

PRESS CONFERENCE (May 30 2023)

FAMILY GLOBAL COMPACT

COMMENTS by HELEN ALFORD

President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences

1. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis encourages us to look at the “concrete realities” of family life (AL, 31), and, in so doing, quotes from Pope St John Paul II’s encyclical, *Familiaris consortio*, for “the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history”. If we look at the current situation of the family, we see both light and dark, as emerged very clearly in the 2022 Plenary of the PASS which was focused on the family, looking at it as a “relational good”.
2. Among the signs of light, we see that, despite the sense of a crisis in the family, or even of the “death” of the family, it remains a central goal and value in people’s lives. As the final statement of last year’s PASS plenary put it, the contemporary world aspires to “create new ways of experiencing the family as a place of authentic love between the sexes and between the generations”, and, “[t]here is certainly no lack of new forms of family solidarity, both in internal relations and in the surrounding community, to give support to those in need”.
3. At the same time, we are witnessing a weakening of the family, thanks to “a series of interdependent causes that converge to foster a strongly individualistic culture in the conception of human and social rights, to the detriment of solidarity and reciprocity between the sexes and between generations”. Such a culture reduces the capacity of families to deal with the stresses of life, making them more fragile and more susceptible to “[f]ragmentation and internal conflict” through “aggravating their conditions of poverty, both material and relational”. As families weaken, so do social structures and “multiple social problems and pathologies are . . . accentuated”.
4. How to interpret the overall import of these two aspects of light and dark? If we look at the media, we mostly see the negative situations in families, with a focus on abuse, violence and discrimination. However, social science research, while giving due regard to these manifold problems, highlights “the persistence and vitality of families in which the challenge to love prevails and generates relational goods”. It was clear in the discussions during the plenary last year that the family remains a very resilient social structure, capable of absorbing shocks and of providing support and healing to people in many different circumstances. In a

world that is looking for more resilience in the face of projected future crises, including those arising from climate change, investing in the family and in research into how families can face their challenges more effectively, would bring great returns for society as a whole.

5. One of the key elements for improving the resilience of families is a deeper “relational family culture”, allowing a search for happiness at a deeper, less superficial, level. In families, people need to find their first experience of men and women being treated equally, one where family members experience “growth in one’s own difference through reciprocity with others”. This is why the PASS focused the plenary on the idea of the family as a “relational good”, and, in doing so, wanted to call the academic world to give greater attention to understanding the family in this way.
6. As a relational good, the family is “the source of a good society, because it generates those fundamental social goods, such as trust, responsibility, collaboration, solidarity, and the whole ensemble of human virtues that are essential to an inclusive, sustainable social life”. Furthermore, we should recognise that the family finds itself “at the intersection of the private and public spheres”, and as a “social subject”. Indeed, in the final statement of the 2022 plenary, the PASS recommended that there should be “a *citizenship right for the family as such*, due to the unique mediation that families exercise between individuals and community”, and that society as a whole should pursue “family-friendly policies” across economic, social and cultural spheres, recognising the fundamental contribution that the family makes in supporting society, especially thanks to its role in forming, maintaining and deepening the capacity to build relationships in a world that experiences so much loneliness and the suffering that comes from this.
7. What should we do? The Final Statement of the 2022 Plenary addressed international organisations, national governments and national authorities, civil society organisations, the business community, the Holy See, all the world’s religions and all people of goodwill with key actions to be carried forward to strengthen the family as a resilient, relational good. These actions included: Make the promotion of family wellbeing one of the new UN Global Development Goals (addressed to international organisations); Prepare *national action plans* to help families meet their basic needs and implement them by allocating a significant amount of their budget to them (addressed to national governments); Create working groups to address family-friendly employment contracts, focusing on concrete actions and preparing positions on key issues that could improve relations between families and businesses (addressed to the business community); Commit to collaborating with one

another to build a global alliance for the protection and promotion of the family (addressed to all religions).

8. In this series of calls, the first suggested action to the Holy See was: “Propose a *family global compact*, understood as a global alliance for the family, in order to include the protection and promotion of the family based on marriage in the new Sustainable Development Goals”. It is wonderful to see that today the Holy See is taking that suggested action forward.