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The Prosperity of the Family – the Future of the World and the Church

Individual and Social Ethical Connections of Marriage and Family Life in Contemporary Western Culture

Abstract:

From a historical point of view, it can be argued that the cultivated arrangement of the relationship between man and woman, the support of the institution of marriage, and therefore families, have always been one of the important requirements of individual cultures and religions. There is also a close connection between the state of society (and the dominant requirements in it) and the form of personal and family life. In the Western cultural space with the decisive ecclesiastical discourse, the view of marriage and the family was not spared from one-sidedness and problematic practice. The current magisterium of the Catholic Church remains critical of some contemporary trends and phenomena, including the questioning of the very institution of marriage and the family. At the same time, it remains open to new challenges in this field.

The article aims to critically reflect on some issues related to the current situation of marriage and the family, especially the individual and social ethical context of married and family life in contemporary Western culture.

Using a reflection of the findings of selected authors, especially of sociologists (Lipovetsky, Beck), the article demonstrates the reality of problematic „points“ of the present time (marked by magisterial texts by Pope Francis) and their connection to married and family life. It thus verifies the thesis that the preconditions for marriage and the family are currently weakened in the Western area. This state of affairs include even the institutions that want to invoke the necessary personal and social responses to the problematic situation. Although the study does not capture the full range of issues and problems currently associated with marriage and the family, it does demonstrate that marital and family relationships in contemporary Western culture are conditioned by a number of factors. Those cannot be fully influenced by the individuals directly affected. The study points

to the crucial role of politics, including its responsibility and to the exclusive role of the Church. The Church can, in many respects, increase respect for the institutions and bring a concrete help to the people.

The result of the study is an emphasis on the fact that, in the current situation, it is not easy for individuals or families to maintain their own integrative values. It is not easy to withstand the pressures from the outside, to not succumb to the vision of success offered by the majority society. It is also problematic that the focus of politics is not predominantly on the family but, above all, on the immediate interests of the individual. Politics is irresponsibly undercutting itself in order to get into favor of individuals.

The conclusion of the study confirms the validity of the magisterial belief that the prosperity of the family is crucial for the future of the world and the Church. Marriage and the family are natural communities that correspond to a person's anthropological setting. They allow him or her to find his or her own identity. They are a guarantee of the humanization of the person and society, a protection against deformations of the individualistic or collectivist type.

Keywords: marriage, family, ethics.

Introduction

At a glance, it can be argued that the cultivated arrangement of the relationship between man and woman, the support of the institution of marriage, and therefore families, have always been one of the important requirements of individual cultures and religions. We can talk about a common cultural basis in this regard. In view of advancing globalization and related issues, The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic approved at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago (1993) also refers to it in the early 1990s. The document emphasizes, *inter alia*, the obligation to create a culture of equality and partnership between men and women, to respect and love one another, not to abuse human sexuality and not to commit infidelity and humiliation (Küng, Kuschel, 1997, pp. 25–26; Küng, 2000, pp. 141–142; Küng, 2012, pp. 60, 74). At the same time, it calls for work to be done in all countries and within all cultures “on economic and social conditions that would allow the decent existence of marriage, the family and also the elderly” (Küng, Kuschel, 1997, p. 26).

However, from a historical point of view, the realization of the demand for respect and a responsible approach to the above-mentioned relationships and values has its “dark corners”. These emphasize a close connection between the state of society and the dominant requirements in it and the form of personal and family life (cf. Šrajer, 2017, p. 168).

In our Western cultural space, until recently, marriage and the family were unilaterally, if not exclusively, valued for the service of life, not so much for the very value of a partnership.¹ Today, we systematically take into account and highlight the previously marginalized value of the partnership (Šrajcar, 2015, pp. 180–184).² A departure from the former, sometimes too strict judgement of human failures in the field of sexuality or problems in marriage and families, accompanied by disproportionate humiliation and contempt for specific perpetrators and then by their punishment, can also be considered a positive shift in this direction.³ At present, it seems that we are generally showing a greater degree of personal and social benevolence towards previously austere condemned failures and transgressions. However, this seemingly positive shift can be somewhat “faded” if we place it in the context of the current dominant culture of boundless individualism which, among other things, weakens the previously much-appreciated, and still rightly desirable, service to life.⁴ Such a culture can, of course, be criticized. At the same time, though, it is currently a challenge. It again poses relevant value questions that need to be reflected upon (with regard to the general demand for a human dignified life).

