

Eighth Pastoral Letter

The Family, Responsibility of Church and State

“Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church” (Eph 5:25)

Assumption 2005

INTRODUCTION

To our brother bishops, priests, deacons, men and women religious and all our faithful laypeople: “*Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (1 Tim 1:2)

1. The Catholic Church believes that the family exists for the well-being of the human person, of society and the Church. It is in fact a “*natural society*” that existed before the State and any other organised grouping. That is why it has peculiar, inviolable rights. Besides, it is not only a juridical, sociological or economic entity. It is primarily a community of love and fellowship, capable of transmitting a collection of cultural, social, moral and religious values; values essential for the growth and welfare of its members, as of all members of society. The family is in fact the “*sanctuary of life*,” the place where life is welcomed and protected against all aggression and in which it is able to enjoy authentic human growth.¹

The family is the **basic cell of society**, in which the human person is born into the life of the community. There husband and wife are called to give themselves to each other with love and children learn about the love of God and humane, moral values. Healthy, stable family relations are the basis of a rich affective life. They are the foundation of freedom, tranquillity and brotherhood in society. They teach individuals about communal living and sharing spiritual and material goods. The family is truly a precious community. If it is injured, a gaping wound opens up across the whole of society. It is enough to mention the pain of divorce and the serious harm it causes to parents and children. Parents then became acquainted with the bitter experience of solitude and abandonment and children are subject to the clash of parental quarrels, sometimes themselves becoming a means of exerting pressure and blackmail. We may also say that the family is the “*basic cell of the State*,” for the State acts like a parent to its citizens and protects people’s moral well-being. That is why it is proper for Church and public authorities to look after the family so that it and its members are sheltered from any influence contrary to natural and divine law.²

The family is a “*domestic Church*,” built on the sacrament of marriage. So it is the basic cell of the Church. It is a community of faith, hope and charity. In it is realised the communion between persons on the model of the Holy Trinity. It aims at selflessness, the gift of self and the unity of its members according to the model of the union between Christ and the Church. It is the first place of education in prayer. There the children of God persevere in prayer together as a Church. As domestic Church, it

1. Charter of Family Rights, Introduction, 5d ; Evangelium Vitae, 92; Centesimo Anno, 39.

2. Humanae Vitae, 23; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2206-2207 and 2385; Familiaris Consortio, 42.

participates in the life and mission of the Church of Christ and contributes to the building up of the Church of Christ and the edification of the Kingdom of God. It participates in the priesthood of Christ in its three dimensions: prophetic, a community proclaiming the Gospel; priestly, a community praying and remaining in dialogue with God; royal, a community in the service of man.³

2. The importance of the family in general, and of the Christian family in particular, the help it needs, and the necessity of protecting it from the dangers that threaten it, so as to allow it to be fulfilled and carry out its fundamental duties, have led the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs to focus its reflection on “*The family in the Middle East – The family, responsibility of State and Church,*” during its 13th Congress held in Cairo, 9-13 December 2003, in St. Stephen’s Residence, Maadi, hosted by H.B. Patriarch Stephanos II Cardinal Ghattas, Patriarch of Alexandria for the Coptic Catholics.

We are happy, brothers and sisters, to address to you this pastoral letter on the family. After an opening chapter on the identity and holiness of the Christian family, we shall discuss the difficulties encountered by the family in Middle Eastern countries in different spheres: economic, moral, means of communication, bioethics, religious education, marital communion, local legislation and tribunals and finally legislation and ways of thinking at an international level. We shall then speak of family pastoral care, needs and the directives and solutions proposed by the Council. This pastoral advice as a whole completes the triple ministry of bishops and priests: teaching, sanctifying and governing. It co-ordinates the activities of movements and organisations working for the family and life. The pastoral care of the family must become for us today a concrete, true and effective priority in order to respond to the call and love of Christ the Redeemer, “*sent... not to condemn; but that the world through him might be saved.*” (Jn. 3:17)⁴

CHAPTER ONE

THE IDENTITY AND HOLINESS OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

3. We believe that **God is love**. We also believe that everything that God has created, he created through love, in love and for love. All creation comes from God-love, bears the imprints of God in the depth of its being and is directed towards the realisation of its end, which is to return to God, the love and happiness of every being.

Man, in particular, created in the image of God, bears in his nature and in all his activity the distinctive marks of his origin and end. And it is insofar as he lives in conformity with what he carries in the depths of his being that he will be able to be fulfilled and happy. That is inscribed in his nature and is at the same time one of the constants of Revelation: God calls man to live in love, to go beyond himself through love and to be fulfilled for love. God calls man and at the same time gives him the necessary means to respond to his love.

3. Vatican II, Lumen Gentium, 11; Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2204-2205 and 2685; Familiaris Consortio, 21 et 49-64.

4. Humanae Vitae, 29.

In marriage, an institution both natural and divine, a human goes out of his individualism, goes towards the other, gives himself to the other and sacrifices himself for the other. Through love one is even ready to die for the other. Thus he satisfies the most profound longings of his nature and accomplishes the conditions for his happiness.

Like all human realities, marriage also has been wounded by original sin and by personal sin. Whilst being in principle such a sublime reality, it bears, more than anything else, the consequences of human and social wrongdoing. That is why **it is in need of redemption** and salvation.

Yet God has not given man up to sin. He has come to meet him. He has sent his Son, become man, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, born of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit into the setting of a family. He lived and worked in the context of a family. He attended marriages and blessed them. He purified marriage, brought it back to its original calling and raised it to the level of a sacrament, that is, he made of marriage a sign and instrument of sanctification, a source of blessings and a token of love for humanity and for the Church. The Church, especially in the Eastern tradition, has condensed its doctrine on the sacrament of marriage into an affirmation that we wish now to meditate upon with you: **marriage and the family are the sanctuary of love and life.**

4. They are **a sanctuary**. That is the sure teaching of the Church, based on reason and revelation. It opens up a broad array of spiritual and pastoral conclusions.

The first of these conclusions is that marriage is originally a good and holy institution, because God so willed it, instilled it in human nature, blessed it and raised it to the level of a sacrament. The family, for its part, founded upon marriage, comes from the holy love of God, and is the source of sanctification for all its members.

Over the course of centuries, the Church has firmly defended the goodness and sacredness of marriage and the family, against the heresies which saw in marriage "*the realm of evil*" and against the hedonist ideas that viewed the family as an encroachment upon freedom and a source of problems; in short, a restriction on hedonism.

Doubtless, marriage and the family have been affected by sin. Our everyday social experience teaches us how much values of life, love and family have been unfortunately degraded and shows the sad and dangerous deviations to which the family is exposed at every level, personal, familial and social. Despite these observations, which require realism and serious work to correct, sanctify and purify, we continue to repeat emphatically the faith of the Church: marriage and the family are fundamentally good and lived according to God's plan, they constitute a source of blessings and sanctification.

Marriage constitutes part of God's plan. That too, we shall never stop repeating. Marriage and the family are not an invention of man. They make up part of the natural vocation of every human being, in every society and age. In the incarnation God repaired what sin had marred, restored what he had planned from the first and raised it to a higher level. When the incarnate Word took flesh, he assumed in his incarnation all humanity. He linked himself to each and every person. Through this union, he saved, raised and sanctified marriage and the family.

Jesus himself did not marry. He chose celibacy and called for chastity "*for the Kingdom of God,*" not out of contempt for marriage, but as a greater love for the

fulfilment of the person and the calling that God addresses to him. Marriage remains an object of veneration and sanctification in the life of the Church. That is why we welcome with joy and gratitude, from the hands of the Lord and of the Church, all the new blessed ones and saints who were fathers and mothers of families. They are the finest witnesses to the sacredness of marriage and the family.

5. Marriage and the family are a sanctuary of love. Marriage is not, of course, a simple biological fact. Neither is it a simple social contract between a man and a woman. Being human, though coming from God who is love, and comprising the involvement of the whole person while leading the two partners to God, marriage is essentially love and a sanctuary of love. That love comprises all the constituent elements of the person: mind, heart, will, conscience, responsibility, body and even all the intrinsic and extrinsic ties of the person with society, time, space and culture. It is a total and all-embracing love, because it is based on the very nature of the person and not just on one of his characteristics or activities.

Saint Paul is so struck by the force and depth of this love that he presents marriage as a real sign, although often rather weak, of the love of Jesus Christ for his Church. (Ephesians 5:21-23)

Thus we understand why Jesus in the Gospel, and the Catholic Church in its long tradition, have defended and promoted the unity and indissolubility of Christian marriage.

Indeed, historically and especially today, as we shall see below, there have been many weaknesses and difficulties in the attitude of mind and in the life of many of our Christians, in being faithful to this total commitment of love. The Church, in its compassion, tries, in its pastoral care and ecclesiastical tribunals, to come to the aid of couples in difficulties. But it will never stop proclaiming the solidity, unity and indissolubility of Christian marriage based on love. In the same way, it also invites society to respect this store of irreplaceable human values.

6. A sanctuary of love and life. In the plan of God for the family, love and life are inseparable. True love has new life as its normal fruit. And procreation, this gift of God that is so wonderful and decisive for the future of humanity, takes place in the suitable setting of love that is the family based on marriage. Here then is the sole foundation of the family's function in relation to life: life is a sacred gift from God; it deserves being respected and welcomed; life in its conception and birth, as a very fragile, defenceless reality, demands a legal, social, medical and loving protection, that only the family can afford; and the new life, after birth, for its education, development and entry into society, also needs a context that the family alone can really ensure.

