

THEOLOGY AND FAMILY IN THE AFRICAN CONTEXT



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TRINITY A MODEL OF LIFE IN AFRICA

Anthony Nwachukwu

Abstract: This year's theology week's focus on the family is both a response to the call of the Holy Father, John Paul II, on theologians in Africa to "work out the theology of the Church as family" and a timely call to reflect, and address the challenges confronting the world today. This paper, responding to both, beyond the social sciences definition of family as a social institution, sees it as a social reality with a supernatural destiny. The paper argues therefore that the church's doctrine of the trinity is a model family, it provides us with an ontological base upon which we could build a sound theology of the family. This understanding provides responses to much of the many upheavals that plague the family today, particularly in poorer nations. The paper assumes that insight drawn from the manner of God's own being would help us model our life and action in the family in a manner similar to that of God, the Trinity. It contends that the African sense of the family, illumined by the light of the Gospel, could be a rich theological asset for making the Gospel incarnate on African soil.

Introduction

The little work, "The Trinity" by Karl Rahner, has remained a theological masterpiece, not only for its retrieval of the Trinitarian discourse in contemporary Catholic theology, but more importantly because it has remained a driving force for doing theology in context. Its statement that the mystery of faith is also a mystery to

be lived (Rahner, K. 1998. 39), has become a theological paradigm which suggests a faith-praxis dynamic. Thus theology is no more seen just as discourse about/of God; it is also about us: our existence, our relationships, and our final destiny.

This paper brings the Christian doctrine of the Trinity to bear on that area of Christian life that is most menaced by the great upheavals of our time (GS, 4; 47) as proposed by the central theme of this year's Theology Week Conference. It makes a two-fold response: it is, at the same time, a contribution to this year's Conference theme as it is also a response to some of the tensions arising from the experience of the family today as requested by the Holy Father, Pope Francis (Relatio Synodi, 2014. n.62) and a response still, to the invitation of the late Holy Father, St. John Paul II, on theologians in Africa to "work out the theology of the church as family" (EIA, n.63). As such, it is a fruit of theological reflection, but one which looks at today's challenges on the family from the perspective of Trinitarian doctrine of the church.

Much importance is attached here to the family as a tabernacle of life and as an ark of love as the paper considers marriage as a doorway or gateway to a more fully human society and the most sublime of all services: giving life because the Triune God, whose image we bear, is a life-giving Being. It hypothesizes that the real cause of the problems befalling the family and indeed the human society today is the forgetfulness of Trinitarian experience in the family setting, especially in the contemporary time. It therefore suggests that a return to Trinitarian spirituality would help families to respond more creatively to their vocation and remain the leaven for the dough of God.

What is the Family? Definitions and Theories

"Family" as a theme is discussed in a wide variety of subject areas, ranging from the social and human sciences down to cultural and core ecclesiastical disciplines. All these agree on the nature of the family as a social reality. Information from ecclesiastical disciplines adds that the family is a social reality with an eternal destiny; one that is intrinsically connected to its author, God and His redeeming mission in the world.

These various perspectives acknowledge the role of the family in human society, especially, as centre for life and love, the first school, and the first church while functioning as the basic cell or the basic social unit. One definition says that families are groups related by kinship, residence, or close emotional attachments and they display four systemic features – intimate interdependence, selective boundary maintenance, ability to adapt to change and maintain their identity over time, and performance of the tasks listed below (Mattessich, P., and Hill, R. 1987). Shorter defines family as "minimal effective group of relatives by blood and /or marriage and analogous groups" (1998, p. 83). By analogous groups he means those members who are not related by blood or marriage, e.g. adopted children.

The social sciences furnish us with ample information on the importance of the family institution in the social structure. According to their findings, the social structure is comprised of a chain of interconnected institutions of which the family is the centre. Unlike Freud (1950) and Trotter (1916), Malinowski (1961) argued that the original unit of human organization is the family. According to him, "common sociability develops by the extension of the family bonds and from no other sources." Being at the centre, whatever affects it affects all others. Hence, the study by

Edward Goldsmith (1976) concludes that the decay in the family institution in modern times has brought about the degeneration of the society into "an alienated agglomeration of disconnected individuals".

