

The Pressure of Modernity on the Christian Family – Moral Christian Values Versus (I) Moral Modernity Values

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ABSTRACT: As any other Christian institution, the family is also subject to the dissolving influences of the values promoted by modernity, being part in the accelerated process of secularisation specific to the contemporary society. In contact with the modernity, its values and its *custom of political correctness*, the Christian family – *the small Church*, as called by Saint John the Chrysostom – tends to lose the fundamental theological valences and meanings of the communion and of the community, by the ghettoization of its capacity to respond to some general human aspirations *with pregnant ontological and soteriological connotations, becoming more and more a simple social form among other forms of two partners living together, too little preoccupied by the fact that “unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labour in vain” (Ps. 127:1).*

KEYWORDS: traditional family, modernity, single-parent family, ghettoised community, soteriology, eschatology

Preliminaries

Under these circumstances, our study aims to depict and *evaluate some of the aspects in the involution of the values role and of the position of the Christian family in contemporaneity, highlighting the major causality factors and the generated theological-moral and social-religious consequences.* Our approach is related to the manner in which the family and the marriage are seen and treated by the Holy Church, from the perspective of the *Holy Scripture* and the *Holy Traditions*, due to their divine origins – *“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Genesis 2:18); „So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27) – and the undoubtable quality of icon of the Church (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19, Hebrews 2:11).*

The recent studies and the statistical markers show that the traditional Christian family is in a process of social-religious involution. In the European Union, a number of 4 in 10 children are born outside marriage (Finegan, 2018), transforming the so-called modern model of the single-parent family into an increasingly frequent alternative, due to its polarising dialectic thinking on the principle of or-or. In other words, the contemporaneity brings the separation from the landmarks of the old Christian relation between marriage and family (G. Murdoch, Levi-Strauss). The recent statistic research show that, for instance, in Great Britain, 25% of all families, with 3 million children

(2009), follow the model of the single-parent family (Browne and Levell 2010); in 2012, there were in the USA 13.7 million single parents and 27% of the children did not experience the company of both parents (2010), in a context in which 41% of the mothers were not married (2010), compared to 20% of them 30 years ago. 14% of the families were single-parent families in (2013) in the USA and 18% in the New Zealand (2013). It is considered to a global level that 16% of the new-born children will not be raised by two parents. Obviously, Romania is also part of this involution democratic process, although a certain social *inertia* is present, partly generated by the lack of *a theology of the contemporary Christian family* – from which, in our opinion, the Romanian Orthodox Church is no stranger: the percentage of 10.8% single-parent families in 1992 increased to 13.5% in 2002, *a slight decrease being observed later*. All these situations – more accentuated in the occidental states and in the urban crowding of the secular citadel (Harvey Cox, 1965), less frequent in Eastern Europe and in the rural environment, *try to coagulate a new modern, occidental and urban family model*, a so-called alternative to the traditional nuclear family – consisting of a father, a mother and children, together with the grandparents – studied thoroughly by sociologists, but which, beyond all this type of considerations, questions the concretisation of all the fundamental psycho-social functions of the family – socialisation, protection, psycho-emotional aspects and social status – even if, the increase of the western wages makes possible materially and financially the model of the *single-parent family*. Without insisting on these aspects, which are more sociological, but which highlight the desacralisation of the society, we will try to underline the involution tendency of the traditional family, the relatively constant depreciation of the ratio between the percentage of marriages and that of divorces. This ratio is not higher than 30% in Romania – 31,324 divorces vs. 107,800 marriages in 2012, and c. 27,000 vs. c. 118,000 in 2014. The ratio is frequently higher than 50% in the western countries: c. 70% in Belgium, around 60% in Spain, Portugal, Hungary and the Czech Republic, while in the USA the value is 53%. These values determine a medium ratio of 47% in Europe; this ratio is already met in Russia, Belorussia and the Republic of Moldavia.

