

Introduction

In the beginning of the 21st century many people in Western society tend to place a high value on feelings, emotions and happiness, which appear ‘genuine’ and important. Some authors even claim that, in postmodern society, people are obliged to be happy in such a way that they need to proclaim their happiness in the loud voice of today’s media. In this culture of happiness and success everyone not only deserves to be happy, but is obligated to be a part of a ‘euphoric experience’ simply following his/her desires, lusts, needs, passions etc. The idea hidden behind is the hyper consumerism which allows the global economic system to function¹. This is a great paradox: the same society that proclaims the autonomy of the human being – so that freedom is not tied to an objective order in the nature of things – proclaims every human being’s aspiration and obligation to happiness, which is understood as the fulfilment of personal desires. Consequently, there is a new form of marginalization of those who are not happy and successful.

The imperative to be happy is also reflected in the concept of stability and the duration of the marriage relationship. Very often, love is perceived as emotion, and considered eternal only as long as the feeling lasts. The quality of the relationship is more important than the continuity of the relationship with the same person. According to the European Value Study, the happy family is recognised as one of the most important values in life. But questions arise: what kind of happiness do people mean when they claim ‘the happy family’ as an important value? Do they consider the happiness of every family member and family as such, or only one’s own happiness? What image or definition of the family do they have in mind? What makes the family happy and strong? What happens when they cease to be happy in the family? What will they do to restore their happiness in the family? Who, and what may help the family to be strong and happy?

¹ See J.I. González, *Nothingness dressed up: Fraternity stripped bare. The struggle for justice in a nihilistic culture*, Barcelona 2010, p. 17–19.

The family in the postmodern world has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected Western society and culture. Some families are trying to live this situation in fidelity to the values that constitute the foundation of the institution of the family (the family is based on marriage as an intimate union of life in complementarity between a man and a woman, which is constituted in the freely contracted and publicly expressed indissoluble bond of matrimony, and is open to the transmission of life). Others have become uncertain of their role and almost unaware of the meaning and truth of marriage and family. Finally, there are also others who, hindered or permeated by postmodern and/or postChristian situations and challenges, have turned towards individualism and nihilism forgetting the Judeo-Christian tradition.

At the same time, the family has been accused, by postmodern currents, to be the essence of conservatism, traditional notions of male dominance, and oppression of women. Moreover, this over-simplification is also used by the media to support the so called 'new role' of the individual in the society and 'new perception' of sex. In reality, the family embody values alternative to the technocratic, consumer, profit-centred motives which are strongly present in contemporary society. Bearing this in mind whilst knowing that the good of the person and of society passes through the family, Christians search for various resources to support the family.

Studying the reality of the family in present society, in all its complexity, specialists, representing various universities and educational institutions, have brought together their reflections, findings and results of scientific research in this book: *The Contemporary Family: Local and European Perspectives*. In the first part, the authors have observed the dramatic changes of political, economic, ethnic, social, cultural, educational and religious contexts, and the rise of new problems and challenges connected with the growth of the mentality against the family in Europe. The specialists in the field of family studies, pedagogy, psychology and theology have also noticed that marriage and the family need accompaniment in such a way that the spouses are able to keep and to renew the commitment to the family. Postmodern reinterpretation of marriage and the family, and legislating for unethical models to be presented as family models, is a direct attack on the health and wellbeing of any society and nation. Families must receive adequate assistance: that is why many experts concentrate not only on the problems and challenges, but on the search for the best solutions in families' struggles with understanding of love and commitment, relations, infertility, lack of time, conflicts, weak communication skills, disability, search for stability and spirituality.