

A HEALTHY FAMILY – THE FOUNDATION FOR A HEALTHY SOCIETY

1. Introduction

Although great efforts have been made for the unification of a modern Europe, it seems that it has not found its own centre, soul - a cohesive force that can truly unite people of different languages and cultures yet. The refugee crisis that fiercely effected Europe in Summer 2015, and the current threat of terrorist attacks revealed a fragmented Europe. This crisis showed that an integration based solely on economic criteria is not sustainable. It also exposed the attempts of political elites in imposing some new values in their own nations, which should foster unity of the European nations. Political elites seemed to have forgotten that Europe has already had its centre, its soul - something that really unites people of different languages and cultures. It is the Christian identity of Euro-

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pean nations which should be rediscovered and revived since it is still recognizable from Lisbon to Vilnius. The Christian identity is associated with the basic human values acceptable to all European nations except to the European political elites, unfortunately. The basic human values are: freedom of religion, the right to life, and marriage and the family taken as the natural union of man and woman.

This article focuses on the values of marriage and the family as prerequisites for the revival of Europe's soul. The correct understanding of marriage and the family is extremely important since only healthy families can become the basis for a healthy society and, at the same time, a way to renew Europe from its fatigue and disappointment. This article does not provide statistical data on the family or on the European legislation referring to family, but it deals with the identity of marriage and the family from the Christian point of view. It aims to clarify any ambiguity relating to the contemporary understanding of marriage and the family.

2. The old and the new image of the family

The assumption that a person is a subject and a bearer of the economic and cultural development of every nation is also based on the fact that any form of development - cultural, economic, political, social - also implies and affects the development of the person, one's self-realization, happiness, physical and spiritual health. Any form of development should serve the person, one's human growth and physical and mental capabilities. Thus, the purpose of economic or any other development should always be at the service of man. Sociological research indicates the highest suicide rates in the world's high-income countries such as Sweden and Japan. Obviously, the level of material growth, i.e. achieving higher living standards does not necessarily result in a higher level of personal happiness and self-realization. The verse written in the Scriptures constantly reminds us that "Man shall not live by bread alone"¹ and that his overall well-being is associated with his heart, his way of being human, coexistence with persons attached to him, family, the question of the meaning of life, suffering and death. In all societies and in all ages, the family has had a key impact on man's satisfaction, fulfilment and happiness. The Second Vatican Council teaches that "The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family"². The family is the basic nucleus of society, a person's lap and cradle, and more important than any other factor in the process of a person's self-realization. Therefore, a healthy family is the prerequisite and

¹ Mt 4, 4.

² *Gaudium et spes*, 47.

the basis of any true cultural, economic or political progress of society. The healthy family raises healthy individuals and personalities which become agents and bearers of progress. However, as soon as the family is mentioned we encounter difficulties based on misconceptions about marriage and family.

In recent decades, the contemporary family as an institution has probably been affected by the greatest and the most painful changes which currently undermine its very identity, its role in the life of an individual and its very concept. In fact, the truth that the family is the natural union of man and woman is denied. Therefore, people, especially the young, are confused and disoriented. This is the aim of specific groups in the modern society, also greatly supported by the media. In today's Croatia, unfortunately, the majority of young people (over 78%) are informed or gain knowledge about family, the male-female relationship, a partnership etc. mainly from the media³. Family disintegration is not a new phenomenon. It has lasted over decades, resulting in the bitter fruits we harvest today. Dramatic changes in family-households in western countries have occurred due to the dissolution of marriage and family relationships.

Growing industrialization and the development of consumer society have greatly weakened the family's economic and social self-determination. The family was once self-sufficient, offering not only home but also schooling, saving and borrowing money, marriage-counselling and vocational counselling. The traditional family was an insurance company in case of illness and old age, a hospital and a nursing home. Despite this nostalgia, the past is gone forever. The contemporary family has emerged and parents, as employees, are required to go to work every day and sometimes far away from home.

