

iMAPP Research Brief

Institute for Marriage and Public Policy

Vol. 2, No. 1, April 2008

POPE BENEDICT XVI ON MARRIAGE: A COMPENDIUM

APRIL 2005 – MARCH 2008

By Maggie Gallagher & Joshua Baker

On April 15, Pope Benedict XVI visits the United States for the first time. What will his message be to Americans and to the world during his United Nations visit? Amid the themes of world peace, respect for human dignity, the dangers of greed, exploitation, and violence, I suspect Pope Benedict will find some time for a reflection on marriage and the human family.

Why? Because as this summary shows, Pope Benedict, no less than his predecessor John Paul II, views our contemporary marriage and family debate as core to understanding, indeed defining, our human dignity. An analysis of the Vatican website shows that in less than three years of his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI has spoken publicly about marriage on 111 occasions. Over and over again he has made it clear that the marriage and family debate in which we are currently engaged is central—not peripheral—to understanding the human person, and defending our human dignity.

For example, when receiving the credentials of the new U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, Harvard Law Professor Mary Ann Glendon, Pope Benedict XVI expressed his appreciation for America's recognition of the important of a dialogue of faith and faiths in the public square and linked this to respect not only for religious freedom but for marriage as the union of husband and wife: "I cannot fail to note with gratitude the importance which the United States has attributed to interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a positive force for peace-making. . . . The American people's historic

appreciation of the role of religion in shaping public discourse and in shedding light on the inherent moral dimension of social issues—a role at times contested in the name of a straitened understanding of political life and public discourse—is reflected in the efforts of so many of your fellow-citizens and government leaders to ensure legal protection for God's gift of life from conception to natural death, and the safeguarding of the institution of marriage, acknowledged as a stable union between a man and a woman, and that of the family."

Underscoring his view that the crisis in marriage and family—both at the conceptual and practical level—is part of the crisis of our times, Pope Benedict devoted his message for the January 1 World Day of Peace to the significance of marriage in developing a culture of peace: "Consequently, whoever, even unknowingly, circumvents the institution of the family undermines peace in the entire community, national and international, since he weakens what is in effect *the primary agency of peace*. This point merits special reflection: everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace."

On Jan. 10 2008, while engaging in a ritual exchange of New Year greetings with

Roman municipal officials, the pontiff described our contemporary situation as an “educational emergency.”

Indeed, it seems ever more difficult to convincingly propose solid certainties and criteria on which the new generations can build their lives. . . . It is clear here that respect and support for the family founded on marriage are imperative. As I wrote in the recent Message for the World Day of Peace, “The natural family, as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman, constitutes ‘the *primary place of “humanization”* for the person and society,’ and a ‘*cradle of life and love*’” (ORE, 19/26 December 2007, p. 8, n. 2). Unfortunately, we see every day how insistent and threatening are the attacks on marriage and the misunderstandings of this fundamental human and social reality.”

Marriage essential to world peace? This may strike American ears as an oddity. If so, Benedict has made clear it is not an unintentional one. On September 21, 2007, in an address to participants in a conference of the Executive Committee of Centrist Democratic International, Pope Benedict prefigured the same theme:

There are those who maintain that human reason is incapable of grasping

the truth, and therefore of pursuing the good that corresponds to personal dignity. There are some who believe that it is legitimate to destroy human life in its earliest or final stages. Equally troubling is the growing crisis of the family, which is the fundamental nucleus of society based on the indissoluble bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Experience has shown that when the truth about man is subverted or the foundation of the family undermined, peace itself is threatened and the rule of law is compromised, leading inevitably to forms of injustice and violence.

The short pontificate of Benedict XVI is thus already a standing rebuke to those voices of our time who attempt to make us embarrassed about our concern for, and battles over, marriage, family and sexual issues—to those who see in the contemporary marriage debate merely a distraction from more important issues.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the substance of his remarks, we believe American readers who care about the future of the human person and the human family will benefit from this compendium of Benedict XVI’s remarks on marriage to date. We hope as well to provide a context for his discussions about marriage and family, if any, on this his first visit to American soil.

APPENDIX

Pope Benedict XVI Statements on Marriage April 2005 – March 2008

1. February 29, 2008, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mrs. Mary Ann Glendon New Ambassador of the United States of America to the Holy See.

I cannot fail to note with gratitude the importance which the United States has attributed to interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a positive force for peacemaking. The Holy See is convinced of the great spiritual potential represented by such dialogue, particularly with regard to the promotion of nonviolence and the rejection of ideologies which manipulate and disfigure religion for political purposes, and justify

violence in the name of God. The American people's historic appreciation of the role of religion in shaping public discourse and in shedding light on the inherent moral dimension of social issues - a role at times contested in the name of a straitened understanding of political life and public discourse - is reflected in the efforts of so many of your fellow-citizens and government leaders to ensure legal protection for God's gift of life from conception to natural death, and the safeguarding of the institution of marriage, acknowledged as a stable union between a man and a woman, and that of the family.

2. January 26, 2008, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, Clementine Hall.

In the matrimonial context, rotal jurisprudence has carried out very conspicuous work in the past 100 years. In particular, it has made significant contributions that are expressed in the codification in force. In this light, one cannot think that the importance of the jurisprudential interpretation of law by the Rota has diminished. Indeed, the application of current canon law requires precisely that it reflect the true sense of justice, linked first of all to marriage's very essence. The Roman Rota is constantly called to carry out an arduous task which has a strong influence on the work of all tribunals: that of understanding the existence or non-existence of the matrimonial reality, which is intrinsically anthropological, theological and juridical. For a better understanding of the role of jurisprudence, I would like to insist on what I said to you last year concerning the "intrinsic juridical dimension of marriage" (cf. [Address to Roman Rota, 27 January 2007](#)). Law cannot be reduced to a mere collection of positive rules that tribunals are required to apply. The only way to give a solid foundation to the jurisprudential task is to conceive of it as a true exercise of *prudentia iuris*. This prudence is quite the opposite of arbitrariness or relativism, for it permits events to reveal the presence or absence of the specific relationship of justice which marriage is, with its real human and saving meaning. Only in this way do jurisprudential maxims acquire their true value without becoming a compilation of abstract and repetitive rules, exposed to the risk of subjective or arbitrary interpretations.

The objective assessment of the facts in the light of the Magisterium and the law of the Church thus constitutes a very important aspect of the Roman Rota's activity and exercises great influence on ministers of justice of the tribunals of local Churches. Rotal jurisprudence should be seen as exemplary juridical wisdom carried out with the authority of the Tribunal permanently constituted by the Successor of Peter for the good of the whole Church. Thanks to this work, the concrete reality in causes of matrimonial nullity is objectively judged in light of criteria that constantly reaffirm the reality of matrimonial indissolubility, open to every man and woman in accordance with the plan of God, Creator and Saviour. Constant effort is needed to attain that unity of the criteria of justice which essentially characterizes the notion of jurisprudence itself and is a fundamental presupposition for its activity. In the Church, precisely because of her universality and the diversity of the juridical cultures in which she is called to operate, there is always a risk that "local forms of jurisprudence" develop, *sensim sine sensu*, ever more distant from the common interpretation of positive law and also from the Church's teaching on matrimony. I hope that appropriate means may be studied to make rotal jurisprudence more and more manifestly unitive as well as effectively accessible to all who exercise justice, in order to ensure its uniform application in all Church tribunals.

The value of interventions of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium on matrimonial and juridical issues, including the Roman Pontiff's Discourses to the Roman Rota, should also be seen in this realistic perspective. They are a ready guide for the work of all Church tribunals, since they authoritatively teach the essential aspects of the reality of marriage. In [his last Address to the Rota](#), my venerable Predecessor John Paul II put people on guard against the positivistic mentality in the understanding of law, which tends to make a distinction between laws and jurisprudential approaches and the Church's doctrine. He affirmed: "In fact, the authentic interpretation of God's Word, exercised by the Magisterium of the Church, has juridical value to the extent that it concerns the context of law, without requiring any further formal procedure to become juridically and morally binding. "For a healthy juridical interpretation, it is indispensable to understand the whole body of the Church's teachings and to place every affirmation systematically in the flow of tradition. It will thus be possible to avoid selective and distorted interpretations and useless criticisms at every step" (John Paul II, [Address to Roman Rota, 29 January 2005](#)).

3. January 11, 2008, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Vatican's General Inspectorate for Public Security during the Meeting for the Exchange of New Year Greetings, Clementine Hall.

This year, when I was drafting my [Message for the World Day of Peace](#) celebrated on 1 January, I was thinking precisely of families. In this text, whose theme is *The human family, a community of peace*, I recalled that “the natural family, as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman, constitutes the primary place for the ‘humanization’ of the person and society, the ‘cradle of life and love’. The family, therefore, is rightly defined as the first natural society, “a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order” (n. 2).

4. January 10, 2008, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Regional Board of Lazio, the Municipal Council of Rome and the Province of Rome for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings, Clementine Hall.

An obvious consequence of all this is the crucial importance of the person's education and training, first and foremost in the first phase of life but also throughout the whole of his existence. Yet, if we look at the reality of our situation, we cannot deny that we are facing a true and large-scale “educational emergency”, as I [emphasized last 11 June, speaking to the Convention of the Diocese of Rome](#) (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 20 June 2007, p. 3). Indeed, it seems ever more difficult to convincingly propose solid certainties and criteria on which the new generations can build their lives. . . .

Such an emergency, distinguished Representatives of the Boards of Rome and Lazio, cannot leave either the Church or your Boards indifferent. Clearly at stake, in fact, with the formation of individuals, are the actual foundations of coexistence and of society's future. . . .

It is clear here that respect and support for the family founded on marriage are imperative. As I wrote in the recent [Message for the World Day of Peace](#), “The natural family, as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman, constitutes “the *primary place of “humanization”* for the person and society”, and a “*cradle of life and love*”” (ORE, 19/26 December 2007, p. 8, n. 2). Unfortunately, we see every day how insistent and threatening are the attacks on marriage and the misunderstandings of this fundamental human and social reality. Thus, it is especially necessary that public administrations do not support these negative trends but, on the contrary, offer families convinced and concrete support, in the certainty that they are thereby acting for the common good.

5. January 7, 2008, Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See for the Traditional Exchange of New Year Greetings.

I regret, once again, the disturbing threats to the integrity of the family, founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. Political leaders, of whatever kind, should defend this fundamental institution, the basic cell of society. What more should be said? Even religious freedom, “an essential requirement of the dignity of every person [and] a cornerstone of the structure of human rights” ([Message for the 1988 World Day of Peace](#), Preamble) is often undermined. There are many places where this right cannot be fully exercised. The Holy See defends it, demands that it be universally respected, and views with concern discrimination against Christians and against the followers of other religions.

6. January 1, 2008, Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace.

THE HUMAN FAMILY, A COMMUNITY OF PEACE

1. At the beginning of a New Year, I wish to send my fervent good wishes for peace, together with a heartfelt message of hope to men and women throughout the world. I do so by offering for our common reflection the theme which I have placed at the beginning of this message. It is one which I consider particularly important: *the human family, a community of peace*. The first form of communion between

persons is that born of the love of a man and a woman who decide to enter a stable union in order to build together *a new family*. But the peoples of the earth, too, are called to build relationships of solidarity and cooperation among themselves, as befits members of the one *human family*: “All peoples”—as the Second Vatican Council declared—“are one community and have one origin, because God caused the whole human race to dwell on the face of the earth (cf. *Acts* 17:26); they also have one final end, God”(1).

The family, society and peace

2. The natural family, as an intimate communion of life and love, based on marriage between a man and a woman(2), constitutes “the *primary place of ‘humanization’* for the person and society”(3), and a “*cradle of life and love*”(4). The family is therefore rightly defined as the first natural society, “*a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order*”(5).

3. Indeed, in a healthy family life we experience some of the fundamental elements of peace: justice and love between brothers and sisters, the role of authority expressed by parents, loving concern for the members who are weaker because of youth, sickness or old age, mutual help in the necessities of life, readiness to accept others and, if necessary, to forgive them. For this reason, the family is *the first and indispensable teacher of peace*. It is no wonder, therefore, that violence, if perpetrated in the family, is seen as particularly intolerable. Consequently, when it is said that the family is “the primary living cell of society”(6), something essential is being stated. The family is the foundation of society for this reason too: *because it enables its members in decisive ways to experience peace*. It follows that the human community cannot do without the service provided by the family. Where can young people gradually learn to savour the genuine “taste” of peace better than in the original “nest” which nature prepares for them? *The language of the family is a language of peace*; we must always draw from it, lest we lose the “vocabulary” of peace. In the inflation of its speech, society cannot cease to refer to that “grammar” which all children learn from the looks and the actions of their mothers and fathers, even before they learn from their words.

4. The family, since it has the duty of educating its members, *is the subject of specific rights*. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which represents a landmark of *juridic civilization of truly universal value*, states that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State”(7). For its part, the Holy See sought to acknowledge a special *juridic dignity* proper to the family by publishing the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. In its Preamble we read: “the rights of the person, even if they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family”(8). The rights set forth in the *Charter* are an expression and explicitation of the natural law written on the heart of the human being and made known to him by reason. The denial or even the restriction of the rights of the family, by obscuring the truth about man, *threatens the very foundations of peace*.

5. Consequently, whoever, even unknowingly, circumvents the institution of the family undermines peace in the entire community, national and international, since he weakens what is in effect *the primary agency of peace*. This point merits special reflection: everything that serves to weaken the family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, everything that directly or indirectly stands in the way of its openness to the responsible acceptance of a new life, everything that obstructs its right to be primarily responsible for the education of its children, constitutes an objective obstacle on the road to peace. The family needs to have a home, employment and a just recognition of the domestic activity of parents, the possibility of schooling for children, and basic health care for all. When society and public policy are not committed to assisting the family in these areas, they deprive themselves of an essential resource in the service of peace. The social communications media, in particular, because of their educational potential, have a special responsibility for promoting respect for the family, making clear its expectations and rights, and presenting all its beauty.

Humanity is one great family

6. The social community, if it is to live in peace, is also called to draw inspiration from the values on which the family community is based. This is as true for local communities as it is for national communities; it is also true for the international community itself, for the human family which dwells *in that common house which is the earth*. Here, however, we cannot forget that the family comes into being from the responsible and definitive “yes” of a man and a woman, and it continues to live from the conscious “yes” of the children who gradually join it. The family community, in order to prosper, needs the generous consent of all its members. This realization also needs to become a shared conviction on the part of all those called to form the *common human family*. We need to say our own “yes” to this vocation which God has inscribed in our very nature. We do not live alongside one another purely by chance; all of us are progressing along a

common path as men and women, and thus as brothers and sisters. Consequently, it is essential that we should all be committed to living our lives in an attitude of responsibility before God, acknowledging him as the deepest source of our own existence and that of others. By going back to this supreme principle we are able to perceive the unconditional worth of each human being, and thus to lay the premises for building a humanity at peace. Without this transcendent foundation society is a mere aggregation of neighbours, not a community of brothers and sisters called to form one great family.

* * *

15. Sixty years ago the United Nations Organization solemnly issued the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948-2008). With that document the human family reacted against the horrors of the Second World War by acknowledging its own unity, based on the equal dignity of all men and women, and by putting respect for the fundamental rights of individuals and peoples at the centre of human coexistence. This was a decisive step forward along the difficult and demanding path towards harmony and peace. This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the Holy See's adoption of the *Charter of the Rights of the Family* (1983-2008) and the 40th anniversary of the celebration of the *first World Day of Peace* (1968-2008). Born of a providential intuition of Pope Paul VI and carried forward with great conviction by my beloved and venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II, the celebration of this Day of Peace has made it possible for the Church, over the course of the years, to present in these Messages an instructive body of teaching regarding this fundamental human good. In the light of these significant anniversaries, I invite every man and woman to have a more lively sense of belonging to the one human family, and to strive to make human coexistence increasingly reflect this conviction, which is essential for the establishment of true and lasting peace. I likewise invite believers to implore tirelessly from God the great gift of peace. Christians, for their part, know that they can trust in the intercession of Mary, who, as the Mother of the Son of God made flesh for the salvation of all humanity, is our common Mother.

To all my best wishes for a joyful New Year!

From the Vatican, 8 December 2007

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

- (1) Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, 1.
- (2) Cf. Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.
- (3) John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 40: AAS 81 (1989), 469.
- (4) *Ibid.*
- (5) Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 211.
- (6) Second Vatican Council, Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.
- (7) Art. 16/3.
- (8) Holy See, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, 24 November 1983, Preamble, A.

7. January 1, 2008, Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God and 41st World Day of Peace, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, St. Peter's Basilica.

. . . This year, in my [Message for today's World Day of Peace](#), I wanted to highlight the close relationship that exists between the family and building peace in the world. The natural family, founded on the marriage of a man and a woman, is "a "cradle of life and love" and "the first and indispensable teacher of peace". For this very reason the family is "the primary "agency" of peace", and "the denial or even the restriction of the rights of the family, by obscuring the truth about man, threatens the very foundations of peace" (cf. nn. 1-5). Since humanity is a "great family", if it wants to live in peace it cannot fail to draw inspiration from those values on which the family community is based and stands. The providential coincidence of various recurrences spur us this year to make an even greater effort to achieve peace in the world. Sixty years ago, in 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations published the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights"; 40 years ago my venerable Predecessor Paul VI celebrated the first World Day of Peace; this year, in

addition, we will be commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Holy See's adoption of the "[Charter of the Rights of the Family](#)". "In the light of these significant anniversaries" - I am repeating here what I wrote precisely at the end of the [Message](#) - "I invite every man and woman to have a more lively sense of belonging to the one human family, and to strive to make human coexistence increasingly reflect this conviction, which is essential for the establishment of true and lasting peace" [n. 15].

8. December 30, 2007, Feast of the Holy Family, Benedict XVI, Angelus, Saint Peter's Square.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, we are celebrating the Feast of the Holy Family. As we follow the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, let us fix our gaze on Jesus, Mary and Joseph and adore the mystery of a God who chose to be born of a woman, the Blessed Virgin, and to enter this world in the way common to all humankind. By so doing he sanctified the reality of the family, filling it with divine grace and fully revealing its vocation and mission. The Second Vatican Council dedicated much attention to the family. Married partners, it said, must be witnesses of faith to each other and to their children (cf. [Lumen Gentium](#), n. 35). The Christian family thus shares in the Church's prophetic vocation: with its way of living it "proclaims aloud both the present power of the Kingdom of God and the hope of the blessed life" (ibid.). Then, as my venerable Predecessor John Paul II tirelessly repeated, the good of the person and of society is closely connected to the "healthy state" of the family (cf. [Gaudium et Spes](#), n. 47). The Church, therefore, is committed to defending and to fostering "the dignity and supremely sacred value of the married state" (ibid.). To this end, an important event is being held in Madrid this very day, whose participants I now address in Spanish.

I greet the participants in the Meeting for Families that is taking place in Madrid this Sunday, together with the Cardinals, Bishops and priests who have accompanied them. In contemplating the mystery of the Son of God who came into the world surrounded by the love of Mary and Joseph, I ask Christian families to experience the loving presence of the Lord in their lives. I likewise encourage them, drawing inspiration from Christ's love for humanity, to bear witness to the world of the beauty of human love, marriage and the family. Founded on the indissoluble union between a man and a woman, the family constitutes the privileged context in which human life is welcomed and protected from its beginning to its natural end. Thus, parents have the right and the fundamental obligation to raise their children in the faith and values which give dignity to human life. It is worthwhile working for the family and marriage because it is worthwhile working for the human being, God's most precious creature. I have a special word for children, so that they may love and pray for their fathers and mothers and their siblings; to young people, so that encouraged by their parents' love, they may follow generously their own vocation to marriage, priestly or religious life; to the elderly and the sick, so that they may find needed help and understanding. And you, dear spouses, may you always count on God's grace so that your love may be increasingly fruitful and faithful every day. I entrust the outcome of this celebration to the hands of Mary, who "with her "yes" she opened the door of our world to God" ([Spe Salvi](#), n. 49). Many thanks and happy holidays!

9. December 13, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, to H.E. Mr. Barry Desker, New Ambassador of the Republic of Singapore to the Holy See, Clementine Hall.

While Catholics constitute only a small percentage of the population of Singapore, they are happy and willing to play their full part in national life and to contribute to the common good. One particularly important way in which they do so is through the witness of marriage and family life. As the natural community in which human social nature is experienced, the family makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the good of society. Indeed, a healthy state of married and family life is the best guarantee against the damaging effects of individualism or collectivism, because "within the family the person is always at the centre of attention as an end and never as a means" ([Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church](#), 213). For this reason, I am confident that your Government will wish to continue safeguarding the vital part played in society by the institution of marriage and by the family.

10. December 13, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Peter Hitjitevi Katjavivi, New Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia to the Holy See, Clementine Hall.

