



The Perspectives of a Lifestyle Adequate to the Nature of Sacramental Marriage¹

LADISLAV CSONTOS SJ

The Faculty of Theology of Trnava University

1. Introduction

The term *lifestyle* has recently become extremely frequent in the media of various types. It is often used by professional psychological journals which retain its original sense introduced by Viennese psychiatrist and psychologist Alfred Adler in 1929, but many medical journals currently use it in a much wider sense, referring especially to a healthy lifestyle. Popular and tabloid magazines usually have regular columns dealing with lifestyle where this term has broader or narrower sense and its meaning undergoes various modifications. These columns present the lifestyles of various stars and celebrities and their misguided way of life is presented as the lifestyle of a particular social group. They use the term *lifestyle* to refer to the behaviour of fans of different styles of popular music (such as rock, punk, metal) or particular groups whose typical lifestyles are often linked to subcultures. Some of these magazines even use the subtitle *lifestyle magazine*. These media, like the media in general, have a great impact on people and Christians are not exception. These journals trivialize divorce, and invite young people to prefer single lifestyle allowing them to escape any permanent commitment or have a child without marriage. The media present a fluid idea of marriage and family changing over time according to personal needs and desires. The family is no longer a classical, stable set of people – male, female and children. In the classical sense, the family is a community, a natural centre of human life, a place where one learns how to love, which is an area where the Church as a community plays an eminent role².

¹ This study is a part of the project APVV 15-0189 entitled *Selected Factors of Pro-Family Strategy and Stable Family within Multicultural Environment*.

² Cf. Vincenzo Paglia, Antonio Sciortino, *La famiglia – Vocazione e missione nella Chiesa e nel mondo* (Milano: San Paolo, 2015), 54-55.

In the Slovak Republic, the majority of Catholics got accustomed to the idea that a Christian should receive the sacraments of Christian initiation and marry in the church, which means in practice that the majority of children are baptized but after the baptism does not follow the transmission of faith in the family living according to it. Similar situation occurs in the case of the First Holy Communion when parents, often under the pressure of grandparents, enrol children on the lessons of religion at school. At the same time, the family continues its usual life without taking part in the life of the parish community and does not attend the Sunday Masses. It often happens that there is no common prayer in the family and fathers act as a negative factor by mocking the religion and the truths of the Catholic faith. Similar situation occurs in the case of the sacrament of Confirmation. As a consequence, the reception of the sacrament of Matrimony is too often motivated by the external glamour and the beauty of the ceremony in the church. After the reception of the sacraments does not follow the life based on them and lived in the middle of the parish community, which is in many cases only a formal community. These Catholics do not develop virtually any form of Christian lifestyle. They are under a strong influence of consumerist lifestyle. They spend a considerable amount of their time watching the electronic media, a space of manipulative advertising messages based on a simple pattern of sustainable development and growing demand-based consumption. Advertising as a sophisticated economic tool increases the demand for certain products. This increased demand also implies a shift in the perception of values. Advertising gradually transforms pleasant things into the needed ones, the needed ones into much needed ones and the much needed ones into absolutely necessary ones. Finally, it attaches a person to its brand as a sports club attaches its fans. In this way *homo sapiens* gradually becomes *homo consumens* controlled by subtle, efficient threads of advertising. This leads him/her to irresponsible wasting leading to far-reaching environmental consequences. This system also affects the family.

In general, the sacrament of Matrimony and the Christian family which stems from it have been privatised. The celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony has been separated from the liturgical celebrations of the parish community and in many respects also from its life. Today, the family is situated in the middle of a deep crisis faced by all industrialized countries, but also by other countries that embrace Western culture. This fact affects the lives of their inhabitants, regardless of their religious identity. The globalization of individualistic and consumerist culture leads to the impoverishment and destruction of the family and subsequently of every stable social form³. The destruction of the family and the Christian community

³ Cf. *ibidem*, 87.

goes hand in hand. The fact is that mutual distance, even alienation, between the family and the ecclesial community is increasing. In the opinion of some theologians, a more intensive osmosis, interpenetration is needed. In the parish community more familiarity and in the family more ecclesiality is needed. St. John Chrysostom understood this connection between the family and the Christian community. He spoke of the family as a domestic church incorporated into the ecclesial community. One needs the other and vice versa⁴. Referring to his ideas many theologians point to the need for a mystagogical catechesis of the sacrament of Matrimony and the spiritual accompaniment of spouses. Using modern language we could say that the point of this initiative is to rediscover and revive the lifestyle of the Christian family and the parish community. In this process, the family needs assistance, in particular the accompaniment conceived in a broad sense, as realised, for example, by the method of counselling.

2. The inspiration drawn from the mystagogical catechesis in the early Church

Originally, the mystagogical catechesis took place after the reception of sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – in the liturgy of the Easter Vigil. Mystagogy is a special method of understanding the mysteries of the Christian faith applied to the whole area of the liturgical celebration, including the “description” of the sacraments, their nature and effects. As St. Ambrose says, mystagogy does not introduce the believers to the sacraments as such, but rather to their sense connecting them with the mystery of the history of salvation, God’s plan with man. The early Christian mystagogy was the masterpiece of inculturation, building upon various religious structures contained in the pagan cults of the mysteries whose symbolism transformed and used for its purposes. Using the modern language we could say that this introduction to the meaning of the sacraments is in fact an introduction to the Christian lifestyle realised in various cultures. This conception was confirmed for example by an address by St. John Paul II delivered at his first pastoral visit to one of Roman parishes where he reminded the believers that, above all, the house, the family is the beginning and space of the living Church. Through the visits to the parishes as parts of the Church-diocese all “home churches”,