Family has lost its centeredness, experiencing the changes that deeply affect not only the parents, but also the children. If the traditional family was slightly associated with the society, the contemporary family is subjected to different legal provisions and regulations and has become greatly institutionalized, thus reinforcing its social involvement (kindergartens, schools, extracurricular activities, etc.). The survival of the contemporary family depends on a society which provides a job, security and a home. A home is no longer a 'home', i.e. natural security for the family, because security and safety is found in public institutions. The contemporary family does not live in a 'home', which represents the space for the life of a small community to be nurtured, but in a house or an apartment. The traditional family attracts its members and encourages them to share their feelings and interests directing them to their household i.e. from society to home. Today, unfortunately, we often testify to the opposite trend in

³ Danijel Labaš, *Medijska slika obitelji u Hrvatskoj*, in: *Vjesnik Đakovačko-osječke nadbiskupije i Srjemske biskupije* 136 (2008) 6, p. 573.

which family members direct their work, interests, plans away from their home and their family. Thus, this way of managing family life negatively affects all family members, especially children. Children are exposed to the harmful effects of mass media brainwashing and manipulation on the upbringing of children who are gradually more and more alienated from their parents⁴. Parents do not perceive their children as a pledge for the future, a source of joy and hope but as a threat to their everyday living and security⁵. Such a negative outcome of family relationships point to a process which cannot be stopped. Nostalgia for the past, for better and more beautiful times is useless. It is necessary to look ahead and help Christian families to live and fulfil their Christian mission⁶.

Instead of relying on its institutional and legal character, tradition or customs, the contemporary family is more focused on its emotional intimacy and interpersonal love. This shift in focus is an opportunity for new, more personal and innovative pastoral initiatives. Love as the basis of married life can be taken as an opportunity for family renewal. The emergence of the new family, based on more intimacy than the contemporary one, suddenly seems so real. Individual and family happiness is measured today by rising living standards and personality norms. Contemporary society tends to reduce a person to a mere consumer, i.e. to institutionalize him/her thoroughly. This is why man is so keen to achieve personal recognition and thus, foster his inner growth. The family environment enables a person to realize oneself and one's true personality, and to be recognized, loved and accepted. It also opens the door for a much deeper, profound intimate connection in married life than it was in the past⁷.

2.1. Marriage and the family in the contemporary social and cultural context

What is the role of marriage and family in society? If marriage and the family still exist, how are they evaluated? Many experts provide answers to these questions. Research shows that the family still holds a central position in society⁸, but on the other hand, it also shows that society does

⁴ The Centre for Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb conducted a survey research on family issues, the man-woman relationships etc. The survey findings showed that the great majority of respondents (78.2%) were informed about man-woman relationships, partnership, marriage and family issues through TV, and some (57.8%) through press. These findings raise concerns with regard to the low response rate of (9.1%) respondents who acquired knowledge through the school, (9.1%) the Church, and only (4.5%) from experts. D. Labaš, *Medijska slika obitelji*, p. 577-580.

⁵ J. Ratzinger, *Europa. Njezini sadašnji i budući temelji*, Verbum, Split 2005, p. 22-23.

⁶ A. Trstenjak, *Stara i nova slika obitelji*, UPT, Đakovo 1991, p. 7-12.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.12-27.

⁸ J. Baloban – G. Črpić, *Brak – institucija od koje se očekuje, a u koju se ne ulaže*, u: Baloban, J. (prir.), *U potrazi za identitetom*, Golden Marketing i Tehnička knjiga, Zagreb

not care sufficiently for marriage and the family. In addition to research, experience indicates a crisis of marriage and the family, but initially and gradually, crisis of the family from the cultural and anthropological point of view. Opponents to a common family structure, some of whom some appeared in modern times⁹, that of individualism and liberalism¹⁰ when personal self-realisation was validated only through gain and profit, and globalization accelerated depersonalization and the separation of sexuality from the person, etc.

