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# Cardinal Antonelli: Families Themselves Must Defend Their Rights

## Urges Family Associations to Confront Culture, Politics

By H. Sergio Mora

ROME, MAY 10, 2012 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The president of the Pontifical Council for Families is hoping that the world meeting in Milan at the end of the month will help families to form ties with each other so that they can defend themselves and issues they hold dear -- similar to the way that workers' unions do.

This was a reflection offered by Cardinal Ennio Antonelli speaking of the 7th World Meeting of Families, which will be held May 30-June 1 in Milan. Benedict XVI is planning to close the event.

The cardinal was offering his proposals at a conference held last Friday, organized by the group Cultural, Educational and Family Initiatives (ICEF) at the Roman parish of St. Eugene.

Cardinal Antonelli told ZENIT that "the objective of the meeting in the city of Milan is to give maximum visibility to reflection on some topics that are permanent, as they are fundamental dimensions of human existence, of man's good life. Specifically: family, work and celebration, values that today suffer imbalances, difficulties and risks. Hence, a reflection at the highest possible level is opportune. Meanwhile, we hope that afterwards the reflections and attention to these values will continue in society, also at the level of parishes."

The president of the Pontifical Council for the Family added that "it's necessary to have ideas and deeds, the message and ideals, fundamental values and God's plan for the family walk together. But it's also necessary to verify the practical confirmation in society, in situations and in testimonies, etc., so that the positive and negative aspects will emerge, and that it is seen how the doctrine of the Church and reality have a very strong concordance."

The cardinal said the Pope's presence at the meeting "will make us feel even more the universality of the event, universality that depends on the presence in Milan of representatives of more than 100 countries and of this great assembly that gathers around the Pope and that is a symbol of the unity of the universal Church."

## Calling the laity

Earlier in his address, the pontifical council president exhorted the laity to take up their role: "Although it's true that the Church could always do more, meanwhile the laity must be in the front line, they must become direct interlocutors, as the labor unions are for workers. They must be aware of themselves and of their importance."

The cardinal continued saying that, although bishops must inspire and help, "the laity must be in the front line, because otherwise significant results will not be obtained. Today society is lay and secularized; there was a time when the Church had a privileged role. Today, instead, it's just one element like others."

"It's absolutely necessary that associations be reinforced. There are many, there is the Forum of Family Associations. However, effectiveness depends not only on the quantity of families that join them but also on how rooted they are in the territory and at all levels."

They must intervene, he said, "to reconcile family-work, family and labor unions, family and businesses."

"I think action in all countries is important. I never tire of recommending it," the Italian-born cardinal continued. Because lay or family associations "in some countries are active, but not in others. In Brazil, for example, there are so many ecclesiastical associations but they are lacking in the civil realm. Who must propose legislation in favor of the family? Christians must, and to do so they must move."

At another point in his conference the cardinal said that "pastors and bishops should give courage to families so that they join family associations and they should help them to establish themselves in the territory so that they acquire strength."

Cardinal Antonelli reflected that strong family groups -- "as strong at least as the labor unions are" -- would change the cultural situation and the political one.

## Divorce and marriage preparation

The cardinal also answered a question on divorce, specifying that "it's necessary to make the costs known, not only the economic but also the human costs that it causes, whether to the couple that separates or to the children, and all the complex situations that are created. There are many studies on this. The problem is that there is a sort of conspiracy of silence: these are subjects that must not be addressed. Then, who must speak? It's the laity, and this is your field," he said. "Because the Church can point out the ideal, the beauty, but then the competence of the studies, of the attempt to modify the reality, is your field."

On marriage annulments, he said: "It's true that today there are more annulled marriages than in the past. In the book-interview 'Light of the World,' the Pope said that in the past one could and should presume the validity of the marriage made in a church. Today, instead, this cannot be assumed because with the present confusion of ideas, of models of life, of behavior, it cannot be taken for granted that one who marries in a church does so because he/she knows [what marriage is], is well motivated and well intentioned. And this means that it's necessary to be more serious."

"Already in *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II said that preparation must be of a catechumenal type, not simply a series of conferences with a debate with a specialist, doctor, theologian, etc. but rather a prolonged itinerary of Christian life, doctrinal but essentially practical, to learn prayer, the

dialogue of a couple, profound mutual knowledge, plans, works of charity, a series of behaviors that must give a certain guarantee that they are well directed,” he continued.

The cardinal suggested that the preparation “should be done in small groups under the guidance of an exemplary and committed married couple that will guide a small group of engaged couples where group dialogue, concrete commitments, reciprocal testimonies, etc. prevail. The whole engagement must be a preparation for marriage, a concrete exercise of Christian life.”

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