

Love, Family and Responsibility

Amor, familia y responsabilidad

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Abstract: The institution of the family has been under ideological attack at least ever since the 19th century. Admittedly, the family in its historical reality is the place of numerous problems, including violence and disordered power structures. The solution to these difficulties, however, cannot be the abolition of the family, given that it is precisely in the web of family relationships, centered on generativity, that human beings find their primary identity, their whence and whither. The solution to the problems experienced in and by the family must rather be found in the Christian Gospel message that is capable of healing family relationships by giving people an unconditional acceptance, preparing the way to forgiveness and opening the family up to love's fruitfulness and hospitality. One important way of taking responsibility for the love that is at the heart of the family is the affective formation in the virtue of chastity. Spouses need to develop this virtue and educate their children in it. For young people chastity is not the repression of their sexuality, but rather the orientation of one's sexual desire to one's future spouse. The abstinence that is implied is thus seen in the horizon of a life-vocation.

Keywords: family, violence, identity, generativity, chastity.

Resumen: La institución de la familia ha estado bajo ataque ideológico al menos desde el siglo XIX. Es cierto que la familia en su realidad histórica es el lugar de numerosos problemas, incluyendo la violencia y las estructuras de poder desordenadas. La solución a estas dificultades, sin embargo, no puede ser la abolición de la familia, ya que es precisamente en el entramado de las relaciones familiares, centradas en la generatividad, donde el ser humano encuentra su identidad primaria, de dónde y hacia dónde. La solución a los problemas experimentados en y por la familia debe encontrarse más bien en el mensaje cristiano evangélico, capaz de sanar las relaciones familiares, dando a las personas una aceptación incondicional, preparando el

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camino al perdón y abriendo la familia a la fecundidad y a la hospitalidad del amor. Una manera importante de asumir la responsabilidad del amor que está en el corazón de la familia es la formación afectiva en la virtud de la castidad. Los esposos necesitan desarrollar esta virtud y educar a sus hijos en ella. Para los jóvenes, la castidad no es la represión de su sexualidad, sino la orientación de su deseo sexual hacia su futuro cónyuge. La abstinencia prematrimonial se ve así en el horizonte de una vocación de vida.

Palabras clave: familia, violencia, identidad, generatividad, castidad.

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1. A Love Gone Missing: The Family as a Problem

“People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can’t get. They’re well off; they’re safe; they’re never ill; they’re not afraid of death; they’re blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they’re plagued with no mothers or fathers; they’ve got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they’re so conditioned that they practically can’t help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there’s soma”¹. These are the words in which Mustapha Mond, the Resident World Controller for Western Europe, praises the advantages of *Brave New World*, a globalized society in the year 632 after Ford, in which stability is the highest goal and in which war and sickness have effectively been eliminated. Destabilizing factors, such as human initiative, genuine interests and human affections have been abolished. Sexual promiscuity is a virtue, while attachment to a single person is considered a vice. After an industrialized process of fertilization and gestation in bottles, children are no longer born, but “decanted”, and hence have no longer any father or mother, terms which have become obscenities. It is a society in which “everyone belongs to everyone else”², which, of course, is just another way of saying that no one belongs to anyone. Committed and affectively charged relationships are a thing of the past. There are no more family ties; people are no longer fathers or mothers, sons or daughters, brothers or sisters.

Evidently, Aldous Huxley wrote his novel not in praise of a certain technological and social progress but as an anti-utopia, and few today would find the world of the 7th century after Ford a desirable place to live in. And yet Huxley is only spelling out the extreme consequences of cultural tendencies detectable already well before his time in the 1930ies. In his 1884 *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Friedrich Engels describes the family a bourgeois institution for the systematic subjugation of women³. In 1848, together with Karl Marx he predicts

¹ A. HUXLEY, *Brave New World*, Flamingo, London 1994, pp. 200-201.

² *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³ Cfr. F. ENGELS, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Penguin Classics, New York 2010, pp. 95-96 (chapter II, section 4): “[Monogamy] was the first form of the family to be based not on natural but on economic conditions – on the victory of private property over primitive, natural communal property. The Greeks themselves put the matter quite frankly: the sole exclusive aims of monogamous marriage were to make the man supreme in the family and to propagate, as the future heirs to his wealth, children indisputably his own. [...]

