

Report of the Netherlands (deacon Henk JF Degen)

Saturday the 28th of July 2007 in the general meeting of the 10th ICCFM World Assembly in Fatima (Portugal)

1. First of all I would like to plant the Dutch flag here amidst of all the other flags of the 35 present countries, and so symbolically put our country of the Netherlands (Holland) under the protection of the Madonna of Fatima. (the assembly applauds to express consensus with this gesture).

2. I will express my feelings of gratitude and recognition for the warm welcome and the wonderful organization of our Portuguese hosts, all those women and men who gave freely their best energy to make this congress succeed. Especially I will say that the spiritual aspects of these days give a depth and very positive atmosphere. Thank you for that.

3. Speaking for the Netherlands (Holland is the most well-known circumscription for our country!), I must say and regret that often the negative aspects draw the attention of the media. As the media-expert mentioned yesterday: if a dog bites a man, that's no news at all, but if a man bites a dog ...that's really news! Coincidentally we have in Holland a program that is called "Man bites dog"! Is that symbolical for our country? Indeed negative news from Holland took the attention of many people, of the media, of the Church worldwide. I only have to mention two examples to illustrate it . Holland was the first country that recognized the homosexual relation as a marriage. Starting from a wrong interpretation of the concept of "equal rights" the majority of politicians and the government did agree to "open marriage for homosexual couples". A wrong interpretation of "equal rights" indeed! As if equality between people means for everyone the same (idem cuique) instead of: for everyone his or her special and own fulfilling of personality (suum cuique). The Dutch Bishops-Conference and Christian politicians (especially protestant-Christian politicians) did fulheartedly and motivated disagree with and protest against the concept-law in favor of homo-marriage, but unfortunately: in vain . A second negative example was mentioned as well yesterday by the media-expert. The program "Big Brother" that nowadays has been spread all over the world is also a product of Dutch TV-program-makers. And I am not proud for that! In these days is coming up a new program, worse than "Big Brother", called "The golden cage". Many people are in protest against it, and I really hope that these protests work out.

4. Let's go quickly to more positive developments in our country. Although church-participation is at low rate, we can also consider that at Sunday much more people are in churches, than in the area of sports (understand me well: I'm not at all against sport on Sunday!). Generally spoken for participation at the church's Liturgy, there is an development a changing pattern from less Sunday's or weekend-participation to more participation at special occasions (marriage, funeral, baptism). In the field of vocations, like in all European countries there is less interest at the moment for a choice to become a priest. At the other side there are many permanent deacons and pastoral workers (women and men) in Holland. And there is a great need for spirituality.

5. For the first time in history we have in our government a minister for Youth and Family-Affairs. This is thanks to the lobby of the Christian-democrats and the protestant Christian parties. I expect much in positive way from this ministry.

6. Studies on European level every decade (1980/1990/2000) about values as lived by the people show us, that two values are predominant equally: 1) personal freedom, and 2) a good and happy family-life! Perhaps these two values seem to be opposite vice versa, or at least in paradox, but in my opinion these two values not necessarily have to exclude each other. Good family-life leads to autonomy and real personal freedom. Personal freedom of the individuals in the family, who in the same time are caring for the well-being of the family as a whole, foster good and happy family-life.

7. A study of The Dutch Family Council in cooperation with The National Office for Statistics point out, that the majority of young people that looks for a relationship, finally does choose for marriage. Many youngsters are living on their own before starting a relationship (especially high-educated students), but many are staying longer in their parental home (especially lower-schooled youngsters). Women get their children much later as it was in the past. (now the average is between 30-35 years for having a baby). The number of two children is for most parents their wish and ideal.

8. For the future I would plead a strengthening of the families by so called "Family-Unions". Families who, in the different countries, are organizing themselves in unions, to cope the problems together, to be a shield of protection against negative developments in Politics and Media, to promote an ethical code for TV- and Internet-programs, to help each other in the education of children, to be a platform for hearing by politicians and consultation for Church-leaders as well. Christian families in the first place, but also non-Christian families with a positive family-intention ,being and acting together as a moral power in our society. I have a dream that there could be a tri-angle between families, schools, and churches as a strong instrument for moral and ethical revival. This triangle needs an organic structure, where representatives of the three identities: families, schools and churches have to meet each other, reflecting and acting together, from the Cardin triplet: observe, judge, act.

9. Finally: I hope to bring your inspiration of Fires to our country, to our Bishops in the first place. I will take all those good examples of activities for the family I saw here with me to the Netherlands, to our so beautiful "Holland" where it is good to live, to believe, to hope and to love, but where it -sometimes- can be so terribly cold..

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