The traditional family structure, mainly patriarchal, upheld European society for a long time and guaranteed a good upbringing of children. However, instead of enriching and opening it to the new human and social needs, the course of history¹¹ guided family to a destructive direction: detaching it gradually and exhaustingly from its role. The requirements of the industrial and urban life, the scientific-technical and competitive market suppress traditional marriage and the family affecting their disintegration and disorganization. Due to cultural androgenism, innovative efforts such as artificial insemination, different methods of contraception, abortion, cloning and the possibility of child adoption or procreation by homosexual couples, present the crucial issues of today's culture. This presents a shift in the relationship rules provoking a series of questions or proposals to be seriously discussed since their profound impact needs to be addressed. Indifferent to the sacrament of marriage and the sacred institution of family, secularized culture promotes trial marriages and free unions, whether heterosexual or homosexual relationships, attempting to be equal to marriage or treated as legally recognized forms. In addition, in an accelerated and self-oriented society, more and more individuals opt neither for marriage nor for having children.

It is necessary to raise awareness of the need for human institutions associated with the character and with the values that should be protected. The UN¹² contributes to promotion of open relationships and the destruction of marriage and family, spreading the ideology of gender according to which there is no natural difference between the sexes¹³.

2005, p. 117: "On the one hand, concerning the question of structure, model and relationships in marriage and the family, readiness for the stability of marriage and the healthy family, a historic model of family has not been completed yet. On the other hand, in most European countries, in more than 80 percent of cases, family is important in the life of citizens".

⁹ R. Guénon, *Kriza modernog svijeta*, Fabula nova, Zagreb 2005.

¹⁰ R. Koch – Ch. Smith, *Samoubojstvo zapada*, Ljevak, Zagreb 2007, p. 137-185.

¹¹ L. Scaraffia, *Una riflessione sul valore aggiunto della famiglia in prospettiva storica*, in: P. Donati (ed.), *Ri-conoscere la famiglia: quale valore aggiunto per la persona e la società*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 2007, p. 353-384.

¹² M. Schooyans, *Skriveno lice UN-a. Prema novoj svjetskoj vladi*, Verbum, Split 2006, p. 189-192.

¹³ G. Kuby, *Die Gender Revolution. Relativismus in Aktion*, Fe-medienvrlag, Koislegg ²2007.

The dissolution of marriage and family disruption are supported in Croatia by the Anti-Discrimination Act¹⁴ passed by the Croatian Parliament without a public hearing, in June 2008. Unfortunately, many other European countries experienced this as well.

If a healthy family is the prerequisite and basis of every development, both of an individual and of society as a whole, we need to be interested in how to achieve it and clarify its meaning. Christians acquire their knowledge about the human being, the family, the meaning of life, suffering, death, etc., not only from the light of natural reason, but also from divine revelation. Therefore, in order to find out what family is, what its purpose and objective, identity and mission in this world are, a deep insight into the Holy Scriptures is required. This need is even greater because of many different responses which lead to uncertainty and confusion with regard to the family's identity and role in the modern society. Of course, it affects the newly formed families, family life, upbringing, the growth and maturation of children, achievement and happiness, and thus the regional development and the nation as a whole.

3. Biblical and theological views of the family

In the contemporary socio-cultural context there is a tendency to equalize traditional family, based on marriage, with the forms of cohabitation. Those who interpret the meaning of the word traditional as the past phenomenon are inclined to relativize marriage and family. However, according to Pope Benedict XVI marriage and the family are not mere social constructs, results of exceptional historical and economic conditions¹⁵. The proper relationship between husband and wife is rooted in the very essence of the human being and reveals its truth starting from nature, which is based on the Trinitarian communion affirmed in Sacred Scripture. Scripture's accounts of creation ends with the institution of marriage i.e. the creation of man and woman as complementary beings whose sexuality, transferred through their union in one flesh, becomes meaningful as God called them to assist one another in mutual love. The mutual love of husband and wife becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves humanity¹⁶. God himself is the author of marriage, of the communion of husband and wife. The second Vatican Council affirms that "God Himself is the author of matrimony,

¹⁴ I. Relković i dr., *Zakon o suzbijanju javne rasprave*, Hrvatsko odgovorno društvo, Zagreb 2008.