Thus, when monogamous marriage first makes its appearance in history, it is not as the reconciliation of man and woman, still less as the highest form of such reconciliation. Quite the contrary monogamous marriage comes on the scene as the subjugation of the one sex by the other; it announces a struggle between the sexes unknown throughout the whole

the family's soon demise, given that its only purpose is the accumulation and protection of capital, a function superfluous under communism⁴. Closer to our own times, in her 1949 *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir famously speaks of the social construction of female identity: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman"⁵. Elsewhere she advises women to be on their "guard against the trap of motherhood and marriage"⁶. Though some women may really desire to have children, they ought to think about all that is entailed in this situation, "because being a mother these days is real slavery"⁷. Again, marriage and family keep women down, preventing them from seeking and finding their self-fulfillment. De Beauvoir's not-husband-yet-life-companion Jean-Paul Sartre remarks that while the act of begetting children is certainly something exquisite, actually *having* children is evil. According to him, this is quite independent of anything the father does inasmuch as the relation of fatherhood in itself is something bad, depriving the child of his or her freedom and autonomy⁸.

Today the nature of the ideological attack on the family has changed with respect to what it has been until the 1960s and 1970s. As it has proven difficult, if not impossible, to purge the word "family" from public discourse, the tendency today is no longer to confront the institution of the family upfront, but to empty the word "family" of all meaning. Thus, in the 2011 Italian census, a one-person household was identified as a one-person "family"⁹. The reason for this determination might not have

previous prehistoric period. [...] The first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male".

⁴ Cfr. K. MARX and F. ENGELS, *Communist Manifesto*, Penguin Books, New York 1968, p. 239 (part II, chapter 2): "Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists. On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain. In its completely developed form, this family exists only among the bourgeoisie. But this state of things finds its complement in the practical absence of the family among the proletarians, and in public prostitution. The bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital".

⁵ S. DE BEAUVOIR, *The Second Sex*, Vintage Books, London 1997, p. 295.

⁶ A. SCHWARZER and S. DE BEAUVOIR, *After the Second Sex: Conversations with Simone de Beauvoir*, Pantheon, New York 1984, p. 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ J.-P. SARTRE, *The Words*, George Braziller, New York 1964, p. 19: "There is no good father, that's the rule. Don't lay the blame on men but on the bond of paternity, which is rotten. To beget children, nothing better; to *have* them, what iniquity. Had my father lived, he would have lain on me at full length and would have crushed me. As luck had it, he died young".

⁹ Cfr. Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, *Manuale della rilevazione 15° censimento generale della popolazione e delle abitazioni*, Rome 2011, p. 15: "Una famiglia può essere costituita anche da una sola persona".

been ideological, since the Italian language simply does not possess a word for “household” as distinct from the word “family”. Nonetheless, the idea of a one-person “family”, proposed in an official government document, is certainly striking. Even more so, efforts to describe people living together in *de facto*, civil or same-sex unions as forming a “family” empty the word of any meaning. It looks like our generation will soon have achieved what the revolutionaries of the latter half of the past century were unable to do: purge the family from the landscape of public institutions. And the highly effective way of doing so is to submit language to the absolute power of a State that arrogates itself the right to call by the name of “marriage” or “family” whatever social reality it sees fit, without having to give criteria, enlarging the category to the point of abolishing it. If every way whatsoever of living together is called “family”, then *nothing* is family.

Where does the modern suspicion or hatred of the family-truly-so-called come from? Why would anyone be interested in abolishing the family as an intergenerational reality based on marriage as the public, permanent, and exclusive union of one man and one woman at the service of life? Why would anybody be convinced that dissolving the meaning of “family” would be an invaluable contribution to human civilization and moral progress? If we look at relevant statistical data, or simply read the news, we may begin to understand where these people are coming from. There certainly exists, for example, the grave problem of *family violence*. According to the US Bureau of Justice Statistics in 2002, family members were responsible for 21,5% of all murders in the United States. In the case that the victim was a female, this figure was even at 43%¹⁰. In the papers we read time and again of family members exerting violence on each other or even killing each other from anger, despair, or to redress what some consider the “honor” of their family. The family seems to be a dangerous place to live in.

In addition, there is the problem of *pathological family relationships*. Erik Erikson notices how some of his patients with similar pathogenic tendencies had similar problematic relations with their parents. These patients tend to have mothers who love them, “but they love fearfully, plaintively, intrusively; they are themselves so hungry for approval and for recognition that they burden their young children with complicated

¹⁰ Cfr. Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Family Violence Statistics. Including Statistics on Strangers and Acquaintances*, 2005 (<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvs03.pdf>; last access: 19 June 2019).

complaints, especially about their fathers”¹¹. Is the family not a place of intrusiveness, jealousy and rivalry, a place where neuroses are born?

