



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY WEEK  
PROMOTED BY THE PONTIFICAL INSTITUTE  
FOR STUDIES ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

*Your Eminences,  
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!*

1. Today I welcome with great joy all of you who are taking part in the International Study Week promoted by the Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. I first greet Bishop Angelo Scola, Rector Magnificent of the Pontifical Lateran University and the Institute's President, and I thank him for his words at the beginning of our meeting. With him, I greet Archbishop Carlo Caffarra of Ferrara, his predecessor, Cardinal Camillo Ruini, Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and the prelates present, the distinguished lecturers who have explained some interesting points to me, and all those who in various capacities are working for the success of your convention. I greet you all, dear faculty members of the Institute's various branches, who have gathered here in Rome for a systematic reflection on the foundation of the divine plan for marriage and the family. Thank you for your commitment and your service to the Church.

2. Since its foundation 18 years ago, the *Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* has promoted a deeper understanding of God's plan for the person, marriage and the family, combining theological, philosophical and scientific reflection with constant attention to the *cura animarum*. This relationship between thought and life, theology and pastoral care, is really crucial. If I look at my own experience, I can easily see how my work with young people in the university chaplaincy of Kraków helped me in my meditation on fundamental aspects of the Christian life. Daily life with the young, the opportunity to guide them in their joys and efforts, and their desire to live to the full the vocation to which the Lord called them helped me to understand ever more deeply the truth that the human being grows and matures in love, that is, in the gift of himself, and that in giving himself he receives in exchange the possibility of his own fulfilment. One of the

loftiest expressions of this principle is found in marriage, which "is the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to establish in man his loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through the mutual gift of themselves which is specific and exclusive to them alone, seek to develop that kind of personal union in which they complement one another in order to cooperate with God in the generation and education of new lives" (*Humanae vitae*, n. 8).

3. Inspired by the profound unity between the truth proclaimed by the Church and the concrete options and experiences of life, your Institute has offered praiseworthy service in these years. With branches in Rome at the Pontifical Lateran University, in Washington, Mexico City and Valencia, with the academic centres of Cotonou (Benin), São Salvador da Bahia (Brazil), and Changanacherry (India), whose incorporation into the Institute is already under way, and with the forthcoming opening of the centre in Melbourne (Australia), the Institute will be able to count on its own centres on the five continents. We must thank the Lord for this development, as we look with due gratitude to all those who have made and continue to make their contribution to the achievement of this work.

4. I would now like to look to the future with you and attentively consider the urgent needs that this field presents to the mission of the Church and, therefore, to your own Institute.

In comparison with 18 years ago when your academic journey began, the challenge posed by the secular mentality regarding the truth about the person, marriage and the family has in a certain sense become even more radical. It is not only a question of debating the individual moral norms of sexual and family ethics. The image of man/woman proper to natural reason and, in particular, to Christianity is opposed with an alternative anthropology. The latter rejects the fact, inscribed in corporeity, that the sexual difference is an identifying characteristic of the person; consequently the concept of the family founded on the indissoluble marriage of a man and a woman, as the natural and basic cell of society, is critically challenged. Fatherhood and motherhood are conceived only as a private project, which can even be accomplished with the application of biomedical technology, without the exercise of conjugal sexuality. This attitude presupposes an unacceptable "*division between freedom and nature*", which are instead "*harmoniously bound together, and each is intimately linked to the other*" (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 50).

In fact, the sexual aspect of corporeity is an integral part of the original divine plan, in which man and woman are created in the image and likeness of God (*Gn 1: 27*) and called to create a communion of persons that is faithful and free, indissoluble and fruitful, as a reflection of the riches of Trinitarian love (cf. *Col 1: 15-16*).

Therefore, before being a project of human freedom, fatherhood and motherhood represent a vocational dimension inscribed in conjugal love, to be lived as a unique responsibility before God, by accepting children as a gift from him (*Gn 4: 1*), in the adoration of that divine fatherhood "from

whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (*Eph* 3: 15).

To eliminate the corporeal mediation of the conjugal act as the place where a new human life can originate means at the same time to degrade procreation from cooperation with God the Creator to the technically controlled "re-production" of an exemplar of the species, and thus to lose the unique personal dignity of the child (cf. *Donum vitae*, II B/5). Indeed, only when there is integral respect for the essential characteristics of the conjugal act as a personal gift of the spouses, at once corporeal and spiritual, is the person of the child also respected and expression given to his origin in God, the source of every gift.

When the body itself, the sexual difference inscribed in it and its proper procreative faculties are treated instead as merely inferior biological elements to be manipulated, one ultimately denies the limit and the vocation present in corporeity and shows a presumption that, beyond subjective intentions, indicates a misunderstanding of one's own being as a gift from God. In the light of these problems which are so current today, I reaffirm with even greater conviction what was already taught in my Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*: "The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (n. 86).