¹⁵ Benedetto XVI, *Discorso all'apertura del Convegno ecclesiale della diocesi di Roma su famiglia e comunità cristiana* (6. VI. 2005.), in: Pontificio consiglio per la famiglia, *Il Vangelo della famiglia e della vita*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2007, p. 44-52.

¹⁶ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1604.

endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole¹⁷. In other words, the fate of the family affects not only the fate of individuals but of all humankind. Therefore, it is clear that the family is not to be exposed to the arbitrary will of humans since human society, as a whole, is called upon to protect its core unit, its source, because in protecting the family - natural communion of husband and wife – it protects itself. It is therefore not surprising that the Church, based on Divine Revelation, has persistently repeated that “marriage is not a purely human institution despite the many variations it may have undergone through the centuries in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes¹⁸. Created in the image and likeness of God who is love himself, man reveals in this love his deepest vocation to life. God blesses the mutual love of husband and wife which is by its nature intended to fruitfulness. According to Genesis 1:26-28, fruitfulness is presented as purposeful and great¹⁹ so that man and woman, according to the plan of the Creator, become one flesh.

The marriage bond, the communion between man and woman is affected by disorder stemmed from sin in the order of creation. Discord, a spirit of domination, infidelity, jealousy, and conflicts between the sexes do not stem from the nature of man and woman but from the reality of sin which hurts man and separate him from his loved ones and from God. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “As a break with God, the first sin had for its first consequence the rupture of the original communion between man and woman. Their relations were distorted by mutual recriminations; their mutual attraction, the Creator’s own gift, changed into a relationship of domination and lust; and the beautiful vocation of man and woman to be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth was burdened by the pain of childbirth and the toil of work²⁰.

In a new situation of disorder and discord, marriage helps man to overcome withdrawal, egoism and urges him to open oneself to the other, to mutual aid and to self-giving. In the Old Testament history of salvation, God gave the Chosen People the law to regulate marital relations. The law was actually adjusted to “the hardness of their hearts”. Social relationship building was detrimental for a woman, who however, was not reduced to a thing that was bought and sold. The Old Testament woman proved herself capable to take responsibility and to actively contribute

¹⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 48.

¹⁸ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1603.

¹⁹ C. Wiéner, *Ženidba*, in: *Rječnik biblijske teologije*, KS, Zagreb 1980, p. 1548-1549.

²⁰ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1607.

to the success of marriage and the reputation of her husband (Proverbs 31, 10-31). Moreover, the Old Testament consists of a book (the Song of Songs), which deals with love of two free partners who through a passionate dialogue elude any force²¹. In the Old Testament polygamy was developed as an expression of desire for a powerful, large family, but also as a lack of respect towards woman.

Jesus' teaching on marriage appeared to his contemporaries very strict so that they were scared of marriage²². Jesus, in spite of the Law of Moses, calls for a parenting plan on marriage and asserts its absoluteness and indissolubility: God is the one that unites a man and a woman and their free choice grants dedication that goes beyond them. The husband and wife become "one flesh", before God, so they are not allowed to renounce it, i.e. to divorce, since God suffered because of "their hardness of heart." Marriage and the world regained their primordial perfection in the Reign of God which Jesus came to establish. However, regained primordial perfection of the institution of marriage did not please Jesus. He gave marriage a new foundation supported by its religious meaning in the kingdom of God. Under the new covenant established in the blood of Christ, he himself becomes the Bridegroom of the Church. Therefore, the marriage of Christians, who through the sacrament of baptism became temples of the Holy Spirit²³, is a sublime mystery in relation to Christ and the Church²⁴. As one of the seven Sacraments of the Church, Christian marriage is the mystery that emanates from Christ's paschal mystery: "This grace of Christian marriage is a fruit of Christ's cross, the source of all Christian life", according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*²⁵.

