

ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW



PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY EUROPEAN CONGRESS OF PRO-LIFE MOVEMENTS 'FAMILY AND LIFE IN THE SYNOD FOR EUROPE' ADDRESS BY CARDINAL THOMAS J. WINNING

Your Eminence, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

It's a great privilege to be here to speak to this august gathering on a subject close not only to my heart but to the heart of the Church: The family.

This city of Granada which is hosting us during these days is one of venerable traditions. Many of the great architectural jewels of Europe lie within the boundaries of this city.

The Alhambra Palace is world famous and is a reminder of the sometimes difficult history of Christian-Islamic relationships.

But as I prepared to come here, it was another, far less famous monument which struck me as being highly symbolic of the age in which we live.

I refer to the Crucifix which stands in the Plaza San Miguel and is called El Cristo de las Lañas - the Christ of the Clamps, because of the heavy iron clamps which hold the sections of His broken body together.

When the Civil War broke out in 1936, the Republican soldiers smashed the statue, leaving the local people to hide the fragments each in a different cellar, until they could be reconstituted after the war.

That act of courage on the part of the people of Granada was an inspiration to the Church. But it has certain parallels in our own times.

Today the Church is attacked in a rather more subtle way than occurred in the 1930s in your country.

In place of guns and bombs our opponents fire off newspaper articles, accusations of bigotry and slurs.

Today, as in previous generations, it takes courage to stand up for the fullness of the Catholic faith.

But while in the past the target was the visible symbols and personnel of the Church today the ground has shifted.

It is no longer statues like the one to which I have just referred which are attacked, it is the Christian family.

The family is the site of our current, and I would say most important challenge, as a Church.

In the past it has been possible to say that even critics of the Catholic Church have generally respected the basic building block of society that is the marriage-based family.

Today that is no longer the case. Recently the European Parliament passed a resolution calling on member states to grant the same rights to *de facto* and homosexual unions as are currently enjoyed by marriage.

As the Pontifical Council for the Family had reason to point out in response just three weeks ago – and I am grateful to Cardinal Trujillo for his very brave and public stand on this issue - "To present the union of homosexuals as a kind of value, at the same level as matrimony, is an attack against the truth of man and woman."

As the Cardinal explained: "The truth is that the family is a necessary good for society -- the family based on matrimony, conceived as the union of love between a man and a woman, a union open to life and integral procreation. The one they call the 'traditional' family."

"This is the model of the family that is the foundation of society. Otherwise, society will lose its fundamental fabric. It is not something that only relates to religious truth; it is a truth that belongs to the heritage of humanity, to man's profound heart, to natural law. Therefore, to present these unions as a kind of value at the same level as matrimony is an attack against the truth of man and woman."

Legislators and politicians must listen and talk to families, to the grassroots of society, to all citizens. Most people, even those who have no formal Church link, know that the family is a good, that marriage is an achievable ideal and that children develop best within a marriage-based union of man and woman.

The Church's opposition to the juridical recognition of irregular or homosexual couples is in no way discriminatory. The issue here is about respect for the truth about humanity.

It is that respect for the truth about humanity which is at the root of the Church's concern for families.

That concern rises to the surface with ever-greater regularity as the family unit comes under more and more pressure.

On occasion of the various synods of Bishops I note a growing concern for the family, its defence being one of the main priorities facing the Church today.

I had the honour of participating in *The First Synod on Europe* in 1991. An analysis of the findings at that Synod is interesting in the light of the Synod held in 1999.

Needless to say, the circumstances are different. In 1991 there was a sense of great relief that East-Central Europe had been liberated from the Communist yoke. New-found freedom was exhilarating : hope abounded, but there was a realism about the condition of the Church.

Catholics in the East had been prevented by Stalinism from keeping abreast of the Church's teaching. The West was no great help because there were tendencies in the West which were devoid of moral values and a new threat to the Churches emerging from oppression.

Prominent among these dangerous Western trends were the individual's demand for personal autonomy with the killing of the unborn an example of the consequences of this liberal philosophy.

