Family and Family Catechesis in Europe Today.
A Matter of Diversification

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It is the intention of this contribution to explore various aspects of the situation of the family in Europe today: understanding the family. The understanding of the family in analysed in terms of a dynamic approace (the changing family, the family as a system providing philosophical presuppositions as well as the relationship of a person and a family. In a second part we intend to reconsider the contribution of catechesis to family in contemporary European context: diversifications and catachesis, models of family catechesis.

Introductions

Parents and teachers, religious authorities and catechists often voice their concerns about the upbringing of children and youngsters, about the specific aims as regards religious education and the continuity of the ecclesial community. Discontinuity observed in religious practices and beliefs, ecclesial membership and identity, ethical standards among many adults and the young generations represent a rupture with what was considered as untouchable over the past couple of centuries. A disciplined and doctrinally well-controlled European church, still linked with the Counter-Reformation, seems to come to an end.

In this context, the family is often identified as the critical nexus: the place where the future of religion in society is guar-anteed or destroyed. And as the family obviously is shifting in many regards in contemporary society, up to the point that some diagnose that we face the end of the family as a foundational institution, the traditional educational and catechetical responsibilities of the family are shaken. The well-established socialization and education practices of the past don't lead any longer to the expected result. There is a lot of uncertainty about what then should be a valuable alternative.

It is understandable, then, that parents, teachers and catechists are the first ones to be affected by the changes and to be perplexed. They realize that modern equipment or more efficient teaching methods don't address the issue appropriately. The challenges are situated at a more fundamental level and are related to a global change in personal and collective con-

sciousness and involvement with a different type of society.

It is the intention of this contribution to explore various aspects of the situation of the family in Europe today: understanding the family. In a second part we intend to reconsider the contribution of catechesis to family in contemporary European context.

1. Understanding the family: a dynamic approach

From a sociological point of view, the family is an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties (Sociology of family, 2005, p. 212–214). As such, and across different ethnic, cultural, social, economic and political settings, the family is considered as a universal model for organising interpersonal relationships while addressing the complex dimensions of living in a human community: personhood, intimacy vs social relationships, career planning, economic (in)dependency, juridical security, long term aims, etc.

Investigations claim that, worldwide, the traditional family system is weakening, and some welcome this change as they consider the family as an oppressive and bankrupt institution. Different strands of criticism try to support this idea: the family as a bolster of capitalist society; the conjugal family oppressing individuality; the traditional gender role patterns being oppressive for women and being anti-social, etc. But the same investigations highlight how much the family is considered as the supreme value in life. While this seems to be obvious, important changes

however affect both the representation and the concrete reality of families, and of what a "family" stands for in contemporary society. The results of a wide range of investigations do demythologise the wide spread common beliefs about families and family systems. They point out the growing diversity of types of family, family structure and family life styles, not only when comparing nations, cultural regions, social classes, or ethnic groups. Families also differ at various stages of the life cycle, from early marriage through old age. And because of the emergence of an open, globalized society, the impact of macro-social and economic changes, more obviously than in the past, and quite immediately, affects the micro-family units and daily life conditions.

For sure, the manifest changes occurring suggest how much the shift of the world situation is a major issue in the debate about the status of the family today. The family is situated at the cross roads of a dynamic and complex interplay of many influences. The global conditions allowing families to be institutionalised and to guarantee stability and security for the younger generations are no longer stable references one can rely upon. They appear to be changing as well. Families then have to cope with uncertainty at all levels and to invent the basic structure and the meaning of what they intend to achieve when creating a family. What appeared to be the institutional and ideological norm of a family in the past, now is challenged by the flexibility and multiplicity of responses accepted by society when addressing its basic needs.

A sociological study of the family needs to be related with sociology of work and occupation, of culture, of the global society, of the changing status of religion. This is of crucial importance for Governments and ideological institutions when preparing political strategies for supporting family life in contemporary society, for solving emerging new and unexpected problems, and for establishing the most appropriate educational policies.

When raising questions about the implications for family education, for religious education and catechesis in particular, a closer look at what is happening to families today is indispensable. A more accurate understanding of what the family represents in today's society is an important component of Christian hermeneutics. There is no linear link between the contingencies, which affect the identity and concrete reality of a family on the one hand, and the family being a specific experience of Gods presence on the other hand. The Christian value of a family relies upon the recognition – in faith – of traces of Gods presence and the interpretation of its meaning.

1.1. The changing family

The exploration of the changing family here focuses upon the European context (Roussel, 1992). Even within this territorial and historical delimitation, major changes occurred during the past few millennia. Diversity is of all ages. The diversity of family patterns emerged throughout human history. The patriarchal family, which prevailed among the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans is often associated with polygamy (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polygamy#Patterns_of_occurrence (22.01.08)). It is finally the Roman juridical system that was, to a large extend, transferred into both the canon and the secular law of Western Europe – and the Western World. Gradually, besides a global cultural evolution, Christianity played an important role in the transition of the family concept into a monogamist system (http://www.patriarchywebsite.com/monogamy/mono-history.htm (22.01.08)).

When recently, in the 19th century, Western nations began to grant women equal rights with men as regards ownership of property, control of children, divorce, political independence, and involvement in the industrial society, basic changes took place in the structure of the family, the rights and protections related to it.

