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## Christian Family as a Foundation of the New Evangelization

### 1. Introduction

“It is zeal for your house that has consumed me”<sup>1</sup> is a shout of the author of the scriptural book of Psalms. The zeal for the kingdom of God is one of the essential characteristics, by which disciples of Christ can be recognized. From the apostolic age up until the present time, proclaimers communicated the good news of the gospel from generation to generation because of their zeal. At the celebration of 1250 years of Christianity at Ljubljana in Slovenia, Pope John Paul II. out that every generation has to decide for Jesus Christ on its own<sup>2</sup>. If Christianity has been communicated from generation to generation for all this time, it means that parents with word and example communicated the message of the gospel to their children. And on the basis of Christian example of parents, their children usually in adult years decided for a personal relationship with Christ. With that type of communicating from generation to generation Christianity has been accepted also by the generation that lives today.

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<sup>1</sup> Ps 69:9.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Speeches in Slovenia*, Ljubljana 1996, no. 22.

Perhaps it seems a matter of course that on the basis of long-standing historical experience the continuity of proclamation will proceed in generations that come after us. But from the second half of the 20th century we have witnessed an extraordinary technological development of the world that established a different way of life and that has had consequences for areas of proclamation and of life according to the gospel<sup>3</sup>. Due to the benefits of technology, a person is not so much dependent on others anymore and that directs him on an individualistic way of life and because of this, interpersonal relationships have weakened. Whilst for centuries the proven ways of the evangelic approaches were in operation, they became inefficient practically overnight. The reasons for this can be seen in a lax condition, in which matrimones and family communities found themselves, too. We witness a great number of divorces and subsequently changes of partners<sup>4</sup>. And parents of children who come from that type of community, are more occupied with themselves than with the education of their children. However, the Christian upbringing of children includes religious education too, and so it is – partially because of the above-mentioned situation of parents – more difficult to communicate the message of the gospel to children. The Second Vatican Council confronted with problems of family and defined Christian family as a domestic church, which is the first one responsible for the proclamation of the gospel to its children<sup>5</sup>.

Fifty years on from the time of the Council, we cannot say that the Church accomplished everything that the above-mentioned Council had proposed. This is especially true for Europe, part of which is Slovenia. At the break of millennium we celebrated the Plenary Council of the Church in Slovenia, which has proposed directives for the future, and in this pastoral year the Slovenian Bishops' Conference prepared a pastoral plan of the Church in Slovenia. With the pastoral plan a continuity of the Second Vatican Council and of the Plenary Council of the Church in Slovenia is established. In pastoral planning for the future it is of an existential importance that the Christian family, which should get a place of priority in pastoral planning, receives a visible role. It is necessary to survey the situation of the Christian family as it has become too isolated in the last decades and at the same time been pushed on the edge of social activities. Prior to that parents and children were included in an intergenerational family community, which gave all-round support to an immediate family. Today, in a technologically developed

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Constitution Gaudium et spes*, no. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Constitutio Lumen gentium*, no. 11.

world, there are no intergenerational families anymore and for this reason parents and children are in general left to themselves. Therefore it is necessary to include the Christian family in the community that will be able to give ear to its needs.

The synodal fathers have spoken at the Synod of Bishops on the new evangelization about the incorporation of Christian family in the process of the new evangelization. The Synod has proposed the assistance of grandparents to parents on behalf of Christian education of children<sup>6</sup>, which would represent a step in the direction of cooperation between generations. When reflecting upon plans for the future evangelization, it is necessary to proceed from the past, which means constant return to the sources. The fundamental book for Christians is the Scripture and therefore it is necessary for pastoral planning to proceed from the very beginnings of the Sacred Scripture.

## 2. The basic emphases in the Sacred Scripture

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”<sup>7</sup>. When we read the accounts on creation in the Sacred Scripture, we can – beside the spiritual message – identify the message of nature, which means that the account is not meant for the faithful only, but for all the people. Even those who do not believe in God are also aware that the world has not been always as it is today and that it is a consequence of natural processes. Whether it has come into existence by an evolution or by a creation is of a secondary importance. Both theories, the evolutionist and the creationist, are about origins of the space and of the world. The fact is that the above-mentioned theories and the account in the Sacred Scripture do not contradict but complement each other. However, the problem arises when we start to interpret the account on creation with a scientific method and for this reason we come to disagreement with advocates of one or another or even of some third theory. The author of the account on creation and the advocates of various scientific theories claim that the world has come into existence and that it came into existence in some kind of a progression. However, the difference between the author of the account on

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Synodus episcoporum bulletin*, XIII Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. URL=[http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino\\_25\\_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02\\_inglese/b33\\_02.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b33_02.html) (11.12.2012).

