

## TO FATHERS OF FAMILIES, Pope Pius XII

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*Allocution to the Fathers of families, given by Pope Pius XII on September 18, 1951.*

What a heartfelt joy it is for Us to see this pilgrimage of fathers of families! How many times—in connection with the most varied questions—have We insisted on family sanctity, on its rights, on its duties as the fundamental cell of human society? Its life, health, vigor and activity ensure the life, health, vigor and activity of society as a whole. Since God has given the family its existence, its dignity, its social function, it must answer to God for them. Its rights and its privileges are inalienable, sacrosanct; it has the duty, primarily before God and secondarily before society, to defend, to vindicate and to promote effectively these rights and these privileges, not only for its own good, but for the glory of God and the welfare of the community.

How many times have been sung the praises of the mother, hailing her as the heart, the sun of the family? But if the mother is the heart, the father is the head of the family, and consequently its health and efficiency depend on the vigor, the virtues and activity of the father.

Beloved sons, you understand—and for this reason you have come here—the necessity for the fathers of families to know individually, socially, and in a Christian manner the function confided to them and their inherent duties. You are here and it is your intention to ask the advice and the blessing of the Common Father, the Head of the great human family.

It is clear that your first duty in the sanctuary of the family home is to provide—with due respect and the perfection, humanly possible, of its integrity, of its unity, of the natural hierarchy which unites the members among themselves—for the preservation of the physical, intellectual, moral and religious sanctity of the family. Evidently, this obligation includes that of defending and promoting its sacred duties; in the first place that of fulfilling the obligations due to God, to constitute a Christian society in the full sense of the word; secondly to defend the rights of the family against all attacks or external influences which could attack its purity, faith, and holy stability.

Promote these same rights by demanding from the civil, political and cultural society the means, at least those which are indispensable, for their free exercise.

### **The cell of society**

The Christian has a rule which permits him to determine with certainty the extent of the rights and duties of the family in the community of the State. It is thus conceived: the family is not made for society; rather it is society which is made for the family. The family is the fundamental cell, the constitutive element, of the community of the State, because—to use the expression of Our Predecessor, Pius XI, of happy memory—"the State is what it is made to be by the individuals and families which compose it, as a body is composed of its members." The State then, should, as it were, in virtue of the instinct of self-preservation fulfill that which, essentially according to the design of God, Creator and Savior, is its first duty, namely guarantee in full measure the values which ensure to the family order, human dignity, health, and happiness.

These values, which are also the very elements of the common good, may never be sacrificed for what may apparently be the common advantage.

Let Us point out, as an example, some of these benefits which are greatly threatened today: the indissolubility of matrimony; the protection of prenatal life; suitable housing for the family, and that not merely for the family composed of one or two children or a childless family, but for the normal larger family; the possibility of finding work, for a father lacking employment is one of the bitterest worries of a family; the rights of the parents over their children in the eyes of the State; their full freedom to raise them in the true faith, and, consequently, the right of Catholic parents to Catholic schools; a condition of public life, and above all, public morals such that the families and especially young people will not have the moral certainty of being corrupted.

On this and other points which concern family life more intimately there are no differences between family and family. On other questions of an economic or political nature they may find themselves in very different conditions, and sometimes in competition or even in opposition. Here there is a great need—and Catholics should be the first to give a good example—to promote a balance of interests, even at the cost of sacrificing particular interests, but having in view an internal peace and stable economy.

But when it is a question of the essential rights of the family, the true faithful of the Church will pledge themselves in support from beginning to end. It may be that on this or that particular point, there must be a retreat before the superiority of political forces. But here it is not capitulation but a matter of patience. In such cases it is necessary that doctrine be safeguarded, that all efficacious means be adopted to arrive little by little at the goal which has never been given up.

## **The union of fathers of families**

Among these efficacious means, even of those which look to a distant future, certainly one of the most powerful is the union between fathers of families who are guided by the same convictions and the same desires. Your presence here is a testimony that such is even your thought.

