

From Divorce to Transhumanism

Abstract

When we talk about rights today, we often think of *individual* rights because this is a concept that has seeped into our mentality since the Enlightenment, but why not consider *family* rights? Isn't the family the essential unit of the *societas perfecta* so highly praised by Popes like Leo XIII and Pius XI? In this talk we will look at how the Magisterium of the Church since the papacy of Benedict XIV in the 1740s has defended the marriage sacrament so as to defend the family and fundamentally man. We shall also consider the so-called "gender issue" from a metaphysical perspective, and then we shall see how it is only one part of a long chain of events from contraception, abortion, and divorce which have threatened the family and man himself. Finally, we shall see that the anthropological changes in man that result from these changes in his social rapports are being confronted by a transhumanist mentality that is a sign of man's demise, and the only response to all of these threats is found in strong traditional family units.

1. Marriage

1.1 The importance of Marriage

There is a scene from the tenth episode of the first season of *The Crown* in which Prince Philip turns to Queen Elizabeth II to make her think about her various roles. He basically tells her to stop thinking about her role as a queen and to start thinking about her role as a wife, a mother, a sister, especially as she was considering her approval of her sister's possible marriage to a divorcé. It is not only interesting how the whole episode revolves around the very issue that caused the original break between the Church of England and the Church, but it shows how important marriage is for the good of the family, of the fatherland, and of the Church herself. In the end, the Queen chooses to forbid Princess Margaret from marrying the divorcé. She takes the interests of the Institution very seriously. This shows a break between the emphasis on the individual interests so common since the French Revolution and the emphasis on the institution more common to a classical model of society.

The family is understood as an institution that is beyond social functions, though. As Pierpaolo Donati writes, it is "a full social relation, i.e. a total social phenomenon, that directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, implies all of the dimensions of the human experience: from the biological to the psychological, to the economic, social, legal, political, and religious..."¹ Another famous writer by the name of Francesco d'Agostino was a champion for the *societas perfecta* so eloquently defended and promoted by Pope Leo XIII. According to Samuele Cecotti, he refused the logic of universal individual suffrage which is the daughter of the French Revolution but rather conceives universal family suffrage. The polity is not viewed as sum of individuals but a sum of individual *family*

¹ Francesco d'Agostino, *La Famiglia, Un Bene Insostituibile*, Cantagalli, Siena 2008, p. 15: "è...una relazione sociale piena, ossia un fenomeno sociale totale, che –direttamente o indirettamente, esplicitamente o implicitamente—implica tutte le dimensioni dell'esperienza umana, da quelle biologiche, a quelle psicologiche, economiche, sociali, giuridiche, politiche, religiose..."

units.² This sounds new to our ears today, but this is something we must strongly consider today as the family is very much under attack, starting with the very sacrament that is its foundation: marriage.

When Balzac publishes in 1829 *Physiologie du mariage*, he writes that marriage falls among the most imperfect of human sciences, reiterating what Napoleon had said a few years prior. Throughout the 19th-century there was this idea that marriage could perfect itself through dynamic changes. The family was considered to be undergoing an historical crisis.³ In an illuminating article by John A. Cuddeback, “A Father’s Presence in the Home,” we read how the main problem today stems from moving the center of work from the household to the outside, a phenomenon that began with the industrial revolution. Cuddeback writes:

“This change—the demise of the household as a center of production—is one that many defenders of the traditional family either dismiss with a shrug, or even approve with a nod in the direction of “economic progress.” Yet I think it is clear that, regardless of an admixture of genuine advantages, this shift was a blow to the very essence of the household community as, in Aristotle’s words, “constituted by nature for everyday life.” Why? Work, especially in the sense of the production of things necessary for human life, is the very stuff of daily human life. Though not the most noble or important activity done in the household, it is naturally the skeleton around which other activities spring—be they meals, prayer, study, leisure, or play.”⁴

Divorce is the culmination and result of many social, economic, and political issues in that very order. By **social**, one can consider the sexual revolution elaborated very well in Gabriel Kuby’s *The Global Sexual Revolution*⁵ which culminates in the gender-identity situation in which we now find ourselves. By **economic**, the move from a mainly agrarian society to an industrial society in the last two hundred years. This takes on different expressions in different countries. It was later in Italy, for instance, than in England, and in Italy even the industrial sphere was until recently very much tied to the family unit, passing on the family business from father to son. With the industrial revolution both father and mother have in the last two centuries had to leave the domestic home from which they worked together with the extended family in the agrarian set-up of society. This sort of strain has clearly contributed to divorce. For a better idea of the historical context, I would recommend Roberto de Mattei’s book, *1900-2000*,⁶ which covers very well the chaos theories tied to such scenario. By **political**, one can consider the way governments have interfered in marriage, bringing about themselves divorce proper. We know from our fight with the abortion industry just how important legalization of such matters is in influencing the mindset. From the divorce mindset, many other problems emerge which are tied to a strong individualism which fundamentally weakens the individual who is no longer the person defined by St. Thomas: “the individual rational subsistent relation.” The relation part is increasingly fragile and ill-defined, allowing for a society of fragile, easily-influenced individuals without a history, a present, or a future. It is the perfect recipe stemming from a relativistic world-view and resulting in the nihilism and depression we see in the subculture desert around us.