<sup>7</sup> Gen 1:27.

creation and the scientists is that the author of the account asks himself: “Why the world has come into existence?” whereas the scientists ask themselves: “How the world has come into existence?”

In the Sacred Scripture the author especially exposes the creation of man as a climax of God’s creation. Human is the only thing among the objects and living creatures which is in the image of God<sup>8</sup>. To be in the image of God means to have the ability of giving love by yourself. God is the one who is the perfect love by himself<sup>9</sup>. The love is exchanged between the three persons in God and therefore God is triune. Because God has placed love in human, he realizes this love in the relationship with God, with the neighbour and with himself<sup>10</sup>.

God created man and woman so that they would search and find God, who is love, in each other. In Christianity, the love between a man and a woman is crowned with the sacrament of the holy matrimony, so that they as a husband and a wife would totally surrender to the love of the God which is manifested in their relationship. The sacramental love proceeds from the creation and is finally confirmed in the cross of Jesus Christ<sup>11</sup>. “The cross and the resurrection is not something that we should just believe in during our lives, but it must be lived; this is the basis of the matrimonial spirituality and of the concreteness of the matrimonial life. If a marriage is in the sign of the cross, it means that it is feed with an irrevocable faithfulness of the God”<sup>12</sup>.

We find one of the most perfect descriptions of love between a man and a woman in the Song of songs. The love between a man and a woman represents the love between God and God’s people. Christianity sees the love, with which Christ loves the Church, in it. The account on creation, the Song of Songs, the teaching of Jesus on marriage, etc. represent an ideal, which was not reached by anyone so far and which no one will reach because of the sinfulness that is rooted in everyone among us. But it is necessary to aspire to this ideal with the cooperation with the mercy of God.

We can read in the Old Testament already that people, because of their selfishness, caused by sin, interpreted marital community in their own way. So Moses allowed

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Gen 1:27.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. 1 Jn 4:7.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Mk 12:30–31.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Phil 2:8.

<sup>12</sup> M. Turnšek, *The Theology of Individual Sacraments*, Maribor 2001, p. 127.

the possibility of a divorce even in the cases, when a husband found something objectionable regarding his wife<sup>13</sup>.

When Jesus claims that he came to fulfil the law<sup>14</sup>, he thinks also of understanding of a marital union. When he was asked by the Pharisees: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”<sup>15</sup> he responded that Moses allowed the divorce because of the hardness of heart, but from the beginning it was not so<sup>16</sup>. Thus Jesus’ teaching confirms our deliberation from the beginning that love between a husband and a wife derives from God and that they are associated in God’s love as “one flesh”<sup>17</sup>.

The first so-called summary in Acts claims that those who believed were “of one heart and soul”<sup>18</sup>. To be of one means to be associated in the body of Christ. A married couple, which is an image of love between Christ and Church that is described by Paul in the Epistle to Ephesians<sup>19</sup>, is primarily called to be “of one heart and soul”. However, the culmination of Paul’s deliberation on love is a hymn to the love in which he depicts what it means to live the real love<sup>20</sup>. Love bears all things and never ends<sup>21</sup>. Jesus on the cross bore the greatest torments and so he demonstrated that love goes to the end and also beyond death. A genuine love can proceed only through the cross of Christ as the sacrifice for other is of an essential importance. Like Jesus Christ once and for all rose from the dead and overcame death, love never ends. “God is love”<sup>22</sup>, said John the apostle. God is immortal because of his very essence, which is love. The more the love of the God is realized between a husband and a wife, the more the love is present in the activity of the Church.

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Deut 24:1–4.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mt 5:17.

<sup>15</sup> Mk 10:2.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Mk 10:5–8.

<sup>17</sup> Mk 10:8.

<sup>18</sup> Act 4:32.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Eph 5:21–33.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 13.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 13:7–8.

<sup>22</sup> 1 Jn 4:8.