The mentioned possible double view of the current reality of marriage and the family (criticism, openness to challenges) has recently been captured in the magisterial statements of the Catholic Church especially in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis on love in the family *Amoris laetitia* (2016). On the one hand, we encounter an uncompromisingly open critique of problematic phenomena and unhealthy tendencies in the contemporary world, in the life of modern man. On the other hand, there is also a sincere effort to understand one’s dispositions and preconditions in relation to the ethical challenges of the gospel. In essence, this is a realistic and convincing

¹ If we omit the fact that religious or military-political interests (e.g., the Old Testament practice) were, in particular, behind this preference in history then later, in the Western cultural space of modern times, these were especially ethical reasons (justification and cultivation of experienced sexuality) and social (family security, solidarity).

² In the environment of the Catholic Church (which in the Western cultural circle decisively shaped the concept of marriage), there was an official change in the above sense during the Second Vatican Council. Specifically, it was the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). This document equates the value of a marital status in marriage with the service of life realized in it. Marriage receives full appreciation in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis about love in the family *Amoris laetitia* (2016).

³ It is possible to mention here, for example, the “non-Christian” treatment of “fallen women” in post-war Catholic Ireland. There were punishments for women’s sexual offenses (mainly for extramarital sexuality). The children were taken away from them and women themselves were deported to institutions (laundries) run by nuns.

⁴ Behind the aforementioned benevolence to moral failures can also often be indifference, disinterest in the problems or needs of others (let everyone do what they want!). So this is not the kind of tolerance which values freedom in truth and takes into account the value of the other.

assessment of the current reality by the pope. It is free from excessive pessimism. This assessment is based on an attitude of faith that seeks to understand the shortcomings and risks of the contemporary world and man in it as “places” that need a touch of God’s grace (EG, 2013, no. 44; GE, 2018, no. 50). According to Pope Francis, these “places” first and foremost represent the danger of spreading extreme individualism, personalism which is wrongly understood and valued and which produces distrust, flight from duty, confinement to comfort, and arrogance; this is also with narcissism, the “culture of temporality” (AL, 2016, no. 33, 39). He also mentions “terrible superficiality” (EG, 2013, no. 64) and moral distortions as a consequence of the denial of all transcendence, the associated weakening of the sense of personal and social sin, and the gradual rise of relativism (EG, 2013, no. 64). Pope Francis also considers the easy confusion of true freedom with arbitrariness to be a problematic phenomenon. “Everyone decides as they like as if there were no truth, values and principles for correct orientation, as if everything was possible and allowed” (AL, 2016, no. 34).

Aware of the fact that the “prosperity of the family” seems to be “crucial for the future of the world and the Church” (AL, 2016, no. 31), the presented study seeks to point out the reality of problematic “places” marked by Pope Francis and their connection to married and family life. Using the reflection upon the knowledge of selected authors, it seeks to work with the thesis that the preconditions for marriage and the family are currently weakened in the Western area including institutions that call for the necessary personal and social responses to this issue. It wants to point out the individual and social ethical contexts that accompany the problematic phenomena of the lifestyle of modern man in Western culture. The ambition is also, at least briefly, to offer several stimuli based on ecclesiastical positions which can help to make the desired appreciation of marriage and family.

1. Weakened Preconditions for Marriage and Family – the Relativization of these Institutions

To understand the above-mentioned issues formulated by Pope Francis, it is necessary to place them in a broader context. The circumstances largely pre-determine and complete them. It is above all a process of globalization which, ‘despite some of its structural elements’, is neither *a priori* good nor bad. Its shape will be determined by people” (CV, 2009, no. 42). This statement of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI is a necessary reminder of the ethical dimension of the

globalization process, personal and social responsibility. The Swiss theologian Hans Küng also called for the same responsibility in the early 1990s. In the long run, given the globalization of problems posed by the globalization of the economy (market), technology and communication, he emphasizes the need for a new “paradigm of global relations” (Küng, 2012, p. 224), the need for a global ethos to avert the inhuman effects of global problems. At the same time, he highlights the culture of humanity which grows out of the ethos of ancestors – the traditions of great cultures and religions – as the absolutely necessary moral basis at present. This element is able to preserve the human face of individual and social life. According to Küng, it is about helping to live in dignity in families, schools and other groups, and to give society a framework of moral order that will keep it together permanently (Küng, 2012, p. 73).⁵

When Hans Küng calls (in the context of the ongoing processes of globalization) for keeping the demand for humanity, for everyone’s respect to human dignity (on which human rights and human duties are based), he is anxious to ensure that this common human ethos is not interpreted individually. This risk is to be ruled out by the basic principle of reciprocity, the ancient golden rule: Don’t do unto others what you don’t want others to do unto you (Küng, 2012, p. 71). In practice, this means that “the principle of humanity applies not only to the human individual and his or her actions but also to various human institutions and structures. They are meant to serve people, to support their humanity, to humanize (...) society and to work for the benefit of the whole, not to its detriment” (Küng, 2012, p. 71).

