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## The Value-Oriented Meaning of the Family and Its Contemporary Transformations

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### Values as a theme of sociological reflections

Man creates values, and values contribute to the creation of a human being; that is, they shape human personality, attitudes, aspirations in life, as well as behavioural patterns which are either preferred or actualised in practices of private and public life. One may therefore say, as Maria Gołaszewska aptly puts it, that “all undertaken decisions, life pursuits, interpersonal conflicts, assume a necessity to be in favour of certain values, and remaining passive in this particular aspect of human existence is tantamount to one’s resignation from aspirations, to the rejection of one’s manhood.”<sup>1</sup> There is no social life, understood both in its individual and collective dimensions, beyond the sphere of axiology. We are always entangled in the world of values.

Values belong to the order of culture. Culture, in turn, can be defined as a typically human manner of existence. Thusly understood, culture is very frequently associated with a looking-glass in which individuals may

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<sup>1</sup> M. GOŁASZEWSKA: “Internalizacja wartości w sytuacji estetycznej. Szkic z pogranicza estetyki i antropologii filozoficznej.” In: *Wartości a sposób życia*. Ed. M. MICHALIK. Wrocław 1979, p. 163. Translation mine.

display their images by means of reflecting on their own constructions: literature, music, folkways, religious beliefs, condition of families, as well as attitudes referring to children and elderly persons, strong and weak people, one's friends and individuals of similar interests, and, finally, to the authorities and political engagement as such. Andrzej Tyszka expresses a similar view when he appropriately observes that "culture is a cult of values."<sup>2</sup> In this sense, culture is a framework which is depended upon each time when members of a given community and parties to a given societal interaction are in a position to draw their interpretations from the inter-subjectively shared and traditionally safeguarded pool of knowledge (values) in order to arrive at *modus vivendi* and, consequently, aim to realize their particular objectives on that very basis.<sup>3</sup>

Following in the footsteps of reflections typical of the classical sociology in Poland, one may refer to a definition that was verbalized by Jan Szczepański a number of years ago: "a value is any material or ideal object, any idea or institution, any imagined or tangible object which individuals — or social groupings — are willing to respect, to ascribe importance to it, and to treat achieving it in terms of a compulsion."<sup>4</sup> When elaborating upon Szczepański's definition, one is tempted to say that an individual, who is in possession of those valuable objects, does not want to be deprived of them at any cost, and prizes these items as his/her own possessions, as something obvious and natural; that is, as these parts of one's social personality and cultural identity that do not evoke any doubts. In this particular sense, Janusz Mariański is also right when he concludes his exposition of sociological theories of values with the following passage: "[...] sociology most frequently tends to understand values in terms of items that evoke positive emotions, concentrate human desires and aspirations, function as important or desirable objects in human life, comprise the most desired goals to be attained, or, finally, constitute treasured objects of one's daily pursuits."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A. TYSZKA: *Kultura jest kultem wartości*. Komorów 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See J. HABERMAS: *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 2: *Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. Boston 1985.

<sup>4</sup> J. SZCZEPAŃSKI: *Elementarne pojęcia socjologii*. Warszawa 1970, pp. 97—98. Translation mine.

<sup>5</sup> J. MARIAŃSKI: *Wprowadzenie do socjologii moralności*. Lublin 1989, p. 165. Translation mine.

## The axiological crisis and directions of axiological transformations

Studies concerning axiological systems and their transformations may be considered to constitute a comfortable vantage point for investigating the courses of changes affecting societies and cultures. In this context, one may postulate that the condition of Polish society can be characterized as facing a period of important cultural transformations, an age marked by a specific “turning point” in history. The task of discarding the manacles of collectivist mentality — as characterized by submissive attitudes towards the state, holding on to the feeling of slave innocence, and distrust expressed in interpersonal relationships — is neither easy nor fast, especially when one recognizes that these attitudes were forged during the times of socialism. At the very same time, watching TV news seems sufficient enough to notice numerous and terrifying examples of axiological crisis.

The condition of contemporary, inherently globalized society may be defined in terms of “axiological warpedness.” The term, needless to say, is a metaphor standing for changeability, instability, dynamics, dispersion, or — in some cases — for the act of chasing something away, especially when it is done in brutal, ruthless, fierce, or irrecoverable ways.

The feeling of stability with reference to social order is being undermined by ongoing processes of diversification (both in terms of cultural contents and distances), homogenization of mass culture, the rise of new relationships among different types of values, and the intensified differentiation among axiological systems and hierarchies. Concurrently, the critical awareness that norms, values, symbols, behavioural patterns have relative characters is, as Peter L. Berger teaches us, no longer limited to elitist groups of intellectuals and, consequently, becomes a socially disseminated fact of culture.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, one observes that tendencies of subjectivist, utilitarian, or relativist descents are being disseminated, which is not only being justified by various pragmatic considerations, but also recognized as theoretically grounded foundations that call for a widespread social acclaim.

When the all-encompassing sphere of morality is taken into account, axiological crisis is tantamount to, on the one hand, becoming liberated from the immutability and durability of values and, on the other hand, to the individualization and, what is even more significant, the subjectivization of values. In this particular context, cultural relativism

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<sup>6</sup> P.L. BERGER: *Invitation to Sociology. A Humanistic Perspective*. New York 1963.

is becoming an autotelic value. The disappearance of commonly shared aspirations results in the erosion of commonly understood and universally accepted symbolic repertoires which otherwise may serve as bases for interpersonal relationships. In this context, culture comprises an array of behaviours ranging from “the internal unification of values by means of reciprocal understanding and common aspirations” to “states of dispersion and conflict.”<sup>7</sup> When conceived as a ramification of the disappearance of community in terms of norms and values, as well as the decrease in commonly understood and shared symbolic devices, the latter process undermines mechanisms responsible for the formation of collective identities and paves the way for the aforementioned condition of “axiological warpedness.”

