

# Prosperity Through Timeless Values

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## THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO THE SOCIALIST ATTACK ON THE FAMILY

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Why do the most deliberate and sustained attacks on the family so often come from the socialist side of the political spectrum? While modern industrial capitalism puts pressure on the family, this pressure is incidental to the main structures of the market economy. By contrast, the most profound attacks on the family, including easy divorce, abortion and same sex marriage, have come deliberately from Socialism, not as its unintended by-product.

My purpose today is to show that the socialist ideal of equality has played an independent role in the breakdown of the family. Socialism, which has grown up in parallel with, and in reaction to capitalism, has attacked the family directly, and has adopted policies that have led to demographic collapse.

I will first explain why I believe that the most violent attacks on the family come from the most committed Socialists. I will then show why

the attack on the family evolves into an attack on the Catholic Church and any other religion that defends the family. Finally, I will argue that the Church really is threat to the socialist ideals, precisely because she offers more appealing solutions to the problems socialism claims to solve.

I should note at once, that my definition of the family is the one grounded in the teaching of the Catholic Church and based on the clear instruction of our Founder, Jesus of Nazareth. We believe that the family is based upon the life-long conjugal love between a man and a woman. The married couple sustains itself, brings forth new members, and provides for the care of its elderly and infirm members. I do not accept the various attempts by the United Nations and others to re-define the family into "families." I simply mean one man, one woman, for life.

### ***The demographic implosion of Socialism***

The simplest way to see the failure of socialism is to look at the demography of Western Europe. The modern welfare-state or social assistance state can not replenish itself because it has marginalized the family. Rather than strengthen the family, as some originally intended it to do, the social assistance state has weakened and almost replaced the family.

The total fertility rate for the European Union is a mere 1.47 babies per woman, far below the replacement rate of 2.1 babies per woman. For some countries, such as Spain and Italy, the total fertility rate is a desperate 1.2. At this rate, the population of these countries will decline almost by half every generation. American fertility rates hover right around the replacement rate.<sup>1</sup> Most observers

attribute this to the higher religiosity of America in comparison with other modern countries.

### ***The economic weakness of the social assistance state.***

Socialism is a major contributing cause to the demographic decline, due to high taxes and perverse incentives. The social assistance state provides generous cradle-to-grave benefits. All these benefits have to be paid for by somebody. That means high taxation on the working population.

The social benefits must be paid for by high tax rates. Even in America, with low taxes by European standards, the median income earner pays 40% of income in taxes. This means the secondary wage earner in the family, usually the mother, is working to pay the family's taxes.

Just before I left for the trip for this Meeting, I took money from my business account thinking we could finally replace our twenty year old mattress. But then I realized that our quarterly income tax payments were due. So, my self-employment income went to pay our quarterly income tax payment.

Labor regulations impose costs on the young. Most European countries regulate wages and hours, requiring relatively high wages and mandating relatively low working hours. The European social model also requires employers to provide generous benefits such as health care, paid vacations, paid parental leave and the like.

These regulations and mandates have a negative impact on young workers by increasing the employers' cost of hiring workers. The productivity of a skilled, experienced worker can justify this generous compensation package. But a young person, just starting out, may not produce enough to pay for the minimum required wage, much less the entire compensation package including health care, and paid time off. The young and the unskilled are less employable. The unemployment rate among the young is much higher than the

general population. In the 25 countries of the EU, the unemployment rate for those under 25 hovers just below 20%.<sup>2</sup> The 15-24 year-old age group in Poland constitutes about 42% of all unemployed, and 28% of all unemployed in Italy.<sup>3</sup>

The high unemployment rate contributes to the delaying of marriage and child-bearing. It is estimated that "An incredible 70% of unmarried Italians between the ages of 25 and 29 live with their parents, where they benefit from subsidized housing and where their poor incomes amount to a handsome pocket money."<sup>4</sup>

So the European social model provides high wages and excellent benefits, for the few who have jobs. The system excludes those who are not skilled enough to be economically productive. But everyone begins their lives being not very economically productive. In practice, this means that the young are kept out of the labor market precisely at the time they are most biologically suited to begin forming families. It also means that those who are intrinsically poor, due to disability or low intelligence, are also excluded from participation in the labor market. Those people are pushed aside into a life of idleness.

### ***The collapse of marriage and the family***

The welfare state has also contributed to the marginalization of marriage. Living with parents is not conducive to starting a family. Age at first marriage is an important determinant of family size: a person who gets married at the age of thirty-five, is not going to have as many kids as one who marries at twenty-three.

