



# CHRISTIAN FAMILY VALUES AND THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNIZATION:

Perspective from the Catholic social teaching.

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*Policy Brief*

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## Executive Summary

The family, as the foundational institution of human society, is ordained by God and serves as a crucial vehicle for the community and the Church to transmit essential values and norms. These doctrinal values and norms form the bedrock of today's society, shaping individual and collective beliefs and actions. However, modernization has ushered in a cultural shift that challenges the traditional family structure, prioritizing absolute human rights over family and community life.

This shift has also created an environment where <sup>1</sup>Christian values concerning the family and human dignity are perceived as antithetical to modernity, promoting individualism over communal life. The Church, however, maintains that the family is the nucleus of human society and must be safeguarded while ensuring the common good and protecting the most vulnerable. Within this context, this policy brief copiously explains the importance of the Catholic Church's social teachings on the importance of the family and its values, identifying some existential challenges and proffering solution to bolster family ethos anchored on church's teachings.

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Benedict, X.VI., 2009. *Caritas in veritate* (authorized English translation). June 29. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.



# Introduction

Modernization, a multifaceted process characterised by rapid technological advancements, improved communication, and increased social mobility, has profoundly transformed societies across the globe (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). While these changes have undeniably improved the quality of life for many, they have also generated complex challenges that can undermine traditional family values, particularly those grounded in Christian beliefs. As the foundational unit of society, the family plays a critical role in shaping individual and collective morals, values, and behaviours. Consequently, understanding the impact of modernization on Christian family values is essential for developing effective policies and strategies that promote the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.

It was for this reason that The Kukah Centre - Kaduna Office, in partnership with the Health Justice Development and Peace (HJDP) – Kaduna Ecclesiastical Province, organized a One Day Round Table Discussion on Christian Family Values and the Challenges of Modernization: Perspectives from the Catholic Social Teaching.

The goal of the roundtable was to draw the attention of the Church, the community and different families that despite the human progress achieved as a result of modernization, the challenges on the family are equally enormous. The objectives are to:

- Highlight the importance of the family, alongside community rights, and the rights of people as a community.

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- Promote Catholic Social Teaching on the family and the dignity of the human person.

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- Re-echo the role of the Church in education, sensitization, and building a human family rather than individualism.

The roundtable provided participants with an opportunity to re-examine the role of the Church and Catholic Social Teachings in supporting and consolidating positive family values in society. It facilitated discussions to seek answers to long-standing questions of faith regarding the family and parenting. Moreover, it identified current and emerging challenges facing modern families and proposed strategic recommendations for intervention.

Thus, this policy brief is a product of the roundtable which inter alia, gauges both the positive and negative consequences of the transformative process of the family's social values and norms. Drawing on the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, the policy brief explores possible solutions that aim to address the challenges posed by modernization while preserving the core principles of Christian family life.

Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant literature and a critical reflection on the perspectives of various stakeholders, this policy brief seeks to provide valuable insights and recommendations for policymakers, religious institutions, and community leaders as they navigate the complex dynamics of modernization and its impact on Christian family values.



## Methodology

A roundtable learning strategy was employed for the event on Christian families, social values, and the challenges of modernization, with a focus on perspectives from Catholic Social Teachings. This strategy was chosen to provide each participant with an equal standing in the discussion, allowing them to contribute their perspectives and ideas freely and fully to the conversation. The roundtable learning strategy (RLS) approach aimed to elicit practical experiences from various segments within the church.

To actualize this strategy, thirty (30) participants were carefully selected, representing a diverse range of church groups, including Catholic Youth Organization (CYON), Catholic Men Organization (CMO), MSM, Zumumtan Mata, Zumuntan Maza, Choir, Reverend sisters, school teachers, Justice Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Legion of Mary, and Family and Human Life units. The participants were divided into four groups to critically examine the effects of modernization on families and explore ways in which modernization can be used to maintain the social values of families and society, drawing from Catholic Social Teachings

During the roundtable learning strategy, several questions were raised to identify the challenges of modernization on Christian families, including the role of the family in the current moral decadence, the potential contributions of youth in reversing the trend, the role of teachers, and the involvement of the church. These questions were relevant to the underlying issues affecting Christian families.

