

## **Why defending marriage is a pro-life issue**

**Catholic Voice conference, Knock, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

**John Smeaton, Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, chief executive**

In November 2011 the national council of the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, (SPUC), which is the Society's policy-making body, elected by its grassroots volunteers, passed a resolution to defend marriage and to oppose so-called same-sex marriage.

SPUC, as a pro-life organization, decided to fight against same-sex marriage legislation for two reasons. First, statistical evidence on abortion clearly shows that marriage as an institution protects children, both born and unborn.

Secondly, same-sex marriage represents an attempt to redefine marriage, thus undermining marriage and family life, as a growing body of academic research clearly shows. It is this undermining which lessens protection for unborn children which true marriage provides.

Legalising same sex marriage is not a question of being kind to people with same-sex attraction and letting them get married if they want to. It is a question of the destruction of the oldest human institution in the world which protects the mental and physical wellbeing of men, women and children; No other grouping offers such a high level of the security and stability that human beings need to flourish. Research shows overwhelmingly that children growing up within marriage do better in terms of health, educational success, happiness, careers and their own marriages. It is precisely because children matter, that real marriage between one man and one woman matters so much.

Research by Dr Patricia Morgan, the social scientist and internationally renowned family policy expert, commissioned by SPUC and presented to the British Parliament, shows that in countries in which same-sex marriage has been legalized, real marriage and family life are undermined.

Based on research and data from Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Canada and the US, Dr Morgan concluded that redefining marriage to accommodate same-sex couples reinforces the idea that marriage is not intrinsically connected to parenthood.

Same-sex marriage contributes to an increase in 'casual' heterosexual unions, such as cohabitation without marriage, and the separation, in people's minds, of marriage and parenthood.

Advocates of same-sex marriage, such as Teresa May the Home Secretary in the UK, claimed that it would strengthen the institution of marriage.

However Dr Morgan found, across all the countries she analysed, that no causal link has been established to support the idea that same-sex marriage prevents decline in the institution of marriage.

Dr Morgan also concluded from her research that same-sex marriage triggers dismemberment of family structures in family-friendly societies.

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Such a collapse of family structures has very grave consequences for all members of society, but especially on children, born and unborn. In the United Kingdom children conceived outside of marriage are 4 to 5 times more likely to be aborted than those conceived within marriage.

There's a website I looked up when I was preparing this talk called Rainforest Concern. Rainforest Concern tells us that half of the Earth's wildlife and at least two-thirds of its plant species live in tropical rainforests ... These plants provide food and shelter for many rare animals that depend on the rainforest for their survival ... Destroy the rainforest and you destroy protection for that wildlife ... In the same way, marriage between a man and a woman is the natural habitat of children, of unborn children. Indeed, the natural family, which is based on marriage, is a pre-political and pre-Christian institution. Destroy that institution in society and you destroy protection for children. SPUC has published a lot of literature, including serious analysis of the academic literature on this subject.

The homosexual rights political agenda, the same-sex marriage agenda, is actively undermining the family and the culture of life, through targeting its message at little children at school. The homosexual rights agenda is targeted at our children and at our grandchildren in their school years.

In this connection, Pope John Paul II, in "Evangelium Vitae", number 97, makes it clear that there's no hope of building a culture of life without teaching young people the truth about human sexuality. Pope John Paul II writes:

"In particular, there is a need for education about the value of life from its very origins. It is an illusion to think that we can build a true culture of human life if we do not help the young to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and in their close interconnection ... The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which have led to contempt for new life. Only a true love is able to protect life. There can be no avoiding the duty to offer, especially to adolescents and young adults, an authentic education in sexuality and in love, an education which involves training in chastity as a virtue which fosters personal maturity and makes one capable of respecting the 'spousal' meaning of the body."

I am sorry to have to share with you that homosexual militants are being invited into schools in Britain, including into Catholic schools with the blessing of the local bishop, to train teachers how to educate little boys as young as four years old that they might grow up to marry a man or that they might grow up to marry a woman – and the same with little girls.