⁴ Cf. Ibidem, 119. See also Jozef Žuffa, „Znamenia čias – úloha pre pastorálnu teológiu“, w *Hlavné línie riešenia projektu APVV 15-0189 „Vybrané faktory pro-rodinnej stratégie a podpora stabilnej rodiny v multikulturálnom prostredí“ v roku 2016. Zborník z pracovného seminára PROFAMILY 2016*, red. Ladislav Csontos (Trnava: Dobrá Kniha, 2016), 67.

that is, all families, should be joined together; in this way Church Fathers, too, appealed to the families. St. John Chrysostom used to encourage his believers, “Transform your house into the church”. The Pope reminded his contemporaries of this same thing⁵. In fact, he pointed to the need to shape the Christian family lifestyle. The question we ask is how the mystagogical catechesis of the Sacrament of Marriage should be “constructed” to lead to a Christian lifestyle.

In the early Christian centuries, as evidenced by testimonies (for example from Jerusalem and Milan), mystagogical catechesis took place no sooner than after the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation and was reserved only for the baptized who were not allowed to talk about the sacraments with non-Christians. (so called *disciplina arcani*). This practice seems to be a consequence of the conviction that only by entering the baptismal waters man’s eyes get opened and he/she acquires the ability to understand the meaning of the sacraments. It follows that this mystery cannot be communicated or transmitted to the uninitiated, and in addition the unnecessary talk of the believer on this topic diminishes the respect for the mysteries that cost him/her a lot. The truth is that mere information about the mystery would not help the uninitiated in any way, on the contrary, it would only do harm to him/her, because he/she does not know the “cost” of initiation, has not put off his/her old self and could therefore too easily disdain this mystery⁶.

There is a cycle of baptismal catecheses coming from Jerusalem dating back to the second half of the fourth century. The last five of them are referred to as mystagogical ones. Traditionally, they were attributed to St. Cyril of Jerusalem, but contemporary scholars tend to think they are the work of Cyril’s successor Bishop John II. The first two of these mystagogical catecheses deal with the rite of Baptism contrasting the Egyptian bondage with the freedom of a Christian who, after Baptism, shares in God’s life. The third catechesis is dedicated to the anointing with oil and the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the two remaining catecheses reflect on the Eucharist from the biblical, theological, and the liturgical point of view explaining the description of the Eucharist in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians and the Lord’s speech on the Eucharist in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. The catecheses explain the Eucharistic doctrine using as didactic tools the characters and images of the Old Testament. Finally,

⁵ Cf. Francesco Belletti, *La famiglia costruisce la società. Un valore „aggiunto“ per tutti* (Milano: Edizioni San Paolo, 2015), 69.

⁶ Cf. Pavel Semela, „Mystagogie jako uvedení do tajemství Krista v rané církvi“, dostęp 27 sierpnia, 2017, <http://www.cestykatecheze.cz/casopis/2010-3/Mystagogie-jako-uedeni-do-tajemstvi-Krista-v-rane-cirkvi.html>.

they explain one by one the rites of the liturgy of the Eucharist and provide a brief commentary on the Lord's Prayer.

The need for mystagogical catechesis begins to be discussed, at the moment mainly abroad, not only in connection with the sacraments of the Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist, but also in connection with the sacrament of Matrimony. Some important early Christian texts have been translated into Slovak recently, namely the following works by St. Ambrose: *Explanation of the Profession of Faith, On the Sacraments, On the Mysteries*. Alongside the texts by the Greek Fathers St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. John Chrysostom they can serve as an excellent starting point and inspiration for catechesis. Ambrose's catecheses have a vivid preaching style, they use short sentences and references to biblical events. In particular, when explaining the Baptism, they turn to the traditional biblical events – the flood, the Red Sea crossing, the encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well of James, the miraculous healing at the Pool of Bethesda, the healing of a man born blind and the resurrection of Lazarus. These texts have traditionally been a part of the Liturgy of the Word and have been read during the Lent, the time when the preparation of catechumens for baptism culminated. An important element is the announcement of Easter on the Day of the Epiphany, which was understood as an invitation addressed to those who had been preparing for Baptism for a long time to write their names on the list of those who want to be baptised at the Easter Vigil Mass. Thanks to the editor's monograph, Ambrose's texts are set in the historical and theological context, and thus better comprehensible in the whole context of the catechesis connected with the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation⁷.

3. The contemporary social and ideological aspects that need to be taken into account

In the process of helping the family, one needs to take into account certain factors that are almost utterly ignored by the Slovak media. One of them is family financial security. "The situation in reference to the life context of the citizens of the Slovak Republic as a part of the European Union can be identified as follows: The monthly net earnings are among the lowest in the European Union. In terms of households' financial situation, families with three or more children are considerably worse off than families with one or two children or childless families. It still holds true that not

⁷ Cf. Miloš Lichner, „Svätý Ambróz a katechumenát“, w *Svätý Ambróz Vysvetlenie vyznania viery, O sviatostiach, O tajomstvách*, red. id (Trnava: Dobrá Kniha, 2017), 65-76.

only big two-parent families, but also broken families (consisting usually of single parents with children) are in a difficult financial situation. Welfare benefits do not suffice to cover the loss of earnings due to the departure of one of the partners from the common household – this is true in general. The low income of families also threatens the possibility of their active participation in the life of the society, hinders consumption and makes it impossible to develop ambitious plans for the future. At the moment, the government of the Slovak Republic is only slowly improving the financial stabilizers of the family's life, and only very marginally and unpurposely supports non-financial stabilizers, mostly through the policy of ensuring equal opportunities and promoting the reconciliation of family and working life⁸. In the economic and social consciousness of society still persists the model introduced by former communist regime implying that mother must be economically active so that the family could have at the disposal two salaries and lead normal life.

