

## PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

### FAMILY, MARRIAGE AND “DE FACTO” UNIONS

#### Presentation

One very widespread phenomenon that calls strongly upon the conscience of the Christian community today is the growing number of de facto unions in society as a whole, with the disaffection for the stability of marriage that this entails. The Church cannot fail to shed light on this reality in its discernment of the “signs of the times”.

Aware of the grave repercussions of this social and pastoral situation, the Pontifical Council for the Family organized a series of study meetings in 1999 and during the first months of the year 2000. Some outstanding persons and well-known experts from different parts of the world took part in order to analyze this delicate problem that has such great transcendence for the Church and the world.

The present document is the fruit of this study. It takes up a current and difficult problem that touches the very heart of human relations, the most delicate part of the intimate union between the family and life, the most sensitive areas of the human heart. At the same time, the undeniable public transcendence of the present international political juncture makes it fitting and urgent to offer a word of guidance addressed especially to those who have responsibilities in this area. It is they in their legislative task who can give juridical consistency to the institution of marriage or, on the contrary, based on an unreal understanding of personal problems, weaken the consistency of the common good that protects this natural institution.

These reflections are also addressed to pastors who must receive and guide so many Christians today and accompany them along the way toward appreciating the natural value that is protected by the institution of marriage and ratified by the Christian sacrament. The family based on marriage corresponds to the Creator’s design “at the beginning” (Mt. 19:4). In the Kingdom of God, where no seed can be sowed other than that of the truth that is already written in the human heart, the only seed capable of “bearing fruit through perseverance” (Lk. 8:15), this truth becomes mercy, understanding and a call to recognize in Jesus the “light of the world” (Jn. 8:12), and the power that frees from the bonds of evil.

This document also proposes to contribute in a positive way to a dialogue that will clarify the truth about these matters and the requirements that come from the natural order itself, and to take part in the socio-political debate and the responsibility for the common good.

May God grant that these serene and responsible considerations, which are shared by so many persons of good will, redound to the benefit of that community of life that is necessary for the Church and the world: the family.

Vatican City, July 26, 2000

Feast of Saints Joaquim and Ann, Parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Alfonso Cardinal López Trujillo  
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## Introduction

(1) The so-called “de facto unions” have been taking on special importance in society during these past years. Some initiatives insist on their institutional recognition and even their equivalence to families originating in a marriage commitment. Before a question of such importance with so many future repercussions for the entire human community, this Pontifical Council proposes in the following reflections to call attention to the danger that such recognition and equivalence would represent for the identity of the matrimonial union, and the grave damage this would entail for the family and the common good of society.

In this document, after considering the social aspect of de facto unions, their constitutive elements, and their existential motivations, the problem is taken up of the juridical recognition and equivalency of de facto unions, first with regard to the family based on marriage, and then with regard to the whole of society. The document then deals with the family as a social value, the objective values to be fostered, and the duty in justice on the part of society to protect and promote the family rooted in marriage. Afterwards, some aspects raised in relation to Christian marriage are studied in depth. Some general criteria are also presented for pastoral discernment which are necessary to guide the Christian communities.

The considerations presented here are not only addressed to those who explicitly recognize the Catholic Church as “the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of truth” (1 Tm. 3:15), but also to all Christians who belong to the different Churches and Christian communities, and to all those who are sincerely committed to the precious good of the family, the fundamental cell of society. As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family. Hence Christians and all men who hold this community in high esteem sincerely rejoice in the various ways by which men today find help in fostering this community of love and perfecting its life, and by which parents are assisted in their lofty calling”[1].

## I – “De facto Unions”

### Social aspect of de facto unions

(2) The term “de facto unions” includes a whole series of many heterogeneous human realities whose common element is that of being forms of cohabitation (of a sexual kind) which are not marriage. De facto unions are characterized precisely by the fact that they ignore, postpone, or even reject the conjugal commitment. Grave consequences are derived from this.

In marriage, through the covenant of conjugal love, all the responsibilities that result from the bond that has been made are taken on publicly. From this public assumption of responsibilities a good results not only for the spouses themselves and for the children in their affective and formational growth, but also for the other members of the family. Therefore, the family based on marriage is a fundamental and precious good for the whole society whose most solid fabric is built on the values that are developed in family relations and guaranteed by stable marriage. The good generated by marriage is basic for the Church which recognizes the family as the “domestic Church”.<sup>[2]</sup> All this is endangered by abandoning the institution of marriage, which is implicit in de facto unions.

(3) Some may wish to, and may use sexuality in a way other than that written by God into human nature and the specifically human end of their acts. This goes against the interpersonal language of love and seriously endangers, through an objective disorder, the true dialogue of life willed by the Creator and Redeemer of humankind. The doctrine of the Catholic Church is well known by public opinion, and it is not necessary to repeat it here.<sup>[3]</sup> It is the social dimension of the problem that requires greater reflection and makes it possible to point out, especially to those with public responsibilities, the inappropriateness of elevating these private situations to the category of public interest. With the pretext of regulating one context of social and juridical cohabitation, attempts are made to justify the institutional recognition of de facto unions. In this way, de facto unions would turn into an institution, and their rights and duties would be sanctioned by law to the detriment of the family based on marriage. The de facto unions would be put on a juridical level similar to marriage; moreover, this kind of cohabitation would be publicly qualified as a “good” by elevating it to a condition similar to, or equivalent to marriage, to the detriment of truth and justice. In this way, a very strong contribution would be made toward the breakdown of the natural institution of marriage which is absolutely vital, basic and necessary for the whole social body.

### Constitutive elements of de facto unions

(4) Not all de facto unions have the same social weight or the same motivations. When describing their positive characteristics, over and above their common negative trait of postponing, ignoring or rejecting the matrimonial union, some elements stand out. First, there is the purely factual character of the relationship. It should be pointed out that these unions imply cohabitation that includes a sexual relationship (which distinguishes them from other forms of cohabitation), and a relative tendency toward stability (which distinguishes them from sporadic or occasional forms of cohabitation). De facto unions do not imply marital rights and duties, and

they do not presume to have the stability that is based on the marriage bond. They are characterized by their strong assertion to not take on any ties. The constant instability that comes from the possibility of terminating the cohabitation is consequently a characteristic of de facto unions. There is also a certain more or less explicit “commitment” to “mutual fidelity”, so to speak, as long as the relationship lasts.

(5) Some de facto unions are clearly the result of a decisive choice. “Trial” unions are common among those planning to marry in the future, but on the condition that they have the experience of a union without a marriage bond. This is a kind of “conditioned stage” for marriage, similar to “trial” marriage, [4] but, different from this, a certain social recognition is presumed.

Some other persons who live together justify this choice because of economic reasons or to avoid legal difficulties. The real motives are often much deeper. In using this type of pretext, there is often an underlying mentality that gives little value to sexuality. This is influenced more or less by pragmatism and hedonism, as well as by a conception of love detached from any responsibility. The commitment is avoided to the stability, the responsibilities, and the rights and duties that real conjugal love includes.

In other cases, de facto unions are formed by persons who were previously divorced and are thus an alternative to marriage. Through pro-divorce legislation, marriage often tends to lose its identity in personal conscience. In this sense, a lack of confidence in the institution of marriage should be pointed out which sometimes comes from the negative experience of persons who have been traumatized by a previous divorce or by their parents’ divorce. This distressing phenomenon is beginning to become important from a social viewpoint in the more economically developed countries.

It is not uncommon for persons living together in a de facto union to make their rejection of marriage for ideological reasons known explicitly. This then is the choice of an alternative, a certain way of living one’s sexuality. These persons consider marriage as something to be rejected, something that is opposed to their ideology, an “unacceptable form of abusing personal well-being”, or even as “the tomb of passionate love”, expressions that denote a lack of knowledge about the real nature of human love and sacrifice, and of the nobility and beauty of constancy and fidelity in human relations.

(6) De facto unions are not always the result of a clear and positive choice. Sometimes persons who are living together in these unions show that they tolerate or bear this situation. In some countries, the increasing number of de facto unions is due to a disaffection regarding marriage not for ideological reasons, but because of a lack of adequate formation in responsibility, which is the product of the poverty and marginalization of their environment. A lack of confidence in marriage, however, can also be due to family conditioning, especially in the Third World. One important factor to be taken into consideration are the situations of injustice and the structures of sin. The cultural predominance of macho or racist attitudes come together and aggravate this difficult situation very much.

In these cases, it is not unusual to find de facto unions where, from the beginning, in principle, the partners want an authentic life together, consider themselves united as husband and wife, and make efforts to fulfill obligations similar to those of marriage.[5] Poverty, that is often the result of imbalances in the world economic order and structural educational shortcomings, poses serious obstacles that keep them from forming a real family.

