



ZDZISŁAW KIELISZEK

Varmijos Mozūrų universitetas, Olsztynas, Lenkija  
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

# IMMANUELIO KANTO FILOSOFIJOS POTENCIALAS POPIEŽIAUS PRANCIŠKAUS ENCIKLIKOS *AMORIS LAETITIA* KONTEKSTE

Potential of Immanuel Kant's Philosophy  
in the Context of The Encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*  
of Pope Francis

## SUMMARY

The new approaches to the topic of marriage, which were expressed by Pope Francis in the encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*, in many aspects are intertwined with the philosophical views of I. Kant, so it is necessary to study this issue to develop the interaction of these worldview systems. The purpose of this article is to determine the role of Kantianism in modern Catholic teaching expressed in *Amoris Laetitia*. During the research, several methods of scientific knowledge were used, including philosophical and historical analysis, comparison, synthesis, concretisation, and generalisation. As a result of the research, the following conclusions were reached: for a long time, Catholicism has been rejecting the ideas of I. Kant, but in the 20th century, steps were taken to get closer to this teaching; the main difference between the views of Catholicism and Kantianism in this context is that the latter does not consider marriage as a sacrament. Between these worldview systems, there are several common views on the issue of marriage, in particular, Catholicism and Kantianism understand marriage as a union in which spouses become a unique community of two people; the formation of marriage is the result of free choice; procreation is not the only purpose of marriage; marriage involves the right to own each other; spouses are equal; marriage is exclusively heterosexual and elimination of sexual contacts is not possible. In addition, I. Kant's philosophy has an important potential for modern Catholic teaching, which is preached by Pope Francis. This article will be useful for philosophers and Catholic priests.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Immanuelis Kantas, popiežius Pranciškus, enciklika *Amoris Laetitia*, santuoka.

KEY WORDS: Immanuel Kant, Pope Francis, Encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*, marriage.

## SANTRAUKA

Popiežiaus Pranciškaus enciklikoje *Amoris Laetitia* išsakytas naujas požiūris į santuoką daugeliu aspektų perspina su I. Kanto filosofinėmis pažiūromis, todėl, nagrinėjant šį klausimą, būtina plačiau patyrinėti minėtų pasaulėžiūrinių sistemų sąveiką. Šio straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti kantizmo vaidmenį, remiantis šiuolaikiniu katalikų mokymu, pateiktu dokumente *Amoris Laetitia*. Atliekant tyrimą, taikyti keli mokslinio pažinimo metodai: filosofinė ir istorinė analizė, palyginimas, sintezė, konkretizavimas ir apibendrinimas. Pabaigus tyrimą, suformuluotos šios išvados: ilgą laiką katalikybė atmetė I. Kanto idėjas, tačiau XX a. pradėta stengtis priartėti prie šio mokymo; pagrindinis katalikybės ir kantizmo pažiūrų skirtumas šiame kontekste tas, kad Kantas bei jo sekėjai nelaiko santuokos sakramentu. Tarp šių pasaulėžiūrinių sistemų išryškėja keletas bendrų požiūrių į santuoką: katalikybė ir kantizmas santuoką supranta kaip sąjungą, kurioje sutuoktiniai tampa unikalia dviejų žmonių bendruomene; santuokos sudarymas yra laisvo pasirinkimo rezultatas; prokreacija nėra vienintelis santuokos tikslas; santuoka apima teisę priklausyti vienas kitam; sutuoktiniai yra lygūs; santuoka yra išimtinai heteroseksuali ir neįmanoma panaikinti lytinių santykių. Be to, I. Kanto filosofija reikšminga šiuolaikiniam katalikų mokymui, kurį skelbia popiežius Pranciškus. Šis straipsnis bus naudingas filosofams ir katalikų kunigams.

## INTRODUCTION

The study of the potential of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant in the context of the encyclical *Amoris Laetitia* of Pope Francis is relevant because it contributes to the combination of Kant's universal moral principles with new approaches to family life, family, and morality expressed in the encyclical. The study of this issue contributes to the expansion of understanding of ethical principles and cooperation between philosophical and religious discourses.