Due to the above present data, we consider that the causal relation between the continuously extended secular social assumption of the modern values and the dialectical thinking, together with the involution of the significance, role and functionality of the Christian family, is implicit. (Rotaru 2006, 251-66). Practically, modernity tends to ignore/suppress the axiological significance of the Christian sense from the moral-theological perspective of the Christian family. By affirming the *elimination of the religion from the social life, which becomes a subjective-problem*, and by the man's determination to live *without the thirst for the lifeblood of the Christian roots...forgetting the spiritual-religious values* (Popescu 2005, 482), modernity transforms the family in a simple form of living together, a formal and non-institutionalised cohabitation between two partners – rather than between two spouses – in an ecclesiological sense, by deliberately suppressing the transfiguring religious dimension that used to characterise the family in Judeo-Christianity. Interacting with the values of the modernity, the institution of the family, which is a family blessed by God – *Your wife will be like a fruitful wine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table* (Ps. 128:3) –based on the *sacrificial love of agapi and not on sexual pathos, subsisting through giving love, confessing the greatest sacrament of life and its origins hidden in God* (Mladin 1969, 355), will lose its transfiguring lines, dissolving its sacrality and relativizing its sacred profound significance. We propose to observe closer this desacralizing process, from the perspective of the causes and of the moral-theological and social-religious contents, as follows.

Modernity and family - the outline of an improper cohabitation

In spite of a certain *positioning/inertia* still pregnant to a social level – because the religious marriage, nowadays, between a man and a woman continues to be dominant, modernity and, next to it, postmodernity contain *in nuce* the ferments of the involution of the family as Christian institution – prolongation and image of the Church established by the Saviour Jesus Christ. (Rotaru 2010, 7). Denying *the guiding and universal [religious] principles and traditions* (Lyotard 2003). Jean Francois Lyotard (Popescu 2005, 249), proposes *the outline of a new model of living* (Runcan 2005, 67) based on the *spell loss of the world* and, implicitly, *the dispossession of the man by the awareness of being ontologically dependent of divine* (Petru 2005, 53). Therefore, modernity will no longer see the family as a finality of a sacramental world, of a sacrament in and by the Church – *Marriage should be honoured by all* (Hebrews 13:4), reducing it to a purely physiologic human act, meant to satisfy the instinctual needs of the spouses, *the consequence of substituting the transfiguration of the religious offering of the two spouses in the unity of the family, ending up in the “recent” man’s egoism and individualism (H.-R. Patapievic), who suffers, in these conditions, of loneliness [...], but who searches, due to missing God, for a real and sincere communion with the other* (Bel 2005, 36).

a) The pressure of the modernity on the Christian family has the origins in the secular attitude of the contemporary society toward the religious faith and practice, substituting the rights of God with the demiurge humans’ rights. In this situation, marked by [the totalitarian and totalitarising instinct [of the modernity] in relation with tradition (Patapievic 2001, 143), the perception of the family as a divine law institution, established through grace and originated in the mystery of the divine unity (St. Theophilus of Antiochia) (Chifăr 1995, 106), becomes less consistent. Through the “recent” man’s desacralizing logic, the family – implicitly the marriage and the children – is simply just human work, subject to and determined exclusively by the aspirations and the needs/instincts of the man. If, by simply living with a partner, the man satisfies egoistically the desires from immanence lacking any opening to transcendence, to God, it means, from the perspective of the modernity, that this form of cohabitation is in essence viable. Opting for a cohabitation form, which is not ecclesiological established, as if breaking free from the ecclesial authority and legislation (Petru, 1995, 50), the “recent” man will consider that he will concretise in this manner his liberty and fundamental rights, also because the European modernity was born from a double [pretended/presumed] opposition: that of the divine rights against the man and that of the human rights against God (Clement 2002, 509).