The new evangelisation called for by John Paul II was acclaimed as a new tool for today's task. Evangelisation was the major issue in this new and free Europe.

One of the greatest victims of the long Communist persecution was clearly the destruction of the family and the education of children in the faith.

If Europe was to regain its soul, the new generations require careful attention and new methods of formation. Young families require special pastoral care.

The roots of spiritual degeneration in the West seem to lie in the soil of liberal philosophy and consequent moral relativism.

Freedom without truth is at the root of Europe's malaise. The genuine Christian notion of freedom can only be maintained if it is linked with truth.

The seriousness of today's crisis of values in Europe is to be seen from the fact that this relativism admits of no moral criteria.

Moral values are being changed at whim. The only norm or criterion is what I want to do. There is no definition of family because the values of the marriage-based family have been rejected. Freedom for the person is an absolute, a value which cannot be measured by any other and which is subject to no other.

Acts become morally licit if the civil law allows them. Majority vote determines morality. Abortion is outlawed in only two countries in Europe and euthanasia has begun creeping to civil approval. Human life is cheap; parents are reluctant to give new life and some even reject children altogether. The Family is in very grave crisis because of the frequency of marriage break-up.

Such was the tone of the '91 Synod's concerns about the Family.

Its main purpose was to study the new situation in Europe which had been created by the dramatic changes of 1989 and to discern the tasks of the Church in the light of these new challenges.

The theme of the Synod was captured in the title "*We are witnesses of Christ who has set us free*". The Church in the East and the Church in the West were meeting for the first time in half a century. There was much to talk about; about Christian Europe, the testimony of those who had suffered for the faith in those years of oppression; how do we use our newfound freedom? How do repair the damage produced by decades of totalitarianism. It is not surprising that the Family did not come under detailed scrutiny. It is the smallest cell in society. Here we were more preoccupied with the more influential sectors of society, new criteria of government; morality in the new Europe; nurturing the vitality of the ecclesial communities and preparing them to be a leaven in society.

In this context it was easy to see that the new evangelisation which the Holy Father has been calling for was seen as the priority of the Church in Europe and the main contribution the Church could make for the common good of the people of our continent.

Here lay the wide sweeps of a new programme of spiritual renewal. To evangelise we must re-evangelise our Christian ecclesial communities: continuing education in the faith and witness to the faith in daily living. These are the priorities of '91.

Eight years later the Holy Father called the Bishops of Europe back to Rome for a review of the '91 programme and where we are on the threshold of the new millennium.

The Second Synod on Europe

The Conclusions of a Synod are traditionally passed to the Holy Father who in due time publishes a document known as an Apostolic Exhortation, depend on what the attending Bishops have dealt with through the interventions in the Synod Hall and the small language group discussions.

That great Magna Carta of the family, *Familiaris Consortio* is one such document.

A Synod on Europe or on Africa will have a much wider horizon than a Synod on the lay faithful. These continental Synods tend to deal with the whole range of life and activity of the Church in that continent and the Bishops will have a wide choice of themes for their personal or collective interventions.

That being so, the contributions of individual bishops on the floor of the Hall often reflect their particular field of pastoral ministry such as Moral Theology, Religious Life, Eschatology, Catholic Education and so forth. Their theme may or may not coincide with their pastoral priorities, but may well reflect the concerns of their particular Churches.

The *instrumentum laboris*, or Working Paper collated from the responses given by the Bishops' Conferences to the Synod Council, offers certain areas and issues relevant to the general theme of the Synod.

The official working-paper (Instrumentum Laboris) issued by the pre-Synodal Council is a collection of the salient points made by the Bishops' Conferences in Europe and in their submissions for the Synod.

The text of this working-paper is therefore an accurate reflection of the signs of the times viewed from the various standpoints of individual Bishops' Conferences.