### 3. The role of Christian family in the Church

Let us put forward the person of Anthony of the Dessert as an example as it is known about him that words of the gospel, which he heard in church at the divine service, completely altered his life. When he heard the words of the gospel: “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me”<sup>23</sup>, he decided to liberate himself of any material goods and to retreat in the solitude, where he would live as a hermit and witness for Jesus Christ. If we look at his decision mere superficially, we could conclude that he suddenly decided on such a radical way of life, without a preceding Christian basis. But his biography tells us that his parents were “an example of godly life”<sup>24</sup> which means that the Christian education provided by his parents had essentially influenced his decision.

When Christianity became a state religion in the Roman empire, the political system was formulated in such a way that it was practically impossible to survive without at least a juridically formal decision for Christianity as the principle of the separation of Church and the state was not enforced yet. The form of government in which the Church was separated from the state gradually became enforced from the French Revolution onwards<sup>25</sup>. This began to happen in the 18th century, in the time of Enlightenment, and this idea stresses that human is what is captured in his physical and mental circle. Simultaneously with the Enlightenment occurred the secularization, which incises in human thinking with the separation of earthly realms from realms that exceed human.

The Church did not officially respond to the phenomenon of secularization until the Second Vatican Council. In the constitution on the Church in the modern world *Gaudium et Spes*, human relationship to earthly affairs is defined<sup>26</sup>. Liberalism, which puts human individual satisfaction on the first place, has with the occurrence of the Enlightenment begun to strengthen, and therefore the common good began to lose its value and that also brought consequences for the realm of family life. The consequence of this was the increasing number of divorces, which

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<sup>23</sup> Mt 19:21.

<sup>24</sup> Čuk, *A Saint for Every Day*, Koper 1999, p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Holzer, *History of Church in a Hundred Pictures*, Ljubljana 1995, p. 362.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no. 36.

means that the significance of the sacramental nature of Christian life has been more and more lost<sup>27</sup>.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council and the documents of the Church that were issued after the Council define a fundamental mission of the Christian family. The Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* claims: “The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children”<sup>28</sup>. Father and mother are playing a role of primary proclaimers of the gospel and that is the starting-point for the pastoral workers, especially for catechists in religious education, who upgrade the first spiritual experience of children that takes place in their families. The constitution notes that “husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children”<sup>29</sup>. Today the essential task of a Christian is to be a witness and this is particularly true for parents, who are a child’s first educators and witnesses of faith at the same time from the very moment they give life to their child. If parents in the power of sacrament of the holy matrimony live in the love of Christ, it has an essential meaning for the Christian witnessing in the family circle.

The Constitution of the Church in the modern world speaks also about the role of the Church in the society that changes. For a society in which changes in the outer world are something of an everyday occurrence the fact that God is unchangeable and that he has to be placed in the centre of the changing world is even more important<sup>30</sup>. Parents in Christian families, who raise their children in today’s world, place God in the centre of family life with their Christian life. “With their parents leading the way by example and family prayer, children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness. Graced with the dignity and office of fatherhood and motherhood, parents will energetically acquit themselves of a duty which devolves primarily on them, namely education and especially religious education”<sup>31</sup>.

Education in the family is of an essential importance for a child’s life in adult years. Since Christian education is provided simultaneously with human education, the Christian life of children depends on parents to a large extent. When we speak

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. Turnšek, *The Theology of Individual Sacraments*, Maribor 2001, p. 125–130.

<sup>28</sup> Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Lumen gentium*, no. 11.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 35.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no. 44.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, no. 48.

of catechetical education, it is too late to start a holistic catechetical education in the first year of religious education as it should already start with the preparation for marriage of couples that are willing to give new life to children<sup>32</sup>. For this reason it is necessary to endeavour towards a quality catechetical education of adults, especially of parents.

Ten years after the Council Pope Paul VI. in the Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* claimed: "Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighbourhood of which it forms part"<sup>33</sup>. Paul VI. realized that the proclamation of the gospel is not finished once and for all, but that it must be proclaimed everywhere and every time. It is also important that to proclaim the gospel does not mean only to give someone something that he lacks, but that the proclamation of the gospel comes back from the addressee and that so the proclaimers become even more permeated with the gospel.