In other places, cohabitation (for more or less extended periods of time) is frequent until the conception or birth of the first child. These customs correspond to ancestral and traditional practices which are very strong in some regions of Africa and Asia and are related to the so-called “marriage by stages”. These practices are in contrast with human dignity, difficult to uproot, and create a negative moral situation with a characteristic and well-defined social problem. This kind of union should not be identified with the de facto unions we are concerned with here (which are formed on the margin of a traditional kind of cultural anthropology), and pose a challenge for the inculturation of the faith in the Third Millennium of the Christian era.

The complexity and diversity of the problem of de facto unions can be clearly seen if we consider, for instance, that in some cases, their most immediate cause can be related to social security and welfare systems. This is the case, for example, in the most developed systems where elderly persons form de facto relationships because they fear that marriage would involve tax burdens or the loss of their pensions.

#### Personal reasons and the cultural factor

(7) It is important to ask the deep reasons why contemporary culture is witnessing a crisis in marriage, both in its religious and civil dimensions, and the attempt to gain recognition and equivalency for de facto unions. In this way, unstable situations, which are defined more by their negative aspect (the omission of marriage) than by their positive characteristics, seem to be on a level similar to marriage. In fact, all these situations are consolidated in different kinds of relations, but all are in contrast with a real and full reciprocal self-giving that is stable and recognized socially. In a context of privatization of love and the elimination of the institutional character of marriage, the complexity of the economic, sociological and psychological reasons suggests the need to delve into the ideological and cultural background on which the phenomenon of de facto unions, as we know it today, has been progressively growing and becoming affirmed.

The progressive decrease in the number of marriages and families recognized as such by the laws of different States, and the increase in some countries in the number of unmarried couples who are living together cannot be explained adequately as an isolated and spontaneous cultural movement. It seems to be a response to the historical changes in societies in the contemporary cultural moment that some authors describe as “post-modernism”. It is certain that the decreased influence of the agricultural world, the development of the tertiary sector of the economy, the increase in the average life span, the instability of work and personal relationships, the reduction in the number of family members living under the same roof, and the globalization of social and economic phenomena have produced great instability in families and favored the ideal of a

smaller family. But is this enough to explain the contemporary situation of marriage? The institution of marriage is experiencing a lesser crisis where family traditions are stronger.

(8) In the process that could be described as the gradual cultural and human de-structuring of the institution of marriage, the spread of a certain ideology of “gender” should not be underestimated. According to this ideology, being a man or a woman is not determined fundamentally by sex but by culture. Therefore, the very bases of the family and inter-personal relationships are attacked. Some considerations should be made in this regard because of the importance of this ideology in contemporary culture and its influence on the phenomenon of de facto unions.

In the integrative dynamics of the human personality, one very important factor is identity. During childhood and adolescence, a person progressively gains awareness of being “him/herself”, an awareness of his/her own identity. This is integrated into a process of recognition of one’s being and, consequently, of the sexual dimension of one’s being. This is therefore awareness of identity and difference. Experts usually make a distinction between sexual identity (i.e., awareness of the psycho-biological identity of one’s sex, and the difference with regard to the other sex), and generic identity (i.e., awareness of the psycho-social and cultural identity of the role which persons of a determined sex play in society). In a correct and harmonious process of integration, sexual and generic identity are complementary because persons live in society according to the cultural aspects corresponding to their sex. The category of generic sexual identity (“gender”) is therefore of a psycho-social and cultural nature. It corresponds to and is harmonious with sexual identity of a psycho-biological nature when the integration of the personality is achieved as recognition of the fullness of the person’s inner truth, the unity of body and soul.

Starting from the decade between 1960-1970, some theories (which today are usually described by experts as “constructionist”) hold not only that generic sexual identity (“gender”) is the product of an interaction between the community and the individual, but that this generic identity is independent from personal sexual identity: i.e., that masculine and feminine genders in society are the exclusive product of social factors, with no relation to any truth about the sexual dimension of the person. In this way, any sexual attitude can be justified, including homosexuality, and it is society that ought to change in order to include other genders, together with male and female, in its way of shaping social life.[6]

The ideology of “gender” found a favorable environment in the individualist anthropology of radical neo-liberalism.[7] Claiming a similar status for marriage and de facto unions (including homosexual unions) is usually justified today on the basis of categories and terms that come from the ideology of “gender”. [8] In this way, there is a certain tendency to give the name “family” to all kinds of consensual unions, thus ignoring the natural inclination of human freedom to reciprocal self-giving and its essential characteristics which are the basis of that common good of humanity, the institution of marriage.

II – The Family based on marriage and de facto unions

## Family, life and de facto unions

(9) It is useful to understand the substantial differences between marriage and de facto unions. This is the root of the difference between the family originating in marriage, and the community that originates in a de facto union. The family community comes from the covenant of the spouses' union. The marriage that comes from this covenant of conjugal love is not created by any public authority: it is a natural and original institution that is prior to it. In de facto unions, on the other hand, reciprocal affection is put in common but, at the same time, the marriage bond, with its original public dimension that gives the foundation to the family, is absent. The family and life form a real unit which must be protected by society because this is the living nucleus of the succession (procreation and education) of human generations.

In today's open and democratic societies, the State and the public authorities must not institutionalize de facto unions, thereby giving them a status similar to marriage and the family, nor much less make them equivalent to the family based on marriage. This would be an arbitrary use of power which does not contribute to the common good because the original nature of marriage and the family proceeds and exceeds, in an absolute and radical way, the sovereign power of the State. A serenely impartial perspective free from any arbitrary or demagogical positions invites us to reflect very seriously in the different political communities on the essential differences between the vital and necessary contribution to the common good of the family based on marriage, and the other reality that exists in merely emotional forms of cohabitation. It does not seem reasonable to hold that the vital functions of family communities, whose nucleus is the stable and monogamous institution of marriage, can be carried out in a large-scale, stable and permanent way by merely emotional forms of cohabitation. The family based on marriage must be carefully protected and promoted as an essential factor in social existence, stability and peace, in a broad future vision of the society's common interest.

(10) Equality before the law must respect the principle of justice which means treating equals equally, and what is different differently: i.e., to give each one his due in justice. This principle of justice would be violated if de facto unions were given a juridical treatment similar or equivalent to the family based on marriage. If the family based on marriage and de facto unions are neither similar nor equivalent in their duties, functions and services in society, then they cannot be similar or equivalent in their juridical status.

The pretext used for exerting pressure to recognize de facto unions (i.e., their "non-discrimination") implies a real discrimination against the family based on marriage because it would be considered on a level similar to any other form of cohabitation, regardless of whether there is a commitment to reciprocal fidelity and the begetting and up-bringing of children or not. The orientation of some political communities today of discriminating against marriage by attributing an institutional status to de facto unions that is similar, or even equivalent to marriage and the family, is a serious sign of the contemporary breakdown in the social moral conscience, of "weak thought" with regard to the common good, when it is not a real and proper ideological imposition exerted by influential pressure groups.

(11) Along the same line of principles, it is good to keep in mind the distinction between public interest and private interest. Regarding the former, society and the public authorities must protect and encourage it; as to the latter, the State must only guarantee freedom. Whenever a matter is of public interest, public law intervenes, and what, on the contrary, corresponds to private interests must be referred to the private sphere. Marriage and the family are of public interest; they are the fundamental nucleus of society and the State and should be recognized and protected as such. Two or more persons may decide to live together, with or without a sexual dimension but this cohabitation is not for that reason of public interest. The public authorities can not get involved in this private choice. De facto unions are the result of private behavior and should remain on the private level. Their public recognition or equivalency to marriage, and the resulting elevation of a private interest to a public interest, damages the family based on marriage. In marriage a man and a woman constitute a community of the whole of life which is ordered by its very nature to the good of the spouses and the generation and up-bringing of offspring. In marriage, different from de facto unions, commitments and responsibilities are taken on publicly and formally that are relevant for society and exigible in the juridical context.

#### De facto unions and the conjugal covenant

(12) The evaluation of de facto unions also includes a subjective dimension: they are formed by concrete persons with their own vision of life, their own intentions, in brief, their “history”. We should consider the existential reality of individual freedom of choice and the dignity of persons which may be in error. However, in a de facto union, the presumption to have public recognition does not only affect the individual area of freedom, and so it is necessary to take up this problem from the viewpoint of social ethics: the human individual is a person and therefore social; a human being is no less social than rational.[9]

Persons can meet and refer to shared values and needs regarding the common good in dialogue. The universal reference point, the criterion in this area, can be none other than the truth about the human good which is objective, transcendent and equal for all. To attain this truth and remain in it is a condition for freedom and personal maturity, and the real objective of an orderly and fruitful social coexistence. Exclusive attention to the subject, to the individual, his intentions and choices, without referring to the social and objective dimension, oriented to the common good, is the result of an arbitrary and unacceptable individualism that is blind to objective values, against the dignity of the person, and harmful to the social order. “Therefore, it is necessary to promote a reflection that will help not only believers but all men of good will to rediscover the value of marriage and the family. In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we can read: ‘The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security and fraternity within society.[10] If reason listens to the moral law written in the human heart, it can arrive at the rediscovery of the family. As a community based on and enlivened by love, [11] the family derives its strength from the definitive covenant of love whereby a man and a woman give themselves to one another mutually and together become God’s cooperators in the gift of life’.[12]

The Second Vatican Council points out that so-called free love (“amore sic dicto libero”)[13] constitutes a factor that breaks down and destroys marriage because it lacks the constitutive element of conjugal love which is based on the personal and irrevocable consent whereby the spouses give and receive one another mutually, giving rise to a juridical bond and a unit sealed by a public dimension of justice. What the Council calls “free” love, which opposes true conjugal love, was then—and is now—the seed that produces de facto unions. Later, with the speed of today’s socio-cultural changes, it has also given rise to the current projects to confer public status on de facto unions.