On the other hand, the media, and not only the tabloids, pay close attention to gender theories and dissolve the Christian concept of marriage and family. It is important to realize that the media present a simplistic idea of immutable human nature and as an alternative propose gender theory understood as a constructivist view completely opposed to the concept of natural law. This requires deeper analyses and gradual deepening of our knowledge regarding these theories. It is necessary to strive for their better understanding and the identification of their crucial arguments, but also to have the ambition to grasp the motivations behind these theories. It is exactly the overlooking of these motivations that gives rise to misunderstandings regarding the gender theory. The metaphysical foundations of feminist philosophy are certainly in opposition to Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, but regardless of the philosophical contradiction, the motivation behind feminist philosophy is more practical than theoretical. Feminist philosophy as well as gender theory is characterized, in particular, by political and legal focus. No matter how consistent and logical the Aristotelian-Thomistic model of natural law is, the feminist philosophy does not respond primarily to the metaphysical concept of person, but to the situation of gender inequality, gender stereotypes, and discrimination that is present here and now. These theories are based on the fact of social discrimination, and this is can legitimize them. In the circles that we can call “conservative” the discussion on gender studies often lacks objectivity and unbiased assessment. Similarly,

⁸ Rastislav Bednárík, „Finančné a nefinančné stabilizátory života rodiny“, w *Hlavné línie riešenia projektu APVV 15-0189 „Vybrané faktory pro-rodinnej stratégie a podpora stabilnej rodiny v multikulturálnom prostredí“ v roku 2016*, 12.

the gender theorists often consider the theory of natural law a theological relic in ethics. In the discussions led in a traditionalist spirit, the assessment of gender studies not infrequently lapses into highlighting exaggerated expressions, extreme positions, and thus the arguments *ad hominem* prevail over the arguments *ad rem*⁹.

The modern concept of society as a social union created by the association of free individuals in order to advance their interests implies the replacement of the family as the primary and essential moment of social life by individual person. The “traditional family” where the head of the household was at the same time husband, father and master, was considered a driving force of economic life for many centuries. This image of a traditional household was reproduced in almost unchanged form for a relatively long period. In the modern times, however, the family lost the function of the initiation phase of state formation, ceased to be “small state”, or better, “state *in potential*” and was replaced by a new sociological explanation. The natural state is no longer made up of fathers and children, masters and servants bound together by organic connections; its new cornerstone is an economically active individual, a free, equal and independent person who has no obligations beyond the self-imposed ones accepted with the purpose to exchange the fruits of his/her labour with other individuals. Having lost the function of the initiation phase of social life the family has also lost its economic function. According to Locke’s theory, the family undergoes a transformation from an economic enterprise into an ethical and educational institution¹⁰.

Moreover, as noted by growing number of political philosophers (N. Fraser, A. Honneth and others), the contemporary democratic deliberation is increasingly influenced by Eastern thought. It provides new stimuli challenging our opinions and attitudes able to transform and inspire our perception of democracy, equality and give rise to new forms of humanistic thinking. In principle, the process of decision making typical for Western democracies takes place on individual level. According to this understanding of democracy, the family is not a legitimate subject of decision making. However, according to Eastern understanding of democracy, the family is entitled to make legitimate decisions regarding an individual, a family member based on the belief that the family as a whole can assess his/her present and future situation with regard to family interests better than the individual family member himself/herself. Especially the Koreans like to

⁹ Cf. Lukáš Jeník, „Ideológia prirodzeného zákona a ideológia rodu. Dialóg, konfrontácia, konflikt“, w *ibidem*, 35.

¹⁰ Cf. Miroslav Karab, „Zmeny koncepcie ľudskej osoby v novovekej filozofii“, w *ibidem*, 46.

accept the principle of the best choice following the family interests. On the one hand, they struggle for the implementation of the fundamental principle of Western democracy – the freedom of the individual; on the other hand, on the basis of the interest of the family, they also accept the principle of limitation of individual rights as a matter of course. The principle works best if, for example, we do not know what the wishes of individuals are and when the others know what is best for the individual. Thus, we can accept the principle of acting in the best interest of the other even though he/she does not know what is best for him/her at the moment¹¹.

4. The principles of the theology of marriage and family according to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council brought about a profound change in the understanding of marriage. It must find a clear expression in the preparation for marriage, the proposed mystagogical catechesis and the creation of a Christian lifestyle. There has been a shift from the contract (in the legal sense) to unity (in the sense of biblical covenant), from marital rights to a positive vision of marital intimacy, from sexual acts aimed primarily at the survival of the human species to the fertility following from the spiritual richness of being which is so to speak consecrated¹². Even the entire vocabulary of marriage that has undergone a radical change over the course of the last decades indicates that love is understood differently compared to the past. Love is a gift, the act of giving, a good for a person, her body and mental life. It involves personal dignity in marital acts as well as the feelings and gestures of happiness, gratitude and tenderness. It is a positive vision embodied in the appreciation of human reality understood as a growth factor of marital love in its constant development¹³.

From the outset, marital unity has been understood as an intimate community of life and love existing between spouses established by the Creator. In a way it is an image of that community of love which is the triune God himself and the sign of the God's covenant with his chosen people and all peoples. When invited to procreation, marital community discovers that it is called to broaden the scope of their love from the starting point of

¹¹ Cf. Rastislav Nemeč, „Porovnanie kultúry Východu a kultúry Západu v pohľade na rodinu“, w ibidem, 48-51.

