



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 38, 2022

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

Family - *micro ecclesia*

Nicolae Brînzea¹, George-Ștefan Silivestru²

^{1 2}Theology Faculty, Ovidius University – Constanța, România

nicolaebranzea@yahoo.com, anima_ge_stefy@yahoo.com

Abstract. The family is a divine part of God's plan. It is the fundamental element of a strong society. Marriage is not only a model of interhuman existence, it is the model of man's relationship with God. Marriage is the mystery of sanctifying love. The family is recognized as the "little Church" or the "Home Church", the mission of both parents being a prophetic one in the sense of understanding the universal priesthood of each active member of the Church of Christ. The family is also the environment where the child naturally learns to pray. It is the first and fundamental school of moral and social life, a community of love. The great mystery of the family is the mystery of transfiguration, of spiritualized love, which lifts man up to God.

Keywords. Christian family, marriage, education, Christian values, prayer, sanctifying love

Introduction

As people who pursue holiness and live under God's covenant we find that everything in life has a purpose. Everything is eternally significant. Absolutely nothing is done without the ultimate goal being the fulfillment of God's purpose and will. We were created for this reason – to fulfill God's purpose and thus to praise His name forever. This is our only reason for being in the world. There is nothing in this world more important than loving God and devoting ourselves to His service. This grand and general purpose for life also applies to marriage. Why do people get married in the first place? Usually because they love each other. They want to enjoy each other emotionally and physically. They are looking for happiness and security. They love the wonderful feeling of having someone they can call theirs for life. Or they marry for other similar reasons. But none of these motivations represent the real purpose of marriage. The purpose of marriage is not just to be in love and enjoy each other. *Marriage includes the perspective of holiness, and aims at the perfection through love and the salvation of the spouses.*

The family is a divine part of God's plan. It is the fundamental element of a strong society. Family is where we can feel love and learn how to love others. Life is hard and we need people to lean on. Home is a safe shelter where we can get advice, support, hugs. The family can be a place where God is worshiped and where discernment of God's mission is of paramount importance.

God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him into existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of loving personal communion. By making the human race in His image and preserving it continually in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus

the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being. As an embodied spirit, that is, a soul expressing itself in a body and in a body informed by an immortal soul, man is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the human body, and the body is made partaker of spiritual love.

Every *Christian family* should be like a *little church*, consecrated to Christ and wholly influenced and governed by His commandments. Education and order in the family are some of the main means of grace. If these fail, all other means will prove ineffective. If these are properly maintained, all the means of grace will be able to prosper and be successful.

Family - "the home church"

In Romania but also in the Romanian diaspora, the family as a pillar of the community in a broad sense and the Church as a pillar of the religious community, represent very strong sources of influence regarding the religious and moral education of teenagers and young people. Likewise, there are relations of complementarity and interdependence between the Church and the school.

The affirmation of religious faith by the students' families, putting the moral and religious values into a favorable light through education, naturally lead to the consent of the majority of parents for teaching Religion and for the presence of religious symbols in school [1].

Since ancient times, the role of both parents, mother and father, has been recognized as two pillars of society and especially of education, whom God chooses to bring new existences into the world and to collaborate with them in the mystery of life.

The education offered in the confessional schools as well as the participation in the Church worship are important aspects in the children's education, but, of course, they depend on the collaboration and cooperation of the family. It is necessary for the parents to be constantly supported by the servants of the Church both through concrete advice about the life and education of the children and especially through a direct support and help of the members of the ecclesial community.

The family is recognized as the "little Church" or the "Home Church", and the mission of both parents is a prophetic one in the sense of understanding the universal priesthood of each active member of the Church of Christ [2]. In the bosom of the Christian family, faith is required to be put into practice not only on Sundays but all the time, hour by hour, day by day. As far as living the faith is concerned, one cannot speak of a vacation, which means the diminishment of faith to the point of disinterest and even apostasy.

Children go to Sunday service, participate in Sunday catechetical school, but family life is continuous [3], every day of the year and is found in every detail of life: in personal relationships, in the supply, preparation and consumption of food, in sickness and in health. It is the environment in which the child's life unfolds.