The life-time assistance of the state displaces the economic function of the family. The elderly don't need adult children to support them in their old age. Women don't need a husband to support them if they do have a child. Husbands become a nuisance, because the government will provide financial benefits without the inevitable difficulties of dealing with a flawed human being as a partner.

Men dislike the feeling of powerlessness inherent in having the state claim a large fraction of one's earning power, and then give it back a little bit at a time. Men do not feel like men, able to care for and protect their families. In this environment, children become consumption goods, an optional life-style appendage to acquire only if one happens to enjoys children.

The social model's attempt to offset declining fertility levels by increasing family allowances has not succeeded. The range of government benefits offered to families is truly staggering. Among the EU countries, parents receive benefits for their children, allowances for a parent who has ceased or reduced employment, single parent allowances, new school year allowances, and housing allowances.

But over the period that these benefits have been enacted, fertility levels have continued to fall. Between 1970 and 2000, the total fertility rate of the 15 original EU countries fell from 2.38 children per woman to 1.48 children per woman, a drop of 38%.<sup>5</sup> These economic subsidies to child-bearing have failed because they are attempting to replace the father.

Economic security offered by taxpayers cannot replace the deeper support that a lifelong marriage can provide a woman and her children. Non-married child-bearing is inherently more risky and more expensive than raising children inside a functioning lifelong married partnership. It is hardly surprising that people choose to have fewer children in a social situation where marriages are unstable.

I made these arguments earlier this year at a conference in Rome sponsored by the Acton Institute. The British Catholic "progressive" newspaper, *The Tablet* criticized my analysis, and took the opportunity to bring up the favorite "progressive" issue: birth control and their claim that *Humane Vitae* was wrong. The way forward, according to *The Tablet*, is to resume the process of "theological development." The editors, as usual, criticized Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, and his "hard line" on sexual

issues. And by the way, *The Tablet* considers the current population decline, which is unprecedented since the Black Death, to be an "alleged population crisis."

Let us conduct the following thought experiment: Suppose the Catholics of Europe and America had embraced *Humanae Vitae*, instead of wrestling with the papacy for the last 40 years. Many of the countries now experiencing population decline, would instead be at or above replacement levels of fertility. Our publicly funded pension systems would be more solvent than they now are. Europe would be more likely to remain Europe, rather than sliding toward becoming an Islamicized Eurabia.

The modern parts of the modern world desperately need another Baby Boom.

### ***Why Equality is not the Summum Bonum of Society***

But the problem with Socialism is deeper than economics. Pope Leo XIII had already predicted the problem of Socialism back in 1891 in the first of the modern encyclicals on the social teaching of the Catholic Church, *Rerum Novarum*. Leo saw that Socialism is essentially organized envy. As he said in *Rerum Novarum*, "Let it be laid down in the first place that a condition of human existence must be borne with, namely that in civil society the lowest cannot be made equal with the highest."<sup>6</sup>

And also, "Socialists, exciting the envy of the poor toward the rich, contend that it is necessary to do away with private possession of goods... but their program is so unsuited for terminating the conflict (between employers and employees) that it actually injures the workers themselves."<sup>7</sup>

However, even as prescient a thinker as Leo XIII could not foretell just how invasive the socialist impulse would become. Treating equality as a moral absolute, the modern summum bonum of society, the socialists would drive not only for economic equality among workers, but also for equal-

ity between men and women in the social sphere, and equality between same sex and opposite sex couples.

“Equality” is not a stand-alone objective, that always and everywhere legitimately takes priority. A society must make some judgements about who must be equal to whom, for what purposes and in what contexts. The organic reality of the family is a continual affront to socialism. Put simply, the Left hates sex.

### ***Why the Left Hates Sex***

Not sexual activity, mind you. The Left is hyper-active sexually. I mean something much deeper: the Left is war with the fact that we are sexual beings. The Left can not accept that we are born as either male or female.

Men and women are so different that they can never be made equal in the way that the Left demands. 8 Radical egalitarians regard sex as a cosmic injustice. The Left demands that we wipe out all sex differences from our social and legal lives.

This assault on sex first emerged with the subject of income equality. The Leftist mind-set has never been at peace with the fact that child-bearing places distinct demands on both women and men. Men tend to work more steadily in the paid labor force throughout their lives, while women tend to cut back on their labor force participation during their child-bearing years. Many women return to full-time employment once their children have matured. As long as men and women can cooperate throughout their lives in marriage, both men and women can be made better off by combining these different economic strategies. Men may have a larger amount written on their paychecks, but their wives get the benefit of their earning power.

