

# Catholic Social Teaching and Family

Gregoire Catta, S.J.

Usually, in a school of theology, once you have completed the class on fundamental moral theology, you have two separate courses of applied ethics: one on family and sexual ethics, one on social ethics. Since the field of moral theology (or theological ethics) is wide, it is all the more natural to have professors with specific competencies. We tend therefore to distinguish matters of personal and family moral questioning and matters of social moral questioning. Dealing with the teaching of the Church we look at documents like *Rerum novarum*, *Populorum progressio*, or *Laudato si'* for our questions about social, economic or political life and when it comes to family, we turn to *Casti connubii*, *Familiaris consortio* or *Amoris laetitia*.<sup>1</sup> My point in this paper is to show that, concerning family, Catholic social teaching and major social encyclicals have also a great deal to say.<sup>2</sup> Of course, it is important to read *Familiaris consortio* and *Amoris laetitia* to get a sense of what the Catholic Church has to say about family life, but it is also very useful to dive into some social encyclicals which speak regularly of family.

Indeed, it should not be such a surprise that Catholic social teaching (CST) has much to say about family. Catholic social teaching can be seen as the outcome of the encounter between the Gospel and social, economic, cultural, and political life. Since family is a social entity, constituted of several persons with social interactions among them, inserted in the wider society, impacted by and contributing to economic or political institutions, shaped by cultures, it is definitely in the scope, sometimes even at the center, of CST's concerns. The promotion of human dignity and the common good, the option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, participation, the universal destination of the goods, all the major principles of Catholic social teaching open fruitful paths of reflection and actions in order to strive for "a good life lived with and for others in just institutions,"<sup>3</sup> as Paul Ricoeur defines ethics, including a good family life.

Today, therefore, I will present several aspects of the teaching of the Church in social encyclicals that explicitly speak of families. I will end by shortly suggesting how, in reverse mode, Pope Francis' major piece on family, namely the post-synodal exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, contributes to CST.

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<sup>1</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* (1891); Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (1967); Francis, *Laudato si'* (2015); Pie XI, *Casti Conubii* (1930); John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* (1981); Francis, *Amoris laetitia* (2016). [www.vatican.org](http://www.vatican.org).

<sup>2</sup> I owe a great debt to Monique Beaujard's article "Famille" on the website [www.doctrine-sociale-catholique.fr](http://www.doctrine-sociale-catholique.fr). The structure of this presentation and some sections of it reflect her approach to the topic.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Blamey, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1990]) 172.

## 1. Family as an Economic Reality

Families are not alien to economic life. On the contrary, the economy impacts family life. Poverty, harsh conditions of living, economic difficulties can very well disintegrate the family cell and impede its contribution to the good of the whole society. Catholic social teaching mentions regularly the family when it deals with economic issues. Two striking examples are the questions of just wages and access to private property.

### *Just wages*

That every worker should receive a just wage is a concern that runs through the social teachings of the popes from Leo XIII through Francis. In a nutshell, a quote from John Paul II's *Centesimus annus* captures the core of this teaching: "Society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings."<sup>4</sup> It is a matter of social justice that not only persons but the family cell depending of their resources receive sufficiently for their work in order to live decently.

In *Rerum novarum* (1891)(*RN*), Leo XIII denounces the temptation for the employer to exploit human misery:

Doubtless, before deciding whether wages are fair, many things have to be considered; but wealthy owners and all masters of labor should be mindful of this - that to exercise pressure upon the indigent and the destitute for the sake of gain, and to gather one's profit out of the need of another, is condemned by all laws, human and divine. To defraud any one of wages that are his due is a great crime which cries to the avenging anger of Heaven (*RN* 20).

Leo is also very well aware of the risk for the worker in dire need of accepting low wages insufficient for a decent living. There is an obvious difference of power between employer and employee that renders it impossible, in a perspective of justice, to let simply the free market fix the wages. Leo explains:

Wages, as we are told, are regulated by free consent, and therefore the employer, when he pays what was agreed upon, has done his part and seemingly is not called upon to do anything beyond. The only way, it is said, in which injustice might occur would be if the master refused to pay the whole of the wages, or if the workman should not complete the work undertaken; in such cases the public authority should intervene, to see that each obtains his due, but not under any other circumstances. To this kind of argument, a fair-minded man will not easily or entirely assent; it is not complete, for there are important considerations which it leaves out of account altogether... Let the working man and the employer make free agreements, and in particular let them agree freely as to the wages; nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (1991), 15. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner (RN 43, 45).

