

THEOLOGY OF THE FAMILY: A RESPONSE TO POSTMODERN CHALLENGES FACING THE FAMILY INSTITUTION IN AFRICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The concept of the family and its importance to human development has been subjected to diverse social and cultural reality checks. The society in which we live is increasingly secularized and does not favour the growth of faith with the consequence that many Christians struggle to bear witness to a style of life in accordance with the Gospel, and so with regard to the sacrament of marriage. Indeed diverse cultures have their constructs for the family and pose a threat to its usefulness and universal appropriation in contemporary times. Understanding the reality of the family from a biblical perspective enables us to provide theological foundation of the community of human existence which the family remains a basic truth. Catholic theology has remained focused in its teachings and doctrinal formulations in safeguarding marriage and the family as divinely instituted human community from postmodern vicissitudes. This article tries to furnish theological response to the many rampaging, both positive and negative exchanges confronting marriages and families. It emphasizes theologically on the need to return to the biblical principle for family life.

Keywords: *Humanization, Personhood, socialization, Marriage, Extended Family, Individuality, Community, Postmodernism, sociality.*

INTRODUCTION

The family, in the understanding of Catholic theology is both divine and human institution created by God for the benefits of human existence. J. H. Christopher Wright supports the biblical teaching that the family is composed of human persons created in the image or likeness of God, which reflects something of God's own relational self, and constitute at the same time an appropriate context and vehicle for the worship of God.² The family system is considered to be the foundation upon which the human personality as well as social relationship is formed. However, from all angles of human relationship, the family has been the hardest hit in recent times. The Genesis narratives rapidly portray the corrupting of all the social relationships around which human life is structured, the fundamental relationship within marriage which begins the building of the culture of the family is twisted. In the mind of Wright, "instead of husband and wife finding the fulfillment of their own created purpose in enabling the other to fulfill his or hers, (Gen. 2:18-24), the relationship degenerates into one of harsh domination and lust."³

All humans exist essentially in concrete social relationships, according to Ray Anderson⁴ who agrees with Herbert Anderson's assertion that; "a theology of the family is shaped by two similarly

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²J. H. Christopher Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, (Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 2004), p. 353

³Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p.215

⁴S. R. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering ministry with Theological Praxis*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 255

contradictory principles”⁵ He recognizes that the family is a necessary component of creation which has fulfilled God’s intent to provide a context for creation and care in order to insure the continuity of the human species... He could therefore affirm that there is no known human community without family in some form⁶.

M. L. Stackhouse contends that, the family as the subject of our investigation is at every point an ethical and a spiritual association as well as material and a biological institution.⁷ In view of that, it is significant to reflect on the family from varying theological and ethical perspectives; be it Biblical or Social so that a comprehensive understanding of the reality of the family in contemporary times could be realized. The challenges that have plagued the family system over the years are the subject for a theological investigation in this current article.

Understanding the Family

The family is the foundation of every society, the original cell of social life. It consists of husband and wife, united in a covenant of love, together with their children.⁸ This has been one of the simplest approaches undertaken to define the family as a social human institution. The family therefore remains the first point for primary socialization and humanization *and par consequent*, the primal milieu for Christian initiation and evangelization. Brigitte Berger and Peter L. Berger on their part emphasize that: “Every human society must provide community [...], where children are raised.”⁹

Bron B. Ingoldsby and Smith Suzanna have defined the family as “a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction which include adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted, of the sexually cohabiting adults.”¹⁰ They define the family from the nuclear family perspective and claims that, “the nuclear family is a universal human social grouping that fulfills the following essential functions such as; sexual, reproduction, socialization of children and economic wellbeing.”¹¹ Akinlolu Makinwa brings to our attention a critique of such definition based on new evidence on the family as “a social arrangement based on marriage and the marriage contract, including recognition of the rights and duties of parenthood, common residence for husband, wife, and children and reciprocal economic obligations between husband and wife”¹²

Per this definition, the family through the husband and wife is charged with the responsibility to not only procreate, but to socialize their offspring and nurture them in their faith. The family serves as the primary instrument by which people are socialized¹³, humanized and ultimately evangelized. The family institution becomes very fundamental to a thriving civil society in terms of habits, customs and ethics. And that is as a result of the fact that the family is instrumental in the quality of people’s material and spiritual development which is in accord with the moral qualities of life that is generated and sustained.