Furthermore, we may refer to the fact that families can constitute significant *power structures* in society. For centuries Europe was ruled by a few royal families of the names of von Habsburg, von Hohenzollern, Bourbon or di Savoia just to name a few. Many times, mediaeval wars took on the character of gigantic family feuds. Often it was not nations, but royal families that made war on each other in violation of the true interests the countries they were governing. Still today families are eluding the complete control of the State (and already for this reason seem suspect to many rulers). Historically, the United States have not possessed a royalty and aristocracy, and yet they have families such as the Kennedy or Bush clans of quasi-aristocratic or even quasi-royal status which have been exercising a decisive influence on political affairs for the past fifty years or more. Let us take Italy as a further example. Here the Agnelli family has had a great influence on the economy and with that also on politics and society at large. Besides, the country is known for other family power structures that are working less openly. In the face of the phenomenon of manipulative, oppressive, and closed families, some sociologists speak of an “amoral familism”: an extreme loyalty to family members combined with an almost complete absence of solidarity that goes beyond the confines of the clan¹². It may at times appear that the solidarity of the family is of the same kind as the solidarity known among robbers.

2. Family and Identity

While critics of the family would argue that violence, oppression, and egoism belong to its nature, one could also argue that these traits are deformation and do not belong to the family’s essence. One can make the case, as we will here, that the undeniable problems inherent to families are so grave precisely because family relationships are so important. No one can hurt us more than those who are closest to us. Already as small children we instinctively know that the love between our father and our mother is at the origin of our being, and we suffer gravely, if for some reason this love does not manifest itself properly or not at all. If a friend

¹¹ E. ERIKSON, “The Problem of Ego-Identity”, in *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 4 (1956), p. 92.

¹² Cfr. E.C. BANFIELD, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, The Free Press, New York 1958.

betrays our trust, we may be quite disappointed, but then again move on with life. But if those at the origin of our being should betray, disown, or deny us, we are shattered at the core of our existence. If those to whom we have given life pretend they no longer know us, we will be wounded at the very heart of our being. Our identity is formed within the family, by our family relationships. By its nature, a family is a relational reality; it is constituted by relationships. Spouse, father, mother, son, daughter, grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt: all these are relational terms that indicate a person's place within the particular web of human relationships that is the family. Now these relationships, in their very unconditionedness, can give us a security and basic trust, but they can also hurt us to the core. The solution to a broken father-son relationship is not the abolition of fatherhood and sonship but its healing. The same is true for all other family relationships.

Who am I? This is the *magna quaestio* of our identity, which we are continuously asking ourselves. Where do I come from? Where am I going to? A response, in fact the only response, is found in the realm of relationships, and in particular in those sorts of relationships that are of a generative kind: relations to those who in some manner have given biological, spiritual, intellectual life to us and to those to whom we have given life in any of these senses. This giving and receiving of life nowhere happens more profoundly and decisively than in the family. It is here that, according to Benedict XVI, "The human person discovers his or her relationality, not as a self-fulfilling, autonomous individual, but as a son or daughter, spouse, or parent, whose identity is founded in being called to love, to receive him –or herself from others and to make him–or herself a gift to others"¹³. Being sons or daughters, spouses, parents: these are the relationships of which the family is made and at the same time the relationships that make up our identity¹⁴. These relationships tell us where we are coming from, a "whence" (we are sons or daughters), and they open up to us a horizon, a path to follow, a "whither" (we are called to be husband or wife, father or mother). To be sons or daughters, spouses, parents: all these are not simply biological relationships. These are relationships that generate both our own identity and the identity of the other.

¹³ BENEDICT XVI, *Address to Participants in the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family*, Rome, May 13, 2011: "E' nella famiglia che l'uomo scopre la sua relazionalità, non come individuo autonomo che si autorealizza, ma come figlio, sposo, genitore, la cui identità si fonda nell'essere chiamato all'amore, a ricevervi da altri e a donarsi ad altri" (translation my own).

¹⁴ Cfr. L. MELINA, *Building a Culture of the Family. The Language of Love*, St. Pauls, Staten Island 2011, pp. 3-21.