With other words, John XXIII repeats the same in 1961: “The remuneration of work is not something that can be left to the laws of the marketplace; nor should it be a decision left to the will of the more powerful. It must be determined in accordance with justice and equity; which means that workers must be paid a wage which allows them to live a truly human life and to fulfill their family obligations in a worthy manner.”<sup>5</sup> Here, it is not simply the “frugal and well-behaved wage-earner” that is mentioned but the worker with “family obligations”. Actually, from Pius XI in *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) onwards, family is constantly mentioned in discussions about just wages.<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI, in *Caritas in veritate* (2009) develops the notion of “decent” work and mentions aspects that deal with family. Hence, among other characteristics, decent work is “work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labor” and “work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level.”<sup>7</sup>

Just wages concern families and not simply individuals. But in discussions addressing economy, the Church has also insisted many times on another topic which she considers important for families although this might surprise us today, namely private property.

#### *Private property*

Early social encyclicals present private property as a guarantee against the uncertainties of life at a time when there was no system of social insurance. Leo XIII in *Rerum novarum* (1891) writes,

That right to property, therefore, which has been proved to belong naturally to individual persons, must in likewise belong to a man in his capacity of head of a family; nay, that right is all the stronger in proportion as the human person receives a wider extension in the family group. It is a most sacred law of nature that a father should provide food and all necessaries for those whom he has begotten; and, similarly, it is natural that he should wish that his children, who carry on, so to speak, and continue his personality, should be by him provided with all that is needful to enable them to keep themselves decently from want and misery amid the uncertainties of this mortal life. Now, in no other way can a father effect this except by the ownership of productive property, which he can transmit to his children by inheritance (RN 13).

The pope strongly advocates for a development of systems of savings and access to private property for the working classes. It is a way of fighting social inequalities. Pius XI carries on

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<sup>5</sup> John XIII, *Mater et magistra* (1961), 71. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>6</sup> See Pie XI, *Quadragesimo anno* (1931) 76-82 ; *Divini redemptoris* (1937), 52. Pie XI, *Radio Message on Christmas 1941*, 19. John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963), 20. John-Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1981), 19; *Centesimus annus* (1991), 8,15. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

<sup>7</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009), 63. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

the same path in *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), demanding for workers “that they may increase their property by thrift, that they may bear, by wise management of this increase in property, the burdens of family life with greater ease and security, and that, emerging from the insecure lot in life in whose uncertainties non-owning workers are cast, they may be able not only to endure the vicissitudes of earthly existence but have also assurance that when their lives are ended they will provide in some measure for those they leave after them.”<sup>8</sup>

By the mid-twentieth century, social insurance systems would lessen the burden of uncertainty for families in some countries. CST pushes for the adoption of such systems. Pius XI in 1937, in his encyclical denouncing communism, points out that “social justice cannot be said to have been satisfied as long as... workingmen cannot make suitable provision through public or private insurance for old age, for periods of illness and unemployment.”<sup>9</sup>

The defense of “private property” remains important in its connection to freedom. At Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (1965) asserts:

Private property or some ownership of external goods confers on everyone a sphere wholly necessary for the autonomy of the person and the family, and it should be regarded as an extension of human freedom. Lastly, since it adds incentives for carrying on one's function and charge, it constitutes one of the conditions for civil liberties.<sup>10</sup>

But the Constitution immediately recalls that private property is not an absolute right. “By its very nature private property has a social quality which is based on the law of the common destination of earthly goods.”<sup>11</sup> With the development of unbridled forms of liberal capitalism and with growing inequalities and a greater consciousness of the harms done to the earth, our common home, it becomes more and more crucial to restate this social nature of private property which is never an end in itself but is ordained to the common destination of goods. As stated in *Gaudium et spes*, “God intended the earth with everything contained in it for the use of all human beings and peoples. Thus, under the leadership of justice and in the company of charity, created goods should be in abundance for all in like manner. Whatever the forms of property may be, as adapted to the legitimate institutions of peoples, according to diverse and changeable circumstances, attention must always be paid to this universal destination of earthly goods.”<sup>12</sup> John Paul II speaks of a “social mortgage” placed upon private property.<sup>13</sup> Francis refers to private property as “a secondary natural right.”<sup>14</sup> For the common good of families it is obvious that the context of today is not the same as in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the defense of private property might still be of crucial importance in some

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<sup>8</sup> Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), 61. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>9</sup> Pius XI, *Divini redemptoris* (1937), 52. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>10</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), 71. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), 69. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), 42. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>14</sup> Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), 120. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

places, but putting it in the right ordering with the higher principle of the common use of the goods is all the more necessary.

