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Reflection on the Family at the Beginning of the 21st Century

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Introduction

A look at any subject of reflection is in the first place conditioned by the observing subject's vantage point. This rule can be applied also to such an important phenomenon as the family. While considering family it is crucial to take into account the situation of an individual being a member of family and community. In this contribution, we are not going to analyse the situation of the observing subject who participates in changes nor the causes of the present position of family, but — on the basis of the available analyses — we will focus our attention on changes in family and on its future in relation to its role and meaning. Examination of philosophical and theological inclinations shows that a social issue can be linked to the opening future as far as “a person's ability to constantly retrieve their own past belongs among their attributive dimensions and on its basis a person can construct projects of their future.”¹

¹ F. MIHINA: “Kríza ‘konca storočia’ alebo philosophiae pro futuro?” In: *Filozofia výchovy a problém vyučovania filozofie*. Bratislava 1998, p. 24.

Social changes and the family

After the Second World War, social circumstances were characterized by a fortunate conjuncture of family life, unprecedented increase in natality, economic growth and higher standard of living amongst different classes of society, particularly in the USA and in the countries of Western and Northern Europe. Middle and Eastern Europe were, in turn, influenced by the totalitarian socialism. Christianity and spiritual life of families were suppressed and the role of family in the society was ideologized. Among the families of East and West European societies with an actual possibility of “a new family in a new family house,” the new concept of nuclear family has started to be perceived as a standard way of family life in modern society.²

Sociologist I. Možný offers an overview of the changes which have had an impact on family in the second half of the 20th century, and which have led to the current problems:³

1. Decrease in the number of multigenerational families has caused discontinuity of generations and change in family structure. The changes relate to the sizes of families. Multi-member families occur rarely, and this causes long-term decrease in birthrate. Age of an average mother giving birth is more advanced.
2. Changes in sexual behaviour. Traditional family had a monopoly in legitimate delivery and socialization of children, which lasted for a relatively long period. Modern technologies have enabled the more efficient separation of pregnancy from sexual intercourse with the help of different kinds of contraception. The age of legitimate parents becomes more advanced and the number of children born out of the wedlock is also growing.
3. Liberalization and legalization of cohabitation causes decrease in marriage rate. In traditional family the choice of a partner was influenced by the family, the Church, and the community. At present, this influence is declining and an individual alone chooses a future partner, as well as a form of this relationship.
4. Secularization, which is a process that reduces the influence of churches on family and promotes secular way of life and atheistic notions. In traditional system, under the influence of Christian teachings,

² Cf. I. Možný: *Sociologia rodiny*. Praha 2002, p. 44.

³ Cf. IDEM: *Společnost a rodina*. Praha 2008, pp. 20—23. Cf. M. POTOČÁROVÁ, L. BARANYAI: “Rodina a výchova.” In: *Európske pedagogické myslenie od moderny po súčasnosť*. Eds. B. KUDLÁČOVÁ, A. RAJSKÝ. Trnava 2012, p. 143.

it was possible to end a marriage of two people only in exceptional cases. At present, marriage is perceived as civic contract which can be renounced by any of the two parties. It causes divorce boom of various measure and range.

5. Family has lost a number of its traditional roles and spheres of influence due to development of different specific institutions. It is mainly school that took over the role of family regarding education and upbringing of children. Also, the mass media cancelled monopoly of family in socializing of children and the young. They form their opinions and attitudes towards values and the proper lifestyle.
6. The role of woman has changed in a way that a woman is employed and wants to achieve success at work, she does not have enough time for maternity. Lifetime maternity changes into a short episode in her lifetime. As a result of education, qualification and financial situation and security of family, women get employed as do men. Marriages with two breadwinners seem common and they are a natural result of this trend.

The changes which influenced family have created a situation in which previously successful solutions are insufficient, and this fact is linked with helplessness and opening of new possibilities. Potočárová introduces three striking causes of problems and difficulties for family at present:

1. Changes in personal disposition of a postmodern person; changes in personalities of spouses, parents and other people, who form the family.
2. Changes on a social scale.
3. Changes in the character of family, in understanding of the marriage, the role of partnership and parenthood.