Accelerated social and cultural changes do not take place in a univocal, unambiguous manner. On the one hand, one may observe robust process of tradition and institutionalization which result in the reinforcement of traditional social structures, the attenuation of social change’s pace, and new generations’ adaptation to already existing values, norms and behavioural patterns. However, on the other hand, one may also notice accelerating processes of individualization giving rise to the societal circulation of provisional roles and social statuses. This is also evident as a threat of anomie designating the in-depth disintegration of values, norms and social ties. Yet, at the same time, the very same process may be positively associated with chances to shape one’s life project in an autonomous, self-reliant and responsible way (self-directedness).<sup>8</sup>

Contemporary transformations in culture are very often characterized by their historically unparalleled pace of change and the omnidirectional character of their axiological references and symbolic interpretations. These features can be subsumed under the umbrella term of “warpedness.” Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, conceived of as the leading symbolic figures of modernity, are now being dethroned by the features of multiplicity, latitude and tolerance which are put forward as values orchestrating the direction of contemporary changes taking place in culture.<sup>9</sup> Knowledge is fragile, and the ethos, which is being tailored specifically to changeable socio-cultural contexts, loses the certitude of cognitive, axiological and religious criteria. Changeability seems to constitute the sole long-lasting value. Likewise, the individualization of human choices, selfishness of motivations, and subjectivization of moral judgments may be

<sup>7</sup> P. RYBICKI: *Struktura społecznego świata*. Warszawa 1979, p. 134. Translation mine.

<sup>8</sup> J. MARIĄSKI: “Moralność katolików w procesie przemian.” In: *Religia. Kościół. Społeczeństwo. Wyniki badań socjologicznych w 12 diecezjach 1996-2006*. Eds. W. ZDANIEWICZ, S.H. ZARĘBA. Warszawa 2006, pp. 47—48.

<sup>9</sup> Z. BAUMAN: *Modernity and Ambivalence*. Cambridge 1993.

all interpreted as basic difficulties restraining individuals from bending over backwards to build a lasting community of values and persons, the shared construction which is based upon attitudes of engagement, responsibility and personal sacrifice. This is, in the main, the reason for the crisis of the natural family in the contemporary culture.

One is in a position to distinguish the following aspects of axiological transformations taking place within contemporary cultures:

**Social differentiation** which postulates that variegated spheres of social life (e.g. family, economy, work, culture, science, politics, religion, etc.) are becoming independent of one another in such a way that they keep on relating with one another, but remain autonomous in normative and behavioural senses. In this way, families are made independent or — as some are willing to put it — liberated from the religion-related spheres of social life and pious norms and values that exert influences upon the shape of family life. Moreover, the aforementioned dissonance taking place between religion and human activities in various spheres of the quotidian matters is best visible (and easily verifiable) in the context of morality attributed to society and everyday social life.<sup>10</sup>

**Deinstitutionalization** stressing that the institutional world is perceived as being artificial, fossilized, impersonal, or inadequate to challenges of the contemporary era. As a consequence, one may observe the intensification of claims made with respect to the autonomous character of social institutions which, in turn, are conceived as being subjected to agential choices taken with reference to multidirectional changes in individuals' life projects. When conceived as a legal institution, the family (or marriage) is being subjected to processes of delegitimation. Traditional families are, consequently, endangered by the rise of alternative forms which — in spite of being handicapped by weak, ill-defined and labile structuration — may still undermine the privileged status of natural families in culture and practices of day-to-day life.

**Cultural pluralism** which is perceived as a basic rule rendering order and organization to contemporary societies. When seen as a dominant value, pluralism in culture is treated — together with changeability referred to as a purely autotelic value — in terms of modernity's main indicator. The axiological multiplicity gains the upper hand over the sphere of universal values that are endowed with stable and inter-generational character. Pluralism forces us to choose from a huge pool of values that regulate diversified spheres or emotional (family-related) existence. Since the con-

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<sup>10</sup> "Blaski i cienie polskiej religijności. Z ks. prof. dr. Władysławem Piwowarskim rozmawia Józef Wołkowski." In: *Oblicza katolicyzmu w Polsce*. Ed. J. WOŁKOWSKI. Warszawa 1984, p. 33.

temporary cultural repertoire is not willing to display life projects favouring traditional families and marriages, undertaken choices are very often unsupportive, or even hostile, to the family as such. “The sign of our times is the radical pluralism, the one which remains tolerant towards contradictory norms and values and, consequently, leaves one with an impression that everything is acceptable.”<sup>11</sup>

**Structural individualism** paves the way for an incoming wave of radical privatization which affects individuals’ decisions and prepares a foreground for uncertainty, ambivalence and risk, chaos and contingency. Rather than being inherited, existential patterns are constructed “under the compulsion” of taking decisions without a facilitation of existential certitude arising from having firm legitimating values at one’s disposal. Making choices is no longer seen as a chance, but rather as the “heretical imperative,” to use Peter L. Berger’s words.<sup>12</sup> The imperative, normatively speaking, is being reinforced by “the rule of alternation” conceived as a cultural pattern postulating the means and conditions to be applied in order to move across a wide range of different (very frequently contradictory) axiological systems, or different personality types.<sup>13</sup> The imperative to take choices single-handedly is represented as the structurally forced individualization with reference to the family understood both as a value and a life project. “As opposed to being brought up within the boundaries of a given tradition which is endowed with its self-evident importance and rules of functionality, one is constantly forced to choose from a plethora of options or preferences. When the ‘marketplace of *Weltanschauung*’ is entered, everyone is in a position to spot things that match his/her current needs or desires.”<sup>14</sup> This is especially evident when one is motivated by a (post)modern lifetime strategy suggesting how to avoid the emotional mortgage by dodging everything that seems settled “once and for all.”

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<sup>11</sup> J. MARIAŃSKI: *Młodość między tradycją a ponowoczesnością*. Lublin 1995, p. 31. Translation mine.

<sup>12</sup> P.L. BERGER: *Der Zwang zur Haresie. Religion und pluralistischen Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main 1980, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> P.L. BERGER: *Invitation to Sociology...*, pp. 25—28.

<sup>14</sup> J. MARIAŃSKI: *Religijność społeczeństwa polskiego w perspektywie europejskiej. Próba syntezy socjologicznej*. Kraków 2004, p. 61. Translation mine.

## Family as a value, and family-related values

The family, as far as the European tradition is concerned, has been customarily conceptualized as a community, the salient form of social life, a primary social group, and a centre for giving life and providing its members with a culture of life that exerts a decisive influence upon the formation of an individual's social personality. In this particular case, socially expected paths of personal development are defined by means of tradition, folkways and norms of religion. Needless to say, the family — together with all kinds of family-related social actions, its stability and religion-based aspects — takes part in the construction of a natural and taken-for-granted social world, the primary cultural reality that comes to create the basic “system of symbolic reference,” both in cases where individuals have had experiences with living in families, as well as in cases where they have been contesting it. Diverse biographies are justified by the consecration of religion-related social roles, individual personality traits, or aberrancy of social situations. At this point, it has to be mentioned that attempts to avoid guidelines of family morality, even if these actions assumed statistically significant forms, did not used to challenge the quintessential characteristics of the family. This is how one can define the significance of the traditional model of family in terms of a value.