The problem of this study is that it is based on two different worldview systems – Kantianism and Catholicism, and it is necessary to analyse each of them in detail in the context of views on the topic of marriage and family. In this aspect, it was necessary to compare Kantian universalism with the special approach of Pope Francis, which emphasises contextual factors, including specific circumstances and the ability to distinguish between situations. Also, it

was important to identify those elements that are common to both doctrines and to consider the prospects of their interaction.

Several scientists from all over the world were engaged in research on this topic. K. Horn described in detail the theory of the value of marriage in I. Kant's worldview and related problems in his book. However, the researcher focused exclusively on the views of Kantianism, without considering the topic of Catholicism (Horn 2022). On the other hand, K. Littger investigated the history of the relationship between Catholicism and Kantianism, as well as the main differences in views between these worldviews. This work is general, so the issue of marriage is considered only tangentially (Littger 2005). Another important work is the book by P. Gabriel, in which the author studied in detail the worldview attitudes that were described in *Amoris Laetitia*. The researcher man-

aged to fully reveal the main features of this work (Gabriel 2022). Regarding the position of Catholicism in the modern world, the article by L. Zhang was an important study, in which the author was able to describe in detail the peculiarities of the development of Catholic teaching in the conditions of globalisation and under the influence of other factors of the modern world (Zhang 2023). An important issue in the context

of consideration of I. Kant's views on the topic of marriage are the topic of same-sex marriages, which was raised by M. Sticker in his article. The author considered this topic in detail, but his general conclusions are largely debatable (Sticker 2020). M. Faggioni devoted his research to a detailed study of the work of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia*, and he researched the key aspects of this work as accurately as possible (Faggioni 2022).

## RESULTS

The philosophy of Immanuel Kant caused a mixed reaction among Catholic thinkers. Some of them recognised his achievements, while others saw in him a contradiction to Catholic teaching. The Vatican placed the Critique of Pure Reason on its Index of Prohibited Books in 1827, which caused Kant to be viewed negatively in the Catholic world. During the 20th century, Catholic thinkers began to look for ways to integrate Kant's achievements into the Catholic worldview, and this approach found imitators. However, even in recent times, some authors consider Kant's philosophy incompatible with Catholicism (Horn 2022).

One of the controversial concepts in Kant's philosophy is "marriage". Kant does not consider marriage as a sacrament and does not relate it to the Catholic understanding. He believed that spouses gave themselves completely to each other in marriage, denying the idea that the purpose of marriage was the birth of offspring. Kant had an influence on the development of the Catholic doctrine of marriage, but this contribution is considered insignificant, and the main

impact is attributed to other authors (Gabriel 2022). In general, in Catholic circles, there is no widespread interest in Kant's philosophy for discussions about "marriage". Some authors look to his works for inspiration, including Sebastian Mutschelle, Matern Reuss, Andreas Metz, Gregor L. Reinder, Joseph Weber, Johann M. Sailer, Ildefons Schwarz and Ulrich Peutingner. However, in general, Kant remains on the periphery of Catholic thinking on this matter (Littger 2005).

There are some similarities between Kant's understanding and the Catholic understanding of "marriage". Kant defines marriage in his work "The Metaphysics of Morals" as the union of a man and a woman, which involves lifelong, mutual, and exclusive possession of sexual characteristics. Although Kant has been accused of reducing marriage to a sexual sphere, in his Observations on the Sensation of the Beautiful and Sublime he gives a higher concept of marriage, where he sees it as an intimate communion based on the intelligence and taste of both partners (Perkins-McVey 2022).

This shows that for Kant, marriage is a relationship in which spouses become a community of two individuals, which gives each other exceptional personality traits, and not only at the level of physical attachment. This understanding of marriage is consistent with the Catholic understanding of “*communio personarum*”. In this dimension, Kant’s concept of marriage has much in common with the Catholic understanding of marriage as a deep community between a man and a woman based on love and mutual giving (Pärttyli 2018).

