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THE PROGRAM
of the
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE
ON
FAMILY LIFE

By
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PROGRAM OF THE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE ON FAMILY LIFE

The general aim of the Catholic Conference on Family Life has on more than one occasion been stated as follows: "the promotion of the welfare of the family the encouragement by every means within its power of wholesome and successful family life." That is as much as to say that the Conference is interested in counteracting whatever is inimical to sound family life and in fostering all forward-moving and constructive activities that give promise of benefiting our domestic world.

We need hardly delay here to consider at any length the necessity of special and organized effort in behalf of the modern family. It would be difficult indeed to conceive of anyone with his eyes open not recognizing such need. All gladly admit, of course that there is still much beautiful home life. But that does not change the fact that there is also a much

darker side to the picture. That side of the picture shows us a situation of which we can hardly be proud and concerning which we may well be not a little disturbed. It shows us to a truly startling extent evils such as divorce and desertion, delinquency and childlessness, parental and juvenile irresponsibility, homes either totally disintegrated or partially disorganized, the prime purposes of the family in greater or lesser degree set aside. To be sure, this picture does not correctly portray the Catholic domestic world of our day. Yet, we must not be deceived. The Catholic home, too, has suffered. It has been much influenced, and not a little hurt and damaged, by the impact of the changing social conditions of the times and by the infiltration of modern pagan ideals.

Naturally the Catholic Conference on Family Life is primarily interested in the Catholic family. It is interested in restoring the Christian home again to its position of dignity and beauty, of happiness and usefulness

of an earlier and better day. To this end was it organized. To this end has the Conference pledged itself to a vigorous campaign of resistance against the evils that are threatening the home and to the development of a constructive program of activities that should lead to its reconstruction and to the upbuilding of a vital and wholesome family life. To this end is it rapidly bringing together into one organization the more capable students of the family, and the more energetic leaders among both men and women who have been singly and in more or less unorganized fashion fighting a valiant battle in defense of the Christian home, hoping that by banding them together into a conference group for mutual counsel and enlightenment, for inspiration and concerted action, it may make their efforts much more far-reaching and effective than they have been in the past.

When we turn to the more specific objectives of the Conference and to the methods it is making use of in

carrying them out, we find prominent among them the study and dissemination of the principles of Christian marriage. This is a matter that has become highly essential today. Whenever powerful influences become rampant, aiming at the destruction of Christian ideals and at the nullification of their wholesome influence in our midst, then it becomes ever more and more necessary to call attention to anew, and to emphasize again, sound doctrines, and to warn against pernicious errors and threatening dangers. As a matter of fact, such powerful influences, particularly with regard to the family, have become extremely rampant in our modern society. Through irreligious and skeptical educational institutions and othersoul-destroying agencies, a pagan philosophy of society is being constantly foisted upon the American public. Christian ideals of marriage are being ignored or dealt with in a hostile spirit. The logical result is a public opinion among us that is reacting most harmfully and detrimental-

ly upon the family and that is leaving the home inadequately protected.

On the part of Catholics, not enough has been done to offset this condition. We have not come forward with adequate rebuttal. We have not been zealous enough in disseminating correct principles. The writer feels that it was no exaggeration when recently he stated elsewhere that "Catholics, generally, have been peculiarly remiss with regard to this matter," that in view of our present critical conditions they have not been, and are not now, "sufficiently awake to their community obligations, that they have not exerted the influence in forming public opinion that is in proportion to their numbers or in proportion to the strength and beauty and wholesomeness of the social principles that are their heritage." And it is difficult indeed either to understand or to justify their attitude—their aloofness, their refusal to make contact with those who misunderstand or differ from them, and their silence when it should be in their

power to show the sanity of the Catholic position and the ennobling influence of the law of the gospel, not only in regard to marriage and the family, but also in regard to every other phase of life.

