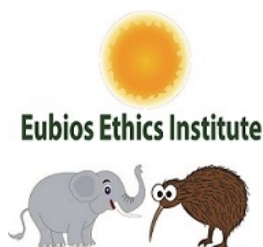


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Editorial: What is the meaning of life?

This collection of four papers in this issue of *EJAIB* share one of the questions fundamental to the relevance of bioethics over time, namely what is the meaning of life? A question both for us and for the beings we share the world with.

Alex Waller reviews some of the new technologies to minimize the use of laboratory animals, building on his experience teaching science for some years. As any student of bioethics who has also studied biology and biomedicine will have asked, if we love life how can we minimize the unnecessary suffering and killing of animals? Although, arguably, many people live in a situation where eating fish and meat is nutritionally very important, the moral justification of gaining only pre-known knowledge from the killing of animals in laboratories might be more questioned. This is an

ongoing question in science education, as well as biomedical research, for many decades.

Izna Khan presents an analysis of religious perspectives on assisted reproductive technologies in South Asia. In some countries there are still legal differences in the access to these services for followers of some religions. Yet there are also clear differences among followers of any one religion in their preferences and judgments of morality in some technologies. Should individuals see their choices constrained by what the religious scholars of the tradition that they identify with limit their choices?

Luke Antonie Yanong Quijano and Wilson Miasco analyze Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia: A Renewed Pastoral Approach of the Church for Couples in the Modern World*. The Roman Catholic church has elaborated some detailed theological rules for Catholics, and how can this help couples when faced with a range of technologies to assist them in reproduction, and life in general? We see variations in personal practice on questions such as use and types of contraception, abortions, sex selection, and various assisted reproductive technologies.

Wesley Kim D. Soguilon raises questions for reflection on health responsibility exploring topics of Aquinas' Charity and antibiotic resistance, that may appear totally different worlds, were we not in the interdisciplinary and philosophical dialogues of bioethics.

So the answer: life has a lot of meaning, and the creation of life is something that can be deliberate or by chance, yet always should be loved.

- Darryl Macer

New technologies to minimize the use of laboratory animals

- Alexander Waller PhD Msc BSc (Hons) CBiol FRSB
CChem MRSC

Visiting Professor of Environmental Ethics & Science Education, American University of Sovereign Nations; Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) Fellow, Yale University.

Email: arwaller1@hotmail.com

Abstract

The use of animals as test subjects has been steadily growing since the mid twentieth century. Since 1938 until 2022 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required all pharmaceutical medicines developed in the USA to have completed animal trials prior to progressing to human clinical trials. Although animal testing was formerly widely accepted practice to ensure public safety and the benefit to society from the development of novel products there are several reasons against it. There is evidence that, in some countries, public opinion is steadily growing against the use of animals in scientific research. Frequently arguments against the use of animals in scientific research are from ethical standpoints relating to animal suffering, the intrinsic value of animals and animal rights. Further considerations include the comparative anatomy of the animal to human physiology, the use of the excessive numbers of animals such as those required to produce clones of genetically modified organisms and the perceived benefits of the use non-sentient in preference to sentient beings. It is also important to consider what the animals are being used for. There may be wider public support for the use of animals for the safe development of pharmaceutical drugs, agrichemicals or processed foods with fewer people endorsing the use of animals as fodder in the cosmetics or tobacco industries. From a sustainability point of view, the carbon footprint created from the use of animals should also be taken into account. Collectively the ethical, technical and economic arguments have been instrumental to influence many authorities

around the globe to start adopting New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) and the three Rs principle of Replace, Reduce and Refine. This review paper outlines and gives examples of these NAMs, with some discussion of the bioethical considerations.

Introduction

The use of animals as test subjects has been steadily growing since the mid twentieth century according to Taylor and Alvarez (2019). For example, until 2022 in the United States of America (USA) the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required all pharmaceutical medicines to have completed animal trials prior to progressing to human clinical trials since the 1938, according to Han (2023). Animal testing could be described by advocates as a gold standard requirement for pharmaceutical research. Although animal testing was formerly widely accepted practice to ensure public safety and the benefit to society from the development of novel products there are several reasons against it. There is evidence that, in some countries, public opinion is steadily growing against the use of animals in scientific research. Polls like the 2024 survey in the link suggest strong public backing for ending animal testing in scientific research.¹

Frequently arguments against the use of animals in scientific research are from ethical standpoints relating to animal suffering, the intrinsic value of animals and animal rights. Further considerations include the comparative anatomy of the animal to human physiology (testing a potential respiratory medicine on amphibians may be relatively meaningless), the use of the excessive numbers of animals such as those required to produce clones of genetically modified organisms and the perceived benefits of the use non-sentient in preference to sentient beings. It is also important to consider why animals are being used: there may be wider public support for the use of animals for the safe development of pharmaceutical drugs, agrichemicals or processed foods with fewer people endorsing the use of animals as fodder in the cosmetics or tobacco industries. From a sustainability point of view, the carbon footprint

¹ Accessed online 22-9-25 available from: <https://www.news-medical.net/news/20240930/Survey-reveals-strong-public-backing-for-ending-animal-testing-in-scientific-research.aspx>

created from the use of animals should also be taken into account.

Related to the ethical considerations is whether the use of animals is actually an accurate model for the long-term use of a substance by humans. Vioxx was a medicine, developed to treat arthritis, which had passed animals trials. Arthritis is a chronic disease that can involve long-term dependence upon medication. However, Mayor (2005) reports that after Vioxx was on the market it was found that if people used it over a sustained period, they had a significantly increased the risk of some cardiovascular diseases. So, although Vioxx had passed animal testing this was insufficient to determine safety in humans.

A further consideration, is the question of economics. Animal testing does not come cheap, by using reliable and accurate alternatives that are also less expensive means that cost reductions may be passed onto the consumer. Indeed, arguments based on the quality of models and economics may be more persuasive than taking moral standpoints, as reported by Reardon (2025).

Collectively the ethical, technical and economic arguments have been instrumental to influence many authorities around the globe to start adopting New Approach Methodologies (NAMs) and the three Rs principle of Replace, Reduce and Refine. In the USA the National Institute of Health (NIH) has increased investment support for alternatives to animal testing, and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and FDA have indicated that they intend to shift from animal testing on some chemicals such as herbicides and fungicides according to Reardon (2025). WOH (2024) also notes that Europe, Japan, and the Republic of Korea are embracing the 3Rs, and showcasing the seven government agencies that having collaborating for four years in the Taiwan 3R Initiative.

New Approach Methodologies (NAMs)

There are several initiatives such as the FDA Advancing Alternative Methods and the EU Reference Laboratory for Alternatives to Animal Testing that are developing NAMs and technologies including:

- **Microfluids** based on hydrogels incorporated into microscopic channels and chambers are used to simulate microenvironments akin to human tissues and organs. This facilitates researchers being able emulate changing conditions such as intercellular communication or blood flow that impact upon the tissue fluid that bathes cells. Microfluids can be customised for different organs to help study the efficacy, toxicity, metabolism and excretion of drugs.
- **Organoids and organs-on-chips** created by 3D printing and tissue engineering incorporating stem cells. These may incorporate distinct cells and be valuable for studying interactions of the drug between different cells. Clarivate (2024) provides an example of induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSC) used to develop a liver-chip consisting of hepatocytes, endothelial and Kupffer cells. There have been some very promising reports of the use of organoids. These include researchers such as Ewart *et al.* (2022) finding 100% specificity and 87% sensitivity in an analysis of 870 liver chips for a set of 27 drugs with known toxicities and Nieskens *et al.* (2021) using a kidney tissue organoid who found that a drug showed toxic effects that had not been detected in preclinical tests on mammals. Romitti (2022) proposes that embryonic stem cells can be used to develop thyroid follicles to research for drugs to treat hyperthyroidism. Further examples of this technology are listed by Block and Amundson (2023) including:
 - intestine organoids used to test drugs for cystic fibrosis
 - brain organoids proving that Zika virus transferred from pregnant mothers caused microcephaly in their babies
 - lung-on-a-chip development allowed for close monitoring of fluid build-up that is often associated with drug treatments lung cancer patients and helped in the discovery of novel drugs to combat this
 - a nervous system organ-on-a-chip helped to find the cause of muscle weakness in patients with rare chronic inflammatory demyelinating

neuropathy. This would not have been possible in animal tests as this rare disease has not been found in laboratory animals.

However further development of this technology is not without its challenges such as tumorigenicity and how differentiated cells can vary depending on the protocol as detailed by Kramer *et al.* (2016).

- **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is revolutionising drug development. Large Language Models (LLMs) are extremely valuable in data mining from literature and interpreting biochemical data. AI is increasingly enhancing the potential and value of the aforementioned technologies. Rudroff (2024) tabulates the work of a range of researchers to illustrate potential breadth and advantages of using AI to replace animal testing. Examples include:

- Zhavoronkov *et al.* (2019) using deep learning to identify a novel candidate drug for fibrosis within three weeks – a very impressive acceleration in drug discovery
- Huang *et al.* (2020) used convolutional neural networks that predicted Parkinson's disease progression with high accuracy that could reduce the need for longitudinal animal studies
- AbdulHameed *et al.* (2021) used machine learning to predict toxicity using in vitro data

- **Virtual organs and digital twins.** Digital twins are virtual models of physical objects. The use of virtual organs in drug development can improve the cost-effectiveness and efficiency of the process. In combination with AI synthetic data can be generated to simulate organ function in living systems. For example, Cobos *et al.* (2022) used digital twins to explore nerve responses in visual cortex of a mouse indicating that in the future the use of digital organs could negate the use of animals in this stage of research and development. Gangwal and Lavecchia (2025) list a number of potential roles of AI and digital organs, many of which will facilitate the development of personalised medical care. This list includes, but is not limited to:

- modelling drug responses in organs and organ-systems
- minimising simulation errors using ongoing data updates from live patient data
- predicting organ-specific toxicity using simulations
- prioritising candidate drugs based on effects in patient-specific digital twins
- simulating disease progression and responses to therapies over time

The use of digital twins, virtual organs, machine learning and deep learning shows great promise. Ro (2024) reports how software has been developed by the FDA, with AI training on data from several thousand rats on over one thousand treatment protocols, that can accurately how rats will react to numerous chemicals. Ro also reports that a virtual dog is being developed.

However, it must be remembered that AI is trained on data and the quality of that data determines the quality of the model. The use of data from older drugs may limit the applicability or usefulness for novel medicines. If data has been gleaned from studies using young healthy males it is questionable whether conclusions by AI can be generalised to the wider population. Additionally, AI makes computational approximations which do not always replicate or capture the complexity of responses in actual living organisms. The use of AI brings several ethical considerations, including transparency, bias, fairness, explainability and accountability. For example, if AI is trained on data solely animal models then biases and limitations will be perpetuated. Additionally, of particular importance is the issue of privacy if data mined from medical records or from research in areas such as neurology as cautioned by researchers such as Rudroff (2024). If the use of AI leads to erroneous safety conclusions of a drug, which is subsequently used in human trials or released for public use, then it must be clear who will be held legally accountable.

If NAMs and AI based testing as outlined above in adopted in place of conventional animal testing it is likely to accelerate the approval of new medications as the time for the development of new drugs will decrease. However, there is a risk that premature reliance on AI and NAMs, before

the technologies are fully developed with ethically determined regulation and monitoring systems in place, it could lead to false positives that could in turn unnecessarily block the development of some medicines. One such example is a deep learning model that has a sensitivity of 91%, an accuracy of 74% but only 47% specificity, according to Li *et al.* (2021). The scientific consensus is moving towards agreement that NAMs are increasingly more accurate and more relevant for drugs designed ultimately for human-use, since there can be disparities between how diseases manifest in different species ultimately due to variation in physiology and genetics. This is particularly so for toxicity testing, as the use of cells and tissues from the target species provide deeper mechanistic insights into effects on whole organisms of that species.

Nonetheless, a cautious approach will probably avoid setbacks like the impact that the death of eighteen-year-old Jesse Gelsinger had on the further rate of development, acceptance and legislation for gene therapy for over a decade, as described by Ghose (2025). Therefore, it would be advisable to currently move to adopting NAMs in conjunction with reductions and refinements to animal testing, rather than entirely replacing the use of animals in medical research. Whichever way NAMS are employed in the future there is now a responsibility for governing authorities to have dynamic regulations in place that both incentivise the adoption of NAMs whilst limit their unrestricted use.

