

CHILDREN AS GIFT

Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "Who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day. (*GS*, #50)

A child is not something owed to one, but is a gift. The "supreme gift of marriage" is a human person. A child may not be considered a piece of property, an idea to which an alleged "right to a child" would lead. In this area, only the child possesses genuine rights: the right "to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents," and "the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception." (*CCC*, #2378)

However morally licit the population policies which they pursue may be, governments have no right to decide for couples the number of children they can or should have. Only the discovery of the inherent value of the human person, of marriage and of the family can encourage people to be receptive to children in view of the world of the future. (*PCF, The Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends*, March 25, 1994, #75)

In discovering the family as the "sanctuary of life" and the "heart of the culture of life," men and women can be freed from the "culture of death." This latter culture begins with the "anti-baby mentality" so widely developed in the ideology of coercive population control. In each child, couples and society must recognize a gift coming to them from the Creator, a precious gift which must be loved and welcomed with joy. (*PCF, The Ethical and Pastoral Dimensions of Population Trends*, March 25, 1994, #89; Quoting *GS*, #50)

With good reason, then, the Church asks during the Rite of Marriage: "Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?" In the raising of children conjugal love is expressed as authentic parental love. The "communion of persons," expressed as conjugal love at the beginning of the family, is thus completed and brought to fulfillment in the raising of children. Every individual born and raised in a family constitutes a potential treasure which must be responsibly accepted, so that it will not be diminished or lost, but will rather come to an ever more mature humanity. (John Paul II, *Gratissimam sane*, #16)

A true and proper right to a child would be contrary to the child's dignity and nature. The child is not an object to which one has a right, nor can he be considered as an object of ownership: rather, a child is a gift, 'the supreme gift' and the most gratuitous gift of

marriage, and is a living testimony of the mutual giving of his parents. For this reason, the child has the right, as already mentioned, to be the fruit of the specific act of the conjugal love of his parents; and he also has the right to be respected as a person from the moment of his conception. (CDF, *DV*, February 22, 1987, II B 8)

The activities of public authorities and private organizations which attempt in any way to limit the freedom of couples in deciding about their children constitute a grave offense against human dignity and justice. (The Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, October 22, 1983, 3 a)

The Church recognizes the legitimacy of the desire for a child and understands the suffering of couples struggling with problems of fertility. Such a desire, however, should not override the dignity of every human life to the point of absolute supremacy. The desire for a child cannot justify the “production” of offspring, just as the desire not to have a child cannot justify the abandonment or destruction of a child once he or she has been conceived. (CDF, *DP*, September 8, 2008, #16)