Pro-family attitudes and orientation at family-related considerations are endowed with significant consequences as far as the construction of individual personality is concerned. The family, as the Polish sociological output teaches us, has been seen as a form of extended personality, or a reference group in the context of which an individual could construct his/her biography. The historical experiences of Polish nation (i.e. the lack of sovereign political institutions in the 19th century and at the beginning of 20th century), vibrant traditions of national culture, as well as the harsh realities of existence in the totalitarian regime aiming to subordinate individuals to the state paved the way for the robust status of family values within the historically well-entrenched cultural hierarchies. As opposed to the communist state's official policymaking, the family was socially considered as a “secure haven,” a “cultural niche,” or a “stronghold” keeping the intimacy of life and freedom of thought intact. It was perceived as a functional alternative with reference to the enslaved world of official institutions and the reality of superficial actions taking place on the arena of public life. Having been born out of the partitions, the concept of family as a “stronghold” came back to the public discourse after the Second World War due to the Catholic Church's undertakings



whose primary objective was to protect Polish culture against the organized and systematic secularization of statist character.<sup>15</sup>

When the situation of “axiological warpedness” is observed, the traditional family is shedding its privileged status in structures of social world. It is observed as the delegitimization of its meaningfulness as a primary group, social institution, and an environment in which one’s social personality matures. Moreover, a belief is being disseminated according to which the traditionally conceived family is no longer viewed as a salient social institution. On the contrary, it is frequently seen as something dispensable. Hence, traditional frameworks rendering order to interpersonal relationships have ceased to exist, and nowadays individuals face the necessity to choose from a plethora of possibilities aiming to exert changes in these relations.<sup>16</sup> We all live in the world of contradictory interests connected to the family, work, love, and finally, to an individual’s freedom to achieve goals single-handedly. The postulate is highlighted by the process of subsuming European legal regulations within the horizon of cultural changes encompassing the increases in cohabitation, number of homosexual relationships with adoption rights, various forms of monoparental families, births out of wedlock, and number of divorces. The enumerated phenomena clearly emphasise the crisis of the traditional family, especially when one considers the fact that non-orthodox family models are not only legally sectioned, but also openly accepted.<sup>17</sup>

In the light of conceptions postulated by western demographers, the traditional family will be disappearing, and forms of the nuclear family will be converted into fragile cohabitation-like relationships just to reach the stage of a “hybrid”; that is, a free relationship in which partners will be in a position to live separately and remain strongly differentiated. This specific type of relationship is known as LAT: “Living Apart Together.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the crystallization of cultural patterns postulates that the

<sup>15</sup> See D. OLSZEWSKI: “Kulturowe zakorzenienie myśli religijnej i teologicznej na przykładzie sytuacji panującej na ziemiach polskich w XIX wieku.” *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 18 (1980), p. 134.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. A. GIDDENS: *Sociology*. Cambridge 2009. See also U. BECK, E. BECK-GERNSEIM: *The Normal Chaos of Love*. Cambridge 1995.

<sup>17</sup> A. KWAK: *Rodzina w dobie przemian. Małżeństwo i kohabitacja*. Warszawa 2005, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> K. ŚLANY: *Alternatywne formy życia małżeńskiego w ponowoczesnym świecie*. Kraków 2002; S. WIERZCHOŚŁAWSKI: “Rodzina w okresie transformacji demograficznej i społeczno-ekonomicznej.” In: *Rodzina w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie*. Red. P. KRYCZKA. Lublin 1997, p. 78; H.-J. HOFFMAN-NOWOTNY: “The Future of the Family.” In: *European Population Conference 1987: Issues and Prospects — Plenaries*. Helsinki 1987.

marriage ceases to constitute a condition for socially acceptable sexual intercourses, and living together in a shared household is no longer a clear-cut criterion for defining families.

The family tends to be more appreciated by those individuals who have already started their families and feel responsible for them.<sup>19</sup> However, when the European perspective is taken into account, the last decades have shown a decrease in the number of marriages. Hence, one may observe that “the willingness to enter into marriages,” as demographers put it, is decreasing throughout the Europe, though with certain notable exceptions (e.g. Poland). Concurrently, individuals who wish to legalize their marriages decide to do it later; that is, when they are in their 30s (approx.). Although family is still considered as one of the most important values, the youth decide to start their own families later due to the initial willingness to secure their social position and economic status. While having been observed for a couple of decades in well-developed, western countries, the tendency could be attributed to the deferred readiness to start professional careers, as well as the corporate labour discipline enforcing occupational mobility and temporal availability. Furthermore, demographers observe similarities between models of career development that characterize both sexes, which, as a result, lead to the increase in occupational competition between males and females. As a consequence, a tendency to remain single is becoming more visible.

The aforementioned direction of social processes seems to be acknowledged by statistical data, detailed sociological research, as well as systematic, longitudinal studies (e.g. the sociological survey-based studies conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center — CBOS). The studies show that the majority of Poles (63%) are willing to accept decisions aiming to defer marriage, which is linked to the acceptance of cohabitation. “The social understanding of the family is becoming more comprehensive. In the last couple of years respondents have been more willing to associate family with a cohabitating couple either raising a child (increase from 71% up to 78%) or not having their own children (increase from 26% to 33%). The same applies to the number of respondents who associate family with a couple of homosexuals raising a child (increase from 9% to 23%) and a couple of homosexuals having a childless, informal relationship (increase from 6% to 14%).”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> D. WADOWSKI: *Podstawy i charakter więzi społecznych w regionie środkowo-wschodniej Polski*. Lublin 2014, p. 148.

<sup>20</sup> “The family, when conceived of as a basic social structure, is subjected to diversified transformations in the period of intensified changes. Preferred and realized family models are being transformed. The same applies to relationships within the family and the social understating of the family. The reasons are manifold: increase in num-

As regards male respondents, marriage-related anxieties are a consequence of one's preferred lifestyle which is characterized by a tendency to avoid long-term emotional commitments (45%), economic difficulties in providing for one's family (33%), or housing difficulties (29%). The same amount of male respondents (29%) indicate difficulties with finding a proper partner. One in four respondents (approx.) is willing to justify their opinions by a belief that men, as a rule, prefer informal relationships to marriages. A similar group of male respondents are afraid of a potentially toxic relationship or parental duties (24% of indications in both cases). One-fifth (19%) claim that their attitudes are motivated by an assumption that marriages interfere with professional careers. As much as 12% claim that they are demotivated by a general aversion to fatherhood.