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Religious Perspectives on Assisted Reproductive Technologies: A Comparative Ethical Analysis with Implications for South Asia

- Izna Khan

BS Biotechnology Student, National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS), Pakistan
Email: iznakhan466@gmail.com

Abstract

Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) such as in vitro fertilization, gamete donation, and surrogacy have transformed possibilities for individuals and couples facing infertility, yet they raise profound ethical debates within religious traditions. This paper critically examines the perspectives of Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism, moving beyond description to highlight points of convergence, contradictions, and their reflection in practice, particularly in South Asia. The analysis shows that while religions converge on themes such as the sanctity of life, the centrality of marriage, and skepticism towards third-party involvement, they diverge on issues such as embryo status, donor gametes, and surrogacy. Paradoxes emerge between doctrine and practice: Catholic teachings reject IVF, yet Catholic-majority countries report high utilization; Sunni Islam prohibits donor gametes, whereas Shia jurisprudence in Iran permits them; Hinduism's mythology celebrates divine surrogacy, yet India has restricted commercial surrogacy. In Pakistan, fatwas prohibit surrogacy and donor gametes, but IVF clinics continue to operate, reflecting a gap between religious injunctions and lived realities. These findings suggest that while religious traditions remain central to ART bioethics, their influence in practice is contested and negotiated. Recognizing both convergence and contradiction provides a more nuanced understanding of ART regulation, underscoring the need for South Asian countries to develop policies that respect religious values while addressing the realities of reproductive healthcare.

Keywords: *assisted reproductive technologies, bioethics, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, cross-cultural ethics*

Introduction

Infertility is a growing global health concern, and advances in assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs)—including in vitro fertilization (IVF), gamete donation, surrogacy, and cryopreservation—have transformed the possibilities of parenthood. While these technologies provide hope for many individuals and couples, they also raise complex ethical questions. Central to these debates are religious perspectives, as faith traditions profoundly shape understandings of family, lineage, and the moral limits of medical intervention.

Existing literature often presents religious rulings on ART in a descriptive manner, focusing on individual faith traditions in isolation. However, there is a need for more comparative and analytical work that explores points of convergence and divergence between religions and examines how doctrinal teachings interact with social realities. This is particularly important in South Asia, where religious norms remain deeply influential and where demand for ART is rapidly increasing despite limited or uneven regulation.

This paper seeks to address this gap by examining Islamic, Christian, Hindu, and Jewish perspectives on ART. It moves beyond descriptive summaries by identifying shared ethical principles, internal contradictions, and the paradoxes between doctrine and practice. The analysis also highlights South Asia as a key regional context where religious beliefs and clinical realities often intersect and sometimes conflict. By doing so, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious bioethics can inform culturally sensitive and ethically robust ART regulations.

Religious Perspectives on Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Islam

Islamic jurisprudence provides guidance for all aspects of life, including religious, political, and social matters, while placing clear ethical boundaries on certain practices such as assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs). Islam has

provided its teachings and sayings in “*Quran*” (the holy book of Muslims) and a word of God delivered through his messenger Prophet Muhammad (P.B.U.H) through his “*Sunnah* and *Hadiths*” (Prophet narrations and sayings). Islam is internally diverse, with multiple schools of thought; however, Sunni Muslims represent the majority (approximately 85–90%) and dominate bioethical discourse in most Muslim-majority countries (Shavazi et al., 2004).

In Sunni sect there is a *fatwa* (a religious decree) on which there are some boundaries for Muslims which tells how to live their lives according to the *Quran and Sunnah* and what are the limitations to these matters of life (Sanie & Kargar, 2021). The Grand Sheikh of Egypt belongs to the well-known religious university, issued *Al-Azhar* fatwa after two years of first born IVF baby in England, this fatwa was widely accepted in Sunni Muslim world (Inhorn., 2006). This fatwa includes some limitations that are:

1. Artificial insemination with the husband’s sperm is permitted, and the resulting child is considered legitimate.
2. IVF treatments are permissible provided they involve only the married couple’s gametes and occur within a valid marriage contract.
3. All forms of surrogacy and third-party gamete donation are prohibited; such practices are viewed as violating lineage preservation and equated with *zina* (Sanie & Kargar, 2021).
4. Cryopreservation of embryos is allowed under certain conditions, but post-divorce or post-widowhood implantation is impermissible.
5. In Multifetal pregnancy (twins or triplets) and a couple wants to do selective abortion or reduction of a child this is considered a deadly sinful act in Islam. It is only allowed when a wife is in critical state or a foetus is abnormal or not able to survive later. “If a woman intends to abort her pregnancy, then the Fuqaha have said: “If the period of the soul being blown into the foetus has elapsed, it will be impermissible.” (Ibn Adam, Radd al-Muhtar 5/276).

6. Gender or Sex selection is another big issue. In Islam if parents want to check their baby's gender then it's only when they are going to accept either its boy or girl but if they want to have a boy and just abort the baby girl then it's highly prohibited in Islam. {6:140} They are lost indeed who kill their children foolishly without knowledge, and forbid what Allah has given to them forging a lie against Allah; they have indeed gone astray, and they are not the followers of the right course (Chamsi-Pasha & Ali Albar, 2015).
7. Some Sunni jurists classify children born from illicit reproductive methods (e.g., using donor gametes) as having disputed lineage.

Shia Perspectives: Unlike Sunni jurisprudence, some Shia authorities (especially in Iran) have issued permissive fatwas allowing egg and sperm donation under regulated conditions (Inhorn 2012; Tremayne 2018). These rulings often include contractual frameworks ensuring clear lineage documentation. This intra-religious diversity highlights the dynamic nature of Islamic bioethics and the influence of cultural and legal contexts on ART rulings.

Hinduism

Hinduism, one of the world's oldest religions, is practiced by more than 1.1 billion people worldwide, with approximately 94% residing in India (Pew Research Center, 2022). The religion encompasses a wide range of cultural traditions and ethical perspectives, resulting in diverse views on assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs).

Procreation is often regarded as a dharma (religious duty) in Hindu tradition, which supports the acceptance of medical interventions such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) to help couples conceive (Crawford, 2003). Hindu texts and scholars do not offer a unified stance on the moral status of the embryo; while some believe life begins at conception, others suggest that ensoulment occurs later. This diversity allows for a relatively flexible approach toward IVF and embryo use (Coward & Lipner, 1989).

Donor gametes remain a debated issue. Some Hindu scholars emphasize lineage and bloodline purity, expressing ethical concerns over third-party gametes, while others permit their use under certain conditions, including donation by close relatives of the husband to preserve lineage (Coward & Lipner, 1989). Abortion is generally permitted under Indian law, and some Hindu scholars allow it under specific circumstances, such as risks to maternal health, though opinions vary regarding its moral permissibility after ensoulment (Sallam & Sallam, 2016). Overall, Hinduism demonstrates considerable flexibility toward ARTs while emphasizing the importance of family, procreation, and ethical lineage.

Christianity

Christianity is the world's largest religion, with an estimated 2.18 billion adherents globally, representing nearly one-third of the global population (Pew Research Center, 2011). It is geographically widespread, and no single continent can claim to be the exclusive center of global Christianity. The three largest branches of Christianity—Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Eastern Orthodoxy—share some core beliefs but differ in their ethical evaluations of assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs).

Roman Catholicism

Catholic bioethics draws on both natural law reasoning and Church teaching. Two key Vatican documents addressing ARTs are *Donum Vitae* (Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, 1987) and *Dignitas Personae* (2008), both issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. These texts provide ethical guidance not only for Catholic couples but also for medical professionals and policymakers. Three core principles emphasized in Catholic teaching include: (1) the need to safeguard the integrity and dignity of the embryo, avoiding any procedure that harms or destroys nascent human life; (2) the importance of kinship, affirming that a child should be conceived by its biological parents within marriage; and (3) the call to respect human sexuality by ensuring that procreation occurs through conjugal love rather than the use of third-party gametes (Tham et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the Catholic Church prohibits IVF using donor gametes, surrogacy, and embryo destruction, and strongly opposes abortion as incompatible with the sanctity of human life (Schenker, 2005).

Protestantism

Protestant views on ART vary widely due to the diversity of denominations. Many Protestant communities permit IVF and intrauterine insemination (IUI) when the couple's own gametes are used. Opinions on third-party gamete donation and surrogacy differ; some liberal Protestant groups view children as a gift from God and allow donor-assisted conception under ethical safeguards, while conservative groups reject third-party involvement and abortion, holding that life begins at conception. Liberal Protestant denominations are generally more accepting of abortion under certain circumstances, emphasizing women's autonomy and access to safe and legal services, whereas conservative groups oppose it as taking innocent human life (Kiyaschenko et al., 2019). Across denominations, Protestant ethicists emphasize the importance of preventing harm and maintaining respect for human dignity (Schenker, 2005).

Eastern Orthodoxy

Eastern Orthodoxy, with over 260 million adherents worldwide, is the second-largest Christian tradition (Pew Research Center, 2017). Like Catholics, Orthodox Churches prohibit third-party gamete donation and surrogacy, stressing the importance of marital fidelity and lineage preservation. Some Orthodox jurisdictions allow IVF using the couple's own gametes under pastoral guidance, but abortion and embryo destruction are strongly condemned as violations of the sanctity of life (Schenker, 2005).

Judaism

According to recent estimates, the global Jewish population reached approximately 15.17 million in early 2021, with nearly 85% residing in Israel and the United States (Pew Research Center, 2021). Israel accounts for about 45% and the US about 40% of world Jewry, while 9% live in Europe, 5% in other parts of North and Latin

America, and 1% in other continents. While Israel's Jewish population has steadily grown, many smaller diaspora communities face demographic challenges such as low birth rates, assimilation, and migration (DellaPergola, 2021). The three main branches—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism—share a strong pronatalist ethic but differ in their interpretation and application of Jewish law (halakha).

A central tenet of Jewish tradition is the biblical commandment to "be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:28), and rabbinic literature emphasizes the importance of procreation, sometimes describing a man without children as lacking life's fullness (Genesis 30:2). Orthodox Judaism adheres closely to halakhic rulings and generally permits IVF and intrauterine insemination (IUI) when performed with the couple's own gametes, typically under rabbinic supervision (Connor et al., 2012; Schenker, 2005). The use of donor gametes and surrogacy can raise lineage concerns and is allowed only under strict rabbinic guidance and with safeguards to prevent violations of Jewish law.

Conservative Judaism takes a more permissive approach, allowing donor gametes and surrogacy with ethical oversight and rabbinic consultation. Reform Judaism is the most liberal; it supports IVF, IUI, gamete donation, and surrogacy, including for single individuals and same-sex couples (Schenker, 2005). Across Jewish traditions, a common permissive feature is the belief—based on some rabbinic interpretations—that ensoulment occurs at 40 days post-conception, making early embryo manipulation less morally problematic compared to later stages of fetal development.

Comparative Ethical Insights and Paradoxes

Beyond individual religious positions, examining cross-faith perspectives on assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) reveals both shared ethical foundations and notable divergences. Across Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Judaism, a common thread is the recognition of procreation as a valued moral duty. Islamic teachings emphasize lineage and marital fidelity; Hinduism frames childbearing as a form of dharma; Judaism interprets the biblical commandment to "be

fruitful and multiply” as an obligation; and Catholicism views openness to life as integral to marriage (Connor et al., 2012; Pande, 2014; Sanie & Kargar, 2021). These converging values highlight that despite theological differences, many faiths regard fertility support as morally significant when it aligns with core ethical principles.

A second shared concern is the moral status of embryos and protection of nascent life, though beliefs differ about when life or ensoulment begins. Catholicism teaches that life begins at conception; many Islamic scholars identify ensoulment around 120 days; some Jewish interpretations place it at 40 days; and Hindu perspectives vary (Chamsi-Pasha & Albar, 2015; Tham et al., 2022). These differences directly shape ethical evaluations of embryo freezing, destruction, or selective reduction.

