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The Christian Family between the Challenges of the Present and its Ideals. Spiritual and Moral Considerations

Emanuel-Ioan PAVEL

Emanuel-Ioan PAVEL

“Lucian Blaga” University, Sibiu, Romania

Email: pavel_emanuel@yahoo.com

Abstract

In its millennia of existence, the institution of the family has proved to be an exceptional school of moral perfection, of crystallization of moral character, with each new generation growing up and forming within a family. In the same way, however, the institution of the family has had to cope with the changes that have constantly occurred in the daily life of society. Today the family is subject to pressure from various directions, which calls into question its very meaning to the extent that it is no longer perceived in all its holiness and in the fullness of its responsibility. At the same time, the cohesion of the family and the fulfilment of its roles is also affected by the phenomenon of migration with all its implications for both spouses and their children. All these realities have to some extent disrupted the Family. The present study aims to present the vast majority of the reasons why the family is in a state of crisis today, while demonstrating the acute need for society and the Church to revive the Family in the depths of its primordial meaning.

Keywords:

family crisis, secularism, devaluation of family, migration, trial marriages, libertinism

I. Introduction

First of all, I would like to emphasize that this study was born out of the need to present, in broad outline, some of the reasons why the family is today in a marked crisis, and also out of the desire to highlight the acute need for society and the Church to revive the family in the depths of its primordial meanings.

The family represents one of the values par excellence of humanity and an exceptional school of moral perfection, with each new generation growing up and being formed within a family. However, as a consequence of secularisation and other trends in society, we are currently witnessing a painstaking and assiduous attempt to destroy this holy institution by distorting and devaluing its meaning, promoting alternatives to the family and attempting to redefine or even recreate this millenary and holy institution in order to make it as appropriate as possible to the trends of the present age. On the other hand, current migration is one of the main causes leading to the alteration of the cohesion of the Christian family, contributing greatly to the perversion of the original aims of the family. All these realities have to some extent upset the Family.

II. The Family in a Secularised World

Along with all other social structures existing today, the family is clearly affected by the secularisation of today's world. A particular characteristic of secularism, which is also one of its challenges, is that it does not give any meaning or importance, especially in the case of marriage and the family, as the priest professor Antoine Nassif remarked, to religious traditions or social customs which do not fit or do not fit into its "current social paradigm"¹.

¹ Pr. prof. Bassam Antoine NASSIF, *Taina Căsătoriei în contextul deconstructivismului: Dialog între antropologia ortodoxă și abordările postmoderne*, translated from English by Ciprian Costin Apintiliese, Editura Basilica, București, 2023, p. 19.

In the same vein, Metropolitan Ilarion Alfeiev remarked extraordinarily that secularism is waging a systematic war against the notions of marriage and family², which have become entrenched throughout history in the conception of life of societies, wishing to make them omnipresent and at the same time proposing, in its approach, its own concept of the understanding of these notions as well as of sexual relations, a concept which, however, is very foreign to the traditional understanding of these notions or of intimate relations.

Because of this, I am of the opinion that secularism, desacralization or secularization have an unsuspected force and countless resources through which they want and can attack the foundations of all the holy principles of Christian morality³, everything that is holy, beautiful and eternal in society and in the Church, with the aim of diminishing, obstructing and finally destroying everything that for more than two millennia has been preached by the Church through her people and lived practically and fruitfully by all the spiritual sons of the Orthodox Church of old. However, the consequences, both in the short term and in the long term, of distancing oneself from all that is holy and thus indirectly from God, of isolating the Church and diminishing its role in society and, basically, of diminishing trust in God⁴, are harmful and particularly serious, bringing with them the worsening of relations between human beings, disregard for all that is sacred and for all sound principles of moral and religious origin. Ignoring and rejecting all moral and Christian values, which have nourished us and our Romanian nation with their

² Mitr. Hilarion ALFEYEV, "Sexual revolution and its demographic consequences", in: Consiglio Conferenze episcopali d'Europa (cur.), "La famiglia: un bene per l'umanità. The Family: a Good for Humanity. Atti del I Forum Europeo Cattolico-Ortodosso Trento, Italia, 11-14 dicembre 2008", Editrice Centro Editoriale Dehoniano, Bologna, 2009, p. 63.

³ Pr. Prof. Dr. Sorin COSMA, *O abordare creștină a Bioeticii*, Editura Marineasa, Timișoara, 2007, p. 108.

⁴ Lect. Univ. Laurențiu D. TĂNASE, "Familia și societatea într-o lume secularizată", in: *Congresul Internațional "Familia și Viața la începutul unui nou mileniu creștin"*, București – Palatul Patriarhiei 25 – 27 septembrie 2001, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2002, p. 80.

sap, automatically gives rise to and brings about novelties, contexts and situations which are incompatible with these values which are part of our tradition, with the Christian spirit⁵ in its essence and directly and primarily with the Christian-Orthodox family. It is precisely for this reason that, in referring to today's neo-pagan secularism⁶, I think of and draw a parallel with the decline of the pagan family during the Roman Empire, which had as its main and defining consequence the final moral collapse of this famous Empire.

From another perspective, secularization is characterized, among other things, as Olivier Clement said, by that society in which contemporary man "ignoring heaven, finds the earth"⁷. Or it is precisely relativism⁸ and carelessness that characterise many people in today's society.

Throughout history we have plenty of evidence that the absence of moral values has caused the collapse not only of entire families but also of great empires. Therefore, in a secularized society and world of humanity, where material goods and values are placed before and above spiritual

⁵ Pr. Asist. Dr. Cosmin Tudor CIOCAN, "«...Și vor fi amândoi un trup» – Răspuns psihopatologiei vieții de familie", in: Universitatea „Ovidius” Constanța, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă, Arhiepiscopia Tomisului, Arhiepiscopia Sucevei și Rădăuților, Centrul de Cercetări Teologice, Interculturale și Ecumenice „Sf. Ioan Casian”, *Simpozionul Internațional "Sfintele Taine și Familia creștină" 17-19 octombrie 2011, Mănăstirea "Acoferământul Maicii Domnului" Dorna – Arini*, Editura Vasiliana '98, Sibiu-Iași, 2012, p. 186.

