

## Family, education and social life Seven inputs regarding the contemporary paradigm

† Benedict VESA

Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj

**Abstract.** *In this article I will analyze the effects that the ideas propagated by the ‘sexual revolution’ of the 60s and 80s have on the family institution today. In my analysis I will consider two main effects: the first one deals with the vulnerability of axiology in the matter of philosophy of life and lifestyle. In this frame, the subjective takes the first place before the objective, experience before the essence, personal before the communitarian. The second element is a consequence of the first one and it refers to the crisis of authority and respect. By using excessive discourse regarding social equality, today's man seeks to get rid of everything that is considered an outdated lifestyle. From this perspective, I will analyze both the changes produced within the family (redefinitions, roles), as well as the behavioural changes and the way in which they could be improved. I will consider character education, emotional investment, forgiveness, and family life accompanied by prayer.*

**Keywords:** *family, axiology, character, lifestyle, authority, model.*

**1. Context.** One needs nowadays to identify the main features of the contemporary philosophy of life so that to interpret it and consequently to choose a lifestyle that interacts with this reality, but at the same time, that naturally pertains to human being in its permanent content – *ousia*. There is an ongoing change, in a rapid manner, and this occurs especially since the “sexual revolution” of the ’60-the ’80s in the USA and Western Europe, now reaching its maturity. I will not enter into details, but I will list two main effects in the matter of approaching and interpreting the contemporary reality in reference with the institution of family, that have their origin in this very period.

The first one, with a general character, points to the vulnerability of axiology, as a common Magna Charta in matter of philosophy of life and a concrete living style. There was a permanent reflection of an objective reality coming from up to down, from a perfect world or at least common accepted by many, if not by all, in a specific place and time, mirrored and respected by the people. This objective reality was considered to be the perfect reality to refer to in matter of living out human experience in a subjective way in the sense of personal – *experientia (energia)*. Since this period one can observe a major shift corresponding to the change of the primate among these two – the subjective takes the first place before the objective, the experience before the *ousia* (the essence), and personal before what means communitarian. And from here, the so-called set of principles, a common axiology, undergoes difficult time, since there are no more

„Family, education and social life - Seven inputs regarding the contemporary paradigm,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 143-151.

evident common criteria to describe a specific formulation or situation, good or bad, natural or un-natural, beautiful or un-beautiful and so on. “I” becomes almost the unique valid criteria to make assertions regarding the „correct” way of speaking or doing. Consequently, the voice of the minority becomes stronger and even gets the priority before that of the majority. The visible effects of this change are identifiable in different contexts and, in particular, regarding family and the specific education. So, one can easily speak nowadays of an axiological crisis.

The second element, as a consequence of the first one, points to what we might call the crisis of authority and respect<sup>1</sup>. As this order from up to down undergoes changes, one finds also difficult to apply the hierarchical model and the authority criteria that accompany it. By using an excessive discourse regarding social equality and freedom from the ‘despotism’ of institutions, ‘the actual man’<sup>2</sup> strongly and insistently struggles to free himself from any element that possibly might be connected to what means ‘old fashion’ lifestyle, that used to offer to first place to institutions before an individual. This direction denounces the ‘communitarian’ communist political approach’, but, almost invisibly, one can identify an ‘individual communist approach’ from another way around. In this sense, we bring into the core of discussion the ‘political’<sup>3</sup> perspective of the Gospel, that makes the balance between the common and individual, between the reality of the Kingdom and the one here, down, between objective and subjective. The Orthodox Church itself offers a paradigm of hierarchy, authority, and a sense of respect, which develops independently with the changeable ideologies. We call this concept ‘Tradition’, as a permanent continuation of teaching and experience, having its source in what we know as ‘Revelation’. It has to do with the institution, this is why one may have a defensive attitude, but also with ‘event’, revealing its contemporary character, as here and now.