Female respondents, in turn, are mostly afraid of unsuccessful marriage (41%). They are also more willing, as compared to male respondents, to indicate both problems with finding a proper partner and unfavourable housing situation (34% of indications in both cases). More than one-fourth refer to an unfavourable economic situation (28%), or being used to personal freedom and unrestricted lifestyle (27%). One-fifth (21%) accept informal relationships and, what is particularly interesting in this comparison, 15% of female respondents are distanced from motherhood and parental duties, and as many as 11% emphasise anxiety associated with parental responsibilities.

It is symptomatic that a slightly bigger number of female respondents (15%) distance themselves from the role of a mother, than male respondents when the case of fatherhood is taken into account (12%). This statistics could be supplemented by conclusions drawn from studies conducted within the EVS (European Values System) framework which are concerned with the correlation taking place between having children and one's life satisfaction. As the studies show: "Poles' attitudes are similar to other Eastern Europeans' attitudes in a way that Polish respondents claim that having children is a factor deteriorating life satisfaction, rather than elevating it. Furthermore, when both male and female respondents' viewpoints are compared, it may be observed that raising children cannot compensate for the lack of a partner. When perceived in the context of individuals remaining in informal relationships, the negative influence

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bers of divorces, separations, and monoparental families, tendencies to delay marriages and procreation, unwillingness to have children, increase in the number of one-person households, or dissemination of informal relationships, which is postulated by certain social groups. There is, however, one constant element in the social understanding of the family. No matter how diversified its meaning is, the family continues to be the primary value of everyday life and it is still endowed with a great significance for Poles." See *Meaning and Understanding of Family* (CBOS BS.33/2013).

of having children on life satisfaction is more experienced by males than females, which is also typical of Poland.”<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the aforementioned studies show that more than a half of Poles (54%) emphasise their attachment to the institution of marriage; the same percentage of respondents are willing to support the formalization of cohabitation (it includes 15% who claim that it is imperative for cohabitantes to formalize their relationships). On the other hand, 39% of respondents claim that marriage is a positive choice, but no one can be forced to it. The CBOS survey conducted in the same year (though not in the same month) indicates that family happiness has been indicated as the most important value for many years (82% of positive indications). The second value in the ranking is reserved for health which is chosen by 74% of respondents. What seems especially interesting is the fact that family happiness is most frequently indicated by well-educated respondents who relate it to the value of work, friendship, and having an interesting life.

From the perspective of the aforementioned studies, the percentage of respondents (37%) who claim that the marital status is less significant for people who love and trust each other is particularly interesting. Only few respondents (5%) are against the legalization of informal relationships or are indifferent to the issue (4%).

Poles are accustomed to canonical marriages. More than one-fourth of respondents (28%) are willing to accept the supremacy of concordat marriages; that is, an ecclesiastical ceremony which is automatically associated with secular consequences of legal character. Concurrently, a similar percentage of respondents (27%) claim that although getting married in a register office could be sufficient enough, one should complete the ceremony by organizing a church wedding. One in eleven (9%) claims that canonical marriages have no special significance, and one in three (33%) is indifferent to the problem. In some Polish cities, e.g. Warsaw and Wałbrzych, canonical marriages are taken more frequently than marriages in a registry office.

Poles are almost equally divided in terms of opinions concerning living without having a steady partner. Less than half of respondents (49%) reject the pattern, whereas two-fifths (44%) accept it. The majority of Poles (61%) are not willing to say that being a single person is more attractive than living in a marital union.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> J. KONIECZNA-SAŁAMATIN: “Dzieci jako czynnik szczęścia rodzinnego. Polacy na tle Europejczyków ze Wschodu i z Zachodu.” In: *Wartości i zmiany. Przemiany postaw Polaków w jednoczącej się Europie*. Ed. A. JASIŃSKA-KANIA. Warszawa 2013, p. 61. Translation mine.

<sup>22</sup> “Aktualne problemy i wydarzenia” (CBOS 31.1—6.2.2013). After: Polish Press Agency.

The number of marriages is decreasing, and the so-called “balance of marriages” is characterized by a negative tendency. The tendency took place for the first time in 1994, and back then it was caused by the rise in male mortality rate and the increasing number of divorces.<sup>23</sup> At this point, one may compare the following figures: 233.2 thousand of marriages in 1991, and 206.5 thousand in 2011.<sup>24</sup> The gap amounts to 26.7 thousand.<sup>25</sup> Beyond any doubt, the tendency is motivated by a number of reasons. As far as the Polish context is concerned, one may indicate economic difficulties and the insufficient number of available houses. Yet, the inclination is also discernible in societies that enjoy far better economic standings. One, therefore, is inclined to say that the problem is far more profound and it touches upon the most fundamental values comprising moral condition, human attitudes and these life orientations which mirror ideas characterizing contemporary culture.

The diminishing marriage rate is concomitant with the increase in the number of extramarital births, and the phenomenon of couples’ cohabitation in marital and childbearing age. Countries with low marriage rates are simultaneously characterized by high rates of extramarital births. This is especially applicable to Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and the former GDR (German Democratic Republic). The same applies to Poland, where the number of extramarital births has been systematically increasing since the mid-1980s. Furthermore, the tendency is related to the growth in the number of births given by women that belong to the youngest age cohort (15—19 years of age). The number of extramarital births increased from 16% in 2004 to 22% in 2012. The figures tend to be higher in urban districts (23.6%) than in countryside areas (18%).<sup>26</sup> When great urban districts are taken into consideration (the case of Łódź), the figure amounts to 30%, and in the district of Gryfice the relevant figure is as high as 50%.<sup>27</sup> The maximum number of extramarital births is noticed in the western Greater Poland (the Lubuskie Province), the borderline region of Lower Silesia, and the northwest part of Warmia and Masuria.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The termination of marriages in Poland is mostly a result of spouses’ death. Almost 80% of martial relationships are terminated by a spouse’s death, predominately by a husband’s death.

<sup>24</sup> A. RAJKIEWICZ: “Polskie małżeństwa i rodziny oraz gospodarstwa domowe w świetle statystyki.” *Małżeństwo i rodzina* 2 (2004), pp. 11—14.