Functionalists explain that the family, a basic social cell, plays a number of social roles for the society. Murdock, Parsons, Brigitte and Peter Berger, among others, are outstanding in that regard. George Murdock (1965) established the universality of the family, especially in stable societies. After studying 250 societies, he came out with the conclusion that the family has four basic functions: sexual, reproductive, economic and educational. Regarding the first, marriage legitimates sexual relations between a man and a woman and limits the extent to which sexual relations can take place outside the bond. This stabilizes the society by containing sexual impulses to legitimate relationships. He claims that economic functions, on the other hand, are most readily and satisfactorily achieved by persons living together. Murdock favours the continuing existence of the family because, "No society has succeeded in finding an adequate substitute for the nuclear family, to which it might transfer these functions". No other form of the social unit can serve as its alternative. Again, he presents it as a harmonious institution.

Talcott Parsons, on the other hand, notes that the family has two basic functions: the primary socialization of children, and the stabilization of adult personalities of the population of society. The first takes place in two stages: during the early years of childhood when children are taught norms and social roles within the family; and subsequently when the child is influenced by other agencies such as school, peer groups. Socialization involves the internalization of society's culture and the structuring of personality. Only the family can effectively carry out these two

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functions. Thus, he idealizes the picture of the family as Murdock did, agreeing with Murdock that it has no alternatives.

Brigitte and Peter Berger argue that while the family is not ideal, only the bourgeois families can effectively meet the demands of a modern society. They trace their origin to the bourgeois family to the 19th century Europe, especially those of Germany and Britain. At this time, the family became child-centred, developed moral codes, placed an emphasis on economic success and became religious. According to them, alternatives to the family do not perform these functions. Yet, bourgeois family creates individuals that can take a stand against society even though they respect the basic values of society (Berger, B and Berger, P.L., 1983: 122).

These theories affirm that the family does noted functions in the society. These functions are prevalent in all cultures irrespective of the different worldviews among different peoples. African societies and the Church both avow these roles. Each extols marriage and the family for their important roles in child bearing and rearing, for instance.

Understanding the Family in Africa: African Studies

Generally, “family” throws shades of meaning to the various peoples and cultures of the world. In Africa, for instance, the family is an important concept (Bourdanné, 2010). It connotes a chain of interrelationships between individuals and their social environment. This means that the family is at the centre of every social communication chain; and all cultural and social practices find their connection in the family. Its overarching importance is pointed out thus: “each person in African traditional life lives in or as a part of the family” (Mbiti, 1975: 175). Here “family” transcends the

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individual nuclear family of man, wife and children; the African is a member of a wider family community (Bourdanné, 2010).Kisembo(1998: 202 – 203) adds that “the family community was the fundamental element of the African, the basic sphere of action. through which he became integrated with the larger, human community.... He always acted from within the sphere of the family”. This family refers to that “minimal effectible group of relatives by connected blood and/or marriage and analogous groups” (Shorter, 1998: 83). The African family therefore is “a community that extends itself beyond even those whom we remember or with whom we are conscious of being connected” (Ogbonnaya, A.O., 1998.4). This connectedness is best illustrated by the use of a genogram, that is, diagram that describes family relationships and their structure. These relationships and structures highlight the linkage/connectedness of the members which characterize the essence of the family or family hood. This received a big thrust from John Paul II who exhorted theologians to develop a theology of the church as family.

The family,as a social reality, has its own well specified structure. This structure contains elements such as communication forms, rules, pattern of resolving conflicts, structures of power and role sharing for solving of problems, completion of tasks and attainment of set family goals. But distinct from other (forms of) social systems, the family is built upon emotions like patience, love, forgiveness and endurance. These enable the family to build a foundation of understanding and acceptance between family members when communication is done properly (Candanedo, J. 2014). According to Candanedo, the family is a natural social structure which, functioning out of the complexity of its own set processes and properties, does not allow any of its members to

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function completely in isolation. Each member influences the system and affects every other part of the social network.

The premium placed on this connectedness has made the family become a metaphor which is today applied in various senses and subjects. In Africa, dead and living beings form one family. Onwubiko, Idowu, Ekennia, Ejizu and other numerous African scholars attest that the dead still remain important members of the family. Among Ndigbo, accomplished life consists in rejoining one's dead ancestors.

In Christianity, theologians speak of God as a family: this analogy is employed more specifically to the Trinity. The Trinity is called a "family;" such concepts, as "Father" and "Son", are relational terms (CCC, 255) which are always associated with family and family life. The church too, is called family of God. This became highlighted in post-Vatican II Council ecclesiology. This title has been adopted by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria as the appropriate description for the church in Nigeria. Indeed, this tag has made a widespread impression all over the Catholic Church giving the church a new thrust in Catechesis.

