

In The School of Mary

(Papal documents condensed by Deacon William Wagner)

First Published in the St. Bartholomew Bulletin: December, 2010

Pope John Paul II

Familiaris Consortio, The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World—Nov. 22, 1981.

The Family, as never before, is under continuous and determined attack. The World Synod of Bishops had considered the role of the family in the fall of 1980 and the late Holy Father, John Paul II, acting as its spokesperson, penned this Apostolic Exhortation, released in November of 1981 on the Feast of Christ the King. It seeks to assist all of us since all are members of this most essential cell of the Church and of Society. We have discovered in the years since the Synod that what the late Pope John Paul II had continuously reiterated is indeed true: that as the Family goes so goes the Church and Society. With an attentive Faith let us now listen to the wisdom of the Synod and to that of perhaps one of the greatest Popes in the History of the Church.

The late Holy Father begins by saying that knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help. The Church wishes to speak to those already aware of the value of marriage and family, to those as well, who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and finally to those unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. In a particular way, the church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey towards marriage and family life. She wishes to help them discover the beauty of this vocation to love and the service of life. To all of these, the Church wishes to direct her attention.

The Synod of 1980 In Continuity with Preceding Synods

This synod on the family is a natural outgrowth of its two immediate predecessors. With them it says that the Christian family is **the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person**. (Italics and bolding, my emphasis) It is to provide a progressive education and catechesis toward full human and Christian maturity. In fact, as an educating community, the family must help man to discern his own vocation, to search for greater justice, educating him from the start in interpersonal relationships rich in justice and love.

The Synod Fathers gave the Pontiff a list of proposals, gathered from their reflections, asking him to be a spokesman before humanity of the Church's lively care for the family. He now seeks to fulfill that task with this Apostolic Exhortation.

The Precious Value of Marriage and of the Family

The Church once again feels the pressing need to proclaim the Gospel, the "good news", to all people without exception, especially to all those who are called to marriage, preparing for it, to all married couples and parents in the world. Willed by God in the very act of creation, marriage and the family are ordained to fulfillment in Christ, and need his graces to be brought to the full understanding and the full realization of God's plan for them

The Need to Understand the Situation

The Holy Father notes that God's plan for marriage and the family touches men and women in the concreteness of their daily existence. Thus, the Church must understand the situations within which marriage and the family are lived today.

The Church must bring to the families of our times the unchangeable and ever new Gospel of Jesus Christ. For their part, the families in the present conditions of the world are called to accept and live the plan of God for them. Moreover the Church is guided to a profound understanding of the mystery of marriage and the family by the circumstances, the questions and hopes of young people, married couples and parents of today.

Many times, very appealing ideas and solutions, but ones that often obscure the truth and the dignity of the human person, are offered to us today. These views are often supported by the powerful and pervasive organizations of the means of social communication, subtly endangering freedom and the capacity for objective judgment. The Church as well, in her own evangelical discernment, offers her service to the truth, to freedom and to the dignity of every man and women.

Evangelical Discernment

This discernment is accomplished through the sense of faith, a gift of the Spirit to the faithful. Discernment is therefore the work of the whole Church. According to the diversity of the various gifts and charisms, she works toward a more profound understanding and activation of the word of God. The Church does not accomplish this discernment only through the Pastors, but also, through the Laity. The Second Vatican Council taught that Christ made them his witnesses (cf Acts 2:17-18; Rev 19:10) so that the power of the Gospel might shine forth in their daily social and family life. Additionally, the laity has the specific role of interpreting the history of the world in the light of Christ.

The “supernatural sense of faith” does not consist solely, or necessarily, in the consensus of the faithful. John Paul II says that, following Christ, the Church seeks the truth that is not always the same as the majority opinion. She listens to conscience and not to power. The Church values sociological and statistical research. Yet, such research alone is not to be considered in itself an expression of the sense of faith.

It is for the Apostolic Ministry to ensure that the Church remains in the truth of Christ. Pastors must promote the sense of faith in all the faithful. Christian parents, at the same time, can and should offer their unique and irreplaceable contribution to an authentic evangelical discernment. They are qualified for that role by their specific gift of the sacrament of matrimony.

The Situation of the Family in the World Today

There are positives and negatives. The first are a sign of the salvation of Christ operating in the world. The second are a sign of man’s refusal of the love of God. On the one hand there is today a more lively awareness of personal freedom, greater attention to interpersonal relationship in marriage, the dignity of women, and the responsible procreation and the education of children. On the other hand, there is a disturbing degradation of fundamental values, a mistaken concept of the independence of spouses in relation to one another. There are the concrete difficulties of the growing number of divorces, the scourge of abortion, the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization, the onset of a truly contraceptive mentality. Pope John Paul II says that at the root of these negative phenomena, there is a corruption of the idea of freedom as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others for one’s own selfish well-being.

Worthy of our attention is the fact that there are Third World families that lack the very means necessary for survival itself. In richer countries, excessive prosperity and a consumer mentality, joined to certain anguish and uncertainty about the future, deprive married couples of a generous courage for raising up new human life. New life is often perceived not as a blessing but as a danger from which to defend oneself. In point of fact, family life is not simply a fixed progression towards the better, but a struggle of freedom, a conflict, according to St. Augustine, between two loves, the love of God to the point of disregard for one self, and the love of self to the point of disregard for God.

The Influence of Circumstances on the Consciences of the Faithful

Living in a world under pressure from especially the mass media, the faithful do not always remain immune from setting themselves up as the critical conscience of family culture and as agents intent on building an authentic family humanism. Among the more troubling signs of this phenomenon, the Synod Fathers mentioned these: 1) the spread of divorce, 2) the acceptance of purely civil marriages, 3) the celebration of the marriage sacrament without living faith, and 4) the rejection of the moral norms that guide the exercise of sexuality in marriage.

Our Age Needs Wisdom

The Holy Father affirms that the whole Church is obliged to reflect deeply and make a commitment so that the new and emerging culture might be evangelized in depth. In this way the “new humanism” will not distract people from their relationship with God, but will more fully lead them to it.

Our Age Needs Wisdom

The Holy Father notes that, often, political choices decide the direction of scientific research. Science is thus used against its original purpose of the advancement of the human person. It is necessary, therefore, to recover the primacy of moral values. The great task that has to be faced for the renewal of society is that of recapturing the ultimate meaning of life and its fundamental values. Only an awareness of the primacy of these values enables man to use the immense possibilities given him by science. Science is called to ally itself with wisdom.

II SERVING LIFE

The Transmission of Life

Cooperators in the Love of God the Creator

God crowns man and woman, created in his own image, and in them brings to perfection the work of his hands. He calls them to a special sharing in his love and power as Creator and Father. Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, actualizing in history the original blessing of the Creator by transmitting the divine image through procreation.

Fecundity is the fruit and sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal self-giving of the spouses. While not demeaning the other purposes of marriage, couples must be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator who through them will enlarge his own family. However, John Paul II reminds us that the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to the procreation of children. It is enriched as well by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life that a father and mother must hand on to their children.

The Church's Teaching and Norm, Always Old Yet Always New

The love of husband and wife is a unique participation in the mystery of the life and love of God himself. Therefore, the Church has a special mission to guard the lofty dignity of marriage and the most serious responsibility of the transmission of human life. Within the living tradition of the Church throughout history, the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI in his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, handed on to us a truly prophetic proclamation, reaffirming with clarity, the Church's teaching, always old yet always new, regarding marriage and the transmission of human life. This recent Sacred Synod, gathered with the Successor of Peter, firmly holds what had been set forth previously by the Second Vatican Council and afterwards by the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, by affirming once again that love between husband and wife must be fully human, exclusive and open to new life.

The Church Stands for Life

The teaching of the Church today is placed in a cultural milieu that renders it difficult to understand and yet more urgent than ever. Technical progress offers the hope of creating a better humanity, but it also causes ever more anxiety about the future. Some doubt therefore if it is right to bring others into life when perhaps later they may curse their existence. Others consider the advantages of technology to be only for themselves and they exclude others by means of contraception or worse. Still others, prisoners of a consumer mentality, cease to understand and thus refuse the spiritual riches of a new human life.

