

THE GIFT OF LIFE: OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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Introduction

I sincerely thank the Pontifical Academy for this kind invitation to me in my capacity as President of the Pontifical Council for the Family. This is a frontier theme which we have in common, and which, in a laudable initiative, this Academy has begun to treat in a systematic way.

I will begin by specifying some elements of these lines, which are only material in the process of elaboration, like an instrument for dialogue.

I have given priority to the theme of the responsibility of the family, even though the responsibility includes society, the State and schools in the civil sphere, about which I will say something with regard to the rights of children at the end, and regarding the responsibility of the Church, parishes, movements and groups that have to help and complement the sacred mission of the family.

I have the following conviction: in *the dialogue* in today's world, especially on the social level, in parliaments and world forums, we have to give greater force to reason in order to share what is possible to know without passing through the riches of faith. It is necessary to share this elementary grammar, especially regarding the family as a 'patrimony of humanity'. However, we cannot renounce the riches and splendors of faith, in the mystery of the Word Incarnate.

1. THE GIFT OF LIFE

This is the original fact that lets us admire the inestimable quality of what is given when we appreciate the One who gives it and those who receive it. 'To admire' is so pertinent and weighty with reasons. Within the Church, reflection has amassed on human life regarding human procre-

ation as the fruit of *total self-giving*. In fact, in *Humanae Vitae*, the truth about man is invoked in which the totality of self-giving maintains the relationship of indissoluble union between the unitive and procreative meanings of conjugal love open to the mystery of life.¹ Between this Encyclical, which is truly prophetic if its anthropological outreach is taken into consideration, and the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, which is like a hymn to life and a strong call to *proclaim* the wonderful ‘good news’, the ‘Gospel of the Family’ is a dramatic appeal with historical contours to safeguard and *defend* it. Some documents of mediation and preparation were the Instruction *Donum Vitae* concerning problems that called for special treatment regarding procreation, which together with some new bioethical questions, warrant illumination in continuity with this teaching, and the Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, which might well have been an Encyclical given its rich, profound content. The Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, and more recently the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* undoubtedly complete an integral view and provide the bases for a solid anthropology. How can we not point out that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* of October 11, 1992, the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Council, is a fact of great importance for the truth that concerns us, a truth that flies on the wings of reason and faith? Today we have this rich inheritance that has given a great aid to Christian anthropology.

Human life is wonderful news that springs forth from God’s loving hands, and which the pages of the Bible let us experience as a torrent of generosity in the formidable mystery of creation. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, God has no other reason to create than his love and goodness, ‘not to increase his glory but to show it forth and to communicate it’, as St. Bonaventure explains.² St. Thomas’ expression is beautiful: *Aperta manu clave amoris creaturae prodierunt* (‘Creatures came into existence when the key of love opened his hand’).³

It is possible to describe a similar irruption of God’s generous love, *Deus est infundens bonitatem in rebus*,⁴ from a horizon of understanding that enables us to have access to, and get immersed in the *secret* of man, in his *mystery*. If there is one thing that calls for the attention of many and is a

¹ Cfr: Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, 13.

² *In II Sent.* I,2,2,1.

³ *Sent.* II, prolog.

⁴ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I. q. 20, a.1.

radical conviction of our Dicastery, it is that today what is at stake, what is decisive is the *humanum*, to refer in a few words to an integral, coherent anthropology.

The density and consistency of this gift lead us to contemplate the convergence of the whole of creation *towards and in* man, created by God, the fruit of the dialogue initiated by Him and kept up until the fullness of time, in the mystery of the incarnate Word.⁵

Man is created not as 'something' but 'someone', as a 'you' that springs forth from God who is love. We are on the sacred terrain of the *humanum*, in an integral sense, led by the hand of the Second Vatican Council that enlightens us about the quality of the gift, created and redeemed in Christ, man in his dignity as a wounded and ransomed *image* that exists because he is personally loved by the One who breathed the spirit into him: 'The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light (...) by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear'.⁶

The foundation of the truth about man, his dignity, and his unique, unrepeatable calling is to be an 'image and likeness of God'. This demonstrates that man, the only earthly creature God loved for himself, 'cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself'.⁷ We are in the heart of the *humanum*. To stray from this truth is to take a short cut to inhumanity. This was the prophetic warning of Romano Guardini who said that man without truth denies his reality as a man and is dehumanized.

