

Family from the II Vatican Council to the Synod on the Family
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The past helps us to understand the present. If we want to understand the causes of the current cultural and moral crisis, we need to go back at least half a century to the beginning of the 1960s.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Europe had experienced two terrible world wars and the horrors of Communist and National Socialist totalitarianism. Families paid for this in blood but the family remained a strong social and moral bulwark.

Marriage was the indissoluble bond between a man and a woman, directed towards the formation of a stable family. Adultery was a sin which was socially frowned upon. It was even mentioned in the penal code. The great majority of women were virgins when they got married. They dreamed of starting a family and they had a strong sense of modesty and a spirit of sacrifice.

It would not be right, however, to idealise the situation. If everything had been perfect then it would not have changed so quickly. Hypocrisy was widespread: official respect for the family hid the reality of practices which tended towards free love. It was this gap between professed morality and actual practice which prepared the ground for the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

The great change occurred in 1968. 1968 was a cultural revolution which went deeper than any political revolution. It presented itself as a revolution in domestic affairs which aimed to "liberate" the instincts of the individual and of the masses from the yoke of centuries of culture and civilisation.

The slogans of 1968 expressed a radical hatred of the family, which was accused of being the means for the transmission of those values which opposed the communist social revolution. It was said that the workers were revolutionaries in the factory and reactionaries in the family. The revolution had to be transferred from the factory to the family. 1968 was the attempt to bring the concept of revolution out of the socio-political domain into the domain of private life, that is from society to man himself.

In the years of the student revolution, Agnes Heller, the most famous disciple of the Hungarian communist, György Lukacs, published a book with the significant title "The sociology of daily life" in which she affirmed that in 1968, "It was neither political systems nor economic arrangements which changed, but instead the way of life. From this came the sexual revolution and the change in educational systems."¹ Sexual revolution and the change in educational systems: family and school, the two pillars on which education is based, were the principal victims of 1968. In those years the works of the Austrian psychoanalyst, Wilhelm Reich, were widely disseminated: he presented the family as the repressive social institution *par excellence* and claimed that "the core of happiness lies in sexual happiness."²

Sexual liberation was the weapon used to destroy the family. 19th century Romanticism had fought reason in the name of sentiment. The revolution of 1968 fought reason in the name of the sexual instincts. The first step was the introduction of divorce, the second was the separation of the concept of marriage from the concept of starting a family. Sexual liberation was embodied in the

¹ Agnes Heller, in "L'Unità", 29 April 1998

² WILHELM REICH, *La rivoluzione sessuale*, tr. it. Feltrinelli, Milan 1977, (1936) p. 16.

feminist movement. Women demanded their social role and put themselves in the place of the proletariat as an actor of revolution.

In May 1960, the contraceptive pill, Enovid, came onto the market in the United States. It was produced by a doctor, Gregory Pinkus, thanks to massive financial support from Margaret Sanger and Katharine McCormack, the two apostles of contraception, abortion and eugenics. The pill became the instrument *par excellence* of sexual liberation.

What was the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the 1968 Revolution?

We can find an answer to this question by looking at what happened before, during and after the Second Vatican Council, the 21st Council of the Church, which took place between 1962 and 1965.

According to the teaching of the Church, marriage is an institution which is one and indissoluble, instituted by God for the propagation of the human race. Its primary purpose is procreation, which is not a purely biological act but which also includes the natural and supernatural education of children. The secondary purposes of marriage are the mutual help the spouses give one another and the remedy of concupiscence. Chastity, within and outside marriage, was considered to be a Christian value: sexual union outside the sacrament of marriage is a grave sin.

Until the 1960s, all Church moralists taught this doctrine and all pastors and confessors referred to it as expressed in the encyclicals *Arcanum* of Leo XIII and *Casti connubi* of Pius XI, and in the teaching of Pius XII in numerous speeches given to married persons, doctors and to the Roman Rota.

But in the 1950s and 1960s, a process began by which traditional morality was subverted. The protagonists of the change were theologians like the German Jesuit Josef Fuchs (1912 - 2005), a professor at the Gregorian University, and above all the German Redemptorist, Bernard Häring (1912-1998), professor at the Alphonsian Academy. They applied to moral theory the theses of the *nouvelle théologie* which had only recently been condemned by Pius XII in his encyclical, *Humani generis*³. This *nouvelle théologie*, a product of modernism, believed in the principle of the evolution of dogma. The new moralists extended this principle to the moral domain, denying the existence of an absolute and immutable natural law.