**2. New ‘definitions’ of family.** In this general frame of rapid changes, the concept of family, first of all, and then the family itself has to do with changes. One may find this situation in the USA and Western Europe, but rapidly extending its effects also in our Eastern space. What commonly was recognized as the strongest structure of human social life – family: father,

---

<sup>1</sup> For details see Adrian Opre, “Reconsiderarea reformelor educaționale. Rolul familiei și al Bisericii în educația socio-emoțională și morală a copiilor”, in *Familia contemporană. Provocări, principii, valori*, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea, 2021, p. 76-77.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Horia Roman Patapievic, *Omul recent*, ediția a VI-a, București, Humanitas, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> In the sense of common work, common purpose.

mother, and children<sup>4</sup> – is put nowadays into question. One observes the presence of a discourse promoting different ‘types’ of contemporary families. I will evoke the main forms, present in the contemporary debate: co-sanguine family, describing the family of origin; conjugal family, founded by marriage, which has its purpose of procreating, highlighting its demographic dimension; nuclear family, formed of typically father, mother and children; reconstituted family, made of those divorced or who lost their partner and forming together a new family; family with one, two or more children; family with no children; monoparental family, because of different reasons; and lastly, in some European countries, in the last years, the family formed of two parents of the same gender. In fact, belonging to a traditional orientation, I will argue that one may find here only one pattern, while the rest of them are either different developments of this unique form, or accidents, because of different contextual situations. So, it remains one unique form of construction and one definition with the necessary spiritual attention for those belonging to all these above-evoked situations.

3. ***The identification of the role in the family.*** I will dwell now on the specific roles to occupy within the family. In the middle of this lack of a set of common values or, at least, in a better situation, of its vulnerable presence, as mentioned above, the specific traditional roles in the family are also undergoing different evolutions and transformations. One may observe the existence of un-clear borders between the role of a father and that of a mother, as has been since in the recent past. In biblical terms, the father is the sign of authority, protection, and security. At the same time, the mother

---

<sup>4</sup> Kari Moxnes gives us a relational perspective on the family, seen as representing primarily the kinship relationships that are created between people, such as those between the two parents, between parents and children, between siblings, who live together in households and take as responsibility the extension of the family through reproduction, production, and consumption of goods (K. Moxnes, “Risk Factors in Divorce: Perceptions by the Children Involved”, in *Childhood*, Volume 10 issue 2, 2003, p. 131-146); George Murdock considers the family to be essentially a (micro) social group, which may be characterized by common living space, reproduction, and economic cooperation, and implicitly includes two adults of both sexes and possibly one or more children, born of the relationship of the two or adopted (cf. A. Băran-Pescaru, *Familia azi. O perspectivă sociopedagogică*, București, Editura Aramis, 2006, p. 77); Rose Laub Coser gives us a social perspective similar to the previous one, understanding the family as a social micro-structure that originates in marriage, includes two adults, husband and wife, may include children born from their marriage or adopted, may include other relatives, the group being united by legal, moral, religious, economic and social rights and obligations (R. Laub Coser, *The Family: Its Structure and Function*, State University of New York, 1965, p. 100-102). See at large Glava, “Familia – o perspectivă pedagogico-socială”, in *Familia contemporană. Provocări, principii, valori*, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea, 2021, p. 117-119.

„Family, education and social life - Seven inputs regarding the contemporary paradigm,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 143-151.

is the icon of sensibility, tenderness, and comfort. This description reflects the psychological area, but only as a natural development of its physiological structure. This paradigm in its relational manifestation is well expressed by Saint Paul in parallel with the mystical relationship between Christ and the Church. Christ is the type of man in the family: “*the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour*” (Ephesians 5:23), so the wife is asked to obey her husband similar with, as in the following verses affirmed, the Church who submits to Christ. But also, the husband is asked to love his wife as Christ did to the Church. The standards are very high, in fact, divine and pertaining to the Kingdom: “*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish*” (Ephesians 5:25-27). The roles are complementary, but not interchangeable. At the same time, they are structural, not only functional. In the following verses, the same author argues the connection between the family structure and the social structure and life, extending this paradigm to the social institutions and life, in general.

Regarding the modifications that may appear in the paradigmatic form of family, the roles might be, in a certain manner, adaptive, but not interchanged. In case of malfunction, other persons would normally assume in a partial manner those missing in the concrete contextual situations. The Church has a great role in this area, to accompany the persons experiencing different difficult family situations. It is about the necessity of a new family pastoral care, contextualized and using all the elements offered by the other socio-humanistic sciences regarding the complex transformations and experiences one may undergo nowadays. While asserting this idea, I refer mostly to the psychological resources in the matter of affective-emotional human evolution. It is quite generally accepted that despite technological progress, one may identify a visible emotional regress. So it is a necessity to take into consideration the emotional process of growing up of the parents, in the first place, and, secondly, of the children. But, most probably, these two processes develop together, in mutual interaction.