The ultimate reason for the modern materialist mentality is the absence in people's hearts of God, whose love alone is stronger than all the world's fears. In consequence, an anti-life mentality is born that uses secularist studies on population growth often exaggerating the danger of demographic increase to the quality of life. But the Church firmly believes that human life, even if weak and suffering, is always a splendid gift of God's goodness. The Church stands for life and in each human life she sees the "Yes", the "Amen", who is Christ himself. The Pope says that the Church must reply with this living "Yes", and so, defend the human person and the world from all who plot against and harm life. The Church finds it necessary to manifest anew with clear and strong conviction the promotion of human life in whatever condition or state of development it is found.

The Church condemns as a grave offense all those activities of public authorities who limit by force the freedom of couples in their decision about children in favor of contraception, or worse, sterilization and procured abortion. John Paul II says that it is gravely unjust also in international relations to make economic help conditional upon programs of contraception, sterilization and procured abortion.

That God's Design May Be Ever More Completely Fulfilled

The Church is certainly aware of the many complex problems facing couples in transmitting life in a responsible way. However, she offers a new and stronger confirmation of her authentic teaching on birth regulation re-proposed in the Second Vatican Council and in the Encyclical, *Humanae Vitae (On Human Life)*. Together with the Synod Fathers, the Holy Father invites theologians to collaborate with the hierarchical Magisterium (Teaching Office) to illustrate ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons behind the Church's teaching. It is extremely important to render her teaching accessible for all people of good will. In this way God's plan will be ever more completely fulfilled for the salvation of humanity and for the glory of the Creator.

A united effort by theologians, inspired by a convinced adherence to the Magisterium, the one authentic guide for the People of God, is particularly urgent. Doubt or error in the field of marriage or the family involves obscuring to a serious extent the integral truth about the human person. In this regard, theologians are called upon to provide enlightenment and a deeper understanding. Theirs represents a unique and highly meritorious service to the family and humanity.

In an Integral Vision of the Human Person and of His or Her Vocation

In a culture that distorts or entirely misinterprets the true meaning of human sexuality, the Church knows how irreplaceable is her mission to present sexuality as a value and task of the whole person, created male and female in the image of God. John Paul II recalls how the Second Vatican Council affirmed that *“when there is a question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards, based on the nature of the human person and his/her acts, that preserve the sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.”*

By beginning with an integral vision of man and of his vocation, both the natural and supernatural, Pope Paul VI affirms in *Humanae Vitae* that the teaching of the Church was founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man, between the unitive and procreative meanings of the conjugal act. He re-emphasized that there must be excluded as intrinsically immoral “every act that, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes to render procreation impossible, either as an end or as a means.”

When by means of recourse to contraception, couples separate these two meanings that God the Creator inscribed in the being of man and woman and in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as *“arbiters”* of the divine plan and they *“manipulate”* and degrade human sexuality by altering its value of *“total”* self-giving. This total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language of not giving oneself totally to the other. The Pope says that this leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of a conjugal love that is called to give itself in personal totality.

Theological reflection can perceive and is called to further study the difference, both anthropological and moral, between contraception and recourse to the rhythm of the cycle, a difference much wider and deeper than is usually thought. It involves, in the final analysis, the two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality. The choice of the natural rhythms involves accepting the cycle of the person that is the woman. It means accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control. It means recognizing the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion and to live personal love with fidelity. Conjugal communion is thereby enriched with tenderness and affection that constitute the inner soul of human sexuality in its physical dimension also. In this way human sexuality is never “used” as an “object” that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God’s creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person.

The Church as Teacher and Mother for Couples in Difficulty

His Holiness reminds us that where conjugal morality is concerned the Church is Teacher and Mother, and acts as such.

As *Teacher*, she proclaims the moral norm that must guide the responsible transmission of life. The Church is in no way the author or the arbiter of this norm. In obedience to Christ, the Church interprets the moral norm and proposes it to all people of good will, without concealing its radical demands and perfection.

As *Mother*, the Church is close to the many married couples that find themselves in difficulty over this important point of the moral life. She knows that many couples encounter difficulties not only in the concrete fulfillment of the moral norm but even in understanding its inherent values.

But it is one and the same Church that is both Teacher and Mother. Without ever falsifying or compromising the truth, the Church is convinced that there can be no true contradiction between the divine law of transmitting life and that of fostering authentic married love. The concrete teaching of the Church must always remain linked with her doctrine; never separated from it. John Paul II says that with the same conviction as his predecessor, he repeats what Paul VI said in *Humanae Vitae*, that *“to diminish in no way the saving teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls.”*

Authentic Church Teaching displays its courageous realism and wisdom when among other conditions it calls for persistence and patience, humility and strength of mind, filial trust in God and in his grace, and frequent recourse to prayer and to the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation. The gift of the Spirit, accepted and responded to by husband and wife, helps them to live their human sexuality in accordance with God’s plan and as a sign of the unitive and fruitful love of Christ for his Church.

In addition, every effort must be made to render the knowledge of the bodily aspect and the body’s rhythms of fertility accessible to all married couples and also to young adults before marriage. Knowledge must lead to education in self-control. Hence, there is the absolute necessity for the virtue of chastity and for permanent education

in it. Chastity signifies a spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it towards its full realization.

With a deeply wise and loving intuition, garnered from the experience of many married couples, Pope Paul VI wrote in his Encyclical, "To dominate instinct by means of one's reason and free will undoubtedly requires ascetical practices (*i.e. mortification and self denial*).” Yet this discipline that is proper to the purity of married couples confers on their love a higher human value. Such discipline bestows on family life fruits of serenity and peace while facilitating the solution of other problems. It favors attention for one's partner (*communication*), helping both to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and deepening their sense of responsibility.

The Moral Progress of Married People

Since the moral order reveals and sets forth the plan of God the Creator, for this reason it cannot be something that harms man, something impersonal. On the contrary, it places itself at the service of that person's full humanity. Therefore it is God himself who inspires, sustains and guides every creature towards its happiness. Pope John Paul II recalls for us that man, called to live God's wise design, is an historical being. Day after day, he builds himself up through his many free decisions. Thus he knows, loves and accomplishes moral good by stages of growth.

Married people also are called to progress unceasingly in their moral life. They must be supported by a generous willingness to embody these values in their concrete decisions. They cannot look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future. They must consider it as a command of Christ to overcome difficulties with constancy. There is no such thing as "gradualness of the law" as if there were different degrees or forms of the precept in God's law for different individuals and situations.

In God's plan, all husbands and wives are called in marriage to holiness. This lofty vocation is fulfilled to the extent that the human person, with God's grace, is able to respond to his command. It is the point of the Church's teaching that husbands and wives should recognize clearly the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* as the norm for the exercise of their sexuality.

The Pope tells us that the Synod saw this teaching as embracing the whole of married life. The function of transmitting life must be integrated into the overall mission of Christian life as a whole, which without the Cross cannot reach the Resurrection. Given this context, it is understandable that sacrifice cannot be removed from family life. It must be wholeheartedly accepted if the love between husband and wife is to become a source of truly intimate joy.

This shared progress demands reflection, instruction and suitable education by all clergy and laity engaged in family pastoral work. In this way they will be able to assist married people in their human and spiritual progress. This progress demands an awareness of sin, a sincere commitment to observe the moral law and ready use of the sacrament of reconciliation. His Holiness notes that it is important that it be kept in mind that conjugal intimacy involves the wills of two persons, called to harmonize their mentality and behavior. It is uniquely important that in this field there be a unity of moral and pastoral judgment among especially the priests. This should be so, in order that the faithful may not have to suffer anxiety of conscience.

It will be easier for married people to progress if, with respect for the Church's teaching and trust in God's grace, they find that within the entire ecclesial community they are able to discover the liberating value of the authentic love as offered by the Gospel and set before us by the Lord's commandment.

Instilling Conviction and Offering Practical Help

At the present time, the Church family must take on the task of instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way. With a renewed vigor this responsibility rests on all, doctors, experts, marriage counselors, teachers and married couples. All must help married people to live their love with respect for the conjugal act that expresses that love. This implies a systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied. Those husbands and wives give a valuable witness who have reached a more mature personal responsibility with regard to love and life. John Paul II reminds us that Pope Paul VI already had noted that the Lord entrusted to these the task of making visible to people the holiness and sweetness of the law that unites their cooperation with the love of God, the author of human life.