⁶ Pr. Prof. Dr. Sorin COSMA, "Legitimitatea familiei creștine în contextul actual", in: *Tabor*, XII (2018), 10, p. 6.

⁷ Olivier CLEMENT, "Despre secularizare", translation into Romanian by Daniela Cojocariu, in: *Contacts (SOP)*, LI (1999), 187, p. 16, *apud* Pr. Drd. Vasile POP, "Familia creștină – imperativul misionar al Bisericii în societatea contemporană. Accente și remedii misionare", in: *Glasul Bisericii*, LXXVII (2018) 1-6, p. 104.

⁸ Claudio GIULIODORI, "La famiglia cristiana, protagonista della nuova evangelizzazione", in Juan José PÉREZ-SOBA (ed.), *La famiglia, luce di dio in una società senza dio. Nuova evangelizzazione e famiglia*, Editrice Cantagalli s.r.l., Siena, 2014, quoting the author J. Ratzinger, draws attention to an extremely dangerous fact that consists in the gradual establishment of a dictatorship of relativism, in which the human person is blown to and fro by every wind of doctrine of different shades. The relativism that exists in society today is characterised by the fact that it does not accept anything in an irrevocable or absolute form, leaving its own desires and its own ego as the ultimate measure in every situation.

values and goods, it is an opportune moment for the institution of the family to rediscover its deeply spiritual and authentic meaning in Christ the Lord, thus strengthening its inner cohesion⁹ and becoming once again the vector or organism of moral renewal of all people and of society as a whole, since the family is the light of God¹⁰ in a society without God, which tries to organise the world as if God did not exist. Secularisation, this particular force, has, however, a crack called the family through which a ray of light enters, which is God and which will never cease to spread its radiance throughout the entire earthly universe.

II.1. The Current Crisis of the Family Institution

In today's world society we see every day how many of the things that surround us are in a state of instability synonymous with collapse, we passively and helplessly witness how ancient institutions are crumbling from the foundations and those that still manage to survive through the mists of time no longer have the vitality and brilliance they once had, the exception to this being marriage or the sacred institution of the family. I am also aware that the ancient holy ordinances that have accompanied our existence until now are beginning to be increasingly disregarded and nonchalantly placed under the heading "to be forgotten". All the holy and positive things that have sustained our Romanian nation in existence and implicitly us as persons are withering and atrophying, and if they are still kept afloat in the axis of existence, this is achieved, according to Arch. Asterie S. Hatzinikolaou, with a "typicality that does not allow us to see their depth and true value"¹¹.

Nowadays, we are witnessing a situation in which the ancestral, natural or traditional family is in a deep crisis, in a heavy mutation towards

⁹ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Dumitru POPESCU, "Familia în cultura secularizată", in: *Congresul Internațional "Familia și Viața la începutul unui nou mileniu creștin"*, București – Palatul Patriarhiei 25 – 27 septembrie 2001", p. 231.

¹⁰ Juan José PÉREZ-SOBA, "Introduzioni", in: *La famiglia, luce di dio in una società senza dio. Nuova evangelizzazione e famiglia*, p. 6.

¹¹ Arhim. Asterie S. HATZINIKOLAOU, *Problemele familiei contemporane*, translated from Greek by Cristian Spătăreanu, Editura Egumenița, Galați, 2021, p. 9.

a confused tomorrow, towards an unpredictable and uncertain¹² future, all over the world. This permanent reality and concomitant existence with every generation in human history, the family, without falling from its holy meaning willed by God, is subjected with an indescribable savagery and violence to the “daily disorder of the profane”¹³, which also explains in large part the crisis without parallel in its history, which it is going through today, is being undermined¹⁴ in a way unprecedented in our days. These times of instability or fickleness with which we are contemporary are striking in a barbaric way at the most ancient and divine social institution, the institution of the family. The instability to which I refer may have many causes or may be caused directly or indirectly by countless ideological currents or existing situations, but whether we are talking about instability generated by secularisation, desacralisation, globalisation, the non-existence of moral, ethical or social values, the lack of money or poverty, which leads many of our fellow human beings to choose the path of flight to foreign countries, all of these have a strong imprint and weaken¹⁵ the institution of the family, to such an extent that they may cause its collapse.

I dare to list, not necessarily in a sequential or chronological or hierarchical order, but as a whole, what I would call the most thorny tragedies and problems of the family in today’s society, namely: the emigration of one or even both spouses, abortion, divorce, the premature death of one of the spouses, the various wars and military conflicts in different parts of the world which also have a strong impact on family cohesion and unity, chronic illnesses, the loss of wealth or housing, the loss of the job of one of the spouses, in many cases the only financial breadwinner etc.

¹² Mitr. Daniel CIOBOTEA, “Familia creștină – speranța României”, in: *Congresul Internațional “Familia și Viața la începutul unui nou mileniu creștin”*, București – Palatul Patriarhiei 25 – 27 septembrie 2001, p. 33.

¹³ Iolanda MITROFAN, Cristian CIUPERCĂ (eds.), *Psihologia vieții de cuplu: între iluzie și realitate*, Editura Sper, București, 2002, p. 28.

¹⁴ Daniel DAGENAIS, *La fin de la famille moderne. La signification des transformations contemporaines de la famille*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2000, p. 234.

¹⁵ Arh. Andrei ANDREICUȚ, “În familie se întemeiază rânduiala morală și spirituală a unui neam”, in: *Simpozionul Teologic Internațional “Familie, Filantropie și Etică Socială. Parteneriatul Stat – Biserică în Asistența Socială”*, Ediția a X-a: 6-8 mai 2011, Vol. I, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2011, p. 5.

Beyond listing the above problems concerning the family as a whole and its current crisis in today's society, I must specify that it is common knowledge that throughout the ages there have always been things and situations that have undermined the integrity and cohesion of the family, although in recent centuries there have been relatively few. The 21st century has brought with it all these family problems of previous centuries, some of which have intensified¹⁶.

The crisis of the family is basically also a crisis of faith, since the sacrament of marriage which consecrates the family is linked to faith, and this not in a formal sense but in the depth of the spiritual understanding of this fact. The weakening or weakening of faith automatically brings with it a dilution of the spiritual capacity of the spouses to perceive or understand and essentially to experience the mystery of the bond of love between them and all the other mysteries of family life. The growing difficulties¹⁷ of relationships today within the family have a strong resonance with the living out of faith within the marital home.