Assuming the fulfillment of his recommended principles, Küng eventually considers himself a realistic optimist who looks to the future with reasonable hope. However, this does not prevent him from occasional condemning of the current form of civilization and morals (Küng, 2012, p. 65, 226). He is thus partly one of those who emphasize the rather negative side of globalization and the lifestyle associated with it. These include, for example, the French economist and essayist Hervé Juvin. He is convinced that “we are witnessing complete political impotence, moral decay, the collapse of civilization and morals” (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, 165). The English psychologist Sue Gerhardt talks about the selfish culture of individualism and criticizes the narrowing of modern ethics to the motto “take what you can, take an interest in yourself” (Gerhardt, 2011, p. 26). The Czech philosopher Petr Piřha then speaks quite openly about the overall disintegration of morality and the prevailing moral chaos (Piřha, 2006).

⁵ The validity of Küng’s positions became particularly evident during the financial and economic crisis of 2008–2010. However, this also applies to current and foreseeable environmental and socio-political problems.

In comparison with the above-mentioned authors and with their perhaps one-sided evaluations of the present, the French philosopher and sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky offers a more elaborate, balanced, and especially more comprehensive view of current events, including its effects on marriage, family and family relationships. However, unlike Hans Küng, he does not deduce a moral basis from the current situation. In his case, it is more of a sociological analysis of reality supplemented by value philosophical comments.

According to Lipovetsky, the globalization we are experiencing is not just geopolitical, technical and market factors. It is also a type of culture, a “third type” culture, a kind of transnational hyper-culture. Together with Jean Serroy, he calls it “world culture” (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, pp. 11–12). In his presentation, the mentioned world culture shows the powerful and unstoppable pursuit of the present time towards the unification of the world. Although this process is still incomplete, it represents a general and profound change in the world’s culture organization and perception. The characteristics of it, mentioned by him, are obvious:

Until now, culture has been an element which brings a clear order to life and gives meaning to life. It has been something which frames life with a set of deities, rules, values and symbolic systems. In comparison with this ancient logic, world culture has the opposite effect: It brings constant disorganization and lack of order into our existence and our consciousness. We are in an era where all components of our lives are falling into crisis, they are unstable and deprived of their coordinates. Church, **family**, ideology, politics, **gender relations**, consumer lifestyle, art, education: there is no single area which would be excluded from the gradual disintegration of territorial unity and the loss of a clear orientation. World culture or planetary culture breaks all systems of clues (...), deprives large collective plans of their appeal, disrupts lifestyles and working methods, bombards man with a flood of confused information. The result is a state of unprecedented, general and almost utter uncertainty and disorientation. Traditional cultures created an organized ‘holistic’ world. They established a strong bond with a collective order. That way, they ensured identity which made it possible to face countless difficulties in life. In the era of second modernity, everything is completely different: the world has rejected all collective symbolic frameworks and falls into the uncertainty of psychic identities. In the past, there was a degree of self-evident social involvement and identification – but we are looking at the growing disintegration and individualism of perceived uncertainty (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, pp. 14–15).

In Lipovetsky's presentation, it is an apt depiction of the nature of transnational multipolar culture. This culture represents a specific social universality. It is a combination of basic and at the same time disparate factors which influence each other, cross each other, and bump into each other. They reinforce a new form of supranational existence, the disorganization of the collective order and chaos, personal and social disorientation and insecurity. The dominant principles in this respect are the market, the consumer lifestyle, science, individualism, and the cultural and communication industry. These facts evoke the feeling of a single globalized world which includes a culture of similar consumer goals and practices, universal norms and opinions, generally accepted ways of thinking and acting (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, pp. 16–18).