⁵ H. Anderson, *The Family and Pastoral Care*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press), 1984, p. 31

⁶ Anderson, *The Family and Pastoral care*, p.31

⁷ M. L. Stackhouse, *Covenants and Commitments; Faith, Family, and Economic Life*, (Kentucky, Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), p. 3

⁸ E. T. Mechmann, *God, Society and the Human Person*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1994), p. 60

⁹ B. Berger and P. L. Berger, *The War over the Family, Capturing the Middle Ground*, (New York, Doubleday /Anchor, 1983), p. 146

¹⁰ B. B. Ingoldsby and D. S. Suzanna, *Families in Global and Multicultural Perspectives*, (California, Sage Publications, Inc. 2006), p. 67.

¹¹ Ingoldsby and Suzanna, *Families in Global and Multicultural Perspective*, p. 68

¹² A. Makinwa, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry: A Practical Theological Investigation* (Unpublished MTh. Dissertation) University of Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2012, p.12

¹³F. Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, (New York, Free Press, 1995), p. 4

The community within which one is brought up as in the family shapes nature and *persona*. K. H. Peschke asserts that, “the family is the primordial community. As the font of new human life, it is the normal and best centre in which the human person can develop bodily and spiritually in a healthy fashion. The moral and religious life of the human person and his or her capability to love are first awakened by parental love. Through the family as its cell, society maintains and renews itself.”¹⁴ The above emphasizes the significance of parenthood in defining the family as an important instrument for human nurturing. Such optimal importance that is attached to the family as a human institution cannot be downplayed since the family provides education for both intellectual and moral development, an opportunity for the young persons to understand the world around them. As a result, Peschke could recognize and affirm correctly that, the “two most important social virtues, charity and justice, are basically taught in the family.”¹⁵

Biblical model of the Family

The family as a human institution should be given the affirmation that is needed for the good of the human persons who receive their basic nurture and identity from it. The family is a God-given gift and surely every effort should be made to support and defend such a gratuitous divine gift. However Wright draws attention to the critical fact that, “we must be careful how and where we apply our biblical insights and whether our insights really take the whole biblical model on the family into account.”¹⁶ For him biblical material on the family presents series of paradoxes or ambiguities. And this to him is inevitable because the family closely mirrors the ambiguity of the human person born into the family, made in the image of God but fallen and sinful. The Bible clearly does not hide the many dysfunctional attitudes exhibited by the family. It will not be out of place to talk of the many dysfunctional issues associated with contemporary family settings in whatever context under consideration.

For Herbert Anderson, the theology of the family must reflect on the ambiguities as he opines:

A theology of the family begins by identifying themes from the whole of the Christian tradition that are of particular significance for understanding the family. Such an approach seeks to avoid absolutizing either the family or the theological tradition. It allows for the possibility of a lively interaction between Christian texts/traditions and common human experience. A theology for family begins by exploring general theological principles, - order, change, uniqueness, mutuality, justice, forgiveness, diversity, - in order to understand first of all what it means to be [...] a family. The pastoral theologian’s agenda is not to identify a “Christian family” but to help people find ways of being Christians in families.¹⁷

For Wright, the modern society as we see is no different from the pattern of family which the Biblical Israel history reveals to us. The same kinship system characteristic of Israel is prevalent in most African and Asian cultures. In other words certain Asian and African traditional patterns of the family have no difficulty at all relating positively to many features of Old Testament family customs and laws.¹⁸ It can however be noticed as being observed by A. Makinwa that modern Western societies and those that have been influenced by Western cultural dominance exhibit some sociological differences in terms of horizontally as the families expands to cover the many cluster of kinships, and also vertically as the family is said to be the family of God or the household of God. For example the creation story was the beginning of the formation of the first human family beginning with the union of Adam and Eve. Later in human history, God formed a large

¹⁴K. H. Peschke, *Christian Ethics: Moral Theology in the Light of the Vatican II*, Vol. 2, Bangalore, Theological Publications in India, 2016, p. 581.

¹⁵Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, p. 583

¹⁶Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 353

¹⁷Anderson, *The Family and Pastoral Care*, pp. 15-16

¹⁸Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 354

family, Israel, made up of the descendants of Abraham and extended to be a model for the families of the earth (Genesis 12:2-3).¹⁹

Once again, Wright presents to us the synthesis of the biblical insights and principles of the family situation in Israel which shares some relationship with African family system.