The Catholic Church on the Family

Marriage and family, a complex whole (Pius XI taught that marriage is ordained "as the principle and foundation of domestic society"; *Casti Connubii*, n. 1), constitute part of the cardinal teachings and practices of the church that find expression in bold lines in the pages of the Sacred Writ and other sources of faith. Leo XIII's *Arcanum* (1880:5) had earlier explained that marriage is "the beginning and foundation of the family union". Its divine origin (cf Gen 1 & 2; St. Augustine, *De Bono Coniugii*; St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theolo Suppl. Quesit. 49. 1*; Pius XI, *Casti Connubii*, nn

5, 6; & LG 48), ends (Gens 2; Council of Trent, Session XXIV; St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theol. P. III Supplem. 9:49.3; Casti Connubii nn, 10 citing Augustine: Di Bono Coniugii, 24.32), symbolism (– the covenantal love between God and Israel, Hos 2, Jer. 3:6-13, Ezk 16; 23; Is 54 and of Christ and his church, Eph. 5:27; GS. n.48) and sacramentality (CIC, 1056), are attested to in the deposits of faith. The 1983 Code (CIC) defines it as that “Covenant by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life and which of its own very nature is ordained to the well-being of spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children” (CIC 1055 & 1). It is a sacrament (CIC 1506; cf. GS, nn.47 & 48) by which God continues to populate the family of mankind and the church (The Roman Missal, Preface I). Thus at marriage, individuals come together to form “that intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state” (LG 48), is lived out in the family.

The family, a usual social phenomenon, contemporaneous with human existence (CCC, 1605), assumed a new significance and status with Christ, who chose to be born in the bosom of the Holy family (CCC, 1655). Amid insights from the social and biological sciences, the church teaches that the Christian family becomes “Islands of Christian life” (CCC, 1655), centre of living radiant faith and “ecclesia domestica” (domestic church, CCC, 1656). To buttress this teaching, the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, is called a model family.

The 1980 Synod Fathers, in agreement with the teaching of the Vatican II Council, maintain that marriage and the family have a place within the plan of God. In the Post-Synodal Exhortation, Familiaris Consortio, the Synod Fathers taught that family is one of the ways of realizing the vocation of the human person (serving as a

symbol of the communion between God and his people (n.12), Christ and his church (n.13); it is “the foundation of the wider community of the family” (n.14) which, itself, is a complex of interpersonal relationships... fatherhood and motherhood, filiations and fraternity; through it each human person is introduced into the “human family” and into the “family of God” which is the church” (n.15, 18). *Familiaris consortio* sums up the role of the Christian family into four general tasks:

- forming a community of persons
- serving life
- participating in the development of society
- sharing in the life and mission of the church (n.17 – 64).

John Paul II summarizes these by saying that the “future of humanity passes by way of the family” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86. Cf. also *Familiaris Consortio*, 75; *Christifideles Laici*, 40). Thus, any activity that sets itself up against the family is therefore a direct attack, not just on the mere social institution (see Goldsmith, 1976), but on human life and society.

Experience of the Family Today: An Ethic of Predation

Available evidences and information from the social sciences show that the cohesive nature of married life and the family is becoming very loose. Many social scientists and observers like Kisembo (1998), O’Donovan, (2000) and many others have reported that society has been undergoing a process of profound changes affecting all aspects of its traditional life. A lot of these changes directly affect the family which is “the logical outcome of marriage” (Ayisi, 1992: 15). They report of a large scale anti-life current blowing on a rapid scale at both global and local scenes. Its prevalence is measurable by the number of nations that have adopted this culture of predation. An instance from the global stage

is the controversial 2011 health policy of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the Obama government which, in its affordable and preventive healthcare packages, required health insurance to cover contraceptive methods, sterilization procedures, abortion (Fraga, B. 2013). The rising number of divorce cases, single-parent families, promotion of permissiveness from popular culture and commercial interest groups added to pressures from the political elite on governments in poorer nations to legalize gay unions, are all indications that the family, life and the basic cell of the society, is under heavy threat. Coextensively, this means nipping life in the bud by attacking the human generative channels. In simple terms, this means that life and the future of the human race too are all under threat. The claim of individual freedom and personal choice as reasons for these pressures means that the human race is justifying an unprecedented blunder, leaving the life generative process at the whims and caprices of individual consciences.

