



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY
ON THE 20th ANNIVERSARY OF THE POST-SYNODAL
APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO**

*To Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo
President of the Pontifical Council for the Family*

1. I cordially greet the participants at the Congress on the theme "*Familiaris Consortio* in the 20th Year, the Anthropological and Pastoral Dimensions" promoted by this Pontifical Council for the 20th anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation.

I greet you, Venerable Cardinal, who preside over the activities of the Pontifical Council; I greet the Secretary and the Undersecretary and the officials and staff, the organizers of this meeting that commemorates an especially important event in the Church's life and touches on one of the subjects closest to my heart: *the family*. Your intent is to examine the immense panorama of the family, its identity and mission as the family that is willed by God to "guard, reveal and communicate love" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 17). In the past 20 years, we have witnessed the development of a new awareness and sensitivity with regard to the family. The Pontifical Council for the Family, to which I entrusted the task of studying and bringing out every aspect of the riches contained in the *Propositiones* of the Synod (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 2) also celebrated its 20 years. I thank God for all the work your office has performed in the defence and service of the Gospel of the Family.

No man has the power to change God's original structure of marriage and family for love and life
2. In this period, in which there have been many threats to the family institution, perhaps some of the most dangerous it has ever known, one notes that some common convictions have taken shape. For example, today the integral cause of the family and of life have been rediscovered and encouraged in many sectors as a value and a right that belong to the common patrimony of humanity. The Magisterium of the Church has provided significant guidance for this renewal, with

numerous and important interventions and teachings. Already at the time of the Second Vatican Council, the family was considered as one of the themes on which it was necessary to enlighten the consciences of Christians and all humanity. Many steps have been taken in this direction. The appeal: "*Family, become what you are*", contained in the Post-Synodal Exhortation quoted above (n. 17), has widely resounded in public opinion.

"*Family, become what you are*" I repeat again today!

As a natural institution, the family community was willed by God in the "beginning", with the creation of man and woman, for the good of humanity. Christ refers to this "beginning" when the Pharisees attempt to distort its structure (Mt 19,3-12). Man is not empowered to change the Creator's original design.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* examined in considerable detail the specific tasks of the family, already taught in the conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et spes*.

Every family must be a true communion of persons "*communio personarum*", with respect to the dignity of the members who compose it. The "service to life" fits into this context of mutual understanding in accord with the two complementary meanings of human sexuality, the unitive and procreative, as my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI, taught in the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*.

3. In recent years numerous events, that showed a growing participation of families, have contributed to the gradual consolidation of the awareness of families of their specific mission in the Church and in society. I am thinking, for example, of the World Meetings in Rome for the International Year of the Family in 1994, the Rio de Janeiro Meeting in 1997 and the Meeting for the Jubilee of Families in 2000. I thank the Lord for the heightened awareness that the family has of itself and its mission.

However, beside the comforting goals achieved, it is only right to record the violent attacks (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 46) on the institution of the family and its social role in some sectors of modern society. Certain pieces of legislation that do not correspond with the true good of the family based on monogamous marriage, and with the protection of the inviolability of human life, have been passed allowing the dangerous shadow of the "culture of death" to creep into the home.

The proliferation of international forums on misleading concepts concerning sexuality and the dignity and mission of the woman that underlie specific ideologies on "gender" are also a cause of concern.

What can be said of the crisis of so many broken families, of lonely persons and of the situation of the so-called "de facto" unions? Among the dangerous designs to undo the family, there is also

the attempt to deny human dignity to the embryo before it has become implanted in the mother's womb, and attacks on its existence with a variety of methods.

When we speak of the family, it is impossible not to mention the children, who most of the time are innocent victims of dysfunctional family communities.

4. In the panorama sketched above, the need for the mission of Christian families becomes more necessary than ever. Their example of joy and self-giving, of hard work and the capacity for sacrifice in the footsteps of the Holy Family can be crucial in encouraging other families to respond to the grace of their vocation. Indeed, how attractive the model of a Christian family can be! In its humility and simplicity, its witness of domestic life can become a most effective vehicle of evangelization. It is therefore right that the various institutions of the Church should give it attention and care. Likewise, they should not stop providing the necessary support in those difficult family situations that require greater pastoral assistance, such as, for example, that of divorced persons who have remarried. It can be said that after the publication of *Familiaris Consortio*, the Church's interest in the family increased, and the pastoral care of families has become the priority in countless dioceses and parishes. Pro-family and pro-life associations and movements are spreading. With their generous efforts, people of good will are helping to develop a new "pro-life" culture. I recall here with deep appreciation the meetings promoted by your Pontifical Council during the last two decades. In the first place, the gathering of the Bishops in charge of the family and pro-life ministry throughout the Church, which turned out to be a useful opportunity for examining problematic approaches to the family.

Dialogue with politicians and legislators on the truth of the family founded on monogamous marriage and on the dignity of human life from the very moment of its conception is especially important. In this regard, the continental and national meetings sponsored by your Pontifical Council have prepared promising ways to a dialogue that can inculcate a Christian spirit in the parliamentary debates and public legislation that govern the life of peoples. The Charter of the Rights of the Family, published in 1983, had already been requested at the Ordinary Synod of 1980.

5. *"Family, believe in what you are; believe in your vocation to be a luminous sign of God's love"*. Today I repeat to you these words that I spoke during the Meeting with Families on 20 October 2001.

Family, be for the people of our time a "sanctuary of life". Christian family, be a "domestic church", faithful to your evangelical vocation. Precisely because she knows that "marriage and the family constitute one of the most precious of human values, the Church wishes to speak and offer her help to those who are already aware of the value of marriage and the family and seek to live it faithfully, to those who are uncertain and anxious and searching for the truth, and to those who are unjustly impeded from living freely their family lives" (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 1).

The family that lives the requirements of love and forgiveness to the full becomes the main bulwark of the civilization of love and the hope for the future of humanity.

Strong in this knowledge, may your Council work ever more courageously at the service of the Gospel of the Family.

As I hope that your congress will be a great success, I assure you of my remembrance in prayer and, invoking the special protection of Mary, *Queen of the Family*, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to all.

From the Vatican, 22 November 2001.

JOHN PAUL II