

# **THE FAMILY, THE HEART OF THE CIVILIZATION OF LOVE**

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Keynote Address of His Eminence Alfonso Cardinal Lopez Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family to the tenth annual conference of Women for Faith & Family on the International Year of the Family

Your Excellencies, Reverend Monsignori, Reverend Fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a great joy for me to be able to come to St. Louis to this tenth annual conference of Women for Faith and Family.

First, I wish to put on record one aspect of this visit to St. Louis which brings me great happiness, the opportunity of being once more with Archbishop Justin Rigali, whom I have known so well for many years, during his dedicated and untiring service of the Holy Father in Rome.

Women for Faith and Family, this highly respected Catholic organization, stands out for its calm and confident witness to the Church's vision of the woman and the family in today's world. In particular I thank Mrs. Helen Hitchcock for her courageous work for the Church.

The subject of my paper is taken from the words of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II in his <Letter to Families>: "the family is the center and the heart of the civilization of love". Together, let us explore what these fascinating words mean.

### **The Family in Society**

You are all familiar with the Holy Father's words in <Familiaris Consortio> 86, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family". This short sentence sums up the irreplaceable relationship between the family and society. This is a two-way relationship. The achievements made by the family revert back to the good of society. But when the family breaks down, the social fabric is broken and endangered. On the other hand, anything that goes wrong in society has negative repercussions on the family, and everything that ensures the appropriately conceived good of society helps to fulfill the mission of the family.

So we dare not, we must not, say that the family is something indifferent, neutral or "private", something marginal in the overall social context. Yet this is precisely the dangerous delusion of those who, even in this Year of the Family, say that the family is the basis of society and yet in fact deny or reduce its relationship or set it aside in favor of individuals or anti-family pressure groups.

This was one of the many problems at the United Nations Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in September. Thanks be to God, marriage and family find a place in the final document of that Conference, due to the work of the Holy See and the other nations, especially Islamic countries, who share our concerns for life and the family.

However, the Holy Father draws us further into the social role of the family when, in his <Letter to Families>, 13, he recalls how the expression "civilization of love" (which was coined, in fact, by Pope Paul VI) "has entered the teaching of the Church and by now has become familiar". In the same paragraphs of his letter, which has enjoyed such an excellent reception within and beyond the Church, the Pope observes that although the word "civilization" stresses a political dimension of an individual's existence ("civilization" is derived from "civis"—citizen). Therefore civilization has, in the deepest sense, a properly "humanist" significance.

Civilization is made up of persons, it is built around citizens relating to one another. To form the "civilization of love" a whole complex and demanding process is required. A concrete example of this, which guides us by its dramatic contrasts, is the struggle for human life against abortion and euthanasia—a struggle which cannot remain only political, but must at the same time embrace education at all levels, pastoral care, prayer, witness,

etc.—that is, a total humanizing and hence civilizing process. Yet behind that struggle for human life are certain presuppositions about the truth of the human person and his innate value and dignity, whether we are speaking of attempts to kill an unborn baby or an elderly woman in hospital.

Therefore, to understand this civilization of love you have to go to the truth about man, the truth about the family and only then to the truth about society. Without these interrelated truths, "civilization" is merely a superficial term which describes an ordered or developed society, where people are polite to one another.

## **The Truth About Man**

If you have a false understanding of human nature, if you fail to understand the human person, and build your whole civilization upon that distortion, the results will be truly terrible. We have seen this in the Nazi system, and more recently in the Communist systems based on the Marxist doctrine of human nature.

Both those systems failed to understand man in relationship to God; they either claimed God did not exist or they put man, the race or the state in His place. But you cannot ignore the relationship of the person to God.

Thus we build our Christian anthropology on the truth of creation: man is made in the image and likeness of God. Man is God's creature yet, at the same time, he represents God. Being an image of God is a concrete reality that belongs to the human person. It is a reality which has been received as a gift, a reality which reaches its most noble projection in Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of the Father.

At the same time being an image of God is a mission, a vocation, a task, something entrusted to each person so he can make it grow. In that sense, the person is the architect of his own destiny, yet entrusted with developing a divine plan which involves each person's moral perfecting, his growth in being. This humanization leads to an integral liberation, the freedom of the sons and daughters of God.