But the essential nature of a family is that it is founded on love, as a model of triune love [4]. A family is not legally defined, it is not characterized by the similarity of age, the matching of character. Dictionaries are often deficient in explaining the term family, calling the family either a human community based on marriage that includes spouses and children, or defining the family as the totality of people who descend from a common ancestor [5]. It is based on the mutual love of spouses, man and woman, and then on the love between parents and children. The experience of family love is different from other manifestations of love, the Greek philosophers identifying several manifestations of love.

The Christian concept of family and family love has a special character. "It is related to the Trinitarian concept of God: a human being cannot exist completely alone. A human being becomes fully human only in a relationship of love with other human beings" [6].

In the relationship between parents and children, the father and mother need enlightenment and direction in understanding the meaning of the relationship between them and their children. The basis of this relationship is a responsible love that does not exclude authority, respect and understanding of the child's personality. From the Christian point of view, parental love possesses the whole emotional fullness of love, but it is not appropriate to be possessive [7]. The parents should not take it as a gift that they offer to the child expecting gratitude in return.

Parental love is fulfilled in the image of accepting the child's independence, which is understood by raising the child to physical, emotional, but especially spiritual maturity.

Emphasizing the importance of the intellectual and spiritual education of the child, as a missionary part of the parents in this world, it is important not to forget the feelings of the child. First of all, the child will learn the habit of praying at home and at church. The sooner he will be taken to church and the more he will get used to prayer at home, the more lasting will be his faith and his anchoring in an eminently Christian life.

How important prayer is, we see from its very work by Christ, the God-Man. "As sight is distinguished among the senses, so is prayer among the works of man" [8]. Many definitions have been given to prayer, but here we recall the one that seems to be the synthetic one, a definition by Evagrius Ponticus, prayer being the conversation of the mind with God.

The essential question is whether praying is something that can be learned. The apostles wanted the Lord to teach them to pray, and the Lord Jesus Christ taught them the Lord's prayer "Our Father".

Prayer is our relationship with God, it places you directly before God and it is a direct conversation with God even if most of the time it seems that God does not answer and that the prayer seems to be just a monologue. Learning to pray is equivalent to learning to speak. There is an innate ability for language; there is a certain content that the speaker wants to convey; there is also the exercise and training of this type of language.

So now the family is the natural environment where speech is learned and where communication is established through words between the young child and the other members of the family, likewise, the family is also the environment where the child naturally learns to pray. From participating in the prayer of others, from the habit acquired through the daily routine, for the child prayer can become a real and personal experience, childish in form at the beginning but in time becoming a mature and responsible prayer; from a formal prayer, a mechanical prayer of the lips, then a prayer of the mind and later it can become an authentic prayer of experiencing grace.

"Children can be like the plants that God entrusted to some gardeners, the parents. If the gardeners plant them in the soil of faith, if they pull out the weeds in due time, capable of stifling all that is good, and water them with the living water of the divine Word, they can breathe a sigh of relief, because they have fulfilled their mission to the end, to their joy and comfort"[9].

Sharing your own experience of prayer is the best way for parents to introduce their children to the experience of prayer. In other words - the power of example. It begins with the prayer spoken by the parents for their child or over the child, being a baby. Some spiritual

guides of the Church advise parents to pray intensely for the child even as soon as they learn the news of pregnancy.

Usually the first prayer of the child is in the form of a prayer list, a string of names preceded by the introductory words "God take care of...". It is important for the parent to pray with his child, thus the child will learn from the parent's prayer. The parent will then teach the child those short poetic prayers, generically called childhood prayers.

But the most important prayer that the Christian parent has the duty to teach the child from an early age is the Lord's Prayer: Our Father.

After the child goes to school, only then, when he knows how to read, the parent will be able to teach the child a habit of prayer, teaching him to pray in his own words, but especially to use the classical texts of the Church, those from prayer books.

The time given to prayer, however short it may be, should be an interregnum of unhurried communication. Even ten minutes is enough to read a Bible story and in addition the parent should pray with his child. For practical reasons and because of daily chores, it seems to be easier to take this time in the evening before the children go to bed. However, it is good for parents to pray together with their children in the morning as well, the time of prayer being placed under the sign of the cross and God's blessing for the day to come.

Prayer must not be done only at certain times of the day, morning and evening, but must be permanent. Prayer is not just about formal words and a certain position of the body during prayer, but

"to keep your mind on God, to think of Him in a personal form, unceasingly, without even saying anything, but only giving Him from your heart a feeling of love and respect and even of fear. In any case, to have your mind and heart towards heaven (...) To go to bed and get up with Christ's concerns, not yours, that is, how he thinks, what Christ thinks about us, about each one, in order to save us [10]".