Christian marriage becomes an efficacious sign, the sacrament of the covenant of Christ and the Church. Since it signifies and communicates grace, marriage between the baptized is the first sacrament of the New Testament²⁶. The family, unity and communion of love between husband and wife, "draw their inner solidity from the marriage covenant which Christ raised to a sacrament"²⁷. In other words, the mutual love of husband and wife involves God and his creative and redemptive love. Through mutual self-giving, husband and wife realize their deepest vocation - a call to love - thus realizing the deepest God's plan for man, i.e. man growing into the image of God. In the unity of marriage, in mutual self-giving and receiving, the spouses realize their image of God, and they become

²¹ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1550.

²² Mt 19,3-10.

²³ 1 Cor 6,19.

²⁴ Eph 5,32.

²⁵ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1615.

²⁶ *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1617; *Gaudium et spes*, 48; *Familiaris consortio*, 13.

²⁷ John Paul II, Letter to Families. *Gratissimam sane*, 8.

to each other the way to sanctification and salvation; self-giving becomes an encounter with God, the source of marriage and family.

3.1. The anthropological foundations of marriage and family

At the time of postmodernism, marriage and family are among many realities and traditional values that are put into question. In fact, post-modern society sees marriage and family through the new anthropological question. Anthropology seeks to address the person because “many cultural, social and political factors are in fact conspiring to create an increasingly evident crisis of the family. In varying ways they jeopardize the truth and dignity of the human person, and call into question, often misrepresenting it, the notion of the family itself”²⁸. This fact was long ago perceived by the Second Vatican Council that raised question: “What is man”²⁹. Of course, it provokes questions: does God exist? Who is God? There are many questions and doubts about the identity and nature of *humanum*, since the joint efforts of science and technology deprived of ethics, are life-threatening. This actually reflects the many conflicts in humanity. The fundamental and original human experience confirms that a human person is a man and a woman³⁰. In this respect, the goodness inherent in a marriage, that is its inner treasure is in the fact that *humanum* as a whole is realized in two different ways as: *a male - female*.

There are also biological and cultural approaches to man. The biological approach reduces man to his physical dimension considering that his essence is not his soul, reason, conscience, but “enclosed in the narrow horizon of his physical nature, he is somehow reduced to being “a thing”, and no longer grasps the “transcendent” character of his “existence as man”³¹. Moreover, “God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning “male and female he created them”³². Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion³³. On the other hand, a cultural approach takes into account the meaning of the sexes’ as a product of culture, i.e. an act of culture without any foundation in nature, on the basis of which ‘man’ becomes more an object of particular techniques than a responsible doer of his act. According to these assump-

²⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Europa*, KS, Zagreb 2003, 90.

²⁹ *Gaudium et spes*, 10.

³⁰ A. Scola, *Il ministero nuziale. 1. Uomo-Donna*, PUL i Mursia, Roma 1998, p. 16-23.

³¹ John Paul II, Encyclical, *Evangelium vitae*, KS, Zagreb 1995, 22. Enclosed in the narrow horizon of his physical nature, he is somehow reduced to being “a thing”, and no longer grasps the “transcendent” character of his “existence as man”.

³² Gen 1,27.

³³ *Gaudium et spes*, 12. But God did not create man as a solitary, for from the beginning “male and female he created them” (Gen 1,27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion.

tions, human person lacks his/her inherent dignity and there is no objective truth about the goodness of a person which is not a result of social consensus: consensus *facit verum*.