In this context, we appreciate that the modernity acts social-religiously dissolving on the institution of the Christian family, especially through the vectors of the concomitant – also complementary – process represented by secularisation, which will absolutize *the strict horizontally reality of life, a life radically lacking the possibility to affirm more or less credible transcendent vertical principle* (Patapievic 2001, 87). In this key, the secularisation will claim and impose *the autonomy of the social practices in relation with religion* (Bauberot, 2005, 220) (Bryan Wilson), so the religious institution, beliefs and practices will no longer have relevance and immediate utility to a social level and will no longer be treated by community as representing, as before, fundamental and standalone references. If, during the premodern times, when the Church led, *the life used to develop under the protection of the Powers of the Holy Ghost* – including the Protestant and Post-protestant area, in modernity, the establishment of the Christian family will have, inevitably, the destiny of the other religious values, becoming exposed to the pressures of a

civil society – *a quasi-secular and secular system* (Achimescu 2013, 493), dominated by *the lack of any preoccupations for God and religiosity* (Achimescu 2013, 484).

Concomitantly with the secularisation of the society, the Christian family will be pressured by the axiological relativism of the modernity and postmodernity, which *deny all the other universal valid doctrines, as the unique paradigms and the absolute religious values* (Achimescu 2013, 491). As a result, lacking a divine-human content and sense, *the modern family will end up in relativism*, facilitating the concretisation of the so-called alternatives represented by the *single-parent family* and the civil partnership – no matter the gender of the partners, because *they embody the postmodern spirit that [...] legitimates the relativity*; thus, *relativizing all, the postmodernism risks to legitimate anything, even what is unacceptable* (Stan 1998, 170–74). Due to this libertine destructive relativism, the Christian family, established through the Sacrament of the Holy Marriage, the Holy Church proposes to the society, yesterday, today and forever, a set of ethical norms and moral values, *with an absolute and incontestable character given by their divine origins*, present next to all possible forms of *civil family life*, in accordance to the *logic* of the other cohabitation forms between two partners, legitimated by the secular world.

Finally, we believe that the pressures on the Christian family in the contemporaneity resides also in the fundamental mutations appeared in the “recent” man’s axiological field, respectively in his aspirations and preoccupations exclusively for the tangible world of the material existence. *The values of the consumption society* dominate the western civil societies, while the *false ideals represented by the individual well-being and the unlimited access to material good monopolize the daily preoccupations, subscribing to the verb “to have.”* Therefore, the *recent man* relates exclusively to *now and here in the detriment of to be; today/the moment became the mantra of the human existence; the fulfilment of all promises is followed today and now* (Trif 2014, 8), even with the risk of *losing the earth and the sky and their liturgical mediation, and any transcendence and rooting* (Bel 2005, 33). From this perspective, considering also the undeniable fact that *the human mentality in the postmodern society is closely connected by the economic progress and the material wellbeing* (Achimescu, 2013, p. 489), *the marriage and the family will also connect to the utilitarian value landmarks of the consumption society, compromising once more the religious dimension and the soteriological sense offered naturally and supernaturally by the Church.*

b) Postmodernity brings a new acceptance on family, one that, generalising the axiological relativism, will not be able to operate with anything else that *alternative* and presumed *complementary* models, similar to *the abolishment of the truth of God and the establishment of a public agenda belonging to the man* (McDonald 2015, 55). Assimilating the alternatives to the model of the traditional family and legitimating them based on “political correctness” – questionable and even unfounded many times, the secularised society valued them inclusively from a moral point of view, coagulating the so-called *modern ethic of the family*, which, according to Marguerita Peeters (*The Globalization of the Western Cultural Revolution*, 2007), opposes to the traditional family legally formalised a false form of family through the marriage of the same gender persons, the unregulated partnership, the acceptance and moral validation of any type of sexual behaviour, and the dilution of the parental authority in the favour of the implementation of the children’s rights (Kuby 2014, 107–08). This ethic, willing to quantify to the moral level the *custom* according to which *equal individuals disputes between them the chances to progress and the happiness in society* (Gheorghe Petraru), does nothing more than showing the generalised relativism of the postmodernity and the complete turmoil of its values. Creating

a regime of the subjective liberty that eliminates any absoluteness – inclusively God and the Revelation (Petraru 2005, 50), postmodernity fails into the most radical anthropocentrism; losing the landmarks created and nurtured by religion and religiosity, it will make appeal to the human subjectivism in order to redefine the values and the references that are socially acceptable. It will result an axiological field that, ignoring God and the supernatural revelation, *will reject the idea of aim of the world and its divine sense and fulfillment in God* (Petraru 2005, 48), while family remains only *a victim* of this desacralizing process.