The world culture presented by Lipovetsky does not primarily represent a homogeneous system. It is a culture of the subjective self! (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, pp. 189–190). Individualist culture is (in the world culture) “the unprecedented driving force of social, cultural and individual transformation... It celebrates individual autonomy and suppresses the influence of collective orders” (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, p. 195). World culture, as Lipovetsky further recalls, “deprived people of the key to understanding their own world. It no longer clarifies the present or the future, it does not set the direction. In fact, it decomposes the structures that have shaped our existence” (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, p. 98).

In Lipovetsky's world culture, however, it is not just a celebration of a liberated individual deprived of collective bonds and traditional ties. It is above all the expansion of the legal person. According to Lipovetsky, the individual is the main point of reference in social life and in the legal field, the central meaning of world culture and its universal-humanistic mission (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, pp. 67–68). In this respect, Lipovetsky also finds support in Hervé Juvin's thoughts. Juvin states that

we are witnessing the overcoming of collective structures in the name of human rights. At least in Europe, these have been transformed into the rights of an absolute individual who is endowed with an unrestricted ability to break free from bonds and duties, to reject relations to others, to nature, to one's own culture, to one's own self. The stage of this drama is the field of education” (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, p. 138).

While “in the past culture preceded the life of the individual, today it aims to increase the satisfaction of each of us” (Lipovetsky, Juvin, 2012, p. 133).

In a world culture based on the universalistic ideology of human rights, the dominance of the legal person and his or her independence, it is necessary (with regard to marriage and family) to emphasize the fact that it is accompanied by specific features of consciousness, perception and feeling. Already in the 1990s, Lipovetsky reflects upon the onset of new thinking or new existence which accompanies changes in the understanding and perception of ethics, ethical requirements and the associated lifestyle.⁶ With a certain degree of exclusivity, he speaks of a change in the ethical paradigm, of the painless ethics of the new democratic times, of the “twilight of duty”, of “post-moralistic ethics”, of “ethics of the third type” (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 12–15).⁷ What this change brings is the loss of consciousness of moral duty and a weakened willingness to sacrifice and self-renunciation. This is the place where we can look for one of the basic (currently problematic) preconditions for marriage and the family.

In the post-moralistic culture which is dominated by the subjective rights of the sovereign individual (the right to prosperity, to private and material happiness), the individual’s ability to cope with the difficulties of life is weakened. Long-term goals which require effort and firm commitments (undoubtedly, marriage and the family is included here) are thus much less attractive for an individual (Gerhardt, 2011, p. 42–43). The validity of this statement is not called into question by the fact (as documented by numerous studies) that marriage and the family are of high value to most young people so far (European Values Study, pp. 170, 173, 175; Hamplová, 2000, pp. 78, 98).

The real discrepancy between the preferences and life attitudes of today’s young people expresses their generally problematic situation. In personal and social consciousness (especially under the influence of advertising and the media), the categories of good and evil are generally blurred. Critical thinking is weakening. The concept of morality is often reduced to private intimate feelings. These can legitimize a lot of things, but it is not possible to articulate and ethically defend them clearly to oneself and others. Ethical concepts and emphasized values become mere abstractions, with minimal response in personal life and decision-making (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 57).

⁶ This fact is captured in the second half of the 20th century by other authors as well. They talk about “psychologization of moral speech”. See for example CLEMENT, Ulrich, *Sexualität im sozialen Wandel. Eine empirische Vergleichsstudie an Studenten 1966 und 1981*, Stuttgart, 1986; KLAGES, Helmut, *Wertorientierung im Wandel. Rückblick, Gegenwartsanalyse, Prognose*, Frankfurt – New York, 1984.

⁷ Lipovetsky speaks of development from traditional religious ethics (the centre of morality is God) through the period of lay secularized ethics which can be roughly defined by the beginning of the Enlightenment until the middle of the 20th century (the theocentric concept of absolute duty is replaced by the “religion” of the lay unconditional duty to oneself, others and the collective) to the current “postmoralist ethics” or “third type of ethics”.

In the context of world culture and its characteristics, the young person, in many respects, has doubts when he or she wants to set off on the path of a lasting and responsible relationship in the form of marriage and family. In addition to the above, it is mainly the fact that in the end he or she does not have much opportunity to give his or her life meaning and purpose. The reason for this is that, on the one hand, he or she is not usually confronted with the requirement to cultivate instincts and passions or responsibilities in relationships. On the other hand, he or she is rather shaped by the requirement to make the best use of opportunities. He or she faces an increased demand to strive for quality of life and health and to achieve a form that corresponds to the expectations of peers, fashion, and the majority-promoted lifestyle (Lipovetsky, 1999, pp. 64–66). If he or she does not meet these demands, he or she seems to be struggling more with anxiety, depression, stress, a sense of emptiness and the futility of life than with remorse. He or she becomes a mere victim of the pursuit of his or her own interests and rights (Küng, 2012, p. 82).⁸