Education, The Right and Duty of Parents Regarding Education

The Second Vatican Council recalled that since parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. Hence, parents also must be acknowledged as the first and foremost

educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. In effect, the family is the first school of those social virtues that every society needs.

The Holy Father lays it down that the right and duty of parents to educate their children is *essential* since it is connected with the transmission of human life. It is *original and primary* on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children. It is *irreplaceable and inalienable*, incapable of being entirely delegated to others or *usurped by others*.

In addition, the most basic element, so basic that it qualifies the educational role of parents, is *parental love*. It completes and perfects its service of life. As well as being a source, the parents' love is also the *animating principle* and therefore the norm inspiring and guiding concrete educational activity. It enriches this love with the values of kindness, constancy, goodness, disinterestedness, service and self-sacrifice.

Educating in the Essential Values of Human Life

Children must grow up with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods. This is accomplished by adopting a simple and austere life style and being fully convinced that, as Vatican Council II had previously said, "*man is more precious for what he is than for what he has.*"

In a society of tensions and conflicts caused by individualism and selfishness, children must be enriched not only with a sense of true justice but also, more powerfully, with a sense of true love understood as sincere solicitude and disinterested service with regard to others, especially those most in need.

The Family is the first and fundamental school of social living. As a community of love, it finds in self-giving the law that guides it and makes it grow. The love of husband and wife for each other is the model and norm for the self-giving between brothers and sisters and the different generations living together in the family. The communion and sharing in the home are the most concrete and effective teaching for children in the wider horizon of society. Education in love as self-giving is the indispensable premise for a clear and delicate sex education.

The education service of parents must aim firmly at training in the area of sex that is truly and fully personal. Sexuality is an enrichment of the whole person. It manifests its inmost meaning in leading the person to the gift of self in love. Sex education that 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 context education for chastity is absolutely essential. It is a virtue that develops a person's authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of respecting and fostering the "nuptial meaning" of the body. Christian parents will devote special attention to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of self-giving. Education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for the moral norms as a guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality. For this reason the Church is firmly opposed to a form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles.

The Mission to Educate & the Sacrament of Marriage

For Christian parents, the mission to educate is rooted in their participation in God's creating activity. It calls upon them to share in the very authority and love of God the Father and Christ the Shepherd. It enriches them with wisdom, counsel, fortitude and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit to help the children in their growth as Christian human beings.

The Sacrament of Marriage gives to the role of education the dignity and vocation of being truly a ministry of the Church, building up her members. John Paul II says that Saint Thomas had no hesitation in comparing this educational ministry with the ministry of priests.

A vivid awareness of the mission received with the Sacrament of Marriage helps Christian parents place themselves at the service of their children's education. They do this with a sense of responsibility before God, who calls them to the mission of building up the Church in their children. As a result in the case of baptized people, the family, called by word and sacrament to be the Church of the home, is both teacher and mother, as is the worldwide Church.

First Experience of the Church

The mission to educate demands that Christian parents do those things necessary for the gradual maturing of their children's personalities from a Christian and ecclesial view point. Following this educational process, parents must take care to show their children the depths to which the faith and love of Jesus Christ can lead them. Further, these parents grow in awareness that the Lord is entrusting to them the growth of a child of God, a brother or sister of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit and a member of the Church. It is truly Christ who supports them in the strengthening of the gift of grace in their children's souls.

The Holy Father notes that the Second Vatican Council described Christian education by expressing its principal aims as: introducing baptized persons into a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, as assisting them to grow more conscious of the gift of faith, learning to adore God the Father in spirit and truth, being trained to conduct their personal life in true holiness, according to their new nature. (*cf Eph 4:22f*) In this way, they grow to maturity to the full stature of Christ and to devote themselves to the up building of the Mystical Body. Aware of their calling, they should learn to give witness to the hope that is within them (*cf I Pt 3:15*) and in this way, to promote the Christian transformation of the world.

This Synod, too, presented the educational mission of the Christian family as a true ministry by which the Gospel is transmitted. Family life itself becomes a true itinerary of faith, a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ.

Through the witness of their lives, parents are the first heralds of the Gospel to their children. By praying with their children, reading the word of God together, by introducing them into the Body of Christ, both Eucharistic and ecclesial, they also become more fully parents.

In order that Christian parents might worthily carry out their ministry of educating, the Synod Fathers expressed the hope that a suitable catechism for families would be prepared. It needs be clear, brief, and easily assimilated by all. The Episcopal Conferences were warmly invited to contribute to producing this catechism. (Condenser's note: This is known as The Catechism of the Catholic Church, first English edition published in 1994.)

Relations with Other Educating Agents

The family is the primary but not the only and exclusive educating community. Well ordered collaboration, both civil and ecclesial, in accordance with its special competence is necessary. This involves a new form of cooperation between parents and Christian communities. The renewal of the Catholic school must give special attention to both the parents of students and to the formation of a perfect educating community.

The right of parents to choose a religious education must be absolutely guaranteed. The State and the Church are obligated to help parents perform their educational role properly. At the same time, those in charge of schools must never forget that the parents have a God given and a completely inalienable right to be the first and principal educators of their children. Equally, parents must commit themselves to a cordial and active relationship with teachers and administrators of schools. But they must and have a right to join with other families in opposing ideologies detrimental to the Christian faith.

Manifold Service to Life

Fruitful married love expresses itself in serving life in many ways. Every act of true love towards a human being bears witness to and perfects the spiritual fecundity of the family, since it is an act of obedience to love as self-giving to others. This perspective can be an inspiration for couples who experience physical sterility.

Christian families, recognizing all as children of one Father, will respond generously to the children of other families. Thus they will be able to more broadly spread their love, nourishing those links rooted in the spirit.

Christian families that recognize all human beings as children of one Father will be able to show greater readiness to adopt and foster children who have lost their parents or have been abandoned by them. In these Christian parents, such children can now experience God's loving fatherhood.

Even beyond the scope of the child, family fruitfulness should manifest a real "creativity." A vast field of activity lies open to families within the sphere of social and cultural exclusion seriously affecting the elderly, the sick, the disabled, drug addicts, ex-prisoners, etc. This enormously broadens the horizons of the parenthood of Christian families. With families and through them, the Lord Jesus continues to "have compassion" on the multitudes.

III PARTICIPATING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY

The Family as the First and Vital Cell of Society

The Pope reminds us that the Second Vatican Council taught that the Creator of all things had established the family as “the first and vital cell of society. The family has vital and organic links with society. It is from the family that citizens come to birth. It is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that animate the existence and development of society itself.

Family Life as an Experience of Communion and Sharing

The very practical experience of communion and sharing is the family’s first and fundamental contribution to society. The relationships between its members, guided by the law of “free giving,” respects and fosters personal dignity in each one. This “free giving” takes the form of acceptance, encounter and dialogue, availability, generous service and real solidarity. The fostering of authentic communion within the family is the irreplaceable school of social life, the stimulus for broader community relationships.

This synod’s Fathers recalled that the family is the place of origin and the most effective means for humanizing and personalizing society. The family uniquely contributes to building up the world by making possible a life that is properly human by guarding and transmitting virtues and values. We are faced with a society that is becoming depersonalized and standardized, therefore inhuman and dehumanizing, with many forms of escapism such as alcoholism, drugs and even terrorism. It is the family that possesses formidable energies capable of taking man out of his anonymity, keeping him conscious of his personal dignity, placing him correctly, in his uniqueness and un-repeatability, within the fabric of society.

The Social and Political Role

The Holy Father points out that families, either singly or in associations, should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially those in favor of the poor. The social contribution of the family has an original character all of its own. In particular, is the ever greater importance in our society for hospitality, the opening of the door of one’s home and heart to the pleas of one’s brothers and sisters. In a special way the Christian family is called upon to imitate Christ’s example of sharing in his love by welcoming the brother or sister in need.

In the form of political intervention, families should be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. Families should grow in their awareness of the need of being “protagonists” of “family politics.” They need to assume the responsibility for transforming society, otherwise families will be the first victims of the evils that they have done no more than note with indifference.

