



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THOSE ATTENDING THE CONVENTION OF THE PRESIDENTS
OF THE EPISCOPAL COMMISSIONS
FOR THE FAMILY AND LIFE OF EUROPE**

Friday, 13 June 2003

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Dear Participants at this meeting,*

1. I greet you today with pleasure on the occasion of the Fourth Meeting of the Presidents of the Episcopal Commissions for the Family and Life of Europe. It is taking place at a very important time when topics of great significance for the future of the families of the European peoples are being discussed.

I cordially greet everyone. In a special way, I greet Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and I thank him for his words on your behalf. I extend my grateful thoughts to the Secretary and personnel of the Dicastery, which works with constant solicitude for the family. I greet each one of you present here and all who, in their respective nations, work with you in this pastoral sector of major interest for the Church and for all humanity.

The theme you have chosen: "*Challenges and Possibilities at the Beginning of the Third Millennium*" is particularly important and sheds clear light on the determination which motivates you to review the situation of the family in Europe, now passing through a difficult time.

However, the family is also endowed with a rich potential, since it is an institution firmly rooted in human nature. In addition, it experiences the energy with which the Spirit endows it and will never lack, in the fulfilment of its sacred mission to transmit life and spread family love through the generations.

2. To tell the truth, today the very identity of the family is being subjected to dehumanizing threats. Loss of the "human" dimension in family life is leading people to dispute the anthropological roots

of the family as a communion of persons. Thus, more or less everywhere in the world, deceptive alternatives are emerging which do not recognize the family as precious and essential for the social fabric. In this way, through irresponsibility and lack of commitment to the family, we run the risk, unfortunately, of having to pay a high social price, and it is the future generations in particular who will have to pay it, as victims of a harmful and bewildered mindset and lifestyles unworthy of man.

3. In Europe today, the family institution is disturbingly fragile, a situation that is accentuated when people are not prepared to assume their own responsibilities in it in an attitude of full reciprocal giving and true love.

At the same time, it is necessary to recognize that many Christian families offer a reassuring ecclesial and social witness: they live admirably the reciprocal gift of self in conjugal and family love, overcoming difficulties and adversity. It is from this total giving that the happiness of couples derives, when they are faithful to conjugal love until death and are confidently open to the gift of life.

4. Trends are emerging in the European societies of the present day which not only do not help to safeguard this fundamental human institution which is, precisely, the family, but are hostile to it, further weakening its inner coherence. Indeed, they spread pro-divorce, pro-contraception and pro-abortion mentalities and deny the authentic sentiment of love; in short, they attack human life, failing to recognize the full right to life of the human being.

Attacks on the family and human life are, of course, numerous, but thanks be to God there are many families who stay faithful to their human and Christian vocation, despite the difficulties. They react to the attacks of a certain contemporary hedonistic and materialistic culture, and are organizing themselves to give a full response of hope together. Today, the pastoral care of families is a priority task. Signs of recovery and a new reawakening in defence of the family are being recorded. I mention here certain legislative interventions as well as timely incentives to halt the advance of the demographic winter, felt the most in Europe. Pro-family and pro-life movements are increasing; they are being consolidated and constitute a new social awareness. Yes, the family has countless resources!

5. Here I would like to renew my invitation to the leaders of peoples and to legislators to fully assume their commitments in the defence of life and to foster the culture of life. This year is the 20th anniversary of the publication by the Holy See of the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. It presents the "fundamental rights that are inherent in that natural and universal society which is the family". These rights are "expressed in the conscience of the human being and in the common values of all humanity", which "arise, in the ultimate analysis, from that law which is inscribed by the Creator in the heart of every human being" (cf. *Introduction*). I hope that this important document will continue to be a valid support and guide for those who, in various capacities, have

social and political duties and responsibilities.

May Mary, Queen of the Family, inspire and sustain your efforts in the "Family and Life" Commissions of your respective Bishops' Conferences, so that the Christian families of Europe may be increasingly "domestic Churches" and shrines of life. With these hopes, reinforced by prayer, I invoke constant divine help for your work as I gladly bless you all.