However, it is not only about weakened preconditions for marriage and the family, but also about the relativization of both institutions. Martin Jacques (like many other authors, including the above-mentioned) recalls that in the age of selfishness (respectively in a society that reflects and imitates the rhythm and character of the inherently contractual market) one robs him or herself of the structure of his or her life by creating his or her own self-importance (Jacques, 2004). This largely explains well-known phenomena: an increase in single-member households, singles and alternative partnerships – premarital or extramarital cohabitation; almost half of marriages end in divorce; the share of the total number of children born out of wedlock is increasing; large families are in decline; parents often do not devote enough time to their children; it is increasingly difficult for family members to be together more often. However, not only these facts are concomitant features of the world culture.

In line with the above, Lipovetsky considers the family a post-moralistic institution with a new household morality. According to him, the post-moralistic order disrupted the traditional primacy of family rights over individual rights.

Family is far from being a goal in itself. It has become an individualistic prosthesis, an institution in which subjective rights and desires prevail over categorical obligations. The values of individual autonomy were subjected to the order of the family institution for a long time. This epoch is gone. The multiplied penetration

⁸ Hans Küng points out, with reference to sociological research, that pleasure and the true meaning of life are two different things.

of individualistic rights undermined both the moral binding nature of marriage and the obligation to reproduce. Parents certainly acknowledge their responsibilities to their children but this does not include the need to stay together for life and sacrifice their personal existence. A post-moralistic family can be built and reconstructed as we wish. The family as such is not respected any longer. The family is a tool for personal realization. The “binding” institution has become a flexible emotional device (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 182).

In essence, “marriage, staying married, and childbirth have been freed from any notion of superior commitment, and the only legitimate marriage is the one which gives rise to happiness” (Lipovetsky, 1999, pp. 180–181; Giddens, 2000, pp. 69–85, especially 75).⁹

According to Lipovetsky, traditional family morality has also been disrupted by new reproductive technologies (artificial insemination). According to him, these techniques quickly disrupted the traditional conception of the child, fatherhood and motherhood.

A woman can be fertilized by an unnamed donor or a deceased individual, a woman-bearer and a woman-parent can be two different people, and a mother can give birth to the child of her own daughter. New reproductive techniques allow the birth of a child without a father, or motherhood and fatherhood without a sexual relationship. What we are watching is not the rise of family order but its post-moralistic breakup. A typical feature of the time is not the obligation to produce offspring and enter into marriage but the individualistic right to a child, even outside of marriage (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 181).

In addition, the new morality of the household contains the paradoxes which reflect the post-moralistic ethics. The dominance of individualism in the family is far from limitless. It has its limits or even requirements and demands. According to Lipovetsky, it does not produce a low birth rate or numerous offspring but a reasonable number of children, i.e., two to three. According to him, behind this practice lies a post-moralistic logic. Such logic is not willing to sacrifice but, at the same time, it does not want to get rid of the many joys that children bring. The goal is to win at all levels, to succeed in professional and family life. No one wants to give up anything. The

⁹ In the current situation, the English sociologist Antony Giddens sees marriage and the family as “shell institutions”. According to him, their basis is no longer an institution. It is a couple, a relationship based on emotional communication. Its origin and duration is justified by the resulting mutual benefit and satisfaction of partners.

child is an integral part of the overall quality of existence (Lipovetsky, 1999, pp. 183–184).

The above-mentioned paradox of the new morality of the household seems to be most evident in the relationship between parents and children. As in the case of the attitude of young people to marriage and family, there is a discrepancy between the proclaimed ideals and social reality. The fourth commandment still seems to enjoy general recognition. In practice, however, we often witness the weakened (or even disappearing) sense of duty and obligation of children towards their parents. According to Lipovetsky, “the historical process that ensured the supremacy of individual rights over responsibilities also affected the notion of children’s respect and devotion in relation to their parents” (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 184). The ancient cult of parents is irresistibly losing its power. Children are no longer praised for honoring their parents. They are complimented for being happy, for becoming independent individuals with control over their lives and their responsibilities. However, even this decay of values is not unlimited (Lipovetsky, 1999, pp. 184–185).