In Europe, the development of family life is inherently related to the emergence of the welfare State (Kaufmann, 1997). The historical evolution of society in Europe, associated with Modernity and the Enlightenment, is based on the differentiation and growing autonomy of different spheres in society. Particularly the liberal economic system relies on private property, on monetary autonomy, and on the market process. The political system freed itself from the controlling influence of religion and the family. (Post-) modern society promotes diversification of the inter-related, interacting, inter-dependent spheres.

The state, non-governmental organisations and schools then have to take responsibility and offer alternative and complementary educational support. The family, with its new conditions, has to address its

aims in different ways and find its proper place in a complex, diversified society[1].

The European Values Study (http://www.europeanvalues.nl (22.01.08)), started in 1980, and repeated in 1990 and 2000 – a subsequent application is planned for 2010 – is an important tool for understanding the changes as regards values, ethical standards and behaviour, religious attitudes, beliefs and practices throughout the continent, and can now be compared with the World Values Study, a comprehensive investigation of political and sociocultural change (http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org (22.01.08)). The observation of the evolution of the family in European society is an important component of these surveys. When describing the situation of the family under communist regime, it is necessary to recognize the differences between the different countries. E. g., the socialist policy for controlling the status of the family in society functioned in a different way in the Soviet Union in comparison to Poland and Hungary. Perceived from the other side of the, now historical, "iron curtain", the communist family policy seems to have been the only possible way of monitoring the family system throughout the communist block. In reality, the external appearances hide a diversified situation and contradictory policies, which became obvious only after 1989 (Mezei, 1997).

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[1] Cf. the well documented discussion of the multiplicity of families and family life, in Annemie Dillen's unpublished STD thesis: *Het gezin: à-Dieu? Naar een contextuele ethiek, theologie en (godsdienst-)pedagogie van gezinnen vandaag (*The end of the family? Toward a contextual ethics, theology and (religious) pedagogy of families today), Faculty of Theology, Leuven, 2005, p. 48–66.

As regards the question "How important is your family in your life?", in average, the Western European population considers the family as very important: 86%, varying from 80% (Finland, Netherlands) up to 95.50% (Malta). This is an unambiguous statement that confirms the prior value of family life today, despite all the changes and difficulties met by families. When focussing upon Central and Eastern Europe in particular, the responses are less homogeneous: Poland 91.8, Slovakia 87.5, Czech Republic 84.7, Ukraine 82.2, Hungary, Romania, and Slovenia 80, Croatia 79.2, Belarus 78.5, Russia 76, Latvia 72.2, Estonia 68, Lithuania 65.6 (Halman, Luijkx, van Zundert, 2005).

A widespread opinion states that, while family is still valued, marriage is outdated. Again, the results of the Values Study reveal that Europeans don't find marriage an outdated institution. The number of people disagreeing with the statement "marriage is outdated" exceeds 80% in nearly two thirds of the countries, the lowest rate being over 60%. Faithfulness is unanimously considered of outmost importance for a successful marriage. Here, Finland, the British Isles, the Netherlands, and Austria tend to disagree slightly. All the other countries score above the 2.5 rate on a scale 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Throughout Europe, fidelity and personal bond are identified as factors contributing to a successful marriage, although less so in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Children are a stronger contributing factor in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, than in Northern and Western Europe. In Europe, marriage is obviously

regarded as an interpersonal relationship and less so as an institution. A successful marriage is predominantly associated with personal qualities: affection, mutual respect and appreciation, understanding and tolerance (Lombaerts, Osewska, 2004).

The strong emphasis upon the affective and relational dimension is relatively new. And, paradoxically, finds its confirmation in the growing divorce rate and its justification. The failure of the relational quality is an important factor for breaking up the marriage. The increase of the divorce rate is noticed in almost all the countries where the record exists. Young people also tend to postpone marriage or may prefer not to marry. The demanding education and professional career planning are among the important circumstances. As a result, cohabitation is growing and the marriage rate is falling. At the same time, women's extended education, professional career, emancipation, and involvement in political and social issues contribute to the weakening role of women as homemaker, traditionally assigned to women. As a consequence, the number of children is decreasing. In Central and Eastern Europe, the Czech Republic (–2.1), Hungary (–3.8), Russia (–5.3), Ukraine (–6.2) are among the countries with a significant decline of population rate. This is the case in Germany (–0.8) and Sweden (–0.4) in Western Europe, be it in a lesser degree (*Rocznik Demograficzny*, *1998,* p. 399, 374; Lombaerts H., Osewska E., 2004).

By and large then, about the family in Europe, on can observe a decreasing number of marriages, with an increasing age of the first marriage. The number of children in the family is decreasing, while women participate more actively in the labour force (Osewska, 2005). A growing number of women combines both home and job obligations. As a consequence, especially among educated women, the ideal family size is reconsidered; the place and value of children is consciously pondered over and against other interests. The most preferred family arrangement is a two-generation family in their own dwelling (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu, 2006).

1.2. *The family as a system*

The shift of the family from a traditional, nearly static and economically stable institution to a relational, affective and thus more fragile reality needs a different representation in order to understand its dynamic nature (Lombaertsas, 2007). The family, today, is to a large extend the outcome of multiple and uncontrollable influences from outside family, and affecting the interactions inside the intimate sphere as well. The family is situated at the cross roads of many and constantly changing influences. The boundary is weak and cannot prevent the external world from being inside the private sphere and from becoming an influential agent. The family then organizes and reorganizes itself in response to these influences and becomes in the first place an attempt to achieve the balance between the basic and given circumstances, the contingent and unforeseen changes, and the limited and uncertain free choices. The solid and comfortable stone houses or apartments hide the fragile and shifting life conditions and centrifugal processes experienced inside.