Namibia's vision for the future recognizes the urgent need to bring the troubling spread of infectious disease to a halt. The tragic toll which HIV/AIDS has had in Southern Africa has been particularly alarming. In this regard, I assure the people of your country that the Church will continue to assist those who suffer from AIDS and to support their families. The Church's contribution to the goal of eradicating AIDS from society cannot but draw its inspiration from the Christian conception of human love and sexuality. The understanding of marriage as the total, reciprocal and exclusive communion of love between a man and a woman not only accords with the plan of the Creator, it prompts the most effective behaviours for preventing the sexual transmission of disease: namely, abstinence before marriage and fidelity within marriage. It is for this reason that the Church dedicates no less energy to education and catechesis than she does to health care and corporal works of mercy. Mr. Ambassador, I encourage the leaders of your nation to legislate in a way that promotes the life of the family, which must always be held as sacred and most fundamental for a stable society.

11. December 3, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Korea and the Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar on their "Ad Limina" Visit.

I wish to conclude by briefly reiterating the importance of the promotion of marriage and family life in your region. Your efforts in this field stand at the heart of the evangelization of culture and contribute much to the well-being of society as a whole. This vital apostolate, in which many priests and Religious are already engaged, rightly belongs also to the laity. The growing complexity of matters regarding the family – including the advances in biomedical science about which I spoke recently to Korea's Ambassador to the Holy See – raises the question of providing appropriate training for those committed to working in this area. In this regard, I wish to draw your attention to the valuable contribution made by the Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family Life now present in many parts of the world.

12. November 19, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Kenya on their "Ad Limina" Visit, Consistory Hall.

A key focus of unity in a community is the institution of marriage and family life, which the people of Africa hold in particular esteem. The devoted love of Christian married couples is a blessing for your country, expressing sacramentally the indissoluble covenant between Christ and his Church. This precious treasure must be guarded at all costs. All too often, the ills besetting some parts of African society, such as promiscuity, polygamy and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, can be directly related to disordered notions of marriage and family life. For this reason it is important to assist parents in teaching their children how to live out a Christian vision of marriage, conceived as an indissoluble union between one man and one woman, essentially equal in their humanity (cf. [*Ecclesia in Africa*](#), 82) and open to the generation of new life.

While this understanding of Christian family life finds a deep resonance in Africa, it is a matter of great concern that the globalized secular culture is exerting an increasing influence on local communities as a result of campaigns by agencies promoting abortion. This direct destruction of an innocent human life can never be justified, however difficult the circumstances that may lead some to consider taking such a grave step. When you preach the Gospel of Life, remind your people that the right to life of every innocent human being, born or unborn, is absolute and applies equally to all people with no exception whatsoever. This equality "is the basis of all authentic social relationships which, to be truly such, can only be founded on truth and justice" ([*Evangelium Vitae*](#), 57). The Catholic community must offer support to those women who may find it difficult to accept a child, above all when they are isolated from their family and friends. Likewise, the community should be open to welcome back all who repent of having participated in the grave sin of abortion, and should guide them with pastoral charity to accept the grace of forgiveness, the need for penance, and the joy of entering once more into the new life of Christ.

13. October 19, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Bishops' Conference of Congo on their "Ad Limina" Visit.

The tangibly dwindling number of canonical marriages is a real challenge that weighs upon the family, which is indispensable for the stability of the social framework, as is well known. Civil legislation, the undermining of the family structure and the powerful influence of certain traditional practices, especially the exorbitant cost of dowries, are truly obstacles that prevent young people from committing themselves to marriage. An in-depth pastoral reflection is called for in order to foster the dignity of Christian marriage, which is a reflection and realization of Christ's love for his Church. It is important to help couples acquire the human and spiritual maturity they need to assume responsibly their mission as Christian spouses and parents, and to remind them that their love is unique and indissoluble and that marriage contributes to the full realization of their human and Christian vocation.

14. September 29, 2007, Episcopal Ordination of Six New Bishops, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Memorial of the three Archangels, St. Peter's Basilica.

St Raphael is presented to us, above all in the Book of Tobit, as the Angel to whom is entrusted the task of healing. When Jesus sends his disciples out on a mission, the task of proclaiming the Gospel is always linked with that of healing. The Good Samaritan, in accepting and healing the injured person lying by the wayside, becomes without words a witness of God's love. We are all this injured man, in need of being healed. Proclaiming the Gospel itself already means healing in itself, because man is in need of truth and love above all things. The Book of Tobit refers to two of the Archangel Raphael's emblematic tasks of healing. He heals the disturbed communion between a man and a woman. He heals their love. He drives out the demons who over and over again exhaust and destroy their love. He purifies the atmosphere between the two and gives them the ability to accept each other for ever. In Tobit's account, this healing is recounted with legendary images. In the New Testament, the order of marriage established in creation and threatened in many ways by sin, is healed through Christ's acceptance of it in his redeeming love. He makes marriage a sacrament: his love, put on a cross for us, is the healing power which in all forms of chaos offers the capacity for reconciliation, purifies the atmosphere and mends the wounds. The priest is entrusted with the task of leading men and women ever anew to the reconciling power of Christ's love. He must be the healing "angel" who helps them to anchor their love to the sacrament and to live it with an ever renewed commitment based upon it. . . .

15. September 26, 2007, Benedict XVI, General Audience, Saint Peter's Square.

St John Chrysostom (2)

* * * For some people, his initiatives in various fields made him a dangerous rival but as a true Pastor, he treated everyone in a warm, fatherly way. In particular, he always spoke kindly to women and showed special concern for marriage and the family. He would invite the faithful to take part in liturgical life, which he made splendid and attractive with brilliant creativity.

* * *

Lastly, my thoughts go to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. May St Vincent de Paul's example of charity, which we will commemorate tomorrow, encourage you, dear *young people*, to plan your future as a generous service to your neighbour. May it help you, dear *sick people*, to feel Christ's comfort in our suffering. And may it prompt you, dear *newly-weds*, always to be attentive to the poor in your family.

16. September 21, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Conference of the Executive Committee of Centrist Democratic International, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo.

. . . There are those who maintain that human reason is incapable of grasping the truth, and therefore of pursuing the good that corresponds to personal dignity. There are some who believe that it is legitimate to destroy human life in its earliest or final stages. Equally troubling is the growing crisis of the family, which

is the fundamental nucleus of society based on the indissoluble bond of marriage between a man and a woman. Experience has shown that when the truth about man is subverted or the foundation of the family undermined, peace itself is threatened and the rule of law is compromised, leading inevitably to forms of injustice and violence.

17. September 20, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Bishops' Conference of Benin on their "Ad Limina" Visit, Pontifical Palace, Castel Gandolfo.

Moreover, the Church's presence in society is also expressed through the public interventions of her Pastors. On various occasions, you have courageously defended the values of the family and respect for life when they were threatened by ideologies that proposed models and attitudes in opposition to an authentic conception of human life. I encourage you to continue this policy which is a service to the whole of society. In this perspective, the formation of young people is also one of your pastoral priorities. I would like here to pay a tribute to the work carried out by all the people who contribute to their human and religious education, especially in Catholic teaching whose quality is widely recognized. In helping young people to acquire human and spiritual maturity, help them to discover God, help them discover that it is in the gift of themselves to the service of others that they will become freer and more mature! Since young couples may meet obstacles - obstacles often linked to culture and tradition - to committing themselves to Christian marriage and in living with fidelity to the commitments taken, they need a serious preparation for this Sacrament as well as on-going guidance of families, particularly at the most difficult moments.

18. September 19, 2007, General Audience, Saint Peter's Square.

Chrysostom therefore recommended: "From the tenderest age, arm children with spiritual weapons and teach them to make the Sign of the Cross on their forehead with their hand" (*Homily, 12, 7 on First Corinthians*).

Then come adolescence and youth: "Following childhood is the sea of adolescence, where violent winds blow..., for concupiscence... grows within us" (*Homily 81, 5 on Matthew's Gospel*).

Lastly comes engagement and marriage: "Youth is succeeded by the age of the mature person who assumes family commitments: this is the time to seek a wife" (*ibid.*).

He recalls the aims of marriage, enriching them - referring to virtue and temperance - with a rich fabric of personal relationships. Properly prepared spouses therefore bar the way to divorce: everything takes place with joy and children can be educated in virtue. Then when the first child is born, he is "like a bridge; the three become one flesh, because the child joins the two parts" (*Homily 12, 5 on the Letter to the Colossians*), and the three constitute "a family, a Church in miniature" (*Homily 20, 6 on the Letter to the Ephesians*).

19. September 13, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Jozef Dravecky, New Ambassador of the Slovak Republic to the Holy See, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo.

The combined efforts of Church and civil society to instruct young people in the ways of goodness are all the more crucial at a time when they are tempted to disparage the values of marriage and family so vital to their future happiness and to a nation's social stability. The family is the nucleus in which a person first learns human love and cultivates the virtues of responsibility, generosity and fraternal concern. Strong families are built on the foundation of strong marriages. Strong societies are built on the foundation of strong families. Indeed, all civic communities should do what they can to promote economic and social policies that aid young married couples and facilitate their desire to raise a family. Far from remaining indifferent to marriage, the State must acknowledge, respect and support this venerable institution as the stable union between a man and a woman who willingly embrace a life-long commitment of love and fidelity (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 40). The members of your National Council are engaged in serious discussions on how to promote marriage and foster family life. The Catholic Bishops, too, in your country are worried about increases in the rate of divorce and the number of children conceived out of wedlock.

Thanks to the efforts of the Council for Family and Youth, the Conference of Bishops has expanded educational initiatives that raise awareness of the noble vocation to marriage, thus preparing young people to assume its responsibilities. Such programmes open the door to further collaboration between Church and State and help to ensure a healthy future for your country.

20. September 6, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Lao and Cambodia on their “Ad Limina” Visit, Castel Gandolfo.

I also encourage you to develop the education of young people in your communities. In order to take on their Christian engagements they are often confronted by complex situations in social life that demand specific pastoral attention.

In particular, an appropriate preparation for Christian marriage is indispensable if the young are to be able to withstand social pressures and develop the human and spiritual qualities required to establish themselves as united and harmonious couples.

May they learn to preserve family values such as “filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony [which] are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions” (*Ecclesia in Asia*, n. 46).

The young must find in their own families the normal place in which to grow humanly and spiritually. I therefore hope that families will always be true centres of evangelization where each one can experience the love of God that may then be communicated to others and first of all to children.

21. September 5, 2007, Benedict XVI, General Audience, Saint Peter’s Square.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (2)

Let us end our catechesis on the three great Cappadocian Fathers by recalling that important aspect of Gregory of Nyssa’s spiritual doctrine which is prayer. To progress on the journey to perfection and to welcome God within him, to bear the Spirit of God within him, the love of God, man must turn to God trustingly in prayer: “Through prayer we succeed in being with God. But anyone who is with God is far from the enemy. Prayer is a support and protection of charity, a brake on anger, an appeasement and the control of pride. Prayer is the custody of virginity, the protection of fidelity in marriage, the hope for those who are watching, an abundant harvest for farmers, certainty for sailors” (*De Oratione Dominica* 1: PG 44, 1124ab).

22. September 1, 2007, Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Loreto on the Occasion of the Agora of Italian Youth Prayer Vigil with Young People, Plain of Montorso.

Then, one aspect of this situation of marginalization that affects so many people is that the important cells of social life that can also build centres on the fringes are fragmented: the family, which should be the place where generations meet - from great grandfather to grandchild -, should not only be a place where generations meet but also where they learn to live, learn the essential virtues, and this is in danger.

Thus, all the more should we do our utmost to ensure that the family survives, that today too, it is the vital cell, the centre in the periphery.

* * *

Mary, dear young people, knows your noblest and deepest aspirations. Above all, she well knows your great desire for love, with your need to love and to be loved. By looking at her, by following her docilely, you will discover the beauty of love; not a “disposable” love that is transient and deceptive, imprisoned in a selfish and materialistic mindset, but true, deep love.

In the very depths of their hearts, every young man, every young woman who are looking out on life, cherish the dream of a love that will give full meaning to their futures. For many, this is fulfilled in the choice of marriage and in the formation of a family in which the love between a man and a woman is lived as a definitive gift, sealed by the “yes” spoken before God on their wedding day, a “yes” for their whole life.

I know well that today this dream is always less easy to realize. How many failures of love surround us! How many couples bow their heads, give up and separate! How many families fall to pieces! How many young people, even among you, have witnessed the separation and divorce of their parents!

I would like to say to those in such sensitive and complex situations: the Mother of God, the Community of believers and the Pope are beside you and are praying that the crisis that marks today’s families may not become an irreversible failure. May Christian families, with the support of divine Grace, stay faithful to that solemn commitment of love joyfully assumed before the priest and the Christian community on the solemn day of their marriage.

In the face of so many failures these questions are often asked: Am I any better than my friends and my parents who have tried and failed? Why should I myself succeed where so many have given up? This human fear can be daunting to even the more courageous spirits but in this night that awaits us, in front of her Holy House, Mary will repeat to each one of you, dear young friends, the words that she herself heard the Angel say to her: Do not be afraid, do not fear!

The Holy Spirit is with you and will never leave you. Nothing is impossible to those who trust in God. This applies for those who are destined to married life and still more for those to whom God proposes a life of total detachment from earthly goods, to be dedicated full time to his Kingdom. Some of you have set out towards the priesthood, towards the consecrated life; some of you aspire to be missionaries, knowing how many and what risks this entails.

23. July 24, 2007, Meeting of the Holy Father Benedict XVI with the Clergy of the Diocese of Belluno-Feltre and Treviso, Church of St. Justin Martyr, Auronzo di Cadore.

* * * The Ten Commandments reinterpreted, relived in the light of Christ, in the light of the life of the Church and of her experiences, point to certain fundamental and essential values. Together, the Fourth and Sixth Commandments suggest the importance of our body, of respecting the laws of the body and of sexuality and love, the value of faithful love, of the family; the Fifth Commandment points to the value of life and also the value of community life; the Seventh Commandment regards the value of sharing the earth’s goods and of a fair distribution of these goods and of the stewardship of God’s creation; the Eighth Commandment points to the great value of truth. If, therefore, in the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Commandments we have love of neighbour, in the Seventh we have the truth. None of this works without communion with God, without respect for God and God’s presence in the world. In any case, a world without God becomes an arbitrary and egoistic world. There is light and hope only if God appears. Our life has a meaning which we must not produce ourselves but which precedes us and guides us.

* * *

Benedict XVI: Yes, this is indeed a painful problem and there is certainly no simple solution to resolve it. This problem makes us all suffer because we all have people close to us who are in this situation. We know it causes them sorrow and pain because they long to be in full communion with the Church. The previous bond of matrimony reduces their participation in the life of the Church. What can be done? I would say: as far as possible, we would naturally put prevention first. Hence, preparation for marriage becomes ever more fundamental and necessary. Canon Law presupposes that man as such, even without much education, intends to contract a marriage in harmony with human nature, as mentioned in the first chapters of Genesis. He is a human being, his nature is human and consequently he knows what marriage is. He intends to behave as human nature dictates to him. Canon Law starts from this presupposition. It is something compulsory: man is man, nature is what it is and tells him this. Today, however, this axiom, which holds that man prompted by his nature will make one faithful marriage, has been transformed into a somewhat different axiom. “*Volunt contrahere matrimonium sicut ceteri homines*”. It is no longer nature alone that speaks, but the “*ceteri homines*”: what everyone does. And what everyone does today is not simply to enter into natural marriage, in accordance with the Creator, in accordance with creation. What the “*ceteri homines*” do is to marry with the idea that one day their marriage might fail and that they will then be able to move on to another one, to a third or even a fourth marriage. This model of what “everyone does” thus

becomes one that is contrary to what nature says. In this way, it becomes normal to marry, divorce and remarry, and no one thinks this is something contrary to human nature, or in any case those who do are few and far between. Therefore, to help people achieve a real marriage, not only in the sense of the Church but also of the Creator, we must revive their capacity for listening to nature. Let us return to the first query, the first question: rediscovering within what everyone does, what nature itself tells us, which is so different from what this modern custom dictates. Indeed, it invites us to marry for life, with lifelong fidelity including the suffering that comes from growing together in love. Thus, these preparatory courses for marriage must be a rectification of the voice of nature, of the Creator, within us, a rediscovery, beyond what all the "*ceteri homines*" do, of what our own being intimately tells us. In this situation, therefore, distinguishing between what everyone else does and what our being tells us, these preparatory courses for marriage must be a journey of rediscovery. They must help us learn anew what our being tells us. They must help couples reach the true decision of marriage in accordance with the Creator and the Redeemer. Hence, these preparatory courses are of great importance in order to "learn oneself", to learn the true intention for marriage. But preparation is not enough; the great crises come later. Consequently, ongoing guidance, at least in the first 10 years, is of the utmost importance. In the parish, therefore, it is not only necessary to provide preparatory courses but also communion in the journey that follows, guidance and mutual help. May priests, but not on their own, and families, which have already undergone such experiences and are familiar with such suffering and temptations, be available in moments of crisis. The presence of a network of families that help one another is important and different movements can make a considerable contribution. The first part of my answer provides for prevention, not only in the sense of preparation but also of guidance and for the presence of a network of families to assist in this contemporary situation where everything goes against faithfulness for life. It is necessary to help people find this faithfulness and learn it, even in the midst of suffering. However, in the case of failure, in other words, when the spouses are incapable of adhering to their original intention, there is always the question of whether it was a real decision in the sense of the sacrament. As a result, one possibility is the process for the declaration of nullity. If their marriage were authentic, which would prevent them from remarrying, the Church's permanent presence would help these people to bear the additional suffering. In the first case, we have the suffering that goes with overcoming this crisis and learning a hard-fought for and mature fidelity. In the second case, we have the suffering of being in a new bond which is not sacramental, hence, does not permit full communion in the sacraments of the Church. Here it would be necessary to teach and to learn how to live with this suffering. We return to this point, to the first question of the other diocese. In our generation, in our culture, we have to rediscover the value of suffering in general, and we have to learn that suffering can be a very positive reality which helps us to mature, to become more ourselves, and to be closer to the Lord who suffered for us and suffers with us. Even in the latter situation, therefore, the presence of the priest, families, movements, personal and communitarian communion in these situations, the helpful love of one's neighbour, a very specific love, is of the greatest importance. And I think that only this love, felt by the Church and expressed in the solidarity of many, can help these people recognize that they are loved by Christ and are members of the Church despite their difficult situation. Thus, it can help them to live the faith.

24. July 5, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops from the Dominican Republic on their "Ad Limina" Visit.

The family is also a priority objective of the new evangelization. It is the true "domestic Church", especially when it is the fruit of lively Christian communities which produce young people who have a true vocation to the Sacrament of Marriage.

Families are not alone in having to face great challenges; the Ecclesial Community supports them, enlivens their faith and ensures their perseverance in a Christian project of life that is all too often subject to so many ups and downs and dangers.

The Church desires that the family truly be the place where the person is born, matures and is educated for life, and where parents, by loving their children tenderly, prepare them for healthy interpersonal relationships which embody moral and human values in the midst of a society so heavily marked by hedonism and religious indifference.

At the same time, in collaboration with the public institutions, Ecclesial Communities will be on the alert to safeguard the stability of families and to encourage their spiritual and material progress. This will lead to an improvement in the upbringing of children.

For this reason, it is to be hoped that the Authorities of your beloved Country collaborate increasingly in this indispensable task of working for families.

In this regard, my Predecessor stressed in his Message for the World Day of Peace in 1994: “The family has a right to the full support of the State in order to carry out fully its particular mission” (n. 5).

I am not unaware of the problems which the family institution encounters in your Nation, especially with the drama of divorce and the pressures to legalize abortion, in addition to the spread of unions that do not comply with the Creator’s plan for marriage.

25. June 30, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Bishops’ Conference of Puerto Rico on their “Ad Limina” Visit.

The family is also a permanent challenge for you. It is threatened on all sides by the snares of the modern world such as the prevalent materialism, the search for instant pleasure and the lack of steadfast fidelity by couples who are constantly influenced by the media.

When marriage is not built on the rock of true love and mutual self-giving, it is easily swept away by the current of divorce and also looks askance at the value of life, especially that of unborn children.

This panorama reveals the need to intensify, as you are already doing, an effective family apostolate which helps Christian spouses to assume the fundamental values of the Sacrament they have received.

In this regard, faithful to Christ’s teaching, through your magisterium you proclaim the truth about the family as a domestic Church and sanctuary of life in the face of certain trends in contemporary society that seek to eclipse or to confuse the one, irreplaceable value of marriage between a man and a woman.

26. June 22, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Togo on their “Ad Limina” Visit.

I praise in particular your commitment to the protection of and respect for life which you have had the opportunity to express on numerous occasions, and quite recently demonstrating it once again in detail by your opposition to abortion.

Moreover, the promotion of the truth and dignity of marriage as well as the preservation of essential family values must feature among your principal priorities.

Pastoral care of the family is an essential element for evangelization and enables young people to discover what a commitment that is unique and faithful entails. I therefore urge you to pay special attention to the formation of couples and families.

27. June 15, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Slovakia on their “Ad Limina” Visit.

With regard to the reality of *families*, I have learned that Slovakia too is beginning to be affected by the crisis of marriage and the birth rate. This is first and foremost due to financial considerations which induce young engaged couples to postpone their marriage.