¹² Cf. Glória Braunsteiner, „Systematický pohľad na dnešné manželstvo“, w ibidem, 23.

¹³ Cf. Pietro Boffi, Lucia Miglionico, Giuseppe Ciavarella, Cinesello Balsamo, *Cos'è la pastorale familiare? Contenti, metodi ed esperienze* (Milano: Edizioni San Paolo, 2015), 20.

“marital core” to the complete family. In fact, the family stems from the bond of marriage. The ontology of marriage implies the ontology of the family: not only the relationship between spouses, but the whole family as the natural extension of the marital relationship is formed according to the original plan of God as an intimate community of life and love. There have always been numerous believers living in marriage. In the Church which as an institution comes from the Lord who betrothed her as his unblemished bride through the Paschal Mystery of his love this mystery of betrothal lives and acts through a special sacrament creating marital bond between some of the laypeople. Thus, the marital service is a particular expression of Christ’s priestly service. There are no other sacraments implying particular and stable forms of life, only marriage and Holy Orders – the priesthood. Both Holy Orders and marriage confer to the lives of the believers in question the constitutive character of sacred service, or better, the service of the saving priesthood of Christ even though they are different sacraments thanks to which Christians, because of the vocation of God, occupy different places in the Church with respect to her salvific mission. The baptismal character leads them to participate in the universal priesthood obliging them to grow in sanctity and transmit faith to others. They are called to realise all this in their own particular way and under the guidance of the Church¹⁴.

According to St. Augustine and the great Church Fathers and Doctors, the father of a family is the father of a church, he is like a bishop, in the sense of the head who is responsible for the ecclesial community that finds expression in his family saved by the sacraments and united around him. Fathers have a duty imposed by God to care for the souls of their wives, children, and other dependents in the same way bishops do. “Build a church from your households (families), teach incessantly your families as their heads”. These are the words of St. John Chrysostom encouraging fathers to keep transforming their houses into domestic churches, teach their families in the same way as great teachers taught people with their sermons, live and proclaim the exultant joy of faith, and give testimony to the world through the joy filling the heart of a believer who listens to the Word of God. These timeless ideas give the same encouragement to contemporary Christians as they did to the believers in the distant past¹⁵.

Catechism of the Catholic Church summarizes the meaning of the universal consecration received by the believers through the sacraments of the

¹⁴ Cf. Gustavo Cavagnani, *La famiglia „Chiesa domestica“*. *Sogetto e ogetto dell’azione evangelizatrice al servizio del regno di Dio* (Roma: LAS, 2015), 58-59.

¹⁵ Cf. Vinicio Albanesi, *Ripensare la famiglia, Per un cambio di passo nella Chiesa* (Milano: ANCORA EDITRICE 2015), 46.

Christian initiation and the particular consecration resulting from the sacrament of Holy Orders and the Sacrament of Matrimony as follows, “Through these sacraments those already consecrated by Baptism and Confirmation for the common priesthood of all the faithful can receive particular consecrations. Those who receive the sacrament of Holy Orders are consecrated in Christ’s name »to feed the Church by the word and grace of God«. On their part, »Christian spouses are fortified, and, as it were, consecrated for the duties and dignity of their state by a special sacrament«”¹⁶.

Carlo Rocchetta distinguishes between the initiatory phase of the sacrament of Matrimony and the phase of further consecration. According to him the second stage represents the mystagogical path of the spouses. The term *mystagogy* combines the terms *mystery* and *initiation* that interpenetrate each other; as such, they refer to a mystical action that introduces the persons in its own depth and gives them a share in its own meaning. This held true as early as in ancient mystical cults, where the term referred to the entry of candidates into a promised new life. In terms of early Christian usage the term *mystagogy* referred to the further phase of the catechumenate, the stage of purification and enlightenment, following after the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation, when the novices became able to understand the full meaning and value of the sacraments they had received. The period of mystagogical catechesis is also a time when the celebrated sacraments begin to act by their own power and allow the believers to enter more fully into their hidden essence. It means not only to understand the mystery celebrated, but in the first place to shape purposefully one’s everyday life in accordance with it, to adopt the Christian lifestyle. What applies to mystagogy in general applies in a specific sense also to the sacrament of marriage, that is, to the intimacy of spouses. During the premarital catechesis, the couples can understand the contents of the great mystery of marriage at the level of the rite, but only after they have received the sacrament of Matrimony they can personally experience and fully understand the essence of what they received as a gift. The sacrament of Matrimony contains the eternal source of mutual devotion and is the exemplary and effective cause of a lasting marriage imitating the relationship between Christ and the Church. “Becoming one flesh” is the effect of the grace conferred by sacramental marriage shaping a new, mystical personality. To live the sacramental marriage means to live it in accordance with the mystery whose sign this sacrament is, that is, the mystery of mystical betrothal (marriage) between Christ and the Church; Christian spouses are not only called to point with their whole being to this mystery, but also to realise

¹⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1535 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993).

it in their marital life. Theologically, therefore, we must distinguish two constitutive moments of the sacrament of Matrimony: first, an initiatory act understood as a mutual consent of the two fiancées, an event of consecration by which Christ enters into the covenant between the spouses and their mutual self-giving love, and gives them a share in his self-giving love that found its supreme expression in his Paschal sacrifice; second, the following acts of mutual self-donation through which their whole being, body and mind, becomes a gift for the partner. These acts reveal the full meaning of marital covenant celebrated in the solemn rite and realised in everyday life. The manifestations of intimacy following the initiatory act, even though the sacrament is not primarily based on them, represent the true fulfilment of the sacrament and are therefore the bearers of grace, provided they correspond to the supernatural betrothal of Christ and the Church. From this derives the calling and commitment of each of the spouses not to avoid the mutual intimate donation and accept the partner both emotionally and physically, as expressed in the marriage vows, where each of them promised to give the other everything forever. Each of the spouses must give himself/herself to the partner with all his/her soul, heart, body, without reserves¹⁷.