Implications for the Church and for Africa

The same currents are forcing a crack on the walls of Catholic life and teaching on family and marriage today (cf. Stille, A., 2014). An affirmation of this pressure on the Catholic Church could be deduced from the mid-term draft report from the 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops reads:

Homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community: are we capable of welcoming these people, guaranteeing to them a fraternal space in our communities (McCarthy, E. 2015).

This portrays in a striking manner the extent at which the various upheavals threatening the family have forced themselves on Catholic life and doctrine.

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In a globalized culture, with the faster means of communication, whatever appears in a given corner of the “village” is better not ignored in another part of the globe. This leaves us to ask: what could be the import of such pressures on Africans who hold the family and procreation in high esteem? Already, indicators abound: commercial jingles, political debates and news from the mass media coupled with discoveries from the social sciences fill our news channels with information indicating the rate at which the collapse of the family, a social institution, is becoming a dominant fashion in contemporary culture. In a continent ravaged by HIV endemic, inadequate healthcare, poverty and disease, are we left with any option on how to defend ourselves when confronted with those forces of death, given the rising number of divorce cases, of single-parent families, promotion of permissiveness by popular culture and commercial interest groups.

The Prophetic Church

The church’s prophetic mandate compels her to teach and to guide those who are entrusted to her care. She would be missing her mark if she fails to play the prophet in present historical situation. Appointed and made a watchman, the Lord charges the church as He did to Ezekiel: “If you do not tell the people as I command you....” (Ezekiel, 3: 17 – 18; 33:8).

As early as 1930, Pius XI reported in his celebrated encyclical, *Casti Connubii*, that there were already cracks on the wall, and that outside influences were then impacting on the church’s marital disciplines negatively. As Holy Father, compelled by pastoral solicitude, he had to “speak” on the nature and dignity of marriage, on the advantages accruing from it to both family and human society and on the errors and vices opposed to conjugal union

(*Casti Connubii*, n.4). His intent was to keep the flock from poisoned pastures (n.3) and to point out remedies. Paul VI faced the storm for standing his ground *innomineChristi* in *Humane Vitae* (David Kelly, 2012).

The 1980 and 2014/15 Synods of Bishops are all efforts towards implementation of teachings of the Vatican II Council on marriage and the family. Prior to these Synods, the Vatican II Council Fathers spoke of the “signs of the time” (GSn.4), and number marriage and the family among the specific areas of Christian life in need of special urgency (GS, 46). They acknowledged that the family and marriage are facing new tensions due to what the Council Fathers called “The critical and swift – upheavals” caused largely by deep-seated changes both within the individual and the social order (cf G.S. n.4; 5-10). These constituted the “signs of the time”. The indicators, according to the Council, include polygamy, “the plague of divorce, the so-called free love, married love... dishonoured by selfishness, hedonism, and unlawful contraceptive practice” (GS 47). The 1980 Synod Bishops (Fathers), convinced that the family is beset by many profound and rapid changes more than any other institution, all impacting society and culture negatively, set to make some clarifications beginning with a retrieval of Catholic doctrine on marriage. They acknowledged that there are certain families today who have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or doubtful and almost unaware of the ultimate meaning and truth of conjugal and family life” (*Familiaris Consortio*, n.I). The 2014 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in preparation for a fuller Ordinary Synod in 2015, remarks that due to anthropological and cultural changes in our times, (*Lineamenta*, n.4) marriage has become a complex social reality requiring courageous pastoral choices that far exceeds “theoretical message with no connection to people’s real problems” (*Lineamenta*, n 31,

Relatio, n 32). This is the concern of our time; this is the *status questionis* on family and marriage today.

Due largely to the deepened changes and the sophisticated nature of the factors of change in the social construct, questions on the family and the marriage institution have reached a new hiatus today. What was considered as mere “disorientation” some fifty (50) years ago has become a real force to contest. With human freedom and rights as the big frame, these today receive the patronage of the law and the state. Pope Francis describes the situation this way: “Evening falls on our assembly. It is the hour at which one willingly returns home to meet at the same table in the depth of affection, of the good that has been done and received.... It is also the weightiest hour for one who finds himself face to face with his own loneliness, in the twilight of sheltered dreams and broken plans....” (Lineamenta, 2014: 1).