The nuclear family is still a fundamental factor in society, just as it was, after all, the basic unit within the extended household. The extended family in Israel was like a molecule formed by the adhesion of several kinship nuclei. It was not an amorphous, free-for-all commune. The extended family in Israel, was not, as one writer put it, a dormitory full of double beds. On the contrary, the internal boundaries of legitimate and illegitimate sexual relationships within the close-knit kinship framework were carefully defined in a way that protected very carefully the integrity of the constituent nuclear families (see Leviticus 18:20).²⁰

The ideal family as God intended it to be from the beginning of creation and from the institution of the marriage as the foundation of the family between Adam and Eve crumbled by sin. Makinwa Akinlolu points out that, “the thought of God and His initial plan for the first and subsequent families are thoughts of peace and not of evil as recorded in the first two chapters of Genesis. However, sin and evil entered the first family and the earth as the first parents, Adam and Eve yielded to Satan’s temptation by disobeying God’s explicit command not to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16, 17; 3:1-14).”²¹

The foundation of the family as Holy Scripture reveals is depended on the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. The marriage institution establishes beyond ordinary terms of relationship or association but presented in a covenant form. It is a pre-fall institution and a covenant, not a curse but good, ordained by God and has remained part of the core social paradigm of human relationships in both the Old and New Testaments.²² The view of those who reject marriage as evil is contrary to Holy Scripture. The New Testament teaches that “everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected” (1 Tim. 4:4). Marriage is “a gift” from the Lord (1 Cor. 7:7).

At the same time, and precisely because of this positive understanding, the New Testament strongly emphasizes the need to safeguard God’s gift as strongly reiterated by Pope Francis: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.”²³

Jesus Christ in the New Testament presents a renewal of the covenant of marriage and family. The Gospels clearly affirm that Jesus had a positive appreciation of the family, both in terms of marriage, children, and the responsibilities of parenthood.²⁴ On many occasions as Luke reveals in his Gospel (Luke 1:14; 2:49-51), Jesus’ narrative though reiterated his allegiance to the Father’s business in the Temple above his parents’ anxiety, but immediately observed the experiences of obedience to his earthly parents. Jesus’s attendance at the wedding at Cana (John 2), and his remarkable gift to the couple, and his teaching on marriage (Mark 10:2-12; Matt. 5:31-32; 19:1-9), could sum up his affirmation of the marriage union for the basis of the family.

The New Testament story of the family gives some hope of restitution and restoration as Jesus stood for the restoration of all the good things God created consequent to the benefits of human existence; marriage and family were first to attend to. The Gospel message of Christ gives hope, love and tenderness to marriage and the family. “The mystery of the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light

¹⁹Makinwa, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry*, p. 33

²⁰Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 355

²¹Makinwa, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry*, p. 36

²²A. Oliver, *God’s Prescription for a healthy marriage and family*, (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2007), pp. 15-16

²³Pope Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, Rome, Vatican City Press, 2016, 61.

²⁴Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 358

of the Father's infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst ... Jesus who reconciled all things in himself, restored marriage and family to their original form. Marriage and family have been redeemed by Christ and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which all true love flows."²⁵ It is however also true that, following Jesus meant a radical reassessment of family ties. The discipleship calling would inject into the whole social and economic sphere of family and household, putting the kingdom of God above all things including family duties where necessary.²⁶ Wright reiterates the point that early church encountered an experience of a new family in Christ in terms of its spiritual fellowship, social and material expression, but at the same time, the Christian experience never set itself against the normal forms of family in society.²⁷ Holy Scripture is to be the law and guide for the Christian family, modeled after Christ and his relationship to the Church.

POSTMODERN TRENDS TO SOCIAL SYSTEMS AND THE FAMILY FOUNDATIONS

The urgent task at hand for the postmodern social being to undertake, either from Christian or secular point of departure is the conclusion that kinship and family are irrelevant and dispensable in modern society. Such ideology, for a Christian theologian points to the urgent necessity of rethinking and refortifying the role of the family in society.²⁸ Recent developments seem to indicate a crisis of the family today. It could not be far from the fact that, the high rates in divorce cases in many nations contribute to it. The other factors could be as a result of "a stronger assertion of the independence of spouses, an increasing number of single-parent families, a weakening of parents' authority over their children, a greater incidence of stepparents, and the growing practice of non-marital unions."²⁹ The family is under threat. Contemporary culture and changes in legislation are seeking to redefine its structure, parents are increasingly giving over to the state the responsibility of disciplining their children, homes are constantly bombarded by immoral images of the family through the television and other social media.

