

## The Conjugal *communio amoris* in the Apostolic Exhortations *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia*

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**Abstract:** The concept of marital *communio amoris* expressed in the apostolic exhortations *Familiaris Consortio* of John Paul II and *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis is the subject of this paper. In theology, this phrase has generally been used to describe the relationship of the Divine Persons in the Trinity. The phrase *communio amoris* in relation to marriage and family comes from the theological thought of John Paul II. The Pope used this term several times in the exhortation. An important issue is the reference of the phrase “communion of love” to spouses entering into a sacramental union. Pope Francis, although he uses the phrase to refer to Trinitarian relationships, does not explicitly use this expression to refer to marital relationships. *Communio amoris*, however, can be read into the concept of marital love presented in *Amoris Laetitia*.

**Keywords:** *Familiaris Consortio*, *Amoris Laetitia*, *communio amoris*, communion of persons, theology of love, psychology of love

Last year marked the 40th anniversary of the announcement of the apostolic exhortation of John Paul II on the tasks of the Christian family in the modern world of *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981). In this document, two key phrases are used in relation to marriage: *communio personarum* and *communio amoris*. The first appears many times in the exhortation. It has been extensively described by researchers in the past forty years and clearly has a function in awareness and theological reflection. The second term seems to have been forgotten in the literature. Sometimes *communio amoris* (communion of love) is used interchangeably as conjugal love, although there are clear distinctions between both expressions. This paper takes up the problem of *communio amoris* presented in two post-synodal apostolic exhortations: *Familiaris Consortio* of John Paul II and *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis. The documents are the fruit of preceding synods on marriage and family. In the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, the teaching of John Paul II is evoked fifty times. These sources were the catechesis on marital love (23 times) and the exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (21 + 6 times).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> These numbers were indicated by Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri during the presentation of the exhortation. The document also contains numerous references to the *Casti Connubii* encyclicals by Pius XI, *Mystici Corporis Christi* by Pius XII, *Humanae Vitae* by Paul VI, *Deus Caritas Est* by Benedict XVI and to the Fathers of

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the phrase “communion of love” in the theological thought of John Paul II, followed by a reading of the mentioned term in the teaching of Pope Francis. For methodological reasons as well as editorial limitations, a comparative analysis of the following key concepts in both exhortations, undertaken by different scholars and related to the term *communio amoris*, will be omitted: the concept of marriage and family, the spirituality of marriage, the tasks of the family, preparation for marriage, and the pastoral care of non-religious unions.<sup>2</sup> The research problem indicated in the title of the article limits the area of analysis only to two documents. All quotations from papal documents in English and their equivalents in Latin come from the official website of the Holy See.

*Communio amoris* in theological reflection is generally referred to the relationship of the Divine Persons in the Holy Trinity. The identification of this expression in the personal relationships of spouses who have entered into a sacramental union is a fundamental concern in contemporary theological reflection and is topical in pastoral concepts.

## 1. *Communio amoris* in the *Familiaris Consortio*

In the *Familiaris Consortio* exhortation, John Paul II uses the terms *communio amoris* or *amoris communitas*<sup>3</sup> several times in relation to marriage and family. Although both expressions have the same meaning and do not show any fundamental semantic differences, they are used in different contexts. *Communio amoris*, however, cannot be separated and understood without reference to the very definition of *communio* and *communio personarum*. In *Familiaris Consortio*, the term “communion” is mentioned 48 times. It is referred 21 times to marriage and 27 times to the family. It is also used for both marriage and family and for God, the Church and the Eucharist.<sup>4</sup> The key phrase for this article, “communion of love,” is indicated 10 times.

The theological term “communion of persons” and “communion of love” was originally applied to the description of the relationship between the persons of God. The comparison of marriage to the Holy Trinity in the Church’s theological reflection goes back to antiquity. This reflection has undergone significant changes

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the Church and the contemporary authors. St. Thomas and his view on love is quoted several times. Documents of the Holy See are also quoted, as well as letters from various episcopal conferences. See: Baldisseri, *Conferenza Stampa*, (access 05.10.2021); see also: Bujak, “Nauczanie papieża Franciszka,” 34.

<sup>2</sup> See: Bujak, “Nauczanie papieża Franciszka,” 33–56; Sobczyk, “Koncepcja duchowości małżeństwa,” 181–198; Dyduch, “Wiodące idee adhortacji,” 127–140; Brzeziński, “Odpowiednie przygotowanie,” 163–180; Dyduch, “Adhortacja *Amoris Laetitia*,” 27–46.

