

## Familiaris Consortio

### John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on the Family

[These reflections released December 15th, 1981 were based on the deliberations of the 1980 Synod of Bishops. Like *Catechesi Tradendae* two years earlier, this Apostolic Exhortation is an effort by the Holy See and the world's Synod of Bishops to articulate the content of revelation in such wise as to renew a basic social and Church institution. The following brief outline attempts to summarize the total message of the Church on marriage and family life to whose individual parts Catholic scholars should, at the invitation of the pope, direct their research and rhetorical skills. (Nos. 31-)]

#### Introduction (Nos. 1-3)

The Church's proclamation of God's plan for marriage and the family.

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#### Part I: *Bright Spots and Shadows for Today's Family* (Nos. 4-10)

New sense of discerning role of the family among pastors "who teach in the name and with the power of Christ" and through the laity who "by reason of their particular vocation have the specific role of interpreting the history of the world in the light of Christ." However, the "supernatural sense of the faith does not consist solely or necessarily in the consensus of the faithful." (No. 5)

*Positive aspects:* "Lively awareness of personal freedom", "greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage", "to promoting the dignity of women", "to responsible procreation", "to the education of children", "rediscovery of the ecclesial mission proper to the family". (No. 6)

*Negative aspects:* mistaken concepts of spousal independence, the relationship between parents and children, family values, divorce, abortion, sterilization and the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality, selfish autonomy, the consumer mentality, neglect of the poor.

Also: invalid marriages, even after divorce, civil marriage, marriage of the faithful "without living faith", rejection of moral norms, etc. (No. 6)

#### Part II: *The Plan of God for Marriage and the Family*

The vocation of the human person realized in marriage and virginity or celibacy. Marriage involves total self-giving of man and woman to each other (not merely biologically) which is publicly confirmed in order to complete God's plan. (No. 11)

The original truth of marriage ("the beginning") finds its definitive fulfillment in Jesus Christ crucified as a symbol of the new Covenant between God and man. The communion involves an unbreakable witness to salvation in Christ. (Nos. 12-13) Marriage is the basis of family life, the couple's greatest gift being their life giving cooperation with God. Parenthood means "family" and "family of God" which is the Church. (Nos. 14-15)

When marriage is not esteemed, neither can consecrated virginity or celibacy exist. When sexuality is not regarded as a great creative value, neither is "renunciation of it for the sake of the Kingdom". Christian couples have the right to expect from Church celibates good example and fidelity until death. (no. 16)

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#### Part III: *The Role of the Christian Family*

The recent Synod emphasized four roles:

##### 1. *Forming a Community of Persons*

- of the couple themselves perfected through the sacrament and lasting until death. (Nos. 19-20)
- of parents with children, of siblings, of extended family, with special regard for the role of women. However, by comparison with her public roles, "clear recognition of their maternal and family role" is required, wives and mothers must not be compelled to work outside the home, nor to renounce their femininity, nor be debased through oppression, pornography, etc. Husbands and fathers have special roles, children contribute in a special way toward the sanctification of parents, and the elderly are important for bridging generation gaps. (Nos. 21-27)

## 2. *Serving Life*

### *First, Transmission of Life* (Nos. 28-35)

Fecundity is the fruit and sign of conjugal love from which family life derives its whole meaning. That love "must be fully human, exclusive, and open to new life." Anti-life mentality originates in doubt, anxiety, and the panic of scientists.

Objectively moral choices cannot be achieved "unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced." Contraception is "intrinsically immoral". This is not a Church norm but one interpreted "in obedience to the truth which is Christ". Further, "the concrete pedagogy of the Church must always remain linked with her doctrine and never be separated from it." How the Church is not only "teacher" but "mother" who understands conjugal difficulties. She calls for patience, trust in God, and "frequent recourse to prayer and to the sacraments of the eucharist and reconciliation."

Married couples and young adults should be trained in the natural rhythms of fertility and self-control ("the absolute necessity for the virtue of chastity"). They cannot "look upon the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future" but "must consider it as a command of Christ." Conviction must be instilled and offered practical help, especially from couples experienced in personal responsibility for love and life.

### *Second, Education for Life* (Nos. 36-41)

The right and duty of parents to give this education is essential and they must train children correctly with a sense of justice, in self giving and for sexual life and chastity: "Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance whether at home or in educational centers chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents." The Church is opposed to sex information disassociated from moral principles. (No. 37) The Synod Fathers hoped that bishops would produce a suitable catechism for families.