Kant emphasises that marriage is formed because of a free and conscious contract between the bride and groom. This also corresponds to the Catholic doctrine, according to which marriage is the result of the free consent and commitment of the spouses before God (Littger 2005). Kant also claims that procreation is not the main purpose of marriage. He sees the natural propensity to procreate as a factor that prompts individual men and women to marry. This corresponds to the Catholic understanding of marriage as oriented towards the birth and upbringing of children, although in post-conciliar Catholicism this aspect is no longer considered as the sole purpose of marriage (Sirovátka 2005).

According to Kant, the marriage contract provides for the exclusive and complete ownership of each other as persons and the lifelong preservation of this contract. A similar concept is present in the Catholic understanding of marriage, where spouses accept exclusive and complete ownership of each other and commit to fidelity to this contract for the rest of their lives (Horn 2022).

Kant emphasises the equality of spouses in each other. This coincides with Catholic teaching, according to which spouses have equal rights and responsibilities in their joint life (Horn 2022). Regarding sexual love, Kant believes that it has physical and spiritual aspects. He argues that sexual behaviour is morally permissible only within the confines of heterosexual marriage. This is consistent with the Catholic position, according to which sexual love is considered morally permissible only within the boundaries of marriage and is an important component of the interaction of spouses (Perkins-McVey 2022).

A betrothed couple, according to Kant, can enter any marriage contracts, but they cannot include complete abstinence from sexual relations, as this would invalidate the marriage. This is also in line with the Catholic position, where the elimination of sexual relations in the future may invalidate the marriage (Arjonillo 1998). Kant also emphasises that parents as spouses have equal rights and responsibilities towards their children. This coincides with Catholic teaching, where parents have equal rights and responsibilities in raising their children.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there are certain parallels between Kant’s understanding and the Catholic understanding of marriage, particularly regarding the community between spouses, the free contract, the purpose of marriage, possession, equality, sexual love, marriage contracts, and the role of parents in raising children.

In Chapter VIII of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis (2016) addresses “irregular” situations, including remarriages of

divorced Catholics. According to current Catholic discipline, if these persons do not undertake to live “as brothers and sisters”, they are not allowed to receive sacramental absolution and Holy Communion. Also, such remarriage is not recognised by the Catholic Church.

Pope Francis hopes that pastors would give divorced and remarried Catholics the opportunity to receive the sacraments. However, he also argues that a solution to this issue must be found that would be consistent with Catholicism’s unbreakable belief in the indissolubility of marriage. Pope Francis emphasizes that the situations of divorced Catholics who are in new marriages are so diverse that each case must be considered individually. Therefore, he considers it unlikely to formulate general canonical norms that could be applied to all such “irregular” situations (Gabriel 2022).

Given Francis’ expectations, it is worth considering Kant’s observations about the structure of the contract, which consists of four expressions of will. Kant claims that for a valid contract to be concluded, the simultaneous will of both parties is necessary. He explains that preliminary statements are preparatory acts, while substantive statements form the basis of the contract. Kant sees that to conclude a legally effective contract, both parties must promise to adhere to the content of the contract. He emphasizes that the conclusion of a contract depends on the simultaneous will of the parties and a joint obligation to fulfil the terms of the contract (Littger 2005; Code of Canon Law, 1983).

These observations of Kant can be identified as structural elements of the canonical form of Catholic marriage. The answers of the bride and groom during the liturgical rite, in which they confirm their voluntariness, fidelity, and readiness to have children and to adopt offspring, can be considered as an offer and acceptance of the offer. The bride and groom’s mutual promise to marry and its acceptance can be perceived as a manifestation of will that confirms the mutual commitment and acceptance of marriage vows (Naz 2022; Zhang 2023).

Thus, one can compare these structural elements of Kant with the Catholic understanding of marriage, where the parties enter a marriage contract, which includes a promise and acceptance of the promise. However, it is important to note that in the context of divorced Catholics who are remarried, the Catholic Church maintains its discipline by requiring the indissolubility of marriage. Special cases of such situations are considered individually, with the search for solutions that would be compatible with Catholicism and the principle of the indissolubility of marriage (Table 1).