<sup>3</sup> On the concept of both terms (*communio* and *communitas*) see: Plezia, *Słownik łacińsko-polski*, 612, 614.

<sup>4</sup> See: Kaczyński, “Małżeństwo i rodzina,” 3; see also: Sobczyk, “Koncepcja duchowości małżeństwa,” 183.

throughout history. One can mention here, for example, the position of John Chrysostom, the great eulogist of marital love, which was, however, rejected by St. Augustine. A few centuries later, the Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, referred to the reflections of the second of the mentioned Fathers of the Church and questioned Augustine's view.<sup>5</sup>

The decisive moment in the theological view of the relationship between the mystery of the Holy Trinity and marriage was the reversal of the problem posed: Marriage is not so much a trace of the Trinity in the world – as in classical theology – but rather it has to become an active reflection of the Trinity in the relationships between husband and wife, in their mutual attitudes, and it has to express itself in the mission undertaken and fulfilled by the spouses, especially in their unifying and at the same time fruitful love.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary researchers of conjugal love recall the position of Richard of St. Victor's Abbey, who lived in the 12th century, concerning the understanding of conjugal and Trinitarian relations. "Authentic love between 'I' and 'you' must include the desire to share oneself with another, and so must overflow into the 'third'. Marriage as a 'covenant' between a man and a woman is based on the Trinitarian divine being. The Trinity is perfect, eternal and divine communion, it is the mystery of love personified."<sup>7</sup> The thesis that points to the image of the Trinity, which is realised in the conjugal openness to the spouse, appears here.<sup>8</sup> The reference to the concept of conjugal love presented by Richard in "one of the most important books in history, *De Trinitate*,"<sup>9</sup> is taken up in contemporary times by Gisbert Greshake. Gisbert Greshake is a contemporary of this concept. This German theologian in his conception, points to *Communio* as a paradigm for understanding the Trinitarian God.<sup>10</sup> Czesław Bartnik, commenting on this concept, states that Greshake's trinitology is "the newest, original and very creative Trinitarian theology [...]. However, it has – in my opinion – some ambiguities. First, *Communio amoris* does not seem to be an ontological unity, but rather a psychological one. Love as such is not a being in itself, but is an amalgamation of various beings, persons."<sup>11</sup> It seems that in this understanding of the relationship of Persons in the Holy Trinity, it is also justified to use the phrase *communio amoris* to describe marital relations. "The Divine *Communio*,

<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion of the aforementioned topic was presented by Anna Maliszewska. The author recalled the statements of the Fathers of the Church presented in: Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, 330; Špidlik, *Perełki Ojców Kościoła*, 81–82; Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, POK 25, 330–335; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Bełch, VII, 93. See: Maliszewska, "Małżeństwo obrazem Trójcy," 27–29.

<sup>6</sup> Królikowski, "Trynitarno-chrystologiczne," 16–17.

<sup>7</sup> Królikowski, "Trynitarno-chrystologiczne," 20–21.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Maliszewska, "Małżeństwo obrazem Trójcy," 29.

<sup>9</sup> Benedykt XVI, "Hugon i Ryszard," 47.

<sup>10</sup> Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*.

<sup>11</sup> Bartnik, "Z nowszych koncepcji osoby w Bogu," 9–10.

who is the supreme form of *Communio*, and at the same time is the model for human *communio*.<sup>12</sup> The communion of love realised in marital relations leads to the formation of a personal community and personal communion. At the same time, in such personal communion, human persons – Christian spouses – are able to fully realise conjugal love. “*Communio* is about an intense form of relationship, love, community. *Communio* means being together, where there is a common goal of action, a common good, which is achieved by giving not everything one possesses, but by giving oneself as a gift. Mutual selfless giving leads to interpenetration, perichoresis, communication. *Communio* is such a community, in which personalisation in love and freedom of persons takes place.”<sup>13</sup>

The conjugal communion of love appears as a specific analogy, model, and reflection of the archetype of the communion of love within the Trinity. What is the essential attribute of God – that is, love – is realised in marriage as a specific reflection of God’s love. John Paul II, teaching about marriage and the family, and especially the Trinitarian approach to the reality of marriage, clearly indicates that the model of this community should be sought in God himself. “The divine ‘We’ is the eternal pattern of the human ‘we’, especially of that ‘we’ formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness” (*GrS* 6). The idea of *communio amoris* involves, first and foremost, a reference to Trinitarian relations.