Even before obtaining a desired result, in the absence of or while awaiting the success which your group continues to pursue, the aim of this association of fathers is to use fruitful means of enlightening public opinion and little by little to pervade it to favor the triumph of truth and justice. No effort to act upon public opinion must be disdained or neglected.

## **Sexual initiation**

There is another field in which this education of public opinion is needed and this with tragic urgency. It is in this field perverted by propaganda which one, does not hesitate to call evil, even if at times it takes its origin from Catholic sources and aims at making headway among Catholics,—and even if those who promote it do not seem aware that they are deluded by the spirit of evil.

Here We intend to speak of writings, books, and articles regarding sexual initiation, which today very often achieve fame as "best sellers," and flood the whole world, taking possession of infancy, submerging the new generation, and disturbing engaged couples and the newly married.

The Church has treated this question regarding instruction on this matter, both as concerns the physical development and normal psychology of adolescence, and as concerns particular cases arising from different individual conditions, with all the gravity, attention, and decency that the argument permitted. The Church can rightly declare that, profoundly respectful of the sanctity of marriage, she has in theory and in practice left husband and wife free in that which the impulse of a wholesome and honest nature concedes without offense to the Creator.

One becomes terrified by the intolerable impudence of certain literature; and while paganism itself seemed to halt in respect before the secret of married intimacy, it is our lot to see the mystery violated and its vision, sexual and degraded, offered as a meal to the public and even to youth.

One must ask oneself if there still remains sufficiently marked out the boundaries between the initiation which is called Catholic, and the press with its erotic and obscene illustrations, which, with serious deliberation, aims at corruption, and basely exploits the lowest instincts of fallen nature for despicable interests.

Would that it ended here. Such a propaganda also threatens Catholics with a double calamity, not to use a stronger expression. First of all, it exaggerates out of all proportion the importance and significance of the sexual element. It may be admitted that these authors, under the purely theoretical aspect, keep within the limits of Catholic morals. But no less true is it that their manner of explaining sexual life is such that it acquires in the mind and conscience of the average reader the idea and value of an end in itself, making him lose sight of the true primordial purpose of matrimony, which is the procreation and upbringing of children, and the grave duty of married couples as regards this purpose—something which the literature of which We are speaking leaves too much in the background.

Secondly, this literature—if it deserves such a title— seems to hold in no account the universal experience of past, present and future ages, although such experience is based on nature itself, which attests that in moral education neither initiation nor instruction offers of itself any advantage; that indeed, it is seriously harmful and prejudicial where it is not firmly restrained by constant discipline, by a vigorous self-control, above all, by the use of the supernatural means of prayer and the Sacraments. All Catholic educators, worthy of the name and their mission, are fully aware of the overwhelming importance of supernatural forces in man's sanctification— youth or adult, married or single. But in the writings mentioned, hardly a word is said about these things, even when the whole matter is not passed over in complete silence. Even the principles so wisely explained by Our Predecessor, Pius XI, in the Encyclical *<Divini illius Magistri>*, regarding sexual education and the related problems, are pushed aside with a smile of compassion: Pius XI, it is said, wrote these things twenty years ago for his own times! The world has gone a long way since then!

Fathers here present: in every corner of the globe, in every country, there are other Christian fathers of families such as yourselves, who share your sentiments. Unite yourselves therefore with them—naturally under the direction of your Bishops. Call to your help all Catholic mothers and with their powerful support fight together, without timidity or human respect, to halt and curtail these movements which authorize and mask themselves under any name or patronage. Not without reason you have placed your pilgrimage under the special care of the great Pope of the Eucharist, Blessed Pius X. Have faith in the help of the Immaculate Virgin, Mother most pure, Mother most chaste, Help of Christians; have faith in the grace of Christ, source of all purity, Who never abandons those who work for the coming and establishment of His kingdom.

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