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SYNOD OF BISHOPS

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THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY  
IN THE MODERN WORLD

*(FOR THE USE OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES)*

STUDY  
GUIDE

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IN THE MODERN WORLD

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# THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD

## INTRODUCTION

### I

#### THE REASON FOR THE THEME

##### 1. THE CONNECTION WITH THE THREE PRECEDING SYNODS

The Holy Father John Paul II opportunely decided that the next session of the Synod should study the theme "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World". The subject of the Family had been proposed with sufficient unanimity by the Synods of the Eastern Churches, the Bishops' Conferences, and the Departments of the Roman Curia, in their replies to the letter sent by the Synod Secretariat. In these last years the Apostolic See and the Bishops' Conferences and even individual Bishops of several countries not infrequently published documents on the family. There is a clear connection with the themes of the three preceding sessions of the Synod, which dealt with justice in the world and the ministerial priesthood, with evangelization and, finally, with catechesis. The first evangelization to be given to children belongs to the family and the same can be said of their deeper education in the faith; education for justice, which is so urgent for contemporary Christians, belongs to the family as the first cell of society. Nowhere can a better means be found than the Christian family for raising up priestly and religious vocations.

##### 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY IN SOCIETY

Since scientific and technological progress is bringing profound changes to the world with increasing rapidity, all institutions are subjected to crisis. Accordingly, the family also cannot escape having an identity

crisis. The importance of this crisis is all the greater because the family is the primary and fundamental cell of society and, as a result, the happiness of the whole of society is connected with the welfare of the family. Light must therefore be thrown both on the family's importance for society and society's duty towards the family to enable it to grow and rightly fulfil its own role.

This makes clear the reason that induced the Pope to propose the subject of the family for the next Synod.

However, to keep the subject within due limits, we must from the beginning of the theme both determine more closely its meaning and show under what aspect it is to be studied.

## II

### MEANING OF THE THEME

#### 1. ROLE

We are dealing with the *role* performed by the Christian family within the People of God, that is to say *its own special gift*,<sup>1</sup> *its own special grace*, *its own special duty*. The word "role" is taken in a theologico-pastoral sense, indicating an ordination for carrying out education, sanctification and social advancement.

#### 2. CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The word "family" can be understood in various senses. As is clear, the wide meaning must be distinguished from the narrow.

The family coming from a marriage<sup>2</sup> can mean the *partnership* of one man and one woman bound together indissolubly by conjugal love in accordance with the order laid down by God. This family is in the strictest sense ordained, as we shall relate, both for mutual help and community of life and for procreation. *This partnership* of a man and a woman can also be considered in its broader or narrower relationship with their kinspeople and, in accordance with this distinction, the family will take on a wider or a narrower meaning.

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*

If it is a partnership between a baptized man and a baptized woman, we can then speak of a *Christian* family; and if it is a partnership between a baptized man and a baptized woman who are in communion with the Catholic Church, we are speaking of a *Catholic* Christian family.

### 3. MODERN WORLD

The meaning of this phrase is clear enough in itself. However, it is well to note the importance of considering "the modern world": there are many new social and psychological conditions with effects in the field of the family; special note must be taken of the presence of love and the vocation of the Catholic Christian family to provide society today with the spirit of Christian love.

## III

### DIVISION OF THE THEME

In order to deal in an orderly and clear fashion with the theme, we are setting out three parts:

1. The first part is descriptive and takes note of the present situation of the family in the various parts of the world.
2. The second part sets out some factors of teaching on the Christian family, taking into account the state of the family in the modern world.
3. The third part is pastoral and speaks of the role of the Christian family in the modern world.

## PART ONE

# THE SITUATION OF THE FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD

### PREAMBLE

At the beginning of the preparation of the fifth General Session of the Synod of Bishops, to which the theme of "The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World" has been assigned, it seems useful to have a look at the panorama of the conditions of the Christian family in the various parts of the world.

Fifteen years have passed since the Second Vatican Council, interpreting the signs of the times, gave expression to its pastoral and dogmatic reflections on the condition and mission of the Christian family. This fifteen-year period has seen a profound change in the Church and the world, a change marked chiefly by two characteristics: a radical change in the way of thinking by society and the rapidity of the process of change.

We do not intend to provide here a scientific study of this change, but only to set out an outline that will open the way to pastoral study of the effectiveness of the family as an instrument in the Church's saving mission.

There are, of course, great differences in the situations in the various continents. In each part of the world a series of factors are seen that have a positive or a negative effect on the state of the family. But the increasing contact between the parts of the earth, the speed of the modern means of communication, and the greater mobility of persons and ideas are leading to a situation in which the initiatives, the popular forms of thought and the decisions that arise in one part of the world have an immediate repercussion in the other parts.

## NEW AWARENESS OF THE PASTORAL IMPORTANCE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

In all regions can be found a new awareness of the pastoral importance of the Christian family.

### 1. THE FAMILY AS THE SCHOOL OF LOVE

The Christian family is the first school in which a Christian is taught love for God and for his or her neighbour. Many Christian married people are expressing the desire to live more deeply the reality of the sacrament of marriage within their conjugal relationship for the sake of their family and for the sake of the building of the Church of Christ in the modern world.

### 2. FAMILY SPIRITUAL LIFE

In these last years there has been a growth in the number of the groups of parents and families which have the goal of fostering the spiritual life of the family. There are, for instance, family prayer groups and groups for conjugal education and for the education of families of their members, especially with regard to responsible parenthood and the Christian meaning of sexuality. Other groups assist future married couples in preparing for the sacrament of marriage.

### 3. THE FAMILY IN SOCIETY

Other movements work for the fostering of the family's responsibility in society. Thus they endeavour to set up collaboration between the family and the school, they seek protection and advancement for the family's role in legislation, they support families in difficulties and they strive for the defence of human life and moral values.

### 4. THE FAMILY IN THE MISSION OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Above all, note must be taken of the renewed awareness of the family as such (in that it constitutes a certain unit) in the pastoral mission of the local Church, in that it should take an active part because of the responsibility that arises at the moment of receiving the sacrament of Marriage.

## II

### THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE CHANGE OF THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN MODERN SOCIETY

The Christian family naturally does not live its life apart from the evolution of the institution of the family in the circumstances of modern society. We must therefore consider the influence had by the character and customs of modern society on the family: the way in which the family is able to fulfil its role effectively depends partly on this influence, which also at times does damage to the integrity of the family.

#### 1. DIVORCE

In the years since the close of the Second Vatican Council the institution of divorce has been introduced into the legislation of almost every nation, including those traditionally called Christian. Statistics show that in some areas one marriage in three leads to divorce. In other places divorce takes on the form of successive polygamy. There is an increase in the number of divorces involving people who seemed to have had a happy married life for years. Various causes for these phenomena can be listed. Thus, for instance, account must be taken of the gradually increasing length of human life: this means that many married couples are living "married life" for a much longer time than in the past after their children have grown up and left the family. This shows the greater necessity now than before for a training or "education" of married couples to undertake properly a longer married relationship.

Many married people consider impossible the permanent continuance of the bond and therefore declare that the promise of such continuance demanded in marriage is without effect; others are psychologically incapable of undertaking a permanent commitment. Day by day there is an increase in the number of Catholics asking for civil divorce and attempting a new union.

Divorce is very harmful to the children, for they are thus deprived of the love and affection that they need in order to develop and properly reach adult life, which is ordinarily secured only through the example of their parents.

## 2. CONSENSUAL UNION OR "TRIAL MARRIAGE"

Another cause is leading to the disintegration of the institution of marriage: many young people refuse, at least for a while, to enter a permanent marriage, preferring a consensual union of "trial marriage". The reasons for such a choice include: the intention not to enter a formal bond without having previous certainty of the partner's fertility; economic considerations, such as the need for too burdensome a dowry, or the excessive expense of the wedding celebration; or, on the other hand, a too "individualistic" concept of marriage, ignorance of the partnership character of marriage and, finally, fear or refusal of the permanent obligations of marriage.

Together with the facts mentioned just now, account must be taken of the growing number of unmarried mothers and of transitory pre-matrimonial relationships accepted by public opinion.