Karol Wojtyła, in his analysis of the concepts of “communion” and “community,” indicates that everything that lies behind the first concept can only be realised by a person endowed with reason, free will, and an ability to create relationships. There is an unequivocal indication of the likeness of the human being to God.<sup>14</sup> In the context of understanding the person and likeness to God, the expression *communio* is clarified.

There is a difference between the statement that a man, while being a person, is also social in nature, and the statement that attributes to a man-person a giftedness for community understood as *communio*. This does not mean that the two concepts are opposed to each other. On the contrary, it can even be argued that they contain one another, that they, in a way, arise from each other [...]. *Communio* indicates the much more personal and interpersonal dimension of all social systems.<sup>15</sup>

The communion of persons, therefore, means more than just a human bond or any human community. In further deliberations, Wojtyła states that “the expression ‘community,’ which is used, for example, in conciliar documents for the purpose of

12 Wojtkiewicz, “*Communio* jako paradygmat,” 284–285.

13 Wojtkiewicz, *Trójca Święta*, 120; see also: Greshake, “Der Ursprung der Kommunikationsidee,” 3–26.

14 See: Wojtyła, “Rodzina jako «*communio personarum*»,” 350; see also: Wojtyła, “Rodzicielstwo a «*communio personarum*»,” 17–31.

15 Wojtyła, “Rodzina jako «*communio personarum*»,” 351–352.

the Latin meaning of *communio*, does not mean exactly the same thing. The expression ‘community’ has the same meaning as the adjective *communis*. However, in the concept of *communio* it is not only about affirming the common, about emphasising the community as a certain effect or even an expression of the being and action of persons – it is about the very way of being and actions of these people. Namely, it is a way (*modus*) that by being and acting in relation to each other (and thus not only by being and acting ‘together’), through this activity and existence of each other as persons they confirm and affirm.”<sup>16</sup> In such a context, it can be said that in matrimonial relations, the concept of “community” is the starting point, while “communion” is the endpoint.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, one exists and acts on the principle of mutual self-giving. With regard to marriage, the concept of *communio* means not only a way of being but also a way of acting as an exclusive characteristic of persons.<sup>18</sup>

The term “communion of love,” mentioned for the first time in *Familiaris Consortio*, refers to the creation and vocation of a man, and love is the foundation of both realities. The formulation is quoted in the description of the relationship between the Persons of God and the Trinitarian relationships. “God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion (*amoris communio*)” (FC 11). Later in the exhortation, John Paul II clarifies the meaning of love in marital and family life. In the relationship of Christian spouses, conjugal love appears unequivocally as a calling and a task. “Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion (*officium amoris atque communionis*)” (FC 11). This fragment of the exhortation is complemented by an indication of love as a fundamental human vocation inspired by God. “Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being” (FC 11).

In the following sentences of the exhortation, John Paul II indicates the sacrament of marriage and the role of the Holy Spirit towards spouses who vow to love each other.

The Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love (*nova communio amoris*) that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus [...]. The gift of the Spirit is a commandment of life for Christian spouses [...], revealing in this way to the Church and to the world the new communion of love (*amoris communio*), given by the grace of Christ (FC 19).

<sup>16</sup> Wojtyła, “Rodzina jako «communio personarum»,” 353.

<sup>17</sup> See: Tykarski, *Kryzys małżeński*, 27; see also: Biedroń, “Osoba jako podmiot,” 238.

<sup>18</sup> Wojtyła, “Rodzina jako «communio personarum»,” 347–361; see also: Jan Paweł II, *Męzczyzną i niewiastą*, 38–39.

Reference to the Holy Spirit is crucial, even fundamental, here. The Love of God is not emotions, feelings, compassion, understanding, cooperation, and even the most wonderful deeds, but it is one of the Persons of God, i.e., the Holy Spirit. “Therefore, the love that is from God and is God, strictly speaking, is the Holy Spirit. Through him the love of God is poured into our hearts, through which the whole Holy Trinity is given to us.”<sup>19</sup> Following Augustine, it should be recognised that since the third Person of the Holy Trinity is the Love of the first two Persons, this is the source of the *communio amoris* that is bestowed upon Christian spouses. The Holy Spirit is the community (*communio*) of the Father and the Son.<sup>20</sup> The sentence in paragraph 19 of the exhortation explicitly states that at the moment of the sacramental vow, the spouses are given the presence of the Holy Spirit, who is Love, and who initiates in their lives a communion of love.

