

HUMAN FAMILIES

Identities, Relationships,
and Responsibilities

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Introduction

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The College Theology Society's 2020 annual meeting was a convention for the history books. Like just about everything else in 2020, the conference was impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Campus closures, travel restrictions, and no small amount of prudence and courage prompted the CTS board of directors to move its sixty-sixth annual meeting online. What could have been a logistical nightmare was guided by tech-savvy members of the board into becoming a lively online event. CTS members, many of us yearning for social contact after months of social distancing and isolation, came together in a *virtual* space for *real* conversation and scholarly exchange. Given the broader social and political context, the gathering proved not only welcome, but much needed. As such, we are deeply grateful to the participants of the 2020 convention for mustering the energy to attend and present papers despite many obstacles. We are particularly indebted to the contributors to this volume, who continued to work through the editorial process during a turbulent summer that was rocked by injustice, outrage, and grief.

In addition to the global pandemic, the days and weeks leading up to the meeting were shaped by the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. These egregious acts recalled parallel instances of police violence in recent memory and focused national attention on the unequal, and too often inhumane, treatment of people of color by those sworn to protect public safety. Protests and calls for radical reforms to law enforcement, the criminal justice sys-

tem, and the prison industrial complex ensued throughout the summer. In recognition of these ongoing events, the CTS board hosted an open session for members to discuss racial justice and solidarity. The board's Statement on US Racism was informed by that conversation and has been included in this volume. The statement reflects the tenor of the conference and takes us to the heart of theological reflection on human families, the human family, and the implications of the Christian commitment to shaping communities that uphold the dignity and sanctity of life.

Since the chaotic events of the summer, suffering related to the COVID-19 pandemic has continued unabated and has further exposed the gross injustices of racism and economic inequality. Minority communities have experienced higher rates of mortality; several outbreaks have been linked to poor protections of factory workers; and undocumented workers have been provided special clearance as "essential workers" despite remaining subject to deportation. In tandem, the Black Lives Matter movement has forced a national reckoning with racism, White privilege, and White supremacy and their institutionalization in enslavement, segregation, Jim Crow laws, and mass incarceration. Given the scope of these pressures, no theological or moral question can remain untouched by the events and realities exposed so clearly in 2020.

This brings us to our conference theme: *Human Families: Identities, Relationships, and Responsibilities*. The original proposal was spurred by the Synods on the Family of 2014 and 2015 and Pope Francis's subsequent apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. The theme is aimed at pushing theological reflection toward more broadly engaging human interdependence, relationships, and family diversities, as well as the moral implications of how we present these realities. But even paper proposals submitted in December 2019 and a conference program crafted early in 2020 could not fully anticipate the events that would weigh so heavily upon us by the end of May. Nonetheless, the papers given at the conference, including those in this volume, stand to make meaningful contributions to theological discourse around families and the grave social injustices that inhibit their full flourishing.

The present volume proceeds in three sections, with the conference keynote addresses leading each section. The first keynote

begins with a sweeping review of social, cultural, and historical factors that have shaped present conditions and theological imaginations. The next keynote introduces problems and possibilities found in the Catholic theological tradition and contemporary scholarship on the family. The final keynote turns to the implications of theological reflection for moral action in response to the experiences of mixed-citizenship-status families in the United States. Within each section we have collected outstanding essays that contribute to building the overall scope and diversity of concerns relevant to theological reflection on the family today.

History, Culture, and Context

The strand of the conference theme that focuses on identities raises questions about how families are identified and how their membership and boundaries are defined, as well as the distinctive place families and kinship networks occupy in the social landscape. For such purposes, CTS welcomed historian Stephanie Coontz to deliver the opening plenary, “Family Values, Social Reciprocity, and Christianity.” In her trademark fashion, Coontz challenges two conflicting tendencies in approaching the study of families that shape theological perspectives. On the one hand, Christians might steep themselves in nostalgia for a time in history that, as it turns out, never really existed. This targets the age-old narrative of decline that claims things have fallen apart and now is the decisive moment in history when Christians must rally and recapture the values and patterns of a past idyllic age. On the other hand, Christians are equally liable to give particular and context-bound family forms a normative status that stretches and imposes their normativity anachronistically onto previous eras. This confronts the ahistorical tendency to assume that the way things are, or were in a relatively recent and rather idealized memory, is the way things had always been and should always be because it is the order God intends. Coontz’s essay plays an inspired role as a piece of the careful, cross-cultural, historical, and archaeological review that disrupts both of these narratives and challenges their universalized claims.