At the same time, there are apparent paradoxes between doctrine and practice. For example, Catholic teaching prohibits IVF with donor gametes, yet many Catholic couples quietly access these services (Tham, 2022). Islamic fatwas forbid third-party donation, but several Muslim-majority countries have thriving fertility industries, sometimes operating under alternative legal frameworks (Farid & Tasnim, 2022). Israel, despite strict rabbinic oversight in Orthodox Judaism, has one of the highest per-capita IVF rates in the world, funded by the state (Shalev & Werner-Felmayer, 2012; Shalev & Gooldin, 2006). In India, Hindu traditions generally accept ARTs, but controversies around commercial surrogacy have prompted regulatory reforms (Pande, 2014). These tensions illustrate how cultural, economic, and policy contexts often mediate religious doctrines in practice.

Such comparative insights underscore that religious bioethics is not static; it interacts dynamically with modern medicine, patient needs, and societal pressures. Recognizing these nuances is essential for healthcare providers, ethicists, and policymakers working in pluralistic societies.

Conclusion

Assisted reproductive technologies present profound ethical questions that engage the deepest values of different faith traditions. While

doctrines vary, there is a consistent moral concern across religions for the dignity of life, integrity of family, and responsible use of technology. Critically, examining both common ground and tensions between doctrine and practice provides valuable lessons for global bioethics. It shows the need for culturally sensitive policies that respect religious values while ensuring equitable access to reproductive care.

Future scholarship should continue exploring how religious teachings shape real-world ART regulation and patient decision-making, especially in diverse societies. Such analysis contributes not just to academic debate but also to more compassionate and inclusive healthcare systems.

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Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*: A Renewed Pastoral Approach of the Church for Couples in the Modern World

- Luke Antonie Yanong Quijano, RCJ
Teaching Fellow, Rogationist College
Silang, Cavite, Philippines

lquijano@rcj.org

- Wilson Miasco, MA

Associate Instructor I, Holy Name University
Tagbilaran City, Bohol

wmiasco@hnu.edu.ph

Abstract

The Catholic Church teaches that the sacrament of marriage is one of the paths toward the sanctification of both beloved and lover, and as such, it is divinely willed. Two individuals in love make a public vow to remain faithful to each other in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, and to love and honor each other for life. In 2016, Pope Francis published the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, which some view as a guiding light for the Church, encouraging a thoughtful consideration of the contemporary challenges marriage faces. However, the document has also caused confusion among the faithful, propelling the high caliber cardinals-Caffarra, Brandmüller, Burke, and Meisner-to submit a *dubia*, to address perceived ambiguities surrounding controversial aspects of Chapter Eight of the said papal document. This study aims to examine Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia* to clarify how certain

circumstances might be morally acceptable while remaining faithful to the fundamental teachings of the Church. In doing so, it seeks to foster a deeper understanding that may help unify the people of God within the Church in a modern, ever-changing world, without compromising the fundamental Catholic teachings on marriage as found in Sacred Scripture and Tradition

Keywords: *Amoris Laetitia*, marriage, Accompaniment, Discernment, Law of Graduality and Integration

Introduction

The Bishop of Rome “possesses supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely,”² meaning that the Pope, as the successor of Peter, has the autonomy to make decisions in leading the Church.³ On March 19, 2016, Pope Francis, promulgated the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. This document was met with enthusiasm by many members of the Church hierarchy, the faithful, and even non-believers. It is widely regarded as a guiding light for addressing the challenges faced by the Church in the modern world, particularly in relation to families, married couples, and the pastoral accompaniment of the clergy. *Amoris Laetitia* emphasizes the importance of accompanying couples in “irregular situations” and pastorally form their conscience and encourage their integration into the life of the Church, with the

ultimate aim of helping them transform their circumstances and strive toward alignment with the Church’s ideals.

However, alongside the deference to Pope Francis’s pastoral direction, opposition emerged against his magisterial teaching—specifically regarding the possibility of admitting divorced and civilly remarried Catholics to the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion⁴ that can be found in the chapter eight of *Amoris Laetitia*. Critics argue that this teaching transgresses and ruptures the Church’s settled doctrines on the indissolubility of marriage and the proper disposition required for receiving Holy Communion.⁵ This controversy prompted prominent cardinals—Caffarra, Brandmüller, Burke, and Meisner—to submit a *dubia* in an effort to clarify the ambiguities surrounding the papal document. Critics contend that the document risks encouraging individuals to deliberately continue verboten relationships with married persons, fully aware of their marital status, therefore jeopardizing ecclesiastical and public morals as well as the sanctity of marriage.

The Church, which has withstood centuries of attacks from all sides, remains steadfast in its mission, rooted in love. With this same virtue, the Church seeks not to suppress the goodwill of individuals, provided they act within its laws and moral teachings. Be that as it may, when these teachings are transgressed, the Church through its hierarchies does not hesitate to intervene in

² John Paul II, *The Code of the Canon Law Canon 331*, (Pasay City, Philippines: Paulines Publishing House, 2024), 97.

³ Although Canon 333 § 2 provides that his exercise of power is always with the college of bishops, yet, since he possesses supreme, full, and immediate power, he can exercise that power without the college when he deems necessary to do so.

⁴ Pope Francis, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* nos. 336, 351.” Vatican, accessed January 25, 2025, (March 19, 2016), https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html.

⁵ In the author’s opinion, the Indissolubility of marriage was taught categorically by Jesus Christ in the Gospel. In addition, the “deposit of faith” is passed from all the ages through the Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture with the Church’s Magisterium who is tasked to safeguard it and transmit the faith work together to assist the faithful to learn, understand and live the faith; and they are guided to eternal salvation. Therefore, our faith rests on a three-legged stool, which offer the believer secure and certain support.

scandalous relationships to preserve the sanctity of marriage and moral order. Such interventions may extend to asundering illicit relationships, including the imposition of canonical penalties, prohibiting the individuals involved from receiving the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Communion⁶ unless they are “ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage.”⁷ However, this legalistic mindset guiding pastoral activity has alienated other members of the Church. The continued reliance on this approach has only contributed to the increasing number of those who feel distanced from the faith each year.

Therefore, in this paper, the author aligns with Pope Francis’s approach to leading the Church by shedding a glimpse of light on the perspectives of those who view the papal document *Amoris Laetitia* as bereft of foundation in the Church’s prior teachings. First, the author will lay down the biblical and sacramental understanding of marriage. Second, he will explore Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*, emphasizing the importance of reinstating those in irregular situations through the lens of merciful accompaniment and discernment, while briefly touching on the doctrine of mitigation. This discussion aims to foster a deeper appreciation of the document and the integration of couples whose culpability is mitigated into the life of the Church, thereby shaping a new pastoral approach suited to contemporary circumstances. Third, the author will address the Law of Graduality, a principle that

underscores the universal call to holiness—a challenging yet attainable journey that unfolds through a step-by-step process. In this context, he will also reflect on the lives of St. Augustine and Herbert Kappler, whose conversions serve as powerful examples of conformation to Gospel values. Finally, the author will address *Amoris Laetitia*’s central criticisms, responding to the concerns raised by those who oppose the document.

The Biblical and Sacramental Account of Marriage

In the Book of Genesis, God observes Adam’s solitude and deems it unfit for him to be alone. To address this, He causes Adam to fall into a deep sleep. Rising from his sleep, man’s loneliness is broken, because the first man reawakens and “in this way he manifests for the first time joy and even exaltation, for which he had no reason before, owing to the lack of a being like himself. Joy in the other human being, in the second ‘self,’ dominates the words spoken by the man on seeing the woman.”⁸ Adam’s solitude led to the creation of Eve, and from that moment, “God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, for love and communion.”⁹ Therefore, every human person on this earth is called and endowed with the ability to love and deserve to be loved. It is natural to feel attraction and fall in love with the opposite sex due to the intrinsic complementarity between femininity and

⁶ See Canon 915 Those who have been excommunicated or interdicted after the imposition or declaration of the penalty and others obstinately persevering in manifest grave sin are not to be admitted to holy communion.; see also Canon 916 A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to celebrate Mass or receive the body of the Lord without previous sacramental confession unless there is a grave reason and there is no opportunity to confess; in this case the person is to remember the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition which includes the resolution of confessing as soon as possible.

⁷ Paul Fahey, “Communion for the Divorced and Remarried: A Defense of *Amoris Laetitia*,” Where Peter is, accessed February 28, 2025, <https://wherpeteris.com/communion-for-the-divorced-and-remarried-a-defense-of-amoris-laetitia/>.

⁸ Pope John Paul II, “General Audience The Original Unity of Man and Woman,” Vatican, accessed March 1, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19791107.html.

⁹ John Paul II, “Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* no.11,” Vatican, accessed February 2, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.

masculinity. Though distinct, these differences are compatible, fostering the “person to become a better person in the relationship”¹⁰ and contributing to a sense of fulfillment and sufficiency in life.

As man was created out of love, but was in solitude although he had the world with him, and to cure his loneliness, God created a suitable partner out of his bone that eliminated his solitary life therefore, he was bound to love the other, which also indicates that they were designed for unity. This unity is manifested to us in Genesis, “that is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body” (Gen 2:24). It is essential to note that the unity of which Genesis speaks about “they become one flesh” is undoubtedly expressed and realized in the conjugal act.¹¹ However, when the first parents succumbed to the “fall” and realized their separation from the Creator, shame, lust, domination, and manipulation distorted the original unity and communion.¹² Sin as the rejection of the divine proposal, in fact, leads to a profound imbalance in all human relations.¹³

This Old Testament biblical foundation was the basis of Jesus’ teachings about the irrevocable marriage covenant to some Pharisees who attempted to measure his knowledge of whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife, and Jesus answered by quoting “in the beginning” means that which Genesis speaks about. From the

natural spousal bond, “it has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.”¹⁴ Marriage as a sacrament is now a visible sign of the invisible reality, a means through which divine grace is conferred upon the beloved and the lover.¹⁵ According to the Code of Canon Law, marriage is a “matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring.” (John Paul II, “*The Code of Canon Law Canon 1055 § 1*”) Marriage is a lifelong covenant that desires the good of the other and bears fruit through openness to new life offspring. Through the sacrament they receive, spouses are endowed with the graces necessary to fulfill their marital duties.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church elucidates that marriage is based on conjugal love which “involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter—appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will.” This conjugal love aims “at a deeply personal unity, a unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul.” The lover completes the beloved in marital unity, and their formation of one heart and soul can be understood as the complementarity of their beings, expressed through the unity of their bodies. However, it “demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving and it is

¹⁰ See Corazon T Toralba, “The Transformative Power of Love,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy (PIJP)*, Volume 21, (Special Issue 2020): 371-384.

¹¹ John Paul II, “In the First Chapters of Genesis, Marriage Is One and Indissoluble”, Vatican, accessed March 1, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19791121.html.

¹² Jove Jim Aguas, “The Notion of Man’s Original Status in John Paul II’s Theology of the Body,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy (PIJP)*, Volume 21, (Published Special Issue 2020): 324.

¹³ Benedict XVI, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the International Theological Commission on the Occasion of its Annual Plenary Assembly,” Vatican, accessed March 1, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedictxvi/en/speeches/2012/december/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20121207_cti.html.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, “Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the Inauguration of the Judicial Year of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota,” Vatican, accessed, March 2, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2013/january/documents/hf_benxvi_spe_20130126_rota-romana.html.

¹⁵ “A Catechism of Christian Doctrine” (The Baltimore Catechism Q 574), The Project Gutenberg eBook of A Catechism of Christian Doctrine, accessed March 2, 2025, <https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/14553/pg14553.html>.

open to fertility.”¹⁶ In other words, indissolubility makes their love for one another more faithful and amendable in rearing and the education of children.¹⁷ Conjugal love on which marriage is based bears a new significance in that it becomes the “expression of specifically Christian values.” (Pope John Paul II, “Familiaris Consortio, no. 9”)

The essential properties of marriage are “unity and indissolubility,” wherein both spouses are committed to enriching their marital love. They share a mutual responsibility to uphold the validity of their marriage and to orient it toward the generation and education of offspring. John Paul II further explains that they “are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.” (Pope John Paul II, “Familiaris Consortio, no. 19”) This communion is “according to the original divine plan this conjugal union is indissoluble,” (*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 338 (Philippines: Claretian Publication, 2005), 108.) as Jesus Christ affirmed: “What God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (Mk 10:9). It is deepened by lives of the common faith and by the Eucharist received together.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1644,” 460) The sacramental and consummated marriage between the beloved and the lover is designed to embody a reciprocal love that, by its nature, involves giving and receiving. This mutual exchange leads to the enrichment of both individuals, blessed and sanctified through the sacrament of marriage.