Such a situation calls for correction. In a much larger measure in the future than in the past must the American lay Catholic contribute toward the defense and preservation of Christian ideals if very disastrous consequences are to be averted. He must come forward when the public weal is at stake and clarify confused and muddled situations by throwing upon them the light of our supernatural principles. Without correct basic principles, all else—even the best and most scientific efforts of sociologists and psychologists, of educators and publicists—will ultimately avail nothing. Not until a thoroughgoing Christian philosophy of life is again well in the ascendency in our midst will genuine Christian family life flourish reasonably unhampered.

It is for this reason that the Cath-

olic Conference on Family Life is interested in the dissemination of true Christian principles and ideals, particularly in so far as the family is concerned. It is for this reason, too, that in its very first meeting, it went on record as declaring that the Encyclical of Pius XI on Marriage would be its unfailing guide in its efforts in behalf of the home, since this authoritative document is the classic answer to the doctrines so destructive of sound family life that are being noised abroad today by both written and spoken word. More than that, it is for this reason that it is keenly interested not only in the dissemination of the ideals and principles of Christian marriage, but also in their serious study and thorough understanding. The Conference realizes full well that ignorance of true principles cannot be dissipated except through knowledge. It knows that the errors of a subtle pagan philosophy cannot be counteracted except through due preparation and understanding. It knows, too, that only

too many of our Catholics have not this adequate preparation. Hence it is logically interested in promoting the study of the family, it urges such study through both the school and the so-called adult education movement, particularly the study club.

The Conference referred to this matter of preparation through study in one of its first resolutions. After speaking approvingly of the speedy growth in our Catholic colleges of courses on Christian marriage, on the family, and on parent education, and of the intense interest shown by the students who attended them, the resolution in question went on to say: "We feel that in this work our Catholic schools are doing a tremendously important service both by developing an informed and capable leadership, prepared to fight the battles of the Christian family and by instilling the knowledge that spurs the individual to action in behalf of his own home and in behalf of home life generally." "We can only express the hope," the resolution continued, "that these

highly practical courses will multiply even more rapidly throughout our entire Catholic educational system." And it added: "For those outside the school system there are scarcely less promising possibilities in the adult education movement, particularly in the study club."

Also ranking high among the aims of the Catholic Conference on Family Life is the promotion of a definite Catholic parent education movement. From its outset the Conference has emphasized this as a matter of special importance. One of the very first resolutions dealt with this subject. It reads as follows: "We, the members of the Catholic Conference on Family Life, condemn as a perversion of the natural order of things, modern efforts to make the merely supplementary educational agencies take the place of the home itself and we pledge to make it one of our chief aims and most active interests to foster a well-founded and thoroughly Catholic parent education program. We feel that one of the most salutary things that

can be done for the family life of our day is for the individual parent to assume again, in truly Christian fashion, his full duties and obligations as the educator of the little ones that God has entrusted to his care."

It need hardly be said that our Conference is not interested in the frills and fancies that are only too often found in this particular field. However, it is interested, and very much interested, in the things worthwhile that are found in connection with the parent education movement. It is interested in popularizing and bringing to the attention of present-day parents—and, for that matter, to potential parents—the tested findings, with regard to child care and training, of child specialists such as psychologists and sociologists, of geneticists and nutritionists, of doctors and educators. More particularly, of course, is it interested in that feature or phase of the little one's training to which unhappily the modern secularist gives little or no attention, namely, his religious training.

In other words, while the members of the Catholic Conference on Family Life approve of a thoroughly rounded program of parent education that aims at preparing fathers and mothers for all phases of child training—the physical, the mental and moral, the social, the emotional and religious—they stand above all for a parent education movement that considers religion the outstanding factor in the little one's training for life. We dare say, they agree thoroughly with the authors of the new volume, *Parent and Child*, when the latter state in their introduction that “they see only the deepest incongruity in the attitude of the secularist who speaks of the ultimate goal of child training in terms of ‘complete living’, ‘wholesome development’, or ‘preparation to live most and serve best’, and then omits all mention of religion, all reference to supernatural means and motives. With the Catholic parent they refuse to acknowledge any ‘complete living’ without religion, any ‘best service’ where there is no serv-

ice of God. They consider religion the factor preeminent in the training of the child."