Making a point that is very similar to that made by Pope Benedict XVI, Francesco Botturi insists that “The human person has a *generative relational identity*, an identity that is exercised and that is constructed as a relation that generates the other’s identity, that is as a relation that accepts the other in his or her real and full difference and in this sense generates and the other, handing him or her over to him –or herself–”¹⁵. Relationships generate our identity. The son receives his sonship from the father. But also, the father receives from something from the son, namely precisely his fatherhood. The same holds true for being a mother and for being a daughter. According to Botturi, for an anthropology that intends human identity as a relational generative identity, the typical characteristics of human identity will be the following three: “The importance of sexual difference, the value of the enduring bond, [... and] the openness to the otherness of the son or daughter in the body”¹⁶. In other words, human identity is built by making the other exist, by giving life to the other in many ways, without ever reducing the other to oneself, but rather accepting him or her in his or her irreducible difference¹⁷.

Erik Erikson, too, formulates the question of identity in terms of generativity when he seeks to elucidate his profound affirmation that at a more mature stage of our personal development “we are what we love”¹⁸: “Evolution has made man a teaching as well as a learning animal, for dependency and maturity are reciprocal: mature man needs to be needed, and maturity is guided by the nature of that which must be cared for. *Generativity*, then, is primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. There are of course, people who, from misfortune or because of special and genuine gifts in other directions, do not apply this drive to offspring of their own, but to other forms of altruistic concern and creativity which many [*sic*] absorb their kind of parental drive. And indeed, the concept of generativity is meant to include productivity and creativity”¹⁹.

¹⁵ F. BOTTURI, *La generazione del bene. Gratuità ed esperienza morale*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2009, pp. 241-242: “L’uomo ha un’identità relazionale generativa, un’identità che si esercita e si costruisce come relazione generatrice d’altra identità, cioè come relazione che accoglie l’altro nella sua reale e piena differenza e in questo senso lo genera e consegna a se stesso” (translation my own).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 242: “[...] il rilievo della differenza sessuale, il valore della durata del legame [... e] l’apertura alla corposa alterità del figlio” (translation my own).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ E. ERIKSON, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1968, p. 138.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

We see that here, at the end, the question “who am I?” –the question of human identity– is equivalent to the question: “To whom have I given life? To whom have I given birth –physically, spiritually, intellectually?–” Human identity is never an autonomous and individualistic identity. It is a generative identity as formulated and described by Benedict XVI, Francesco Botturi and Erik Erikson.

We do not generate only sexually, but also with our gestures and our words: through what is called recognition. The son or daughter needs to be generated, but also recognized as son or daughter. He or she needs to hear from the father and the mother: “you are my / our son” – “you are my / our daughter”. Only when we feel recognized as sons or daughters will we be able to become spouses and parents and to recognize others, giving them life. The question of our identity, which is the question of the meaning of our very existence, is played out in relational and familial terms.

If there is violence, pain, and hurt in the family, the reason is that so much is at stake. The solution to the violence, pain, and hurt cannot be abolishing the family. This would be tantamount to trying to abolish the human being as a relational being. The solution is to find the lost love again, by the power of the Christian Gospel. This Gospel love is not only required as a commandment, but also offered as a new possibility. In what follows I will argue that this love has at least three aspects which are able to transform and heal family relationships. It is a love that is unconditional, forgiving, and fruitful.

3. The Family and the Gospel Love

3.1. An Unconditional Acceptance

The Vatican II Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* speaks of marriage as an “intimate partnership of married life and love”²⁰. That marriage has something to do with love is not to be taken for granted. In pagan antiquity often it did not. It is precisely the work of the Christian Good News to have transformed family relations from relations of dominion to relations of love. While according to *Ephesians* 5 the wife is to be “subordinate” to her husband, the husband is called to love his wife “as Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her” (*Eph* 5:21 and 25). This love finds expression in the possibility of the “forever”,

²⁰ Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, December 7, 1965, n. 48.

which makes this love unconditional. Only as unconditional can the relationship between husband and wife be one that truly forms their identity and provides security, not only from the economic point of view, but also affectively: one can dare love. One can invest one's very life, give one's whole self to the other who one knows will do the same. There is not catch, there is no backdoor. It is safe to give oneself and embark together on the adventure of a common life, forming a community of destiny to the point that one's life can henceforth be thought of as succeeding as a human life only if the life of one's spouse, too, succeeds, only if one succeeds *together*. One links one's destinies. One's own destiny and the destiny of one's spouse can from now on only be thought together.