**4. The education of character.** The methodology of contemporary education goes along with the accumulation of knowledge in a time of a vast area of information, brought together in published works or digital libraries. There are mostly no barriers to getting information regarding one or another issue, because of the digital development which characterizes contemporary reality. But in the same time, at least in our Romanian

educational system, one may easily observe the scarce preoccupation for the formation of characters in the case of young people. And this situation should also be interpreted in the same paradigm of the equivoque atmosphere in a matter of objective criteria. There is no more visible acceptance of a set of common values, for there is no anymore present the concept of common values since this up-down movement of the *ousia*/ objective reality with the *energia*/ subjective experience, common and personal, tradition and circumstance. One may find it very difficult to reach a balanced relation between the two.

I will quote Professor Adrian Opre, the dean of the Faculty of Psychology in Cluj-Napoca while referring to the education of characters: “*Character refers to a series of psycho-moral characteristics of human being that remain relatively stable over time and manifest in the same way regardless of context. Once acquired, this personal trait helps children and adolescents to have confidence in the values they outline, to distinguish between what is good and what is bad, in order to make the most appropriate decisions. Thanks to this competence, adolescents are able to notice how their own behaviours have an impact on those around them. Children and adolescents with a well-developed ethical attitude manage to be more empathetic with their colleagues and loved ones, to respect them, and to offer them help. But beyond definitions and operationalizations, I consider that given the moral profile we want to develop in the case of our children, much more important is the way it is lived and expressed in behaviour by those who teach and then by those who are taught. Let us not forget that in the Book of Books, the Holy Scriptures, we find, first of all, living examples of moral conduct. In the Bible, we are simply presented with human models of morality, at the head of which is placed their prototype – Jesus Christ*”<sup>5</sup>. The same author argues the necessity of making credible the moral formation of children, that if of characters. And in this sense, he indicates the importance of the good collaboration between family, school, and the Church. He, surprisingly for the pedagogical orientation in Cluj-Napoca, is a representative of the traditional vision on family and education.

The last three sections will be dedicated to behaviours in the family that need attention and, eventually, modifications and corrections.

**5. Affective investment.** Human beings need protection, security, and affection so that to reach happiness. For that one finds necessary the existence of coordination, stable structures so as to reach a place of refuge in the front of rapid, excessive, and unpredictable changes. Family properly may bring together all these needs into one reality. I will quote an Italian psychologist with his inputs on this issue: “*The contemporary researches show that*

---

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Opre, “Reconsiderarea reformelor educaționale”, p. 87-88.

„Family, education and social life - Seven inputs regarding the contemporary paradigm,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 143-151.

*family life helps a lot in maintaining mental health because love is a flame that emanates an inner good estate; it is an energy that generates peace, offering health, harmony and inner well-being. In addition, it adjusts the crystallization of one's identity, thanks to constant interaction with the other; and it is a continuous way of verifying one's personal 'seductive arsenal' which God has endowed us with. Thanks to the dialogue, we can negotiate and clarify the different points of view of the couple. In addition, if conflicts are confronted in a constructive way, they will be transformed into evolution in the couple, mutual growth, or mutual enrichment”<sup>6</sup>.*

In this line, I will argue that in the family one may find the basic way of affective investment, but, at the same time, the best school of learning how to do it. Husband and wife, on one side, struggle to practically manifest their mutual love; love is something to be learned and to be taught. And, on the other side, parents and children do the same thing but respecting the specificity of the correspondent relation. Love gives vital force, and to love means to fully live your life. It means participation: in two, or in three, so to speak about the triangle structure of the family, pain is half reduced, while love and happiness double themselves. And transform a person into a good colleague and a good friend in the social area. I will quote the same Italian psychologist to highlight this idea: *“The quarrelsome couple is a very fragile one, while the one united in love forms a real team, which, both professionally and socially, is a much stronger entity than would have been the two individuals combined, or taken separately. Having friends increases your self-esteem, but not as much as the awareness that you are loved by your life partner. A life partner with great emotional potential and great confidence invites you to pursue new goals at work and socially stimulates you”<sup>7</sup>.*

