

Why the Synod on the Family is of fundamental significance for the pro-life movement

John Smeaton, Rome 9th May 2015

I've worked in the pro-life movement for 41 years, for 40 years at national level for the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, SPUC, the first pro-life group to be established anywhere in the world, in September 1966.

When the pro-life movement came into existence almost fifty years ago it was in response to the legalisation, and rapid spread, of abortion around the world. Our task was to secure legal protection for unborn children. However in recent decades we have witnessed the culture of death expand into new areas of human life; including, for example, the most vulnerable unborn children of all, newly-conceived human embryos, who are more and more threatened by the giant, universal, anti-life in-vitro fertilisation industry, just as newly-conceived human embryos have been threatened for many decades by the pharmaceutical industry and by so-called "contraceptive" drugs and devices which also work by stopping newly-conceived embryos from implanting in the womb and thus killed; the culture of death, based on contraception and abortion has also expanded to our children at school who are threatened by destructive anti-life, anti-family sex education; it has spread more and more to targeting and eliminating the disabled, the sick and the elderly who are threatened by euthanasia and "assisted suicide"; and the very nature of marriage and the family, the exclusive lifetime union of a man and a woman, open to life and committed to the nurture and protection of their children, is being undermined and denied by those who hold power and influence. The consequences of all this is catastrophic, not only for millions of individuals, but for the whole of our increasingly globalised society.

The silence of the Synod last October was deafening – on abortion, on contraception, the foundation stone of the culture of death, on euthanasia and assisted suicide, on pornographic anti-life sex education, on the suppression of parents as the primary educators of their children and on the indoctrination of children into the homosexual ideology. All of these evils are either crimes against life committed, millions upon millions of times annually, in the bosom of the family or they are morally criminal activities imposed on children and parents worldwide millions of times annually. These crimes against did not merit a mention in the Synod documents published by the Vatican. There is every reason for us as pro-life leaders to focus on this scandalous silence on these moral crimes in the Synod documents for the sake of giving witness to Christ who founded the church, for the sake of authentic church renewal, for the sake of the pro-life movement and for the sake of our families who have been betrayed by the Synod authorities.

On the other hand, the International Planned Parenthood Federation must be delighted with the Synod authorities. They understand the significance of the Synod authorities' silence on these matters better than we do ourselves.

The issues at the Family Synod last year which have caught, above all, the attention of the world's media and political establishment, are, firstly, marriage and, in particular the reception of Holy Communion by divorced persons living in invalid civil unions; and secondly, homosexual unions. The treatment of these issues was summed up, amongst others, by Cardinal Raymond Burke. He said that the interim Synod report was “a gravely flawed document and does not express adequately the teaching and discipline of the Church and, in some aspects, propagates doctrinal error and a false pastoral approach”.

Why should the pro-life movement care about such this?

Voice of the Family and the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children care about this because sacramental marriage, binding a man and a woman together in an indissoluble union, is the greatest protector of children born and unborn.

In November 2011 the national council of the Society for the Protection of Children, our organisation's policy-making body, elected by its grassroots volunteers, passed, without opposition, a resolution to defend marriage and to oppose so-called “same-sex marriage”.

The Society for the Protection of Unborn Children (SPUC), as a pro-life organization, decided to fight against “same-sex marriage” legislation for two reasons. First, statistical evidence on abortion clearly shows that marriage as an institution protects children, both born and unborn.

Secondly, “same-sex marriage” represents an attempt to redefine marriage, thus undermining marriage and family life, as a growing body of academic research clearly shows. It is this undermining that lessens the protection for unborn children that true marriage provides.

No other grouping offers such a high level of that security and stability that human beings need to flourish. Research shows overwhelmingly that children growing up within marriage do better in terms of health, educational success, happiness, careers and their own marriages. It is precisely because children matter, that real marriage between one man and one woman matters so much.

Research by Dr Patricia Morgan, a leading researcher in family policy, commissioned by SPUC and presented to the British Parliament, shows that in countries in which same-sex marriage has been legalised, real marriage and family life are undermined – thus undermining also the protection, which marriage and family life provide to children, including unborn children.

Spain provides a good example of how “same-sex marriage” is an effective weapon against the traditional family structure. In Spain family structures *had* remained relatively strong. However, the recognition of so-called “same-sex marriage” in 2005 was followed by a pronounced acceleration in the decline of real marriage. The annual number of marriages fell by an average of nearly 15,000 during the three years immediately following the legislation. For the next three years after that the annual fall was over 34,000.

The destruction of traditional family structures has very grave consequences for all members of society, but it is children, born and unborn, who are especially vulnerable. Government statistics show that in Britain children conceived outside of marriage are 4 to 5 times more likely to be aborted than those conceived within marriage.

Historically, our nations' laws protected unborn children from being killed, and so, quite logically and rightly, pro-life movements worldwide have worked tirelessly to restore, or to uphold, such laws.

By the same token, historically, families based on the indissoluble union in marriage of a man and a woman, have provided children, both born and unborn, with their best hope of life and fulfilment in life ... so, quite logically and rightly, pro-life movements worldwide must work tirelessly to defend marriage and the family.

The pro-life movement cannot possibly succeed in its efforts to end abortion if the family based on marriage between a man and a woman is destroyed.

What's more, a major way in which the so-called "homosexual rights" lobby is actively undermining the family and the culture of life, is through targeting its message at little children in their schools including, in the UK, in Catholic primary schools. I have little doubt that the same pattern is repeated in other countries too.

