

Life, Family and Development in Church perspective

The crisis of the family as the basis of social life asks for a more attentive regard not only as a social institution but insofar as the family is a unique way and primal structure of human relationship. The Church responded to this challenge with fundamental documents, numerous conferences and analysis on different subjects related to this historical disaster. The present conference is given only one year after the important conference for the 20 year anniversary of “Mulieris Dignitatem” and after the 6th World Meeting of Families in Mexico City, and has to be, as I understand, far more oriented towards more practical analysis and solutions.

I was asked to speak on this topic concentrating on the Christian anthropological outlook, so widely discussed these days, from the perspective of the “new feminism” called for by Pope John Paul II in order to examine position of women and their role in the heart of the family and society. Once again I looked through numerous texts published on that topic and discovered that for this audience it is hardly possible to say anything more essential on the importance of feminine values in the life of society and the Church than it is said in the *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*.¹ On the ontological level the reality of women’s existence is unfolded so substantively and exquisitely that I can approve every statement of this document...with a deep sorrow that most women presuming all that in their hearts have never heard this in their life, hardly experienced, and constantly are misled to think and perceive rather the reverse. If the reason for that would be mainly the unjust laws, the lack of civic rights or other social obstacles, we, women could unite and organize our force against that, as it was done one century ago in the action for social and political women’s rights. But it is already obvious that the mainstream feminism brings today more confusion than fruit, which implies that something in its paradigm contradicts the fundamental nature of human being and harmony of human life.

New forms of hidden and even more destructive exploitation of women that develops hand in hand with the crisis of the family and the radical questioning of existence of the biological sex and male-female complementarity motivated the Church to speak out against all that and to deepen an analysis of the human person on the base of biblical vision, thus overcoming the former and insufficiently consistent Christian anthropology. But how to relate this beautiful anthropological truth about the person, marriage and family,

¹*Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World*.
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, May 31, 2004.

which reveals the ontological level of human reality, with actual human experience of many in face of ongoing social processes that misrepresent or even pervert the profound human thirst for faithful love and stable relationships?

In posing this question I will not direct my presentation on the enunciation of Christian anthropology. We have to deepen our knowledge of the Theology of the Body developed by John Paul II and to help others to discover the treasure of Theological Anthropology that is now available through various texts and internet sites. Now we speak more on the family as a unique way and primal structure of human relationship as a community of persons and on mutual love between man and woman that has to be the base of it. Has to be... But in everyday reality we see the increasing human incapacity for long-lasting relationships of mutual love and because of that the confusion which reinforces individualism. The present crisis of family and human identity is already the anthropological crisis - it is at the deepest level of human reality and consequently accumulates both sociological and psychological levels. Because of that in dealing with this problem we have to examine carefully the interaction between these different levels of human reality avoiding any predominant orientation to make decisions merely on the level of social structures and mechanisms.

I will concentrate on the problem of the perception of oneself as a person – relational human being. But in order to show the roots of the lack of this perception and to search for the ways how to deal with that, I will start with the analysis of some aspects of family reality and its changes in Western societies.

Why the crisis of the family?

Let us begin with a contrast between the *traditional* family (which is advocated by the Church) and the *modern* one. The traditional family today is usually depicted (especially in predominant feminist circles and mass media) as a historical relic – a patriarchal structure with the domination of man and a subjected woman without equal social rights. The contrast namely to that image is a “modern” family – the advanced one, where the priority for the decision to marry or not, to give birth or devote oneself to a professional career is given primarily and entirely to a woman. However let us return to the proper meaning of these concepts and reflect why these rather strange implications are given to them.

