Abstract
Without ignoring the contribution of the sociological school, such as the experimental sciences institutes, studies that have influenced, by their theories, the actions of the governments regarding family, we can constantly remark the involvement of the Church, always attentive to the issues of vital importance for people, an involvement expressed by pontiffs as allocutions, encyclical and radio-messages. The article shows the interest towards the institution of family expressed in the social teachings of Pope Leon XIII, the first modern Pontiff who had a firm and radical stand as a defender of the Christian family and marriage, being aware of the new progress of the time that was leading to the drainage of their main religious root. Regarding marriage, Pope Leon has never ceased to fight for the absolute sacramental dignity that was supposed to remain in the sole competence of the Church.

Key words: social doctrine, human being
Sacrament, dignity, indissolubility.

Since its birth, the Church intervened in a concrete way in different situations and socio-economical contexts of the life of people\[2\]. During centuries, we can observe that this intervention had a continuous character, developing and taking various forms. As a consequence, the social Teachings of the Church on family are characterized by a pronounced historical dimension, imposed by the diversity of the moments when the respective documents were created and by the nature of the social Magisterium. Because we are talking about a theoretical-practical ensemble, the fruit of a dialectics between the Gospel and life, permanent principles and historical moments, theory and practice, this

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social Doctrine of the Church does not close in a rigid and definitive construction of knowledge, but shows an historical development, through the comparisons with the change of institutions, ideologies, cultural movements, religious ideas and also with views on the social group and the institution of family[1].

The last centuries of the Church teachings are under the sign of a true development, influenced also by the affirmation of a new culture, under the culture of two vast and complex phenomena: industrial civilization (especially in the socio-economical aspects), and also the French Revolution and socialism (from an ideological perspective). Therefore, the industrialization process, which had its origins in the protestant countries of Northern Europe and Northern America, and which spread afterwards in all the catholic countries of Europe, made the Church face two phenomena: breaking the rights of the human person (by excessively exploiting the workers) and the ideological movement deeply anti-religion represented by socialism.

This new culture revolutionized the view on the world and life and also influenced the traditional values of marriage and family. In the approach of this issues, we observe a more and more emphasized secular disproof, which is in favor of the civil marriage, the refusal of the marriage insolubility, the legalization of divorce, the denial of the competences of the Church in the field of matrimony, the demographic revolution, the artificial control of births, the legalization of abortion, the sexual libertinage.

In the context of the political changes that marked the 19th century, the Church was relieved of the temporal power, so now it had the freedom to intervene in the socio-economical-political problems of the world, without this intervention to be understood as from a state that affirms his own interests. As a consequence, in the last years of the papacy of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), the Church was able to intervene in the social matters using the authority given by the moral force.

The social teaching of the Church has a profound orientation towards social action. This action is not achieved through philosophical and ethical considerations, but through an evangelical perception of reality:

this method must be exerted in a communitarian way, by all the components of the Church\textsuperscript{[1]}. “Having a strong conscience on the discussed values, fundamental values such as the ones concerning the person, life, family, work and social justice, the Church does not only feel entitled to intervene, but even feels obliged to express its own judgment, taking on itself the hardship of the families and of the workers and offering, if necessary, some guidelines”\textsuperscript{[2]}.

In the social teaching of the Church there is a considerable corpus of theoretical-practical approaches on the family, although the pontiffs were not preoccupied to give systematic and comprehensive works (from ethic, political and cultural perspectives), but rather principles for reasoning, consideration principles and action directives, but also socio-pastoral guidelines (even if they are not always well structured from a thematic point of view). Therefore, in their teachings on the family, the pontiffs tried to offer numerous socio-pastoral guidelines, even if they were not always structured in a theme. Despite all these, until the Council Vatican II, we cannot distinguish a pastoral project on families\textsuperscript{[3]} in a concrete sense, as it can be noticed in the documents of Pope Paul II.

Of the social teachings of the Church on the realities of family we can observe a historical continuity-discontinuity of the finality of marriage, terminology, the procreation concepts, sexuality, and also the perspective on the family as an institution, on the condition of women, on the relationships between parents and children. In the pontiff documents we can observe a close connection between family life and work: their inter-relationship, founded on the aim of the human to have a honest fulfillment from a material and moral point of view, represents the secret of the nations development, of theory progress: “Work is the fundament on which family life is formed, which is a natural right and a vocation of the human. These two circles of values – one that is common to the work, the other that is consequent to the family character of the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{[1]} Cf. Toso M., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 139.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{[2]} Anfossi G., \textit{Famiglia e Lavoro, Un crocevia}, (collective work, edition cared by PIEM-ME), Casale Monferrato, Alessandria, 1995, p. 17.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{[3]} A pastoral project means an intercession formed of two phases: assumptions (where reference ideas are specified, and also the anthropological and theological view) and the proposal of interventions (the materialization of assumptions) (cf. Anfossi G., \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 14-15).}
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human life – must correctly unify and correctly merge”[1]. Also: “…we must remind and affirm that family represents one of the most important reference points, on which the socio-ethical order of human labor must be formed”[2].

