

# **A CALL FOR LIFE AND THE FAMILY**

## **Conclusions of the Meeting of Politicians and Legislators of the Americas**

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<In accord with the Apostolic Constitution> Pastor Bonus, <the Pontifical Council for the Family "strives to have the rights of the family recognized and defended in social and political life and sustains and co-ordinates initiatives for the protection of human life from conception and in favour of responsible procreation"> (Pastor Bonus <art. 141.3). In the light of this competency, in Mexico City, from 6 to 8 June 1996, the Pontifical Council convened the Second International Meeting of Politicians and Legislators of the Americas on "The Dignity of the Family and Life in the Politics and Legislation of the Americas: Reflections in the Light of Evangelium Vitae". A first Meeting of European Politicians and Legislators was held in Varese, Italy, 8-10 March 1993, on "The Rights of the Family on the Threshold of the Third Millennium". This was followed by a Meeting of Politicians and Legislators of the Americas in Rio de Janeiro, 28-31 August 1993, on the same theme. At this Mexico City meeting, there were about 130 participants coming from the world of politics and legislation as well as the Church, from all the nations of the American Continent, who approved the following Conclusions.>

### ***For Life and the Family! A Call to the Americas***

Notwithstanding all the massive changes taking place in our great continent, one reality remains at the heart of every nation: <the family>, the basic, primordial and vital cell of society. In the family, founded on marriage, human life is conceived, born and nurtured. Because the family is the sanctuary of life, serious questions concerning human life, such as abortion, euthanasia and other threats and attacks on life, cannot be separated from the family. Because the family is the first essential element of society, economic and social policies should serve and strengthen it.

Today, in all our nations, we are alarmed to see human life and the family under attack. Therefore, gathered in Mexico City, we make this appeal to fellow politicians and legislators.

At this time, we wish to delineate the principal features of the crisis; to reaffirm the principles that must be upheld; and to propose some practical and urgent recommendations.

### **I. The crisis in the Americas**

<Demographic trends> vary from nation to nation. Migration increasingly raises different challenges. The process of the reduction and stabilization of population growth, described by experts as the <demographic transition>, is well advanced in many of our regions. Nevertheless, the neo-Malthusian ideology, with a serious misunderstanding of demographic data, inspires policies of population control, in so many of our nations, through contraception, sterilization and even through abortion. Supported by rich countries, the agents of this destructive and false ideology are wealthy <international Institutions>, involved in what Pope John Paul II calls a "conspiracy against life" (<Evangelium vitae>, n. 17). Thus they contradict the people's right that international institutions should be oriented towards serving the universal common good and that they should avoid activities that do not correspond with their original mandate.

<Abortion> is a primordial evil and one of the fundamental problems of our age. In the United States, legalized abortion reaches new depths of depravity and cruelty with such inhuman practices as "<partial birth abortion>". In Latin America, existing laws in defence of the right to life are undermined by failure to apply them and by concerted efforts to <decriminalize abortion>, together with projects to turn this crime into a "right", invoking pretexts, such as the "woman's reproductive health" and "reproductive rights", among others.

<Euthanasia> follows abortion in contempt for life. In North America efforts to introduce euthanasia threaten the lives of millions of defenceless persons—especially the aged and the handicapped who are entitled to love and care within the family.

<The law> itself, as the principle of right, is being corrupted. Behind these attacks on life we find legal positivism and utilitarianism, breaking down the original right to life so that the will of the legislator, jurist or president becomes absolute. Closely linked to these forces, a ruthless form of capitalism (cf. <Centesimus annus>, n. 33) and individualism and consumerism, break down and even destroy the values and responsibilities of sexuality, marriage and family life. As Pope John Paul II points out, such forces undermine the basis of true democracy (cf. <Evangelium vitae>, n. 20).

<The mass media> is often misused to promote the "culture of death" and a materialistic and hedonistic concept of the person, in conflict with the values of marriage and the family.

<The economic policies of our nations> frequently do not favour the family. Women are obliged to work outside the home and are not supported in their mission as mothers. In some nations social problems such as family poverty, single parent homes, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction and violent crime are exacerbated by misguided welfare programmes. In other nations a lack of adequate welfare provisions leaves poor families in a very weak and vulnerable situation.

<The parents' primary rights in education> are not always recognized. Sex education programmes, imposed by the State and often directed by population control organizations, violate parental rights and promote hedonistic lifestyles. Many parents are not free to choose an education for their children in accord with their faith and conscience, or they are obliged to pay much for such an education.

<children> in many regions are subjected to infamous exploitation through child labour, prostitution and pornography. The suffering of "street children", victims of a lack of family policies, is the scandal and shame of so many of our greatest cities.

<Women>, to a great extent, bear the burden of poverty. So often they are vulnerable through lack of education. With their children, they are the main victims of family breakdown. In some societies they are the victims of <machismo>. Yet, at the same time, a radical feminism, promoting a false concept of "gender", harms them in every nation in the Americas, instilling prejudices against authentic feminism which protects the dignity of women.