While her credentials as a historian are impressive, as of late Coontz has turned her lens toward the growing and, one might

say, grotesque income inequality in the United States, a gap that has been widening exponentially since the 1980s with dire consequences for many families. Her address offers much to consider as it highlights tensions between Catholic ideals for the social role of the family and the historical reality that strong family bonds often serve to enforce exclusionary boundaries for the sake of the self-serving accumulation of wealth and influence.

A cornerstone of much theological reflection on families within the Catholic moral tradition is that the family is a first cell of civil society, a building block for larger networks of social cooperation. People come to society through the family, where they have cultivated important skills and virtues like cooperation, solidarity, and compassion. The proposition is that families can play a significant role in working toward the common good of society. In contrast, Coontz cautions, “The relationship between family bonding and social bonding, between fulfilling obligations to relatives and participating in larger circles of social cooperation, turns out to be more complicated than is often claimed.”

The history of these complicated relationships offers both problems and possibilities for the theological work undertaken in the remainder of the volume. Part I includes four essays that provide historical and cultural perspectives on the family that shape religious imagination and moral formation.

In “Neither Confirm nor Deny: Trinitarian Comments and the Iconography of Family,” Charles Gillespie weaves together theologies of iconography with the rhetorical power of visual images, suggesting deeper engagement with the Holy Trinity as a particularly fruitful icon for family relationships. In doing so, he questions simplistic associations that fail to appreciate the fuller theological possibilities. He writes, “The triad of mother, father, and child does not exhaustively image the Trinity in the ways these comments may imply.”

In “‘It Was They Who Led Me to Your Door’: Terrence Malick’s Cinematic Redefinition of Family in Theological Perspective,” Daniel Rober looks at a triptych of films by Malick to explore how he subverts the shallow notions of family so prevalent in mass media in order to lead viewers to deeper questions of meaning. While not religious per se, the films are part of the cultural

milieu that might shape reflection on the challenges and graces of family life.

Stephen Werner looks to an earlier time in American Catholic history in “Daniel Lord, SJ, the Restless Flame: Supporting Catholic Families.” Through a review of Lord’s legacy, he introduces the kinds of pastoral messages that abounded, particularly those aimed at young Catholics navigating courtship with the expectation of marriage and founding a family. While the patriarchal and racial assumptions of his time are influential and largely accepted in his work, Lord’s legacy hinges on his unparalleled ability to tap into popular Catholic concerns while offering widely accessible and entertaining pastoral responses that proved profoundly influential.

Concluding this section, Christina A. Astorga’s essay, “Natural Law and Sexual Anthropology: A Critique of the New Natural Law Theory,” provides a bridge to Part II by introducing the terms of an ongoing debate within Catholic moral theology. This accessible essay succinctly presents the natural law foundations of official Catholic teaching on human sexuality while explaining and critiquing the efforts of Germain Grisez to account for their weaknesses and offers a revised foundation. Understanding these foundations of magisterial thought and their translations into alternate methodologies, as well as the parallels in historical and anthropological assumptions common to these, is vital to appreciating diversities of opinion and mutual critiques within Catholic moral theology. Such methodological commitments bear decisively in teaching on family life even when the moral issues under consideration are not sexual or reproductive per se. Honoring the dignity of diverse family identities and structures and securing justice for all families demands an examination and understanding of such fundamental diversities within Catholic moral methodology.

Relationships and Practices of Solidarity

Darlene Fozard Weaver’s plenary, “Other People’s Children: Making Solidarity Central to Catholic Teaching about Families,” takes us deeper into the ways in which a “persistent biologism” in natural law interpretation, inattention to race and class, and moral

selectivity homed in on sexual ethics have shaped the Catholic theological inheritance concerning the family. In the context of deepening racial and economic inequality, the blind spots these tendencies create diminish “the family’s debt of justice to other persons.” Weaver’s challenge to theologians and the Church today is to center the virtue of solidarity, already foundational for Catholic social teaching in economic and political spheres, in teaching about families. Solidarity orients family life toward the common good of society and church. Centering solidarity has ramifications for family practices, the pastoral care of families, and the public policies that both protect and promote their well-being. Weaver’s vision offers hope for a more inclusive theology of family life in which all families can discern their distinctive contributions to a more just world and makes claims on the community for their sustenance and support.

