

UNDER THE HEADING OF “synodality” and “synodal process”, the Catholic Church has made initial, but significant, efforts to bring the Christian faith – after two thousand years of history – to the thinking, attitudes, and mindset of humanity which is confronted today with an increasingly digitalized and globalized world. The first attempt to overcome almost two hundred years of antimodernist sentiment was made by the Second Vatican Council, which expressed its resolute desire that it speak “not only to the sons of the Church and to all who invoke the name of Christ, but to the whole of humanity” and therefore “yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today” (GS 2). However, the desired renewing of the church’s *modus vivendi et operandi* was not fully achieved and slipped back into old patterns in the post-conciliar decades. With Pope Francis a new spirit has emerged in the Catholic Church after a long period of deadlock and lethargy. Retrieving the often neglected or even ignored seeds of Vatican II and settling essential issues which have not yet been addressed are some of his main tasks. Questions of ecclesiology, especially the concept and structure of the church in its theological and practical applications, are certainly of prime importance. But items of marriage and sexuality are no less on the agenda. The articles of this issue of *Marriage, Families & Spirituality*, at first sight a compilation of loose papers, can be read in this context: they provide modest, but helpful, contributions to the challenges which the church has to master.

The most noticeable contribution is perhaps the article “Conscience in *Amoris Laetitia* and the Responses of Women in Oceania” by two women scholars. As a theologian and sociologist at the University of Newcastle in Australia, *Tracy McEwan* collaborated on the *International Survey of Catholic Women* (ISCW) which was published this year; *Rocío Figueroa Alvear* is very familiar with the situation of the church in Oceania where she teaches systematic theology in the Catholic Theological College in Auckland, New Zealand. The perspectives of Catholic women in Oceania are the subject of their research, but their findings are more striking than expected: Pope Francis’s Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* has certainly helped the church “rejuvenate the primacy of conscience and adopt a less authoritarian, more pastoral perspective on the challenges of family life”. However, among Catholic women in Oceania the conviction still prevails that female agency stumbles over compliance to the church doctrine and law that the magisterium imposes on them.

*Amoris laetitia* is also the subject of the following articles. Although Pope Francis has provided for a “new spirit” with regard to sexual morality and conjugal theology, the document is not the end but rather the beginning of further development of church teaching and life. *Wellars Uwamahoro*, a doctoral student at KU Leuven, reopens the post-conciliar debate about birth control and contraception and sees in Francis’s exhortation a middle way between the sexual rigorism of *Humanae*

*vitae* and John Paul II's "theology of the body" on the one side and the laxism of the Neo-Malthusian ideology on the other side. According to him, there is no "rupture" which characterizes AL but rather "a harmonious evolution and creative continuity with the teaching of previous popes". More critical, in the true sense of the word, is the article on "family spirituality" by *Manfred Riegger* who is senior assistant professor of religious education at the University of Augsburg in Germany. AL has its own chapter on family spirituality, but it conforms more to the objective rules of church teaching than it responds to the challenges of a quickly changing time and culture. But something similar can be said of the academic field of religious education: research about family spirituality and religiosity still lacks a sustainable approach to maintaining and promoting what distinguishes families today, namely the experience of mutual commitment, security, and mutual acceptance.

Vatican II has rightly emphasized that the faithful can only "be brought to a purer and more mature living of the faith" (GS 62) if the church takes the tradition as the basis for a deeper investigation into the sources. Likewise, the insights and findings of the human sciences have "an important part to play in manifesting and interpreting both what the church actually believes and what it ought to believe and do in response to what it believes". That is the argument of *Michael G. Lawler* and *Todd A. Salzman*, both Amelia and Emil Graff Chair Professors of Catholic Theology at Creighton University in Omaha, USA, who refer to the theological principles of "reception" and *sensus fidei et fidelium* to respond constructively to the long-term process of "non-reception" of sexual issues such as homosexuality and contraception.

*Patrick Connelly*, a canonist and Associate Professor in Theology and Religious Studies at Mary Immaculate College at the University of Limerick, Ireland, carves out the "Current Canonical Legislation of the Catholic Church on Marriage" in both the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and the 1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*. "Major Changes in the Last Century" concerns to a lesser extent the differences between the Latin and the Oriental legacy on marriage which were both influenced by Vatican II; more open and subject to debate is the question whether the post-conciliar legislation has fully implemented the theology of marriage of GS.

What happens to the countless "love locks" which decorate the bridges in so many cities today as signs of durable and unbreakable commitment? With this question *Bernhard Sill*, retired professor of moral theology at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in Germany, opens his essay. Yes, indeed, divorce has become an integral part of the longing for eternal conjugal love! And yet, "humans are finite beings, and therefore the love they are able to give is also finite. Much of what people do is and remains fragmentary. The enactment of their love also is and remains fragmentary. Whoever despises the fragment because it is not the whole does injustice to the fragment. Half is much, and love has already reached a good measure – by no means a mediocre 'mean measure' – when it is half successful."

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