The participants shared diverse opinions during the discussion. For example, one of the speakers highlighted the importance of understanding each other as a community with respect, civility, and decency, accepting differences and working together for a better society. Other speakers emphasized the potential negative consequences of unsupervised individuals and reminded the participants that the human person is a subject, not an object. However, the views of the speakers underscored the crucial role of the family as the foundation of individuals' values and morals.

## CHALLENGES OF MODERNIZATION ON CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

<sup>2</sup>Modernization has undoubtedly brought numerous benefits to families, such as improved communication, access to information, and better living conditions. However, despite these advantages, Christian families face several challenges due to modernization, including:



### 1. The Erosion of Traditional Family Values:

<sup>3</sup>The process of modernization, characterized by rapid societal and technological changes, has contributed to the erosion of traditional family values, such as commitment, respect, and solidarity. <sup>4</sup>These values are integral to creating stable and nurturing family environments that promote the well-being of individuals and communities.

However, as modernization progresses, external influences, such as evolving cultural norms, consumerism, and globalization, increasingly challenge Christian families to maintain their foundational principles. This transformation poses a significant risk to the stability and resilience of family units, necessitating concerted efforts to preserve and revitalize traditional Christian family values amidst the rapid changes ushered in by modernization.

### 2. The Rise of Individualism:

The growing focus on personal success and self-centeredness in contemporary society can lead to the neglect of family relationships and the common good. <sup>5</sup>This shift towards individualism challenges the core tenets of Catholic social teaching, which emphasize the importance of communal life and shared values. The prioritization of individual interests over collective well-being may

<sup>2</sup>Castells, M. (2011). *The rise of the network society*. John Wiley & Sons.

<sup>3</sup>Alsop, J. (2006). *Teacher identity discourses: Negotiating personal and professional spaces*. Routledge.

<sup>4</sup>Bell, K. (2013). norm definition| *Open Education Sociology Dictionary*.

<sup>5</sup>Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2004

weaken social cohesion and contribute to the fragmentation of Christian family values, as members increasingly prioritize their own ambitions and desires above the needs of their families and communities. This trend necessitates a critical reevaluation of the role of individualism within the context of Christian families and the broader social fabric.

### 3. THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

The ubiquitous use of social media in contemporary society exposes families to various negative influences, misinformation, and distorted social values. In particular, an excessive reliance on online communication can erode the quality of face-to-face interactions and genuine connections within families, potentially undermining the foundation of Christian family values. Moreover, social media platforms can amplify the prevalence of cyberbullying, addiction, and other negative behaviours that may adversely impact family dynamics and mental well-being. As a result, it is crucial for families and communities to critically evaluate the role of social media in shaping their values and relationships, and to develop strategies for mitigating its potentially harmful effects.

### 4. SECULARISM:

The growing secularization of society contributes to a diminished appreciation of Christian family values and religious practices. This shift may weaken the role of faith within family life, making it challenging for Christian families to nurture and transmit their religious beliefs to future generations. Furthermore, secularism can lead to the marginalization of

religious perspectives in public discourse, potentially alienating Christian families and undermining the social cohesion that stems from shared values.

Consequently, it is vital for religious institutions, policymakers, and community leaders to engage in open dialogue and foster an inclusive environment that respects and upholds diverse family values, including those rooted in religious traditions.

### 5. SEPARATION AND DIVORCE:

The influence of contemporary marriage ideologies and the pressures of modern life have contributed to rising rates of separation and divorce, causing instability within families and communities. This increase in marital dissolution challenges the foundational role of the family as a stable and unified unit, which is central to Catholic Social Teaching. Furthermore, the repercussions of these trends extend beyond individual families, impacting children's well-being, intergenerational relationships, and the social fabric of communities. Accordingly, it is crucial to develop policies and support structures that promote the resilience and unity of Christian families in the face of these challenges.





## 7. INEFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT PLAN:

**Ineffectiveness of Government Integrated Development Plan:** The ineffectiveness of government policies and integrated development plans may exacerbate the challenges faced by Christian families in maintaining their values. Governments should be encouraged to develop and implement policies that prioritize the well-being of families and support the preservation of Christian family values, with a focus on social, economic, and spiritual aspects of family life.

This shift in focus towards individual achievements and personal gratification can undermine the importance of collective responsibility, compassion, and solidarity, which are at the core of Catholic Social Teaching. To counteract these effects, it is essential to cultivate a sense of belonging and shared values within urban communities, encouraging individuals to prioritize the well-being of their families and the common good.