## 3. TRANSMISSION OF NEW LIFE

Furthermore, note must be taken of the birth question, in view of its special importance nowadays. In some places questions of population and progress are placed in the very centre of pastoral care. Attempts are made to explain the truly Christian concept of responsible parenthood, rightly giving attention to the real demographic situation but also observing fully the spiritual values and moral rules handed down by the Church's magisterium. In other places the reason for disquiet lies in the decrease in the number of births, for this decrease is due to the fact that the child is considered rather a burden than a gift from God or the fruit of the married couple's love.

The dramatic increase in the number of abortions must also be taken into consideration as one of the most tragic facts of our time.

## 4. THE CHANGED SITUATION OF WOMEN

With regard to the situation of marriage in the modern world, the change in the social situation of women is of the highest importance. Women today enjoy greater independence than ever before. Many mothers, even those with infant children, work outside the home. This of course provides both economic and professional freedom, as well as possibilities for contributing in a new way to the progress of society;

but it implies that the education of the children must from the most tender age be entrusted to institutions outside the family. The greater control acquired by women over their fertility through various methods has given them a greater sense of independence.

## 5. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL FACTORS

Economic and social factors also have an important influence on the concept and existence of marriage and the family. On the one hand, many families throughout the world live in conditions of economic penury, deprived of the necessities for satisfactory family life as regards food, housing, clothing and health. The major cities do not provide houses or spaces suitable for families with several children. Recently formed families have difficulty in finding a home of their own to begin their family life in independence. On the other hand, in various societies the "affluent" mentality considers material prosperity and personal satisfaction the only goals worth pursuing and thus fosters a way of life centred on money, pleasure, the appetites and power. In this case no room is left for the self-denial that is needed in every family life.

Entrance into marriage, since it implies permanent obligations, requires in every case a certain degree of freedom and security. Many men and women today are in the clutch of violence, wars, economic crises and unemployment. The greatest worry of parents is often fear about what can happen to their children in the future.

## 6. RELATIONS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The final element to be noted in considering the changed situation of the family is in connection with relations between parents and children. Children often no longer have the traditional reverence for their parents. And on the other hand parents do not sufficiently allow their children to contribute in their own way to family life. Children want dialogue in order that they may take an active part in the harmony of the family partnership. Many parents have difficulty in the upbringing, especially the religious upbringing of their children, when these reach a higher educational level than their parents. Some parents also have difficulty in understanding the new teaching methods in schools and therefore feel that they are incapable of helping their children.



Modern theories about children “deciding for themselves” even in matters involving fundamental values have led some parents to abdicate their own responsibility to lead their children along safe paths.

### III

#### SPECIAL DIFFICULTIES OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE MODERN WORLD

In the complicated situation of the modern world, the Christian family as such experiences particular difficulties.

##### 1. PLURALISM IN RELIGIOUS MATTERS

Pluralism is a characteristic of modern society, even in religious matters. The plurality of confessions involves different interpretations of the duties of Christian life. This happens especially in the field of the family. The Catholic position is very different from the positions of some Christian confessions in important matters of doctrine and morals.

##### 2. REJECTION OF DOCTRINE

Within the Church herself many reject the doctrines taught by the magisterium, especially in matters of morals. Even the right of the Church to set out a doctrine concerning the personal life of modern men and women is questioned, especially in what concerns sexuality.

##### 3. EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Church's pastoral activity with regard to the family is affected by some *external circumstances*. The public authorities often interfere with the family's autonomy. It becomes difficult, or even impossible, to get married in the Church. Teaching methods are often opposed to Christian moral attitudes. Even the education of their children within the family often brings danger for Christian parents. In other areas, as has been said above, the laws and the personal moral attitudes contribute to the progressive disintegration of the concept and the institution of marriage.

#### 4. LACK OF A CLEAR CONCEPT OF THE SACRALITY AND SACRAMENTALITY OF MARRIAGE

A more fundamental problem today consists in the fact that many Christians lack a clear concept of the sacrality—resulting from the Creator's intention—and the sacramentality of marriage, in that marriage is a sign both of God's covenant with his people and of the faithfulness of Christ and of the Church.

Many Catholics lack such a clear concept of the sacrament of marriage. Accordingly some simply choose a civil or traditional marriage. Others go and have their marriage celebrated in the Church, but only because of the insistence of their parents or the beauty of the ceremony.

Catechesis on marriage, both general catechesis and that given in pre-marriage instruction, does not always show sufficiently the importance of the Christian faith required for the self-giving of Christian marriage.

The fact that in some countries most marriages by Catholics are contracted with people of another religion gives rise to problems and difficulties with regard to the religious unity of these unions and the education of the children.

#### *Questions on part one*

1. What should be said about the situation of the family in the various regions with reference to pastoral attention?
2. Are there other questions to be considered with respect to the theme for this Synod?

PART TWO  
QUESTIONS OF DOCTRINE  
CONCERNING MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

CHAPTER ONE  
Fundamental principles

I

THE MISSION AND RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MAGISTERIUM  
AND THE CHURCH WITH REGARD TO THE CONJUGAL  
AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIP

1. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MAGISTERIUM WITH REGARD TO ALL  
ASPECTS OF THE MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COVENANT

After the examination of the facts and of cultural development, the Pastors of the Church wish to fulfil their responsibility by suitable and authentic care of souls. To set up and continue this pastoral care, it is good to recollect what is God's intention as Creator and Redeemer with regard to conjugal and family life.

The family and marriage are closely connected, even if they have a different extension with regard to persons and role. The bond of marriage is based on love and "an affection of the will",<sup>1</sup> while the primary element in the family is the bond of blood relationship, to be completed by love, personal communication and education. Care of the family has many aspects that in themselves are human, but even in them is seen the presence of God's love: "The Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant between Christ and the Church and as a participation in that covenant, will

<sup>1</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 49: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1069.

manifest to all the Saviour's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all members of the family work together".<sup>2</sup>

The Christ-centred aspect of the family and of marriage does not detract from their human aspect.<sup>3</sup> "This destination [*of things to Christ*] not only does not deprive the temporal order of its independence, its own goals, laws, resources, and significance for human welfare but rather perfects the temporal order in its own intrinsic strength and excellence and raises it to the level of man's total vocation upon earth".<sup>4</sup> "The rightful autonomy of earthly affairs"<sup>5</sup> does not do away with the need to proceed in accordance with the rules of morality or the reference to "the will of the Creator".<sup>6</sup> Even in their temporal aspect, neither marriage nor the family can be excluded from the responsibility of the Church's Pastors, of whom *Apostolicam Actuositatem* declared: "The pastors must clearly state the principles concerning the purpose of creation and the use of temporal things, and must make available the moral and spiritual aids by which the temporal order can be restored in Christ".<sup>7</sup> It is not a matter of an improper wish to dominate private life but only of recalling the demands of the human person's dignity.

## 2. THE SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE MAGISTERIUM WITH REGARD TO THE COVENANT OF SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

Since in the marriage and the family of Christians you have a participation in the mystery of Christ through a permanent sacrament, there is much more here than in a purely human agreement. And since human independence is claimed beyond what is right under the pretence of absolute freedom against Christ and the Church, it is well to recall

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 48: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1069.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 847.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 7: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 843.

<sup>5</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 36: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1053.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 1054.

<sup>7</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 7: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 844.

with regard to this point the Church's teaching about her mission and authority.<sup>8</sup> The Apostles follow the teaching of Christ "in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion";<sup>9</sup> the Supreme Pastor and the bishops follow the teaching of the Apostles as their lawful successors. "Now what was handed on by the Apostles includes everything which contributes to the holiness of life, and the increase in faith of the People of God; and so the Church, in her teaching, life, and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes".<sup>10</sup>

Guided by the light of Christ and of the Church, the Christian family does not in this hold itself apart from the other families that are interesting themselves in a life more worthy of human beings throughout the world, and it gives recognition to what is right and honourable in them. It is also aware that it can give service and assistance not only for its own good but for that of all people of good will, in accordance with what Vatican II said:<sup>11</sup> "Out of this religious mission itself come a role, a light, and an energy that can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to God's law".