5. A Possible content of the mystagogical catechesis of the sacrament of Matrimony

There is no direct, substantial evidence regarding the presence of the mystagogical catechesis of the sacramental marriage in the teachings of the Church Fathers. Therefore, we can only draw inspiration from their method and seek adequate ways of catechesis after the reception of the sacramental marriage and the possibilities of the spiritual accompaniment of newlyweds. It is advisable to keep in mind the typological method of St. John Chrysostom (344-407). In his commentary on the Letter to the Colossians the great Bishop of Constantinople writes about the mystery of marriage. He asks whether marriage can be likened to a theatrical performance and gives this answer: marriage is a mystery, a great reality, even in case the roles intended by God for the realisation of its essence are not respected. As a type, the great reality of marriage represents the mystery of the relationship between Christ and His Church. Both marriage and the Church are mysteries. Their similarity is based on their typological character, a duality heading for unity. The mystery of marriage was revealed as early as in the act creation, when the first woman was created from the first man to form together a new unity. Although, strictly speaking, every human being is born of one person

¹⁷ Cf. Carlo Rocchetta, *Teologia del talano nuziale. Per un'intimità gioiosa* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2015), 137-138.

only, in fact he/she comes from two persons. Thus man and woman are not two beings, but one. As a confirmation of this view we can quote the following words of Jesus: “At the beginning the Creator »made them male and female«”. St. John Chrysostom typologically relates marriage to the events of salvation history, drawing a parallel between the creation of man as male and female – the human couple (Gen 1:27) – and redemption. Above all he anticipates the betrothal of Christ to the Church as the object of his reflection. According to St. John Chrysostom the mystery of marriage lies at the heart of the mystery of the Church. Christ comes into the world, shapes the Church, gives birth to her and creates spiritual unity with her. In fact, the spouses betrothed each other as a pure virgin her beloved one. Christian marriage and the betrothal of Christ to the Church are based on the same economy of salvation. Both of these realities, in their external, phenomenal expression, are obviously platonic archetypes. The advantage of mystagogy is that thanks to the mediating function of the archetype it enables us to understand, at least partially, the mystery of the covenant between Christ and the Church¹⁸.

As we have already mentioned, we are facing a serious problem in pastoral care of the family, namely the privatization of the family leading to impoverished reflection on it taking into account only couples and the issues related to their private life¹⁹. This suggests the need to apply the teachings of the Second Vatican Council in the life of the parish community. The concept of *Communio* plays the key role in postconciliar ecclesiology. Although the Eucharist is the essential principle uniting the believers, due to human fragility there are also tensions among them. The issue of unity is a key element of one of the most beautiful passages in the Gospel according to St. John, Jesus’ High Priestly Prayer, in which he pleads the Father for the unity of those who believe in him, as well as those who will be his disciples in the future, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17: 20-21). In these words of Jesus one can see his great concern for the beginning work of gathering humanity into a single family of God’s children whose Father is God Himself, “I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one – I in them and you in me – so that they may be brought to complete

¹⁸ Cf. „È possibile una mistagogia sul sacramento del matrimonio?“ w *Scipione*, dostęp 27 sierpnia, 2017, http://www.scipionecastello.it/html/testi/scritti_telogici/mistagogia_del_sacramento_del_matrimonio.html

¹⁹ Cf. Livio Melina, red., *Conversione pastorale per famiglia: Sì, ma quale?* (Siena: Edizioni Contragalli, 2015), 39-40.

unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (John 17: 22-23). Jesus conceives this unity of the community of believers in a very real, even physical sense. He speaks of it in the parable of the vine and its branches where he compares himself to the vine and his disciples to its branches. (Cf. John 15:1-6). God’s life becomes available to us thanks to the vine, that is, the human nature of Jesus Christ who began the work of uniting humanity²⁰.

For Jesus, community is not only an additional element in the life of his Church but rather its very centre and essence. In this way the vital power of the Church finds its expression. Community is a maternal womb where new person is formed by the life-giving and perpetual action of the God’s Word (1 Pet 1:23); it is the Pool of Siloam whose water heals people born blind from their blindness (John 9:7); it is the new family of disciples, a place where the message of Gospel is received and the epicentre whence the Gospel received is spread into the whole world. The events described in the Acts of the Apostles show that those who turn to Christ become at the same time members of community²¹. This fact finds its expression in the connection of sacramental and liturgical celebration of the faith with everyday life. “The point is that the Church should be based on a dense web of human relationships giving rise to true communities where the life of faith is lived in the unity of hearts and minds and the religious practice is an authentic expression of both faith and freedom”²². The ecclesial community is the place where Christian initiation and also, in accordance with its pattern, the initiation of the newlyweds into the lifestyle of the Christian family take place²³.

It is important that young Christians learn to perceive the theological doctrine teaching them that their marriage is not a private matter. But they should not feel abandoned either in the psychological sense. The entire Christian community must feel and be involved in the preparation of young couples for marriage and the spiritual accompaniment of spouses. The Christian community must not ignore the complications and possible crises of marital life; it must stand by the spouses not only in festive and happy moments, such as the birth of a child, but also in the difficult ones such as crises, illness, and the death of a beloved person. It may be said, paraphrasing the initial words of the conciliar constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, that the

²⁰ Cf. Józef Kulisz, „Eucharystia sakramentem jedności w rozumieniu Teilharda de Chardin“, *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia UKSW* 38, nr 2 (2000): 137-138.