That CST insists on the impacts on families of economic concerns is very accurate for our current situation of a world shaped more and more by economic liberalism. It is a crucial reminder that material aspects of life cannot be ignored when thinking of promoting family life.

## 2. The Social Role of Family

When speaking of family, CST regularly mentions its necessary contribution to building a society truly human. The family is a fundamental unit for society and consequently it is the place where crucial social principles and virtues are to be lived, taught and learned. I will mention, solidarity, justice, dignifying work, and ecological virtues.

### *Family cell as a source for social structures*

*Gaudium et spes* (1965), the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World offers in its first part an overview of a Christian vision of the human person. Central to this vision is the social dimension of the human being.<sup>15</sup> Created male and female in the image and likeness of God, human beings are inherently social beings. The family is, in a certain sense, the first expression of this social dimension. As recalled by *Gaudium et spes*, the social ties within the family relate to the innermost nature of the human being. They do not originate principally in free decisions as do many other social ties.<sup>16</sup> If the whole of humanity is rightly called the "human family" since it is its vocation to become so, the path towards a full realization of this vocation starts with the reality of the family cell.

For the Council Fathers, family ties, sanctified by the work of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh who lived such ties, "are the source of social structures."<sup>17</sup> Hence, later on in the Constitution, when dealing more specifically with the topic of family, the Council Fathers will state that "the family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. [...] The family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society."<sup>18</sup> A few years later, Paul VI repeats the same while also recognizing some legitimate critiques of some aspects of the traditional model of family. "Man is not really himself, however, except within the framework of society and there the family plays the basic and most important role. The family's influence may have been excessive at some periods of history and in some places, to the extent that it was exercised to the detriment of the fundamental rights of the individual."<sup>19</sup> Warning us about the danger of the weakening of family bonds in the cultural

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<sup>15</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), 23-32. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 25.

<sup>17</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 32.

<sup>18</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, 52.

<sup>19</sup> Paul VI, *Populorum progressio* (1967), 36. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

crisis of early 21<sup>st</sup> century, Francis restates that “the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another.”<sup>20</sup>

The affirmation that the family is the foundation of society can be understood at least at two levels. First it points to the necessity to recognize that there could be no proper healthy society without healthy family units. Society is not a mere agglomerate of independent individuals without previous ties. Hence the necessary recognition and support to families from higher institutions such as the State. We will come back later to this point. At another level, this affirmation should also probably be read as an invitation for families wishing to live a Christian life to fully engage and contribute to building a more human society. It is their vocation. It will be the case if families strive to be really schools of deeper humanity, and work at being intergenerational places of growth in wisdom and harmonization of personal rights with those of others. Here we can follow several leads offered by CST when it mentions explicitly families and stress their social role.

### *Solidarity*

Solidarity is a key principle for building up a society shaped by the striving towards the common good and respect for the dignity of every person. As taught by John Paul II in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), the virtue of solidarity brings the *de-facto* interdependence existing among individuals and nations to a higher moral level marked by decisive choices. Solidarity “is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.”<sup>21</sup>

There is solidarity at work in families when we consider the mutual support of the spouses or the mutual care between generations. This is why *Centesimus annus* sees families as a crucial place for fighting the growing individualism of the times. “In order to overcome today's widespread individualistic mentality, what is required is a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity, beginning in the family with the mutual support of husband and wife and the care which the different generations give to one another.”<sup>22</sup>

Families have a great responsibility for the education in solidarity that will contribute to the whole society. In *Fratelli tutti* (2020), Francis recalls this responsibility. Solidarity “as a moral virtue and social attitude born of personal conversion, calls for commitment on the part of those responsible for education and formation. I think first of families, called to a primary and vital mission of education. Families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity, togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Francis, *Evangelium gaudium* (2013), 66. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), 38. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (1991), 49. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>23</sup> Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), 114. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

This is why Benedict XVI had alerted that if families become too small, there is a danger that solidarity will not be guaranteed. “Smaller and at times miniscule families run the risk of impoverishing social relations, and failing to ensure effective forms of solidarity.”<sup>24</sup>