2. RESPONSIBILITY

The personal capacity to respond to someone, to another, is a property of our freedom and the development of a person as a personality, and in our transcendent vocation, that Someone is God. Anyone who is more capable of responding, in a synthesis of knowing and wanting, as the action that pertains to a person, involves at the same time our relative autonomy, our finitude, our conditioned and wounded freedom, and our relational being. We respond to a Word that addresses us and turns our response into a voca-

⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

tion because it has called us with the most unique, personal 'you' in the fundamental dialogue. It is the Word that calls and, in so doing, creates through its loving will. In this sense, the 'Fiat' of creation, crowned by the creation of man made from nothing, not from anything pre-existing, weaves our own mystery for which we are an 'end' of creation, which leads to the final end: the encounter with the Lord. This is a basic content of a biblical anthropology that makes what we can access through reason more profound and luminous.

In a conception of the person as open to relation and encounter, Martin Buber rightly states: 'What is meant by person is precisely someone that has been called and responds'.⁸

We might say that education is preparation to respond for our actions and choices in the adventure of our life.

3. THE FAMILY'S RESPONSIBILITY TOWARDS CHILDREN AND YOUTH

'Our responsibility' is at the same time shared, starting from the community par excellence, the family, with its original and specific tasks that cannot be completely delegated. The family is indeed the basis of society, the primordial pillar, where the gift of life, the gift of children, is received with a loving and particular tenderness: 'Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. *Children are really the supreme gift of marriage* and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents'.⁹ The emphasis is meant to recall that Paul VI expressly wanted this statement. It was pointed out in No. 48 that '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...', and, 'For the good of the spouses and their off-springs as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond (*intuitu boni*) no longer depends on human decisions alone'. This has very great bearing on 'the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself... By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are

⁸ *Il principio dialogico e altri Saggi*, S. Paolo, Milan 1993, p. 261.

⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown’.

The family is the privileged place, like a cradle and sanctuary of life, where *integral procreation*, which is not reduced to conception and birth, is possible and represents its great responsibility.

There is a chain that must be put down as a premise: Children are a gift that comes from God, from the Trinitarian We, in order to manifest God’s goodness and strength through the goods he grants to his creatures. They, in the mystery of creation with which parents are associated, come from the *we* constituted by reciprocal and total self-giving. It is a *communion* between the I and You that becomes a community in which the fruit of love originates and is treated as a *you* that gains awareness of its personal being, its eminent dignity, and its unique, unrepeatable reality by virtue of its vocation. The *Letter to Families* delved deeply into this aspect: ‘When a man and woman in marriage mutually give and receive each other in the unity of “one flesh”, the logic of the sincere gift of self becomes a part of their life. Without this, marriage would be empty; whereas a communion of persons, built on this logic, becomes a communion of parents. When they transmit *life to the child, a new human “thou” becomes a part of the horizon of the “we” of the spouses, a person whom they will call by a new name: “our son...; our daughter...”* (...) a human being, first expected for nine months and then “revealed” to parents, brothers and sisters. The process from conception and growth in the mother’s womb to birth makes it possible to create a space within which the new creature can be revealed as a “gift” (...). *Its existence is already a gift, the first gift of the Creator to the creature* (...) the common good of the family is fulfilled through that same spousal love, as embodied in the newborn child’.¹⁰

A child, in a much more concrete way, is a common, unique and unrepeatable good for its family. “This man” has, in every instance, *the right to fulfill himself on the basis of his human dignity*. It is precisely this dignity that establishes a person’s place among others, and above all, in the family. The family is indeed – more than any other human reality – the place where an individual can exist “for himself” through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution which neither can nor should be replaced: it is the “sanctuary of life”.¹¹

¹⁰ *Gratissimam Sane*, 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

Here a *new responsibility* arises with regard to the child, the *responsibility for that particular common good*,¹² a joint responsibility of the man and the woman, 'the responsibility for the new life which they have brought into existence'.¹³

When a mother conceives a human being, an education already begins in the maternal womb, like 'begetting' in a spiritual sense, for the man who must live in truth and love. 'The first months of the child's presence in the mother's womb bring about a particular bond which already possesses an educational significance of its own. The *mother*, even before giving birth, *does not only give shape to the child's body, but also, in an indirect way, to the child's whole personality*'.¹⁴

