

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 47

The family is the sanctuary of life 1

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The birth of a baby is often surrounded with lots of excitement. In the majority of instances couples anxiously await the birth, grandparents anxiously await the birth of their first grandchild, sisters and brothers are anxious to be aunts and uncles, previous children of a married couple want a younger one to play with, friends want an opportunity to hang out together and plan baby showers.

Basically everyone gets involved, sometimes even before a couple “gets pregnant”. The birth of a baby has a way of bringing people together and “sets in motion a dynamism of love”. This is explained to us in a more profound manner in the *Compendium*.

“Conjugal love is by its nature open to the acceptance of life (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). The dignity of the human being, called to proclaim the goodness and fruitfulness that come from God, is eminently revealed in the task of procreation: “Human fatherhood and motherhood, while remaining biologically similar to that of other living beings in nature, contain in an essential and unique way a ‘likeness’ to God which is the basis of the family as a community of human life, as a community of persons united in love (*communio personarum*) (*Gratissimam Sane*).”

“Procreation expresses the social subjectivity of the family and sets in motion a dynamism of love and solidarity between the generations upon which society is founded. It is necessary to rediscover the social value of that portion of the common good inherent in each new human being.

Every child “becomes a gift to its brothers, sisters, parents and entire family. Its life becomes a gift for the very people who were givers of life and who cannot help but feel its presence, its sharing in their life and its contribution to their common good and to that of the community of the family (*Gratissimam Sane*).”

The baby must be welcomed in the proper environment - a loving home, where it can be nurtured, develop, learn to receive and give love and be protected. It becomes important to encourage this environment, so that all babies born have a chance to receive all the gifts of stable family, which will ensure that they are well-adjusted and productive members of society.

“The family founded on marriage is truly the sanctuary of life, ‘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 (*Centesimus Annus*). Its role in promoting and building the culture of life (*Evangelium Vitae*) against “the possibility of a destructive ‘anti-civilisation’, as so many present trends and situations confirm (*Gratissimam Sane*), is decisive and irreplaceable.”

“Christian families have then, in virtue of the sacrament received, a particular mission that makes them witnesses and proclaimers of the Gospel of life.

This is a commitment which in society takes on the value of true and courageous prophecy. It is for this reason that “serving the Gospel of life ... means that the family, particularly through its membership in family associations, works to ensure that the laws and institutions of the State in no way violate the right to life, from conception to natural death, but rather protect and promote it (*Evangelium Vitae*.)”

Because of the importance of the environment from birth for the development of the human being, it is important that the decision to have children is done in a responsible manner. The entry of children into the world should be well planned by couples. God indicated that one of the key purposes of marriage was procreation. Children are to be welcomed.

This however, does not mean irresponsibly having children the couple is not properly able to care for. Couples can plan the timing of their children all with the view to fulfilling their obligation to God first, themselves second (that is their responsibility to support each other in their salvation), their family third and then the society.

On the flip side, this choice to plan for parenthood, does not mean that couples should not want to have children. It can be a selfish decision – one must always bear in mind – God’s purpose for marriage and the family.

“The family contributes to the social good in an eminent fashion through responsible motherhood and fatherhood, the spouses special participation in God’s work of creation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). The weight of this responsibility must not be used as a justification for being selfishly closed but must guide the decisions of the spouses in a generous acceptance of life.

“In relation to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised both in the duly pondered and generous decision to have a large family, and in the decision, made for serious reasons and in respect of the moral law, to avoid for a time or even indeterminately a new birth (*Gaudium et Spes*).

The motivations that should guide the couple in exercising responsible motherhood and fatherhood originate in the full recognition of their duties towards God, towards themselves, towards the family and towards society in a proper hierarchy of values.”

Next week this discussion continues with “the methods of practising responsible procreation”.