence, he postulates a greater incorporation of the decisions of conscience in the Church’s practice. He states:

Recognizing the influence of such concrete factors, we can add that individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church’s praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage. Naturally, every effort should be made to encourage the development of an enlightened conscience, formed and guided by the responsible and serious discernment of one’s pastor, and to encourage an ever greater trust in God’s grace. [...] In any event, let us recall that this discernment is dynamic; it must remain ever open to new stages of growth and to new decisions which can enable the ideal to be more fully realized (*AL* 303).¹⁹

When analyzing the question of understanding conscience and its significance in pastoral care, some theologians perceive a shift in the pastoral paradigm. “It is not difficult to see – states Paweł Bortkiewicz – how clearly the realization of the famous paradigm shift is taking place here – the place of doctrinal principles is taken by the so-called pastoral care embedded in a specific existential situation, marked especially by a multiform postmodern crisis.”²⁰ From the pastoral-theological point of view, *Amoris Laetitia* is therefore not only the heir and continuator of *Familiaris Consortio*, but also introduces a certain new perspective on the pastoral care of the Church, and especially on pastoral paradigms.²¹ While *Familiaris Consortio* presents a more normative character of pastoral principles, *Amoris Laetitia* takes as its starting point concrete existential situations.²² In order to make the Christian mes-

17 Cf. Pryba, “Naturalne planowanie,” 167–168.

18 Cf. Glombik, “Specyficzne aspekty teologii,” 15.

19 Cf. Muszala, “Rozeznanie,” 233–234.

20 Bortkiewicz, “Kreatywne sumienie,” 67.

21 Cf. Gryz, “Prawo stopniowości,” 166–167; Glombik, “Adhortacja apostołska,” 85–88.

22 Cf. Glombik, “Adhortacja apostołska,” 88–96; Schockenhoff, “Theologischer Paradigmenwechsel,” 16, 20.

sage on marriage and the family clear in the modern world, it is necessary to “appeal to human experience, since it remains the main way of mediation through which access to the truth of Revelation is possible.”²³ Referring to Thomas Aquinas, “Pope Francis makes a far-reaching paradigm shift within the traditional teaching, which can be characterized as a shift in theology from the speculative-deductive method to the inductive approach, which in the case of individual indications referring to the life of the faithful attaches a greater importance to closeness with experience and specific adequacy.”²⁴ *Amoris Laetitia* can therefore only be understood if this shift in the pastoral paradigm is accepted. This change does not reject the teaching existing so far, but places it in a broader context.²⁵

Pastoral discernment leads Pope Francis to adopt yet another pastoral paradigm, previously presented in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “the whole is greater than the part” (cf. *EG* 235). *Amoris Laetitia* highlighted the necessity to address this postulate, showing “as plain as day” the insufficiency of partial solutions. “The whole is greater than the part – Francis teaches – but it is also greater than the sum of its parts. There is no need, then, to be overly obsessed with limited and particular questions. We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all” (*EG* 235). Pope Francis therefore addressed the call to conversion to the entire salvific activity of the Church, calling it “pastoral conversion.” For purification is a pastoral work. It will not do much to look for short-term recipes to overcome particular phenomena of the contemporary crisis of the Church. It is necessary to deepen reflection on the pastoral vision of the Church’s activity *in genere* and to undertake an effort to heal it. When addressing specific issues, Francis perceives them in the context of the entire evangelizing mission of the Church. It is impossible to renew the pastoral care of married couples and families without renewing the integral concept of the Church’s pastoral mission in the contemporary world. This results in a search not only for a new shape of its presence in society, but also focusing on its essence, on what constitutes its identity. This applies both to the current church structures, rites and customs, as well as to the content and way of preaching the truths of faith. This whole process is intended to ensure that all the elements of the Church’s pastoral care “can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (cf. *EG* 27, 41, 43).

Summarizing the issue of pastoral paradigms in the exhortations *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia*, one should state that in terms of general foundations of pastoral activity, the paradigms of “new evangelization” and “pastoral conversion” are similar to each other “Pastoral conversion” gears the programme of “new

²³ Cf. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, 200.

²⁴ Schockenhoff, “Zerwanie z tradycją,” 17.