What are the limitations of post-moralistic ethics in relation to the family? Lipovetsky answers:

Nothing is more outrageous in our time than not loving your children, not caring about their happiness and their future. (...) The right to subjective self-absorption does not go beyond the principle of parental obligations. The more individualistic values gain power, the stronger the sense of duty towards children is. (...) There are no longer corrupt children. There are just corrupt parents (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 185).

In the parent-child relationship, there is a fundamental turnaround. What is decisive today is not the obligations of children to their parents, it is the duty of parents to their children. “The ingratitude of offspring is less scandalous than the indifference of parents to children. Violence against children has become one of the least excusable and tolerable offenses from the point of view of public opinion” (Lipovetsky, 1999, pp. 186–187). According to Lipovetsky, the feeling of parental responsibility is also strengthened by scientific knowledge. This includes the importance of the early stages of a child’s development, and the requirement for his or her overall personality development. Lipovetsky says that everything becomes more important in relation to children (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 186).

Finally, it should be emphasized that (in the case of strengthening the sense of parental commitment) the intentions of post-moralistic ethics do not emphasize obligations in the sense of a categorical imperative. They are not associated

with resilience and effort. They are understood only as an emotional commitment, as a kind of helpfulness. Its goal is the development of the child and personal enrichment as a condition of true existence (Lipovetsky, 1999, pp. 188–189). It should also be added that the family does not just become a tense emotional space. It is also transforming

into a company that must be optimally managed in all directions. Nothing must be neglected: children's health, studies, holidays, television programs, music, languages, games or sports – it is necessary to watch over all of it, to develop it, to move forward. Parents increasingly resemble 'young dynamic' managers who love their boundless business. The question of parental ethics does not concern self-denial, it is about general management (Lipovetsky, 1999, p. 189).

2. Marriage and Family Relations – Social and Ethical Context

When reflecting upon marital and family relationships, one cannot focus on cultural change, or changes in a person's consciousness and his or her situation only. One has to focus on the conditional connection of these facts with the state of society, with its changes. It is a confrontation with trivial truth – individuality is created socially.

According to sociologist Ulrich Beck, the currently dominant individualization is not a creation of modernity. According to him, it should not be understood as a historical-sociological, socio-historical category. It should not be seen as a dimension of "liberation" – detachment from historically given traditional social forms and ties. It represents a rather general ahistorical model for him. In addition to the "liberation" dimension, it also includes the "disenchantment" dimension – the loss of traditional certainties in the field of practical knowledge, faith and governing norms, and a new kind of social attachment (the dimension of control or reintegration). Beck speaks about a new mode of *socialization*, about transformation or even about a "categorical turn-around" in the relationship between the individual and society (Beck, 2004, pp. 205–207). These findings are important in many ways to understand the situation of today's family.

In view of the above, the very beginning of the industrial revolution deserves attention. Behind it is the effort to improve material conditions and the vision of a more comfortable life. However, this legitimate goal also produces undesirable side effects, such as the neglect of interpersonal relationships and the promotion of selfishness. Competition is being introduced and inequality between

people is deepening. Competition in Western society after World War II has also been intensified by the process of women's emancipation. Mainly under the influence of the economic changes of the time, and also, for example, as a result of the discovery of the contraceptive pill (which gives women the opportunity to regulate the reproductive cycle), women's employment is increasing. The need for employment is shifting from heavy industry to workplaces using advanced technology and services. A more educated worker – in many cases a woman – is more in demand than a male force. Women compete with men. They become largely independent of them. They also participate in public life (Gerhardtová, 2011, pp. 161–162, 187).¹⁰ These changes foreshadow more than one “Copernican turn” in interpersonal, resp. in family relationships. Opposites and new limitations are profiled here which deepen over time.

In Beck's mode of *socialization*, the process of individualization is accompanied by the neglecting of family relationships (respectively by the subordinating of these relationships to the domination of the vital interests of the individual), and the individual is freed “from traditional ties and ways of existential security” (Beck, 2004, p. 211) and gets into a new “external” dependence. He or she becomes a victim of a mode of *socialization*. “He or she is subject to the pressures of the labor market and consumer existence, as well as to the standardization and control mechanisms in them [...] these, more than ever, do not allow one to be an independent individual existence” (Beck, 2004, p. 211). For example, women escaped from the limited traditional identity of mere wives and mothers, but they immediately came under the control of the equally limited modern identity of working women. It throws them into the tension field between production and reproduction. The result is a reduced fertility rate.¹¹ The previously enforced right of a woman to work is currently being changed to the obligation to work for pay.