Only the government, delegated by the people, has the political responsibility to develop and implement a family policy to make it possible for a large variety of types of family to survive in the neo-liberal European society. But the national policy depends upon the economic, social and political world policy. Europe, for example, is deeply affected by the recent migration and refugee issue, which to a large extend is the outcome of the development in and between the other continents and of the so-called globalization processes at all levels. The struggle for economic and military hegemony is a crucial issue, whereby the official formal democratic institutions find it extremely difficult to overcome the changes initiated by informal, uncontrollable, often violent, even criminal networks. Particularly the weakening impact of labour in the economic system, neutralized by the massive financial market, threatens the security and autonomy of the family. The non-governmental organizations take on a lot of issues and guarantee that fundamental needs are met properly, locally and at an international level. With the emancipation of women and the different role of modern families in society, all families experience similar needs in a complex and hectic society. The needs of child care then are met via many extra-family initiatives and organizations: the care for small children, the concern for children at risk or who disappeared (Child Focus), care for young people, or children and youth with special needs, addressing the violence issue, etc.

External agents set the agenda for family life and offer ready-made solutions for practical problems parents are facing 24 hours a day, for which they cannot provide an outcome themselves. The clothing industry, health services, food industry, transport, schooling, social contacts, sports and leisure organizations, the media develop an intense communication and advertisement interaction with the families. Parents admit that they are no longer controlling the socialization process and education of their children, once they grow up and enter into the complex social reality.

The sociological parameters like birth rate, evolution of marriages and divorces, the evolution of family structure, and the like, explore the symptoms of changes. Perceiving the family as a system highlights the depth of the impact. It is a different reality now to be married, being a child, being a parent, to belong to a larger family, being a family in society… than half a century ago. The family is a dynamic organism which is in continuous interaction with its environment, receiving impulses, responding to the endless opportunities to establish solidarities or antagonisms.

A Modern family has to generate itself the appropriate attitudes, interaction and communication styles for dealing with conflictive circumstances, aspirations, ambitions, individual social networks, etc. The management of the multiple, var-ying, unpredictable interactions among the members of a family becomes a crucial concern for a family guaranteeing its survival, valuing the complementarities of individuation and togetherness, fostering the emancipation of all its members through a proper style of parenting. Changes affecting one family member may change the balance of the family and require special attention from

all the members in order to achieve a new adjusted integration of differences. Because each member is a potential source of change affecting the whole system, many aspects are under threat most of the time. Alternative family structures may be adopted, the status of the parents may change over time, the gender roles may be adjusted, the family size and time spent together may be affected by all kinds of circumstances. Because the standard traditional role models tend to disappear, families organize themselves according to what seems to be possible or desirable in a particular context.

1.3. Philosophical presuppositions

The changes affecting the family system go along not only with basic economic, social, political, cultural, ideological developments in Western society, Europe in particular. These factors also affect a global understanding of society, of the meaning of life, of authority and power, of the dependency of the political order upon non-political principles, etc. A global picture tends to highlight the coherence between the different aspects at stake. The following chart tends to summarize this coherence proper to a particular worldview or philosophical presuppositions on

the one hand, and on the other hand the difference or opposition between different models (Cf. Claude Lefort, 1981).

With the establishment of the European Union and more and more countries joining the Union, the neoliberal capitalist system becomes the main option for a successful and good life on this planet. With a qualitative and prolonged schooling policy, people become more capable of managing their own life. Relying upon critically evaluated information, they develop the capacity to discern among different alternatives and decide for themselves. These are decisive conditions for increasing diversity among people. The underlying pattern, harmonizing the economic system, civil society, the meaning of life, values and ethics explains why families not only have to adjust to external circumstances. The family as a system transforms, restructures itself, adopting a different logic for interacting with society.

The parameters of diversity vary immensely. Because of the open and pluralist orientation of society, people virtually can compose what kind of family they want. The range of possible free choices and the multiplicity of agreed models induce that people are less paralysed by limiting circumstances, starting with the concept or

Traditional (Christian) society	Communist society	Neoliberal society
Essentialist philosophy	communist ideology	Existentialist philosophy
Gods order	(opposed to religion)	Pluralist society
Family property Rural vs industrial economy	plan economy	Neoliberal capitalism Free market
Absolute, universal order valid for all (law)	totalitarian society dictatorship	Democratic society Legislation promoting free choice
uniformity	uniformity	plurality

structure of family one intends to establish (unmarried, married, separated, still married but living alone, divorced, remarried, widowed, single parent, step parent, blended, adoptive parent…), or overcoming fertility problems, handicaps of all kinds, limiting the impact of cultural, ethnological, religious identities.

1.4. Person and family

As a result, not only the family as such, but also each member of a family claims more personal independence in vital areas where the autonomy and identity of a person is manifested: money and consumption, communication and social relationships, sexuality, management of time. People want to control contingent circumstances themselves. The dissociation of stable sexual relationships and parental roles is supposed to address incompatible consequences of personal independence and structural problems. The occurring diversity needs space for negotiation and collective discernment about personal and collective interests in order to find a balance between (inter-) dependence and independence.