## 8. THE EFFECT OF URBANIZATION AND SELF-CENTEREDNESS:

**The Effect of Urbanization and Self-centeredness:** Rapid urbanization and the rise of self-centeredness can negatively impact Christian family values by fostering social isolation and weakening community

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the face of the various challenges posed by modernization, it is crucial for Christian families, religious institutions, governments, and educational stakeholders to work together to preserve and promote Christian family values. This section presents a set of policy recommendations aimed at addressing these contemporary issues, fostering resilience among Christian families, and ensuring the continuity of their values in an ever-changing world.

### *The Role of the Church*

As the cornerstone of faith for many Christian families, the Church plays a vital role in addressing the contemporary challenges they face. To effectively navigate these issues, it is essential for the Church to foster collaboration among various church groups, denominations, and religious organizations. By working together, they can develop targeted initiatives and support systems that cater to the diverse needs of modern families, such as faith-based parenting programs, marriage enrichment workshops, and community-building activities.

The Church must actively engage in providing relevant teachings that resonate with contemporary families, addressing issues such as technology use, secularization, and evolving social norms. This may involve adapting traditional religious practices and messages to better suit the realities of modern life, while maintaining a strong connection to core Christian values.

The Church should invest in developing resources and support networks for families, such as pastoral care, counselling services, and faith-based educational materials. These initiatives can help create a supportive and nurturing environment for Christian families, empowering them to maintain their faith and values amidst the rapid changes of modern society.

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By fostering collaboration, providing relevant teachings, and creating a supportive community, the Church can play a crucial role in bolstering the resilience of Christian families, facilitating the transmission of Christian values across generations, and ensuring the continuity of these values in an increasingly complex world.

## ***Social Media Regulation***

To address the negative effects of social media on family life, it is crucial for governments and tech companies to collaborate in developing and implementing policies that encourage responsible use and protect families from harmful content. These efforts may encompass various strategies, such as:

**Enhancing digital literacy programs:** By educating users on responsible online behavior, privacy settings, and discerning reliable information, digital literacy initiatives can empower families to make informed decisions about their social media use.



**Establishing content rating systems:** Implementing age-appropriate content filters and rating systems can help protect younger users from inappropriate or harmful material, ensuring a safer online experience for all family members.

**Supporting research on the impact of social media on family life:** Investing in empirical studies that examine the influence of social media on family dynamics, mental health, and well-being can provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and parents, enabling more effective interventions.

**Encouraging tech companies to prioritize user safety and privacy:** By advocating for ethical design principles and the incorporation of user-friendly privacy settings, Christian communities can contribute to the development of a safer online environment that respects their values.

By fostering collaboration between governments, tech companies, and Christian communities in these areas, it is possible to create a more responsible and secure digital landscape that supports the well-being of families while upholding Christian values.

## *Empowering Youths*

To preserve and propagate Christian family values, it is essential to invest in the development of young people, empowering them to become responsible citizens and leaders capable of positively influencing society. This can be achieved through various strategies, including:

**Fostering spiritual growth:** Encouraging youth participation in faith-based activities, such as worship services, retreats, and Bible study groups, can help them deepen their understanding of Christian values and strengthen their spiritual foundations.

**Creating opportunities for community engagement and service:** Facilitating volunteer opportunities, service projects, and social outreach initiatives can enable young people to put their faith into action, develop empathy, and foster a sense of social responsibility.

**Promoting education and skill development:** Supporting young people in acquiring the knowledge, skills, and qualifications needed for personal and professional success can further their capacity to contribute positively to society.

By implementing these strategies, Christian communities can help ensure the continuity and sustainability of their values and principles in future generations, promoting a society that upholds the tenets of Christian family life.

## *Strengthening Parental Roles*

It is crucial for parents and guardians to foster strong moral values, provide proper guidance, and create a supportive family environment in order to maintain the resilience and unity of Christian families amidst the challenges posed by modernization (Lerner et al., 2005). Several strategies can be employed to achieve this goal, including:

- **Parenting education programs:** Offering workshops, seminars, or courses that provide parents with tools and knowledge to nurture their children's emotional, social, and spiritual development can help reinforce Christian family values.
- **Family counselling services:** Access to professional family counselling and therapy services can assist parents in addressing relationship difficulties, managing conflicts, and fostering a supportive and nurturing home environment.
- **Faith-based initiatives:** Religious institutions can develop programs and resources to support parents in their spiritual journey, facilitating a deeper understanding of Christian family values and their practical applications in daily life.