An authentic emotional relationship reduces anxiety: *“Love is the best anxiolytic and antidepressant, because, often, there are moments in life that you can overcome only thanks to the acceptance and love received from the one next to you. In two it is much easier to fix mistakes and train children properly. Affective stability in the family is the most useful ingredient for success at work. The one who benefits from harmony in the family will also transfer it to the workplace, easily facing the difficulties there. The emotional state in the family also has a social impact”<sup>8</sup>.*

The same observation may be prolonged in the area of public education. Next to its moral dimension, contemporary educators are asked to take care also of the emotional behaviour of children or younger in its educative dimension. I will quote again Professor Adrian Opre who clearly argues on this issue: *“Unfortunately, we find that, more and more often, school*

---

<sup>6</sup> Giacomo Dacquino, *Guarire l'amore. Strategie di speranza per la famiglia di oggi*, San Paolo Edizioni, 2014, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> Giacomo Dacquino, *Guarire l'amore*, p. 58-59.

<sup>8</sup> Teofil Tia, “Familia, o universitate a dragostei”, in *Familia contemporană. Provocări, principii, valori*, Cluj-Napoca, Renașterea, 2021, p. 27-28.

*programs leave at random or evade not only the moral development but also the socio-emotional development of children, unilaterally overbidding their academic training. Often, they are deprived of even the slightest emotional literacy, leaving the education system unarmed in the face of reality. That is why a new vision is needed regarding what kindergarten and then the school can do to ensure a complete education of children, both academic and socio-emotional, which will allow them to better adapt to the complexities of everyday life”<sup>9</sup>.*

In the last part of this section, I will make an observation regarding the necessity of pointing to the difference between healthy emotional investment and the dependency, very present in contemporary families. The origin of this behaviour is a negative way of emotional investment, in particular in a family where one finds a very demanding parent, constantly concerned with the child’s performance, critical even when it is not the case, never satisfied with the child’s achievement, rigid in decisions and in enforcing the rules. This parental model tries to create the ideal child, as he has always imagined, perfectly, impeccably. Sometimes as he sees himself, or as he would like to be, these parents turn the child into a ‘puppet dependent on their decisions, without initiative, timid, discouraged’<sup>10</sup>. Often these children, as adults, find various solutions to leave the family of origin, in an attempt to get rid of the trauma. In reality, the role of the parent is to reinforce his positive and desirable behaviour by inducing positive emotions. Exaggerated exigency entails insecurity, the fear of not meeting the requirements, the fear of failure and its consequences.

The same situation may occur in the case of a hyper-protective parent, always preoccupied to create a supportive climate for his child, protective, so that to offer to him protection and security. Thus, he/she consumes time, resources, and energy to meet all the needs and especially desires of his family members. Favourable resolutions to their children become priorities, very often exaggerating in this regard. His scope is to cope as much as possible with the child in a way falling into a trap to satisfy all his/her exaggerate desires. Behind this apparent positive intention, one finds the effect visible later, in suffocating a child’s personality. In this situation, a parent needs to optimize his parenting style in time, stabilize rules, and be firm in respecting them. There is also disagreement and dissatisfaction. This would be the right way to establish a healthy climate in the family and, consequently, very important, not to isolate the child from the reality of daily life, with its positive or negative experiences, but both of them are necessary to understand and interpret the reality. Children need a favourable, positive and supportive educational environment, in which to

---

<sup>9</sup> Adrian Opre, “Reconsiderarea reformelor educaționale”, p. 99-100.

<sup>10</sup> Catalin Glava, “Familia – o perspectivă pedagogico-socială”, p. 148-149.

„Family, education and social life - Seven inputs regarding the contemporary paradigm,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 143-151.

develop and experience various behaviours in response to environmental challenges<sup>11</sup>.

**6. Attention to forgiveness.** The biblical rule regarding forgiveness asks humans not to be angry more than one day: “*Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*” (Ephesians 4:26)<sup>12</sup>. If the spouses do not engage in daily forgiveness, the mutual malice is sedimented in stages day after day, time after time. One may speak in this case of solid resentments, or, even more, of a specific general and permanent atmosphere, difficult either for the spouses, as well as for children. Unfortunately, very often, forgiveness is interpreted by many as a sign of vulnerability, but spiritually or even psychologically it frees of the negative burden of the other’s action and visibly gives space to the correction of the other<sup>13</sup>. Forgiveness brings peace, inner good estate, and availability before the other. Thus, it is compulsory to solve family conflicts as soon as possible. The initiative must be assumed by one of the family members, despite all possible risks.