In many cases, the recent developments of the concept and structure of the family strengthen the identity of the individual members. From early age on, children and youngsters are less dependent upon parental relationships. Family services, like minding small children, forms of proximity, also with the larger family and acquaintances are negotiated. Several signs highlight the desire of a family to take distance from well-established traditions in Christian Europe. Name giving at birth, for example, often does not rely upon the

names of parents or grand parents or the names of saints. In the traditional understanding, a Christian name is considered as a symbol of the spiritual heritage of a family. This tendency may well induce the loss of an inter-generational awareness. Does it mean that primary families intend to separate themselves from the traditional aspects of parental links? Also, young generations claim autonomy in the choice of a partner and want to manage for themselves their social and intimate relationships.

Nevertheless, to create a family remains a basic aspiration of most people as the place where they can situate themselves socially, and address the desire for personal fulfilment and meaning. People do invest considerably to achieve these goals. For a family to develop strength and stability, able to address all the aspirations, six characteristics seem to be decisive. 1) commitment: the family members are dedicated to promoting each other's welfare and happiness; 2) time: both quantity and quality of time spent together; 3) appreciation: family members genuinely appreciate and respect each other, they affirm and support each others values and aspirations; 4) communication: members of the family develop and use skills of communication and negotiation; 5) spiritual wellness: a family integrates a solid core of moral and religious beliefs, in particular the ability to love and to experience compassion for others; 6) coping with crisis: the ability to reframe difficult situations and conflicts, and to search for help when necessary.

While society becomes more and more open, diversified, less dependent upon uniformity commonly shared ideology or

beliefs, with a weakening institutional support for personal development, individual people and families develop the necessary insights, attitudes and assertively to achieve their projects. Building up a family is not a mere reproduction of an established tradition, but the outcome of a complex and demanding commitment where the members of a family, together, have to solve continually new situations and unexpected challenges (Cf. Stala, 2004).

This new situation evidently creates its proper educational environment, which in many regards differs from what upbringing, socialization and formal education represented in the past. In particular the continuity of religious affiliation is thoroughly challenged by contemporary society.

2. Family education and family catechesis in Europe today

The European context, thus, is a decisive presupposition for imagining the future of Christianity and for developing educational vision and strategies. Catechesis is part of this complex process (Lombaerts, 2007a). In particular, the position and status of religion in a secular, pluralist environment prevents the church to continue its mission on the basis of a traditional "Christian Europe". Parents, their children, Christian communities together have to reflect upon the unique and original features of Christian faith and examine what exactly can make a qualitative difference in the present European context. Religious education is not longer a must in the personal biography. Religion and religious education became a risky endeavour for they can either induce a constructive per-

ception of God's presence, or discourage people (Astley, 2004).

Basic forms of being church

In order to appraise the importance of the challenges referred to for religious education, it may be useful to be reminded of the traditional forms of initiation into the Christian faith and to be situated in the ecclesial community[2] Four levels can be distinguished: 1) family, house church and basic communities; 2) the local church; 3) the diocese; 4) the universal church. While each level represents specific aspects of being involved in the Christian community, with its specific responsibilities as regards initiation and catechesis, difficulties and discontinuities emerge at each of the institutional levels.

1) Family, house church and basic communities. The family is the natural unit for sharing Christian living. Within the informal style, the natural love, the caring atmosphere and mutual recognition, children assimilate and integrate, as an osmosis, the religious images, stories, emotions, vocabulary and language, rituals, relationships, behaviour related to sacred spaces, etc. They enter into the religious universe, which the parents set for themselves and intend to live with their children. This is the first basis for a religious / Christian identity. It all offers the young generation a decisive reference frame that will last for the rest of their life: I was born a Christian – or

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[2] Cf. Wiedenhofer's analysis of the ecclesial faith transmission affected by the tensions proper to church structures, K. Gabriel, a. o., *Wie geschieht Tradition?*, Freiburg, 1991, p. 127–172.

a Jew, or a Moslem, or a non-believer. Within the house church or a basic community, children will meet other people, equally involved in the same universe and living similar commitments. The larger social circle, but still close to the family, will strengthen, and deepen the impressions children experienced with their family. Here children may have a sense of what it means to belong to a community of believers.

2) The local church (parish). The local church is the place where the official membership of the church is established. While the parents already offered a variety of aspects of the Christian tradition, the parish organises the official initiation into the church and into sacramental life, the Eucharist in particular. The parish offers opportunities for children to discover the social dimension of being church and of the commitments Christians take on inside the community and in society. Children also have their first impressions of the relative autonomy of the local church and hear about the interdependence with other parishes, the wider network, the international communion and solidarity.

3) The diocese. The parishes are interrelated and function under the responsibility of a bishop. Within the diocese, bishops act as shepherd, caring for all the aspects of being church locally. While finding inspiration in Gods Word, bishops offer leadership through discernment, decision-making, and government. The bishop is responsible for guaranteeing the authenticity of the formal ecclesial membership of the faithful. He offers support for the commitment of Christians in society and solidarity with their initiatives. The diocese is also the place where diversity and unity are kept in balance, where steps towards progress and change are pondered and implemented.