On this foundation of truth will emerge a very different kind of society than that offered by the totalitarian ideologies I have already mentioned. It will be a civilization of persons related to God, who is the Source of love. But it will also be different from the dominant Western secular liberal society around us today. Based on individualism, on the assertion of an absolute autonomy which ignores God, that society is producing a permissive and decadent civilization of death. The essence of that system can be distilled into one deadly arrogant expression—"pro-choice".

However, as an image of God, each person is called by God. Responsible, free and personal collaboration is thus inherent in God's own design, in his will for the good of the person. We are called to grow in that good we have received from God, in a response which is a grace-filled collaboration with Him.

But none of us lives alone. We are not islands. We are social beings, made to relate to others in a communion of persons. The first and foremost created communion of persons exists between a man and a woman. Thus, at the very beginning of his discussion of "the civilization of love" in his <Letter to Families>, 6, the Holy Father underlines the truth of Genesis 1.27: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them..." The Pope comments: "Human fatherhood and motherhood ... contain in an essential and unique way a 'likeness' to God which is the basis of the family as a community of human life, as a community of persons united in love".

We are at the heart of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, in some way "imaged" in the family, the first and fundamental expression of the social nature of man (cf. <Letter to Families>, 7). Out of this flows the created reality of marriage itself, the mutual gift of the "I" and "thou" in a communion of persons and the procreation of children. So the truth of the family is already inherent in the truth of the person, created in the image and likeness of the Triune God.

## **The Truth About the Family**

I have already referred to false attitudes concerning the family which emerged during this Year of the Family, even a mentality of hostility to the family. To this we must calmly and confidently respond with the truth about the family.

First, we must affirm strongly, at every level, that the family is founded on marriage, that this communion of persons is the basis of the family as a good willed by God himself. The Second Vatican Council insisted that, amidst all changes and social transformations, the identity of the family must be protected (<Gaudium et Spes,> 48). We have to proclaim the good news that the family is not a prison, but it is a <good> for husbands and wives, for children and for society as a whole. It is the place where people can realize their potential and find true freedom and happiness. The challenges that have emerged in this Year of the Family should spur us on to defend this truth.

First of all there is the claim that "no one can define the family". You have all heard this by now, have you not? Behind it is not merely confused thinking and social relativism; but also an ideological attempt to undermine or destroy marriage by making it equal to "free unions" and, as we recently saw in the Parliament of Europe, even making homosexual relationships into a new kind of "marriage" or "family".

All these challenges highlight the need to define the family as always based on marriage between a man and a woman. On this there can be no compromise, even at meetings and seminars where they try to forbid the word "marriage", as has happened during the Year of the Family.

At times you will hear people, even within the Church, say that our insistence on marriage is not fair to single parents, especially to women who have borne children outside of wedlock. In turn this leads to sympathy for the corollary of never defining the family, summed up in the familiar sentence, "There are many forms of the family today."

At the level of merely describing phenomena it could be said that "the family takes various forms today." There are small families, large families, nuclear families, extended families. The different social mores of peoples and tribes are expressed in a variety of often complex family relationships. But this description of phenomena must never be allowed to slide into ambiguity, so as to destroy the truth that a binding marriage is always the source of the family. Even when marriage has been broken by death, divorce or separation, the reality and the identity of the family after that disaster is derived from the marriage which established that family.

We must therefore insist that ambiguities such as "many forms of the family" be strictly qualified with words such as "always based on marriage between a man and a woman". Only then can we avoid falling into the ideological trap which would make a "family" out of a "household" consisting of two men and a cat, or an old lady and her dogs, or young people sharing an apartment, or an unmarried couple living together.

## **Recent Positive Developments**

However, we should be encouraged in maintaining the truth of the natural institution of the family by some recent developments.

At the Cairo Conference, the Islamic nations were offended by a phrase inserted in the draft final document: "marriage and other unions". They insisted that the words "other unions" be removed to avoid any hint that "other unions", such as cohabitation or homosexual relationships, could ever be equal to marriage.