However, the biblical and sacramental values of marriage are not immune to polemical attacks brought about by modernization¹⁸ and the secularization of society. These forces view the scriptural and sacramental significance of marriage as obsolete and irrelevant, leading to the

diminishing of its paramount importance and, consequently, to the rise of infidelity and separation. While we recognize the auspicious contributions of modernization to our lives today, its detrimental effects on marriage can be traced to various factors such “as poverty, anthropocentrism and different factors for the change of lifestyle, which contributed to the engendering of some issues-divorce, adultery, child abuse, and child labor can be seen in today.”¹⁹ A papal document that pastorally reexamines the modern situation of family and marriage with an eye of mercy and love is *Amoris Laetitia*. This document entrusts pastors with the responsibility to accompany, discern, and integrate families and couples, regardless of their status, into the life of the Church. The researcher will explore this theme in greater detail in the next section.

Chapter Eight of Amoris Laetitia: Accompanying, Discerning and Integrating

The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* emphasizes the importance of approaching various marital situations with the lens of mercy (See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, nos. 309- 310) and love (See Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 306). These include sacramentally valid married couples who, due to unfortunate circumstances, have decided to civilly divorce and remarry, those who are only civilly married or in simple cohabitation, individuals who distrust marriage and choose to live together, those who distrust marriage break a prior commitment and immediately assume a new one, and individuals who openly persist in objective sin. This is for the purpose of accompanying them on their journey involves understanding their situation, discerning with them the best possible avenues for their integration into the life of the

¹⁶ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Catechism of the Catholic*, no. 1643 (Makati City, Metro Manila: Word and Life Publication, 1997), 460.

¹⁷ Mark Joseph Calano, “Marriage, Persons and the Body: Thomistic Intimations in Wojtyla,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy (PIJP)*, Volume 21, (Special Issue, 2020), 521.

¹⁸ See Manuel Dy, “Marcel’s mystery of the family and the problems of modernization in the Asian context,” *Karunungan: A Journal of Philosophy*, 20, (2003), 68-80.

¹⁹ Ivan Efreaim A. Gozum, “The Filipino Family in the Formation of Values in the Light of John Paul II’s Familiaris Consortio,” *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy (PIJP)*, Volume 21, (Special Issue 2020), 562.

Church²⁰ and receiving the sacraments of reconciliation and communion again, and guiding them toward conformity with the Gospel truth. This call by the Jesuit pope was met with hope and positive reception from people of various backgrounds, including those outside the Catholic faith. However, while many baptized Catholics warmly welcomed the document, it was also met with resistance from a significant number of faithful, including some members of the College of Cardinals.²¹ It was thought to be “conservatives versus liberals fighting for power over Church doctrine and pastoral practice.”²² The criticism centered on perceived “ambiguities and apparent contradictions,”²³ particularly in Chapter Eight of the document.

In addition, it is also important to note that this papal exhortation did not emerge in isolation—it was the result of the work and prayer of the whole church²⁴ and through the culmination of prior pastoral reflection, or more specifically, pastoral-theological reflection,²⁵ from the

previous two Synods. These Synods examined the Church’s teachings on the sacrament of matrimony and the Christian understanding of the family through the “discernment of the current cultural, social, and ecclesial situation.”²⁶ It sought to recognize the diversity of family realities, noting that “the Synod’s reflection shows us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes, and problems. The situations that concern us are challenges.” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 57). Examining the challenges faced by families worldwide is a significant step toward a comprehensive approach to evangelization. Understanding these situations enables the Church to discover new ways of communicating the unchanging message of the Gospel. To make the Christian message and the role of the family clear in the modern world,²⁷ it is essential for the fulfillment of a higher purpose to “appeal to human experience, since it remains the primary

²⁰ Brian Pedraza, PhD and John Meinert PhD, Fidelity and Discernment: Reading *Amoris Laetitia*, *Church Life: A Journal of McGrath Institute for Church Life*, accessed March 5, 2025, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/fidelity-and-discernment-reading-amoris-laetitia/>.

²¹ Edward Pentin, Cardinal Burke on *Amoris Laetitia* Dubia: ‘Tremendous Division’ Warrants Action, National Catholic Register, accessed March 5, 2025, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/cardinal-burke-on-amoris-laetitia-dubia-tremendous-division-warrants-action>.

²² Kent J. Lasnoski, “A Tale of Two Synods: What’s Become of Catholic Marriage and What Can We Do About It?,” *Church Life Journal A Journal of the McGrath Institute for Church Life*, accessed March 6, 2025, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/a-tale-of-two-synods-whats-become-of-catholic-marriage-and-what-can-we-do-about-it/>.

²³ Regis Scanlon, “*Amoris Laetitia*: A Deceptive Joy,” *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, accessed March 6, 2025, <https://www.hprweb.com/2016/05/amoris-laetitia-a-deceptive-joy/>.

²⁴ Victor Manuel Fernandez, “Appunto For the Audience with the Holy Father: Response to a Series of Questions Posed by His Eminence, Dominik Cardinal Duka, OP., Regarding the Administration of the Eucharist to Divorced People Living in a New Union,” *Vatican*, accessed March 6, 2025 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_20230925_risposte-card-duka_en.html.

²⁵ Rozkrut, T., “Znaczenie Synodu Biskupow dla wspolczesnego Kosciola,” *Roczniki Nauk Prawnych* Volume 21/1 (2011): 235-239.

²⁶ Mieczyslaw Polak, “From *Familiaris Consortio* to *Amoris Laetitia*: Pope Francis’ Renewed Vision of the Pastoral Care of Families,” *Verbum Vitae* Volume 40, no. 2 (2022): 408.

²⁷ Polak, “From *Familiaris Consortio* to *Amoris Laetitia*: Pope Francis’ Renewed Vision of the Pastoral Care of Families,” 414-415.

means of mediation through which access to the truth of Revelation is possible.”²⁸

With the final report from the Synod on the Family 2015 leading to the incarnation of *Amoris Laetitia*, one particularly controversial aspect of this papal exhortation is the suggestion that those in “irregular situations” may now be permitted to receive the “sacraments of reconciliation and holy communion without changing their living situation.”²⁹ The negative reaction from many faithful is understandable, especially considering that for centuries, the Church has upheld the teaching on the indissolubility of marriage as rooted in biblical scripture and explicitly taught by Jesus himself. Additionally, current canon law prohibits individuals in “irregular situations” or, to use the scriptural term, those living in “adultery” from receiving absolution through confession and partaking in Holy Communion (See Canon 915; see also CCC 1310, 1415, 1422, 1457, 1650). But is it true that *Amoris Laetitia* breaks away from the Church’s teachings, undermines its discipline toward those committing adultery, and downgrades the principle of the indissolubility of marriage by granting absolution and taking the holy communion?³⁰

To better address the question above, the author will first discuss Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia* which outlines how to achieve its fundamental aim, which is to integrate those living in irregular unions into the life of the Church and abide by the truth of the sacred scripture. On the one hand, it emphasizes connecting with them and “reinstating with an eye

of mercy,” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 296) where individuals are welcomed, accompanied, and integrated. On the other hand, it advocates applying the “law of gradualism,” encouraging a “*more perfect response*” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 300.) toward the ideal to be more fully realized. These principles are primarily the duty of a pastor, who is called to welcome and guide individuals patiently and discreetly, leading them toward the full reality of marriage and family in conformity with the Gospel. This mirrors how Jesus treated the Samaritan woman, bringing her to the full joy of the Gospel.³¹ Understanding this pastoral approach serves as a compass to appreciate better the document’s vision and its emphasis on mercy and gradual integration.

Reinstate with an Eye of Mercy through Accompaniment and Discernment

Chapter eight of the papal exhortation’s point of departure is the reassertion of the timeless church’s teaching that “*any breach of the marriage bond is against the will of God.*” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 291). However in the same paragraph, the Pope also recognized that the church through the example of Jesus’ gaze “*must accompany with attention and care the weakest of her children, who show signs of a wounded and troubled love,*” that due to certain circumstances “do not yet or no longer correspond to her teaching on marriage.” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 292). This opening statement of Pope Francis is a word of honor that there is no breaking away from the teachings of the church but developing only a new way that is

²⁸ Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, *Directory for Catechesis*, (Makati City, Philippines: Word and Life Publishing House, 2020), no. 200.

²⁹ Jeffrey Tranzillo, “*Amoris Laetitia*, the Human Person and the Meaning of Marital Indissolubility,” *Homiletic and Pastoral Review Magazine*, accessed March 07, 2025, <https://www.hprweb.com/2016/08/amoris-laetitia-the-human-person-and-the-meaning-of-marital-indissolubility/>

³⁰ Cf. Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, “Letter To The Bishops Of The Catholic Church Concerning The Reception Of Holy Communion By The Divorced And Remarried Members Of The Faithful,” *Vatican*, Published September 14, 1994 available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_14091994_rec-holy-comm-by-divorced_en.html no. 6; cf also John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” *Vatican*, Published November 22, 1981 available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html, no 84.

³¹ See Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 38 “. . . Many people feel that the Church’s message on marriage and the family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery.”

best possible to channel the faith and that those who are not yet in conformity to the unaltered message of the Gospel should be accompanied and be showed with mercy for “mercy was first shown to us”³².

Over the past decades, the world has changed rapidly, leading to an erosion of the Gospel’s ideals regarding family and marriage. These changes have made it increasingly difficult for pastors to effectively preach these ideals, resulting in a trivialized understanding of marriage and family. The widening gap between the Church’s prescriptions and individuals influenced by the many factors of modernization is alarming. Couples in irregular situations often view their relationships as normal because such practices have become widespread in the modern world. In this context, pastoral accompaniment and discernment are urgently needed. Priests, tasked with guiding their flock, must engage responsibly and seriously in the process of discernment (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 303). For it is the “priests who welcomes the person, listens attentively and shows the material face of the church, welcoming the person’s right intention and good purpose to place his or her whole life in the light of the Gospel and to practice charity.”³³ Through this, they can creatively and empathetically catechize couples on the Gospel’s demands for truth and charity (Pope Francis, “*Amoris*

Laetitia,” no. 300), while adhering to the conditions of “*humility, discretion, and love for the Church and her teaching, in a sincere search for God’s will and a desire to make a more perfect response to it.*”³⁴ A valuable spiritual tool for divorced and remarried Catholics is the examination of conscience, as advocated by St. Ignatius of Loyola. “*Through moments of reflection and repentance*”, couples in irregular situations are invited to listen to God and discern His direction for their lives. Evidently, this process is arduous, “it takes insight, determination, and courage on the part of the couple to properly discern together.”³⁵ Nevertheless, “a sincere reflection can strengthen trust in the merc of God which is not denied anyone.”³⁶ The priest plays a crucial role in this process as well, as he is “called to form consciences, not replace them” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 37) helping the couple discern what God is asking of them for the good of their children and family. In addition, pastors will broaden their perspective on ministry, as it involves “returning to and meditating on the message of Christ and the Christian tradition of the family, and seeking to understand how this message can guide and accompany families in addressing the challenges they face today.”³⁷ In such a manner, the Bride of Christ “veers away from a self-referential method that is self-absorbed by its own thought, but is constantly

³² Pope Francis, “*Misericordiae Vultus* Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, no.9 *Vatican*, accessed April 07, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.

³³ Fernandez, “*Appunto For the Audience with the Holy Father: Response to a Series of Questions Posed by His Eminence, Dominik Cardinal Duka, OP., Regarding the Administration of the Eucharist to Divorced People Living in a New Union*”

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Alexis Deodato Itao, “A Phenomenology of Marital Discernment: Applying Key Principles from Paul Ricoeur and Karol Wojtyla to Resolve Family Conflicts,” *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 22, no. 65 (2023): 17.