Last but not least, I appreciate and point out that in the context of the countless discussions, debates, various polemics or hypotheses concerning the family in the current context, we might miss an extremely important aspect, namely that the way in which the notion of "human being" is understood by each person depends on the understanding of life itself, of its purposes and of the family as an integral part of life and as the cradle and source of life par excellence. As one philosophic scholar has pointed out, the whole current crisis of the family is basically an anthropological crisis¹⁸. The consequences of this current crisis of the family are always brought up without considering its sources, which resonate strongly, among other things, with the anthropological precepts of each individual person.

¹⁶ Pr. Drd. Vasile POP, "Familia creștină – imperativul misionar al Bisericii în societatea contemporană. Accente și remedii misionare", p. 106.

¹⁷ Claudio GIULIODORI, "La famiglia cristiana, protagonista della nuova evangelizzazione", p. 93.

¹⁸ Iustinian ȘOVREA, "Familia creștină și «spiritul vremii». Note teologico-antropologice", in: *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa*, LVI (2011) 2, p. 166.

III. Migration – The Multitude of Approaches and its Consequences for the Family

In this globalized age¹⁹, we are contemporaries of a huge phenomenon that has been taking place since the most remote times²⁰, that of migration²¹, materialized throughout history by transhumance, invasions, crusades, colonizations or other reasons²², but which nowadays seems unprecedented in history, spreading with great speed throughout the world. The existence of globalisation and various events on the international scene²³ have led to a sharp increase in migration flows in recent times. Globalisation is fostering this phenomenon of migration, which in the past was considered an exception, even an anomaly, in relation to the condition of sedentary human communities²⁴. Recent man is characterized in some cases as man without heaven and earth, in other words he has neither God nor homeland, which basically means globalization. Man seeks only material comfort detached from the spiritual side. This is probably why migration was understood by many Romanians, immediately after the fall of the communist regime in our country, as a “life strategy”²⁵, and accession to

19 Aurelian-Petruș PLOPEANU, Daniel HOMOCIANU (eds.), “A Romanian University Students’ Profile regarding their Migration Intentions. A Cross-Sectional Study based on Questionnaire Survey”, in: *Revista Românească pentru Educație Multidimensională*, IX (2017) 3, p. 61.

20 Hristea G. KARAIANNIS, “Biblical Perceptions about Diversity and Identity in a World of Migration”, in: *Icoana Credinței. International Journal of Interdisciplinary Scientific Research*, V (2019) 9, p. 6.

21 Mircea AGABRIAN, *Sociologie generală*, Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2003, p. 274, states that migration can be defined under two distinct aspects: “immigration, which refers to the number of people who enter the country in a fixed period of time, and emigration, which refers to the number of people who move outside the borders of a country, permanently or temporarily, in a given time. These elements, combined, produce migration in its full meaning, which is the gain or loss of population in a country due to migration. Net migration equals immigration minus emigration”.

22 Simona MACARIE, Cristian BENȚE (eds.), “Fenomenul migrației externe și efectul acestuia asupra Familiei”, in: *Societate și politică*, II (2008) 1, p. 129.

23 Alina ARDELEANU, “Migrația internațională în contextul fenomenului de globalizare”, in: *Revista de Științe Militare*, XIX (2019) 57, p. 141.

24 Alexandra DEACONU, “International Migration in the Current Context”, in: *Revista Universitară de Sociologie*, XII (2016) 1, p. 57.

25 Aniela MATEI, Andra-Bertha SÂNDULEASA (eds.), “Effects of Parental Migration on

the European Union²⁶ brought with it new opportunities for citizens of our country to emigrate with a wide offer from countries with much higher living standards than Romania. Our country's emigrants are very open and attracted to Western countries²⁷, where they hope to earn enough money to make their dreams come true in their native Romania.

As we have seen, the phenomenon of migration has appeared, in one form or another, during the passage of time in all countries of the world, but in the post-revolutionary period of our country, the migration phenomenon has reached alarming levels, deeply influencing Romanian society today, with millions of Romanian citizens²⁸ experiencing this phenomenon. I would also add that with the liberalization of the visa regime for the Schengen Area we are facing an explosion²⁹ of emigration of the sons of our homeland, being dismaying how every year thousands and tens of thousands leave their ancestral land, eager and determined not to return. In the context of current migration and under the effects of globalism, the expressions “permanent” and “temporary”³⁰ risk being confused, being imprecise, since Romanian citizens and not only can change their country of residence whenever their professional or material needs require it. The time to return to the mother country, in the context of the desire to gather as much as possible and to fulfil one's dreams, loses its coordinates³¹, extending itself into an eternal and unpredictable tomorrow. This is also

Families and Children in Post-Communist Romania”, in: *Revista de Științe Politice*, XI (2015) 46, p. 197.

²⁶ Jarosław DOMALEWSKI, “Migration as an Element of Young People's Life Strategies”, in: *Sociologie Românească*, XV (2017) 1-2, p. 37.

²⁷ Roxana Florina MUNTEANU, Andreea MORARU (eds.), “Romania – Metamorphosis of a Developing Country and the Long-Term Impact of Migration”, in: *CES Working Papers*, VI (2014) 4, p. 71.

²⁸ Remus Gabriel ANGHEL, István HORVÁTH (coord.), *Sociologia Migrației. Teorii și studii de caz românești*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 14.

²⁹ This phenomenon of migration, as we will see in the end of this study, has also provoked the reaction of the Romanian Patriarchate regarding the regulation and organization of the Romanian Orthodox diaspora, which has developed greatly in the last twenty years.

³⁰ Răzvan BRUDIU, Alexandru CIUCURESCU (eds.), “Diaspora ortodoxă: analiză, nuanțare și redefinire”, in: *Altarul Reîntregirii*, XXVI (2021) 3, p. 142.

³¹ Ana-Elena COSTANDACHE, “Diversity issues of Exile: between Identity and Migration”, in: *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, VII (2017) 10, p. 735.

shown by the specialized studies and monitoring of Romanian emigrants over the last 15 years, during which time their temporary migration has gradually turned into a permanent³² and circular migration. Also according to the studies we see that the majority of Romanian migrants are young, generally under 35³³, they are more flexible³⁴ than older people, especially in circular migration.