7. Marriage and the family are a part of the inheritance given by God to humanity: *“God created man in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. God blessed them and God said unto them, ‘Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.’”* (Gen. 1:27-28) He gave them laws not to limit their freedom, but to help them develop as individuals and societies. That is why marriage and the family are not just Christian institutions.⁵

God instituted marriage and endowed it with values and different goals. It is a community of life and love, established upon the covenant of the spouses, upon their

5. John Paul II, Speech to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (10 June 1988), 4.

irrevocable personal consent, through which they both mutually give themselves and are received. This covenant has as its objective the personal welfare of the couple and the welfare of human life through the procreation and education of children. In marriage and the family are ensured the continuity of the human race, and the personal progress and eternal destiny of each one of the family members, for the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family and of human society as a whole.⁶

Marriage, a covenant for the whole of life between husband and wife, through a bond between two persons and an exclusive love, is a good that is rooted in human nature. The Creator, from the beginning, “*made them male and female and said: For this cause shall a man leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh.*” (Mt. 19:4-5) So everything that Church and State do for the benefit of marriage and the family they do for the welfare of society itself and of all humanity.⁷ God, by raising marriage to the dignity of a sacrament, has endorsed the bond and granted it the nature of permanence, by his sanctifying grace that makes holy the two spouses and their love and by the state of grace which strengthens them. Thus they become in their conjugal life the image of the union between Christ with the Church. (cf. Eph. 5:23-32)⁸ Every canonically valid marriage, i.e. without lawful impediment and substantive lack of consent or canonical breach,⁹ is one of the seven sacraments of the Church.¹⁰

So marriage is a covenant, contract and sacrament in the canonical and theological senses. Our Eastern families have remained faithful to the meaning of marriage and their faithfulness is one of the reasons for the survival and persistence of our people.

8. Marriage is a covenant rooted in that of God with his people, which the Prophets describe through the image of a conjugal love that is both passionate and faithful. With this image, they prepared people’s consciousness to understand the unity and stability of marriage.¹¹ In the same way, the community of love between God and mankind, shown through the revelation and experience of faith among people, found its expression in the conjugal covenant between husband and wife. The essential idea of it all is: “*God loves his people, “expressed by the language of the spouses in the prophecy of Hosea: “And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.”* (Hosea 2:19-20) Sin, which goes against the conjugal covenant, becomes the image of the faithlessness of the people to their God, just as disobedience to the law becomes infidelity to his love. However, disobedience does not destroy God’s eternal faithfulness, for he loves his people even when they “*look to other gods.*” (Hosea 3:1) This communion between God and human beings finds its perfection in Jesus Christ, the husband and lover of mankind, who gave himself to it as saviour and took his body from it. He perfected the love of the new covenant by assuming human nature and sealed it with his blood poured

6. Gaudium et Spes, 48

7. Pontifical Council for Marriage, Preparation for Marriage, 7.

8. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, c. 778.2; *Humanae Vitae*, 8.

9. Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches, cc. 800-828.

10. *Ibid.*, c. 776, 2.

11. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 318.

out on the cross, for he “*loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.*” (Jn. 13:1)¹²

Through the conjugal covenant, the two spouses form a community of life and love that is life-long and irrevocable.¹³ Through it, they mutually help and sustain each other in their personal life, by reciprocal respect and perfecting. Each endeavours to ensure the happiness of the other. Both of them also dedicate themselves to the service of human life, which is the fruit of the mutual gift of self, through the procreation and education of children. In their community of love, they bear witness to the love of God poured out by the Holy Spirit into their hearts. And in this community of life and love, they are equal in their rights and duties.¹⁴

9. Marriage is a peculiar **contract**. Like any contract, it has three constituent elements: the capacity, free from any nullifying impediment, to enter a contract;¹⁵ conscious, freely-given consent, not invalidated by any defect,¹⁶ and the form of exchange of consent between spouses not invalidated by any juridical fault.¹⁷ However, it differs from other contracts in its objective. In other contracts, the two parties to the contract exchange external objects of this world. In marriage, they are exchanging their own persons. Each gives himself to the other and receives the other. The qualities of this reciprocal gift of self give the mutual right of the parties to the act ordained for procreation, in unity, faithfulness and exclusive ownership limited only to the two spouses. It is a matter then of a permanent and indissoluble bond, which is dissolved only by the death of one of the partners.¹⁸

The marriage contract, with its juridical effects, protects the life of the couple. It is the solid rock on which the family is built, guaranteeing its stability and permanence at every level.

10. Marriage is one of the seven **sacraments** of the Church, when it is a canonically valid contract.

Christ raised the conjugal covenant to the dignity of a sacrament and granted the spouses to share in his love for his bride the Church. (Eph. 5:25-32) He made them both into participants and an image of his love.¹⁹ So he made the Christian family into a “*domestic Church*,” “*the first living cell of society*”²⁰ and the “*temple of life*.”²¹

The sacrament of marriage gives husband and wife a peculiar grace which is the presence of the Holy Spirit in their life. This shapes them according to the model of the union of Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:23-33) and makes of the two one body: (Mt.

12. Familiaris Consortio, 514-515.

13. Gaudium et Spes, 48.

14. Code of Canons of Eastern Churches, cn. 776-777.

15. Ibid., nullifying impediments, cn. 800-812.

16. Ibid., defects of consent, cn. 818-826.

17. Ibid., canonical form, cn. 828.

18. Gaudium et Spes, 48.

19. Familiaris Consortio, 13.

20. Vatican II, Apostolicam Actuositatem, 11.

21. Evangelium Vitae, 92 et 94.

19:4-6) it is a **creative grace**. It sanctifies the spouses, purifies their love and strengthens their will to fulfil their conjugal duties; it makes them capable of consecrating themselves to one another and making each other happy: it is a **sanctifying grace**. It consoles them in trials; illumines them in dark moments; strengthens them in their weakness; teaches them truth and leads them towards it; it is an **active grace**, the grace of the married state.

11. The Apostolic Exhortation “*Familiaris Consortio*” presented the identity of the family founded on marriage as community of life and conjugal love. The family is not the product of culture, or evolution, or a form of communal living bound up with a given social system. It is a natural institution, established directly by God, before any canonical or political institution. The pope, in the Exhortation, invites the family to know itself: “*Family, become what you are.*” (Para. 17)

The Exhortation indicates four duties that help the family to be what it is: forming a community of persons; serving life through procreation and education; contributing to the advancement of society; and taking part in the life and mission of the Church, as a community believing in and propagating the Gospel, and as a community in dialogue with God and at the service of humanity.²²

12. God who wanted marriage and the family destined them, from the first moment of creation, to attain their perfection in Christ, through grace that heals the wound caused by sin and makes them again capable of understanding God’s plan and of realising it in a perfect way.²³ So they are a **way of holiness and personal salvation** for the spouses, parents and children. The Christian family, born of marriage, image of the covenant of love between Christ and his Church (Eph. 5:32) and sharing in this same love, reveals to everyone the active presence of the Saviour in the world and reflects the original nature of the Church, as much by its love, faithfulness, procreation and education as by the loving collaboration of all the members of the family.²⁴

All know how many husband and wives, parents and children, in our countries and other countries of the world, have lived their life as a couple and in the family in holiness. The Church has numbered among its saints those who have lived the heroic life of theological and natural virtues. The greatness of God has been manifest in them by the miracles they have wrought. That is why they have been beatified and canonised and presented to us as models of Christian life and holiness in their conjugal and family life. We mention in an annex to this letter some of these lay-people who have attained holiness in marriage and in different aspects of society.

22. *Familiaris Consortio*, 18-62.

23. *Ibid.*, 3.

24. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48 ; *Lumen Gentium*, 41.

CHAPTER TWO
DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY THE FAMILY
IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE MIDDLE EAST

13. During the 13th Congress of the CECP, the representatives of the Eastern Catholic Churches presented practical reports on the family in our countries: Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Holy Land. We can summarise them as follows.

In our countries, the family is suffering from **an acute economic crisis** that is the result of global and local circumstances. That has increased unemployment and poverty, because of wars that are happening in certain places, particularly in Palestine and Iraq, because of the rise in terrorism, abuses in appropriating the earth's resources and the lack of equity in their distribution. So the rich have become richer and the poor poorer. The economic crisis has shown itself through various privations among the majority of our families: living standards that are too low and unworthy of human beings, lack even of basic human rights, a situation that requires intervention by the State, which must place all its capabilities at the service of economic development and social progress and ensure public services for all its citizens and that in all regions.²⁵

This crisis has also driven some to have recourse to immoral means of earning money, through corruption, robbery, sex and drugs. Corruption is widespread, job opportunities are fewer and the doors of emigration have opened up, causing our faithful to go away and with them the vital force of our countries. All that has caused the dispersal of the family; separation of parents and children, the weakening of communion between its members, the absence of dialogue, neglect of children's education in the home and the growth of tensions in relationships because of anxieties, worries and instances of discouragement.