³⁶ Fernandez, “*Appunto For the Audience with the Holy Father: Response to a Series of Questions Posed by His Eminence, Dominik Cardinal Duka, OP., Regarding the Administration of the Eucharist to Divorced People Living in a New Union,*”

³⁷ Anne-Benedict Hoffner, “*Amoris Laetitia* Requires an Effort of Formation for Discernment” *LaCroix International*, accessed April 8, 2025, <https://international.la-croix.com/news/amoris-laetitia-requires-an-effort-of-formation-for-discernment/4085>.

changing itself in response to the signs of the times.”³⁸

However, while conscience is a personal ability to find the will of God prayerfully even beyond one’s comfort, it does not operate the same way in everyone, as not all individuals possess the same capacity to grasp and appreciate what is true and good³⁹ expressed in a human language of the time it was defined. For this reason, many argue that relying solely on the personal examination of conscience by divorced and remarried Catholics does not suffice. They may judge their circumstances too leniently and act in an occasional way only when it is convenient for them. Even secular law acknowledges that individuals are often the least objective judges of their own guilt or innocence. This is why courts exist to impartially determine who has violated the boundaries of the law.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Church is seen to function as an institution tasked with adjudicating actions that deviate from its teachings and laws. Nonetheless, this objectivism and legalism can present a predicament when moral responsibility is perceived as being imposed externally, rather than understood and embraced internally.

Building on this, *Amoris Laetitia* warns against the rigid application of moral laws to those living in “irregular situations,” stating that doing so “as if they were stones to throw at people’s lives” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 305) risks distorting the Christian message of mercy and forgiveness.⁴¹ Jesus “expects us to stop looking for those

personal or communal niches which shelter us from the maelstrom of human misfortune, and instead to enter into the reality of other people’s lives and to know the power of tenderness.”⁴² It is evident that Pope Francis is embodying the teachings of *Gaudium et Spes*, which reminds us that “in the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience.”⁴³ This shift from a traditional, static, and overly objective legalism to a more compassionate pastoral approach—one that empowers one’s moral agency—makes the good more attractive. It encourages and propels those, no matter their current situation, to begin living out the Gospel step by step. As *Gaudium et Spes* also highlights, “conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary of a man. There he is alone with God, Whose voice echoes in his depths.” *Amoris Laetitia* nurtures this reality, emphasizing that “individual conscience needs to be better incorporated into the Church’s praxis in certain situations which do not objectively embody our understanding of marriage.” (Pope Francis, “*Amoris Laetitia*,” no. 303). In other words, “conscience can do more” and is not limited solely to identifying actions that transgress the objective moral norm. However, this process should encourage the development of an “enlightened conscience,” one that is formed and guided through the responsible and serious discernment of any of the ecclesial hierarchy. It ultimately fosters an ever-greater trust in God’s grace, helping individuals align their lives more closely with the Gospel.

³⁸ Delfo Canceran, “Careful Reading of the Synod on the Family,” *Hapag 13*, no. 1-2 (2016): 73.

³⁹ Paul Wadell, *Happiness and the Christian Moral Life*, (United States of America: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 171.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Tranzillo, “*Amoris Laetitia*, the Human Person and the Meaning of Marital Indissolubility,” *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, accessed April 09, 2025, available at <https://www.hprweb.com/2016/08/amoris-laetitia-the-human-person-and-the-meaning-of-marital-indissolubility/>

⁴¹ Grant Kaplan, “From Tübingen to the Tiber A Conversation with Peter Hünermann,” *Commonweal*, Accessed April 09, 2025, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/t%C3%BCbingen-tiber>

⁴² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 270,” Vatican, accessed April 9, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

⁴³ Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudeum et Spes*, no. 16,” Vatican, accessed April 9, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudeum-et-spes_en.html.

After earnest accompaniment and discernment by the pastor with couples in irregular situations, both parties are enriched. The pastor gains a deeper understanding of the realities of married life in the modern world and understands the complexities of the couples' situations, particularly when "no grave fault exists." This process allows the pastor to offer spiritual guidance that fosters growth in the couples, helping them move gradually toward realizing the ideal. Sincere repentance, as a result of an examination of conscience and a better understanding of their situation, is a fundamental practice in accessing Eucharistic communion. Thus, this process facilitates the feasibility of reconciliation with God and opens the door to receiving the Eucharist.⁴⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium* serves as one of the foundations for this renewed perspective, as it recognizes the importance of pastoral discernment and a new way of viewing such situations.

"Everyone can share in some way in the life of the Church; everyone can be part of the community, nor should the doors of the sacraments be closed for simply any reason. This is especially true of the sacrament which is itself "the door": baptism. The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. These convictions have pastoral consequences that we are called to consider with prudence and boldness. Frequently, we act as arbiters of grace rather than its facilitators. But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems." (Pope Francis, "Evangelii Gaudium," no. 47.)

Further, in dispensing the sacrament of the holy communion Walter Kasper reminds that it is not "a bargain-basement commodity offered to everyone without distinction and to which everyone believes they have an inherent right."⁴⁵ Hence, divorced individuals who have remarried but long to live their baptismal vocation by remaining in the Church do not necessarily receive immediate dispensation of Holy Communion. Instead, this should be the result of accompaniment and discernment- a process wherein mutual transformation occurs. When the administration of the sacraments of reconciliation and communion is not possible due to certain cases, the accompaniment and discernment "can [be] directed toward other forms of integration into the life of the Church, such as a greater presence in the community, participation in prayer or reflection groups or involvement in various ecclesial services."⁴⁶ Through this journey, the priest broadens his perspective beyond parochial thinking, while the couples in irregular situations grow spiritually and gradually conform their lives to the Gospel.

To entirely prevent them from approaching and participating in the Church would alienate them from their baptismal promises. Such an ultra-conservative and legalistic approach, lacking empathy, risks putting the faith of their children in jeopardy. As Kasper noted, "If children never see their parents go to the sacraments, they too will struggle to find their way to confession and communion."⁴⁷ This issue is certainly palpable in the author's previous practical training in Tarragona, Spain, where there is a noticeable decline in the number of families attending mass and students preparing for Holy Communion.

⁴⁴ Kaplan, "From Tübingen to the Tiber A Conversation with Peter Hünermann"

⁴⁵ Walter Kasper, *Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life*, trans. William Madges, (New York: Paulist Press, 2014), 176.

⁴⁶ Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia no. 209," Vatican, accessed March 6, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html cited in Victor Manuel Fernandez, "Appunto For the Audience with the Holy Father: Response to a Series of Questions Posed by His Eminence, Dominik Cardinal Duka, OP., Regarding the Administration of the Eucharist to Divorced People Living in a New Union," *Vatican*, accessed March 6, 2025 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_pro_20230925_risposte-card-duka_en.html.

⁴⁷ Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, trans. William Madges, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2014), 33.

Therefore, a creative pastoral approach is urgently needed to ensure the diffusion of faith continues without undermining the Church's essential teachings.

Be that as it may, a significant portion of the ecclesial hierarchy and faithful view this approach as diverging from Church discipline, particularly regarding the prohibition against admitting invalidly married couples to the reception of Holy Communion. They argue that such cases violate the commandment against adultery, as these individuals are seen as living "in an objective situation of grave habitual sin"⁴⁸ and thus committing intrinsically evil acts. Every intrinsically evil act constitutes mortal sin, which transgresses divine law and signifies a rejection of God's love—the ultimate end and beatitude—by choosing an apparent good (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1855," 508) over the true good. Such a disposition, especially among those in irregular situations, is perceived as contradicting Church teaching, rendering individuals unworthy to partake in sacramental communion.

To counter the argument of those who insist on the unworthiness of the divorced and remarried Catholics to partake in the holy communion, *Amoris Laetitia* introduces a perspective based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the teachings of John Paul II in his *Familiaris Consortio*, emphasizing the mitigating factors in pastoral discernment. It suggests that one can no longer categorically state that all couples in irregular situations are living in a state of mortal sin and are, therefore, deprived of sanctifying grace (See Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," nos. 301-303). This development reflects a deeper understanding of human frailty, personal circumstances, and the role of conscience, highlighting the logic of the gospel of mercy.

Mitigating Factor

The doctrine of mitigating factors is of paramount importance in understanding what does not constitute a mortal sin in the diverse

circumstances in which couples find themselves. A proper grasp of this doctrine serves as an aid to fully appreciating the message of *Amoris Laetitia*. For an act to be considered a mortal sin, three necessary conditions must be met: first, grave matter; second, full knowledge; and third, full consent (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1857," 509).

Grave matter pertains to the seriousness of the sin committed. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* specifies these sins by quoting Jesus' response to the rich young man: "Do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, honor your father and your mother." (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1858," 509.) The objective sin that this paper seeks to examine—adultery—falls under grave matter because Jesus explicitly taught: "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery" (Lk 16:18).

However, while a divorced and remarried Catholic may be in a state of objective sin, one cannot immediately judge that they are in mortal sin, because other essential criteria must be met. Full knowledge and full consent, the two other conditions necessary for a sin to be mortal, can only be properly assessed through a personal understanding of the couple's unique situation. In light of this, *Amoris Laetitia* cites the Synod Fathers, who acknowledge that "under certain circumstances, people find it very difficult to act differently. Therefore, while upholding a general rule, it is necessary to recognize that responsibility with respect to certain actions or decisions is not the same in all cases." (Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," no. 302.) Thus, merciful accompaniment is necessary with discernment in order to know their standing and those who polemically attack the document focus solely on the first criterion of mortal sin—grave matter—while they overlook the other two. By doing so, they hastily judge and equate the couple's objective situation with their level of personal

⁴⁸ Walter Brandmüller, Raymond L. Burke, Carlo Caffarra, and Joachim Meisner, "Seeking Clarity: A Plea to Untie the Knots in Amoris Laetitia," *Aleteia*, accessed April 10, 2025, <https://aleteia.org/2016/11/14/full-text-seeking-clarity-a-plea-to-untie-the-knots-in-amoris-laetitia>.

culpability. Further, the Catechism of the Catholic Church states that, “*imputability and responsibility for an action can be diminished or even nullified by ignorance, inadvertence, duress, fear, habit, inordinate attachments and other psychological or social factors.*” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1735,” 483)

If one or more of these three *sine qua non* conditions are lacking in a particular situation, the act does not necessarily constitute a mortal sin. For a sin to be mortal, all three requisite conditions must be present. While grave matter is essential, it is not sufficient on its own. Therefore, divorced and remarried Catholics cannot be judged as living in an intrinsically evil state solely based on their objective situation, without a thorough understanding of their personal circumstances and unique challenges.

Integration in the life of the Church

After the journey of accompaniment and discernment, the objective of Chapter Eight of the papal document which is integration and concurrence with the church’s salvific mission is hoped to be the outcome. Pope Francis seeks to renew the Church by welcoming those alienated, often due to certain pastors who, in carrying out their duties, hardened their hearts by imposing qualifications on showing mercy. But the author would emphasize once again: that this process is mutually beneficial. As we deepen our understanding of the realities faced by married couples and families in the modern world-by engaging with them beyond the confines of the altar-we come to realize that a purely theoretical approach to preaching about marriage and family is insufficient, if not outdated. When we encounter them in their homes, we are called to move beyond a cold, bureaucratic approach to morality. Instead, we must embrace them with merciful love-one that understands, forgives, accompanies, hopes, and, most importantly, integrates them into the life of the Church (Pope Francis, “Amoris Laetitia,” no. 312). The diversity of family situations today demands a broad range of pastoral responses, where each unique

experience plays a vital role in shaping the future of the Church. And we can begin this by encountering where they are. Pope Francis acknowledges this in *Amoris Laetitia*: “It is a matter of reaching out to everyone, of needing to help each person find his or her proper way of participating in the ecclesial community and thus to experience being touched by an ‘unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous’ mercy. No one can be condemned forever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves.” (Pope Francis, “Amoris Laetitia,” no. 297)

Law of Gradualism

God knows that our damaged-yet not completely destroyed-nature is susceptible to disregarding His call to holiness. From the account of the Old Testament, He has been sending men to remind us that true happiness cannot be found in disordered earthly and bodily impulses but only in God. In the New Testament, God the Father fully revealed Himself through Jesus Christ, who is the “Divine Teacher and Model (magister et exemplar) of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His Disciples of every condition. He Himself stands as the author and consummator of this holiness of life: “*Be you therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.*”⁴⁹ This Dogmatic Constitution on the Church document ends, “*Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity.*” Therefore, the call for holiness is not limited to religious or priestly life only but to all person of goodwill wherever they are in the midst of their circumstances and weaknesses.

