

## Reactions to *Familiaris Consortio*

### Peter Hebblethwaite

"John Paul responded to the majority view at the synod. One cannot complain that he did not listen to *them*. But the minority view was first caricatured, then processed out and finally dismissed with arguments of questionable validity. The vanquished can console themselves with John Paul's remarks that 'the church seeks the truth, which is not always the same as the majority opinion.'

Although *Familiaris Consortio* follows the main outlines of the synod propositions, it could have been written even if the synod had never met. It contains 24 quotations from Pope John Paul's addresses delivered before the synod met. The truth is he is an expert on the subject of marriage and the family, and so he did not need the synod's advice on these matters.

But before one concludes that the synod was an expensive waste of time, one should consider the possibility that its function has changed: instead of giving advice to someone who does not need it, it becomes a celebration of the unity of the bishops gathered around the pope. It was indeed a famous victory. Time will tell whether it was a Pyrrhic victory." (NCR January 1, 1982 p. 12)

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### Fr. Richard McBrien

"I don't suspect it is going to change anybody's mind one way or another." "Catholics today", he said, "have learned what it means to be selectively obedient to the Church's teachings." (Washington Post, December 15, 1981)

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### Fr. Andrew Greeley

"There are really two different kinds of religion: the kind that thinks God talks to humankind only through religious leaders and the kind that thinks God's spirit (or God's Spirit, if you will) speaks also through ordinary people. . ."

". . . the long document shows little effect of any lay contribution. Indeed, the synod of the bishops on the family, which the pope was summarizing in his exhortation, had only a few carefully selected lay people around as 'observers.' However fine the pope's notion of lay contribution may be in theory, the Catholic Church is organized in such a way that they cannot make that contribution in practice.

"Nor are the power-hungry barons of the Roman Curia likely to give them a chance — ever, if they can help it.

"So you have the ludicrous spectacle of a group of elderly unmarried men pontificating easily and freely about the problems of marriage, sex and family life without any need to listen to those who are married, have families and experience sexual intimacy." (Los Angeles Herald *Examiner*, January 16, 1982 p. B8 )

### Dr. David Thomas (Lay adviser to U.S. Bishops at the Roman Synod)

"Now that I have had the opportunity to read through the document — with intensity and interest almost as great as I experienced in reading my wife's letters before we were married — I come away feeling both delighted and depressed. What delighted me most was, the outright affirmation that the Christian family is indeed church in a radical decisive way — and that the rest of the Church is best described in family terms.

"What depressed me is the same matter that bothered me at the synod itself — little advance is made in formulating a practical, experientially rooted theology of marriage and the family. Such a theology is needed — and I would add already available — yet the church does not seem to be ready or equipped to look for that treasure." (NCR January 15, 1982 p. 19)

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### Fr. Ronald Modras (St. Louis University, co-author of *Human Sexuality*)

"The pope speaks the language of personalism. His conclusions, however, are those of a Thomist who uses personalist categories to defend what he describes as a 'teaching and norm, always old yet always new.' His personal philosophy is consistently Thomistic.

"Can Thomism's theory of natural law be so easily reconciled with personalism? Shortly after the council Joseph Ratzinger, now cardinal prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith wrote, "It is simply not the same, whether a person asks himself if his actions are in accord with nature or whether he must ask whether his actions are responsible actions in view of other persons" (Theological Highlights of Vatican II, 1966, pp. 167-68). For Pope John Paul II, however, the difference is only in its expression. The philosophia is perennis.

"Pope John Paul II is an apologist par excellence of the neo-Thomism that dominated Roman Catholic theology before Vatican Council II. It is difficult to imagine a more eloquent exponent of the Catholicism of this passing second millennium." (NCR January 15, 1982 p. 23)

### John Kippley (Couple to Couple League)

"John Kippley, president of the Couple to Couple League, said that Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation was more than simply a condemnation of contraception and abortion and an encouragement of the proper regulation of births. He said that the 38,000-word statement went to great lengths to emphasize the importance of a mother's work in the home, chastity and the covenant relationship between a husband and wife.

Kippley praised the Pope's request that theologians work with Church administrators to present a theology of marriage which emphasizes the value and importance of natural family planning as opposed to contraception or sterilization. The pontiff asked in the statement that theologians 'unite their efforts in order to collaborate with the hierarchical magisterium and to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons' behind the Church's teaching on birth control." (The Couple to Couple League News Release, Dec. 30, 1981)

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### Father Thomas F. Lynch (USCC Family Life Representative)

"The most exciting dimension of Pope John Paul's document is the issue of the empowerment of marriage and family to minister to themselves and others. Marriage and the family are called to be active participants in both society and Church life, not merely passive recipients. With a narrow focus in understanding the document, this component can be placed in secondary position.

"A challenging theology of marriage and the Pope's burning desire to provide a creative and relevant support to marriage from its preparation and through its various stages of development are highlighted throughout this exhortation. The Pope especially voices a pastoral concern for the help that young married couples need in today's world and the need that the whole community support them.

"The key to the document is the affirmation of the power and grace that belongs to married couples and families by their very vocation. The Pope sees marriage and the family as a system with an identity and mission of its own. That the family is an intimate community of life and love, founded on and given life by love, is his constant reminder. Its mission is to guard, reveal, and communicate love." (NC News December 23, 1981)

### Father John Finnegan

"Divorced and remarried Catholics can still receive the sacraments under special circumstances without annulments even though Pope John Paul recently reaffirmed the church's stand against such a procedure.

"This was the opinion of Father John Finnegan, past president of the Canon Law Society of America. Finnegan, a Boston inner city pastor who has specialized in divorce ministry for 20 years, gave a workshop on divorce ministry to area priests Friday at Catholic Family Ministry. The workshop was closed to the press.

"In an interview, Finnegan discussed the implications of the section on divorce in the pope's document on family issues. While he disagreed with the section on divorce, Finnegan said he thought it was a superb encyclical that made a serious attempt to give a 'spirituality of marriage.'

"Finnegan, a marriage tribunal judge for the Boston Archdiocese, said for hundreds of years there has been a tradition in the church where confessors can reconcile people to the Church through the internal forum" . . .

"In his encyclical, the pope said the only way divorced people who remarried outside the church could receive the sacraments was to live in 'complete continence' abstaining from conjugal acts.

"I'm disappointed in that portion of the papal statement . . . the brother-sister solution was always humanly inadequate," Finnegan said. "I always felt that it could only be invented by celibates."

"Finnegan indicated the Pope's statement on divorce would have little impact on the majority of divorced Catholics in the United States because it would be ignored.

"I prefer to see Catholics . . . cull all the good out of this encyclical that is there for them . . . and be able to lay aside those sections that they feel are inappropriate for their own lives," he said.

"I used to tell my students that I never disobey a church law . . . I do dispense myself from church law at times," he said." (Milwaukee Sentinel, pg. 6 Part 1 1/16/82)