The fundamental aims of this Second European Synod were:

- To analyse the situation of the Church in Europe.
- To indicate ways in which the immense spiritual reserves of the continent can fully develop (Instrumentum Laboris 3).
- To foster a new proclamation of the Gospel.
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When the text comes to discern the changes since the First Synod of Europe on the religious and ecclesial level, the general verdict is "there is a great risk of a progressive and radical de-Christianisation and paganisation of the continent" (ibid. 14)

The word 'de-Christianisation' will occur more than once again in my quotations from the Bishops present.

On reaching a critical discernment of social special questions, the difficulties are seen to be on a practical, experiential level. Daily concerns of people loom large; for example, unemployment and a variety of family problems, poverty and injustice in society tend to alienate people from spiritual values or make them indifferent to these. Underlying these problems is a widening separation between private conscience and public values.

To serve the Gospel of hope the "Church must be the love inside the history of Europe" (ibid. 71)

The first way to live the witness of charity is to be builders of communion in the Christian community. (ibid. 73)

"Each person in society has to be valued" (ibid. 74)

It is a short step from this kind of principle to awareness that the Family is an authentic service of the person and the entire society. Therefore, attention needs to be given in pastoral work to appropriate education, preparation, guidance and support; "programmes need to be adopted which will promote proper and genuine family life and relationships as well as allowing families themselves to become leading figures in these programmes so that they can assume the responsibility of transforming society" (ibid. 76)

Included in this vision is the Church's task "to renew and revitalise pastoral work with the young" (ibid. 78)
Let us now see how these concerns were carried into the debating chamber during the Synod.

The theme of the Second European Synod was *Jesus Christ, alive in His Church, source of hope for Europe*.

An important moment in the Synod process is the summation by one of the Cardinal Delegates of the main issues raised by the bishops in their personal, spoken or written interventions.

For the next few minutes allow me to give you a flavour of the kind of things the Bishops felt they needed to say aloud.

There we are listening to one another and being confirmed in our faith and our hope by our brother bishops, especially by those among us who had endured imprisonment and torture in their own bodies for the sake of the love they have for the truth and for their fidelity to that truth.

On the one hand we have a Europe without walls and iron curtains, but on the other hand we have more subtle barriers of a secularised society affected by a liberal philosophy and a culture which seems to have relegated God to the periphery of human living.

Europe is primarily not about economics or politics, but about human beings, about people.

Secularisation of the social and political order leads to the loss of value of the dignity of the human person and his or her fundamental rights and obligations.

This concept of freedom as understood by liberal philosophy leads to the autonomy of the individual which in turn produces moral relativism as each person constructs their own moral values according to their individual desires and feelings.

Coming through the interventions was the feeling that the ways of thinking and living in a culture without God have infiltrated into the ways of thinking and living of members of the Church.

Some people in the Church now reject the moral doctrine she teaches as if they were dealing with merely human norms no longer of any use to men and women of today. Such a situation makes it more difficult than ever to pass on the faith to the young, many of whom have themselves been captivated by lifestyles at variance with the Christian way of life.

Many families are witnessing the apostasy of their children and grandchildren. Recently I heard one Catholic lady wonder what had become of her efforts to pass on a faith which she dearly loved since she now had 4 children and 17 grandchildren who no longer practise their Catholic faith.

More than once bishops were heard to admit that we are witnessing a process of dechristianisation of family and of life itself.

Punctuating the bishops' interventions at regular intervals were words clearly concerned about the future of marriage and the family.

'Europe is dying for want of births' said one prelate. "The Family is being demolished bit by bit," said another..

Others offered similar assessments: "Parents cannot educate their children because of their own ignorance of the Church's teaching."

"We have to assist at the rebirth of the family. There is no substitute for the role of the Family."

An analysis of these interventions has made me reach the conclusion that the Bishops from Eastern and Central Europe who have had the experience of watching their families and young people brainwashed by Communist Regimes tend to see the care of the young as the 'priority of priorities'. (But this *cri de coeur* came not only from the East, but from France.)

So great was the concern about family life amongst the bishops that a call was made repeatedly for some kind of parish pastorate for the family. Every parish to have an active Family Association: These family Associations were called upon to share resources, have regular newsletters and establish solidarity programmes with other Associations.