Thus certain Catholic primary schools in England and certain Catholic bishops are insisting that our Catholic infant children and grandchildren grow up to think it's OK to live a depraved or corrupt way of life. This is a direct attack by the Catholic hierarchy on the laity, on parents as the primary educators of their children ... and parents must fight back.

As you know, same-sex couples are now demanding the right to have children– making it even more difficult for pro-life groups effectively to oppose surrogacy and in vitro

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fertilisation. For every baby born by IVF, 23 are either discarded, or frozen, or used in destructive experiments, or miscarry. Defending the right to life of unborn children will be increasingly viewed as an attack on the rights of homosexual couples. What do you think teachers will say to our little children and grandchildren in their Catholic schools when they say: Can two men who get married have a baby Miss? Even if teacher says "No" will children think that's fair?

In other words, with the active co-operation of certain Catholic bishops in England little children are to be taught that men can marry men, and women can marry women – thus teaching them to be depraved when they grow up; and with the active co-operation of certain Catholic bishops in England, the idea will be planted in little children's minds that it's not fair to deny test-tube babies to homosexual couples – with all that test-tube baby techniques involve – the instrumentalization and destruction of human embryos, selective abortion, and the separation of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the sexual act thus preparing them for the acceptance of contraception and abortion. What further evidence do we need that the pro-life movement must defend marriage as the exclusive union of one man and one woman for life?

Unfortunately, this kind of depraved and anti-life thinking has been echoed during the past three weeks by leading Synod Fathers at the Extraordinary Synod in Rome. All of these matters constitute a direct attack by members the Catholic hierarchy on the laity, on parents as the primary educators of their children ... and parents, the primary educators, must fight back.

I should add here, by the way, that Catholic schools in England and Wales, and around the world, have long been complicit in the culture of death, co-operating with the provision of access to abortion and contraception for the under 16s without parental knowledge or consent. I repeat: This is happening with the co-operation of the Catholic authorities.

One can see why, during the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in 1976, the future John Paul II told those gathered:

"We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has ever experienced. I do not think that the wide circle of the American Society, or the whole wide circle of the Christian Community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-church, between the gospel and the anti-gospel, between Christ and the antichrist. The confrontation lies within the plans of Divine Providence. It is, therefore, in God's Plan, and it must be a trial which the Church must take up, and face courageously..."

It is important that we realise in the light of what I have mentioned thus far that the persecution of the Christian faithful, in particular of Christian parents, and of all who adhere to the moral law written in our hearts, is not something to be feared for the future but is something which is already here.

Many of you will be aware that here on this island, in Belfast, the livelihood of a family who own a bakery is being threatened because they refused to bake a cake celebrating so-

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called homosexual “marriage”. The cake was to have the slogan “Support gay marriage” with the logo of the organization “Queer Space” along with an image of the children’s television puppets, Bert and Ernie.

Christian pastors in Coeur D’Alene, a city in the US state of Idaho, are facing fines and a prison sentence for refusing to permit same-sex couples to ‘get married’ in their chapel. The chapel charges a small fee and therefore classifies as a ‘business’ under local law and so can be forced to provide its services to same-sex couples.

We of course have similar legislation in the United Kingdom: the British government and the European Union have enacted a body of law on the equal employment rights of male and female homosexuals, and bisexuals and transsexuals, which is to be enforced with the threat of severe legal sanctions. The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales has produced *Diversity and Equality Guidelines*, a policy statement which (whilst it includes elements of Catholic doctrine) welcomes, seeks to implement and states that it will monitor Government policy within the Church, including in Catholic schools. The bishops’ *Diversity and Equality Guidelines* utterly betray the lay faithful, and especially parents who are trying to bring up their children in conformity with the natural moral law and the teaching of the Church.

A pro-abortion document prepared at the request of the EU Commission on the right to conscientious objection, links rights relating to sexual orientation to other supposed rights, including the “right” to abortion and the “right” to euthanasia and assisted suicide. The EU Commission document quotes, in part, the *Diversity and Equality Guidelines* of the Catholic bishops of England and Wales in a generally approving way.

