

Statement on Demography and Family

The Presidents of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe gathering in Zagreb, Croatia, for the 40th General Assembly of the Council of the European Bishops' Conferences (CEE), discussed the issue of demography and family. A survey carried out via the Bishops' Conferences of 47 Countries confirms a downward population trend. This is certainly the result of family policies in each Nation, but such observation does not appear sufficient to explain the sharp and generalised fall in birth rates described as a *demographic winter*. The current widespread cultural climate has an impact on personal and social behavioural patterns which should not be underestimated. As Catholics, we need to grow in a faith featuring greater awareness and knowledge, in order to be able to critically assess the mainstream culture questioning values such as human life from its beginnings to its natural end, the objective structure of the human person, freedom as a moral responsibility, faithfulness, love and family. One instance is current-day debate at the Council of Europe on limiting the right to objection of conscience for medical personnel in order to make abortion more accessible. All this shows that as well as the need to keep our faith well rooted and alive, there is a need to believe in the ability of reason to discover the truth of things in themselves as well as ethics. The substantial lack of trust in human reason seems to be a feature of so-called post-modernity. The presence of the Catholic Church in this context must be inspired by hope: our hope is Jesus Christ, and it identifies the signs of care and trust which we do find expressed in private form.

We are certain that human conscience is able to open up to the values existing in our nature, created and redeemed by God through Jesus Christ. The Church, aware of Her mission of service towards man and society through the proclamation of Christ the Saviour, recalls to mind the anthropological and social implications deriving from Him. For this reason She never ceases to state the fundamental values of life, of marriage between one man and one woman, of family and of freedom of religion and of education: these are the values upon which every other value rests, and finds a social and political dimension. The many families welcoming the presence of Jesus and living in line with the true dimension of family are the permanent witness of the beauty and alignment with the heart of man the Church proclaims by showing that a family according to Christ's calling is possible.

This theme has brought to light the urgency of the educational task the Church is entrusted with, in line with its millennia-old legacy: and it is a task identifying in Christ - true God and perfect man – the Master, the perfect model and the source of grace.