### *Justice*

Families are also places where the sense of justice and its practice ought to be learnt. Issued from the 1971’s General Assembly of the Synod of bishops dedicated to “Social Justice in the World,” the document *Justitia in mundo* develops at length the social dimension of the Gospel within the specific context of that time. The bishops are adamant in stating that,

Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.<sup>25</sup>

As members of society, members of the Church are called to act “as a leaven in the world, in their family, professional, social, cultural and political life.”<sup>26</sup> “Christians' specific contribution to justice is the day-to-day life of individual believers acting like the leaven of the Gospel in their family, their school, their work and their social and civic life.”<sup>27</sup> Education is therefore crucial and “education for justice is imparted first in the family” even if “not only Church institutions but also schools, trade unions and political parties are collaborating in this.”<sup>28</sup>

### *Work*

“The family is simultaneously a community made possible by work and the first *school of work*, within the home, for every person.”<sup>29</sup> In *Laborem exercens* (1981), his first major social encyclical, focusing the social question on the question of work, John Paul II does not miss the opportunity to stress the role of family in addressing this question.

In the Christian perspective, human work is valued as a sharing in God’s activity as Creator. It is not merely the production of material and immaterial goods necessary for life; It is also a place of transformation for the human person. There is a personal dimension of human work which, according to *Laborem exercens*, takes priority over its objective dimension. Hence, the challenge of striving to create the conditions for work to be humanizing and dignifying. This includes the affirmation and defense of the workers’ rights, and the priority of work over capital.

The stress on the personal dimension of work leads us to recognize and work out specific interconnections between work and family. First, work has a huge impact on family. “Work

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<sup>24</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009), 44. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>25</sup> World Synod of Catholic Bishops, *Justitia in mundo* (1971), 6. <https://www.cctwincities.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Justicia-in-Mundo.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> *Justitia in mundo*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Justitia in mundo*, 49.

<sup>28</sup> *Justitia in mundo*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1981), 10.

is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work.” Second, family, as the first place for education, plays a decisive role in educating for dignifying work. “Everyone ‘becomes a human being’ through, among other things, work, and becoming a human being is precisely the main purpose of the whole process of education.” Thus, “the family constitutes one of the most important terms of reference for shaping the social and ethical order of human work.”<sup>30</sup>

### *Caring for life*

Family is also a place of prime importance in educating in care for life. In *Centesimus annus*, John Paul II states,

It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the sanctuary of life. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.<sup>31</sup>

Francis speaks regularly of the need to fight the spreading of a “throwaway culture which affects the excluded just as it quickly reduces things to rubbish.”<sup>32</sup> We can probably see as part of this fight the concern for the elderly and care for intergenerational relations. In *Fratelli tutti* (2020), he warns that, “by isolating the elderly and leaving them in the care of others without the closeness and concern of family members, we disfigure and impoverish the family itself.”<sup>33</sup>

### *Ecological virtues*

With the growing awareness of ecological concerns within CST, we find also the mention of the family as a key player in order to foster the much-needed ecological conversion. In *Laudato si’* (LS), Francis calls for a “cultural revolution” (LS 114) and an “ecological conversion” (LS 217) by listening to “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (LS 49).

Francis points out that education is fundamental, especially in terms of changing bad habits and developing good ones. “Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment.” He then gives some suggestive examples:

A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes, shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment. There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around

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<sup>30</sup> Idem.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (1991), 39. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>32</sup> Francis, *Laudato si’* (2015), 22. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>33</sup> Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (2020), 19. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).



us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices (LS 211).

We should not think of these efforts simply in terms of their immediate impact or their utility (often very limited). Because they develop virtues, these efforts change us and change the world. “We must not think that these efforts are not going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread” (LS 212).

Although many educational settings such as schools, media, youth organization are concerned, Francis gives a primary responsibility to the family.

Here, though, I would stress the great importance of the family, which is “the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life”. In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. In the family we learn to ask without demanding, to say “thank you” as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings (LS 213).