A single and consistent response to the primordial question about the human is offered by Christian, personalist anthropology, which refers to Sacred Scripture and teaches that man was created in the image of God³⁴, and that God is love³⁵. Man resembles God to the extent that he becomes the one who loves³⁶. From the anthropological point of view, beside the fundamental relationship between God and man, there is a relationship between body and soul: man is soul which manifests itself in the body, and the body is revived by the immortal spirit. In this sense, the human body does not have only biological but also theological meaning. Furthermore, human sexuality is not something detached from man, but is integrated into a person and as such is only sensible. Therefore, man is not a body or soul alone, but a unity of two³⁷. Christian, personalist anthropology is reflected in church documents right through teaching that the human nature of man and woman is created in the image of God and God enriched human nature with the ability and responsibility for love and communion³⁸.

Contrary to the modern and postmodern philosophy which depersonalizes man, theological anthropology, based on the Revelation, provides a holistic view of man as a person, who integrates the important dimension of self-giving and diversity, that is, *humanum* is directed to the other. Man, as a person, also integrates an image of plurality and unity, because God, who is the source of this image, is one God in three persons and a source of unity and mutuality as well. A man is rooted in Christ, because he is the image of God as much as he is the image of Christ which is reflected in the faces of people of different languages and cultures³⁹. Consequently, the human person is, by nature, directed to be in community with others,

³⁴ Gen 1,27.

³⁵ 1 Jn 4,8.

³⁶ Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus caritas est*, KS, Zagreb 2006, 11. "Adam is a seeker, who "abandons his mother and father" in order to find woman; only together do the two represent complete humanity and become "one flesh". The second aspect is equally important. From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfil its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.

³⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 14.

³⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, KS, Zagreb 1997, 11.

³⁹ I. Sanna, *L'antropologia cristiana tra modernità e postmodernità*, Queriniana, Brescia 2001, p. 461-469.

and to give to others, so that society, as a fruit and expression of human sociability, reveals its full truth as the community of persons. However, the first and true expression of the social dimension of the human person is the human couple and the family⁴⁰. Otherness in personality is an important cause of the social dimension of the human person: it is like a source from which socialized human life flows. The bond between man and woman is intertwined in *humanum* and is based through participation in human nature itself. There is also a natural difference in the realization of human nature itself: the *humanum*, in its truth and goodness, is the unity in diversity of men and women⁴¹.

As already stated, the inner goodness or values of marriage consists in the fact that the *humanum* is realized and rooted in the unity of husband and wife, in all its integrity. Such goodness and preciousness cannot be found in any other social relation. At the beginning of human mutuality there were not many unions closed into themselves. There was only one duality, the relationship of one man and one woman. Such form of relationship is not contracted by originally alienated individuals⁴², but it is rather the encounter in love of two different persons: husband and wife, according to Pope Benedict XVI, in the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*⁴³. Christian faith has always considered man as being of unity and duality, in whom the soul and body are mutually imbued.

In that sense “the first communion is the one which is established and which develops between husband and wife: by virtue of the covenant of married life, the man and woman ‘are no longer two but one flesh’ and they are called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving. This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need⁴⁴. Therefore, only the marriage between man and woman and the family founded on marriage are immanent to man, because important elements such as mutuality and self-giving are specific for the nature of each person⁴⁵.

⁴⁰ John Paul II., Apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, KS, Zagreb 2003, 6-7.

⁴¹ John Paul II., *Christifideles laici*, KS, Zagreb 1997, 40.

⁴² J. Maritain, *Tri reformatora*, Laus, Split 1995, p. 20-34.

⁴³ Benedict XVI., *Deus caritas est*, 3-5.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, 19.