The Holy Scripture commences with the episode of creating man and woman after the image of God (Gen 1,26-27) and closes with the vision of the wedding of the Lamb (Ap 19,7,9). The entire Holy Scripture talks about marriage and its mystery, about its foundation, its origin, the sense and the purpose God gave it, about the different achievements, but also about its hardships, originated in sin, and also about its renewal in the Lord (1 Cor 7,39). In the biblical view, family relationships are based on what the Bible says about God as a parent in His relationship with the children of Israel and about Christ as a groom in his relationship with the Church, His bride. The key-verses extracted in a typical way from different biblical excerpts on family (including domestic relationships) are: Ephesians 5:21-6:9[3]; Colossians 3:18 -4:1;
1 Timothy 2:8-15; 6:1-2; Tit 2:1-10; 1 Peter 2:18-3:7. These excerpts indicate the concern of the 1st century Christians for order in the three basic domestic relationships: husband-wife, parent-children, and master-slave. These texts of the Holy Scripture should be interpreted considering the social, historical and cultural contexts when they were written. Although the reasons to establish firm rules for domestic life are logical, these provisions of the family code cannot be transformed in atemporal rules, which could be transposed in time, without being adapted to the new socio-cultural contexts.

Relationship between God and God’s children is an efficient model to elaborate a theology of the family relationships. If God’s actions for Israel are considered as a model, exerting the role of the parent is characterized by traits such as love, care, receptivity, discipline, giving, respect, knowledge and forgiveness. The current theology on family relationships places an emphasis on concepts such as convention, grace, empowerment and intimacy. People are social beings and live in a community. The persons who live through a covenant experience both struggle and conflict, but also harmony; as a consequence, they must have the availability to forgive and be forgiven by the others, to accept the cohabitation law under the form of patterns and order. The starting point of any family relationship is a commitment-covenant, which has in its core unconditional love. Of the stability and the safety determined by this covenant, grace is developed. In this atmosphere of grace, the family members have the freedom to empower each other and go give more and more trust. This leads to a greater intimacy amongst the family members.

Considered as a fundamental structure of society, the cell on which the future of humanity is based, the natural crib of life and the sanctuary of love, family, made holy by the sacrament of Marriage, represents in the new economy of redemption, the school of faith, the beginning of the connection with God, the first church, named by the Council Vatican II “ecclesia domestica”[1], where the connection between man and his Creator starts, grows and is made whole. In our

masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him.”

days, in a world that is many times strange and even hostile to faith, Christian families have special roles, being the focuses of living faith. “Living in a shaken and dismantled society of tensions and conflicts, because of violent clashes and individual and selfish trends, the sons must get rich not only in the sense of true justice, which is the only one leading to the respect of the personal dignity of each being, but mostly in true love, understood as sincere care and unselfish ministry for others, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. Family is the first and the fundamental school of sociability, because it is a community of love who knows to find in self-giving the law who leads it and makes it grow. Self-giving, which inspires the love of spouses, is the model and the norm of self-give which must get updated between brothers and sisters, and also between the different generations that are together in the family. The communion and the participation in the daily life of the house, moments of joy and difficulty, represent the most concrete and efficient teachings for the active, responsible and prolific enrollment of children in the wide view of society”[1].

On the basis of the resemblance of man with God “the family is founded, being understood as a human life community, as a community of people united in love (communio personarum)”[2], being Ecclesia domestica[3], the place of the first school of Christian life and a “school of human development”[4] where the first proclamation of faith is being received.

According to the social teachings of the Church, family is called to practice respect for the dignity of each individual and to offer unselfish service to needy ones. Through their love, their mutual commitment, the spouses find the way to their human fulfillment, to deliverance, to wholeness, to holiness, they enrich each other’s souls, they help and encourage each other, so they are closer to God, better and agreeable in God’s eyes[5]. Because of all these, the Church shall never alter or modify its own teachings on marital love, on the holiness of marriage.

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[3] Council Vatican II absorbed and gave value to this concept from the patristic tradition, a term used at first by Saint John Crisostom to define Christian family.
and on family. It condemns any attempt such as polygamy or divorce, wounds that can destroy the unity of marriage.