Today, all the countries of the world are active or passive participants in this migration phenomenon, under the heading of country of origin, transit country or destination country³⁵. Migration is an integral part of a process that affects a significant³⁶ part of the world's population today. I would venture to say that today's migration is one of the starkest realities for humanity today and has untold complex implications for economic, social, cultural and educational processes³⁷. The changes are visible³⁸ in economic, political, social, cultural and educational life, both from the perspective of those who migrate and those who receive migrants. In another order of ideas, we see that labour migration is on the agenda of various institutions, including the Romanian Patriarchate, contrary to the fact that there is currently no comprehensive study in the theological literature or in Romanian theological writings that exposes the effects and major implications of the migration of Romanians or how the Romanian Patriarchate manages the phenomenon of emigration of its Orthodox Christian sons. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church, as a loving

³² Victor Bogdan OPREAN, "Migration costs in asymmetric environments and education outsourcing. The case of Romania", in: *Analele Științifice ale Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" din Iași. Științe economice*, LXI (2014), 1, p. 83.

³³ Jarosław DOMALEWSKI, "Migration as an Element of Young People's Life Strategies", p. 41.

³⁴ Roxana Florina MUNTEANU, Andreea MORARU (eds.), "Romania – Metamorphosis of a Developing Country and the Long-Term Impact of Migration", p. 72.

³⁵ Adelin-Ion MAZĂRE, "Manifestări ale fenomenului migraționist în contextul fenomenului de globalizare", in: *Studii de securitate publică*, III (2014) 3, p. 160.

³⁶ Levente DIMÉN, András HORVÁTH (eds.), "Root Causes of Migration in the 21st Century", in: *Pangeea*, XVIII (2018) 18, p. 14.

³⁷ Laura Nicoleta POPA, "Effects of Parents' circular Migration on Students' School Achievement: Explanatory Variables", in: *Educația Plus*, VIII (2012) 1, p. 124.

³⁸ Laurențiu GEORGESCU, "Migration and the Role of Intercultural Education", in: *Review of General Management*, X (2015) 2, p. 105.

spiritual mother of her children who have been alienated³⁹ abroad, takes a special care of them, constantly watching over their faith, education and identity.

In the context of the institution of the Family, I must emphasize that migration is a major cause leading to the alteration of the cohesion of the Christian family, contributing greatly to the perversion of its original purposes. The consequences and implications of this phenomenon called migration for the family are varied and manifold, both positive and negative. Worryingly, beyond the scale of this phenomenon, a large proportion of all this migration is parents whose children have remained in their country of origin⁴⁰. In my short experience as a minister of the Holy Church, I have realised, through discussions with young people affected by migration, how difficult it is for those who leave or those who stay at home and take care of their little ones. Beyond this burden of substituting the role of the other, there is mistrust of the partner, which often leads to endless arguments, jealousy and ends in cohabitation and divorce. But even more difficult is the situation when both parents leave and the children remain at home, since the deprivation of parental presence, either of the father or especially of the mother, has an extremely painful⁴¹ imprint that will gradually and unknowingly affect the short and long term development of the children.

One of the most affected aspects and tasks of the contemporary family, in the context of migration, is the care of children⁴² in all the aspects that this responsibility implies, because one of the most thorny problems when it comes to migration is the situation of children left at home, because it causes great damage to the role of the family both in the educational act and in their formation as future members of our society and Church.

³⁹ Ep. Ignatie TRIF, *Maladia ideologiei și terapia Adevărului*, Editura Horeb, Huși, 2020, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Emanuela APOSTOL, “The Migration Exodus – The Context of the Family Destructuration and the Psycho-Educational Destabilization of the Child”, in: *Journal of Romanian Literary Studies*, VIII (2018) 14, p. 481.

⁴¹ Vasile CREȚU, “Criza familiei în România contemporană. O analiză sociologică, pastorală și catehetică”, in: *Altarul Reîntregirii*, XXV (2020) 3, p. 26.

⁴² Aniela MATEI, Andra-Bertha SÂNDULEASA (eds.), “Effects of Parental Migration on Families and Children in Post-Communist Romania”, p. 197.

Research by institutions accredited to monitor this phenomenon also reveals psychological⁴³ and emotional disorders of those who remain at home, i.e. spouses or children, abandonment of the elderly, the increase of the elderly living in rural areas, and in the not too distant future even the disappearance of certain village communities.

Given the dynamism of current romanian migration, by virtue of the fact that it represents one of the main migrations to Western Europe⁴⁴, I note both the implications full of responsibility and efficiency that are required both from Romania, as a state, and from the Romanian Orthodox Church, as the mother of her spiritual children, as a prompt response to the many challenges, problems, risks and multiple approaches that migration entails.

IV. The Values in Society and the Devaluation of the Family

It is no news that soon after 1930 society around the world witnessed a redefinition of the value table, a reversal of the value hierarchy, with the spread of pornographic art and culture from the territory of the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark⁴⁵, with the aim of taking over the whole world and gaining as many people as possible to share the so-called “new values”. But these non-values have come with the loss of common sense, tenderness, shame, guilt and beauty of soul.

Gradually, what the worthy Metropolitan Bartholomew Ananias called a perfidious spirit⁴⁶, who in his work overturned values and perverted language, gradually crept through the darkness of time and made his presence felt, little by little, unexpectedly and unexpectedly, so that the

⁴³ Raluca TOMȘA, “Psychological Effects of Separation through Temporary Labor Migration upon the Members of the Family”, in: *Societate și politică*, III (2009) 2, p. 49.

⁴⁴ Florin Spiridon CROITORU, “Diaspora românească – realitate proeminentă și provocare misionară”, in: *Simpozionul Internațional de Știință, Teologie și Arte “Ethosul misionar al Bisericii în post-modernitate”*, ediția a XIV-a: 4-6 mai 2015, Vol. I, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2015, p. 206.

⁴⁵ Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Sorin COSMA, *O abordare creștină a Bioeticii*, p. 108.