One of the consequences of the above is the situation of “cold households.” If women (just like men) are busy with work (which also demands an increasingly mobile and flexible employee, ability to work long hours on various complex tasks), it is no exception that no one is home during the week. There is no one “who would keep the household, manage children, prepare nutritious meals, have the time and energy to take on an ‘emotional job’ and soothe others when they return from work” (Gerhardtová, 2011, p. 161). This practice makes family

¹⁰ On the other hand, the psychological differences between men and women, deepened by the industrial revolution, are reduced by the involvement of women in public space. Women have acquired “masculine” qualities (they are capable of ambition and self-expression). Men, on the other hand, have regained emotional and family (traditional “female”) ties.

¹¹ The fertility rate within the EU is generally very low.

relationships difficult. It weakens their mutual emotional closeness and intimacy. Not only the very nature of the family is endangered but also the upbringing of children in families.

It is very difficult for working parents to combine responsibility at work with responsibility for raising children and taking care of the family. In general, the social understanding of children's education as an "externality", which can be successfully solved with the help of a social network of educational facilities (nurseries, kindergartens, leisure facilities, etc.), does not help the situation. Other problems in the field of upbringing is the alienation of family members (they have their own worlds, own opinions), families with only a few members (many children are raised in relative isolation). This is also supported by well-equipped modern households which do not create the need for mutual cooperation (not even with neighbours or acquaintances, as before). In addition, these "loved ones" are so busy with their own activities and needs that they are often unable to create bonds of mutual help. (Gerhardtová, 2011, pp. 162–163).

The quality of upbringing in families is also determined by the process of adapting to the demand of consumer society. Children are emotionally neglected. It is a very common, disturbing phenomenon. Parents try to compensate it with material pleasures. They rather buy something for the children instead of giving them some time. Children are endangered by this practice in their development and adolescence. This reinforces, among other things, the belief that they should not see certainty in the love of their parents, but in material possessions. Thanks to this, they often do not impose any restrictions on their material desires. (Gerhardtová, 2011, pp. 139–140, 143).

However, if we return to the basic problem of individualization, that is, to the individual whose "individualized private existence is becoming more and more dependent on circumstances and conditions that are completely beyond his or her reach" (Beck, 2004, p. 211), we cannot (in this context) omit the area of politics, the relationship of politicians to voters, important milestones and changes that have taken place in recent years in the relationship of an individual and politics.

It is widely believed that the growing culture of instant satisfaction has strengthened voters' narcissism since the 1970s. Of course, this fact influences the politics. Sue Gerhardt argues that "the moral and emotional development of a large number of people evidently determines the quality of society." (Gerhardtová, 2011, pp. 162–163). More prosaically speaking, political representation reflects the quality of society. Politicians do not pursue a policy aimed at the long-term prosperity of society but a policy that guarantees

their election or re-election. It is a policy that takes into account only the immediate needs of the electorate. Thanks to this, the policy is commercialized. Political figures rather than political views are sold to voters. Politicians are more interested in their image and influence concerning public opinion than in the politics of the country (Gerhardtová, 2011, pp. 194–195).¹² This reinforces irresponsibility on both sides of the barricade. Politicians submit to the consumer mentality of voters. They not only support this mentality but also put voters at a disproportionate risk. Examples in this regard are the 1990s and the present in the Czech Republic. Politicians strengthen voters' courage to take risks, not to be afraid to live in debt and to take out unlimited loans for that purpose, etc. The consequences of such behaviour are terrible for many people.

The most important thing that cannot be neglected in the relationship between politicians versus the citizen is the above-mentioned “trap”, that is, the voter's dependence on politics. This fact exists even though politics becomes more alienated for people. The individual (voter) is often “freed” from family ties and relationships. He or she is permanently encouraged to realize his or her individual desires, he or she is uncompromisingly “grinded” by the wheels of the market, politics and institutions. The family ceases to be an existential background for him or her. His or her life biography is determined by political decisions, such as the availability of education, the possibility of employment in the labour market, or the form of social policy, social and health security, etc. However, the more he or she becomes dependent on them, the less the promised guarantee is certain for him or her (Liessmann, 2010, pp. 93–105, esp. 95; Beck, 2004, pp. 211–219). As a result, not only the individual but also the whole of society is endangered by this practice.