c) In these circumstances, marriage and family will be just empty inside in postmodernity. They stopped representing the divine-human institutions in which they were converted by Christianity – in and through the Church - for the operationalisation of soteriological and ontological finalities. Family, as form of cohabitation, will adapt to the postmodern *spirituality*, assuming theoretically and practically the objective of *abolishing the institutions of any type, most of all the religious institutions – appreciated falsely as constraining and completely exterior to the human individuality and to its fundamental liberties* (Niculcea 2005, 268). Limiting the concept of family to its traditional sense, which put a man and a woman *in a new spiritual relation* (Popa 2005, 151), will be perceived by the “recent” man as *an aggression* on his fundamental rights and liberties, as *an obstacle in the way of the individual self-fulfilment and of the personal creativity* (Ciocan 2005,302). For his physical *fulfilment* in the detriment of the soul, the individualised, not personalised, “recent” man will be aware that the world he lives in *does not accept [anymore] absolutely any institutional norm* (Petraru 2005, 59) and will search for new and various forms of living and expressing emotions, according to the social importance gained by concepts as multiculturalism or diversity, some of them capable to “cover” the most disfiguring forms of social and sexual cohabitation.

d) As presented above, in the European Union, 4 of 10 children are born outside the traditional family. This means that 6 of 10 children are still born from spouses – man and woman, united in a family, many times in a family established under the authentic or just formal patronage of an ecclesial institution. On the other hand, even when the two spouses are atheists or agnostics – which are rare cases – or come from the vast space of the religious indifference, the life together in the form of the family regulated civilly and ecclesial seems to be in essence majoritarian and benefits of the largest adhesion/support of the society. We can only conclude that in spite of the pressures of the modern “spirituality”, the institutions of marriage and family, established between a man and a woman, continues to represent a sufficiently pregnant landmark in the collective mentality. No matter how religiously formal would be, the marriage in church proves that something in the profound nature of the “recent” man is still attached to the traditional Christian values and that, in spite of the implacable way to secularisation, the man tends, at least in the moments of capital importance from his life – marriage and the children’s birth – to rediscover his vocation of religious being, because *the tragedy of the modern and postmodern man [is] the fact that he always misses God* (Citirigă 2005, 239). In fact, no matter how disfiguring the secular world, it cannot elude love. The contemporary individualism and egocentrism, the rush for success and personal gain, and the loss of the community valences of the daily existence cannot suppress love. The love between the spouses, the love of the parents and the love of the children are nowadays the same as in the premodern times.

In fact, postmodernity, preceded by modernism, did nothing more than to weaken – without suppressing entirely, as desired – *the theological acceptance and sense of the marriage and of the family*, to limit somehow its sacred dimensions in which they were

perceived and lived to the levels of individuals and community. Theologically, the fact is perfectly explainable from a Christian perspective, because *God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female he created them* (Genesis 1:27). The man, even wearing after the fall a maculated image of his Creator, the image of *the nature that is beyond any mind, resemblance of the incorruptible beauty, the imprint of the real God* (St. Gregory of Nyssa) (Răducă 1996, 110) cannot completely and definitely eliminate the behaviour related to the search of the communion with God, missing the Creator/ his Father. In the same way, marriage will remain, inclusively in its secular acceptation, an act subsequent to the ideal of restoring *koinonia*, as *God blessed them and said to them: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it"* (Genesis 1:28).