Beyond the 20th century the experience of human society is the post-modernized socio-economic life, cultural change and relationships. It is only expressed as the tendencies coming from the progressive effects of modern trends of cultural emancipations. Postmodern theorists assume to claim that we have crossed a watershed into a new world order where institutional authority no longer commands automatic respect, taking on the precise meaning of a reaction against modernism and modernity.³⁰ The family culture and its positive effects are always subjugated to the influences under the so called modernization tendencies. For Makinwa, the postmodern reality in respect of the family community promotes individuality instead of inter-dependence and solidarity which characterizes the wider African society. Post-modernity in the understanding of D.J. Cheal, is a concept that emphasizes a type of culture in which an accelerated rate of change produces unpredictable outcomes and modern social institutions lose much of their capacity.³¹

The postmodern world projects the picture of a fragmented world, more and more populated with isolated and drifting individuals in an age of hyper-individualism³², a tendency for people to act in a highly individual way, without regard to society. It is an excessive or aggressive pursuit of personal success at the expense of others' wellbeing. Postmodern tendencies 'relativizes' the Scriptural foundations of the family principles to the contextual anthropological vicissitudes. According to Walt Mueller,

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 63

²⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 357

²⁷ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 358

²⁸ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, p. 355

²⁹ Peschke, *Christian Ethic*, p. 58

³⁰ S. Sim (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, (London, Icon Books Limited, 1998), p. ix-xi

³¹ D. J. Cheal, *Sociology of the Family Life*, (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan Education 2002), 150

³² Makinwa, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry*, p. 77

The postmodern world is marked by a new level of moral relativism, the view that each person's own personal standard of right and wrong is legitimate, true and authoritative as any other. As a result of this, the Word of God upon whom the moral fibre of the Church is laid is shaken by postmodernity. Contemporary Christian youth and family are facing great challenge because of family members' exposure to different 'gods' and 'sacred' books as well as their negative effect on their "faith in God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ which was once delivered to the Saints (Jude 3)."³³

The individual outside the community does not have a shield protecting the head. That is to mean, for the African, individuality cannot promote the wellbeing of the wider community or the family, except projecting self-interests and selfish gains. No one is considered as an autonomous individual, cut off from the influences of social and cultural traditions. We belong to communities that help shape our perception of reality.³⁴ Pope Francis took note of the phenomenon and cautioned vehemently that: "... equal consideration needs to be given to the growing danger represented by an extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit, leading in some cases to the idea that, one's personality is shaped by his or her desires, which are considered absolute. The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families."³⁵

Consequent to postmodernism is the concept of globalization which has also contributed to the disintegration of the family system, seeing it as waist of human resources and time to the modern person. To Don S. Browning, "globalization is a process by which information, images, symbols, and styles of life zigzag back and forth across the world in unpredictable patterns."³⁶ The contemporary family now lives in a world that is referred to as "global village", with its attendant cultural diffusion. The world has brought home and many of the activities jointly performed by the families have been substituted.³⁷ There are many tasks of the family that has been taken over by or delegated to social relations such as multinational companies, academic clubs and institutions, schools, teachers, church and state. Parents have left their responsibilities in the hands of teachers, caregivers and the television. Makinwa once again observed some negative effects of the excessive use of Television on the family: "with the media goes sexually explicit, music and movies from which both adult and youth are learning foul languages, pornography, violence, drug – addiction, crime and values. The children who are more inclined to go along with television, to lap up its messages uncritically, are those who have received little in the way of guidance at home, hence their susceptibility to whatever the big tube send their way."³⁸

It is true that the postmodern society has generated a wide plurality of social bonds and relationships that have taken over the many social functions previously vested in the family and the community networks. However, the core social paradigm, the insights and the biblical principles that undergird the family in society must be vigorously pursued. Such as must be worked at by "both Christians and secular, far from concluding that kinship and family are irrelevant and dispensable in modern society, seems to me rather to point to the urgent necessity of rethinking and redefining the role of the family in society."³⁹ There is the need to deepen and give fuller expression to a biblical theology of the family in our postmodern world.