In reference to the family, John Paul II once again uses the term *communio amoris*, although in a form that indicates the social nature of this relationship. “The family is the first and fundamental school of social living: as a community of love (*amoris communitas*), it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving” (FC 37). The “community of love” refers to the spouses’ external activity. Their communion of love creates proper family relationships.

An important aspect of the Pope’s teaching is to highlight the activities that foster the communion of love. These factors are the common prayer of spouses and family, and the exercise of the commandment of love. In paragraph 59, the issue of family prayer is addressed: husband, wife, parents and children. “Communion in prayer is both a consequence of and a requirement for the communion (*communio*) bestowed by the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony” (FC 59). It is clear from the preceding texts that in the sacrament of marriage, the spouses receive the gift of *communio amoris*. This thought is continued in paragraph 61, when John Paul II highlights Marian devotion, imitation of the Mother of God, and the rosary as those means that “nourish the communion of love”: “In this way authentic devotion to Mary, which finds expression in sincere love and generous imitation of the Blessed Virgin’s interior spiritual attitude, constitutes a special instrument for nourishing loving communion (*amoris communio*) in the family and for developing conjugal and family spirituality” (FC 61). Still another activity of the spouses should be “a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love (*interna amoris communio*)” (FC 64).

The Pope uses this phrase once again in the context of marriage and the Christian family. Indeed, the family “considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God [...]. It should be so especially between husband and wife

<sup>19</sup> Augustinus, *De Trinitate*, POK 25, 502.

<sup>20</sup> See: Jaśkiewicz, “Duch Święty,” 39, 41.

and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community (*personarum communitas*), initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love (*interna amoris communitio*)” (FC 64). This is a special statement because of the use of the term “communion of love” as a reality separate from the “community of persons” and the definition of the relationship of these concepts. The Pope’s teaching is unequivocal. The possibility of perceiving the image of God in each person is most effective among spouses and among the Christian family who practices mutual love and creates internal relationships of love.

The last sentence in which the considered expression appears is a passage from the 18th paragraph of the exhortation. The Holy Father refers to the love between a man and a woman in marriage, and love in the family. This love “is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion (*communitio*), which is the foundation and soul of the community (*communitas*) of marriage and the family” (FC 18). The difference between conjugal love and the communion of love is clearly indicated here. Marital love with its essential characteristics indicated in the teaching of the Church<sup>21</sup> is “is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism” – that is, by the *communitio amoris*, which leads to the building up of the marital and family community. Marital love in turn shapes and strengthens this communion. “The inner principle of that task, its permanent power and its final goal is love: without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons” (FC 18).

In the life of Christian spouses, the communion of love indicates the relationship with the spouse and later in the family – a horizontal dimension. The source of this love, however, should be seen in the One God in the Holy Trinity, that is, in the vertical dimension. The term *communitio amoris* can only be understood in the personalistic vision of the relationship between a man and a woman as a deep, internal, friendly, intimate community of conjugal life and love (*communitas vitae et amoris coniugalis*).<sup>22</sup> The phrase “communion of love” contained in the *Familiaris Consortio* requires the reference to another fundamental term relating to the marital covenant, namely *communitio personarum*. The spousal character of marriage is constituted by the gift only between a man and a woman. The “hermeneutic of the gift” of self in marriage is an essential element of conjugal love.<sup>23</sup> In this relationship, mutual self-

<sup>21</sup> See: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1604, 1643; see also: Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*, no. 9–11 (it is a thoroughly human love, and therefore both sensual and spiritual, complete, faithful and exclusive, and fertile); Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 49–51; John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 29; John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*; Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 89–163.

<sup>22</sup> See: Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, no. 48; see also: Pastwa, *Przymierze miłości małżeńskiej*, 201; Królikowski, *Tajemnica to wielka*, 35–48.

