

FAMILY ASSISTANCE IN A PERIOD OF DEMOGRAPHIC CRISIS AND DESTITUTE EDUCATION

Kard. Ennio Antonelli, Family Council, Chairman
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1) Family and Development

Many thanks to Mr. Petr Nečas, Government Vice Premier and Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic for organizing this conference on labour and parental childcare.

The fact that politicians are addressing this issue means that they have acknowledged the social and public function of a family and that they perceive the importance of organizing labour for family needs.

The reconciliation of work and family life is absolutely necessary for the mental and physical well-being of humans and society. Also Amartya Sen, a Nobel prize winner for economy, emphasized that the development and well-being of a state does not consist of the amount of wealth (GDP), but namely the quality of life, interpersonal relations, and the space of freedom. Many sociological researches imply that it is the very family that considerably contributes to creating the comprehensive development of humans; for example, during the recent World Meeting of Families in the Mexican capital I heard, in this respect, a lot of statistical data; however according to various countries in nature (Canada, USA? Guatemala, Chile), percentage values indicated concord on the positive influence of families on civilized society.

Thus, it implies that married and stable couples of a man and woman everywhere bring much greater social benefits than any other types of cohabitations, including single mothers. For older children, a married couple gives a higher probability of better education, regular school attendance, better mastering of the curriculum, securer and better employment achievements, a lower probability of criminal behaviour and lower consumption of cigarettes, alcohol and drugs. Furthermore, it gives a lower child mortality rate, better physical fitness and mental balance of the children and the parents themselves, a lower rate of occurrence of depression in women, less suicides, meeting life aims (i.e. for men), higher work productivity, higher economic income, a higher number of property owners, a lower probability of the occurrence of poverty for women and children, and lower social expenses for the state.

Based on these researches it would seem that it has been empirically proven and it has been documented that families contribute positively to the creation of intangible and tangible assets, thus supporting the overall development of the state. Therefore it is in the public interest that the family is based on marriage and that the family is healthy.

2) Demographic Crisis and Destitute Education

Having considered these facts it is surprising to claim that the economy and politics consider the quality of family relations for their own purposes and because of modern, quite common prejudices, to be insignificant.

The work of enterprises is organized by individual workers (hourly working hours, individual workstations, individual mobility and fixed-term contracts). Household work is not recognized as socially beneficial (unless carried out by domestic helpers or nurse-maids). A woman leaving work carried on outside her family environment to take care of her children faces personal depletion and, in fact, depletion of the whole family. The tax burden very often penalizes married couples and does not take account of children being taken care of.

There are ideologies that revere women's self-fulfilment in their professional employment and in work outside the household, and which do not recognize the importance of their mother status. More generally, during the past decades, more and more often the liberal, relativistic, individualistic, utilitarian and consumer culture has been enforced, which is, of course, not beneficial to families and very often regards the family as something outlived and condemned to extinction.

Also, we need to include the serious population crisis tormenting Europe in this context. The fertility rate pro rata (per woman) has decreased to 1.56 (in Italy it is down to 1.2), it is much lower than needed for population reproduction (2.1) when we take into account aging and loss of population with serious economic, social and culture impacts.

The demographic crisis is due to another crisis, which Pope Benedict XVI called destitute education, in other words a shortage of education for handling freedom properly, which results in other bitter pills of the fall of ethics and social disintegration.

Due to this demographic crisis and social disintegration in Europe we are again feeling the necessity of the family. A number of analysis and recommendations of European authorities call for policies focusing on the family, establishing childcare services, support of childcare and education, protection of maternity against labour discrimination, reconciliation of labour and family life and preventive measures against exposing new born babies.

Work in the family is not a priority in Europe, yet. Funds allocated for this sector are only 1/13th of all social expenses and 2.1% of GDP (even less in Italy, only 1.2%). In addition to others, the European Union lacks an authority to deal with family policy, specifically.

We hope that the six-month Czech Presidency and also the results of this meeting may produce a specific step in the right direction.

The initiative of the Czech Presidency to reopen the discussion on the European Union policy seems to be very positive; this policy gives priority to childcare for children up to three years old in collective facilities as compared to family care in households, as recommended by scientific researches and experience for the well-being of the children themselves, and last, but not least, for the entire society. The policy rights of children and

families should give parents actual freedom of choice and provide them with corresponding financial funds.