(13) Like every other human problem, the problem of de facto unions must also be taken up from a rational perspective, more precisely, from “right reason”. [14] With this term from classical ethics, it is stressed that the interpretation of reality and the judgment of reason must be objective, and free from conditioning, such as disorderly affectivity or weakness in considering sorrowful situations that inclines toward a superficial kind of compassion, eventual ideological prejudices, social or cultural pressures, conditioning by lobbies or political parties. Of course, Christians have a vision of marriage and the family whose anthropological and theological foundation is rooted harmoniously in the truth that comes from the Word of God, Tradition, and the Magisterium of the Church.[15] But the light of the faith itself teaches that the reality of the sacrament of marriage is not something subsequent or extrinsic, or just an external “sacramental” addition to the spouses’ love; it is the natural reality of conjugal love that has been assumed by Christ as a sign and means of salvation in the order of the New Law. Consequently, the problem of de facto unions can and must be faced from the viewpoint of right reason. It is not a question primarily of Christian faith but of rationality. The tendency to oppose denominational “Catholic thought” on this matter to “lay thought” is erroneous.[16]

### III – De facto unions in the whole of society

#### Social and political dimension of the problem of equivalency

(14) Some radical cultural influences (such as the ideology of “gender”, which we mentioned earlier) result in damage to the family institution. “Still more distressing is the direct attack on the family institution that is developing both on the cultural as well as on the political, legislative and administrative levels...The tendency is clear to make the family equivalent to other very different forms of cohabitation, apart from fundamental considerations of an ethical and anthropological order”. [17] For this reason, the definition of the family’s identity is a priority. The value of and the need for stability in the marriage relationship between a man and a woman are pertinent to this identity, and this stability is expressed and confirmed in a perspective of procreation and up-bringing of children which benefits the entire social fabric. Such marital and family stability does not only depend on the good will of concrete persons; it takes on an institutional character of public recognition by the State of the choice of conjugal life. The recognition, protection and promotion of this stability contributes to the general interest, especially of the weakest, i.e., the children.

(15) Another risk in the social consideration of the problem that concerns us is its trivialization. Some affirm that recognition and equivalency of de facto unions should not cause excessive concern because the number of these cases is relatively small. If this were the case, however, the opposite should be concluded because a quantitative consideration of the problem ought to lead to doubting the advisability of raising the problem of de facto unions to one of primary importance, especially where adequate attention is barely given to the grave problem (both present and future) of protecting marriage and the family through adequate family policies that really affect social life. The undifferentiated exaltation of individuals' freedom of choice, with no reference to a socially relevant value order, obeys a completely individualistic and private approach to marriage and the family that is blind to its objective social dimension. It must be kept in mind that procreation is the "genetic" principle of society, and that the children's upbringing is the first place for the transmission and cultivation of the social fabric as well as the essential nucleus of its structural configuration.

#### Recognition and equivalence of de facto unions discriminates against marriage

(16) Through public recognition of de facto unions, an asymmetrical juridical framework is established. Whereas society would take on obligations towards the partners in a de facto union, they in turn would not take on the essential obligations to society that are proper to marriage. Making them equivalent aggravates this situation because it privileges de facto unions with respect to marriages by exempting the former from fulfilling essential duties for society. In this way, a paradoxical disassociation is accepted that is ultimately detrimental to the institution of the family. With regard to the recent legislative attempts to make the family and de facto unions equivalent, including homosexual unions (it is good to keep in mind that their juridical recognition is the first step toward their equivalency), members of parliament should be reminded about their grave responsibility to oppose them, for "lawmakers, and in particular Catholic members of parliaments, should not favor this type of legislation with their vote because it is contrary to the common good and the truth about man and thus truly unjust".[18] These legal initiatives present all the characteristics of non-conformity to the natural law which makes them incompatible with the dignity of the law. As Saint Augustine says, "Non videtur esse lex, quae iusta non fuerit".[19] An ultimate foundation of the juridical system must be recognized.[20] This does not mean presuming to impose a given behavior "model" on the whole of society, but rather the social need for recognition, by the legal system, of the indispensable contribution of the family based on marriage to the common good. Wherever the family is in crisis, the society falters.

(17) The family has a right to be protected and promoted by society, as many Constitutions in force in States around the whole world recognize.[21] This is a recognition in justice of the essential function which the family based on marriage represents for society. A duty of society, which is not only moral but civil too, corresponds to this original right of the family. The right of the family based on marriage to be protected and promoted by society and the State must be recognized by laws. This is a question that affects the common good. With clear argumentation, Saint Thomas Aquinas rejects the idea that moral law and civil law can be in opposition: they are different but not in opposition; both are distinguished from one another, but they are not disassociated from one another; between them there is neither unanimity nor contradiction.[22]

As John Paul II stated: “It is important that all who are called to guide the destiny of nations recognize and strengthen the institution of marriage; in fact, marriage has a particular juridical status that recognizes the rights and duties of the spouses to one another and to their children, and families play an essential role in society, whose permanence they guarantee. The family fosters the socialization of the young and helps curb the phenomena of violence by transmitting values and the experience of brotherhood and solidarity which it allows to become a reality each day. In the search for justified solutions in modern society, the family cannot be put on the same level as mere associations or unions, and the latter cannot enjoy the particular rights exclusively connected with the protection of the conjugal commitment and the family based on marriage, a stable community of life and love, the result of the total and faithful gift of the spouses, open to life”. [23]

(18) Those who are involved in politics ought to be aware of the seriousness of this problem. In the West, current political activity often tends to privilege pragmatic aspects in general and the so-called “policy of balances” on very concrete matters, without entering into a discussion of principles that may endanger difficult and precarious compromises between parties, alliances and coalitions. But shouldn’t these balances be based on clear principles, fidelity to essential values, and clarity in the fundamental postulates? “ If there is no ultimate truth to guide and direct political activity, then ideas and convictions can easily be manipulated for reasons of power. As history demonstrates, a democracy without values turns easily into open or thinly disguised totalitarianism”. [24] The legislative function corresponds to political responsibility; in this sense, it is up to politicians to be vigilant (not only on the level of principles but also of applications) to avoid a breakdown, with serious present and future consequences, of the relationship between moral and civil law, and the defense of the educational and cultural value of the juridical system. [25] The most effective way to watch over the public interest does not consist in demagogic concessions to pressure groups that promote de facto unions, but rather the energetic and systematic promotion of organic family policies, which consider the family based on marriage as the center and motor of social policy, and which cover the extensive area of the rights of the family. [26] The Holy See has dedicated its attention to this aspect in the Charter of the Rights of the Family, [27] going beyond a merely welfare conception of the State.

Anthropological foundations of the difference between marriage and “de facto” unions

(19) Marriage is based on some well-defined anthropological foundations which distinguish it from other kinds of union and which—beyond the realm of concrete action and what is “factual”—root it in the very essence of the person of the woman or the man.

These presuppositions include: equality between men and women, for both are persons equally [28] (although in different ways); the complementary character of the sexes [29] from which comes their natural inclination toward the generation of children; the possibility to love one another precisely because they are sexually different and complementary in such a way that “this love is expressed and perfected uniquely through the acts proper to marriage”; [30] the possibility—of freedom—to set up a stable and definitive relationship, i.e., one that is due in justice; [31] and, lastly, the social dimension of the conjugal and family condition which

constitutes the first context of education and openness to society through family relations (which contribute to shaping the identity of the human person).[32]

(20) If the possibility is accepted of a specific love between a man and a woman, it is obvious that this love is inclined (in itself) toward intimacy, a certain exclusivity, the generation of offspring, and a joint life project. When this is what is wanted and in such a way that the other is given the ability to be entitled to this, then real self-giving and acceptance between the man and woman comes about which constitutes the conjugal communion. “Amor coniugalis, therefore, is not only or primarily a feeling, but essentially a commitment to the other person, a commitment made through a precise act of the will. It is this commitment which gives amor the quality of coniugalis. Once a commitment has been made and accepted through consent, love becomes conjugal and never loses this character”.[33] This, in the Western Christian historical tradition, is called marriage.