The initial expression of interest for the institution of family enlists in the social Doctrine of Church during the papacy of Leon XIII. The teachings of this Pope express the cultural context of the time, the level of bible studies, the mentalities and the customs of those times, and also the view on the relationships between the Church and the State[1].

Pope Leon XIII gave a lot of attention to knowing the truth and promoting marriage by the content of the Encyclicals *Inscrutabili Dei Consilio* (21 April 1878) and *Quod apostolici muneres* (28 December 1878). In fact, Pope Pecci was the first modern Pope that had a firm and radical position as a defender of Christian family and marriage, being aware of the new progress of the time that lead to a drainage of their main religious root.

Concerning marriage, Pope Leon has never ceased to fight for the absolute sacramental dignity, which must remain in the sole competence of the Church and of no one else. The most relevant Leonean document on this matter and afterwards absorbed by many of his followers as a reference point, is the Encyclical *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (made public on the 10th of February 1880). It represents the first Encyclical entirely devoted to Christian marriage, a document where Pope Leon expressed a firm defense of the matrimonial covenant in its important Christian dignity, by representing the essential values of family, analyzed from the perspective of social change.

In this pontiff document, there are clear references to the secularized theories[2] on marriage and family, citing those who assaulted “with open hostility the Christian marriage: (...), Mormons, simonies, falanste-

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[2] In the view of the “utopist socialism”, family was meant to disappear. In the future society of labor, men and women shall be absorbed by working in productive structures, in the context where family would have yield to productive units and society

(Cf. Engels F., *L’origine della famiglia, della proprietà e dello stato*, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-114). F. Engels şi K. Marx, founded their theories on family on the evolutionist anthropology (in whose concept there is no human nature), were providing the extinction of family, together with the disappearance of the bourgeois and capitalist society.
rians, communists”[1], and later on, after reminding of the “so called civil marriages”[2], “naturalists”[3] and “royalists”[4].

According to the view described in this pontiff document, marriage has two purposes: an altruist one (bonum prolis), and the good of the persons (the good of the couple). At an attentive reading of the text we can observe the idea – never expressed before – according to which the family is the place where the spouses become holy. This truth shall constitute a significance widely developed in the documents of the Vatican II Council.

Also, in this encyclical it is affirmed the principle of the husband`s authority, defined as being “familiae princeps”[5]. Therefore, reading some excerpts from the Letter to Ephesians (especially 5, 2-25), Pope Leon XIII does not talk about the mutual submission between spouses, but only about the submission of the wife to her husband, and “the divine charity must be a continuous moderator of their duties”[6]. Regarding children, Pope Leon XIII affirmed that they “must be submitted to their parents and must honor them”[7].

Against the advocators of the human character of the institution of family, Pope Leon XIII has promoted the idea of a double foundation: human and divine[8]. In Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae the Holy Father described very rigorously and analytically the true and authentic origin of marriage. Starting with the Genesis, he drew the following conclusions:” That union of woman and men, since then [meaning since the Genesis] has showed two main and very noble proprieties, more exactly the unity and the perpetuity. We can see this declared and ratified solemnly by the Gospel with the divine authority of Jesus Christ”. From

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[3] Idem, 53. For naturalists, who were dependent on the illuminist and rationalist culture that was using a concept of “human nature” freed of any reference to supernatural, the family was not representing a sacred reality, but only an institution of human origin that was depending on the human arbitrary, an artificial reality built by human will.
[4] Idem, 55. Royalists (who were the supporters of the king more than supporters of the Church) were making a distinction between a matrimonial contract (existing in the competence of the State) and a sacrament (reserved for the authority of the Church).
the words of Leon XIII is understood incontestably the fact according to
which marriage is an indissoluble union, once it was raised by Christ to
sacramental dignity, as it is the case of any other sacrament, the human
abilities cannot determine neither the end, nor the breaking of the
union: “Jesus Christ has made noble by His presence the wedding from
Cana Galilee, [and therefore] raised marriage to the dignity of Sacra-
ment, in the same time making it possible that the spouses obtain
holiness through marriage. By this, [Christ] has made natural love per-
fect and strengthened with more power the connection of divine charity
of the union of the husband with the wife, indivisible by its own nature.
In the Christian marriage the contract cannot be separated by the
Sacrament; it is therefore clear that any covenant between Christians is
in itself and for itself the Sacrament”.