The changes in the life of family have caused the changes in organization of marriages, namely

1. From hierarchical to egalitarian relationship between partners.
2. From normatively defined roles to a relationship where individuality and individual roles of partners are respected.
3. The emphasis is put on what one can gain from marriage, what can be taken from the relationship rather than on giving, offering, devoting to each other.⁴

The changes in family and understanding of marriage are not the issues of the present study. On the contrary, these changes have accompanied mankind throughout the history. The real issue is their qualitative dimension, that is whether these are changes for better or worse. When Aristotle criticizes Plato's totalitarian reforms of family life, the central issue is whether Plato's suggestions are good or bad for *polis*, that is for

⁴ Cf. M. POTOČÁROVÁ, L. BARANYAI: "Rodina a výchova...", pp. 147—148.

society, since one can live one's life only in community and society, meaning with others. According to Aristotle, diversity of families is conditioned by providing them with basic needs for life, reproduction and raising children. Family, where relationships are given by love,⁵ cannot provide basic needs sufficiently and hence, it joins the *komé* (village, family community, city district) and with more *komai* creates *polis*, which is a complete and perfect community, almost self-sufficient with regard to providing for the needs.⁶ The aim of joining in the first place is to survive, not to gain.

Christianity also caused changes in understanding of marriage by emphasising morally pure life, freedom and responsibility. The *Epistle to Diognetus* says: "For Christians are not distinguished from the rest of the mankind either in locality or in speech or in customs. They bear their share in all things as citizens, and they endure all hardships as strangers. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every fatherland is foreign. They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives [...]. They obey the established laws, and they surpass the law in their own lives [...]. In a word, what the soul is in a body, the Christians are in the world."⁷

If we witness transformations of family and marriage, these changes must be assessed exactly as they were once by Aristotle, that is from the point of view of a particular entirety. The third enumerated cause of these changes appears to be the most problematic: the emphasis is put on personal benefits from marriage, on taking from the relationship rather than on giving oneself to each other. The paradox is that unwillingness to share with the other leads to poverty, as the involved parties lose the benefits of the synergistic effect. Different structures of families and households are connected with variegated social and economic results. Risk of poverty is higher among the so-called flatmates than among married couples; divorce and living separately are associated with poverty, too. This situation seems risky mainly for women but also for the single-parent families. Even a working person has higher poverty rate than a family with both parents, where only one parent works. Young people face smaller risk of poverty if they live with their parents, and also children in single-parent families face higher risk of poverty.⁸ This issue was linked to personalists in the 20th century, where the central topic is *persona* actualising themselves in *communio personarum*. For subject, it is necessary to reflect

⁵ Cf. ARISTOTELES: *Politika*. Vol I. Bratislava 2009, pp. 24—28.

⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 2—4.

⁷ *List Diognetovi*. In: *Liturgia hodín*. Vol. II. Vatican 1988, pp. 813—814.

⁸ Cf. *The Future of Families to 2030*. Ed. ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT. Paris 2011, p. 17.

pro futuro basic demand of love, to be “together with others,” to act with them and, in that way, make up a community of people, the realization and completion of subject’s being depends on.

Changes in family structures and family relationships have an impact on informal networks in taking care of elderly people: not having children can mean higher dependency on professional care at older age. The divorced, separated and re-married have bigger difficulties in keeping long-term relationships with their children, which will lead to lower ability to provide informal care within family network. The data show that all the above-mentioned changes in the structure of households and families will continue and will be even faster in the course of next 20 years, hence the issue of family needs deep reflection and decisive action. There are changes which influence lives of man and family in a positive way and changes with negative influence, fundamental and accidental changes, therefore it is important to rediscover meaning of family. Based on the sociological research, it is relevant to point out the most serious dangers concerning the stability of marriage and family and at the same time to explain possibilities of social support for families.

On 22 October 1983, the Holy See issued the Charter of the Rights of the Family to international institutions and authorities responsible for family issues. The charter addresses mainly governments and is offered as a model and foundation for changes in laws regarding family policy. It emphasises social dimension of human rights which concern the individual as well as the family. Family is rendered as a community of love and solidarity, unique as far as educational opportunities and possibilities for passing cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values are concerned, important for development and success of its own members and the whole society as well.

In the present Slovak legislation, family is defined as a unit based on monogamous marriage. In the amended Family Act No. 36/2005 Coll. it is stated that marriage is a union of a man and a woman under the protection of society; the main aim of marriage is family and upbringing of children, family based on marriage is a basic unit of the society, and the society protects all forms of family. Parenthood is appreciated as a role of men and women. The society offers not only its protection to parenthood, but also the necessary care, mainly material support for parents and help in carrying out parents’ rights and duties.⁹ Family has always been in every condition a primary source of providing for child’s biological needs and guiding its development towards an integrated person, able to live in society and to pass its culture on.

⁹ Cf. J. GABURA: *Sociálna práca s rodinou*. Bratislava 2006, p. 5.

