

Between ideal and morality. Family and its socio-moral problems and challenges in Romania

Pomiędzy ideałem a moralnością. Społeczne i moralne problemy w rodzinie w Rumunii

Abstract.

In Romanian society, family was one of the fundamental “institutions”, strongly supported by religious convictions, by tradition, stability and need of social safety. Inside a family man is educated from a religious point of view, he receives the model of behaviour he needs in society, he discovers the first social relations. Until today, these characteristics have been preserved in many families in Romania and they represent the foundation of a good training for young people for beautiful life, well anchored in the realities of the society.

After the fall of communism in Romania at the end of 1989 and especially when the first manifestations of the globalization of secularization occurred, family was and still is confronted with new and unparalleled challenges. It has lost a lot of its value, since young people consider that they can live together without an engagement blessed by the Church and legislated by the state. Instead of assuming the responsibility of becoming a family, young people have now other priorities in life: career, their own happiness, social and economical fulfillment. These are the reasons why the average age of contracting a marriage is very high. The model of the monoparental family seems to be now in fashion, since more than 20% of children in Romania live in such a family. There is an increasing number of divorces, concubinages, abortions, people who neglect the education of their own children, of people who do not get married any more. Some of the members of Romanian families live and work abroad - the official number is 900,000 - and this situation has serious consequences upon family itself and especially upon the children who remain at home.

All these realities have placed family, in the last 10 years, in the center of attention of all the institutions in Romania which have a social and educational impact. Churches especially engaged themselves in supporting family, in protecting it and rendering its

value again. They hope that young people and members of present families will discover and assume the values of the most important institution of moral and social education.

Keywords:

family, Romania, traditional family, “modern” family, religion, education, modernity.

1. Family in Romanian tradition

According to the Romanian social-religious view, family was considered for centuries the main institution of society and was considered as such. It held a fundamental place in the life of society and represented a source of moral principles. This primary and traditional meaning is still observed and preserved by the majority of the population, even if now it is labeled by some as “traditional” and conservative.

For a large part of Romanian population, family is until today the first social framework needed by man in order to receive good education. It is the favourable environment for the birth, the development and the fulfillment of a human being. For many of the Romanians, family is the first to give an example of community and communion.¹ This is the place in which children are born, this is the place where they receive the first elements of religious education, this is the place where they experience the otherness and the involvement in the social life. Within the family a lot of difficult decisions are taken, which strengthen its members in the hardships of life and determine them to focus their attention on the fulfillment of their responsibilities towards their neighbours. Discipline and the spirit of initiative are taught in the family, and the sense of dignity, justice, love, respect, mutual support and sacrifice is cultivated here, too. These are fundamental elements of the social life. Family is the soil in which the seed of morality, of good habits, love for inherited customs and traditions is sown, it is the keeper of the goods which man will hand over to the next generations, it is the cradle and strength of our nation.²

Even if this image seems to be an idealized one, it, nevertheless, represents reality for many of our families. This assertion is supported especially

¹ ION D. DUNĂREANU, *Familia românească [The Romanian family]*, Târgu Mureș, 2000.

² TUDOR COLCAC, *Familia - vatră a spiritualității românești [Family - hearth of the Romanian spirituality]*, [s.n.], Cluj-Napoca, 1999.

by the population from the countryside, but also by the urban population, because many of the urban families were formerly rural families, who moved to town in the last 30–40 years as a consequence of the industrialization.

The religious faith³ supported in the past and still supports very seriously the institution of the family. Deeply rooted into our hearts and souls, practiced, lived and experienced in the daily life, being – sometimes for centuries – the only hope against invaders, social trials and economical hardships, faith represented and still represents the light which guides man in order to accomplish spiritual and social fulfillment.

Even if faith has supported everything through centuries, including family, the Communist rule, installed in Romania immediately after the Second World War, turned things upside down. During this difficult period, when the religious manifestation was pursued and restrained until almost complete prohibition, family was the one which saved faith. The fundamental elements of faith were handed over from parents and grandparents to their children and grandchildren, even if they could be received also in churches, which were not all destroyed or closed.

2. The family within the social context after the anticommunist revolution in 1989

After the fall of the communist regime in Romania, in December 1989, in the climate of profound social and economical changes, the family suffered a series of changes, too, both in its structure and in its functions. The modern society caused these changes by creating some new “models” adapted to realities, while others have been indiscriminately “imported” from other societies. The occurred changes have stimulated the evolution of all components of family structure, with specific advantages and disadvantages.