The charter for the Catholic parent education movement is, of course, the Encyclical of Pius XI on *The Christian Education of Youth*. It is in that superb document that His Holiness deplores what he calls "the lamentable decline in family education" and implores particularly pastors of souls to take the lead in correcting this unfortunate situation.

Not only with regard to parent education, however, but also with regard to the whole field of the family and home life, does the Conference emphasize the element of religion. Hence it is that its members are particularly eager to see re-established in our midst the so-called *Association of the Holy Family*. In its initial meeting the Conference expressed, through its resolutions committee, the conviction that "this Association is a most promising instrumentality for the renewal of religious life within

the Christian home" and recommended that it be speedily established throughout the country. "Even the mere calling of attention to the wonderful privileges and manifold indulgences attached to membership therein," the resolution stated, "should serve speedily to increase its growth."

This *Association*, or *League*, as it is sometimes called, enjoys the highest sanction of the Church. It was launched by one of the most illustrious Pontiffs of modern times, namely, Leo XIII. Noting the alarming symptoms of disease and the growing signs of decay which already in his day were menacing the family, this Supreme Shepherd had pointed to *The Association of the Holy Family* as the means best suited for revitalizing it and for protecting the Christian home against the diabolical influences that were threatening it. It was shortly after he had given to the world his famous Encyclical on Christian Marriage that he authoritatively approved of and heartily recommended it as the one organization—*unica et uni-*

versalis (one and universal), as he put it—for carrying out this purpose.

There is perhaps even more reason today for this organization than there was in the day of the great Leo. Irreligion has made greater inroads. More Catholic homes have been invaded by a spirit of worldliness. More are found to be devoid of the spirit of piety and prayer. We are reaping the fruits of our neglect to establish the *Association* when His Holiness urged it upon us. And it is highly essential that this unfortunate situation be corrected. It is most important that the two orders, the natural and supernatural, be again wedded within the home. *The Association of the Holy Family* should serve as an excellent medium for doing this. It should serve as a simple and effective means for making religion again a vital and active force within the generality of Christian homes. It is because of this that the Catholic Conference on Family Life is keenly interested in its establishment.

Unfortunately, we cannot describe this League or Association here in any detail. We shall, however, make the following few brief observations regarding it:

To be properly established in a diocese, it must have the approval of the Ordinary. The appointment of a diocesan director is provided for in the Apostolic Letters recommending it. Pastors are its recognized moderators in their respective parishes.

Pastors in whose parishes the Association is organized enjoy the benefits of a privileged altar on any three days of the week they choose and the Mass for a deceased member, read at any altar whatever, has all the benefits of a privileged one. Furthermore, a great number of special indulgences are attached to membership.

Not the least consideration in this day of complaint of over-organization—a complaint which we personally think unfounded, in so far as useful Catholic organizations are concerned—is the extreme simplicity of *The Association of the Holy Family*. Indeed,

it is so simple that it can hardly with right be called an organization. The only indispensable conditions to membership are: that the head of the family be enrolled in the *Association* by the pastor; that a picture of the Holy Family find a place in the home; and that a prayer be daily recited before the picture.

It might furthermore be added that the *Association* does not interfere with other organized groups. As one Bishop wrote in the pastoral by which he authorized and urged its establishment in the parishes of his diocese: "This League, being confined to the home, will not interfere with any sodality or society already established in the respective congregation, but will greatly aid them." It is true, nevertheless, that wherever it is found in a parish it might well serve as an ideal basis for various activities relating to family life, such as study clubs on the family or parent education, Maternity Guilds, etc.

