

ARTICLE 30

Legio Sanctae Familiae – The Legion of the Holy Family

Marriage a gift from God

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Marriage! A Great Sacrament

Pope Pius XI - Casti Connubi

In responding not just to the Lambeth conference but to the world at large, Pope Pius XI opens the encyclical letter *Casti Connubi* by recalling to our minds the greatness of the sacrament of matrimony.

“How great is the dignity of chaste wedlock, Venerable Brethren, may be judged best from this that Christ Our Lord, Son of the Eternal Father, having assumed the nature of fallen man, not only, with His loving desire of compassing the redemption of our race, ordained it in an especial manner as the principle and foundation of domestic society and therefore of all human intercourse, but also raised it to the rank of a truly and great sacrament of the New Law, restored it to the original purity of its divine institution, and accordingly entrusted all its discipline and care to His spouse the Church.” (*Casti Connubi* – opening paragraph).

The pope then goes on to elucidate in great detail and clarity the Church's understanding of the nature of true Christian marriage.

A Teaching Perverted & Ignored

Sadly, much of this teaching has been perverted, ignored or side stepped in the last forty or fifty years by many in the Church who wish to appear compassionate and progressive in dealing with those who are experiencing difficulties in their marriages. But this is not a new phenomenon and Pope Pius XI alluded to it in his encyclical. Before looking at what he said it will be instructive to have a brief look at what was going on in the western world around 1930.

1930s Europe & Marie Stopes

European society was recovering from a world war which began on 28th July 1914 and lasted until 11th November 1918 and which saw some sixteen million people killed. There was a lot of poverty in the larger cities and in London, a woman called Marie Stopes, sought in part to tackle poverty by opening a 'birth control' clinic in 1921. Another interesting fact about Marie Stopes is that she sent a pamphlet which she had written, promoting artificial birth control, to the Anglican bishops at their Lambeth conference in 1920 called “A New Gospel to All Peoples”. In this pamphlet she said “My Lords, I speak to you in the name of God. You are his priests. I am his prophet. I speak to you of the mysteries of man and woman.” Stopes realised that she needed the support of the Anglican bishops in order to promote her birth control movement in England.

America & Margaret Sanger

On the far side of the of the Atlantic a woman named Margaret Sanger, who had met Marie Stopes in 1915 in London, was also involved in setting up a birth control movement which eventually became the largest abortion provider in America namely 'Planned Parenthood'.

The situation in France early 1900s

In France, the Catholic sociologist Paul Bureau, wrote a book in 1919 titled "Towards Moral Bankruptcy" in which he gives details of French society at the time. Remember that in 1905 France passed a law on the separation of Churches and state which led to the expulsion of almost all religious orders from France, the closing of most Catholic schools, and the repossession by the state of Catholic land and buildings.

Bureau paints a picture of a sexually decadent France, rife with prostitution and pornography of all kinds. An 'anti-conceptionist' agency was established in Paris in 1907 to promote birth control and public meetings were held all across France to foster this aim. Compiling statistics from various sources Bureau estimates the abortion rate in France as being between 275,000 to 325,000 saying that this agrees with the figure arrived at by the 'Société Obstetricale de France' for 1909 which estimated that about one-third of all pregnancies in France at that time ended in abortion.

The Catholic Intelligence Network

In looking at the world of the 1930's we should remember that the Catholic church, through her sacred priestly ministry in dioceses and parishes throughout the world, had probably what could be called the greatest intelligence network on the entire planet. As Pope Pius XI declared "Yet not only do We, looking with paternal eye on the universal world from this Apostolic See as from a watch-tower, but you, also, Venerable Brethren, see, and seeing deeply grieve with Us that a great number of men, forgetful of that divine work of redemption, either entirely ignore or shamelessly deny the great sanctity of Christian wedlock, or relying on the false principles of a new and utterly perverse morality, too often trample it under foot." (Casti Connubi – 3)

The pope was acutely aware of what was going on in the world and of the decadent forces being gathered whose sole purpose was to destroy the family founded on marriage. He realised that a critical juncture had been reached at the Lambeth Conference of 1930 and that the enemy was now at the door. He therefore issued both a warning and a call to arms to all Catholics through this encyclical.

The Evil of Contraception

Given what transpired at the 1930 Lambeth Conference and that the primary end of marriage is the procreation of children, Pope Pius XI, in outlining the evils opposed to Christian marriage, begins with the evil of contraception. "First consideration is due to the offspring, which many have the boldness to call the disagreeable burden of matrimony and which they say is to be carefully avoided by married people not through virtuous continence (which Christian law permits in matrimony when both parties consent) but by frustrating the marriage act." (Casti Connubi – 53)

He then goes on to restate Catholic teaching on this matter "But no reason, however grave, may be put forward by which anything intrinsically against nature may become conformable to nature and morally good. Since, therefore, the conjugal act is destined primarily by nature for the begetting of children, those who in exercising it deliberately frustrate its natural power and purpose sin against nature and commit a deed which is shameful and intrinsically vicious." (Casti Connubi – 54)

Infallible Doctrine

To remove any doubt as to the infallible nature of this doctrine and the gravity of this sin, Pope Pius XI continues, "Since, therefore, openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition some recently have judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding this question, the Catholic Church, to whom God has entrusted the defence of the integrity and purity of morals, standing erect in the midst of the moral ruin which surrounds her, in order that she may preserve the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by this foul stain, raises her voice in token of her divine ambassadorship and through Our mouth proclaims anew: any use whatsoever of matrimony

exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offence against the law of God and of nature, and those who indulge in such are branded with the guilt of a grave sin.” (Casti Connubi - 56)

Given the clarity of Pope Pius' words it is hard to understand those Catholics who continue to insist that contraception is permissible in certain circumstances. However Pope Pius XI was aware that the dissent existed even amongst the clergy and his next words were addressed to them. We shall have a look at those words in the next article.

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