Paul VI. was succeeded by the somehow forgotten pope John Paul I., of whom it can be said that despite having a short pontificate he brought the mission of proclamation even nearer to the parents as he defined God as a Father and Mother<sup>34</sup>. Because of this view of father and mother as bearers of family religious education, they could be even more aware of their role of God's substitute. With the definition of God as Father and Mother the pope pointed up to the roots on the beginning of the Sacred Scripture, where the account of the creation says that God created man and woman in his image<sup>35</sup>.

Pope John Paul II. has in his twenty-seven-year pontificate enriched the Church with numerous documents that refer to the family, among which a place of priority belongs to an exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, in which the pope speaks on the role and the mission of the Christian family in the modern world.

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. John Paul II., *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*, Ljubljana 1982, p. 66.

<sup>33</sup> Paul VI., *Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Ljubljana 1976, no. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Guimarães Atila Sinke, *Is God a Mother?* URL=<http://www.traditioninaction.org/HotTopics/a009ht.htm> (06.12.2012).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Gen 1:27.



Pope John Paul II. in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* claims that married couples with the sacrament of the baptism receive a charisma for an authentic evangelical discernment in various situations and cultures<sup>36</sup>. He points out that the message of the gospel belongs to every age and every culture. Moreover, the service of married couples, which in the power of the sacrament of the holy matrimony witness for the evangelical discernment in the world, especially in the circle of their family, is pointed out.

The pope points out that marriage and virginity are two ways that are given to the people for choosing and realizing the vocation of the human person to love in one's entirety<sup>37</sup>. It means that a Christian can live an evangelical life only in the conscious decision for single life for the sake of the kingdom of God or for marriage for the sake of the kingdom of God alike. Any other type of living is not in accordance with Christian revelation and that is why it is necessary to pastorally act in such a manner that those Christians who have not yet made a life decision either for marriage or for virginity, direct their lives to the decision for one or another option.

John Paul II. is aware that an unbelief and secularism are strongly present in the world. He sees the mission of the Christian family as the only alternative to this situation: "In places where widespread unbelief or invasive secularism makes real religious growth practically impossible, 'the Church of the home' remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis"<sup>38</sup>. And this is especially true for Slovenia as there is no religious education in the school system nor is public opinion favourable towards the Church. The pope has given a commission to episcopal conferences to prepare directives for pastoral care of the family<sup>39</sup>. The Final document of the Plenary council of the Church in Slovenia in the chapter on the life in the Church points out the pastoral care of the family<sup>40</sup>. The Church has to support the family and to accompany it through all stages. The preparation for marriage must be particularly good as it should establish the foundations for the entire family life. For this reason the Plenary council deals with the pastoral care of youth immediately after the pastoral care

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*, Ljubljana 1982, no. 5.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ibidem*, no. 11.

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, *Ibidem*, no. 52.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Ibidem*, no. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Final Document Plenary Assembly of the Slovenian Church*, Ljubljana 2002, no. 304–307.

of the family<sup>41</sup>. The goal of the pastoral care of youth is to prepare young people for the life decision. Regarding the education of youth it is of a crucial importance to educate them for living in a community, because this is an alternative to the individualistic orientation of a modern human.

The General Directory for Catechesis speaks about holistic pastoral care and systematically analyses catechesis for individual periods of life<sup>42</sup>. Regarding Christian education in the chapter on ministry of catechesis and on catechists in particular Churches it stresses the principle of subsidiarity. In the Christian community everyone is responsible for catechesis according to his or her mission: bishops, priests, parents, religious catechists, catechists and lay catechists<sup>43</sup>. Parents, who receive in the sacrament of the holy matrimony a grace and responsibility for the education of their children, are the heart of the catechesis. For this reason a quality preparation for marriage, which also contains a preparation for the Christian education of children, is urgently needed. It is also necessary to stress that the preparation for the sacraments should not be directed to the particular sacrament, which candidates would like to receive, but an individual sacrament should be included in the complex of all sacraments. Namely, all sacraments derive from Jesus Christ and are therefore inseparably intertwined.

Thus, if an engaged couple is preparing for marriage, this preparation should include the preparation for baptism of a child, too, and a renewal of conception of the sacraments of reconciliation and Eucharist as well. And because disease is also a part of life in the family, it is necessary to speak of the meaning of anointing of the sick. In the period of growing up, children who come from Christian families start to decide for their life vocation and also for the life decision of marital or virgin status. For this reason it is also necessary to devote a part of the preparation for marriage to the sacrament of holy orders and to the religious vocations.