## II

### MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY AS COVENANTS

#### 1. THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

*Gaudium et Spes*<sup>12</sup> directed the attention of Christians especially to the community aspect of the human condition. Obviously, this vision of things presents a special importance in questions of marriage and the family. Modern men and women are more and more aware that the life they are living is intimately characterized by manifold reciprocal relationships with other men and women. This holds for their homes,

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, nn. 22, 25: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 25, 29; Pauli VI Litt. Encycl. *Humanae vitae*, n. 4: AAS 60 (1968), p. 483.

<sup>9</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Divina Revelatione *Dei verbum*, n. 7: AAS 58 (1966), p. 820.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 8: AAS 58 (1966), p. 821.

<sup>11</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 42: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1060.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, nn. 23 ss., pp. 1044 ss.

their neighbourhood, their work, their religion, their culture, and their leisure. And if there is a lack of these communications, each one complains of loneliness and frustration. For the relationship with others, with the other, is not something accidental or merely fitting, but it belongs to man's ontological and psychological nature. Obviously, these communications encourage the role of both the human and the Christian virtues, such as sincerity, truthfulness, kindness towards others, reverence, solidarity, the rightful keeping of promises, and the sense of commitment and of faith in the common meaning of words. Each person then is not only bound by responsibility before God and himself with regard to his own affairs but is also answerable to others for what he has promised or what they can lawfully expect of him either on the grounds of duty or because of a personal commitment. The keeping of these relationships and commitments demands two conditions chiefly.

The first condition is psychological maturity, which, leaving childish things behind, is capable of binding itself in accordance with the pre-eminence of things. Many people of today avoid this kind of commitment and are afraid of being tied down and thus losing their authenticity. On the contrary, the series of these obligations undertaken, as is obvious, through human, deliberate acts shows each person the way to build his life and develop not in accordance with temptations and childish caprices but in line with adult structure and responsibility.

The second condition is consideration for the others to whom a promise has been made or whose situation is changed because of the human acts of those who performed the action or made the promise. Perhaps the outstanding example of this modern awareness of the interpersonal human condition is the increase in "parents' responsibility" towards their children.

## 2. THE FULLNESS OF THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

Outstanding among all human relationships is the privileged, exclusive and definitive covenant between a man and a woman in marriage and the family. Each partner in a marriage binds himself with regard to the other and both undertake responsibility with regard to the children that will be born. As the Sacred Writings that we will later recall and comment upon witness, the force of that attraction and the basis of this bond is already seen in sexuality, in its complementary

character and in its vehement desire. "God saw that it was good" (*Gen* 1:31). If sexuality, like all man's tendencies, has been disturbed by sin, here too grace abounded all the more. As is obvious, this force is not the whole of marriage and family life: it must be directed and controlled by a rational will, and by grace, so that the covenant between the man and the woman "far excels mere erotic inclination"<sup>13</sup> and is truly an exchange of affection, opinion and will. On both sides it implies a deliberate human act of uniting oneself for better or for worse. This covenant is expressed once in mutual consent, but it is lived throughout a lifetime in reciprocal self-giving and acceptance. This covenant is truly the origin of a new human "reality" before God, before the married couple, and before society. Thus a complex of new relationships and communications is definitively brought into existence. The desire and the will for the permanence and indissolubility of the marriage covenant is part of its very essence, with the result that this covenant can in no way have a matrimonial character unless it is accepted from the start as definite and irrevocable.

### 3. THE HUMAN DIMENSION AND THE DIVINE DIMENSION OF THE MARRIAGE COVENANT

This union springing from a voluntary and public covenant is a total one, since it assumes all the dimensions of the human person, "wholly... spirit and soul and body" (*1 Thess* 5:23). Indeed it goes beyond the two persons who give themselves and accept each other, because from that union will be born children indissolubly united with the parents by the bond of blood relationship. Because of its total character it follows that this bond cannot be broken at man's pleasure. Every violation of the covenant and every alienation not only reduces to nothingness the marriage pledge that has been given and accepted but it also injures the other partner, who has built his or her life on trusting the other.

It is no wonder then that throughout the history of salvation the marriage covenant has been understood and explained in the light of the covenant between God the Creator and the People of Israel and of the covenant between Christ and the Church. What is in question here

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 49, p. 1070.

is no symbolism or allegory but an ontological reality and a communion and loving union between God and human beings.

Let us now see therefore what marriage and the family are in accordance with the wisdom, holiness and love of God the Creator and Redeemer.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The intention of God the Creator regarding the marriage and family partnership

#### I

#### GOD'S INTENTION AS AN AID TO UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF HUMAN AFFAIRS

Very often the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* sought light concerning the dignity of the human person and his or her qualities by examining the works of God the Creator and Redeemer.<sup>14</sup> It took the same course with regard to marriage and the family, teaching for instance: "The intimate partnership of married life and love *has been established by the Creator* and qualified by his laws. It is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence, by that human act by which spouses mutually bestow themselves and accept each other, *an institution arises which, by divine will, is a lasting one* even in the eyes of society. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, this sacred bond does not depend on human decisions alone. For God himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes".<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the profound meaning of marriage and the family, a meaning willed by God the Creator, the Council,<sup>16</sup> following the words of the Lord in the Gospels<sup>17</sup> and the apostolic teaching<sup>18</sup> refers to the will of God the Creator in accordance with what he said and did in creating man in his image and after his likeness.<sup>19</sup> In these texts are

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, nn. 22, 32, 33, 38, 45, pp. 1042, 1051, 1052, 1055, 1065.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 48, p. 1067.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 50, p. 1070.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. *Mt* 19, 4-6; *Mc* 10, 6-9.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. *Eph* 5, 30-31.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. *Gen* 1, 26.



seen the riches, the wisdom and the goodness of God the Creator, who at one and the same time took care of the intersubjectivity or permanent complementary union of man and woman and of the procreation of offspring and the wonderful suitability of the married couple for this purpose.

It is well to recall these two aspects of the marriage partnership in line with the recent documents of the Magisterium: *Gaudium et Spes, Humanae Vitae*, and in line with many letters by Episcopal Conferences or Bishops. We shall first speak of the “personalist” aspect, then of the aspect of procreation, and finally of the vital connection between the two ends.

## II

### THE PERSONALIST ASPECT

In the above-mentioned Bible texts is seen “from the beginning” the transcendency and high value of the sexual life of man and woman and the general intersubjective complementarity of the male and female wishing to be united in accordance with God’s will with awareness of their responsibilities. The image of God in the human race is thus more fully expressed, because “in the image of God he created him (man) male and female” (*Gen* 1:27). On the other hand, male and female are of the same bones and flesh (cf. *Gen* 2:23). They are ordained for intimate union in all the dimensions of their personhood, both in partnership and affection and in their bodies, as must be understood from the text “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh” (*Gen* 2:24).

Each married partner gives himself or herself to the other, who receives him or her from God in a union of which God himself is witness. Since it was the Lord himself who joined that partnership together, the logical conclusion is: “What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (*Mt* 19:6; cf. *1 Cor* 7:10). In this way man and woman are no longer alone but find “a helper fit for them” (*Gen* 2:18). Assuredly they are husband and wife with a single love upholding and animating their existence. Mutual love is the force and atmosphere of married life. Such is the dynamism of this love that it is found not only at the start of their common path but also at each

stage of it. It is something permanent, but on the other hand it has a historical aspect, since its psychological reality does not remain unchanged at the different stages of the life in common and of the individuals. Moment differs from moment of this union with the succession of joys and difficulties. Through differing degrees and moments each married partner shows himself or herself to be the same yet different. Thus in a parallel and complementary way, both persons show themselves in the whole of their reality. This diligent and loving investigation enables them to give mutual aid and more careful complementariness. They educate, elevate and enrich themselves both in their human affections and in the sense of their responsibilities. In a very kindly but exigent way each is urged to make the effort necessary for preserving fidelity to the marriage covenant.

Fear of married people's sexual life in the strict sense is therefore foreign to authentic teaching and genuine pastoral care. In this life consists one of the blessings of marriage of which Scripture, handed down and explained by the Magisterium, speaks. Fear of sexual life is not to be confused with the need for discipline, the sense of responsibility, or the awareness of one's duties to God and human beings. No worthy human life is possible without an effort in keeping with the demand of reason and faith. The Apostle Paul spoke of this to the first Christians when he wrote to the Thessalonians: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God" (*1 Thess* 4:3-5).

