



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO PARTICIPANTS IN
THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON THE FAMILY**

*Clementine Hall
Monday, 30 October 1978*

It is always a joy for the Pope to meet fathers and mothers of a family who are deeply aware of their responsibilities as Christian educators. And it is a grace to see numerous initiatives in support of families arise in the Church today.

There is no need, in your presence, to emphasize the essential role of the family in human and Christian education. The recent Council, in several of its texts, happily stressed the mission of parents, "first and chief educators" and almost impossible to replace (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 3). It is a natural right for them, since they have given life to their children; it is also the best way to ensure a harmonious education, owing to the absolutely original character of parent-children relations, and to the atmosphere of affection and security that parents can create in the radiance of their love. (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 52). Most civil societies have themselves had to recognize the special and necessary role of parents in early education. On the international plane, the "Declaration of the child's rights", which is at least the sign of very wide consensus, has admitted that the child "must, as far as possible, grow up under the safeguard and under the responsibility of his parents" (principle 6). Let us hope that this commitment will be applied more and more in practice, especially during the International Year of the Child which will begin soon.

But it is not enough to affirm and defend this principle of the parents' right. It is necessary above all to carry out well this difficult occupation of education in our modern times. In this field, goodwill, love itself, are not sufficient. It is a skill that parents must acquire, with the grace of God, in the first place by strengthening their own moral and religious convictions, by setting an example, by reflecting also on their experience, with each other, with other parents, with expert educators, with priests. It is a question of helping children and adolescents "to make sound moral judgments and

to put them into practice with a sense of personal commitment, and to know and love God more perfectly" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 1). This education of their discernment, their will and their faith is a whole art; the family atmosphere must be one of trust, dialogue, firmness, rightly understood respect of incipient freedom: all things which permit gradual initiation to meeting the Lord and to habits which already honour the child and prepare the man of tomorrow. May your children acquire in your families "their first experience of a well-balanced human society and of the Church." (cf. *Ibid.*, 3.) It will be up to you, too, to introduce them gradually into educative communities wider than the family. The latter must then accompany its adolescents, with patient love, in hope, and, without resigning its task, cooperate with other educators. In this way, strengthened in their Christian identity to face in the right way a pluralistic world, often indifferent or even hostile to their convictions, these young people will be able to become strong in faith, serve society, and take an active part in the life of the Church in communion with their Pastors, and putting into application the orientations of the Second Vatican Council.

May the example and the prayer of the Virgin Mother help you in your magnificent mission! I am happy to bless your families and encourage, beyond you personally, all parents and parents' associations concerned about Christian education.

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