The key point of the innovators was and remains the substitution of the concept of nature with the concept of person. According to classical philosophy, man, before becoming a person who is the holder of rights and duties, has his own nature, a human nature which distinguishes him from animals and angels. To say that there exists such a thing as human nature is therefore to say that there exists an objective and immutable natural order which precedes our birth and transcends us. This order presupposes a law, natural law, which is not external to man but which is instead written into his very heart.

Moral personalism, influenced not only by existentialism but also by evolutionist theories, propagated by Teilhard de Chardin, turned this traditional doctrine on its head. A moral code rooted in natural law was replaced by an evolutionary ethic based on the subjective choice of the person. This re-foundation of morality on the person, rather than on the objective reality of nature, meant giving a dominant role to human conscience. If the person precedes nature, then it is based on its own self-awareness and will. The moral rule is no longer objective and rational but affective, personal and existential. Individual conscience becomes the sovereign norm of morality. Conjugal

³ Pius XII, Enc. *Humani Generis* August 1950, in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, vol. XII, pp. 493-510.

morality constituted, and continues to constitute, the privileged area in which this new anthropology is deployed.

On 9 October 1958, Pius XII died. On 25 January 1959, only three months after his election to the throne of Peter, Giovanni XXIII announced the opening of the Second Vatican Council. This caused a great deal of surprise but the groundwork for the Council was undertaken scrupulously and carefully by means of a pre-preparatory phase of one year and a preparatory phase of two years.

In the spring of 1960, the *consilia et vota* were collected, that is the 2,150 responses received from bishops, from all over the world, who had been asked about the subjects to be raised at the forthcoming assembly. This material was handed over to ten committees appointed by the Pope who worked under the supervision of Cardinal Ottaviani, Prefect of the Holy Office. In 1962, the first seven schemes for the Council's constitutions were submitted to the Pope. These documents, on which ten committees had worked for three years, gathered together the best of 20th century theology. They were texts which went to the very heart of the problems of the age, and they did so in a clear and persuasive language. Giovanni XXIII studied them attentively and made annotations in his own hand: "On all the schemes," records Mgr. Vicenzio Fagiolo, "the same expressions are often repeated in the margins - 'Good', 'Excellent'."⁴ The Pope approved these drafts and on 13 July, three months before the Council opened, he ordered that they be sent to all the Council Fathers as the basis for the discussions in the general congregations.

One of the most important schemes was called "Draft of a Dogmatic Constitution on Chastity, Marriage, the Family and Virginity."⁵ The authors believed rightly that it was not possible to discuss marriage without discussing chastity.

The draft reaffirmed not only the principle of the unity and indissolubility of marriage but also the principle of the hierarchy of the aims of marriage. The text stipulated that, "The primary end of marriage is only the procreation and education of children, even if a particular marriage is not fruitful" (Section 11). "The other objective ends of marriage, which arise from the nature of marriage itself but are secondary, are the mutual help and solace of the spouses in the communion of domestic life and what is called the remedy for concupiscence." Among the errors condemned in the document are (Section 14) "the theories by which, in an inversion of the right order of values, the primary purpose of marriage is esteemed less than biological and personal values and conjugal love, in the objective order itself, is proclaimed to be the primary purpose."

In the second chapter, devoted to the rights, obligations and virtues proper to Christian marriage, the draft - in line with the traditional Augustinian doctrine of the three goods - distinguishes between the "*bonum prolis*", the Good of Children, the "*bonum fidei*", the Good of Fidelity, and the "*bonum sacramenti*", the Good of the Sacrament. From the *bonum prolis* derives the right and the duty of spouses to procreate, but artificial fertilisation is prohibited as is the use of contraception, therapeutic abortion and any other manner of terminating a pregnancy.

From the Good of the Sacrament derives the indissolubility of marriage. As the document emphasises, "Those who are deceitfully and invalidly married against the laws of the Church are rightly considered as public sinners, and the Church has the right publicly to declare them to be

⁴ VINCENZO FAGIOLO *Il cardinale Amleto Cicognani e mons. Pericle Felici*, in *Le deuxième Concile du Vatican (1959-1965)*, Atti del Convegno organizzato a Roma (28-30 maggio 1986), Ecole Française de Rome, Roma 1989, pp. 234-235 (pp. 229-242).