Furthermore I would like to hope that efforts to reconcile childcare for children up to three years of age with the employment and work of parents will be the first sign of initiating employment and labour reforms tailor-made for families and building a more family-friendly society. Because of this I have embedded this topic into a wider context.

3) Why Healthy Family is an Important Resource for Society

Besides the logic of the market and trade calculus being interested in its own individual profit and establishing, based on this, purpose relations, the family on its own implements and provides society with the logic of gift and coexistence and it pursues its own good along with the good of others, not against it or without it, it lives with the logic of love, which is a unification energy (Saint Thomas Aquinas) for preserving heterogeneity, liberty and difference. The basic anthropological differences between both sexes - men and women - and both generations - parents and children within the family are harmonized, even becoming a gift and mutual enrichment; what is good for an individual is reconciled with good for society; with liberty and solidarity.

In the logic of relation, love and gift, the family ensures the future of society via its function of reproduction. Unfortunately, due to adverse social and economic conditions the number of actually born children is lower than the number of actually desired children. Couples getting married in Italy plan, on average, for 2-3 children, however, they have 1-2 children in reality.

In the name of the logic of relation, love and gift, the family nourishes in all its members, namely in the children, personal and social values: trust in others, in life, in God; self-confidence, realization of the dignity of every man and thus respect, justice, loyalty, service, diligence, care for the weakest, forgiveness, mutual sharing, dialog, sincerity, allegiance, cooperation, and solidarity. Within the environment of love, through individual evidence and every-day experiences, values and ethical norms are perceived as something inherent, and these become a necessity of life; they are not kept in the theoretical framework and they are not perceived as something mandatory, ordered from outside. Because of this, the family is the first, irreplaceable school of socialization (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* 43).

The family cannot be regarded as a private institution only, nor as the common sum of members living in the same household, but as an original tie of mutual relations between a man and a woman and parents and children, to be a specific subject of public interest.

4) Family-Friendly Economic Policy

Parents have an original, primary, irreplaceable and vested right/obligation to raise their own children (John Paul II *FC* 36). On the other hand, children have the right to have their mother and father and to be raised by them. To develop, they need both food and their emotions.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 recognizes the "family to be a natural and base unit of society and to be entitled to the protection of society and the state", (Art. 16.3). This means that it must be protected in its own identity and must be installed into such conditions so that it can responsibly perform its function of reproduction and education.

Today, the policy focused on family assistance, which wants to implement these requirements in specific steps, is subject to many difficult directions of development, but it is also of significant social importance. However, it must be said that politics is the art of dealing with options, but it is necessary to move politics in the right direction.

Since the flexibility of work is ever increasing as is the percentage of employment for fixed terms, work activities must be guaranteed a minimum wage so that flexibility does not result in poverty.

In order to prevent marriages being postponed and to prevent married couples living far from each other, employees must be able to transfer without financial impacts and losses.

To harmonize working hours with the rhythm of the family, enterprises must be helped to provide employees with custom made labour-law relationships, e.g. flexible working hours, so as to control the results rather than the number of hours worked, so as to be able to provide part-time work and to be able to commonly combine working in the company with the work of the home.

In order to help parents, particularly mother's, to freely choose, whether to work taking care of the children at home without any financial penalty, household work must be recognized as worthy work and socially needed and thus remunerated. Why should a mother be penalized for deciding to take care of her children? In Italy, up to 33% of female employees leave their paid employment once their baby is born. Why should a family that decides to have children be poorer?

The equality of the tax burden must be promoted more for the growth of fertility. Taxation should take into account not only the total family income, but also the income of those taking care of children (the number of children, the eventual handicap). Why should someone with a numerous family be just as well off as someone with no family at all? Or as someone who can afford to save up for the moment, to have a good time and to draw a pension in the future, for which the children of others will work?

Families must be provided with accordant services to support education (nurseries, schools, etc.), to strengthen cooperation between institutions, the school private sector and the network of families themselves. All families, even poor ones, must be able to freely choose non-state schools without any additional financial burden if they wish so. Why should, in some countries Italy included, only the rich be able choose the school they consider to be the fittest in relation to the family educational focus?

Politics that take steps forward in these directions would contribute to building a society that would be more family-friendly and would strengthen cohesion and development. I want the family to become the priority in Europe and to be recognized as a civil subject with its own rights and obligations.

The future of Europe depends on the family!