Thus the policy of the Catholic bishops’ conference of England and Wales in its *Diversity and Equality Guidelines* is helping the British government to promote the homosexual rights agenda, throughout Europe via a document from the European Commission which, in its turn, links homosexual rights to abortion rights.

Throughout Britain, Ireland and Europe, the failure of Catholic bishops to teach their flocks on matters relating to sexuality and the fundamental right to life is directly responsible for great confusion and, consequently, for the failure of the overwhelming majority of Catholics, both clerical and lay, to provide truly effective resistance to the greatest legalized slaughter of human beings in the history of the world. Countless millions of unborn children are being killed each year and the policy of very many Catholic bishops in Europe is contributing hugely to this deplorable situation. In addition, the failure at best to resist the homosexual rights lobby by certain Catholic Episcopal leaders in England and in other parts of the world, and, at worst, the active co-operation of certain Episcopal leaders with the homosexual rights lobby, threatens to destroy marriage worldwide and the innocence, physical health, human and eternal happiness of our children and grandchildren.

By way of contrast, let’s take encouragement from the good archbishop of Riga of Latvia, Archbishop Stankevics, one of the Synod fathers and a true pastor, whom Pat Buckley, my

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colleague in SPUC and Voice of the Family, had the great honour of meeting twice during the Synod in Rome this month.

**“Christians are too politically correct” when it comes to opposing same-sex “marriage,” Archbishop Stankewics told LifeSite News.. “They are keeping silence instead of proclaiming truth. We are called to evangelize the contemporary world ... and we are invited not to have shame for the sake of our message – even if the message is against political correctness, and even if the message is not in concordance with the majority.”**

**“The Christian message is promoting the human person, and it’s helping to arrive at fulfillment of our human being,” Stankevičs said. “Homosexual relationships are destroying our identity – not only our Christian identity, but also our human identity, the identity of man and the identity of woman.”**

Also, by way of complete contrast to the bad things I have been mentioning, I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks as a parent to the Catholic bishops of Nigeria:

Earlier this year, the Catholic bishops of Nigeria publicly thanked Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria's president, for signing into law the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill, 2011, which prohibits same-sex marriages, civil partnerships, and the promotion of homosexuality.

Archbishop Ignatius Kaigama, president of the bishops' conference, commended President Jonathan for his:

**"decision...not to bow to international pressure in the promotion of unethical and immoral practices of same sex union and other related vices"**

and Archbishops Kaigama spoke of: **"the conspiracy of the developed world to make our country and continent, the dumping ground for the promotion of all immoral practices, that have continued to debase the purpose of God for man in the area of creation and morality, in their own countries."**

Archbishop Kaigama and other African bishops offered a courageous defence of the teachings of the Church on matters relating to human sexuality at the Extraordinary Synod on the family held recently in Rome.

I was at the Synod as co-founder of *Voice of the Family* an international coalition of 20 pro-life and pro-family groups representing people from many nations and all five continents. Pat Buckley, my colleague in SPUC, and here this weekend, was also part of that team.

The synod was ostensibly called to find solutions to the crisis facing the family in our world today.

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I must inform you, though I am sure many of you are already aware, that far from seeking solutions to the pressing problems facing our families, the synod's organizers are threatening to make the situation a good deal worse.

During the synod those of us who are faithful to Catholic teaching had to defend marriage from assaults coming from *within the Church* by a well organised, highly disciplined group of senior prelates who are determined to undermine her immutable teachings.

On Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October a scandalous document, containing very grave errors, was presented to the press, purporting to be an interim report reflecting the discussions of the synod fathers.

In fact the report represented the views of a small handpicked team appointed by Pope Francis to oversee the synod and it was vigorously opposed by many faithful bishops and Cardinals.

It is crucially important to get to grips with this document because it is nothing less than the manifesto of a group within the Church who wish to dismantle her entire edifice of teachings on human sexuality.

There are many serious problems with the document but I wish to focus on what I consider the two major threats to marriage contained within it.