### III

#### THE FECUNDITY ASPECT

The personalist aspect of marriage becomes still wider when, through the blessing of God the Creator, the love of the married couple leads to the procreation and education of new human beings. "Children are really", as *Gaudium et Spes* says, "the supreme gift of marriage, and they contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. God himself who said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone' (*Gen* 2:18) ... blessed male and female, saying: 'Be fruitful and multiply'

(Gen 1:28)".<sup>20</sup> In this phrase is found both God's gift and the married couple's duty: in it is the beginning of human history and the possibility of dominating the whole of the earth.

Although a regulation of births can be opportune and licit,<sup>21</sup> this cannot be secured while forgetting what was said by the Second Vatican Council: "Relying on these principles, the sons and daughters of the Church may not undertake methods of regulating procreation that are found blameworthy by the teaching authority of the Church in its unfolding of God's law".<sup>22</sup> Such methods were again found blameworthy not long since in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

The logical normal evolution of married love itself leads husband and wife to procreate new human beings. As was noted by *Gaudium et Spes*, "While not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life that results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Saviour, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day".<sup>23</sup> On the same lines, the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* teaches: "Marriage, then, is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man his loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves that is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect each other, cooperating with God in the generation and upbringing of new lives".<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, in becoming parents, husband and wife find a new way of union and of presence to one another. In an explicit and conscious way they live their love no longer for themselves alone but also for others: for the children who are also bone of their bones and flesh of their flesh, to use the expression in the Book of Genesis (cf. *Gen* 2:23). Children are witnesses to the love of their parents; in them each married partner recognizes the presence of the other.

<sup>20</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 50: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1070.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. Pii XII *Alloc.*, 29 Oct. 1951: *AAS* 43 (1951), pp. 835-854.

<sup>22</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 51: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1072.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 50, p. 1071.

<sup>24</sup> Pauli VI Litt. Encycl. *Humanae vitae*, n. 8: *AAS* 60 (1968), pp. 485-486.

## IV

### THE TWO ASPECTS ARE INSEPARABLE

The inseparability of these two significances of married life is taught in an especially clear way in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* published by Pope Paul VI of blessed memory. After recalling the intimate connection between the two finalities, the Pope writes: "This particular doctrine, often expounded by the teaching authority of the Church, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God and not breakable by man on his own initiative, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance inherent, both of them, in the marriage act. The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life—and this as a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called. We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason".<sup>25</sup>

## CHAPTER THREE

### What God the Redeemer intends and does

#### I

### THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

God, who made human nature a marvellous thing and has remade it even more splendidly through the Incarnation and Redemption of Christ, has given new force and meaning to all the dimensions and functions of the human person, by bringing all human beings into his friendship and his family. He has established the new and everlasting covenant through the "mystery" of Christ, as he had proclaimed through the prophets.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 12, p. 488.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. *Ier* 31, 31; *Hebr* 8, 8-13; 10, 15-17.

What is that "mystery" of which the Pauline letters<sup>27</sup> often speak? All human beings, whether Jews of Gentiles, become "fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (*Eph* 3:6). The mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things is today revealed and brought to realization in the unsearchable riches of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Human beings are reconciled to God through the forgiveness of their sins and become adopted children of God. They abandon hate and aggressiveness and become brothers and sisters in love. Within themselves, peace is restored to all, because they are no longer torn by the diversity of tendencies. (Thus is brought to realization the new covenant: the whole of the human family is gathered together in the partnership of children of God and of brothers and sisters united through Christ's new law of love).

In this light *Lumen Gentium* taught that Christ's Church is an efficacious manifestation of the mystery of God and that she is his family; thus "by her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind".<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the list of images that represent the Church includes "the house of God" and "the family": In the field of divine grace and human reality every family in heaven and on earth is named from God.<sup>30</sup>

## II

### INSERTING THE MARRIAGE OF CHRISTIANS INTO THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

People share in this fundamental "sacrament" or "mystery" through various special sacraments, of which baptism is the first.<sup>31</sup> In the same way the effective communion of Christian married people with the "mystery" of Christ is achieved through the sacramental sign of marriage. A new covenant, a new union "in Christ" takes the place of the purely human covenant, elevating married love to the firmness of the charity

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. *Rom* 16, 25-26; *Eph* 3, 3-10; *Col* 1, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. *Eph* 3, 8-10.

<sup>29</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 1: *AAS* 57 (1965), p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. *Eph* 3, 14-19.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. *Rom* 6.

of Christ without any suppression of its human specificity. This covenant is assumed in the covenant of the love between Christ and the Church, not merely psychologically but ontologically as is taught by the Letter to the Ephesians.<sup>32</sup>

Here the “mystery” (or sacrament) of Christ is presented as a manifestation of conjugal love for his Church. Christ is presented as “the head of the Church, his body, and (as) himself its Saviour” (*Eph* 5:23). “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (*Eph* 5:25-26). “This is a great mystery (sacrament), and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church” (*Eph* 5:32). But precisely this type of interpersonal communion is the example and ontological foundation for a new kind of lawful union of wife and husband, who, far from the licentiousness and uncleanness of the pagans,<sup>33</sup> are “imitators of God, as beloved children (and) walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us” (*Eph* 5:1-2). It is no mere question of a figure or an extrinsic comparison; the insertion of Christian married love into the mystery of the charity of Christ takes place through partaking of grace, moral strength and the light of faith. In this is brought to realization through Christ’s grace a unique consecration of a Christian married couple both to God, to each other and to their future children.

### III

#### PERFECTING MARRIED LOVE THROUGH THE WILL FOR DEFINITIVE SELF-GIVING

Christian married love, indeed, is not merely desire—although that desire be in itself good—but it is much more the will for self-giving, for seeking the good of others, in particular that of the married partner. Of this love can be said what the Apostle writes of Christian charity: “love does not insist on its own way” (*1 Cor* 13:5). The love of those who, to use the expression of the same Apostle (*1 Cor* 7:39), “are married in the Lord” is founded on mutual self-giving and the will humbly to do honour: they are “subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (*Eph* 5:21). This specific sacramental participation

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. *Eph* 5, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. *Eph* 4, 19.

in the “mystery” of the love between Christ and the Church also takes on the everlastingness of the fidelity of God, whose gifts are irrevocable. Whatever there is about human weakness either in the Old Covenant or—much more so—in the New Covenant, which is an eternal covenant, God’s will to give married people his graces and strength never fails. This permanence of God’s gift not only demands fidelity and postulates indissolubility—Paul himself mentions the Lord’s precept in this regard<sup>34</sup>—but it is a constant source of graces which must help husband and wife to overcome difficulties either of one with respect to the other or those they both share in the necessities of life, the upbringing of their children and the troubles that come upon them. As a permanent sacrament, Christian marriage is lived differently at the different stages of the life of the married couple. Certainly there is seen a development and almost a history, as is said today, of each marriage. But the grace of Christ, like the charity that it gives rise to and the human love that it strengthens and endows, can display different shapes and forms at different times, so that this charity and this love fashioned by grace—as things belonging to God—become capable of overcoming the vicissitudes and differences of duration and continuance.

#### IV

#### THE ASCETICISM OF CONJUGAL FIDELITY AND CHASTITY

The participation by the love of a Christian husband and wife in the irrevocable charity of Christ implies psychological and moral duties and tasks through which they live their consecration to God in a specific way.<sup>35</sup> These are dealt with especially in the third part of this outline.

Here let it suffice to recall the urgency of an asceticism of fidelity through the exercise of the virtue of conjugal chastity.