14. In our countries, the family is suffering from **moral deviations**, which are marring its aspect, violating its holiness and damaging its dignity. Although our societies are still relatively faithful to tradition, and young people are still surrounded by the family, the Church and various apostolic movements, a sexual liberalism has begun to be practised in secret, free living together is increasing, and the marriage customary among young people has begun to spread in some universities in some of our countries. Since they are surrounded by an atmosphere permeated by violence, abuse, and decadence in values and morality, and since the image of the responsible father no longer is offered as a model to imitate and there is a lack of authority in the home, several of our young people have gone astray and run after whatever is easy, without any moral or juridical restraint. They have turned to drugs and alcohol, though in different proportions depending on which country they live in. Drugs have found their way into schools and universities. Tourism, hotels and globalisation have increased this. It has terrible consequences: ruined health, inability to work and earn one's daily bread by legal means. It has cost parents and society huge sums to combat its effects and treat those who have been damaged by it. Among the phenomena of moral decadence, an imbalance in social relations must be mentioned, the preference given to personal

25. *Communio et Progressio*, 2.

interests at the expense of the common good, carpet-bagging, the exploitation of others and the fact that everything becomes the subject of bargaining. Consequent upon all that, unhealthy aberrations have found their way into daily behaviour, and instead of being rare exceptions, they have become the rule. All these deviations, contrary to moral law and to the teachings of the Gospel, have damaged the dignity of marriage; they have destroyed the idea of the family and deformed the beauty of love and conjugal fidelity.²⁶

15. The family has become the prey of destructive programmes on the media, broadcast by certain written or audio-visual means. Although these means are in themselves “*a gift of God*,”²⁷ as the Church says, a new common language among people and a culture that extends into all aspects of intellectual and social life, there is however a part of the media that is in the process of causing great harm to the family and its members. Foreign widely broadcast satellite channels, cable and news networks are a source both of cultural enrichment and of serious dangers directly threatening the Christian family and its values.²⁸ In fact, the promotion of violence and of illicit pleasure in films and noisy music, programmes advocating atheism and hostility to Christianity and the rites of certain sects that mimic Christian symbols and dogmas, constitute a great power of moral destruction. The same can be said of some Internet sites and email, with their supporting programmes. With all the capabilities for exchange that these means afford, they comprise also a danger for young people, when they use them without being aware of their attendant ills and without responsible supervision.²⁹

Destructive news programmes, from which the family is suffering in our countries, are weakening moral values, depraving minds by the propagation of sexual immorality, taking away love and compassion from people’s hearts through incitement to violence, and, by showing items on divorce and conjugal infidelity, are helping to dissolve marital ties. They have also a great influence on relations among young people, over the choice of their partner for life, on the peace and harmony of family life, on the relations between husband and wife, and on relations between parents and children.

16. The human person is sometimes also the victim of the negative use of biological research. Biological research constitutes the collection of efforts spent by science on improving the quality of human life. It comprises discoveries in the fields of natural and biological sciences, that make possible intervention in human life, or even in its very nature, throughout the whole length of a life, from its beginning, with *in vitro* fertilisation, right up to its end, with euthanasia and therapeutic obstinacy, and through other techniques besides, such as embryo selection, gene therapy, organ transplants and other such. When these discoveries are used contrary to divine or natural law and all ethical considerations (abortion, artificial contraception, all kinds of artificial fertility), they cause serious moral damage to the family.

A great number of married couples and family members in our countries have

26. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2390

27. John Paul II, Message for the 36th. World Communications Day (12.5.2002): Internet: a New Forum for Proclaiming the Gospel, 4.

28. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media; The Church and Internet; Ethics in Internet.

29. John Paul II, Message for the 36th. World Communications Day (12.5.2002), Internet: a New Forum for proclaiming the Gospel, 4.

recourse to some of these practices. Those who promote them exploit the general ignorance of people with regard to scientific and moral truths. For some doctors, they represent simply the opportunity to cash in on big material profits. The leaders in society or in the Church, for their part, remain inactive in this field. In the West, some of these practices have even been legalised: this is the case with abortion in all phases of embryonic life, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, experimentation on human life, on embryos, and human cloning.

The question of bioethics is the sociological question of the present day.³⁰ Pope John Paul II affirms in his letter *“The Gospel of Life”*: *“Just as a century ago it was the working classes which were oppressed in their fundamental rights, and the Church very courageously came to their defence by proclaiming the sacrosanct rights of the worker as a person, so now, when another category of persons is being oppressed in the fundamental right to life, the Church feels in duty bound to speak out with the same courage on behalf of those who have no voice. Hers is always the evangelical cry in defence of the world’s poor, those who are threatened and despised and whose human rights are violated... If, at the end of the last century, the Church could not be silent about the injustices of those times, still less can she be silent today.”*³¹

17. Religious ignorance, amongst a large number of our families, is another factor that weakens the values of conjugal and family life. It allows the infiltration of erroneous concepts on marriage, its objectives and characteristics. It allows practices contrary to divine and moral law, and ends by emptying faith of its content. The married couple and other members of the family fall easily under the influence of ideological currents propagated by certain sects spread widely throughout our countries. The practice of the sacraments is increasingly abandoned, especially the sacrament of Repentance and the Eucharist, bases of married and family life, that underpin the unity and sanctity of marriage, the communion of persons and the sharing of material and spiritual goods.

To guard against this grave ignorance, the Church invites Christians to receive spiritual training that goes with them from childhood up to engagement and marriage. A training that acquaints them with the principles necessary for Christian living, habituates them to practise the sacraments, set right their morals, resist the passions, and respect other people. A training that helps them grow and understand the dignity and sanctity of marriage, the role and importance of the family, the value of sex, of chastity within and outside of marriage, and responsible fatherhood and motherhood with regard to the procreation and education of children.³²

18. All the above-mentioned difficulties end by **destroying the marital bond**. Although our families still remain faithful to the stability of marriage and the unity of its members, we notice nowadays more and more cases of dissolution of the marital tie by separation, annulment or divorce. That causes spiritual, moral and material damage to the innocent party and produces an emotional and psychological shock that marks the life of the children, who become orphans while their parents are still alive. There must be then special pastoral care that starts with preparation for marriage in every sphere,

30. Card. Dionigi Tettamanzi, *Dizionario Bioetico*, p. 92.

31. *Evangelium Vitae*, 5.

32. *Familiaris Consortio*, 66; Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, 22.

spiritual, moral, psychological and social. Then there will have to be protection of the young couples and rallying round families in difficulty, so that they feel loved and cared for, and the necessary initiatives must be taken to come to their rescue and save them. The family is the basic cell of society; that is why taking care of the family is taking care of society itself.³³

CHAPTER THREE

THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE FAMILY IN LEGISLATION, JUDICIAL PRACTICES AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

19. **The Personal Statute**, in the Middle East and North Africa, protects marriage and the family in its identity and tradition. However, the family as such, just like its members, does not in fact enjoy all its rights in these countries. The causes are various and concern legislation and judicial practices. We mention particularly: discrimination and inequality between husband and wife, mixed marriages in which the Christian party loses many of his or her rights, changing religion or denomination with the aim of obtaining a divorce and of freeing oneself from legislation and Catholic tribunals. All that contributes to weakening family ties, by putting the family in a situation of suffering, unemployment and privation and thus it becomes one of the reasons inciting the whole family or some of its members to emigrate.

20. The Personal Statute was born in our countries from the political and religious concept, developed and adopted by Islam, of the "*absolute personalisation of law*" at the level of legislation and tribunals. According to this concept, each person has his religion and his legislation. Consequently, there are in any given country as many legislative systems as religions. Each "*ummah*" or religious community has its laws according to which litigious cases between its faithful are judged. This legislative autonomy is rounded off by judicial autonomy.

On this basis, Christians have had their particular legislation in the spiritual and temporal domains since the seventh century. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there appeared a unified legislation (*Nomocanon*) inside each Church: the legislation of Ibn al-Assal for the Coptic Church, Kitabu-l Huda for the Maronite Church, Ibn al-Ibri for the Jacobite Church or the Syrian Orthodox, Abedyashu' for the Nestorians, and legislative *Compendia* for both Melkite and Armenian Churches.

21. During the different Islamic periods, Christians have thus kept their legislative and judicial autonomy, in their civil and religious affairs, though in more or less broad terms. This autonomy was absolute in the time of the first caliphs (*Ar-Rashidin*, 632-656), and in the time of the Umayyads (656-750). Legislative and judicial competence began however to shrink during the Abbasid period (750-1258), in the framework of a system known under the title of personal, property, succession and penal legislation, with the judicial competences that accompanied that. In this system, the Muslim judge retained the capacity to judge, according to Muslim law, differences between non-Muslims belonging to different communities, as in the case of conflicts between Muslims and dhimmis, or conflicts of public order. The situation remained that way

33. *Familiaris Consortio*, 79 sq.

during the period of the Mamelukes (1253-1517). In the Ottoman period (1517-1920), there were the “*tanzimat*” with the aim of including non-Muslim communities within the nation (*the Ummah*). A series of imperial decrees, between 1839 and 1917, defined their personal statute. However, while justice for Muslims formed part of the system of State, non-Muslims continued to have a confessional legislative and judicial structure, but under State supervision that conferred on it its competency and ensured its enactment.

22. With the birth and independence of Arab States in the Middle East and in North Africa, in every country, official legislation was promulgated defining the personal statute. The Churches had their particular legislation and tribunals within the limits defined by the political power in each country. Then the laws of these countries evolved and started to restrict little by little the jurisdiction of Christian religious authorities in legislation and judicial practice, in the framework of the personal statute, so that Christians were no longer treated on equal terms with other citizens.³⁴ Only in Lebanon³⁵ has a complete personal statute remained until today ensuring equality among citizens, Muslims and Christians, before the law and before tribunals.

23. The principles adhered to in the judicial system of the above-mentioned countries undermine the rights of Christian spouses, and cause an imbalance in the equality of citizens by reason of religious discrimination. We mention by way of example the following instances:

a. If one of the Christian spouses embraces Islam, while the case is pending, he has the right, as a Muslim, to have recourse to Islamic law. If the Christian husband becomes Muslim, Islamic law is applied to his case in his disputes of personal status, whether the change took place before he went to court or during its session and even if the wife remains Christian that changes nothing. If, on the other hand, it is the wife who embraces Islam, she has the right to ask for divorce *according to the khol' law* recognized in law by the civil court that becomes competent due to differences of denomination or religion.