The first assault on marriage was an attempt to change the teaching of the Church on the question of the admission of the divorced and 'remarried' to Holy Communion without amendment of life.

The Church has clearly taught, since the beginning of her existence, that a sacramental marriage cannot be dissolved by any authority on earth.

Our Lord taught clearly:

"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

And he continued:

"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."

St Paul taught, in his first letter to the Corinthians:

"To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord, that the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, let her remain single or else be reconciled to her husband) -- and that the husband should not divorce his wife."

This teaching has been repeated unceasingly by the Church for twenty centuries.

So why is it now being challenged?

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On February 20<sup>th</sup> this year, at the request of Pope Francis, Cardinal Walter Kasper addressed a Consistory of Cardinals held in Rome to discuss the planned Synod.

In his speech he suggested that those divorced persons who were living in civil unions could nonetheless receive Holy Communion despite living in grave sin.

Between February and the Synod earlier this month Cardinal Kasper travelled the world giving lectures and interviews in which he pushed his ideas, often asserting that he had the Pope on his side.

Cardinal Kasper has been supported publicly by other prelates, such as Cardinal Marx, the Archbishop of Munich who has made the extraordinary, and utterly illogical, statement that the Church must change her teaching on this matter in order to regain credibility following the sex abuse scandals.

In response to this coordinated campaign by dissident prelates, a number of Cardinals faithful to the teaching of the Church got together to co-author a book refuting Cardinal Kasper's proposals step-by-step.

The book is entitled *Remaining in the Truth of Christ: Marriage and Communion in the Catholic Church* and I would give it my strong recommendation.

The five Cardinals who contributed to this project, Burke, Muller, Caffara, de Paolis and Brandmuller deserve the grateful thanks of all orthodox Catholics.

Let's now return to the interim report published on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October.

This report reduced the permanent and unchanging teaching of the Church on the question of Holy Communion for those committing adultery to the status of mere "regulations" while raising the possibility that "partaking of the sacraments might occur were it preceded by a penitential pathway".

It continued that this would be "on a case-by-case basis, according to the law of gradualness, which takes into consideration the distinction between a state of sin, the state of grace and [...] extenuating circumstances."

Thus in one small paragraph the whole of the Church's beautiful teaching on the indissoluble nature of marriage is undermined.

These are truly wicked and heretical proposals which, as Cardinal Raymond Burke so forcefully stated, cannot be assented to by any faithful shepherd of the flock.

At this point I want to speak about mercy and to introduce here the words of Cardinal Muller, the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Benedict's old job. This time last year, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2013, he wrote an article for *L'Osservatore Romano* entitled: "TESTIMONY TO THE POWER OF GRACE: ON THE INDISSOLUBILITY OF MARRIAGE AND THE DEBATE CONCERNING THE CIVILLY REMARRIED AND THE SACRAMENTS". Cardinal Muller said: "A further case for the admission of remarried divorcees to the sacraments is argued in terms of mercy. Given that Jesus himself showed

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solidarity with the suffering and poured out his merciful love upon them, mercy is said to be a distinctive quality of true discipleship. This is correct, but it misses the mark when adopted as an argument in the field of sacramental theology. The entire sacramental economy is a work of divine mercy and it cannot simply be swept aside by an appeal to the same. An objectively false appeal to mercy also runs the risk of trivialising the image of God, by implying that God cannot do other than forgive. The mystery of God includes not only his mercy but also his holiness and his justice. If one were to suppress these characteristics of God and refuse to take sin seriously, ultimately it would not even be possible to bring God's mercy to man. Jesus encountered the adulteress with great compassion, but he said to her 'Go and do not sin again.' God's mercy does not dispense us from following his commandments or the rules of the Church. Rather it supplies us with the grace and strength needed to fulfil them, to pick ourselves up after a fall, and to live life in its fullness according to the image of our heavenly Father".

Before discussing the response of the orthodox synod fathers further, I wish briefly to consider a second serious assault on marriage which took place at the extraordinary synod.