Church documents divide preparation for marriage into a remote, proximate and immediate preparation<sup>44</sup>, which means that a person already starts to prepare for marriage in childhood, when the remote preparation commences. The proximate preparation commences with an engagement or when a man and a woman decide that they would live in a marital community for the entire life. This is the time

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 327.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, Ljubljana 1998, no. 171–188.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, no. 217–232.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, Congregation for Catholic Education, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage*, Ljubljana 1997, no. 22–59.

when an engaged couple prepares for marriage in various courses. However, the immediate preparation especially stresses the spiritual meaning of the matrimony so that the engaged couple becomes aware of the importance of prayer and of liturgical celebration of the matrimony.

In our time, when secularisation has also reached Christian family, it is not a matter of course that parents will – deriving from their spiritual experience – provide Christian education for their children. It was for this reason that was reasonable to stress the catechetical education of children in the parish religious education in the past as they already acquired the foundation of religious experience in primary family. But many Christian families do not justify the title “domestic Church” today and for this matter it is necessary to put the Christian family with its spiritual experience, which would with the power that was received from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ implement the new evangelization, on the place of priority in the programme of new evangelization. It is also necessary to provide for a Christian family so that it would continuously deepen its Christian life, which means that it is necessary to provide new spiritual accompanists, who will strengthen and confirm Christian family for the evangelical mission.

#### **4. Family and other forms of cohabitation**

The term new evangelization refers particularly to those who are normally baptised, but for whatever reason they do not live a Christian life in fullness. Among them are also people who live in communities that imitate the so-called ordinary family. Among these communities are the divorced and remarried, single-parent families and heterosexual and homosexual cohabitations. According to Christian teaching we are all loved in the eyes of Christ and therefore it would be wrong not to include all the members of the above-mentioned communities into the process of the new evangelization. Not just those who in the eyes of the world have a settled relationship are called to recognize the truth of the gospel. Those who in the eyes of the Church do not live according to Christian principles are especially pastorally challenged.

The first condition which is necessary for performing the new evangelization is to confess to ourselves that various marital communities exist among us. Whether we call those marital communities families or otherwise is not of crucial importance. But there is no doubt that the community of a man and a woman who in faith received the sacrament of the holy matrimony is called a Christian family. The man and the woman placed with their conferring of the sacrament of the holy

matrimony Christ in the centre, means that as a husband and a wife and as a father and a mother they took upon themselves the responsibility of proclamation of the gospel in the name of Jesus Christ. And this means that with a Christian life they can give an example to those that cohabit in other types of marital communities, too. Namely, to be a witness of Christ means to lead with the life, in the centre of which is Jesus Christ, the way to the redemption for those who do not know him or who get away from him.

Although the divorced and remarried couples perhaps cannot be given as an example of Christianity, it would not be right to exclude them from the process of evangelization. In this sense we think that even those couples could be one of the bearers of the new evangelization, especially for the matter of proclamation of the word of God. By going through the cross of divorce they did not necessary reject Christ. If living in the past marriage has become unbearable, for example, because of alcoholism of one of the spouses, the other spouse just wanted to make a human frame for his or her life. It is true that divorced and remarried cannot receive a sacramental absolution and go to a Communion, but it does not mean that they are excluded from the Church because of this. Still, those couples are especially called to read and to meditate the Sacred Scripture, which is one of the foundations of Christian life<sup>45</sup>.

Beside the classic family we mostly encounter communities of cohabitation in western society. A vast part of parents from those communities sends their children for religious education and so they are connected with the parish, especially in the time of a primary school religious education. So it is necessary to use this time to address those parents and to communicate them the meaning of sacrament of the holy matrimony. We could also include married couples and families that live in personal empirical relationship with Christ in the process of the new evangelization of the cohabited couples. Their experience could be communicated on regular meetings for parents of children that attend religious education. For this reason it is necessary in the sphere of parish catechesis to establish a regular form of catechesis for parents, in which Christian married couples would be bearers of it.

