



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis

Consilium Internationale

FAMILY COMMISSION
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CONCLUSIONS OF THE SYNOD OF THE FAMILY

PART II - Chapter II

The Family in the Magisterium of the Church¹

The Church has received from Jesus, her divine Master, the mission to teach humanity the ways of God. And indeed, Our ways are not God's ways (cf. Is 55,8). God's ways can be really embarrassing as when Jesus asked the servants at the wedding feast in Cana to fill the jars with water when they needed wine, (cf. Jn 2, 1-11). The Second chapter of the Synod conclusions summarizes the teachings of the Church on the Family from the Second Vatican Council till date. Given its concision and clarity, we present the text almost entirely².

The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, devotes an entire chapter to the dignity of marriage and the family (cf. GS, 47-52) and defines marriage and the family in the following manner: "The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one." (GS, 48). The "true love between husband and wife" (GS, 49) involves a mutual gift of self, which is to include and integrate the sexual dimension and affectivity according to the divine plan (cf. GS, 48-49). This clearly shows that marriage and the conjugal love that gives it life, "are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children" (GS, 50). Furthermore, the grounding of the couple in Christ is emphasized: Christ the Lord "comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony" (GS, 48) and remains with them (*sacramentum permanens*). He assumes human love, purifies it, brings it to fulfilment and gives the married couple, with his Spirit, the ability to live it by permeating every aspect of their life of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the couple, like consecrated persons through a grace proper to them, builds up the Body of Christ and is a domestic Church (cf. LG, 11), so that the Church, through fully understanding her mystery, looks to the Christian family, which manifests that mystery in an authentic way. (42)

The teaching of the Council has since been further developed and clarified by the Popes.

Blessed Pope Paul VI greatly developed the doctrine on marriage and the family. In a particular way, with the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, he highlighted the intrinsic link between conjugal love and the generation of life: "Married love, therefore, requires of husband and wife the full awareness of

¹ We have also published under this topic in Koinonia 2015_1, see <http://www.ciofs.org/portal/index.php/en/spiritual-assistance>

² All documents quoted can be found at <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/it.html>

their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood, which today, rightly enough, is much insisted upon, but which at the same time should be rightly understood. [...] the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society” (*HV*, 10). Later, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI highlighted the relationship between the family and the Church: “One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity. At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of ‘domestic Church.’ This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates” (*EN*, 71); (43).

Pope Saint John Paul II devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love and the theology of the body. In them, he has given the Church a wealth of reflections on the nuptial meaning of the human body and God's plan for marriage and the family from the beginning of creation. In particular, by treating conjugal love, he described how spouses, in their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness. In the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane* and particularly in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II pointed to the family as the “way of the Church.” He also offered a general vision of man and woman's vocation to love and proposed basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the presence of the family in society. “In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up — married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity — through which each human person is introduced into the ‘human family’ and into the ‘family of God,’ which is the Church” (*FC*, 15); (44).

Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, returned to the topic of the truth of the love between man and woman, that is fully illuminated only in light of the love of the Crucified Christ (cf. *DCE*, 2). He stresses that “marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love” (*DCE*, 11). In the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, he highlights the importance of family love as a principle of life in society, a place where we learn the experience of the common good. “It is thus becoming a social and even economic necessity once more to hold up to future generations the beauty of marriage and the family, and the fact that these institutions correspond to the deepest needs and dignity of the person. In view of this, States are called to enact policies promoting the centrality and the integrity of the family, founded on marriage between a man and a woman, the primary vital cell of society, and to assume responsibility for its economic and fiscal needs, while respecting its essentially relational character” (*CiV*, 44); (45).

Pope Francis, in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, treats the connection between the family and faith: “The first setting in which faith enlightens the human city is the family. I think first and foremost of the stable union of man and woman in marriage [...] Promising love for ever is possible when we perceive a plan bigger than our own ideas and undertakings” (*LF*, 52). In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope recalls the centrality of the family among the cultural challenges of today: “The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis, as are all communities and social bonds. In the case of the family, the weakening of these bonds is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another; it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. Marriage now tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction that can be constructed in any way or modified at will. But the indispensable contribution of marriage to society transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple” (*EG*, 66). Pope Francis, in further treating issues relating to the family, has dedicated an organic cycle of catechesis which thoroughly examines the various persons in the family, their different experiences and the stages of life; (46). To crown it all, the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* on love in the family. The opening words say a lot: “The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” (*AL* 1).

In these few lines, the Conclusions of the Synod of October 2015 offer us the teachings of the highest authority of the Church on marriage and the family since the Second Vatican Council till date.

Questions for discussion

1. In the light of the OFS Rule and General Constitutions, in you Fraternity, comment on the following affirmation taken form LG 11: “*the couple, like consecrated persons through a grace proper to them, builds up the Body of Christ and is a domestic Church.*”

2. Blessed Pope Paul VI who gave the OFS its new Rule also wrote: “*One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity*” (EN,71). Discuss in your fraternity on the possible contributions which the families of OFS members has offered or could offer for the apostolate of evangelization in your own context. Take concrete actions.

We finish our encounter praying together: the prayer of the Holy Family.

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