Society at the Service of the Family

Society equally has an obligation not to fail in its fundamental task of respecting and fostering the family. The family and society have complementary functions in defending the good of every human being. The Second Vatican Council noted that the State must recognize that “the family is a society in its own original right.” By virtue of the principle of subsidiarity, the State cannot and must not take away from families the functions that they can just as well perform on their own or in free associations. In truth, it must positively favor as far as possible responsible initiatives by families. In the conviction that the good of the family is an indispensable value of the civil community, public authorities must do everything possible to ensure that families have all the aid they need in order to face responsibilities in a human way.

The Charter of Family Rights

The ideal of mutual support and development between the family and society is often very seriously in conflict. As was repeatedly denounced by the Synod, many families in various countries experience an almost entirely negative situation. Institutions and laws unjustly ignore the inviolable rights of the family. The society itself attacks it violently in its values and fundamental requirements. Thus the family, the basic cell of society, many times finds itself the victim of society. For this reason, the Church strongly defends the rights of the family against the intolerable usurpations of society and State.

The Church strongly defends the rights of the family against the intolerable usurpations of society and State. The Fathers of the recent Synod mentioned the rights of the family such as some of the following:

- the right to the transmission of life, the education of children, along with the intimacy of the conjugal life;
- the right to exist and progress as a family; that is to say, to found a family and to its adequate means of support;

- the right to the stability of the institution and the bond of marriage;
- the right to profess one's faith and to propagate it;
- the right to suitable housing;
- the right of the elderly to a worthy life and death;

Acceding to the Synod's explicit request, the Holy See set about the preparation of a Charter of Rights of the Family.

The Christian Family's Grace and Responsibility

The social role, belonging by a new and original right to the Christian family, is based on the sacrament of marriage. The Sacrament gives to Christian parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people. They are to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them to the plan of God." (*Vat. II, Lumen Gentium, # 31*) The Christian family is called to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters, thereby advancing in its following of the Lord by a special love of all the poor.

For a New International Order

The spiritual communion between Christian families, rooted in a common faith and hope and given life by love, generates, spreads, and develops justice, reconciliation, and peace among human beings. Insofar as it is a "small-scale Church," the Christian family is called upon, like the "large-scale Church," to be a sign of unity for the world. In the same way it is to exercise its prophetic role by bearing witness to the Kingdom and to the peace of Christ, towards which the whole world is journeying. Christian families can do this through their educational activity by presenting to their children a model of life based on the values of truth, freedom, justice, and love. They approach this in their own active and responsible involvement in fostering the authentically human growth of society and its institutions.

III SHARING IN THE LIFE AND MISSION OF THE CHURCH

The Family, within the Mystery of the Church

Pope John Paul II says that one of the Christian family's primary tasks is that of building up the Kingdom of God by participating in the life and mission of the Church. The Second Vatican Council in its document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium #11*, says that the Christian family as a "Church in miniature", the *Ecclesia Domestica*, is a living image and representation of the mystery of the Church.

The Church as Mother gives birth to, educates and builds up the Christian family. By proclaiming the word of God, the Church reveals to the Christian family its true identity according to the Lord's plan. By celebrating the sacraments, the Church enriches and strengthens the Christian family with the grace of Christ. By the continuous proclamation of the new commandment of love, the Church encourages and guides the family so that it might imitate and relive the self-giving love that the Lord Jesus has for the entire human race.

In turn, the Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church so that, in its own way, it becomes a sharer in the saving mission proper to the Church. Christian married couples "in their state of life have their own special gift among the People of God." (*Vat II: Lumen Gentium 11*) Not only are they recipients of the love of Christ thereby becoming a *saved community*, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to others thus becoming a *saving community*. The Christian family is the fruit and sign of the supernatural fecundity of the Church. It stands as a symbol, a witness and a participant in the Church's Motherhood.

A Specific and Original Ecclesial Role

The Christian family is to take part actively and responsibly in the mission of the Church by being an "intimate community of life and love" at the service of the Church and society. The Christian family is a community of relationships renewed by Christ through faith and the sacraments. Its sharing in the Church's mission should follow a *community pattern*. The spouses together as a couple and the parents and children as a *family* must live their service to the Church and to the world by being of one heart and soul in a lived faith.

The Christian family builds up the Kingdom of God in a practical way through the everyday realities that distinguish its state in life. It is then through the love between husband and wife and between the members of the family that the Christian family gives expression and realization to the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church.

The Second Vatican Council recalls for us that families will share their spiritual riches generously with other families. In this way the Christian family manifests to all people the Savior's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. The family will do this by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all the members of the family work together. Having laid a foundation for the family's participation in the mission of the Church, the Holy Father now wishes to proceed to illustrate how this is to be. With reference to Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King he wishes to present the Christian family as 1) a believing and evangelizing community, 2) a community in dialogue with God, and 3) a community at the service of man.

1. The Christian Family as a Believing and Evangelizing Community

Faith as the Discovery and Admiring Awareness

of God's Plan for the Family

As a sharer in the life and mission of the Church, the Christian family fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the word of God. Christian spouses and parents are required to offer "the obedience of faith." Only in faith can they discover with joyful gratitude the dignity to which God has deigned to raise marriage and the family. He wishes to make it the meeting place of the loving covenant between himself and man, between Jesus Christ and his bride, the Church.

The very preparation for Christian marriage is itself already a journey of faith. The engaged couple comes to recognize and freely accept their vocation to follow Christ and serve the Kingdom of God in the married state.

The celebration of the sacrament of marriage is the basic moment of the faith for the couple. This sacrament is the proclamation in the Church of the Good News concerning married love. At the same time, this proclamation of the word of God must also be a "profession of faith" within and with the Church as a community of believers. This profession of faith demands that it be prolonged in the life of the married couple and the family. God comes to them in the events, problems, difficulties and circumstances of everyday life, revealing the concrete "demands" of their sharing in the love of Christ for his Church in the specific family. Obedience to the plan of God in the family community must take place in the "togetherness" between husband and wife, and between parents and children, lived in the Spirit of Christ. Thus this "domestic Church" will be in constant need of evangelization.

The Christian Family's Ministry of Evangelization

Pope Paul VI had said earlier that the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. Conscious of such a mission, all within the family evangelize and are evangelized. Such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families. This Synod carried forward John Paul II's statement, made in 1979 to the Latin American Bishops at Puebla that the future of evangelization depended greatly on the Church of the home. This mission rooted in Baptism, receives new strength in the grace of the sacrament of marriage.

Especially today, the Christian family has a special vocation to witness to the paschal covenant of Christ. It loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Further, the absolute need for family catechesis emerges with particular force in certain situations, especially in the face of anti-religious legislation and of widespread unbelief or invasive secularism. Thus, "the Church of the home" remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis.

Ecclesial Service

Evangelization as carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. The Holy Father says that the family must educate the children for life in such a way that each one may fully perform his or her role according to the vocation received from God. Open to transcendent values, the family will serve its brothers and sisters with joy. It, likewise, becomes a primary and most excellent seedbed for religious vocations. The parents' ministry of evangelization and catechesis ought to play a part in the children's lives as adolescence and youth as well. Within the Christian family, parents must face with courage and great interior serenity difficulties that their ministry of evangelization at times will surely encounter in their own children.

The service rendered by Christian spouses and parents has its place within the context of the whole Church as an evangelized and evangelizing community. This ministry of "the Church of the home" is ordained to the building up of

the Body of Christ. As such, it remains in intimate communion to collaborate with all the other evangelizing and catechetical activities in the Church at the diocesan and parochial levels.

To Preach the Gospel in the Whole Creation

Evangelization is characterized by universality without boundaries. It is the response to Christ's explicit command: *"Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation."* (Mt 16:15)

To Preach the Gospel in the Whole Creation

The Christian family's faith also possesses the catholic missionary inspiration. The Sacrament of Marriage takes up the task of defending and spreading the faith, a task that has its roots in Baptism and Confirmation. Missionary activity can be exercised even within the family. Members of the family must give to each other a living witness of their own faith. The Church of the home is called to be a luminous sign of the presence of Christ for those who are "far away," for families who do not yet believe, and for those who no longer live in accordance with the faith that they once received.