Given that the call to holiness is challenging due to our wounded nature, the Lord’s mercy does not merely impose directives but rather invites us to understand the value of living according to the Gospel through a step-by-step process. This gradual journey is particularly relevant for couples whose circumstances mitigate their

⁴⁹ Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 40,” Vatican, accessed April 10, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

culpability. However, this does not mean they are to remain indefinitely in their current situation. Rather, they are called, with the guidance of a priest, to discern their condition in light of the Church's teachings. The priest has "the duty to accompany [them] in helping them to understand their situation according to the Church" (Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," no. 300) and to gradually guide them "in conformity with the Gospel." (Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," no. 294).

When this journey is undertaken with "mercy and patience" (Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," no. 308) toward our brethren who are in the "midst of a storm" and who "show signs of a wounded and troubled love," (Pope Francis, "Amoris Laetitia," no. 291) the possibility of their growth in holiness becomes attainable. This process, which *Amoris Laetitia* draws from St. John Paul II's *Familiaris Consortio*, is called the "law of gradualism." It recognizes that the human person "knows, loves, and accomplishes moral good by different stages of growth." (Pope John Paul II, "Familiaris Consortio," no. 34). Thus, the call to embrace the immutable message of the Gospel should be realized as a journey of gradual conversion. As *Evangelii Gaudium* states, "A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties." (Pope Francis, "Evangelii Gaudium," no. 44.). This highlights that holiness is not attained merely through external conformity to rules but through a sincere and progressive response to God's grace, accompanied by a compassionate guide capable of leading the way.

Ancient and modern stories of gradual conformity to the Gospel values

St. Augustine was once a seeker of life's deepest questions. In his quest for fulfillment, he immersed himself in alcoholism, fornication, and even joined Manicheism. Yet, these pursuits led him further away from the true source of

fulfillment: God. Despite this, his mother, Monica, never ceased praying for his conversion. Providentially, Augustine heard the preaching of St. Ambrose. Shortly after, he encountered a child on the seashore who urged him to pick up the Scriptures and read. Following this mysterious prompting, Augustine opened to the Letter of St. Paul to the Romans 13:13-14, which reads: "Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh." This passage profoundly impacted Augustine's life. He experienced a spiritual transformation and was baptized on April 24, 387, by Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. On the same day, his son, Adeodatus, and his close friend, Alypius, were also baptized.⁵⁰

The movie *The Scarlet and the Black* depicts the events of the Second World War, during which the Nazis occupied Rome, with Herbert Kappler serving as the head of the Gestapo. Kappler was responsible for the infamous Ardeatine Massacre, which claimed the lives of more than 300 civilians.⁵¹ He also led efforts to hunt down Jews and Allied forces seeking refuge in Vatican City—a task made particularly challenging by the efforts of Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty, who worked tirelessly to hide them. As the German occupation began to crumble, and with the possibility of being captured and court-martialed looming, Kappler sought O'Flaherty's help to secure the escape of his wife and children from the country. Initially, O'Flaherty, outraged by the atrocities Kappler had committed against the Jews, civilians, and himself, refused and walked away in anger. However, after Kappler's arrest, he learned that his family had indeed escaped to Switzerland with the assistance of Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty. From that point onward, O'Flaherty visited Kappler monthly, continuing these visits for years. In 1959, Kappler, moved by O'Flaherty's kind of witnessing, accompanied by an eye of mercy and love, had understood his

⁵⁰ "Conversion of St. Augustine," *Midwest Augustinians*, accessed April 22, 2025, <https://www.midwestaugustinians.org/conversion-of-st-augustine>.

⁵¹ Jason Dawsey, PhD, "The Italian Resistance and the Ardeatine Caves Massacre," *The National WW II Museum New Orleans*, accessed April 22, 2025, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/italian-resistance-and-ardeatine-caves-massacre>.

mistakes and was attracted to the values of being Catholic and asked to be baptized.

The stories of St. Augustine and Herbert Kappler exemplify profound journeys of gradual conformity to the Gospel values, each unfolding inch by inch through the compassionate accompaniment of others. St. Augustine's transformation was deeply influenced by his mother, Monica, whose unwavering prayers and guidance did not go unrewarded. Her persistent devotion bore fruit, leading Augustine to embrace Catholicism, eventually becoming a bishop, a saint, and a Doctor of the Church. Similarly, Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty's consistent visits to Herbert Kappler in prison were, although not solely grounded in persuading him to convert to Catholicism, but were acts of friendship and moral support. This fraternal presence profoundly influenced Kappler, culminating in his baptism by Msgr. O'Flaherty in 1959. These narratives illustrate that conformity to the unchanging Gospel values is not an instantaneous event but rather a gradual process. It is nurtured by the compassionate support of others who guide individuals toward aligning their lives with the truth. This serves as a reminder not to lose hope in our brethren who find themselves in irregular situations—especially for those tasked with accompanying and discerning with them. With appropriate and creative ways to convey the teachings of the Church, there is hope for their situations to be regularized.

The Root Criticism against the Papal document

God's definitive revelation in Christ is unchanging, and no pope, even with the charism of infallibility, can pronounce anything that breaches this revelation. The pope must exercise his authority in continuity with this divine revelation.⁵² The criticisms against *Amoris Laetitia* largely stem from the belief that long-standing teachings and traditions are immutable, and altering them is considered a treachery of doctrine. However, what has been handed down is often doctrinal formulations interpreting the cornucopia of the Gospel within the spatial and temporal conditions of their time.

Over time, guided by the Holy Spirit, the Church acknowledges the development of doctrine. Those confused by the concept of development often view doctrines as hard and fast, unaware of the theological principle of doctrinal development, which Saint John Henry Newman eloquently articulated. Newman distinguished authentic development from corruption, defining the former as "the germination and maturation of some truth or apparent truth on a large mental field."⁵³ For example, the punishment for adultery in the Pio-Benedictine Code of Canon Law includes excommunication⁵⁴, but this was modified in the 1983 Code of Canon Law and in the teachings of Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*. Such developments represent a deeper understanding of God's definitive revelation in Christ. And the latter, Newman defined corruption as "the breaking up of life, preparatory to its termination."⁵⁵ A prime example of corruption is the Christological heresy of Arianism, introduced by Arius, a catechumen in Alexandria, who denied the divinity of Jesus Christ by claiming He was a

⁵² Aaron Taylor, "Revelation on Tap: Vatican I and the Amoris Laetitia Controversy," *First Things*, accessed April 23, 2025, available at <https://firstthings.com/revelation-on-tap-vatican-i-and-the-amoris-laetitia-controversy>.

⁵³ John Henry Newman, "Essay on the Development of Doctrine," *Newman Reader*, accessed April 23, 2025, <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/development/chapter1.html>.

⁵⁴ Benedict XV, *Pio-Benedictine Code Of Canon Law* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), Canon 2357 § 2.

⁵⁵ John Henry Newman, "Essay on the Development of Doctrine," *Newman Reader*, accessed April 23, 2025, <https://www.newmanreader.org/works/development/chapter5.html>.

created being and, therefore, there was a time when He did not exist. This view was contrary to the Church's creed that Jesus is consubstantial with the Father, a truth upheld by the Council of Nicaea. Corruption, therefore, entails a detachment from the source of truth that sustains doctrine.

Therefore, the papal document *Amoris Laetitia*, as a pastoral instrument for preaching and teaching the ideals of the Gospel, represents "a fresh and new way that a large public can read."⁵⁶ Cardinal Christoph Schönborn added that "there is continuity in teaching here, but there is also something really new. There's a real development [of doctrine], not a rupture."⁵⁷ And that the encyclical letter *Amoris Laetitia* is an "act of the magisterium," "a pontifical document of great quality an authentic teaching of *sacra doctrina*. . . that makes the teaching of the church present and relevant today."⁵⁸ In a speech during the solemn opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, Pope John XXIII stated that the Church, "the Bride of Christ, prefers to use the medicine of mercy rather than severity. She wants to come to meet current needs, showing the validity of her doctrine rather than renewing sentences."⁵⁹ More than sixty years later, countless changes have occurred in the world, prompting the Church to listen with mercy and respond to the needs of the present age. This approach ensures the continuation of her teachings without periling the perpetual message of the Gospel, offering instead a novel way to transmit it.

Message of Chapter Eight of the Amoris Laetitia

The essence of Chapter Eight calls for active participation in God's mercy—a mercy that not only restores and sustains but also recognizes our shared human frailty and tendency to fall short of His love. This same mercy must be extended to couples in irregular situations, acknowledging their struggles rather than reducing their circumstances to mere legal infractions. A rigid application of Church discipline, without first accompanying them in understanding their reality through the lens of faith, risks becoming an obstacle rather than a path to grace. Proclaiming the immutable truth of the Gospel is most effective when it is first rooted in the assurance that God's love for every person remains unwavering, even amid complex and imperfect situations. By listening with pastoral sensitivity to their "troubles and struggles, joys and hopes," the Church exercises Christ-like compassion, fostering an environment where love can mature. This journey of growth, sustained by grace, can gradually lead them toward deeper alignment with the Gospel ideal.

Such an approach reflects God's vision for His Church in the third millennium: a community that remains steadfast in truth yet embodies a mercy that walks alongside the wounded, guiding them with patience rather than distancing them through judgment. Pope Francis also added that, "A synodal church is a listening church, aware that listening is more than hearing. It is a reciprocal listening in which each one has something to learn."⁶⁰ By adopting this spirit of mutual

⁵⁶ Antonio Spadara, SJ, "Cardinal Schonborn on "The Joy of Love": The Full Conversation," *America The Jesuit Review*, accessed April 23, 2025, <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/richness-love>.

⁵⁷ Gerard O'Connell, "'Amoris Laetitia' represents an organic development of doctrine, 'not a rupture,'" *America The Jesuit Review*, accessed April 24, 2025, <https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2016/04/08/amoris-laetitia-represents-organic-development-doctrine-not-rupture>.

⁵⁸ Antonio Spadara "The Demands of Love: A Conversation with Cardinal Schonborn about "The Joy of Love," *America The Jesuit Review*, accessed April 25, 2025, available at <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/demands-love>.

⁵⁹ John XXIII, "Speech on the occasion of the solemn opening of the Council," *Vatican*, accessed April 25 2025, available at https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/es/speeches/1962/documents/hf_j-xxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html.

⁶⁰Cindy Wooden, "Pope Calls for Synodal Church that Listens, Learns, Shares Mission," *National Catholic Reporter The Independent News Source*, accessed, April 25 2025, <https://www.ncronline.org/pope-calls-synodal-church-listens-learns-shares-mission>.

understanding, the Church can better accompany its faithful on their path toward spiritual growth and renewal.

Conclusion

Is the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* a deviation from the unaltered core of the gospel? No. The controversial Chapter Eight of the document, which addresses the possibility of permitting couples in irregular situations to receive Holy Communion, must be understood in light of the doctrine of mitigating factors. This doctrine helps us recognize that not all individuals in such situations are necessarily in a state of mortal sin. Moral culpability cannot be determined solely by one's external circumstances, rather, it requires careful discernment of personal responsibility, intention, and the presence of mitigating conditions. Although the doctrine of mitigating factors is not attributed to a single individual, Pope John Paul II played a key role in articulating and popularizing it, while Pope Francis has reaffirmed its significance within the context of contemporary pastoral challenges.

For this reason, pastoral accompaniment and discernment are essential to assess each case individually, provide appropriate spiritual guidance, and help individuals understand their moral standing before receiving absolution and Holy Communion. However, it should be noted that this process does not perforce to the reception of the sacraments, as it may instead point to other forms of integration into the life of the Church.⁶¹ While this pastoral approach may seem new, its foundations remain consistent with the Church's longstanding teachings. As the Church journeys through time, her understanding of how to apply moral and canonical laws also develops-not by altering their fundamental meaning, but by deepening their application in response to contemporary pastoral realities.

Pope Francis's exhortation is not a breach of fidelity from tradition but a development of the Church's pastoral approach, similar to how previous theological understandings have evolved over time. A useful example is the theological

principle "Outside the Catholic Church there is no salvation" was once understood in a strictly literal sense during the 12th Ecumenical Council (Lateran IV, 1215), to the extent that its forceful application could lead to severe consequences, including death, for those who refused conversion and baptism. However, with further theological development, Vatican II reaffirmed that salvation, while fully realized in the Church, is not absolutely restricted to formal membership, rather, God's grace extends universally, even to those outside the visible boundaries of the Church. Similarly, the Church has always upheld the sanctity of marriage as an indissoluble bond instituted by God. However, she also acknowledges that pastoral care must take into account individuals' personal struggles and unique circumstances. *Amoris Laetitia* invites the Church to accompany the faithful with patience, guiding them step by step toward deeper conformity with the Gospel. This approach does not alter the fundamental moral law but seeks to apply it with greater pastoral sensitivity, recognizing the complexity of human situations and the role of discernment in the life of the Church.