If one of the Christian spouses becomes Muslim after the competent Christian tribunal has given its verdict, on the question of separation or costs, the finding

34. In Egypt: see the Constitution; the two laws 461 and 462 of 21.9.1955 of the Ministry of Justice of the government of the Revolution; the civil law of 15 October 1949 on the subject of wills and inheritance; law no. 10 of the year 2000, commonly known under the name of the Khol' law. In Syria, see the Constitution of 31.1.1973; the law of the personal statute promulgated by decree no. 56 of 17.9.1953; law no. 98 of 15.11.1961. In Jordan: the Constitution of 1.1.1952; law of the Councils of non-Muslim religious communities of 1938; the personal statute of 1.12.1957, that abrogates the law of the rights of the family no. 97 of 1951 and other legislation; law of the National Council on the family, no. 27 of 2001. In Iraq: the Constitution of 27.7.1958; law no. 32 of 1947, which regulated the tribunals of the religious communities; the personal statute no. 188, promulgated on 31.12.1959, then modified by law no. 11, promulgated on 21.3.1963; law of the tribunals of 13.5.1950, applied by Christian tribunals; civil laws on the subject of inheritance, of the 'administration of the property of minors. In Tunisia: the Constitution; law of the personal statute, known under the name of “Al-Majallah,” promulgated successively in 12 volumes, on 13.8.1956, 19.6.1959 and 28.5.1964. In Algeria: the Constitution; law on the family of 9.6.1984 in four volumes. In Morocco: the Constitution; law of the statute, known under the name of “Mudawwanah” (written law), of 1957 and promulgated on 1.1.1958; this law was applied to Muslim and non-Muslim Moroccans and Jews from the time of the promulgation of the law of Moroccan nationality on 6.9.1958.

35. The Lebanese State defined the jurisdiction of the tribunals of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christian communities, and of the Jewish community by the law of 2.4.1951, that of the Druze tribunals by the law of 24.2.1948, and that of Muslim tribunals by the law of 16.7.1962.

no longer applies to him, for the jurisdiction passes to the Muslim tribunal that may decree divorce and annul the verdict already pronounced by the Christian tribunal. And any sentence from the Christian tribunal can no longer be implemented.

b. If the two spouses belong to two different denominations or religions, it is Muslim law which deals with their disputes.

c. If one of the two spouses, either husband or wife, is Muslim, the jurisdiction with regard to personal status falls to the Muslim tribunal.

d. If one of the two spouses is Muslim, the Christian spouse cannot inherit from him. If the Christian husband converts to Islam, his Christian wife loses her inheritance rights.

24. In the Lebanon, Christian and Muslim and other religious authorities can only exercise their judicial power over persons of their persuasion and of Lebanese nationality. Jurisdiction with respect to the marriage contract between Lebanese of different denominations falls to the husband's religious authority unless the two spouses agree in writing to make the contract according to the wife's religious authority. In any case, the marriage remains subject to the tribunals of the denomination where the wedding was celebrated. If there is one or more than one legal contract, jurisdiction belongs to the authority of the first contract. If only one of the contracts is legal, i.e. conforms to the demands of the law, the jurisdiction falls to the authority before which the contract was signed. In the case of a change of denomination or religion by one of the spouses, the jurisdiction remains with the authority before which the contract was signed. If both spouses change denomination or religion, the jurisdiction is transferred to the new religious authority on which they depend.

This Lebanese legislation bestows equality on Christians and Muslims in their personal statute, as far as legislation and tribunals are concerned. It is based on living together as defined by the Constitution of Lebanon and especially in article 9 which says: "*Freedom of conscience is absolute. By giving homage to the Most High, the State respects all denominations and guarantees and protects their free practice, on condition that they do not undermine public order. It guarantees equally to populations, no matter what the rite to which they belong, respect for their personal status and religious interests.*"

25. On the level of the international community, the family has had to face difficulties and obstacles from the part of certain organisations as happened in the international Congress on demography and development in Cairo on the occasion of the world year of the family in 1994. They wanted to negate the mission of the family, by insisting on the pretext of *the demographic explosion*. Although that pretext has been shown to be false, in the light of recent scientific research, the international community continues to support a world campaign for **population control**. Pope John Paul II said in his letter *Evangelium Vitae* (par. 12) that it was a matter there of "*war of the strong against the weak.*" So it is indeed. For this "*control*" uses means that do not respect the human person and his fundamental rights; it supports abortion, contraceptives, sterilisation and even infanticide.

The UN, which is an international authority for supporting actions and initiatives whose goal is maintaining peace and collaboration between peoples, by supporting and defending basic rights of the human person and the common good, must understand that among these rights and common good, the family occupies first place, for it is "*the*

*original, holy inheritance of humanity,” as the Pope says, and because it is the “natural and fundamental” constituent “of society.”*³⁶

26. The Roman Pontiff has more than once drawn attention to the impending danger of losing the original meaning of the family, because of the measures taken by the international community and the programmes that it supports and which are contrary to the ideals and moral values on which it is based. That weakens its sense of duty that requires it to find moral solutions to the problems of world order, such as demographic growth, old age in certain industrialised countries, the struggle against illness and the re-education of certain population groups.³⁷ The Church has always pointed out impending dangers to the family nowadays, the life and dignity of the human person, the juridical status of the embryo, the essential and principal role of the family in society and the place and significance of sexuality. On all that the Pope says: *“Without ceasing to denounce these threats in various circumstances (as in the speeches at the UN, UNESCO, FAO and elsewhere), the Church must look at them at the same time in the light of the truth received from God.”*³⁸

27. The European Parliament, by legalising same-sex marriage, is inventing new legislation for a new kind of family based on the union of homosexual persons, thus giving the value of an institution to abnormal practices, contrary to the plan of God, even if it is pretending, through this decision, to take up the defence of the weak who have homosexual inclinations and not make any discrimination against them. The Church is in agreement with defending the weak and refusing any discrimination, but it cannot morally accept the legalisation of homosexual practice. On the occasion of the year of the family,³⁹ Pope John Paul II had said: *“We all know that a human being may have weaknesses, but that does not mean that one must support and encourage these weaknesses, as the European Parliament has done.”*

The family, which is the union of a man and a woman involved in giving themselves to one another, open to the procreation of life, is not only a Christian value, but a value rooted in creation. The loss of this truth is not a denominational issue, but a danger threatening the whole of humanity. In fact, natural law, because it is inscribed by God in the human heart, precedes all positive law established by men, and is its criterion of truth.⁴⁰

28. The Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of John Paul II encourages families to *“be the first to take steps to see that the laws and institutions of the State not only do not offend but support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family.”*⁴¹ The pope reminded legislators and political leaders of the family’s values and social tasks. These must also be formulated in political speeches. Families have the right to demand that, as otherwise their primordial task could be considered as interference in government that might diminish its authority. For it is very simply a

36. Angelus of 17.4.1994; Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man, art. 16.3.

37. Discourse of John Paul II to the Directors General of the International Organisations of the UN of 18.10.1985 ; his Letter to the Heads of State and to the Secretary General of the UN of 19.3.1994.

38. Encyclical Dives in Misericordia, 2.

39. Angelus of 20.2.1994.

40. Angelus of 19.6.1994.

41. *Familiaris Consortio*, 44.

matter of the right of everyone to contribute to the public good, and in first place, to the good of the family and of life.⁴² That is why international organisations, for their part too, cannot limit their action, in the third millennium, merely to economic problems or the balance of power based on a situation of non-aggression between peoples.

29. The Charter of the Rights of the Family, in its preamble, draws attention to the fact that *“the rights, the fundamental needs, the well-being and the values of the family, even though they are progressively safeguarded in some cases, are often ignored and not rarely undermined by laws, institutions and socio-economic programmes.”* It stipulates that *“economic aid for the advancement of peoples must not be conditioned on acceptance of programmes of contraception, sterilisation or abortion.”* (Art. 3b) It emphasises also that *“the family has a right to assistance by society in the bearing and rearing of children. Those married couples who have a large family have a right to adequate aid and should not be subjected to discrimination.”* (Art. 3c)

CHAPTER FOUR

GUIDANCE AND SOLUTIONS

30. Faced with these difficulties that represent a great challenge for us all, we should like to set down in this letter a common plan for pastoral care of the family in our countries, in the light of the recommendations of our 13th. Congress held in Cairo and in the light of the principles and instructions proposed by the Church.

Economic conditions

Good economic conditions are basic constituents for bringing up a family with dignity, as befits all its members, especially the young generations. We affirm here the right of families to benefit from economic conditions that ensure a standard of living that allows them to flourish. They have the right to hold private property and acquire it through legal inheritance or transfer, without religious discrimination, as befits the promotion of stable family life.⁴³

A healthy economic life ensures the whole family’s fundamental natural rights in the areas of work, fair wages, suitable housing, health, treatment, teaching and education.⁴⁴ Work originates in human nature and enables people to carry out creative activity, fulfil themselves, earn their living and ensure their means of survival. It is a social necessity for the growth of the whole of society, its development and progress and for the promotion of social and distributive justice. Housing is the basis of the stability and security of the family. It protects its private and intimate character and its members find rest there after the fatigue and weight of the working-day. Health, protection against illness and infectious diseases, access to good medical treatment, teaching and education, are equally important building materials for family, social and national life.

42. Speech of Pope John Paul II to the participants at the 69th. Conference of the interparliamentary Union, on 18.9.1982.

43. The Charter of the Rights of the Family, art. 9a.

44. Ibidem, art. 10a, 11.

Church and State are invited, each in its own field and according to its own means, to alleviate the economic crisis and free families from its appalling social consequences. We invite our faithful and our institutions to intensify their efforts, to invest their money and energies in creating new job opportunities and take new initiatives of solidarity and co-operation in order to face up to life's difficulties in the areas of teaching, medical care and hospitals.

