

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 55

The family as active participant in social life – Society at the service of the family

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Over the past sixteen weeks, the focus has been on “The Family the Vital Cell of Society”. Today we conclude the discussion of the family, by highlighting the key principles that society as a whole, and we as individuals, must follow in order to ensure that the family is preserved.

“The starting point for a correct and constructive relationship between the family and society is the recognition of the subjectivity and the social priority of the family.” What makes the family a social priority? The family is a social priority because it:

- is the basic unit of social organisation
- makes a significant contribution to each individual by providing an environment where he/she can learn to receive and give love and develop the self-confidence to become a productive member of society, contributing to its advancement
- is essential to providing the socialisation for children and teenagers, that is required to function successfully in the world.
- provides the environment to counterweight the stresses of everyday life for adults and ensure that they remain emotionally stable

The intimate relationship between the society and the family requires that “society should never fail in its fundamental task of respecting and fostering the family (*Familiaris Consortio*).

Society, and in particular State institutions, respecting the priority and “antecedence” of the family, is called to guarantee and foster the genuine identity of family life and to avoid and fight all that alters or wounds it. This requires political and legislative action to safeguard family values, from the promotion of intimacy and harmony within families to the respect for unborn life and to the effective freedom of choice in educating children.

Therefore, neither society nor the State may absorb, substitute or reduce the social dimension of the family; rather, they must honor it, recognize it, respect it and promote it according to the principle of subsidiarity (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).”

This means that efforts to recognise legalising of artificial methods of conceiving children, and termination of the lives of unborn children should not be encouraged. What must instead be promoted are the values that encourage a respect for life and everyone born into it, as well as putting the preconditions in place to ensure that every new born is welcomed in a proper environment that will ensure their success in this life and their salvation.

“Society’s service of the family becomes concrete in recognizing, respecting and promoting the rights of the family (*Familiaris Consortio*). This means authentic and effective family policies must be brought about with specific interventions that are able to meet the needs arising from the rights of the family as such. In this sense, there is a necessary pre-requisite, one that is essential and indispensable: the recognition – which entails protecting, appreciating and promoting – the identity of the family, the natural society founded on marriage.

This recognition represents a clear line of demarcation between the family, understood correctly, and all other forms of cohabitation which, by their very nature, deserve neither the name nor the status of family.”

“The recognition on the part of civil society and the State of the priority of the family over every other community, and even over the reality of the State, means overcoming merely individualistic conceptions and accepting the family dimension as the indispensable cultural and political perspective in the consideration of persons. This is not offered as an alternative, but rather as a support and defence of the very rights that people have as individuals.

This perspective makes it possible to draw up normative criteria for a correct solution to different social problems, because people must not be considered only as individuals but also in relation to the family nucleus to which they belong, the specific values and needs of which must be taken into due account.”

Bearing all this in mind we must remember those persons who do not live in ideal conditions i.e. those who have been abandoned by family, street children, children born as a result of rape, families who are unable to provide for their members.

Those of us who are in loving families have an opportunity to seek those who have not been as fortunate as we have been, to assist them and welcome them into the community of loving persons as well as lobby to ensure that the State puts the pillars in place to ensure that those persons who are disadvantaged by life circumstances are not deprived of their basic human rights of food and shelter, love, security and esteem.