Family catechesis in the parish was perceived to be a 'must'.

In Scotland in recent months we have been in the process of building up this kind of family movement as an institution of solidarity – one family supporting another.

Cardinal Trujillo very generously spoke to our new movement last year and just last month we saw couples and their children come together from all over Scotland to meet, pray, exchange views and just be together at one of our most picturesque Marian shrines.

I have also seen at first hand how movements like this can help families in Malta. There the Catholic Families Associations are many and well established. There is a lesson for some of Europe's larger states to be learned from one of the smallest!

But to go back to the synod experience ... Complaints were heard that sometimes the Church – in Synod and elsewhere – speaks the language of philosophy and theology, but not the language of the heart. And we simply repeat the same answers without searching for solutions.

Some bishops seemed to have a concern about religious education in school maintaining that it is sometimes reduced to information about religion. We have to help children to meet Jesus. One Father illustrated his point by saying: "The people spoke *about* Jesus, but the disciples spoke *to* Jesus because they shared his life".

We need to be self-critical of how we communicate God's message. We have to challenge ourselves: It's God's message, God's truth we are transmitting. We need to open people to the mystery of God.

If Christ is to be alive in his Church, then the Church itself has to be alive, but if the Church is seen as structure, everything about it will be seen in that light. We need not only new words, but a new vision of the Church.

The Emmaus story was used by more than one bishop to emphasise that we need to walk without families, with our young people. As one participant put it: "how do we sup with the people struggling with life?" Jesus was intransigent with evil, but compassionate with the person. Love and Truth are far from being incompatible; they go together.

We have to show people that moral principles are not a restriction on our freedom, but are the way to complete freedom.

The message of the Bishops to our communities issued at the Synod's end summed up well the particular concern for the future of marriage and the family in the new Europe.

In it the Bishops appeal to all those with influence at institutional, political and cultural levels to keep in mind their duty to speak up for human rights; to pay special attention to everything that concerns life from the moment of conception to natural death and to the family based on marriage, affirming that these are the foundations on which our common European home rests.

And, finally to make every effort to guarantee young people a truly human future, with work, culture and education in moral and spiritual values.

So far I have attempted to present you with the thinking of the Bishops of Europe at this crucial point in the future of the continent. The obvious solidarity of Europe's shepherds will come as no surprise to you, but it is encouraging for us all to be aware of the consistent teaching of our Church leaders.

Resolutions at the end of a Synod of Bishops are the refined produce of a wide variety of papers, discussions, further language circle reflection and dialogue and a final summing up which we have already analysed. But it is the Resolutions or the Propositions or Proposals that really count in the end. These proposals have their origin in the main issues raised during the Synod.

As each proposal is read out the Bishops place the vote beside the text of the proposal.

In this Synod 40 propositions were voted on. Propositions with negative majority are eliminated. The rest go forward to the Holy Father with a request that he will in due time offer a document on the theme '*Jesus Christ alive in his Church, source of hope for Europe*'.

The strength and influence of the ordinary teaching of the Bishops are well illustrated in the proposals the Bishops of Europe have offered to the Pope for publication within the next four months.

Their words are a signal testimony to the consistency, balance and unity of the Catholic Church's day to day teaching in the ordinary magisterium. Here we are dealing with her teaching on marriage human life, and family.

Europe, her people and her institutions are being challenged in three major and vital issues, namely human life, the institution of marriage, and the first unit of society, namely the family.

It was not the Synod's intention simply to repeat the Church's ordinary teaching but to apply that teaching and its values to the Europe of today and tomorrow.

What our European bishops highlight are the fundamental truths about human life. For example ... because human life is the foundation for all other human gifts it has a unique value and significance. Life is the "first right of the human person" and the "condition of all others" (*CDF Declaration on Procured Abortion. 11*).

The very significant fall in the birthrate in practically all European countries is a matter for great concern. It diminishes hope for the future of Europe. It is a manifestation of the creeping and insidious culture which John Paul II has described as the "culture of death" – a trend contrary to the Gospel of Life which is Christ's message.

