

Human Life in Our Day

Family Spirituality

Our concern for family life must extend far beyond the publication of pastoral letters. We pledge ourselves to cooperate in multiplying ways and means toward the renewal of the family and the enhancing of its prestige. Specifically, we shall increase our encouragement in the dioceses and the nation of programs undertaken by apostolic groups whose objective is the natural and spiritual strengthening of the Christian family.

Because of the primacy of the spiritual in all that makes for renewal, we give top priority to whatever may produce a sound "family spirituality". Family prayer, above all that which derives its content and spirit from the liturgy, and other devotions, particularly the Rosary; family reading of the Scriptures; family attendance at Mass and reception of Communion; family retreats, days of recollection and other special devotions; the observance of occasions of spiritual significance for members of the household—all these will increase the awareness of the family that it is the "Church in miniature".

For these reasons, we welcome the work of those theologians who are preparing a modern and valid ascetical theology of marriage. We recall gratefully the spiritual emphasis in many family-life programs, national and local, whose primary focus of concern has been the theology of the Christian family.

To prepare future spouses more adequately we recommend specialized team-efforts in their behalf on the part of pastors of souls and quali-

quent role of Parent-Teacher Guilds and similar home/school associations is apparent.

Parents are sometimes fearful that their right to teach the norms of sexual morality to their children may be usurped or that programs such as we envision may lead to the sexual misdirection of their children if the teachers involved are inadequately prepared or emotionally immature. In the light of such legitimate concerns, the careful selection of instructors for these discussions is a serious responsibility to be shared by priests, school authorities and parents, perhaps best under the auspices of parent-teacher associations.

The content of these instructions should provide an appreciation of "the true values of life and of the family" in addition to a healthy inculcation, from the earliest years of moral and intellectual formation, of how conjugal love involves a harmonious response from the emotions, the passions, the body and the mind. At the same time, healthy Christian attitudes toward life will be developed in young people if they are given an understanding, consistent with their years, of why the Council insists that those "actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones."

The New Family

In facing current problems of the American family, we welcome the open approach of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* toward marriage and the

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which it is not possible to enumerate in detail."

One of the best examples of this new type of family structure is the present-day American family. It is a community of individual persons joined by human love, and living a community life that provides for the greatest expression of individualism. At the same time, equalitarian marriage patterns have so developed among Americans as to avoid rigid role assignments within the family and thus make possible a deeper family unit.

The family unit develops apart from the parent-families, yet not totally isolated. In our technological culture, transportation facilities and communications media provide new systems of mobility and yet fortunately allow for a strengthening of human bonds among families, despite the distances in geographical location.

The educational attainment of women and a new emphasis on legal and social equality between men and women create further tensions but also opportunities for more effective partnership in marriage. This adds a further reason why a Catholic theology of family life must be spelled out to match the changing patterns of the American family.

A relevant theology will reinforce the efforts of spouses to achieve conjugal maturity; it will enable them to realize the more profound difference between romance and love and to understand that only gradually will they achieve the harmony between healthy individualism and mutual self-giving in which Christian personalism consists.

New Tensions, New Needs

Technological and cultural changes bring with them complexities not easily resolved. Some of these set up pressures on the family from outside, some from within. For example, even the family today finds itself under the necessity to develop new channels of "communication"; this seems a formidable word to describe relations within the intimate community that a human family should be. However, the problem is made real by the profound change of circumstances under which each family member now seeks to establish an identity while preserving a warm sense of family unity and pride.

Family harmony in our day will depend on just such "communication" as parents attempt to solve the authority-obedience dilemma with their growing children. Moreover, reformed "communication" within the family is needed if the manifold educational resources of family life itself are to complement the formal schooling of children.

And so Christian families, conscious of their part in the progress of the wider human family, will wish to share not only their spiritual heritage with families less privileged but also their material resources. They will seek by their own initiatives to supplement government action, being painfully aware that in our own country many families are victims

physical well-being of persons but their emotional stability and moral growth, not as individuals but, whenever possible, within family units.

In principle, American social theory has always recognized that the normal family enjoys a real autonomy; only the abnormal inadequacy of a particular family places its members within the competency of our courts. Even then, whenever possible, it is the disposition of our public agencies to supply the defects of nature by providing the neglected, delinquent or homeless child with the nearest possible approach to life and training in a family setting.

Americans have tended to prefer, particularly recently, the plans of foster homes where the role of natural parents can be somehow supplied in the development of the person within a human family. Our theory in all these respects has been admirable; its implementation in legislation and in practice has not always kept pace with the problems testing the theory. The present urban crisis is but one evidence of this.