The Christian family – sacramental senses

The marriage and the family are prior to the fall (*Genesis 2:18-24*) and *exists before the pair, because Adam was created in the image of Christ, and Eve in the image of the Church* (Evdokimov 1996, 319). They accompany organically the institution of salvation, to become, in Christianity, *an image of the Resurrection* (St. John the Chrysostom) (Teșu 2005, 58), a reflection in immanence of the Sacrament of the Holy Trinity and, ultimately, a reflection of the *greatness of God* (Mladin 1969, 355). The family – the frame of the “conjugal consubstantiality of the *man– Iș* and of the *woman –Ișa* (Evdokimov 2016, 146), the restoration at a small scale of the ontological unity of the human nature, is the one *confessing the greatest sacrament of life and its origins hidden in God* (Mladin 1969, 355). Because *the meaning of our life is discovered only when we discover our roots deeply planted in the Trinity reality and in the cosmic reality, in Christ* (Popescu 2001, 21), and the marriage and family, completed by the birth of children – as divine blessing (Ps. 128:3-4) are directly connected with the eschatological destiny of the humanity, we consider that *an existence centred one on another, as achieved through the Sacrament of the Marriage, is a sign of the Kingdom, of the presence of God in the world* (Evdokimov 1996,125).

a) The theological senses of the Christian marriage are remarkable due to its *plenitude and grace* (Evdokimov 1996, 87). Therefore, following Christ, the Church places the marriage inside its sacramental work, because *family, based on marriage, is part in the order of the creation* (Vizitiu 2005, 28). In fact, God Himself established the marriage in the Garden of Eden – *It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable to him* (Genesis 2:18) – thus, the family consisting of a man and a woman, made by the hand of God, as Origen says, will gain an obvious ontological and divine-human content. Hence, as Christ showed to the Pharisees – *a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh* (Matthew 19:5) and *what God has joined together, let no one separate* (Matthew 19:6) – the wedding changes radically the human condition and not only because it is based on the work of the Sacrament – *the instrument of salvation and the salvation itself* (Evdokimov 1966, 155). In fact, the wedding relocates and reconfigures the humanity of the two spouses, opening it to another ontological condition, where the original unity is transparent: *the human unity is achieved in the personal and complementary duality of man and woman* (Stăniloae 1997, 120-21). United this way, the spouses will be filled, as one, by the sanctifying grace of the *Sacrament of Marriage. The two will become one flesh...* is an immense ontological and anthropological truth; a renewed being, the man transformed in Church through grace changes, is another one, and the loving working through the blessing of the serving priest repositions the

human being in front of the Creator. This is not accidental, because *the love has an important sacramental aspect, it is as a communication coming from the essences of life, where the creating breath of the divinity can be felt* (Mladin 1969, 355). Love comes to fruition through grace, which gives the meaning of *materiality* of the *Sacrament of Marriage* (Paul Evdokimov). With the help of the grace – divine uncreated sanctifying energy – the love between the spouses is converted in an ontological coagulation factor – *only love turns two beings in a single one* (Evdokimov 1996, 321) (St. John the Chrysostom) – and implicitly restores partially the Edenic humanity. Working through the Christian marriage, love comes to fulfil the general human aspiration to unity – *the man and the woman are not two, but a single being* (Evdokimov 1996, 321) (St. John the Chrysostom) – a unity between people of opposed gender, on horizontality, and with God, on verticality, because, as Vladimir Lossky shows, *the human nature cannot be gathered in a single monad, reclaiming necessarily the state of interpersonal communion and integrating organically in it* (Lossky 1993, 89).