The interim report contains shocking paragraphs on both cohabitation and homosexual unions which suggest that the Church should identify and affirm positive aspects of these gravely sinful relationships. At no point does the document make any reference to the sinful nature of these practices nor of the harm they cause to individuals and society.

The report stated, and I quote:

"A new element in today's pastoral activity is a sensitivity to the positive aspects of civilly celebrated marriages and, with obvious differences, cohabitation. While clearly presenting the ideal, the Church needs also to indicate the constructive elements in these situations which do not yet or no longer correspond to that ideal."

It continued, in a section entitled "*The discernment of values present in wounded families and in irregular situations*",

"Some ask whether the sacramental fullness of marriage does not exclude the possibility of recognizing positive elements even in the imperfect forms that may be found outside this nuptial situation, which are in any case ordered in relation to it. The doctrine of levels of communion, formulated by Vatican Council II, confirms the vision of a structured way of participating in the *Mysterium Ecclesiae* by baptized persons."

There is obviously a great deal that could be said about such proposals, but I want to suggest just a few key points for your reflection.

It is the duty of the Church to lead people to life in Jesus Christ, to the true peace and happiness that is found in Him. This is not to be achieved by refusing to confront people with the reality of the situation in which they find themselves, as Cardinal Muller suggested in his article in *Osservatore Romano*. It is the duty of the Church to teach the truth in love, "in season and out of season."

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By focusing on the supposed positive aspects of objectively sinful unions we risk giving people a false understanding of their situation. We run the risk of giving them excuses not to change their lives or to feel that the Church in some way approves of their behaviour.

The document completely fails to draw the necessary distinctions between a valid natural marriage, a valid sacramental marriage, a relationship between two unmarried persons and a relationship between two persons, one or both of whom is married.

Through its confusing presentation it fails to make clear the fundamental difference between a true marriage, whether natural or sacramental, and sinful unions such as cohabitation and adultery.

This is truly scandalous. And the chief victims of course are, as always, the children left fatherless or motherless or both as a result of this deliberate confusion about marriage, adultery, cohabitation, and so on.

The confusion at the Extraordinary Synod only deepens when we turn to the section dealing with homosexuality.

The document states:

**“Homosexuals have gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community. Are we capable of providing for these people, guaranteeing them a place of fellowship in our communities? Oftentimes, they want to encounter a Church which offers them a welcoming home. Are our communities capable of this, accepting and valuing their sexual orientation...?”**

It continues:

**“Without denying the moral problems connected to homosexual unions it has to be noted that there are cases in which mutual aid to the point of sacrifice constitutes a precious support in the life of the partners.”**

Once again, there is much that can be said.

Firstly, we should never tire of pointing to the value and dignity of every human being which resides in our creation in the image and likeness of God, and our possession of a rational soul capable of knowing and choosing the good.

It is an offence against human dignity to say that the Church must accept and value a sexual orientation which the Catholic Church clearly teaches is “intrinsically disordered”.

This is a false mercy, a false compassion, which shows no interest for the good of the individual, who is at risk of being confirmed in behaviour which the Catechism refers to as “great depravity.”

Note well, there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in this entire section which indicates that homosexual acts are sinful.

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I repeat: this is false mercy, false compassion, and it is not offered because the authors generally care about those of homosexual orientation, or those who are divorced or remarried, but rather because they view both of these issues as a first step to destroying the whole edifice of Catholic teaching on matters of human sexuality.

Raymond Cardinal Burke, Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura and one of the greatest pro-life leaders in the Church, stated that:

*“You do not have to be a rocket scientist to see the approach at work, which is certainly not of the Church.”*

He went on:

*“While the document in question purports to report only the discussion which took place among the Synod Fathers, it, in fact, advances positions which many Synod Fathers do not accept and, I would say, as faithful shepherds of the flock, cannot accept. Clearly, the response to the document in the discussion which immediately followed its presentation manifested that a great number of the Synod Fathers found it objectionable.*

*“The document lacks a solid foundation in the Sacred Scriptures and the Magisterium. In a matter on which the Church has a very rich and clear teaching, it gives the impression of inventing a totally new, what one Synod Father called “revolutionary,” teaching on marriage and the family.”*

It was precisely for these reasons, because the gravity of the threat was realised, that Cardinal after Cardinal, bishop after bishop came out strongly against the document.