Family and education

Amongst different socializing influences participating in forming an individual in the course of life, family plays a decisive and irreplaceable role. It influences a person from the earliest age when it is most likely to influence them. This influence is very intense, emotional, personal and long-lasting. As the smallest social unit, the family makes up the most important relationship system of reference for most of people, where many important aspects of psychical development of all its members, especially children, take place. Its role is to provide conditions for the development and support of the members on biological, social, psychological and spiritual level.

From the psychological point of view, in the modern society, family is a shelter and it offers stability that is necessary for the individual's balance in a dynamically changing society. Within a family, people relieve tension from other social relationships, they look at it as a source of strength. Those who are successful leave responsibility and decision-making to other family members, usually to spouses, whereas the unsuccessful ones compensate the lack of their authority within the family by exerting their control in other spheres of life. The world of family has become the most private place, most valued sovereign authority for family members. In a modern family, an individual who established family is thought of as a sovereign. The modern society claims the right to interfere with internal affairs in case the rights and health of individual members are threatened.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, the family is an important and unique environment for upbringing and education of the youth. The scholar takes into consideration some properties and roles of the family which have changed with the development of the society, but it has maintained some basic features, which clarify the meaning of family:

- a. Family is a form of long-term coexistence approved by society.
- b. Family consists of people mutually connected by blood kinship, marriage or adoption, as accepted by prevailing custom.
- c. Family members usually live under one roof.
- d. Family members cooperate within division of roles accepted by society, where one of the most important roles is nurturing and education of children.¹⁰

Family is generally considered to be the basic unit of social organization, but it is difficult to define it properly. Family is an institutional-

¹⁰ Cf. Z. BAUMAN: *Úvahy o postmoderní době*. Praha 1995, p. 47.

ized social unit, in which some of the members are interconnected by a consanguineous or an adoptive parent-child social relationship. The second group of members function in a mother-father relationship; the third group, which is not always present, is a siblings relationship. All of them are socially sanctioned, more or less lasting social relationships.

The notion in question is not to be seen as an abstract construct of a lawmaker, but it is a complex and extensive establishment. Despite the natural character of family life, it is also the biggest experiment of the mankind. Within family the education takes place in a father-mother-child triangle; all the attempts to diminish this relation by resembling it to the master-subject relationship, a sage vs. an unwise person, a teacher and a pupil, lead us away from the original source of education, that is *fillia* — love, friendship, favour. Originating from *fillia* ‘cosmos character’ of family following each custom and each historical form of community, means to protect from damage caused by all our decisions and thoughts, all our plans which do not count with unconquerability, incomprehensibility, no subjectivity of being. Upbringing is not only an education, but rather a process of learning to live.¹¹

Education as such originates in the area of love, friendship, favour and care; therefore, the need to be educated belongs to the essence of a person, as Eugen Fink, a German philosopher and pedagogue, claims: “Human being is essentially co-determined by original phenomenon of education.” To educate means to confirm that man cannot live without another man. Unlike original *paidea*, modern thinking has lowered education to the level of necessary evil, which helps to change a word into brand and reduce education to the role of a tool, like a hammer, which can be put aside when the work is finished. If one tries to put education aside, it leads to delay, separation and alienation from life and from oneself.¹²

Christianity brought very important optimism into education. Evil in the world does not originate in metaphysical principle, but it originates in a personal and free decision of man who rejects God. God is not a subject to necessity. He is Love, and man is given second chance in Jesus Christ. Man is created in the image of God. Christian education does not accept division of society and totalitarian features of Plato’s education, because Christ does not care only about the chosen Jews or educated Greeks, but He takes care about all the people. Christ’s coming to the world is the highest expression of God’s educational effort. Jesus Christ — *Logos*, is an

¹¹ Cf. A. RAJSKÝ: “Ideál a ideály európskeho človeka v procese dejín vlastného sebanazerania (antropologicko-teologický context).” In: *Európske pedagogické myslenie od antiky po modernu*. Ed. B. KUDLÁČOVÁ. Trnava 2010, pp. 35—67. Cf. J. MICHÁLEK: *Topologie výchovy*. Praha 1996, pp. 68—79.