On the other hand, the archetype of the Christian marriage is the “relation between Christ and the Church” (His Holiness Nicolae Mladin, Metropolitan of Transylvania), as well as *Adam was created in the image of the Church* (Evdokimov 1996, 319). Thus, after the prophets of the Old Testament – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea – placed under the auspices of a symbolic relation between spouses the preferred relation of Yahve with the chosen people, in the New Testament, Christ is the husband of His Church – *I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so I may present you as a pure virgin to Him* (2 Corinthians 11:2. Ephesians 5:22-32) – and the Groom (Mark 2:19-30, John 3:29), while the Church is His Bride (Ephesians 5:22-24, Revelation 21:2, 9-10). Following as *type* the archetype of the *Marriage of the Lamb*, the natural order of marriage preserves something from its divine origins. Thus, *the feeling of the divine presence became an inner norm of the conjugal life* (Moldovan 1979, 511), regulating specifically the relations between spouses (Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18-19; 1Peter 3:1, 7), especially as *the head of any man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God* (1 Corinthians 11:3). It is exactly the ordering structure of divine-human origins of the Christian marriage; a structure *communicating the divine life of the Holy Trinity to the humanity and, thus, to the entire Cosmos* (Popa 2005, 149), makes completely void any pretended postmodern alternative to the *Sacrament of Marriage* from the Christian wedding. The renunciation to the divine order of the wedding, together with the deliberated renunciation to its sacerdotal dimension (Paul Evdokimov), suppress the fruition of marriage on an ontological and soteriological plan, while the human nature continues to subsist crumbled, fragmented in egocentric, sometimes antagonist individualities (Lossky, n.d., 212), a contradiction to the exhortation of the Saviour: *whoever does not gather with Me scatters* (Matthew 12:30).

b) Remarking that *the man’s creation, the establishment of the marriage and the establishment of the Church from Heaven are united in a single creating act of God, leading to their close relation* (Evdokimov 1996, 320; Rotaru 2011, 7), Paul Evdokimov does nothing else than underlining the Theandric valences of the Christian family – a nuanced and sacramental potentiated prolongation of the Judaic family, which became exclusively monogamous starting with the decree from 1000 of the Rabin of Mainz, Gherşom Meor ha-Gola (c. 960 – 1028). Theologically speaking, the family established in and by the Church is *an image of the Holy Trinity, a more precise image of the divine realities* (Mladin 1969, 357), somehow making more transparent the perichoretic way of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost of living inside love. *Micro-Church – εχχλεσια μιχρα; according to St. John the Chrysostom, the family is a prefiguration of the*

future communion state – koinonia with the Holy Trinity; starting right in this aeon, the family reconsiders and redefines the relation between the human nature and the human person, anticipating somehow the eschatological affirmation of the ontological unity of the humanity and restoring, at a small scale, the communion beyond the persons' separation, as well as in Christ there is no man side and woman side (Galatians 3:28). Through the family and inside the family, love makes heaven accessible to the earth (Evdokimov 1996, 319–20); established through the working grace and oriented to God – But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15), the Christian family is a whole that finds the achievement of its perfection in the union with God (Losski n.d., 272), a distinct eschatological step (Acts 18:8, 1 Corinthians 1:16), capable to bring to fruition the fragments from the image of God that are still treasured by men.

The saving dimension of the Christian family is highlighted all the more so because the natural love relation between a man and a woman is *weakened and disfigured in many forms after the fall* (Stăniloae 1997, 122). The reciprocal help of the two spouses – a close follow-up of the spouses' love and reciprocal completion – will reverberate soteriological, because, as Kallistos, bishop of Daioklia says, *the supreme aim of marriage is for the husband and the wife to help each other entering the Kingdom of heaven*. United in the Sacrament of Marriage, the man and the woman – the family witnessing the Lord Jesus Christ (Moussa 2005, 170), are solidary in the spiritual ascension. Watching for each other not to fall and not to sin, the spouses are called to transfigure their life, to relate it and direct it continuously to God, aware that the establishment of the family is in itself a major eschatological step, because *the entrance of the spouses in Church for crowning is considered walking on His ways* (Ford 2007, 17). Due to this acceptance, the future spouses are welcomed in the Church with the *Psalm 128 – Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to Him*, while their crowning by the priest is in fact a crowning by God.