The traditional family was predominant in the agrarian society, where the social status as well as property was inherited mainly by a son from his father, i.e. by male line. Meanwhile the mother played a considerable role in transmitting the cultural heritage and values which are more linked with the traditional inheritance. Consequently the core of tradition was not woman’s social subjection to man, which certainly existed, but a definite way of life and the values, transmitted from generation to generation – namely those which were

proved by former experience and maintained (because founded on experiences that have been suffered). The family would be the one which kept the cultural tradition: children could not doubt the existing habits and the rightness of morals, as the latter were witnessed in everyday life at least by two generations – i.e. “the lot”. Therefore the cadency absorbed a miscellaneous experience of intimate intercourse, care, mutual assistance, underlying human skills and communal activity. There was one more aspect of great importance: the sphere of public activity and the family life were commonly not separated in space. Male and female activities existed in farming or manufactory as well as in domesticity, and these jobs more often than not were operated side-by-side. So the children could know and respectively take over both male and female roles, but above all - the patterns of their interaction and cooperation. And even in case of the father’s or mother’s death the formation of the child’s sexual identity and absorption of sexual roles did not fall into disarray. True, in some public activities women did not participate directly, but their indirect participation had great value. There is an old Jewish proverb addressed to man: “When you can not find any solution, question women for that.” Being not involved in the turbulence of external events, but taking care of transmitting human values, which in everyday life take the form of simple duties and giving children basic education, woman usually were more attentive with regard to human morals and could help in making an adequate evaluation of events and the right decisions.

In the modern family, which emerges with the industrialization of society many things have changed. First and foremost the sphere of work as a public activity and the family life are separated in space. The father is expelled from the daily round, as he returns back late from his work at the factory or in the office. Therefore children effectively lose the experience of activity and relationship with their father as a male and manage to relate his responsibilities mainly with earning money. Thus in the modern family -diminishing the role of the man as a father, devolved the responsibility for children’s education and socialization mainly upon the mother, and today, when a woman in turn also leaves the family to work in the public sphere – mainly upon school and mass media.

What impelled women to leave the family with giving priority to the job sphere. The core of modern society is a preference for economic development – for material well being and consumption. However the priorities of women were changed not only due to increased and progressively boosted family tangible needs. A more important factor was the devaluation of activity and communication in the family, because in modern society the public activity and its results, which earlier was more related with male action, became a passport to social recognition and even self-esteem by everyone. (The intelligent and educated women are witnessing that today their choice to stay at home for childrearing often brings confusion to their elder children because in this instance their mother is considered of less value in society than a working one). Consequently a

woman, seeking to be of equal dignity and worth, more and more often abandons family life and with entering the public space absorbs the prevailing pattern of “masculine domination”: functional relations, expansiveness, competition, and even the pursuit of power and fame – all that what we can name as capacity to hold life in one’s hands.

I can ask not a simple question addressing women in the West: for which women’s rights can we strive now? For the right not to be treated the same way as man, not to have too many responsibilities and obligations that are performed at the cost of family life? I made this sociological analysis to invite us to reflect as to whether activity in various organizations for better laws and civil rights in the way we are still engaged is a key solution for fundamental problems? The problem of treating a woman not of equal worth as man manifests on the social level (for example, still no equal payment for the same job), but it is the social consequence of a more profound attitude, which we will hardly overcome by simply changing the law.

Therefore now I will go on another level of analysis of the traditional and the modern family. The traditional one was a basic structure of the traditional society, in which a few centuries ago to be a pious catholic was simpler than in our days. As far as I know, in some Western countries for the omission of confession during the Easter season a man could be put in prison... But I question whether there were more believers then, because in traditional society moral actions were conditioned not only by personal decisions, but sometimes and foremost by the prevailed social norms as collective norms. The family also functioned as a small collectivity, socially controlled by strong interdependence in a social milieu.

Because of that the family was considered an organic entity that exists on its own as a natural base (*Gemeinschaft* of Ferdinand Tönnies²) and was viewed by society as its primal cell. It was a most stable form of sociality, constituted by cooperation, custom and religion. The family was grounded on an explicit agreement to assume marital roles and obligations that traditionally were taken over from the parents’ and grandparents’ family. For this reason existing family roles and relations could be non-consciously taken over and performed only as the social norm, i.e. without any serious reflection or questioning, because others – people round about – were living this way as well.