### 3. Family and State

When CST addresses questions related to the organization of the political community, the role of State, or the duties of government, family is often mentioned. In line with Aristotle and Aquinas, CST constantly reminds us that the common good should be the goal of any political body. With the words of Vatican II: “the political community exists... for the sake of the common good, in which it finds its full justification and significance, and the source of its inherent legitimacy.”<sup>34</sup> The thriving of families and of family life are a crucial part of the common good. No surprise then, that CST underlines the duty of the State to support families. We have already noticed the concerns of several encyclicals about providing to families the material conditions for their flourishing through decent incomes and systems of insurance against contingencies of life. The State should also support the institution of marriage as a place of stability for family life. *Pacem in terris* (1963), in listing essential human rights, mentions the right to freely found a family and adds the consequent duty for social, economic and political affairs:

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<sup>34</sup> Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (1965), 74. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

“The family, founded upon marriage freely contracted, one and indissoluble, must be regarded as the natural, primary cell of human society. The interests of the family, therefore, must be taken very specially into consideration in social and economic affairs, as well as in the spheres of faith and morals. For all of these have to do with strengthening the family and assisting it in the fulfilment of its mission.<sup>35</sup>

John Paul II, in *Centesimus annus* (1991) formulates a similar point:

It can happen, that when a family does decide to live up fully to its vocation, it finds itself without the necessary support from the State and without sufficient resources. It is urgent therefore to promote not only family policies, but also those social policies which have the family as their principal object, policies which assist the family by providing adequate resources and efficient means of support, both for bringing up children and for looking after the elderly, so as to avoid distancing the latter from the family unit and in order to strengthen relations between generations.<sup>36</sup>

But if the State ought to support families it should not intervene unduly in the life of families, especially concerning birth regulation, education of children, or religious matters. The Church always stresses the need to preserve the freedom and responsibility of the parents. *Rerum novarum* was already explicit on the matter:

The contention, then, that the civil government should at its option intrude into and exercise intimate control over the family and the household is a great and pernicious error. True, if a family finds itself in exceeding distress, utterly deprived of the counsel of friends, and without any prospect of extricating itself, it is right that extreme necessity be met by public aid, since each family is a part of the commonwealth. In like manner, if within the precincts of the household there occur grave disturbance of mutual rights, public authority should intervene to force each party to yield to the other its proper due; for this is not to deprive citizens of their rights, but justly and properly to safeguard and strengthen them.<sup>37</sup>

Even if the word is not used, we find here a good example of the application of the principle of subsidiarity. The State, which is an entity of higher level in the organization of the society, ought to promote and safeguard the autonomy of an association of lower level such as the family for everything it can do. Nonetheless it should *help* – this is the meaning of the Latin word *subsidium* – when some members of the family are at risk with no internal capacity to protect them. For example, it is not the role of the State to impose educative orientations to the parents but it could be its duty to intervene via social institutions of child protection if children are subject to abuses within the family.

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<sup>35</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963), 16. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (1991), 49. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>37</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, 14. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

The temptation of States, especially totalitarian States, to impose constraints on parents regarding the education to be given to their children or on other aspects of family life, is regularly denounced in social encyclicals. The 1937 encyclicals of Pius XI against Nazism and Communism are good examples.<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, restates the same in his rereading of 1989's fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in *Centesimus annus*:

The totalitarian State tends to absorb within itself the nation, society, the family, religious groups and individuals themselves. In defending her own freedom, the Church is also defending the human person, who must obey God rather than men (cf. Acts 5:29), as well as defending the family, the various social organizations and nations — all of which enjoy their own spheres of autonomy and sovereignty.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. Gender equality

Among the significant evolutions of societies within the last centuries lies the place and the social role of women. It is still a process at work. Arguably the Catholic Church is not seen as a major promoter of feminist claims. Some key scriptural passages such as Galatians 3:28, “there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” ground a solid need to work for more effective gender equality in many aspects of human life. Many within the Christian faith are engaged in fostering social changes in this line. But there are also fierce debates about what this implies, for example, for the distribution of powers and responsibilities within the Church or the possibility to be ordained. With no pretention to settle the question, I suggest that it is nonetheless interesting to look at CST, and more specifically the question of women and work, since it is a good testimony of how the Church's teaching evolves.

At first, social encyclicals' prime concern is to protect women from conditions of work that are harsh and dangerous for them. Thus, the topic is addressed alongside the issue of children's work which is not absolutely forbidden but should be limited to those of sufficient age and adapted to their capacities.