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Letter to families*, 12: “In the conjugal act, husband and wife are called to confirm in a responsible way *the mutual gift of self* which they have made to each other in the marriage covenant. The logic of the *total gift of self to the other* involves a potential openness to procreation: in this way the marriage is called to even greater fulfilment as

Connectedness of man and God, and the inseparability of body-soul unity, there is connection between human person and institution. Only through their personal and interpersonal free self-giving do the husband and wife create a space for the future and establish everlasting mutual fidelity. This is marked by faith, which is the assurance of what we hope for, and confidence, that children, the fruit of that love and trusting in man, can grow only within that relationship. The free and mutual commitment and the personal “I do” should be also a public responsibility with which couples accept public responsibility for their fidelity. In fact, no one belongs exclusively to oneself, so everyone is invited to accept personal responsibility in public. In this context, marriage and family are *Communio personarum*⁴⁶ and a public act. Marriage, as the institution and foundation for the family, is not disintegrated from society as an ephemeral social category but rather its inner requirement for the matrimonial covenant of love, thus society, should protect marriage and the family⁴⁷. However, some of today’s forms of *more uxorio*, i.e. so-called ‘marriages’, are an expression of anarchic freedom, which turns to be a right⁴⁸. It often happens that the body is devalued and consequently as everything is allowed, it leads to ambiguous and uncritical pragmatic principle: “it is forbidden to forbid”.

3.2. Family spirituality

All aspects of family spirituality are encompassed within the scope of this paper as they include the particular role of husband-father, wife-mother and children in living their family spirituality. However, some of the main aspects of the spirituality of the Christian family shall be discussed. The very nature of Christian marriage reflects its spirituality, which can be defined as the way in which husband and wife are united in the sacrament of marriage and growing together in faith, hope and love while bearing witness to Christ’s redemptive love before their children, others and the world⁴⁹. Family is defined as a privileged way to achieve

a family. Certainly the mutual gift of husband and wife does not have the begetting of children as its only end, but is in itself a mutual communion of love and of life.”

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Letter to families*, 7.

⁴⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 52.

⁴⁸ John Paul II, *Letter to families*, 14: “What is needed then is for human societies, and the families who live within them, often in a context of struggle between the civilization of love and its opposites, to seek their solid foundation in a correct vision of man and of everything which determines the full “realization” of his humanity. *Opposed to the civilization of love* is certainly the phenomenon of so-called “free love”; this is particularly dangerous because it is usually suggested as a way of following one’s “real” feelings, but it is in fact destructive of love. How many families have been ruined because of “free love”!”

⁴⁹ Gianna and Giorgio Campanini, *Famiglia*, in: *Nuovo dizionario di spiritualità*, Edizioni Paoline, Milano 1989, p. 623.

Christian holiness, i.e. union with God is the ultimate goal to which all human beings aspire. The universal call to holiness is not addressed to a few individuals but to all believers⁵⁰ and the family accordingly.

The call to holiness is realized within the particular circumstances of marriage and family life itself not beyond it, thus making family spirituality so specific. Daily family life, made up of thousands of “little things”, children, vocations and occupations, home, etc. becomes more the theological, than the sociological, ‘context’ to which God directs his call to holiness to all members of the family⁵¹.

The family’s spirituality is a spirituality of communion stemming from the unbreakable unity of spouses. Based on the sacrament of baptism, Christian spouses have already been directed towards unity and communion and in the sacrament of marriage have become “one flesh”. Unity and oneness are the constituent elements of the family spirituality. At the same time, it is a sign of indissoluble unity, which will be accomplished in the fullness of life, in the kingdom of God. In this context marriage is viewed as a lifelong task and not just the wedding day. By God’s grace, spouses should build a life-long covenantal relationship based on human and Christian values of fidelity, solidarity, truthfulness and forgiveness.