In the Acts of the Apostles at the dawn of Christianity, Aquila and Priscilla were presented as a missionary couple. Still today, they remain a model for the missionary activity of couples. Christian families offer a special contribution to the Church by fostering missionary vocations among their children and also by generally training them to recognize God's love for all people.

2. The Christian Family as a Community in Dialogue with God

The Church's Sanctuary in the Home

The proclamation of the Gospel and its acceptance in faith reach their fullness in the celebration of the sacraments. The Church is also a priestly people. That makes the family as well a part of this priestly people that is the Church. The Christian family is vivified by the Lord Jesus and called by him in a dialogue with God through the sacraments by the offering of one's life and through prayer. This is the priestly role that the Christian family can and ought to exercise in communion with the whole Church. In this way the family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the church community and the world.

Marriage as a Sacrament of Mutual Sanctification and an Act of Worship

The Holy Father reminds us that the sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. By virtue of the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made a part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy. The gift of Jesus Christ accompanies the married couple throughout their lives. The Second Vatican Council says that Jesus Christ "abides with them so that, just as He loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal" as well.

By virtue of this sacrament in fulfilling their conjugal and family obligations, spouses are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ. They advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards mutual holiness. For Christian spouses, the universal call to holiness is made specific in the sacrament they have celebrated. They carry out this call in the concrete realities proper to their life together. This gives rise to an authentic and profound conjugal and family spirituality.

Christian marriage, like the other sacraments, "whose purpose is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to give worship to God," (Vat. II, Doc. on the Sacred Liturgy, #59) is in itself a liturgical action glorifying God in Jesus Christ and in the Church. In this special life together, the spouses are made capable of living the very love of God for people and that of the Lord Jesus for the Church, his bride. The same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a "spiritual sacrifice." The Second Vatican Council again confirms that as worshippers, leading holy lives in every place, the laity, Christian spouses included, consecrate the world itself to God.

Marriage and the Eucharist

Pope John Paul II tells us that the Christian family's sanctifying role is grounded in Baptism and has its highest expression in the Eucharist, to which Christian marriage is intimately connected. That is why marriage normally should be celebrated within the Mass. The Eucharistic Sacrifice represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with his blood on the Cross. In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, spouses encounter the source from which their marriage covenant flows, is structured and is continuously renewed. It is in this Eucharistic gift of charity that the family finds its own "communion" and "mission". Thus, in the very sharing in the Body of Christ that is given up and in the Blood that is shed is found the cause of the living dynamic of the family.

The Sacrament of Conversion and Reconciliation

An essential part of the Christian family's role consists in accepting the call to conversion that the Gospel addresses to all. As with individuals, just so is the family itself subject to unfaithfulness. Repentance and mutual pardon come to it as well through sacramental Penance. This sacrament holds special significance for the family in that it reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and family communion.

Family Prayer

The Church prays for the family and educates it to live in generous accord with its priestly role received from Christ the High Priest. The baptismal priesthood of the faithful, exercised in the sacrament of marriage, constitutes the basis by which its daily life is transformed into "a spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." This transformation happens not only through the family's celebrating the Eucharist and by the offering of itself to God, but also through a life of prayer.

Family prayer has for its very own object *family life itself*. It is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to it. All the various concrete aspects and celebrations within family life should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, petition, trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father. The responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God's unceasing aid.

Educators in Prayer

Parents have the specific responsibility of educating their children in prayer. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and by the office of the Sacrament of Matrimony, that from the earliest years parents should teach their children knowledge of God, to worship him, and to love their neighbor. *The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray.* Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave a lasting impression. John Paul II's predecessor, Pope Paul VI, at a general audience had asked, "Mothers, do you teach your children the Christian prayers?" Amongst all the other devotional practices, "Do you say the family rosary together? And you, Fathers, do you pray with your children, at least sometimes? Your example of honesty in thought and action, joined to some common prayer, is a lesson for life."

Liturgical Prayer

There exists a deep and vital bond between the prayer of the Church and prayer of the individual. An important purpose of the prayer of the *domestic Church* is to serve as the natural introduction for the children into the liturgical prayer of the whole Church. Especially is it true where participation by all the members of the Christian family in the celebration of the Eucharist is concerned. Further, the Second Vatican Council itself listed the family among those to whom it recommended the recitation of the Divine Office in common.

Liturgical Prayer

The Second Vatican Council, in addition to the Divine Office, also recommended that the family celebrate the times and the feasts of the liturgical year in the home. As preparation for worship in the church and as prolongation of it in the home, Christian families should make use of private prayer in all its forms. In addition to morning and evening prayers, this Synod's fathers expressly recommended certain other exercises. They encouraged reading and meditating on the word of God, preparation for the reception of the sacraments, devotion and consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary, grace before and after meals and observance of popular devotions.

Pope John Paul II reminds us that the Church has always proposed certain practices of piety to the faithful with solicitude and insistence. He says that here he wishes to follow the thought of his predecessors in strongly recommending the recitation of the family rosary. He continues by saying that there is no doubt that the rosary should be considered as one of the best and most efficacious prayers that the family is invited to pray in common. Authentic devotion to Mary, in the mind of the Pope, constitutes a special instrument for nourishing loving communion in the Christian family and for growth of conjugal and family spirituality. For she, who is the Mother of Christ and the Church, is in a special way the Mother of Christian families, of domestic Churches.

Prayer and Life

Prayer constitutes an essential part of Christian life. It is the first expression of man's inner truth, the first condition for authentic freedom of spirit. Prayer constitutes the strongest incentive for the family to assume its responsibilities as the primary and fundamental cell of human society. The fruitfulness of the family cannot but eventually lead to the transformation of the world itself. This fertility derives from its living union with Christ, nourished by the Liturgy, by self-offering and by prayer.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The New Commandment of Love

The Church is a prophetic, priestly and kingly people. It is endowed with the mission of bringing all human beings to accept the word of God in faith, to celebrate and profess it in the sacraments and in prayer. It must give expression to this in the concrete realities of life in accordance with the gift and new commandment of love.

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

The New Commandment of Love

The law of Christian life is to be found not in a written code, but in the personal action of the Holy Spirit. The Christian couple's and the family's rule of life is the Spirit of Jesus poured into their hearts in the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony. As a result, the Spirit engraves the evangelical law more profoundly on the hearts of Christian husbands and wives. Their purified love is a fruit of the Spirit. In consequence, their moral life is to be lived in responsible freedom.

The Christian family, in intimate communion with the Church, is called to exercise its "service" of love towards God and towards its fellow human beings just as Christ exercises his royal power by serving us. Christ has communicated this power to his disciples that they might be established in royal freedom and that by serving him in their fellow human beings they might lead their brothers and sisters to that King whom to serve is to reign. For the Lord does wish to spread his kingdom by means of the laity. In this kingdom, creation itself will be delivered into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

To discover the Image of God in Each Brother and Sister

The Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God. It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family. This way of life should then be extended to the wider circle of the Church community of which the family is a part. Thanks to love within the family, the Church ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension. Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since "everybody is my brother or sister." In each individual, especially in the poor and the unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ. That the family may serve man in a truly evangelical way, the instructions of the Second Vatican Council must be carefully put into practice. Attention is to be paid to the image of God in which our neighbor has been created, and also to Christ the Lord to whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person.

While building up the Church in love, the Christian family places itself at the service of the human person and the world. Another task for the family is to form persons in love and to practice love in all its relationships. This is so that the family remains open to the community, conscious of its responsibility towards the whole of society.

CHAPTER IV PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY: STAGES, STRUCTURES, AGENTS AND SITUATIONS

Section I STAGES OF PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

The Church Accompanies the Christian Family

on Its Journey Through Life

Like every other living reality, the family too is called to develop and grow. After proper preparation, the couple begins their daily journey towards actualization of the values and duties of marriage. In the light of faith and by virtue of hope, the Christian family shares, in communion with the Church, the earthly pilgrimage towards the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God. The Pope emphasizes that every effort should be made to strengthen pastoral care for the family; that it should be treated as a priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church. The Church's pastoral concern must extend its horizons in harmony with the Heart of Christ. For all, the Church will have a word of truth, goodness, understanding, hope and deep sympathy. To all these families she will offer her help so that they may approach more nearly that model of a family that the Creator intended from "the beginning." The Church's pastoral action must follow the family step by step in the different stages of its formation and development.