The indissolubility of marriage is not a heavy burden placed on the Christian spouses. It is divorce that is the bad news. Divorce derives from "the hardness of the human heart" (cfr. *Mt* 19:8). It leaves people abandoned and alienated. The mere possibility of divorce alienates spouses, because it prevents them from linking their destinies. A backdoor is kept open. The relationship is not unconditional and hence not one of true love. The indissolubility of marriage is quintessential part of the meaning of true love and is given the followers of Jesus as a new possibility. It is good news. When Jesus says, "What God has joined together, no human being must separate" (*Mt* 19:6), he also provides the *possibility* of life-long fidelity. In him all things were created. He is the Eternal Word by which the Father made the universe (cfr. *Col* 1:16). God said, and it was (cfr. *Gen.* 1). Now Jesus says that faithfulness is possible.

3.2. A Place for Forgiveness

A reason why this love can be faithful is that it is *forgiving*. Christian spouses can forgive each other, because they know that they themselves have been forgiven. "As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive" (*Col* 3:13). This command to forgive, expressed by the Apostle, is not imposed from the outside as another heavy burden on the followers of Christ. The willingness to forgive is rather the natural consequence of one's awareness of having been forgiven. Persons who know that they have received a great gift can themselves be generous. We are speaking of a generosity that flows from a sense of gratitude, which in turn derives from the realization that one has received a great gift. This would seem to be the essence of Christian existence: "A Christian is someone who knows that [...] he lives first and foremost as the beneficiary of a bounty; and that consequently all righteousness can only consist in being himself a donor, like the beggar who is grateful for what he receives and gene-

rously passes part of it on to others”²¹. Hence, forgiveness is possible because of God’s initiative, and as such it is the visible and concrete witness to his activity.

Forgiving does not simply mean forgetting or pretending that the offense suffered did not matter after all. Rather, the one who forgives participates in the hope that God has for the other²², refusing to tie him or her down to the one evil act committed. Basing ourselves on Robert Spaemann’s profound reflections on the topic, we can say that the one forgiving tells the offending party, “I know that this is what you’ve done, but I refuse to believe that this is what you’ve become! I have hope for you. This is not you”²³. In reconciliation, which is forgiveness offered and received, the relationship between the offender and the offended is reestablished, their friendship is restored. It is here that the center of the Gospel message is manifested, Good News that Saint Paul calls the “the message of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19).

3.3. Love and Fruitfulness

Finally, a love renewed by the Gospel is *fruitful*. Superabundance is a characteristic of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus is turning the water into wine (Joh 2:1-12) or breaking the bread for the multitudes (e.g. Mt 14:13-21), he produces a superabundance of bread and wine by far exceeding the immediate needs of the people present²⁴. The Christian family is called to a supernatural fruitfulness. Jesus is saying to the family: “*Effata*” –open up!– (cfr. Mt 7:31-37). Children, as the natural fruit of marriage, are no longer seen simply in function of the family –to let one’s name endure–. The Christian family has a horizon that transcends itself: children are birthed into the Kingdom. It is in the family that the faith is passed on. As Pope Francis says in his first encyclical *Lumen fidei*, “In the family, faith accompanies every age of life, beginning with childhood: children learn to trust in the love of their parents”²⁵. Biological fruitfulness is linked to spiritual fruitfulness and to hospitality to strangers. As Abraham receives the three strangers, he obtains the promise of a son

²¹ J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1990, p. 196.

²² Cfr. L. MELINA, *Building a Culture of the Family*, cit., p. 34.

²³ Cfr. R. SPAEMANN, *Persons. The Difference between “Someone” and “Something”*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006, p. 234: “One who forgives abandons the right to take the offender as he found him and gives the offender the opportunity to take himself differently, too”.

²⁴ Cfr. J. RATZINGER, *Introduction to Christianity*, cit., p. 197.

²⁵ FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, June 29, 2013, n. 53.

(*Gen 18:1-15*). Hospitality is thus a central virtue of the Christian family²⁶.

A family's hospitality is the opposite of a family's egoism. Hospitality signifies openness to the stranger; to the unbidden²⁷, to the newness of the other as other, whether he or she be someone literally unknown, one's spouse, or one's son or daughter. There is a way in which spouses, but also parents and children, will remain "strangers" to each other, in the sense that they will not absorb each other, but leave space to each other and accept each other as inscrutable mysteries. "Thou shalt not make an image of me" (*Ex 20, 4*), the Lord God tells his people Israel. The same, we may say, holds true for the human person made in his likeness²⁸. We must not reduce the other to the ideas we have of him or her but give the other hospitality in our hearts as he or she is and accept that he or she will always remain to some extent a stranger.