In her response to Weaver, LaReine Marie Mosely challenges us to reflect on the tradition of Catholic teaching in light of the experiences of Black and Brown families. She notes, “Catholic teaching on the family rarely addresses and analyzes the important factors of race and class and the manner in which the widening gap between the rich and the poor, often along racial lines, is having adverse and even deadly effects on families.” At present, the coronavirus pandemic has brought these factors into stark relief as many families of privilege can largely insulate themselves from the greatest health risks and worst economic consequences of the pandemic, while less advantaged families more often cannot. Mosely calls for a full-throated position on the sin of systemic racism and commitment to antiracist solidarity. Genuine solidarity disrupts sinful patterns of relationship and dismantles the structures and policies that have a stranglehold on families of color. Subsequent essays in Part II likewise highlight themes in Catholic social thought and teaching and the dynamic interplay between teaching and the lived experiences of families.

Kevin Schemenauer offers a theological reflection on Luke 14:26, one of the “hard sayings” about families found in the gospels. “Hating One’s Family” takes us to the heart of the tension described by Coontz as between familial obligation and social cooperation, and places it in the context of radical discipleship

and membership in a family united by baptism and Eucharist. Challenging readers to face these passages squarely and in light of the whole of Luke's gospel, he offers a way for families to wrestle with the experience of conflicting claims.

Sandra A. Ham brings an interdisciplinary approach to reading *Amoris Laetitia* with an eye to the moral development of children and young people in "*Amoris Laetitia* and Haidt's Moral Elevation." Ham focuses on the role of moral exemplars in children's moral formation and argues that although *AL* is largely compatible with these theories, the exhortation could have benefited from more explicit engagement with the particular theories of moral development under consideration.

Jason King's essay, "Parenting for Environmental Care," likewise presses the issue of parents as exemplars by taking up the particular moral challenge of our ecological crisis. In a twist on Francis's call to intergenerational solidarity, King asks the provocative question, "How do we raise *children now* for the sake of the *environment's future*?" Parenting practices for the good of our common home involve narrating environmental hope, modeling environmental care, and fostering children's agency. King draws on storytelling and the Christian story as a path to education that mitigates the paralysis-inducing fear-mongering of much environmental education. Honoring the moral agency of children and young people on issues of environmental concern, King highlights the responsibility children can take that might help adults imagine a new creation through child's play.

"Resistance, Persistence, and Solidarity: Practicing Spiritual Wisdom in/as Families Today," by Marcus Mescher, completes Part II by creatively engaging the dynamism between the family as domestic church and as the first cell of civil society. The fruit of this engagement is a vision of family life that defies the binaries of spiritual and social, personal and political, contemplation and action, love and justice. Familial solidarity, which is itself not without real challenges, opens persons to ever expanding spheres of relationship. Mescher's work on solidarity builds a bridge between applications of Catholic social thought to family life and the calls for a more inclusive church without which theological reflection on families will remain impoverished.

Responsibilities for Inclusion

Part III opens with Victor Carmona's plenary address, "Mixed-Status Families and Brokenness: Will Our Fractured Relationships Heal?" Drawing upon both scholarship and firsthand experience, Carmona proceeds through the pastoral spiral from the experiences of suffering caused by migration and immigration policy, through social analysis and theological ethical reflection, to a proposal for personal, pastoral, and political action. He paints a moving portrait of the pervasive brokenness and trauma inflicted by callous immigration policy and practice in the United States. In his analysis, Carmona echoes critiques of other institutions of law enforcement, writing, "Our country's immigration system is leaving fractured relationships in its wake because that is what it is designed to do." After a brief but helpful primer on theories of migration and a history lesson on US immigration policy, Carmona employs Aquinas's order of charity, interpersonal and institutional solidarity, and an account of relational justice to suggest a road to healing that theologians can advance through their writing, teaching, and ministry.

In the opening essays of this section, both Steve Calme and Burt Fulmer take up Mosely's call to racial solidarity and to the dismantling of the White privilege and White supremacy that undermine the dignity of so many families. In "Leveraging Love of Family to Promote Interracial Solidarity," Calme claims, "Giving life to the Christian truth of our universal siblinghood requires digging into a tension between a tangible, experienced 'love of one's own,' and a theoretical, elusive 'love for all of humanity.'" Calme recognizes that love of family has special power *and* that it has the potential to both thwart and sustain a more universal love. Love of one's own can move toward a more authentic human solidarity and universal siblinghood only if preferential care has interracial solidarities as one of its aims.

In the subsequent essay, Fulmer advances an antiracist program by viewing structural racism in the United States through its parallels with domestic abuse and violence. He offers the analogy to trauma-organized families as providing a way to understand White complicity in racism. While there are insights into the

manipulative tactics of abusers and the survival strategies of the abused, Fulmer's essay speaks directly to the self-protective measures of bystanders, without whom the violence of racism could not be perpetrated. Bringing the popular antiracist work of Ibram X. Kendi into dialogue with Black liberation theologies, Fulmer describes the Black gaze of God that is both inescapable and absolutely just. This gaze sees White complicity, judges it sinful, and calls people to repentance.