We could say that a child sets up with its mother, and reciprocally, a dialogue, in an unarticulated language in which the presence of a new life is experienced and her loving protection and preparation for the birth of the one who will begin the adventure of life with a high degree of vulnerability and thus require all the care due to him. We are well aware that this is a stage which psychologists and educators are investigating with interest. The peace, love and tenderness of the home are experienced by the child, 'the "fruit" of its parents' love and mutual self-giving. Let us not forget that *fetus* means *fruit*. There is a *reciprocal influence* between mother and child in which the father takes part who must collaborate and offer his care and support.¹⁵

'In rearing children, the "we" of the *parents*, of husband and wife, develops into the "we" of the *family*',¹⁶ which is for a full humanity. This educational process will later reach a more mature stage of 'self-education' when the man begins to 'educate himself'. This is a task for the whole family through the 'grace of its state' and the specific 'charisma' of the family community.

We should not be afraid to speak about Christian education as a great responsibility. 'We have been completely instructed in God's own way of teaching by the eternal Word of the Father who, by becoming man, revealed to man the authentic and integral greatness of his humanity, that is, being a child of God'. 'Through *Christ* all education, within the family and outside of it, *becomes part of God's own saving pedagogy*, which is addressed to indi-

¹² Cfr. *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ Cfr. *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

viduals and families and culminates in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord's Death and Resurrection'.¹⁷ In this case, it should be said that every man is an 'image' of God that must grow according to the perfect 'image' of the Father, who is Christ, the 'image of the invisible God',¹⁸ and through Baptism is regenerated as a 'child', which is the most complete form of being an 'image'.

These reflections have to pass through the concept of 'human ecology', as presented to us in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. This is not only to point out the respect that man owes to creation, but also to not overlook the fact that the human person must be the object of this 'ecology' so that his life will not be hindered by the truth threatened by 'structures of sin' that can oppress a human being.¹⁹

Therefore, in a particularly rich text in this Encyclical, we read the following: 'The first and fundamental structure for "human ecology" is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the *family founded on marriage*, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny'.²⁰ The family, as the *sanctuary of life* is sacred: 'It is the place in which life – the gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life'.²¹

The family and the education it imparts strengthen the defenses against the temptations to not respect the principle of subsidiarity and the relative sovereignty of the family, against the modern totalitarianism that negates the transcendent value of the dignity of the human person and throws the social order into ruin and the worst alienation: 'The root of modern totalitarianism is to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person...the visible image of the invisible God...'.²²

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Col 1:15.

¹⁹ Cfr. CA, 38.

²⁰ CA, 39.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 44.

Here it is good to reflect on a rich expression of Saint Thomas which strangely, to my knowledge, has not been used in the Papal Magisterium: *The family is like a spiritual uterus*.²³

4. CHILDHOOD, ADOLESCENCE AND YOUTH

In the educational process, as a responsibility of the family, authority, love, example and doctrinal teaching must be taken into consideration. A will to educate must exist and the fear to guide must be put aside by overcoming the fears of invading the freedom of others, as many psychologists and educators warn today. In many cases, the family gives up or does not fulfill its responsibility or does not present itself in fact as the place where the fundamental human and Christian values are transmitted that ensure and give meaning to life. The fragility, emptiness and lack of a real, stable home represents high social costs for children. John Paul II referred to orphans 'with living parents'.²⁴ Children do not have real support and backing in the home, and studies are plentiful that indicate how the difficulty emerges from this for scholastic learning and performance, and for the manifestations of violence that make the institutions shudder.

It is well known that when the values and reasons for living, for giving a meaning to life are not offered by society, by the family, children, especially adolescents and youths, tend to seek them in false and artificial forms of compensation such as drugs. Liberation in these cases, both through ways close to Victor Frank's logotherapy or to a clear, defined evangelization to remake the personality, consists in the vocation as a personal response, affirmed in a re-structured world.

Quite a bit has been said about the Peter Pan Syndrome, which does not allow positive development because with the complicity of others, a child wants to remain as such. He is not capable of taking on responsibilities gradually according to his age, and sometimes settles into a kind of pseudo-protection.

²³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Quodlibeta*, II q. 4 art. 2 co., and *Summa Theologiae* II-II q. 10, a. 12 co.: *postquam ex utero egreditur, antequam usum liberi arbitrii habeat, contentur sub arentum cura sicut sub quodam spiritali utero*.