⁴⁶ Mitr. Bartolomeu ANANIA, “Scrisoare Pastorală la praznicul Învierii Domnului”, in: *Renașterea*, XVI (2005) 4, p. 2.

abnormal was conceived and understood as something natural or normal, vices became chosen virtues, lies a real truth and the shattering or break-up of the family institution would be called and understood, in the presence of this perfidious spirit, as family planning.

In today's society, it can be seen that the various branches of many sciences and opinion formers, vloggers and various personalities of the contemporary world, are showing a predisposition or concern for the subject of the family, or what a family means today or what form it should take, so that the term family is, proportionally speaking, fashionable⁴⁷ or in vogue throughout today's world, a world and society that is, however, in many respects, dominated by a relativism that has reached alarming heights. In saying this, I am thinking of the fact that the institution of the family is no longer perceived and seen today in all its holiness and in the fullness of the responsibility it entails through the sacrament of Holy Communion. The union of man and woman through the blessing of the sacrament of Holy Communion, and thus the birth of a new family, is no longer to the liking of many, and is strongly contested, being considered old-fashioned, nonsensical and a form of life whose resistance or viability over time is almost non-existent. Moreover, modern sociology and its studies on the institution of the family show a permanent decline in the number of people who marry and, at the same time, the new habit of bringing children into the world outside marriage. To give an overview, almost 40% of children born in the United States are born out of wedlock and the trend is increasing⁴⁸. Another survey of young mothers under the age of thirty, who account for two-thirds of all mothers giving birth, shows that 53% of babies born to them are now born out of wedlock⁴⁹. Beyond these sociological data, i.e. percentages and trends, there is a profound change in society's understanding of the purpose of marriage and childbirth, including all the great responsibilities that go with it.

⁴⁷ Ioan-Daniel MANOLACHE, "Despre monogamie și poligamie în gândirea iudeo-creștină", in: *Tabor*, XVII (2023) 5, p. 73.

⁴⁸ Roger CLEGG, "Percentage of Births to Unmarried Women", <https://www.ceousa.org/2020/02/26/percentage-of-births-to-unmarried-women/> (19 January 2024).

⁴⁹ Jason DEPARLE, Sabrina TAVERNISE (eds.), "For Women Under 30, Most Births Occur Outside Marriage", <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/18/us/for-women-under-30-most-births-occur-outside-marriage.html> (19 January 2024).

The various currents of modernism and postmodernism as well as the ever-changing concepts, as a result of economic, social, cultural or psychological changes, are attacking and causing significant damage through their influence on the institution at the foundation of mankind, noting, as emphasized in a work that has as its theme the subject of the family, the priest professor Iloaie Ștefan, the existence of alarmingly serious realities, which have as their purpose the formation of real currents of opinion “directed against the family, manifested as phenomena that contradict its foundations”⁵⁰. The reverse side of these painful realities, which are constantly being updated and intensified, is also a result of the absence of sound principles of moral origin, the lack or diminution of authentic moral values and the promotion instead of everything that is alien to the DNA of the being of the Romanian Christian Orthodox people.

Looking back over the last two decades, however, I believe that as national and traditional values have declined or collapsed, the importance of the family has also diminished. I emphasise that the devaluation of the institution of the family has gone hand in hand with the degradation of national identity or patriotic consciousness .

Under the auspices of these states of affairs we see the emergence of new kinds of family life or marriage, the existence of people who live in a celibate way, couples who do not plan to have children, families where children live with only one parent or single-parent families, people who change partners more often as the seasons change, divorced people, people who live for a long time in cohabitation, people who, in the absence of one of their partners (especially in the case of migration abroad of one of the spouses) live a double life, making partners other than the legitimate ones ordained by God through the Sacrament of Matrimony.

In the context of a clear decline in moral and social values, and at the same time the existence of increasingly relaxed social principles and exacerbated tolerance, young people are starting their sex lives earlier and earlier, cohabitation or premarital experience is becoming more frequent and longer, while the number of those who marry is decreasing every day. Celibacy is embraced more and more often, but without the awareness that

⁵⁰ Ștefan ILOAIE, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, Editura Renașterea, Cluj-Napoca, 2009, pp. 30-31.

it comes with its direct and indirect consequences for the family in the first place and for society in general, namely: the growing number of divorces, cohabitations and, to top it all, the so-called “trial marriage”, a practice that is so easily embraced by many young people, who so easily accept living with partners of the opposite sex for a long time before marriage, if it will ever come for them.

But this constant disregard of marriage and through it of its fruit, which is the family, we see it at European level, beginning gradually after the 1960s, when the German author and philosopher Arno Plack considered, in one of his works, that any marriage would be nothing but a “moment of love”⁵¹, arguing that this was a further disregard or degradation of marriage, which he placed on the same footing or of the same value as any object that surrounds us or that we use, arguing that: “anything you have at any time, after a while loses its charm”⁵². For many others, the family is perceived today as a union of two people who are characterized by “rationality and not responsibility, by self-interested activity and not affective tradition, by profit and not sentiment”⁵³. There are also not a few people for whom the concept of family explicitly no longer exists, or at least in the Community’s understanding of the concept, the family has completely broken down, and family means something else entirely, not just family. The terminology of family, they argue, has remained throughout the centuries but this word defines and encompasses increasingly diverse realities, gradually becoming “more and more ambiguous”⁵⁴.

One of the zero priorities for today’s society and world is to identify, clarify and cultivate the true and most basic values necessary for everyday life and above all for spiritual life, those unique and unutterably valuable values that can quench the thirst for the infinite and for the fulfillment and

⁵¹ Arno PLACK, *Die Gesellschaft und das Böse, Eine Kritik der herrschenden Moral*, München, 1967, p. 143, *apud* Ciprian Vasile RUS, Mihaela RUS (eds.), *Rolul bisericii în familia creștină contemporană-studiu psihosocio-teologic*, Editura Universitară, București, 2021, p. 14.

⁵² Ciprian Vasile RUS, Mihaela RUS (eds.), *Rolul bisericii în familia creștină...*, pp. 14-15.

⁵³ Iolanda MITROFAN, Cristian CIUPERCĂ (eds.), *Incursiune în psihosociologia și psihosexologia familiei*, Editura Edit Press Mihaela, București, 1998, p. 38.