³³W. Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldview and Christian Truth*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2006), p. 66

³⁴Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, p. 251.

³⁵Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 33.

³⁶D. S. Browning, *Marriage and Modernization: How Globalization Threatens Marriage and what to do about it*, (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 129.

³⁷Makinwa, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry*, p. 75.

³⁸Makinwa, *Challenges of Disintegrating Family Life to Youth Ministry*, p. 75

³⁹Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, p. 355

Reviving the Biblical Theology of the Family in Postmodern Civil Society

In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis has reiterated the biblical mandate to the Christian community and family in society to rise up to the responsibility of ensuring that we truly promote what will make marriage and family survive in the modern day intolerance and the hostility towards the family. What we need according to the *Amoris Laetitia* “is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and the 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.”⁴⁰ The main deficiency in the first human that was created was not just a lack of a wife but a lack of a human counterpart necessary for his existence. Therefore the divine image as Anderson reiterates, is grounded in the image of marriage as a core social relation. “The mutual existence of the first humans constitutes the essential core of what the Bible means by family - mutual care - where development in self-identity, personal maturity, acquiring of moral values and spiritual formation take place.”⁴¹

The Pope identified the challenges the contemporary family and the marriage institutions are facing - the negative tendencies leading to destabilization of the social union binding their formations. The weakening of the family which is a natural human union founded on marriage goes a long way to derail the societal norms. He further stressed that the weakness of family union, “poses a threat to the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of community values and the moral progress of the cities and countries.”⁴² It is significant to signal some major issues that are considered as *de facto* unions offering alternatives to family and marriage unions. Some, such as same-sex unions and polygamy cannot offer stability and the future of society. What those who are promoting and projecting same-sex marriage and diversity of multiple marriages do not realize is that, “only the exclusive and indissoluble union between a man and a woman has a plenary role to play in society as a stable commitment that bears fruit in new life.”⁴³

The Pope raises the concern about who is making the effort to strengthen marriages and the families, to help key players in the families and marriage systems to surmount their challenges. As has been the practice in some parts of Africa, the wider family within the community, has always been contributing to the raising of children and to encourage the stability of the marriage bond. However, elements and the shifts from the external family system to nuclear family phenomenon has waned that cultural spirit of sociability in nurturing young people within the community by all. The caution is that, if the family system is not strengthened the way it should and as God intended it, people then will find new ways of living and forming families such as same-sex, single-parent families, and transnational families⁴⁴.

Love as a Transformative dynamic for the Family and Marriage Development

The teachings of the church have founded its inspiration and objective from the words of Scriptures in acknowledging God’s presence and love in the marriage and the family union. Consequently Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia* could confirm that, “God’s indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross”⁴⁵. Human beings are born to give and receive love. The reason being that, God who created the human beings in his image is a relational loving Being. In the same vein, Patricia Lamoureux et Paul Wadell affirm strongly: “God’s very being is an everlasting communion of love. He is not a lonesome figure; but a vibrant communion of love in which each person’s love gives life, identity, and joy to the

⁴⁰ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 35.

⁴¹ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, pp. 260-261

⁴² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 52.

⁴³ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 52

⁴⁴ Cf. Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2010), pp. 419-420.

⁴⁵ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 62.

other.”⁴⁶ Love gives meaning to every human efforts and existence; meaning that it possesses ethical-eschatological properties for life and relationships. The most fundamental law of nature can only be expressed through learning to love. “Human beings are created from love and are made to love because nothing else will fulfill us, nothing else will content us, and nothing else will bless us with life.”⁴⁷ The marriage and the family unions must always take inspiration from the fact that;

We live because God loves us [...], and ceaselessly seeks to be in relationship with us. We live because at every moment of our lives we receive as *gift* the love by which all things are. But we are not only to receive this love; we are also to imitate it, participate in it, share it, and model our lives on it. Learning to give and receive love is our vocation for a lifetime because as God’s finely sculpted images we grow and have life only in relationships and communities characterized by mutual and generous love.⁴⁸

The Pope cautions in practical terms that, “all that has been said so far would be insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to speak of love. For, we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love.”⁴⁹ He continues that families, “which are far from considering themselves perfect, should live in love, fulfill their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way.”⁵⁰ In fact, the reality is that marriages and families have had to go through difficulties and life threatening challenges to keep their ranks intact and solid in meeting the needs and aspirations of people entrusted into their care.

