



# The Holy See

---

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS  
TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM  
ON THE COMPLEMENTARITY BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN  
SPONSORED BY THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH**

*Synod Hall*

*Monday, 17 November 2014*

---

**[Multimedia]**

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I cordially greet you and I thank Cardinal Müller for the words with which he introduced this meeting.

1. I would like to begin by sharing a reflection on the theme of your colloquium. “Complementarity” is a precious word, with multiple values. It can refer to various situations in which one component completes another or compensates for a lack in the other. However, complementarity is much more than this. Christians find its meaning in the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, where the Apostle says that the Spirit has endowed each one with different gifts in order that, as limbs join the human body for the good of the organism as a whole, so the talents of each one contribute to the benefit of all (cf. 1 Cor 12). To reflect upon complementarity is but to ponder the dynamic harmonies which lie at the heart of all Creation. This is a key word: harmony. The Creator made every complementarity, so that the Holy Spirit, the Author of harmony, could create this harmony.

It is fitting that you have gathered here in this international colloquium to explore the theme of the complementarity between man and woman. In effect, this complementarity lies at the foundation of marriage and the family, which is the first school where we learn to appreciate our talents and those of others, and where we begin to acquire the art of living together. For most of us, the family is the principal place in which we begin to “breathe” values and ideals, as we develop our full capacity for virtue and charity. At the same time, as we know, in families tensions arise: between

egoism and altruism, between reason and passion, between immediate desires and long-term goals, and so on. But families also provide the environment in which these tensions are resolved: this is important. When we speak of complementarity between man and woman in this context, we must not confuse the term with the simplistic idea that all the roles and relationships of both sexes are confined to a single and static model. Complementarity assumes many forms, since every man and every woman brings their personal contribution — personal richness, their own charisma — to the marriage and to the upbringing of their children. Thus, complementarity becomes a great treasure. It is not only an asset but is also a thing of beauty.

2. Marriage and the family are in crisis today. We now live in a culture of the temporary, in which more and more people reject marriage as a public obligation. This revolution of customs and morals has often waved “the flag of freedom”, but it has, in reality, brought spiritual and material devastation to countless human beings, especially the poorest and most vulnerable. It is ever more evident that the decline of the culture of marriage is associated with increased poverty and a host of other social ills that disproportionately affect women, children and the elderly. It is always they who suffer the most in this crisis.

The crisis of the family has produced a human ecological crisis, for social environments, like natural environments, need protection. Although humanity has come to understand the need to address the conditions that threaten our natural environment, we have been slow — we have been slow in our culture, even in our Catholic culture — we have been slow to recognize that even our social environments are at risk. It is therefore essential that we foster a new human ecology and make it move forward.

3. It is necessary to insist on the fundamental pillars that govern a nation: its intangible assets. The family is the foundation of co-existence and a guarantee against social fragmentation. Children have a right to grow up in a family with a father and a mother capable of creating a suitable environment for the child's growth and emotional development. This is why, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, I stressed the “indispensable” contribution of marriage to society, a contribution which “transcends the feelings and momentary needs of the couple” (n. 66). And this is why I am grateful to you for the emphasis that your colloquium has placed on the benefits that marriage can provide children, the spouses themselves, and society.

In these days, as you reflect on the complementarity between man and woman, I urge you to emphasize yet another truth about marriage: that the permanent commitment to solidarity, fidelity and fruitful love responds to the deepest longings of the human heart. Let us think especially of the young people who represent our future: it is important that they should not let the harmful mentality of the temporary affect them, but rather that they be revolutionaries with the courage to seek strong and lasting love, in other words, to go against the current: this must be done. I would like to say one thing about this: we must not fall into the trap of being limited by ideological concepts. The family is an anthropological fact, and consequently a social, cultural fact, etc. We cannot qualify it

with ideological concepts which are compelling at only one moment in history, and then decline. Today there can be no talk of the *conservative family* or the *progressive family*: family is family! Do not allow yourselves to be qualified by this, or by other ideological concepts. The family has a force of its own.

May this colloquium be a source of inspiration for all who seek to support and strengthen the union of man and woman in marriage as a unique, natural, fundamental and beautiful good for people, families, communities and societies.

In the same context I would like to confirm that, God willing, I will go to Philadelphia in September 2015 for the Eighth World Meeting of Families.

I thank you for the prayers with which you accompany my service to the Church. I too pray for you and I bless you from my heart. Thank you very much.