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The end of the family and the end of civil society

I was asked to treat the present subject from the philosophical point of view. It is for this reason that I mention neither the sacrament of marriage nor the supernatural society which is the Church. Our viewpoint, however, is no less philosophical for being that of Christian philosophy. In fact, the chief basis for the present paper is none other than the Encyclicals of Pius XI: "Divini Illius Magistri", and "Casti Connubii".

Of a family we say that it is good, when, faithful to the indissoluble union which they have vowed, husband and wife do all they can to provide their offspring with proper nourishment and education. This is the fundamental criterion, for the primary end of marriage is the child; whereas the form and principle of the family consists mainly in the union of mind and heart between husband and wife, primarily in view of the child not only as to its generation, but even more so far the sake of its education to manhood. For this reason, whatever is characteristic of the married person must somehow be related to the child. Even the friendship of husband and wife (of which Aristotle has

spoken so well in the Ethics) is intrinsic to marriage itself and must therefore be ultimately based on their union for the sake of the child whose education is the main reason for the indissoluble character of ~~marriage~~ *wedlock*.

At this juncture a first difficulty may be raised against this doctrine. It seems that the end of marriage as well as the persons of husband and wife are altogether minified if we confine them *in* the perspective of the child.

This objection may arise from the fact that on the one hand we seek in the family more than it is and on the other hand we would reduce the persons who make up the family to what they are insofar as they are members of this imperfect society, and correspondingly reduce their good to that which is theirs as members of such a society. For although the family is indeed a society in the strict sense of that term, it remains an imperfect one, as Pius XI states it in the Encyclical "Divini Illius Magistri": "The family enjoys a priority both of nature and of right ~~in relation to civil~~ <sup>over civil</sup> society. ~~It is~~ <sup>Newsholm, the family is</sup> an imperfect society ~~because it does not dispose~~ <sup>since it has not in itself all the means</sup> ~~within itself of all these things~~ which are required for a perfect achievement of its end; whereas civil society is a perfect <sup>Society's having</sup> ~~one~~ <sup>since</sup>

all those things which are necessary to ~~the common good~~ *the good its proper end* -

~~the common good of our present~~ *the common good of our present*

*the common good of our present*  
life on earth. It is by <sup>virtue</sup> ~~reason~~ of this common good that civil society has ~~the~~ pre-eminence over the family: only in the commonweal can the family attain with security and propriety that temporal perfection which is its aim." Hence we should not expect to find within the confines of the family the fulness of the temporal good of man quâ man. (X)

(X) (Text déjà copié du livre noir).

What is this temporal common good which, absolutely speaking, is superior to that of the family? The same document replies: "It consists in the peace and security which the families and *individual* citizens enjoy in the exercise of their rights as well as in the greatest spiritual and material wealth that can be obtained in this life thanks to the concerted efforts of all." Note, particularly, that the temporal common good is not restricted to material wealth, but comprises spiritual goods, such as a wise legislation, not to mention "the arts and the sciences which make for the wealth and prosperity of civil society." (ibid.)

Because the family is an imperfect society which cannot reach even its own end outside the political community, both the latter and the former may tend, in practice, to transgress their

respective limits. Nor are these limits always easy to define — even when we prescind from man's ordination to a common good far superior to that of civil society. However, the very fact that on the one hand the family is not self-sufficient in the pursuit of its own end, and that on the other hand the end of civil society is quite distinct from the former, may serve as the basis for a distinction to be made in the realm of civil society itself.

The primary end of the family is the education of the child to the maturity of manhood. This is an inalienable right of the family, since, as St. Thomas says: "the child is ~~as i~~ ~~here~~ something of the parent

*Th. II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 10, a. 12.  
 III<sup>ae</sup>, q. 41, a. 1. ?*

These words of the Angelic Doctor are quoted by Pius XI in the above-mentioned Encyclical. Yet, even here, "the family is not a perfect society which embraces all that is required for its own perfection." As Pius XI expressly points out: "the common good demands that the State promote the education and learning of youth in various ways", which must, of course, be performed

with due respect for, and in conformity with, the innate rights of the family. The question is: how can the common good demand that civil society should share in promoting the good that is proper to the family? Must this be interpreted to mean that the common good of political society is subordinate to the good of the family? that the perfect society is subservient to the imperfect one? By no means; the contradiction is all too obvious. What, then, is the answer?