#### 1. THE ASCETICISM OF CONJUGAL FIDELITY

The help of God’s grace and the work of the husband and wife themselves are necessary for preserving fidelity and observing the indissolubility of marriage, both by refusing temptations and in building up

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. 1 Cor 7, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1068.

conjugal unity. Admittedly this indissolubility of Christian marriage is a precept of the Lord,<sup>36</sup> a consequence of the insertion of human married love into the mystery and charity of Christ and the best condition for the upbringing of the children. But the fact that this indissolubility is a precept of the Lord and a consequence of the insertion of human love into the charity of Christ does not automatically give rise to a corresponding manner of moral acting by husband and wife; they must construct such a way of acting with lucidity and strength day by day, in the various circumstances, both in the Christian foundation and the logical consequence of their first love and their complete and definitive self-giving. No living reality of active and positive fidelity and no witness of life can be given to the covenant of marriage if husband and wife neglect the Christian and human conditions in which they must perform this duty. This requires generosity, an open mind, continual attentiveness to the other, mutual respect, self-denial, and forgetfulness of offences or defects. Married life is the way in which the daily duties and tasks, the joys, the sorrows and inevitable hurts, and the ordinary and religious acts of the domestic church show that, in this also, "everything works for good with those who love God" (*Rom* 8:28).

## 2. CONJUGAL CHASTITY

Here is required specifically the practice of conjugal chastity. This virtue, today somewhat despised, does not imply hatred for the body or contempt for conjugal acts and the accompanying lawful pleasure and satisfaction. These were all willed by God the Creator, as is noted in the First Letter to Timothy.<sup>37</sup> What does the Apostle ask for here and in the other exhortations that he addressed to Christian married people? He asks that the whole of their married life, in all its dimensions, even the bodily ones, should be able to be ordained and referred to God, in honour of the other partner, and with the will to manifest authentic love. He hopes that husband and wife will be aware that their bodies have been sanctified by the Holy Spirit<sup>38</sup> and have in them the gift and the fruit of the Spirit of the Lord,<sup>39</sup> so that all their conjugal acts,

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. *1 Cor* 7, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. *1 Tim* 4, 1-4.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. *1 Cor* 6, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. *Gal* 5, 22-23.



even the more intimate ones, are inspired by the couple's vocation, which is both God-given and fully human, and not by the impulse of unbridled disordered passion.

Thus understood and practised, the partnership of the whole life of the married couple will be a special centre of the first importance, since it is the first cell of society, the domestic church and the school of love of Christ and of human beings, as will now be shown in the pastoral study of the role of the Christian family.

### *Questions on part two*

1. Does this setting forth of doctrine answer well enough the pastoral needs of today? Should something else be added?
2. In view of pastoral experience, what points of doctrine should be stressed nowadays? How can and should this be done?

PART THREE  
THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

PREAMBLE

1. MEANING OF THE PHRASE "THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY"

In proposing the role of the Christian family as the theme for the next Synod, the intention is not that a list be drawn up of the duties and rights of the family. The aims under consideration by the Synod are recognition of "the special gift" that God confers on married couples and the family through the sacrament of marriage, and the study of the conditions necessary for the family to take its part in the mission of the Church.

2. THE ROLE COMES DOWN TO EVANGELIZATION

It could be said that the Christian family has a single function or role, that of evangelizing, as evangelizing has been described in the previous Synods, namely as "bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new".<sup>1</sup> For by acting in this way, the family well deserves the name of "domestic Church", and in it should be found the various aspects of the universal Church.<sup>2</sup>

The action of the family is, like evangelization, a complex, rich and dynamic matter, which cannot easily be defined, but whose factors must be investigated and distinguished in a fixed order, in order to reach practical pastoral propositions.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pauli VI Adhort. Apost. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, n. 18: AAS 68 (1976), p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 71, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 17, p. 17.

### 3. THE ROLE DISTINGUISHED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FUNCTIONS OF THE COMMON PRIESTHOOD DESCRIBED BY VATICAN II

It would be possible to distinguish the role of the family by saying that the family has an inward role (for its own members) and an outward one (for other persons and for society itself). But the excellent teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the nature of the Church and on the Christian vocation suggests that we should adopt a wider vision, even if it is a less simple one.<sup>4</sup>

It therefore seems useful, in preparing the Synod discussion, to distinguish the role of the family according as it is associated with the threefold mission of the People of God, namely the prophetic, sanctifying or priestly, and social or kingly mission.

### 4. THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THESE ROLES AND THE NATURAL DUTIES OF THE FAMILY

From its origin the family has the duty of preserving virtues and "values" and transmitting them by education, and of thus building up and fostering society. For a higher reason this same duty rests on the Christian family and in this case is wider in scope because the members of the Christian family have a baptismal, and therefore also an apostolic vocation and because their conjugal and matrimonial partnership is strengthened, sanctified and ordained for higher benefits by a special sacrament.

## CHAPTER ONE

### The role of the family in the upbringing of children and the handing on of the faith

#### I

### THE EDUCATIONAL ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN GENERAL

#### 1. CHURCH DOCUMENTS

The numerous documents in which the teaching authority of the Church constantly affirms and explains the transcendent role of parents

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Ioannis Pauli I *Alloc.*, 21 Sept. 1978, in «L'Osservatore Romano» 22 Sept. 1978, p. 1, ubi statuit: «Viva conscientia de participatione laicorum et praesertim familiae in missione salvifica Ecclesiae inter maxima bona quae Concilium Vaticanum II nobis tradidit, aestimanda est».

in the human and Christian upbringing of their children are well known. The Encyclicals of Pius XI on education and the family, and the frequent talks of Pius XII to young married couples, parents' associations, and school teachers propounded a sufficiently complete teaching, which was then taken up again and fitted to new circumstances in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in the talks and writings of Paul VI, in the deliberations of the 1974 and 1977 Synods, and in the recent Document on the Catholic School published by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education.<sup>5</sup>

## 2. EDUCATION AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE ROLE OF PROCREATION

Parents derive their responsibility for bringing up their children from their having cooperated freely with God for the procreation of new living beings. Since they gave their children the gift of life, it is for them to teach their children what is necessary in order to live a fully human life. By word and action they hand on to them what they must know for a harmonious development of their physical and intellectual life and for the acquirement of spiritual maturity. They also prepare their children by the example of their own way of acting for the various duties that will gradually become theirs in human society.

## 3. EDUCATION WITHIN THE FAMILY

Hence "parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children".<sup>6</sup> The family surroundings must be recognized as the place that in itself is the most favourable for genuine education, because in it are found understanding and love by the parents for their

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, praesertim nota n. 1: AAS 58 (1966), p. 728; praeter Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, textus conciliares maioris momenti inveniuntur in Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*: AAS 57 (1965), pp. 1 ss.; Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1025 ss.; Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 837 ss.; Decl. de libertate religiosa *Dignitatis humanae*: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 929 ss.; Decr. de activitate missionali Eccl. *Ad gentes divinitus*: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 947 ss. Notanda est etiam Ioannis XXIII *Alloc. ad Sacram Romanam Rotam*, diei 25 Oct. 1960: AAS 52 (1960), p. 898; Sacra Congregazione per l'Educazione Cattolica, *La Scuola Cattolica*, Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, Roma 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.

children, which give rise naturally to care for everything that is truly good and beneficial for the children. Nor should small account be taken of the special help that parents get in the work of education within the family from brothers and sisters of different ages assisting each other and from grandparents and other members of the family passing on their own knowledge and experience to the young.

#### 4. RECOURSE BY THE FAMILY TO EXTERNAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Parents can, and indeed should, send their children to the various school institutions in order that they may acquire an education suited to the demands of modern social life. But they can never renounce their own responsibility or entrust the whole of the burden of education on the teachers.

They have the inalienable right to choose a school that can satisfy their own aspirations and those of their children. They should keep in contact with the school. Among other ways of doing so, they should make known what is wanted for the good of their children, they should collaborate with the school and they should support its initiatives.<sup>7</sup>

## II

### THE SPECIAL ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

#### 1. CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF CHILDREN BY THEIR PARENTS

The children are however destined for a life beyond this earth. "A true education aims at the formation of the human person with respect to his ultimate goal".<sup>8</sup> Therefore, those who, having been born in a Christian family and sealed with baptism, are called and really are God's children are entitled to a Christian education.<sup>9</sup> In other words, they have the right to acquire the thought patterns and to see the examples that will open to them the way to holiness on earth and everlasting happiness in heaven.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*; Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 52: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1073.

<sup>8</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 1: AAS 58 (1966), p. 729.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 2, p. 729.

