

# **World Congress of Families IV**

## **Modern Woman and the Challenge of Motherhood**

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Modern woman! Until very recently this term has seemed the very opposite of those willing to undertake the challenge of motherhood!

Today I have been asked to talk about the great anomaly of our time: which is the seeming disjunction between the modern, educated woman and the great challenges of motherhood.

But before I begin, I would like to say what an honour it is for me to be here once more in this great hall, and to be able to address the great and most admired Polish people. But particularly I want to pay tribute to one particular Polish hero, the Patron of this Congress, a hero of the Family. He was my first host in Poland and for years was a great advisor: Archbishop Kaszimirz Majdanski. This pioneer in the study of family was prophetic when in 1945 he resolved that a repetition of the horrors of war and destruction that he had witnessed could only be averted by strengthening the family in the face of increasing pressures. He was a prophet, and here in Poland he planted a seedbed of a return to the anthropological truths of the human person in its true setting, the family, where the 3 levels of the human person can thrive: where, and only where, the needs of the body, the emotions and the soul are cared for and nurtured. May his presence continue to be felt and his wisdom never be forgotten.

Now, let us ask who is this modern woman we are to talk about this morning? The modern woman is much more educated, informed, efficient and ambitious than her forebears. She has also been made to feel that she is the first generation to attempt equality with men. So frequently she feels a challenge to compete with men in order to show that she too can rise to the highest levels of business and government. And thus we see that almost every international body is clamouring for 50/50 hiring to give her the chance to sit in the seats hitherto occupied by men.

Somehow, with all of this the modern woman is often confused and begins to think that her equality with men has been put in doubt. It would seem that only manly qualities are measured in this unhealthy competition, fabricated in our day. Qualities and talents where women have evident superiority are not part of the comparison, and so a distortion in society is having an increasing effect and a feeling of insecurity is nurtured in girls and women. This is happening in spite of the obvious facts and famous instances that have shown, without any doubt, that women have as great a competence as men in all fields, whether scientific, intellectual or political.

The modern woman has, as have men and children, been subject to enormous changes and increasing complications in the societies where she lives and strives to excel. The acceleration of change, which was perhaps first fully described in Allen Toflers' 1970 best seller, *Future Shock*, one whole generation ago, has only become more so, as change has spawned more change and distances and communications have grown shorter and shorter.

These changes, the speed of communication and the shortening of distances, have made many things easier. Certainly the incredible amount of information available promises us better lives in every way. But instead we are seeing a worsening of social problems, and a serious lack of hope in the future, which is demonstrated by the

appalling demographics that we have heard about in this excellent gathering of experts. A society that has no desire to continue in time, and has so low a birth-rate as we have seen, is a society with little joy, and of course no future.

The modern woman is a main actor in this drama. This modern woman, conscious of her talents, rights, ambition and potential, is also mindful of her womanhood. Her desire to love, to nurture and to be needed, is at odds with her full-time involvement in public life. And this can be intensely painful.

There is another factor that weighs heavily in this wrenching situation. And that is the fact that economic systems have, for complicated and intricate reasons, abandoned the concept of the fair family wage. The **fair family wage**, so forcefully advocated by Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical issued in 1891, became a banner of the first Feminists, who rightly fought for a fair wage for their husbands, which would permit the wives to leave the factory and stay home to care for their children. As we know, the first businesses to conform to this new notion of justice found that well-paid men, from happy, well-fed homes were much more productive than the miserable, subsistence workers whose wives and children also had to labour. The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw a great improvement in conditions and in homes, and an incredible spurt in development.

Sadly, changes in the economies and tax structures of modern nations since the 1960's have obliged many women to go out to work again, causing unforeseen problems, some of them so grave that they must be examined and redressed if civilization is to survive. For it is one thing for a woman to have the **right** to be a professional and there should be no barriers to prevent her from developing her talents and contributing to society as she knows best. But it is quite another matter that women who would prefer to raise their children can not do so because low salaries and high taxes **force** her to work outside, as well as inside, the home.