(21) Marriage is therefore a stable, joint project that comes from the free and total self-giving of fruitful conjugal love as something due in justice. Since an original social institution is founded (and which gives origin to society), the dimension of justice is inherent in conjugality itself. “They are free to celebrate marriage, after having chosen each other with equal freedom, but as soon as they perform this act, they establish a personal state in which love becomes something that is owed, entailing effects of a juridical nature as well”.[34] Other ways of living sexuality can exist—even against natural tendencies-, other forms of living together, other friendly relationships—whether based or not on the sexual difference-, and other ways of bringing children into the world. But what is specific about the family based on marriage is that it is the only institution that incorporates and unites all the elements mentioned at the same time and in an original way.

(22) Consequently, it seems necessary to stress the gravity and the irreplaceable character of some anthropological principles regarding the man-woman relationship, which are fundamental for human cohabitation, and all the more so for safeguarding the dignity of all persons. The central nucleus and the essential element of these principles is the conjugal love between two persons who have equal dignity but are different and complementary in their sexuality. It is the essence of marriage, as a natural and human reality, which is at stake, and it is the good of all society that is up for discussion. “As everyone knows, not only are the properties and ends of marriage called into question today, but even the value and the very usefulness of the institution. While avoiding undue generalizations, we cannot ignore, in this regard, the growing phenomenon of mere de facto unions (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 81), and the unrelenting public opinion campaigns to gain the dignity of marriage even for unions between persons of the same sex”.[35]

This is a basic principle: in order to be real and free conjugal love, love must be transformed into one that is due in justice through the free act of marital consent. The Pope concluded in this way: “In the light of these principles, we can identify and understand the essential difference between a mere de facto union—even though it claims to be based on love—and marriage, in which love is expressed in a commitment that is not only moral but rigorously juridical. The bond reciprocally assumed has a reinforcing effect in turn on the love from which it is derived, fostering its permanence to the advantage of the partners, the children and society itself”.[36]

Marriage, in fact, the foundation of the family, is not a “way of living sexuality as a couple”. If it were only this, it would be just one of many possible ways.[37] Nor is it simply the expression of a sentimental love between two persons: this characteristic is usually present in every loving friendship. Marriage is more than that: it is a union between a man and a woman, precisely as such, and in the totality of their male and female essence. This union can only be established through an act of the partners’ free will, but its specific content is determined by the structure of the human being, the woman and the man: mutual self-giving and the transmission of life. Such self-giving, in the whole complementary dimension of a woman and a man, together with the willingness to owe oneself in justice to the other, is called conjugality, and the partners in this way become spouses: “This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need”.[38]

Making homosexual relations equivalent to marriage is much more grave

(23) The truth about conjugal love also makes it possible to understand the serious social consequences of the institutionalization of homosexual relations: “We can also see how incongruous is the demand to grant ‘marital’ status to unions between persons of the same sex. It is opposed, first of all, by the objective impossibility of making the partnership fruitful through the transmission of life according to the plan inscribed by God in the very structure of the human being. Another obstacle is the absence of the conditions for that interpersonal complementarity between male and female willed by the Creator at both the physical-biological and the eminently psychological levels”.[39] Marriage cannot be reduced to a condition similar to that of a homosexual relationship: this is contrary to common sense.[40] In the case of homosexual relations, which demand to be considered *de facto* unions, the moral and juridical consequences take on special relevance.[41] “Lastly, ‘*de facto* unions’ between homosexuals are a deplorable distortion of what should be a communion of love and life between a man and a woman in a reciprocal gift open to life”.[42] However, the presumption to make these unions equivalent to “legal marriage”, as some recent initiatives attempt to do, is even more serious.[43] Furthermore, the attempts to legalize the adoption of children by homosexual couples adds an element of great danger to all the previous ones.[44] “The bond between two men or two women cannot constitute a real family and much less can the right be attributed to that union to adopt children without a family”.[45] To recall the social transcendence of the truth about conjugal love and consequently the grave error of recognizing or even making homosexual relations equivalent to marriage does not presume to discriminate against these persons in any way. It is the common good of society which requires the laws to recognize, favor and protect the marital union as the basis of the family which would be damaged in this way.[46]

#### IV – Justice and the Family as a Social Good

The family, a social good to be protected in justice

(24) Marriage and the family are a social good of the first order: “The family always expresses a new dimension of good for mankind, and it thus creates a new responsibility. We are speaking of the responsibility for that particular common good which includes the good of the person, of every member of the family community. While certainly a ‘difficult’ good (‘bonum arduum’), it is also an attractive one”.[47] It is certain that not all spouses nor all families really develop all the personal and social good possible. [48] As a result, society must do its part by making the means as accessible as possible that will facilitate the development of its values: “Every effort should be made so that the family will be recognized as the primordial and, in a certain sense ‘sovereign’ society! The ‘sovereignty’ of the family is essential for the good of society”.[49]

#### Objective social values to be fostered

(25) In this sense, marriage and the family constitute a good for society because they protect a precious good for the spouses themselves, for “the family, a natural society, exists prior to the State or any other community, and possesses inherent rights which are inalienable”.[50] On the one hand, the social dimension of being married persons postulates a principle of juridical security. Since becoming a wife or a husband pertains to the area of being—and not just of acting, the dignity of this new sign of personal identity has a right to public recognition which society should give, as the good it constitutes deserves.[51] Obviously the right order of society is aided when marriage and the family are formed as they truly are: a stable reality.[52] Moreover, the complete self-giving as a man and a woman in their potential fatherhood and motherhood, with the resulting union—that is also exclusive and permanent—between the parents and the children, expresses unconditional trust that is expressed in strength and enrichment for all.[53]

(26) On the one hand, the dignity of human persons requires their origin to be from parents joined in marriage, from the necessary intimate, integral, mutual and permanent union that comes from being spouses. This then is a good for the children. This is the only origin that adequately safeguards the principle of the children’s identity not only from the genetic or biological viewpoint, but also from the biographical and historical perspective.[54] On the other hand, marriage itself constitutes the most human and humanizing context for welcoming children, the context which most readily provides emotional security and guarantees greater unity and continuity in the process of social integration and education. “The union between a mother and a conceived child and the irreplaceable function of the father require the child to be welcomed into a family which will guarantee it if possible the presence of both parents. The specific contribution offered by them to the family, and through it, to the society, is worthy of great consideration”.[55] Furthermore, the continued sequence between conjugality, motherhood/fatherhood and kinship (filiation, fraternity, etc.) avoids many serious problems for society which come up precisely when the chain of the different elements is broken in such a way that each of them acts independently from the others.[56]

(27) Also for the other members of the family, the marriage union as a social reality, is a good. In fact, in the family that grows from the conjugal bond, not only are the new generations welcomed and taught to cooperate in what is proper to them, but also the previous generations (the

grandparents) have the opportunity to contribute to the common enrichment: to contribute their own experiences, to feel valid once more in their service, to confirm their full dignity as persons who are valued and loved for themselves and accepted in an inter-generational dialogue that is often fruitful. In fact, “the family is the place where different generations come together and help one another to grow in human wisdom and to harmonize the rights of individuals with other demands of social life”.[57] At the same time, elderly persons can look to the future with confidence and certainty knowing they are surrounded and taken care of by those whom they have taken care of for many years. Moreover, it is known that when the family really lives as such, the quality of the attention to the elderly cannot be substituted—at least for certain aspects—by the care provided by outside institutions, even though they are conscientious and have advanced technological means.[58]

(28) Other goods for the whole of society, which are derived from the conjugal communion as the essence of marriage and the origin of the family, can also be considered, such as: the principle of a citizen’s identification; the principle of the unitary character of kinship—which constitutes the origin of relations in society as well as their stability; the principle of the transmission of cultural goods and values; the principle of subsidiarity, because the disappearance of the family would oblige the State to substitute it in tasks which are its own by nature; the principle of economy also in legal matters, because when the family breaks down, the State must increase its interventions in order to solve problems directly which ought to remain and be solved in the private sphere, with great traumatic effects and high economic costs as well. To summarize, in addition to what has been mentioned, it must be remembered that “the family constitutes, much more than a mere juridical, social and economic unit, a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society”.[59] Moreover, far from contributing to a greater sphere of freedom, the breakdown of the family would leave the individual more and more vulnerable and defenseless before the power of the State and impoverish him by requiring a progressive juridical complexity.