In traditional society the family included both types of relationship – *collectivity* and *community* – later described by Martin Buber³. The communal (‘*Verbindung*’) aspect of family relations always existed in

² Tönnies, F., *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 1887 (*Community and Society*, Loomis, Ch.P.(ed), The Michigan State University Press, 1957);

³ Buber, M., *Dialogo principas II*, Vilnius, Kataliku pasaulis, 2001, p. 88-89.(Martin Buber, *Das Dialogische Prinzip*, Verlad Lamber Schneider: Heidelberg, 1962)

relations of mutual love and was supported by personal commitment. Meanwhile *collectivity* ('Bündelung') as a predominant mode of social relationship in traditional society was oriented towards a common aim, mainly external, and was determined by its role in a larger milieu. When we say: "family is a primal cell of society" what do we mean: its unique structure, the significance of the family's internal life, its crucial role in a life of a person, and because of that in society? If now European countries are looking how to support the family mainly for the sake of a better demographic situation, does this not mean that the family is seen too functionally?

Neither *collectivity*, nor *individualism*, as a contemporary base for social relationship, questions the heart of its own existence, much like a person who is valued for the effect he makes but not for what he really is.⁴ Soren Kierkegaard already in the middle of 19-th century came to the providential conclusion that modern individualism and modern collectivism are mirror images of one another⁵. I personally experienced living under a totalitarian regime and now the process of social transformation after its collapse. With deep sorrow I can testify that radical *collectivism* can inevitably switch only to radical *individualism* as to an opposite mode of social relationship. The increase of individualism in Western society has in time altered a former type of family relationship bringing about the switch from the collective entity grounded on normative behavior to the temporal contract of self-centered individuals and because of that - the present crisis.

The increasing preference for cohabitation in *de facto* unions as a substitute form of living instead of marriage is determined not only by individualistic mentality, which atrophies the capacity of self-giving and reciprocity. In considerable degree this preference is related with new patterns of living "as others do", what is no less (if not more) important than in traditional society; only the patterns are different. Mass media publications are full of stories of so called "free choice" taken from the lives of contemporary public heroes (film stars, popular singers, models, and others). These stories are used as a hook for potential purchasers, but eventually they play a different role – they project these behaviors as the contemporary social norm, what also has no habit to be reflected.

The problem of the perception of oneself as a person

Individualism brings a challenge not only to family, because it is too frequently considered as an organic entity, but also to all other basic identities: national, religious, even sexual ones, and reveals that in the world

⁴ Buber, M., *op.cit.*

⁵ Quoted after Gunton, C.E., *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, T&T Clark, 1991, p. 86-87. We can see now how they coexist in our societies: the extreme individualism looks for an experience of collectivity in the sensual and the emotional belonging to a crowd, an orientation to the consumption of material goods is combined with withdrawal to a virtual reality, and the savage competition for individual success in the daily round is matched by the imagined unification of all people in an abstract impersonal divine Absolute, propagated in the culture of the New Age.

touched by sin human values could not survive unconsciously or in themselves – they are very fragile and vague if they exist mainly on maintenance of social norms as external power.

In a two-dimensional system of social relations, activity and thinking, the two patterns of *collectivism* and *individualism* exist as two sides of the same “coin”. In a certain sense they both manifest a fundamental social phenomenon – the absence of experience and self-perception of the *person* as a unique and relational being and because of that the lack of a *community* in its proper sense.

Very often we use the notion of a *person* (especially in humanities and social sciences) in the sense of an *individual*. Meanwhile the concept of a person (*persona, prosopon*) was first introduced into theological circulation in third century Latin texts in the context of discussing the Trinity as a dialogical reality and *Logos* as personal incarnation.⁶ Unfortunately, because of legal and philosophical interpretations, the word has acquired a different content. An extreme example of this confusion would be the term “juridical person”, which does refer not only to the particular human individual, but to the organizations as agents of juridically determined functional activity.

I will not go further with the analysis how and why this happened (this process already takes a profound reflection in the Church), but will only maintain that for a few centuries in Christian philosophy and theology of the Latin Church the person was defined as an individual substance distinguished by its rational or intellectual nature – an independent and self-subsistent being, in whom the *imago Dei* is related only with the spiritual dimension of human nature (the godliness of the human person is located in the mind)⁷, and relationality (openness for relation) on the human level is considered mainly an accidental characteristic⁸. The stress on individuality – self-sufficiency – that was taken from the antic Greek philosophy had a considerable influence on the development of modern individualism,⁹ which was completely embodied by Cartesian philosophy and the Enlightenment.