<sup>23</sup> See: Jan Paweł II, *Mężczyzną i niewiastą*, 61; see also: Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*; Kułaczkowski, “Komunia małżeńska,” 23.

giving takes place – including in the dimension of sexuality. The mutual gift of self (the selfless gift of self) between husband and wife is a sign of the communion of persons always refers to the essence of human love. The relationship of love indicates a new quality of marriage, a specific “ennoblement” of marital relations.

*Communio amoris* is a gift from God through which the spouses “become one flesh.” This is done through a free and rational choice. John Paul teaches that “the conjugal union, the biblical “*una caro*,” can be understood and fully explained only by recourse to the values of the “person” and of “gift.” Every man and every woman fully realizes himself or herself through the sincere gift of self” (*GrS* 12). Marriage – the whole life covenant they create – is directed to the good of the spouses and to the birth and upbringing of children. Through Christ it was raised to the dignity of a sacrament.

## 2. *Communio amoris* in the *Amoris Laetitia*

Pope Francis refers repeatedly in his teaching to each person as valuable in him or herself. This view of the human person opposes various exclusions and the marginalisation of anyone.<sup>24</sup> In the context of the vision of the human person, specific concepts repeatedly appear in papal teaching: “conditions,” “extenuating circumstances,” “weakness,” “fragility,” “maturation of unity,” “maturation of love,” and “accompaniment of spouses.” As a consequence, there are pastoral criteria, characteristic of the Church’s activity, expressed in the following attitudes: to welcome, to accompany, to discern (a term used 50 times in the Exhortation), and to integrate.<sup>25</sup> The path to full union with Christ and His Church must be followed through the formation of conscience and fraternal love, Christian witness, and through various inclusive interventions.

A statistical analysis of the term ‘communion’ throughout the document reveals that the word is used nineteen times. The Holy Father most often refers to family communion (8 times) and marital communion (4 times). It appears twice each in the context of the Holy Trinity, the Eucharist, and love. On one occasion, the Pope points to fraternal communion.

In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis in one of his opening sentences (paragraph 11) refers to the Trinity and the Trinitarian relationship, which he relates to family interrelationships. Love is a fundamental value both within the Trinity and in conjugal and familial relationships. There is therefore a complete parallel here with the teaching of John Paul II expressed in *Familiaris Consortio*. “Seen

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Francis, *Evangeli Gaudium*, no. 35, 53–54, 59–60; cf. also: Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 297.

<sup>25</sup> See: Polish Bishops’ Conference, *Wytyczne Pastoralne KEP*.

this way, the couple's fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, (*communio est amoris*) and the family is its living reflection" (AL 11). The reference to the communion of love in the relations of the divine Persons has a strong justification in the teaching of the Church, which was mentioned earlier in the article. However, it should be noted that the continuation of John Paul II's thought is not justified by citing the exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, but by an excerpt from John Paul II's homily delivered in Mexico in 1979: "The persons of the nave God, in their innermost mystery, do not remain in solitude, but form a family, because in this mystery is contained fatherhood, sonship and the very essence of the family, which is love. The love in this divine family is the Holy Spirit."<sup>26</sup>

In paragraph 120, Pope Francis makes a direct reference of conjugal love to the Holy Spirit. "Infused by the Holy Spirit, this powerful love is a reflection of the unbroken covenant between Christ and humanity that culminated in his self-sacrifice on the cross. "The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained: conjugal charity" (AL 120). Although the phrase *communio amoris* does not appear explicitly in this quotation, the Trinitarian and pneumatological dimension of marital love is clearly visible – as it is in John Paul II. The gift of the communion of love offered to the spouses during the sacramental vow by the Holy Spirit is, however, heard in the teaching of Pope Francis. The Pope expresses the truth by pointing to the spouses who, out of love giving birth to new life, reveal God as Creator and Saviour. Marital relations also make it possible to discover God in the Holy Trinity. The Triune God is the very communion of love. Christian spouses and the family they create are a living reflection of this divine reality. Love is explicitly shown as a dynamic process of maturation in marriage and is a fundamental dimension of family spirituality.<sup>27</sup> Pope Francis refers here directly to the teaching of John Paul II and his concept of marital love read in the category of mutual gift, that is, the concept of *communio personarum* and *communio amoris*.<sup>28</sup> The idea of a "communion of persons" is characterised, among other things, by openness to childbearing.<sup>29</sup> In the exhortation, Francis repeatedly links marital and parental bonds, although he uses different vocabulary than his holy predecessor. The realisation of this idea takes place both in the aspect of the sexual relationship of the spouses, as well as in the aspect of minds, hearts, personalities, characters, emotional states, and aspirations. Marital love here becomes a selfless

<sup>26</sup> Jan Paweł II, "Homilia," 80.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Franciszek, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 220; see also: Zurzycki, "Wymiary duchowości rodziny," 137–151.