Society and the State must protect and promote the family based on marriage

(29) To summarize, the human, social and material promotion of the family based on marriage, and the juridical protection of the elements that comprise it in its unitary character are not only a good for the members of the family considered individually, but also for the structure and appropriate functioning of the interpersonal relations, the balance of powers, the guarantees of freedom, the educational interests, the personalization of the citizens, and the distribution of functions between the different social institutions: “Consequently the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable”.[60] We cannot forget that if the crisis of the family has been, on certain occasions and for certain aspects, the cause of greater intervention by the State in its sphere, it is also certain that in many other cases and for many other aspects it has been the initiative of lawmakers that has facilitated or promoted the difficulties and breakdowns of many marriages and families. “The experience of different cultures throughout history has shown the need for society to recognize and defend the institution of the family; society, and in a particular manner the State and International Organizations, must protect the

family through measures of a political, economic, social and juridical character, which aim at consolidating the unity and stability of the family so that it can exercise its specific function”.[61]

Today more than ever, adequate attention becomes necessary—for the sake of the family and for society itself—to the current problems of marriage and the family, a special respect for its freedom, legislation that will protect its essential elements and not weigh on its free decisions regarding: women’s work that is not compatible with their situation as wives and mothers,[62] a “culture of success” which does not allow those who work to reconcile their professional competence with dedication to their family, [63] the decision to have the number of children which the spouses decide in conscience, [64] protection of the permanent character to which married couples legitimately aspire, [65] religious freedom and the dignity and equality of rights,[66] the principles and carrying out of the kind of education desired for their children, [67] fiscal treatment and other norms of a patrimonial nature (inheritance, housing, etc.), treatment of their legitimate autonomy, and respect and encouragement of their initiative in the social and political sphere, especially with regard to their own families. [68] From this comes the social need to distinguish phenomena that are different in their legal aspect and in their contribution to the common good, and to treat them accordingly as being different. “The institutional value of marriage should be upheld by the public authorities; the situation of non-married couples must not be placed on the same level as marriage duly contracted”.[69]

## V – Christian Marriage and de facto unions

### Christian marriage and social pluralism

(30) More intensely in recent times, the Church has repeatedly stressed the trust that is due to the human person, his freedom, dignity and values, and the hope that comes from God’s saving action in the world which helps overcome all weakness. At the same time, it has made its grave concern known regarding different attempts against the human person and his dignity and pointed out some ideological presuppositions typical of the so-called “post-modern” culture which make it difficult to understand and live the values required by the truth about the human person. “It is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional moral doctrine, on the basis of certain anthropological and ethical presuppositions. At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth”.[70]

When freedom is disconnected from truth, “any reference to common values and to a truth absolutely binding on everyone is lost, and social life ventures on to the shifting sands of complete relativism. At that point, everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining, even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life”.[71] This is also a warning that is surely applicable to the reality of marriage and the family, the sole source and fully human channel for the realization of that first right. There is “a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God’s plan for marriage and the

family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being".[72]

(31) In the same way, from the beginning the Christian community has held that the constitution of Christian marriage is a real sign of Christ's union with the Church. Marriage was elevated by Christ to a saving event in the new order set up in the economy of the Redemption: i.e., marriage is a sacrament of the New Covenant, [73] an essential aspect for understanding the content and importance of the marital community between baptized persons. The Magisterium of the Church has also pointed out clearly that "the sacrament of Matrimony has this specific element that distinguishes it from all the other sacraments: it is the sacrament of something that was part of the very economy of creation; it is the very conjugal covenant instituted by the Creator 'in the beginning'".[74]

In the context of a society that is often de-Christianized and removed from the values of the truth about the human person, it is now of interest to emphasize the content of "the matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life, [which] is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring",[75] as instituted by God "from the beginning", [76] in the natural order of Creation. A serene reflection is useful not only for faithful believers, but also for those who are now far from religious practice, who lack faith, or hold beliefs of a different kind: for every human person, men and women, members of a civil community and responsible for the common good. It is also useful to recall the nature of the family that originates in marriage, its ontological and not only historical and conjunctural character, over and above the changes in time, place and culture, and the dimension of justice that flows from its very essence.

The process of the family's secularization in the West

(32) At the beginning of the process of secularization of the matrimonial institution, the first and almost only thing that was secularized was the wedding or the way of celebrating marriage, at least in the Western countries with Catholic roots. For a certain period of time, both in the people's conscience and in the secular systems, the basic principles of marriage persisted, such as the precious value of the indissolubility of marriage and, in particular, the absolute indissolubility of sacramental marriage between baptized persons, ratified and consummated.[77] The widespread introduction of legislative systems which the Second Vatican Council described as "the divorce epidemic", gave rise to a progressive darkening in the social conscience regarding the value of what constituted a great conquest of humanity over the ages. The early Church did not succeed while in making sacred or Christianizing the Roman concept of marriage, it did restore this institution to its origins from creation, as explicitly willed by Jesus Christ. It is certain that in the conscience of the early Church it was already understood clearly that the natural essence of marriage had been conceived originally by God the Creator as a sign of God's love for his people, and when the fullness of time came, of Christ's love for his Church. But the first thing the Church did, guided by the Gospel and the explicit teachings of Christ, was to bring marriage back to its beginning, aware that "God himself is the author of marriage which he endowed with various goods and ends"[78]. Moreover, the Church was well aware that the importance of this natural institution has "a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the

human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole”[79]. Those who get married according to the established formalities (by the Church and the State, according to the cases), can and normally want to contract a real marriage. The inclination toward the conjugal union is innate in human persons, and the juridical aspect of the conjugal covenant and the origin of a real conjugal bond is based on this decision.

Marriage, the institution of conjugal love and other kinds of unions

(33) The natural reality is taken into consideration in the canonical laws of the Church.[80] Canonical law describes substantially the essence of marriage between baptized persons, both in its moment in fieri – the conjugal covenant – and as a permanent state in which the conjugal and family relations are situated. In this sense, the ecclesiastical jurisdiction over marriage is decisive and represents an authentic protection for family values. The basic principles of the essence of marriage with regard to conjugal love and its sacramental nature are not always sufficiently understood and respected.

(34) As to the first, love is often spoken about as the basis of marriage, a community of life and love, but its real condition as a conjugal institution is not always affirmed clearly by not including the dimension of justice proper to consent. Marriage is an institution. Failure to note this deficiency usually produces a grave misunderstanding between Christian marriage and de facto unions. Partners in de facto unions can also say that they are based on “love” (but a “love” described by the Second Vatican Council as “sic dicto libero”), and that they constitute a community of life and love, but they are substantially different from the “*communitas vitae et amoris coniugalis*” of marriage.[81]

(35) With regard to the basic principles related to the sacramentality of marriage, the question is more complex because the pastors of the Church have to consider the immense wealth of grace that gives dynamism to the sacramental essence of Christian marriage and its influence on the family relations derived from marriage. God wanted the conjugal covenant from the beginning, the marriage of Creation, to be a permanent sign of Christ’s union with the Church and thus a real sacrament of the New Covenant. The problem lies in understanding properly that this sacramentality is not something that is added or extrinsic to the natural essence of marriage, but that it is the same indissoluble marriage willed by the Creator that was elevated to a sacrament through the redeeming action of Christ, without this implying any “de-naturalization” of the reality. By not understanding the particular feature of this sacrament compared to the others, some misunderstandings can arise that obscure the notion of sacramental marriage. This is especially important in marriage preparation: the praiseworthy efforts to prepare the engaged to celebrate the sacrament can vanish if there is no clear understanding of what the absolutely indissoluble marriage is which they are about to contract. Baptized persons do not present themselves to the Church just to celebrate a feast with some special rites, but to contract a lifetime marriage which is a sacrament of the New Alliance. Through this sacrament they share in the mystery of the union of Christ and the Church, and they express their intimate and indissoluble union.[82]

## VI – Christian Guidelines

Basic approach to the problem: “At the beginning it was not that way”

(36) The Christian community is challenged by the phenomenon of de facto unions. The unions without any legal institutional bond –civil or religious—constitute an increasingly frequent phenomenon to which the pastoral action of the Church must pay attention.[83] Not only through reason, but also and above all through the “splendor of truth”, which has been given to them through faith, believers are capable of calling things by their own name: good, good and evil, evil. In the current context, which is highly relativist and tends to dissolve all differences, including essential ones between marriage and de facto unions, greater wisdom and more courageous freedom are needed to avoid errors or compromises, with the conviction that “the most dangerous crisis which can afflict man...[is] the confusion between good and evil, which makes it impossible to build up and to preserve the moral order of individuals and communities”.[84] When carrying out a specifically Christian reflection on the signs of the times before the apparent obscuring in the hearts of some of our contemporaries of the profound truth about human love, it is good to draw closer to the pure waters of the Gospel.

(37) “Some Pharisees came up to him and said, to test him, ‘May a man divorce his wife for any reason whatever?’ He replied, ‘Have you not read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and declared, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become as one’? Thus they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, let no man separate what God has joined.’ They said to him, ‘Then why did Moses command divorce and the promulgation of a divorce decree?’ ‘Became of your stubbornness Moses let you divorce your wives,’ he replied; ‘but at the beginning it was not that way’” (Mt 19:3-8). These words of the Lord are well known, like the reaction of the disciples: “If that is the case between man and wife, it is better not to marry” (Mt 19:10). This reaction was certainly framed in the prevailing mentality of the time, a mentality that broke with the Creator’s original plan.[85] The concession by Moses expressed the presence of sin which took on the form of a “duritia cordis”. Today, perhaps more than in other eras, this obstacle of the intelligence must be taken into consideration, the hardening of the will, the fixation of the passion, which is the hidden root of many of the factors of fragility that influence the present spread of de facto unions.