However it was not only the document that they protested against but the consistent manipulation of the bishops by the organisers of the synod and the censorship and distortion that they were subjected to by the Vatican press office.

On the morning of Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> October Rome witnessed truly historic scenes.

For three days the synod fathers had been working to correct the scandalous document of Monday 13<sup>th</sup> October. On Thursday morning they presented their final reports in the expectation that these would be made public, as they had been at previous synods.

The whole world would then know that the interim document did not represent their views and the final drafting committee would have no choice but to extensively amend the text.

However Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri announced that these texts, like their speeches in the synod, would be kept secret.

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This meant that the Vatican press office would once again be able to deceive the media about what had taken place and that the final drafting committee could once again produce a report that did not faithfully take into account the synod fathers' views.

This decision prompted an extraordinary scene in the synod hall as bishop after bishop rose to their feet to demand the publication of the reports and to condemn the manipulation of the synod. Accounts suggest that after around 15 minutes Pope Francis relented and gave permission for the reports to be published.

I would like to share with you the words of some of these true pastors because they can express far better than I the fury that all true Catholics will feel at seeing bishops manipulated and Catholic doctrine abused.

After these dramatic events Cardinal Pell, Prefect of the Congregation for the Economy, made a public statement in which he said, that the report:

“didn’t represent accurately the feelings of the Synod fathers and it was “tendentious and skewed”

“A major absence” he said “was scriptural teaching. A major absence was the treatment of the Church tradition. It was as though there was an idealized vision of every imperfect situation.”

Cardinal Pell continued:

“One father said to me... that he wouldn’t want his young adult children to read it because they’d be confused.”

Isn’t that revealing statement? Catholic fathers feel a need to protect their children from the documents being produced by the current authorities in Rome!

Cardinal Wilfred Napier, Archbishop of Durban in South Africa, said that the document put the synod fathers in "a position that is virtually irredeemable."

He said "The message has gone out: This is what the synod is saying, this is what the Catholic church is saying,"

"And it's not what we're saying at all, No matter how we try correcting that ... there's no way of retrieving it."

Cardinal Burke spoke against the manipulation in even stronger terms:

“I wholeheartedly agree with what Cardinal George Pell and Cardinal Wilfrid Fox Napier have stated regarding the manipulation of the Synod Fathers by means of the *Relatio post disceptationem*. It is clear that whoever wrote the *Relatio* has an agenda and simply used the authority of a solemn meeting of Cardinals and Bishops to advance his agenda without respect for the discussion which took place during the first week of the Synod.

“The fact that none of the interventions of the Synod Fathers were permitted to be

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published and that their content was filtered through the daily briefings organized by Father Lombardi facilitated the manipulation.”

Despite such protests the manipulation continued to the very end of the synod.

A final report was produced and presented to the synod fathers on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> October. This document was in many respects a significant improvement though still gravely flawed. It was presented to vote and three paragraphs, dealing with Holy Communion for the divorced and remarried, failed to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority.

Astonishingly it was immediately announced by the Vatican that they would be included in the document anyway.

Imagine for a moment amendments to a law being rejected by a national parliament and the government including them anyway?

Imagine the outcry such an outrage would occasion.

And yet that is what is happening in our Church today.

A decision has been made to assault Catholic doctrine and those responsible are determined not to let anyone, even Princes of the Church and Successors of the Apostles, get in their way.

The leaders of that faction are quite clear that they will continue the struggle at the Ordinary Synod next year, and beyond.

Faced with such a threat, to our faith, to our families, and to our children, what can we do?

In the first place we must follow the call made by the brave Archbishop of Riga, Archbishop Stankevics, to give ourselves over to prayer. We must pray unceasingly for the Pope, for the Bishops, and for all clergy, religious and laity that we may remain firm in our profession of the gospel.