The positive effects of forgiveness are present both in the one who beneficiates of it, for it gets vital energy and enthusiasm, and in the same time, inner stability, dominated by harmony and peace, but also in the case of the one who offers forgiveness: it is about his psychological and spiritual health which is lifted to higher standards. Forgiveness is, finally, “*a liberating act, the smartest option to quickly reach inner peace, as it facilitates concentration on the future, on a deep and lasting psycho-physical well-being. It allows us to overcome the problem to move forward, to act beyond and above it, to love*”<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> For the main types of parenting see Catalin Glava, “Familia – o perspectivă pedagogico-socială”, p. 139-153.

<sup>12</sup> See the commentary made by Pope Francis on this rule: “One cannot live without seeking forgiveness, or at least, one cannot live at peace, especially in the family. We wrong one another every day. We must take into account these mistakes, due to our frailty and our selfishness. However, what we are asked to do is to promptly heal the wounds that we cause, to immediately reweave the bonds that break within the family. If we wait too long, everything becomes more difficult. There is a simple secret to healing wounds and to avoiding recriminations. It is this: do not let the day end without apologizing, without making peace between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters... between daughters- and mothers-in-law! If we learn to apologize promptly and to give each other mutual forgiveness, the wounds heal, the marriage grows stronger, and the family becomes an increasingly stronger home, which withstands the shocks of our smaller or greater misdeeds. This is why there is no need for a long speech, as a caress is enough: one caress and everything is over and one can start afresh. But do not end the day at war!” (*Catechesis on Family, Family - 31. Forgive us our debts*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151104\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20151104_udienza-generale.html), 7 September 2021).

<sup>13</sup> Teofil Tia, “Familia, o universitate a dragostei”, p. 60-61.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 62-63.

**7. Family life accompanied by prayer.** The last point to deal with in this paper has a general and panoramic character and seems to be the most salient one. There is so present the lamentation that one does not have time enough for prayer. Or even worse, it is really difficult to observe and to have the impression that prayer is more than to spend time in vain. In fact, prayer has to do with relationships and, eventually, with love. And this special relationship may have visible effects, not only personally, but also in the family, and in the social area.

In fact, prayer offers the time to God so that to sanctify it and then He gives it back to us, but in an extensive way<sup>15</sup>. There are affairs to do and essential projects. Very often we accomplish the first category of things, while we avoid the second one. Secondly, in prayer, the family members, in their complicated moments and difficult passages, entrust to each other, so that each of them may be guarded by the perfect and permanent love of God. And finally, prayer is ‘a methodology’ of giving a specific architecture to the family itself, for it is not only a practice but a lifestyle. If so, it has also social effects summarized into three – the beauty of celebration, the serenity of work, the spirit of prayer (cf. Luke 10:38-42).

---

<sup>15</sup> See the commentary of Pope Francis on that: “The spirit of prayer gives time back to God, it steps away from the obsession of a life that is always lacking time, it rediscovers the peace of necessary things, and discovers the joy of unexpected gifts. Two good guides for this are the sisters Martha and Mary, spoken of in the Gospel we have just heard; they learned from God the harmony of family rhythms: the beauty of celebration, the serenity of work, the spirit of prayer (cf. Lk 10:38-42). The visit of Jesus, whom they loved, was their celebration. However, one day Martha learned that the work of hospitality, though important, is not everything, but that listening to the Lord, as Mary did, was the really essential thing, the “best kind” of time. Prayer flows from listening to Jesus, from reading the Gospel. Do not forget to read a passage of the Gospel every day. Prayer flows from closeness with the Word of God. Is there this closeness in our family? Do we have the Gospel at home? Do we open it sometimes to read it together?... In the morning and in the evening, and when we sit at the table, we learn to say together a prayer with great simplicity: it is Jesus who comes among us, as he was with the family of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. There is something that is very close to my heart; because I have seen it in the city: there are children who have not learned to make the Sign of the Cross! But you, mother, father, teach your child to pray, to make the Sign of the Cross: this is a lovely task for mothers and fathers!” (*Catechesis on Family, The family - 24. Prayer*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150826\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150826_udienza-generale.html), 3 September 2021).

„Family, education and social life - Seven inputs regarding the contemporary paradigm,” *Astra Sahensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 143-151.