¹² Cf. A. RAJSKÝ: “Ideál a ideály...,” p. 54.

example and authority, aim and sense, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (Jn 14, 6). The first Christian thinkers introduce Christ as the only Educator and Teacher. The whole universe, the work of creation and salvation, every man and the entire mankind is included in a universal process of education, which is salvation leading to the excellence of a person living with God. Knowledge is not sufficient when we want to act right, God’s grace is necessary, too. Education of a Christian is *imitato Christi*.¹³

Family is the first natural educational environment. In family, man experiences his first joys, sufferings, desire to work as well as he/she gains an ability to give. According to Jacques Maritain, the function of the family is twofold: biologically-creative and psychologically-educational. The natural unity of these two functions has a positive impact on children and parents. The first experiences tend to have long-lasting effect on a person. Therefore, the good or bad example of parents accompanies man for the rest of his/her life. Maritain considers moral education of children to be the special role of the family.¹⁴ The basic justification of the distinguished position of family is love which makes man capable of internal acceptance of values and leads him/her to respect ethical standards. It is impossible to talk about education without authentic conjugal and parental love. Love is not a matter of training or learned science, love is a gift — from man or God.¹⁵ There are many forms of love within a family: conjugal, parental, filial and sibling. Variety of educational suggestions by father, mother and other family members is important as well. Their roles differ, but they enrich a child emotionally and spiritually. Family love is a prototype of any love as a life attitude. Considering religion, it has a significant position in the family,¹⁶ because love is from God and it is love to God that creates an atmosphere for integral education of man.¹⁷ Integral humanism is theocentric and it respects freedom of man as well as transcendental grace, because it is grace that unifies people with God. The biblical message is the message of salvation which is provided for a person living in the history, since it is in such a earthly circumstances that a person should testify about transcendental world where they belong.¹⁸ Family may be a subject to various deviations. Maritain warns against an

¹³ Cf. W. JAEGER: *Wczesne chrześcijaństwo i grecka paideia*. Bydgoszcz 1997, p. 103.

¹⁴ Cf. J. MARITAIN: *Pour une philosophie de l'éducation*. Paris 1959, pp. 118—120.

¹⁵ Cf. IDEM: *Education at the Crossroads*. New Have 1943, pp. 117—121.

¹⁶ Cf. M. REMBIERZ: “Dom rodzinny jako przestrzeń wychowania intelektualnego — wzrastanie w mądrości, czy utwierdzanie się w dziedzicznych uprzedzeniach i stereotypach?” In: *Jaka rodzina, takie społeczeństwo. Wspólnototwórczy wymiar wychowania integralnego*. Ed. M.T. KOZUBEK. Katowice 2012, p. 240.

¹⁷ Cf. J. MARITAIN: *Pour une philosophie...*, p. 120.

¹⁸ Cf. IDEM: *Křesťanský humanismus*. Praha 1947, p. 254.

overtly authoritative approach of parents and against neglecting any of their responsibilities (economic, social, educational, etc.). He recommends a purposeful deepening of family relations, because family breakdown leads to demoralization and subjectivity of upbringing.¹⁹ In the article 17 of *Familiaris consortio* introduces a concept of family where education is conditioned by an intimate community of life and love. Family is given the mission to “guard, express and provide love as a living echo, and a real participation in God’s love towards mankind and in Jesus Christ’s love toward Church, His bride.”²⁰

If we want to raise person towards respecting life, we must educate him/her to actual understanding of and living in freedom. Education towards the actual living in freedom must take place in family, school and other educational institutions, but again, “the most important is man and his moral authority, which is the result of true nature of principles and their identity with his deeds.”²¹ Education within a family has its special, primary importance in culture and in education towards actual humanity. Holy Father emphasises the importance of this upbringing, claiming that family “fulfills its mission of spreading the Gospel in upbringing children. By a word and example, every day contacts and decisions, actual expressions and signs, parents teach their children the authentic freedom which is realized by unconditional self-giving and develops respect towards others, sense of justice, attitude of cordial accepting of others, dialogue, service full of devotion and solidarity, as well as all the other values which help to accept life as a gift.”²² A role of not lesser importance belongs to teachers and tutors: “It depends on them whether the young, educated to actual freedom, are able to keep and spread ideals of life and form attitude of respect and service in every person in family and society.”²³

The aim of the integral education is a preparation of man for life in the society. Man is a social being and belongs to various social groups (family, school, work, profession, nation, politics, religion, etc.). Upbringing must reflect the social character of human being and lead children as well as youth to cooperation with other people. Maritain rejects individualism and sociologism.²⁴ Extreme individualism minimized the role of social bonds of the individual and his/her responsibility towards other people. Maritain perceives freedom in an abstract and unilateral way.

¹⁹ Cf. IDEM: *Pour une philosophie...*, p. 42.

²⁰ IOANNES PAULUS II: *Adhortatio apostolica “Familiaris consortio”*, 22.11.1981, n. 17.

