



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM
FOR UNIVERSITY TEACHERS**

Friday, 25 June 2004

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the *European Symposium for University Teachers* which is taking place in the context of the International Year of the Family. You have been engaged in reflecting and comparing *the foundations, experiences and prospects of families in Europe*. I extend my cordial greeting to each one of you. In particular, I greet Cardinal Camillo Ruini, to whom I am grateful for his courteous words on your behalf.

I express my deep appreciation for the theme you have chosen: *Europe's future is staked on the family*. It can be said that the family mirrors society, hence, also the Europe that is under construction. The development of families is and will be the most important indicator of cultural and institutional development on the Continent. It is therefore particularly appropriate that universities, and especially Christian teachers, follow attentively the dynamics of families, fostering a responsible and conscious outlook in young people.

2. In the first millennium *the encounter between Roman law and the Christian message* brought about what one might call the *European model of the family* that subsequently spread on a wide scale in the Americas and in Oceania. The vicissitudes of this model coincide with the events of the so-called "Western" civilization itself. In fact, in the middle of the past century, in the socially and economically better-developed communities, phenomena symptomatic of a deep crisis surfaced with disruptive consequences that are visible to everyone today (cf. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 90). In the face of this crisis, the family has always been a *strong and cohesive element* and, despite being bitterly opposed, has remained the object of aspirations, desires, plans and yearning. The origin of this crisis is really cultural, to the point

that the *younger generations* today seem to be strongly *attracted by the ideal of the traditional family* but *are almost incapable of assuming responsibility for it in the right way*.

3. Thus, it is possible to comprehend the importance of a congress such as yours, which looks at the family institution in the perspective of its foundations - philosophical, juridical and theological - for a full interpretation of current experiences that are often problematic and sometimes dramatic, and to grasp the many perspectives that are unfolding in the context of a renewed family model.

The main question, however, is precisely this: can we still speak of a family model today? The Church is convinced that in the context of our time it is more necessary than ever *to reassert the institutions of marriage and the family as realities that derive from the wisdom of God's will* and reveal their full significance and value in his creative and saving plan (cf. *ibid.*; cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 48; Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, nn. 11-16). To this end, side by side with the strictly pastoral initiatives is the role of all who work in the *context of culture and scientific investigation*, where the method of dialogue and comparison between the different disciplines concerned with family topics becomes highly significant.

4. In dealing with the European context, it is this method that is inspiring you in the course of this current Symposium. I hope that your timely initiative will contribute to ensuring that in Europe, today and tomorrow, families can carry out satisfactorily the *role inherent in their most eminent dignity*. To this end, I assure you of my special remembrance in prayer and I invoke the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the model for every family.

I wish each one of you, dear friends, success in your work and a peaceful stay in Rome. I accompany this wish with my Blessing, which I extend to all your loved ones.