²¹ Cf. Jozef Kyselica, *Odovzdávať vieru v súčasnej spoločnosti* (Trnava: Dobrá Kniha, 2006), 91.

²² Ibidem, 90.

²³ Cf. Melina, red., *Conversione pastorale per famiglia: Sì, ma quale?*, 42-45.

joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age are also the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the Christian community that accompanies and accepts them²⁴.

Let us mention two proposals formulated in Italy that can be considered as the proposals for a mystagogical catechesis concerning marriage and family. The first originates in Franciscan circles and has been realised since August 2017 in Domus Pacis in Assisi. It is scheduled for the period of two years and includes the following themes:

The first year: *The sacramental identity of family and spouses*:

- Male, female and their relationship
- The marital structure of human person
- The mystery of betrothal revealed: selected passages of the Old Testament. Christ the Bridegroom and the great mystery of the New Testament
- The graces conferred by the sacrament of matrimony: the mystagogy of the sacramental rite of matrimony
- The efficient presence of Jesus in the sacrament of matrimony
- The family: domestic church
- From baptism to marriage: the specific character of the grace conferred by the sacrament of matrimony
- The sacramental identity of spouses
- Holy Spirit and marriage
- Theology of the family
- Domestic liturgy in the family
- The Eucharist and marriage: the sacraments of the covenant
- The sacrament of marriage: the original source of marital and familial spirituality
- The spirituality of tenderness
- The contemplative path of spouses
- The eschatological dimension of the family

The second year: *Marriage: a sacrament of mission*:

- Salvation history proceeds through the family
- The sacrament of matrimony: the new mission of spouses
- Showing in the power of the Spirit how to live the beauty of masculinity and femininity and be its witnesses
- The ability to love like Christ does
- Fatherhood and maternity
- Fraternal and sisterly relationship
- The community of families

²⁴ Cf. Paglia, Sciortino, *La famiglia – Vocazione e missione nella Chiesa e nel mondo*, 124-125.

- The link between mission and pastoral care
- What can a married couple offer to the local parish and civic community? In what manner can they do that?
- Virginitly and marriage: two God's gifts intended for mission
- How to bear witness to the heavenly wedding banquet?
- Domestic church: home as a place where evangelization takes place and community is built
- The life of domestic church as a way of self-expression²⁵.

The second proposal formulated a few years earlier comes from Cardinal Tettamanzi of Milan and links the sacraments of the Christian initiation with the sacrament of Matrimony. According to him, the renewed process of Christian initiation should take place in the following steps:

1. First of all, it is necessary to ensure unconditional acceptance and initial spiritual accompaniment of spouses requesting a baptism for their child;
2. The second step requires to celebrate the baptism in a way that clearly highlights the extraordinary abundance of baptismal grace and the community dimension of marriage;
3. Next, it is necessary to pay special attention to the spiritual accompaniment of families and their children in the first years of their lives, to find and create appropriate opportunities for the meetings of relatives, to offer formation programs for parents and create occasions for festive celebrations of the anniversaries of baptism;
4. Parents and, as far as possible, their children, should be offered a possibility to continue their journey of faith. It would be advisable to implement this project above all in the age range 3-6 years and link it to the educational programs of preschool institutions²⁶.

Let us also include some of our own proposals that try to take into account the complexity of marriage and the family and find their expression in a multidisciplinary approach to them:

- Following Christ and his love
- Mutual respect and empathy; human person created in the image of God

²⁵ Cf. „Percorso per Famiglie – Mysterium Familiae“, w *Domus Pacis Assisi Hotel*, dostęp 27 sierpnia, 2017, <http://domuspacis.it/corso-mysterium-familiae-assisi>.

²⁶ Cf. Dionigi Tettamanzi, *L'amore di Dio è in mezzo di noi, La missione della famiglia a servizio del Vangelo, Famiglia comunica la tua fede* (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano, 2007), 74-75.

- Self-sacrificing love – greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s love for one’s friends (John 15:13)
- Children as a gift enriching their parents and making them grow
- Following Christ in marriage implies following him on his way of the cross (Mt 16:24)
- Resolving conflicts: forgiveness; do not let the sun go down while you are still angry
- Exercising virtues: humility, faith, hope, and love; hospitality, patience, self-sacrifice.

6. The accompaniment of the family

In the past, the basic elements of the lifestyle of the Christian family were transmitted from generation to generation through the life in multi-generational families and Christian community closely related to the celebration of the liturgical year. The common prayer in the family and the rituals of mutual forgiveness and solidarity with close and distant relatives were considered as a matter of course. In this way, young families were naturally accompanied by the elder ones. Nowadays, when young families consider it as a necessity to become independent from their parents, there is a growing need to accompany young families to adopt the Christian lifestyle. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us of the need to accompany families. He means, in general, the pastoral accompaniment provided by both clergy and laypeople. It should encourage spouses to be generous in the transmission of life. Pope Francis points to the need to rediscover the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Paul VI and the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* of John Paul II to reawaken the willingness to procreate which is in contrast to the mentality of the contemporary world that often shows hostility towards life. According to Pope Francis, it is always to be emphasized that “children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church. Through them, the Lord renews the world”²⁷.