⁶ For the etymology of this notion see Ratzinger, J., “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology”, in: *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol. 17 (Fall, 1990), P. 439-443; Grabowski, J.S., “Person: Substance and Relation”, in: *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol. 22 (Spring, 1995), P. 139-144; Zizioulas, J. D., *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993, P. 31-41.

⁷ For Aquinas, the *imago Dei* is realized principally in an act of contemplation in the intellect (*S.Th.* I q.93 a.4 and 7. Meanwhile for Bonaventure the image is realized chiefly through the will in the religious act of man. Within a similar mystical vision, but with a greater boldness, Meister Eckhart tends to spiritualize the *imago Dei* by placing it at the summit of the soul and detaching it from the body (See International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 15. July 23, 2004 // www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents).

⁸ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.29, a.1, ad. 1. For a more thorough criticism of this conception see Ratzinger J, *op. cit.*, P. 449; Balthasar, H.U., „On the Concept of Person“, in : *Communio: International Catholic Review*, vol. 13 (Spring 1986), P. 22; Grabowski, J.S., *op. cit.*, P.149-152.

⁹ Already Augustine and Boethius saw the human analogy of the Trinity not in the loving relation of persons for each other, but in the structures of the mind’s intellectual love of itself. (See Gunton C.E., *op. cit.*, p. 90-93)

In antiquity the word *man* (ανθρωπος) was employed, usually in speaking about a male, or about a representative of a concrete social group, of a particular kind of activity (a philosopher, an artisan, a soldier, and the like). Although a human being is in essence a social creature, his social character originates from the *polis* itself: the individual is subordinated to the good of the species, to the *cosmos*, to which he belongs, and to performing roles of varying degrees of nobility. Furthermore, the ancient philosophy, which was primarily oriented to the world as an object of knowing, gave base to the attitude to look at the human individual as an object as well. Even in the relationship of friendship, the other one is used to be chosen as an object according to its “merit”¹⁰. Therefore, the individual does not have value in himself – he is not a unique creature, but a separate entity with definite attributes, a representative of that particular species (human, animal, and the like), which is valued in conformity with the importance or usefulness of his concrete characteristics: sex, age, social background, physical or intellectual capacities and strides etc.

Do we recognize that this concept designates a prevailing reality of our social life as well as a predominant attitude towards oneself and others? Therefore a profound human thirst for love (to love and to be loved) more than often takes on dramatic or even inadequate manifestations, which lead to psychological fragility, social instability and even bigger alienation of individualism.

Meanwhile the concept of the person is based on a different human experience – the one, which appeared with the Christ Event that restored to human beings the possibility of a mutual relationship with God rejected by them – i.e. the ability to recognize oneself as a person – a unique being created after the image of God, who responds to God’s love and who can more and more resemble God made man, and live in communion with Him. The concept of the person did not appear straight after the Redemption, but only after 2-3 centuries due to a new human experience – in experience of personal and communal prayer addressed to the living God, who by taking on human nature became familiar to us. This experience in the loving presence of the risen Jesus Christ – the real image of the invisible God – gradually opened a capacity to discover oneself as a being after the image of God; to discover one’s profound nature as a human person¹¹ as relational and unique and because of that incomparably worthy being who recognizes his dignity in God’s love to him:

¹⁰ Carmichael, L., *Friendship: Interpreting Christian Love*, T&T Clark International, 2004, P. 7-34.

¹¹ Because a person is not an object and therefore not a finite reality, in its theological meaning, “person” does not lie on the level of substance, but of existence. Therefore more adequately we could define the human person through his constitutive spring – a freedom, which is also relational – a freedom to respond to the other or not. It is true to say, that not opening oneself to the Other and another – with closing oneself in self-sufficiency – a human person strengthens one’s experience of an individual. The uniqueness of the human person comes out not only due to one’s peculiar history and relationships, but even more manifests and develops in personal and due to that incomparable relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

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“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (Jn 3:16). Here I would like to stress (after Angelo Scola) that priority of experience over theology is ontological, and this priority reveals plainly that man is primarily and essentially the receiver, not the producer of truth¹². Therefore, those concepts such as *person*, *agape*, and *caritas* (I would add also *communio* as *koinonia*) are unique contributions of Christian faith and theological insight, expressing a new reality and opening up new perspectives to human intellectual history¹³ as well as human experience.