In the context of the search for relationships between Kant’s philosophical teachings and Catholicism, it is important to consider two preparatory statements found in the Catholic rite of marriage (Code of Canon Law, 1983). According to Kant’s reasoning, it can be argued that the Catholic marriage consensus, which is entered into between an engaged couple during a liturgical rite, becomes legally invalid if one of the parties is affected by a defect. For example,

**Table 1.** Commonalities and differences between the views of Kantianism and Catholicism on marriage

	Convergences	Divergences
Philosophy of I. Kant / Catholicism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Understanding marriage as a union in which spouses become a unique community of two people</li> <li>2. Formation of marriage because of a free and conscious choice</li> <li>3. Procreation is not the only purpose of marriage</li> <li>4. Marriage involves exclusive and complete possession of each other</li> <li>5. Equality of spouses</li> <li>6. Only heterosexuality is acceptable</li> <li>7. Elimination of sexual relations is impossible</li> <li>8. Parents have equal rights and responsibilities toward children</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kant does not perceive marriage as a sacrament</li> <li>2. In Catholicism, remarriage after divorce is impossible</li> </ol>

Source: compiled by the author.

giving or accepting a marriage proposal under coercion, deception or ignorance leads to the ecclesiastical invalidity of a Catholic marriage. The specified conceptual constructions presented by Kant reflect already existing principles of Catholic discipline and do not introduce much new into this sphere. If Catholics find themselves in a similar situation, they have the option of turning to the ecclesiastical authority, usually their bishop and going through a canonical verification procedure to obtain a declaration of the nullity of their marriage. This procedure may be based on factors such as forced marriage or receiving false information during the engagement process, etc. Of course, to begin with, the parties must file an appropriate lawsuit in the ecclesiastical court. Thus, Catholics who find themselves in similar situations can go through the canonical path to enter into a “new” Catholic marriage and continue to enjoy the sacraments.

It is also necessary to analyse two declarations, which are constituent elements of the contract in question in the canonical form of Catholic marriage. According to Kant’s conceptual constructions, it can be argued that the Catholic marriage consensus loses legal validity if one of the parties does not fulfil the promises made during the marriage ceremony. Additionally, using Kant’s views, it is possible to propose a general canonical norm for solving the “irregular” situations that Catholics face (Jucewicz 2019). Such a norm could be formulated as follows: after the appropriate canonical procedure and verification of the actual state of the parties, a marriage between Catholics is declared invalid if at least one of the parties does not keep the promises made during the celebration of the marriage ceremony. Of course, it is also necessary to specify exactly how to understand and describe these promises in a canonical context and how to treat their non-fulfilment.

The proposed solution meets the expectations of Pope Francis, as it does not contradict the belief in the indissolubility of marriage, which is characteristic of Catholicism. For example, if one spouse leaves the other, if one of the parties does not fulfil their marital obligations, etc., the proposed solution provides that the “previous” marriage is not dissolved, al-

lowing Catholics in “irregular” situations to enter a “new” Catholic marriage and receive the sacraments. Thus, the invalidity of the “previous” marriage could be justified based on the failure of one of the parties to fulfil this promise, which was expressed during the celebrations of the marriage ceremony, based on the differences expressed by Kant.

## DISCUSSION

Kant’s philosophy and Catholic teaching are among the leading worldview systems that play an important role in the study of modern philosophy. In addition, the search for common attitudes is important for the establishment of interaction between the mentioned teachings in the future. Therefore, the issue of Kantianism and Catholicism, in the context of views on the topic of marriage, was studied by several scientists worldwide.

In his research, M. Sticker (2020) studied the topic of I. Kant’s views on same-sex marriage. The author claims that among modern philosophers there is a tendency to recognize that I. Kant considered same-sex marriages permissible from the point of view of morality. The researcher supports this thesis and develops it. M. Sticker says that I. Kant’s philosophy is more open to same-sex marriages than to heterosexual ones. This is because the German philosopher argued that marriage required equality between spouses, and this was more achievable in a same-sex relationship. Such thoughts are logical, however, as already indicated

in the results of this study, I. Kant considered same-sex marriages impossible from the point of view of morality, as well as from the point of view that one of the important roles of marriage is the continuation of humanity, which is impossible in homosexual relations.