But it is primarily the State's duty to put an end to the economic crisis by stopping the waste of public money, corruption, social oppression and poverty. *"Those who accept involvement in public service, in political, economic and social life, have an imperative duty to subordinate their private or party interests to the national good... so as to guide the whole people to happiness, through the just conduct of the res publica.... The Lebanese... must strive to build a just and fair social and political system, respectful of persons and all constituent parties, so as to build together their common home."*⁴⁵

31. Spiritually and morally speaking, the family is the basic guarantee for keeping humane social values and for ensuring the upbringing that requires. No human society can be built without these values. The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council teach that *"the family is the place of origin and the most effective means for humanising and personalising society: it makes an original contribution in depth to building up the world, by making possible a life that is properly speaking human, in particular by guarding and transmitting virtues and values."*⁴⁶

So that the family may be able to avoid the moral deviations that threaten it, it is the duty of shepherds of souls to surround it with special care and stimulate conjugal and family spirituality, that infuses the whole of everyday life in all its activities with pure love and generous self-giving, so that it does not stray from moral family values. This spirituality that is rooted in the two sacraments of baptism and confirmation, is strengthened by repentance and nourished by the Eucharist. It is further complemented by family prayers.⁴⁷

The practice of the sacrament of reconciliation enables the spouses and all members of the family to understand through faith how *"sin contradicts not only the covenant with God, but also the covenant between husband and wife and the communion of the family, the married couple and the other members of the family are led to an encounter with God, who is "rich in mercy," who bestows on them His love which is more powerful than sin and who reconstructs and brings to perfection the marriage covenant and the family communion."*⁴⁸

"The Eucharistic Sacrifice, in fact, represents Christ's covenant of love with the Church, sealed with His blood on the Cross. In this sacrifice of the New and Eternal Covenant, Christian spouses encounter the source from which their own marriage covenant flows, is interiorly structured and continuously renewed. As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a fountain of charity. In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its "communion" and its "mission": by partaking in the Eucharistic bread, the different

45. A New Hope for Lebanon, 94.

46. Vatican II, Gaudium et Spes, 52; Familiaris Consortio, 43.

47. Pontifical Council for the Family, Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage, 41.

48. Familiaris Consortio, 58.

members of the Christian family become one body, which reveals and shares in the wider unity of the Church. Their sharing in the Body of Christ that is "given up" and in His Blood that is "shed" becomes a never-ending source of missionary and apostolic dynamism for the Christian family."⁴⁹

We hope that the year of the Eucharist that we are currently living through will be an opportunity to consolidate the bases of marriage and the family. We hope that the two Letters of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003) and *Mane nobiscum Domine* (7 October 2004) will be an inexhaustible well-spring for the spirituality of conjugal and family life.

Family prayer transforms daily life and every family activity into "*a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God through the mediation of Jesus Christ*," for its members participate in the priesthood of Christ in the sacraments of baptism and marriage. Family prayer is a prayer made in common, husband and wife together, parents and children. Family prayer has as its original content the life of the family itself, in all circumstances: joys and sorrows, hopes and sadness, births and anniversaries, parents' wedding anniversaries, departures, absences and returns, important and decisive choices, death of loved ones, etc. All these events must also become a favourable moment for thanksgiving, supplication and trusting abandonment into the hands of our common Father who is in heaven. They are the signs of the loving presence of God in the family's story.⁵⁰

32. Means of Communication exercise great influence over culture nowadays. They have become indispensable. So the family and young people must be taught to use them, with all their great potentialities for good for individuals and families, in contrast to those interests that often tend to forget or even sacrifice moral good, together with the welfare of children, young people and families. Through their great power, Means of Communication can exercise a beneficial influence. But they also have the capability of playing havoc with consciences and family life. It is therefore the duty of the State, the Church and leaders and employees in the field of Communications to work together to find better strategies for helping people to profit more successfully from their positive powers in favour of the family.

The family in fact has a basic right to use these media in a way, both free and protected, that shelters it from invasive images, representative of violence, sex and immorality, through aggressive programmes and immodest advertisements.⁵¹

Families do not have the right to give up their educative responsibility in this field. They do not have the right to fill their children's leisure time with opportunities for facile escapism, television, the Internet and other common advertising. It behoves the parents to take the trouble to obtain healthier ways for their children to amuse themselves, ones that are more useful and more formative from the physical, moral and spiritual point of view. They have the duty of teaching their children how to use means of communication moderately, critically and wisely, so as to form their conscience, guide them through the proposed programmes⁵² and give them the faculty of choosing.

49. Ibid., 57.

50. Ibid., 59.

51. Congress on the Rights of the Family and Means of Communication, Vatican, 2-4.6.1992.

52. Familiaris Consortio, 76.

Parents should keep in touch with those in charge of the various types of production and broadcasting, and let them know what the family requires and what can ensure its stability, equilibrium and happiness. For every attack on fundamental family values – whether through eroticism or violence or defence of divorce – is an attack on humans' real welfare.⁵³

The **pastors of the Church** should also take great care of all those who are involved in the area of means of communication: editors, writers, producers, directors, playwrights, newscasters, commentators and actors. Besides these professional capacities, they will ensure that they provide them with Christian training that enables them to make means of communication into positive tools for building up society, transmitting basic family values and protecting its members against any aggression from certain of these media.⁵⁴ On the other hand, all equally have the obligation to give financial support to the Christian media and to benefit from their programmes, such as the *Voix de la Charité*, *Télé-lumière* and *Noursat*, which contribute to the proclamation of salvation and evangelical values all over the country.

Since these means of communication are an important forum for new evangelisation, it is therefore necessary for seminarists, as well as lay-people involved in pastoral work to be initiated and receive the training required in this field.

In the area of Bioethics

33. The seriousness of the scientific experiments on human life and the human person itself that are happening without reference to divine Revelation or moral law, requires the Church to elucidate the theological and moral principles concerning the family, marriage and life. It is also the duty of priests and all pastors and guides of souls to mould the conscience of doctors and the faithful.

The numerous Church documents on the subject of moral questions in bioethics (in vitro fertilisation, contraceptive methods, sterilisation, prenatal testing, abortion, euthanasia and other matters), must be translated into Arabic and constitute part of the programme of centres of preparation for marriage and counselling centres for married couples and families. It is very important also to set up training centres in bioethics that offer health professionals, nurses and educationalists, a scientific and moral foundation that may help them fulfil their duty properly. It is also imperative, in co-ordination with the Holy See's systems and guidance, to prepare documents that may provide advice and opinions for legislators involved in preparing future legislation.

34. The Church summarises its position on the matter of bioethics in *The Charter of the Rights of the Family* as follows:

- a) *The spouses have the inalienable right to found a family and to decide on the spacing of births and the number of children to be born, taking into full consideration their duties towards themselves, their children already born, the family and society, in a just hierarchy of values and in accordance with the objective moral order which excludes recourse to contraception, sterilisation and abortion.*

53. Ibidem.

54. Charter of the Rights of the Family, art. 5f.

The activities of public authorities and private organisations which attempt in any way to limit the freedom of couples in deciding about their children constitute a grave offence against human dignity and justice. (Art 3.a)

b. Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. That is why abortion is a direct violation of the fundamental right to life of the human being. Respect of the dignity of the human being excludes all experimental manipulation or exploitation of the human embryo. All interventions on the genetic heritage of the human person that are not aimed at correcting anomalies constitute a violation of the right to bodily integrity and contradict the good of the family. (Art 4.a.b.c.)

Religious ignorance

35. Pastoral care for the family obliges pastors in the Church to increase the awareness of faith in all the faithful and to help them to ripen day by day the knowledge of Gospel truth. The function of the Church consists in bringing the Gospel, in the circumstances of life today, to families called “*to welcome and live out the plan of God for them.*” It is the duty of spouses and Christian parents to take care of their own spiritual training, as individuals or in groups, within the framework of initiatives taken by themselves or the Church, so as to be able, with the special grace received from the sacrament of marriage,⁵⁵ to elaborate an authentic evangelical discernment in the different situations in which they have to live their marital and family life. The Church wishes to provide for its children a religious and moral education, and wishes to do it above all through the family enabled by the gift of the state of grace that the sacrament of marriage provides for it. Responsible fatherhood and motherhood mean that the religious upbringing of children falls primarily to the parents, before any other accountable person.⁵⁶

Family pastoral care is based on the religious training of all, children, young people, adults and the elderly. Preparation for marriage in its three stages, remote, proximate and immediate⁵⁷ is a priority. It must also provide special care for couples and families in difficulty or in abnormal situations,⁵⁸ as indicated by the Apostolic Exhortation “*Familiaris Consortio.*”⁵⁹

To support **religious training**, all priests and consecrated persons must be involved in ensuring the necessary training for apostolic movements and organisations, especially those that concern the family and life. It is also up to the bishops to concern themselves with training those who carry out pastoral care of the family and ensure their moral, anthropological, psychological, biblical and sacramental training. Those who carry out pastoral care are the priests, religious men and women, lay-people and seminarists.

Pastoral care of the family has as its particular aim the preparation of parents for their mission as educators of their children, in the setting of “*the culture of love.*” It trains them to live according to truth and love and to fulfil themselves by giving

55. *Familiaris Consortio*, 4 et 5.

56. Letter to Families, 16 ; *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

57. *Ibidem*, 66; Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, 21-59.

58. *Familiaris Consortio*, 77-85.

