

‘Amoris Laetitia’ represents an organic development of doctrine, ‘not a rupture.’

Gerard O’Connell April 08, 2016

At a Vatican press conference to present Pope Francis’ new exhortation on the family, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn said there is **“an organic development of doctrine”** in **“Amoris Laetitia”** (The Joy of Love) when compared to a similar text, **“Familiaris Consortio,”** (The Fellowship of the Family) written by St. John Paul II after the 1980 Synod on the Family.

The archbishop of Vienna’s words are highly significant, since he is considered an authority in such matters. He is one of the theological heavyweights in the College of Cardinals, was chief editor of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is very close to Benedict XVI and played an important role in the 2014 and 2015 synod of bishops. For all these reasons, Francis chose him, and not Cardinal Gerhard Müller, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to present his post-synodal exhortation on the family to the international media.

His statement on the development of doctrine came in response to a question as to whether paragraph No. 84 of **“Familiaris Consortio”** is still valid given that in footnote No. 351 of **“Amoris Laetitia,”** Pope Francis opened the possibility that divorced and remarried Catholics could, in certain circumstances, receive the sacraments of reconciliation and Communion. St. John Paul II had ruled out such a possibility, unless the couple—who for serious reasons cannot separate—**“take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence, that is, by abstinence from the acts proper to married couples.”**

The Austrian cardinal describes Francis’ opening as **“a classic case”** of **“the organic development of doctrine.”** He explained that here **“there is not a change [of doctrine],” but there is “the organic development of doctrine,”** along the lines that John Henry Newman had envisaged. He recalled that just as John Paul II had **“developed doctrine”** in **“Familiaris Consortio,”** so, too, Francis has done the same in **“Amoris Laetitia.”** He suggested that one might even say that this new development was in some way **“implicit”** in No. 84 of **“Familiaris Consortio,”** which looked at three different situations. In any case, the cardinal said, **“There is continuity in teaching here, but there is also something really new. There’s a real development [of doctrine], not a rupture.”**

Asked why Francis had inserted this significant change into a footnote (No. 351) and not into the main body of the text, the cardinal responded, **“I don’t know!”** He suggested, however, that the reason may have been because Francis—as he said on several occasions—thinks **“it’s a trap to focus on this single issue”** because one risks losing the wider vision of marriage that is being presented here. Cardinal Schönborn then expressed his own view that perhaps the time has come, 50 years after the Second Vatican Council, to look anew at **“how we understand the sacramental life.”**

In his presentation, the Austrian prelate expressed **“personal joy”** at **“the language and style”** used by Francis which, he said, contrasts with the usual **“ecclesial discourse on marriage and the family”** where there is often a tendency **“to discuss these realities of life on the basis of two separate tracks, the ‘regular’ where everything is according to the rules, and ‘irregular’ situations that represent a problem.”** He confessed that he found such discourse particularly difficult since he came from **“a patchwork family,”** and felt such talk **“may cause harm and can give the sensation of exclusion.”** He noted that Francis, on the other hand, reaches out to everyone, and speaks about all situations **“without cataloguing them,”** and **“with the eyes of Jesus that exclude no one.”**

In his presentation at the press conference chaired by Federico Lombardi, S.J., the cardinal reminded reporters that Francis has described Chapters 4 and 5 “as central, not only in terms of their position but also their content,” because “we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love.” Cardinal Schönborn recommended that everyone meditate on the fourth chapter, where Francis “speaks, with rare clarity, of the role of the passions, emotion, eros and sexuality in married and family life.” As a member of the Order of Preachers, the cardinal observed that “it is not by chance that Pope Francis reconnects here with St. Thomas Aquinas, who attributes an important role to the passions, while modern society, often puritanical, has discredited or neglected them.”

Earlier, the Dominican cardinal said he took personal joy in the fact that “Amoris Laetitia,” written by a Jesuit pope, “is profoundly Thomistic.” In actual fact St. Thomas Aquinas is cited 19 times in the text, according to Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, the secretary general of the synod of bishops, who was also on the panel presenting the text, together with an Italian married couple, Professors Francesco Miano and Giuseppina De Simone.