⁵ *Schema constitutionis dogmaticae de Castitate, Matrimonio, Familia et Virginitate*, in *Concilio Vaticano II, Acta Synodalia*, vol. II, Periodus I, Pars IV, Congregationes generales XXXI-XXXVI, Typis Poliglottis Vaticanis, Città del Vaticano 1971, pp. 718-771.

publicly sinning and to inflict canonical penalties upon them." (Section 19). Civil divorce is condemned (section 20), free love (section 22) and the position is proclaimed mistaken "which maintains that a marriage can be declared invalid or dissolved solely because of a failure of love."

In the third party, finally, sacred virginity is praised. The document recalls the condemnation of "those who dare to maintain that the marital state is to be preferred to the state of virginity or celibacy" (section 38). Christian parents are invited to foster sacred vocations by "prayer, purity of life, and veneration for the priestly and religious state."

Giovanni XXIII was convinced that the Council, being pastoral, would conclude very quickly. When Mgr Pericle Felici, secretary of the Council, presented him with the draft documents for the Council, Pope Roncalli commented enthusiastically, "The Council is done, we can conclude by Christmas!"⁶ In reality, by Christmas of that year all the drafts approved by Giovanni XXIII had been rejected by the assembly. The Second Vatican Council was to last not three months but three years.

What happened? A group of Council Fathers from Central Europe and Latin America, who had the principal representatives of the "*nouvelle théologie*" as their experts, had decided to reject the schemes prepared by the Roman commissions because they thought them too traditional.

Vatican II was officially opened on 11 October 1962. On 13 October, the first general congregation was inaugurated. But at the opening of the session, there was an unexpected and dramatic turn of events. The role of bishops' conferences, which had not been foreseen in the rules of procedure, was given official sanction. The bishops' conferences were guided not so much by the bishops who belonged to them, but instead more by their experts, theologians, many of whom had been condemned by Pius XII and who were preparing to play a decisive role in the Council.

The schemes approved by Giovanni XXIII were excellent working drafts. They could certainly have been improved but they did not deserve to be turned upside down and re-written. Yet this is what happened. The schemes were thrown into the bin and revised in a completely different spirit and length. The draft on marriage underwent a tormented revision.

The original draft on marriage and the family was absorbed into a text which was initially called Scheme 17, later Scheme 13, before being entitled *Gaudium et Spes*.

Father Bernard Häring, who had been appointed an expert of the Council and then secretary of the Commission on the modern world, was one of the primary architects of this document. Father Häring and the other authors of *Gaudium et spes* were mainly interested in the problem of birth control.

A colleague of Pinkus, the medic John Rock, in a book which was widely discussed, *The Time Has Come*, argued that the Catholic Church needed to adopt a new approach towards the issue of birth control.⁷ These arguments found favour with the new moralists and with Council Fathers from the progressive minority. These people rejected the teaching of the Church, according to which the use of contraceptives is a grave sin, and they called instead for the Church to accept the pill. Within the halls of the Council a decisive battle was waged between the progressive and traditional minorities. This battle went beyond the pill to include the ends of marriage. At issue was the very basis of natural law itself.

⁶ Cit. in MICHELE MACCARRONE, *Paolo VI e il Concilio: testimonianze*, in "Rivista di Storia della Chiesa in Italia", n. 43 (1989), p. 101 (pp. 101-122).

⁷ JOHN ROCK, *The time has come: A Catholic Doctor's Proposal to End the Battle over Birth Control*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 1963..

The speech which caused the greatest sensation was that of Cardinal Leo Suenens, Archbishop of Brussels, on 29 October 1964, who referred to birth control with these vehement words: "It could be that we have accentuated the words of Holy Scripture, 'Go forth and multiply', to the extent that the other divine words have been overshadowed, 'The two will become one flesh'. Let us follow the progress of science. I implore you, brothers: let us avoid a new trail of Galileo. One is enough for the Church."⁸

These words caused indignation among those Council Fathers who remained faithful to the teaching of the Church. They disconcerted Paul VI who decided to delete the issue of birth control from *Gaudium et Spes*, reserving discussion of it to the committee which Giovanni XXIII had created in 1963, on the advice of Suenens.