The meaning of the family and its religious foundation have lost in a short time a lot of their meaning, because they were contaminated by the concepts of boundless freedom, lack of responsibility and altruism, selfishness and indifference. Generally, the family is no longer seen as the most important “institution”; a new idea has emerged now, according to which it is much better not to have a family, because of its responsibilities, because of its serious commitments, because there is another priority, the professional career. Even if a new family is constituted, it can be very quickly dissolved by means of divorce.

³ Romania is a country of an Orthodox majority.

Today there are notable differences between the concept of “traditional family” and “modern family”, an aspect due to the changes of mentality and the loss of essential values. Thus, the traditional family is composed of parents and at least three children, while the modern family has, in many cases, only one child, because “the expenses are too high” or because the child is raised only by the mother.⁴ Within the traditional family the children were educated in a Christian spirit. They were trained by the grandmother or by the mother, prayers were taught to them, they took part every Sunday in religious services. Within the modern family, the children are educated almost exclusively by school, because the parents have no time or not sufficient time to educate and communicate with them⁵. Then, when their parents are gone abroad to work, some children are educated by television or by their circles of friends.⁶

Especially in the last 10 years, these realities – true alarm signals in what concerns the family – have determined many social and religious institutions in Romania to focus on the problem of the family future.

In this present analysis, we want to refer only to the family “state of crisis” in Romania. We may well observe the fact that the general attitude of Romanians regarding family is a conservative one. In 2010, the attachment to the couple life was very high, in comparison with other European countries. Thus, a stable and lasting relation was considered by 90% of the Romanians to be important in order to be happy. Nevertheless, there are notable differences between declarations and reality.

⁴ See: ANA RODICA STĂICULESCU, DANIELA JITCOV, *Familia monoparentală între tradiționalism și modernitate: scurtă analiză a problemelor specifice și a politicilor sociale de rezolvare a lor* [The monoparental family between tradition and modernity: a short analysis of the specific problems and of the social politics regarding their solutions], București, 2006; CRISTINA ȘTEFAN, *Familia monoparentală: aspecte privind protecția socială* [The monoparental family: aspects regarding the social protection], București, 2001.

⁵ After December 1989, Religion as a discipline of study has been reintroduced in the school curriculum, at first timidly, but then, since 1995, as an obligatory discipline in primary and secondary school, as well as in high-school. There are over 11.000 jobs of professor of Religion for all the acknowledged cults in Romania who teach religion in school, an hour a week. The pupil and his parents decide freely, according to their confession, what classes of religion to attend.

⁶ Cf. MARINELA FLOREA, *Școala și familia: analiza și îmbunătățirea formelor de cooperare între școală și familie* [School and family: the analysis and the improvement of cooperation forms between school and family], București, 2009; ELENA VOINEA, *Familia - partenerul de bază al școlii în dezvoltarea personalității elevului* [Family - the main partner of school in the development of pupil's personality], Craiova, 2010.

3. Relevant statistics

According to the provisional results⁷ of the population census in Romania, done at the end of 2011, the population of Romania is 20.2 million inhabitants; the stable population counts to 19 million inhabitants, with 2.5 million less than in 2002. 910,000 persons are abroad for a long period. The majority of the population lives in towns (52.8%), while 8.9 million inhabitants live in the countryside (47.2%).

In 2011, in Romania there were registered only 105,000 marriages, almost half of the number registered in 2007 (189,200 marriages). Practically, between 2007 and 2011 – the last three years were years of economical crisis – the number of the couples who chose to get married dropped by 45%. In 2011 almost 355,000 Romanians were at the age of 31, the average age of getting married. From a demographic point of view, this drop is considerable – although there is a natural tendency of decreasing the number of marriages, due both to the diminution of the population and to the modernization of society – because such an abrupt evolution in such a short period has never been seen until now. The average age of getting married is 31, and there is a close connection between the type of decisions taken regarding marriage and the evolution of the economy.

As regarding the new born in 2011, the diminution was not so considerable as in the case of marriages, because more and more Romanians have children outside the institution of marriage. Nevertheless, in 2011 the new-born were less than 200,000: the estimation for the first 11 months of 2011 was that of 195,000 new-borns, while in 2007 there were registered 214,000 new borns and in 2008, 222,000 new borns. In 1990, in Romania there were registered 314,000 new borns and 192,000 marriages.