- **Parental support networks:** Encouraging the formation of peer support groups among parents within religious communities can foster a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, providing opportunities for mutual encouragement, learning, and growth.
- By implementing these strategies and actively supporting parents in their roles as the primary educators and nurturers of their children, Christian communities can contribute to the preservation and transmission of Christian family values in the face of contemporary societal challenges.

## Government Support

Christian communities have a vital role to play in advocating for policies that support family stability, access to education, and social services while addressing economic inequality. Several specific policy recommendations can be pursued, including:

- **Family-friendly workplace policies:** Encourage the adoption of flexible working hours, paid parental leave, and telecommuting options to help parents balance their work and family life more effectively.
- **Affordable housing initiatives:** Advocate for policies that promote access to affordable and quality housing, ensuring that families have a stable and secure place to live and thrive.
- **Investments in early childhood education:** Support increased funding for high-quality early childhood education programs, recognizing their crucial role in promoting children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development, as well as their long-term well-being.
- **Addressing economic inequality:** Call for fair taxation policies and social welfare programs that help alleviate poverty, reduce income disparities, and promote social mobility for all families.
- **Strengthening social services:** Encourage government investment in social services that support families, such as mental health services, child care assistance, and community-based programs.
- By promoting these policies and collaborating with policymakers, Christian communities can contribute to the creation of a society that values and supports families in all their diversity, helping to preserve and strengthen Christian family values in an ever-changing world.



## Enhancing the Role of School Teachers

Recognizing the influential role that school teachers play in shaping the values and beliefs of students, both private and public-school educators should be encouraged to promote Christian family values, provide moral guidance, and support students in developing a strong ethical foundation. Several specific strategies can be pursued, including:



- **Values-based education:** Incorporate values education in the curriculum, focusing on the development of character, empathy, and ethical decision-making skills.
- **Fostering respectful dialogues:** Encourage open and respectful dialogues about diverse beliefs and perspectives, promoting understanding and tolerance among students.
- **Engaging parents in the educational process:** Establish partnerships with parents and guardians to create a supportive learning environment that reinforces Christian family values and fosters moral development.
- **Professional development for teachers:** Provide ongoing training and support for teachers, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to effectively impart Christian family values and moral guidance in the classroom.
- **Promoting community engagement:** Encourage schools to collaborate with local faith-based organizations and community groups, providing students with opportunities for service-learning and the practical application of Christian family values.
- By enhancing the role of teachers and promoting a holistic approach to education that emphasizes moral development, schools can contribute to the formation of ethically responsible citizens who uphold the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and Christian family values, strengthening the fabric of society.



## CONCLUSION

Modernization presents both opportunities and challenges for Christian families. While advancements in technology and social mobility have improved the quality of life for many, they have also given rise to new problems that can undermine traditional family values. By drawing on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching and implementing policy recommendations for the Church, social media companies, youth, parents, guardians, government, and school teachers, we can address these challenges and foster the growth of Christian family values in the modern world. This concerted effort will help ensure that Christian families continue to thrive as pillars of society, nurturing future generations with strong moral values, compassion, and a commitment to the common good.



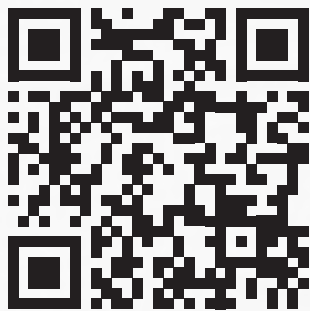
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### About The Kukah Centre

The Kukah Centre (TKC) is a Nigeria-based policy research institute, founded by Most Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah, Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Sokoto. The Centre has offices in Abuja and Kaduna and treats political leadership as a collaborative exercise that requires multiple governance structures at various levels - individuals, households, small businesses, the organized private sector, NGOs and government.

Interfaith dialogue is at the core of the Centre's work and involves actively promoting conversations among Nigeria's faith communities, as well as between leaders in faith and public policy. The Kukah Centre aspires to become Nigeria's leading institution for the promotion of an active and engaged citizenry by providing support for inclusive dialogue and advocacy initiatives.

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