On the subject of the communities of cohabitation we cannot overlook same-sex communities, which have become reality in today's world. Despite diverse opinions on those communities it is not possible to avoid the fact that it is necessary to proclaim the gospel even to those people as the message of the gospel excludes

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<sup>45</sup> John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*, Ljubljana 1982, no. 84.

nobody<sup>46</sup>. Evidently, the debate on the same-sex communities is limited to moral questions and there is much less discussion on the formation of pastoral work with those people. However, we always have to bear in mind that every human, irrespective of his moral status, is loved in God's eyes. Besides, it is necessary to know that the very essence of Christian proclamation are not moral norms, but the cross of Christ.

Apart from that, it is necessary to point out that the Church is perhaps too much dedicated to the so-called elite groups, which means that we are too much occupied with those, to which the gospel is already proclaimed, and that we include the evangelized in the evangelization of the non-evangelized too little. Because of this a wall around those groups has been built, which could in long term cause a reticence and a separation from those, to which the gospel should be proclaimed.

## 5. Pastoral priorities of the Christian family

It is necessary to stress that the Christian family is not an institution which is worth more than other living communities, but that we deal with it – primarily because of pastoral intentions – as with an institution responsible for the proclamation of the Gospel. Also priests are worth no more than other people, but are in a special way called to the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel. At the same time priests, who are appointed in service to a certain pastoral unit, are responsible for delegating pastoral tasks according to the principle of subsidiarity. In case of activities of a parish, which is the prevalent pastoral unit in the Church, the priest is responsible for the setting up of a Christian family in the proper place in the life of a parish, so the family can by word and by example proclaim the gospel<sup>47</sup>.

Besides, it is necessary to point out that pharaonic way of management<sup>48</sup> mostly predominates in the pastoral approach in the Church in Slovenia, which means that most of the pastoral activities are carried out in the presence of a parish priest, in spite of the fact that the Second Vatican Council clearly defined priesthood of all believers, which is that all the Christians, especially the community of Christian family, are in service of the Gospel<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Mt 28:19.

<sup>47</sup> *Code of the Canon Law*, Can. 519.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Ex 18:13–22.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Decree Apostolicam actuositatem*, no. 2.

If we follow the first chapters of the Sacred Scripture about the creation of man and woman that are authorized by God to manage the creation in his name<sup>50</sup> and if we believe that the word of God holds true for all times, hence it follows that a mission of human is outlined in that direction today, too. Life community of a man and a woman is a basic community, in which human can serve God. It would be appropriate, if we would elaborate a pastoral plan on the level of episcopal conferences, which will set up Christian married couples in the process of evangelization that they would manage God's creation in a proper way today, too.

The pastoral responsibility of Christian family derives from a sacramentality of Christian matrimony. The sacrament of the matrimony is a sign of "an eschatological banquet of Christ and his Church"<sup>51</sup>. The essence of Christian life is in that a Christian with his life in the world displays a realisation of the kingdom of God in the present moment. A Christian married couple with a sign of the love of Christ realizes God's creative plan in the present time. Their fertility is shown in their faithful relationship with Jesus Christ and in their giving of a new life. And when they give life to their children, the sacramentality of their matrimony directs them to the responsibility of giving a Christian education to their children<sup>52</sup>.

A married couple as a head of Christian family can be with a life according to the word of God and according to the sacraments among the first pastoral co-operators in the parish. As close co-operators of the parish priest they could take over the key pastoral tasks in the parish, especially in the sphere of proclamation. The most important pastoral mission of a Christian family is to live in a close personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The personal relationship has a place of priority and hence it is a foundation of pastoral planning. Like the Holy Eucharist is in the centre of life of the parish, in the centre of the Christian family is a life from the Holy Eucharist of its members<sup>53</sup>.

As individual family members are included in different pastoral groups, the whole Christian family is included in the life of the Church. Married couples could be responsible for the preparation for marriage of those who want to become married. Likewise, married couples could bear responsibility for the preparation for the sacrament of baptism as they could communicate their own experience of educating a child in the Christian faith to the parents of the baptised. Likewise,

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Gen 1:28.

<sup>51</sup> M. Turnšek, *The Theology of Individual Sacraments*, Maribor 2001, p. 116.