The ecclesial community’s role in rejuvenating the families and marriages cannot be overlooked. The church provides the *catechesis* intended to teach the marriage and the family unions the most excellent ways to demonstrate the grace of God in the Christian community (1 Cor. 12:31). That community intended to reorganize along the path that ensures the strict adherence to the truth of the Word of God that undergirds the marriage union and the families. The call on the ecclesial community is never to be entrapped “into wasting our energy in doleful laments, but rather seeks new forms of missionary creativity,” in which in every situation, “that presents itself, the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope [...]. The great values of marriage and Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence.”⁵¹

The Church’s message of salvation must have at its core of the kerygma, the appeal of Christ’s sacrifice to make all things work for the good of humanity, so that the family can learn from the example of Christ for the Church. It is in this regard that the Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, insists strongly that the Church should foremost and always be conscious of the fact that her “teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness, otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defense of a dry and lifeless doctrine.”⁵²

The Church takes a leap from there to genuinely promote the dignity of marriage and the family. As Pope John Paul II insinuated in his *Letter to Families*, that the family is the way of the Church and it is also the vocation of men and women to love.⁵³ For they bear witness to the indissoluble and cleave of the marriage and family unions. The Second Vatican Council in its *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*,

⁴⁶ P. Lamoureux & P. Wadell, *The Christian Moral Life, Faithful Discipleship for a Global Society*, (New York), Orbis Books, 2011, p. 181

⁴⁷ Lamoureux & Wadell, *The Christian Moral Life*, p. 179

⁴⁸ Lamoureux & Wadell, *The Christian Moral Life*, p. 182

⁴⁹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 89

⁵⁰ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 57

⁵¹ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 57

⁵² Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* 58.

⁵³ John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, (Boston, MA, Pauline Publications, 1994), 2.

Lumen Gentium, strongly teaches that, within the family, which is the ‘domestic church’ individuals enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity.⁵⁴

The survival of the marriage union and the families does not depend on the health of riches and social statuses, it depends on the Church which is the family of families, which constantly enriches the persons who continually seek to participate in the fraternity that the ‘domestic church’ offers them in their day to day activities. *Amoris Laetitia* therefore calls on the ecclesial community to constantly reflect on the interplay between the Church and the family. “The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is a concern not only of individual families, but of the entire Christian Community.”⁵⁵

Love so understood and engulfed in both the marriage and family unions encapsulate sociality and it takes care of the true development and wellbeing of the human person in the image of God. Anderson, could assert that “the general spirituality of persons is woven into the net of sociality.”⁵⁶ According to J. Moltmann “the Spirit of God does not constitute something alongside of, or merely inside of a person as an individual. Rather, the Spirit of God joins the human spirit at the core of its social reality. Human spirituality is the core of the self as it becomes a self through social relation with others.”⁵⁷ The destruction of the human spirituality (human relation with God) preceded the destruction of human sociality. The restoration of hope in human sociality was achieved when God through the mystery of the incarnation of His Son reestablished the human social spirituality for the benefits of the marriage institution and the family.

CONCLUSION

We have emphasized how the family has been subjected to many crises in the name of modernity and postmodernity. Some of these cultural exchanges have resulted in the diminishing value of the human health in relationships. The traditional bases of the marriage union and the families have been negatively skewed to irresponsible parenthood and genuine love in its down-sliding. The only hope for the marriage union and families is in the reawakening of human persons who are social beings, to the reality of biblical perspectives as providing the core social paradigm that underlies all cultural forms and practices. We conclude with Ray Anderson that; “...the moral and spiritual values that determine authentic family life are not relative to any particular culture but are intrinsic to the quality of human life that God intended. The church’s mission to families thus seeks to bring the good news of the kingdom of God as a redemptive and healing ministry to all people within their own cultural and ethnic identity.”⁵⁸

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⁵⁴*Lumen Gentium* 11

⁵⁵Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 87.

⁵⁶ Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, p. 262

⁵⁷J. Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), p. 263

⁵⁸Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, p. 264

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