The respond of Christian anthropology

Contemporary Christian anthropology, beginning with the state of humanity at the time of Creation, approaches some of the consequences of the Fall, while with the reality of the Redemption there appears a possibility not only to recognize these differing human experiences – both of person and individual – in the tension of daily existence, but also to open oneself to the transforming grace of God¹⁴, in that way subordinating the experience of the individual to that reality of the person.¹⁵ That it is not a simple process, we can recognize in a dramatic revelation of St. Paul, when he says: “*The will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want – that is what I do. But every time I do what I do not want to, then it is not myself acting, but the sin that lives in me. <...> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? God – thanks be to him – through Jesus Christ our Lord.*”(Rom 7:18-20.24-25)

¹² Christian experience - the entirety of a life lived according to the faith and, therefore, within the community of the Church. Christian community is the commensurate subject of this experience. This subject as communion, which does not absorb the person, but allows him to exist in an ontological correlation with all who have received (by faith and baptism) the grace of participation in the dead and risen Christ. Therefore every crisis of theology—provided that the requirements of its object and the rigor of its method have been ensured—has its ultimate explanation in a crisis of Christian experience. (see Scola, A., *Christian Experience and Theology*, *Communio: International Catholic Review*, Summer 1996).

¹³ Ratzinger J., *op. cit.*; Balthasar H.U., *op. cit.*; Zizioulas, J. D., *op. cit.*, P. 27-49.

¹⁴ In Thomas Aquinas, the *imago Dei* possesses a historical character, since it passes through three stages: the *imago creationis* (*naturae*), the *imago recreationis* (*gratiae*), and the *similitudinis* (*gloriae*). See *Summa Theologiae*, I q. 93 a.4.

¹⁵ Seeking the integrity of Christian anthropology, the subordination of these two human experiences—the personal and individual – has not yet been fully solved on a conceptual plane. That most likely would require deeper interdisciplinary studies, in which a more concrete, clearer, and more real vision of the human person and his existence would be crystallized. This would also be useful for the pastoral care of the human person in his or her existential reality, especially in marriage and family life. (see Laumenskaite, I.E., “The Family as a Primal Community of Persons and its Decisive Role in the Formation of Personal Identity and Social Responsibility” In: Gerhard Höver/ Gerrit G. de Kruijff, Oliver O'Donovan/ Bernd Wannewetsch (Hg.), *Die Familie im neuen Europa. Ethische Herausforderungen und interdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (Symposium. Anstöße zur interdisziplinären Verständigung Band 9), LIT Verlag, Berlin 2008. P 61-72.

In the Catholic Church, the turning point in Christian anthropology was the Second Vatican Council¹⁶ that receded from a static, rationally based, philosophical doctrine of man, to which Christian doctrine was added as a sort of crowning conclusion. The Council put forth a dynamic account of man, which stressed history and was essentially based on biblical data. However, commentaries on documents of the Council, written several years after its conclusion as well as later reflections¹⁷, reveal that this transition from a mosaic of different attitudes to a Christocentric and consistent anthropological view¹⁸ was not easily accomplished and has proceeded slowly even up to the present decade.

Through all these changes we can reflect the vital power of the Word of God. Being read, contemplated and lived in the Church in spite of dramatic events and difficult periods the word of God operated in the Christian world *'like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.'* (Lc 13:21). The unique concept of man (male and female) made in the image of God – a free, worthy and responsible being - has led to democracy and civil society as the outcomes of Christian culture. Feminism as the trend of thought and social action is also the product of that. All pre-Christian cultures were marked by one or another form of inequality of woman with regard to man. During the process of slow transformations of thought and social reality, Christianity had to deal with that as one of the greatest challenges for human experience – a relation with others as different one from another. Today we can see that long-lasting exclusion of woman from the world of knowledge, governance and social collaboration that was inherited as the former social attitude and habit, in turn impeded an ability to overcome the dualistic worldview of matter-spirit, body-soul, mind-heart, which does not exist in biblical mentality.