More recently, in Rome, the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Pontifical Council for the Family convened a meeting at which Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems, Jews, Sikhs, various Native Religions and

Christians discussed marriage and the family today. Together they produced a final statement. Let me quote from it, because it sends a strong message to those who deny the truth of the family:

"The family is the basic unit of society. Marriage is the foundation of the family. It exists to foster love between a man and a woman and their mutual growth and spiritual fulfillment based on ethical, moral and religious values, enabling procreation, nurturing and an holistic development of children, safeguarding the sanctity of human life in all its dimensions".

Remember that this statement was a consensus between representatives of the world's major religions.

Thirdly, I recall my recent visit to the United Nations, when I addressed the General Assembly at the session marking the Year of the Family. I was greatly impressed by the strong pro-family statements which came from various nations, indicating, let us hope, a new positive tendency to value and support the rights of the family, because that is what is at stake in society today. Let us now turn to society.

## **The Truth About Society**

In the light of the truth of the person and the truth of the family we can come to understand the truth of society, which is that society is based upon its natural, essential living cell, the family (cf. <Familiaris Consortio>, 42). This is obvious once we reflect on the structure of society, on how each of us entered society, and how society is recreated again and again through family life. The family is the essential basic community, the natural institution, which carries out the tasks of socializing individuals and perpetuating society.

Today, however, we are challenged by an atomized model of society. This could be described as a collection of independent human beings rattling around, at times colliding, running in and out of "relationships", getting and consuming whatever they want, when they want it. The law in this atomized society gradually becomes a social contract to protect the individual's right to his or her total liberty at all costs. But crime, vice, poverty personal and family tragedies, intense human suffering and much loneliness and unhappiness are the consequences of this attempt to build society on a false anthropology which ignores the natural institution of the family.

The social disaster which is developing in many nations is largely the fruit of the liberal Western secularist ideology. Everything is tolerated, so long as it does not interfere with the rights of the individual and dominating concepts such as "privacy", "choice" and "self-realization". But as a natural institution, the family enjoys rights, set out in the Holy See's <Charter of the Rights of the Family>. Let us therefore fight for those rights—and let us work for laws and policies, economic and social, which protect and advance the rights and duties of the family.

These rights of the family as a natural institution are not in conflict with the rights of individuals, properly understood. The members of the family first learn how to relate to one another as members of society. Therefore it is disastrous either to privatize the family, pretending that the state must never legislate on family matters (as if the family did not exist!), or on the other hand to let the state invade the family and take over its role and functions.

The Church maintains a balance between these extremes by insisting on the rights of this natural institution, its freedom and responsibilities in society. But those two dangerous extremes are not really opposed to one another, for what better excuse is there to invade the family if you pretend it does not, as such, exist? The question of ignoring parental rights when providing contraception or abortion to adolescents is a typical example of this danger. Thanks be to God, the Islamic nations, supported by the Holy See, succeeded in affirming these rights in this context at Cairo.

Children and young people suffer when the selfish secularist mentality strikes at the family. Women are the next victims, especially poor women. The breakdown of families is accelerated through the "plague of divorce" so easily gained today. Nearly thirty years ago, the Second Vatican Council used that expression "plague of divorce" in <Gaudium et Spes>, 47. How much worse the situation is today!

The Church is deeply concerned about the suffering of women and children and actively involved in meeting their needs. This year the Pontifical Council for the Family brings to a conclusion a three-year cycle of meetings and work on the rights and welfare of the child. We held a meeting in Rome on the rights of the child, a meeting in Bangkok on the exploitation of children through prostitution and pornography, a meeting in Manila on child labor, a meeting in Barcelona on adoption and finally, last July, a meeting in Rio de Janeiro on street children. A book will be published including the papers and findings of these meetings on the child.

Next year, we will continue our work for women, a task which we already commenced this year when the wife and mother was the theme of the plenary meeting of members of the Pontifical Council, made up mainly of a group of thirty member couples chosen from all the continents of the world. Now I wish to say something about women and children in the context of the family, the heart of the civilization of love.

