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Introduction

“Anthropological and cultural changes in our times influence all aspects of life and call for an analytic and diversified approach... It is also evident that the principal tendencies in anthropological-cultural changes are leading individuals, in personal and family life, to receive less and less support from social structures than in the past. On the other hand, *The tensions created by an overly individualistic culture, caught up with possessions and pleasures, leads to intolerance and hostility in families.* Here I would also include today’s fast pace of life, stress and the organization of society and labour, since all these are cultural factors which militate against permanent decisions. We also encounter widespread uncertainty and ambiguity. For example, we rightly value a personalism that opts for authenticity as opposed to mere conformity. While this can favour spontaneity and a better use of people’s talents, if misdirected it can foster attitudes of constant suspicion, fear of commitment, self-centredness and arrogance. Freedom of choice makes it possible to plan our lives and to make the most of ourselves. Yet if this freedom lacks noble goals or personal discipline, it degenerates into an inability to give oneself generously to others. Indeed, in many countries where the number of marriages is decreasing, more and more people are choosing to live alone or simply to spend time together without cohabiting. We can also point to a praiseworthy concern for justice; but if

misunderstood, this can turn citizens into clients interested solely in the provision of services. When these factors affect our understanding of the family, it can come to be seen as a way station, helpful when convenient, or a setting in which rights can be asserted while relationships are left to the changing winds of personal desire and circumstances. Ultimately, it is easy nowadays to confuse genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible. The ideal of marriage, marked by a commitment to exclusivity and stability, is swept aside whenever it proves inconvenient or tiresome. The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one's personal goals" (*Amoris Laetitia* 32–34). All these changes presented by Pope Francis have happened due to the progress of Western society, culture and ideology. Referring to the contemporary challenges, one also can notice a growing atmosphere which is antifamily. The contemporary mass media often describe family as a setting of abuse, violence and aggression, and one that restricts individual career plans. Embedded in different social contexts, the contemporary human is subjected to the influence of various ideas, rules and advertisements that frequently promote the hedonist lifestyle focused on individual pleasures. Many significant features of the 21st century North Atlantic societies are the consequential process of the gradual loss of importance of many values. Contemporary society destroys many of the traditional norms, values and rules contributing to the effect of value chaos, where young people are unable to decide what is right and what is wrong, also in the matter of starting a family.

Taking into consideration the present context of marital and family life, a group of experts in various fields of family studies have decided to prepare an multi-authored monograph: *Families: Opportunities and Challenges* as a responsible effort to respond to contemporary challenges and highlight the present situation, chances, strengths, opportunities, threats and fragilities of contemporary families. Presenting a realistic acknowledgment of family challenges and problems, authors from Czech Republic, Malta, Poland and Slovenia try to find solutions based on sociological, pedagogical, psychological, therapeutic, legal and theological research. These chapters are not abstract, but well based on theory, are also strongly connected

with the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families, for example: attributes of marital love, marital and family stability, family education about love, patriotic education, teenage problems, spiritually wounded family members, the child's right to privacy, aspects of Relational Family Therapy, dynamics of childhood parentification, the consequences of sexual abuse in the daily life of the survivors, family relationships and the development of a predisposition to violence.

The book *Families: Opportunities and Challenges* is published as a volume in the series *Family Study* edited by Elżbieta Osewska and Józef Stala with the aim of a good analysis of the present possibilities, problems and challenges experienced by the family and the consistent search for solutions in the local and European context. The issues concerning marriage and the family described in this multi-author monograph are important for the future of the family, society, nation and the Church, so I am grateful to all the authors participating in the preparation of this publication.

The authors of this book deeply believe that the debate on family issues is best advanced in the interdisciplinary and international context. In particular, the voices coming from different contexts of Europe are the important contributions in the field of family studies. Authors try to find the right arguments, forms of witness and ways to support marriages and families that can help family members to expand and deepen their commitment, respect, love, responsibility and spiritual life.

Editor
Józef Stala



I. Education in the Family