4) The universal church. The diversity of the church becomes most obvious through the variety of ethnic, social, cultural identities, but even more so because of the differences in faith experience, in theological understanding, in ritual and liturgical traditions, in symbolic expressions. The unity among Christians is highlighted as a promise, a hope, and symbolically represented by the pope. Synods, councils, internal solidarity, and ongoing institutional discernment intend to guarantee a common basic understanding of the Christian tradition and to develop criteria for asserting the authenticity and veracity of the (Roman Catholic) identity in matters of doctrine, social justice, institutional discipline, sacramental life and liturgy, ethics and moral conduct.

Diversification and catechesis

The changes occurring in contemporary society as mentioned in the first paragraph have far-reaching consequences for the involvement of people in a religious context, not only as individuals, but also as a family, as social entities. Over the past four or five decades, religious institutions, had to adjust to a different position and status of religion in society (Lombaerts, 2007b). At government level, the relationship between church and State has been reinterpreted and adjusted to the role of political leadership

in a globalized world. At the level of society, the "secularisation" movement claimed the autonomy of different spheres, politics, ethics, economy, legislation and justice, health care, etc., from any formal religious authority. Hence churches had to deepen, and renegotiate their role in and their contribution to the development of humanity and society. What is the specific contribution of churches for the establishment of "Gods kingdom" in today's context? What are the crucial challenges the church intends to meet in contemporary society?

Such evolution, raising many scaring questions, may invite Christians to withdraw from the threatening secularist society within the boundaries of a pure and unambiguous faith community, with a clear apostolic mission. And indeed, some want to situate religion exclusively into the "private sphere", where churches can live according to their convictions, because religion should not play an active role in the public sphere of a democratic society. This option does not make any sense, of course, as institutionalised religions have a legal status in society, and as such have a public responsibility. A democratic society is committed to guarantee for religions the space and protection for achieving their specific aims. More and more governments and political leaders tend to establish a cooperative relationship with religions in order to work together, be it from different viewpoints and with different tinterests, to solve complex and threatening problems. Precisely such interdenominational cooperation in the context of these commitments also creates new circumstances and perspectives for interreligious dialogue.

The extension of the European Union, now including most of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, with most of these countries joining the Schengen agreement – which includes the abolition of physical borders between the countries – heightens the diversification of contacts, economic ambitions, professional careers, life styles, etc. While still identifying with a national identity, most people now identify with an economic Europe as the main reference frame of a neoliberal capitalist consumer society. These are decisive changes that affect profoundly the life of individual people, of family life in particular.

The changing concept and structure of the family generates different patterns of questioning and understanding life, values, and moral standards, and undermine ideological evidences. Although most people will continue to identify with their historical religious identity (only in the Czech Republic and Estonia a (small) majority are not religious) (*Atlas of European Values*, 2005, p. 71), the majority church is now reduced to a minority church in a secular environment, with a diminishing number of core members *(Ibid.*, p. 72)[3]. The consequences are important for the functioning and government of parishes and dioceses, suffering also from the aging of clergy and overall decline of religious practices. Nearly 40% of all Europeans only attend church at special occasions; 30%, mostly elderly people, visit religious services regularly, another 30% never. Yet a large majority of 75% find a religious service appropriate

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[3] A core member: church members, who attend religious services at least once a month and are otherwise involved in church organisations.

at birth, marriage and death. However the differences among countries are immense (*Ibid.*, p. 62–63). Besides new movements and signs of vitality, a conflictive diversity becomes manifest at all levels and motivates many people to distance themselves from the church. The universal church stages alternative mass events, strengthens its central authority, extends its concerns about issues of social justice, human dignity, political abuses, and heightens its presence in the media to maintain its influence and authority worldwide. However, according to a large majority of Europeans, although addressing spiritual needs, churches are not giving adequate answers to today's social problems (*Ibid.*, p. 65).

Families are deeply imbedded in specific cultural, social, political, and economic contexts, and are very sensitive to changes in society and governmental decisions which threaten their welfare and well-being: migration, work conditions, retirement, child care and schooling, democratic freedom, consumerism, etc. The itinerary of a family is unforeseeable as children grow up and parents get older. Families move from inter-generational to co-generational educational processes with changing parental roles of parents and grand parents. Misunderstandings, conflicts, discontinuities induce different responses to an established Christianity. The traditional initiation of children into Christian faith is maintained at parish level. And still many parents send their children to the preparation for sacramental life, but leave it to the free decision of their children whether to continue with it or not. Religion is easily taxed as irrelevant or secondary in life, especially among the younger generations, in public opinion. This does not necessary mean that they are "indifferent" (Lombaerts, 2004). According to their experiences, family context, personal development people with distinguish between being religious, (a-religious / religious / Christian) spirituality, and being a church member. These fields of interest do not necessarily overlap, but represent important patterns of search for meaning and depth in life. The aesthetic sense is becoming an important form of exploring the religious domain among educated people: religious art, sacred architecture, religious buildings, music, and the like.

Catechesis, then, is challenged to overcome major difficulties. Catechists have to face religious ignorance from the start, as many families don't seem to offer any form of religious socialisation or upbringing. As this basis is missing, the impact of catechesis is at risk. Being reduced to mere cognitive information, to contacts with the rudimentary external aspects of Christianity, without the support of a lived experience or living community, the outcome will be short-termed and considered as pragmatic or simply opportunistic. And those who happen to live in a committed Christian family may not meet the necessary nurturing of their faith. The outcome of catechesis then will be highly diversified according to the kind of family children grow up with, the basic human experiences they may live in the home situation, the family culture, the value attributed to religion, the kind of religious upbringing (images, attitudes, practices, language, questions and answers…).