<sup>25</sup> *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny GUS*. Warszawa 2012.

<sup>26</sup> “Podstawowe informacje o rozwoju demograficznym Polski do roku 2012.” In: *Rocznik Demograficzny 2012*. Warszawa: GUS, Departament Badań Demograficznych, 2013, p. 6. Available at: [www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl). Accessed 1.8.2013.

<sup>27</sup> P. SZUKALSKI: *Urodzenia pozamałżeńskie w Polsce*. Łódź 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Z. BRZOZOWSKA: “Przestrzenne zróżnicowanie urodzeń pozamałżeńskich w Polsce w latach 2002—2010.” *Studia Demograficzne* 2 (2011). Available at: [www.sd.pan.pl](http://www.sd.pan.pl). Accessed 1.8.2013.

The persistently small number of births has not been able to guarantee the linear interchangeability of generations for 20 years. The drop in the number of births has been noticed since 1989.<sup>29</sup> Concomitantly, long-term social forecasts (up to the year 2060) show a dramatic social situation in which for every 1,000 people reaching production age, there will be 670 pensioners.<sup>30</sup>

When approached from the axiological perspective, the directions of family-related transformations can be summarized by the two main tendencies:

1. The transformation leading from the family conceived as an institution, through the family as a community (*communio personarum*), to alternative forms of family and marriage.

2. The transformation from the great family, through the nuclear family, to the culture of single persons.

One may refer to numerous statistical breakdowns which describe the condition of contemporary families in a more or less detailed ways. Yet, these statistics merely display figures which camouflage transformations affecting culture and social mentality. Demographic crunch is, first and foremost, the crisis of values, the crisis of man considered as a value, and, finally, the crisis of family conceived of as a natural environment of upbringing.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> "Podstawowe informacje o rozwoju demograficznym..." p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> "A forecast issued by Social Insurance Institution postulates that if Polish women do not start to give birth to a bigger number of children, the population of Poland will decrease from 38.3 million to 30.56 million. It would be an equivalent to the provinces of Subcarpathia, Warmia-Masuria, Świętokrzyskie, Podlachian, Opole and Lubusz being depopulated. These regions are jointly inhabited by 8.1 million.

**Base scenario:** The Social Insurance Institution estimated the population of Poland with reference to a scenario depending on the number of lifeborn children. The base scenario postulates that the total fertility rate (TFR), which presently amounts to 1.3, will be slightly increasing. It will amount to 1.56 in 2060. Yet, even this scenario predicts that the Polish population will decrease from 38.3 million to 32.3 million.

**Pessimistic scenario** postulates, as previous years teach us, that the TFR will be oscillating around 1.4—1.2. What does it mean? It means that 20 percent of the Polish population will disappear.

**Optimistic scenario** states that with the TFR amounting to 1.9, the Polish population will decrease to 34.3 million.

Yet, the bad news are yet to come. It is sufficient to say that according to the Social Insurance Institution for every 1,000 employed people there are 270 pensioners. In 2060 the relevant number will increase to 670." See: <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1342,title,Polakow-bedzie-coraz-mniej-prognoza-spadku-ludnosci-o-8-mln,wid,15876335,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=111153>. Accessed 7.8.2013.

<sup>31</sup> W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ: "Rodzina jako wartość społeczna." In: *W trosce o rodzinę*. Ed. W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ. Katowice 1994.

Apart from the decrease in tendencies to marry, the crisis of family as a traditional value is indicative of attempts to undermine its significance as a primary, long-lasting foundation of human existence. This is especially typical of subsuming families within the framework of labile rules characterizing the contemporary, “warped” world of values. Yet, one has to remember that the crisis of family is not tantamount to various crisis-related phenomena that have been taking place in families from time immemorial. Despite their propensity for raising reservations concerning social anxiety, family-related pathologies used to trigger relevant coping mechanism and, as a result, did not undermine the very sense of standing by the concept of family.

As far as the post-war history of Poland is concerned, pathological phenomena have nowadays become amplified by an entirely new problem, an obstacle to which the Polish society is helplessly unprepared. This refers to unemployment of long-lasting consequences, which affect both parents (or monoparental families) and exerts destructive influence with respect to traditionally reinforced patterns of fulfilling social roles, mutually held emotional references, and life aspirations.<sup>32</sup> The crisis of Polish families is intensified by the general pauperization, harsh social stratification, and the egoistically driven consumerism which disseminates lifestyle models that are both ruled by the visualization of social status’s symbols<sup>33</sup> and powered by delusive advertising as well as pressures exerted by the public opinion. As a consequence, the stratification-related functions of Polish families are getting stronger. Sociological studies, as well as various press articles, seem to point to the tendency showing that economic functions of families — related mostly to securing their members’ material needs — are being overemphasised. This is accomplished at the expense of reducing the significance of functions concerned with education, upbringing, acculturation, and the reinforcement of social ties as manifested by building emotional bonds, facilitating personal development, and the actualization of the family’s common good.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>32</sup> L. DYCZEWSKI: *Rodzina. Państwo. Społeczeństwo*. Lublin 1994; J. MARIAŃSKI: *Etos pracy bezrobotnych*. Lublin 1994; Z. TYSZKA: “Rodziny wielkomiejskich bezrobotnych ze średnim i wyższym wykształceniem.” *Roczniki Socjologii Rodziny* (1993); PEŁNOMOCNIK RZĄDU DS. RODZINY I KOBIEC: *Raport o sytuacji polskich rodzin*. Warszawa 1995; A. KURZYŃOWSKI (ed.): *Rodzina w okresie transformacji systemowej*. Warszawa 1995.

<sup>33</sup> H. BOJAR: “Rodzina i życie rodzinne.” In: *Co nam zostało z tych lat. Społeczeństwo polskie u progu zmiany systemowej*. Ed. M. MARODY. London 1991.

<sup>34</sup> One may refer to a sociological survey conducted in 1995 in the Katowice Province in which respondents were asked to indicate the most important functions of the family. “Safeguarding material needs” enjoyed the first place in the ranking of provided answers (71%). In turn, the role of families in leisure and relaxation was indicated least frequently (15.6%). The same applies to “procreation and educational functions” (25%).