²⁵ Cf. Faggioni, “Teologia małżeństwa,” 139–140.

evangelization” towards being more missionary.²⁶ However, regarding more detailed issues in *Amoris Laetitia*, there are many new paradigms that ultimately reveal not only the renewed but also the original pastoral-theological thought of Pope Francis, as Walter Kasper puts it: “*Amoris Laetitia* does not change a single element in the teaching of the Church, yet it changes everything.”²⁷

3. Pastoral Praxeology of the Exhortation

The third stage of pastoral-theological reflection is the formulation of pastoral-praxeological conclusions. *Familiaris Consortio* devotes the fourth part to this issue. The part is entitled: “Pastoral Care of the Family: Stages, Structures, Agents and Situations.” The pastoral-praxeological reflection of the exhortation includes such issues as: preparation for marriage along with the wedding rite, pastoral care of marriages, structure and pastoral care of families and pastoral care in difficult cases (cf. *FC* 65–85). *Amoris Laetitia* also contains pastoral-praxeological parts. Its sixth chapter is entitled: “Some Pastoral Perspectives.” It consists of such issues as: proclaiming the Gospel of the family, preparing engaged couples for marriage, accompanying the first years of married life and during crises, after breakdown and divorce and in the event of the spouse’s death (cf. *AL* 199–258). The eighth chapter of the exhortation entitled: “Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating Weakness” also has a pastoral-praxeological character. It is devoted to discerning the so-called “irregular” situations and the pastoral attitude of the Church towards them (cf. *AL* 291–253). The analysis of the structure and method of presenting pastoral-praxeological conclusions shows both similarities and differences. In relation to the methodological structure of presenting the conclusions, *Familiaris Consortio* is very well-ordered. After the cairological and criteriological reflection, the praxeological stage follows. On the other hand, in *Amoris Laetitia*, pastoral-praxeological conclusions, apart from the chapters indicated above, can also be found in other places.

The pastoral idea linking the two exhortations is the indication of the priority character of the pastoral care of families. We read in *Familiaris Consortio*, “Every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church” (*FC* 65). A similar understanding of the character of the pastoral care of families is shown by *Amoris Laetitia* (cf. *AL* 200–202). It is not only a part of ecclesial activity, but is inscribed in its ordinary pastoral care. Therefore, “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families

²⁶ Cf. Polak, “Misyjny dynamizm,” 177.

²⁷ Kasper, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” 725–726.

is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony” (AL 202). Thus, each parish should become aware of “the grace and responsibility that it receives from the Lord in order that it may promote the pastoral care of the family” (cf. FC 70).

Compared to *Familiaris Consortio*, which afforded an evangelizing character to the pastoral care of families, Pope Francis’ document made it more missionary in nature. The consequence of this approach are practical guidelines, as can be seen in *Amoris Laetitia*, “Given the pace of life today, most couples cannot attend frequent meetings; still, we cannot restrict our pastoral outreach to small and select groups. Nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended” (AL 230).²⁸ The fruit of the missionary pastoral care of families is also a departure from purely theoretical preaching which is isolated from the real problems of married couples and families. In this context, *Amoris Laetitia* points to the pastoral empowerment of families. It affirms that “Christian families are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through «their joy-filled witness as domestic churches»” (AL 200). This witness is necessary, *inter alia*, in order to move away from merely presenting “some norms” in the pastoral care of families and turning to “proposing values” (cf. AL 201).

Another new pastoral-praxeological postulate, formulated by Francis, is to emphasize the importance of “inclusive pastoral work” resulting from the adoption of the “logic of integration.” He puts it this way: “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an «unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous» mercy. No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves” (AL 297).²⁹

Amoris Laetitia also developed the perception of the pastoral care of families in the context of the “pastoral care of mercy.”³⁰ A quantitative analysis of papal documents shows that John Paul II uses the term “mercy” only three times, while Francis uses the term forty-four times. *Familiaris Consortio* indicates mercy with regard to the sacrament of penance twice (cf. FC 58) and once in relation to the attitude of the Church towards divorced persons who have remarried. Here it postulates that the Church should be a “merciful mother” for them (cf. FC 84). Pope Francis, in turn, perceives the activity of the Church in the context of mercy and he also uses this pastoral principle in relation to the vision of pastoral care for families contained in

²⁸ Polak, “Misyjny dynamizm,” 177.

²⁹ Cf. Slatinek, “Pastoralni izzivi,” 141–142; Goleń, “Towarzystwo,” 118–120.

³⁰ Cf. Przygoda, “Dowartościowanie miłości,” 159–161.