The natural negative growth began immediately after 1990 and still continues. Thus in April 2012, 13,924 children were born (that is 7.9 new-born per 1000 inhabitants), while the number of the deceased was 22,054 (that is 12.6 deceased per 1000 inhabitants). In the same month of 2012, there were registered in Romania 5,951 marriages (3.4 marriages per 1000 inhabitants), while the number of the divorces was 2,563 (1.5 divorces per 1000 inhabitants).

⁷ This information is taken from the data of the Romanian National Institute of Statistics: <http://www.insse.ro/cms/rw/pages/index.ro.do> (15. June 2012) and of the “Vladimir Trebici” Demographical Research Center of the Romanian Academy. See, also: <http://www.zf.ro/special/criza-erodeaza-increderea-romanilor-in-viitor-cele-mai-importante-statistici-numarul-casatoriilor-a-scazut-la-jumatate-fata-de-2007-iar-numarul-de-nou-nascuti-la-un-minim-istoric-9160180> (15 June 2012).

4. Moral and social challenges for family today

As we have already seen, the family is confronted today in Romania with new situations, special ones, which diminish the Christian meaning of it and threaten it with dissolution. The changes in mentality in the last decades have influenced so strongly this institution which is at the foundation of the society, that we are being now confronted with totally new situations. Observed especially among the young people, these situations represent real opinion trends against family and manifest themselves as phenomena which come in conflict with their foundations.

4.1.

The important causes of the above mentioned realities are as follows: the progressive loss of the moral and spiritual values, lack of orientation and appropriate training regarding marriage and paternity, existence of some social phenomena and pressures.

At least some of the *special causes* of this phenomenon may be traced in the following realities:

- more and more growing attention given to individuality, egoism, exaggerate love for the self and to eroticism;
- the appearance of new forms of "family": cohabitation outside civil marriage and outside religious ceremony, especially in the urban environment;
- indifference towards family responsibilities;
- interest given in obtaining easy financial income, when at least one of the family members goes to work abroad;
- many young people who are at the age of getting married consider that family is no longer a value etc.

4.2.

These attitudes, as well as others, enhanced also by the negative models of society, point out presence and manifestation of the phenomenon of diminishing the importance of the family. The effects are felt especially in what concerns family as an institution, in what concerns its members, most of all the children, in what concerns the social implications.

Here are some of the observable effects regarding family:

1. *the appearance of the monoparental family*: a single parent raises and educates the child, and the child is deprived of both members' love;⁸ at the end of 2007, a third of the children born in Romania were raised by a single parent;
2. many of the married young people decide *to postpone having children*, because they want to secure their social position, their economic situation or the security of their job (especially in the case of the mothers)⁹;
3. *indifference of the family environment towards children*: the appearance of the context in which children are abandoned, the lack of interest in their education, the violent attitude and behaviour of the parents towards their children and vice versa;
4. increasing number of the *divorces*. Courts of law do not try to reconcile the members of the couple; at the same time, the members themselves do not try to understand each other. For many of them, the divorce means nothing else than the rediscovery of freedom.

At another level, *young people*:

1. manifest already lack of interest for the values of the family, for the communitarian and even for the religious ones;
2. are indifferent even before marriage, because they begin early their sexual life;
3. change their partners very often, either in a long-term concubinage or in a short-term one;
4. do not want to assume the responsibilities of a family;
5. do not have the necessary social guidance in order to found a family.

⁸ See the following books: PETRU ILUȚ, VIOREL-MIHAI CIOFLICĂ, LAURA NISTOR, *Familia monoparentală în România și fenomene conexe [The monoparental family in Romania and connected phenomena]*, Cluj-Napoca, 2009; CRISTINA ȘTEFAN, MIHAELA MIROIU, *Familia monoparentală: o abordare politică [The monoparental family: a political approach]*, Iași-București, 2006.

⁹ The specialists assert that there is a phenomenon of postponing the marriage or giving birth to a child, because it entails a series of costs which are very burdensome. This is the reason why the average age of women who get married or have children has become very high in the last ten years.

4.3.