At another point in his presentation, the archbishop of Vienna highlighted the fact that Francis often returns to **the issue of trust in the conscience of the faithful**, and said: **“We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them”** (No. 37). But, the cardinal said, “The great question, obviously, is this: How do we form consciences? How do we arrive at what is the key concept of this great document, the key to correctly understanding Pope Francis’ intentions: ‘personal discernment,’ especially in difficult and complex situations?”

He recalled that **“discernment is a central concept in Ignatian exercises” which “must help to discern the will of God in the concrete situations of life.”**

He emphasized that discernment should be of help to **individuals “in reaching personal maturity: not forming automatons, externally conditioned and remote-controlled, but people who have matured in their friendship with Christ.”** He added that “only when this personal discernment is “mature is it also possible to arrive at ‘pastoral discernment’; which is important especially in those situations that fall short of what the Lord demands of us” (No. 6). He noted that “pastoral discernment” is at the heart of the eighth chapter of “Amoris Laetitia.”

Asked by a reporter what happens if a bishop is unable to make a discernment, Cardinal Schönborn explained that “discernment by its nature involves some uncertainty; the principles are clear but, as St. Thomas Aquinas said, the deeper we go the more difficult it is to discern.” He predicted that bishops and priests will have a lot of work to do as a result of this papal exhortation.

“Amoris Laetitia” embodies the pope’s vision of a listening church.

Kevin Ahern, April 08, 2016

Last October, Pope Francis reminded the members of the Synod on the Family that the church is called to be “a listening church...in which everyone has something to learn.” In both content and style, “Amoris Laetitia” embodies this vision of a dialogical church. The text itself is the result of a historic process of listening. Departing from previous customs, Francis facilitated what he describes as the “Synod process,” a two-year long effort that involved two assemblies of bishops and several efforts to solicit the input of lay people. This, he writes, “proved both impressive and illuminating” and enabled him “to appreciate more fully the problems faced by families throughout the world” (No. 4).

The pope’s inductive approach is visible in the many sources that he draws upon. Like “Laudato Si’,” “Amoris Laetitia” departs from traditional papal teaching, which generally only referenced the Bible, magisterial documents and the teachings of saints. In dialogue with these doctrinal sources, Francis develops a pastoral theology of family life that explicitly draws from some surprising sources.

In addition to the scriptural sources embedded throughout the text, Francis brings in dozens of additional sources in the 391 footnotes to the text. Unsurprisingly, 132 of the references are to the final texts (“Relatio Synodi”) that were drafted by the 2014 and 2015 Synods of Bishops. Throughout the text, Francis references his own writing over 80 times, including nearly 50 references to his catechesis sessions. References to these and other pastoral addresses allow “Amoris Laetitia” to offer a more personal tone, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5, which he hopes will be more useful to families (see No. 7).

For example, in No. 104, he quotes a catechesis from last May to advise families “never to let the day end without making peace in the family.... Just a little caress, no words are necessary. But do not let the day end without making peace in your family.” Or later in No. 133, he draws from his address to a group of families to emphasize the importance of “Three words: ‘Please’, ‘Thank you’, ‘Sorry.’ Three essential words!” At times, Chapters 4 and 5 almost read like an excellent wedding homily.

In terms of previous popes, the teachings of St. John Paul II, and in particular “Familiaris Consortio” (1981), are referenced the most with over 50 citations in the text. This does not include the 14 references to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. This strong dialogue with John Paul II’s work is noteworthy as some commentators in the coming days will point to some of the developments or tensions between “Amoris Laetitia” and “Familiaris Consortio.”

Like “Laudato Si’,” “Amoris Laetitia” also makes strategic references to statements from bishops’ conferences in Spain, Korea, Argentina, Mexico, Columbia, Chile, Australia, Italy and Kenya—one conference from each continent, with two others from South America.