⁵⁴ Iolanda MITROFAN, Cristian CIUPERCĂ (eds.), *Incursiune în psihosociologia și psihosexologia familiei*, p. 38.

wholeness of the soul, values that cannot be bought or acquired with all the gifts and material riches of this world, and among these immense perennial values⁵⁵, as the priest professor Ion Teșu extraordinarily pointed out, the family must and it is necessary to include the family, the institution so old as humanity itself and through which the spiritual delicacy, moral beauty, harmony, warmth and spiritual peace of regaining body and soul balance and preserving life itself has been, is and will be perpetuated until the end of this world.

IV.1. The Contemporary Family and the Attacks on its Morality

Throughout the ages, in the conception and tradition of the Romanian people there has always been the idea of morality, of sacredness and of shyness towards moral values, but nowadays we seem to be witnessing the loss of morality, the blindness of the spiritual vision and conscience of many of our people. As I have already pointed out, secularisation means precisely this secularisation, this detachment and alienation from God, achieved by abolishing the notion of sin and turning towards a corrupt nature, towards a secular society alien to the christian spirit, the commandments and the will of God.

In this context of desacralization and secularization of today's society, society and its institutions, in this case the family, are faced with many problems and challenges that have as their object marriage and the relationships of the two spouses. One challenge which is both problematic and severe at the same time, and which tends to become chronic⁵⁶ is "trial marriage", or as it is still perceived, i.e. "open marriage"⁵⁷, which in the

⁵⁵ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ioan C. TEȘU, "Vocația familială a ființei umane", in: *Teologie și Viață*, XXI (2011) 1-4, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Pr. Florea ȘTEFAN, "The Orthodox Christian Family in Present-day Society", in: Nicu DUMITRAȘCU (ed.), *Christian Family and Contemporary Society*, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, London/New Delhi/New York/Sydney, 2015, p. 218.

⁵⁷ Drd. Marius MARIN-IONESCU, "Provocări contemporane la adresa Tainei Căsătoriei", in: Universitatea „Ovidius” Constanța, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă, Arhiepiscopia Tomisului, Arhiepiscopia Sucevei și Rădăușilor, Centrul de Cercetări Teologice, Interculturale și Ecumenice „Sf. Ioan Casian”, *Simpozionul Internațional "Sfintele Taine și Familia creștină" 17-19 octombrie 2011, Mănăstirea "Acoperământul Maicii Domnului" Dorna – Arini*, Editura Vasiliana '98, Sibiu-Iași, 2012, p. 267.

West, but also rapidly in Romania, is taking on an indescribable scale. Under the influence of society and the currents that influence its healthy course, and as a result of the estrangement from God and the Church's sacred teachings, which are disregarded and overshadowed by ignorance, many young men and women are no longer eager to start a family by embracing the sacrament of Holy Matrimony, but are opting to live together, in all respects, behaving as two spouses⁵⁸, to experience the mysteries of life together, to see if they have the aptitude for living together and to get used to the idea of future family life. In other words, I note with concern that people and society itself are questioning the institution of the family, the iron structure of humanity since time immemorial.

It is alarming that this so-called cohabitation free of any duties, this form of common existence of the two, man and woman, does not have as its aim or finality marriage itself but is intended as a viable alternative⁵⁹ to it.

However, this cohabitation for long periods before marriage is like a double-edged sword, in the sense that these periods of cohabitation, often stretched over several good years, routinise⁶⁰ the assumptions or expectations and hopes of the two, who when they get married will no longer experience anything new in the other partner and will no longer have that innocent joy of discovering new and interesting things in the other person. Even some studies show that both this premarital cohabitation and especially the birth of premarital children influence the quality of marriages⁶¹. Priest professor Nicolae Achimescu referring to these so-called "free cohabitations" states and emphasizes their total contradiction with the tradition of our Church as well as with the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, since through these cohabitations outside marriage "agape"

⁵⁸ Pr. Dr. Cristian BOLOȘ, "O constantă incontestabilă, indiferent de regim: Familia, celula de bază a societății și a Bisericii", in: *Ortodoxia Maramureșeană*, XXV (2020) 25, p. 226.

⁵⁹ Ciprian Vasile RUS, Mihaela RUS (eds.), *Rolul bisericii în familia creștină ...*, p. 15.

⁶⁰ Ștefan ILOAIE, *Cultura vieții. Aspecte morale în bioetică*, p. 36.

⁶¹ Laura TACH, Sarah HALPERN-MEEKIN (eds.), "How Does Premarital Cohabitation Affect Trajectories of Marital Quality?", in: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, LXXI (2009) 2, p. 313.

is separated both from “eros” and from the conjugal relationship⁶² as a whole, although normally they are inseparable and inseparable.

The human body becomes through these trial marriages in the temple of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 3, 20) a slave of sinful passions, because these forms of free living without social or moral responsibilities are nothing but false illusions, renunciations of Gospel norms and principles, ephemeral retreats “into sexism, enslaving and desolating pleasures”⁶³, the consequences of which are felt not only by society as a whole, but also by each individual who experiences this depth of enslavement of the soul, which dishonours the virtue of being the bearer of God’s image in the world.

This kind of cohabitation obviously becomes more a kind of “object marriage”, as argued by the same renowned priest professor Nicolae Achimescu, in which the two individuals or partners only “try on” each other⁶⁴, excluding any form of personal, sincere communion based on harmony and love.

There is a strong desire, under the influence of current cultures and ideologies, on the one hand to abolish marriage in its current civic and religious form and regulations and to reconstruct the family itself, and on the other hand to privatize⁶⁵ marriage. What is worrying is that we are currently witnessing a relativist tendency to recreate the family⁶⁶ in any way and in any context, in such a way as to best suit the requirements of the individual and society as a whole, because beyond this “trial marriage” or “open marriage”, which I have detailed in the lines above, as a result of the influence of modernism and postmodernism in secular society, there are today other forms that claim to be alternatives to the family. Group

⁶² Pr. Lect. Dr. Nicolae ACHIMESCU, “Familia creștină între tradiție și modernitate, considerații teologice-sociologice”, in: Universitatea AL. I. Cuza – Iași, Mitropolia Moldovei și Bucovinei – Iași, Facultatea de Teologie Ortodoxă, *Familia creștină azi*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 1995, p. 129.