Pope Leon XIII highlighted the fact that a marriage, because it serves
the preservation of human society, has divine implications. Never-
theless, marriage is a sacrament; therefore it is the subject of the
Church authority[1]. Such a reality made the Christian marriage (just
because it was it was before everything else a sacrament and then a
civil act) an absolute prerogative of the Church: “All the same, marriage
showing by its own nature to be an entirely holy thing, it is just to be
regulated and moderated not by the power of Principles, but by the
divine authority of the Church, who was the magisterium of holy
things”. In order to protect this jurisdiction prerogative that could not
be let go, Leon XIII had many fights and many things to say, in the times
when civil marriage started to be recognized from a legal point of view
(trends encouraged especially by the bourgeois spirits of the time),
through which the State assigned to itself in an arbitrary way the ability
to decide the fate of marriage, with a tendency to de-Christian it.

Liberal individualism and collective socialism followed a common
idea on the legalization of divorces, an issue that is directly linked to the
introduction of civil marriage. For this purpose, the encyclical Arcanum
Divinae Sapientiae expressed a concern for the shortcomings that are
deriving from divorce[2]: “mutual goodwill is diminished; harmful
impulses are given towards infidelity; the welfare and the education of

[2] In Belgium, divorce is practiced since 1809.
children is harmed; opportunity to dissolve domestic society arises; the germs of mischief are spread between different families; the dignity of women is diminished and degraded, because after serving the passion of the man, they face the risk of abandonment”[1].

Regarding the serious theme of the disunion, which seemed more and more profound, between the “religious” and the “civil” marriage, it is important as well the Leonean letter Il divisamento, where the religious priority of marriage was clearly reclaimed, considering to be unconceivable the subordination of the religious issues to the civil ones (unfortunately this is what happened later). Pope Pecci, in a quite prudent manner, has separated the respective spheres of competence of the Church and of the State with concerns to marriage, but without making them independent one from the other: the first one was supposed to have assigned the sacramental-religious aspect, and the second one the civil aspect. To separate (but not to part) without ambiguities the two areas was a determinant assumption, because, as Pope Leon XIII believed, it is not the right of any of the parties to invade the area that doesn’t belong to them. ”It is not suitable to declare that civil power should lead also the civil acts of marriage, but to leave to the Church those acts regarding marriage itself. It is pointless to have a distinction between contract and Sacrament; therefore, the administration of the sacraments that belong exclusively to the Church, any intrusion of the political authority in the matrimonial contract, and not only in its acts, is profaning usurpation”[2].

References more or less sharp concerning this subject appear in many other texts. For example in the Speech Sullo scorcio di quest’anno, addressed by Pope Pecci to the priests of the Rome Diocese for the sanctification of the family, and one of the last texts of his Papacy, and also in the Epistle Dum multa, addressed to the Bishops of Ecuador against the spread of civil marriage against religious one: “In accordance with Our supreme duty that makes Us keepers of the divine and ecclesiastic law, We raise our voice and totally condemn the so-called matrimonial civil laws enforced in Ecuador”[3].

The encyclical *Rerum novarum* (dated the 15th of May 1891), on the condition of the workers, has represented the official start of the Social Doctrine of the Church, because it brought to light for the first time the fundamental terms of the new civilization—industrial society, having at the same time the merit to bring in the communitarian conscience of the Church the conflictual situation of the new social context and the attempt to offer efficient solutions in a systematic manner. This pontiff document represents the essence of the teachings expounded in over 50 studies and researches of the social Christian school[1], “the seal of the supreme authority of a doctrine developed slow but sure, through the merits of the study and the activities of some gifted and enthusiastic members of the catholic hierarchy and laicism”[2].

The encyclical *Rerum novarum* suggests practical guidelines for the reformation of the labor organization, of the economical reports, of a social law that favors the development of the family. In this context, Pope Leon XIII has suggested, especially, the protection of women’s and children’s labor, two social categories that are often overloaded with inadequate tasks for their gender and age particularities[3]. In the catholic environments of social studies, the labor of women in the industry represents an important theme: in essence, this issue was contested and it was insistently suggested to decrease it. Regarding this issue, Pope Leon was stating: “Certain types of labors are not adapted for women, they are created by nature for domestic works that mainly protect the honesty of the gentle sex, having a natural compatibility with children’s education and the welfare of the house”[4].