Regarding the topic of the Catholic view on marriage, an important study in this context is the article by M. Faggioni (2022). The researcher examined in detail and process the main theological documents in which the issue of marriage is considered. One of these documents is *Amoris Laetitia*, in which the issue of marriage was discussed. M. Faggioni claims that the mentioned document is canonical, and it accurately describes the various aspects of marriage from the Catholic point of view. In addition, the author claims that the role of Pope Francis is quite important in the context of solving certain issues related to marriage. It is worth agreeing with this opinion, since *Amoris Laetitia* is indeed a leading religious document in the context of the concept of marriage, and the role of the Pope can be important for the introduc-

tion of new concepts and cooperation with the philosophy of I. Kant.

Z. Kieliszek (2022) in his research claims that the philosophy of I. Kant in the context of consideration of the concepts of marriage and family is quite important and was largely innovative at the time of its creation. The researcher claims that to date there is no unified view of Kant's interpretation of the concept of family in the general context of his philosophical teaching. Z. Kieliszek also draws attention to the fact that today there is a considerable lack of research on the topic of family and marriage in Kantian teaching, which is a significant problem. In addition, the author of the article claims that this topic is quite debatable, and its in-depth study allows for reaching new conclusions. It is worth agreeing with this opinion, since the philosophical teaching of I. Kant is quite broad and complex, therefore it needs deep research in various aspects. Also, further study of this topic is important in the context of the formation of the interaction between Kantianism and Catholicism.

The question of the connection between Kantianism and Catholicism is quite relevant in modern scientific circulation. D. R. McGaughey (2006) devoted his research to this topic. In his article, the researcher studied similar and different aspects of the philosophy of I. Kant and the Catholic faith. As a result of studying this topic, the author claimed that these worldview systems are quite different in various aspects and cannot coexist and interact in the future. It is

worth disagreeing with this opinion, because, firstly, as already indicated in the results of this article, the attitude of Catholicism to Kantianism is not stable, and in the course of history, several steps were taken to strengthen the interaction between these worldview systems. Secondly, speaking exclusively in the context of the issue of marriage, this article has already shown that Kantianism and Catholicism have much in common in their worldviews and can coexist in the future.

Regarding the topic of canonicity and compliance with Catholic norms of the document *Amoris Laetitia*, the study of E. Reimer-Barry (2022) is important. In his article, the author researched the mentioned document in detail, as well as analysed certain aspects of the history of its creation. The researcher claims that, in general, this document is of great importance for modern Catholicism, and coincides with the main religious theses. However, E. Reimer-Barry says that chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia* is incorrect and should be removed from the way it is presented. It is worth disagreeing with this position of the researcher, because, as already shown in the research results, religious documents and norms cannot fully cover all situations that will arise in marriage. With this in mind, divorced Catholics will have greater freedom of action in their lives, which is provided for in the 8th section of the mentioned document.

C. L. Firestone (2006) in his article studied the topic of the relationship between Kantianism and religious teachings. The author claims that this issue is

quite relevant in the modern world and needs detailed study. In addition, the author emphasizes that when analysing the philosophy of I. Kant in the context of religious teachings, should be perceived not as anti-metaphysics, but as a true seeker of spirituality in human experience. One should agree with this opinion, since, indeed, the philosophical teaching of I. Kant is quite broad, and its study cannot be limited to one ap-

proach only. In addition, this way of researching the intellectual heritage of the great philosopher will allow to expand the perception of his ideas in a religious context and will provide an opportunity for the development of further interaction between them. In general, it should be noted that I. Kant's views on the issue of marriage are quite complex and can be combined with Catholic teaching and interact with it in the future.

## CONCLUSION

As a result of the research, it can be concluded that I. Kant's philosophical views on the issue of marriage are quite complex and ambiguous. In addition, it is worth noting that at one time these ideas were quite progressive. On the other hand, Catholic teaching has not been accepting the ideas of the German philosopher for a long time, however, in the 20th century, a significant shift occurred in the context of Catholics' perception of I. Kant's philosophy.