⁶³ Pr. Asist. Dr. Cosmin Tudor CIOCAN, “«...Și vor fi amândoi un trup» – Răspuns psihopatologiei vieții de familie”, pp. 186-187.

⁶⁴ Pr. Lect. Dr. Nicolae ACHIMESCU, “Familia creștină între tradiție și modernitate, considerații teologice-sociologice”, p. 129.

⁶⁵ Scott YENOR, *The Recovery of Family Life. Exposing the Limits of Modern Ideologies*, Baylor University Press, Texas, 2020, p. 42.

⁶⁶ Pr. Florea ȘTEFAN, “The Orthodox Christian Family in Present-day Society”, p. 218.

marriage, gay marriage, single parenthood, etc, are seen as proximate alternatives to the traditional Christian family.

IV.2. Freedom understood as libertinism in family and marriage

From a different perspective of understanding all the currents, ideologies or phenomena that have a strong imprint in the attempt to shake and essentially dissolve the foundations of marriage and family, we will see that all these are a result or a consequence of the misunderstanding of the notion of freedom, in the sense that freedom is often perceived as an independent power of selfish self-assertion⁶⁷ but not as an extraordinary ability to fulfill God's plan for marriage and the family. The human being, freed from all moral constraints, feels free to live as he pleases, being constrained tangentially or periodically only by pressures of social and economic origin. As a society, however, we feel the instability that brings with it endless pain and trauma for the family, present in modern society as real social phenomena: "infidelity, alcoholism, sexual and emotional dysfunction and domestic violence"⁶⁸.

Freedom as God's immense gift to us and its misunderstanding and misuse has led to a situation where human beings have created for themselves, far from God and in a context of self-permissive freedom, their own fundamental laws and rights by which they can assert their own self and their own personality, literally transforming freedom from a chosen virtue into an excessive libertinism with exclusively sinful inclinations. Under the aegis of this self-permissive freedom for contemporary man it has become so simple and practically one and the same thing to contract marriage or to annul it, to undo it. Dissolution of marriage is considered as easy as an affair⁶⁹.

Freedom, often understood as libertinism, in the modern family also indirectly implies an increase in the autonomy and freedom of the

⁶⁷ Valer BEL, "Familia și Biserica", in: *Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai Theologia Orthodoxa*, LVI (2011) 1, p. 100.

⁶⁸ Larisa CIOCHINĂ, Constantin IFTIME (eds.), *O viziune asupra vieții*, Editura Asociația Pro Vita Media, București, 2003, p. 133.

⁶⁹ Daniel DAGENAIS, *La fin de la famille moderne. La signification des transformations contemporaines de la famille*, p. 12.

family from an intimate point of view⁷⁰, in which the two spouses allow themselves many compromises and many erotic or sexual indulgences, making the family itself particularly sensitive or vulnerable and unstable. This frequently leads to agreements or arrangements between legally married couples, such as: living at different home addresses, or the situation where couples live together without being legally married, sometimes with children and using this form of living as a probationary or learning period⁷¹ before marriage, as already mentioned, or extramarital intimate relationships agreed and consented to by both partners, and here I refer to the existence of a form of modern polygamy embodied in the existence of swinger⁷², i.e. couples or single people who experience so-called sexual freedom, achieved by lending their partners to friends or by exchanging their spouses for those of other couples, all under the pretext of maintaining marital fidelity and under the so-called consent of both partners of the couple.

In a word, today the sexual function or sexuality is, in the case of extremely many couples, the master of all the family's primary functions. Without giving too much thought to the consequences, for many of our fellow human beings it is commonplace to have all the things I have listed in this study. In times not so long ago there was a sense of guilt and shame about certain sins, but in the light of an upside-down understanding of freedom, all these sins have become a kind of chosen virtue, widely preached as if they were something natural. Today, for many of our fellow human beings, it is commonplace to have , as we have already mentioned, trial marriages that have no connection with the sacrament of marriage, in vitro fertilisation, family planning, open fornication, uncountable abortions, sexual perversions both within and between couples and swinging, all of which seriously distort the high meaning of the institution of the family.

⁷⁰ Ciprian Vasile RUS, Mihaela RUS (eds.), *Rolul bisericii în familia creștină...*, p. 14.

⁷¹ Lisa PARKINSON, *Separarea, divorțul și familia*, Editura Alternative, București, 1993, p. 176.

⁷² Vasile CEZAR, "Swinging – Un Fenomen care ia amploare în România", <https://redactia.ro/swinging-un-fenomen-care-ia-amploare-in-romania-241349> (29 September 2023).

V. The Christian Family – Cell and Factor of Stability in Society

In its millenary existence the family institution has proved to be an exceptional school of moral perfection, of crystallization of moral characters and a renewing ferment always concerned with what fulfils the human person and permanently creative in discovering what is new and beneficial for society and the members of society. From its beginnings it has been, together with the institution of the Church, the most important institution of society, being both a symbol of the continuity and unity⁷³ of the human race and a barometer⁷⁴ which has constantly shown the level of society's vitality and morality within it. Humanity is almost impossible to understand outside the institution of the family, whether we refer to the first humans or to the great events of mankind or to modern civilisation today, the family is omnipresent in all not only as a basic cell of society⁷⁵ but as the most important driving force in its maintenance and development. Bishop Vasile Coman said that just as there cannot be a living organism without healthy cells, in the same way there cannot be a society without healthy families⁷⁶, and priest professor Spiridon Căndea of the Andreanian Academy in Sibiu, emphasized that the family is the cell of every social organism and when it is suffering or sick, the whole organism feels pain and suffers, and if this cell does not regain its health, death and decomposition of the whole organism naturally and normally follows⁷⁷.

Marriage and family must be understood as the root or foundation or basis of society not only in an empirical light of ensuring the continuity of the existence of future generations but also in the direction of revealing

⁷³ Nicu DUMITRAȘCU, "Family between Tradition/Traditions and Contemporary Life in Orthodox Spirituality (With some References to St. John Chrysostom)", in: Nicu DUMITRAȘCU (ed.), *Christian Family and Contemporary Society*, p. 105.