²⁴ *Gratissimam Sane*, 14.

Aristotle wrote, 'An animal is taught, for its ends, through the magisterium of nature, but we need our own exercise and the advice of others'.²⁵

Today another syndrome is reason for concern: the syndrome of endless adolescence. This is the theme dealt with by Professor Tony Anatrella in one of his important books.²⁶

Adolescence is a stage that runs the risk of becoming a *state in life* into which one settles. The word in vogue is 'to stay young'. Slogans invite us to look after our physical form, to be uncomplicated and spontaneous, free from any limits in the affective and sexual spheres. Getting old is a sickness. Adults behave like youths in order to stay like them. The process of identification is inverted: young people are not the ones that must identify with adults, but the opposite. To stay young is to leave the door open to all possible choices and lives.²⁷

An adolescent tends to escape or take refuge in a group in which he runs the risk of being assimilated, thereby losing his ability to assert himself. While adolescents defend spontaneity and freedom, they are easily attracted and seduced by 'models', fashions and known behaviors. In the group he lives his selfishness, and the passage to an oblique sense does not take place, a limitation that is of little help for greater commitments, especially marriage, which is usually put off. While in an agrarian civilization there is practically no psychological space for youth because work is taken on early, or marriage, which requires assuming adult attitudes, today the space is growing where no defined responsibilities are taken on. Perhaps youth is not lived today as Marcuse thought in his *One-dimensional Man* where young people almost made up a *social class*, as in the 60s, but there are irruptions that are similar. A young person risks losing himself in the group, in the mass, which impedes his development.

One special aspect concerns language, with a kind of absence of the word, almost like aphasia. One does not seek to build a language, but rather to express an emotional state. This turns into a 'coded' language, with new terms used by the group, which substitutes a real conceptual language. Sound annuls words. In this way one falls victim to a kind of relational poverty. Another question refers to music, but the lack of time does not allow us to deal with this.²⁸

²⁵ *De Anima*, II.

²⁶ T. Anatrella, *Interminable adolescence*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1988.

²⁷ Cfr. *Ibid.*, No. 174.

²⁸ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

The easy-going behaviors are well-known in relation to which there would allegedly be no principles, norms or laws. In this way a world is destroyed that ought to be built with solid values.

In a broader context, an *adolescent society* is spoken about: adolescents identify with their way of life, their way of dressing, their kind of thinking and language. Professor Anatrella states, 'It is no longer the children and adolescents that identify with adults, but the opposite. Adults take adolescence as a model, a reference point'.²⁹

Of course, one necessary ingredient for this phenomenon is a 'democratic kind of family', as presented by Anthony Giddens in his work, *The Third Way*.³⁰ He pointed to family breakdown, which opens the possibilities to 'all kinds' of families, with their corresponding apology, as occurs in other nations too. He mentioned that in the year 1994, in the United Kingdom, 32% of births took place outside of marriage, 35% in France, 47% in Denmark, and 50% in Sweden.³¹

5. THE YOUNG, A PROBLEM, A BURDEN OR HOPE?

Four years ago, I took part in a meeting on children at the United Nations and represented the Holy See. My attention was drawn by the growing interest of most of the Delegations, with a few exceptions, in the relationship between childhood and the family. Many delegations were invited made up by 'children' who, according to the criteria of the United Nations, strangely included those up to 18 years of age. The children and adolescents carried very expressive placards and posters that made their protest and purpose evident. 'We are not the *source* of problems, but the *resource* to solve them'. They put themselves along the line of a 'gift', of what they *contribute* to society, the family and the future. They are a 'resource', the basic one, in terms of humanity. I was not able to completely identify the object of their protest and their interesting defense, but I thought that they believed society today considered them a threat. They reasserted themselves instead as a hopeful response.