Preparation for Marriage

More than ever as in our modern times is preparation necessary for young people for marriage and family life. Changes have taken place within almost all modern societies. These demand that not only the family but also society and the Church be involved in the effort of properly preparing young people for their future responsibilities. Many negative phenomena derive from the fact that, young people not only lose sight of the correct hierarchy of values but, since they no longer have certain criteria of behavior, they do not know how to face and deal with the new difficulties that they are encountering. Experience teaches that young people who have been well prepared for family life generally succeed better than others. The Church must therefore promote better and more intensive programs of marriage preparation in order to favor positively the establishing and maturing of successful marriages. In this light, marriage has to be seen as a gradual and continuous process.

Preparation for Marriage

Marriage preparation must be seen and put into practice as a gradual and continuous process. It has three stages: remote, proximate, and immediate.

Remote preparation: This begins in childhood as a life-long process. It is that period in which esteem for all authentic human values are instilled with all that this signifies for the formation of character, for the right use of one's inclinations, for the manner of regarding people of the opposite sex. It is especially necessary for Christians to have a solid, spiritual and catechetical formation that will show that marriage is a true vocation and mission.

Proximate preparation: This involves, from a suitable age, a catechumenal process with more specific content. This renewed catechesis of young people and others preparing for Christian marriage is absolutely necessary. The religious formation of young people should be integrated in accordance with the various concrete requirements for life as a couple. This preparation will present marriage as an interpersonal relationship that requires the study of the nature of conjugal sexuality and responsible parenthood, in effect, the basic requisites for a well-ordered family life. Finally, preparation for the family apostolate, for fraternal solidarity and collaboration with other families must not be overlooked.

Immediate preparation: This should take place in the months and weeks immediately preceding the wedding. This preparation is not only necessary in every case, but it is more urgent for engaged couples that manifest shortcomings or difficulties in Christian doctrine and practice. Couples should have a deeper knowledge of the mystery of Christ and the Church, of the meaning of grace and of the responsibility of Christian marriage. The Christian family and the whole of the church community should feel involved in the different phases of the preparation for marriage. Episcopal Conferences should take steps to see that there is issued a *Directory for the Pastoral Care of the Family*. It should lay down the minimum content of the "Preparation Courses" concerning marriage. Although one must not underestimate the necessity and obligation of the immediate preparation for marriage, omitting it should not to be thought of as an impediment to the celebration of marriage.

Preparation for Marriage

Since it is a sacramental action of sanctification, the celebration of marriage, inserted as it is into the liturgy (Mass), must be valid, worthy and fruitful. As a result there is a wide range of pastoral and theological concerns. The actual rite of the celebration should be faithfully observed. It should be simple and dignified. It is also helpful to include in the liturgical celebration such elements proper to each culture that serve to express more clearly the profound human and religious significance of the marriage contract. The liturgical celebration should be conducted in such a way as to include a proclamation of the word and a profession of faith. As it is a sacramental action of the Church, the liturgical celebration of marriage should involve the Christian community with the full, active and responsible participation of all those present.

Celebration of Marriage and Evangelization of

Non-Believing Baptized Persons

Because the Church finds herself in a very secular society, very special attention must be devoted to the moral and spiritual disposition of those being married. In fact, the faith of the person asking the Church for marriage can exist at different levels. So, it is the duty of pastors to bring about a rediscovery of the faith and nourish it and bring it to maturity. Nevertheless, the Church with good reason allows even those who are imperfectly disposed to the celebration of marriage. The sacrament of Matrimony is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation. Pope John Paul II recalls that marriage is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator "in the beginning." The decision by the man and woman to commit themselves to an irrevocable conjugal consent of their whole lives in indissoluble love and unconditional fidelity really involves an attitude of profound obedience to the will of God. The Pope sees it as an attitude that cannot exist without God's grace. The couple has thus already begun in a true sense a journey towards salvation.

It is true that sometimes, engaged couples ask to be married in the church for motives that are social rather than genuinely religious. It should not be surprising. By its very nature marriage is also a social matter, committing the couple being married in the eyes of society. This celebration has always been seen as an occasion that brings together families and friends.

Preparation for Marriage

Despite the social desires inherent in marriage, engaged couples, by virtue of their Baptism, are already really sharers in Christ's marriage Covenant with the Church. Likewise by their right intention, at least implicitly, they consent to what the Church intends to do when she celebrates marriage. The fact that motives of a social nature also enter into the request for marriage is not enough to justify refusal on the part of pastors. To lay down criteria that would concern the level of faith of those to be married would involve grave risks. It would involve the risk of making unfounded and discriminatory judgments; the risk of causing doubts about the validity of marriages already celebrated or perhaps unjustified anxieties to the consciences of married couples. There could be the danger of calling into question the sacramental nature of many marriages of brethren separated from full communion with the Catholic Church.

Clearly, when engaged couples reject explicitly and formally what the Church intends to do when the marriage of baptized persons is celebrated, the pastor of souls cannot admit them to the celebration of marriage. In that instance, it is not the Church that is placing an obstacle in the way of the celebration they wish, but they themselves.

Pastoral Care After Marriage

In order that the family may be a true community of love, all its members must be helped and trained in their responsibilities, in an active sharing in family life. This holds true especially for young families within the context of new values in the first years of marriage. It could also be due to difficulties created by adaptations to life together or by the birth of children.

Within the ecclesial community – the great family made up of Christian families – there will take place a mutual exchange of presence and help among all the families. They will share their own experience of life, as well as the gifts of faith and grace. Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family is the simplest, most effective means of transmitting from one to another important Christian values. The Pope notes that in her pastoral care of young families, the Church must also pay special attention to helping them to live married love responsibly, harmonizing the intimacy of home life with the generous shared work of building up the Church and society.

CHAPTER IV PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY: STAGES, STRUCTURES, AGENTS AND SITUATIONS

Section II Structures of Family Pastoral Care

Pastoral activity is always the dynamic expression of the reality of the Church. Family pastoral care is a specific form of this pastoral activity and has as its operative principle the Church herself.

The Ecclesial Community and in Particular the Parish

The Church, a saved and a saving community, has to be considered here under two aspects: universal and particular. The second aspect is actuated in the diocesan community of which the parish is of special importance.

Communion with the universal Church guarantees and promotes the substance of the various particular Churches. These latter remain the more immediate and effective subjects for putting the pastoral care of the family into practice. Every local Church, every parochial community, must become more aware of the grace and responsibility received from the Lord to promote the pastoral care of the family. No plan for organized pastoral work must ever fail to take into consideration the pastoral care of the family.

Priests and men and women religious, from the time of their formation, should be oriented and framed progressively and thoroughly for the various tasks. The Holy Father said that he was pleased to emphasize the recent establishment in Rome, at the Pontifical Lateran University, of a higher institute for the study of the problems of the family. Bishops should see to it that as many priests as possible attend specialized courses there before taking on parish responsibilities.

The Family

In this field there is a prominent place for the mission of married couples and Christian families. For it is he who, by virtue of the fact that marriage of baptized persons has been raised to a sacrament, confers upon Christian married couples a special mission as apostles sending them as workers into his vineyards, and in particular, into this field of the family. This apostolate will be exercised through the witness of a life lived in conformity with the divine law. The apostolate of the family will become wider through works of spiritual and material charity towards other families, especially those most in need of help and support.

Associations of Families for Families

The Holy Father feels that it is important that he take note of the various groups of the faithful in which the mystery of Christ's Church in some way manifests itself and lives. The Synod on the Family expressly recognized the useful contribution made by associations of spirituality, formation and apostolate. It should be their task to foster among the faithful a lively sense of solidarity, to form consciences according to Christian values, to stimulate attentiveness toward one another and to make Christian families into a true source of light and a wholesome leaven for other families. They likewise should develop a lively sense of the common good in which the Christian family would become actively engaged in other non-ecclesial associations. Some of these associations work for the wholesome, ethical and cultural values of people, the development of the human person. They further the knowledge of the problems connected with the responsible regulation of fertility in accordance with natural methods in conformity with human dignity and the teaching of the Church. Other such groups work for the building of a more just and human world.