² Cfr. Fr. Samuele Cecotti, “C.F. d’Agostino Fedele Interprete del Programma Sociale-Politico di Leone XIII,” in *Bollettino di Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa*, no. 4, anno xii, ottobre-dicembre 2016, p. 162.

³ Cfr. Francesco d’Agostino, *La Famiglia, Un Bene Insostituibile*, Cantagalli, Siena 2008, pp. 11-12.

⁴ John A. Cuddeback, “A Father’s Presence in the Home,” in *Principles*, Christendom College, 2015. <http://www.getprinciples.com/a-fathers-presence-in-the-home/>.

⁵ Gabriel Kuby, *The Global Sexual Revolution: Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, Angelico Press, Kettering, OH, 2015. Read especially chapters 1-4.

⁶ Roberto de Mattei, *1900-2000 Due sogni si succedono: la costruzione la distruzione*, Edizioni Fiducia, Roma 1990.

1.2 Magisterium on Marriage from the 18th to the early 20th-Century

Such a crisis was clearly not overlooked by the Magisterium of the Church. We have only to look at all of the works written by the Popes since the 19th-century on the subjects of family and marriage to understand this. Looking back, I found encyclicals from the pontificate of Benedict XIV (1740-1758) on marriage, and this was before the French Revolution, but the admixture of civil with religious rites was coming to the fore and needed to be addressed.⁷ The Popes were very conscious of the fact that the Church's role was to protect Sacred Matrimony from all sorts of confusion because both the Church and society as a whole would suffer.⁸ The Magisterium's emphasis under Pius IX (1846-1878) and Leo XIII (1878-1903) will continue to be on the topic of civil marriage, and we see the most important encyclical on this very topic to be Leo XIII's *Arcanum divinae Sapientiae* on February 10, 1880.

The main thesis of *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* is that the marriage contract and the sacrament cannot be separated, so here we are dealing more explicitly with divorce. It therefore condemns very strongly divorce because marriage, elevated by Our Lord Jesus Christ to be a sacrament, is something sacred that cannot be touched by mere human institutions. Marriage is not merely a convention which the State can decide upon at whim.⁹ Marriage was established by God after the creation of our first parents so that they would transmit the life that He had given to them. In the first account of Creation we read that: "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth."" (Gn. 1: 27-28) So it is clear that the first duty of the first family was to generate children. They were given the Earth as their habitat. As St. Lawrence of Brindisi points out, the blessing that man receives, "consists first and foremost in the receipt of the power to propagate, so that the human species be multiplied in the number of persons lest the chief and noblest of species die out."¹⁰ In the second

⁷ On February 2, 1744, Benedict XIV writes *Inter omnigenas*, condemning those contracting marriage civilly in Turkey with a Muslim judge, reminding them of the decrees of the Council of Trent on the matter. On September 16, 1747, he writes *Apostolici ministerii* to address Jewish converts who marry Jewish women in the Ghetto with Jewish rites, condemning such a practice. On September 17, 1746, with *Redditae sunt Nobis* the Holy Father has to address and condemn those Catholics who try to contract marriage in front of a civil judge or a Protestant minister. Later, Pius VI (1775-1799), would write in *Auctorum fidei* against the Jansenist tendency to permit marriage to fall under civil law. What is a civil matter is just that. It cannot become a sacred rite. This clearly ties in with the rapport between the Church and the Crown or the Church and the emerging modern State. Similar documents are published by Clement XIII (1758-1769) and Pius VII (1800-1823), dealing with such interreligious marriages, warning about the complexities caused by such unions for the children and for society at large. For instance, *Quantopere* by Clement XIII on November 16, 1763 or *Etsi Fraternalitatis* by Pius VII on October 8, 1803. This latter cites *Magna Nobis* by Benedict XIV on June 29, 1748, and it reiterates the impotence of civil authorities to dissolve marriage.