Because parents go to work abroad, *the situation of the children* left in the care of other persons became very serious from the social, moral and religious standpoint. In the middle of 2012, the statistics have shown that 80,000 Romanian children had at least one parent abroad. These children:

- remain in the care of their grandparents, their great grandparents, their neighbours or even in the care of “no one”, alone in the house; when there are many brothers and sisters, the elder ones take care of the younger ones;
- manifest an affectivity to their parents gone abroad which cannot be satisfied by others; it is a very surprising and also understandable fact that many children suffer because “they miss their parents”;
- abandon school;
- receive the education of the street;
- are in the hands of the circles with a negative influence on them (drugs, prostitution);
- increase the number of illegalities;
- are not prepared to found, at a right time, a family.

5. Important changes in the institution of family

Basically, there are in Romania two main trends regarding family: some believe that family and marriage belong to the past and that these are no longer reference elements for the present times; others, on the contrary, assert that family – although it is now in hard times, in times of crisis – must fulfill the basic functions it always fulfilled in human life and in the Romanian society.¹⁰ Therefore, responsible persons and institutions raise more and more often questions of the following kind: is the family, as we know it or as we lived it, threatened with extinction? Do the new generations trust in this institution and support it? Is it really true that family loses its traditional values?

To a certain extent, the answers may be found in spreading the negative realities regarding family, and it became clear that importance of family is diminishing in Romania, especially in the last decade, because this element of stability is confronted with very serious problems.¹¹ Of course, the traditional family, which is considered as “normal”, and which observes the Christian

¹⁰ MARIA CONSTANTINESCU, *Familia românească între tradiție și modernitate: studii și cercetări* [The Romanian family between tradition and modernity: studies and researches], Pitești, 2008.

norms and the good habits, exists side by side with the “secular” one, without entering into serious conflicts with it. Generally, the family of the present times is subjected to some moral and social challenges, as well as challenges of mentality. Here are some of the major problems: separation between the civil marriage and the religious marriage, concubinage or the test marriage, celibacy (the non-religious one), couples without children, the monoparental families, adultery, divorce, abortion, relations between persons of the same sex, contraception, prostitution.¹² We will detail in the lines below some of these problems.

The lack of familial identity. In Romania there are at least two different types of population: rural population and urban population. If, during the communist period, there was a huge migration of the population from the village to the city, due to massive industrialization, today we assist, even if in a small degree, in the reverse phenomenon: the migration from towns and cities, where jobs are very few, to villages. If in the rural environment we find people of the same social, professional, economic, religious and cultural level, in the urban environment, on the contrary, the population is very different in all these aspects.¹³

In the so called developed or post-industrial society, marriage is more and more rejected by couples, who decide to *practice the free relations*. By trying to give an answer to this modern mentality and practice which promotes a many-year-long cohabitation of the young people before marriage or even giving up the marriage, the Church underlines the lack of spiritual and moral value of such a relation. The intention of founding a family implies the paternal blessing, the divine grace and assuming responsibilities of any kind, including the social ones, and this is the reason why the free cohabitation – “a marriage with no papers” – do not observe and do not agree with this public guarantee and do not acknowledge the social importance of marriage.

Within some families, *the center of the family life is no longer the children*, as it was until now, but the couple itself, and all the desires, expectations, hopes, are focused on this couple.¹⁴ When a child is born, the sphere of professional and extra-professional activities is restrained and a series of specific respons-

¹¹ RALUCA POPESCU, *Introducere în sociologia familiei: familia românească în societatea contemporană* [Introduction to the family sociology: the Romanian family in the contemporary society], Iași, 2009.

¹² ION D. DUNĂREANU, *Familia și societatea* [Family and society], Târgu Mureș, 2000.

¹³ GEORGETA GHERBEA, *Familia și politica familială în România în perioada de tranziție* [Family and the family politics in Romania during the transition period], București, 1996.

¹⁴ BĂRAN PESCARU, ADINA, *Familia azi. O perspectivă sociopedagogică* [Family today. A social-pedagogic perspective], București, 2004.

ibilities occurs. The emancipation of women is another reason which determined this situation. By giving up her status of a housewife, some women gave up maternity as well. The lack of a child into a family may be explained also by the economic difficulties the individuals are confronted with, especially in our days: unemployment, low incomes, the instability of jobs etc. Families without children are a form of the reorganization of family, as well as a model for a significant part of the young population. In 1990, in Romania there were born almost 314,000 children, and in 2012 less than 195,000. In our country, the most significant percentage is among young couples in the urban environment, in which the wife has a professional career.