### **Wives and Mothers—Bearers of the Civilization of Love**

Mothers play a vital role in the process of civilizing their children, and, even in some cases, their own husbands! Mothers, wives, women of the Church, you are the bearers of the civilization of love! The babe in your arms, the little ones who cling to you and gather around you, these are called to be tomorrow's civilization of love. That questioning child, the teenager seeking his or her identity and asking for affirmation, they already stand on the threshold of that civilization. But what will it be—a civilization of life and love or a civilization of death and hatred? The decision is not only theirs to make tomorrow—it is also largely yours to make, here and now.

Meeting the vast multitudes of families crowded into St. Peter's Square on October 9th, the largest single celebration of the whole Year of the Family, the Holy Father John Paul II, said to the family "You are '<gaudium et spes>', 'joy and hope!'" But the Pope of the Family challenges us with these encouraging words. He well understands that the crucial direction that civilization will take depends on parents more than anyone else in this world. Parents must be the primary educators for a true civilization of love.

### **Education for Love**

An important part of this task is educating your children for love, teaching them to care for others; about love as self-giving, according to the Gospel of Christ.

Each child has to be taught the values of self-sacrifice, and the best school for this is a family based on marriage where husband and wife put this into practice. Each child needs to learn to reverence and welcome new life. This is only possible when the good news of <Humanae Vitae> is lived, when love means openness to life, generous cooperation with the Creator. Each child needs to become self-disciplined, learned best from parents who practice periodic continence, who moderate the use of luxuries avoiding the pitfalls of consumerism, who use television with prudence. Moreover, each child needs to become tender and compassionate towards others, and that is so easy when he or she sees parents who cherish each other, who communicate, who share their lives as "one flesh". This education for love learned in the true "school of the virtues" is, therefore, the key to resolving the problem of the misuse of human sexuality. Often that is the root cause of marriage breakdown and much personal suffering.

Today, amidst grave threats to purity, we need to educate our children in the family very carefully in sexual matters. In <Familiaris Consortio>, 37, Pope John Paul II teaches that, because they are the primary educators,

parents have the right and duty to carry out this task, which especially builds up a strong civilization of love. Never surrender that right and duty to others. Try to carry it out responsibly, positively and wisely.

## **Towards Beijing**

Next year, in Beijing, the United Nations will hold a great international meeting on women. It is most important that this meeting should give a voice to all the women of the world, not just to Western pressure groups or certain ideological factions, but to the silent majority of women, especially the wives and mothers. These are the women who can find strength and liberation in their femininity, in their maternity, in their conjugal love.

I hope that some of you will be at that meeting and that all of you will take a concerned interest in it. Especially within the family, women do play a key role in social and economic development. As citizens, they are meant to play a major role in society. But let them never be reduced to instruments of ideologies or political programs. They are not engaged in perpetual conflict with men, nor do they gain anything by seeking vengeance for crimes which weak or corrupt men commit against them.

In the civilization of love, women are raised, through grace, above hurts and human failures. They can be freed from the past. They are called and gifted as persons created in the image of God, bearing his mission to heal and build, working as partners with men. So often, like Mary herself, they offer unique consolation and hope amidst men's fears. So we must work and pray that, at Beijing in 1995, women who believe in the civilization of love will do something beautiful for all women, men, and children—for the family.

## **The Role of Women**

Let me therefore conclude by clarifying the particular contribution women can make in building the civilization of love, through the family. We have reflected on the humanizing role in society which wives and mothers exercise through society's basic living cell. But all women, by their very femininity play a special civilizing role in society.

I stress femininity, which the Holy Father has developed in his magnificent encyclical on women, <Mulieris Dignitatem>. Femininity includes the subtlety, the wisdom, the sensitivity, the gentle healing power of women. It is your strength, women of the Church—your femininity. Do not let anyone take this gift from you. It is so much stronger than sad attempts to imitate men, which often degenerates into absorbing the worst male weaknesses and imperfections.

Through your femininity you are called to play a deeper role in society and in the Church. It is a civilizing, humanizing, socializing role—which is your calling and mission as women, your place in God's plan.

May he bless you as you take up this task once more.