5. In view of these challenges, the Church has no other option than to turn her gaze to Christ, the Redeemer of man and fullness of Revelation. As I had occasion to say in the Encyclical *Fides et ratio*: "Christian Revelation is the true lodestar of men and women as they strive to make their way amid the pressures of an immanentist habit of mind and the constrictions of a technocratic logic" (n. 15). This guidance is offered to us precisely through the revelation of the foundation of reality, that is, of that Father who created it and maintains it in being at every instant.

A deeper reflection on God's plan for the person, marriage and the family is the task that should engage you with renewed vigour at the beginning of the third millennium.

Here I should like to suggest a few perspectives for this reflection. The first concerns the foundation in the strict sense, that is, the *Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity*, the very source of being and, therefore, the ultimate foundation of anthropology. In the light of the mystery of the Trinity, the sexual difference reveals its complete nature as an expressive *sign* of the whole person.

The second perspective which I intend to submit for your study concerns *the vocation of man and woman to communion*. It is also rooted in the Trinitarian mystery, is fully revealed to us in the Incarnation of the Son of God in which the human nature and the divine nature are united in the Person of the Word and is historically inserted into the sacramental dynamism of the Christian economy. The nuptial mystery of Christ, Bridegroom of the Church, is expressed in a singular way through sacramental marriage, the fruitful community of life and love.

In this way the theology of marriage and the family this is the third point that I would like to offer

you is inscribed in the contemplation of the mystery of the Triune God, who invites all people to the wedding feast of the Lamb accomplished in the paschal mystery and eternally offered to human freedom in the *sacramental reality of the Church*.

*In addition, reflection on the person, marriage and the family is deepened by devoting special attention to the person-society relationship.* The Christian response to the failure of individualistic and collectivistic anthropology calls for an ontological personalism rooted in the analysis of primary family relationships. The rationality and relationality of the human person, unity and difference in communion and the constitutive polarities of man-woman, spirit-body and individual-community are co-essential and inseparable dimensions. Reflection on the person, marriage and the family can thus be ultimately integrated into the Church's social teaching and become one of its strongest roots.

6. These and other perspectives for the Institute's future work must be developed in accordance with the twofold method that can also be inferred from your meeting.

On the one hand, it is essential to start from the unity of God's plan for the person, marriage and the family. This unitary starting-point alone enables the teaching offered at the Institute not to be a mere juxtaposition of what theology, philosophy and human science tell us about these subjects. An adequate anthropology flows from Christian Revelation, as does a *sacramental vision of marriage and the family*, which can interact dialogically with the results of the research belonging to *philosophical reason* and the *human sciences*. This original unity is also at the root of the joint work between teachers of different subjects and makes possible interdisciplinary research and teaching which have as their object the "*unum*" of the person, marriage and the family studied from different and complementary viewpoints with specific methodologies.

On the other hand, the importance should be emphasized of the three thematic areas around which all the study "*curricula*" offered at the Institute are concretely organized. All three areas are necessary for your work of research, teaching and study to be complete and consistent. Indeed, how is it possible not to consider the "*human phenomenon*" as it is presented by the different sciences? How could we neglect the study of freedom, the centre of every anthropology and the gateway to the fundamental ontological questions? How could we forgo a theology in which nature, freedom and grace are seen in an articulated unity, in the light of Christ's mystery? This is the point of synthesis for all your work, since "in reality, it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

7. The originality of the *Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* is not only linked to the content and method of its research, but is also expressed through its specific juridical-institutional structure. The Institute in a certain sense has a unique status among the Church's academic institutions. In fact, it is one (with a single Grand Chancellor and a single President), and at the same time, it is juridically organized into branches on the various continents.

Thus we have a juridical-institutional expression of the normal dynamism of communion that flows between the universal Church and the particular Churches. In this way the Institute lives, in an exemplary way, the twofold Roman and universal dimension that marks the city's university institutions and, in particular, the *Pontifical Lateran University*, where the central branch is located and which is described by *Article 1 of the Statutes* as "the university of the Supreme Pontiff in a special sense".

If we look at the Institute and its history, we see how fruitful is the principle of unity in multiplicity! It is not only made concrete in a unity of doctrinal orientation which makes research and teaching effective, but is expressed above all in the real communion of the teachers, students and staff. This is so both within the individual branches and in the mutual exchange between branches, so different from one another. In this way you collaborate in enriching the Church's life and, in the final analysis, the *Catholica* itself!

8. So that men and women could share, as members of the Church, in his very life, the Son of God wanted to become a member of a human family. For this reason the Holy Family of Nazareth, as the "original Church in miniature (*Ecclesia domestica*)" (*Redemptoris Custos*, n. 7), is a privileged guide for the Institute's work. It clearly shows the involvement of the family in the mission of the incarnate and redemptive Word and sheds light on the Church's own mission.

May Mary, Virgin, Wife and Mother, protect the teachers, students and staff of your Institute. May she accompany and support your reflection and your work, so that God's Church can find in you diligent and valuable help for her task of proclaiming to all humanity God's truth about the person, marriage and the family.

*My thanks and my Blessing to all.*