The help and accompaniment provided by the Church are not meant to be addressed to an abstract family, but quite concrete, as always emphasised Pope John Paul II who taught that man is the way of the Church; he meant concrete human person joined and accompanied by Christ and his Church on the path of his/her life, in the same way as Jesus unobtrusively joined his disciples on the road to Emmaus. As it turns out, this accompaniment is needed from the very beginning, i.e. it should start immediately after entering into the sacramental marriage because wedding is actually just a begin-

²⁷ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2016), 222.

ning and young couples are exposed to a strong influence of the consumerist lifestyle and lack the accompaniment enabling them to adopt the lifestyle of Christian spouses and Christian family. At present there is a boom of accompanying better known as counselling. Counselling as a new method of supporting families in stressful situations i.e. a method of accompaniment, helps both individuals and families to cope with problematic situations concerning work and unemployment, marital and family conflicts, sexual and emotional problems, inability to make decisions, educational problems, existential losses and the resulting grief, solitude, inadequate interpersonal relationships, illness, existential emptiness, lack of faith, and problems whose root cause is spiritual in nature²⁸. Counselling makes it possible to extend our view of the family accompaniment which is not just a specific form of spiritual accompaniment and guidance provided by the priest, mainly within the sacramental forum. Families in crisis can be helped by relatives (siblings, parents, grandparents), godparents, confirmation sponsors or friends (A friend in need is friend indeed.) They form the closest organic community where the mutual accompaniment in the process of spiritual growth takes place. (cf. 1 Cor 12: 12-27)²⁹ Similarly, Christian institutions such as Catholic schools, family movements, and parish communities can be helpful. It is not only a recommendation but also an obligation *the Code of Canon Law* imposes on parish priests.

The Code of Canon Law is sober in enumerating the duties of parish priest towards the parish community, “to visit families, sharing especially in the cares, anxieties and griefs of the faithful, strengthening them in the Lord, and prudently correcting them if they are failing in certain areas. With generous love he is to help the sick, particularly those close to death, by refreshing them solicitously with the sacraments and commending their souls to God; with particular diligence he is to seek out the poor, the afflicted, the lonely, those exiled from their country, and similar those weighed down by special difficulties. He is to work so that spouses and parents are supported in fulfilling their proper duties and is to foster growth of Christian life in the family. A pastor is to recognize and promote the proper part which the lay members of the Christian faithful have in the mission of the

²⁸ Cf. Mária Šmidová, „Odpoveď na výzvy Synody o rodine. Counseling ako nová metóda podpory rodín v záťažových situáciách“, w *Synoda o rodine 2015 a čo po nej, Zborník abstraktov z medzinárodného seminára PROFAMILY 2015*, red. Ladislav Csontos (Trnava: Dobrá Kniha 2015), 18.

²⁹ Cf. Ján Ďurica, „Spôsoby pomoci spoločenstva stabilite manželstva a rodiny“, w *Hlavné línie riešenia projektu APVV 15-0189 „Vybrané faktory pro-rodinnej stratégie a podpora stabilnej rodiny v multikulturálnom prostredí“ v roku 2016*, 31-32.

Church, by fostering their associations for the purposes of religion”³⁰. Undoubtedly, the associations and movements of Christian families are among the most important of them.

The accompaniment of families requires a complex approach, just as the lifestyle of the Christian family must be complex and integrated into everyday life. The life of a family with a disabled child is a good example of this fact. A priest can play an important role here, but the help of many other professionals is also needed. The birth of a disabled child leads to a deep family crisis which is usually so intense that the family is not able to cope with it without the help of others. Therefore, the assistance needed by the family must be as accessible as possible. These families need proximity in the sense of being offered useful services either within the local community or directly at home and also in the sense of understanding and respecting their needs. Among the most important factors influencing the efficiency of family assistance are the affordability of the services for families and interdisciplinarity, which means that professionals providing support to families come from different backgrounds and have different skills. Interdisciplinary cooperation makes easier the sharing of information among the members of family assistance teams. The variety of family services stems from the involvement of three areas: health services, social services and education. In this way, a multilevel form of family accompaniment could be organized. The basic level of this accompaniment should be represented by the parish community, such one, where no one feels abandoned and no family is left without the support of others. As a matter of fact, the Church wants to protect and support the family in any situation³¹.

Pope Francis, in response to exaggerated expectations of many regarding marriage, reminds us that it is a fragile and limited reality to be taken as “process of growth, in which each spouse is God’s means of helping the other to mature. Change, improvement, the flowering of the good qualities present in each person – all these are possible. Each marriage is a kind of »salvation history«, which from fragile beginnings – thanks to God’s gift and a creative and generous response on our part – grows over time into something precious and enduring. Might we say that the greatest mission of two people in love is to help one another become, respectively, more a man and more a woman? Fostering growth means helping a person to shape his

³⁰ *Code of Canon Law* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), can. 529.