Furthermore, addressing irregular situations with this new approach should not become the norm or a readily available option, but rather a last resort when circumstances truly necessitate it. For instance, the commandment "*Thou shall not kill*" provides an example. While killing is objectively grave, it is not always intrinsically evil, as in the case of legitimate self-defense, where the preservation of one's life may morally justify the act.

It is also important to emphasize that this discussion does not promote fornication or encourage young couples to engage in intimate marital acts outside the sacrament of marriage. Instead, it seeks to provide pastoral care in situations where past decisions have created complexities requiring healing and discernment. Ignoring these pressing crises in marriage and family life would compromise the Church's mission in the modern world. The reality we face is an urgent pastoral challenge-one that requires

⁶¹ Fernandez, "Appunto For the Audience with the Holy Father: Response to a Series of Questions Posed by His Eminence, Dominik Cardinal Duka, OP., Regarding the Administration of the Eucharist to Divorced People Living in a New Union"

- www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_14091994_rec-holy-comm-by-divorced_en.html
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Health Responsibility: Initial Musings on Aquinas' Charity and Antibiotic Resistance

- Wesley Kim D. Soguilon
(ORCID: 0000-0003-0542-1915)
Santo Niño Seminary and Wadeford School
Formation, Religion, and Social Sciences
Departments, Sitio Kamanggahan, Pook, Kalibo,
Aklan 5600 Philippines
Email: soguilonwesleykim@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper is an expository work on the views of St. Thomas Aquinas on the virtue of charity and the increasing problem of antibiotic resistance in the contemporary world. In my work, I will explore how the virtue of charity in Aquinas may help shed light on the formulation of possible solutions to addressing this problem. In this exploration, I argue that Aquinas' charity forms the individual, out of love, to be responsible for one's and others' health, especially regarding antibiotics. To achieve this, I shall discuss the following: first, I shall deal with Aquinas' idea of the virtue of charity and the place of the common good in it; second, I shall give a cursory background on antibiotic resistance and its

consequences; third, I shall discuss how Aquinas' idea of charity would be helpful in man' formation on using antibiotics responsibly, bearing in mind that his use of such not only impacts him but others.

Keywords: charity, antibiotics, health responsibility, drug use, common good

Introduction

In this work, I will explore how the virtue of charity in Aquinas may help shed light on the formulation of possible solutions to addressing antibiotic resistance, arguing that Aquinas' virtue of charity forms the individual to be responsible for one's and other's health out of love and the prioritization of the common good. We live in a world full of medical wonders: over the last century, we have seen many medical innovations that help us today how to live better and healthily. One of those wonders or, I say, developments is the use of antibiotics. Antibiotics, in layman's understanding, are "compounds that target bacteria and, thus, are intended to treat and prevent bacterial infections."⁶⁴ This means that antibiotics are medicines made up of chemical compounds that treat sickness or illnesses caused by bacteria. An important note must be observed here: bacteria are microorganisms that continue to adapt to different environments. They are "metabolically active... multiply at rapid rates... and adapt to changing environments, [making them] a major cause of disease and important in every field of medicine."⁶⁵ Because of the capacity of bacteria to adapt, antibiotics were formulated. Particularly, the mechanism of antibiotics is to destroy "the bacterial cell by either preventing cell reproduction or changing a necessary cellular function or process within the cell."⁶⁶ With the bacterial cell, which enables the bacteria to adapt,

destroyed, bacteria cannot anymore grow and reproduce.

The development of antibiotics brought antibiotics to our public sphere and daily lives. It has become essential to our lives, a part that most of us could not live well without because of the benefits it brings. One of the benefits of antibiotics is to prevent or treat bacterial infections and illnesses that might happen to patients who "are receiving chemotherapy treatments; who have chronic diseases such as diabetes, end-stage renal disease, or rheumatoid arthritis; or who have had complex surgeries such as organ transplants, joint replacements, or cardiac surgery."⁶⁷ This means that antibiotics are not only treatments for existing illnesses but also preventative in such a way that they hamper bacterial growth, which would result in the illness of vulnerable patients. This brings us to another benefit of antibiotics: their use in preventative medicine. Antibiotics are used as prophylaxis or an agent that prevents bacterial growth and emergence when surgery or operation takes place.⁶⁸ Penicillin, the first antibiotic, was used mainly for treatment and prophylaxis. Furthermore, antibiotics raise our chances of survival. Its use in places that have high mortality rates might increase the survival of individuals prone to sickness.⁶⁹

In as much as beneficial antibiotics are to us today, the misuse and lack of new developments in antibiotic medicine resulted in what scholars would call the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. The Antibiotic Resistance Crisis can be characterized as the increase of threatening bacterial infections because of the rapid surfacing of resistant bacteria, a result of the overuse and misuse of antibiotics.⁷⁰ Because of the capacity of bacteria to adapt, and the misuse of, and lack of new developments in, antibiotics, bacteria can adapt to

1. Preeti Patel et al., "Antibiotics," StatPearls - NCBI Bookshelf, May 26, 2023, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK535443/>.

2. Samuel Baron, ed., "Medical Microbiology: Introduction to Bacteriology," National Center for Biotechnology Information, 1996, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK8120/>.

3. Patel et al., "Antibiotics."

4. C. Lee Ventola, "The Antibiotic Resistance Crisis: Part 1: Causes and Threats," National Library of Medicine, April 1, 2015, accessed August 26, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4378521/>.

5. Elroy P. Weledji et al., "Pros, Cons and Future of Antibiotics," *New Horizons in Translational Medicine* 4, no. 1–4 (November 1, 2017): 9–14, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nhtm.2017.08.001>.

6. Stefan Flasche and Katherine E Atkins, "Balancing Benefits and Risks of Antibiotic Use," *The Journal of Infectious Diseases* 218, no. 9 (June 5, 2018): 1351–53, <https://doi.org/10.1093/infdis/jiy344>.

7. Ventola, "The Antibiotic Resistance Crisis: Part 1: Causes and Threats."

the supposed benefits of antibiotics and overcome them. This brings a plethora of problems, and one of those problems is the uncontrolled adaptation of bacteria. This is where my work comes in: while I am not a medical professional or someone who studied the sciences, I am offering a layman's possible solution to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. In my view, the crisis began because of the misuse and abuse of antibiotics. Considering this, my paper explores what we can do, as humans, to prevent the furtherance of this crisis in the light of St. Thomas Aquinas' virtue of charity. I think that, bearing in mind St. Thomas Aquinas' virtue of charity, we can be responsible humans when it comes to our, and others, health. With the virtue of charity, the individual may be formed to be responsible for one's and other's health out of love and the prioritization of the common good.

To achieve this aim, I shall discuss the following: first, I shall deal with St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of the virtue of charity and the place of the common good in it; second, I shall give a cursory background on antibiotic resistance and its consequences; third, I shall discuss how St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of charity would be helpful in man' formation on using antibiotics responsibly, bearing in mind that his use of such not only impacts him but others. In discussing those points, I shall use sources from St. Thomas Aquinas that are English translations; thus, the intended meaning of the terms may have been lost along the way. Additionally, my discussions are limited expositions of the matter at hand, which is why my paper only presents initial musings that may be furthered and developed by later scholars.

Aquinas' Charity and the Common Good

We first deal with St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of the virtue of charity and the place of the common good in it. The Catholic Church,⁷¹ through her eminent theologians, would discuss charity in the

broader context of the virtues. Primarily, the Church, through St. Thomas Aquinas, her foremost thinker, would understand charity or *caritas* as an infused virtue in the soul since it makes the person possessing it and his or her works good.⁷² It is a virtue precisely because it makes the person love and act for the good since the person loves the good for which he aspires. He or she longs to possess that highest good, which is pursued for its own sake, and then share it with others: beatific vision. Since it makes the person aspire for the highest good (i.e., beatific vision), charity is a virtue and the highest among them. St. Thomas Aquinas says that charity makes man love [sic] "God for His own sake, and loves fellow-men who are capable of attaining beatitude as it loves itself; charity resists every hindrance both in itself and in others."⁷³ One can see here that *caritas* makes man also overcome obstacles to loving: he or she becomes courageous enough to love others and share his or her goodness despite the challenges that he or she might face.

Since love involves some sort of communication or outpouring of one's goodness, it is intimately linked to friendship. *Caritas* is the friendship between man and God since there is mutual love (which is a requirement for friendship) between them.⁷⁴ Friendship, in St. Thomas Aquinas' thought, is the willing of the good of the other. It is a person's desire for another person's good and the former's effort to bring that good about in his or her friend.⁷⁵ In this scheme, the friendship of man with God is a love-relationship of man with God. God loves man as His created creature and wills his good and man loves God in return by living according to His ways and committing to work for His plans in our world.⁷⁶ However, the love man gives to God is not on the same pedestal as the love of God for man. There are two reasons for this: first, man is not on the same steeple as God. God is Divine and man is, admittedly, human. Second, the virtue of charity

8. Hereon referred to as Church or church.

9. *De Virtutibus*, art.2, resp.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *ST II-II*, q.24, art.2, resp.

12. Paul J. Wadell, "Charity: How Friendship with God Unfolds in Love for Others," in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Oxford University Press, 2014), 377.

13. *Ibid.*

itself is caused by “the infusion of the Holy Ghost, Who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of Whom in us is created charity.”⁷⁷ This means that the virtue of charity is a gift or grace from God that is given to us. Our acts of charity, which may stem from “a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith” are acts that “dispose man [sic] the receive the infusion of charity” or the grace of God that makes us love God and our neighbor wholly.⁷⁸ In all, St. Thomas Aquinas argued that friendship is based on virtue. The virtue in this case, which is charity, however, is one that is from God and not solely on our effort.⁷⁹

Now, as St. Thomas Aquinas understood it, the kind of friendship that is necessitated by charity is one that is between God and man since God, the one to be seen in the beatific vision, is man’s source of happiness (since the beatific vision is the highest good that man longs for, which means that God is man’s ultimate source of happiness).⁸⁰ God takes precedence in man’s act of loving, yet the proper love for God does not end there: it is shared by loving others since the happiness we receive from God is shared. In other words, the story of love does not end there. In fact, man’s proper love of God recognizes others as subjects to be loved, which stems from man’s affection for the Divine. The happiness we receive from God is also received by others in their love for God, and since happiness is a good that is shared as it outpours from the Divine, we love our neighbors as well: “Therefore God ought to be loved chiefly and before all out of charity: for He is loved as the cause of happiness, whereas our neighbor is loved as receiving together with us a share of happiness from Him.”⁸¹ In this, we can infer that loving God requires us to love also

others. Our relationship with God, though being primary from other relationships, does not make us turn away our faces from others. It is quite the opposite, since our love for God extends to us loving others since all people belong to Him.⁸² It makes us reach out, face them straight, and extend ourselves to them by being charitable and loving them.

In the *Summa Theologiae*, particularly in the treatise of St. Thomas Aquinas on the order of charity, we go back to the point we have said earlier: that man must love his neighbors by virtue of them being subjects of love because of our fellowship with them in their partaking of God’s good. Our relationship with others, taken as a relation of human persons under God, is our fellowship with others, and this fellowship is our reason for our act of love towards them.⁸³ This fellowship, which becomes the basis for loving, is a mandate for us to love our neighbors as an expression of our love for God. Particularly in St. Thomas Aquinas’ thought, man’s perfect love of God consists in our “love of neighbor [since it] includes love of God, while love of God [alone] does not include love of our neighbor.”⁸⁴ Man loves God and his creation and does everything he can to have a good relationship with him, in the same way as God loves man and provides for his good.⁸⁵ Notice here how one can love God by loving His creation. This means that everyone is mandated to love one’s neighbor since they are bearers of God’s image and dignity.⁸⁶ Not only that but loving one’s neighbor is charity being true to itself: it is seeking something outside of the self.⁸⁷ It is going out of the self to seek the good, particularly the common good, since it takes primacy over self-interests. True charity then, in loving one’s neighbor, is to put the common good

14. *ST* II-II, q.24, art.2, resp.

