The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CARDINAL CAMILLO RUINI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 20th ANNIVERSARY
OF FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO

1. I heard with joy that the Church in Italy is preparing to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Familiaris consortio* with a series of events: they will be a great help to the People of God, for all who are in search of the truth and even for secular society. These are important initiatives; I would like to accompany them with my prayers and deep affection, as I look forward to meeting the Italian families at the Vigil that will be held in St Peter's Square on Saturday 20 October, and at the Mass that I will have the joy of celebrating the following day, for the beatification of the married couple, Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi.

At the beginning of my Pontificate, when I inaugurated the work for the Synod on the Family, 26 September 1980, I said that "the family is the fundamental object of evangelization and catechesis of the Church, but it is also its indispensable and irreplaceable subject: the creative subject" and I added that, because of its creative force, "it is precisely the family that gives life to the society". I then concluded my address to the Synod Fathers recalling that all the duties of the family can be summed up in one which is primary: "simply guarding and preserving man!".

2. Many people ask: why are families so important? Why does the Church so insist on the topic of marriage and the family? The reason is simple, even if not everyone can understand it: the future of the human person, his happiness, his capacity for giving life meaning all depend on the family. The destiny of the human being depends upon that of the family; this is why I never tire of saying that the future of humanity is closely linked to that of the family (cf. *Familiaris consortio*, n. 86). This truth is so obvious that the attitude, unfortunately very widespread, of those who neglect, offend and relativize the value of marriage and the family seems paradoxical.

The vision of the human person, the interpretation of his personal unity in which the physical, intellectual and spiritual dimensions are expressed, the significance of the tenderness of married

love and of the generation of life are the focus of an epoch-making debate that is having a profound effect on the condition of families. In the face of this situation, the Church's primary task is to point out the reasons that make the commitment to the family of all Christians urgent and necessary. At the same time, it is the task of families themselves and of all people of good will to do their utmost to ensure that the rights of this fundamental social institution be recognized, for the good of individuals and of the whole of society.

3. The Synod on the Family marked the life of the Church in its implementation of the Second Vatican Council, and *Familiaris consortio*, which set out its precious work, stands as a crucial landmark in identifying the responsibilities of families and of what must be done to help them fulfil their irreplaceable role. Twenty years after this Apostolic Exhortation, we should thank God for the abundant fruits it has yielded for the Church and for society. We must gather the seeds of good which have grown in the hearts of families which are beginning a new season of lively leadership thanks to the teaching it represents. These 20 years have served to bring about a widespread awareness of the vocation and mission of the family, and, as happens in the normal course of human life, this is the point when the season of maturity begins, the season of fully assuming responsibility.

The Church must accompany this journey properly and provide from her spiritual resources that are rooted in the sacramental grace of marriage all those human, cultural and social contributions that can help the family become the centre and the crossroads of ecclesial and social life. Every naive and improper separation between the spiritual life and social life must be overcome. The good of the family is an integral good and the various dimensions of its life are inseparable. Its life, as the first cell of the Church and of society, always has a social and public value that must be recognized, protected and promoted.

4. The family is at the beginning of salvation history, but it is also at the beginning of the history of humanity; we can say that it is its essence, because the history of humanity is substantially a love story. We can never forget that "man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it" (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, n. 10; repeated in *Familiaris consortio,* n. 18).

The family revolves around this central nucleus of human life and from it society draws its origin. All too often today, this truth is forgotten, belied and trampled upon. We must therefore maximize the opportunities for study and reflection, the ways to mobilize families, the cultural, social and political initiatives which, with respect for roles and duties, can help those responsible for the common good to act consistently with the truth about man, which primarily involves safeguarding human life, marriage and the family. For some time the Church in Italy has been working in favour of the family in a cultural perspective that combines pastoral action with a marked presence in the fields of culture and of communication.

5. This convention, organized by the Episcopal Commission for the family and life, by the Forum of Family Associations and by the (Italian) National Service for the Cultural Project, on the theme: "*The family as a social subject. Roots, challenges and projects*", which will be held in Rome from 18-20 October and in which more than 1,000 delegates from dioceses and family associations will take part, is of great importance for the ecclesial community and for the beloved Italian nation. To all the participants I extend my warm best wishes for the success of the meeting and a special blessing, so that this precious occasion for study and comparison may confirm the convictions about the value of marriage and the family and give rise to fresh enthusiasm in the task of serving the family. The theme chosen clearly indicates the direction that must be taken in order to make an impact on the social situation, that in Italy has not yet fully embraced a coherent project in the area of family policies, which are often talked about but seldom put into practice.

Above all it is necessary to stop considering the family as a sector to viewing it as a criterion by which to measure all political action, because all the dimensions of human and social life are interconnected with the good of the family: the protection of human life, health care and the environment; city planning that must offer the housing conditions, services and green areas that families need; the school system that must guarantee a series of services, State schools or schools run by other social groups, in accordance with the parents' right to choose; the revision of work procedures and taxation criteria, which cannot be based merely on the consideration of single subjects, neglecting or worse still, penalizing the family nucleus.

6. The work that awaits the congress participants is vast and challenging. However, today conditions exist for a significant inversion of trends, starting with the firm conviction that the principle of subsidiarity has to operate in relations between the State and families, and there is a strong cultural impulse that can make the values of marriage and the family once again the centre of everyone's esteem and attention. The correct relationship between the State and families is based on the juridical institution of marriage, which is and must remain, as stated in the Constitution of the Italian Republic, an element that guarantees the social recognition of the family. Marriage is also the condition that allows the State to make a correct and necessary discernment between genuine families with their inalienable rights and other forms of cohabitation.

What I wrote in *Familiaris consortio* remains a fundamental reference point: "The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive, in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the Creator" (n. 11).

Of course, the expert contributions of the relators, the experts and all the convention participants will be useful in finding the most suitable ways to affirm and develop all this in the new season. Indeed, on the one hand families legitimately call for the social conditions that correspond to their needs, on the other, they must contribute to building a new social model, through their direct

efforts and with the help of the family associations they represent. I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation for all that has been done in Italy by the Forum of Family Associations, which can be credited with having encouraged a high-profile debate on social problems, giving a voice to the most authentic appeals of families and thus contributing to the good of the whole of Italian society.

7. I joyfully look forward to the meeting on Saturday, 20 October, to call upon the Lord together with many families. It will be an important moment to reflect on the challenges concerning the family and on the responsibility of the various subjects in the context of ecclesial and civil life. The different stages of this journey, which has involved Italian families in reflection and brought them together by the Italian Bishops' Conference, will reach its high point at the beatification of the spouses Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi on Sunday morning. As I look forward to celebrating the wonders of the Lord rendered visible in the journey of holiness of this husband and wife, I address my grateful thoughts to all the families that are committed to building the civilization of love, and I accompany this day of reflection and examination of conscience with prayer, invoking the protection and closeness of Mary, Queen of the Family, upon you all.

From the Vatican, 15 October 2001.

JOHN PAUL II

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