

Apostolic Exhortation

Promulgated by Pope John Paul II on December 15, 1981.

To the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to the Faithful

of the Whole Catholic Church

INTRODUCTION

1. The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture. Many families are living this situation in fidelity to those values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family. Others have become uncertain and bewildered over their role or even doubtful and almost unaware of the ultimate meaning and truth of conjugal and family life. Finally, there are others who are hindered by various situations of injustice in the realization of their fundamental rights.

Knowing that marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives. Supporting the first, illuminating the second and

assisting the others, the church offers her services to every person who wonders about the destiny of marriage and the family.¹

In a particular way the church addresses the young, who are beginning their journey toward marriage and family life, for the purpose of presenting them with new horizons, helping them to discover the beauty and grandeur of the vocation to love and the service of life.

2. A sign of this profound interest of the church in the family was the last Synod of Bishops, held in Rome from Sept. 26 to Oct. 25, 1980. This was a natural continuation of the two preceding synods:² The Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity.

Furthermore, the recent synod is logically connected in some way as well with that on the ministerial priesthood and on justice in the modern world. In fact, as an educating community,

the family must help man to discern his own vocation and to accept responsibility in the search for greater justice, educating him from the beginning in interpersonal relationships, rich in justice and in love.

At the close of their assembly, the synod fathers presented me with a long list of proposals in which they had gathered the fruits of their reflections, which had matured over intense days of work, and they asked me unanimously to be a spokesman before humanity of the church's lively care for the family and to give suitable indications for renewed pastoral effort in this fundamental sector of the life of man and of the church.

As I fulfill that mission with this exhortation, thus actuating in a particular matter the apostolic ministry with which I am entrusted, I wish to thank all the members of the synod for the very valuable contribution of teaching and experience that they made, especially through the propositions, the text of which I am entrusting to the Pontifical Council for the Family with instructions to study it so as to bring out every aspect of its rich content.

3. Illuminated by the faith that gives her an understanding of all the truth concerning the great value of marriage and the family and their deepest meaning, the church once again feels the pressing need to proclaim the Gospel, that is the "good news," to all people without exception, in particular to all those who are

called to marriage and are preparing for it, to all married couples and parents in the world.

The church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.

Willed by God in the very act of creation,³ marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ⁴ and have need of his graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin⁵ and restored to their "beginning,"⁶ that is, to full understanding and the full realization of God's plan.

At a moment of history in which the family is the object of numerous forces that seek to destroy it or in some way to deform it, and aware that the well-being of society and her own good are intimately tied to the good of the family,⁷ the church perceives in a more urgent and compelling way her mission of proclaiming to all people the plan of God for marriage and the family, ensuring their full vitality and human and Christian development, and thus contributing to the renewal of society and of the people of God.

4. Since God's plan for marriage and the family touches men and women in the concreteness of their daily existence in specific social and cultural situations, the church ought to apply herself to understanding the situations

within which marriage and the family are lived today, in order to fulfill her task of serving.⁸

This understanding is therefore an inescapable requirement of the work of evangelization. It is, in fact, to the families of our times that the church must bring the unchangeable and ever new gospel of Jesus Christ, just as it is the families involved in the present conditions of the world that are called to accept and to live the plan of God that pertains to them. Moreover, the call and demands of the spirit resound in the very events of history, and so the church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family by the circumstances, the questions and the anxieties and hopes of the young people, married couples and parents of today.⁹

To this ought to be added a

further reflection of particular importance at the present time. Not infrequently ideas and solutions which are very appealing, but which obscure in varying degrees the truth and the dignity of the human person, are offered to the men and women of today in their sincere and deep search for a response to the important daily problems that affect their married and family life. These views are often supported by the powerful and pervasive organization of the means of social communication, which subtly endangers freedom and the capacity for objective judgment.

Many are already aware of this danger to the human person and are working for the truth. The church, with her evangelical discernment, joins with them, offering her own service to the truth, to freedom and to the dignity of every man and every woman.

CATECHESIS - Lesson One. No catechesis for Lesson One

QUESTIONS - Lesson One.

1. In article 3 the Pope writes:

“Willed by God in the very act of creation, marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ and have need of his graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin and restored to their ‘beginning.’” (*Refer to Lesson One Enrichment*)
God’s plan in the “beginning” was for marriage to be a lifelong and harmonious communion of husband and wife, out of which children would spring as a fruit of their love.

Q. What disturbed God’s original plan?

2. **Q. What are the day to day “wounds of sin” from which Christ must heal our marriages and families?** (Give concrete examples).

3. Q. How can we, inclined to weakness and sin, seek Christ's healing grace? (Again, be concrete)

4. The Pope writes in article 1 that the family "has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture."
Q. What are some of those changes? Discuss their effects on marriage and family life.

5. In article 3, the Pope writes:
"The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled." Recall introduction discussion: John 21: 15-17
Q. What are the hopes that we place in marriage and the family?

6. Q. Why can these hopes only be fulfilled by accepting the Gospel, the truths taught by Christ and His Church?

7. In article 4 we read:
"Not infrequently, ideas and solutions which are very appealing, but which obscure in varying degrees the truth and the dignity of the human person, are offered to the men and women of today in their sincere and deep search for a response to the important daily problems that affect their married and family life."
Q. Give some examples of these appealing but harmful "ideas and solutions" .

8. The Pope continues: "Many are already aware of this danger to the human person and are working for the truth."
Q. Discuss the names of organizations, apostolates, newsletters, magazines, books, pamphlets, etc. that are working for the truth of marriage and family life? Which of these have you considered most helpful and why?

Enrichment

God' s Original Plan: Further Background and Explanation

Question 1; (cf. Genesis 1:26-31). Along with chapter two of Genesis, this passage about the origin of man and of marriage formed the basis for the Pope's Wednesday audiences on the theology of the body (1979-1984). Transcripts of these audiences have been compiled in a series of four books published by the Daughters of St. Paul: *The Origins of Man and Woman, Blessed are the Pure of Heart, The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy, and Reflections on Humanae Vitae*. They are challenging but rewarding reading for those with a bit of a theological background.

In his audience of November 14, 1979, the Pope said, regarding the creation of man in the image of God:

"...the complete and definitive creation of 'man' (subjected first to the experience of original solitude) is expressed in giving life to that communion of persons that man and woman form.

"Man becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, right 'from the beginning' not only an image in which there is reflected the solitude of a Person who rules the world, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons" (3).

Recall that the fundamental doctrine of the Trinity is critical: God is *three Persons* in one divine nature -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So God, in his very essence, is a *community*. An intimate relationship of understanding and love is at the very heart of God Himself. We could even refer to God as the first "Family."

When we say that we are created in the image of God, we do not mean simply that we resemble God in being persons endowed with intellect and free will. That is true, but the deeper imaging relates to our being created for communion with one another, mirroring God' s communion in the Trinity. There is no more profound human image of that communion than that of husband and wife.

The Pope is saying that we do not see the image of God most profoundly in Adam and Eve as individuals, but in Adam and Eve as an intimate communion of persons. Here the sublime beauty and dignity of marriage and family life are unveiled! This is God' s original plan for marriage.