³¹ Cf. Mária Šmidová, „Včasná podpora rodín s dieťaťom s postihnutím formou sprevádzania – counseling“, w *Hlavné línie riešenia projektu APVV 15-0189 „Vybrané faktory pro-rodinnej stratégie a podpora stabilnej rodiny v multikulturálnom prostredí“ v roku 2016*, 58-62.

or her own identity”³². Particular benefits for accompaniment of families in crisis realized in this spirit result from a recent turn of interest that took place in a relatively new area of psychological practice and research called Family Science. The researchers focus their attention on the concepts of change and growth with the aim to identify the potential competencies of the family. The crisis is seen as an opportunity to reassess priorities and transform the family system. It is a positive, forward-looking approach, where primary emphasis is placed on uncovering the sources of family system functionality and its development, in order to promote the family well-being. As we can see, the attention of researchers as well as professionals working with families is now focused mainly on the forces that build, strengthen and develop the family system. In addition to identifying the resilience factors of the family system, the further challenge for scientific research is to understand the dynamic structure of the relationships among the individual resilience factors, as well as the nature of interaction between various types of mental strain and specific sources of resilience.³³

7. Conclusion

The two-phase synodal process has helped the Catholic Church to place Catholic marriage and family in the centre of her pastoral interest and make it a topic of social discourse. For a relatively long period we have been witnessing negative demographic trends in Slovak Republic, which are generally related to persisting problems that had to be dealt with long time ago but instead of it have been neglected. The issue of the family is very complex and affects not only the Catholic Church, but also the national and local politics. Our research wants to be a basis for the formulation of a pro-family strategy capable of providing support to families living in a multicultural environment; Slovakia has been this type of country for a very long time and this feature of Slovak society will be even more noticeable in the future. Within the Catholic Church, we find it important to revive, follow and creatively update the early Christian tradition of mystagogical catechesis following after the reception of the sacraments of Christian initiation and apply it to sacramental marriage. Our research is far from being complete. We intend to continue and further explore the issue of the lifestyle of Christian spouses and family in the contemporary world, along with the issue of

³² Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 221.

³³ Cf. Martin Šarkan, „Personálna integrita ako prorodinný faktor“, w *Hlavné línie riešenia projektu APVV 15-0189 „Vybrané faktory pro-rodinnej stratégie a podpora stabilnej rodiny v multikulturálnom prostredí“ v roku 2016*, 52.

creating the communities of families within parish communities and their effective pastoral accompaniment.

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The Perspectives of a Lifestyle Adequate to the Nature of Sacramental Marriage

SUMMARY

The Synod on the Family and the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia* drew attention to marriage and family also in Slovakia. In the last century, under the pressure of cultural and social change, the tradition of transmitting faith and its daily living in the form of a Christian family lifestyle has disappeared. Today, the lifestyle of an average Catholic family does not differ much from the mainstream lifestyle shaped by consumerist mentality. During the preparation of the engaged couples for the celebration of the sacrament of Matrimony considerable attention is paid to its spiritual aspect but the couples themselves usually pay most attention to the material aspect of wedding ceremony. Many experts point to the need to elaborate, according to the pattern of mystagogical catechesis of the sacraments of Christian initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist) also the mystagogical catechesis of the sacrament of Matrimony. Doing this, it is necessary to take into account the current social situation

where a family with more than two children is at risk of poverty and where the necessity of both parents being economically active persists. It is also necessary to consider the ideological influences favouring cohabitation, promoting gender theories and so on. The mystagogical catechesis of the sacrament of Matrimony must be inspired by the renewed theology of the domestic church following the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on common priesthood and the vocation of all believers to the fullness of Christian life. In the study, we present two models starting to take place in Italy that could give suitable inspiration to other local churches as well. Finally, in the spirit of the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, we suggest the possibility of accompanying families using the method of counselling which is not reserved to priests only, but can be used both by them and the lay faithful to help families.

Keywords: theology of marriage, domestic Church, mystagogical catechesis, family accompaniment, social assistance

Perspektywa stylu życia adekwatnego z naturą małżeństwa sakramentalnego

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STRESZCZENIE

Synod o Rodzinie i Adhortacja Apostolska papieża Franciszka *Amoris Laetitia* kierują uwagę na małżeństwo i rodzinę również w Słowacji. W ostatnim stuleciu, pod presją przemian kulturowych i socjalnych, zaniknęła tradycja przekazująca wiarę i wprowadzająca ją do codziennego życia rodzin chrześcijańskich. Dzisiaj styl życia przeciętnej rodziny katolickiej nie różni się zwykle od tego, co proponuje mentalność konsumpcyjnego mainstreamu. W trakcie przygotowania par do małżeństwa więcej uwagi przywiązują się nie do duchowego wymiaru tego sakramentu, ale do całej materialnej oprawy ceremonii. Wielu ekspertów zwraca uwagę na wypracowanie, zgodnie z wzorcami katechezy mistagogicznej sakramentów inicjacji chrześcijańskiej (chrztu, bierzmowania, Eucharystii), również mistagogicznej katechezy sakramentu małżeństwa. Czyniąc to, należy brać pod uwagę fakt współczesnej sytuacji, gdzie rodzina z więcej niż dwójką dzieci wystawiona jest na ryzyko ubóstwa, i gdzie konieczna do ekonomicznego przetrwania jest praca obojga rodziców. Należy też brać pod uwagę wpływ ideologii faworyzujących współżycie, promujących teorie genderyzmu itp. Mistagogiczna katecheza sakramentu małżeństwa winna być inspirowana przed odnowioną teologią Kościoła lokalnego opartą na nauczaniu II Soboru Watykańskiego o powszechnym kapłaństwie i powołaniu wszystkich wierzących do pełni życia chrześcijańskiego. W opracowaniu prezentowane są dwa modele zapoczątkowane we Włoszech, mogące dać wystarczającą inspirację również lokalnym Kościołom. W końcu, w duchu adhortacji *Amoris Laetitia*, sugeruje

się możliwość towarzyszenia rodzinom, stosując metodę poradnictwa, która nie jest zarezerwowana wyłącznie dla księży, ale jest skutecznie wykorzystywana również przez wiernych świeckich.

Słowa kluczowe: teologia małżeństwa, Kościół lokalny, katecheza mistagogiczna, poradnictwo rodzinne, asystencja społeczna.