The family’s spirituality is a lay spirituality which means that it is lived within the reality of this world. The mundane realities become instruments by which the Holy Spirit constantly calls the spouses to jointly recognize the “signs of the times” that is to recognize and to carry out the will of God within the reality of this world. At the same time, they are called to contribute to the reality of this world by their own offerings to God. They themselves become the means through which God sanctifies mundane realities which have been redeemed and sanctified through the Christian holy spouses. This includes their mutual love, sexuality, home, work, etc., and also, illness, suffering, death, etc. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that Christians, “redeeming the present time and distinguishing eternal realities from their changing expressions, should actively promote the values of marriage and the family, both by the examples of their own lives and by cooperation with other men of good will. Thus, when difficulties arise, Christians will provide, on behalf of family life, those necessities and helps which are suitably modern”⁵².

Being open to life and fertility, family spirituality is specific in its ecclesial character. It does not refer to a particular family, but to the church community which is supported by the fact that marriage itself is presented as a sign of the Church, and the family itself is the “domestic church”⁵³

⁵⁰ *Lumen gentium*, 40.

⁵¹ L. Evely, *Spiritualità dei laici*, Citadella Editrice, Assisi 1972, p. 89-91.

⁵² *Gaudium et spes*, 52.

⁵³ *Lumen gentium*, 11.

. Christian marriage and family build up the Church; for in the family the human person is not only brought into being, and progressively introduced, by means of education, into the human community, but by means of the rebirth of baptism and education in the faith the child is also introduced into God's family, which is the Church. At the present time of increasing alienation and anonymity of the faithful, it is important to point out ecclesial dimension of the Christian family, that is, its natural openness to other families and its mission of building up communion and unity of Christ's Body, the Church⁵⁴. The Christian family should not and cannot close into itself but should be viewed as part of a larger family, the family of God. Pope John Paul II rightly highlights the social and political role of the family: "Families therefore, either singly or in association, can and should devote themselves to manifold social service activities, especially in favour of the poor, or at any rate for the benefit of all people and situations that cannot be reached by the public authorities' welfare organization⁵⁵."

Family spirituality instruments are in line with Christian spirituality in general: personal and communal prayer, reading and hearing the word of God, the celebration of the Holy Mass, regular celebration of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, spiritual solidarity, etc.

Family, as the school of deeper humanity⁵⁶, is also presented as the institution of exceptional public interest. Therefore the state authorities should refer to the family with due respect. The Council highlights that "public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect and promote the authentic nature of marriage and family, to shield public morality and to favour the prosperity of home life. The right of parents to beget and educate their children in the bosom of the family must be safeguarded⁵⁷."

4. Conclusion

The healthy family, as the prerequisite for the authentic humanity of human beings, and a secure foundation for building a more humane society, should be priority of the Church as well as social programs and projects. Family, as the natural union of man and woman, has its foundation in the Creator, God, and therefore, cannot be left to the arbitrary will of individuals or society. Facing many challenges and difficulties, the identity and mission of the modern family in the world are threatened. Experience clearly shows that destroyed families create insecure and

⁵⁴ John Paul II., *Familiaris Consortio*, 15.

⁵⁵ John Paul II., *Familiaris Consortio*, 44.

⁵⁶ *Gaudium et spes*, 52.

⁵⁷ *Gaudium et spes*, 52. John Paul II., *Familiaris Consortio*, 45.

disoriented individuals, who can hardly be bearers of development at a local or national level. In the healthy family, as in the school of deeper humanity, a person learns about solidarity, coexistence and care for the good of others - the common good. Founded on the mutual love of spouses, husband and wife, the healthy family offers the possibility of realizing the deepest human vocation, calling for love. If economic, or any other development, do not support a healthy family, sooner or later society is destined to failure.

In modern and plural European society, neither all socio-cultural and political processes are beneficial nor effective for the life of the individual and society. Some of them negatively affect the family. Therefore, it is important to point out the deepest identity of family viewed by Christian tradition which, after all, created what we have recently called Europe. We are firmly convinced that the future of Europe is in the acceptance of the fundamental values that gave rise to the Christian civilization and which can be summed up to the following: freedom of religion, the protection of life from conception to natural death, and the protection of marriage and the family, understood as the natural union of man and woman.

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