Every new human being is an expression of hope, and every human life, young or old, sick or healthy, male or female, born or unborn, has to be treated with the reverence and care proper to all God's children, expressions, as they are, of His creative love.

Every human being is empowered with human dignity which is inviolable and with a right to life which must be protected from the moment of conception till natural death.

To deprive an innocent human being of life, directly and deliberately either by killing, unjust oppression, abortion, euthanasia or by any other means is always and everywhere an evil.

To generate new life within a marriage-based union of man and woman is not only a sign of love but also a sign of hope.

Every baptized person by his or her commitment to Christ's values has to contribute to the hope we cherish for the future of this continent so as to bring about a new civilisation of solidarity by invigorating our communities with the message of the Gospel of Christ alive in His Church.

The Synod sought to inspire Christian communities:

- to become evangelisers of life
- to encourage Christian marriages and families to remain faithful to their mission as collaborators with God in the birth and formation of new human life
- to value every generous attempt at reacting against selfishness and self-centredness in the transmission of life which may come about through the promotion of false fears about security and happiness

to demand that states in Europe and the European Union foster generously and openly political action in the interests of proper living conditions, employment, and availability of social services which favour the family, including arrangements for paternity and maternity benefits.

The Synod also stated: "We see the main concern of the Europe of today has to be the Europe of tomorrow..."

"We need to work indefatigably towards developing a collective social conscience and public opinion which will impel Governments and legislators to make decisions on human life in keeping with genuine Christian anthropology..."

"Society, and, in her own way, the Church has a duty to assist women who are pregnant and who may be experiencing difficulties of one kind or another in having their child. Society and the Church should not only support them morally, but offer whatever resources they need to have their baby in a fitting way."

Marriage and Family

We as Christians believe that marriage and the family are from God and are part of His plan for human beings as such. Both institutions have undergone many cultural changes and are still being affected by the changing status of women and decisions of parents regarding the size of their family. Relationships, too, have been affected by breakdown of marriage and family life.

In a very unique way the family is THE place of love and security, where people are accepted as they are and feel they belong; where life is cherished and children are moulded for adult life. The family has been given rightly the title of "Home Church".

Today, marriage and family life have to be affirmed in preference to all other forms of partnership. Today, however, marriage and family life are being deliberately distanced from one another.

In his address to the Bishops of this country (Spain) during their 1998 ad limina visit the Holy Father had this to say:

"This crisis in marriage and the family compels the local Churches in Europe to proclaim with pastoral firmness, as an authentic service to the family and to society, the truth about marriage and the family as God has established it. To neglect to do so would be a grave pastoral omission that would lead believers into error as well as those who have the important responsibility of making decisions for the common good of the nation. This truth is valid not only for Catholics, but for all men and women without distinction, since marriage and the family are an irreplaceable good of society which cannot remain indifferent to their degradation or disappearance." (O.R. 19/2/98)

As I mentioned earlier, in Western society especially, pressure is being exerted to have *de facto* unions (i.e. unions between unmarried partners) and even same-sex relationships recognised as legally equivalent to marriage.

The Church unequivocally upholds marriage and family as institutions for which there are no substitutes and affirms the fundamental relevance of this for our younger generations and at the same time emphasises to them the immense value to life of marriage and family.

The Church has the duty to defend the family against pressures today to equate it with other forms of relationship which undermine the traditional family and seek to usurp its primary and original rights regarding the birth and rearing of children and their free choice regarding their education.