This is the thought that the child should learn with reference to prayer as a state of continuous conversation with God.

Besides morning and evening prayers there are other occasions for home worship. Mealtime prayers. Unfortunately, they are often neglected, this also because in postmodern days there is no longer a stable schedule for the meal, even more so for the meal as an opportunity for the family to gather, for the whole family, even for extended family communion. Breakfast is reduced to nibbling something on the run or just a coffee, lunch is often ignored because no one is at home and dinner is eaten in front of the TV or laptop.

Dinner would be the only meal time that brings the family together, a time of communion and communication, that's why it would be good to be preceded by prayer, a Eucharistic one, of thanks for all that God offers us. Nature and the entire cosmos is God's gift to man and man owes at least thanks.

The departure of a family member on a journey, the departure of the whole family on a journey or religious pilgrimage, can be an occasion for prayer within the family. In the Russian Orthodox tradition there is this custom that family members pray when one goes on a journey. Even more so when the child goes to study in another locality or moves to a university campus. The father or mother marks him with the sign of the cross, after praying for the child. It is a sign of blessing, recalling the words of the Scripture "Grace upon grace and blessing upon blessing."

It is essential and vital for a family to discover the form of gratitude to God for all the gifts received; or this can only be prayer. Parents become role models for their children in all aspects of life, therefore they are role models [11] in prayer as well, instilling in their children love not only for themselves, for their parents, but also for God.

Conclusions

Knowing that marriage and family are among the most precious human values, the Church wants to speak and help those who already know the value of marriage and family and want to live by faith. The family has an important and organic connection with society because the family is its foundation and continuously nourishes society through its role in serving life. Future citizens are born in the family, the family being the first school for the formation of moral, spiritual and social values - basic principles of the existence and development of society itself. Thus, the family is the place of origin and the most effective means of humanizing and personalizing society. The family makes a unique contribution to the development of the world, making possible a life that is truly human, by preserving and transmitting virtues and "values".

The family is the first fundamental school of moral and social life. It is a community of love that finds in its gift the laws that guide and nurture it. The self-giving that inspires the love of husband and wife, one for the other, is the pattern and norm for the self-giving that must be practiced in the relationships between members of a family. Communion and prayer, which should be part of the daily life of a family, are the most concrete and effective pedagogical methods for the active, responsible and fruitful inclusion of children in the wider horizons of society.

By giving life in the family, parents share God's creative power and, raising their children, become partakers of God's paternal – and at the same time maternal – way of teaching. Through Christ, all education, inside and outside the family, becomes part of God's pedagogy of salvation, which is addressed to all people.

References

- [1] MIRCEA, Adrian, *Moral-religious education in Romania. The results of a national research* in Monica OPRIȘ (coord.) *Investigative approaches in religious education*, Alba Iulia, Reintegirea Publishing House, 2010, pp. 65-66.
- [2] ZIZIOULAS, Ioannis, *Eucharist, Bishop, Church*, trans. Ioan Valentin Istrati and Geanina Chiriac, Bucharest, Basilica Publishing House, 2009, p. 68.
- [3] BACONSCHI, Teodor, *The battle effect. Some views on contemporary culture*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing, 2020, pp. 129-133.
- [4] STĂNILOAE, Dumitru *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I, Bucharest, Publishing House of the Biblical and Orthodox Mission Institute, 1997.
- [5] *Illustrated universal dictionary of the Romanian language*, Bucharest, Litera Publishing House, 2010, p. 159.
- [6] KOULOMZIN, Sophie, *The Church and our children*, Bucharest, Sofia Publishing House, 2010, p. 121.
- [7] BRUDIU, Răzvan (editor), *Dialogues with meaning in pandemic times*, Alba Iulia, Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2021, p. 482.
- [8] *Pateric Egyptian*, Sofia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011, p. 464.
- [9] KALEDA, Gleb, *The Church in the House*, Translation by Lucia Ciornea, Bucharest, Sofia Publishing House, 2017, p. 276.
- [10] PAPACIOC, Arsenie, *Letters to my spiritual sons*, Constanța, Dervent Monastery Publishing House 2000, p. 160.
- [11] COMAN, Mihai, *Mass-media, religion, public space*, Bucharest, Polirom Publishing House, 2020, pp. 124-135.