In a very concrete way, hospitality means openness to welcoming a child as someone new and unknown. For Hannah Arendt, the birth of a child is the miracle that saves the world, inasmuch as it marks the beginning of a beginner. A new person is made manifest to the world, able to begin and take a new initiative. We read: "The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born. Only the full experience of this capacity can bestow upon human affairs faith and hope [...] It is this faith in and hope for the world that found perhaps its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their 'glad tidings': 'A child has been born unto us'"²⁹.

But for there to be this faith and hope for the world, based on the fact that the new human being can act and take initiative, see the world

²⁶ Cf. A. SCOLA, *Il mistero nuziale 2. Matrimonio – Famiglia*, PUL-Mursia, Roma 2000, p. 143: "La potenza dello Spirito del Risorto è all'opera nella famiglia cristiana, quando nell'amore fecondo degli sposi si documenta la logica dell'accoglienza dell'altro nel suo bisogno, espressione, magari inconsapevole, del desiderio di pienezza dell'umano. Le famiglie cristiane sono chiamate ad essere una *dimora* aperta, in cui gli altri possano sperimentare, attraverso il fascino del matrimonio, la bontà dell'umano esistere".

²⁷ Cf. M. SANDEL, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*, The Belknap Press, Cambridge, MA 2007, p. 45: "Parenthood, more than other human relationships, teaches what the theologian William F. May calls an 'openness to the unbidden'".

²⁸ Cf. M. JUNKER-KENNY, "Genetic Enhancement as Care or as Domination? The Ethics of Asymmetrical Relationships in the Upbringing of Children", in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 39 (2005), pp. 1-17.

²⁹ H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998, p. 247.

with new eyes and possibly find new solutions to old problems, it is central that people are born and not decanted, i.e., that they are not the product of other people's wills, whose destiny has been determined in advance, but spontaneous new beginnings that are welcomed by their parents. The child is "the guest' who comes from afar"³⁰ from whom the "unexpected can be expected"³¹ and whose depths the parents will never be able to fathom. Any attempt to decide for others who and what they are will have ruinous consequences. For children to thrive, the hospitality they receive from their parents has to be unconditional. In this context, Alasdair MacIntyre affirms, "If parents, especially mothers, are to provide children with the security and recognition that they need, they have to make the object of their continuing care and their commitment *this* child, just because it is their child for whom and to whom they are uniquely responsible. Secondly, their initial commitment has to be in important respects unconditional. [...] Thirdly, [...] it is the needs of the child, and not their own needs in relationship to the child that have to be paramount"³². Having said all this, he concludes, "Good parental care is defined in part by a reference to the possibility of the affliction of their child by serious disability. [...] It is the parents of the seriously disabled who are the paradigms of good motherhood and fatherhood as such"³³.

But we can only give this unconditional welcome if we know and experience that we ourselves have been unconditionally welcomed. And this indeed touches the heart of the gospel message. The story of the waiting father is not simply a paradigm of a well-lived human father-son relationship, but a parable of God the Father's relationship with fallen humanity, whom he invites with unconditional love to return to his house. Having received God's welcome and having been inserted into his family that is the Church, we can give welcome to others. Family relationships will be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit and will no longer be exclusive and egoistic. Rather they will open up and become a school for love. In their very particularity these relationships will also be for the good of society at large. Hence Cardinal Scola writes, "Welcoming into one's own home (family) has an absolutely extraordinary power to build community and aid the common good (culture of life)"³⁴. In this way, then, the words of Goethe, who confidently claims that "A heart that

³⁰ L. MELINA, *Building a Culture of the Family*, cit., p. 104.

³¹ H. ARENDT, *The Human Condition*, cit., p. 178.

³² A. MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago 1999, p. 90.

³³ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁴ A. SCOLA, *Il mistero nuziale 2*, cit., p. 108.

loves one person cannot hate anyone”³⁵ are not romantic wishful thinking but express a profound truth.