The present changes in Christian anthropology and especially in the attitude towards a social role of woman to a fair extent were influenced by the development of feminist theology. But today we also can maintain that unfruitful development of mainstream feminism towards a dangerous biological reductionism and the social construction of nature¹⁹ is mainly based on the concept of the human being as an individual and effectively embodies perverted masculinized mentality. Whereas an individual does not have unique concreteness, he is seen as a separate entity with definite attributes or characteristics, among these is a sex,

¹⁶ „The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. <...> Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear“ (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 22)

¹⁷ Vorglimler, H. (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 5, New York, 1969; Latourelle, R. (ed.), *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives: Twenty-five Years After (1962-1987)*, Vol. 2, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1989.

¹⁸ Ratzinger, J., “The Dignity of the Human Person”, in: Vorglimler H. (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. 5, New York, 1969, p. 115-163; International Theological Commission, *Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God*, 15. July 23, 2004 // www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents

¹⁹ The first attack would reduce women to their bodies and their vocation to motherhood, understood in the most diminutive sense of having babies and giving birth. The second would allow society to dictate what is and what is not "natural" and to educate girls to this end, saying that women are "maternal," for example, because girls are raised to be mothers and not because of some innate quality.

which also can be analyzed as a separate abstraction. This viewpoint brings to the setting at odds of man and woman, nature and nurture – to the dualist mentality with orientation or to a possible confrontation between opposite characteristics or to annihilation of them.

The respond of the *new feminism*

How the *new feminism* called for by Pope John Paul II can fruitfully respond to that? As far as it is based on the concept of the person – unique and relational being – man or woman, whose equal dignity and difference open them to integral complementarity and because of that to authentic *communio personarum* in their mutual relationship, first of all it is necessary to highlight that this given nature is nature as it is lived. If the concept of person was crystallized by the experience of personal and communal relationship with the Lord as the Other and because of that with human others, a human being is the person when he lives this relationship. Hence we become who we are by the exercise of our freedom and thus by our own actions.

If the person comes to self-realization only in relation to the other – if man and woman identify who they really are thanks to the other – woman's vocation and social identity can be defined in coherence with man's vocation and identity. The reverse can also be true. Their interdependence (being different and ipso facto complementary) means that the most important decisions on life and activity for that have to be taken together. When we speak about the family as a unique way and primal structure of human relationship, its creation, consolidation and also defense has to be their mutual activity. If women first learn and witness the ability to open oneself and accept the other person, they have to invite into this relation first of all their husbands, the members of their family and to help them enter it. If motherhood is linked to the personal structure of the woman and to the personal dimension of the gift – is more “substantial,” – fatherhood is more relational, because it develops in responding to this gift with the help of the spouse as mother – with the help of woman who has discovered the root of her *feminine genius*. Namely the solidarity of the two – as two different but complementary persons acting together for the survival and consolidation of the family in their integral complementarity²⁰, which is creative and vital, – has to be more fruitful than efforts just of women organizations. Because already in this common action for the *culture of life* man and woman witness together the importance and goodness of the family, in this way they will strengthen it more. I think that the words of fr. Raniero Cantalamessa said during the 6th World Meeting of Families in Mexico City are very important to hear and reflect the present situation: “Today, – he said, – more than defending Christian matrimony in

²⁰ Allen, P., *Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration*. In: http://www.endowonline.com/__metadot__/attachment/download/52748

face of society and culture, we have to improve the quality of the Christian family, and work so that Christian families are truly a place where the initial plan of God is fulfilled <...> The first Christians, especially in the first three centuries, changed the laws of the state with their customs.” Indeed, if we look to the reality of the Western countries, we see that the aggressiveness of the *culture of death* is would say less the problem of laws or lack of rights, but of the crisis of family relationship, of the individualistic withdrawal and toughness of the human heart that open the way for evil decisions. By entering the world of masculinized patterns of action that they already absorb in the process of learning to enter it, women are not able to make the society more human and open to the proper needs of the person if they do not do this together with men. They need the help of one another. This communion, as well as collaboration, comes from the very concept and reality of the human person.