Finally, work which is quite suitable for a strong man cannot rightly be required from a woman or a child. And, in regard to children, great care should be taken not to place them in workshops and factories until their bodies and minds are sufficiently developed. [...] Women, again, are not suited for certain occupations; a woman is by nature fitted for home-work, and it is that which is best adapted at once to preserve her modesty and to promote the good bringing up of children and the well-being of the family.<sup>40</sup>

If Leo recognizes that there are women at work within factories and is concerned for the improvement of their situation, the baseline of his thought is that the father is the primary

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<sup>38</sup> Pius XI, *Mit Brennender Sorge* (1937), 39; *Divini redemptoris* (1937), 11. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *Centesimus annus* (1991), 45. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>40</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum* (1891), 42. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

breadwinner of the family and that women who are mothers have duties within the household and should probably not have to work outside. There is also the sense of a moral danger of having mixed people working in the same place.<sup>41</sup>

In the 1930s, Pius XI carries on the same kind of teaching:

To abuse the years of childhood and the limited strength of women is grossly wrong. Mothers, concentrating on household duties, should work primarily in the home or in its immediate vicinity. It is an intolerable abuse, and to be abolished at all cost, for mothers on account of the father's low wage to be forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the home to the neglect of their proper cares and duties, especially the training of children.<sup>42</sup>

In 1963, John XXIII marks a shift in his great encyclical on human rights, *Pacem in terris*, by stating the equality of rights and duties between husband and wife.<sup>43</sup> He also gives a positive consideration to the presence of women in public life.

The part that women are now playing in political life is everywhere evident... Women are gaining an increasing awareness of their natural dignity. Far from being content with a purely passive role or allowing themselves to be regarded as a kind of instrument, they are demanding both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties which belong to them as human persons.<sup>44</sup>

The recognition of women's rights and the strive for an effective equality in the area of work will become more and more explicit in social encyclicals, but it comes often with a warning about a proper understanding of equality which should not erase the specificities of natures and vocations. Hence, Paul VI in *Octogesima adveniens* (1971):

in many countries a charter for women which would put an end to an actual discrimination and would establish relationships of equality in rights and of respect for their dignity is the object of study and at times of lively demands. We do not have in mind that false equality which would deny the distinction with woman's proper role, which is of such capital importance, at the heart of the family as well as within society. Developments in legislation should on the contrary be directed to protecting her proper vocation and at the same time recognizing her independence as a person, and her equal rights to participate in cultural, economic, social and political life.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Rerum novarum* 36. A justified reason for strike is "if in workshops and factories there were danger to morals through the mixing of the sexes." This alludes to the way mixing places are envisioned.

<sup>42</sup> Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), 71. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>43</sup> "Human beings have also the right to choose for themselves the kind of life which appeals to them: whether it is to found a family—in the founding of which both the man and the woman enjoy equal rights and duties—or to embrace the priesthood or the religious life." John XXIII, *Pacem in terris* (1963), 15. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>44</sup> John XXIII, *Pacem in terris*, 41. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>45</sup> Paul VI, *Octogesima adveniens* (1971), 13. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

John Paul II in *Laborem exercens* (1981) puts the work done by women within the household and for the education of children at the same level as any other job and pleads for a better recognition of its social value.

Experience confirms that there must be a social re-evaluation of the mother's role, of the toil connected with it, and of the need that children have for care, love and affection in order that they may develop into responsible, morally and religiously mature and psychologically stable persons.<sup>46</sup>

The Polish pope pleads also for an adaptation of work to the needs of family life. “The true advancement of women requires that labor should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role.”<sup>47</sup>

30 years later, in Benedict XVI’s specific statements about work in *Caritas in veritate*, the language is markedly more gender-inclusive than that of his predecessors. He says that “decent” work is that which, “expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community [...] work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children [...]”<sup>48</sup> There is obviously here an approach that avoids linking the duty of raising children or some specificities of household work with the specific nature of women.

## 5. *Amoris laetitia*: When Teaching on Family Contributes to CST

I have pointed out that the theme of family is regularly present in CST. The reflections and orientations for action resulting from the encounter of the Gospel with the challenges of social, economic and political life of one given epoch necessarily speak of family concerns since families are social cells whose lives are intimately intermingled with social transformations. Families contribute to and are impacted by them. To end this paper, I would like to suggest that this intermingling between family concerns and social concerns in the moral teaching of the Church is also very much visible in magisterial documents dealing primarily with the theme of family. I look here at the teaching of Pope Francis in *Amoris laetitia* (*AL*) (2016)<sup>49</sup>, the post-synodal exhortation on love in the family.