After long discussions, the pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, was approved on 7 December 1965, by 2,309 votes in favour and 75 against. Only paragraphs 47 to 52 deal with marriage and the family, far less space than that given to the issue in the original draft. The most surprising aspect of *Gaudium et spes*, however, is the lack of any presentation of the traditional order of the ends of marriage, the primary and the secondary. In paragraph 48 it is said that in marriage an *intima communitas vitae et amoris coniugal*is is created between the spouses. The institution of marriage, therefore, is defined without any reference to children and only as an intimate community of conjugal life. Moreover, in the succeeding paragraphs, conjugal love is discussed first (paragraph 49) and procreation second (paragraph 50).

The document avoided reaffirming the hierarchy of the ends of marriage. Like many other texts, it is an ambiguous document because it refuses to define a hierarchy of ends: it thereby leaves open the possibility that doctrine can be inverted. Moreover, logic teaches that two different values cannot be absolutely equal to one another. In case of a conflict, one or other of the equated values is bound to prevail. The majority of Council Fathers voted for the document intending that the primary end of marriage would remain procreation, based on the objective nature of the institution of marriage. The progressive Fathers, on the other hand, understood that equating the two ends meant denying the primacy of procreation. They also understood the implicit claim that conjugal love has primacy, based not on nature but on the person. It was this interpretation which prevailed in the post-conciliar period.

The Second Vatican Council concluded on 8 December 1965. However, the committee on birth control, which had been set up by Giovanni XXIII and confirmed in existence by Paul VI, continued its work. Towards the end of June 1966 it presented its conclusions to the Pope. Public opinion widely believed that Paul VI had changed the traditional doctrine of the Church under pressure from the feminist movement. Almost everywhere, family planning was presented as a necessity in the modern world and the contraceptive pill as an instrument of women's "liberation". Between 1966 and 1968, Paul VI seemed to waver before taking a tormented and belaboured decision. Finally, on 25 July 1968, the Pope promulgated the encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*.⁹ In this document, and in spite of the opinion of the majority of experts he consulted, Paul VI reaffirmed the condemnation of artificial contraception.

A few days later, on 30 July 1968, under the headline "Against the encyclical of Pope Paul," the New York Times published an appeal signed by more than 200 theologians which called on

⁸ Cfr. ROBERTO DE MATTEI, *Il Concilio Vaticano II. Una storia mai scritta*, Lindau, Turin 1911, p. 419.

⁹ PAOLO VI, Enc. *Humanae vitae* 25 July 1968, in AAS, 60 (1968), pp. 481-503.

Catholics to disobey Paul VI's encyclical. The main promoter of the text, Don Charles Curran, a theologian at the Catholic University of America, had been a pupil of Father Häring.

A group of protagonists of the Council who were against Paul VI's encyclical, including the cardinals Suenens, Alfrink, Heenan, Döpfner and König, met in the German city of Essen to coordinate their opposition to *Humanae Vitae*. On 9 September 1968, during the *Katholikentag*, a resolution was voted by an overwhelming majority calling for the encyclical to be revised. This was something which had never happened before in the long and tormented history of the Church. The exceptional fact is that open dissent from the Pope, and from the traditional doctrine of the Church, did not come only from theologians and priests, but even from some episcopates, including the Belgian, headed by the cardinal primate Leo Suenens, and the German, chaired by Cardinal Julius August Döpfner.

The origins of the dissent by the German episcopate in recent months lie in this event.

Paul VI was traumatised by this dissent as it came from some of the people who had been closest to him in the Council. In the ten years after *Humanae vitae*, he did not publish any further encyclical, after having published seven between 1964 and 1968. The Vatican did not oppose the cultural revolution of 1968 but instead compromised with it. It was especially priests from the North who were involved in the contestation of 1968, above all those who as chaplains had come into close contact with the world of universities: the Faculty of Sociology at the University of Trent is a case in point.

As a result, the post-conciliar period did not follow the instructions of *Humanae Vitae*, but instead those of Cardinal Suenens and the dissident theologians.