The road to the universal goes through the particular. “Everyone belongs to everyone else”³⁶, the motto of the fictional *Brave New World* but also in many ways of the quite real sexual revolution, bespeaks a despair of love, which is seen as absorbing, exclusive, possessive and otherwise deviant in thousand ways. What the Good News tells us is that, because “God has first loved us”³⁷ (*1 Jn* 4, 10), true love is possible, a love that is welcoming, open, respectful of the difference, and unconditional. For a love that respects the difference, that gives true hospitality, true welcome to the other as other, the words of Erich Fromm will be true: “If I truly love one person, I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. If I can say to somebody else, I love you, I must be able to say, I love in you everybody, I love through you the world, I love in you also myself”³⁸.

4. Taking Responsibility for Love: Affective Formation and the Virtue of Chastity

This kind of familial love we have just described is offered to the Christian faithful as a new possibility. And yet God asks us to cooperate with his grace, to cultivate his gift, to take responsibility for it. A particular and specific way for spouses to take responsibility for this love is to grow in the virtue of chastity, by which sexual desire is integrated into the order of personal love. In addition, parents will take responsibility for this love by educating their children in this virtue, providing them with the formation of the affections. Indeed, the affective formation of young people is one of the main concerns highlighted by Pope Francis in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, in which describes the urgency of a “pedagogy of love”³⁹.

As young people grow up, the birth of sexual desire presents a great novelty in their lives. They will need someone to give them indications on how to interpret this desire and how to deal with it. Education to chastity will be crucial. Given that the parents are the first educators of their children, the family takes pride of place for this kind of education.

³⁵ J. W. GOETHE, *Die Laune des Verliebten*, in *Poetische Werke*, Vol. 5, Aufbau Verlag, Berlin 1964, p. 20: “Ein Herz, das einen liebt, kann keinen Menschen hassen”. Cited in J. PIEPER, *Faith, Hope, Love*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1997, p. 200.

³⁶ Cfr. A. HUXLEY, *Brave New World*, cit., p. 38.

³⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, n. 1.

³⁸ E. FROMM, *The Art of Loving*, Harper, New York 2000, p. 43.

³⁹ Cfr. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 19 March 2016, n. 211. Cfr. also: *Ibid.*, n. 280-286.

But of course, if the parents themselves do not know how to integrate their sexual desire in the context of personal love, then it will be difficult for them to educate their children in this area. If, on the other hand, the parents manage to exercise self-possession and self-control, this will give them authority also in front of their children. This is what Paul VI stresses in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. We read: “For if with the aid of reason and of free will they are to control their natural drives, there can be no doubt at all of the need for self-denial. [...] Self-discipline of this kind is a shining witness to the chastity of husband and wife and, far from being a hindrance to their love of one another, transforms it by giving it a more truly human character. [...] For it brings to family life abundant fruits of tranquility and peace. It helps in solving difficulties of other kinds. It fosters in husband and wife thoughtfulness and loving consideration for one another. It helps them to repel inordinate self-love, which is the opposite of charity. It arouses in them a consciousness of their responsibilities. And finally, it confers upon parents a deeper and more effective influence in the education of their children”⁴⁰.

Sometimes educators hide behind a profession of an anti-authoritarian education. Supposedly the best education is that which allows young people to learn from experience. Behind this excuse there often hides a peculiar kind of fear. Education always means to introduce children into the common world, into reality. Those who feel lost with respect to a particular aspect of reality, will feel hesitant to try and teach their children about it. Those who feel incapable to take responsibility for their own affective life will find it difficult to take responsibility for their children’s affective life by trying to educate them in this field.

We must not forget, however, that mistakes in the realm of sexuality can have consequences that mark one’s life forever. Therefore, it will be cruel to educate our young people by making them use the method of trial and error. Let us imagine a mother of a fifteen-year-old girl who tells her daughter, who is about to attend a party, not to do anything stupid and then adds: “But in any case, do take a condom with you to avoid the worst”. What does the mother communicate to her daughter in this way? Telling her to use a condom does not mean to tell her to be responsible. It means telling her that she thinks her daughter is incapable of being responsible. Indeed, by handing over a condom, the mother encourages her daughter’s irresponsible behavior. The preservative may prevent the young lady from becoming ill or pregnant. But can it protect her from a

⁴⁰ PAUL VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae Vitae*, 25 July 1968, n. 21.

broken heart? Acts of sexual intimacy form extremely strong bonds between the persons involved. If these bonds are formed and then broken, people are left with deep wounds and become increasingly less capable of forming deep relationships⁴¹. Sex without bonding is anthropologically impossible. Strong attachments form. Every time one changes one's sexual partner, the previous partners takes part of oneself with them. One becomes alienated and fragmented.