*AL* is notable for the way it addresses its topic. After an opening chapter offering a meditation on the Scriptures, it turns to examine “the actual situation of families, in order to keep firmly grounded in reality” (*AL* 6). Then some points of doctrine and theological reflection are developed. Finally pastoral orientations and paths of discernments are exposed. We recognize here the *See-Judge-Act* approach at work. In 1961, John XXIII had proposed the

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<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1981), 19. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>47</sup> John Paul II, *Laborem exercens* (1981), 19. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>48</sup> Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009), 63. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>49</sup> Francis, *Amoris laetitia* (2016). [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va). Subsequent quotes will be indicated by *AL* followed by the number of the paragraph.

famous methodology of Catholic Action as a model for social thinking and acting.<sup>50</sup> CST and the social encyclicals are often framed in this inductive mode. Looking at the reality as it stands in its complexity is a key starting point. It is a look that is always shaped, explicitly or implicitly, by the Gospel and the Christian faith of those proposing CST while using also means of analysis from secular sciences. The teaching of the church on sexuality and family concerns is more often shaped in a deductive mode, starting with the presentation of what is revealed by the Scriptures and interpreted in the tradition. From there, more concrete situations are dealt with. It is therefore very significant that, in *AL*, great attention is paid from the beginning to the diversity of concrete challenges faced by families. For the pope, paying this attention to the concrete reality of families in their plurality and their weaknesses is the path to listen to the “call and demands of the Spirit [that] resound in the events of history” (*AL* 31).

Many social, cultural, economic factors impact the institution of family. They are listed and shortly analyzed in this second chapter of *AL*: the mentality of “use and discard” affects goods, environment, and persons; the spread of pornography; drugs and other addictions; the demographic decline in some parts of the world; the lack of proper housing and decent work; economic constraints; forced migrations. *AL* evokes also violence inside the families themselves: This recognition is the first of its kind in this type of magisterial document and it is a significant example of the non-idealistic look at the reality of families. Some families live in “dire poverty and great limitation” and should be of primary concern for the Church (*AL* 49). The chapter speaks also of the positive evolution in the recognition of women’s rights, of their participation in public life, and of the work remaining to be done (*AL* 54) while raising some challenges concerning the role of men within the family (*AL* 55). Challenges are also pointed out in relation to the effects of the biotechnological revolution in the area of procreation. It is no matter of getting enclosed in a logic of “decrying present-day-evils” (*AL* 35) or being “trapped into wasting our energy in doleful laments” (*AL* 57). The realistic look at the current challenges is the path toward “a positive and welcoming pastoral approach” that facilitates a profound encounter with the demands of the Gospel (*AL* 38). In regard to the concerns of CST, this second chapter of *AL* is a large overview of the social, cultural and economic challenges impacting families and the path to living together within a society. It reminds us how things are “all connected”, as *Laudato si’* states.

Families have a role to play for a society truly oriented toward the common good. We find in *Amoris laetitia* several calls to the social role of the family. When speaking of the fruitfulness of love within the family, the exhortation stresses the movement of expansion from the circle of the couple and their children to the larger family and to friends so that the dimension of hospitality and solidarity could expand to many people in need.

Friends and other families are part of this larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith. This larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers,

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. John XXIII, *Mater et magistra* (1961), 236. [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should also embrace even those who have made shipwreck of their lives. (AL 196-197).

The family is the first place of education for children and a crucial one in regards to the type of society we wish to build. It is “the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one... There is no social bond without the primary, every day, almost microscopic aspect of living side by side, crossing paths at different times of the day, being concerned about everything that affects us, helping one another with ordinary little things” (AL 276). The family is the place where we can “rethink our habits of consumption and join in caring for the environment as our common home. The family is the principal agent of an integral ecology, because it is the primary social subject which contains within it the two fundamental principles of human civilization on earth: the principle of communion and the principle of fruitfulness” (AL 277).

Families are not merely impacted by society they are “the ‘bricks’ for the building up of society.”<sup>51</sup> The key principles of CST such as human dignity, common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, participation, universal destination of goods and preferential option for the poor, are to be fostered, taught, learnt, and lived within families so that they inspire the whole society. No surprise therefore that a key document of the magisterial teaching on family is full of social concerns just as social encyclicals are full of family concerns.

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<sup>51</sup> Francis, *Homily. September 14th, 2014.* [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).