“Amoris Laetitia” reflects the pope’s Jesuit spirituality in its call for a more listening and discerning church on the question of family. While he only references the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola three times, Ignatian spirituality is deeply present as he proposes a pastoral response. Chapter 8, for example, invites the church to adopt a “process of accompaniment and discernment,” which would include assisting families in “an examination of conscience” (No. 300).

Francis also includes dozens of references to documents produced by Vatican offices, Thomas Aquinas and St. Augustine. For me, however, the most surprising references in this text are those to non-Catholic sources. In No. 129 he references a scene from the “film *Babette’s Feast*, when the generous cook receives a grateful hug” as an example of the need to cultivate and share love. In No. 149, Francis references the “teachings of some Eastern masters who urge us to expand our consciousness.” Several times, he draws from the work of poets and writers from the last century, including Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Antonin-Gilbert Sertillanges, O.P., Gabriel Marcel and Mario Benedetti.

But it is perhaps his inclusion of two Protestant figures that will surprise and inspire many. In his reflection on the meaning of love, Francis offers an extensive and powerful quote in No. 188 from Martin Luther King Jr., who the pope describes as meeting “every kind of trial and tribulation with fraternal love.” Later, in Chapter 9, Francis quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer in laying out a deeper spirituality of “exclusive and free love.”

By engaging the experiences and wisdom of sources beyond the traditional reference points of Scripture, popes and saints, Francis models in “*Amoris Laetitia*” the type of listening and discerning church that he believes can address many of the problems facing the family today.

Pope Francis redirects mission of John Paul II institute on marriage, family

Gerard O'Connell, September 19, 2017

As a follow-up to the publication of “*Amoris Laetitia*” and the two synods on the family, Pope Francis has refounded the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, giving it a broader mandate than it originally had to ensure that it does not just focus on moral and sacramental theology, but also takes account of the biblical, dogmatic and historical dimensions, as well as contemporary challenges.

Francis did so by a *motu proprio*, dated Sept. 8, which the Vatican released today in Latin and Italian. The decree, known by its Latin title, “*Summa familiae cura*,” announced the establishment of the “John Paul II Pontifical Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences.” It replaces the original one set up by his Polish predecessor after the 1980 synod on the family, and the publication of the post-synod exhortation, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” which was called the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family.

While acknowledging that the original institute carried out important work in past decades, Francis said the 2014 and 2015 synods have brought a renewed awareness of “the new pastoral challenges” regarding the family “to which the Christian community is called to respond.” In other words, much has changed in these past 36 years since John Paul II set up the original institute in 1981. While the institute, with its branches in different continents, researched, taught and promoted the teaching on marriage and the family that came out of the 1980 synod, there is a need for this new institute because of the anthropological and cultural changes that have taken place in the world, which “require an analytical and diversified approach, and does not allow us to limit ourselves to practices of pastoral (ministry) and mission that reflect forms and models of the past.” That wider focus and vision of the family is reflected in the mandate for the new institute, which has “*Amoris Laetitia*” as its lodestar.

The mandate for the new institute has “*Amoris Laetitia*” as its lodestar. “With a clear proposal to remain faithful to the teaching of Christ, we must look with the intelligence of love and with wise realism at the reality of the family today, in all its complexity, and in its lights and shadows,” the pope said.

Like its predecessor, the new theological institute will have “a special relation with the ministry and magisterium of the Holy See” and will maintain its institutional links with the Pontifical Lateran University. It will also be closely connected to the Holy See through the Congregation for Catholic Education, the Pontifical Academy for Life and the new Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life. The institute, which comes into effect immediately, will offer students courses leading to a diploma, a license and a doctorate in marriage and family sciences.

By amplifying the institute's scope in making it a “theological” institute that is also dedicated to human “sciences,” the pope said, the institute’s work will study in a “deeper and more rigorous way—the truth of revelation and the wisdom of the tradition of faith.”

“We must be informed and passionate interpreters of the wisdom of faith” in a context in which individuals find less support than they had in the past from social structures, relationships and family.

“In the clear proposal of remaining faithful to the teaching of Christ, we must, therefore, look with the intelligence of love and with wise realism, at the reality of families today in all of their complexity, in their light and darkness,” the pope wrote.