De facto unions, factors of fragility and sacramental grace

(38) The presence of the Church and of Christian marriage over the ages has made civil society capable of recognizing marriage in its original condition to which Christ alludes in his response. [86] The original condition of marriage and the difficulty of recognizing it and living it as an intimate truth in the depths of one’s being, “propter duritiam cordis”, always seems to be a current question. Marriage is a natural institution whose essential characteristics can be recognized by intelligence, over and above cultures.[87] This recognition of the truth about marriage is also of a moral nature.[88] However, the fact cannot be ignored that human nature, wounded by sin and redeemed by Christ, does not always succeed in recognizing clearly the

truths written by God in the human heart. Hence Christian witness in the world, the Church and its Magisterium have to be a living teaching and a testimony in the world.[89] In this context it is also important to stress in this context the real and proper need for grace so that married life can reach its true fullness.[90] Therefore, when making a pastoral discernment of the problem of de facto unions, it is important to consider human fragility and the importance of a truly ecclesial experience and catechesis which will guide toward a life of grace, prayer, the sacraments and in particular Reconciliation.

(39) Different elements must be distinguished among these factors of fragility that give rise to de facto unions characterized by what is called “free” love which neglects or excludes the bond characteristic of conjugal love. Moreover, as we said earlier, a distinction must be made between the de facto unions into which some consider themselves compelled by difficult situations, and the others which are sought by people who “scorn, rebel against or reject society, the institution of the family and the social and political order, or who are solely seeking pleasure”.[91] It is also necessary to consider those who are driven into de facto unions “by extreme ignorance or poverty, sometimes by a conditioning due to situations of real injustice, or by a certain psychological immaturity that makes them uncertain or afraid to enter into a stable and definitive union”.[92]

Ethical discernment, pastoral action and Christian engagement in political realities will thus have to take into consideration the many real situations included under the common term “de facto unions” as we said earlier.[93] Whatever the causes that give rise to these unions, they entail “serious pastoral problems, because of the grave religious and moral consequences that are derived from them (loss of the religious meaning of marriage seen in the light of God’s Covenant with his People, deprivation of the sacramental grace, serious scandal), as well as social consequences (destruction of the concept of family, lessening of the significance of fidelity, also toward society, possible psychological traumas in the children, and the reaffirmation of selfishness”).[94] For this reason, the Church is sensitive to the spread of non-matrimonial unions due to the moral and pastoral dimensions of the problem.

### Witness of Christian marriage

(40) The efforts to obtain legislation favorable to de facto unions in many countries with an ancient Christian tradition are of great concern to pastors and the faithful. Often it might seem that one does not know what answer to give to this phenomenon, and that the reaction is merely defensive, thus giving the impression that the Church only wants to maintain the status quo, as if the family based on marriage were simply the cultural model (a “traditional” model) of the Church that it wants to keep, despite the great transformations in our era.

In this regard, the positive aspects of conjugal love must be deepened so that it will be possible to return to inculturating the Gospel truth in a way similar to that of the Christians during the first centuries of our era. The privileged subject of this new evangelization of the family are Christian families because they, being the subjects of evangelization, are the first evangelizers of the “Good News” of “fair love”, [95] not only through their words, but above all through their personal witness. It is urgent to rediscover the social value of the wonder of conjugal love

because the phenomenon of de facto unions is not on the margin of the ideological factors that obscure it and which correspond to an erroneous conception of human sexuality and of the man-woman relationship. From this comes the transcendental importance of the life of grace in Christ of Christian marriages: “The Christian family too is part of this priestly people which is the Church. By means of the sacrament of marriage, in which it is rooted and from which it draws its nourishment, the Christian family is continuously vivified by the Lord Jesus and called and engaged by him in a dialogue with God through the sacraments, through the offering of one’s life, and through prayer. This is the priestly role which the Christian family can and ought to exercise in intimate communion with the whole Church, through the daily realities of married and family life. In this way the Christian family is called to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world”.[96]

(41) The very presence of Christian married couples in many milieus in society is a privileged way of showing contemporary people (whose subjectivity is destroyed to a good extent, who are exhausted in a vain search for “free” love, opposed to real conjugal love, through a multitude of fragmented experiences) that it is really possible for human beings to find themselves again and to help them to understand the reality of a fully realized subjectivity in marriage in Christ the Lord. Only in this kind of “clash” with reality can the nostalgia emerge for a homeland of which every person has an indelible memory. To the disillusioned men and women who ask themselves cynically, “Can anything good come from the human heart?”, it is necessary to be able to answer them: “Come and see our marriage, our family”. This can be a decisive departure point, a real witness whereby the Christian community, with God’s grace, will manifest God’s mercy toward men. It can be seen that the substantial influence exercised by faithful Christians in many milieus is very positive. By reason of a conscious choice of faith and life, in the midst of their contemporaries, they appear to be the ferment in the mass, the light in the midst of the darkness. Pastoral attention to their preparation for marriage and the family and follow-up in their married and family life is of fundamental importance for the life of the Church and the world.[97]

#### Adequate marriage preparation

(42) The Magisterium of the Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council, has referred repeatedly to the importance and the irreplaceability of marriage preparation in ordinary pastoral care. This preparation cannot be reduced to simple information about what marriage is for the Church; it has to be a real path of personal formation based on education in the faith and education in the virtues. The Pontifical Council for the Family has dealt with this important aspect of the Church’s pastoral care in the documents: *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality* (December 8, 1995), and *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (May 13, 1996).

(43) “Preparation for marriage, for married and family life, is of great importance for the good of the Church. In fact, the sacrament of Marriage has great value for the whole Christian community and, in the first place, for the spouses whose decision is such that it cannot be improvised or made hastily. In the past, this preparation could count on the support of society which recognized the values and benefits of marriage. Without any difficulties or doubts, the Church protected the sanctity of marriage with the awareness that this sacrament represented an ecclesial guarantee as the living cell of the People of God. At least in the communities that were

truly evangelized, the Church's support was solid, unitary and compact. In general, separations and marriage failures were rare, and divorce was considered a social 'plague' (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 47). Today, on the contrary, in many cases, we are witnessing an accentuated deterioration of the family and a certain corrosion of the values of marriage. In many nations, especially economically developed ones, the number of marriages has decreased. Marriage is usually contracted at a later age and the number of divorces and separations is increasing, even during the first years of married life. All this inevitably leads to a pastoral concern that comes up repeatedly: Are the persons contracting marriage really prepared for it? The problem of preparation for the sacrament of Marriage and the life that follows emerges as a great pastoral need, first for the sake of the spouses, for the whole Christian community and for society. Therefore, interest in, and initiatives for providing adequate and timely answers to preparation for the sacrament of Marriage are growing everywhere".[98]

(44) At present, the problem is not limited, as in other eras, to young people being unprepared for marriage. Due in part to a pessimistic anthropological vision that de-structures and breaks down subjectivity, many young people even doubt that it is possible to achieve real self-giving in marriage that will give rise to a faithful, fruitful and indissoluble bond. In some cases, this view results in the rejection of the institution of marriage as an illusory reality to which only persons with very special preparation can aspire. Hence the importance of Christian formation in a correct and realistic idea of freedom in relation to marriage as the ability to choose and direct oneself toward the good of self-giving in marriage.

#### Family catechesis

(45) In this sense, preventive action through family catechesis is very important. The witness of Christian families is irreplaceable both with regard to their own children and the society in which they live. Not only pastors must defend the family; the families themselves must demand respect for their rights and for their identity. The important place of family catecheses today in pastoral care of the family must be emphasized. In such catecheses, the family realities are tackled in an organic, complete and systematic way, subjected to the criterion of faith, and clarified by the Word of God interpreted in an ecclesial way, in fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church, by legitimate and competent pastors who will truly contribute, in a catechetical process, to deepening the saving truth about man. Efforts must be made to show the rationality and the credibility of the Gospel on marriage and the family by re-structuring the Church's educational system.[99] In this way, the explanation of marriage and the family based on a correct anthropological vision will not fail to surprise Christians themselves. They will discover that it is not only a question of faith and will find reasons for confirming this to themselves, acting through personal life witness, and developing a specifically lay apostolic mission.

#### Means of communication

(46) In our times, the crisis of family values and the concept of the family in State systems and in the means of transmitting culture—press, television, Internet, film, etc.—require a special effort to make family values present in the communications media. Consider, for example, the great influence of these media in the loss of social sensitivity with regard to situations such as adultery,

divorce or even de facto unions, as well as the pernicious deformation in many cases of the “values” (or rather the “non-values”) that the media sometimes present as normal possibilities in life. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that on some occasions, and despite the praiseworthy contribution of committed Christians who collaborate in these media, some programs and television series contribute to misinformation and the growth of religious ignorance rather than to religious formation. Even if these factors are not found among the fundamental elements that shape a culture, their influence is not negligible among the sociological factors to be kept in mind in pastoral care inspired by realistic criteria.

