

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

PRESENTATION OF THE BOOK CONTAINING THE PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL-PASTORAL CONGRESS  
(October 11-13, 2000)

THIRD WORLD MEETING OF THE HOLY FATHER  
WITH FAMILIES – JUBILEE OF FAMILIES

**CHILDREN: FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

It has become traditional for the triennial World Meetings of the Holy Father with Families to begin with a Theological-Pastoral Congress. In this way, every three years, a unique opportunity is offered to reflect in depth on a central theme of the pastoral care of the family and life. For this Third World Meeting, which was held in the framework of the Jubilee Year 2000, the reflections of the Congress focused on: Children, Springtime of the Family and Society. At the first Meeting (Rome, 1994), on the occasion of the International Year of the Family, the theme was: The Family: Heart of the Civilization of Love, while the second (Rio de Janeiro, 1997) was centered on: The Family: Gift and Commitment, Hope for Humanity.

With regard to the participants in the International Congress, a crescendo continues to be recorded in the official presence of delegations representing the Commissions for the Family and Life of the Bishops' Conference of the whole world. Delegations also take part from pro-family and pro-life movements, groups and associations. This increase in the number of participants reflects awareness of the importance of this subject matter for the pastoral care of the whole people of God as well as the delegations' desire to be present. The family, in fact, and the concrete aspect of children, has a crucial dimension, certainly for society, but no less for the community of believers. Whereas there were approximately 800 participants in 1994, and over 2,500 in 1997, this time there were more than 5,000: Bishops, priests and lay persons, both men and women, who are well aware that to carry forward the cause of the family and life is a matter of momentary enthusiasm, but rather of a well-formed Christian faith and a life witness that is coherent with the criteria that spring from the life and doctrine of Christ presented by the Magisterium of the Church.

The speakers at the Congress were pastors, professors and professionals, experts in the various sciences. They examined the central theme of children from different viewpoints in the light of the rich Papal Magisterium on the theme of the family and life. And so, in the opening session, after the greetings from the Cardinal Secretary of State, H.E. Angelo Sodano and H.E. Card. Roger Etchegaray, the

President of the Central Committee for the Jubilee, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, H.E. Card. Alfonso López Trujillo, gave an overall presentation of the theme, while H.E. Card. Carlo Maria Martini, the Archbishop of Milan, presented the Biblical vision of the image of God in children.

Other reports were of a philosophical-theological nature, such as those given by: Prof. Pedro Morandé of the Catholic University of Chile, on children as a gift of God for the family and humanity; His Excellency Angelo Scola, the Rector of the Pontifical Lateran University and President of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, on the genealogy of the person of children; Prof. Francesco D'Agostino, the Honorary President of the Italian National Committee for Bioethics, on the rights of children; Rev. Tony Anatrella, psychoanalyst, on the truth and meaning of sexual education. In the report by His Excellency Francisco Gil Hellín, the Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family, the theme was examined of the family, conjugal love and procreation, while His Excellency Carlo Caffarra, the first President of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, delved into the priest's influence on relations between parents and their children.

Some reports had a more specific social profile, such as those by Prof. Janne Haaland Matlary of the University of Oslo, on motherhood, children and service to society and by His Excellency Renato Martino, with his experience as the Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the United Nations, on the five years following the International Conferences of Cairo and Beijing. Prof. Alicja Grzeskowiak, the President of the Polish Senate, spoke about children's rights and the political world. Other social aspects were dealt with by Mrs. Kathryn Hoomkwap of Nigeria on poverty and the family in the Third World, and His Excellency Elden Francis Curtiss, the Archbishop of Omaha, spoke about initiatives on behalf of abandoned children.

The Pontifical Academy for Life offered a series of reports regarding its specific contributions to the cause of life with interventions by His Excellency Elio Sgreccia, the Vice-President of the Academy, Rev. Angelo Serra, and Prof. Roberto Colombo.

Regarding the transmission of the faith to children, reports were delivered by Miss Chiara Lubich, the President of the Focolari Movement, Mr. Kiko Argüello, the Initiator of the Neocatechumenal Way, and Dr. Salvatore Martínez, the National Coordinator of Renewal in the Spirit. On the culture of life and the culture of death, interventions were made by Msgr. Luigi Giussani, the Founder of Communion and Liberation, Prof. Alessandro Zuccari, the President of the Community of Sant'Egidio, and Rev. Marcial Maciel, the Superior General of the Legionaries of Christ.

In addition to the presence of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family in the person of its President, other Institutes for the family were also represented that have grown up in the pastoral example of John Paul II either before or after his election as Peter's Successor: Prof. Wanda Poltawska attended for the Krakow Institute, of which she was formerly the directress; His Excellency Agustín García Gasco for the John Paul II Institute for the Family in Valencia (Spain), of which he is the Vice-Grand Chancellor; the Directress, Dr. Lydia Jiménez, for the Berit Institute for the Family, Spain. His Excellency Javier Echevarría Rodríguez, Prelate, spoke about the relationship between the Institutes and the Opus Dei Prelature.

Each work session of the Congress was presided by a Cardinal. An entire afternoon was dedicated to communications on themes such as: educating children in the faith; disabled children and the family; grandparents in children's formation; children in the pastoral care of the divorced; street children; dialogue between parents and children today. Briefings were also given on some recent congresses promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Family: the Second Meeting of Politicians and Lawmakers of Europe (Vatican, October 1998), and the Third Meeting of Politicians and Lawmakers of America (Buenos Aires, August 1999).

His Excellency Angelo Comastri, the Papal Delegate for the Shrine of Loreto, and His Excellency Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo, the auxiliary Bishop for Nazareth, led the participants in prayer at the beginning of the day with reflections on Biblical passages.

Lastly, a group of couples and speakers was charged with preparing a draft of the Congress Conclusions and Recommendations as a result of the work,. Once approved by the assembly, these Conclusions and Recommendations-- which will serve as guidelines for the pastoral work of the National Commissions and the pro-family and pro-life movements, groups and associations – were presented the next day, October 14, 2000, to the Holy Father John Paul II during the festive meeting with the families of the world. On that occasion, the Pope addressed these words of encouragement to the families: "Dear friends, let us commit all our forces to defending the value of the family and respect for human life from the moment of conception. These are values which belong to the basic 'grammar' of dialogue and human coexistence among peoples".

The figure of children in the family reflects the quality of a culture. In fact, children let the value of conjugal self-giving, the true foundation of families, be seen in society. While the light of the Gospel emphasizes the transcendental value of children, it also reminds us

that they are the fruit of their parents' conjugal love: strong families, bound by love, open to the procreation and education of children. This is a social value of primary importance in which marriage and the family are irreplaceable.

Alfonso Cardinal López Trujillo  
President

Most Rev. Francisco Gil Hellín  
Secretary