59. *Ibidem*, 77-85.

themselves to each other. Education is an essential parental duty, because of its relation to the transmission of human life that is ensured through them. It is a fundamental duty compared with that of other agents of education, and it is a priority because of the special and intimate bond between parents and children. It is an indispensable and irreplaceable duty. That is why, it cannot be entrusted to others and no one can take it away from parents.⁶⁰ Parents are the first and chief educators of their children. They have the right to educate them according to their own moral and religious convictions and according to the cultural traditions of the family. In that capacity, they have the right freely to choose the school and other means of education and demand that their children not be forced to receive teaching contrary to their convictions, especially in the realm of sex education, which they have a duty to supervise in school, as in the other centres of education they have chosen. The parents bear the weight of responsibility for educating their children. Public authorities for their part must help them through the requisite public funds, so that parents are not directly or indirectly subjected to extra charges that might hinder or unduly limit their freedom of choice.⁶¹

Dissolution of the marital bond

36. To confront this difficulty, the pastoral care of the family requires action on three levels: 1. Encouraging centres of preparation for marriage and making preparation for proximate and immediate marriage for candidates for marriage; 2. Founding counselling and family advice centres to protect married couples and their families in their difficulties and work with ecclesiastical tribunals for reconciliation of couples and other family members. 3. Revising the *personal Statutes* in respect of expenditure, child care, visitation or custody. That presupposes that the judges are pastorally minded, and have perfect integrity and zeal for justice and equity tempered by charity.⁶²

CHAPTER FIVE

PRACTICAL WAYS OF EXERCISING PASTORAL

CARE OF THE FAMILY

37. Pastoral care of the family is a **priority** in the mission of the Church. The family is the stuff of society and in it young people's upbringing is realised. In the family, children are introduced from their earliest years to the presence of God and trust in his fatherly goodness. That is where Christian faith is transmitted from generation to generation. There too grow vocations to marriage, the priesthood and the consecrated life. Parents, through their life-style, witness to the beauty of living in community and self-giving, the model of Christian prayer and meditation on the Word of God.⁶³ That is why everyone should collaborate and co-ordinate efforts for better pastoral care of the family, according to the different cultural, sociological and political settings in which families in our Middle Eastern countries live. That is the responsibility of the vital

60. Ibidem, 36.

61. Charter of the Rights of the Family, 5.a,b,c

62. A New Hope for Lebanon, 47-48.

63. Ibidem, 46.

forces in our Church: eparchies, parishes, religious congregations and their institutions, universities, schools, organisations and movements for the family.

38. At the **level of the eparchy**, the bishop must create as a priority an **eparchial Commission for the family**, to help him plan and animate commissions at parish level. It will also be the link between the eparchy and the central commission for the family and life in each country.

Among other priorities, there must be created an **eparchial Centre for preparation for marriage**. The experience of different eparchies has shown that this centre's work constitutes a very important spiritual stage in the life of the engaged couple. It helps them form their characters as believers through the knowledge of Christian truths about marriage, love, the family and life. It strengthens the moral principles underlying their conjugal and family life, and helps them become aware of their responsibilities with regard to one another, the family, the Church and society. Indeed, it helps them discover the beauty and grandeur of their calling to the service of love and life.

The centre of preparation for marriage is also a place of meeting and dialogue with one's inner self, God and the Church. The meeting with one's inner self enables the engaged couple to take the decision to marry in full awareness of its meaning and after mature reflection, without having given way to improvised or hurried choosing. The meeting with God awakens in them the awareness of their vocation to marriage for the service of love and life. The encounter with the Church enables them to know the Church, mother and teacher (*Mater et Magistra*) which supports them in their future matrimonial and family life. It protects them, carries their anxieties with them, and sketches out for them their future road.

Preparation for marriage is not just limited to the spouses. It includes the Christian community and society as well. For the preparation of the engaged couple is targeted on a future family that is gaining a wealth of humane, spiritual, social and national values, and from that very fact is becoming an asset to society. By learning how to face up to difficulties in conjugal and family life and how to find the necessary solutions it spares society dramas and problems which could come from quarrels between husband and wife or from the dissolution of their matrimonial bond. The family is an inexhaustible wellspring for the humanisation of society. *"Parents give their new-born children their adult humanity, while the child, for its part, gives them the sweetness and newness of its humanity that it brings with it on coming into the world."*⁶⁴

39. **The programme of preparation for marriage**, in conformity with the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*,⁶⁵ is held over consecutive weekly sessions, and comprises: theology of marriage, as contract and sacrament; the morality of sexual life in marriage; responsible fatherhood and motherhood in the matter of the procreation of children and their upbringing and spacing of births with recourse to natural means, known under the name of the Billings method; conjugal chastity, the dignity of love and the matrimonial tie; the position of the Church on the subject of contraception, artificial fertilisation and abortion; the psychological states through which couples and the family

64. Letter to Families, 16.

65. *Familiaris Consortio*, 66.

pass and the ways of dealing with them; the responsibility of parents in the education of children inside the home and in collaboration with school, Church, society and means of communication; daily life of the family in its human and social aspects, and the economic and financial management of the home; the co-ordination between work and the presence of husband and wife in the family for the good of the couple and their children; and lastly, the rite of the marriage celebration, spiritual preparation, understanding its symbols, and good participation in the liturgy.

40. The Bishop will also create **an eparchial counselling and advice Centre** whose goal is to ensure spiritual and human protection to families in difficulty, so that they can recover their inner peace and normal life in the home, society and the Church. The centre cares for husband and wife who have difficulties in their conjugal life that adversely affect their life and happiness, and trouble the calm and peace of the family, or couples who have psychological difficulties that prevent communication between them, or problems of matrimonial violence or health, material difficulties, or legal disputes that make their common life difficult and threaten its stability.

The centre will strive to understand the needs and problems, and help couples and children find the best solutions, in collaboration with priests, experts, experienced and enthusiastic couples, and social workers.

This centre will create a network of relations and collaboration with social institutions and organisations concerned with the family, and with a number of doctors and expert volunteer psychoanalysts, so that they may be referred to for treatment, mediation or even for material assistance.

It should be indicated that this centre has a role in reconciliation between husband and wife in any quarrel and is to help them avoid tribunals that normally precede separation or annulment of marriage and the ensuing human dramas and spiritual and moral damage that threaten the life of the couple and their children. That is why we encourage close collaboration between this centre and the ecclesiastical tribunal.

41. **The parish priest** is a spiritual director, who has the mission of taking care of the couple and all the members of the family, of all ages and in all circumstances. He should create a **family Commission**, linked to the presbyteral Council. His function is to put into action the pastoral plan for the family and life, set up by the Bishop in collaboration with the eparchial Commission for the family. It transmits and makes known to the Bishop the spiritual and social reality of the family in the parish, so that he can carry out his pastoral plan. With the priest, he attempts to create a network of committed families, in fellowship with each other, in view of the spiritual and social mission to other families.

The priest encourages **family prayer**. Family prayer in fact helps Christian families grow stronger and grow as a domestic Church, and cell of society, and natural school for the development of spiritual, humane and social values. Family prayer is an ancient tradition in our countries. It has preserved faith. It has educated children in their personal dialogue with God, in the discovery of the mystery of his love, love of neighbour and the life and mission of the Church; it has helped families bear the trials and difficulties that God allows in the course of their life and read the signs of his

presence in the easy or difficult moments of marital life. Prayer indeed sanctifies the family in all its activities and hopes, joys and sorrows, worries and aspirations.⁶⁶

The priest must also link family prayer to the liturgical life of the parish. He helps it see in domestic prayers a preparation that invites the family to participate in liturgical life in general: sacraments, rites and blessings. He teaches its members to communicate in the communal prayers in the house of God that is the parish church. He will alert the families to the fact that prayer in the family does not take the place of parish community prayer in the context of the Eucharist, but that they must remain in organic connection with it.

In some of our parishes there exist **groups of families** who live their Christian life together: together, they hear the call of God to live their identity and mission in society, according to his saving plan for marriage and the family. They have as their aim to create an ecclesial and parish framework that procures for them what they require to deepen their training, grow in the knowledge and love of Christ, and be witness in society and participate in the life and mission of the Church. Thus this group of families can fulfil its vocation of holiness in the midst of the world.

The life of these groups is based on persistence in teaching, prayers, practice of the sacraments and the ministry of charity. They have a definite structure in the parish. They live their spiritual and active life under the guidance of the priest and Bishop. They also fulfil a role of co-ordination of gifts and activities in the framework of family pastoral care.

42. Different **organisations and apostolic movements** enrich the pastoral care of the family and life. They are initiatives awakened by the Holy Spirit in eparchies and parishes. They have and do contribute broadly to animation and renewal of the spirituality of marriage and the family. They help the Bishop and priest fulfil their mission in this regard. So it is vital to care for these organisations and movements with good spiritual guidance, advice and training that makes them capable of spiritual discernment. We would like to encourage all efforts made in this direction for the good of the family, and we can only praise the spirit of unity and ecclesial communion with which they act. A network of co-ordination and collaboration between the different organisations and movements should be created at eparchial and regional level, as a common support for the fulfilment of these goals and activities and to enable their insertion in the pastoral plan at diocesan and national level.

The main movements that exist in certain of our eparchies are the *New Families* in the framework of the *Focolari*, the *Teams of Our Lady* or *Confraternity of Mary* for Families, the *Brothers of Cana* in the framework of the *Chemin Neuf*, the *Renewal in the Holy Spirit*, an ecumenical apostolic movement, *Yes to life*, *Couples for Christ*, *You are my brother* and *Faith and Light*, two movements of a social nature for handicapped and others. All these movements play a big role in the pastoral care of the family.