At the level of the universal church, many efforts intend to unify and univer-

salise the modalities of being a church member across ethnic and cultural boundaries, with standardized doctrinal content and liturgical norms (the Catechism of the Catholic Church). However, the gap between the basic human root experiences, the perception of the religious world, and initial sensitivities on the one hand, the formal, normative presentation on the other hand, may widen and prevent a fortunate development of a Christian identity. The hoped-for institutional continuity presumes that a common doctrine, symbolic universe, and disciplined uniformity will overcome differences. However one cannot eliminate personal ownership and creative interpretation as the most dynamic drives of being a committed religious person, individually and as a (local) community.

As regards the development of a personal Christian identity, one may wonder what the causal impact is of parents religious affiliation, or absence thereof, upon their children. Investigations did observe that parents do have an influence upon the religious orientation of their children. However the picture is more complex or conditional than a linear representation may suggest. What seems to be the most important factor for children is their witnessing the meaning religious faith has for their parents, whether their parents communicate among themselves about religion. As regards the more direct impact, children observe both parents with different interests. On the side of the mother, the church attendance, the intrinsic religious attitude and faithfulness to traditional faith convictions seem to have an impact upon the intrinsic religious attitude of the children. On the side of the father, it is rather his personal experience of Gods presence, and his support of religious behaviour of his children that seems to affect their religious conviction. The influence of parents, thus, is rather indirect, the explicit communication about religion being the critical factor. And even if children are equally religious as their parents, their attitudes and opinions will differ. The influence of society also orients their personal interpretation of being a religious person (Cf. van der Slik, 1992).

Catechesis

Catechesis is supposed to introduce children, youngsters and adults into these four dimensions, as they constitute the dynamic identity of the Christian tradition.

Learning to be fully human within a faith context is a life-time pilgrimage, experienced in a *community-of-faith* situation. In that sense, the family is the *church in miniature* with each member sharing equally in a common baptismal mutual service. Parents catechise their children, but children catechise their parents as well, when asking unexpected questions or offering their personal intuitions, images, fantasies, and creative interpretations. Of course, family catechesis does not only mean formal and informal moments of explicit initiation. It also refers to daily experiences, prayer, a nurturing community, witness of commitment to social justice issues, solidarity, and compassion with people in need. With God's help, catechesis intends to develop an as yet initial faith related to the mysteries of Christian tradition, to stimulate progress towards maturity in faith, and to

nurture day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old[4].

Many specific aspects can be distinguished in the catechetical work. Given the strictly personal journey of children, youngsters or adults in response to what drew their attention, the religious domain deserves special attention. Catechesis should help them to see the link between their discovery and the wisdom of the ecclesial faith tradition, and support their efforts to understand better what attracts them, to pray, to take part in liturgical worship, to join the community, to grow into solidarity with other – less privileged – people, to integrate faith into human life. Of course each person lives a unique story into faith and church membership. There should be space for people to express their faith awareness in a personalized language, to be creative in religious thinking, to use images and (Christian) art. To share what they believe and what faith means for them, in what sense their faith inspires them in their personal commitments and discernment in concrete situations is an essential feature of a dynamic and personalised catechesis.

So far, family catechesis has been associated in the first place with what parents offer their children: the "Christian home" they intend to set up, the deepening of faith with other parents, deepening their experiences, doubts or questions. But it also refers to the catechetical event in the family, which initiates new situations, feelings, levels of solidarity, interdependent searching, responses to influences from outside the family[5]. Catechesis with the family as a whole puts the focus upon cooperation with other families, also including the parish, schools, youth groups, religious groups and other kinds of gatherings or action groups. This network integrates a variety of complementary approaches to the understanding of a faith commitment, which always somehow remains beyond full understanding. Faith commitment remains a mystery and cannot be fully explained or justified rationnaly.

Models of family catechesis

Associating family catechesis with "models" is an attempt to perceive some form of rationality, or systematic intention in the way parents initiate their children into the Christian tradition. Researchers intend to discover these patterns by questioning or observing systematically the practice of religious socialization in a large number of families. Models however do not exist as such, as a tool, or a recipe, or a standardized formula, which can be applied in any family context. The family catechist, or the catechetical

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[4] In the patristic church, still under the influence of Hellenistic Christianity, initiation into faith was related to the *disciplina arcan*i. Cf. Tjeu van den Berk, *Mystagogie. Inwijding in het symbolisch bewustzijn*, Zoetermeer, 1999, p. 83–101. van den Berk highlights the outspoken interest of the primitive church for the symbolic dimension of Christian faith. Catechesis then includes an education into symbolic awareness. *Ibid*., p. 117–134.

[5] Ulrich Beck highlights the importance of the freedom experience by children and youth in today's democratic society for parents: youth as a form and avant garde of one's own life. This offers opportunities for children and youngsters to being catechists for their own parents. Cf. Democratization of the family, *Childhood*, 2(1997/4) 151–168, here p. 161ss; cf. also Jeff Astley, The Role of the Family in the Formation of Criticism of Faith, in Stephen C. Barton (ed.), *The Family in Theological Perspective*, Edinburgh, 1996, p. 187–202.

strategy developed by the parish, or the diocese, or interdiocesan projects may induce what parents try to organize. However, what concretely happens in a family is the outcome of interactive, explicit and implicit, overt and covert communication about the religion as it is perceived in the family itself and in the larger environment. Understanding the family as a system means that de logic of the functioning of a family differs from a mere rational control of events. The family exists because of its interactions with the environment and specific position in a larger network with other systems. Each member is involved in a different whole of relationships with different patterns of interaction with the environment. The reality of the family is then the unforeseen, unpredictable response to the multiplicity of stimuli, and to what the individual members are becoming due to the multiple and diversified ways of being connected.