The following then, are very real imperatives for the Church:

- We must walk with the many families who are faithful to their Christian commitment and are visible witnesses of the presence of Jesus Christ.
- We must deepen the theology and spirituality of marriage and the marriage-based family
- We must consistently promote and demonstrate with convincing examples the truth and beauty of marriage-based family life as a stable and fruitful union of man and woman.
- We must establish adequate and active pastoral care for families and take on a mother's responsibility (as befits the Church, *Mater et Magistra*) in supporting marriages and families who find themselves in difficulties.
- We must help families, individually and collectively play their part in the life of the Church and society at large.
- We must ensure that individual countries and the European Union in particular, promote genuine and proper political action in favour of families.
- We must recognise that the pain of the loss of a partner in marriage through death, separation or divorce makes it more difficult for people to sustain hope. Pastors and the whole Christian community must come to the assistance of divorced people and, while maintaining the discipline of the sacraments, make sure they do not feel alienated from the life of the Church.
- We must provide opportunities for young people to prepare for marriage and to exercise chastity in courtship, helping them to reflect on the responsibilities of marriage.
- We must encourage and support young people who reject values which are not compatible with their Christian faith. They need to know they are valued witnesses of hope and a source of inspiration to their contemporaries and to the Church as a whole.

Besides these practical action points, last year's European synod sent out very real messages of hope.

It said: "All Christians, and especially the peoples of eastern and central Europe who have undergone radical social and cultural changes are to be encouraged by this Synod of the Bishops of Europe to look on their homes as places of formation in holiness and evangelisation..."

"It is for the laity to regard as their own apostolate the transformation of all areas of human life, politics, civil society, economics, public discussion, art, culture, medicine and ecology. They have to bring the presence of Christ to all these dimensions of human life, but first and foremost to ensure that the family is the place of formation in holiness and commitment to the values of the Gospel..."

"If the Church is to be the source of hope for Europe it must be a faithful witness to the dignity of the human person. It is called in these days to proclaim and esteem the role of woman as wife and mother which today is diminished by feminist movements which consider a woman working in the home is experiencing a type of slavery..."

"The Church has to campaign as strenuously as she can to ensure proper remuneration for mothers who devote themselves to the care of husband and children and to bring an end to all kinds of exploitation of women."

These were just some of the messages of hope agreed upon by the Bishops of Europe last October.

Transmission of faith

Perhaps the most significant observation, though, was the recognition that the handing on of the faith to the younger generations is the central problem facing the Church today in Europe.

This transmission of the faith was the subject of much discussion in the small language circles at the Synod.

One group maintained that the transmission of values in today's world is not exclusively a problem for the Church as much as a difficulty for society. There is so much turmoil in society and so much rejection by the people of today of traditional values that Europe in general finds it difficult to transmit anything of its rich heritage.

However we are concerned with the transmission of the faith to new generations and it is this which the Synod Fathers affirmed as the central problem facing the Church in Europe.

Involved also in the transmission of the faith is the passing on of the cultural, moral and spiritual heritage to a new generation. If the Church were able to transmit the faith this could be a deciding factor in the passing on of a truly European Christian culture.

However, the truth is that in many countries of Europe an early announcement of the faith is missing, owing to the fact that in many places peoples are not baptized as was the tradition in earlier days. Added to this are the growing numbers of people in Europe who follow religions and faiths other than Christian. We, the Church, nevertheless remain responsible for those who do not have access to the faith.

The object of the new evangelisation is a reawakening among all the faithful that Jesus Christ is the source of salvation. Christ is the focal point of preaching the Good News. What the Church has to do today is not only to baptize new entrants into the Church but to see that the already baptised are converted to Christ.

One Synod Father put it well when he said that the Church should not only try to baptise the converted but also convert the baptised!

Awakening to the faith should occur in early infancy and within the family circle. We must not be afraid to challenge young people to continue their spiritual growth. We should be encouraging young parents to pray together and with their children.

Formation of adults in the faith does not begin and end with the Rites of Christian Initiation and Christian action. Attention must also be given to deepening the spiritual life so that people are able to become genuine Christians in a secular world.

It is the living example of Christians that is the most effective tool in handing on the faith along with the other pre-requisites – good formation in doctrine and morals.

At the Synod there was a call for the Roman dicasteries to work out a programme of post-baptismal catechumenate which would be an effective means of overcoming ignorance of the faith among young Catholics, especially those who are called to pass on the faith to their children.