43. The different **Orders** and **religious Congregations**, for their part, have many activities, initiatives and institutions for the good of the family and its members. They deserve all our esteem and gratitude. We thank God also for **Catholic schools** and the role that they play in the all-round basic education that they give to our young people. An education that takes into account family values: faith, prayer, love, sexuality, social relations, fellowship, collaboration, and the development of the individual and society.

66. Ibidem, 59.

We invite these schools to engage in a permanent collaboration with the family in order to ensure the well-rounded education of children. The Church also aims to work in closer collaboration with **universities and higher academic institutes**, where they exist, in order to pursue academic research on the family and life, with the goal of training experts to help the Church in different areas of pastoral care of the family.

CONCLUSION

44. The Congress of the Council of Eastern Catholic Patriarchs has recommended, among other things, creating in Lebanon for the Middle East a branch of the **John Paul II Institute for the study of Marriage and the Family**. This institute was created in Rome after the episcopal synod on the family, held in Rome from 26 September to 25 October 1980. It is mentioned in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* of John Paul II, of 22 November 1981. Its purpose is to provide theological, philosophical and scientific training about marriage, the family, and bioethics up to university level. It trains experts, priests, religious men and women and lay-people, who work in the realm of teaching and pastoral activity for the welfare of the family and life.

To this end, the Pontifical Institute of Rome, directly dependent of the Holy See, is trying to create branches outside Rome, on different continents.

45. The Congress recommended too the creation of a **Co-ordination Commission** between **Commissions for Families** in the different eparchies of the Middle East, dependent on the CECP; its purpose is to follow and co-ordinate initiatives in the realm of the family, and organise meetings for Christian families every three years, or any other regional initiative.

46. We conclude our Letter with a prayer:

O God from whom all paternity is derived on heaven and on earth, Father who art in heaven, thou life and love, we implore thee through Jesus Christ, thy Son born of a woman, and by the Holy Spirit, source of divine love, make every human family on this earth into a true temple of life and love.

O Christ, reign over our families and remain present in them, as thou wast present at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. Grant them light, joy and strength. Bless them that they may contribute to the building up of thy kingdom, a kingdom of holiness, justice, love and peace.

O Virgin Mary, mother of the Church, be a mother for all our families, so that every family may become, with thy help, a domestic Church, in which faith shines, love reigns and hope animates and enlivens.

Saint Joseph, guardian and father of the home in which Jesus grew up, tireless worker, who didst fulfil with great faithfulness the mission that God confided to thee, protect our families, illumine them and keep them from all evil.

Holy Family of Nazareth, who lived in silence and poverty, persecution and displacement, help our families faithfully to fulfil their daily responsibilities, to bear with faith and patience the fatigues and difficulties of life, to concern themselves generously in the needs of others, and accomplish God's will with joy. Support our families in their journey towards holiness, so that they may be a leaven of love, unity and faithfulness at the heart of the world.

We ask thee, O merciful God, at the intercession of the Holy Family, grant thy Church, among all nations of the world, to fulfil its mission in and through the family, and to harvest the fruits thereof, thou who art the way, the truth and the life, in the unity of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

+ **Stephanos II Ghattas**, Patriarch of Alexandria for the Coptic Catholics

+ **Nasrallah Boutros Cardinal Sfeir**, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East for the Maronites

+ **Gregorios III**, Patriarch of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and of Jerusalem, for the Melkite Greek Catholics

+ **Ignatius Peter VIII Abdel-Ahad**, Patriarch of Antioch for the Syrian Catholics

+ **Emmanuel III Delly**, Patriarch of Babylon for the Chaldeans

+ **Nerses Bedros XIX**, Patriarch of Cilicia for the Armenian Catholics

+ **Michael Sabbah**, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

Council of the Eastern Catholic Patriarchs

Feast of the Dormition, 15 August 2005

APPENDIX I
MEN AND WOMEN
WHO ATTAINED HOLINESS
IN MARRIED LIFE
AND DIFFERENT AREAS OF SOCIETY

1. **Saint Gianna Beretta Molla** (1922-1962), an Italian woman, wife, mother and paediatrician, canonised by Pope John Paul II, on 14 May 2004. The tenth of 13 children, married in 1955 to architect Pietro Molla, still alive today and who has been present at two ceremonies of beatification in 1994 and of canonisation in 2004. She gave birth to a son and two daughters between 1956 and 1959. At her fourth pregnancy with her daughter Gianna Emanuela, in 1961, her life was in danger from uterine cancer. She asked the doctor to save the life of her child and gave herself up to divine Providence and prayer. She said to the doctors: *“If you have to take a decision and choose between me and the baby, don’t hesitate: choose the baby; I insist on it. Save the life that is in me.”* The baby was born on 21 April 1962. A week later, the mother died repeating: *“Jesus, I love you.”* She was 39. She had lived in holiness since her childhood, from the time of her first communion at 5 years old. She received a deeply Christian upbringing in her family. While young, she became involved in Catholic Action; during her time at university, then while she was doctor and wife, she persevered in receiving the two sacraments of reconciliation and the Eucharist. She devoted a great deal of time to apostolic activities and to treating free of charge sick people in different clinics and hospitals.

2. The blessed couple, **Luigi Beltrami Quattrocchi** (1880-1951) and **Maria Corsini** (1884-1965), Italians, beatified by John Paul II, on 21 October 2001. They are the first husband and wife to be beatified together. They had an exemplary life as husband and wife and parents. They were very attached to the sanctuary of *“Our Lady of Divine Love”* in Rome. During the Second World War, Maria made a pilgrimage to the sanctuary and confided her four children to the Virgin. In fact they were delivered by a miracle during the war. Luigi was a lawyer and his wife, Maria, a writer. They married in Rome in 1905; they had four children: two boys and two girls between 1906 and 1914. All entered upon the religious and priestly life, incited by the family atmosphere that was so full of holiness, prayer and devotion to the Sacred Heart. Every day they went to mass in the basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. They took part in the apostolic movement *“Christian Awakening,”* and in the movement *“For a better world.”* The wife became a volunteer nurse in the Red Cross, a catechist for women in the parish, where she organised sessions of preparation for marriage. She contributed to the foundation of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart and was a member of the Central Committee of the Union of Italian Catholic Women. The conjugal and family life of the couple was a road to sanctity and a journey of love towards God. Holiness consists of loving and love is possible for all; that is why all are invited to holiness.⁶⁷

3. Blessed **Frédéric Ozanam** (1813-1853), beatified by John Paul II on the occasion of the World Youth Days in Paris (21-24 August 1998). *“Apostle of love,*

67. Gaudium et Spes, ch.V, Universal Vocation to Holiness.

model husband and father, a great Catholic layperson of the nineteenth century,” with five other companions, he founded the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (1833) that he wanted to be a “*a new form of lay apostolate,*” for he said, “*Christianity has a role in building up a just and humane society that lives out social love for the poor.*” A specialist in law and literature at the Sorbonne, he was the spokesman for Catholic renewal. He petitioned for the “*Conférences de Notre Dame*” held at Notre Dame de Paris, inaugurated by the celebrated preacher Lacordaire. He died at 40, in the presence of his wife and daughter.

4. Blessed **Charles of Austria** (1880-1922), last emperor and king of Austria, beatified by John Paul II, on 3 November 2004. King and father of a family, he wished to put himself at the service of God’s will. His faith in God was the criterion of his responsibilities and guide for living.

5. Saint **Thomas More** (1478-1535), canonised by John Paul II and declared heavenly patron of government leaders and politicians, on 31 November 2000, for his Christian life as husband, father and exemplary statesman. He defended the rights of moral conscience and the complete co-ordination between the two systems, natural and supernatural, action and faith. He was the chief adviser, the greatest friend of King Henry VIII and the chancellor. Accused of high treason, he was condemned to death by the king, on 6 July 1535, because he refused to submit the Church of England to the authority of the King, who had separated from Rome and because he did not approve the declaration of annulment of marriage of the King with Queen Catherine of Aragon, or the King’s second marriage to Anne Boleyn. Thomas More was married; he had four children, three girls and a boy, as well as an adopted daughter from a poor background. He married twice; his first wife died young while the children were small. He was entirely obedient to God, to truth and the voice of conscience and strove to live in a way faithful to his human dignity. Before laying his head on the block, he said, in public and to the king: “*I die the king’s good servant, but God’s first.*”

6. *The Church is now studying the case for beatification of two politicians, who were married and fathers of families.* The first, an Italian, is that of **Alcide De Gasperi** (1881-1954), prime minister, a humble, loyal Christian, a perfect witness to his faith in his private and public life. He understood how to combine the virtues of a religious life and a civil life and place them at the service of his political involvement. He wrote one day to his wife Francesca: “*There are men of prey, men of authority and men of faith. I would like to be remembered in this last category.*” The second, **Robert Schuman**, a Frenchman (1886-1963), prime minister and minister of finance and latterly head of the European Parliament in Strasbourg with the title of “*father of Europe,*” a committed Christian for a new Christian Europe, he was able to unite, with his friend De Gasperi Christian involvement and self-denial in political engagement.

