

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 40

The family, the vital cell of society 1

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Today we enter Part II of the *Compendium on the Social Doctrine of the Church: The Family, the Vital Cell of Society*; specifically, we focus on Chapter 5, I: *The Family, the First Natural Society*.

“The importance and centrality of the family with regard to the person and society is repeatedly underlined by Sacred Scripture. *It is not good that the man should be alone* (Gen 2:18). From the texts that narrate the creation of man (Gen 1: 26-28, 2:7-24) there emerges how - in God’s plan – the couple constitutes “the first form of communion between persons.”

Eve is created like Adam as the one who, in her otherness, completes him (cf Gen 2:8) in order to form with him *one flesh* (Gen 2:24; Mt 19:5-6) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). At the same time, both are involved in the work of procreation, which makes them co-workers with the Creator: *Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth* (Gen 1:28). The family is presented, in the Creator’s plan as ‘the primary place of ‘humanisation’ for the person and society’ and the ‘cradle of life and love’.”

“It is in the family that one learns the love and faithfulness of the Lord, and the seed to respond to these (Ex 12:25-27, 13:8,14-15; Deut 6:20-25, 13:7-11; 1 Sam 3:13). It is in the family that children learn their first and most important lessons of practical wisdom, to which the virtues are connected (Prov 1:8-9, 4:1-4, 6: 20-21; Sir 3:1-16, 7:27-28). Because of all this, the Lord himself is the guarantor of the love and fidelity of married life (Mal 2:14-15).”

“Jesus was born and lived in a concrete family, accepting all its characteristic features and he conferred the highest dignity on the institution of marriage, making it a sacrament of the new covenant (Mt 19:3-9). It is in this new perspective that the couple finds the fullness of its dignity and the family its solid foundation.”

“Enlightened by the radiance of the biblical message, the Church considers the family as the first natural society, with underived rights that are proper to it, and places it at the center of social life. Relegating the family ‘to a subordinate or secondary role excluding it from its rightful position in society, would be to inflict grave harm on the authentic growth of society as a whole.’ (*Gratissimam Sane*).

The family, in fact is born of the intimate communion of life and love founded on the marriage between one man and one woman (*Gaudium et Spes*). It possesses its own specific and original social dimension, in that it is the principal place of interpersonal relationships, the first and vital cell of society (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). The family is

a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order.”

Importance of the family for the person

“The family has central importance in reference to the person. It is in this cradle of life and love that people are born and grow; when a child is conceived, society receives the gift of a new person who is called ‘from the innermost depths of self to communion with others and to the giving of self to others.’ (*Christifideles Laici*).

It is in the family therefore, that the mutual giving of self on the part of man and woman united in marriage creates an environment of life in which children ‘develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny’ (*Centesimus Annus*).”

“In the climate of natural affection which unites the members of a family unit, persons are recognised and learn responsibility in the wholeness of their personhood. 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 be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person.

“The obligations of its members, in fact, are not limited by the terms of a contract but derive from the very essence of the family, founded on the irrevocable marriage covenant and given structure in the relationships that arise within it following the generation or adoption of children.”