15. *ST* II-II, q.24, art.2, resp. to obj.

16. Philip Ney, “Charity as the Perfection of Natural Friendship in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” *Lethbridge Undergraduate Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 5, <http://hdl.handle.net/10133/461>.

17. See *ST* II-II, q.26, art.2, resp.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Ney, “Charity as the Perfection of Natural Friendship in Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” 4.

20. *ST* II-II, q.26, art.4, resp.

21. *ST* II-II, q.27, art.8, resp.

22. See *ST* II-II, q.27, art.8, resp.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *ST* II-II, q.25, art.1, resp.

above all else, even above individual preferences: “The common good is always more lovable to the individual than his private good, even as the good of the whole is more lovable to the part, than the latter’s own partial good.”⁸⁸ To love one’s neighbors is to love and prefer the common good since the good of the whole and of others is prioritized over the self.

To love others is to express our love for God more profoundly and wholly. It is an expression of how deep our love for God is, since loving God in charity must make us see that our neighbors also partake in the happiness God gives to us. In other words, “to love our neighbors for God’s sake is to love them as beings like ourselves who are prized by God and precious to God and who, like ourselves, are capable of loving and enjoying God.”⁸⁹ With this, we see our neighbors as human beings like us who deserve our love: they are other selves or humans who live with us in this world as partakers of God’s goodness. God is in them just as God is with us since they, too, are creatures of God and, in loving them, we express our love for God.⁹⁰ Because of that, it would only be right and just to prioritize the good of all or the common good instead of one’s interests. In prioritizing the common good, one loves one’s neighbors since the common good is preferable to one’s own good. It makes the lover achieve the ultimate good by realizing the common good, and this is only possible if loving God and one’s neighbors is put first before one’s interests.⁹¹

The Reality of Antibiotic Resistance

We now discuss, albeit cursorily and from a layman’s perspective, antibiotic resistance and its consequences. The contemporary world faces the problem of antibiotic resistance: bacteria that were treated by antibiotics are adapting to the effects of antibiotics, making them immune or resistant to them. The problem stems from antibiotic misuse, overuse, and lack of development, resulting in the emergence of drug-resistant bacteria.⁹² Aside from that, its agricultural overuse, inappropriate prescription, and lack of regulation, aided its advent.⁹³ Now, as was mentioned in the earlier part of this work, bacteria have an adaptive capacity: they can adapt based on the conditions they are in. This is because they are metabolically active microorganisms that rapidly multiply and can adapt and survive.⁹⁴ This means that, given they are exposed to the antibiotics of today and that these antibiotics are misused, bacteria would overcome the supposed beneficial effects of antibiotics. They would become drug-resistant and harder to eliminate.

Contemporarily, there are already cases wherein bacteria are resistant (thus the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis we have today). For example, there is an increase in drug-resistant fungal infections and a surge in drug resistance among HIV, Tuberculosis, Malaria, and tropical diseases such as leprosy patients.⁹⁵ Furthermore, “*Staphylococcus aureus*, urinary tract infections caused by *E. coli*, and *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, a common intestinal bacterium, also showed elevated resistance levels against critical antibiotics.”⁹⁶ Moreover, the emergence of this kind of bacteria led to “1.27 million global deaths in 2019 and contributed to 4.95 million deaths.”⁹⁷

25. *ST II-II*, q.26, art.4, resp. to obj.

26. Wadell, “Charity: How Friendship with God Unfolds in Love for Others,” 381.

27. Iacopo Costa, “Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas on Charity and the Common Good,” in *Common Good and Self-Interest in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Heikki Haara and Juhana Toivanen, vol. 78 (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2024), 84, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55304-2>.

28. *Ibid.*, 85.

29. Yacob Habboush and Nilmarie Guzman, “Antibiotic Resistance,” National Library of Medicine- National Center for Biotechnology Information, June 20, 2023, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK513277/>.

30. Ventola, “The Antibiotic Resistance Crisis: Part 1: Causes and Threats.”

31. Baron, ed., “Medical Microbiology: Introduction to Bacteriology.”

32. World Health Organization, “Antimicrobial Resistance,” November 21, 2023, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/antimicrobial-resistance>.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Habboush and Guzman, “Antibiotic Resistance.”

Additionally, across all the regions of the globe, the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis⁹⁸ currently affects everyone regardless of socioeconomic status. It affects everyone since bacteria is transmitted through nearly normal everyday activities such as handshaking, working out, preparing and eating food, traveling, or having contact with our pets or other animals.⁹⁹ The crisis, furthermore, is “exacerbated by poverty and inequality, and low- and middle-income countries are most affected.”¹⁰⁰ It also puts many of the developments and innovations of modern medicine at risk. For instance, it makes infections harder to treat and makes other medical procedures and treatments, such as surgery, cesarean sections, and cancer chemotherapy, much riskier.¹⁰¹ Without its proper use, bacteria would continue to adapt and become more drug-resistant, making healing from illnesses and treatment harder in years to come.

Despite being invented for its beneficial uses and effects, we have seen that antibiotics today could do little to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. Supposedly a help and a friend instead of a foe, antibiotics became harmful because of man’s misuse and abuse. It all lies in man: how he uses antibiotics would dictate the crisis’ future. If he continues to be irresponsible with it, then we would be left with the crisis becoming more harmful. However, if he uses antibiotics responsibly, I think we can alleviate the crisis a little since this crisis is complex in itself. With those things considered, we shall now discuss how St. Thomas Aquinas’ idea of charity and the antibiotic crisis. I argue that Aquinas’ charity forms the individual, out of love, to be responsible for one’s and others’ health, especially regarding antibiotics. This argument stems from charity being a virtue, which means that it has effects on man and his soul.

Aquinas’ Charity and Responsible Antibiotic Use

Thomas Aquinas stipulated that charity, as a virtue, has effects on the soul. The more that a person obeys God’s commands and cultivates the virtue of *caritas* through acts of charity, the more that he or she becomes like God and grows closer to Him in such a way that grace enters the scene. St. Thomas Aquinas asserted: “the human mind’s movement to the fruition of the Divine good is the proper act of charity, whereby all the acts of the other virtues are ordained to this end, since all the other virtues are commanded by charity. Hence the merit of life everlasting pertains first to charity, and secondly, to the other virtues, inasmuch as their acts are commanded by charity. So, likewise, is it manifest that what we do out of love we do most willingly.”¹⁰² Now, grace assists the soul in attaining beatific vision or the direct vision of God.¹⁰³ In simple terms, grace assists the soul in attaining eternal life in heaven. How does grace do this? By elevating the intellect to achieve beatific vision, and this is done based on the degree of love that a person possesses, since we are all judged by the way we have loved.¹⁰⁴ This means that the more a person loves God and others, the more that he or she would know and see God. Beatific vision is, then, attained by the one who has loved God and his or her neighbors well.

One of the interior acts of charity is joy. Joy, when the well-being of a friend is present, is the effect of charity on the soul. If the person’s friend, however, lacks something, much more his or her well-being, the person becomes sorrowful, and the sadness felt is a “sorrow [that] arises from love, either through the absence of the thing loved, or because the loved object to which we wish well, is deprived of its good or afflicted with some evil.”¹⁰⁵ I would like to point out that there are two ideas here that we have to focus on: first,

35. From hereon referred to as crisis.

36. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Antimicrobial Resistance,” CDC, April 22, 2024, accessed September 1, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/antimicrobial-resistance/causes/index.html>.

37. World Health Organization, “Antimicrobial Resistance.”

38. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Antimicrobial Resistance.”

39. *ST I-II*, q.114, art.4, resp.

40. Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering, *Knowing the Love of Christ: An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 127.

41. *Ibid.*

42. *ST II-II*, q.28, art.1, resp.

we also suffer because of our neighbor's suffering. This is because of our love for them, which makes us suffer their sufferings as if they were our own.¹⁰⁶ Going back to mercy and Caritas, one must love one's neighbor by practicing charity: that is, by caring for them as how their situation demands. St. Thomas Aquinas is not convinced that wishing and praying for the well-being of one's neighbor is already love: we must relieve the suffering of others and "give to the needy out of our compassion and for God's sake."¹⁰⁷ In other words, true love goes beyond well-wishing. That is why for him, real charity is manifested through actions, and "Aquinas divides these acts into three categories: (1) acts of beneficence, (2) almsgiving, and (3) fraternal correction."¹⁰⁸ Particularly, mercy belongs to the second category. Compassion and mercy here become connected, since mercy compels the person to have compassion for those who are suffering and be compassionate to them by alleviating their sorrow.¹⁰⁹

Now, under charity as a virtue, St. Thomas Aquinas would highlight three acts of charity: beneficence, alms, deeds, and fraternal correction. They are done as acts of love since we must love our neighbors: "the reason for loving is indicated in the word 'neighbor,' because the reason why we ought to love others out of charity is because they are nigh to us, both as to the natural image of God, and as to the capacity for glory."¹¹⁰ With that, our acts of beneficence, almsdeeds, and fraternal correction must be done to our neighbors out of our love for them. Beneficence, on *prima facie*, is doing good to someone. The good done may mean to be any good charitable act "because the act of love includes goodwill whereby a man wishes his friend well... Now the will carries into effect if

possible, the things it wills, so that, consequently, the result of an act of love is that a man is beneficent to his friend. Therefore beneficence in its general acceptation is an act of friendship or charity."¹¹¹ Following this characterization, we can state that any good act done out of charity, as long as it is intended and really is for our neighbor's good, is an act of beneficence. On top of that, beneficence concerns all: we must do good to all regardless of their status. This is the case "since the love of charity extends to all, beneficence also should extend to all, but according as time and place require: because all acts of virtue must be modified with a view to their due circumstances."¹¹² Connecting it to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis, our act of using antibiotics responsibly because of our concern for others and the world and for their good may be considered an act of beneficence. Since Antibiotic Resistance is a global challenge, all are called to be cautious and proper in using antibiotics since one's use affects the health of others.¹¹³ The health of others, like ours, is also our responsibility. Additionally, our prayers for those who do suffer because of the crisis and for the development of antibiotics may be considered acts of beneficence since "there is however a good that we can do to all, if not to each individual, at least to all in general, as when we pray for all, for unbelievers as well as for the faithful."¹¹⁴ Moreover, fraternal correction, as an act of charity and justice that remedies the hurtful actions of others that are "detrimental to the common good," may happen by informing and educating others of the proper way of using antibiotics.¹¹⁵ Courses of action such as knowing the symptoms of Antibiotic Resistance, asking questions, learning the right ways to use antibiotics, and educating others are

43. *ST II-II*, q.30, art.1, resp.

44. *ST II-II*, q.32, art.1, resp.

45. Shawn Floyd, "Aquinas and the Obligations of Mercy," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 37, no. 3 (2009): pp. 449-471, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2009.00394.x>, 458.

46. *Ibid.*, 469.

47. *ST II-II*, q.44, art.7, resp.

48. *ST II-II*, q.31, art.1, resp.

49. *ST II-II*, q.31, art.2, resp.

50. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Antimicrobial Resistance."

51. *ST II-II*, q.31, art.2, reply to obj. 1.

52. *ST II-II*, q.33, art.1, resp.

all ways of preventing the spread and development of the crisis.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

We have explored how the virtue of charity may be able to provide solutions to the Antibiotic Resistance Crisis. We dealt with the virtue of charity as understood by St. Thomas Aquinas and the place of the common good in it. Moving from that segment, we turned to the reality of the crisis today and its effects. After this, we explored how the virtue of charity, as a virtue that has effects on the soul, may be able to help in alleviating and furthering the development of this crisis. The real challenge now is to be the force of good in this tragic world: it is to apply what has been learned in one's life by using antibiotics properly as an act of charity.

Since this work is preliminary in its scope and nature, further studies on the matter might revolve around the following topics that have a connection with the crisis: the political common good in St. Thomas Aquinas' thought, a broadened focus on the societal common good, a detailed exposition and inclusion of some other sources and questions on charity such as *De Virtutibus* and *De Caritate*, the person's cultivation of charity, and non-Christian or non-Thomistic views on charity and its possible solutions to the crisis.

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Editorial address, and all correspondence to:

Prof. Darryl Macer, Ph.D., Hon.D.
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Email: darryl@eubios.info

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