The modern woman will be the key to the future. The future will depend on her response to the pressures which blind society today in two ways. First there is the enormous propaganda generated by the feminists during the 1960's, 70's and 80's. These feminists, unlike the first feminists who fought for the fair family wage and the right to vote, these Radical Feminists insisted that the role of mothering is a form of degradation and a waste of a life. These women took the international agencies, particularly the UN, by storm and were frequently echoed by men and women of good will. Just when the role of mothering became easier, with less farm work and more labour-saving devices, the world became convinced that bearing and raising children was futile and stultifying.

The world is at a moment of decision, and the stakes are very high. Consider the following. The social as well as the hard sciences now know that civilization cannot continue as it is going now.

There is more to concern us than the dangerous demographics. It is indeed very disturbing to read, as in Le Monde some days ago, that in France in 2050, there will be a need for several millions of immigrants to work for a nation of old people, to make up for a lack of French youth.

But much more critical than the huge numbers of elderly, with no one to care for them nor to pay for their retirement and health, will be the huge numbers of emotionally deprived youth. Mothers, as we know, have always worked. And they have always

worked very hard. On the farms, and even in the urban home, the work of mothers has always been what they call now “24-7”. All day, every day. This work included the care of their babies. During those periods when many mothers were in factories, grandmothers or other family members cared for the babies or they were put up for adoption. Our 21<sup>st</sup> century world has decided to put all babies in day care. This is a new experiment, only ever tried on a big scale in the Soviet Union. We read for instance that Germany is planning to create 750.000 new crèches.

What is being ignored here is what modern neurology is discovering: that babies must be with their mothers for the crucial first years when their cortico-limbic lobes are to be formed. This new branch of neuro-science has discovered that it is the interaction of the baby with *one woman* that causes joy and delight (expressed with smiles and gurgling) and which pleasure is **due to the formation of those parts of the cortex**, the cortico-limbic lobes, which will govern self awareness, self assurance, self control, and the management of the emotions and sentiments. The children who have not had this interaction, which starts with hours of mutual gaze and games of expression, hide and seek and other fun that mothers and babies invent together, are turning out to be unresponsive, incapable of attachments and showing the lacks that were so tragically apparent in the babies found in the Bucarest orphanages in 1990. Teachers are reporting increasing numbers of violent, unmanageable, and bullying children. These are the first signs of what will be a huge problem in the next 10 years or so as childcare becomes increasingly “professionalised” and fewer mothers are with their babies and children.

So we are risking a future with tragic implications for not only the number of young people to be born, but the neuro-emotional condition of this future generation, also.

But enough of these projections, true as they may be.

Let us talk about the challenge of motherhood, as it is being taken up and exercised by so many courageous and loving modern women.

What is this challenge? It is the challenge to be the best, the essential and most multi-faceted members of society. For the mother is not only she who creates, with God’s willingness, new, unique, gifted, perfect new persons. She is also, with her husband’s help and cooperation, she who forms and guides these varied and contrasting new people.

For let us not forget that a mother starts out very young, and each baby is a new and unknown personage. With her love, tact and intelligence she discerns the qualities, gifts, weaknesses and tendencies of these new people as they begin to develop, and must also balance the interaction of these very different children as they grow. It is the mother who instils the virtues, strengthens the wills, guides the talents, tames the instincts of her children. She knows them better than any paid hand, and loves them more. The eyes of love give her insights that no one else can have. Those eyes have known the changing lights in that child’s eyes since his or her very birth. Her love is stronger than her life.

Human Capital is what that mother is creating and, as we know, a distinguished professor earned the Nobel Prize in Economics for identifying this oft-forgotten but indispensable element of the economy. Human Capital, Gary Becker teaches, is the

human being formed in the virtues of honesty, responsibility, perseverance and so on, which are, as he stresses, formed by the mother in the home at an early age.

The newest Development Theory also puts emphasis upon the need for the formation of these virtues, without which there can be no trust, and therefore no cooperation, no collaboration...no development.

Obviously the task of mothers is the most important, the most challenging, but also the most difficult of professions. The mother ends her day emotionally exhausted, as well as physically exhausted. This could be part of the attraction of working outside the home. The woman who comes home from work is physically tired, but has not had to use her emotional intelligence to the fullest. The paid woman who has cared for babies or children, is tired, too, but does not have the emotional investment that a mother would have. For this reason, often women find that work outside the house, whether it be running a museum, being a secretary or climbing telephone poles, more attractive than educating her children, which requires constant learning and daily personal growth.