You may have noticed that in a passage already quoted from the Encyclical, the common good of civil society refers to the families and to the individual citizens: "familiae singulique cives". The same distinction is applied in the sentence which immediately follows: "The function of the authority which resides in the State is twofold: to protect and to further the family and the individual citizen, but not in the least by absorbing or replacing them." Family and individual citizen are not the same. Man is not born a citizen, the child is not as yet causa sui: in fact, the end of the family is to lead the child toward the status of causa sui. But until he has reached this status he belongs to the parent. "Prior to becoming a citizen, man must live, and

this life he does not receive from the State, but from his parents. As Leo XIII declared: 'The children are something of the father; an extension, as it were, of the father's person; to be exact, they enter into and participate in civil society, not immediately by themselves, but through ~~(the intermediary of)~~ the domestic community in which they are born...The authority of the father is such that it can neither be suppressed nor absorbed by the State...' " Hence, in this respect, the parent quâ parent as well as the child are, normally, beyond the reach of the State. It is the parent as citizen who immediately, and by himself, enters into civil society. How, then, can the family concern the State? How can the common good demand that the State further the proper good of the family?

We have just pointed out that the good which the family pursues for the child is the status of causa sui, of being a free man: but this is precisely the primary condition of citizenship. The term of education is at the same time the very principle of civil society, which is an association of free men who seek their greatest good quâ men in the commonweal. It is therefore in the interest of civil society

that its members be free men in the strict sense of the word: that they possess the education and learning essential to citizenship. That is why the common good of civil society must extend to the cradle of citizenship.

Obviously, the common good of civil society and the authority which resides in the government do not extend in the same manner to the family and to the individual citizen. Nevertheless, the end is the same in both instances. The end proper to political society is the common good of the citizen as such — of the freeman — "who can participate in deliberative or judicial office", (1) whether directly or indirectly. However, even in helping the family to achieve its own good — the perfection of the offspring — the State pursues this good only in virtue of, and for the sake of, the perfect human good which is proper to civil society.

Although the two have their principle and term in the same common good, we must distinguish the function of the State with regard to the individual citizen from its function in regard to the family. In protecting and helping the latter, the State meets a requirement which was already

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(1) Aristotle, Politics, III, c.1.

fulfilled to a degree in the pre-political stage of society. The needs of the individual family are such that it naturally seeks the facilities and security which result from inter-family cooperation. However, so long as the family turns to a larger group for the mere sake of its own good, not even the parents may be called free men and citizens in the true sense of these terms. Such persons do not as yet form a civil society. In this pre-political stage, social functions are merely social, confined as they are to the sole benefit of the family. The good of such a society is merely useful (bonum utile) and not strictly a common good. Social assistance, thus understood, is not political, since it is not yet practised in view of the perfect human good. In fact, it is not even ordered to the true good of the family itself, which is a good to be achieved, not by social assistance alone, but by the assistance of civil society, i. e. in conformity with the perfect human good. This distinction, I fear, may reveal a sad state of affairs. The person whose concern is restricted to the individual good as such, quâ a good that he may derive from association with others does not deserve the name of citizen. For the same reason, a family which — though materially

*which man is to attain as a citizen.*

*justice*  
 the "lower" ~~government~~ *citizen*  
 It has more the nature of what is *merely useful.*



belonging to the civil community — is interested only in the kind of social assistance (but "more of it") which can be found in the pre-political stage of society, is not a good family: it does not pursue even its own true good — to make the child a free man is hardly the ideal that consistently governs its behaviour. The citizen who, in voting, gives preference to the candidate from whose election he hopes to derive the greater personal good, forfeits his citizenship. It is only in a material sense that he acts as a free man, as a citizen proper. And in voting for a man who promises a good for the family, which is harmful to the common good of the political community, the father turns against the family itself, and so <sup>against</sup> himself as a father.

If there is always the danger that the State may exceed the limits of its rightful power, there is an equal menace — resulting in a tyranny sui generis — in the family which seeks above all its own good. Such a good is of course no more than an apparent one. When the security of civil society is sacrificed to the material security of the family, the latter destroys its own true security. Perhaps there is no better criterion of the good citizen and the good family than the one which both St. Augustine and St. Thomas have

quoted from Valerius Maximus: "The citizens of Rome preferred to be poor in a wealthy republic, rather than be wealthy in a poor republic."

This doctrine must not be interpreted to mean that the family or the individual citizen should blindly submit to whatever the government may plan or devise for them in the "name" of the common good. The child is subject to its parents, but neither the citizen nor the family are subjects to the State. Only under tyrannical government is the citizen reduced to the condition of subject — and he accordingly ceases to enjoy citizenship. When the State supplants either the family or the individual citizen, it has thereby destroyed itself as a civil society, for the latter is an association of citizens, and the citizen is by nature a free man. Again, it is the citizen that is attacked when the State assumes the authority of the father, since only the family whose rights are protected and whose needs are met with in conformity with its own nature, can foster the child toward the status of free man.