The Maternity Guild, which was just mentioned, brings before us an-

other activity in behalf of the family. A Maternity Guild may be broadly defined as "a group of individuals who provide a fund for the purpose of defraying the expenses incidental to childbirth on the part of any of its members." Since the Catholic Conference on Family Life is interested in anything and everything that is to the advantage of family life, it is only to be taken for granted that it is interested in such a practical project as the Maternity Guild. And indeed it is much interested in the speedy growth of these guilds. And we would add, personally, that we feel the formation of a great number of them in the not far-distant future is a matter of the most vital importance both to the Catholic family and to the Catholic Church.

The betterment of housing conditions is also a special aim of the Catholic Conference on Family Life. There is no question that there is a fairly close relation between family life and the physical environment, particularly the physical abode or

house in which the family finds itself. Nor is there any question that hundreds of thousands of American families today are living in houses that are scarcely fit for human habitation. It has been estimated that it would take the United States a decade or more to provide really suitable housing for all of its people in rural and urban parts. There is need, therefore, for a vast housing program in this country. And such a program should do much toward the development of a more satisfying and wholesome family life and toward the elimination of unemployment. Naturally the Conference is much interested in the government's present efforts along this line.

A conference that is genuinely interested in the welfare of home life is also logically interested in all community conditions that react harmfully upon the home. And in our modern world today there are a great number of factors in the average community that exert a detrimental influence upon our domestic worlds.

Particularly are bad moral conditions proving hurtful to our family life. As the writer stated elsewhere recently: "As matters stand at present, even the most shielded and the best of homes can hardly expect to escape the contaminating influence of the moral contagion that surrounds them. By means of the press and the radio, the movie-house and the dance-hall, the lecture-room and the platform are our communities being infected with a poison of immorality that is gradually penetrating even into the innermost recesses of the family sanctuary. With unrelenting precision is it weakening the moral fibre of the family." Well indeed may the Catholic Conference on Family Life, and, for that matter, all other organizations that have at heart the good of the family, turn their attention toward the speedy elimination of such a harmful situation.

But there are still other community conditions that readily prove hurtful to family life. Such are, for instance, unsanitary conditions, lack of play

space or of suitable recreational facilities, unjust economic conditions, bad industrial conditions. These and many others are endangering our home life, and consequently their correction or elimination are necessarily a matter of interest to the Catholic Conference on Family Life.

Another highly important aim of the Conference is the development of a popular and an advanced literature on the family and on parent education. This it considers a very important link in the development of its whole program. Those who have been interested in the promotion of study clubs in this particular field will recognize the importance of a suitable literature. Indeed, they will undoubtedly admit that very little can be accomplished without it unless, possibly, the leader happens to be a genuine student of the subject. But such students, so far at any rate as we have been able to discover, are still rather few and far between among Catholics.

How well the writer recalls his

own amazement when, on first interesting himself seriously in the study of the family, he found that there was only the most meager Catholic literature on the subject in the English language—practically nothing, one might say, so far as a modern sociological literature was concerned.

Since that time, however, the situation has been bettered somewhat. We now have, for instance, a sociological text on the family and a volume of *Readings* to accompany and expand upon it. Also, there is a simple study club outline based upon these two books, making it fairly easy to use them for study club purposes. Again, there is now a Catholic text on parent education, a volume that is crowded with facts drawn from many different sources and presented in a style that is reasonably simple. A study club outline for it, too, will soon be in readiness. *The Catholic Family Monthly**, a popular periodical

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treating of various aspects of family life, is also helping gradually to swell the volume of helpful literature. Over and above this there are a number of books written on specific features of family life or on particular phases of child training, several written almost exclusively from the religious viewpoint, and a considerable assortment of pamphlets. Yet at that, there is still a very considerable need for further literature in this field, and the Catholic Conference on Family Life has pledged itself to strive gradually to fill that need.

Concerning conventions as a means of furthering the work of the Conference, little need be said, since the educational and inspirational values of properly conducted conventions are very generally recognized. Certainly the Conference intends to continue making use of this particular means for furthering its aims. To date, however, it has not yet settled upon the exact number of meetings that it intends to hold annually. The

writer feels personally that there should be three or four, one on a national scale and two or three that are regional in scope. The national convention might very fittingly begin or end its sessions on the Feast of the Holy Family, which occurs on the Sunday immediately following the Feast of Epiphany.