In this respect, I must mention one particular challenge of motherhood today which is perhaps under-estimated. In former times mothers had to pass on to their children the knowledge and skills important for survival and a good level of life. Today the mother must teach her children many things she herself has not learnt and does not know. She must prepare her children for an advancing world and many new situations. It requires all her efforts and accumulated wisdom. This is also part of the growth of the modern woman!

Today, success and happiness have been monetised and are considered to be financially measurable. But self-fulfilment and happiness come from doing what is really worthwhile: what gives a life meaning. As that great neurologist and psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl was able to prove, real happiness can only occur as a result of self-gift to something worthwhile, and here we see the reason for so much existential pain in women who have skipped motherhood and otherwise reached their goals.

The main challenge, then, for the modern woman, that woman more educated, more informed, more inquiring and more ambitious than her forebears, is to be *willing* to temporarily reduce all of her new vistas, information and knowledge to the level of her children. This is actually a difficult intellectual exercise, but it is in fact the very process of the creation of Human Capital, that indispensable industry which our society does not yet fully recognise!

It is not easy, and consumes the energies of young women at their most vibrant. The temptation is great to postpone or skip it altogether, or to give this task to others, in crèches and schools. But as the mother lovingly makes this sacrifice, and regears her intellect to the level of the baby, the small child, the adolescent, she finds herself unexpectedly rewarded. In some way, her knowledge, plus all she learns in the great school of motherhood, is multiplied and becomes wisdom. The other reward for the mother who can subordinate her own interests to that of her children, is that she will find herself surrounded in her maturity with love, admiration and support she never imagined. This modern mother, developed, deepened, and with a broadened experience of human nature, can then, at a fairly young age, begin activities outside the home; activities that will be fulfilling because she by now fully knows her talents and what she really wants to contribute.

An unexpected challenge for an intelligent mother is the impoverishment of public schooling and her need to supplement this failing institution. Many are finding it simpler to home-school, avoiding the peer pressure and anti-values often found in school. The academic and social benefits of this solution are becoming well known.

We at the Alliance for the Family have made a modest contribution to this problem of the anti-values invading families and societies. We have created for school systems a 12-year curriculum of Values Education. Called [Learning to Cherish](#), this program is a systematic progression, helping schools to give children and young people from age 6 to 18 a complete, and entertaining, formation in the values and virtues indispensable for the human being's integrity, happiness and psycho-sexual balance. A continuous story about a group of friends who encounter universal situations of belonging, of friendship, peer pressure and decision-making is the background for learning an analytical approach to life. The student texts are accompanied by teacher's guides that give the pedagogical tools and the scientific background to make classroom or home use easy and stimulating. Our stand has samples of this universal program, which is now being adapted for Africa in their search for education in development and an effective prevention of behaviours that lead to HIV/AIDS and other population-threatening diseases.

To recapitulate, the great challenges for the modern woman are to remain women: to value and exercise the tremendous calling to be mothers and formers of the men and women who will lead the world in an awesome and promising future. And therefore to make the effort to subject her interests, her ambition and her daily routine to teaching those little people that she will be contributing to the world. Another is to tolerate the daily grind, which is so often taken for granted by family and friends and even insulted and thwarted by a society that denies her the moral and financial support she deserves.

And so, what can be said in the language of angels or poets about motherhood, or equally conveyed in the pragmatic expressions of Economics, comes down to this: a call for modern women, prepared to take up the challenge of creating tomorrow's Human Capital, nurturing the intellect, the emotions, the nutrition, the health, the values of the next generation. But we also need all thinking people to unite. And, as someone who lives in the developing world, I would like to add that we must convince the European Union and the United Nations to cease imposing on our countries anti-family policy, designed to destroy our children, neuter our women and stunt our development, as they are trying to do today in Nicaragua, Poland and other countries.

Together we must make our voices heard and insist that our governments recognise human anthropology and the indispensable role of mothers, modern mothers, raising excellent children within the family. That laws return to the recognition that mothers need committed husbands, earning a just wage, and who give the support only a man can give. We must succeed in convincing our governments that tax structures must cease to impoverish the worker and his wife who are raising the children who will guarantee the comfort of tomorrow's elderly.

Thank you very much.

Zincuye Barzo!