But the Left’s war on sex differences transcends the merely political, and pops up in the most personal ways. For instance, most first-time parents slide into “stereo-typical gender roles.” Studies show that people who embrace gender equality are likely to be upset by the arrival of their first child.

Because of their deep commitment to equality, they often become angry at their partners and ultimately at themselves. Unless they can surrender their rigid Leftist gender ideology, their marriage is headed for divorce and they are headed for misery. 9

The Left wants sex to be an irrelevant category. Now, if the question is who can be an astronaut or accountant, you might be able to make the case that sex is irrelevant. Most people can go along with the idea that we should not be overly rigid about gender roles. But the Left wants much more than that. They want sex to be irrelevant, period.

I was once debating same sex marriage, at a large state university. I was the only person on the panel who supported the definition of marriage as being between a man and a woman. (In fact, I was probably the only person in the room who supported marriage: I looked around the room and saw numerous lesbian couples, holding hands in the audience.) I asked one of my opponents whether she thought gender were a relevant category for parenting. I expected that she would be too embarrassed to say no. But in that Leftist-dominated environment, she came right out and admitted that she thought men and women were completely interchangeable as parents. 10

This idea that mothers and fathers are interchangeable is prevalent throughout the European academy as well. Here in Spain, the Socialist government has even changed the birth certificates to accommodate same sex marriage. Children no longer have “Father” and “Mother” listed on their birth certificates. Instead, children have “Progenitor A” and “Progenitor B.”

I suppose that when Pope Benedict XVI arrives for these meetings, we shall not be allowed to call him our Holy Father. We shall have to call him our Spiritual Progenitor.

I can report with confidence that in America, the widespread support for the traditional definition of marriage is founded on precisely on this point. Most Americans intuitively understand that

mothers and fathers are different, and that children need both. Claiming that same sex couples can be married is claiming that sex is irrelevant to parenting. No one outside of a university really believes that.

### ***Reproductive Freedom and Income Equality***

The Left has tried to define “Reproductive Freedom” to be synonymous with women’s equality. But income equality is the kind of equality they have in mind. If women have babies, and leave the labor force to raise those babies, the lifetime incomes of women will be lower than the lifetime incomes of men. Well, let us concede this point: if this is what the feminists mean by equality, they are correct. The presence of children is the single most salient factor in the income differences between men and women.<sup>11</sup>

Since pregnancy and child rearing affect men and women differently, equality is impossible without somehow removing the sting of that difference. Allowing every pregnancy to be explicitly chosen, exclusively by the woman, is a way of leveling the playing field between men and women. Insisting that men take on a greater role in household chores is another. And so finally is attempting to equalize the income earning possibilities of men and women at every point in their life cycles.

Of course, very few sensible people literally maximize their income. Most people, men and women alike, sacrifice some income for other things that they value. Since most women want some children at some time in their lives, there will always be some income differences between mothers and others. Access to abortion allows women to manage that income difference to their own satisfaction. They can postpone or completely forego having children, if income maximization should happen to be their goal. Access to abortion allows women to achieve income equality, or at least as much income equality as they can stand.<sup>12</sup>

I believe this is why the feminists become so angry at mothers who choose stay at home: the

feminists claim to value choice, but in fact they believe some choices are more equal than others. A member of the Dutch Labor Party recently proposed that women who stay at home with children be penalized, because they were wasting the investment society had made in their education.<sup>13</sup> A feminist law professor in American has launched a one-woman jihad against women who leave the labor force to “lead lesser lives” as mothers. She advises women to postpone child bearing as long as possible, and certainly to have no more than one child.<sup>14</sup> The woman who chooses to stay at home threatens the premise of the feminist movement: that women earn less because their choices have been limited by the oppressive patriarchy.

### ***No Equality for the Weak***

As socialism has unfolded throughout the industrialized world, it has become clear that many people are necessarily excluded from its concern with equality. The physically weak, the incapacitated, and the disabled can never be made the equal of the strong. Throughout the world where equality has been made into an idol, powerful political forces operate to completely exclude these people from the most basic protections of law. The infant in the womb has been excluded in many secularized countries from any legal protections whatsoever. Euthanasia is often described as “mercy killing.” But it has become clear that it is really Killing for Convenience.<sup>15</sup>

It is not simply that the infirm are not useful, as one might expect from a purely utilitarian approach so typical of the market place. It is that the infirm are an affront to the ideals of equality. The child in the womb is not the equal of an adult. The person at the end of his life can never again be the equal of the young and the fit. The disabled person, no matter how many resources are directed toward him, can never be made the equal of a person without disabilities. So they become non-persons. It is certainly the political Left, throughout the world, that has promoted these policies, and has offered the most elaborate justifications for them.