<sup>28</sup> See: Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 11; see also: Bujak, "Nauczanie papieża Franciszka," 35–36; Sobczyk, "Koncepcja duchowości małżeństwa," 183; Skrzypczak, "Miłość małżeńska," 93–103.

<sup>29</sup> See: John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 14.

gift of self and is characterised by fidelity and indissolubility. “The marital union is thus evoked not only in its sexual and corporal dimension, but also in its voluntary self-giving in love” (AL 13). The issue of procreation in married life is clearly shown with reference to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and John Paul II. Pope Francis expressed his position in paragraph 80: “Marriage is firstly an ‘intimate partnership of life and love’ which is a good for the spouses themselves, while sexuality is ‘ordered to the conjugal love of man and woman.’”<sup>30</sup> The marital *communio amoris* having its source in the Holy Spirit and Trinitarian relations is unequivocally expressed in the papal teaching. Another place in the exhortation where Pope Francis makes reference of marriage to the love of God and to Trinitarian relationships is in paragraph no. 121: “Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us. Indeed, God is also communion (*communio*): the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live eternally in perfect unity” (AL 121).

Referring to the relationship between spouses and to the vocation of the family, the Pope recalls the example of the Holy Family: “The covenant of love and fidelity lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth illuminates the principle which gives shape to every family, and enables it better to face the vicissitudes of life and history. On this basis, every family, despite its weaknesses, can become a light in the darkness of the world” (AL 66). It continues with the words of a prayer by Paul VI taken from a speech at Nazareth in 1964, in which the phrase “communion of love” appears: “Nazareth teaches us the meaning of family life, its loving communion (*communio dilectionis*), its simple and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character” (AL 66). In this claim, however, the Latin *communio amoris* does not appear, but *communio dilectionis*. The latter term is known from the Gospel of St John: “No one can have greater love (*dilectio*) than to lay down his life for his friends” (J 15,13). It is worth noting that this sentence is recalled in the Exhortation in two other paragraphs: 27 and 102. In both cases, Francis justifies with these evangelical sentences the necessity of bestowing love on others in imitation of Christ’s love. In paragraph 27, it is about the witness of the love of parents who put love into practice with their lives. Whereas in paragraph 102, Francis reasons the generosity of love of Christian spouses and parents. These are behaviours that are definitely outward, towards others, although they have their source in the inner marital relationships, in a love shaped on the model of Trinitarian relationships and God’s supernatural communion.

The expression used, *communio dilectionis*, implies love in the sense of an act of will, a free decision, a choice using reason and free will, carrying out God’s will. St. Thomas Aquinas’s distinction concerning the forms of love is well-known: *dilectio*, *amor* and *caritas*. Pope Francis uses Aquinas’ thought 18 times in two chapters

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<sup>30</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 80; see also: Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48; *Code of Canon Law*, 1055§1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2360.

(the fourth and eighth). Although certainly the concept of *dilectio* is devoid of the aspect of passion, sexuality, desire and emotions associated with the sphere of marital self-donation, these two terms (*amor* and *dilectio*) are used to refer to marriage in the literature.<sup>31</sup> However, the more extensive texts of *Amoris Laetitia* indicate that marital sexuality is positioned in the exhortation in the context of love, which is the element that integrates the sensual dimension with the spiritual. The sexuality of the spouses in their relationships becomes an area of expression of love, or even the language of love. Detaching sexuality from conjugal love would even mean reversing the meaning given to it by God.<sup>32</sup> Procreation and love are strongly connected. This approach to the sphere of married life is certainly part of the concept of *communio personarum* and *communio amoris*. Francis' reference to the Family of Nazareth can also be read in the context of what John Paul II taught about the family, highlighting "spiritual fecundity" with its "intrinsic and deep dynamism of love": "Fruitful married love expresses itself in serving life in many ways. Of these ways, begetting and educating children are the most immediate, specific and irreplaceable. In fact, every act of true love towards a human being bears witness to and perfects the spiritual fecundity of the family, since it is an act of obedience to the deep inner dynamism of love as self-giving to others" (FC 41). Francis points out with the above expression the necessity of the spouses' self-sacrifice, the imperative of unity and fidelity, the desire for goodness, self-sacrifice, loving service, loving collaboration, and mutual respect. *Communio dilectionis* can also be read in the context of the unique use of this expression in the exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. There, it points to marriage as "a reflection of the loving (*dilectio*) covenant uniting Christ with the Church."<sup>33</sup>