The consensual relations or concubinages tend to become a frequent model, especially among young people, and are practiced as sexual experiences and non-marital cohabitations. It is spoken more and more often about couples and not family. The random relations and the “test marriages” are frequent practices. As we have shown in the statistics chapter, an important diminution of the number of marriages, aggravated by the impact of the economical crises, occurred between 2007 and 2011. In this period, the number of the young who decided to get married decreased by 45%. These models create few responsibilities. The popularity of this way of life grew sensibly in the last years, due to the fact that a relation with no life commitments is a more economic, more pleasant and more comfortable way of living together. It is more and more obvious that the option for concubinage satisfies the need of autonomy.¹⁵

Regarding *the responsibility of raising and educating children*, there are nevertheless many cases in which the interest of the parents for their own children is very small. The need and the desire of earning more, in order to live a decent life, determine some parents to work longer, even to have two or three jobs, and this situation have bad repercussions upon family and especially children. The direct effect is the lack of communication and dialogue inside family, the lack of good cohabitation and good education of the children.¹⁶ There are parents who expect that school will do all the education necessary. There is a wrong idea that school has to do the moral education as well, while family has no role in it. On the contrary, the traditional view says that the so-called “seven years from home” are very important for the moral health of the people.

¹⁵ See: DIANA IULIA ANDREESCU, *Familia monoparentală – alternativă la familia tradițională* [The monoparental family – an alternative to the traditional family], Slatina, 2006.

¹⁶ DELIA BÎRLE, ELENA BONCHIȘ, DENISA BOROȘ, *Familia și rolul ei în educarea copilului* [Family and its role in child's education], Iași, 2011.

Divorce is also more and more present. We remind the reader that, on an average, there were in Romania in 2012 6,000 marriages and 2,500 divorces per month. What the idea of the person's sacredness and the mystery of the marriage in general and the Christian family in particular imply is, to a great extent, lost. Marriages made only out of interest, without a good and profound knowledge of the partner, the lack of the inner equilibrium and patience, as well as the influence of the imported models of family, do not determine any more members of the family to assume the cross it entails.¹⁷

There is also a social disorder created by the *phenomenon of the migration abroad* of a part of the active population of Romania in search of a better paid job. It happens often that many marriages come to an end, since there is a significant distance between the partners, while their children become victims of school abandonment, prostitution, alcoholism, drugs, antisocial life, even suicide. Many divorces are caused by this separation, especially in those couples where problems were already present. The distance does not solve problems, it makes them more serious.

Another major problem in Romania is *abortion*. While in the last three decades of the communist regime abortion was forbidden, now it is a free practice. So free, that only between 1990 and 2010 there were officially 22 million abortions! There is a constant struggle against abortions, in which the Churches have the main role, and the result of this struggle is visible: from almost one million abortions in 1990, the number in 2010 is around some thousands.

Alarming is also *the average age of the beginning of the sexual life*, around 12, due to the bad influence of the social environment, and the appearance of pregnancies at immature ages (12–14 years old), followed by abortions with traumatic consequences for the young girl or by the so-called “children who have children” situations.

There remain other problems family is confronted with every day: the conception of the dominant role of man, the domestic violence, alcohol. Mass-media, bad TV serials, the news about all kinds of VIPs offer to the young people some false models according to which fidelity and values are no longer in fashion. Marriage is a commercial good. There is this conviction that nothing lasts forever.

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¹⁷ CORNEL AVRAM, *Familia sub stare de asediu: căsătorie, divorț, recăsătorire* [Family under siege: marriage, divorce, remarriage], Oradea, 2010.

We deliberately insisted on some recent challenges the family in Romania is confronted with. When comparing to other European states, the problems are in general the same. Although we presented almost exclusively the negative aspects of the family, it remains nevertheless one of the important pillars of the Church and the Romanian society.

Besides, there is also a positive trend: that of working for the benefit of the family. There are movements of familial therapy, there are public and private institutions dedicated to protect the family interests. The issue of family is omnipresent. The Church considers that family is the blessed climate of life, the nest of love and the foundation of any healthy society; therefore, the Church protects it. The unity and the indestructible character of marriage and Christian family represent the warrant of fulfilling the divine plan for mankind: “Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it” (Genesis 1, 28).

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