Also in this document, Pope Leon has approached the controversial issue of the “just salary”[5] and of the “family salary”[6]; although not in a

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[3] Cf. *Rerum novarum*, 35. The work schedule, in those times, was up to 14-17 hours every day; in these labors were employed without discrimination women and even children (sometimes younger than 6 years old). These life conditions were described by C. Dickens (1812-1870) in his famous novels (*cf.* Martina G., *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21).


manner as explicit as the one of Pope Pius XI (in the encyclical *Quadra-gesimo Anno*), Pope Leon has stated that the worker must “receive a sufficient salary to support himself and his family”, in a “sober and honest manner”[1] (the term “sufficient” is referring to a level superior to a simple survival). This issue triggered numerous debates, confirming the awareness of society towards the complex relationship (and difficult from a pragmatic viewpoint) between labor, salary and domestic society. Satisfying the exigencies regarding “the just salary” meant guaranteeing a decent life level for the worker and his family. Therefore, the head of the family was becoming capable to supervise the welfare of his children[2]. This observation sends the message that the social Teachings of the Church have an interest to defend the right of private property and, implicitly, the right to have a safe space for the welfare and future of domestic society.

Regarding the relationships between father and children, the Pope states in this encyclical: “the sons are the image of the father” and “almost an expansion and a continuation of his person”[3] (this doesn’t apply also for the image of the mother).

Pope Leon has discussed also the theme of the relationships between family and the State, having a position of defending the family autonomy (that he was considering a society gifted with “own, paternal power”[4]), threatened by the excessive intervention of political power. The legit independence of “domestic society” was substantiated on the reasoning according to which this was “prior, from the historical point of view, to civil society”[5]. The state was able to intervene only if the family was having hardships that couldn’t be resolved by it[6]. It’s about the principle of subsidiarity (treated in the bud), that shall be developed and defined in an uncontestable manner approximately 40 years after, by Pope Pius XI.

In the pontiff documents of Pope Leon XIII, there aren’t any explicit socio-pastoral guidelines on family, but we can observe the beginning of

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a new family policy, in the context of displaying his own view on the purpose of politics and governors. Therefore, the welfare of the family is considered to be a factor of the prosperity of the nations\footnote{Cf. Rerum novarum, 26.}. Also, the Pope has insisted on achieving the social justice and state responsibility of caring about the welfare of the workers, because they form, through the family, the social body\footnote{Idem, 27a.} (but without implying that the state substitutes the family\footnote{Idem, 28.}). Also, in \textit{Rerum novarum} he suggested an intervention from the state in the family, considering it to be “established according to the law of God and of natural principles”, so that the “natural relationships within the family” ”\footnote{Idem, 29a.} are not destroyed.

Pope Leon XIII has emphasized the necessity of the day of rest (repose during the holiday) for workers (and in consequence, for the family), because this, together with religion, disrupts the monotony of daily life in order to guide towards the heavenly goods and towards practicing the cult owned to God\footnote{Idem, 33.}.

The beginnings of some socio-pastoral guidelines (the debut of a social policy and law\footnote{Idem, 34.}) can be found in the phrase ”When the worker receives a sufficient salary to support himself and his family”\footnote{Idem, 38.}, because the concept “family salary” can be outlined (this concept shall be widely debated and developed in the social teachings of the Church).

Likewise, regarding the debut of social policies, we can observe the fact that Pope Leon XIII has encouraged the activities orientated in order to “achieve goods”, so that the distances between social classes are reduced, “the huge distance between extreme poverty and top wealth”\footnote{Idem, 39.}. In the same way, he has recommended that private property should not be “oppressed by excessive incomes”\footnote{Ibidem.}, which, by all means, would affect a great deal the welfare of the small families of owners.

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{Cf. Rerum novarum, 26.}
\item \footnote{Idem, 27a.}
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\item \footnote{Idem, 33.}
\item \footnote{Idem, 34.}
\item \footnote{Idem, 38.}
\item \footnote{Idem, 39.}
\item \footnote{Ibidem.}
\end{itemize}}
At the end of the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, Pope Leon has praised the efforts of the “secular priests and of the religious orders”[1], which devote themselves to social apostleship, in order to improve/develop the individual and the family welfare of the workers[2].

For Pope Leon, family is a society, but also a “sanctuary” that must be supported only if it is upset by needs and poverty. Therefore, family must be included in the political speeches and, as a consequence, in the attention of the governmental decision factors.

In conclusion, the issues set forth truly show to what extent defending the sacramental dimension of marriage and of the religiosity of the family represented for Pope Leon XIII a priority, not at all secondary between the tasks that sometimes were weighing so much on his authority and decisions. According to the concepts of the Holy Father, the crises through which the society of that time was going [3] was possible to be surpassed only through a recovery of religious order and Christian morality and by accepting with trust the influence of the Church in society[4].

References

*The pontiff Magisterium*


[3] The social, political and economical world of those times was suffering because of some capitalist concepts protected by a liberalism that was in favor to make a small number of people rich and was causing many people to become poor.


**Studies**