²¹ IDEM: “W imię przyszłości kultury. Przemówienie w UNESCO.” Paris, 2.6.1980. In: IDEM: *Wiara i kultura*. Rzym 1986, p. 72.

²² IDEM: *Litterae encyclicae “Evangelium vitae”*, 25.3.1995, n. 92.

²³ *Ibidem*, n. 98.

²⁴ Cf. J. MARITAIN: *Pour une philosophie...*, pp. 31—34.

The correctly interpreted freedom is a responsible one which does not collide with requirements of social life. For the sake of social life, spiritually mature man freely chooses the necessary constraints. From the personalistic point of view, social life does not represent a threat to a person, but rather enriches him/her by various relationships and updates their integrity. The threat to man and his freedom comes from some concepts of social life put forward by sociology.²⁵ Maritain warns against collectivism which assumes the full right in axiological sphere. Utilitarianism and pedagogical pragmatism lead to upbringing which ignores internal needs and individual aspirations of man. The purpose of social life is not the restriction but development of human being. The dynamic character of social life requires continual adaptation of changing human relations which causes a temporal tension between an individual and community, but it does not represent a denial of individual freedom. The adequate upbringing is mostly threatened by various anthropologic deviations, the absence of the goal of education, improper understanding of it, pragmatism, sociologism, intellectualism and voluntarism.²⁶

Conclusions

Deliberation over the future of family is connected to upbringing in its narrowest sense, whereas it is necessary to bear in mind that “the most important thing is to touch human reality in its most distinctive point — the point, which man’s experience refers to and from which man cannot step back without destroying himself/herself.”²⁷ The point of no return is a deed, a good deed carried out by man.²⁸ At the beginning of the 21st century, family still has a relevant mission: to do good, and hence, the education cannot be restricted to matters of Plato’s shadow, but it must aim at asking questions longing for the truth and voice of conscience, on duty, on freedom and responsibility, suffering, guilt, hope, troubles, meetings, work, that is to the whole basic experience through which essence and meaning of man is uncovered.

²⁵ Cf. S. KOWALCZYK: *Wprowadzenie do filozofii J. Maritaina*. Lublin 1992, p. 51.

²⁶ Cf. J. MARITAIN: *Pour une philosophie...*, pp. 17—39.

²⁷ K. WOJTYŁA: *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*. Lublin 1994, p. 70.

²⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 60.

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PAVOL DANCÁK

Reflection on the Family at the Beginning of the 21st Century

Summary

When thinking about family it is important to consider the situation in which man is the observing subject, that is a member of a family and a community. In this contribution, on the basis of available analyses, we focus our attention on changes in family and on its future in relation to its role and meaning. Contemplation of the future of family is connected to the upbringing in its most basic sense, to which man's experience refers and from which man cannot step back without destroying himself.

PAVOL DANCÁK

Réflexion sur la famille au début du XXIe siècle

Résumé

L'une des plus importantes parties de la réflexion sur la famille est bien l'analyse de la situation où l'homme, étant membre d'une famille et d'une communauté, occupe la position d'un sujet observant. Dans le présent article, tout en s'appuyant sur les analyses qui ont été faites dans ce domaine jusqu'à présent, l'auteur porte son attention sur les changements s'opérant dans un milieu familial et sur le futur de la famille, y compris sa mission et son sens. Les questions concernant le futur de la famille sont strictement liées à l'éducation perçue comme celle dont le sens renvoie à ses origines et qui est déterminée par la plus élémentaire expérience existentielle et axiologique de l'homme. Ici, il s'agit du sens dont l'homme ne peut pas se détacher, sinon il anéantirait lui-même.

Mots clés: famille, homme, futur, éducation

PAVOL DANCÁK

Riflessione sulla famiglia agli inizi del XXI secolo

Sommario

Una parte molto importante della riflessione sulla famiglia è la ponderazione della situazione in cui l'uomo si trova come soggetto che osserva, da membro della famiglia e della società. Nel presente articolo, partendo dalle analisi condotte finora nella letteratura su tale materia, concentriamo l'attenzione sui cambiamenti che hanno luogo nella famiglia e sul futuro della famiglia riguardo alla sua missione e al suo senso. Le osservazioni sul futuro della famiglia sono strettamente legate all'educazione, intesa nel suo significato originario e più appropriato, che indica l'esperienza esistenziale ed assiologica dell'uomo più elementare, significato che nessun uomo può rinnegare in alcun modo, perché altrimenti annullerebbe se stesso.

Parole chiave: famiglia, uomo, futuro, educazione