



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE FORUM OF FAMILY ASSOCIATIONS

*Clementine Hall
Friday, 16 May 2008*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Thank you for your visit which enables me to know the activities that your praiseworthy Associations carry out as part of the Forum of Family Associations and the European Federation of Catholic Family Associations. I offer a cordial greeting to each one of you who are present here and in the first place to Mr Giovanni Giacobbe, President of the Forum, to whom I am grateful for his kind words on your behalf. This meeting is taking place on the occasion of the annual celebration of the *International Day of the Family* which was yesterday, 15 May. To emphasize the importance of the occasion, you have wished to organize a special Congress with a timely theme: "*Alliance for the family in Europe: Associations in the leading role*", in order to address the experiences of various forms of family associations and to sensitize government leaders and the public opinion concerning the central and irreplaceable role carried out by the family in our society.

In fact, as you rightly point out, any political policy that looks well into the future cannot fail to make the family the focus of its attention and planning. This year, as you know well, we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* and the 25th anniversary of the promulgation of the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, presented by the Holy See on 22 October 1983. These two Documents share a common inspiration since the former strongly reasserts the quality of spousal love, courageously going against the tide of the prevalent culture, selfless and open to life, the latter highlights those inalienable rights that permit the family, founded on the marriage of a man and a woman, to be the natural cradle of human life. The *Charter of the Rights of the Family* in particular, addressed primarily to Governments, offers all those who are invested with responsibility regarding the common good a model and a reference point for the elaboration of a sound legislation for family policies.

At the same time, the Charter is addressed to all families, inspiring them to join forces in the defence and promotion of their rights. And in this regard your associations are particularly well-adapted to implement the spirit of the above-mentioned Charter of the Rights of the Family in the best way.

The beloved Pontiff, John Paul II, also known and rightly so as the "Pope of the family", repeated that the "future of humanity passes by way of the family" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 86). He often emphasized the irreplaceable value of the family institution, in accordance with the plan of God the Creator and Father. Precisely at the beginning of my Pontificate, on 6 June 2005, in opening the Convention of the Diocese of Rome, dedicated specifically to the family, I too reaffirmed that the truth about marriage and the family is deeply rooted in the truth about the human being and comes to fulfilment in salvation history, at whose heart lie the words: "God loves his people". Indeed, biblical revelation is above all an expression of a love story, the story of God's Covenant with humankind. This is why the story of the union of life and love between a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage was used by God as a symbol of salvation history. For this very reason, the union of life and love based on the marriage between a man and a woman, which constitutes the family, is an indispensable good for society as a whole and must not be confused or likened to other types of union.

We are well aware of the many challenges facing families today, and we know how difficult it is, in current social conditions, to achieve the ideal of fidelity and solidarity in conjugal love, to bring up children, and to preserve the harmony of the family unit. While on the one hand - thanks be to God - there are shining examples of good families, open to the culture of life and love, on the other hand, sadly, an increasing number of marriages and families are in crisis. From so many families, in a worryingly precarious state, we hear a cry for help, often an unconscious one, which clamours for a response from civil authorities, from ecclesial communities and from the various educational agencies. Accordingly, there is an increasingly urgent need for a common commitment to support families by every means available, from the social and economic point of view, as well as the juridical and spiritual. In this context, I am pleased to recommend and encourage certain initiatives and proposals that have emerged in the course of your Conference. I am thinking, for example, of the laudable commitment to mobilize citizens in support of the initiative for "Family-friendly fiscal policy", urging Governments to promote family-related policies that give parents a real possibility of having children and bringing them up in the family.

For believers, the family, the cell of communion on which society is founded, resembles a "domestic church in miniature" called to reveal God's love to the world. Dear brothers and sisters, help families to be a visible sign of this truth, to defend the values inscribed in human nature itself, and therefore common to all humanity, that is: life, the family and education. These are not principles that derive from a confession of faith but rather from the application of justice that respects every person's rights. This is your mission, dear Christian families! May you never lack trust in the Lord and communion with him in prayer and in the constant reference to his Word. Thus, you will be witnesses of his Love, not merely relying on human resources, but firmly based

on the rock that is God, enlivened by the power of his Spirit. May Mary, Queen of the Family, as a bright Star of hope guide the journey of all humanity's families. With these sentiments, I very gladly bless you who are present here and all who belong to the various Associations that you represent.

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