In addition, the dwindling social esteem of the value of marriage is being recorded, combined with a weakness in the new generations who are often afraid to make permanent decisions and lifelong commitments.

Another destabilizing factor is undoubtedly the systematic attack on marriage and the family conducted by certain areas of culture and by the mass media. In this framework, what should the Church do other than intensify prayer and continue to be strongly committed to supporting families as they face the challenges of the present time?

Thanks be to God, the pastoral care in your Country of the sacraments connected with the family, is well structured: Marriage, the Baptism of children, First Communion and Confirmation have obligatory

preparation periods, and it is a constant commitment for you as Pastors and for the priests who assist you to help families start out on an authentic journey of faith and of Christian life as a community.

The groups, movements and lay ecclesial associations involved on the front line in the promotion of conjugal and family life and in the dissemination of the Church's teaching on matrimony, the family, sexual morals and bioethical themes, can be an effective source of help in your pastoral action.

At the crossroads between the pastoral care of the family and that of young people is the *pastoral care of vocations*.

28. June 1, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Bishops' Conference of the Central African Republic on their "Ad Limina" Visit.

Furthermore, a change in mindset must be brought about to allow society to have access to genuine human and spiritual development. This long-term task concerns in the first place the family and marriage. By resolutely engaging to live in conjugal fidelity and in the unity of the couple, Christians show everyone the greatness and truth of marriage.

It is by a freely consenting "yes", for ever, that a man and a woman express their genuine humanity and openness to giving new life. Thus, the serious preparation for marriage of young people must help them overcome their reluctance to found a permanent family open to the future. I also ask you to develop support for families, especially by encouraging their Christian education. They will then be able to account more vigorously for the faith that enlivens them, both to their children and to society.

29. June 1, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Juri Seilenthal, New Ambassador of the Republic of Estonia to the Holy See, Consistory Hall.

... The Church proposes her teaching in the conviction that the truth of the Gospel sheds light on the reality of the human situation and provides the wisdom needed for individuals and communities to discern and embrace the demands of the moral law which provide the necessary and enduring foundation for just and harmonious relations within society. In a special way, the Church is committed to the promotion of the sanctity of marriage, the basic role and mission of the family, the education of children and respect for God's gift of life from conception to natural death. Since the health of any society depends in no small measure on the health of its families (cf. *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 29), I trust that this witness will contribute to the consolidation of family and community life and, together with wise and far-sighted social policies, will help to revitalize Estonia's long history of strong and united families. For it is in the family, above all, that the young are trained in goodness, generosity, forgiveness and fraternal concern for others, and given a sense of personal responsibility for building a world of freedom, solidarity and hope.

30. May 26, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in a Meeting Sponsored by the "Young Entrepreneurs of the Italian Manufacturers' Association," Clementine Hall.

Besides the centrality of man in the economy, your reflection in the course of these years has faced other highly topical issues, for example, that of the family in Italian business. Several times I have been able to repeat the importance of the family founded on marriage as the supporting element of a society's life and development.

To work in favour of the family means to contribute to renewing the social fabric and also to ensuring the foundations of an authentic economic development.

31. May 26, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Mozambique on their “Ad Limina” Visit.

The evangelization of Christian life and the budding of vocations depends on the formation of authentically Christian families that accept the model, demands and grace of Christian marriage.

I know that there are no lack of difficulties due to the limitations of some ancient customs and also to the instability of domestic life, sorely tried by a so-called “modern” society permeated with sensualism and individualism.

The crisis will not abate unless there is a dynamic and solidly founded pastoral care of the family, with the support of family associations coordinated at the diocesan and national level.

32. May 23, 2007, General Audience, Saint Peter’s Square.

Only the one who meets the love of God in Jesus and sets himself upon this way to practice it among men, becomes his disciple and missionary. I have invited the youth to be apostles of their contemporaries; and for this reason, to always care for their human and spiritual formation; to have a high esteem of marriage and of the way that leads to it, in chastity and responsibility; to be open also to the call to consecrated life for the Kingdom of God. In summary, I encouraged them to put to good use the “wealth” of their youth, to be the young face of the Church.

33. May 20, 2007, Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 41st World Communications Day.

Theme: “Children and the Media:
A Challenge for Education”

3. This heartfelt wish of parents and teachers to educate children in the ways of beauty, truth and goodness can be supported by the media industry only to the extent that it promotes fundamental human dignity, the true value of marriage and family life, and the positive achievements and goals of humanity. Thus, the need for the media to be committed to effective formation and ethical standards is viewed with particular interest and even urgency not only by parents and teachers but by all who have a sense of civic responsibility.

While affirming the belief that many people involved in social communications want to do what is right (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, [Ethics in Communications](#), 4), we must also recognize that those who work in this field confront “special psychological pressures and ethical dilemmas” ([Aetatis Novae](#), 19) which at times see commercial competitiveness compelling communicators to lower standards. Any trend to produce programmes and products - including animated films and video games - which in the name of entertainment exalt violence and portray anti-social behaviour or the trivialization of human sexuality is a perversion, all the more repulsive when these programmes are directed at children and adolescents. How could one explain this ‘entertainment’ to the countless innocent young people who actually suffer violence, exploitation and abuse? In this regard, all would do well to reflect on the contrast between Christ who “put his arms around [the children] laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing” (*Mk* 10:16) and the one who “leads astray ... these little ones” for whom “it would be better ... if a millstone were hung round his neck” (*Lk* 17:2). Again I appeal to the leaders of the media industry to educate and encourage producers to safeguard the common good, to uphold the truth, to protect individual human dignity and promote respect for the needs of the family.

34. May 20, 2007, Benedict XVI, Regina Caeli, Saint Peter’s Square, Seventh Sunday of Easter.

In this context, an adequate formation in the correct use of the media is essential: parents, teachers and the Ecclesial Community are called to collaborate to educate children and youth to be selective and to develop a critical attitude, cultivating a taste for what is aesthetically and morally valid.

But the media must also bring their contribution to this educational commitment, promoting the dignity of the human person, marriage and family, and the achievements and aims of civilization. Programmes that instil violence and anti-social behaviour or vulgarize human sexuality are unacceptable, all the more so if they are proposed to minors.

I therefore renew the appeal to those responsible in the media industry and to social communications workers to safeguard the common good, respect the truth and protect the dignity of the person and the family.

35. May 18, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Mali on their “Ad Limina” Visit, Papal Residence, Castel Gandolfo.

In response to the frequently expressed fear of the definitive character of marriage, a sound preparation with the collaboration of lay people and experts may thereby enable Christian couples to stay faithful to their marriage vows. They will become aware that the faithfulness of the spouses and the indissolubility of their covenant, whose model is the faithfulness shown by God in the indestructible Covenant which he himself contracted with man, are a source of happiness to those who marry.

And this happiness will also be shared by their children, who mirror the love their parents have for each other. A human and Christian education imparted from infancy and based on the parents’ example will enable children to receive the seeds of faith and will allow them to develop within them.

In this spirit, I give thanks for those young people who are prepared to listen to God’s call to serve him in the priesthood and in the consecrated life.

36. May 11, 2007, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Brazil on the Occasion of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean Meeting and Celebration of Vespers with the Bishops of Brazil, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Catedral da Se, São Paulo.

Certainly the present is a difficult time for the Church, and many of her children are experiencing difficulty. Society is experiencing moments of worrying disorientation. The sanctity of marriage and the family are attacked with impunity, as concessions are made to forms of pressure which have a harmful effect on legislative processes; crimes against life are justified in the name of individual freedom and rights; attacks are made on the dignity of the human person; the plague of divorce and extra-marital unions is increasingly widespread. Even more: when, within the Church herself, people start to question the value of the priestly commitment as a total entrustment to God through apostolic celibacy and as a total openness to the service of souls, and preference is given to ideological, political and even party issues, the structure of total consecration to God begins to lose its deepest meaning. How can we not be deeply saddened by this? But be confident: the Church is holy and imperishable (cf. Eph 5:27). As Saint Augustine said: “The Church will be shaken if its foundation is shaken; but will Christ be shaken? Since Christ cannot be shaken, the Church will remain firmly established to the end of time” (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, 103, 2, 5: PL 37, 1353).

37. May 11, 2007, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Brazil on the Occasion of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, Holy Mass and Canonization of Fr. Antonio De Sant’ana Galvao, OFM, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, “Campo de Marte,” São Paulo.

My dearest friends, what a fine example Frei Galvão has left for us to follow! There is a phrase included in the formula of his consecration which sounds remarkably contemporary to us, who live in an age so full of hedonism: “*Take away my life before I offend your blessed Son, my Lord!*” They are strong words, the words of an impassioned soul, words that should be part of the normal life of every Christian, whether consecrated or not, and they enkindle a desire for fidelity to God in married couples as well as in the unmarried. The world needs transparent lives, clear souls, pure minds that refuse to be perceived as mere objects of pleasure. It is necessary to oppose those elements of the media that ridicule the sanctity of marriage and virginity before marriage.

38. May 10, 2007, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Brazil on the Occasion of the Fifth General Conference of the Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean Meeting with Youth, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Municipal Stadium in Pacaembu, Sao Paulo.

Above all, have great respect for the institution of the sacrament of Matrimony. There cannot be true domestic happiness unless, at the same time, there is fidelity between spouses. Marriage is an institution of natural law, which has been raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament; it is a great gift that God has given to mankind: respect it and honour it. At the same time, God calls you to respect one another when you fall in love and become engaged, since conjugal life, reserved by divine ordinance to married couples, will bring happiness and peace only to the extent that you are able to build your future hopes upon chastity, both within and outside marriage. I repeat here to all of you that “*eros* tends to rise . . . towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing” (Encyclical Letter [*Deus Caritas Est*](#), 5). To put it briefly, it requires a spirit of sacrifice and renunciation for the sake of a greater good, namely the love of God above all things. Seek to resist forcefully the snares of evil that are found in many contexts, driving you towards a dissolute and paradoxically empty life, causing you to lose the precious gift of your freedom and your true happiness. True love “increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to ‘be there for’ the other” (*ibid.*, 7) and therefore will always grow in faithfulness, indissolubility and fruitfulness.

39. May 4, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the International Bishops’ Conference of Sts. Cyril and Methodius on their “Ad Limina” Visit.

I urge everyone to persevere in unity, in reciprocal openness and in the spirit of brotherhood. The different countries and social and religious contexts in which your faithful live, venerable Brothers, have many repercussions on their Christian life.

I am thinking, for example, of marriage between spouses of different denominations or religions; they require of you, dear Pastors, special spiritual care and a more harmonious cooperation with the other Christian Churches.

I am furthermore thinking of the religious education of the new generations which should be provided for in school curricula, as is only right. And then how can I fail to mention that aspect which is fundamental for ecclesial life: the formation of sacred ministers and their spiritual guidance in the multiconfessional context mentioned above?

40. April 5, 2007, Chrism Mass, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Saint Peter’s Basilica, Holy Thursday.

But with the garment of light which the Lord gave us in Baptism and in a new way in priestly Ordination, we can also think of the wedding apparel which he tells us about in the parable of God’s banquet.

In the homilies of Gregory the Great, I found in this regard a noteworthy reflection. Gregory distinguishes between Luke’s version of the parable and Matthew’s. He is convinced that the Lucan parable speaks of the eschatological marriage feast, whereas - in his opinion - the version handed down by Matthew anticipates this nuptial banquet in the liturgy and life of the Church. In Matthew, in fact, and only in Matthew, the king comes into the crowded room to see his guests. And here in this multitude he also finds a guest who was not wearing wedding clothes, who is then thrown outside into the darkness.

Then Gregory asks himself: “But what kind of clothes ought he to have been wearing? All those who are gathered in the Church have received the new garment of baptism and the faith; otherwise, they would not be in the Church. So what was it that was still lacking? What wedding clothes must there be in addition?”

The Pope responds: “the clothes of love”. And unfortunately, among his guests to whom he had given new clothes, the white clothes of rebirth, the king found some who were not wearing the purple clothes of twofold love, for God and for neighbour.

“In what condition do we want to come to the feast in Heaven, if we are not wearing wedding clothes - that is, love, which alone can make us beautiful?”, the Pope asks. A person without love is dark within. External shadows, of which the Gospel speaks, are only the reflection of the internal blindness of the heart (cf. *Hom.* 38, 8-13).

41. March 30, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mrs. Tetiana Izhevskaya, Ambassador of Ukraine to the Holy See.

I thank the President of the Republic in particular for his cordial attention to the Bishops of the Latin-Rite Bishops’ Conference of Ukraine, whom he recently met, and I am certain of the commitment of all Catholics in Ukraine to the service of the common good of the Country.

I know that they wish to witness to the Gospel every day through solidarity with the lowly, determination to build peace and a desire to consolidate increasingly the values of the family based on the institution of marriage.

42. March 9, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants of the Annual Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Clementine Hall.

In this regard, [my message for this year’s World Communications Day](#) draws attention to the relationship between the media and young people. My concerns are no different from those of any mother or father, or teacher, or responsible citizen. We all recognise that “beauty, a kind of mirror of the divine, inspires and vivifies young hearts and minds, while ugliness and coarseness have a depressing impact on attitudes and behaviour” (No. 2). The responsibility to introduce and educate children and young people into the ways of beauty, truth and goodness is therefore a grave one. It can be supported by media conglomerates only to the extent that they promote fundamental human dignity, the true value of marriage and family life, and the positive achievements and goals of humanity.

43. February 24, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Clementine Hall.

All of this comes about while, on another front, efforts are multiplying to legalize cohabitation as an alternative to matrimony and closed to natural procreation.

* * *

For this reason it is necessary to appeal to the conscience, and in particular, to the Christian conscience. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing or has already completed. In all he says and does, man is obliged to follow faithfully what he knows to be just and right” (n. 1778).

* * *

Concerning the Christian conscience, its growth and nourishment, one cannot be content with fleeting contact with the principal truths of faith in infancy, but a programme of accompaniment is necessary along the various stages of life, opening the mind and the heart to welcome the fundamental duties upon which the existence of the individual and the community rest.

Only in this way will it be possible to prepare youth to comprehend the values of life, love, marriage and the family. Only in this way can they be brought to appreciate the beauty and the sanctity of the love, joy and responsibility of being parents and collaborators of God in giving life.

In the absence of a continuous and qualified formation, the capacity for judgment of the problems posed by biomedicine in the areas of sexuality, new-born life, procreation, and also in the way to treat and care for patients and the weaker sectors of society, becomes even more problematic.

It is certainly necessary to speak about the moral criteria that regard these themes with professionals, doctors and lawyers, to engage them to elaborate a competent judgment of conscience, and if need be, also a courageous objection of conscience, but an equal need rises from the basic level for families and parish communities in the process of the formation of youth and adults.

Under this aspect, next to Christian formation, whose aim is the knowledge of the Person of Christ, of his Word and Sacraments in the itinerary of faith of children and adolescents, one must consistently fuse the discourse on moral values that regard the body, sexuality, human love, procreation, respect for life at every moment, at the same time with valid and precise motives, reporting behaviour contrary to these primary values.

In this specific field the work of priests must be opportunely flanked by the commitment of lay educators, also specialists, dedicated to the duty to guide the ecclesial reality with their knowledge enlightened by faith.

Therefore, I ask the Lord to send among you, dear brothers and sisters, and among those dedicated to science, medicine, law and politics, witnesses endowed with true and upright consciences in order to defend and promote the “splendour of the truth” and to sustain the gift and mystery of life.

I trust in your help dearest professionals, philosophers, theologians, scientists and doctors. In a society at times chaotic and violent, with your cultural qualifications, by teaching and by example, you can contribute to awakening in many hearts the eloquent and clear voice of conscience.

The Second Vatican Council teaches us that “man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 16). The Council has offered wise directives so that “the faithful should learn to distinguish carefully between the rights and the duties which they have as belonging to the Church and those which fall to them as members of the human society”, and “they will strive to unite the two harmoniously, remembering that in every temporal affair they are to be guided by a Christian conscience, since not even in temporal business may any human activity be withdrawn from God’s dominion” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 36).

For this very reason the Council exhorts lay believers to welcome “what is decided by the Pastors as teachers and rulers of the Church”, and then recommends that “Pastors... should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of the laity in the Church. They should willingly use their prudent advice” and concludes that “[m]any benefits for the Church are to be expected from this familiar relationship between the laity and the Pastors” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 37).

44. February 22, 2007, Lenten Meeting with the Clergy of Rome, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Hall of Blessings.

Now, as a synthesis of the two fundamental rules, I would say: gratitude, patience and also acceptance of the inevitable sufferings. In marriage too, there is always suffering and tension. Yet, the couple goes forward and thus true love matures. The same thing happens in the Church’s communities: let us be patient together.

45. February 17, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Papal Representatives in Latin American Countries in Preparation for the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), Consistory Hall.

The family institution deserves priority attention; it is showing signs of breaking up under the pressure of lobbies that can have a negative effect on legislative processes. Divorce and de facto unions are on the rise, while adultery is viewed with unjustifiable tolerance.

It is necessary to reassert that marriage and the family are based on the deepest nucleus of the truth about man and his destiny; only on the rock of faithful and permanent conjugal love between a man and woman is it possible to build a community worthy of the human being.

46. February 12, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the International Congress on Natural Moral Law, Clementine Hall.

What has been said up to this point has very concrete applications if one refers to the family, that is, to “the intimate partnership of life and the love which constitutes the married state... established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws” (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48).

Concerning this, the Second Vatican Council has opportunely recalled that the institution of marriage has been “confirmed by the divine law”, and therefore “this sacred bond... for the good of the partner, of the children and of society no longer depends on human decision alone” (*ibid.*).

Therefore, no law made by man can override the norm written by the Creator without society becoming dramatically wounded in what constitutes its basic foundation. To forget this would mean to weaken the family, penalizing the children and rendering the future of society precarious.

47. February 10, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Luis Paris Chaverri, New Ambassador of Costa Rica to the Holy See.

On the other hand, Your Excellency, as you pointed out, this dialogue must exclude all the different forms of violence and help in building a more human future with the collaboration of all.

In this regard, it is appropriate to recall that social improvements are not only achieved by applying the necessary technical means but also by promoting reforms that take into account an ethical consideration of the person, the family and society.

It is consequently necessary to cultivate moral values such as honesty, discipline and responsibility for the common good. In this way it will be possible to avoid personal and collective selfishness in every context, as well as corruption which hinders every form of progress.

It is well known that the future of a nation must be based on peace, the harvest of righteousness (cf. Jas 3: 18), building the kind of society which, starting with those in charge of politics, parliament, administration and the law, encourages concord, harmony and respect for individuals as well as the defence of their fundamental rights.

In this regard, the policies that the Government of Costa Rica has implemented in the international arena to promote peace and human rights in the world, and its traditional closeness to the positions maintained by the Holy See in various international forums on matters as important as the defence of human life and the promotion of marriage and the family, deserve praise.

48. February 9, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Juan Gomez Martinez, Ambassador of Colombia to the Holy See.

As Pastor of the universal Church, I cannot refrain from expressing to Your Excellency my anxiety for the laws that concern those very sensitive issues such as the transmission and defence of life, sickness, the identity of the family and respect for marriage. On these topics and in the light of natural reason and the moral and spiritual principles that derive from the Gospel, the Catholic Church will continue ceaselessly to proclaim the inalienable greatness of human dignity.

It is also necessary to appeal to the responsibility of the lay people present in legislative bodies, in the Government and in the administration of justice to ensure that laws always express principles and values that are in conformity with natural law and that foster the authentic common good.

49. February 4, 2007, Angelus, St. Peter’s Square.

The “Week of life and of the family” begins in our Diocese of Rome today. It is an important opportunity to pray and reflect on the family, which is the “cradle” of life and of every vocation. We are well aware that the family founded on marriage is the natural environment in which to bear and raise children and thereby guarantee the future of all of humanity.

However, we also know that marriage is going through a deep crisis and today must face numerous challenges. It is consequently necessary to defend, help, safeguard and value it in its unrepeatable uniqueness.

If this commitment is in the first place the duty of spouses, it is also a priority duty of the Church and of every public institution to support the family by means of pastoral and political initiatives that take into account the real needs of married couples, of the elderly and of the new generations.

A peaceful family atmosphere, illumined by faith and the holy fear of God also nurtures the budding and blossoming of vocations to the service of the Gospel. I am referring in particular not only to those who are called to follow Christ on the path of the priesthood but also to all men and women religious, the consecrated people we remembered last Friday on the “World Day of Consecrated Life”.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us pray that through a constant effort to promote life and the family institution, our communities may be places of communion and hope in which, despite the many difficulties, the great “yes” to authentic love and to the reality of the human being and the family is renewed in accordance with God’s original plan. Let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, to grant that respect for the sacredness of life will grow so that people will be ever more aware of the real needs of families and that the number of those who help to build the civilization of love in the world will increase.