All Magisterial statements on the family, ever since the Council, and *Humanac Vitae* inclusive, have consistently avowed the presence of “disfigurements” and their ever “obscuring effect on marriage and the family. Each acknowledges their increasing sophistication and grip over Christ’s faithful over time. Today, the *Relatio Synodii* and the accompanying *Lineamenta* point to a new approach – pastoral consideration towards the persons (actors and victims) of these disfigurements (cf *Relatio*, nos 25-27). Though described as wounded families (persons who are separated, divorced and not remarried, divorced and remarried, and single – parent families, divorced and abandoned, cf nos. 25-27, 42, including those with homosexual tendencies) who participate in the church’s life “in an incomplete manner” (n.25), “her weakest children who have lost their way and are now in the midst of storm” and as such bear signs of wounded and lost love (n.28); and

concerned that their "wine of joy" has become less plentiful (Lineamenta, n 1), does in no way mean that the church should lose sight of the patrimony of faith and inner tenacity of her prophetic mandate. The truth of salvation must not be compromised, it is inalienable. As an alternative approach, there are other possibilities, the most attractive to reason being healing from the root. There is need to heal the problem from the root which must begin with an honest search for the real causes of the rupture, in both their remote and proximate contexts.

Healing from the Root.

The above situation as noted by these magisterial statements compels us to adopt this approach in the hope that it will lead the church to a pastoral "eureka" by proper direction. Our basic questions are: what are the likely causes of these disfigurements? Has the church any answer to them or any light to shed in this regard? Noting what the church has done so far over this overall situation of the family in our time and the persistence of the disfigurements, what could be the path that must be towed should we mean to address the problems? Where do we turn to for effective sustainable solution?

The historical trajectory that brought the marriage journey along this dark alley, says John Paul II, started with the "philosophes" who held that all communities were formed by social contract, by arrangements freely entered into by consenting adults. Having thus abstracted the person from integral ties to the family, J. Michael Muller adds, the Enlightenment forerunners facilitated its redefinition. This focuses on isolating the person from every collective entity, including the family. The individual becomes a self-contained reality, with reference neither to family nor any community outside the self; the search for one's own individual

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identity becomes life's principal concern. Collective institutions, especially the family, are held to constrain the autonomous and sovereign individual (J. Michael Miller: 1996). Whenever this view is accepted, the family is redefined as just "one of many freely chosen and freely disposable mechanisms whose purpose is the fostering of the individual's project of self-attainment" (Berger, B and Berger, P.L., 1983: 122). "Every other institution must bow before the insatiable claims of the individual. We are only now reaping its bitter fruit. When the primary reality in society becomes the individual, the family ceases to be its primary community" (J. Michael Miller, 1996). It now becomes only "a project of individuals", susceptible to redefinition, reconstruction and termination "replacement" at will. Being a family has been replaced by participating in a personal life-style, dependent upon the unpredictability and instability of free choice (J. Michael Miller, 1996). This is as spiteful to the gospel as it is strange to Africa where "I am" because "we are"; where the individual lives and thrives and accomplishes his destiny in the bosom of the family. The consequences of this ethic of predation (the cataclysmic menace to life channels and its generating process) in the contemporary society have been decried by John A. Hardon. He notes:

If there is one phenomenon that characterizes the modern world, especially the modern western world, it is the breakdown of family life. The most rampant divorce rate of human history, which in some cities in the United States has reached a rate approaching 100%. One large city unnamed, recently had a divorce rate of 500%, five divorces for one marriage that year. The national American rate is well over 50% and climbing constantly.

This impacts gravely on the church – the breakdown of community religious life and the disintegration of once flourishing religious institutes in western society as obvious consequences. Beyond this, there is also breakdown of cohesive parochial life where parishes once lived and worked together as clusters of united families (Hardon, 1998).

The Trinity, Our Theological Door

In as much as the situation requires adequate response, we ask anew, where do we turn to for effective sustainable solution? Before taking off, we distance ourselves from the “if you cannot beat them, join them” syndrome. The church must always be alive to her prophetic mission here in the world as Christ’s “*portelumière*” (light bearer) in every age. John Paul II (1992) built a legacy in his relentless efforts towards this prophetic mandate by defending the divine plan for marriage and the family, “which can and must always be recognized as God’s “gift” to humanity,” a legacy we must not allow to crumble.