Today's world, in some regions, without excluding many families, classifies children and youth, for different reasons, as a burden, a problem it is

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

³⁰ Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*, Polity Press, 1998, pp. 89-99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

not always willing to 'accept'. Rather than being gratification and a way of fulfillment, human completeness, and the success of a vocation as persons, children would limit or reduce their space for 'freedom' and enjoyment, in a sad distortion of values. This can have presuppositions and premises of a different nature. There are those of an *economic* kind, and this is one of the aspects of a demographic, neo-Malthusian catastrophism, against which the Church has waged a difficult battle that may subside with the collapse of the population myth. In very many cases, the reality is raised of misery, a kind of poverty that does not ensure food, education, housing and hygiene to children including, and perhaps especially, in rich countries. This is a real problem not only when employment is uncertain and unstable, but also when the father's and mother's salary is not enough to get by. We are well aware that some economic conditioning leads to a drastic limitation of children and the fear of new life. It is not only the drama of hedonism and the fear of self-giving and sacrifice.

In other cases, there can be conditioning of a psychological kind that tends to avoid any commitments, challenges and hardship.

For some aspects, children and youth can be a problem. Someone who loves children viscerally recognizes this, and so he is not under suspicion. He considers hatred towards children infernal. *L'enfant constitue une gêne* refers to economic questions that no socio-economic system can totally erase. This is corroborated by the illustrious historian despite the fact that new life is essential, especially where the 'demographic winter' has set in and the real situation is becoming pitiful, as he announced decades ago in his work, *La peste blanche*: 'We have never had such a need for children because we are transforming Europe and America into an enormous old age home where children's smiles have been banished'.³²

Time has shown that the forecast for America is less drastic. Against this background, his protest assumes greater importance 'so that a child can live in a society that has liberalized' and defends killing innocent life as a right. 'Hatred towards the child has grown, which has motivated the demand to kill it *in utero*, that is, in the very heart of life, at the absolute beginning of childhood'.³³ This is a moral protest: 'A civilization is judged in relation to children *in* and *ex utero*'.³⁴

³² Pierre Chaunu, *La mémoire de l'éternité*, Ed. Robert Laffont, Paris 1975, pp. 118 and 120.

³³ Pierre Chaunu, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

The contrast is more striking with regard to the 'gift' of life: 'Childhood contains in potentiality almost all the 'happiness' that a human life can have (...). A society without children is the prophetic figure of hell'.³⁵

It would not appear that society has redeemed the gift of children, and John Paul II does not hide the possible difficulties this creates: 'It is true that for the parents the birth of a child means more work, new financial burdens and further inconveniences, all of which can lead to the temptation not to want another birth...These are some of the disturbing questions which men and women today find hard to escape'.³⁶

A lack of space in a world that seems to have less and less room is mentioned,³⁷ and demographic reasons that were pointed out by Paul VI in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*,³⁸ which are in some way less general today, and in some places have been overcome. Spouses must trust in Divine Providence, cultivate a spirit of sacrifice, and glorify the Creator when they fulfill their function to procreate with 'generous, human and Christian responsibility'.³⁹ Therefore, they are invited to accept courageously a greater number of children 'in order to educate them properly'.⁴⁰ This is a question of integral human education which the family can offer, even in poverty.

Scholastic education (which is always desirable) may be lacking, but not the transmission of the faith and the incarnation of human and Christian values, which are essential in order to truly educate.

In the family, 'a child's presence should be felt' as a *gift* and a *responsibility*, a great 'gift' that is worth much more than the 'burdens' a child may bring. The fear of life thrusts man into the abysses of inhumanity. In the final analysis, for a family to want, welcome and educate a child is a permanent task of love that must be carried out with generous love, and love makes the burden lighter, as Saint Augustine noted.

6. SOME ASPECTS REGARDING SEXUALITY: FROM SELFISHNESS TO OBLATION

This is a responsibility shared by the family and youth to make possible and respect *true self-giving* in love, in order to dream of, and consolidate a *stable project* in marriage.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁶ Letter to Families *Gratissimam Sane*, 11.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Cfr. HV, 21, 22.

³⁹ GS, 50.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Freud recognizes in a certain way the concept of a kind of sexuality that makes the transition from immaturity to adulthood, albeit without any ethical implications. It is obviously less than the description. Selfish 'love' is not given as an authentic gift, but submerged in pleasure, in the 'drive', which uses another person as an 'instrument', overlooking his/her dignity as a person, with whom no commitment is made with a real bond that expresses self-giving. In this case, the *oblative aspect* does not come about. This implies a very different *quality*. This difference is considered with a nearsighted view or like someone contemplating caricatures. In this way, human sexuality and its meaning are erased in ambiguous strokes in which freedom is reduced, and preponderance is attributed to the 'animal' aspect, to what is not human and not subject to the regulation of reason. This falls victim to the assimilation of instinct which is human and not absorbed in excessive conditioning or determinism that makes decisions and choices something not free.