Though families, like man himself, do not live on bread alone, without bread they suffer and die. Food programs still need a family orientation. Poor housing, for further example, has an adverse effect on family stability. We urge an expansion of home ownership programs for low and moderate-income families, especially the larger families frequently neglected in these plans, as well as programs for low-rent housing and housing rehabilitation.

Programs devised to assist less advantaged families should at all costs avoid disruption of the family unit. A major disruption occurs when mothers are required to separate themselves from their young children for the sake of added income. Disruption has too often been the result of certain welfare policies which, whether consciously intended or not, have destroyed rather than supported family stability; one such policy we pinpointed in our reference to the "man in the house" rule

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when we spoke in a recent statement on the nationally social problem, but others could be documented.

Every member of each family has a right to be cared for, not as an isolated person but as a person who belongs with and depends upon a family. We therefore favor the trend to consider social service programs, domestic relations courts and child welfare casework as involving family rather than merely individual dimensions and solutions.

Whenever a family is undermined, society suffers the loss. There are no insignificant families, as there is no insignificant person. If families are to function as the good of society requires, each must have income proportionate to its needs.

Wages in our country are usually based on the work done, plus productivity. Little or no consideration is given to the family situation of the individual, his marital status, or the number of children in his home. It should not normally be necessary for the father of a family to "moonlight", seeking employment from more than one source to support his wife and children.

Single men and the married men with families receive the same rates of pay for the same work. As a result, one sector of the population bears a disproportionately large share of the financial burden of maintaining the child population, which means the future nation, except for income tax benefits, which may unfortunately be cancelled out by consumer taxes.

The effective solution we are urging may well require a family allowance system in the United States similar to those adopted by Canada, many European nations, Australia, New Zealand and some governments of South America. We stand ready

to support enlightened legislation in this sense.

The challenges and threats to contemporary family life may often seem insuperable. However, the resources of this nation are more than sufficient to enhance the security and prosperity of our families at home while leaving us free to fulfill our duties in charity and justice abroad. The scientific, education and financial resources of our nation cannot be better utilized than in defense and development of the family. The future civilization itself depends upon such creative use of our resources.

We are mindful of those families which include disadvantaged children and of families which by adoption assume full responsibility for children not born to them. Adoption corresponds with a deeply human instinct; it gives a home to the homeless and parents to the or-

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phaned while at the same time rewarding the love with which a family welcomes life not originally committed to its keeping.

Likewise praiseworthy is the unselfishness which prompts qualified people to become foster parents to children who need material, emotional or spiritual assistance at some point in their lives.

Finally, we offer a word of encouragement to our brothers or sisters in Christ who care for children in one-parent families. The sacrifices required to provide for the physical welfare and psychological development of children under these circumstances are sometimes extraordinary. Those who thus spend themselves on behalf of life and love witness to the world and the Church a generosity which cannot fail to inspire others and to sanctify themselves.

Further Threats To Life

Let society always be on the side of life. Let it never dictate, directly

isters of life. Hence, the Council declares:

"... whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the integrity of the human person . . . all these things and others of their like are in families indeed. They poison human society but they do more harm to those who practice them than those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonor to the Creator" (Gaudium et Spes, 27).

The Christian family is an image of God and a sign of the Church. It is the community wherein Christ is most powerfully preached, where Christians first hear the name of God, first learn to pray, and first express their faith. In the words and example of their believing parents, children come to know what faith

is and how it must be lived, what life is and how it must be honored.

For this reason, a spirituality which is suitable to the contemporary family and which brings all members of the family together in faith and hope is, we repeat, the most urgent need of modern culture.

Since the family is the basic unit of human society, it should be the object of civilization's concern. Since family brings to the parish control it is the basic unit of their life, parishes should make the needs of the family and the benefits which the ing norms in the planning of parish organizations and activities, liturgical, educational, charitable and social.

As bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States, concerned for its present well-being and prospects, our first prayer is for the families who comprise its parishes and dioceses. Our optimism for the future of the Church, the family of God, springs largely from optimism for the future of the family. In turn, our basis for optimism for the future of family life, despite occasional negative signs, rests upon the persevering hope of married couples whose responsibility to life and vocation to love have been the opening theme of this pastoral letter.

Chapter Two: The Family Of Nations

We share the deep concern of thoughtful people in our times, a concern voiced by the Vatican Council, that "the whole human family has reached an hour of supreme crisis" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 77). The crisis can ultimately offer great promise for a more abundant human life, but at the moment it portends grave threats to all life. The threats to life depend on urgent and difficult decisions concerning war and peace.