⁸ We see this especially in *Post factum tibi* by Pius VI on February 2, 1782. He explicitly cites canons from the Council of Trent to reiterate the Church's sacred duty to place limits and impediments on all that pertains to Holy Matrimony. All those who feel that this is not the competency of ecclesiastical courts are to be excommunicated, according to Canon 12 of Session 24 of the Council of Trent, and this is reiterated in *Deessemus Nos* on September 16th, 1788. Gregory XVI (1831-1846) continues to address mixed marriages (cfr. *Summo iugiter* on May 27, 1832 and *Non sine gravi* on May 23, 1846), the responsibilities of bishops (in his famous *Mirari vos* on August 15, 1832) and of the Church's role in setting the limits on marriage (cfr. *Commissum divinitus* on May 17, 1835 and *Quas Vestro* on April 30, 1841) because of the very mandate afforded her by the Lord Himself.

⁹ Pope Leo XIII, *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* 27, Rome, February 10, 1880. The Holy Father summarizes, "But, now, there is a spreading wish to supplant natural and divine law by human law; and hence has begun a gradual extinction of that most excellent ideal of marriage which nature herself had impressed on the soul of man, and sealed, as it were, with her own seal; nay, more, even in Christian marriages this power, productive of so great good, has been weakened by the sinfulness of man."

¹⁰ St. Lawrence of Brindisi, *On Creation and the Fall – A Verse by Verse Commentary on Genesis 1-3*, Kolbe Center, Mount Jackson, VA, 2012, p. 93.

account of Creation we read that: “So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The LORD God then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of 'her man' this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gn. 2: 21-24) As later Christ will interpret this text it marks the indissolubility of marriage. “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” (Mt. 19:4-6)

Marriage sanctifies the union of man and woman, and in these two accounts we see two ends of marriage clearly identified: procreative and unitive. In addition, if marriage is properly unitive it will also be a *remedium concupiscentiae*, as Pope Leo XIII shows in the previously cited passage by mentioning man’s sinfulness. Through marriage, there is a remedy in store for man’s wounded nature. Fifty years after Pope Leo XIII wrote *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, Pope Pius XI will also recall this remedy when he begins his famous encyclical *Casti Connubii*:

“...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.”¹¹

While not to be intended as a “valve” to control certain disorders, this fruit of marriage is also clear from what St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 7, 2: “But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband.” It shows the supernatural remedy that marriage is to many ills in society, and—according to Pope Pius XI—this can only occur if men’s minds are illuminated with the true doctrine of Christ regarding it and if Christian spouses shape their ways of thinking and acting in conformity with the “pure law of Christ so as to obtain true peace and happiness for themselves and for their families.”¹²

1.3 Negative Consequences of Divorce ---and other Marriage ailments---for Man and his relation to God

The world is desperately in need of the grace of God, of salvation, and for this the Word became flesh. How He became flesh is also very significant, of course, because divine pedagogy teaches that He became flesh in a family. On October 21, 1921, upon an initiative of Pope Benedict XV, the Congregation for Rites inserted the Feast of the Holy Family in the Calendar of the Roman Rite. This was clearly not the beginning of the devotion to the Holy Family. The fact that the Feast became part of the general calendar, however, was due to something else: the deep concern of the Holy Father for the breakdown of the family, especially in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 which threatened the family even further. Each time I read documents from the early part of the 20th century I notice that many good Catholic writers were lamenting the breakdown of the family and society back

¹¹ Pope Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* 1, Rome, December 31, 1930.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2.

then, and I wonder: what would they say today? In many ways, they predicted what is happening today. When Pope Pius XI published *Casti Connubii* on December 31st 1930 it was as a reaction against what the Anglican Communion had recently permitted: contraception.

Enforcing what Leo XIII had stressed earlier against divorce and the State's unjust interference in what is a natural and divine institution, and advocating the model of Holy Family which Pope Benedict XV sought to do with the feast which he universalized, Pius XI showed the further risk to the family's breakdown through contraception and its false promises. While marriage

“arises only from the free consent of each of the spouses...the nature of matrimony is entirely independent of the free will of man, so that if one has once contracted matrimony he is thereby subject to its divinely made laws and its essential properties.”¹³

Pius VIII (1829-1830) in *Traditi humilitati* and Pius XI in *Casti Connubii* both begin by stressing the truth that is the *raison d'être* of the holy institution of marriage: man himself. However, before one thinks that it is only about man, one sees the definition of man as one who adores and worships God. It is all about this, after all. It is all about the liturgical worship of God. Man is created to worship God. This is the supernatural end which Pius XI stresses for man and for the holy institution that would permit him to fulfill the end most easily and perfectly. This is why the bond between anthropology and marriage is very tight, so if one fiddles with marriage, man will inevitably suffer. If man suffers, society at large suffers too. Actually, it dies. It is no wonder that John Paul II would so often refer to this society as a culture of death.

¹³ *Casti Connubii* 6.