In today's world, there is a tendency to acquiesce and let certain 'customs' pass as unimportant and licit, behaviors that tend to become generalized.

Perhaps the distinction that Professor Campanini proposes is not new between sexuality linked to marriage, and another that is not related to it. Sex that is not tied to marriage would allegedly have no consequences or be part of a real responsibility, neither on the part of the family of origin that should give the essentials for a committed love based on what one sees in one's own parents, nor would it compromise the young person or make him responsible. He does not have to make an account to anyone or to society. This, on the other, in what is called the West, is not something that is required, different from other cultures and religions where the penalties and punishments are extremely rigorous.

Professor Xavier Lacroix offers a good synthesis of the situation in *Le corps de chair*.⁴¹

Before marriage, an adolescent's activity would generally be the freest imaginable, according to R. Caillois. This also includes initiation ceremonies that introduce him into the social area.⁴²

Roger Bastide introduces two kinds of sexuality: *social sexuality*, tied to marriage, which is strongly regulated, and *libidinous sexuality*, given over to pleasure and practiced like a game. This would be completely individual and have no symbolic value.⁴³

⁴¹ X. Lacroix, *Le corps de chair*, Paris, Cerf, 1992.

⁴² Cfr. R. Caillois, *L'homme et le sacré*, Gallimard, Coll. 'idées', p. 135.

⁴³ R. Bastide, *Sociologie et psychanalyse*, PUF, 1972, pp. 261-267.

The disassociation between *eros* and *gamos* has been a Western pagan temptation that is returning in view of the long period of time that passes between a young person's first sexual relations (according to one kind of research), and the much later age when marriage is contracted: e.g., in Italy, this is approximately 30 years of age, and this is also the trend in many countries. In other latitudes, puberty may occur earlier.

Over a great interval of time, sex education is more urgent because ten or fifteen years can pass, and without a sense of commitment and respect, debatable behaviors can set in that are not theoretical risks.

At present, there is a tendency to make a distinction in adolescent and youth behavior between *operational sexuality*, which is focused on the experience of discovering the body of another and one's own, like a rite of passage that breaks with childhood and the affirmation of virility,⁴⁴ and *relational sexuality* that is affective, sentimental, and tender; like a novel,⁴⁵ and would not lack meaning. It may even include an encouraging position of seeking approval.

Fortunately, many psychologists point out the obvious disadvantages that must also be considered in a moral analysis, which show that the danger exists of blocking affective development in psychosexual maturity. As a matter of fact, by getting used to living sexuality on the simple level of pleasure, a young person becomes progressively incapable of living it, even much later, as a language and a commitment. The passage to oblation becomes very difficult.

The warning made by T. Anatrella, a recognized expert, is very pertinent: 'Experiences are not what is going to favor the association of affectivity with genitality (...). By getting used to living impulsive activities, one becomes incapable of integrating one's sexuality and affectivity in a loving project with fidelity and duration'.⁴⁶

7. IN THE LIGHT OF THE ENCYCLICAL *DEUS CARITAS EST*

The union of love through marriage, in an integral conception of human sexuality, is stressed in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* in the first

⁴⁴ D. Marcelli, *L'adolescence aux mille visages*, Paris, Ed. Univ., 1988.

⁴⁵ There would appear to be a new sympathy among young persons. 'They do not seek to exclude anything from their symbiosis, even though this is not accompanied by a project of continuity'. M. Legrain, *La vie du couple chez certaines jeunes*, *Etudes*, 354, 1, 1981, p. 63.