Although Pope Francis does not explicitly use the phrase *communio amoris* for the marital relationship, in the mentioned prayer (sentence from paragraph 66) one can see the presence of the Holy Spirit initiated in the marital vow. Thanks to the sacrament, the spouses experience the gift of the realisation of conjugal love not only through Christ and with Christ, but above all in Christ. A very strong justification of the presence not only of the Son of God, but of the whole Trinity in conjugal love is found in paragraph 314: "the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion [...], so he (God) dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory" (AL 314). This important statement points to the source of both the communion of love and of conjugal love. That source is the Holy Trinity. Deriving marital love from general Christian love or even equating the two kinds of love may seem to be a risky approach, although marital love is certainly part of the implementation of the commandment

<sup>31</sup> See: Pastwa, *Dobro małżonków*, 20, 43, 249.

<sup>32</sup> See: Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 150–152; see also: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1604; Bohdanowicz, "Miłość małżeńska," 16.

<sup>33</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 50; see also: Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48.

of love. Dietrich von Hildebrand – called by Pope Pius XII “the 20th century Doctor of the Church,” and by Joseph Ratzinger “one of the most eminent figures of our time”<sup>34</sup> – notes that “Christian love of neighbour and *communio in Christus* are fundamentally different.”<sup>35</sup> For the love of neighbour exercised by Christ’s followers – including Christian spouses – extends also to people with whom no *communio* is possible. The term *communio amoris* refers to sacramental marriage, not to love of neighbour in the broadest sense.

Francis’ use of the phrase *communio dilectionis* therefore demands a careful reading of the entire document and the wider context presented in the exhortation. Certainly, the Pope presents the truth about marriage and family very strongly in the aspect of love. The gift of mutual love in marriage and the gift of love for others should be modelled on Trinitarian relationships. Such love is to be sought, developed, realised in marriage and family, and passed on. Such love is the way to marital holiness.

An effective strategy for seeing what lies behind the phrase *communio amoris* in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* is to analyse marital love. The document presents marital love in the context of the traditional teaching of the Church. Besides pointing out the aspect of the supernatural character of love and the typically human qualities, Francis also speaks of the existing dangers. In general, the teaching on marital love appears to be very realistic and pragmatic. A new and original approach to marital love is its analysis through the prism of St. Paul’s Hymn to Love. The various characteristics of love indicated in the hymn, Francis relates to the marital relationship. Love given to man by the Holy Spirit, who is Love, becomes an important task and at the same time becomes part of the personal relationship of man and woman.

The exhortation very strongly emphasises the human nature of conjugal love. It is presented in a psychological context. *Amoris Laetitia* is the first theological document in which there is a reference to psychology and what this discipline proposes for the knowledge of marital love as many as ten times.<sup>36</sup> For example, in paragraph 101, the Pope states that “Loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others: ‘If a man is mean to himself, to whom will he be generous? No one is meaner than the man who is grudging to himself’ (Sir 14:5–6)” (*AL* 101). Further Francis indicates that “Desires, feelings, emotions, what the ancients called ‘the passions,’ all have an important place in married life [...]. They

<sup>34</sup> Ratzinger, “Przedmowa,” 11.

<sup>35</sup> Hildebrand, *Istota miłości*, 460.

<sup>36</sup> The Pope, noticing the purely psychological and therefore natural order of conjugal love, thus opens the possibility or even the necessity of an interdisciplinary understanding of love. The classic theory of Robert Sternberg seems to be helpful in this instance. The author notes that in the love of two people, three dimensions are important: intimacy (as psychological closeness – sharing life, a sense of bond), passion (understood in terms of striving for physical closeness), and decision/commitment (including the will to recognise and maintain a loving relationship with another person). Compare: Sternberg – Sternberg, *The New Psychology of Love*; D’Souza – Gurin, “The Universal Significance,” 210–214.

ground the most elementary psychological activity. Human beings live on this earth, and all that they do and seek is fraught with passion” (AL 143). In building up marital and family communion, the Pope points out the important role of emotional life. It should become an asset for the family and serve the common good. When it reveals sensitivity, it allows the family to reach maturity.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, in his reflection on the emotional and affectionate life, the pope made very strong reference to the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas. Marital love portrayed in this way has a particularly strong communal and community-building aspect in Francis’ teaching. The aim of conjugal love is the desire for the good of one’s spouse. With Francis’ teaching on marital love in mind, it is certainly easier to see what is meant by marital communion, marital community, *communio personarum*, or above all *communio amoris*.