c) *Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them* (children) – Psalm 127:5, sings King David, showing the children's fundamental role in the Jewish families in the times of the *Old Testament* (Semen 2005, 9). Indeed, children are a heritage from God entrusted to the man - *offspring, a reward from Him* (Psalms 127:3), a gift from God - *With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man [Cain]* (Genesis 4:1), and an expression of the Creator's love for the man who is subject to death – *The children God has graciously given your servant* (Genesis 33:5). Naturally, due to the fact that *God created the man to breed and to become heir of the Kingdom of Heaven* (Chifăr 1995, 108), the Church appropriated this perspective, enriching the meanings according to the teachings and the work of the Saviour Jesus Christ, because *the children [...] are reflections of the divine love, and reflexes of God among people* (Mladin 1969, 357). Children – fulfilment and finality of the love between spouses, and, most of all, divine blessing, attract an increased care from the Creator – *Don't you know that God takes care of your child more than you?* (St. John the Chrysostom) (Teșu 1995, 58); but most of all they are an infinite spiritual responsibility, which, in substance, is capable to *deepen the essence of marriage* (Stăniloae 1997, 129), as Father Dumitru Stăniloae writes, and to amplify the soteriological valences of the small Church, which is the family.

In fact, the family – father, mother, children, reiterates the *Trinity model of living in the limits of the created nature* (Yannaras 1996, 89). The transcendent archetype of the Christian family is the Holy Trinity. The unity of the family copies the consubstantiality of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, while the love connecting the family makes it also a unitary whole, imitating to the scale of the immanence the love between the three divine

hypostases. Through children and due to them, the love uniting the spouses becomes perfect; relating to the multiple, the love becomes complete, continuously opening and extending; implicitly, love becomes a way of living, while the children – blessing and gift – are the one generating and feeding it (Achimescu 2005,115; Rotaru 2011,5). As result, the voice of Malachi, the prophet maintains its authority nowadays more than ever: *Has not the one God made you? You belong to Him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring* (Malachi 2:15).

Conclusions

Accompanied by the wave of secularisation, modernity tries/tends to suppress the sacramental valences of the marriage and of the family, trying to limit them to a purely human dimension, which, even in the presence of desirable, noble and mobilising energies, remains within the immanence of horizontality, thus lacking the spiritual opening on the verticality of the Cross/ Sacrifice of Communion. It is obvious that the secular marriage has, in modernity and postmodernity, a relatively high social relevance, being the main form of spouses living together, inclusively in the western world, where, even if partially real, the communion and unity state is temporally limited to *today* and *here*. The utilitarian values prevail in the functioning logic of the modern family; *the exclusive materiality of the contemporary existence enslaves the family, its behaviour and its aspirations, at least as long as the human ideals are reduced to “professional success and a consumer-driven life* (Petrucci 2005, 54). Parallel to this vision, emptied by the richness of sacramental senses and significances, the traditional family will be subject to the pressure of the secularising relativism. Therefore, its defining structure – the family composed of a man and a woman, together with their children – became, gradually, a simple alternative, a possibility from a group of possible *solutions*.

As counterbalance, the Christian marriage and family are authentic ways to spiritual fulfillment. In other words, they highlight the most authentic potencies of the human being – to love, to be, to resemblance to the other by the life of communion, and the aspiration to community. It is a dimension that will gain the force of an authentic inner pressure where the dominance of *us* climbs against the egocentric individualism of *me*. Practically, the institution of the family crowns the human quality (...and crowned them with glory and honour – Psalms 8:5) of being created in the image and in the perspective of the divine likeness (*Genesis* 1:26). The Christian family is a divine-human institution- *the sky and the earth, God and the human kind, Christ and the Church* (Mladin 1969, 357). Thus, the family is *ecclesia domestica* – *the small church of Christ*, a space for reciprocal sacrifice and solidary prayer, where the three-folded communion and love – between husband, wife and children – *prefigures the eschatological unity of the humanity*. After the religious marriage, the spouses make together a first important step toward the communion with Christ in His Church. Allowing the grace to transform their existence, oriented to the child, the *family will have sense, aim and scope*, through the love and the sacrifice capacity of *us*, man and woman, who do nothing more than bring Christ in their daily life (*Matthew* 18:20), placing their life under the protection of the Holy Trinity.

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