In universities and pontifical seminaries, Father Häring's views, and those of his disciples, came to predominate. Even today he is considered to be "the father of modern moral theology". The new moralists argued that it was necessary to move from a biologist and physicist conception of morality to an open and evolutionary ethic. They replaced the objectivity of natural law with the will of the "person" immersed in "situational ethics". Since sex constitutes an integral part of the person, they argued for the role of sexuality, defined as "a primary function of personal growth", and quoted *Gaudium et spes* (No. 24), according to which it is only in a relationship of dialogue with others that the human person achieves fulfilment.

The encyclical, *Veritatis Splendor*, of John Paul II reaffirmed the existence of the natural law and of moral absolutes. But in practice, situational ethics and the ethics of the lesser evil prevailed. Pontifical teachings were disobeyed and today contraception is widely used by Catholic couples with the support of confessors, moralists, bishops and even bishops' conferences. After contraception, abortion, extra-marital cohabitation and homosexuality spread among Catholics. These were often justified by theologians and bishops who argued for the need for a new pastoral approach, brought up to date and adaptable to circumstances. No less a body than the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family, which took place in 2014, seemed to welcome the arguments of Cardinal Kasper, according to which doctrine had to adapt to practices which were common among Christians in matters of sexual morality, rather than rectifying their behaviour according the immutable natural and divine law.

This is the result of a moral relativism which comes from a long time ago and whose origins it is necessary to recall.

If the primary end of marriage is not procreation, then marriage's highest expression lies in the love between the spouses. But the love of spouses comes from an act of will and an act of will

can decree the purpose of it. If morality is not rooted in nature, but instead in the person, then the relationship between the spouses prevails over the objective good of the family. And if it is claimed that the interpersonal relationship has primacy, it is inevitable that the same principle will be extended to extra-marital relationships including homosexual ones.

The original draft of Vatican II, so imprudently abandoned, reminds us that marriage and the family are not realities subject to historical evolution. They are natural realities which are regulated by immutable laws. This means that every attempt to destroy them is destined to fail because every man who is born, and every generation which arises, carries with it the need for a family. And the greater the crisis within society, the greater this need for the family.

The historian, Alberto Melloni, in a recent paper entitled *Love without an end, love without ends*¹⁰, is consistent when he launches an unprecedented attack against the family. Melloni is the most famous exponent of the Bologna school, the follower of Giuseppe Alberigo. In order to stop this attack, one would need courageously to open a debate on the Second Vatican Council, or at least to discuss some of its documents, starting with *Gaudium et spes*, distinguishing what is pastoral from what is doctrinal, what is in conformity with tradition and what claims to innovate, what must be believed and what can be rejected. Progress consists also in such critical re-examinations of the past.

We cannot hide from the fact that a battle is underway. Cardinals, bishops, priests, lay people, men of letters and ordinary faithful, are called to assume their responsibilities and to be witnesses of the faith. Today one can and one must be a witness of the truth of the Gospel of Christ, not only in far-flung parts of the world where a violent persecution has been unleashed against Christians, but also in the centre of the world, in the very heart of a Synod in which not the physical life of Christians will be under attack but the living word of Jesus Christ, the source of life for souls in society and in the Church.

The Synod is devoted not to theological issues but to a moral one which concerns the daily life of many Christians. What do we expect from this Synod, as Catholics? We expect that the Synod dispel confusion. It can do this only by reviving the notions of good and evil, notions which have been extinguished from the souls of the faithful.

It is essential to know with certainty what is just and what is unjust, what can be done and what cannot be done, what forms of behaviour are just, and what are mistaken.

We expect that the rules of Catholic morality will be recalled in such a way as to direct our behaviour. We expect that errors will be condemned, and that their catastrophic consequences for souls and society will be demonstrated. It is necessary to explain that divorce is illicit, that it has ruinous consequences for the family and that, above all, it leads to the perdition of souls. It is necessary to recall that it is not licit for remarried divorced people to accede to the sacraments of the Church if they do not remove the root cause of their sinful situation.

To demonstrate error helps to illuminate truth. The greater our revulsion against evil, the greater will be our love for the good. This good needs to be illustrated by speaking of the value of virginity, chastity and continence.

A Synod devoted to family which attacks natural law, which pays no attention to the primary end of marriage, which draws a veil of silence over sin, and which does not promote the value of chastity both within and outside of marriage, is condemned to pastoral failure. Above all, it risks disowning the principles of Catholic morals.

¹⁰ Alberto Melloni, *Amore senza fine. Amore senza fini*, Il Mulino, Bologna 2015.