## Conclusions

Sacramental marriage is a unique communion between a man and a woman – *communio personarum*. For such a communion to exist, the love of husband and wife, that is, the principle of this communion, is indispensable. On the other hand, only persons – in this case husband and wife – have the capacity to form a community of persons in marriage and in the family. *Communio amoris*, as a gift which the spouses receive, that is, the presence of God Himself, and as an inner principle of married life, enables them to grow in holiness. The communion of love is the foundation of Christian marriage. In conclusion, it should be noted that:

- 1) The Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, although it does not explicitly use the expression *communio amoris* for the marital relationship, can nevertheless be considered as a continuation of the teaching contained in *Familiaris Consortio*. The teaching of Pope Francis on the analyzed issue refers directly and indirectly to the magisterium of John Paul II. This continuity is clearly revealed in the presentation of the sources of conjugal love and the communion of love, i.e. the Trinitarian, Pneumatological and Christological sources.
- 2) The phrase *communio amoris* appears many times solely in the exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. The Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* in relation to marriage uses the expression *communio dilectionis* once. Although in the tradition of the Church both terms refer to marital relation, only *communio amoris* accentuates the aspect of human sexuality, passion, desire and experience of marital devotion to the other party. However, these aspects of married life are brought up by Francis in many places in the adhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.

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<sup>37</sup> See: Franciszek, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 146; see also: Brzeziński, “Indywidualizm i wolność jednostki,” 95.

- 3) The marital *communio amoris* has its source in the relationship of the Persons of God, i.e., in the Trinitarian relationships. This is the model of conjugal love. A special role should be seen in the person of the Holy Spirit, who is Love. This fact is indicated by both John Paul II and Francis. It should also be borne in mind that the models of communal life in God related to conjugal communion can only be considered as a certain analogy.
- 4) The complete convergence of the two documents concerns the recognition that the spouses strengthened by the gift of the *communio amoris*, realise the communion of persons in marriage and in the family. The gift of self is what animates conjugal love. Mutual self-giving is a sign of the communion of persons. And only this reality allows the family to be transformed into a community of love and a community of persons. That is, from the inner and invisible principle of the sacramental life of marriage (*communio amoris*) derives the external and visible reality of marriage and family (conjugal love). The communion of love is the exclusive property of the persons – in this case, the spouses. As a sincere gift of self, it is the principle of the communion of persons. It is even inscribed in the humanity of the spouses and is “the basic and innate vocation.” As a gratuitous gift of self, it constitutes the fundamental principle of the communion of persons. Marital love, on the other hand, together with the practice of common prayer and the implementation of the commandment of love, leads to the realisation and strengthening of the *communio amoris*.
- 5) Francis’ concern for future marital communion and the conditions for the development of marital love can easily be seen in his use of figurative terms related to preparation for the sacrament of marriage: “learning to love” (the indispensable role of parents), “maturing of love” (tasks of the fiancées), and “love above all” (mutual love combined with constant forgiveness and spiritual experience of the liturgy of the sacrament of marriage).<sup>38</sup> From the analysis of marital love presented in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* one can indirectly deduce about the foundation of this love which is *communio amoris*.

In the case of the exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, marital love results directly from *communio amoris*. In both documents marital love has clearly different distinctions from the communion of love.

The analysed definition of *communio amoris* in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* continues and develops the teaching of John Paul II. Although some accents are placed in slightly different places than the pope of the family in *Familiaris Consortio*, the continuity of teaching and continuity of the pastoral concept expressed in both documents is certainly evident. John Paul II shows this reality directly, very clearly and unambiguously. With Francis, this formulation and the reality it expresses can be read in the wider context of the entire exhortation.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Bajer vel Bojer, “Przygotowanie do małżeństwa,” 163.

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