Amoris Laetitia.³¹ He states in the introduction to the document that it “is especially timely in this Jubilee Year of Mercy” (cf. *AL* 5). Then he refers to the “logic of pastoral mercy” which must penetrate the entire pastoral care of families (cf. *AL* 307–312).³² The rejection of the logic of mercy in the pastoral care of families will “indoctrinate» the Gospel message, turning it into «dead stones to be hurled at others»” (cf. *AL* 49). Francis says, “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love in our pastoral activity. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel. [...] For this reason, we should always consider «inadequate any theological conception which in the end puts in doubt the omnipotence of God and, especially, his mercy»” (*AL* 311). According to Wiesław Przygoda, “the novelty of *Amoris Laetitia* lies in the fact that Pope Francis, instead of rigorous pastoral care, proposes pastoral care permeated with mercy – instead of cold objectivity, he proposes insightful, patient and long-term discernment of the situation.”³³

In comparison with *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope Francis’ document also gives a more marked mystagogical dimension to the pastoral care of marriages and families.³⁴ A brief description of the understanding of mystagogic initiation was presented by Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, where we read that mystagogic initiation “basically has to do with two things: a progressive experience of formation involving the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation” (cf. *EG* 166). At the same time, he points to the need to strengthen the mystagogical dimension of pastoral care, since “many manuals and programmes have not yet taken sufficiently into account the need for a mystagogical renewal, one which would assume very different forms based on each educational community’s discernment” (cf. *EG* 166).

Mystagogical renewal concerns the entire pastoral care of families. But it is preparation for marriage that requires it most. John Paul II described preparation for marriage as “in a catechumenal process” or as “a journey of faith, which is similar to the catechumenate” (cf. *FC* 66). This idea was taken up and developed by Pope Francis, who stated that preparation for marriage is a kind of “initiation” to the sacrament of marriage, which provides engaged couples “with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family” (*AL* 207). The mystagogic pastoral care of families will take into account both liturgical and catechetical mystagogy (*AL* 213–216) and a “new mystagogy” referring to the experience and “mysticism of everyday life” (cf. *AL* 225–226).³⁵ This dimension of mystagogy is much less emphasized in the teaching of *Familiaris Consortio*.

31 Cf. Hajduk, “Miłosierdzie duszpasterskie,” 187–190.

32 Cf. Petrà, “From *Familiaris consortio*,” 212.

33 Przygoda, “Dowartościowanie miłości,” 160.

34 Cf. Polak, “Mystagogical Preparation,” 242–250; Kobak, “Ujęcie duchowości,” 155.

35 Cf. Polak, “Zarys koncepcji,” 217–242.

Summarizing this stage of the analysis, one should state that the pastoral praxeology of pastoral care of families presented in the exhortations results from the previously described analysis of the cultural and social situation and from the adopted pastoral paradigms. Hence, at this point, both the continuation of pastoral thought and its fundamental renewal were revealed. Its main postulates are missionary orientation of the pastoral care of families, perceiving it in the perspective of “inclusive pastoral work” and “logic of integration” and pointing to the significance of “pastoral mercy” and mystagogical renewal. This confirms the thesis that Pope Francis gave a new shape to the concept of pastoral care of families.

Conclusions

In numerous theological publications on Pope Francis’ apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, two ways of approaching the content of this document can be observed.³⁶ The first one indicates that Pope Francis did not intend to introduce changes in the teaching of the Church and therefore refers to the statements of his predecessors, John Paul II and Benedict XVI. He only uses a different language to express what had been known in a new way.³⁷ The second one emphasizes the significant changes introduced to the teaching of the Church by *Amoris Laetitia*. It is primarily about changing the pastoral paradigm, that is also the pastoral-theological paradigm. Eberhard Schockenhoff states:

When reading *Amoris Laetitia* in direct comparison with the earlier statements of the Magisterium, including John Paul II’s exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, or with the statements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on love, marriage and family, significant differences emerge. The Pope is concerned with nothing else, but a replacement of an objectivist moral science based on static, essential metaphysics with the one corresponding to the Gospel and pragmatic theology which is characterized by greater relevance in life.³⁸

The pastoral theological analysis of *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* presented here indicates that the thesis that the document of Pope Francis breaks with the current teaching and practice of the Church regarding the pastoral care of families cannot be confirmed. It confirms the thesis about the continuation and also about development of this teaching. It results both from the cairological premise (evangelical discernment of the anthropological and cultural situation) and from

³⁶ Cf. Kasper, “Amoris Laetitia,” 723–724.

³⁷ Cf. Dyduch, “Adhortacja,” 44.

³⁸ Schockenhoff, “Zerwanie z tradycją,” 12–13.

the criteriological premise (adoption of certain paradigms of the pastoral mission of the Church). Hence, the comparison of *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia* in a pastoral-theological perspective indicates the continuation of the teaching of the Church, but also the formulation of his own pastoral paradigms by Pope Francis, which gives his teaching an original character and renews the current concept of pastoral care for families.

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