

Summary of the Lecture

In the introduction to his intervention, the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family said that, on the occasion of these anniversaries, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, this year, reiterated *“opportunity to refocus on the role of families in development; take stock of recent trends in family policy development; share good practices in family policy making; review challenges faced by families worldwide and recommend solutions.”*

The family is a basic human right, said Msgr. Paglia. *“The family in fact is the fundamental unit of human society. It is where the generations meet, love, educate, support each other and pass on life from age to age. And this understanding of the family has been embraced by all cultures throughout history. With good reason the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that: ‘Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family.’”*

The President, then, recalled how the Charter of the Rights of the Family reaffirms the strategic importance of the family’s role in society. Already in the Preamble states: *“The rights of the person, even though they are expressed as rights of the individual, have a fundamental social dimension which finds an innate and vital expression in the family, which is based on marriage, that intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and a woman, constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony and is open to the transmission of life.”*

Therefore, *“the family is the fundamental resource of society, the source of social capital and the birthright of all humanity. Indeed the stability of any society depends pari passu on the stability of the families from which it springs.”*

It can, in fact, be said without a doubt that *“the family, composed of a mother, a father and children, notwithstanding the many attacks to which it is subject, comes first in the hearts of the world’s peoples; and studies show that the great majority of young people look forward happily to marriage as a lifelong faithful union with their husband or wife.”* Unfortunately, however, *“that vision is opposed by cultural currents that for example consider it impossible to love someone forever. But when I hear things like that, I ask myself how can a young man profess, with great enthusiasm, undying love for his favorite sports team but can’t do the same for his wife.”*

On the basis of the research and sociological studies also promoted by the Pontifical Council for the Family, Msgr. Paglia addressed four major issues of every discussion on the family: the couple and marriage, intergenerational relationships, family and work, family and social capital.

“Getting married constitutes an added value for persons and for society, in that the marriage contract enhances the quality of the relationship of the couple and has important positive consequences (biological, psychological, economic and social) for children and adults. Simple cohabitation is not equal to marriage because it renders relations unstable and creates major uncertainty in the lives of children.”

“Natural families experience solidarity between generations much more frequently and more deeply than other forms of life in common. Children who live with their own biological parents enjoy better physical and psychological health, and experience more trust and hope in life. The analysis of three different family structures -two-parent families, blended families and single-parent families- demonstrates the greater fragility of the latter two patterns. In blended families following separation, the parents have major difficulties in developing their educational role. Single parents or those separated or divorced are characterized by major distrust of external social contexts and the minors have a greater incidence of psychological problems and states of anxiety.”

“The family constitutes an incredibly rich resource for the world of work, much more than the world of work benefits the family. Therefore, recognizing its importance for human society, the world of work should organize itself in a way that puts the needs of the family first. Governments, in turn, will have to develop public policies, including in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, with assistance programs especially aimed at supporting families that are needy or divided.”

“Free and democratic political and economic processes are possible only where there is a strong social fabric, where the public and civil sphere requires and rewards basic human values, promotes the common good and ensures the circumstances in which families can be created and thrive. In the words of Alexis de Tocqueville, ‘modern democracy needs a solid and stable family.’ The family builds and strengthens relationships, generates the primary social capital and creates the fabric of ‘the wealth of nations.’” The

family, as a “living organism,” *“constitutes the primary vehicle for the humanization of persons and social life.”*