“But though we,” says St. Paul, “or an angel from heaven preach a gospel to you other than that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema” (Gal. 1:8).

Archbishop Stankevics suggested in particular that we ask for the intercession of the Holy Souls.

Secondly, we must remember that we, the lay faithful, have both the right and the duty to make known to our pastors our views about the crisis which has engulfed the Church.

We have a right and a duty to require from our clergy unwavering obedience to the natural law and the teaching of the Catholic Church.

The Code of Canon Law clearly upholds this right and duty:

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Can. 211 states that “All the Christian faithful have the duty and right to work so that the divine message of salvation more and more reaches all people in every age and in every land.”

This is followed by Can. 212 which, among other things, states

“The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires.

“According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.”

Finally, Can. 213 says “The Christian faithful have the right to receive assistance from the sacred pastors out of the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the word of God and the sacraments.”

Finally of course we must strive to remain faithful in our own lives and try to lead our families, and all those we come into contact with, to Jesus Christ.

As we have learned at this conference, it is only through holiness in our own lives that we can hope to draw our family members, our parish communities, our church leaders and the whole social and political community to respect for life, for the truth about marriage and human sexuality, and true reverence for God and God’s laws.

But holiness includes urgent action: urgent action, in particular, to uphold parents as the primary educators of their children. The truth about parents is a truth which, the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children has found, really does echo in the hearts of women and men of all faiths and none. Muslim parents, and parents of no faith at all, have flocked to meetings organized by SPUC – appalled at their children being taught about same-sex marriage, and appalled at their children as young as 7 being shown pornographic cartoon films, including in Catholic primary schools, of a naked couple engaging in sexual intercourse in various positions. Parents must fight back, parents are fighting back against school authorities, political authorities, and church authorities who insist on programmes designed to corrupt their children.

Tomorrow, here in Knock, leaders of various groups, including thank God the magnificent organizers of this conference Catholic Voice, are meeting together to plan seminars for parents around Ireland based on the universal truths which brought together 20 pro-life and pro-family groups in Rome these past few weeks as *Voice of the Family*. The universal truths are these:

## **Why defending marriage is a pro-life issue**

**Catholic Voice conference, Knock, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2014**

**John Smeaton, Society for the Protection of Unborn Children, chief executive**

1. Sacramental marriage, binding parents together in an indissoluble union, is the greatest protector of children both born and unborn.
2. The artificial separation of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the sexual act is a major catalyst of the culture of death.
3. Parents are the primary educators of their children and it is through the education and formation of parents, and future parents, that the culture of life will be built.

At this point in history, observing events in the Church and in the State we have much to be fearful of, yet we know can take comfort from the fact that history shows that, no matter how grave the crisis, a time will come when the Church and Her teaching stands vindicated and error and sin powerless and condemned. We are currently experiencing an internal persecution of the Catholic faithful, at the hands of those at the highest level of the Church, the like of which has not been seen before in church history. But we must not be afraid.

Let's remember again the words of the future John Paul II at the Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia in 1976 ... He told those gathered:

"We are now standing in the face of the greatest historical confrontation humanity has ever experienced. I do not think that the wide circle of the American Society, or the whole wide circle of the Christian Community realize this fully. We are now facing the final confrontation between the Church and the anti-church, between the gospel and the anti-gospel, between Christ and the antichrist. The confrontation lies within the plans of Divine Providence. It is, therefore, in God's Plan, and it must be a trial which the Church must take up, and face courageously..."

Antoine de Saint-Exupery, in his book *Wind, Sand and Stars*, writes:

"Water is worth its weight in gold; the smallest drop kindles in the sand the green spark of a blade of grass. If rain falls anywhere, a great exodus brings life to the Sahara."

Modern Europe and the Catholic Church in many parts of the world, including the Vatican authorities at the Synod, like the Sahara, seems to be a lifeless desert. Yet just beneath the surface life waits to be given the opportunity to spring forth. Faithful Catholics worldwide, lay and Episcopal, are the leaders who are seeds of this life, waiting to spring forth. Let us pray that the harvest is very great in the months and years ahead.