7. *Among the saints, there are also widows or mothers who have lost their children or husbands and who thereupon took up the religious life.*

- Blessed **Paola Elisabetta Cerioli** (1816-1865), from the North of Italy, married and mother of four was beatified by John Paul II on 16 May 2004. Widow at the age of 38, she had lost three of her children while they were very young and the fourth when he was 16. On his death bed, her son said to her: “*Don’t cry, mother... because God will give you other children.*” After having prayed, sought advice and after having suffered and drunk the cup of bitterness to the dregs, she opened up the house she had inherited

from her husband, and began to spend her wealth in the service of the sick and needy. One day when she was meditating on the words of her child in front of the image of Our Lady of Sorrows, she grasped the prophetic meaning of the words that were fulfilled in the holy family of Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph contributed so wonderfully to the saving plan of the Father, through their universal spiritual maternity and paternity. She began taking care of abandoned children, preparing a future for those who lacked one, because they had no family. With five women companions, she founded the society "*Sisters of the Holy Family*." She founded orphanages for abandoned children, and hospitals and schools. She organised catechetical sessions, spiritual retreats and summer camps. She died on 24 December 1865, at the age of 49.

- Saint **Rita of Cascia** (1381-1457), canonised only in 1900. Christian people all over the world venerate her. She was sanctified in her married and family life as wife, mother and widow and having lost her children, then in her religious life. Renowned for her miracles, she is called the saint "*of impossible cases*." Her husband was killed, when she was twenty years old. Her two children died very young. She asked God to grant her the strength to forgive as he himself forgave on the cross.

8. *We mention also the children and young people who walked in the way of sanctity, thanks to the Christian education received in the family.*

Blessed **Alberto Marvelli** (1918-1946), beatified by John Paul II, on 5 September, 2004. Brought up in a family of six children, involved in Catholic Action, then the Christian Democratic Party, he was elected to membership of Rimini town council. He served charity during the Second World War. His attitude was inspired by his faith. Convinced of the necessity of living in a perfect way, as a son of God in history, he made daily attendance at mass the spring of his ecclesial, social and political action. He died in a road accident aged 28.

- The Blessed **Pina Suriano** (1915-1950), beatified by John Paul II, on 5 September 2004. Brought up in a Christian family, she received a good religious and moral upbringing. She became involved in Catholic Action. She had in her heart a burning and faithful love for Christ. She wrote one day: "*I only live for Jesus. Jesus, grant me to be more and more thine. Jesus, I want to live and die with thee and for thee.*" She finally took the decision to offer her young life to God, especially for the sanctification and faithfulness of priests. She died of a heart attack at 35.

- Saint **Giuseppe Moscati** (1880-1927), canonised by John Paul II. He was a doctor and head of faculty in a hospital in Naples. Brought up in a Christian family, while still a student at university, he underwent salutary suffering on the death of his father and the death of his 32 year-old brother. He lived his vocation to sanctity as a layman. John Paul II said of him: "*This saint calls all lay-people to take into consideration their vocation to holiness as children of the Church.*"

- Blessed **Pier Giorgio Frassati** (1901-1925), architect, committed Christian and militant politician, was beatified by John Paul II, on 20 May 1990. His father was a member of the Italian Senate, founder of the newspaper *La Stampa* and Italian ambassador to Berlin. At the age of 13, he began taking communion daily, and throughout his whole life he fed every day on Gospel reading and Eucharist. He combined prayer and action. He became involved in the Italian Popular party and became militant. He devoted his free time to the service of the poor and needy, as a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. He died at the age of 24. His message

was a call to reinforce the link between faith and action on all levels and to proclaim and defend the truth.

- Saint **Maria Goretti** (1890-1902), canonised by Pius XII on 24 June 1950, in St. Peter's Square in Rome, in front of a crowd of 50.000 people, among whom was a man of 67, Alessandro Serenelli, who at the age of 20, had killed Maria Goretti when she was just 12, after he had tried to rape her, while she defended herself shouting: "*God doesn't like that. You will go to hell.*" This saint is a martyr to purity that she defended at the cost of her life. God loved her and made her a model for the whole Church.

- Saint **Domenico Savio** (1842-1857), canonised by Pius XII in 1954. He became a saint through faithfulness to his promise made at his first communion at seven years old: "*Death rather than sin.*" In October 1854, having become a student of Don Bosco, he revealed to him his secret: "*I want to become a saint, and quickly.*" Don Bosco gave him a secret: "*Joy, study and prayer. Do everything for Christ so that you become a man. Do good, help your friends, even if it is costly for you. That's holiness.*" Domenico heard these words gladly at the age of 12. Two months later, at the feast of the promulgation of the Immaculate Conception, on 8 December 1854, he said a prayer to the Virgin: "*O Mary, I give thee my heart. Take it for thine own. Jesus, Mary, be my friends. Grant me to die rather than commit sin.*" Domenico died at 14, murmuring to his father, after having received the Anointing of the sick: "*Goodbye, daddy. What I can see is so beautiful.*"

APPENDIX II

APOSTOLIC MOVEMENTS FOR THE FAMILY

1. *New Families*

A movement of *Focolari* inspiration: it deepens its spirituality of communion and life according to the Gospel and tries to live it in the bosom of the family, so as to witness in its surroundings and contribute to the realisation of the prayer of Christ: "*That they may be one as we are.*" (Jn. 17:21)

It tries to live the Gospel to the letter and put it into practice in the daily life of its members so that they grow in love and experience the mutual love that draws the grace and presence of Christ: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" (Mt. 18:20)

A number of families of the movement participate actively in the different eparchial commissions for the family, in the animation of sessions preparatory to marriage. Some put themselves at the disposal of engaged couples to train them in the Billings method for responsible and planned procreation. Still others participate in the movement "*New Humanity*" or in "*Distance Adoption.*"

2. *Teams of Our Lady or Confraternity of Mary for Families*

A movement for couples and a school of prayer that has as its goal living conjugal love in the light of the Gospel, with the aim of witnessing and proclaiming in their surroundings. It tries to live conjugal spirituality, seeing in marriage a way of holiness and a place of love and happiness. Its members are couples who want to live their marriage as a sacrament and pool their treasures in order to answer together the call of Christ, “*Come and follow me,*” (Mt. 19:21) with a conjugal spirituality that says “yes” afresh every day. They deepen their love transformed by the sacrament of marriage into a journey towards God, witnessing in a concrete way to the love of Christ, and becoming involved in action and service to the Church and society, each according to his gifts. It is on that basis that they also bring up their children.

3. *The Cana fraternities*

A Church movement that follows the *Chemin Neuf*, a Catholic community with an ecumenical bearing, made up of women and men either single or married, united by an identical faith in Jesus Christ and a keen desire to serve the Gospel, the Church and society.

These fraternities organise sessions known by the name of *Cana Sessions*, for couples and families. Their goal is to spread the Gospel. They are based on prayer, true sharing and fraternal living. They endeavour to create local fraternities that receive solid Christian training, that enable couples to work in their parishes and eparchies. They live in co-ordination and communion with local Church authorities.

The Cana Sessions offer a moment of pause and reflection, an opportune time for the couple to rediscover each other and to deepen their awareness of their conjugal link. They meditate on the meaning of marriage and the family, through discussion on basic themes, such as dialogue, sexuality, commitment and other matters. They share life, its joys, sorrows, richness, poverty and all the questions that face them every day. They remain present before the Creator who has made couples, man and wife and continues to recreate them at every moment.

4. *Renewal in the Holy Spirit*

An ecumenical apostolic movement, it tries to live out Christian values and the teachings of the Gospel. It conducts regular spiritual activities; it invites better acquaintance with the Gospel, through meetings and collective spiritual retreats.

It is especially concerned with the family life of the member couples. The leaders remain in permanent contact with the couples, maintaining a permanent conversation with them on their joys and sorrows. It organises pedagogical, cultural, social and educational activities, taking its inspiration from Christian values and the teachings of the Church. It organises sessions of preparation for marriage and accompanies the married couple in their daily difficulties, thanks to holding regular meetings with sharing teams.

It is concerned principally with children and adolescents, so as to ensure a better climate for healthy Christian growth in our society, with all its difficulties and problems. It organises for children, according to their age, regular meetings, in which they discuss questions they encounter in their daily life where they live. It endeavours to fill their leisure time with programmes suitable to their age: cultural and social activities, amusements, besides genuine Christian training.

It encourages its members to serve in parishes and to participate in eparchial commissions for the family.

5. *Yes to Life*

A Christian movement, under the supervision of the eparchial commission for the family, it has as its aim to defend the dignity of human life, protecting it with absolute values and considering it as a gift of God in all its stages, from the moment of conception to the last breath. It tries to live in agreement with the Gospel of Life and the guidance of the Pontifical Council for the Family with regard to human life.

It organises conferences in schools, universities, parishes, on themes such as abortion, euthanasia, contraceptives and other bioethical matters. It ensures lay training in specialist sessions and creates special youth groups. It propagates, wherever it may be, the Church's teaching about life and participates, according to its speciality, in sessions of immediate or remote preparation for marriage in the eparchy.

6. *You are my brother*

This is a social institution that has as its objective to ensure a worthwhile future for physically or mentally handicapped or those having multiple handicaps.

It is concerned with helping young handicapped people in their everyday requirements, in a way that enables them to maintain their dignity as children of God. It organises programmes of spiritual and personal development and amusement. It collaborates, to achieve these goals, with a team of experts and volunteers. It places itself at the disposal and service of eparchies and parishes so that every handicapped person may live in the Church and with it, the joy and peace of Christ, feed on his living body and on his life-giving blood and become an active member in the bosom of the Church.

7. We mention finally the *Neocatechumenal Way*, the *Couples for Christ* and *Faith and Light* (for physically or mentally handicapped and their families.)

These and other movements play a great role in the pastoral care of the family, besides the spiritual, pastoral and social role that confraternities and lay apostolic movements spread throughout many parishes, among people of all ages. All act to introduce the Gospel, the spirit of prayer and faith into families, and to give life through the Spirit to family life, in every aspect and circumstance.

COUNCIL OF EASTERN CATHOLIC PATRIARCHS

Feast of the Dormition, 15 August 2005