50. January 27, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, Clementine Hall.

Last year, at my first meeting with you, I sought to explore ways to overcome the apparent antithesis between the institution of causes of the nullity of marriage and genuine pastoral concern. In this perspective, the love of truth emerges as a point of convergence between processual research and the pastoral service of the person. We must not forget, however, that in causes of the nullity of marriage, the legal truth presupposes the “truth of the marriage” itself. Yet the expression “truth of the marriage” loses its existential importance in a cultural context that is marked by relativism and juridical positivism, which regard marriage as a mere social formalization of emotional ties.

Consequently, not only is it becoming incidental, as human sentiments can be, but it is also presented as a legal superstructure of the human will that can be arbitrarily manipulated and even deprived of its heterosexual character.

This crisis of the meaning of marriage is also influencing the attitude of many of the faithful. The practical effects of what I have called “the hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture” with regard to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, (cf. *Address to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 2005; *L’Osservatore Romano* English edition [ORE], 4 January 2006, p. 4), is felt especially acutely in the sphere of marriage and the family.

Indeed, it seems to some that the conciliar teaching on marriage, and in particular, the description of this institution as “*intima communitas vitae et amoris*” [*the intimate partnership of life and love*] (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48), must lead to a denial of the existence of an indissoluble conjugal bond because this would be a question of an “ideal” to which “normal Christians” cannot be “constrained”.

In fact, the conviction that the pastoral good of the person in an irregular marital situation requires a sort of canonical regularization, independently of the validity or nullity of his/her marriage, independently, that is, of the “truth” of his/her personal status, has also spread in certain ecclesiastical milieus. The process of the declaration of matrimonial nullity is actually considered as a legal means for achieving this objective, according to a logic in which the law becomes the formalization of subjective claims. In this regard, it should first be pointed out that the Council certainly described marriage as *intima communitas vitae et amoris*, but this partnership is determined, in accordance with the tradition of the Church, by a whole set of principles of the divine law which establish its true and permanent anthropological meaning (cf. *ibid.*).

Furthermore, the Magisteriums of Paul VI and John Paul II, as well as the legislative action of both the Latin and Eastern Codes, have followed up the Council in faithful hermeneutical continuity with regard to both the doctrine and the discipline of marriage and indeed, persevered in its effort for “reform” or “renewal in continuity” (cf. *Address to the Roman Curia*, *op. cit.*). This development was based on the indisputable presupposition that marriage has a truth of its own - that is, the human knowledge, illumined by the Word of

God, of the sexually different reality of the man and of the woman with their profound needs for complementarity, definitive self-giving and exclusivity - to whose discovery and deepening reason and faith harmoniously contribute.

The *anthropological and saving truth of marriage* - also in its juridical dimension - is already presented in Sacred Scripture. Jesus' response to those Pharisees who asked his opinion about the lawfulness of repudiation is well known: "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning *made them male and female*, and said, "For this reason *a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one*"? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (Mt 19: 4-6).

The citations of Genesis (1: 27; 2: 24) propose the matrimonial truth of the "principle", that truth whose fullness is found in connection with Christ's union with the Church (cf. Eph 5: 30-31) and was the object of such broad and deep reflections on the part of Pope John Paul II in his cycles of catecheses on human love in the divine design.

On the basis of this dual unity of the human couple, it is possible to work out an authentic *juridical anthropology of marriage*. In this sense, Jesus' conclusive words are especially enlightening: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder". Every marriage is of course the result of the free consent of the man and the woman, but in practice their freedom expresses the natural capacity inherent in their masculinity and femininity.

The union takes place by virtue of the very plan of God who created them male and female and gives them the power to unite for ever those natural and complementary dimensions of their persons.

The indissolubility of marriage does not derive from the definitive commitment of those who contract it but is intrinsic in the nature of the "powerful bond established by the Creator" (John Paul II, *Catechesis*, General Audience 21 November 1979, n. 2; *ORE*, 26 November 1979, p. 1).

People who contract marriage must be definitively committed to it because marriage is such in the plan of creation and of redemption. And the essential juridical character of marriage is inherent precisely in this bond which represents for the man and for the woman a requirement of justice and love from which, for their good and for the good of all, they may not withdraw without contradicting what God himself has wrought within them.

It is necessary to study this aspect further, not only in consideration of your role as canon lawyers, but also because the overall understanding of the institution of marriage must also include clarity with regard to its juridical dimension. However, conceptions of the nature of this relationship can be radically divergent. For positivism, the legality of the conjugal bond would be solely the result of the application of a formally valid and effective human norm. In this way, the human reality of life and conjugal love remains extrinsic to the "juridical" institution of marriage. A hiatus is created between law and human existence which radically denies the possibility of an anthropological foundation of the law.

The traditional role of the Church is quite different in the understanding of the juridical dimension of the conjugal union following the teachings of Jesus, of the Apostles and of the Holy Fathers. St Augustine, for instance, in citing St Paul, forcefully affirms: "*Cui fidei [coniugali] tantum iuris tribuit Apostolus, ut eam potestatem appellaret, dicens: Mulier non habet potestatem corporis sui, sed vir; similiter autem et vir non habet potestatem corporis sui, sed mulier (I Cor 7: 4)*" (*De Bono Coniugali*, 4, 4).

St Paul who so profoundly explains in his Letter to the Ephesians the "mysterion mega" of conjugal love in relation to Christ's union with the Church (5: 22-31), did not hesitate to apply to marriage the strongest legal terms to designate the juridical bond by which spouses are united in their sexual dimension. So too, for St Augustine, lawfulness is essential in each one of the three goods (*proles, fides, sacramentum*) that form the backbone of his doctrinal exposition on marriage.

With regard to the subjective and libertarian relativization of the sexual experience, the Church's tradition clearly affirms the natural juridical character of marriage, that is, the fact that it belongs by nature to the context of justice in interpersonal relations.

In this perspective, the law is truly interwoven with life and love as one of the intrinsic obligations of its existence. Therefore, as I wrote in my first Encyclical, "From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfil its deepest purpose" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 11).

Thus, love and law can be united to the point of ensuring that husband and wife *mutually owe to one another* the love *with which they spontaneously love one another*: the love in them is the fruit of their free desire for the good of one another and of their children; which, moreover, is also a requirement of love for one's own true good.

All the activity of the Church and of the faithful in the context of the family, must be based on this *truth about marriage and its intrinsic juridical dimension*. In spite of this, as I recalled earlier, the relativistic mindset, in more or less open or subtle ways, can also insinuate itself into the ecclesial community.

You are well aware that this is a risk of our time which is sometimes expressed in a distorted interpretation of the canonical norms in force. One must react to this tendency with courage and faith, constantly applying the *hermeneutic of renewal in continuity* and not allowing oneself to be seduced by forms of interpretation that involve a break with the Church's tradition.

These paths lead away from the true essence of marriage, as well as from its intrinsic juridical dimension and, under various more or less attractive names, seek to conceal a false conjugal reality.

So it is that the point is sometimes reached of maintaining that nothing is right or wrong in a couple's relationship, provided it corresponds with the achievement of the subjective aspirations of each party. In this perspective, the idea of marriage "*in facto esse*" oscillates between merely factual relations and the juridical-positivistic aspect, overlooking its essence as an intrinsic bond of justice between the persons of the man and of the woman.

The contribution of ecclesiastical tribunals to overcoming the crisis of the meaning of marriage, in the Church and in civil society, could seem to some people of somewhat secondary or minor importance.

However, precisely because marriage has an intrinsically juridical dimension, being wise and convinced servants of justice in this sensitive and most important sector has the significant value of witness and is of deep reassurance to all. Dear Prelate Auditors, you are committed on a front in which responsibility for the truth makes itself felt in a special way in our times.

In being faithful to your task, make sure that your action fits harmoniously into an overall rediscovery of the beauty of that "truth about marriage", the truth of the "principle", which Jesus fully taught us and of which the Holy Spirit continually reminds us in the Church today.

51. January 11, 2007, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Regional Board of Lazio, the Municipal Corporation of Rome and the Province of Rome, Clementine Hall.

This same concern for the human being that impels us to be close to the poor and the sick makes us attentive to that fundamental human good of the family based on marriage. Today, the intrinsic value and authentic motivations of marriage and the family need to be understood better. To this end, the Church's pastoral commitment has been considerable and must increase further.

But a twofold policy of and for the family, which calls into question the responsibility of its members, is also necessary. In other words, it is a matter of increasing initiatives that can make the forming of a family and subsequently having and raising children easier and less burdensome for young couples; that encourage the employment of youth, contain housing costs as much as possible and increase the number of kindergartens and nursery schools.

Indeed, those projects that aim to attribute to other forms of union inappropriate legal recognition, inevitably lead to weakening and destabilizing the legitimate family founded on marriage and appear to be dangerous and counterproductive.

Educating the new generations is the pastoral priority on which the Diocese of Rome is currently focusing attention. The social and civil importance of this problem certainly escapes none of you. Therefore, while I am grateful for the support you already offer to certain forms of the Church's educational commitment, including the after-school recreation facilities, I am confident that in this area too it will be possible to develop a fruitful collaboration with respect for the temperament and tasks proper to each one of those concerned.

52. January 7, 2007, Mass in the Sistine Chapel and Baptisms, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

The Christmas Season, which ends precisely today, has made us contemplate the Child Jesus in the poor grotto of Bethlehem, lovingly tended by Mary and Joseph. God entrusts every child who is born to his parents: so how important is the family founded on marriage, the cradle of life and love!

The House of Nazareth where the Holy Family lived is the model and school of simplicity, patience and harmony for all Christian families. I pray the Lord that your families too may be welcoming places where these little ones can not only grow in good health but also in faith and love for God, who today, with Baptism, makes them his children.

53. December 31, 2006, Angelus, St. Peter's Square.

In the Gospel we do not find discourses on the family but an *event* which is worth more than any words: God *wanted to be born and to grow up in a human family*. In this way he consecrated the family as the first and ordinary means of his encounter with humanity.

In his life spent at Nazareth, Jesus honoured the Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph, remaining under their authority throughout the period of his childhood and his adolescence (cf. Lk 2: 41-52). In this way he shed light on the primary value of the family in the education of the person.

Jesus was introduced by Mary and Joseph into the religious community and frequented the synagogue of Nazareth. With them, he learned to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as the Gospel passage offered for our meditation by today's liturgy tells us.

When he was 12 years old, he stayed behind in the Temple and it took his parents all of three days to find him. With this act he made them understand that he "had to see to his Father's affairs", in other words, to the mission that God had entrusted to him (cf. Lk 2: 41-52).

This Gospel episode reveals the most authentic and profound vocation of the family: that is, to accompany each of its members on the path of the discovery of God and of the plan that he has prepared for him or her.

Mary and Joseph taught Jesus primarily by their example: in his parents he came to know the full beauty of faith, of love for God and for his Law, as well as the demands of justice, which is totally fulfilled in love (cf. Rom 13: 10).

From them he learned that it is necessary first of all to do God's will, and that the spiritual bond is worth more than the bond of kinship.

The Holy Family of Nazareth is truly the "prototype" of every Christian family which, united in the Sacrament of Marriage and nourished by the Word and the Eucharist, is called to carry out the wonderful vocation and mission of being the living cell not only of society but also of the Church, a sign and instrument of unity for the entire human race.

Let us now invoke for every family, especially families in difficulty, the protection of Mary Most Holy and of St Joseph. May they sustain such families so that they can resist the disintegrating forces of a certain contemporary culture which undermines the very foundations of the family institution.

May they help Christian families to be, in every part of the world, living images of God's love.

54. November 22, 2006, Benedict XVI, General Audience, St. Peter's Square.

St Paul and the Church

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. Next Sunday, the last of Ordinary Time, we will be celebrating the Solemnity of Christ the King. Dear *young people*, put Jesus at the centre of your life and you will receive from him light and courage in every daily decision. May Christ, who made the Cross his royal throne, help you, dear *sick people*, to understand the redemptive value of suffering lived in union with him. As I remind you, dear *newly-weds*, that this very day is the 25th anniversary of the promulgation

of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* that encouraged pastoral care of the family in the Church, I express the hope that you will persevere on your way in marriage ever united to Christ.

55. November 20, 2006, Official Visit of H.E. Mr. Giorgio Napolitano President of the Republic of Italy, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI.

Thus, when they [the lay faithful] undertake to confront with their words and actions today's great challenges, such as war and terrorism, hunger and thirst, the extreme poverty of so many human beings, several terrible epidemics, but also the safeguard of human life in all its stages from conception until natural death and the promotion of the family founded on marriage and primarily responsible for education, they are not acting in their own special interests or on behalf of principles that can only be perceived by those who profess a specific religious creed: they do so, instead, in the context of, and abiding by, the rules of democratic coexistence for the good of the whole of society and on behalf of values that every upright person can share.

56. November 19, 2006, Angelus, St. Peter's Square.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank the Lord, who in his Providence has desired male and female cloistered communities. May they have our spiritual and also our material support, so that they can carry out their mission to keep alive in the Church the ardent expectation of Christ's Second Coming.

For this, let us invoke the intercession of Mary, whom we contemplate on the Memorial of her Presentation in the Temple as Mother and model of the Church, who welcomes in herself both vocations: to virginity and to marriage, to contemplative life and to active life.

57. November 18, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Second Group of German Bishops on their "Ad Limina" Visit, Consistory Hall.

I also have the topic of *marriage* and *the family* particularly at heart.

Today, the order of marriage as established in creation and of which the Bible tells us expressly in the narrative of creation (cf. Gn 2: 24) is gradually being obscured.

To the extent that man seeks in new ways to build for himself the world as a whole, thereby ever more perceptibly endangering its foundations, he also loses his vision of the order of creation with regard to his own life. He considers he can define himself as he pleases by virtue of an inane freedom.

Thus, the foundations that support his life and the life of society are undermined. It becomes difficult for young people to commit themselves definitively. They are afraid of finality, which seems to them impracticable and contrary to freedom.

In this way it becomes more and more difficult to welcome children and to give them that lasting space for the growth and development that only the family founded on marriage can provide.

In this situation just mentioned, it is very important to help young people say to themselves the definitive "yes" that is not in opposition to freedom but constitutes its greatest opportunity.

Love reaches its true maturity in the patience required by being together for the whole of life. It is in this environment of lifelong love that children too must learn to live and love.

Therefore, I would like to ask you to do all you can to see that marriage and the family are formed, promoted and encouraged.

58. November 9, 2006, Conclusion of the Meeting of the Holy Father with the Bishops of Switzerland, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI.

I remember, when I used to go to Germany in the 1980s and '90s, that I was asked to give interviews and I always knew the questions in advance. They concerned the ordination of women, contraception, abortion and other such constantly recurring problems.

If we let ourselves be drawn into these discussions, the Church is then identified with certain commandments or prohibitions; we give the impression that we are moralists with a few somewhat antiquated convictions, and not even a hint of the true greatness of the faith appears. I therefore consider it essential always to highlight the greatness of our faith - a commitment from which we must not allow such situations to divert us.

* * *

This is one aspect: this morality exists and it also fascinates young people, who work for peace, for non-violence, for justice, for the poor, for creation. And there are truly great moral themes that also belong, moreover, to the tradition of the Church. The means offered for their solution, however, are often very unilateral and not always credible, but we cannot dwell on this now. The important topics are present.

The other part of morality, often received controversially by politics, concerns life. One aspect of it is the commitment to life from conception to death, that is, its defence against abortion, against euthanasia, against the manipulation and man's self-authorization in order to dispose of life.

People often seek to justify these interventions with the seemingly great purpose of thereby serving the future generations, and it even appears moral to take human life into one's own hands and manipulate it.

However, on the other hand, the knowledge also exists that human life is a gift that demands our respect and love from the very first to its very last moments, also for the suffering, the disabled and the weak.

The morality of marriage and the family also fit into this context. Marriage is becoming, so to speak, ever more marginalized.

We are aware of the example of certain countries where legislation has been modified so that marriage is no longer defined as a bond between a man and a woman but a bond between persons; with this, obviously, the basic idea is destroyed and society from its roots becomes something quite different.

The awareness that sexuality, *eros* and marriage as a union between a man and a woman go together - "and they become one flesh" (Gn 2: 24) - this knowledge is growing weaker and weaker; every type of bond seems entirely normal - they represent a sort of overall morality of non-discrimination and a form of freedom due to man.

Naturally, with this the indissolubility of marriage has become almost a utopian idea which many public figures seem precisely to contradict. So it is that even the family is gradually breaking up. There are of course many explanations for the problem of the sharp decline in the birth rate, but certainly a decisive role is also played in this by the fact that people want to enjoy life, that they have little confidence in the future and that they feel the family is no longer viable as a lasting community in which future generations may grow up.

In these contexts, therefore, our proclamation clashes with an awareness, as it were, contrary to society and with a sort of anti-morality based on a conception of freedom seen as the faculty to choose autonomously with no pre-defined guidelines, as non-discrimination, hence, as the approval of every type of possibility.

59. October 19, 2006, Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Verona on the Occasion of the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Convention, Verona Exhibition Centre.

Civil and political responsibility of Catholics

Your Convention has rightly considered the theme of citizenship, that is, the question of the civil and political responsibility of Catholics. Christ has come to save the real, concrete man who lives in history and

in the community, and so Christianity and the Church have had a public dimension and value from the beginning.

As I wrote in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (cf. nn. 28-29) on the relationship between religion and politics, Jesus Christ brought a substantial novelty, opening the way towards a more human, freer world through the reciprocal distinction and autonomy of the State and the Church, that is, between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (cf. Mt 22: 21).

The very religious freedom that we hold as a universal value, particularly necessary in the world today, has its historical roots here. The Church, therefore, is not and does not intend to be a political agent. At the same time she has a profound interest in the good of the political community, whose soul is justice, and offers it her specific contribution at a double level.

Indeed, Christian faith purifies reason and helps it to be better: as a result, with its social doctrine whose argument begins from what is conformed to the nature of every human being, the Church's contribution is to enable whatever is just to be effectively recognized and then also accomplished. To this end, moral and spiritual energies are clearly indispensable as they ensure that the demands of justice are put before personal interests, a social category or even a State. For the Church, here again, there is ample space to root these energies in the conscience, to nourish them and fortify them.

The immediate duty to act in the political sphere to build a just order in society is not the Church's task as such, but that of the lay faithful, who work as citizens under their own responsibility. This is a duty of great importance to which Italian lay Christians are called to dedicate themselves with generosity and courage, illuminated by faith and by the Magisterium of the Church and animated by the charity of Christ.

Special attention and extraordinary commitment are demanded today by those great challenges that endanger vast portions of the human family: war and terrorism, hunger and thirst, some terrible epidemics. But it is also necessary to face, with equal determination and clear policies the risks of political and legislative choices that contradict fundamental values and anthropological principles and ethics rooted in the nature of the human being, in particular, regarding the guardianship of human life in all its stages, from conception to natural death, and to the promotion of the family founded on marriage, avoiding the introduction in the public order of other forms of union that would contribute to destabilizing it, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable role in society.

60. October 13, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Zambia on their "Ad Limina" Visit.

We believe that the Church is holy. When you urge your priests to live holy lives in accordance with their calling, when you preach generous love and fidelity in marriage and when you exhort everybody to practise the works of mercy, remind them of the Lord's own words: "You are the light of the world ... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:14-16). Holiness is a divine gift, which manifests itself in love of God and love of neighbour. Dear Brothers, show your people the beautiful face of Christ by living a life of genuine love. Show Christ's compassion especially for the poor, for refugees, for the sick and for all who suffer. At the same time, in your teaching continue to proclaim the need for honesty, family affection, discipline and fidelity, all of which have a decisive impact on the health and stability of society.

61. October 8, 2006, Benedict XVI, Angelus, St. Peter's Square.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This Sunday, the Gospel presents to us Jesus' words on marriage. He answered those who asked him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife, as provided by a decree in Mosaic law (cf. Dt 24: 1), that this was a concession made to Moses because of man's "hardness of heart", whereas the truth about marriage dated back to "the beginning of creation" when, as is written of God in the Book of Genesis, "male and female he created them; for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one" (Mk 10: 6-7; cf. Gn 1: 27; 2: 24).

And Jesus added: “So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mk 10: 8-9). This is God’s original plan, as the Second Vatican Council also recalled in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*: “The intimate partnership of life and love which constitutes the married state has been established by the Creator and endowed by him with its own proper laws: it is rooted in the contract of its partners... God himself is the author of marriage” (n. 48).

My thoughts now go to all Christian spouses: I thank the Lord with them for the gift of the Sacrament of Marriage, and I urge them to remain faithful to their vocation in every season of life, “in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health”, as they promised in the sacramental rite.

Conscious of the grace they have received, may Christian husbands and wives build a family open to life and capable of facing united the many complex challenges of our time.

Today, there is a special need for their witness. There is a need for families that do not let themselves be swept away by modern cultural currents inspired by hedonism and relativism, and which are ready instead to carry out their mission in the Church and in society with generous dedication.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, the Servant of God John Paul II wrote that “the sacrament of marriage makes Christian couples and parents witnesses of Christ “to the end of the earth’, missionaries, in the true and proper sense, of love and life” (cf. n. 54). Their mission is directed both to inside the family - especially in reciprocal service and the education of the children - and to outside it. Indeed, the domestic community is called to be a sign of God’s love for all.