The here proposed categories for identifying a certain number of models are hypothetical. Official documents and catechetical policies express a logical, often deductive understanding of the initiation process, putting the emphasis upon what parents should be transmitting. The institutional priority would be to guarantee that the young generations, together with the parents, profess the same ecclesial faith, and are faithful to the same religious practices and commitments. In today's context, most families know by experience one cannot impose whatever kind of educational style or religious initiation. Because of the influences from a pluralist and open society, children develop a different sensitivity and way of thinking. The family

develops its own systemic logic, which is the outcome of mutual agreements and negotiations about the question: what shall we do with "religion"? In today's context, nobody escapes this question, as religious affiliation is a personal choice and no longer a sociological evidence. The different options members of a family is often a source of bitter conflicts. In order to keep the peace, religion and religious education become a forbidden issue. Trying to map the diversity of the practical responses is a necessary aspect of catechetical responsibility. It offers the basic information for starting to dialogue with parents and the young involved, and to discern what kind of catechetical process would make sense in a given family context.

The family systemic logic does not necessarily, never fully, coincide with the institutional, rational, intentional, or voluntarist 'catechetical logic'. To allow the pragmatic family logic to reveal its inner search and honesty is an important component for discovering the wisdom of a faith tradition.

1) The *implicit model* of family catechesis, via 'osmosis', does not rely upon an intentional transmittance of faith content or planned and formal moments of catechesis. Parents do not "teach" the Christian faith. Questions about religion are not given too much explicit attention. However, the family practices a certain number of rituals, devotions, exhibits a certain number of religious artefacts, favours religious feasts or events in the local church. Parents may tell bible stories, sing religious songs, or occasionally use religious language to give meaning to circumstances or events. Child-

ren live in this environment and absorb it without much reflection; they take part in whatever is offered and experience the impact according to their age and personal sensitivity or interest. On the other hand, the absence of explicit religious practices will have its 'catechetical' consequences.

2) The *ritualistic model* puts the emphasis upon religious socialization via religious rituals and celebrations. Liturgy and rituals are important in family life. Prayer before and after meals, devotional practices, participation in liturgical celebrations in the parish or other occasions are practiced regularly. Parents take their children to religious events, pilgrimages or celebrations. Priority is given to the lived religious experiences, to being part of religion as an exteriorised personal or social behaviour. Not much is done to support understanding, or provide information, historical or theological insights, to reflect together upon the meaning or the impact of religious practices. In case the religious rituals and practices do not include explicit interpretations of their meaning, Christianity will be reduced to its external appearance and fail to constitute the core of a consciously integrated identity.

3) the *cognitive model* prioritises information and knowledge about religion. Families are concerned to provide the basic understanding and to extend the religious culture of their children. To know facts, to be informed, to understand what the church is professing is considered as an essential dimension of education. Non-confessional knowledge seems to be more important than religious experiences, or practices. One can escape personal involvement, and

stay at the outside of what a religious commitment represents in its inner core. Cognitive understanding does not necessarily lead to grasping the mystery behind the formal information. From an equally rational point of view, religious knowledge can be considered as a "culture", without much relevance for daily life.

4) the *self-management model* is related to a possible rupture of the family tradition. Parents made up their mind, clarified for themselves where they stand in relation to religion and Christian faith. In most cases, for parents, religion is not a major issue. Interesting, important in human history, useful to know about it, but it is not an essential element when discerning about important options in life or decisions. But parents do not want to prevent their children from being personally interested or wanting to identify with the Christian faith and ecclesial affiliation. Thus, they will encourage their children to attend parish catechesis, and to be initiated into sacramental life. But they are totally free to decide for themselves what to do with it later on. To guarantee continuity of a religious faith is not part of the family project. It is left to the individual and private initiative of family members.

5) the *interpretative and communication model* is related to a conscious and well-motivated involvement of parents with the Christian faith. They, for themselves, moved beyond the reproductive dependency and know from their personal journey how much, in today's context, religion is a matter of a clarified and motivated personal commitment. Religion then is, in the family context, a topic of ongoing

conversation. Parents talk about religion regularly and initiate their children in communicating about ones personal discoveries, questions, personal reflections as regards encounters, society, what happens to people elsewhere, the meaning of life, faith, values. Parents try to develop with their children sensitivity for meaning, for the aesthetic and symbolic dimension of life, for the transcendent, religious realm in particular. Well-documented information about the Christian tradition is necessary, but finally, every person has to "work" with it, able to understand a concrete life history in the light of a constant confrontation between "what I live" and "what has been given to me", unexpectedly, beyond imagination. According to this perspective, to be a Christian in this type of family is to be on a journey, personally, and together, the unknown outcome being trusted because of a promise.