Parents should therefore show themselves to be proclaimers and educators in the faith for their children from their tenderest age; they should gradually pass on to them and open up for them the truths of faith and teach them how to set up relationships of love, fidelity, prayer and obedience with God.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. OBLIGATIONS AND RIGHTS OF PARENTS CONCERNING THE COMPLETION IN THE COMMUNITY OF EDUCATION IN FAITH

A living faith needs the help of a community. Parents are therefore obliged to bring their children to participate in the life of the parish and of the other communities and associations that are necessary and useful for their education and confirmation in the faith. Parents have the sacred inalienable right of choosing for their children a school in which the religious instruction and the mentality inspiring the whole of the formation are in conformity with their Catholic faith.<sup>11</sup>

### III

#### MODERN PROBLEMS

The Synod offers the Church the occasion to manifest publicly once again before all her doctrine and the norms that she has constantly proposed with regard to the educational role of the family and, in the order of grace, with regard to the role of the family concerning the transmission of the Gospel. But we must first examine to what extent that doctrine has entered into the thoughts and the activities of pastors and faithful.

## 1. THE NEW POSSIBILITIES OPEN TO THE FAMILY

The recent development of the conditions of social life has admittedly made it more difficult for the family to fulfil its educational role. But

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 35: AAS 57 (1965), p. 40; Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: AAS 58 (1966), p. 847.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de libertate religiosa *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 5: AAS 58 (1966), p. 933.

at the same time this development is a challenge to find new forms of activity and it offers the family new possibilities of intervening in the process of education.

Educational institutions often are incapable of giving a truly personal and human formation to children and young people, either because they are burdened by an excessive number of pupils, or because they are too tied down by particular ideologies, or for other reasons. The duty of providing what the schools cannot provide then falls on the family. On the other hand, parents aware of their new responsibility feel the need to improve their own culture and to seek help from experts.

By setting up the means for the citizens to play their part in the direction of schools, the public authorities prepare the way for parents, and indeed for all members of the family, to have greater influence in the work of education. Pastors should encourage and train the faithful for this form of apostleship. It would be good to invite Catholic institutions, which perhaps are still displeased at intervention by parents as a limitation of their own freedom, to cooperate more with the family.

## 2. SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS MEDIA

The progress of communication between the members of society and the invention of means by which news and moral convictions and examples from all sides can with ever increasing facility enter the home obliges the family to consider new aspects of its role. Families must work together and be helped in order that television, radio and cinema programmes will be put on that do not offend the morality and faith of the children. They should actively seek the means by which these powerful instruments can contribute positively to the spread of the whole truth and to the defence of the dignity of the human person.<sup>12</sup>

## 3. PARTICIPATION BY THE FAMILY IN THE WORK OF CATECHESIS

An ever increasing share in the work of catechesis should be entrusted to the family. The present experiments by which parents are associated with the pastoral initiation of their children for the reception of the

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de instrumentis communicationis socialis *Inter mirifica*, n. 10: *AAS* 56 (1964), p. 148.

sacraments (confession, communion, confirmation) or which look for an active part by the family in pre-baptism instruction should be extended successfully to a wider continuous catechism programme, especially for children of pre-school years.

#### 4. COLLABORATION BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN FAMILY EDUCATION

The Synod Sessions that dealt with Evangelization and Catechesis stated that much importance for the present exercise of the Church's mission must be given to the talents, the creativity and the generosity of the young. The next Synod too should usefully encourage families to take their children, even if they are not yet of adult age, into partnership in their work of education. Young people should be educated in such a way as to become educators themselves as soon as possible.

As John Paul II recently stated, the aim of the education of the young is to help them in their formation and strengthen them in their Christian identity to face in the right way a pluralistic world, often indifferent or even hostile to their convictions, to become strong in faith, to serve society, and to take an active part in the life of the Church, in communion with their pastors.<sup>13</sup>

## CHAPTER TWO

### The role of the family in preserving spiritual values and sanctifying its members

#### I

#### THE SPIRITUAL ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN GENERAL

##### 1. THE FAMILY AS GUARDIAN AND TEACHER OF VIRTUES

States that were solicitous for the preservation and advancement of spiritual and moral values have always put trust in marriage and the family for that purpose. "The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity".<sup>14</sup> Amid the most radical changes of the human condition,

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Ioannis Pauli II *Alloc.*, in «L'Osservatore Romano» 30-31 Oct. 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 52: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1073.



it is the family that has kept what was entrusted to it in the form of genuine love, generosity, faithfulness, respect for one's neighbour and defence of life.

## 2. MUTUAL ASSISTANCE BY HUSBAND AND WIFE IN REACHING PERFECTION

The love that moves a married couple to begin a family sets up between them a communication of minds and a sharing of counsels that enable the family to reach the fullness of its life and mission.<sup>15</sup> Its effect is that "husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul, and together attain their human fulfilment".<sup>16</sup> This demands of both of them a constant endeavour of generosity, patience and understanding. It disposes each partner to recognize the other's gifts and to help the other to grow in all the talents and virtues of his own personality.<sup>17</sup>

## 3. COMMUNICATION OF VALUES BY PARENTS TO THEIR CHILDREN

When their love has become fruitful and proceeds to the transmission of life, their natural affection for their offspring of itself stirs up in parents the desire and the aptitude to hand on to their children the riches that they have received as a heritage, that is to say the culture, traditions, virtues and aspirations by which they are to pursue their human and social vocation and attain happiness for themselves and share it with their neighbours.<sup>18</sup>

## 4. THE BENEFITS OF THE COEXISTENCE OF GENERATIONS IN THE FAMILY

The family is a school of perfection also because it is a meeting place for different generations, which mutually assist each other to acquire fuller wisdom and a more human way of life.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Pauli VI Litt. *Encycl. Humanae vitae*, n. 9: AAS 60 (1968), p. 486.

<sup>17</sup> Vid. *supra* Partem I, caput II, II.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo eius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 61, 52: AAS (1966), pp. 1081, 1073.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 57, p. 1078.

## THE SANCTIFYING ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

## 1. THE MISSION OF SANCTIFYING CONFERRED ON PARENTS BY THE SACRAMENT

In people made like Christ by baptism, that virtue-inspiring love is elevated and fashioned according to the model of God's love. To bring marriage to this holiness, Christ the Saviour raised it to the dignity of a sacrament. In this way, by a special gift of grace and charity, the Lord healed, perfected and elevated conjugal love. Combining human and divine elements, love pervades the whole of the life of husband and wife and is given perfection and growth through their generous activity.<sup>20</sup>

The married state is that in which the majority of the faithful hear and follow the call to holiness whose universality was again proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore Christ the Lord encounters Christian married couples through the sacrament of marriage and as it were consecrates them in their conjugal and family role. "He stays with them, so that, just as he loved the Church and gave himself up for her, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal".<sup>22</sup>

Thus the family arising from sacramental marriage is itself given the role of producing fruits of holiness not only for the husband and wife but also for all its members and for the whole of the Church.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. MUTUAL SANCTIFICATION OF HUSBAND AND WIFE

Imbued with the spirit of Christ, husband and wife increasingly draw close to their own sanctification and that of each other, because the whole of their life is in a special way pervaded by faith, hope and charity.<sup>24</sup> In married life there is a specific way of living in accordance

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, nn. 48, 49, pp. 1067-1070.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 41: AAS 57 (1965), p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1068.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1068-1069.

with the graces and the theological virtues. It is in this that the foundation is found for both family spirituality and apostolic activity by families.

Indeed, it is not in believing revealed truths but when, “working through love”, faith is applied to morals that Christian faith reaches its fulfilment.<sup>25</sup> Faith thus brings husband and wife to have a lively awareness of the Christian perfection of their mutual commitment, a perfection derived from the active presence of the charity of Christ, perfecting, healing and helping their conjugal love and consummating it in such a way that to their lawful love of desire is added the will for self-giving and respect of the other. Through faith a living real knowledge is gradually acquired of the presence of Christ as the companion of their life and their journey. If the Christian celebration of the sacrament of marriage is illumined by faith, it will not appear as a merely juridical act or some worldly show.