### 3. *Participating in the Development of Society* (Nos. 42-48)

By humanizing and personalizing society through the transmission of virtues and values, by devoting itself to social service, by political intervention on behalf of the family and sound

laws, the state cannot take away from families the functions they can just as well perform on their own or in free associations. (At this point the pope lists 14 special rights of the family from the right to exist to the "right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life". (No. 46) The family should show special concern for the poor.

### 4. *Sharing the Life and Mission of the Church* (Nos. 49-64)

The family is "a Church in miniature" participating in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ.

*First, as a believing and evangelizing community* (Prophetic role)

Announcing the Word of God, deepening faith, celebrating married love, engaging in catechesis, performing missionary services.

*Secondly, by dialoguing with God* (Priestly role)

The home is a sanctuary and marriage is an act of worship and the source of the members' sanctification. The gift of Jesus Christ in marriage accompanies the married couple throughout their lives and the sacraments ongoing grace helps them consecrate the world itself to God.

The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. Recourse to penance is also a recommended source of holiness. Family prayer is so important, especially on the occasion of significant family events, that parents should by word as by example teach their children the prayers of the Church, including the public prayers and the rosary.

*Thirdly, by service to their fellow man* (Kingly role)

To discover the image of God in each brother and sister, extending love especially to the weak – with a sense of justice.

## Part IV: *Pastoral Care of the Family*

### 1. *Stages of Pastoral Care of the Family* (Nos. 65-69)

Pastoral intervention of the Church in support of the family is a matter of urgency – a real matter of priority.

*First, preparation for marriage.* Three main stages: remote, proximate, and immediate: "The Church must promote better and more intensive

programs of marriage preparation in order to eliminate as far as possible the difficulties that many married couples find themselves in, and even in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages." (Movements for the benefit of the family should be established.) These courses should balance the doctrinal, pedagogical, legal and medical aspects of marriage.

However, marriage preparation courses must not be an impediment to the celebration of marriage. (No. 66)

#### *Second, the celebration of Marriage* (Nos. 67-69)

Normally, this requires liturgy. The celebration must be *per se* valid, worthy, and fruitful. Pastoral solicitude calls for the Church's discipline to be met, i.e. in regard to free consent, impediments, the canonical form and the actual rite of celebration. The liturgical celebration should constitute a proclamation of the word of God and a profession of faith on behalf of the community of believers.

For those who may be imperfectly disposed to the faith pastors must bring about a rediscovery. However, the Church also admits to the celebration of marriage those who are imperfectly disposed. The fact that social motives enter into a request for sacramental marriage is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors. Laying down further criteria for admission to the ecclesial celebration of marriage involves grave risks — of making discriminatory judgements, causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated, especially those of separated brethren. If engaged couples, however, reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends, pastors cannot admit them to the celebration of marriages. (No. 68)

#### *Thirdly, pastoral care after marriage* (No. 69)

This mainly involves mutual exchange of presence by the Church, especially to young couples.

### *2. Structures of Family Pastoral Care* (Nos. 70-72)

*First, the parish.* Priests and religious should be trained for this task.

*Secondly, the family itself,* through social works.

*Thirdly, through family associations* engaged in transmitting values and developing human persons and then in work for a just and human world.

### *3. Agents of the Pastoral Care of the Family* (Nos. 73-76).

*First, bishops and priests.* Their responsibility extends not only to moral and liturgical matters but to personal and social matters as well supporting and caring for families, explaining the content of the Church's magisterium.

*Secondly, men and women religious.* By virtue of their consecration they are called to serve families, teaching them correctly, offering their houses for hospitality and prayer, especially today.

*Thirdly, lay specialists* e.g. doctors.

*Fourthly, social communicators,* especially in their concern about the bad formation of the young. Parents are particularly important but so are TV producers, publishers.

### *4. Pastoral Care of the Family in Difficult Cases.* (Nos. 77-85)

*First, Church support for families in difficult circumstances,* (migrant workers, military, old age, single parent etc.)

*Secondly, mixed marriages,* especially where the other party professes no religion at all, and the Catholic baptism and education of children may be in danger.

#### *Thirdly, irregular situations*

Trial marriages, cohabitation (free unions), civil marriages call for special pastoral interventions. Remarried divorced persons, especially those unjustly abandoned the first time, need special care. (However, those invalidly remarried may not ordinarily be admitted to the Eucharist, for several reasons not the least of which is encouragement of errors about the indissolubility of marriage. The exception, of course is the situation where there is sexual abstinence.) Pastors may not perform ceremonies "of any kind" for invalidly remarried divorcees.

Special concern should be paid to people who have no family life of their own, especially if they live in extreme poverty. The Church should become their family.

*Conclusion* (No. 86) — a final exhortation.