<sup>52</sup> *Code of the Canon Law*, Can. 1055.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, Ljubljana 2003, no. 34–46.

married couples could assume responsibility for the catechesis of children. Children from Christian families could assume responsibilities according to their age (as animators, scout leaders, leaders of youth groups, children and youth choirs, etc.). In the case of this type of pastoral approach we can speak of the holistic approach to the process of evangelization. Those who proclaim and those who are the recipients of the proclamation are of various age and from various generations. In this way the mentality of people who think of Christianity as a deed, which is directed merely on the admission of individual sacraments, can be changed, as this brings Christian life in many cases to a conclusion. With a holistic approach we can create a mentality which comprehends Christianity as a process that lasts for life.

## 6. Conclusion

In the world that is full of the most heterogeneous material and spiritual offers it is hard for a human as an individual to orientate oneself – as a Christian individual, too. A human is challenged more than ever to know how to distinguish between what is good for him or for her or for the community, in which one lives, and what is not. To know how to distinguish is presupposed by human psychophysical and spiritual maturity. On the basis of an integral maturity one can responsibly take challenges of life. In today's world it is not enough for a Christian to live Christianity mere on the basis of traditional heritage, but one has to whole-heartedly respond to the invitation of Christ: "Follow me"<sup>54</sup>. However, to follow Christ does not mean to go on an easy way, but to accept the cross of Christ as a whole in the form of troubles, which occur in the time of one's earthly life. This also means that a disciple of Christ does not bear the cross alone but with a help of Jesus Christ and the community, which is his prop. In that way, a Christian community that is "of one heart and soul"<sup>55</sup>, can search for the right way which leads to the eternal life, in the vigour of the cross.

Christians lived in a genuine connectedness in the first three centuries, when they were prosecuted by the then Roman Empire. The community had been giving them support and energy for everyday life. When in the year 395 Christianity became a state religion, the strong support was no longer necessary as Christians were protected by the state. But a good 1600 years later Christianity has again become

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<sup>54</sup> Lk 9:23.

<sup>55</sup> Act 4:32.

a foreign object in the empire of the materialistic world. If Christians would like to further live and proclaim the gospel, they will have to connect with each other in a similar way as they did in the first three centuries. The fundamental Christian community is a Christian family, which is – beside by relative connections – also bounded up by a sacramental dimension of living in Jesus Christ. Family members as individuals spend various parts of the day in various places: at work, in school, in sports club, in music school, etc. But at evening a Christian family is usually, at least in the physical sense, together. In the hours that the Christian family spends together their members should spend less time watching television and in front of other electronic media and more time talking with each other and the climax of their conversations should be family prayer. From a sincere conversation, in the centre of which God's presence would be called, the family evangelical life could arise. One of the challenges could be to eliminate electronic appliances physically from the centre of dwelling-places and to place the Sacred Scripture and a cross as a symbol of Christianity in a visible place instead of them. On the basis of power that comes out from a life according to gospel members of Christian families could live in the everyday life of the secularized world. For that matter it is necessary for Christian married couples to gather in groups, where members exchange experiences of matrimonial life and support each other on the way to the salvation.

In the Church in Slovenia there has been a big improvement in the last two decades in the charitable sphere of the Church. Caritas is present in major parts of Slovenian parishes. Following on from this positive experience from the charitable sphere, we can hope that in a similar way we could initiate groups for married couples, where married couples would strengthen their relationship with Jesus Christ. On the basis of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ we could make a change in the secularized world and Christianity could have an influence on life in society, which means that materialism would lose more and more of its power, and values that bring permanent joy to humankind would come to the front instead.

Concerning Christian values we have to be cautious not to confuse them with common human values, like honesty, sincerity, internal peace, joy, love, etc. For Christians the fundamental value is faith in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is a fundamental starting-point for human freedom. The more Christians live in a relationship with Jesus Christ, the more we humanize ourselves, which means that we as active Christians live human values. The great danger of today's time is to handle Christian and human life separately. Faith in the cross of Christ and life according to the gospel, which proceeds from the cross, is the essence of life of every Christian. A Christian who reads and meditates the Word of God and who lives in the power of the sacraments in the name of Jesus Christ,



means that he or she is a proclaimer and a bearer of freedom in Jesus Christ. If a Christian family lives the value of the cross with all its members, it means that a “domestic church” has fulfilled its mission.

However, life according to the gospel is not directed only towards the salvation of an individual or of an individual community and for this reason the life of a Christian family can be “light of the world and salt of the earth” for today’s humanity. The more a Christian family lives its mission that belongs to it, the more we can hope that the Son of man will find faith on earth when he comes<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Lk 18:8.