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January 21, 1947

The Reverend Paul Bussard
CATHOLIC DIGEST
St. Paul, Minnesota

Dear Father Bussard,

As Chaplain of the Veterans Club here at Notre Dame, I have found the problem of adequate housing and assistance very pressing, most especially for the married veterans with children. It seems that our Catholic people have to be made aware of this problem, and the couples involved need encouragement.

I have attempted to do this in the enclosed sermon preached here at Notre Dame on the Feast of the Holy Family. Of course, liturgically it is dated now, but possibly it might be adapted or reproduced as a discussion of a pertinent modern problem in the light of an age old solution, personalized in the Holy Family.

In any case, I would appreciate your reaction to it.

Sincerely in Christ Our Lord,

(Rev.) Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY
NOTRE DAME...1947

THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

At the end of each year comes the tender heart-warming message of Christmas. The weary world relives again with joy and hope that never-to-be-forgotten day when to us a Child was born, and a Saviour given. Each year as young and old kneel at the Crib, all feel assured that the Divine Child on the straw has all the answers to the many problems of our plush but often unhappy world.

Now today, before this lovely picture fades into the forgetfulness and promise of a new year, the Church asks all the world to celebrate the Feast of the Holy Family. We are told to widen our gaze for one last look, to take in the silent adoring figures on each side of the manger, the figures of Mary and Joseph. We are reminded that Christ's coming into the stable did not merely make a trio, but a family. Here in these three holiest persons who ever graced our world, we find the prototype and exemplar of every Christian Family, yes, of the families you men hope to found some day. Here too in the Holy Family, we find one of the most important answers to the restless seeking of our day for peace, security and happiness.

It would be difficult to find a more important element in life than the family, for it is in the family that life originates, develops, and fructifies. Yet in our day, there is hardly any other element of society more under fire than the family. And it is not exaggerating to say that the Christian family is fighting for its life.

Consider these figures for a moment. Twenty-five per cent of American couples do not have any children at all. It simply isn't fashionable. The next twenty per cent have one child only. Twenty per cent more have two children, which is not even enough to balance our population. Now are these couples, sixty-five per cent of all American couples, happy and contented in marriage. Again, the figures speak for themselves. Eighty-six per cent of our divorces come from couples who have no children, or only one or two children. On the other hand, couples with five children represent less than one per cent of the divorces granted in this country.

It seems obvious from this actual state of affairs, that our big families are our happy families. The reason is that you have to be big yourself to live and grow in a big family. And if you are big yourself, you are kept busy finding things to do for other people, to have time to find fault with them. A husband and a wife work best together as a father and a mother.

It is a strange thing that our world today which has made so much progress in making life comfortable, has made so little progress in making life liveable. It is strange that a country so rich and prosperous as ours has so little use for children who are the greatest riches and prosperity of a country. We spend billions of dollars a year on luxuries, but when it comes to having children, so many say: "We can't afford them." We utilize the best heads of science improving health and lengthening the span of life, but when it comes to bringing life into the world, they devise means of pre-

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venting it. We put our best executives to work activating housing projects, but when it comes to making homes of our fine houses, so many people simply renege.

The young married couple who are courageous, who decide to follow God's way instead of the world's way for married life, are met with scorn, and often enough eviction. Lest he be bothered again, the landlord placards his door with a sign: "No children and no pets allowed." Think what those horrible words mean. They mean that human babies, the most magnificent earthly creation of God's love and the love of husband and wife for each other, are put in the same category as cats and dogs. In some classes of society, cats and dogs simply replace them.

To add insult to injury, as soon as the notice of the new birth is listed in the public papers, our efficient modern propaganda machinery goes into high gear. The deluded young couple, for so they seem to the modern mind, are deluged with so-called enlightening, but actually filthy literature telling them twenty new ways of practicing birth control. This is the freedom he was fighting for overseas, scarcely a year ago: the freedom for someone in a swank office on Fifth Avenue to insult him through the mail. This is the home she dreamed about while she prayed for his safe return from the war: a single drab and dingy room, with a day bed in one corner, and in another, a portable hot plate instead of a cozy kitchen.

Oh their hearts may well ache, but these courageous young Christian couples of today need not fear. For the hearts of Mary and Joseph must also have ached to see the long awaited of the nations, the saviour of the world turned away from door to door, brought to the light of the world he made in a cold and drafty stable. They too had to face eviction by the cruel and heartless Herod. Theirs too were the hardships of the flight into Egypt.

But if holiness is happiness, well can we wish all the courageous couples of today all the heavenly bliss that filled the hearts of that first Holy Family through all their trial and hardship. With all the coldness of the modern world, at least our couples know that they are not turning away Christ again. They indeed are cradling the Christ Child in the baptized soul of their baby. Theirs too is the consolation of hearing the words of Christ for them: "Whosoever receiveth such a little one in my name, receiveth me."

The world today may go its way, turning away by the millions babies that could and should be born for the glory of God, but let them not call themselves Christian for it was Christ who said: "Suffer the little ones to come unto Me, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Heartless modern people who are wedded to the dollar may go on, closing their doors and making life difficult for couples with children, but they too will one day face the Christ who said: "Whatsoever you did unto one of these my least brethren, you did it unto Me."

My dear friends, never forget that God is not mocked. The world may make and break its own rules about marriage, but it cannot find happiness in marriage apart from God and God's way. You can take all the riches and all the luxuries of our childless American houses, and

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add them all together, and still they will not begin to spell out the happiness that filled the hearts of the Holy Family there in the stable. For this is a happiness that comes from God, and from being faithful to His way, a tender and lasting family happiness that is reflected in every Christian family of every age, and which will be reflected also in the family that many of you will found one day, please God.

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