In Lithuania for the last two years I worked in the group of specialists and members of the Parliament in preparing the Project of the State Family Policy Concept. After some tension of debates and collaboration with jurisprudent most of us accepted the decision to formulate that the state will give preferential support for the family – the primal community based on marriage of man and woman. We included the right of every child to receive the support of the state regardless to his background as well as the defense of maternity, paternity and childhood. To be sure of the position of the general population we made a representative survey before. When the project went public the oppositional reaction of definite organizations of equal rights using mass media was huge. But who were the most savage opponents? The group of educated, socially active women. I went through numerous public debates using rational arguments, sociological data and discovered that the reason for their opposition based on statistics was not so much the reality of family and perspectives for the children, but their own reality, their deep wounds in family relations that made them hardened and active to fight for women’s self-sufficiency and principal independence from man. I understood that we have to struggle for better family policy, but I also felt more and more deeply that not so much legal rights, but healing of the hearts, healing of painful and because of that usually negated wounds and trampled dignity of the person have to obtain priority in women’s social activity.

And the Church’s serious help here is urgent – much greater support to the family as a primal community of love is needed – the help to family as *foundational created good*: a given setting within which human beings embark upon their way in life,²¹ the primal community that plays a decisive role in the formation of person and due to that of social relations. Because man is the way for the Church – a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk – <...> man in the full truth of his existence <...> because he

²¹ Gerhard Höver/ Gerrit G. de Kruijf, Oliver O'Donovan/ Bernd Wannewetsch (Hg.), *Die Familie im neuen Europa. Ethische Herausforderungen und interdisziplinäre Perspektiven* (Symposion. Anstöße zur interdisziplinären Verständigung Band 9), LIT Verlag, Berlin 2008. P. 9-60.

is a person²². The key of the *development* from the Church perspective is here, because the will and ability to strive for a common good, to accept interdependence, to practice solidarity have roots in community, and first of all in a primal community that family is. Because a *community* in a proper sense is founded on the *communion*, it is not a 'bundle' of individuals related mainly by common values and norms, but is based on personal relationship, and develops "being-for-another". Even when it is oriented to a common goal this proceeds from *I* to *You* until it becomes greater *We*.

The challenges and possibilities

So how do we respond to the dramatic situation of the world, which in waiting for the appearance of a real *genius of woman*²³ is appealing to reconcile with life? ²⁴

I will begin with the question why the serpent deceived Eve, not Adam? It is not said that she was more fragile, or that Adam did not succumb to temptation. If we examine the history of faith of the People of the Alliance, especially during the period this second narrative of Creation was composed and then edited, it is clear that the principal challenge of the history of faith is expressed in symbolic language. It was a long-lasting life-and-death struggle against idolatry – the practice of the Canaanites' agrarian cult of fecundity. A woman would be more responsive to that, because she is more sensitive and knows better the reality of fecundity. If we read the narratives (2 Kings) of that period about the turnover of kings, we will see one thing: the decision of the king to resist idolatry and demolish the altars for Baal gods was related to the religious experience and practice of his wife and/or his mother – was she faithful to the living God of the Alliance or did she practice idolatry. Because women are more responsive to the mystery of life, they are more sensitive to the spiritual reality – to the reality of relations – and take more initiative in cultivating them. (You know that the leaders of many New Age cults are women). Therefore women's openness and faithfulness to the Spirit of God, their religious consciousness is a very important factor in dealing with reality today.

In "Mulieris Dignitatem" John Paul II says that "the struggle with evil and the Evil One marks the biblical exemplar of the "woman" from the beginning to the end of history. It is also a struggle for man, for his true

²² John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

²³ A *Genius of woman* is a certain feminine sensitivity and openness for human persons in every circumstance, accepting him/her as God's special entrustment. It is woman's maternal vocation, by which she not only receives another human being, but also gives herself.

²⁴ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 99.

good, for his salvation.”²⁵ I think today woman has to direct ones attention and efforts towards the struggle against concreteness of the death shadows and violence in mass media, in advertisement which penetrate into the souls of children and youth, against all aggressive Gender Mainstream and Loops education for change in sex priorities in early childhood – to protect and heal human sensitivity and experience.