The Christian family can only fulfil this mission if it is supported by divine grace. It is therefore necessary for Christian couples to pray tirelessly and to persevere in their daily efforts to maintain the commitments they assumed on their wedding day.

I invoke upon all families, especially those in difficulty, the motherly protection of Our Lady and of her husband Joseph. Mary, Queen of the family, pray for us!

62. September 29, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Malawi on their “Ad Limina” Visit, Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo.

I am pleased to note that you continue to exercise your teaching office by commenting on matters of social concern. In fact, your Pentecost Pastoral Letter *Renewing Our Lives and Society with the Power of the Holy Spirit*, which you published earlier this year, drew attention to some of the social and moral evils afflicting the nation. Food security is threatened not only by drought but also by inefficient and unjust management of agriculture; the spread of AIDS is increased by failure to remain faithful to one partner in marriage or to practise abstinence; the rights of women, children and the unborn are cynically violated by human trafficking, by domestic violence and by those who advocate abortion. Never cease to proclaim the truth, and insist on it, “in season and out of season” (2 *Tim* 4:2) because “the truth will set you free” (*Jn* 8:32).

63. September 28, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Hans-Henning Horstmann, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Holy See, Castel Gandolfo.

In this Intervention I can only stress several contexts considered important by the Catholic Church, which has at heart, as I have already said, first and foremost man and his salvation.

In the first place, I cite the protection of marriage and the family which is recognized by the Fundamental Law. But they are threatened on the one hand by the change taking place in public opinion in the interpretation of matrimonial communion, and on the other, by the new forms provided for by legislators that are drifting away from the form of the natural family.

64. September 23, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Episcopal Conference of Chad on their “Ad Limina” Visit, Consistory Hall, Castel Gandolfo.

Among the pastoral challenges to be faced is the urgent need to proclaim the whole truth about marriage and the family. Indeed, it is of paramount importance to show that the institution of marriage contributes to the true development of people and of society, and also makes it possible to assure the dignity, equality and true freedom of men and women as well as the human and spiritual growth of children.

“Having both been created in the image of God, man and woman, although different, are essentially equal from the point of view of their humanity” (*Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 82).

Young people who have received a sound formation will promote a renewal of the family apostolate and will help alleviate the social, cultural or financial difficulties which are obstacles to Christian marriage for many of the faithful.

While preserving the essential values of the African family, may your Country’s young people welcome into their lives the beauty and grandeur of Christian marriage, which in its oneness implies indissoluble and faithful love between the spouses.

65. September 11, 2006, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to München, Altötting, and Regensburg (September 9-14, 2006), Eucharistic Celebration, Homily of the Holy Father, Kapellplatz, Altötting.

. . . Jesus is not a wonder-worker, he does not play games with his power in what is, after all, a private affair. No, he gives a sign, in which he proclaims his hour, the hour of the wedding-feast, the hour of union between God and man. He does not merely “make” wine, but transforms the human wedding-feast into an image of the divine wedding-feast, to which the Father invites us through the Son and in which he gives us every good thing, represented by the abundance of wine. The wedding-feast becomes an image of that moment when Jesus pushed love to the utmost, let his body be rent and thus gave himself to us for ever, having become completely one with us - a marriage between God and man. The hour of the Cross, the hour which is the source of the Sacrament, in which he gives himself really to us in flesh and blood, puts his Body into our hands and our hearts, this is the hour of the wedding feast. Thus a momentary need is resolved in a truly divine manner and the initial request is superabundantly granted. Jesus’ hour has not yet arrived, but in the sign of the water changed into wine, in the sign of the festive gift, he even now anticipates that hour.

66. September 8, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Pedro Pablo Cabrera Gaete, New Ambassador of Chile to the Holy See, Castel Gandolfo.

In this sense, the Church shares the desire for a justice that is not reduced by insufficient respect for human dignity or for the inalienable rights that derive from it.

These rights are inalienable precisely because man possesses them by his very nature, and consequently, they are not at the service of other interests. Among them should be mentioned first of all the right to life at every stage of its development and in all circumstances. Mention should also be made of the right to form a family, based on bonds of love and faithfulness and established in marriage between a man and a woman, which must be given protection and assistance if it is to fulfil its incomparable task as a source of successful coexistence and as the basic cell of all society.

Moreover, the primary right to educate children in accordance with the ideals with which their parents have desired to enrich them by joyfully welcoming them into their lives is implicit in the family as a natural institution.

67. August 31, 2006, Meeting of His Holiness Benedict XVI with the Priests of the Diocese of Albano, Swiss Hall at the Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo.

We can now also mention Marriage: Marriage too presents itself as a great missionary opportunity because today - thanks be to God - many people, even those who do not go to church often, still want to marry in church. It is an opportunity to make these young people face the reality of Christian Marriage, sacramental Marriage. This also seems to me a great responsibility. We see it in causes of the nullity of marriage, and we see it above all in the great problem of divorced and remarried people who want to receive Communion and do not understand why this is impossible. It is more than likely that when they said their "yes" before the Lord, they did not understand what this "yes" means. It is an identification with the "yes" of Christ, it means entering into the fidelity of Christ, hence, into the sacrament that is the Church and thus, into the Sacrament of Marriage.

I therefore think that preparation for marriage is a very important missionary opportunity for proclaiming the Sacrament of Christ once again in the Sacrament of Marriage, to understand this fidelity and thereby help people to understand the problem of those who are divorced and remarried.

* * *

Benedict XVI:

Two tremendous questions! The first one is: how is it possible to communicate the beauty of marriage to the people of today? We see how many young people are reluctant to marry in church because they are afraid of finality; indeed, they are even reluctant to have a civil wedding. Today, to many young people and even to some who are not so young, definitiveness appears as a constriction, a limitation of freedom. And what they want first of all is freedom. They are afraid that in the end they might not succeed. They see so many failed marriages. They fear that this juridical form, as they understand it, will be an external weight that will extinguish love.

It is essential to understand that it is not a question of a juridical bond, a burden imposed with marriage. On the contrary, depth and beauty lie precisely in finality. Only in this way can love mature to its full beauty. But how is it possible to communicate this? I think this problem is common to us all.

For me, in Valencia - and Your Eminence, you can confirm this - it was an important moment not only when I talked about this, but when various families presented themselves to me with one or more children; one family was virtually a "parish", it had so many children! The presence and witness of these families really was far stronger than any words.

They presented first of all the riches of their family experience: how such a large family truly becomes a cultural treasure, an opportunity for the education of one and all, a possibility for making the various cultural expressions of today coexist, the gift of self, mutual help also in suffering, etc.

But their testimony of the crises they had suffered was also significant. One of these couples had almost reached the point of divorcing. They explained that they then learned to live through this crisis, this suffering of the otherness of the other, and to accept each other anew. Precisely in overcoming the moment of crisis, the desire to separate, a new dimension of love developed and opened the door to a new dimension of life, which nothing but tolerating the suffering of the crisis could reopen.

This seems to me very important. Today, a crisis point is reached the moment the diversity of temperament is perceived, the difficulty of putting up with each other every day for an entire life. In the end, then, they decided: let us separate. From these testimonies we understood precisely that in crises, in bearing the moment in which it seems that no more can be borne, new doors and a new beauty of love truly open.

A beauty consisting of harmony alone is not true beauty. Something is missing, it becomes insufficient. True beauty also needs contrast. Darkness and light complement each other. Even a grape, in order to ripen, does not only need the sun but also the rain, not only the day but also the night.

We priests ourselves, both young and old, must learn the need for suffering and for crises. We must put up with and transcend this suffering. Only in this way is life enriched. I believe that the fact the Lord bears the stigmata for eternity has a symbolic value. As an expression of the atrocity of suffering and death, today the stigmata are seals of Christ's victory, of the full beauty of his victory and his love for us. We must accept, both as priests and as married persons, the need to put up with the crises of otherness, of the other, the crisis in which it seems that it is no longer possible to stay together.

Husbands and wives must learn to move ahead together, also for love of the children, and thus be newly acquainted with one another, love one another anew with a love far deeper and far truer. So it is that on a long journey, with its suffering, love truly matures.

It seems to me that we priests can also learn from married people precisely because of their suffering and sacrifices. We often think that celibacy on its own is a sacrifice. However, knowing the sacrifices married people make - let us think of their children, of the problems that arise, of the fears, suffering, illnesses, rebellion, and also of the problems of the early years when nights are almost always spent sleeplessly because of the crying of small children - we must learn our sacrifice from them, from their sacrifices. And at the same time we must learn that it is beautiful to mature through sacrifices and thus to work for the salvation of others.

Fr Pennazza, you correctly mentioned the Council which says that Marriage is a Sacrament for the salvation of others: first of all for the salvation of the other, of the husband and of the wife, but also of the children, the sons and daughters, and lastly of the entire community. And thus, priesthood too matures in the encounter.

I then think that we ought to involve families. Family celebrations seem to me to be very important. On the occasion of celebrations it is right that the family, the beauty of families, appear. Even testimonies - although they are perhaps somewhat too fashionable - can in some instances truly be a proclamation, a help for us all.

To conclude, I consider it very significant that in St Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, God's marriage with humanity through the Incarnation of the Lord is achieved on the Cross, on which is born the new humanity: the Church.

Precisely from these divine nuptials Christian marriage is born. As St Paul says, it is the sacramental concretization of what happens in this great mystery. Thus, we must learn ever anew this bond between the Cross and the Resurrection, between the Cross and the beauty of the Redemption, and insert ourselves into this sacrament. Let us pray to the Lord to help us proclaim this mystery well, to live this mystery, to learn from married couples how they live it in order to help us live the Cross, so that we may also attain moments of joy and of the Resurrection.

68. August 5, 2006, Interview of the Holy Father Benedict XVI in Preparation for the Upcoming Journey to Bavaria (September 9-14, 2006), Apostolic Palace of Castel Gandolfo.

VR: The issue of the family. A month ago you were in Valencia for the World Meeting of Families. Anyone who was listening carefully, as we tried to do at Vatican Radio, noticed how you never mentioned the words "homosexual marriage", you never spoke about abortion or about contraception. Careful observers thought that was very interesting. Clearly your idea is to go around the world preaching the faith rather than as an "apostle of morality". What are your comments?

Benedict XVI: Obviously, yes. Actually, I should say I had only two opportunities to speak for 20 minutes. And when you have so little time you cannot immediately begin with "no". Firstly, you have to know what we really want, right? Christianity, Catholicism, is not a collection of prohibitions: it is a positive option. It is very important that we look at it again because this idea has almost completely disappeared today. We have heard so much about what is not allowed that now it is time to say: we have a positive idea to offer, that man and woman are made for each other, that the scale of sexuality, eros, agape, indicates the level of love and it is in this way that marriage develops, first of all as a joyful and blessing-filled encounter between a man and a woman, and then, the family, which guarantees continuity among generations and through which generations are reconciled to each other and even cultures can meet. So, firstly, it is important to stress what we want. Secondly, we can also see why we do not want some things. I believe we need to see and reflect on the fact that it is not a Catholic invention that man and woman are made for each other so that humanity can go on living: all cultures know this. As far as abortion is concerned, it is part of the fifth, not the sixth, commandment: "You shall not kill!". We have to presume this is obvious and always stress that the human person begins in the mother's womb and remains a human person until his or her last breath. The human person must always be respected as a human person. But all this is clearer if you say it first in a positive way.

69. July 9, 2006, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Valencia (Spain) on Occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families, Farewell Ceremony, Address of the Holy Father, Airport of Manises.

2. I am confident that, with the help of the Most High and the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, this Meeting will keep echoing like a joyful song of the love, life and of faith shared by families, and help today's world to understand that the marriage covenant, whereby man and woman establish a permanent bond, is a great good for all humanity.

70. July 9, 2006, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Valencia (Spain) on Occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families, Holy Mass, Homily of the Holy Father, City of Arts and Sciences.

Both Esther and Paul, as we have just heard in today's readings, testify that the family is called to work for the handing on of the faith. Esther admits: "Ever since I was born, I have heard in the tribe of my family that you, O Lord, took Israel out of all the nations" (14:5). Paul follows the tradition of his Jewish ancestors by worshipping God with a pure conscience. He praises the sincere faith of Timothy and speaks to him about "a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you" (2 *Tim* 1:15). In these biblical testimonies, the family includes not only parents and children, but also grandparents and ancestors. The family thus appears to us as a community of generations and the guarantee of a patrimony of traditions.

None of us gave ourselves life or singlehandedly learned how to live. All of us received from others both life itself and its basic truths, and we have been called to attain perfection in relationship and loving communion with others. The family, founded on indissoluble marriage between a man and a woman, is the expression of this relational, filial and communal aspect of life. It is the setting where men and women are enabled to be born with dignity, and to grow and develop in an integral manner.

Once children are born, through their relationship with their parents they begin to share in a family tradition with even older roots. Together with the gift of life, they receive a whole patrimony of experience. Parents have the right and the inalienable duty to transmit this heritage to their children: to help them find their own identity, to initiate them to the life of society, to foster the responsible exercise of their moral freedom and their ability to love on the basis of their having been loved and, above all, to enable them to encounter God. Children experience human growth and maturity to the extent that they trustingly accept this heritage and training which they gradually make their own. They are thus enabled to make a personal synthesis between what has been passed on and what is new, a synthesis that every individual and generation is called to make.

At the origin of every man and woman, and thus in all human fatherhood and motherhood, we find God the Creator. For this reason, married couples must accept the child born to them, not simply as theirs alone, but also as a child of God, loved for his or her own sake and called to be a son or daughter of God. What is more: each generation, all parenthood and every family has its origin in God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Esther's father had passed on to her, along with the memory of her forebears and her people, the memory of a God who is the origin of all and to whom all are called to answer. The memory of God the Father, who chose a people for himself and who acts in history for our salvation. The memory of this Father sheds light on our deepest human identity: where we come from, who we are, and how great is our dignity. Certainly we come from our parents and we are their children, but we also come from God who has created us in his image and called us to be his children. Consequently, at the origin of every human being there is not something haphazard or chance, but a loving plan of God. This was revealed to us by Jesus Christ, the true Son of God and a perfect man. He knew whence he came and whence all of us have come: from the love of his Father and our Father.

Faith, then, is not merely a cultural heritage, but the constant working of the grace of God who calls and our human freedom, which can respond or not to his call. Even if no one can answer for another person, Christian parents are still called to give a credible witness of their Christian faith and hope. The need to ensure that God's call and the good news of Christ will reach their children with the utmost clarity and authenticity.

As the years pass, this gift of God which the parents have helped set before the eyes of the little ones will also need to be cultivated with wisdom and gentleness, in order to instill in them a capacity for discernment. Thus, with the constant witness of the their parents' conjugal love, permeated with a living faith, and with the loving accompaniment of the Christian community, children will be helped better to appropriate the gift of their faith, to discover the deepest meaning of their own lives and to respond with joy and gratitude.

The Christian family passes on the faith when parents teach their children to pray and when they pray with them (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 60); when they lead them to the sacraments and gradually introduce them to the life of the Church; when all join in reading the Bible, letting the light of faith shine on their family life and praising God as our Father.

In contemporary culture, we often see an excessive exaltation of the freedom of the individual as an autonomous subject, as if we were self-created and self-sufficient, apart from our relationship with others and our responsibilities in their regard. Attempts are being made to organize the life of society on the basis of subjective and ephemeral desires alone, with no reference to objective, prior truths such as the dignity of each human being and his inalienable rights and duties, which every social group is called to serve.

The Church does not cease to remind us that true human freedom derives from our having been created in God's image and likeness. Christian education is consequently an education in freedom and for freedom. "We do not do good as slaves, who are not free to act otherwise, but we do it because we are personally responsible for the world; because we love truth and goodness, because we love God himself and therefore his creatures as well. This is the true freedom to which the Holy Spirit wants to lead us (*Homily for the Vigil of Pentecost*, 9 June 2006).

Jesus Christ is the perfect human being, an example of filial freedom, who teaches us to share with others his own love: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love" (*Jn* 15:9). And so the Second Vatican Council teaches that "Christian married couples and parents, following their own way, should support one another in grace all through life with faithful love, and should train their children, lovingly received from God, in Christian doctrine and evangelical virtues. Because in this way they present to all an example of unflinching and generous love, they build up the brotherhood of charity, and they stand as witnesses and cooperators of the fruitfulness of Mother Church, as a sign of and a share in that love with which Christ loved his Bride and gave himself for her" (*Lumen Gentium*, 41).

The joyful love with which our parents welcomed us and accompanied our first steps in this world is like a sacramental sign and prolongation of the benevolent love of God from which we have come. The experience of being welcomed and loved by God and by our parents is always the firm foundation for authentic human growth and authentic development, helping us to mature on the way towards truth and love, and to move beyond ourselves in order to enter into communion with others and with God.

To help us advance along the path of human maturity, the Church teaches us to respect and foster the marvellous reality of the indissoluble marriage between man and woman which is also the origin of the family. To recognize and assist this institution is one of the greatest services which can be rendered nowadays to the common good and to the authentic development of individuals and societies, as well as the best means of ensuring the dignity, equality and true freedom of the human person.

This being the case, I want to stress the importance and the positive role which the Church's various family associations are playing in support of marriage and the family. Consequently, "I wish to call on all Christians to collaborate cordially and courageously with all people of good will who are serving the family in accordance with their responsibility" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86), so that by joining forces in a legitimate plurality of initiatives they will contribute to the promotion of the authentic good of the family in contemporary society.

Let us return for a moment to the first reading of this Mass, drawn from the Book of Esther. The Church at prayer has seen in this humble queen interceding with all her heart for her suffering people, a prefigurement of Mary, whom her Son has given to us all as our Mother; a prefigurement of the Mother who protects by her love God's family on its earthly pilgrimage. Mary is the image and model of all mothers, of their great mission to be guardians of life, of their mission to be teachers of the art of living and of the art of loving.

The Christian family - father, mother and children - is called, then, to do all these things not as a task imposed from without, but rather as a gift of the sacramental grace of marriage poured out upon the spouses. If they remain open to the Spirit and implore his help, he will not fail to bestow on them the love of God the Father made manifest and incarnate in Christ. The presence of the Spirit will help spouses not to lose

sight of the source and criterion of their love and self-giving, and to cooperate with him to make it visible and incarnate in every aspect of their lives. The Spirit will also awaken in them a yearning for the definitive encounter with Christ in the house of his Father and our Father. And this is the message of hope that, from Valencia, I wish to share with all the families of the world. Amen.

71. July 8, 2006, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Valencia (Spain) on Occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families, Vigil of Prayer, Address of the Holy Father, City of Arts and Sciences.

I am most happy to take part in this prayer meeting which is meant to celebrate with great joy God's gift of the family. I feel very close in prayer to all those who have recently experienced this city's mourning and in our hope in the Risen Christ, which provides light and strength even at times of immense human tragedy.

United by the same faith in Christ, we have gathered here from so many parts of the world as a community which with gratitude and joy bears witness that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God for love, and that complete human fulfilment only comes about when we make a sincere gift of ourselves to others. The family is the privileged setting where every person learns to give and receive love. That is why the Church constantly wishes to demonstrate her pastoral concern for this reality, so basic for the human person. This is what she teaches in her Magisterium: "God, who is love and who created man and woman for love, has called them to love. By creating man and woman he called them to an intimate communion of life and love in Marriage. 'So they are no longer two but one flesh' (Mt 19:6)" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Compendium, 337).

This is the truth that the Church tirelessly proclaims to the world. My beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II said that "man has been made "in the image and likeness of God not only by his being human, but also by the communion of the persons that man and woman have formed since the beginning. They become the image of God, not so much in their aloneness as in their communion" (*Catechesis*, 14 November 1979). That is why I confirmed the calling of this Fifth World Meeting of Families in Spain, and specifically here in Valencia, a city rich in tradition and proud of the Christian faith lived and nurtured in so many of its families.

The family is an intermediate institution between individuals and society, and nothing can completely take its place. The family is itself based primarily on a deep interpersonal relationship between husband and wife, sustained by affection and mutual understanding. To enable this, it receives abundant help from God in the sacrament of Matrimony, which brings with it a true vocation to holiness. Would that our children might experience more the harmony and affection between their parents, rather than disagreements and discord, since the love between father and mother is a source of great security for children and its teaches them the beauty of a faithful and lasting love.

The family is a necessary good for peoples, an indispensable foundation for society and a great and lifelong treasure for couples. It is a unique good for children, who are meant to be the fruit of the love, of the total and generous self-giving of their parents. To proclaim the whole truth about the family, based on marriage as *a domestic Church and a sanctuary of life*, is a great responsibility incumbent upon all.

Father and mother have said a complete "yes" in the sight of God, which constitutes the basis of the sacrament which joins them together. Likewise, for the inner relationship of the family to be complete, they also need to say a "yes" of acceptance to the children whom they have given birth to or adopted, and each of which has his or her own personality and character. In this way, children will grow up in a climate of acceptance and love, and upon reaching sufficient maturity, will then want to say "yes" in turn to those who gave them life.