Magazines for teenagers contain articles in which young people criticize their parents for shedding the original sense of family which is lost in everyday pursuits focused upon a need for elevating one's economic status or realizing professional success at the expense of household presence. A home is merely becoming a house filled with (or packed with) tenants whose primary objective is concerned with the frantic search for their individual objectives. In this context, family members' co-presence merely means dwelling next to each other and living by the illusion of actuality of values that have already been deferred. This is inevitably related to individualization and the separation of a household's space, which paves the way for the attenuation of emotional ties within the family.

Sociological researches instance a plethora of statements in which parents complain about time deficiency, especially with respect to "commonly shared life" understood in cultural, religious or social ways.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, parents are seldom in a position to provide affirmative answers to questions related to their children's interests. Such attitudes are fostered by contemporary patterns of participation in mass media culture, especially the ones concerned with television or the Internet. At the same time, one observes the increase in time span devoted to work. Needless to say, diverse forms of earning extra money may result in the distortion of borders between professional activities and family existence, between private and public temporal spaces. The process disorganizes the structure of family time which was previously sanctioned by social and religious norms. In addition to that, the aforementioned tendency may exert significant changes concerning a household's spatial organization. In this particular context, the child is sometimes perceived as a kind of "means" facilitating the realization of one's unfulfilled plans and ambitions. At the same time, depositing one's aspirations in children is treated as a specific defensive mechanism carried from one generation to another.

Families are, first and foremost, expected to accept an individual's "self," which is not concomitant with the readiness to sacrifice oneself for the sake of other family members. When seen as a product of family existence, common good gives way to the power of selfishness and

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51% claimed that families are, first and foremost, responsible for providing "sense of safety" for their members. 48% indicated "providing children with relevant education," 46% indicated the role of families in "safeguarding an atmosphere of love and friendship," and 40% were willing to say that the family should "take care of children and elderly people." See: "Monitoring społeczny województwa katowickiego." The research conducted by Pracownia Badań Społecznych for Voivodeship Office in Katowice.

<sup>35</sup> W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ (ed.): *Wartości a style życia rodzin. Socjologiczne badania rodzin miejskich na Górnym Śląsku*. Katowice 1993.



egocentrism that demand acceptance and justification.<sup>36</sup> One may also indicate an asymmetry taking place within cultural patterns regulating emotional processes. Family violence — which is presently an extensively covered topic of public debates — is one of the most extreme signs of the aforementioned inequalities. It strongly affects children's mentality which becomes characterized by a belief concerning the natural "right" of the older (the stronger) to exert domination across dimensions of social life. Needless to say, the belief is reproduced in adult life.

Some studies seem to suggest the problem of a culturally-defined generation gap which could be attributed to the fact that extraordinarily strong bond between grandparents and grandchildren is observed in the context of weaker ties taking place between parents and their own children.<sup>37</sup> Hence, one may observe that values legitimizing the significance of intergenerational ties are being swayed, which is also represented by attitudes towards the elderly persons who are handed over to social welfare institutions with unnerving easiness.<sup>38</sup>

Family as a value, and family-related values, still enjoy a relatively high acclaim in the contemporary Polish society. However, the acclaim is more related to attitudes and declared or preferred values, rather than lifestyles taking place in the sphere of realized and experienced values. The EVS (European Values System) studies on homogamy of marriages indicate that "marital homogamy is most frequently related to such spouses' characteristics as **religion**, ethnicity, nationality, place of residence, and to such indicators of social status as education and occupational position."<sup>39</sup> The studies are concluded by the following passage: "inhabitants of northwest Europe are more willing to value the community of religious beliefs, than one's social background or the fact of having similar political views. These respondents have probably spiritual community in their minds, which is easily subsumed within the post-materialist system of values."<sup>40</sup> At the same time, the region of northwest Europe is characterized by "the lowest number of marriages and, concurrently, the biggest numbers of divorces as well as people who are completely indifferent to marriage."<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> E. BUDZYŃSKA: "Wychowanie prospołeczne w rodzinie." In: *W trosce o rodzinę...*

<sup>37</sup> M. TYSZKOWA: "Jednostka a rodzina: interakcje, stosunki, rozwój." In: *Rodziny polskie u progu lat dziewięćdziesiątych*. Ed. Z. TYSZKA. Poznań 1991.

<sup>38</sup> W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ (ed.): *Więzi międzypokoleniowe w rodzinie i w kulturze*. Katowice 2012.

<sup>39</sup> G. KACPROWICZ: "Małżeństwo jako obszar przemian zachowań i wartości Europejczyków." In: *Wartości i zmiany. Przemiany postaw Polaków w jednoczącej się Europie*. Warszawa 2013, p. 48. Translation and emphasis mine.

<sup>40</sup> G. KACPROWICZ: "Małżeństwo jako obszar przemian zachowań..." p. 48.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 37.

When analysed from the perspective of studies conducted by the Institute of Catholic Church Statistics, one may see that the last two decades witnessed a new direction of changes affecting both Polish society's mentality, as well as declared value orientations. These transformations are represented by attitudes towards having children and family. The significance of these beliefs is currently exposed to the risk of breakdown, which, in turn, results in visible scuffs on the traditional Polish culture. These new changes are represented mostly by young, well-educated professionals who live in big urban districts.<sup>42</sup> These individuals are responsible for forging new value orientations that will indicate a fate of Polish culture in the future. As Mariański puts it: "adolescents' and adults' pro-family awareness is marked by an eclectic combination of the Catholic and secular value systems."<sup>43</sup>

Many contemporary countries are based more on individuals than families. It is postulated that individuals are more mobile, adaptive and responsive to new behavioural patterns. They can be also manipulated in a much more convenient way. Under such circumstances, the status of families becomes diminished, and their problems are perceived as private dilemmas which the state does not have to take care of. Nowadays, the aforementioned model of family transforms very dynamically in Poland. Adolescents are mostly interested in becoming independent, but not for the sake of having their own families. Being independent, self-reliant, having a regular economic status are first-rate needs that, when fulfilled, are hard to be rejected freely. As a result, alternative forms of marriage and family are becoming more popular. Families, in turn, are subsumed within the sphere of political economy in which they are subjected to tensions implicit in it. Socialization, among other objectives, aims "to prepare individuals to exist in a standardized, fragmentized and inconsistent world. On the other hand, families face postulates referring to individual, personalized 'persons.' As we can see, the family has been entrapped, since it is a sphere divided between two incompatible grammars of self. By shaping autonomous and self-reliant individuals, the family will fail because these individuals would not be able to cope with expectations of organized society. Being authentic in terms of identity is tantamount to being maladaptive. Conversely, by shaping individuals who fit into large social organizations, the family is doomed to create neurotics whose usefulness is limited to the virtue of adaptation. These people, when being

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<sup>42</sup> W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ: "Między rodziną a życiem publicznym — ciągłość i zmiana orientacji na wartości." In: *Postawy społeczno-religijne Polaków 1991—2012*. Eds. Ł. ADAMCZUK, E. FIRLIT, W. ZDANIEWICZ. Warszawa 2013.