The conviction here is that “a problem identified,” as the African adage goes, is a problem half solved” brings us relief. In this respect, we discover that there is a disconnection from the fabric that gives us meaning and holds us in being: the Trinity, God’s own manner of subsisting.

The Trinity is the specifically Christian doctrine of God, which stands at the centre of the Christian faith (cf. CCC, 234; Catherine Mowry Lacugna, 1995). This doctrine, according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), says that there are three persons in one God. Yet, systematic theology interprets and defines the Trinity

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in the light of its relevance and implications for human persons as members of the same family or community. Thus, beyond doctrinal retrievals, theology looks at God, employing anthropomorphic resources such as images as human language and imageries like family, community or even church, that is, concepts which, in this case, underline the reality of God as an interrelational being. The goal of such hermeneutics is to extract from such teachings lessons that would illumine human hearts as they relate with one another as members of the same family, as *imago dei*.

In this light, the real problem as outlined in the aforementioned indicators on family and marriage, far beyond the “anthropological and cultural changes” (Lineamenta, n.4, Relatio. n.5) and the “deep-seated” “social changes” (G.S, 5 – 10), is according to Leonardo Boff, is the disintegration of the Trinitarian experience. This is all about the “neglect of the principal, essential perspective of the mystery of the triune God, which is communion among the divine persons” (Leonardo Boff, 1996: 77). This started with the adoption of individualism.

Communion constitutes both the essence of God and, at the same time, the concrete dynamic of every being. It is indeed, a special characteristic of God (the Trinity), as evidenced in the deposits of faith. It is an experience of mutual self-sharing and giving among the Trinitarian persons. This shows that, in the words of Zižioulas, each person of the Trinity is “being in-relation” and a “communion of love” outpoured towards otherness.

The scholastics dwelt so much on Trinitarian relations. These relationships determined the distinctness of each person of the Trinity. The words Begetter, Begotten and Spiration are relational concepts showing in indisputable terms the asymmetrical

relationship within the Godhead. This got a Conciliar stamp at the Council of Florence (1442) in the principle, 'everything in God is one except where there is opposition of relationship'. Further explained, the persons are who they are by virtue their relationship to each other (LaCugna, 1995). This doctrine of Trinitarian relations has its foundation in the divine *monarchia* which is talks of the one nature (*substantia, ousios, essence*) shared co-equally and co-eternally by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as it is equally the foundation of the mutual relations among the divine persons.

In the East, Athanasius and the Cappadocians introduced another relational interpretation of the Trinity. Athanasius used "reciprocal delight" to show that God is inherently relational and generative. The height of their doctrine of God would be their doctrine of perichoresis: the life of mutual co-inherence, mutual self-opening and transparency among the persons of the Trinity. We cannot indeed conceive of the Father or the Son apart from their relationship with each other (St. Basil. De Spiritu Sancto 6.14). The three thus help, open up to, and depend upon each other in mutuality of love and self accomplishment (Carroll, M.O. 131, 140).

Augustine's search for *vestigiatrinitatis* led him first to think of love as the best description of Trinitarian life and relationship. For him, the Father is the Lover; the Son is the Beloved while the Holy Spirit in their Mutual Love (De Trin-128.8-12). Richard of St. Victor would re-invent it by an exploration of interpersonal love in his task to use this love to demonstrate the Trinity. Basing his (Richard's) thought on the frame of the fullness and perfection in God, in its highest form, God must possess charity in its highest form (De Trinitate 5.7), supreme charity in turn, requires a consummation of the mutual love of the lover and the beloved with

a third co-equal one. Thus, the fulfillment of mutual love is not just love (*dilectio*) but shared love (*condilectus*), all three share one love each in a model unique to a person (De Trin. 5 – 16). For Richard, human love is an image of God in creation because, the human self-transcending love provides an image of the exemplar which is the intra-Trinitarian love. This thought of Richard is excellent for both marital union and the conjugal act. Benedict XVI commented on this in his weekly catechesis of 25 November 2009. He told his audience that the divine life is a community of persons, characterized by mutual giving and receiving between two persons which finds its perfection in the creation of a third (Benedict XVI, 2009). This has great implications for the life engendering role of the family and couples in marriage state. Its sublimest point would be, like the family of Nazareth, presenting the new life to God in a unique expression of thanksgiving. In many ways, the family reflects the Trinity. In the Trinity, there is obvious diversity of persons. Despite their personal distinctness, there is unbounded unity (CCC, 253; cf., Constantinople II, 553: DS 421), in God everything is one where there is no relative opposition (Council of Florence, 1442: DS 1330). The three work together as a family. The unity of substance is the basis for their equality while mutual coinherence characterized in the most perfect way, their interpersonal relationship.