In the same way husband and wife should be fortified by the strength of Christian faith in accepting their responsibilities with regard to the generation and education of their offspring. If “fear of having a child” is today found among some peoples, is that not due in part to a lack of confidence in the goodness and help of God? Supernatural hope admittedly does not justify a lack of due foresight and human prudence. But there is such a thing as “setting the mind on the flesh”, as the Apostle says (*Rom* 8:6), which prevents hope in the help of God’s grace for human endeavours.

### 3. SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHILDREN

The family becomes a source of holiness for the children, firstly because their parents bring them to baptism for them to be made children of God and members of the holy People, and secondly because they receive from their parents by word and example the proclamation of the faith and the testimony of love and are assisted in finding and following their own vocation.<sup>26</sup> Parents also foster their children’s holiness by creating a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and men that the children’s integral education is

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 25: AAS 57 (1965), p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, nn. 11 et 35, pp. 15 et 40.

given a position in which the first and foremost element is that they should have a personal relationship with God.<sup>27</sup>

The intimate life of the family provides many occasions for recollection and various forms of conversation with God; for it is within the family that the days about which account must be rendered to the Creator begin and end, that the food received from God's goodness is taken, and that joys, sorrows, worries and plans are communicated and shared, all of which can contribute to the praise of God in thanksgiving and request for aid. Within the family children open their minds to the notion of God's fatherhood and institute a first relationship with the Father; within the family parents, by sharing in the charity of the provident Father and the love of Christ the Redeemer, ever increasingly perfect and should inspire in their children a sense of intimate union with the Holy Trinity, which is the foundation of all true prayer.

Within the family, provided the grace of the Spirit promised in the gift of the Sacrament is present, the essential personal relations, those between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between brothers and sisters, are animated by that grace and so introduce the members to many forms of expression of that divine love that inspires the Church's prayer.

#### 4. THE FAMILY AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF SOCIETY

The family contributes to the holiness of the whole of the Church, for it is within the family that the new citizens are born through which the People of God pursues its sanctifying mission through succeeding generations.<sup>28</sup>

"The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come".<sup>29</sup> "Married couples and parents... stand as witnesses to and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Mother Church, signifying and sharing in the love with which Christ loved his bride and gave himself up for her".<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dcgm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 35, p. 40.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 41, p. 47.

III  
ISSUES OF TODAY

Very much has been said in the teaching authority's recent documents about the role of the family in sanctifying its members and the world. The next Synod should not subject all to consideration again. But among the matters that seem today to be of greater importance for the apostles of the family the following issues should perhaps be noted:

1. FAMILY PRAYER

Prayer within the family and participation by the family in the Liturgy.<sup>31</sup>

2. VOCATIONS

The cooperation that pertains to the family in raising up vocations for the service of the Church, that is to say vocations to the priesthood, to the religious life, to missionary work, and to lay apostleship.<sup>32</sup>

3. WITNESSING TO CHRIST'S LOVE

The testimony that the family is obliged to give as a visible sign of the *love* between Christ and the Church: some new movements of married people and of families draw an effective stimulus for continual progress and apostleship from a deeper understanding of the meaning of sacramental marriage.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*, n. 34, p. 39; Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: AAS 58 (1966), p. 847; Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 15; Decr. de accommodata renovatione vitae religiosae *Perfectae caritatis*, n. 24: AAS 58 (1966), p. 711; Decr. de institutione sacerdotali *Optatam totius*, n. 2: AAS 58 (1966), p. 714; Decr. de activitate missionali Ecclesiae *Ad gentes divinitus*, n. 39: AAS 58 (1966), p. 986; Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, nn. 11, 30: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 847, 860.

<sup>33</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 35: AAS 57 (1965), p. 40; Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 41, 48: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1059, 1069; Decr. de institutione sacerdotali *Optatam totius*, n. 10: AAS 58 (1966), p. 719.

#### 4. MARRIED LOVE AND CHASTITY

The importance for the attainment of holiness of the expressions of *married love*, veneration for the virtue of chastity and the progressive education of husband and wife for the observance of the ethical order as regards the honourable performance of the generative role in the present circumstances of society—what is today called “responsible parenthood”.<sup>34</sup>

### CHAPTER THREE

## The role of the family in fostering and animating social life

### I

#### THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE FAMILY

The Church’s Magisterium has often spoken of the relationship between the family and society, paying attention not only to the Christian family but to the very institution of marriage and the family as that institution originated with creation.

#### 1. THE FAMILY AS A CELL OF SOCIETY AND A TEACHER OF SOCIAL VIRTUES

The Second Vatican Council recalled the traditional doctrine that the family is “the primary vital cell of society”;<sup>35</sup> for “the Creator of all made the married state the beginning and foundation of human society”.<sup>36</sup>

Human society depends on the family not merely because from the family are born society’s citizens,<sup>37</sup> but also because the family is the

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 49, 51 et 87: AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1069, 1072 et 1110; Pauli VI Litt. Encycl. *Humanae vitae*: AAS 60 (1968), pp. 481-503; Pauli VI *Alloc. ad Congressum Obstetriciae et Gynaecologiae*, Romae 19 Nov. 1977, in «L'Osservatore Romano» 20 Nov. 1977; *Nuntius ad Foederationem Internationalem Actionis Familiaris*, Cali Iun. 1977, in «L'Osservatore Romano» 25 Iun. 1977, et *Nuntius ad Conferentiam Melburni de Methodo ovulationis*, Febr. 1978, in «L'Osservatore Romano» 12 Febr. 1978.

<sup>35</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: AAS 58 (1966), p. 848.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 847.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 16.

primary school of the social virtues that are necessary to every society.<sup>38</sup> “The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life”.<sup>39</sup> “The family is the place where different generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and harmonize the rights of individuals with other demands of social life”.<sup>40</sup> In the family children are educated so that when they grow up they are capable of choosing their state of life and place their own talents at the service of the whole of society with full consciousness of responsibility.<sup>41</sup>

## 2. THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY BEFORE SOCIETY

Although the family is called a cell of society, it is also affirmed that it is in itself a true society in the proper sense, with its own reality and finality. Pius XII set forth this truth excellently in his Talk of 26 June 1940.<sup>42</sup> The family does not have as its only vocation service of the State but it is “a society in its own original right”.<sup>43</sup>

The public authority feels tempted however to forget the principle of subsidiarity<sup>44</sup> and to reduce the family’s autonomy and activity within ever narrower limits. For that reason the rights of the family must be proclaimed and vindicated time and time again.

The Church means to bring assistance to human society but she expects that the civil authority should “recognize the basic rights of the person and the family”.<sup>45</sup> While in the world “there is a growing awareness of the sublime dignity of the human person”,<sup>46</sup> the Church affirms that the human person stands above all earthly things, that his rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and that therefore he

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.

<sup>39</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 47: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1067.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 52, p. 1073.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. Pii XII *Alloc.*, 26 Iun. 1940, in «L'Osservatore Romano» 27 Iun. 1940.

<sup>43</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de libertate religiosa *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 5: AAS 58 (1966), p. 933.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. Ioannis XXIII Litt. Encycl. *Pacem in terris*: AAS 55 (1963), pp. 257-304.

<sup>45</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 42: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1061.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 26, p. 1046.

should be given ready access to all that he needs in order to live a truly human life.<sup>47</sup>

Accordingly, on the one hand the Church firmly encourages the faithful and people of good will to defend man's right to found a family and his right to protection for private life, and also the right of husband and wife to procreate, to decide the number of their children without undue compulsion by the public authority, and to bring up their children in the bosom of the family.<sup>48</sup>

### 3. ASSISTANCE DUE TO THE FAMILY FROM SOCIETY

On the other hand the Church is convinced that the family needs the help of the whole of society in order to fulfil its responsibilities. She therefore calls on all who have influence on communities and social groups to contribute effectively to fostering marriage and the family. She therefore expects the civil power to recognize, protect and advance the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect public morality and to favour domestic prosperity.<sup>49</sup> She recommends to all that they see to it "that in social administration consideration is given to the requirements of families in the matter of housing, education of children, working conditions, social security and taxes; and that in emigration regulations family life is perfectly safeguarded".<sup>50</sup> With solicitude for young and for poor married couples, she teaches that they should be provided with food and housing conditions sufficient for them to set up a family opportunely and to maintain it decently.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 26, 52 et 87: *AAS* 58 (1966), pp. 1046, 1073 et 1110; Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 848.