<sup>43</sup> J. MARIAŃSKI: *Małżeństwo i rodzina w świadomości młodzieży maturalnej*. Toruń 2012, p. 96.

confronted with a compulsion to fulfill objectives, tend to demonstrate insufficient degree of practically-oriented autonomy and trust.”<sup>44</sup>

Historically speaking, in Poland one could experience the practical realization of a state philosophy that aimed at the subordination of families and the justification of state interference in the most intimate aspects of family life. Yet, the state polity can neither substitute families, nor replace it as far as their natural functions are concerned. Consequently, political structures carry the responsibility of assisting families by means of implementing policies focused upon social help, housing, taxation, education, an individual’s salary, etc. The benefit of social welfare should be applied to the spheres which families cannot provide for. The rules should foster and facilitate one’s agency, which indicate that families are in possession of rights to “self-reliant, responsible action and farseeing care.”<sup>45</sup> As St. John Paul II teaches us: “[...] the family is a social reality which does not have readily available all the means necessary to carry out its proper ends, also in matters regarding schooling and the rearing of children. The State is thus called upon to play a role in accordance with the principle mentioned above. Whenever the family is self-sufficient, it should be left to act on its own; an excessive intrusiveness on the part of the State would prove detrimental, to say nothing of lacking due respect, and would constitute an open violation of the rights of the family. Only in those situations where the family is not really self-sufficient does the State have the authority and duty to intervene.”<sup>46</sup> Regardless of a polity, families face a task of protecting their status in established forms of culture and social structure, as well as safeguarding their rights with reference to obligations held by state or self-government institutions towards it. Needless to say, the rule of subsidiarity paves the way for granting families with right to pro-family policies implemented by various authorities. The future of every society depends upon the condition of family. The aforementioned demographic data clearly prove the thesis. State-wide, region-wide or district-wide social relationships and their role in reinforcing families are not indifferent to this matter. A debate on the condition of family is, at the same time, a dispute concerning the fate of a polity, nation or society.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Z. BOKSZAŃSKI: *Tożsamości zbiorowe*. Warszawa 2005, p. 220. Translation mine.

<sup>45</sup> See W. OCKENFLES: *Kleine Katholische Soziallehre. Eine Einführung*. Trier 1990.

<sup>46</sup> ST. JOHN PAUL II: *Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris Consortio” of Pope John Paul II to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to the Faithful of the Whole Catholic Church on the role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*. Available at: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_19811122\\_familiaris-consortio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html) (accessed 29.4.2014).

<sup>47</sup> W. ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ: “Rodzina jako wartość społeczna.” In: *W trosce o rodzinę...*

The family-related debates are nowadays public disputes concerning the construction of society and the sphere of commonly shared values. These elements are indispensable in order to see beyond the horizon of the present day. When concluding his analyses concerning the transformation of contemporary families, Anthony Giddens postulates that the future of families depends on a personal ability to provide a “golden means” balance between individual autonomy and interpersonal obligations arising from the fact of having a fixed relationship.<sup>48</sup>

Family can be regarded as a stable foundation of social life. Hence, it is little wonder that the diminution of families is not conducive to any attempts to construct social order. Concurrently, the lack of family-grounded support for political transformations that take place in the contemporary Poland creates mental barriers that hinder their societal acceptance. These transformations, consequently, will be perceived in the light of possible or real unemployment, loss of social privileges, deepening stratification, or difficult expectations that enforce radical changes in one's personality. It is sufficient enough to listen to casual conversations in order to discern groups of dissatisfied people who yearn for the reality of the People's Republic of Poland and treat it as a depository of lost chances and unfulfilled dreams or successes. Hence, it is our duty to heal Polish families and protect them against the conditions of “axiological warpedness” by implementing wise cultural and social policies. Threats to families are, as a matter of fact, threats to human beings and, consequently, to the whole society seen as a macrostructure. Axiological consensus will be conditioned by the extent to which family-based moral socialization accentuates the ethos of personalism which is communal, altruistic, as well as indifferent to egocentrism, selfishness, relativism and fashionable, postmodern tendencies towards individualization and subjectivism.<sup>49</sup> “The community values are responsible for the potential of social self-organization, the ability to perform actions that reach well beyond the perimeter of familiar individuals, beyond the temporal perspective of our grandchildren and grand grandchildren (most people are not familiar with their own grand grandchildren). Power exercised upon the world of values is the authority exerted over the temporal perspective. Conflicted and fragmented communities are unable to execute long-term projects whose benefits can be postponed. The ability to construct long-term benefits is a pillar of our civilization” (Andrzej Zybertowicz).

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<sup>48</sup> A. GIDDENS: *Sociology...*

<sup>49</sup> K. OLBRYCHT: *Prawda, dobro i piękno w wychowaniu człowieka jako osoby*. Katowice 2002; J. MARIAŃSKI: “Rodzina a przekaz wartości moralnych.” In: *Rodzina. Społeczeństwo. Gospodarka Rynkowa*. Ed. J. KROSZEL. Opole 1995.

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WOJCIECH ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ

## The Value-Oriented Meaning of the Family and Its Contemporary Transformations

### Summary

#### 1. Values as a theme of sociological reflections

There is no social life, understood both in its individual and collective dimensions, beyond the sphere of axiology. We always remain entangled within the world of values. Values belong to the order of culture. Culture is a cult of values

#### 2. The axiological crisis and directions of axiological transformations

Studies concerning axiological systems and their transformations may be considered to constitute a comfortable vantage point for investigating the courses of changes affecting societies and cultures. In this context, one may postulate that the condition of Polish society can be characterized as facing a period of important cultural transformations, an age marked by a specific "turning point" in history. The condition of contemporary, inherently globalized society may be defined in terms of axiological *warpedness*.