I am sorry to have to share with you that homosexual militants are being invited into schools in our country, including into Catholic schools with the blessing of the local bishop, to train teachers how to educate little boys as young as four years old that they might grow up to marry a man rather than a woman – and the same with little girls.

Catholic schools in Britain, and around the world, have long been complicit in the culture of death, providing access to abortion and contraception for the under 16s without parental knowledge. This is happening with the co-operation of the Catholic authorities.

Now what happens when little Johnny at Our Lady's School, say, in south London, says to his teacher: "Please Miss! Can boys who grow up to marry a man have babies like mummies and daddies can?" Without a shadow of doubt, very many teachers will say "Yes they can. In a different way ... but yes they can."

As you know, same-sex couples are now demanding the right to have children– making it even more difficult for pro-life groups effectively to oppose surrogacy and in vitro fertilisation. According to peer-reviewed research, for every baby born by IVF, 23 are either discarded, or frozen, or used in destructive experiments, or miscarry. Defending the right to life of unborn children will increasingly be viewed as an attack on the rights of homosexual couples.

Homosexual indoctrination thus leads to increased contempt for the sanctity of human life. The studied ambiguity of the Synod authorities' published documents on the questions relating to homosexual unions in general and on children brought up by homosexual couples

is of huge significance for the pro-life movement. If the Church at the highest levels insists on imposing its will on these matters, without prejudice to Catholic doctrine which can never change, and continues to proclaim an ambiguous message which gives aid and comfort to the homosexual lobby in our countries back home, our pro-life work may effectively all but disappear off the world map.

Pro-life movements around the world ignore these kinds of developments, which have massive geopolitical significance, at their peril.

In fact the Archbishop of Westminster, Vincent Cardinal Nichols, on the Synod fathers has twice indicated publicly that the Church may one day recognise homosexual unions.

By way of complete contrast, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks as a parent to the Catholic bishops of Nigeria.

Archbishop Kaigama and other African bishops offered a courageous defence of the unchangeable teachings of the Church on matters relating to human sexuality at the Extraordinary Synod on the family held last October in Rome.

So, we must ask, why is sacramental marriage now being challenged at the highest levels in the Church?

Cardinal Pell has publicly stated that this proposal is a “stalking horse” being proposed by “radical elements” within the Church who want, and I quote the Cardinal, “who want wider changes, recognition of civil unions, recognition of homosexual unions.”

Let us be clear: Cardinal Pell is telling us that there are figures, at the highest levels of the Church, who want the Church to approve of homosexual unions.

Indeed, as I said earlier, this is already considered an open question by influential clerics, such as Cardinal Nichols of Westminster.

Faced with this new threat, not only to our faith, to our families, and to our children, but also to the existence of the prolife movement itself what can the Catholic laity, and non-Catholics too I would say, do? Everyone has a stake in this matter.

In the first place we must follow the call made by the Latvian archbishop, the Archbishop of Riga, Archbishop Stankevičs, and commit ourselves to prayer. We must pray unceasingly for the Pope, for the cardinals, for the bishops, and for clergy, religious and laity that we may *all* remain firm and unyielding in our profession of the gospel.

“But though we,” says St. Paul, “or an angel from heaven preach a gospel to you other than that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1:8).

Secondly, we must remember that we, the lay faithful, have both the right and the duty to make known to our pastors our views about the crisis engulfing the Catholic Church.

We have a right and a duty to require from our clergy and from the Holy Father unwavering obedience to the natural law and the teaching of the Church. No authority, not even the Pope, has the power or the right to alter in any way that which has been revealed to the Church by Almighty God.

Canon 211 of the Code of Canon Law states that:

“All the Christian faithful have the duty and right to work so that the divine message of salvation more and more reaches all people in every age and in every land.”

This is followed by Canon 212, which states:

“The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

“According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.”

The most notable achievement of the pro-life movement is that we exist. Yes, pro-life organizations have enjoyed successes and saved lives. We’ve also had our setbacks. But, brutally realistically, we’re tiny – compared with the overwhelming reach of the culture of death, and compared with the universal reach of the Catholic Church in particular. That’s why Catholics here – and everyone here who has an interest in the common good – must study what’s happening at the highest levels in the Catholic Church and take action and we must have the maturity to speak out when things are badly wrong at the highest levels of the Church.

Moreover, the pro-life movement must embrace the defence of marriage or face defeat but, at this stage in history, this is not primarily a political or legislative matter, albeit we must keep up the legislative battle and speak out politically. Embracing the defence of marriage is primarily about handing on what we know to be the truth about the nature of marriage to the next generation upon whose shoulders the burden of the pro-life struggle is rapidly falling: that marriage is the exclusive lifetime union of one man and one woman which is open to life and committed to the nurture and protection of their children; I refer in particular, of course, to the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the marriage act.

I think in a sense, speaking on behalf of the oldest pro-life organization in the world, after nearly 50 years, our work is just beginning. Where do we begin? We begin with empowering families, with empowering mothers and fathers as primary educators. Parents, as the primary educators of their children, must find ways of teaching their children, including our older children who have fled the nest, the truth about the sanctity of human life and its transmission, the truth found in *Humanae Vitae* and in *Evangelium Vitae* and in *Familiaris*

Consortio, because we have the right and the authority to do so and because, at this point in human history, the overwhelming majority of Episcopal leaders, who also have authority, are failing to do their duty. There's nothing left out there – except the family, based on the marriage between a man and a woman, to pick up the billions of broken babies, the billions of broken lives, and start again. We as leaders of pro-life and pro-family groups must help them to do that.