### Social commitment

(47) For many of our contemporaries whose subjectivity has been ideologically “demolished”, so to speak, marriage appears to be more or less unthinkable. For these persons, the reality of marriage has no meaning. In what way can the Church’s pastoral care be an event of salvation for them too? In this sense, the political and legislative commitment of Catholics who have responsibilities in this area is decisive. Laws constitute to a great extent the “ethos” of a people. With regard to this point, it seems very useful to make an appeal to overcome the temptation to be indifferent in the political-legislative area, and to stress the need for public witness to the dignity of the person. As we said earlier, making de facto unions equivalent to the family implies an alteration in the system for the common good of society, and this is detrimental to the institution of the family based on marriage. Therefore, it is an evil for persons, families and societies. What is “politically possible” and its evolution over time cannot be detached from the ultimate principles of truth about the human person which must inspire attitudes, concrete initiatives and future programs.[100] It also seems useful to criticize the “dogma” of the inseparable connection between democracy and ethical relativism that is at the basis of many legislative attempts to make de facto unions equivalent to the family.

(48) The problem of de facto unions constitutes a real challenge for Christians in their ability to demonstrate the rational aspect of the faith, the profound rationality of the Gospel of marriage and the family. A proclamation of the Gospel without this challenge to rationality (in the sense of an intimate correspondence between man’s desiderium naturale and the Gospel proclaimed by the Church) would be ineffective. For this reason, today more than in other eras, it is necessary to make known in believable terms the inner credibility of the truth about man which is at the basis of the institution of conjugal love. Different from what occurs with the other sacraments, marriage also pertains to the economy of Creation and is inscribed in the natural dynamics of humankind. Secondly, a renewed reflection is also necessary on the fundamental bases, the essential principles that inspire educational activities in the different milieus and institutions. What is the philosophy today of the educational institutions in the Church, and what is the way in which these principles flow into an appropriate education to marriage and the family as both fundamental and necessary nuclear structures for society itself?

### Pastoral care and closeness

(49) Understanding the existential problems and the choices of persons living in de facto unions is legitimate and, in some cases, a duty. Some of these situations should even arouse real and

proper compassion. Respect for the dignity of persons is not subject to discussion. However, understanding circumstances and respect for persons are not equivalent to a justification. On the contrary, in these circumstances, it is a matter of emphasizing that truth is an essential good of persons and a factor of authentic freedom, and that from the affirmation of truth an offense will not result, for “it is an outstanding manifestation of charity towards souls to omit nothing from the saving doctrine of Christ”.[101] On the other hand, “this must always be joined with tolerance and charity. Of this, the Lord himself in his conversation and dealings with men has left an example”.[102] Therefore, Christians must try to understand the personal, social, cultural and ideological reasons for the spread of de facto unions. It must be remembered that intelligent and discreet pastoral care can, on certain occasions, favor the “institutional” recovery of some of these unions. The persons who find themselves in these situations must be kept in mind in a detailed and prudent way in the ordinary pastoral care of the ecclesial community. This care implies nearness, attention to the related problems and difficulties, patient dialogue, and concrete assistance, especially with regard to the children. Prevention, also in this aspect of pastoral care, is a priority concern.

## Conclusion

(50) Over the ages, the wisdom of peoples, albeit with limitations, has substantially been capable of recognizing the essence and the fundamental and irreplaceable mission of the family based on marriage. The family is a necessary and indispensable good for the whole of society, and it has a real and proper right in justice to be recognized, protected and promoted by the whole of society. It is this whole of society that is damaged when this precious and necessary good of humanity is wounded in any way. Before the social phenomenon of de facto unions, and the postponing of conjugal love which this implies, society itself cannot remain indifferent. Merely erasing the problem through the false solution of granting them recognition and placing them on a public level similar to, or even equivalent to families based on marriage, is a detrimental comparison to marriage (which further damages this natural institution, that is so necessary today, rather than providing real family policies). Moreover, this implies a profound lack of recognition of the anthropological truth about the human love between a man and a woman, and its inseparable aspects of stable unity and openness to life. This lack of recognition is still more grave when the essential and very profound difference is ignored between conjugal love, that comes from the institution of marriage, and homosexual relationships. The “indifference” of public administrations toward this aspect is very similar to a kind of apathy with regard to the life or death of society, an indifference about its future projection or its degradation. If suitable remedies are not applied, this “neutrality” would lead to a serious breakdown of the social fabric and of the pedagogy of the future generations.

The under-evaluation of conjugal love and its intrinsic openness to life, with the instability of family life that this entails, is a social phenomenon that requires proper discernment by all those who feel committed to the good of the family, and in a very special way by Christians. This means first of all recognizing the real causes (ideological and economic) of the situation, and not giving in to demagogic pressures by lobbies that do not take the common good of society into

consideration. The Catholic Church, in following Jesus Christ, recognizes in the family and in conjugal love a gift of communion of the merciful God with humanity, a precious treasure of holiness and grace that shines in the midst of the world. Therefore, it invites those who are fighting for the cause of man to unite their efforts in promoting the family and its intimate source of life which is the conjugal union.

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## NOTES

[1] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, No. 47.

[2] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, No. 11; Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, No. 11.

[3] Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 2331-2400, 2514-2533; Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, December 8, 1995.

[4] JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 80.

[5] The humanizing and pastoral activity of the Church, in her preferential choice for the poor, has generally been directed in these countries at “regularizing” these unions through the celebration of marriage (or through validation or healing, according to the cases) in the ecclesial position of a commitment to the sanctification of Christian homes.

[6] Different constructionist theories today hold different conceptions about the way in which society—in their opinion—ought to change by adapting itself to the different “genders” (think, for example, of education, health, etc.). Some support three genders, others five, others seven, others a different number, according to different considerations.

[7] Both Marxism and structuralism have contributed to a different extent to the consolidation of this ideology of “gender” which has undergone various influences, such as the “sexual revolution”, with postulates such as those put forth by W. Reich (1897-1957) regarding the call to a “liberation” from all sexual discipline, or Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and his invitation to experience all kinds of sexual situations (in the sense of a sexual polymorphism or indifferently “heterosexual” orientation – i.e., the natural sexual orientation—or homosexual), detached from the family and from any natural end of differentiation between the sexes, as well as from any obstacle derived from procreational responsibility. A certain radical and extreme feminism, represented by the contributions of Margaret Sanger (1879-1966) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), cannot be put on the margin of this historical process of consolidation of an ideology. In this way, “heterosexuality” and monogamy no longer seem to be considered anything but one of the possible cases of sexual practice.

[8] This position has unhappily had a favorable reception in a good number of important international institutions, with the resulting damage to the very concept of family whose foundation is and must be marriage. Among these institutions, some organisms of the United Nations recently seem to support some of these theories, thereby avoiding the authentic meaning of article 16 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which indicates the family as “a natural and fundamental element of society”. Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *The Family and Human Rights*, 1999, No. 16.

[9] Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Politica* I, 9-10 (Bk 1253a).

[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2207.

[11] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris consortio*, No. 18.

[12] JOHN PAUL II, *Allocution during the General Audience of December 1, 1999*.

[13] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Constitution Gaudium et spes*, No. 47.

[14] “...beyond different schools of thought, there exists a body of knowledge which may be judged a kind of spiritual heritage of humanity. It is as if we had come upon an implicit philosophy, as a result of which all feel that they possess these principles, albeit in a general and unreflective way. Precisely because it is shared in some measure by all, this knowledge should serve as a kind of reference-point for the different philosophical schools. Once reason successfully intuits and formulates the first universal principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically, then it may be called right reason or, as the ancients called it, orth(o)-s logos, recta ratio”. JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, No. 4.

[15] Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Constitution Dei Verbum*, No. 10.

[16] “The preaching of Christ crucified and risen is the reef upon which the link between faith and philosophy can break up, but it is also the reef beyond which the two can set forth upon the boundless ocean of truth. Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two may meet”. JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Fides et ratio*, No. 23. “The Gospel of life is not for believers alone: it is for everyone. The issue of life and its defense and promotion is not a concern of Christians alone”. JOHN PAUL II, *Encyclical Evangelium vitae*, No. 101.

[17] JOHN PAUL II, *Allocution to the Forum of Catholic Associations of Italy*, June 27, 1998.

[18] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Statement on the Resolution by the European Parliament making de facto unions, including same sex unions, equal to the family*, March 17, 2000.

[19] ST. AUGUSTINE, *De libero arbitrio*, I,5,11.

[20] “Social life and its juridical apparatus require an ultimate foundation. If there is no other law than civil law, then we must admit that some value, including those for which men have fought and considered crucial steps in the slow march toward freedom, can be cancelled by a simple majority vote. Those who criticize moral law must close their eyes before this possibility, and when they promote laws—that go against the common good in its fundamental requirements—they must take all the consequences of their actions into consideration because they can drive the society in a dangerous direction”. Card. A. Sodano, Discourse during the Second Meeting of European Politicians and Lawmakers, organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family, Vatican City, October 22-24, 1998.