6) the *Christian commitment model* puts the focus upon the involvement with other people in establishing a better situation for people in today's society[6]. To be a Christian means to be committed to improve the life conditions on this planet and to build up communities, in which people can experience dignity, respect, justice, and love. Parents are committed according to their discernment, and live up to concrete projects with authenticity, honesty, and humility. For them, the other matters, the final improvement matters, the journey together with other people matters. What

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[6] The awareness of one's responsibility in today's society is also related to a new consciousness of European citizenship. This presupposition orients the interpretation of being a Christian and of the education of one's children.

is experienced and discovered during the journey offers the basic content for perceiving Gods presence and worshipping Him. The commitment is a sacred space of Gods presence among people. They initiate their children into this life style, the starting point for any form of profession and ecclesial membership. Faith tradition is perceived and interpreted according to the genuine, gratuitous 'commitment logic'. Children will have to respond personally to what they discover as major challenges in their lives. Parents refer to their choice as a witness of a God-given response to what life is supposed to be.

The six descriptions being hypothetical, partly theoretical, are complementary and represent dimensions of the catechetical journey into faith. Can they all be integrated into one comprehensive form of Christian initiation? Christian faith never is complete, finished, pure, and all-inclusive. The lie of Christians always is anecdotal, a response to very concrete life conditions, personal options, contingencies, hopes, to failures and limitations, to transforming events and revealing encounters, and is lived step by step, day by day. Meaning is given in retrospect, gradually; when offered beforehand, its prophetic, transforming value may not be noticed.

Family catechesis is not an initiation into a predetermined, static religious world. Is catechesis today still the kind of initiation as imagined and organized in the patristic churches? In our present European situation, with a long history of christianisation and divided Christian churches, catechesis intends to bring children and youngsters on a journey into the progressive discovery of what marks the "soul", of what transforms

a person, a community, and becomes unforgettable, beyond expectation. Only then this discovery can become a lasting ground for a life commitment. Educational support is often associated with "empowerment". Strengthening the personal convictions, motivation, and will to develop a coherent identity and to act accordingly. Empowerment, in catechesis, respects the personal story of a person and intention to live the Christian faith, and encourages to own one's commitments (Dillen, 2005, p. 389).

Catechesis is supposed to awaken the receptive attention for what goes beyond the material, anecdotal, short-term aspects of life and introduces into the world of the Other – for Christians, the God of Jesus of Nazareth (Astley, 2004, p. 414)

The supportive activities will vary from one model to another, even the faith content will be organized, formulated, interpreted in different ways. Families and family members will understand, experience, and value prayer, rituals, family liturgies, gatherings with cluster groups, home church, or basic communities, the reading of Scripture texts, sacramental life… in significantly different ways. These basic experiences are foundational for the development of a Christian identity. They are also responsible for a lasting differentiation within the church. This is not new. Conflictive diversity characterized the church right from the beginning. The differences today, in the European family context are deeply affected by the transition – some call it the great transition – from the 'modernity' way of thinking to the so-called 'postmodern' way of thinking, from the close connection between church and political authority to the separation between church and state, from a socially integrated Christianity to a post-Christian thought pattern, from a homogeneous religious situation to religious and philosophical pluralism.

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ŠEIMA IR ŠEIMOS KATECHEZĖ ŠIŲ DIENŲ EUROPOJE. KLAUSIMO DIVERSIFIKAVIMAS

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S u m m a r y

Per pastaruosius keletą šimtmečių atrodė, kad religinis tapatumas ir etiniai tėvų bei vaikų santykių standartai yra neliečiami, tačiau drausminga ir doktriniškai gerai kontroliuojama Katalikų Bažnyčia Europoje dabar išgyvena permainų metą. Religingi tėvai ir mokytojai dažnai reiškia susirūpinimą dėl vaikų ir jaunuolių auklėjimo, nes būtent šeima yra ta vieta, kuri religijos ateitį visuomenėje garantuoja arba sunaikina.

Kadangi šeima šiuolaikinėje visuomenėje keičiasi tiek, kad netgi diagnozuojama jos, kaip pamatinės institucijos, pabaiga, tradicinė šeimos katechezė patiria krizę. Šiuolaikinė įranga ar efektyvesni mokymo metodai neveiksmingi, nes iššūkiai yra fundamentalūs, susiję su globaliu asmeninės ir kolektyvinės sąmonės pasikeitimu. Įprastai edukacinei praktikai neduodant rezultatų, kyla alternatyvos klausimas.

Šio straipsnio tikslas – ištirti įvairius šeimos situacijos aspektus šių dienų Europoje ir aptarti, kuo ir kaip šiuolaikinės Europos kontekste katechezė gali padėti šeimai. Pirmoje dalyje pristatoma istorinė šeimos modelio raida; šeima analizuojama kaip sistema, kuri garantuoja visuomenės tvirtumą ir stabilumą. Antroje dalyje apžvelgiami katechezei kylantys iššūkiai dėl skirtingo gyvenimo būdo, vertybių ir moralinių standartų supratimo; pristatomas naujas požiūris į religinį ugdymą. Krikščioniškos bendruomenės kviečiamos reflektuoti savo tikėjimo unikalumą ir nustatyti, kas iš tiesų turi kokybinę reikšmę dabartiniame Europos kontekste; persvarstyti savo vaidmenį ir įnašą į žmonijos ir visuomenės raidą.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: šeima, šeimos katechezė, visuomenė, religija, krikščionybė.

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