Finally, we express our deepest concern over a new "paradigm of health" aimed at making the right to health subordinate to the solvency of individuals or societies.

## **II. Truths of the family and life**

In the face of these problems and challenges we reaffirm some of the more important principles that guide us:

1. We reaffirm the innate dignity and value of every human person, created in the image and likeness of God and thus capable of self-giving love.
2. We reaffirm that universal human rights are innate, as set out in the <Universal Declaration of Human Rights> (1948).
3. We reaffirm the validity and current importance of the <Charter of the Rights of the Family>, published by the Holy See (1983). Therefore we reaffirm that the family has rights flowing from its identity as the basic cell of society.

4. We reaffirm that the family is founded on marriage, a union between a man and a woman, open to transmitting human life.

5. We reaffirm that the indissolubility of marriage between a man and woman should be protected by the law for the good of society.

6. We reaffirm the right to life of all human beings, from the moment of conception until natural death. As Pope John Paul II teaches, "Before the moral norm which prohibits the direct taking of the life of an innocent human being '<there are no privileges or exceptions for anyone>. It makes no difference whether one is the master of the world or the "poorest of the poor" on the face of the earth. Before the demands of morality we are all absolutely equal"' (<Evangelium vitae>, n. 57).

### **III. Recommendations**

In the light of these truths, we appeal to fellow politicians and legislators to meet the problems of our nations and we propose recommendations to this end.

1. We call for a massive international effort by politicians and legislators in favour of human life. We recommend that a parliamentary group be formed in every nation in our continent to defend life and the family. Furthermore, we recommend that these groups work together through an inter-American co-ordinating body, related to the Pontifical Council for the Family.

2. We call for a rediscovery of the law as the defence of any human life, especially the weakest and poorest. We recommend education in the natural law, which is the basis for universal human rights, beginning with the right to life, hence the true foundation of democracy. In schools, colleges, universities and higher institutes, the social doctrine of the Church, with all its pro-life and family requirements, should be taught thoroughly. This presupposes that continuous moral teaching in accord with the Magisterium be provided in these institutions.

3. We call for the strict maintenance and application of constitutional norms and laws still in force in many of our nations which protect the rights of the unborn. We recommend promoting awareness of these laws and vigilance on the part of politicians and legislators at attempts to undermine them, whether by tolerating illegal abortion, by decriminalization or by invoking spurious rights.

4. We call for practical pro-life assistance for women who contemplate abortion or who have had an abortion. We recommend that more pro-life centres for women be opened, and that existing centres be recognized and supported.

5. We call for legal protection for the unborn child from the moment of conception. We recommend unequivocal pro-life legislation on embryo experimentation and genetic engineering. We welcome the call of Pope John Paul II to jurists and government leaders to recognize and defend "the natural rights of the very origin of human life" (<Address to the Symposium on Evangelium Vitae and the Law>, 24 May 1996, n. 6; <L'Osservatore Romano> English edition 29 May 1996, p. 12).

6. We call for economic justice for families so that the irreplaceable "human capital" of the family can be developed, free from undue State control and untrammelled by misguided social policies. We recommend the formulation of specific family policies in every nation, not merely social policies but strategies designed to recover the full natural role of the family in economy and development for the common good.

7. We call for specific family policies which offer women the concrete conditions to reconcile their mission as a mother with their professional and educational aspirations. We recommend that steps should be taken, especially in the fiscal area, to make this possible.

8. We call for recognition of the irreplaceable educational role of the family. We recommend legislation in favour of a free choice in schooling for all parents-especially the poor.

9. We call for recognition of the right of parents to provide "an authentic education in sexuality and in love" (<Evangelium vitae>, n. 97). We recommend the promotion of <The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Guidelines for Education within the Family>, recently published by the Pontifical Council for the Family.

10. We call for greater moral responsibility on the part of the mass media. We recommend establishing or strengthening bodies that facilitate the exercise of professional responsibility.

11. We call for a truly scientific assessment of demographic realities in the Americas, free from ideological bias or self-interest. We recommend that migrants in particular merit protection through laws and just policies.

12. We call for an end to the "contraceptive imperialism" of population control promoted with the use of abortion, sterilization and contraception. We recommend a responsible parenthood, assisted by the widest possible promotion of the modern methods of the natural regulation of fertility, which are scientifically sure ways of achieving or of postponing pregnancy, when there are just reasons. 13. We call for justice and love for each child, who is a blessing from God. We recommend that new legislation be formulated to protect the rights and welfare of children, especially those who are victims of exploitation through labour, prostitution or pornography.

14. We request the competent bodies to make life and the family a central theme at the forthcoming Synod of Bishops for America.

Finally we appeal to politicians, legislators and all men and women of good will to join us in the struggle for life and the family. Once again, we commit ourselves to this great cause. We are confident that a better future is possible, and so we entrust all our work for life and the family to God, the Lord of Life and Creator of the family.

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