⁷⁴ Pr. Dr. Edmond Nicolae POPA, *Provocări la adresa familiei creștine azi*, Editura Episcopiei Giurgiului, 2011, p. 270.

⁷⁵ Drd. Oana NICOLAE, "Familia – biserica de acasă", in: Pr. Prof. Univ. Dr. Mihai HIMCINSCHI (ed.), *Misiune și educație religioasă*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 2016, p. 603.

⁷⁶ Ep. Vasile COMAN, *Cuvinte pentru suflet. Studii și articole cu caracter pastoral-misionar*, Editura Episcopiei Orădiei, Oradea, 1987, p. 143.

⁷⁷ Pr. Prof. Spiridon CÂNDEA, "Familia și viața modernă. Importanța familiei", in: *Mitropolia Ardealului*, XII (1967) 10-12, p. 845.

the vocation⁷⁸ of each person and the values that keep society healthy and prosperous, since within society the family is a true and authentic “living and enduring form of existence”⁷⁹ and that place where both life comes into being and is extinguished⁸⁰. In fact, one of the main causes of the disorder in society, of the many terrible experiences of our existence and of the disturbances that darken the bright horizon of life is without doubt the existence of too few, or often even non-existent, families, capable of raising people with a healthy mentality, with true characters capable of giving life that value and quality by which it, life, stands out in its fullness.

Historical and anthropological evidence, innumerable and at the same time undeniable, exceptionally attests to the unique truth that the family founded through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony is absolutely the backbone⁸¹ of every society in the world. In this sense I can affirm with all responsibility, referring to the indispensability of the family in every corner of this world and in every type of society, the hypothetical fact materialized in the thought that if the family union breaks down, a community regardless of its structure and values is concomitantly destined to disappear as well.

Today it is more necessary than ever for the family to assume its mission in this disoriented world, and its mission is first of all to become what it is, namely “the social bond par excellence and the organic fibre of community life”⁸² and not least that powerful collectivity of love and authentic Christian life in constant tension⁸³ which will find its eternal definitive fulfilment, together with the whole created universe, on the unending day of His Kingdom.

⁷⁸ Nicholas J. HEALY, “Matrimonio e bene comune: la famiglia come scuola di comunione”, in: *La famiglia, luce di dio in una società senza dio. Nuova evangelizzazione e famiglia*, p. 191.

⁷⁹ Pr. Prof. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *În Hristos și în Biserică. Adevărul și frumusețea căsătoriei. Teologia iubirii II*, Editura Reîntregirea, Alba Iulia, 1996, p. 195.

⁸⁰ Pr. Prof. Dr. Ion BRIA, *Ortodoxia în Europa. Locul spiritualității române*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 1995, p. 223.

⁸¹ Giuliano GUZZO, “La famiglia, architrate della società e seme del futuro”, in: Giorgia BRAMBILLA (ed.), *Come olio di nardo. Il valore della famiglia nel mondo contemporaneo*, Editrice Ateneo Pontificio Regina Apostolorum, Roma, 2022, p. 37.

⁸² Pr. Prof. Ilie MOLDOVAN, *În Hristos și în Biserică. Adevărul și frumusețea căsătoriei*, p. 197.

⁸³ Valer BEL, “Familia și Biserica”, p. 102.

VI. Conclusions

The alienation and indifference towards God, his commandments and the Holy Church, the disregard or mockery of all the values of Christian morality, all these have as their end or consequence the state of the institution of the family today, because the crisis of the family, of whatever nature it may be, has in a broad framework as its main pillars the ignorance, the lack of knowledge, the systematic and prolonged non-practice of the teachings of the Christian faith as well as the principles of Christian-Orthodox morality.

The implications of this phenomenon of migration on the family are multiple and major and it is imperative that they be debated and resolved, especially in terms of the moral and theological thinking of all those who are part of the “battlefield” of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and here I refer to hierarchs, priests, etc. as well as to prominent theologians and not only, of our christian-orthodox nation.

Our age tends to have an increasingly unstable, disoriented⁸⁴ and ambiguous view of family, full of hostility. In this context, I also consider and note that modern society has replaced the certainty, balance and liveliness that characterise the traditional family with the enthusiasm, passion and temporariness of the modern family. This is why the challenges and changes brought about by modernity and the currents within it are also deeply felt at the level of this sacred institution, but this present reality should not automatically mean that the family is obliged to adopt or identify with all these changes or innovations, tailoring its natural course to them. On the contrary, I believe that all these changes and challenges have a different perspective and the role of stimulating the family to provide answers and to seek new and viable solutions in order to regain its horizon, which are essential to make this millenary institution responsible for reinvigorating its role. When we refer to the rebirth of the family, this desire or ideal must not be a mere phrase or a mere speech⁸⁵, but an acute necessity.

⁸⁴ Pierpaolo DONATI, *La famiglia. Il genoma che fa vivere la società*, Editrice Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2013, p. 8.

⁸⁵ Sergiu CIOCĂRLAN, *Renașterea familiei și a neamului românesc în învățătura Părintelui Arsenie Boca*, Editura Chilia Sfântului Ipatie, Sfântul Munte Athos, 2023, p. 38.

The family is imperatively necessary to be permanently the heart and soul of a world and an entire society in a constant loss of horizons and meaningful goals. The incomparable professor of Moral Theology from Sibiu, priest professor Ilie Moldovan, underlines, in a unique way and characteristic of his thought full of a heartfelt and conscientious Romanian and spiritual feeling at the same time, the fact that the traditional peasant model that characterizes the Romanian family, has, as part of its being, a rich spiritual dowry, acquired since ethnogenesis⁸⁶ by the Romanian family soul. But this soul of the Romanian family, draws the attention of the respectable priest professor Ilie Moldovan, must at all costs be protected and defended⁸⁷ against all cold and foreign waves from the ancestral roots of this divine institution.

⁸⁶ Pr. Prof. Univ. Ilie MOLDOVAN, “Valori creștine ale Familiei în România și practici contrare acestora”, in: *Congresul Internațional “Familia și Viața la începutul unui nou mileniu creștin”*, p. 155.

⁸⁷ Pr. Prof. Univ. Ilie MOLDOVAN, “Valori creștine ale Familiei în România și practici contrare acestora”, p. 155.