The challenges of present-day society, marked by the centrifugal forces generated especially in urban settings, make it necessary to ensure that families do not feel alone. A small family can encounter difficult obstacles when it is isolated from relatives and friends. The ecclesial community therefore has the responsibility of offering support, encouragement and spiritual nourishment which can strengthen the cohesiveness of the family, especially in times of trial or difficulty. Here parishes have an important role to play, as do the various ecclesial associations, called to cooperate as networks of support and a helping hand for the growth of families in faith.

Christ has shown us what is always be the supreme source of our life and thus of the lives of families: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one had greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn* 15:12-13). The love of God himself has been poured out upon us in Baptism. Consequently, families are called to experience this same kind of love, for the Lord makes it possible for us, through our human love, to be sensitive, loving and merciful like Christ.

Together with passing on the faith and the love of God, one of the greatest responsibilities of families is that of training free and responsible persons. For this reason the parents need gradually to give their children greater freedom, while remaining for some time the guardians of that freedom. If children see that their parents - and, more generally, all the adults around them - live life with joy and enthusiasm, despite all difficulties, they will themselves develop that profound “joy of life” which can help them to overcome wisely the inevitable obstacles and problems which are part of life. Furthermore, when families are not closed in on themselves, children come to learn that every person is worthy of love, and that there is a basic, universal brotherhood which embraces every human being.

This Fifth World Meeting invites us to reflect on a theme of particular importance, one fraught with great responsibility: *the transmission of faith in the family*. This theme is nicely expressed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “As a mother who teacher her children to speak and so to understand and communicate, the Church our Mother teaches us the language of faith in order to introduce us to the understanding and the life of faith” (No. 171).

This is symbolically in the liturgy of Baptism: with the handing over of the lighted candle, the parents are made part of the mystery of new life as children of God given to their sons and daughters in the waters of baptism.

To hand down the faith to children, with the help of individuals and institutions like the parish, the school or Catholic associations, is a responsibility which parents cannot overlook, neglect or completely delegate to others. “The Christian family is called the domestic church because the family manifests and lives out the communal and familiar nature of the Church as the family of God. Each family member, in accord with his or her own role, exercises the baptismal priesthood and contributes towards making the family a community of grace and of prayer, a school of human and Christian virtues, and the place where the faith is first proclaimed to children” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Compendium, 350). And what is more: “Parents, in virtue of their participation in the fatherhood of God, have the first responsibility for the education of their children and they are the first heralds of the faith for them. They have the duty to love and respect their children as *persons* and as *children of God*... in particular, they have the mission of educating their children in the Christian faith” (*ibid*, 460).

The language of faith is learned in homes where this faith grows and is strengthened through prayer and Christian practice. In the reading from *Deuteronomy* we have heard the prayer constantly repeated by the Chosen People, the “Shema Israel”, which Jesus himself would have heard and recited in his home in Nazareth. He himself would refer to it during his public life, as we see in the Gospel of Mark (12:29). This is the faith of the Church, which is born of God’s love which comes through your families. To live the fullness of this faith, in all its wondrous newness, is a great gift. All the same, at those times when God’s face seems to be hidden, believing can be difficult and takes great effort.

This meeting provides a new impetus for proclaiming the Gospel of the family, reaffirming the strength and identity of the family founded upon marriage and open to the generous gift of life, where children are accompanied in their bodily and spiritual growth. This is the best way to counter a widespread hedonism which reduces human relations to banality and empties them of their authentic value and beauty. To promote the values of marriage does not stand in the way of fully experiencing the happiness that man and women encounter in their mutual love. Christian faith and ethics are not meant to stifle love, but to make it healthier, stronger and more truly free. Human love needs to be purified and to mature if it is to be fully human and the principle of a true and lasting joy (cf. [Address at Saint John Lateran](#), 5 June 2006).

And so I invite government leaders and legislators to reflect on the evident benefits which homes in peace and harmony assure to individuals and the family, the neuralgic center of society, as the Holy See has stated in the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*. The purpose of laws is the integral good of man, in response to his needs and aspirations. This good is a significant help to society, of which it cannot be deprived, and for peoples a safeguard and a purification. The family is also a school which enables men and women to grow to the full measure of their humanity. The experience of being loved by their parents helps children to become aware of their dignity as children.

Children need to be brought up in the faith, to be loved and protected. Along with their basic right to be born and to be raised in the faith, children also have the right to a home which takes as its model the home of Nazareth, and to be shielded from all dangers and threats. I am the grandfather of the world, we have heard.

I would now like to say a word to grandparents, who are so important for every family. They can be - and so often are - the guarantors of the affection and tenderness which every human being needs to give and receive. They offer little ones the perspective of time, they are memory and richness of families. In no way should they ever be excluded from the family circle. They are a treasure which the younger generation should not be denied, especially when they bear witness to their faith at the approach of death.

I now wish to recite a part of the prayer which you have prayed in asking for the success of this World Meeting of Families.

O God, who in the Holy Family
left us a perfect model of family life
lived in faith and obedience to your will.
Help us to be examples of faith and love for your commandments.
Help us in our mission of transmitting the faith that we received from our parents.
Open the hearts of our children
so that the seed of faith, which they received in Baptism, will grow in them.
Strengthen the faith of our young people,
that they may grow in knowledge of Jesus.
Increase love and faithfulness in all marriages,
especially those going through times of suffering or difficulty.
(...)
United to Joseph and Mary,
we ask this through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

72. July 8, 2006, Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Valencia (Spain) on Occasion of the Fifth World Meeting of Families, Welcome Ceremony, Address of the Holy Father, Airport of Manises.

3. My reason for this long-awaited visit is to take part in the Fifth World Meeting of Families, whose theme is “The Transmission of Faith in the Family”. I wish to set forth the central role, for the Church and for society, proper to the family based on marriage. The family is a unique institution in God’s plan, and the Church cannot fail to proclaim and promote its fundamental importance, so that it can live out its vocation with a constant sense of responsibility and joy.

73. Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Fifth World Meeting of Families.

Today, if they are to give a truly human face to society, no people can ignore the precious good of the family, founded on marriage. “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a *partnership* of the whole of life, is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (can. 1055): this is the foundation of the family and the patrimony and common good of humanity.

Thus, the Church cannot cease to proclaim that in accordance with God’s plans (cf. Mt 19: 3-9), marriage and the family are irreplaceable and permit no other alternatives.

Today more than ever, the Christian family has a very noble mission that it cannot shirk: the transmission of the faith, which involves the gift of self to Jesus Christ who died and rose, and insertion into the Ecclesial Community.

Parents are the first evangelizers of children, a precious gift from the Creator (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 50), and begin by teaching them to say their first prayers. In this way a moral universe is built up, rooted in the will of God, where the child grows in the human and Christian values that give life its full meaning.

74. June 30, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Mario Juan Bosco Cayota Zappettini, Ambassador of the Oriental Republic of Uruguay to the Holy See.

Therefore, certain tendencies that attempt to limit the inviolable value of human life itself, from conception to its natural end, or separate it from its natural context, such as human love in marriage and the family, are viewed with concern.

The Church certainly encourages a generous “culture of life” which creates hope and not only for strictly denominational reasons. As you well know, Mr Ambassador, there are many eminent people also in your Country who for ethical and rational reasons are similarly preoccupied.

Related to this by their very nature are the issues of the family, the essential structure of society, and that of the union in marriage of a man and a woman, in accordance with a plan imprinted in human nature by the Creator.

There are numerous people in the mass media who denigrate or deride the important value of marriage and the family, thereby encouraging selfishness and confusion rather than the generosity and sacrifice necessary to protect the health of this authentic “primary cell” of the human community.

Promoting the family, helping it to carry out its indispensable tasks, means at the same time gaining social cohesion and above all, respecting its rights which cannot be eroded by other forms of union that claim to usurp them.

75. June 5, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants at the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome, Basilica of Saint John Lateran.

Human love, in fact, needs to be purified, to mature and also to surpass itself if it is to be able to become fully human, to be the beginning of true and lasting joy, to respond, that is, to the question of eternity which it bears within it and which it cannot renounce without betraying itself.

This is the principal reason why love between a man and a woman is only completely fulfilled in marriage.

76. June 2, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Media of the Italian Bishops Conference, Hall of Blessings.

As you know well, Christianity helped to shape European culture down the centuries. With the advent of Illuminism, Western culture began to drift more and more swiftly away from its Christian foundations. Especially in the most recent period, the break-up of the family and of marriage, attacks on human life and its dignity, the reduction of faith to a subjective experience and the consequent secularization of public awareness are seen as the stark and dramatic consequences of this distancing.

Yet, in various parts of Europe experiences and forms of Christian culture exist that are growing stronger or re-emerging with increased vitality. In particular, the Catholic faith is still substantially present in the life of the Italian People, and the signs of its renewed vitality are visible to all.

77. May 25, 2006, Pastoral Visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Poland, Address of the Holy Father, Ecumenical Encounter, Warsaw.

The second question to which I want to refer concerns married life and family life. We know that among Christian communities, called to witness to love, the family occupies a special place. In today’s world, in which international and intercultural relations are multiplying, it happens increasingly often that young people from different traditions, different religions, or different Christian denominations, decide to start a family. For the young people themselves and for those dear to them, it is often a difficult decision that brings with it various dangers concerning both perseverance in the faith and the future structuring of the family, the creation of an atmosphere of unity in the family and of suitable conditions for the spiritual growth of the children. Nevertheless, thanks to the spread of ecumenical dialogue on a larger scale, the decision can lead to the formation of a practical laboratory of unity. For this to happen there is a need for mutual good will, understanding and maturity in faith of both parties, and also of the communities from which they come. I

would like to express my appreciation for the Bilateral Commission of the Council for Ecumenical Issues of the Polish Episcopal Conference and of the Polish Council for Ecumenism, which have begun to draft a document presenting common Christian teaching on marriage and family life and establishing principles acceptable to all for contracting interdenominational marriages, indicating a common programme of pastoral care for such marriages. To all of you I express the wish that in this delicate area reciprocal trust and co-operation between the Churches may grow, fully respecting the rights and responsibility of the spouses for the faith formation of their own family and the education of their children.

78. May 20, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Francisco Vazquez Vazquez, Ambassador of Spain to the Holy See.

For this reason the Church proclaims wholeheartedly the fundamental right to life from conception to its natural end, the right to be born, to form and to live in a family, and not to let the family be supplanted by other institutions or different forms.

In this regard, the upcoming World Meeting of Families in Valencia, Spain, to which I am very much looking forward, will give me the opportunity to celebrate the beauty and fruitfulness of the family founded on marriage, its exalted vocation and indispensable social value.

79. May 18, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mrs. Anne Maree Plunkett, New Ambassador of Australia to the Holy See, Clementine Hall.

It is this same respect for transcendent order that has led Australians to recognize the fundamental importance of marriage and stable domestic life at the heart of society, and to expect that political and social forces - including the media and entertainment industries - recognize, support and protect the irreplaceable value of families. They appreciate that pseudo-forms of 'marriage' distort the Creator's design and undermine the truth of our human nature, confusing a false sense of freedom with the true freedom of choosing the definitive gift of the permanent "yes" which spouses promise to each other. I therefore encourage the people of Australia to continue to take up the challenge of forging a pattern of life, both individually and as a community, in harmony with God's loving plan for all humanity.

For her part the Catholic Church in Australia continues to support marriage and family life, and to uphold the Christian foundations of civic life. She is much involved in the spiritual and intellectual formation of the young, especially through her schools. Additionally her charitable apostolate extends to immigrant communities and those living on the margins of society and, through her mission of service, she will respond generously to new social challenges as they arise.

80. May 13, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Valentin Vassilev Bozhilov, New Ambassador of Bulgaria to the Holy See.

Today, Mr Ambassador, your Country is preparing to join the European Union. Because of its history and culture, the Bulgar People, which continues to make its Christian heritage fruitful, is asked to play an important role in helping to restore to our Continent the spiritual enthusiasm which it often lacks. . . . Your Country will be able to contribute its special stone to the common building, so that it is not only a great market for the exchange of more and more abundant material goods but also has a soul, a true spiritual dimension that reflects the heritage of so many witnesses of the past and may be a fertile terrain for life and creativity to produce the Europeans of the future.

Thus, the young generations will be able to rediscover trust in the future and engage without fear in long-term projects, giving birth to new families solidly founded upon marriage and open to welcoming children, learning to serve the common good of society through political, financial and social activity, and also showing solidarity with the least privileged and with immigrants who come from other spheres in search of shelter or another chance.

81. May 13, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Clementine Hall.

The family, founded on marriage, is the “patrimony of humanity”, a fundamental social institution; it is the vital cell and pillar of society and this concerns believers and non-believers alike. It is a reality that all States must hold in the highest regard because, as John Paul II liked to repeat, “the future of humanity passes by way of the family” (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 86).

In the Christian vision, moreover, marriage, which Christ raised to the most exalted dignity of a sacrament, confers greater splendour and depth on the conjugal bond and more powerfully binds the spouses who, blessed by the Lord of the Covenant, promise each other faithfulness until death in love that is open to life.

For them, the Lord is the centre and heart of the family. He accompanies them in their union and sustains them in their mission to raise children to maturity. In this way the Christian family not only cooperates with God in generating natural life, but also in cultivating the seeds of divine life given in Baptism. These are the well-known principles of the Christian view of marriage and the family. I recalled them once again last Thursday, when I spoke to the members of the [John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family](#).

In today’s world, where certain erroneous concepts concerning the human being, freedom and love are spreading, we must never tire of presenting anew the truth about the family institution, as God has desired it since creation. Unfortunately, the number of separations and divorces is increasing.

They destroy family unity and create numerous problems for children, the innocent victims of these situations. In our day it is especially the stability of the family that is at risk; to safeguard it one often has to swim against the tide of the prevalent culture, and this demands patience, effort, sacrifice and the ceaseless quest for mutual understanding. Today, however, it is possible for husbands and wives to overcome their difficulties and remain faithful to their vocation with recourse to God’s support, with prayer and participating devotedly in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. The unity and strength of families helps society to breathe the genuine human values and to be open to the Gospel. The apostolate of many of the Movements called to work in this context in harmonious understanding with the dioceses and parishes contributes to this.

* * *

The greatness of conjugal love in accordance with the divine plan demands it, as I recalled in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*: “Eros reduced to pure ‘sex’, has become a commodity, a mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity.... Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body” (n. 5).

Thanks to God, many, especially young people, are rediscovering the value of chastity, which appears more and more as a reliable guarantee of authentic love. The historical period in which we live asks Christian families to witness with courageous coherence to the fact that procreation is the fruit of love. Such a witness will not fail to encourage politicians and legislators to safeguard the rights of the family. Indeed, it is well known that juridical solutions for the so-called “de facto” unions are gaining credibility; although they reject the obligations of marriage, they claim enjoyment of the same rights.

Furthermore, at times there are even attempts to give marriage a new definition in order to legalize homosexual unions, attributing to them the right to adopt children. Vast areas of the world are suffering from the so-called “demographic winter”, with the consequent gradual ageing of the population. Families sometimes seem ensnared by the fear of life and of parenthood. It is necessary to restore their trust, so that they can continue to carry out their noble mission of procreation in love.

82. May 11, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family on the XXVth Anniversary of its Foundation, Hall of Blessings.

This event has special importance at this commemoration, which we are celebrating a little more than a year after his death. You have wished to emphasize it with the fitting initiative of a Congress on *The legacy of John Paul II on marriage and family: loving human love*.

You rightly feel that this legacy of yours is very special, since the vision that is one of the structural centres of his mission and reflections was addressed to you and you are its perpetuators: God's plan for marriage and the family.

This bequest is not merely a collection of doctrines or ideas but first and foremost a teaching endowed with enlightening unity on the meaning of human love and life. The presence of numerous families at this Audience - therefore not only the students of the present and the past but above all the students of the future - is a particularly eloquent testimony of how the teaching of this truth has been received and has born fruit.

As a young priest, Karol Wojty³a already had the idea of "teaching how to love". It was later to fill him with enthusiasm when, as a young Bishop, he confronted the difficult times that followed the publication of my Predecessor Paul VI's prophetic and ever timely Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

It was then that he realized the need for a systematic study of this topic. It was the basis of this teaching which he later offered to the entire Church in his unforgettable *Catechesis on human love*. Thus, two fundamental *elements* were highlighted that in recent years you have sought to examine more deeply and that give novelty to your Institute as an academic reality with a specific mission in the Church.

The *first element* concerns the fact that marriage and the family are rooted in the inmost nucleus of the truth about man and his destiny. Sacred Scripture reveals that the vocation to love is part of the authentic image of God which the Creator has desired to impress upon his creature, calling them to resemble him precisely to the extent in which they are open to love.

Consequently, the sexual difference that distinguishes the male from the female body is not a mere biological factor but has a far deeper significance. It expresses that form of love with which man and woman, by becoming one flesh, as Sacred Scripture says, can achieve an authentic communion of people open to the transmission of life and who thus cooperate with God in the procreation of new human beings.

A *second element* marks the newness of John Paul II's teaching on human love: his original way of interpreting God's plan precisely in the convergence of divine revelation with the human experience. Indeed, in Christ, fullness of the revelation of the Father's love, is also expressed the full truth of the human vocation to love that can only be found completely in the sincere gift of self.

In my recent Encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, I wanted to emphasize that it is precisely through love that "the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny" (n. 1) shines forth.

In other words, God used the way of love to reveal the intimate mystery of his Trinitarian life. Furthermore, the close relationship that exists between the image of God-Love and human love enables us to understand that: "Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love" (n. 11).

It is here that the duty incumbent on the Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in academic structures overall stands out: to illumine the truth of love as a path to fullness in every form of human life. The great challenge of the new evangelization that John Paul II proposed with such enthusiasm needs to be sustained with a truly profound reflection on human love, since precisely this love is the privileged path that God chose to reveal himself to man and in this love he calls human beings to communion in the Trinitarian life.

This approach enables us also to overcome a private conception of love that is so widespread today. Authentic love is transformed into a light that guides the whole of life towards its fullness, generating a society in which human beings can live. The communion of life and love which is marriage thus emerges as an authentic good for society.

Today, the need to avoid confusing marriage with other types of unions based on weak love is especially urgent. It is only the rock of total, irrevocable love between a man and a woman that can serve as the foundation on which to build a society that will become a home for all mankind.

83. May 7, 2006, Regina Caeli, St. Peter's Square.

Moreover, let us not forget that Christian marriage is in all respects a vocation to holiness, and that the example of holy parents is the first favourable condition for the flourishing of priestly and religious vocations.

84. April 26, 2006, Benedict XVI, General Audience.

To special groups

I welcome all the English-speaking pilgrims present, including the pupils and staff from Holy Faith Convent School in Dublin. May your Easter pilgrimage be a time of deep spiritual renewal. Upon you and your families I invoke an abundance of God's blessings of peace and joy!

While we are still in the joyful atmosphere of Easter, I would like to address an affectionate thought to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. I exhort you, dear *young people*, especially you students from the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Frosinone-Veroli-Ferentino, led by your Pastor, Bishop Salvatore Boccaccio, to follow faithfully in Christ's footsteps. Dear *sick people*, I invite each one of you to accept with faith the sufferings and trials of life, glimpsing in them mysterious manifestations of divine love. Dear *newly-weds*, I hope that you will live marriage as a gift and a daily process of maturation, for yourselves personally and for the family, so that you may become generous servants of the Gospel. I thank you all!

85. Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops Priests and Deacons Men and Women Religious and all the Lay Faithful on Christian Love.

Let us first of all bring to mind the vast semantic range of the word "love": we speak of love of country, love of one's profession, love between friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbour and love of God. Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison. So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?

* * *

Two aspects of this are important. First, *eros* is somehow rooted in man's very nature; Adam is a seeker, who "abandons his mother and father" in order to find woman; only together do the two represent complete humanity and become "one flesh". The second aspect is equally important. From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfil its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.

86. April 6, 2006, Meeting with the Youth of Rome and the Lazio Region in Preparation for the XXI World Youth Day Encounter of His Holiness Benedict XVI with the Youth, St. Peter's Square.

This is a vast question and it would certainly be impossible to answer it in a few minutes, but I will try to say something.

Anna herself has already given us some of the answers. She said that today love is often wrongly interpreted because it is presented as a selfish experience, whereas it is actually an abandonment of self and thus becomes a self-discovery.

She also said that a consumer culture falsifies our life with a relativism that seems to grant us everything, but in fact completely drains us.

So let us listen to the Word of God in this regard. Anna rightly wanted to know what the Word of God says. For me it is a beautiful thing to observe that already in the first pages of Sacred Scripture, subsequent to the story of man's Creation, we immediately find the definition of love and marriage.

The sacred author tells us: "A man will leave his father and mother and will cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh", one life (cf. Gn 2: 24-25). We are at the beginning and we are already given a prophecy

of what marriage is; and this definition also remains identical in the New Testament. Marriage is this following of the other in love, thus becoming one existence, one flesh, therefore inseparable; a new life that is born from this communion of love that unites and thus also creates the future.