⁴⁶ T. Anatrella, *Interminable adolescence*, Paris, Ed. du Cerf, 1988.

part: 'Eros is somehow rooted in man's very nature...eros directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive'.⁴⁷ For this reason, it points out that 'man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become 'complete'.⁴⁸ It refers to *Genesis 2:24* in the well-known text that is always good to deepen regarding what it is to be 'only one flesh'. On the other hand, 'Eros, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity'.⁴⁹

It is essential to provide children with *values* on which they can assert themselves and build in order to give meaning to life and a meaning to themselves, and the family can and must communicate this. Even though it does not occur automatically in all cases, it is not necessary to refer to many arguments to confirm that where there is family instability, it is more difficult for children to find security and confidence to face life in a positive way.⁵⁰

This urgent need to communicate certainties in order to face life and cultivate the virtues is more pressing in societies where a 'cultural revolution' is taking place, where natural law is demolished, and where an altar is raised to subjectivism and moral relativism. Everything is revised and subject to changes that are capricious and profoundly harmful to man who destroys himself in this way. Just as in the case of drug addiction where a subject experiences an 'existential depression' from which he seeks artificial refuge, so too society changes the rules of the game that are fundamental for leading a human life. Catastrophe soon follows when a radical inversion of values comes like a torment, or when conceptual confusion, which is the worst defeat, is taken on tranquilly like a non-problematic uncertainty raised to the magnitude of a system. Everything possible is done to show that values are insignificant, with irony, and 'paradoxically regression and transgression are presented *as virtue*'.⁵¹

John Paul II denounced something similar in society and in the preparation of iniquitous laws that make crime pass for a right. Today it is not rare to see that in order to destroy the rules more easily, they are scorned because they are inconvenient for a problematic way of life. 'By interrupt-

⁴⁷ Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, 11.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁰ Cfr. T. Anatrella, *La liberté détruite*, Flammarion, 2001, p. 146.

⁵¹ Cfr. T. Anatrella, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

ing the transmission of moral values an individual deprives himself of a source of being'.⁵²

8. THE RESPONSIBILITY AND RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

Historically, the Christian faith has been the greatest defense of what a child is and represents. It has never accepted that a child would be conceived of as a 'thing', or that its dignity would be denied. The inhuman behavior that was practiced in Greece, Spain or Rome, which left up to the will of adults the decision as to whether or not a newborn child would live, went against the requirements of faith. Our faith has gradually humanized the defense and recognition of children's rights the declaration of which has been recent, in the 1989 United Nations Convention.

Therefore, a child's right to life, which must be recognized before birth, from its conception, is not something – as Benedict XVI said – that is negotiable, and the reinterpretations or biased interpretations have never been accepted that were introduced into the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 in relation to article 3, and into the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* mentioned earlier. The position has been coherent with the respect indicated in the *Letter to Diognetus* to not waste the unborn child.⁵³ All forms of abuse of children, following the teaching of John Paul II, have been the constant concern of our Dicastery. All forms of slavery, child labor, their trade and exploitation, which are unfortunately still present, have warranted a firm denouncement on our part. This attitude has been known from the time the Church introduced the cradle in order to ensure respect for the child, down to recognition of the child's higher interest, which must be present for its adoption, and to avoid anything inhuman and less acceptable to a child's integral good in relation to same-sex de facto unions, because this does not support a child's up-bringing and offers a 'false model' that is just a caricature of the family. One cannot fail to be astonished that this has been accepted in well known laws in Holland, Spain, Belgium and the United Kingdom, with the danger of exporting such legislation to other countries as if it were a conquest of modernity.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵³ Cfr. *Letter to Diognetus*, Chapter 5; Funk 1, 318.

Conclusion

I have preferred to refer to some challenges of the family and youth, themes that have been treated more fully in other books.⁵⁴ In a certain way, in this section I have limited myself to a kind of pathology of adolescence and the family that we can neither generalize nor hide. These are dangers and trends that we all must face, especially the family, and which society, the State, must privilege in their struggle and mission, and aid the irreplaceable mission of the family with the converging collaboration of the educational community.

Fortunately, the crisis is moving us towards greater commitment and founded hope, especially if we put in function the enormous energies of the family and youth, with their possibilities and riches.

In the Year of the Family in 1994, I questioned the author of 'The Uncertain Family', the French sociologist L. Roussel, in a Congress in which he synthesized his interesting and pessimistic work. He put up for doubt the existence of the family in the future because of its accelerated breakdown and said it was like a tunnel. When I asked him if he could see any light at the end of the tunnel, he answered: 'Yes, I see children'. Let us say children, and this hope is the responsibility of all, especially the family and the Church whose eyes are illuminated by man, *Gloria Dei vivens homo, vita autem hominis visio Dei*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ A. López Trujillo, *La grande sfida. Famiglia, dignità della persona e umanizzazione*, Ed. Città Nuova, Rome 2004.

⁵⁵ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* IV, 20, 7.