



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO CHIAVARI AND BRESCIA (ITALY)
(SEPTEMBER 18-20, 1998)

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY AND SCHOOL APOSTOLATES
IN THE CATHEDRAL**

Sunday, 20 September 1998

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Directors and Leaders of the Family and School Apostolates,

1. During my brief visit to your Church, my meeting with you is particularly significant and gives me great joy today as Brescia commemorates the centenary year of Paul VI's birth and rejoices in the beatification of Giuseppe Tovini, both distinguished sons of your land. They both offer a message precisely about the matters in which you are particularly involved, *promotion of the family and education of the young*.

The new blessed speaks to us by the example of his life. Indeed, he was an exemplary husband, the father of 10 children, who was able to make his family a true "domestic church", rich in prayer and communion. Then, in his civil role, he distinguished himself as a tireless leader of educational initiatives to imbue schools with Christian truth.

2. In a different role, *Paul VI* also deserves praise for these two noble causes. In his magisterium, both as Archbishop of Milan and as Pastor of the universal Church, he devoted a special place to the family. His concern for this matter was rooted in his own experience of a family marked by great sensitivity to relationships and deep spirituality.

The Church in Brescia could not but be influenced by these two figures. Therefore, she does well today to recall them with legitimate pride and to let them infuse new zeal into her pastoral activity, especially in the areas of school and the family.

Starting with the *family*, how can we not stress that we are dealing with a matter of fundamental and decisive

importance? This awareness requires great responsibility, especially if we consider that today, due to the rapid changes in mores and widespread ethical relativism, the family has become the object of destructive pressures which undermine its very foundations.

In this situation, the Church feels obliged to remind people of the cornerstones of family and marital ethics. She does so, not to impose a discipline “of her own”, but in the conviction that she is to remind consciences of a truth that everyone can discern within himself.

Let us reflect briefly again on this truth, which Bl. Tovini lived in such an exemplary way and the Servant of God Paul VI authoritatively explained, so that we can bear witness to it ever more zealously in our words and deeds.

3. Today it is more necessary than ever to regain the sense of *marriage* as a covenant of love, by which a man and woman publicly and permanently bind themselves to one another, for their mutual fulfilment and the responsible service to life. As such, *it has been inscribed in God's plan from the very beginning*. Jesus appeals precisely to this its primordial nature, in reaction to the permissiveness that had prevailed in the Law of Moses itself. In fact, when questioned about the legitimacy of divorce, he gave this solemn answer: “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female’. ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one’. So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mk 10:6-9).

These words of the Lord are certainly very demanding. But how can we deny that they best express the deep meaning of authentic conjugal love? In so far as it is *authentic*, such love cannot be reduced to a “temporary” decision left to changing circumstances or, worse still, moods. As *conjugal*, it therefore involves the couples' whole life, by respecting and integrating their specific masculinity and femininity.

Jesus' words prove to be demanding but true, and, if we take the viewpoint of children whose rights only his words can fully protect, by fostering their psycho-physical growth in a harmonious and serene atmosphere.

It is therefore important to educate the young generations to live love in an authentically human way. In its sexual dimension as well, it then becomes an element of that “spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1) to which St Paul refers in the passage just proclaimed. We must rediscover, dear brothers and sisters, the *beauty of marriage* lived according to God's plan, and we must work so that the value of this institution, which is fundamental and indispensable for human society, is reaffirmed in consciences, in culture and in the law itself.

4. It is equally urgent to help married couples understand the connection between their mutual self-giving and the *service to life*: a connection that belongs to the profound logic of love in its twofold dimension, unitive and fruitful, which is inscribed in the very biological and psychological structure of man and woman. Today, in remembering Paul VI, how could we fail to recall on this delicate and controversial subject the enlightening teaching he gave 30 years ago in the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*? There his primary objective was not to “forbid” something, but to extol the sublime mission which makes spouses God's co-workers in giving life to new beings. Giving life is a lofty task that should be performed generously and, as the Encyclical stresses, with that *sense of responsibility* which permits and can at times require the spacing of births, in accordance with criteria that take into careful consideration the good of the

couple, the family and the children themselves. However, while this responsible choice does not make couple's relations in their naturally infertile periods illicit, it does not justify the artificial separation of the unitive meaning from the procreative, since they are both, according to specific biological laws, inherent in the conjugal act. Man's control of his own body and, in particular, of his generative faculties as such — Paul VI forcefully reminds us — is not unlimited!

5. This teaching awaits capable heralds who can present all its anthropological richness to the men and women of today. Pastors should not be afraid to follow Paul VI's shining example and to imitate his courage in *swimming against the tide*. Lay people, in turn, should look to the many models of holiness that can inspire them. Today's beatification of Giuseppe Tovini is an encouragement especially for you Brescians to an even greater commitment and is, after all, in line with your entire tradition. In fact, you have clearly understood that God's plan for marriage cannot be merely proclaimed, but must be communicated through a *concrete educational programme* for young people, engaged couples, husbands and wives, and families. Therefore, use and develop the best experiences of your pastoral tradition! It was a keen insight which led to the foundation of the *Pro-Family Institute*, to provide substantial formation from adolescents to mature families.

The Teams of Our Lady and the New Families Movement have also proved to be effective and fruitful. Praise should also be given to the services offered by counselors of Christian inspiration and by the diocesan counseling centre for couples and families, as well as to the role played by the parents' associations involved in education and the school, and the willingness of various religious institutes to take responsibility for difficult family situations. The Provincial Forum of Family Associations, formed to foster and express the social and political role of the family itself, is very promising. And how can we forget the active solidarity shown by many associations to those families dealing with problems such as serious illness, handicaps or social hardships?

6. The Church and society in Brescia have so many resources! This commitment to the family will be more effective if it can take advantage of the close co-operation between all the educational agencies inspired by authentic human and Christian values. There is not enough time here to speak specifically about the *role of the school*. Leaving it to your own sensitivity, already so alert and active in this area, I will merely recall the importance of *school-family co-operation* at a time when the fragmentation of culture and the variety of messages spread by the mass media increasingly isolate the family and make it unequal to its educational task.

This issue concerns *every type of school*, starting with the *State* school, to the extent that it continues to be securely anchored to the moral values inscribed in the heart of every person, many of which are recalled in the Constitution which governs the life of the Italian people. At the same time, it is precisely the urgent need for school-family co-operation which presupposes a concrete recognition of the family's right, with appropriate assistance, to have the *possibility of choosing* the educational orientation and type of school most beneficial to the growth of its own children. The concerted effort made by Bl. Giuseppe Tovini to promote Christianity in State schools and to strengthen Catholic schools is a witness which has lost none of its timeliness. One need only mention his foundation of the review *Scuola italiana moderna*, which in over a century of existence — through the praiseworthy work of the "Editrice La Scuola" — has helped and continues to help a great many elementary school teachers in their educational duties.

7. So take courage, Church in Brescia! Take courage, dear family and school workers! Today your task has become more difficult, but it is still exalting and necessary. You are called to help build healthy, motivated personalities, deeply

reflective and capable of communion. Families in difficulty have a right to trust in your intervention and must be shown the affectionate and active concern of the whole ecclesial community. With your help, a great many men and women, young people and families will be able to discover the gift of faith and, with it, the joy of life.

May Our Lady of Grace, so dear to the spirituality of Brescians, obtain for you the divine help necessary for this work. May the memory of Paul VI and the example of Bl. Giuseppe Tovini fill your intentions with zeal.

I bless you all with affection.