But in this struggle "the great dragon...that ancient serpent" (Rev 12:9), the "father of lies" and of sin (cf. Jn 8:44) first of all is facing her with all temptations of power watching for her heart. Therefore it is the struggle of each and every woman to decide whether she will say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to God and His eternal plan for her. Hence we become who we are by the exercise of our freedom and thus by our own actions. Therefore I think that the first task for Catholic women’s organizations is the education of women – a help to recognize and reflect the present temptations, to heal their bad experiences, to learn to understand human relations, to help woman overcome her tendency to possess those she loves and take upon herself their responsibilities; it has to be education for the capacity to listen and look with the eyes of the heart, for wisdom and courage to address a man and to help him to recognize the essential role of complementarity in love and mutual acting for the family and for the future. As one of possibilities I can name the example of ENDOW, an acronym for Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women according to the new feminism of John Paul II. With the written permission of the local ordinary it began in Denver few years ago and classes are still held in dioceses today. ENDOW provides study guides and facilitator training on specific documents of the Church and theological texts on woman’s dignity and vocation. After just four years, ENDOW classes are being held in twenty-four states, thirty-five different dioceses, and have started in two new countries, Canada and Italy.

Focusing on the personal capacity of a man and woman in love to overcome every kind of egoism, Benedict XVI distinguishes *amor concupiscentiae* from *amor benevolentiae* – possessive love and oblation love²⁶. Thomas Aquinas asks towards what does the motion of love tends and introduces the distinction between love of concupiscence (*amor concupiscentiae*) and friendship type love (*amor amicitiae*).²⁷ Possessive love “instrumentalizes” the other: the other’s goodness or perfection becomes goodness for me, which I seek for my own fulfilment (pleasure, joy, recognition of my importance or self-worth). In friendship type love I do not draw the other, so to speak, into my “world” as I would in *amor concupiscentiae*, but rather I extend my “world” to include others. (The experience of joy in the presence of the beloved person is not due to the possibility of “using” his/her goodness, but rather to affirm his/her goodness for the union of friendship – mutual receiving and giving.) St. Thomas does not oppose self-love to the love of others or even to the love of God, but discloses that the difference between these two loves is a crucial distinction between the proper

²⁵ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30.

²⁶ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 7.

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.2, a.4.

and improper love of oneself. Here we can make a turning point and say, that proper self-love is not solely the desire for higher goods (goods of the spiritual faculties – the intellect and the will – as perfect objects), but more importantly – one's thirst and openness to the relationship of love, to which I am open if I perceive myself as a Gift – a gift of God for others and my life as His gift to me. If I accept God's love for me as a unique person, created in His image and His likeness, the peace of self-worth is given to me and can lead me to authentic relations with others, to the capacity of self-giving and receiving.

“A woman's dignity is closely connected with the love which she receives by the very reason of her femininity; it is likewise connected with the love which she gives in return.”²⁸ So we can ask ourselves: do I really perceive myself as Gift – a gift of God for others and my life as His gift to me?

Therefore John Paul II says: “A Catholic woman has to find the time everyday to stand before the Lord and to hear how He loves her, how He trusts her giving her a heart, which is able to open to Love and radiate love to others”²⁹.

A contemplative “action” is a basis for all other woman's actions. Like Mary, we too – women and men of the Church – today are called not only to proclaim and live the Gospel message, but also to realize and live heroic acts of faith and most especially to help “bring to birth” the personal faith – the “yes, I believe” – of others, especially that of the children entrusted to our care.³⁰ “Mary is ‘the new beginning’ of the dignity and vocation of women, of each and every woman. <...> In Mary, Eve discovers the nature of the true dignity of woman, of feminine humanity. This discovery must continually reach the heart of every woman and shape her vocation and her life”³¹

²⁸ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 30.

²⁹ John Paul II, *The Prayer of Catholic Woman*.

³⁰ *Towards a New Feminism*. Interview with Michele Schumacher, Zenit org., March 8, 2007.

³¹ John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 11.