The role of the school

Catholic schools were widely recognised as having a very positive contribution to make in building up the faith of younger generations for the following reasons.

- They support the human and Christian formation offered to people by the evangelising mission of the Church
- They heighten awareness of the Christian tradition of culture and family while supporting parents in the difficult task of educating their children.
- They support a Christian view of life and the world
- They offer integral Christian formation founded on Christ and the values of the Gospel.
- They demonstrate the right of parents to choose the kind of school they wish their children to attend in order to obtain that Christian and moral education which is in keeping with their own conscience.

Young people make their own contribution to the new Europe. They are the Europe of tomorrow, our future promise, our hope.

They need to experience different aspects of the Church. They need to come into contact with a different experience of Church to that with which they are familiar in their home parish. I firmly believe local Churches should offer greater opportunities for spiritual growth – pilgrimages, trips to the great events proposed by the Holy Father like World Youth Day or the Meeting with Families. These are excellent opportunities to broaden young people's horizons.

It should be noted, too, that making demands on young people is a positive thing. They respond to challenge. But we cannot ever lose sight of the fact that the seeds of the spiritual life have to be planted in early infancy. Parents, teachers and priests have to assume their responsibility for forming children in the faith from the earliest years.

That is the way to plan and hope for tomorrow. That is the hope of the Synod of Bishops.

But there is one other ground for hope which was not part of the Synod's conclusions, but which I have become increasingly aware of recently.

I started by paying tribute to this great city of Granada, and I mentioned its history which has sometimes been marked by a difficult relationship between Islam and the Church.

May I just say this about Granada.

The Alhambra Palace, which dominates the skyline of this city, is a magnificent achievement of Moorish culture. It is a reminder of the great achievements of our Muslim friends. And in dealing with representatives of the Islamic communities I believe we have much to learn from their strong and determined culture of commitment to the family and human life.

At great international conventions, it is invariably true that the Holy See delegation finds strong support from the Islamic world in its efforts to protect life and the marriage-based family. In my own country Christians and Muslims work very closely to protect the family from those who would seek to redefine it in all manner of ways.

And so today, within the walls of a city which has seen more than its fair share of religious strife, I close with a recommendation that all of us who care passionately about the family seek common cause with our brothers and sisters of the other great faiths of the world.

Just a fortnight ago, the Holy Father stood side by side with leaders of the Jewish and Islamic faiths in the land which is sacred to all three great monotheistic religions – a visible and moving lesson in reconciliation.

Perhaps it is in our common commitment to defend and promote the marriage based family that the three great world faiths can best work together, to remove old enmities and to forge a new and better Europe – a family of nations and nations of families.

We have read the signs of the times adequately enough over the years regarding human life, marriage and the Family. We have witnessed the gradual de-construction or destruction of all three: innocent human life deliberately destroyed at the beginning and in the twilight days. We are left with pieces, bits of each: broken, destroyed lives, mothers the victims of abortion, broken marriages, broken families.

Does this mean that these essential areas of human living in this world are no longer worth fighting for? Are we to admit defeat and surrender the truth about man and woman? Yet, given the apathy and indifference of many of our people, yes, clergy as well as lay, the world looking on would be justified in thinking the Church has accepted defeat.

One deficiency I have detected in the Church following a Synod of Bishops is that because we have discussed the particular challenge, *Formation in the Faith, the Family, Consecrated Life*, and can turn to a document in our library for the conclusions reached, we mistakenly act as if the challenge had been met and the problem solved.

A Synod is a point of departure not an arrival at a destination.

My plea to this Congress is that we study thoroughly the Holy Father's document on the Second Synod of Europe when it is published and organise ourselves in every country to make *Christ living in his Church the source of hope for Europe* a reality, particularly by rallying our clergy and people to a thorough re-evangelisation programme beginning with young people and families.

In the words of the Holy Father to the Bishops of the Netherlands (January 11th 1993): "Christians must seize the opportunities offered to them by the *kairos* of the present moment and show themselves equal to the emerging pastoral challenges of the concrete historical situation."