From a Catholic perspective, Kant's philosophy is seriously flawed because it does not consider marriage as a sacrament. This aspect is of key importance to Catholicism, and it is in this context that there are significant contradictions between these worldview systems.

There are parallels between Kantian and Catholic concepts of "marriage", which requires a careful analysis of Kant's influence on the development of Catholic teaching on marriage. I. Kant understands marriage as a union in which spouses become a unique community of two people; the formation of

marriage is the result of free choice; procreation is not the only purpose of marriage; marriage involves the right to own each other; spouses are equal; marriage is exclusively heterosexual, and elimination of sexual contacts is not possible.

Kant's philosophy has the potential to meet the expectations of Pope Francis and open the possibility of developing canonical norms that will help Catholics in so-called "irregular" situations to enter a true Catholic marriage and receive the sacraments, while maintaining faith in the indissolubility of marriage, which is characteristic of Catholicism.

Whether Kant is more important than he is given credit for in changing the Catholic understanding of marriage after the Second Vatican Council requires further research. In addition, reflections on the issue of Pope Francis's views are not exhaustive, but it seems that the indicated general direction, which is based on Kant's thoughts, is promising and worth further development in future research.

## References

- Arjonillo, R.B. 1998. *Conjugal love and the ends of marriage: A study of Dietrich von Hildebrand and Herbert Doms in the light of the pastoral constitution*. Bern: Peter Lang AG.
- Code of Canon Law. 1983. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic\\_index\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html)
- Faggioni, M. 2022. Theology of marriage in the exhortations "Familiaris Consortio" and "Amoris Laetitia". Pastoral Aspects. *Verbum Vitae*, 40(1), 133–145.
- Firestone, C.L. 2006. *Kant and the new philosophy of religion*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Gabriel, P. 2022. *The Orthodoxy of Amoris Laetitia*. London: Penguin.
- Horn, K. 2022. Kant's problematic theory of the value of marriage. In: *Kant's Theory of Value* (pp. 197–216). Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Jucewicz, A. 2019. The morality of the marriage act in the light of John Paul II's Wednesday Catecheses. *Studia Warmińskie*, 56, 341–354.
- Kant, I. 2021. *Three critiques: Critique of pure reason, critique of practical reason, critique of judgement paperback*. London: Penguin.
- Kieliszek, Z. 2022. Kant's interpretations of understanding "family" as a domestic society. *Studia Warmińskie*, 59, 25–52.
- Littger, K. 2005. *Kant and Catholicism*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- McGaughey, D.R. 2006. Kant on religion and science: Independence or integration? *Zygon*, 41(3), 727–746.
- Naz, B. 2022. Sensibility, virginity, possession and the polity of power: a postcolonial reading of Fleda's quest of aesthetic and ethical autonomy in the spoils of Poynton. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 9(1), 2034282.
- Paglia, V. 2022. *Theological ethics of life. Writing, tradition, practical challenges*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Pärttyli, R. 2018. *Kant on Love*. Boston: De Gruyter.
- Perkins-McVey, M. 2022. Kant, intoxicated: the aesthetics of drunkenness, between moral duty and "active play". *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 44(4), 46.
- Pope Francis. 2016. *Amoris Laetitia: On love in the family*. Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor.
- Reimer-Barry, E. 2022. Amoris Laetitia at five. *Theological Studies*, 83(1), 109–132.
- Sirovátka, J. 2005. The 'Alleszermalmer' crushed?: The dispute about Kant; Joseph Weber (1753–1831), Stattlers (1728–1797) 'Anti-Kant' and Bishop Sailer (1751–1832). In: *Kant and Catholicism: Stations in a Checkered History* (pp. 263–281). Freiburg: Herder.
- Sticker, M. 2020. The case against different-sex marriage in Kant. *Kantian Review*, 25(3), 441–464.
- Zhang, L. 2023. The globalization of Catholicism as expressed in the sacramental narratives of Jiangnan Catholics from the late Ming to early republican period. *Religions*, 14(6), 731.