Medieval theologians, interpreting this affirmation which is found at the beginning of Sacred Scripture, said that marriage is the first of the seven sacraments to have been instituted by God already at the moment of creation, in Paradise, at the beginning of history and before any human history.

It is a sacrament of the Creator of the universe, hence, it is engraved in the human being himself, who is oriented to this journey on which man leaves his parents and is united to a woman in order to form only one flesh, so that the two may be a single existence.

Thus, the sacrament of marriage is not an invention of the Church; it is really “con-created” with man as such, as a fruit of the dynamism of love in which the man and the woman find themselves and thus also find the Creator who called them to love.

It is true that man fell and was expelled from Paradise, or, in other words, more modern words, it is true that all cultures are polluted by the sin, the errors of human beings in their history, and that the initial plan engraved in our nature is thereby clouded. Indeed, in human cultures we find this clouding of God’s original plan.

At the same time, however, if we look at cultures, the whole cultural history of humanity, we note that man was never able to forget completely this plan that exists in the depths of his being. He has always known, in a certain sense, that other forms of relationship between a man and a woman do not truly correspond with the original design for his being.

And thus, in cultures, especially in the great cultures, we see again and again how they are oriented to this reality: monogamy, the man and the woman becoming one flesh. This is how a new generation can grow in fidelity, how a cultural tradition can endure, renew itself in continuity and make authentic progress.

The Lord, who spoke of this in the language of the prophets of Israel, said referring to Moses, who tolerated divorce: Moses permitted you to divorce “because of the hardness of your hearts”. After sin, the heart became “hard”, but this was not what the Creator had intended, and the Prophets, with increasing clarity, insisted on this original plan.

To renew man, the Lord - alluding to these prophetic voices which always guided Israel towards the clarity of monogamy - recognized with Ezekiel that, to live this vocation, we need a new heart; instead of a heart of stone - as Ezekiel said - we need a heart of flesh, a heart that is truly human.

And the Lord “implants” this new heart in us at Baptism, through faith. It is not a physical transplant, but perhaps we can make this comparison. After a transplant, the organism needs treatment, requires the necessary medicines to be able to live with the new heart, so that it becomes “one’s own heart” and not the “heart of another”.

This is especially so in this “spiritual transplant” when the Lord implants within us a new heart, a heart open to the Creator, to God’s call. To be able to live with this new heart, adequate treatment is necessary; one must have recourse to the appropriate medicines so that it can really become “our heart”.

Thus, by living in communion with Christ, with his Church, the new heart truly becomes “our own heart” and makes marriage possible. The exclusive love between a man and a woman, their life as a couple planned by the Creator, becomes possible, even if the atmosphere of our world makes it difficult to the point that it appears impossible.

The Lord gives us a new heart and we must live with this new heart, using the appropriate therapies to ensure that it is really “our own”. In this way we live with all that the Creator has given us and this creates a truly happy life.

Indeed, we can also see it in this world, despite the numerous other models of life: there are so many Christian families who live with faithfulness and joy the life and love pointed out to us by the Creator, so that a new humanity develops.

And lastly, I would add: we all know that to reach a goal in a sport or in one’s profession, discipline and sacrifices are required; but then, by reaching a desired goal, it is all crowned with success.

Life itself is like this. In other words, becoming men and women according to Jesus' plan demands sacrifices, but these are by no means negative; on the contrary, they are a help in living as people with new hearts, in living a truly human and happy life.

Since a consumer culture exists that wants to prevent us from living in accordance with the Creator's plan, we must have the courage to create islands, oases, and then great stretches of land of Catholic culture where the Creator's design is lived out.

87. March 18, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of Cameroon on their "Ad Limina" Visit, Vatican's Clementine Hall.

In your quinquennial reports you presented the major challenges that confront the family. The family is suffering the full force of the devastating effects of a society that proposes behaviour which all too often undermines it.

For this reason it is right to encourage a family ministry that offers young people a demanding emotional and moral education, and prepares them to commit themselves to living conjugal love responsibly, a condition that is so important for the stability of families and for the whole of society.

Through an initial and continuing formation, may you enable Christian families to perceive the greatness and importance of their vocation, calling them ceaselessly to revive their communion through daily fidelity to the promise of the mutual, unique and exclusive gift that marriage entails.

88. March 17, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Clementine Hall.

I also wished in my message this year to draw particular attention to the urgent need to uphold and support marriage and family life, the foundation of every culture and society. In cooperation with parents, the social communications and entertainment industries can assist in the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children, through presenting edifying models of human life and love. How disheartening and destructive it is to us all when the opposite occurs! Do not our hearts cry out, most especially, when our young people are subjected to debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of the human person and undermine family interests?

In conclusion, I urge you to renew your efforts to assist those working in the world of media to promote what is good and true, especially in regard to the meaning of human and social existence, and to denounce what is false, especially pernicious trends which erode the fabric of a civil society worthy of the human person. Let us be encouraged by the words of Saint Paul: Christ is our peace: In him we are one (cf. *Eph.* 2:14)! And let us work together to build up the communion of love according to the designs of the Creator made known through his Son! To all of you, your colleagues, and the members of your families at home I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

89. February 18, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Permanent Deacons of Rome, Clementine Hall.

Meanwhile, you also proclaim the truth about human love to engaged couples who desire to celebrate the sacrament of marriage, explaining that "marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa" (*ibid.*, n. 11).

90. February 6, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo on their “Ad Limina” Visit.

The evangelization of the family is a pastoral priority. The flow of refugees or displaced persons, the pandemic of AIDS but also the radical changes in contemporary society have broken up numerous families, undermining the family institution with the risk of weakening the very social fabric.

It is important at all levels of diocesan and social life to encourage Catholics to preserve and promote the fundamental values of the family. In this spirit, it is right to be attentive to the human and spiritual preparation of couples for marriage and to follow up the pastoral care of families, recalling the eminent dignity of Christian marriage, one and indissoluble, and proposing a solid conjugal spirituality so that families may grow in holiness.

91. January 28, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Members of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, Clementine Hall.

The greatest contribution of this Instruction, which I hope will be applied in its entirety by those who work in the ecclesiastical tribunals, consists in pointing out, in the causes of matrimonial nullity, the extent and manner in which to apply the norms contained in the canons concerning ordinary contentious judgment, as well as the observance of the special norms dictated for causes on the state of persons and for the public good.

As you well know, the attention dedicated to trials of the nullity of marriage increasingly transcends the context of experts. In fact, for many of the faithful, ecclesiastical sentences in this sector bear upon whether or not they may receive Eucharistic Communion.

It is this very aspect, so crucial from the viewpoint of Christian life, which explains why the subject of the nullity of marriage arose again and again at the recent Synod on the Eucharist. It might seem at first glance that there is a great divergence between the pastoral concern shown during the Synod’s work and the spirit of the collection of juridical norms in *Dignitas Connubii*, almost to the point of their being in opposition.

* * *

In addition to this point, valid in every trial, there is another, more specific point in the hypothesis of matrimonial nullity. Here, the parties are not contending for some possession that must be attributed to one or the other. The trial’s aim is rather to declare the truth about the validity or invalidity of an actual marriage, in other words, about a reality that establishes the institution of the family and deeply concerns the Church and civil society.

Consequently, it can be said that in this type of trial the Church herself is the one to whom the request for the declaration is addressed. Given the natural presumption of the validity of a marriage that has been formally contracted, my Predecessor, Benedict XIV, an outstanding canon lawyer, conceived of and made obligatory in such proceedings the participation of the defender of the bond at the said trial (cf. Apostolic Constitution *Dei Misericordiae*, 3 November 1741). Thus, the dialectic of the proceedings whose aim was to ascertain the truth was better guaranteed.

Just as the dialectic of the proceedings leads us to understand the criterion of the search for the truth, so it can help us grasp the other aspect of the question: its pastoral value, which cannot be separated from love for the truth.

Indeed, pastoral love can sometimes be contaminated by complacent attitudes towards the parties. Such attitudes can seem pastoral, but in fact they do not correspond with the good of the parties and of the Ecclesial Community itself; by avoiding confrontation with the truth that saves, they can even turn out to be counterproductive with regard to each person’s saving encounter with Christ.

The principle of the indissolubility of marriage forcefully reaffirmed here by John Paul II (cf. Addresses: 21 January 2000, in *ORE*, 26 January 2000, p. 1; 28 January 2002, in *ibid.*, 6 February 2002, p. 6) pertains to the integrity of the Christian mystery.

Today, unfortunately, we may observe that this truth is sometimes obscured in the consciences of Christians and of people of good will. For this very reason, the service that can be offered to the faithful and to non-

Christian spouses in difficulty is deceptive: it reinforces in them, if only implicitly, the tendency to forget the indissolubility of their union.

Thus, the possible intervention of the ecclesiastical institution in causes of nullity risks merely registering a failure.

However, the truth sought in processes of the nullity of marriage is not an abstract truth, cut off from the good of the people involved. It is a truth integrated in the human and Christian journey of every member of the faithful. It is very important, therefore, that the declaration of the truth is reached in reasonable time.

Divine Providence certainly knows how to draw good from evil, even when the ecclesiastical institutions neglect their duty or commit errors.

It is nonetheless a grave obligation to bring the Church's institutional action in her tribunals ever closer to the faithful. Besides, pastoral sensitivity must be directed to avoiding matrimonial nullity when the couple seeks to marry and to striving to help the spouses solve their possible problems and find the path to reconciliation. That same pastoral sensitivity to the real situations of individuals must nonetheless lead to safeguarding the truth and applying the norms prescribed to protect it during the trial.

I hope that these reflections will serve to help people understand better that love of the truth links the institution of canonical causes of the nullity of marriage with the authentic pastoral sense that must motivate these processes. With this key to interpretation, the Instruction *Dignitas Connubii* and the concerns expressed during the last Synod can be seen to converge.

92. January 12, 2006, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to Members of the Regional Board of Lazio, the Municipal Corporation of Rome, and the Province of Rome, Clementine Hall.

I am thinking in particular of that highly sensitive area that is as crucial to the formation and happiness of people as to the future of society: the family.

For the past three years the Diocese of Rome has made the family the focus of its pastoral commitment, in order to help the family face the new causes of crises and challenges widespread in our cultural context by a clearer and more convinced awareness of its real nature and consequent duties.

Indeed, as I said last 6 June, speaking to the Convention the Diocese organized on these topics: "Marriage and the family are not in fact a chance sociological construction, the product of particular historical and financial situations. On the contrary, the question of the right relationship between man and woman is rooted in the essential core of the human being and it is only by starting from here that its response can be found" ([Address to Ecclesial Diocesan Convention](#), St John Lateran, 6 June 2005; *ORE*, 15 June, p. 6).

I therefore added: "Marriage as an institution is thus not an undue interference of society or of authority. The external imposition of form on the most private reality of life is instead an intrinsic requirement of the covenant of conjugal love" (*ibid.*, p. 6).

Here, it is not a question of specific norms of Catholic morals but of elementary truths that concern our common humanity: respecting them is essential for the good of the person and of society. Consequently, they also call into question your responsibilities as public Administrators and your legal competences in two directions.

On the one hand, all measures that can sustain young couples in forming a family, and the family itself, in the procreation and education of children, are as expedient as ever: in this regard, problems such as the cost of housing, nurseries and kindergarten schools for the tiniest children immediately spring to mind.

On the other, it is a serious error to obscure the value and roles of the legitimate family founded on marriage by attributing legal recognition to other improper forms of union for which there is really no effective social need.

The protection of unborn human life likewise requires attention: care must be taken that pregnant women in difficult conditions do not lack material help, and that drugs which in some way conceal the gravity of abortion are not introduced as an anti-life choice.

93. December 31, 2005, Te Deum and First Vespers of the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI.

Precisely to underline the importance of the family based on marriage in the life of the Church and of society, I also wished to make my contribution by speaking at the Diocesan Congress in St John Lateran last 6 June. I am delighted because the diocesan programme is going smoothly with a far-reaching apostolic action which is carried out in the parishes, at the prefectures and in the various ecclesial associations.

May the Lord grant that the common effort lead to an authentic renewal of Christian families.

94. September 23, 2005, Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, Ambassador of Mexico to the Holy See.

In the face of the growing secularism that seeks to reduce the citizens' religious life to the private sphere and to eliminate any social or public expression of religion, the Church is well aware that the Christian message reinforces and illumines the basic principles of all coexistence, such as the sacred gift of life, the dignity of the person together with the equality and inviolability of his or her rights, the value of marriage and the family which cannot be renounced or compared or confused with other forms of human union.

The family institution needs special support because in Mexico, as in other countries, its vitality and fundamental role are gradually diminishing. This is not only because of cultural changes, but also because of the phenomenon of emigration, with the consequent serious difficulties of various kinds, especially for women, children and young people.

95. July 25, 2005, Meeting with Diocesan Clergy of Aosta, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Parish Church at Introd (Aosta Valley)

School is a cultural institution for intellectual and professional training: it is therefore necessary to make the organic and logical dimensions of the faith understood, in order to make known its important and essential elements for an understanding of what the Eucharist is, what happens on Sunday, and in Christian marriage. It is necessary, of course, to make people comprehend that nonetheless, the discipline of religion is not a purely intellectual and individualistic ideology, as perhaps happens in other disciplines: in mathematics, for example, I know how to do a specific calculation, but in the end other subjects have a practical tendency, a tendency to professionalism, to applicability in life. And so, it is necessary to understand that faith essentially creates assembly and unites.

* * *

[Regarding communion of divorced and remarried] None of us has a ready-made formula, also because situations always differ. I would say that those who were married in the Church for the sake of tradition but were not truly believers, and who later find themselves in a new and invalid marriage and subsequently convert, discover faith and feel excluded from the Sacrament, are in a particularly painful situation. This really is a cause of great suffering and when I was Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, I invited various Bishops' Conferences and experts to study this problem: a sacrament celebrated without faith. Whether, in fact, a moment of invalidity could be discovered here because the Sacrament was found to be lacking a fundamental dimension, I do not dare to say. I personally thought so, but from the discussions we had I realized that it is a highly-complex problem and ought to be studied further. But given these people's painful plight, it must be studied further.

I shall not attempt to give an answer now, but in any case two aspects are very important. The first: even if these people cannot go to sacramental Communion, they are not excluded from the love of the Church or from the love of Christ. A Eucharist without immediate sacramental Communion is not of course complete; it lacks an essential dimension. Nonetheless, it is also true that taking part in the Eucharist without Eucharistic Communion is not the same as nothing; it still means being involved in the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ. It is still participating in the great Sacrament in its spiritual and pneumatic dimensions, and also in its ecclesial dimension, although this is not strictly sacramental.

And since it is the Sacrament of Christ's passion, the suffering Christ embraces these people in a special way and communicates with them in another way differently, so that they may feel embraced by the

Crucified Lord who fell to the ground and died and suffered for them and with them. Consequently, they must be made to understand that even if, unfortunately, a fundamental dimension is absent, they are not excluded from the great mystery of the Eucharist or from the love of Christ who is present in it. This seems to me important, just as it is important that the parish priest and the parish community make these people realize that on the one hand they must respect the indissolubility of the Sacrament, and on the other, that we love these people who are also suffering for us. Moreover, we must suffer with them, because they are bearing an important witness and because we know that the moment when one gives in “out of love”, one wrongs the Sacrament itself and the indissolubility appears less and less true.

We know the problem, not only of the Protestant Communities but also of the Orthodox Churches, which are often presented as a model for the possibility of remarriage. But only the first marriage is sacramental: the Orthodox too recognize that the other marriages are not sacramental, they are reduced and redimensioned marriages and in a penitential situation; in a certain sense, the couple can go to Communion but in the awareness that this is a concession “by economy”, as they say, through mercy which, nevertheless, does not remove the fact that their marriage is not a Sacrament. The other point is that in the Eastern Churches for these marriages they have conceded the possibility of divorce too lightly, and that the principle of indissolubility, the true sacramental character of the marriage, is therefore seriously injured.

On the one hand, therefore, is the good of the community and the good of the Sacrament that we must respect, and on the other, the suffering of the people we must alleviate.

96. June 25, 2005, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, on their “Ad Limina Apostolorum” Visit

4. Dear Brothers, your Catechists have embraced with great zeal the burning conviction of Saint Paul: “woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (*1 Cor 9:16*). During the Synod for Oceania many of you noted with satisfaction that an increasing number of the lay faithful are coming to a deeper appreciation of their duty to participate in the Church’s mission of evangelization (cf. *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 19). If this zeal is to succeed in convincing an ever greater number of believers that “faith in fact has the force to shape culture itself by penetrating it to its very core” (*ibid.*, 20) then the pastoral priorities which you have identified - especially that of marriage and stable family life - will require corresponding, appropriate adult catechetical programmes. In this way, I am confident that your people will deepen their understanding of the faith, grow in their ability to express its liberating truth, and account for the hope that is in them! (cf. *1 Pet 3:15*).

97. June 24, 2005, Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to the President of the Italian Republic, H.E. Mr. Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, Quirinal Palace.

Mr President, as you can easily understand, I have many concerns at the beginning of my pastoral service on the Chair of Peter. I would like to point out some of them which, because of their universally human character, cannot but also concern those who are responsible for government. I am alluding to the problem of the protection of the family founded on marriage, as it is recognized also in the Italian Constitution (n. 29), the problem of the defence of human life from conception to its natural end and lastly, the problem of education and consequently of school, an indispensable training ground for the formation of the new generations.

The Church, accustomed as she is to scrutinizing God’s will engraved in the very nature of the human creature, sees in the family a most important value that must be defended from any attack that aims to undermine its solidity and call its very existence into question.

98. June 16, 2005, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Antonio Ganado, Ambassador of Malta to the Holy See.

I am grateful to you, Mr Ambassador, for expressing the renewed desire of your Country to play the lead in this new phase of the Continent’s history, by helping to reinforce its capacity for dialogue, for the defence

and promotion of the family founded on marriage, for the Christian traditions and for openness to and an encounter with the different cultures and religions.

99. June 10, 2005, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Bishops of South Africa, Botswana, Swaziland, Namibia and Lesotho, on their “Ad Limina Apostolorum” Visit.

4. Family life has always been a unifying characteristic of African society. In fact, it is within the “domestic Church”, “built on the solid cultural pillar and noble values of the African tradition of the family”, that children first learn of the centrality of the Eucharist in Christian life (cf. [Ecclesia in Africa](#), 92). It is of great concern that the fabric of African life, its very source of hope and stability, is threatened by divorce, abortion, prostitution, human trafficking and a contraceptive mentality, all of which contribute to a breakdown in sexual morality. Brother Bishops, I share your deep concern over the devastation caused by AIDS and related diseases. I especially pray for the widows, the orphans, the young mothers and all those whose lives have been shattered by this cruel epidemic. I urge you to continue your efforts to fight this virus which not only kills but seriously threatens the economic and social stability of the Continent. The Catholic Church has always been at the forefront both in prevention and in treatment of this illness. The traditional teaching of the Church has proven to be the only failsafe way to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. For this reason, “the companionship, joy, happiness and peace which Christian marriage and fidelity provide, and the safeguard which chastity gives, must be continuously presented to the faithful, particularly the young” ([Ecclesia in Africa](#), 116).

100. June 6, 2005, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Participants in the Ecclesial Diocesan Convention of Rome, Basilica of St. John Lateran.

For two years now the missionary commitment of the Church of Rome has focused above all on the family. This is not only because today this fundamental human reality is subjected to a multitude of problems and threats and is therefore especially in need of evangelization and practical support, but also because Christian families constitute a crucial resource for education in the faith, for the edification of the Church as communion and for her ability to be a missionary presence in the most varied situations of life, as well as to act as a Christian leaven in the widespread culture and social structures.

We will also continue along these lines in the coming pastoral year, and so the theme of our Convention is “Family and Christian community: formation of the person and transmission of the faith”.

The assumption from which it is necessary to set out, if we are to understand the family mission in the Christian community and its tasks of forming the person and transmitting the faith, is always that of the meaning of marriage and the family in the plan of God, Creator and Saviour. This will therefore be the focus of my Reflection this evening and I will refer to the teaching of the Apostolic Exhortation [Familiaris Consortio](#) (Part II, nn. 12-16).

Marriage and the family are not in fact a chance sociological construction, the product of particular historical and financial situations. On the other hand, the question of the right relationship between the man and the woman is rooted in the essential core of the human being and it is only by starting from here that its response can be found.

In other words, it cannot be separated from the ancient but ever new human question: Who am I? What is a human being? And this question, in turn, cannot be separated from the question about God: Does God exist? Who is God? What is his face truly like?

The Bible gives one consequential answer to these two queries: the human being is created in the image of God, and God himself is love. It is therefore the vocation to love that makes the human person an authentic image of God: man and woman come to resemble God to the extent that they become loving people.

This fundamental connection between God and the person gives rise to another: the indissoluble connection between spirit and body: in fact, the human being is a soul that finds expression in a body and a body that is enlivened by an immortal spirit.