We all are looking for a great beauty in our lives. It is here that education to chastity comes in. Chastity does not mean repressing desire, but rather taking responsibility for the love that this desire is calling us to. Education to chastity means indicating a beauty, opening up a horizon, a context that gives meaning to this desire. The beauty we are looking for is not found in splendid buildings, magnificent landscapes or marvelous paintings, but rather in human interpersonal relationships lived well. It is found in the love between husband and wife who want each other's good, who are faithful and trusting. It is found where love is life-giving, where parents feel enough at home in the world to take upon themselves the responsibility of introducing their children into it, explaining to them also the deepest meaning of the sexual desire that has suddenly sprung up in them as a great novelty.

Given that the exercise of our sexuality has a finality, an end, a context of meaning, namely that of conjugal love, or, said differently, given that our sexuality implies a life vocation, chastity is not repressive but beautiful. Where chastity, as the virtue that integrates sexual desire into the order of personal love, requires abstinence –as is the case in couples not yet married– this abstinence is not lived as the negative repression of “evil” sex. Rather, it is lived as a requirement of love. It is a mode of taking responsibility for love, inasmuch as this abstinence is not primarily abstinence *from* but abstinence *for*: abstinence for one's future hus-

⁴¹ To this effect, the sociologist Jay Teachman presents statistical data suggesting that women who have their first experience of sexual intimacy with the person who is or will become their marital partner have a lower risk of marital failure than those who have had previous sexual encounters with other partners. Cfr. J. TEACHMAN, “Premarital Sex, Premarital Cohabitation, and the Risk of Subsequent Marital Dissolution Among Women”, in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 65 (2003), pp. 444-455: “Women who cohabit prior to marriage or who have premarital sex have an increased likelihood of marital disruption. Considering the joint effects of premarital cohabitation and premarital sex, as well as histories of pre-marital relationships, extends previous research. The most salient finding from this analysis is that women whose intimate premarital relationships are limited to their husbands –either premarital sex alone or premarital cohabitation– do not experience an increased risk of divorce. It is only women who have more than one intimate pre-marital relationship who have an elevated risk of marital disruption. This effect is strongest for women who have multiple premarital coresidential unions” (p. 453).

band or one's future wife, with whom one desires to build a common life and for whom it is beautiful and meaningful to preserve oneself in the body. Any other perspective on human sexuality ends up depriving it of its deepest meaning and of leaving human beings hurt and fragmented.

Education to chastity wants to explain and give witness to the fact that there is never any casual sex. It means showing that sexuality is a gift from God that is so splendid that it needs to be inserted into a special context: the faithful, exclusive and fruitful love between husband and wife who promise their lives to each other⁴². Human sexuality speaks to us about our destiny. It opens up the path to a life-vocation. Educating to chastity means demonstrating that there is a great beauty. It means to help adolescents understand that they are made and called to love: to become spouses and parents. This is the beauty of chastity: it keeps and preserves a vocation. Already with thirteen years of age, adolescents can think of their future spouse. This does not mean depriving sexuality of its value, but rather appreciating its preciousness to the full. There is the call to fruitfulness: here is the great beauty of life. This is what our young people need to hear. It is worthwhile keeping oneself for marriage. It is worthwhile getting married. There is a future for which one needs to take responsibility already today to keep and preserve, not to destroy.

It is important not to underestimate our young people. They have a desire for life; they want to live it to the full. It is necessary to open up before their eyes a path toward the great beauty: a vocation, a cause for which it is worthwhile living. Let no one say that this is asking too much, that this path is too difficult, and that speaking this way serves only to discourage people. It is a difficult path, no doubt. But it is nonetheless a possible path. And let us remember that young people indeed need challenges. To say it with Viktor Frankl: "Education which is still based on the homeostasis theory, avoids confronting young people with ideals and values so that as few demands as possible may be imposed on them. It is true that young people should not be overdemanding. However, we have also to consider the fact that at least today, in the age of an affluent society, most people are underdemanded rather than overdemanding"⁴³. The educator worthy of the name, such as parents taking responsibility for their children's love, point out to young people which challenges are truly worth their while, such as the challenge of true love.

⁴² For a decisive work that proposes such a perspective cfr: K. WOJTYŁA, *Love and Responsibility*, Pauline Books and Media, Boston 2013.

⁴³ V. FRANKL, "Self-transcendence as a Human Phenomenon", in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 6 (1966), pp. 102-103.