CHAPTER IV PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY:

Section III AGENTS OF THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY

Pope John Paul II felt it appropriate at this point to mention other main agents that must focus on the family.

Bishops and Priests

In the diocese, the Bishop has the principal responsibility for the pastoral care of the family. As father and pastor, he must devote to it personal interest, time and personnel. It is within his particular care to make the diocese an ever more truly diocesan family, a model and source of hope. In setting up the Pontifical Council for the Family, the Pope

wished to make clear the importance he attributed to the pastoral care for the family. The Bishops need to avail themselves especially of the priests. The same is true of deacons in whose care this area of pastoral work can be entrusted. Their responsibility extends not only to moral and liturgical matters, but to personal and social concerns as well. They must support the family in its difficulties and sufferings, helping them to see their lives in the light of the Gospel. When exercised with due discernment and an apostolic spirit, the Church's minister will draw fresh encouragement and spiritual energy from this work for his own vocation.

Priests and deacons must unceasingly act towards families as fathers, brothers, pastors, and teachers. Their teaching and advice must therefore always be in full harmony with the authentic Magisterium of the Church, in such a way as to help the People of God to gain a correct sense of the faith, to be subsequently applied to practical life. Such a fidelity to the Magisterium will avoid troubling the consciences of the faithful. Pastors and laity share in the prophetic mission of Christ. The laity does so by witnessing to the faith by their words and by their Christian lives. The pastors do so by distinguishing in that witness what is the expression of genuine faith from what is less in harmony with the light of faith. Theologians and experts can be of great help in the dialogue between pastors and families in family matters by explaining exactly the content of the Church's Magisterium and the content of the experience of family life. In this way the Magisterium becomes better understood. The Holy Father notes that it is useful to recall that the proximate and obligatory norm in the teaching of the faith – also concerning family matters – belongs to the hierarchical Magisterium. Clearly defined relationships between theologians, experts in family matters and the Magisterium are of no little assistance for the correct understanding of the faith and for promoting, within the boundaries of the faith, legitimate pluralism.

Men and Women Religious

The contribution that can be made to the apostolate of the family by men and women religious in general finds its primary expression in their consecration to God. All Christ's faithful religious recall that wonderful marriage made by God in which the Church has Christ for her only spouse. It is noteworthy that men and women religious develop their service to families with particular solicitude for children. They can offer their own work of teaching and counseling in the preparation of young people for marriage, and in helping couples towards truly responsible parenthood. They can open their houses to families so that they can find there a sense of God's presence and gain a taste for prayer and recollection.

The Pope here indicates that he wishes to add a pressing exhortation to the heads of institutes of consecrated life to consider the apostolate of the family as one of their priority tasks, rendered even more urgent by the present state of the world.

Lay Specialists

Considerable help can be given to families by lay specialists, doctors, lawyers, psychologists, consultants, etc., who offer their contribution of enlightenment, advice and support. In an address, the Holy Father had noted that commitment from such individuals well deserves the title of mission. Ultimately, the good of society and the Christian community itself derive benefit from it. The Holy Father noted that very importantly "the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family."

Recipients and Agents of Social Communications

It is well known that the means of social communication affect, and often profoundly so, the minds of those who use them, especially in the case of young people. They can thus exercise a beneficial influence on the life of the family. But at the same time, they also conceal snares and dangers that cannot be ignored. Social communications can also become a vehicle for divisive ideologies and distorted ways of looking at life, the family, religion and morality. These dangers are all the more real inasmuch as, especially in the more industrialized nations, they cause families to abandon their responsibility to educate their children. Evasion of this duty is made easy for them by the presence of television and certain publications in the home. Hence there is the duty to protect the young from the forms of aggression to which they are subjected by mass media, and to ensure that media in the family is carefully regulated. Families should direct their children to entertainment that is more wholesome; physically, morally and spiritually formative.

Parents must also actively ensure the moderate, critical, and prudent use of the media. By controlling the use of the media they can train the consciences of their children and guide them in the choice or rejection of the programs available.

Parents must seek to influence through suitable initiatives those in charge of the various phases of production and transmission of programs. They must try to ensure that the fundamental human values that form part of the true good

of society are not ignored or deliberately attacked. With a high sense of responsibility and real courage, producers must know and respect the needs of the family. Every attack on the value of family is an attack on the true good of man. It is also the duty of the Church to encourage and support Catholics who are called to and have the talent to take up this sensitive type of work.

CHAPTER IV PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY:

Section IV Pastoral Care of the Family in Difficult Cases

Particular Circumstances

An even more generous pastoral commitment is called for in the case of families that find themselves faced by situations that are objectively difficult. In this regard it is necessary to call special attention to certain particular groups that are more in need not only of assistance but also of more incisive action so that the profound causes of their needs may be eliminated as far as possible. The Holy Father then lists numerous examples of such families. Among their number are families of migrant workers, members of the armed forces and all kinds of itinerant people, families of those in prison, of refugees and exiles, incomplete or single-parent families, families with children that are handicapped or addicted to drugs, families of alcoholics, families experiencing violence or unjust treatment because of their faith, teenage married couples, and finally, the elderly who are often obliged to live alone with inadequate means of subsistence.

The Pope notes that families of migrants, especially of manual laborers and farm workers, should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. It is also the Church's task to appeal to the public conscience and to all those in authority in order that workers may find employment in their own regions and homelands, that they might receive just wages, that families be reunited as soon as possible and treated on an equal footing with others.

A difficult problem is that of the family that is ideologically divided. Believing members must be strengthened in their faith and supported in their Christian lives. Although the party faithful to Catholicism cannot give way, dialogue with the other party must always be kept alive. Love and respect must be freely shown in hope that unity will be maintained. Other difficult circumstances in which the family needs the help of the ecclesial community and its pastors are: rebellious adolescence of children, abandonment by one of the spouses, death that brings the painful experience of widowhood. Similarly, the Church cannot ignore the time of old age, with all its positive and negative aspects. There is also the burden of loneliness, many times of a psychological and emotional nature, abandonment or neglect on the part of children and relations. There is likewise the suffering of ill health and the approach of the end of life.

In all these different situations prayer must be a source of light and strength and the nourishment of Christian hope and cannot be neglected.

Mixed Marriages

The Holy Father notes that the growing number of mixed marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons calls for special attention. Couples living in a mixed marriage have special needs. In the first place, attention must be paid to the obligations that the faith imposes on the Catholic party as to the free exercise of the faith and the Baptism and upbringing of the children in the Catholic faith. There are particular difficulties inherent in the relationships between husband and wife with regard to respect for the religious freedom of both. With regard to the liturgical and canonical form of marriage, Ordinaries can make wide use of their faculties.

The following points should be kept in mind:

- In the appropriate preparation for this type of marriage, every reasonable effort must be made to ensure a proper understanding of Catholic teaching on the qualities and obligations of marriage.
- It is of the greatest importance that the Catholic party should be strengthened in the faith and positively helped to mature in the understanding and practicing that faith. Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons have their own particular nature and should be valued for their intrinsic worth and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement. Their common Baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the spouses motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values.

- An effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers of the couple from the time that preparations for the marriage begins and the wedding ceremony itself. With regard to the non-Catholic party sharing in Eucharistic Communion, the proper norms should be followed.

In many parts of the world marriages between Catholics and non-baptized persons are increasing. The non-baptized person and his beliefs are to be treated with respect. In secularized societies, the non-baptized person often professes no religion at all. Here there is a need for Episcopal Conferences and individual Bishops to ensure that there are proper pastoral safeguards for the faith of the Catholic. Above all it is the Catholic's duty to do all in his power to ensure the Catholic baptism and education of the children of the marriage. The Catholic must be assisted in offering within his family a genuine witness to the Catholic faith and to Catholic life.

Pastoral Action in Certain Irregular Situations

The Synod of Bishops carefully considered certain marital situations that are irregular in a religious sense as well as civil. Such cases are becoming widespread in the Catholic community as well, with no little damage to family and society.