#### 3. Family as a value, and family-related values

When the situation of *axiological warpedness* is observed, the traditional family is shedding its privileged status in structures of social world. It is observed as the de-legitimization of its meaningfulness as a primary group, social institution, and an environment in which one's social personality matures. Moreover, a belief is being disseminated according to which the traditionally conceived family is no longer viewed as a salient social institution. On the contrary, it is frequently seen as something dispensable.

When approached from an axiological perspective, the directions of family-related transformations can be summarized by enumerating two main tendencies:

- The transformation leading from the family conceived as an institution, through the family as a community (*communio personarum*), to alternative forms of family and marriage.
- The transformation from the great family, through the nuclear family, to the culture of single persons.

Regardless of a polity, families face a task of protecting their status in established forms of culture and social structure, as well as safeguarding their rights with reference to obligations held by state or self-government institutions towards it. The future of

every society depends upon the condition of family. The aforementioned demographic data clearly prove the thesis. State-wide, region-wide or district-wide social relationships and their role in reinforcing families are not indifferent to this matter. A debate on the condition of family is, at the same time, a dispute concerning the fate of a polity, nation or society.

WOJCIECH ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ

## Famille en tant que valeur et ses transformations contemporaines

### Résumé

L'homme établit les valeurs, et les valeurs constituent l'homme : sa personnalité, ses attitudes, ses aspirations de la vie, les modèles de comportements et d'activités sociales dans la vie privée ou publique qui sont choisis et réalisés par lui. La vie sociale n'existe pas hors de la sphère axiologique, aussi bien au niveau individuel que collectif. On est toujours impliqués dans un système de valeurs. Les valeurs appartiennent au champ culturel, et la culture est un culte de valeurs.

Les études des systèmes de valeurs et de leurs transformations constituent un plan très avantageux pour des réflexions sur le vecteur des changements de la société et de sa culture. En ce qui concerne la condition contemporaine de la société polonaise, on peut dire qu'elle se trouve à une étape importante des transformations de la culture, à une sorte de « tournant de l'histoire ». On peut attribuer à la condition culturelle de la société contemporaine vivant à l'ère de la mondialisation le nom d' « un gauchissement axiologique ».

À l'époque de cet ébouriffage axiologique, une famille naturelle commence à perdre sa place privilégiée dans les structures de l'espace social. Sa raison d'être, en tant que groupe élémentaire et institution sociale ou encore milieu où mûrit toute personnalité sociale, est soumise à la délégitimisation. On répand la conviction que dans le monde moderne, la famille saisie d'une façon traditionnelle devient moins importante, et peut-être même inutile.

L'orientation des changements de la famille contemporaine perçus dans la perspective des mutations axiologiques peut être divisée en deux tendances principales :

- de la famille en tant qu'institution, en passant par la famille en tant que communauté (*communio personarum*), jusqu'aux formes alternatives du mariage et de la famille ;
- de la culture d'une famille nombreuse, en passant par la famille nucléaire (regroupant deux adultes mariés ou non, avec ou sans enfants), jusqu'à la culture du célibat.

Sans distinction du régime politique qui est au pouvoir, le devoir de la famille est de protéger sa position dans la culture et dans la structure sociale, ses droits mais également la garantie des obligations que les institutions du pouvoir étatique ou local doivent lui assurer. Le futur de toute société dépend de la condition de ses familles. Les données démographiques que l'on a rapportées prouvent cette thèse d'une façon lucide. La manière dont les relations sociales seront formées à l'échelle de l'État, de la commune ou de la région n'est point sans importance ; non plus la question si ces relations favoriseront la famille et le foyer. Le différend concernant la forme de la famille n'est en réalité qu'un différend sur la forme de l'État, de la nation et de la société.

**Mots clés :** famille, valeurs familiales, mutations de la famille, crise des valeurs, crise familiale

WOJCIECH ŚWIĄTKIEWICZ

## La famiglia come valore e le sue trasformazioni contemporanee

### Sommario

L'uomo crea i valori e i valori contribuiscono alla creazione dell'uomo; la sua personalità, gli atteggiamenti, le aspirazioni di vita, i modelli di comportamento come pure le attività sociali, preferiti e realizzati nella pratica della vita privata o pubblica. Non c'è vita sociale fuori della sfera assiologica, sia nella dimensione individuale, sia collettiva. Siamo sempre coinvolti nel mondo dei valori. I valori appartengono all'ordine della cultura. La cultura è il culto dei valori.

Gli studi sui sistemi di valori e sulle loro mutazioni costituiscono un piano conveniente di riflessione sulle direzioni delle trasformazioni della società e della sua cultura. Della condizione contemporanea della società polacca possiamo dire che si trova in una fase importante di trasformazione della cultura, ad uno specifico "punto di svolta nella storia". La condizione culturale della società contemporanea dell'era della globalizzazione può essere chiamata "deformazione assiologica".

In una situazione di deformazione assiologica della cultura la famiglia naturale inizia a perdere il suo posto privilegiato nelle strutture del mondo sociale. Il senso della sua esistenza come gruppo fondamentale e istituzione sociale, ambiente di maturazione della personalità sociale, è sottoposto a delegittimazione. È diffusa la convinzione secondo la quale la famiglia concepita in modo tradizionale non diventa nella società moderna l'istituzione più importante, ma forse è addirittura inutile.

Le direzioni delle trasformazioni della famiglia contemporanea, affrontate nella prospettiva dei mutamenti assiologici, possono essere ricondotte a due correnti principali:

- dalla famiglia come istituzione, attraverso la famiglia come comunità (*communio personarum*) fino alle forme alternative di matrimonio e di famiglia.
- Dalla cultura della famiglia grande, attraverso la famiglia piccola (nucleare) fino alla cultura dei single.

A prescindere dal sistema di governo instaurato, il compito della famiglia è la protezione della sua posizione nella cultura e nella struttura sociale; la salvaguardia dei suoi diritti ma anche la garanzia degli obblighi che gravano sulle istituzioni dell'autorità statale o auto-governativa nei suoi confronti. Il futuro di ciascuna società dipende dalla condizione delle sue famiglie. I dati demografici sopraccitati documentano in modo chiaro tale tesi. Non è quindi indifferente come saranno formati i rapporti sociali su scala statale, comunale o regionale; e se essi saranno propizi alla famiglia e allo spirito familiare. La disputa sulla forma della famiglia è in sostanza una disputa sulla forma dello stato, del popolo e della società.

**Parole chiave:** Famiglia, valori familiari, cambiamenti della famiglia, crisi dei valori, crisi della famiglia