3. Support and Appreciation of Marriage and Family

The more it is possible to see a number of centrifugal influences that weakened marriage and the family or make the realization of these difficult, the more it is primarily a call for ways to support and appreciate these institutions. Therefore, the basic premise is to understand, or perhaps rather defend the value and importance of these institutions. Paradoxically, the problematic lived practice, as well

¹² This trend has been more or less a global trend in recent years. This is largely related to the transformation of the political scene. The decisive role is played by the emerging political movements with elaborated marketing. Their primary goal is to gain political power and influence to promote their own interests.

as ideological efforts to relativize these classical institutions (for example, by the ideology of gender) can contribute to their clarification by contrasting with their value and thus by creating the need for clarification of this value.

In ecclesiastical documents and in numerous speeches of the last popes, emphasis is placed on marriage and the family as a natural space for finding one's own identity (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2008, p. 213). Marriage, as a community of man and woman (and the family based on it), is presented here as the first natural communities that correspond to the anthropological setting of man. They represent a guarantee of humanization of the person and society, protection against deformations of the individualistic or collectivist type. They work this way primarily because the person is still in the spotlight as a goal, never as a means in marriage and the family (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2008, p. 213).

Marriage (and the family) is not currently a problem for the Church. It is more an opportunity (AL, 2016, no. 7). Although the Church rightly condemns many unhealthy trends in the life of modern man, it is far more concerned with the helping process. The Church wants to bring personal and social responsibility towards these institutions. Appreciated respect for the personal freedom of the individual necessarily binds the requirement of responsibility. The possibilities of the Church are few in this area. Although its influence is currently limited within society, it is not insignificant. Numerous suggestions for activities in the field of preparation of young people for marriage, for new ways of helping to support married and family life (as reported by the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris laetitia*) are (resp. they could be) an unquestionable contribution to this area of human practice.

The Church, as a moral authority respecting the competence of political power (respectively, the competence of the state in the field of family policy), can also exert its influence on the support of married and family life by formulating principled opinions. Such opinions should determine a policy that supports and protects marriage and the family (Mlčoch, 2013, pp. 73–84).¹³ It should be done, for example, by creating suitable conditions for marriage and for the establishment of a family. In this way, these would be a great responsibility, as well as a joy, and not a problem due to social insecurity or need (Pope Francis, 2018, no. 101–102). Addressing Europe, Pope Francis recalls that it should strive for an effective family policy “where human faces instead of numbers are in the center.” It is a policy “more focused on increasing the number of children than on increasing wealth” (Pope Francis, 2018, no. 102).

¹³ On a global scale, we encounter its various forms and shapes.

Last but not least, the family is not just an “object of political action” in the Church’s view. At the same time, the family is encouraged to become a politically “active subject”. In cooperation with other families, the family should become an active participant in family policy and take responsibility for the transformation of society.

Families have the right to form associations with other families and institutions in order to be able to fulfill their role in an appropriate and effective way, as well as to defend the rights of the family, to develop the good, and to promote family interests. At the economic, social, legal and cultural levels, the legitimate role of families and family associations in the design and implementation of programs relating to family life must be recognized (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2008, p. 247).

Conclusion

The presented study does not capture the full range of issues and problems currently associated with marriage and the family. Nevertheless, it sufficiently proves that marital and family relationships in contemporary Western culture are conditioned by a number of factors that cannot be fully influenced by those who are directly affected.

The spreading “world culture” and the dominant individualism in it, the dominance of the legal person and the generally enforced consumer mentality significantly influence and (to a large extent) also disrupt marital and family relationships, family togetherness, solidarity and belonging. As a result of many external pressures, the individual finds him or herself on the “periphery” of the family while being subject to “unification and standardization of existential forms” (Beck, 2004, p. 213). Life is crammed into his or her current, active presence. His or her own ego is in the centre. Around it everything revolves. Individuals are required to make personal (but often “prefabricated”) decisions and commitments.

In the described situations, it is not easy for individuals or families to maintain their own integrative values. It is not easy to withstand the pressures from the outside, not to succumb to the vision of success offered by the majority society. It is also problematic that the political focus is not predominantly on the family but, above all, on the immediate interests of the individual. Politics irresponsibly undercuts itself in order to impress the individual.

However, the above-mentioned facts are also a call for the support of the institutions of marriage and the family, for the support of married and family

life in order to discover its value and significance. In this respect, the exclusive role of the Church is shown. The Church can contribute, in many ways, to respect for the given institutions. Above all, it wants to be close to specific people and provide them with support, accompaniment and orientation on this life path.

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