[21] In Europe, for instance, in the Constitution of Germany: “Marriage and the family have special protection in the State system” (Art. 6); Spain: “The public authorities assure the social, economic and juridical protection of the family” (Art. 39); Ireland: “The State recognizes the family as the primary and fundamental natural group of society and as a moral institution endowed with inalienable and permanent rights that are prior and superior to all positive law. For this reason, the State is committed to protect the constitution and the authority of the family as the necessary foundation of the society and as indispensable for the well-being of the Nation and the State” (Art. 41); Italy: “The Republic recognizes the rights of the family as a natural society based on marriage” (Art. 29); Poland: “Marriage, i.e., the union of a man and a woman, as well as the family, fatherhood and motherhood, must find protection and care in the Republic of Poland” (Art. 18); Portugal: “The family, as the fundamental element of society, is entitled to the protection of society and the State and the attainment of all the conditions that will permit the personal realization of its members” (Art. 67).

Also in Constitutions around the world: Argentina: “...the law will decree...the integral protection of the family” (Art. 14); Brazil: “The family, the basis of society, is the object of special protection by the State” (Art. 226); Chile: “The family is the fundamental nucleus of society...It is the State’s duty...to give protection to the people and to the family...” (Art. 1); People’s Republic of China: “The State protects marriage, the family, motherhood and children” (Art. 49); Colombia: “The State recognizes, with no discrimination, the primacy of the inalienable rights of the person and protects the family as the basic institution of society” (Art. 5); South Korea: “Marriage and family life are founded on the basis of individual dignity and equality between the sexes; the State will use all the means at its disposal to attain this end” (Art. 36); The Philippines: “The State recognizes the Filipino family as the foundation of the Nation. In accord with this, it must promote intensely solidarity, its active promotion, and its complete development. Marriage is an inviolable social institution; it is the foundation of the family and must be protected by the State” (Art. 15); Mexico: “...The Law...will protect the organization and the development of the family” (Art. 4); Peru: “The community and the State...also protect the family and promote marriage. They recognize them as the natural and fundamental institutions of society” (Art. 4); Rwanda: “The family, as the natural basis of the Rwandan people, will be protected by the State” (Art. 24).

[22] “Every law made by men has reason to be law in that it is derived from natural law. If, on the other hand, something is opposed to natural law, then it is not law but corruption of the law”. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Teologica*, I-II, q. 95, a.2.

[23] JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Second Meeting of European Politicians and Lawmakers, organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family, Vatican City, October 23, 1998.

[24] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, No. 46.

[25] “As politicians and legislators faithful to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we commit ourselves to promote and defend the rights of the family founded on marriage between a man and a woman. This must be done at all levels: local, regional, national and international. Only in this way can we be true servants of the common good, both in the national and international fields”. Conclusions of the Second Meeting of European Politicians and Lawmakers, organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family, Vatican City, October 22-24, 1998.

[26] “The family is the central nucleus of civil society. It certainly has an important economic role, which cannot be overlooked, because it constitutes the greatest human capital, but its mission encompasses many other tasks. It is above all a natural community of life, a community that is based on marriage and for this reason it has a cohesiveness that surpasses that of any other social community”. Final Declaration of the Third Meeting of Politicians and Lawmakers of America, Buenos Aires, August 3-5, 1999.

[27] Cf. Charter of the Rights of the Family, Preamble.

[28] JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, No. 6.

[29] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2333; JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, No. 8.

[30] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, No. 49.

[31] Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2332; JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, January 21, 1999.

[32] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, No. 7-8.

[33] JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, January 21, 1999.

[34] *Ibid.*

[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] “Marriage creates the juridical framework that fosters the stability of the family. It makes the renewal of the generations possible. It is not a simple contract or a private matter but rather it constitutes one of the fundamental structures of society which it keeps united in coherence”. Statement of the Permanent Council of the French Bishops’ Conference, regarding the legislative bill “Civil Pact of Solidarity”, September 17, 1998.

[38] JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 19.

[39] JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, January 2, 1999

[40] “There is no equivalence between the relationship of two persons of the same sex and the relationship formed by a man and a woman. Only the latter can be described as a couple because it implies sexual difference, the conjugal dimension, the ability to exercise fatherhood and motherhood. Obviously, homosexuality cannot represent this symbolic whole”. Statement by the Permanent Council of the French Bishops’ Conference regarding the legislative bill “Civil Pact of Solidarity”, September 17, 1998.

[41] With regard to the grave, intrinsic moral disorder, contrary to natural law, of homosexual acts, see: Catechism of the Catholic Church, Nos. 2357-2359; CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction *Persona Humana*, December 29, 1975; PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*, December 8, 1995, No. 104.

[42] JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Participants in the XIV General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, June 4, 1999; Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, June 19, 1994.

[43] Cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, Statement on the Resolution by the European Parliament making de facto unions, including same sex unions, equal to the family, March 17, 2000

[44] “It cannot be overlooked that, as some of its promoters acknowledge, this legislation constitutes a first step toward, for example, the adoption of children by persons living in a homosexual relation. We fear for the future as we deplore what has happened”. Statement by the Chairman of the French Bishops’ Conference after the promulgation of the “Civil Pact of Solidarity”, October 13, 1999.

[45] JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, February 20, 1994.

[46] Cf. Note of the Permanent Commission of the Spanish Bishops’ Conference (June 24, 1994) on the occasion of the Resolution of the European Parliament of February 8, 1994 on equal rights of homosexuals and lesbians.

[47] JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, No. 11.

[48] Ibid., No. 14.

[49] Ibid., No. 17.

[50] Charter of the Rights of the Family, Preamble, D.

[51] Ibid., Preamble passim and Art. 6.

[52] Ibid., Preamble B and I.

[53] Ibid., Preamble C and G.

[54] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families Gratissimam sane, No. 9-11.

[55] JOHN PAUL II, Allocution, December 26, 1999.

[56] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris consortio, No. 21 and Letter to Families Gratissimam sane, No. 13-15.

[57] Charter of the Rights of the Family, Preamble, F; Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris consortio, No. 21.

[58] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Evangelium vitae, Nos. 91, 94.

[59] Charter of the Rights of the Family, Preamble, E.

[60] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Evangelium vitae, No. 92.

[61] Charter of the Rights of the Family, Preamble, H-I.

[62] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris consortio, No. 23-24.

[63] Cf. Ibid., No. 25.

[64] Cf. Ibid., Nos. 28-35; Charter of the Rights of the Family, Art. 3.

[65] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris consortio, No. 20; Charter of the Rights of the Family, Art. 6.

[66] Cf. Charter of the Rights of the Family, Art 2, b and c; Art. 7.

[67] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, Familiaris consortio, No. 36-41; Charter of the Rights of the Family, Art. 5; JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families Gratissimam sane, No. 16.

[68] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, 42-48; Charter of the Rights of the Family, Art. 8-12.

[69] Charter of the Rights of the Family, Art. 1, c.

[70] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 4.

[71] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, No. 20; Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 19.

[72] JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 6; Cf. Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, No. 13.

[73] Cf. COUNCIL OF TRENT, Sessions VII and XXIV.

[74] JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 68.

[75] Code of Canon Law, Canon 1055, §1; Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1601.

[76] Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, No. 48-49.

[77] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Discourse to the Roman Rota, January 21, 2000.

[78] SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, No. 48.

[79] *Ibid.*

[80] Cf. Code of Canon Law and Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, 1983 and 1990 respectively.

[81] Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, No. 49.

[82] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 68.

[83] Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 81.

[84] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 93.

[85] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Allocution during the General Audience of September 5, 1979. With this Allocution, the Cycle of catechesis began known as the “Catechesis on Human Love”.

[86] “Christ does not accept the discussion on the level which his speakers try to introduce it; in a certain sense, he does not approve the dimension they try to give to the problem. He avoids becoming involved in juridical-legal controversies and instead makes reference twice to the ‘beginning’”. *Ibid.*

[87] “It must certainly be admitted that man always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that man is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in man which transcends those cultures. This ‘something’ is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that man does not become the prisoner of any of his cultures, but asserts his personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of his being”. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 53.

[88] Natural law “is none other than the light of the intelligence instilled in us by God. Thanks to this, we know what must be done and what must be avoided. God has given this light and this law in Creation”. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 35-53.

[89] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, No. 62-64.

[90] Through the grace of marriage, the spouses “help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children”. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 11. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 1641-1642.

[91] JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, No. 81.

[92] *Ibid.*

[93] Cf. above Nos. 4-8.

[94] *Ibid.*

[95] JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*, No. 20.

[96] JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, No. 55.

[97] Cf. *Ibid.*, No. 66.

[98] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, 1996, No. 1.

[99] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio*, No. 97.

[100] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Evangelium vitae*, No. 73.

[101] PAUL VI, Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, No. 29.

[102] *Ibid.*