Trial Marriages

A first example of an irregular situation is "trial" marriages". Human reason leads one to see that they are unacceptable by showing the unconvincing nature of carrying out an "experiment" with human beings

The Church cannot admit such a kind of union for reasons that derive from faith. In the first place, the gift of the body in the sexual relationship is a real symbol of the giving of the whole person. Such a giving cannot take place without the concurrence of the love of charity given by Christ. Secondly, marriage between two baptized persons is a real symbol of the union of Christ and the Church. This is not a union that is temporary or a "trail" but is one that is eternally faithful. Thus, the Holy Father draws the obvious conclusion that between two baptized persons there can exist only an indissoluble marriage. Such a situation cannot usually be overcome unless the person, with Christ's grace, has been trained to dominate concupiscence and to establish relationships of genuine love with other people. This cannot be achieved without a true education in Christian love and in the right use of sexuality.

De Facto Free Unions

Unions without any publicly recognized institutional bond, either civil or religious, is becoming ever more frequent. This cannot fail to concern pastors.

Some people consider themselves almost forced into a free union by difficult economic, cultural or religious situations, on the grounds that were they to contract a regular marriage they, for example, would be exposed to some form of harm. In other cases, one encounters people who scorn, rebel against or reject society, the institution of the family and the social and political order. Others may solely be seeking pleasure. There are still others who are driven by extreme ignorance or poverty. There likewise may be a certain psychological immaturity that creates uncertainty about or fear of entering into a stable and definitive union. In some countries, traditional customs presume that the true marriage will take place only after a period of cohabitation and the birth of the first child. Each of these elements presents the Church with arduous pastoral problems.

Pastoral Action in Certain Irregular Situations

Having spoken of *Trial Marriages* and *Free Unions*, Pope John Paul II says that each of these presents the Church with arduous pastoral problems because of the serious consequences deriving from them, both religious and moral. He specifies what some of these are: *the loss of the religious sense of marriage, the deprivation of the grace of the sacrament, grave scandal*, and then indicating the social consequences: *the destruction of the concept of the family, the weakening of the sense of fidelity, and finally, also the harmful effects toward society: psychological damage to children and the strengthening of selfishness.*

The Holy Father says that pastors need to make every attempt to regularize these cases as soon as possible. Above all, there must be a campaign of prevention, by fostering the sense of fidelity in the whole moral and religious training of the young. They must be helped to reach spiritual maturity and enabled to understand the richness of marriage as a sacrament.

The People of God should also make approaches to public authorities to ensure that public opinion is not led to undervalue the institutional importance of marriage and the family. Society and public authorities should favor legitimate marriage by encouraging and guaranteeing a family wage. They should ensure housing fit for family life and by creating opportunities for work and life.

c) Catholics in Civil Marriages

There are increasing cases of Catholics who, for ideological or practical reasons, prefer civil marriage. By seeking public recognition of their bond on the part of the State, such couples show that they are ready to accept not only its advantages but also its obligations. Not even this situation, however, is acceptable to the Church. The aim of pastoral action must be to educate these people to the need for consistency between their choice of life and the faith that they profess. While treating them with great charity and bringing them into the life of the respective communities, the pastors of the Church will regrettably *not be able to admit them to the sacraments*.

d) Separated and Divorced Persons Who Have Not Remarried

Various reasons can lead to the irreparable breakdown of valid marriages. In such instances, separation must be considered as a last resort after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have failed. Loneliness and other trials are the lot of the innocent parties. The ecclesial community must support such people more than ever. The situation is similar for people who have been divorced, but refrain from a new union and devote themselves solely to carrying out their family duties in Christian living. Their example of fidelity and Christian consistency takes on particular value as a witness before the world and the Church. *Since there are no obstacles to admission to the sacraments. (Italics mine)* it is even more necessary for the Church to offer continual love and assistance,

e) Divorced Persons Who Have Remarried

Unfortunately, experience shows that people who have obtained a divorce usually intend to enter a new union. Obviously, it would be outside a Catholic union. Since this is an evil act, affecting more and more Catholics, the problem must be faced with resolution and *without delay. (Italics mine)* The Synod Fathers specifically studied this problem. The Church cannot abandon to their own devices those who have been previously bound by sacramental marriage and attempted a second marriage. While pastors must exercise careful discernment, the Church will put at the disposal those individuals the means of salvation available to them. There is a difference between those unjustly abandoned and those who *through their own grave fault (italics mine)* destroyed a canonically valid marriage. Finally, there are those who may have entered a second union for the sake of the children's upbringing and have done so, subjectively certain in conscience, that their previous irreparably destroyed marriage was invalid. Whatever the case, the whole community must take pains to see to it that the divorced do not consider themselves as separated from the Church. As baptized persons, they can participate in her life in many, if sometimes, limited ways. For her part, let the Church pray for them, encourage them and show herself a merciful mother, sustaining them in faith and hope.

Pastoral Action in Certain Irregular Situations

e) Divorced Persons Who Have Remarried

Although divorced and remarried Catholics are not, in fact, separated from the Church, still the Church must reaffirm her practice, based upon Scripture, of not admitting them to Eucharistic Communion. Their state and condition of life objectively contradict the union of love between Christ and the Church that is signified and effected by the Eucharist. If these people were admitted to the Eucharist, the faithful would be led into error and confusion regarding the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage. Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance can only be granted to repentant penitents who are ready to undertake a way of life that is no longer in contradiction to the indissolubility of marriage. This means, practically, that when, for serious reasons, such as the presence of children, a couple cannot satisfy the obligation to separate, they "take on themselves the duty to live in complete continence." This requires them to abstain from acts proper to marriage.

Similarly, the respect due to the sacrament of Matrimony and also to the community of the faithful forbids any pastor to perform ceremonies of any kind for divorced people who remarry. Such ceremonies would give the impression of a new sacramentally valid marriage and would lead people into error concerning the indissolubility of marriage. By acting in this way, the Church professes her own fidelity to Christ and to his truth. With firm confidence she believes in the grace of conversion and salvation, provided that these individuals persevere in prayer, penance and charity.

Those Without a Family

The Holy Father mentions here, particularly close to the Heart of Christ and deserving of the affection and active solicitude of the Church, are all those countless people who cannot in any way claim membership in the proper sense in a family. Large sections of humanity live in conditions of extreme poverty that make it impossible in practice to speak of a true family. Yet there exists a "good news of the family" for them and many others. It is a task for the whole of society. For those without a natural family the doors of the great family, the Church, must be opened even wider. The Church is home and family for all, especially those who "labor and are heavy laden."

IV PASTORAL CARE OF THE FAMILY:STAGES, STRUCTURES, AGENTS AND SITUATIONS

CONCLUSION

The future of the family passes by way of the family. The Holy Father says that therefore it is indispensable that every person of good will endeavor to save and foster the values of the family. Faith gives them full knowledge of God's plan. They must show the family a special love calling for concrete action. The Christian family is often tempted to be discouraged at the growth of its difficulties. Pope John Paul II says that we, as families, are being called back to our original position. We must follow Christ.

The Church knows the path by which the family can reach the deepest truth about itself. The Church has learned this path at the school of Christ and the school of history interpreted in the light of the Spirit. She knows that the Good News includes the subject of the Cross. It is through the Cross that the family can attain the fullness of its being and the perfection of its love.

The Pope asks us to collaborate cordially and courageously with all people of good will who are serving the family. He says that with faithfulness to the values of the Gospel and of the human person, and respecting the lawful pluralism in initiatives, our collaboration can favor a more rapid advancement of the family.

The Holy Father, at this point, invokes the protection of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the prototype and example for all Christian families. It passed its life in quiet anonymity. St. Joseph was "a just man." He beseeches St. Joseph to guard, protect and enlighten families. He petitions the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church, also to be the Mother of "the Church of the home." The Pope prays that she, the Sorrowful Mother at the foot of the Cross, comfort the sufferings and dry the tears of those in distress because of the difficulties of their families. Further, he asks Christ the Lord, the King of Families, to be present in every Christian home as He was at Cana.

Finally, John Paul II entrusts each family to Jesus Christ, our Lord and King, to Mary, and to St. Joseph that they might open our hearts to the light that the Gospel sheds on every family.