

PROFILE La famiglia in crisis

by Raeleen Mautner

If you travel the highways and byways of Italy, you might just catch psychoanalyst Roberto Vincenzi cruising past ancient architectural masterpieces on his Triumph Bonneville. Dr. Vincenzi feels fortunate to be a part of a culture where his passion for fine art can be satisfied in the midst of everyday life. Yet, when asked if Italians still celebrate life's little pleasures — the joys of family, food, good wine — the Genova-born psychoanalyst offers telling insight into the difficulties of living la dolce vita in Italy today.

Even when life isn't always so dolce, Italians have traditionally talked out their problems with family members as a cultural antidote. Not so much any longer, according to Vincenzi, who believes the root cause of emotional difficulties among contemporary Italians can be traced to the erosion of this value. "While Italians have historically confided in family and friends," he opines. "Over time — and especially in the larger cities — we are losing that tradition."

Famiglia, once considered the fabric of Italian well-being, is now, according to Vincenzi, starting to show signs of wear and tear. "The traditional closed and self-contained Italian family," according to Vincenzi, "is now considered by many to be a pathological way of life." He adds that psychotherapists very often advise their patients to "become more independent of their families in order to heal their emotional neuroses." In the eyes of these therapists, the traditional family "is one of the major causes of psychological disturbances," he observes.

The emergence of this view may explain why the extended Italian family is on its way out in Italy. "Grandparents," according to Dr. Vincenzi "no

longer live with their adult children, and except for in smaller villages and rural areas, rarely do several generations live under the same roof anymore." Also, younger parents see their grandparents as "old-fashioned and out of touch with contemporary life. They no longer want their grandparents influencing their children, and thus the cultural matrix of the older generation is no longer accepted."

But the family in transition is not the major obstacle to living la dolce vita in Italy today. Dr. Vincenzi lays that blame squarely on Italy's



Is the traditional Italian family yet another species endangered by modernity? Italian psychoanalyst Roberto Vincenzi fears the answer may be yes.

economic and political crisis, which is fueled by a governmental malaise that breeds "corruption and scandal, making the rich richer and the poor poorer." Vincenzi says Italians have the perception that justice is not applied equally. "There are categories of people that live above the law and never get punished. Furthermore, because public spending on universities and research has been reduced, many of our intellectuals are going abroad to find work." In the United States, we know this phenomenon as Italy's "brain drain."

Despite change and challenges, Vincenzi still finds ways to engage in the classic Italian celebration of life. "For the connoisseur of art, Italy is a paradise. Also, my wife and I love to travel throughout this country to seek out art exhibitions, museums and galleries. We love Italian regional cuisine, with its unique specialties, making the experience of eating in a local restaurant a real adventure. I also relish the distinctive regional dialects and traditions."

Always ready with great advice, Dr. Vincenzi has three tips for Italian Americans wanting to live la dolce vita in the United States. First: "Interact with Americans of all ethnicities and avoid becoming an exclusive ethnic heritage group." Second (despite the apparent contradiction): "Preserve the traditions and cultures of your treasured Italian heritage." Finally: "Take a nice vacation in Italy to help you discover more ways to live a dolce vita."

To read Dr. Vincenzi's articles, visit www.roberto-vincenzi.com

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