The communion of life existing within the Trinitarian community is communicated to mankind in the Trinitarian missions and extra (in economy). This communication has creation as its first instance. God who subsists in loving relationship calls all things into being. In this act, He extends His love and communion to the created "other". Zizioulas comments here that faith in the Trinity is the model for the proper relation between communion (Trinity) and otherness (personal distinction) as one who begets, who engenders

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life and who shares his being unreservedly. Christ's incarnation reveals to us this image that God is a being in communion. The definitive purpose of such a revelation is to let us (human beings) have a share in that relationship of communion with the Triune God. He took the first dance-step, sharing in our humanity and thus opened the way for a dialogue and communion with the Trinitarian God. The "life that has its origin in the Father and is given to us in the Son, is made our interior personal possession by the Holy Spirit;

That which has its origin in the Father and its centre in the Son reaches its completion in the Holy Spirit" (Kasper,1984:198). The Spirit expresses in a personal manner the giftness and love of the Father and the Son. He is the "Reciprocal Love" of the Father and the Son. John Paul II highlights this love-gift image of the Holy Spirit by calling the Holy Spirit the "Personal-Love" and the "Love-Gift" within the Triune God (1986. *Dominium of Vivificantem*, n.10). He is the principle of communion and unity in the world and in the church. "Wherever human beings struggle to preserve unity of families and communities and unity between societies and nations and do so in a way that does not suppress personal distinction they are in fact transcribing the Trinity's life into their moral commitment" (O'Collins. 1999: 180).

The Trinity shares oneness (love, nature within and mission without). At the inner life of God is that perfect communion or perichoresis which flows outside and is made manifest in the economy. We learn by these divine missions the inner life of the invisible God. Important is that the unity of nature is neither manipulated nor appropriated by only one person. It is commonly shared. Relating this to the contemporary challenges to the family in our world, we see therefore that the indicators outlined in the papal documents are none other than expressions of a disintegration

of the Trinitarian experience. This is all about the neglect of the principal, essential perspective of the mystery of the Triune God, which is communion among the divine persons (Sobrino, J., and Ellacuria, I., 1996:77). With Boff, we may rightly say here that the precarious condition of the family and marriage today and, by extension, of life and the human society today, is a consequence of this tradition of brokenness which results from a shift from antecedent social concerns expressed in earlier epochs to the declaration of unrestrained radical freedom, individualism, and relativisms occasioned by modernism. This has endangered life by threatening the basic cell of society. With the flight from the Trinitarian experience, occasioned by hedonistic tendencies of our time, the cohesive that kept our communities cannot but give way to rugged individualism.

Conclusion

The paper avows to the danger embedded in the rupture of the family instantiated in the pressure for legalization of gay marriage, the fear to make commitments in marriage and flight from raising children. Treated merely as “disorientations” by previous church documents, the paper observes that these pressures have been consistent since the 20th century. Today, they have attained a new hiatus. The music seems to be saying, slow and steady wins the race, while on the part of the church, loss of focus and vigilance wanes the grip. Like Pius XI, there is need for the church to stand bold and condemn obnoxious tendencies that threaten the very existence of human life and society and promote the culture of death in the present times. As Pius did, a step copied by the Vatican II Council and followed by the 1980 Synod of Bishops, the present Synod should have an eye over the patrimony of faith while adopting new pastoral strategies for confronting the world as a vigilant watchman and custodian of the Gospel of life.

This, the paper proposes a deepened marriage /family catechesis with special focus on Trinitarian life.As St. Justin the Martyr taught, light does neither diminish in its brightness nor its heat by giving other lights, couples today should be encouraged to learn that love is not antithetical to life, love is generative. Trinitarian communion teaches us that light/love/life shared is light/love/life multiplied. This Trinitarian hermeneutics alone stands to deepen proper family values among those experiencing doubt, who are wounded and who find themselves in the storm, whose wine is less plentiful.

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