Kerri Tokarski draws the circle of solidarity wider to include the experiences of children and youth who are or have been in the foster care system. In "Where Do We Fit? Foster Care Youth, Family, and the Sacred," she marshals the resources of both practical theology and social work to highlight the voices of young people with foster care backgrounds. Their stories and ideas about the meaning of family lend greater nuance to Christian theologies of family as well as to the ethical responsibilities of both families and faith communities. Christian communities must explore ways to welcome and support families who are fostering youth and the young people themselves both during and after foster care.

The volume concludes with Dana Dillon's work on Catholic social teaching and the challenges facing families when a family member is living with a serious mental illness or psychiatric disorder. In "The Vital Cell: Subsidiarity and a Family-Centered Approach to Accompanying Persons with Mental Illness," she reflects on personal experiences in order to draw a more complex picture of mental illness itself, the moral agency of people with mental illness, and the shifting role of caregiving family members. The principle of subsidiarity is instructive *within* the family, as caregivers carefully negotiate their relationships and responsibilities in the context of unpredictability, and highlights the ability of mediating institutions and organizations to serve as dynamic support networks. She writes, "Even as the family turns within to support the flourishing of its ill, vulnerable member, it turns outward to advocate for the resources required for this work." Likewise, Dillon's concern for solidarity is a fitting close to a volume that consistently returns to this theme.

Entering into an ongoing and expansive dialogue within Christianity at large, and the Catholic tradition in particular, this volume grounds its efforts in ongoing discernment aimed at

describing and understanding the human and theological realities of family. Among the most recent interlocutors in this field (many of whom are active in the College Theology Society) are the contributors to *Sex, Love, and Families: Catholic Perspectives*, edited by Jason King (who is featured in this volume) and Julie Hanlon Rubio (see her book *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians*); and Julie Donovan Massey and Bridget Burke Ravizza, in their book *Project Holiness: Marriage as a Workshop for Everyday Saints*. In addition to their scholarly contributions, Tim and Sue Muldoon also publish books for a general audience on family spirituality rooted in the Ignatian charism, such as *Six Sacred Rules for Families: A Spirituality for the Home*; *The Discerning Parent: An Ignatian Guide to Raising Your Teen*; and *Reclaiming Family Time: A Guide to Slowing Down and Savoring the Gift of One Another*. Rubio too has engaged this market with *Reading, Praying, Living Pope Francis's The Joy of Love: A Faith Formation Guide*. Characteristic of this literature is its attention to the lived experiences of diverse families as sources of theological, moral, and spiritual wisdom. Church teachings on sex, gender, marriage, and reproduction—so central to Catholic thought on family—share space with teaching on the economy, environment, migration, work, and other social issues as families strive to live out their mission in the church and world. The tent is big enough to include a range of perspectives that address daily habits at the most intimate spaces of family life as well as the protection and promotion of family life at the structural and policy level.

It comes as no surprise, then, that the sources engaged by those writing about human families include documents directly concerned with marriage and family, such as *Familiaris Consortio* and *Amoris Laetitia*, as well as more expansive social documents such as *Laudato Si'*, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, *Querida Amazonia*, and *Christus Vivit*. Whether the Church is addressing families in particular or the relationships that connect all human beings and the earth, the language of family and kinship runs throughout: brothers, sisters, siblings all in the Christian family, the human family, and the family of creation. Images of family in the documents are rife with problems and bursting with possibilities, as the contributors here illustrate.

“The joy of love experienced by families is also the joy of the

Church.” So begins Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. In the spirit of *Gaudium et Spes*, we note that the sorrows and sufferings of families are experienced in the heart of the Church as well. Though the implementation and response were uneven across dioceses, Francis chose to request input from the experiences and insights of families to inform the synod gatherings of the world’s bishops and help them understand more fully the challenges facing families in all places and cultures. Many families are in crisis. According to some, the family itself is under assault. This volume looks squarely at many of the conditions that have brought families to this critical moment: racism, economic inequality, patriarchy, environmental devastation, and weakened social bonds at the local and global levels. Essays here anticipate Pope Francis’s most recent call to a universal human solidarity in *Fratelli Tutti*. The tenor is hopeful, the vision is rooted in solidarity, the proposals are practical, and the invitation to participate in a world fit for families is open wide.