The body, therefore, both male and female, also has, as it were, a theological character: it is not merely a body; and what is biological in the human being is not merely biological but is the expression and the fulfilment of our humanity.

Likewise, human sexuality is not juxtaposed to our being as person but part of it. Only when sexuality is integrated within the person does it successfully acquire meaning.

Thus, these two links, between the human being with God and in the human being, of the body with the spirit, give rise to a third: the connection between the person and the institution.

Indeed, the totality of the person includes the dimension of time, and the person's "yes" is a step beyond the present moment: in its wholeness, the "yes" means "always", it creates the space for faithfulness. Only in this space can faith develop, which provides a future and enables children, the fruit of love, to believe in human beings and in their future in difficult times.

The freedom of the "yes", therefore, reveals itself to be freedom capable of assuming what is definitive: the greatest expression of freedom is not the search for pleasure without ever coming to a real decision; this apparent, permanent openness seems to be the realization of freedom, but it is not true. The true expression of freedom is the capacity to choose a definitive gift in which freedom, in being given, is fully rediscovered.

In practice, the personal and reciprocal "yes" of the man and the woman makes room for the future, for the authentic humanity of each of them. At the same time, it is an assent to the gift of a new life.

Therefore, this personal "yes" must also be a publicly responsible "yes", with which the spouses take on the public responsibility of fidelity, also guaranteeing the future of the community. None of us, in fact, belongs exclusively to himself or herself: one and all are therefore called to take on in their inmost depths their own public responsibility.

Marriage as an institution is thus not an undue interference of society or of authority. The external imposition of form on the most private reality of life is instead an intrinsic requirement of the covenant of conjugal love and of the depths of the human person.

Today, the various forms of the erosion of marriage, such as free unions and "trial marriage", and even pseudo-marriages between people of the same sex, are instead an expression of anarchic freedom that are wrongly made to pass as true human liberation. This pseudo-freedom is based on a trivialization of the body, which inevitably entails the trivialization of the person. Its premise is that the human being can do to himself or herself whatever he or she likes: thus, the body becomes a secondary thing that can be manipulated, from the human point of view, and used as one likes. Licentiousness, which passes for the discovery of the body and its value, is actually a dualism that makes the body despicable, placing it, so to speak, outside the person's authentic being and dignity.

The truth about marriage and the family, deeply rooted in the truth about the human being, has been actuated in the history of salvation, at whose heart lie the words: "God loves his people". The biblical revelation, in fact, is first and foremost the expression of a history of love, the history of God's Covenant with humankind.

Consequently, God could take the history of love and of the union of a man and a woman in the covenant of marriage as a symbol of salvation history. The inexpressible fact, the mystery of God's love for men and women, receives its linguistic form from the vocabulary of marriage and the family, both positive and negative: indeed, God's drawing close to his people is presented in the language of spousal love, whereas Israel's infidelity, its idolatry, is designated as adultery and prostitution.

In the New Testament God radicalizes his love to the point that he himself becomes, in his Son, flesh of our flesh, a true man. In this way, God's union with humankind acquired its supreme, irreversible form.

Thus, the blue-print of human love is also definitely set out, that reciprocal "yes" which cannot be revoked: it does not alienate men and women but sets them free from the different forms of alienation in history in order to restore them to the truth of creation.

The sacramental quality that marriage assumes in Christ, therefore, means that the gift of creation has been raised to the grace of redemption. Christ's grace is not an external addition to human nature, it does not do violence to men and women but sets them free and restores them, precisely by raising them above their own limitations. And just as the Incarnation of the Son of God reveals its true meaning in the Cross, so genuine human love is self-giving and cannot exist if it seeks to detach itself from the Cross.

Dear brothers and sisters, this profound link between God and the human being, between God's love and human love, is also confirmed in certain tendencies and negative developments that have weighed heavily on us all. In fact, the debasement of human love, the suppression of the authentic capacity for loving, is turning out in our time to be the most suitable and effective weapon to drive God away from men and women, to distance God from the human gaze and heart.

Similarly, the desire to "liberate" nature from God leads to losing sight of the reality of nature itself, including the nature of the human being, reducing it to a conglomeration of functions so as to have them available at will to build what is presumed to be a better world and presumed to be a happier humanity. Instead, the Creator's design is destroyed, and so is the truth of our nature.

Even in the begetting of children marriage reflects its divine model, God's love for man. In man and woman, fatherhood and motherhood, like the body and like love, cannot be limited to the biological: life is entirely given only when, by birth, love and meaning are also given, which make it possible to say yes to this life.

From this point it becomes clear how contrary to human love, to the profound vocation of the man and the woman, are the systematic closure of a union to the gift of life and even more, the suppression or manipulation of newborn life.

No man and no woman, however, alone and single-handed, can adequately transmit to children love and the meaning of life. Indeed, to be able to say to someone "your life is good, even though I may not know your future", requires an authority and credibility superior to what individuals can assume on their own.

Christians know that this authority is conferred upon that larger family which God, through his Son Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, created in the story of humanity, that is, upon the Church. Here they recognize the work of that eternal, indestructible love which guarantees permanent meaning to the life of each one of us, even if the future remains unknown.

For this reason, the edification of each individual Christian family fits into the context of the larger family of the Church, which supports it and carries it with her and guarantees that it has, and will also have in the future, the meaningful "yes" of the Creator. And the Church is reciprocally built up by the family, a "small domestic church", as the Second Vatican Council called it ([*Lumen Gentium*](#), n. 11; [*Apostolicam Actuositatem*](#), n. 11), rediscovering an ancient Patristic expression (cf. St John Chrysostom, *In Genesis Serm.* VI, 2; VII, 1).

In the same sense, [*Familiaris Consortio*](#) affirms that "Christian marriage... constitutes the natural setting in which the human person is introduced into the great family of the Church" (n. 15).

There is an obvious consequence to all this: the family and the Church - in practice, parishes and other forms of Ecclesial Community - are called to collaborate more closely in the fundamental task that consists, inseparably, in the formation of the person and the transmission of the faith.

* * *

Consequently, it is clear that not only must we seek to get the better of relativism in our work of forming people, but we are also called to counter its destructive predominance in society and culture. Hence, as well as the words of the Church, the witness and public commitment of Christian families is very important, especially in order to reassert the inviolability of human life from conception until its natural end, the unique and irreplaceable value of the family founded on marriage and the need for legislative and administrative measures that support families in the task of bringing children into the world and raising them, an essential duty for our common future. I also offer you my heartfelt thanks for this commitment.

101. June 4, 2005, Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to Pilgrims from the Diocese of Verona in Northern Italy

The family was rightly one of the main themes of your Synod, as it has been in the pastoral guidelines of the Church in Italy and throughout the world. Indeed, in your Diocese, moreover, as elsewhere, divorce and de facto unions are on the increase, and this constitutes for Christians an urgent appeal to proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel of Life and of the Family in its integrity.

The family is called to be an "intimate partnership of life and love" (Pastoral Constitution [*Gaudium et Spes*](#), n. 48), because it is founded on indissoluble marriage. Despite the difficulties and the social and cultural

conditioning of this period of history, Christian spouses must not cease to be in their lives a sign of God's faithful love: may they collaborate actively with priests in the pastoral guidance of engaged couples, young married couples and families, and in bringing up the new generations.

102. May 30, 2005, Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI to the Italian Bishops Taking Part in the 54th Assembly of the Italian Bishops Conference.

One crucial issue that demands of us the maximum pastoral attention is the family. In Italy, even more than in other countries, the family truly is the fundamental cell of society. It is deeply rooted in the hearts of the young generations and bears the brunt of many problems, providing support and remedies to situations that would otherwise be desperate.

Yet also in Italy, families in today's cultural atmosphere are exposed to the many risks and threats with which we are all familiar. The inner frailty and instability of many conjugal unions is combined with the widespread social and cultural tendency to dispute the unique character and special mission of the family founded on marriage.

Then, Italy itself is one of the nations where the low birth rate is the most serious and constant, with consequences that are already felt by the whole body of society. This is why for some time you Italian Bishops have been joining your voice to that of John Paul II, primarily in defending the sacredness of human life and the value of the institution of marriage, but also in promoting the role of the family in the Church and in society, requesting financial and legislative measures that support young families in having children and raising them.

In the same spirit, you are currently involved in enlightening and motivating the decisions of Catholics and of all citizens concerning the upcoming referendums on the law on assisted procreation. Your clear and concrete commitment is a sign of your concern as Pastors for every human being, who can never be reduced to a means but is always an end, as our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us in his Gospel and as human reason itself tells us. In this commitment and in all the many different kinds of work that are part of a Pastor's mission and duty, I am close to you with my words and my prayers, trusting in the light and grace of the Holy Spirit who acts in the conscience and heart.

The same concern for the true good of human beings that impels us to take care of the future of families and of respect for human life, is expressed in attention to the poor we have among us, to the sick, to immigrants, to peoples decimated by disease, war and famine.

Undated Statements

103. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* of the Holy Father Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Eucharist as the Source and Summit of the Church's Life and Mission

V. The Eucharist and Matrimony

The Eucharist, a nuptial sacrament

27. The Eucharist, as the sacrament of charity, has a particular relationship with the love of man and woman united in marriage. A deeper understanding of this relationship is needed at the present time. (83) Pope John Paul II frequently spoke of the nuptial character of the Eucharist and its special relationship with the sacrament of Matrimony: "The Eucharist is the sacrament of our redemption. It is the sacrament of the Bridegroom and of the Bride." (84) Moreover, "the entire Christian life bears the mark of the spousal love of Christ and the Church. Already Baptism, the entry into the People of God, is a nuptial mystery; it is so to speak the nuptial bath which precedes the wedding feast, the Eucharist." (85) The Eucharist inexhaustibly strengthens the indissoluble unity and love of every Christian marriage. By the power of the sacrament, the marriage bond is intrinsically linked to the eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and his Bride, the Church (cf. *Eph* 5:31-32). The mutual consent that husband and wife exchange in Christ, which establishes

them as a community of life and love, also has a eucharistic dimension. Indeed, in the theology of Saint Paul, conjugal love is a sacramental sign of Christ's love for his Church, a love culminating in the Cross, the expression of his "marriage" with humanity and at the same time the origin and heart of the Eucharist. For this reason the Church manifests her particular spiritual closeness to all those who have built their family on the sacrament of Matrimony. (86) The family – the domestic Church (87) – is a primary sphere of the Church's life, especially because of its decisive role in the Christian education of children. (88) In this context, the Synod also called for an acknowledgment of the unique mission of women in the family and in society, a mission that needs to be defended, protected and promoted. (89) Marriage and motherhood represent essential realities which must never be denigrated.

The Eucharist and the unicity of marriage

28. In the light of this intrinsic relationship between marriage, the family and the Eucharist, we can turn to several pastoral problems. The indissoluble, exclusive and faithful bond uniting Christ and the Church, which finds sacramental expression in the Eucharist, corresponds to the basic anthropological fact that man is meant to be definitively united to one woman and vice versa (cf. *Gen* 2:24, *Mt* 19:5). With this in mind, the Synod of Bishops addressed the question of pastoral practice regarding people who come to the Gospel from cultures in which polygamy is practised. Those living in this situation who open themselves to Christian faith need to be helped to integrate their life-plan into the radical newness of Christ. During the catechumenate, Christ encounters them in their specific circumstances and calls them to embrace the full truth of love, making whatever sacrifices are necessary in order to arrive at perfect ecclesial communion. The Church accompanies them with a pastoral care that is gentle yet firm, (90) above all by showing them the light shed by the Christian mysteries on nature and on human affections.

The Eucharist and the indissolubility of marriage

29. If the Eucharist expresses the irrevocable nature of God's love in Christ for his Church, we can then understand why it implies, with regard to the sacrament of Matrimony, that indissolubility to which all true love necessarily aspires. (91) There was good reason for the pastoral attention that the Synod gave to the painful situations experienced by some of the faithful who, having celebrated the sacrament of Matrimony, then divorced and remarried. This represents a complex and troubling pastoral problem, a real scourge for contemporary society, and one which increasingly affects the Catholic community as well. The Church's pastors, out of love for the truth, are obliged to discern different situations carefully, in order to be able to offer appropriate spiritual guidance to the faithful involved.(92) The Synod of Bishops confirmed the Church's practice, based on Sacred Scripture (cf. *Mk* 10:2- 12), of not admitting the divorced and remarried to the sacraments, since their state and their condition of life objectively contradict the loving union of Christ and the Church signified and made present in the Eucharist. Yet the divorced and remarried continue to belong to the Church, which accompanies them with special concern and encourages them to live as fully as possible the Christian life through regular participation at Mass, albeit without receiving communion, listening to the word of God, eucharistic adoration, prayer, participation in the life of the community, honest dialogue with a priest or spiritual director, dedication to the life of charity, works of penance, and commitment to the education of their children.

When legitimate doubts exist about the validity of the prior sacramental marriage, the necessary investigation must be carried out to establish if these are well-founded. Consequently there is a need to ensure, in full respect for canon law (93), the presence of local ecclesiastical tribunals, their pastoral character, and their correct and prompt functioning (94). Each Diocese should have a sufficient number of persons with the necessary preparation, so that the ecclesiastical tribunals can operate in an expeditious manner. I repeat that "it is a grave obligation to bring the Church's institutional activity in her tribunals ever closer to the faithful" (95). At the same time, pastoral care must not be understood as if it were somehow in conflict with the law. Rather, one should begin by assuming that the fundamental point of encounter between the law and pastoral care is *love for the truth*: truth is never something purely abstract, but "a real part of the human and Christian journey of every member of the faithful" (96). Finally, where the nullity of the marriage bond is not declared and objective circumstances make it impossible to cease cohabitation, the Church encourages these members of the faithful to commit themselves to living their relationship in fidelity to the demands of God's law, as friends, as brother and sister; in this way they will be able to return to the table of the Eucharist, taking care to observe the Church's established and approved practice in this regard. This path, if it is to be possible and fruitful, must be supported by pastors and by adequate ecclesial initiatives, nor can it ever involve the blessing of these relations, lest confusion arise among the faithful concerning the value of marriage (97).

Given the complex cultural context which the Church today encounters in many countries, the Synod also recommended devoting maximum pastoral attention to training couples preparing for marriage and to ascertaining beforehand their convictions regarding the obligations required for the validity of the sacrament of Matrimony. Serious discernment in this matter will help to avoid situations where impulsive decisions or superficial reasons lead two young people to take on responsibilities that they are then incapable of honouring. (98) The good that the Church and society as a whole expect from marriage and from the family founded upon marriage is so great as to call for full pastoral commitment to this particular area. Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself.

104. Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to H.E. Mr. Roh Moo-Hyun, President of the Republic of Korea.

Sadly, the modern world is marked by an increasing number of threats to the dignity of human life. I wish therefore to commend all those in your country who work to uphold and defend the sanctity of life, marriage and the family, areas in which, as you know, the Catholic Church in Korea is particularly active. The risk of a nuclear arms race in the region is a further source of concern, fully shared by the Holy See. I urge all interested parties to make every effort to resolve the present tensions through peaceful means and to refrain from any gesture or initiative that might endanger the negotiations, while ensuring that the most vulnerable part of the North Korean population has access to humanitarian aid.

105. Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Latin American Council.

I would like to recommend to CELAM's reflection the pastoral care of the family, besieged in our days by serious challenges represented by the different ideologies and by customs that undermine the very foundation of marriage and of the Christian family. Attention must then be given to family catechesis and to a positive and correct vision of matrimony and of conjugal morality, thus contributing to the formation of authentic Christian families that are distinguished by their visible experience of Gospel values. A Christian family, a true "domestic church", will also be a seedbed for abundant and holy vocations.

106. Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for the Celebration of World Food Day.

The order of creation demands that priority be given to those human activities that do not cause irreversible damage to nature, but which instead are woven into the social, cultural and religious fabric of the different communities. In this way, a sober balance is achieved between consumption and the sustainability of resources.

The *rural family* needs to regain its rightful place at the heart of the social order. The moral principles and values which govern it belong to the heritage of humanity, and must take priority over legislation. They are concerned with individual conduct, relations between husband and wife and between generations, and the sense of family solidarity. Investment in the agricultural sector has to allow the family to assume its proper place and function, avoiding the damaging consequences of hedonism and materialism that can place marriage and family life at risk.

Education and formation programmes in rural areas need to be broadly based, adequately resourced and aimed at all age groups. Special attention should be given to the most vulnerable, especially women and the young. It is important to hand on to future generations not merely the technical aspects of production, nutrition and protection of natural resources, but the values of the rural world.

107. Common Declaration of Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury, His Grace Rowan Williams.

As Christian leaders facing the challenges of the new millennium, we affirm again our public commitment to the revelation of divine life uniquely set forth by God in the divinity and humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that it is through Christ and the means of salvation found in him that healing and reconciliation are offered to us and to the world.

There are many areas of witness and service in which we can stand together, and which indeed call for closer co-operation between us: the pursuit of peace in the Holy Land and in other parts of the world marred by conflict and the threat of terrorism; promoting respect for life from conception until natural death; protecting the sanctity of marriage and the well-being of children in the context of healthy family life; outreach to the poor, oppressed and the most vulnerable, especially those who are persecuted for their faith; addressing the negative effects of materialism; and care for creation and for our environment. We also commit ourselves to inter-religious dialogue through which we can jointly reach out to our non-Christian brothers and sisters.

108. Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI for the 40th World Communications Day.

“The Media: A Network for Communication, Communion and Cooperation”

3. The call for today’s media to be responsible - to be the protagonist of truth and promoter of the peace that ensues - carries with it a number of challenges. While the various instruments of social communication facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and mutual understanding among groups, they are also tainted by ambiguity. Alongside the provision of a “great round table” for dialogue, certain tendencies within the media engender a kind of monoculture that dims creative genius, deflates the subtlety of complex thought and undervalues the specificity of cultural practices and the particularity of religious belief. These are distortions that occur when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good.

Accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern, and fair representation of diverse points of view must, then, always be fostered. The need to uphold and support marriage and family life is of particular importance, precisely because it pertains to the foundation of every culture and society (cf. [Apostolicam Actuositatem](#), 11). In cooperation with parents, the social communications and entertainment industries can assist in the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children, through presenting edifying models of human life and love (cf. [Inter Mirifica](#), 11). How disheartening and destructive it is to us all when the opposite occurs. Do not our hearts cry out, most especially, when our young people are subjected to debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of every human person and undermine family interests?

109. Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI, 42nd World Communications Day.

- Sunday, 4 May 2008

The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service.
Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others.

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. The theme of this year’s World Communications Day – “The Media: At the Crossroads between Self-Promotion and Service. Searching for the Truth in order to Share it with Others” – sheds light on the important role of the media in the life of individuals and society. Truly, there is no area of human experience, especially given the vast phenomenon of globalization, in which the media have not become an integral part of interpersonal relations and of social, economic, political and religious development. As I said in my [Message for this year’s World Day of Peace](#) (1 January 2008): “The social communications media, in particular, because of their educational potential, have a special responsibility for promoting respect for the family, making clear its expectations and rights, and presenting all its beauty” (No. 5).

110. Letter of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the President of the Italian Bishops' Conference on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Italian Catholic Social Week.

The daily news demonstrates that contemporary society is facing many ethical and social emergencies that could undermine its stability and seriously jeopardize its future. Particularly relevant is the current anthropological question which embraces respect for human life and the attention to be paid to the needs of the family founded on the marriage of a man and a woman. As has been affirmed several times, it is not a matter of solely “Catholic” values and principles but of defending and protecting common human values, such as justice, peace and the safeguarding of creation.

What can then be said of the problems concerning work in relation to the family and young people? When lack of steady work does not permit young people to have a family of their own, society’s authentic and full development is seriously jeopardized. Here I repeat the invitation I addressed to Italian Catholics at the Ecclesial Convention in Verona, to be ready to welcome the great opportunity that these challenges offer and not to react with a defeatist withdrawal into themselves, but on the contrary, with a renewed dynamism, to trustingly open themselves to new relationships and not waste any energy that could contribute to Italy’s cultural and moral growth.

111. Letter of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI to the Bishops, Priests, Consecrated Persons and Lay Faithful of the Catholic Church in the People’s Republic of China.

Since the future of humanity passes by way of the family, I consider it indispensable and urgent that lay people should promote family values and safeguard the needs of the family. Lay people, whose faith enables them to know God’s marvellous design for the family, have an added reason to assume this concrete and demanding task: the family in fact “is the normal place where the young grow to personal and social maturity. It is also the bearer of the heritage of humanity itself, because through the family, life is passed on from generation to generation. The family occupies a very important place in Asian cultures; and, as the Synod Fathers noted, family values like filial respect, love and care for the aged and the sick, love of children and harmony are held in high esteem in all Asian cultures and religious traditions” [52].

The above-mentioned values form part of the relevant Chinese cultural context, but also in your land there is no lack of forces that influence the family negatively in various ways. Therefore the Church which is in China, aware that the good of society and her own good are profoundly linked to the good of the family [53], must have a keener and more urgent sense of her mission to proclaim to all people God’s plan for marriage and the family, ensuring the full vitality of each [54].