In considering these we share the conviction of Vatican Council II that the horror and perversity of technological warfare "compel us to undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude."

This compelling obligation is the greater in our case since we are citizens of a nation in many ways the most powerful in the world. The responsibility of moral leadership is the greater in the local Church of a nation whose arsenals contain the greatest nuclear potential for both the harm that we would wish to impede or the help it is our obligation to encourage. We are acutely aware that our moral posture and comportment in this hour of supreme crisis will be assessed by the judgment of history and of God.

We renew the affirmation by the Council that "the loftier strivings and aspirations of the human race are in harmony with the message of the Gospel". We speak as witnesses to that Gospel, aware that the issues of war and peace test the relevancy of its message for our generation, particularly in terms of the service of life and its dignity. We seek to

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"... the family is the place where God's image is reproduced in His creation. The family is the community within which the person is realized, the place where all our hopes for the future of the person are nourished. The family is a learning experience in which fidelity is fostered . . ."

fied counsellors, including devout married couples. Such projects will give engaged couples the benefit of human wisdom and of Christian spirituality in the planning of their home, the founding of a family, the education of children, and all that makes for fidelity and hope in their lives together.

We endorse the establishment of diocesan family life centers throughout the country so that Christian couples, physicians, psychologists, sociologists and priests may cooperate in implementing responsible parenthood in accordance with the principles enunciated in *Humanae Vitae*.

The responsibility of our Family Life Division to provide information, educational tools and guidance in the face of the mounting problems of family life will make it an increasing source of service to diocesan family programs. We also hope to see established centers of education in family life under the auspices of local medical schools or doctors guilds together with collegiate or adult education programs, and the chaplains to students or young-adult groups. We note the Holy Father's tribute to the promising apostolate which brings together married couples who desire to communicate their experiences to other married couples and thus become apostles of fidelity to the divine law and guides to fulfillment in love.

Education of Children In Sexuality

In accord with the *Decree on Christian Education* of Vatican Council II we affirm the value and necessity of wisely planned education of children in human sexuality, adapted to the maturity and background of our young people. We are under a grave obligation, in part arising from the new circumstances of modern culture and communications, to assist the family in its efforts to provide such training. This obligation can be met either by systematic provision of such education in the diocesan school curriculum or by the inauguration of acceptable educational programs under other diocesan auspices, including the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Parents are those primarily responsible for imparting to their children an awareness of the sacredness of sexuality; this will ordinarily be best accomplished when both parents discharge this duty in mutual consultation and shared responsibility. The necessity for greater communication and cooperation between parents and teachers is highlighted in this problem; the conse-

family. It provides a timely and optimistic overview of the community aspect of marriage, a community that functions best when all its members understand that freedom is their birthright and a developing sense of responsibility their challenge. It sets up balances which provide for the more perfect personal development of each family member and, at the same time, assures the optimum effect of the family unit in the larger family of man. It recognizes the continual and rapid changes which characterize our times.

The style of family living is undoubtedly affected by changing social conditions, yet the family retains a resilience and strength that helps it adapt to change. In fact, the family has always been the witness to change as it passes on the wisdom, successes and accomplishments of one generation to the next as a patrimony for the pursuance of its dreams.

Commenting on this adaptability to change that is almost inherent in the family, Pope Paul VI notes that "in a world in the midst of change, it would be useless to want to close one's eyes to the adaptations which even the most stable, most traditional institutions must accept. No matter how great the merits of the family of yesterday may have been, it is the one of today and of tomorrow which must attract the attention of men who are really preoc-

"At this tense moment in our history . . . an affirmation of the sanctity of human life by renewed attention to the family is imperative. Let society always be on the side of life. Let it never dictate directly or indirectly, recourse to the prevention of life or to its destruction in any of its phases."

cupied with the welfare of humanity.

"These 'new families' possess many new characteristics, some of which may certainly give rise to legitimate disquietude. But—we say without fear — the Church looks with pleasure upon many of these innovations: the cessation, for example, of certain social or family restrictions, the freer and more conscious choice of a spouse, the greater stress placed upon the development of husband and wife, the more lively interest in the education of children, and still many other traits

of poverty, disease and inadequate living standards.

Informed social critics are asserting that family instability in the urban areas of America is the result, in part at least, of our national failure to adopt comprehensive and realistic family-centered policies during the course of this century. The break-down of the family has intrinsic causes, some of them moral, but these have been aggravated by the indifference or neglect of society and by the consequences of poverty and racist attitudes. The object of wise social policy is not only the