Other aims of the Conference and means of carrying them out might be mentioned. A great many more that have been given little or no attention to date will unquestionably be added to its program as the organization continues to advance in wisdom and in age. The field of useful activities that stretches out before it is practically without limit.

There is but one more point, however, that we wish to touch upon here, and that is the matter of cooperation between the Catholic Conference on Family Life and other organizations. This was specifically dealt with at its organization meeting, the resolution by which its organizers recorded their views on the matter reading as

follows: "Fully aware that the creation of a genuine and universal interest in Christian home life and in the development of a truly effective program of family reconstruction is a gigantic task, the Catholic Conference on Family Life most earnestly seeks the cooperation of other Catholic organizations in this highly important work. It notes with special interest that several organizations have already appointed committees devoted to constructive efforts in behalf of the home and trust that their example will speedily be followed by a host of others. The Conference will gladly give any help within its power to such groups as cooperate with it. It will also be pleased to cooperate with secular groups in so far as such cooperation may be feasible."

Needless to say, those who organized the Catholic Conference on Family Life felt the need of a special-purpose organization to promote the welfare of our family life and which would, therefore, pri-

marily center its energies and its efforts in this one field of endeavor. In other words, they were convinced of the truths of the words written by that eminent Catholic layman, Sir Knight Frederick P. Kenkel: "Special purposes in need of intensive fostering always demand individuals and groups specially interested in that purpose and willing and able to apply to it more than usual energy." However, they did not see any reason for fine distinctions between mine and thine, for saying, for example, "Now this is our particular field, so all the rest of you keep out of it." Quite to the contrary, they specifically invited and urged the cooperation of others in the field. They were keenly aware that if a great number of the more general types of organizations would definitely interest their members in the promotion of the well-being of the family, it could ultimately be for the common good of all. A number of national organizations were represented at the organization meeting of the Conference.

In conclusion, let us again point to the need for action, to the need for both defensive and constructive effort in behalf of our family life. It is not at all to stretch the truth to say that unless very definite steps are taken and very determined efforts are put forth to restore the Christian family to the position of dignity and honor that was its glory in the past, other efforts in the field of Catholic Action will prove but of little avail. Little can be accomplished toward a reconstruction of society where there is not a sound basis on which to work, where, in other words, there is not a good family life with which to begin. As Father Cathrein has well said: "If the social reform that is being demanded on all sides is to have any hope of success, it must begin with the reform of the family." Without such reform, it is to be feared that our civilization will continue its rapid downward course to ultimate destruction.

It is by no means a small task that

confronts the Church today, this restoration of a genuine Christian family life. Still, it is not an impossible task, either. The same Church that gave to the world the Christian family can also restore to it the Christian home. That Church can turn back the pagan tide of destruction that threatens ever more and more to engulf the family and to wipe out our civilization. She can reconstruct the home and restore Christian marriage. She can make genuine Catholic family life blossom forth again in the full bloom and enchanting beauty of an earlier day. However, it must be acknowledged that this can be done only through vigorous action. It can be done only through concerted effort. I dare say, it can only be accomplished through the launching of a mighty and determined crusade to restore the home again to all its former strength and pristine beauty. The Catholic Conference on Family Life is eager to be in the forefront of such a crusade. It hopes to be supported in its

efforts there not only by the National Council of Catholic Women but also by many other Catholic organizations. If that is done, it is convinced that with the unity that springs from harmonious cooperation strengthening it and with the zeal that derives from a great cause inspiring it, there will be no let-up until the home has again been wrested from the enemy; there will be no peace until the family has been reinstated as the fairest flower of our civilization. What a blessed consummation to hope for! What a sacred and inviting cause to sacrifice and fight for!