### ***The attack on the Catholic Church***

The Left around the world appears to be at war with the Catholic Church. The Left believes that unlimited sexual activity without a live baby resulting is an entitlement. The teaching authority of the Church holds that not all private sexual acts between consenting adults are morally equivalent. The Life-Style Left believes that the only thing standing between them and a lifetime of guilt-free sex is the Pope.

But more than this obvious problem is the fact that the Church proposes an alternative vision of life, and of what is truly valuable and worth pursuing. The Church offers alternative and more appealing solutions to the problems that Socialism seems to solve.

As I already mentioned, Pope Leo XIII understood that creating economic equality was a fool's errand. A certain amount of inequality is inevitable and even justified, in any society. Pope John Paul II continued in this tradition by proposing a very different principle from creating equality, the principle of defending the weak. As he said in *Centesimus Annus*, "Leo XIII is repeating an elementary principle of sound political organization, namely, the more that individuals are defenseless within a given society, the more they require the care and concern of others, and in particular the intervention of government authority."<sup>16</sup>

It is now abundantly clear that "defend the weak" is a very different ethical mandate from "create equality." When Catholics defend the right to life from conception until natural death, we are defending the weak. And our enemies worldwide are primarily from the left end of the political spectrum, who demand equality for every other group in every other circumstance, other than the life-threatening ones.

The Catholic vision of sex is not threatened by the differences between men and women, but embraces these differences as part of the divine plan for teaching love, and drawing us out of our

natural self-centeredness. A man is drawn out of himself by his sexual desire for a woman. This desire makes him want to please her, protect her and give her what is good for her. A woman is drawn out of herself by her desire to have children. Her love for her children teaches her to seek the good beyond herself.

The modern view of sex insists that love, sex and reproduction be separated from each other, for the sake of making men and women equal. But this view places men and women at odds with each other. Men exploit women for sex, seeing them as objects that give pleasure. Women exploit men for reproduction, treating them as a combination of wallet and sperm bank.

The Catholic vision insists that marriage is the proper context for both sexual activity and for child-rearing. In this vision, the man's sexual desire for woman, turns him toward love for her. Catholic teaching insists that his love for her be connected with love for the children she bears. The woman's desire for children turns her heart toward the man who will be the father of her children. Catholicism insists that she love her husband for the sake of her children, rather than use him and discard him. The Catholic vision of human sexuality is that love, sex and child-bearing are all integrated with each under the umbrella of marriage.

The Catholic vision of the family sees men and women as complementary to each other, not as competitors with each other. Marriage is inherently a gender-based institution, because it helps men and women to bridge the natural differences between them. Marriage is the school and household of love. Within the household, men and women learn to help each other, to cooperate with each other and to understand each other. This is a very different vision that the image of husbands and wives at each other's throats, in competition for dominance and power inside their own homes.<sup>17</sup>

Catholic social teaching insists on supporting the family, economically and politically. Catholic social teaching defends the family as a social

institution independent of the state, that has claims against the state. In *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul reiterates this point, originally made by Pope Leo XIII in *Rerum Novarum*. “He (Leo XIII) frequently insists on necessary limits to the State’s intervention and on its instrumental character, inasmuch as the family and society are prior to the State, and inasmuch as the State exists in order to protect their rights and not stifle them.”<sup>18</sup> Today, the modern State plants itself firmly against the organic reality of the family.

### ***Conclusion: the Catholic Vision of a Civilization of Love***

As the Roman Empire was collapsing, St. Benedict gathered the monks together to preserve what was good and decent from the ancient world. The founder of Western monasticism instructed the monks to copy everything of value in the Latin language: they copied the Bible of course, but also Cicero and Virgil and bawdy Roman plays. As the modern world is collapsing, I am certain that the new Benedict intends to try and preserve what is valuable in the modern world. Much of modern science, technology and economic productive power are good and worthy things, well worth preserving. But these things must be placed at the service of the human person, and his capacity for love.

The Church has long recognized that the market economy is subject to excesses. The Church quite rightly speaks out against materialism and consumerism, without denying the legitimate rights of private property and enterprise. It is time to speak with similar forthrightness against Equality as one of the great political Idols of our time. Our Catholic proposal to “defend the weak,” achieves many of the goods that made “create equality” so appealing as a political principle.

And above all, the Catholic vision respects the family as the great pre-political social institution, and marriage as the most basic unit of social cooperation. For the family truly is the cradle of any civilization, because it shapes the next genera-

tion and transmits the culture’s values to them. The family is certainly the cradle of the civilization of love, which is the civilization the Church wishes to promote.