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 52: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1073.

<sup>50</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 848.

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 26: *AAS* 58 (1966), p. 1046; Interventus Sanctae Sedis in Conferentiis internationalibus de Populatione et de Ambitu, in « *L'Osservatore Romano* » 25 Aug. 1974 et 5 Iun. 1976.



## THE SOCIAL ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

## 1. THE DUTY OF THE FAMILY WITHIN THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Christ raised to sacramental dignity the very institution of marriage and wedlock on which was conferred from the beginning the social duty of ensuring the functioning and right ordering of human society.<sup>52</sup> As has been often said, "In virtue of the sacrament of marriage, Christian married couples ... have their own special gift within the People of God".<sup>53</sup> Certainly, the family is not called to lesser but to greater and wider tasks in society when it is assumed by Christ in the economy of redemption. In this way the Council exhorts parents to "appreciate how important the truly Christian family is for the life and progress of God's own people".<sup>54</sup>

The Christian family has a greater duty and possibility than others of opening the hearts and minds of its members to the needs of the whole of humanity. Above all in the Christian family endowed with the grace and duty of the sacrament of marriage the children can from their tenderest years perceive God in accordance with the faith they have received in baptism and they can venerate him as the Father of all men, the Father who gave them equal dignity and made them worthy of equal consideration: "It rests with parents to prepare their children from an early age, within the family circle, to discern God's love for all men; they will teach them little by little—and above all by their example—to have concern for their neighbours' needs, material and spiritual".<sup>55</sup> The revelation of God's fatherhood that children receive within the family, where the love between parents and children becomes like the charity of Christ, puts a special mark on their first experience of a well-balanced human society and of the Church. The children are gradually initiated not only "into association with their fellowmen

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Ecc! in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1069; *Summa Theol.* 3, q. 65, a. 1.

<sup>53</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 11: AAS 57 (1965), p. 15

<sup>54</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de educatione Christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 30: AAS 58 (1966), p. 860.

in civil life” but also “as members of the people of God”.<sup>56</sup> The whole family, accordingly, and its community life should become a kind of apprenticeship to the apostolate.

## 2. THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY WITH REGARD TO THE WHOLE OF HUMAN SOCIETY

By its very existence and on account of the benefits it brings its own members, the family has a healthy influence on all the societies in which it is included. The mutual love of husband and wife, their generous fruitfulness, unity and faithfulness, and the loving cooperation of all the members of the family reveal marriage as an image of and a sharing in the covenant of love between Christ and the Church and make the family show forth the Saviour’s living presence in the world and the authentic nature of the Church.<sup>57</sup>

The Christian family is called to spread beyond itself and to provide in society the advantages for which it alone is fitted. “Families will generously share their spiritual treasures with other families”.<sup>58</sup> Many are the works of apostolic charity to which the family can devote its energy, especially in the service of the needs of the workers.<sup>59</sup>

## 3. THE ROLE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE DEFENCE OF THE PERSON

The role of the family is not however limited to such works. The family must also see to it that the virtues of which it is the teacher and guardian should be enshrined in laws and institutions. It is of the highest importance that families should together devote themselves directly and by common agreement to transforming the very structure of society. Otherwise families will become the first victims of the evils that they will have watched idly and with indifference.

It is indeed urgent to check the worsening evils that imperil the very

<sup>56</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3: AAS 58 (1966), p. 731.

<sup>57</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Eccl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1069.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11: AAS 58 (1966), p. 848, ubi recensentur quaedam ex illis operibus; plura tamen adhuc enumerari possent.

institution of the family and which unfortunately are at times tolerated or supported by the public authorities. The concrete manner in which the reality of marriage is lived depends on the commonly accepted moral attitudes and moral attitudes in turn depend on the standards accepted in the society. Changes in the conditions of food, work and free time, and the continual influence of the communications media on the more intimate aspirations of people deeply affect the very structure of day-to-day life and the relationships between people, including those joined in marriage. Families must therefore endeavour to obtain from the civil authorities laws and dispositions protecting the family against the evils that threaten it, such as the exaltation and practically deification of sexual matters, contempt for woman, who is looked on as an object and a means, and the unbridled licence of spectacles and sexual mores.

Finally, there is today much in people's way of acting and in state administration that violates the integrity of the human person, offends human dignity, or gives rise to shameful subhuman living conditions<sup>60</sup> and which will be remedied only if families, under the inspiration and guidance of their pastors, understand and perform their kingly office.<sup>61</sup>

### III

#### ISSUES TODAY

##### 1. THE RIGHTS OF THE FAMILY SHOULD BE AFFIRMED ANEW

Today, in various parts of the world, the family is being subjected to new pressures. Therefore the Synod should examine how best to recall the principles of the family's right "to organize its own religious life in the home", its right "to decide the form of religious upbringing that is to be given to its children",<sup>62</sup> and its right to get a form of education from which religious instruction is not excluded.

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Const. past. de Ecl. in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes*, n. 27: AAS 58 (1966), p. 1047.

<sup>61</sup> Cfr. Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decr. de apostolatu laicorum *Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 7: AAS 58 (1966), p. 844; Const. dogm. de Ecclesia *Lumen gentium*, n. 36: AAS 57 (1965), p. 41.

<sup>62</sup> Conc. Oecum. Vat. II, Decl. de libertate religiosa *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 5: AAS 58 (1966), p. 933. In hoc documento et in Decl. de educatione christiana *Gravissimum educationis*, n. 6: AAS 58 (1966), p. 733, illustrantur quaedam exigentiae concretae libertatis religiosae familiae.

## 2. INCLUSION OF THE FAMILY IN PASTORAL WORK

The Synod is offered an excellent opportunity for inquiring whether in fact adequate recognition is given to the family's own special gift and social responsibilities in the organization of pastoral and apostolic endeavours.

Does not the People of God obtain greater success, if in its advancement of the values of the human person and the family it makes use of the cooperation of families, especially if they are joined together? When families lament adverse conditions, is it stressed that they themselves have the obligation to take the leading part in transforming the context of social life?

The burden of work, the difficulty of finding peace and quiet, especially amid the crowds and bustle of the cities, often induce married people to flee society and to seek consolation, rest and solitude within the home. This lawful aspiration should not lead them to avoid the presence of their friends and even of their children. Nor does it dispense them from undertaking all social responsibility.

## 3. FAMILY MOVEMENTS SHOULD BE FOSTERED

The Synod will also give an opportunity to the Church's pastors to manifest the confidence they have in the movements of married people and families, to encourage them to undertake ever more necessary initiatives, and to give them the help they need and clear directions.

## 4. THE ACTIVE PRESENCE OF FAMILIES IN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL UNDERTAKINGS

The future of families depends to a large extent on the decisions taken by national leaders and the international community. Changes in family legislation and in social and health laws, which are now introduced in the various parts of the world almost simultaneously, have a great effect on the life and activity of families. Families and family associations must be prepared and assisted to intervene in national and international initiatives that try to give an answer to the problems of the family. It would indeed be useful if the voice of Christian conscience and of the Church were heard more frequently. And lay Catholics and their associations can often be more acceptable and effective in proposing

to state leaders solutions in keeping with the fundamental rights of man and the will of the Creator.

Because the faithful and the Christian families participate in the royal priesthood of the People of God, they will not lack the grace of Christ.

### *Questions on part three*

1. On the basis of pastoral experience, which roles of the Christian family seem most to require being brought to the fore and put into practice? What steps should be taken for that purpose?

2. What endeavours and initiatives, especially pastoral ones, are in existence within the local Churches for the fulfilment of these roles? Do these endeavours increase the Christian family's capacity to fulfil its role? What remains to be done either on the part of the pastors or of the family itself?

3. How is the role of the Christian family affected either by the secular "consumer" mentality or by the situations of social injustice or the denial of the rights of the family? What should be done for the Christian family in these conditions?

4. What cases of greater difficulty in family pastoral practice seem to need consideration with greater attention? What steps should be taken in this field?





