



CONTEMPORARY FAMILY PROFILE IN THE POST PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, SOCIAL DISTANCING REGULATIONS HAVE MEANT THAT FAMILIES ARE SPENDING MORE TIME AT HOME, AND MANY HAVE BEEN ENJOYING THIS QUALITY TIME TOGETHER. HOWEVER, WHILE MANY PRACTITIONERS PROVIDED VIRTUAL SUPPORT TO HELP FAMILIES WITH HOME LEARNING ACTIVITIES, RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT MIDDLE-CLASS PARENTS WERE MORE LIKELY THAN WORKING-CLASS PARENTS TO RECEIVE ONLINE SUPPORT, AND MANY LOW-INCOME FAMILIES DO NOT HAVE ADEQUATE ACCESS TO A DEVICE OR CONNECTIVITY AT HOME.

COVID-19 HAS EXACERBATED FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE THE PREVALENCE OF PARENTAL DEPRESSION, INCLUDING ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AND JOB INSECURITY, AND THOSE IN LOW-PAID OR INSECURE WORK, WHO HAD FEWER RESOURCES TO BEGIN WITH, WERE HIT HARDER. PARENTING IS INFLUENCED BY PARENTS' CURRENT LIVES - IT IS EASIER TO PARENT MORE EFFECTIVELY WHEN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES ARE FAVORABLE AND WHEN STRESS AND ANXIETY ARE LOWER. SOME FAMILIES WERE AT HOME IN MORE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, AND FOR MANY PARENTS THE STRESS OF FINANCIAL INSECURITY MEANT THAT THEY WERE UNABLE TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING AS MUCH AS THEY WOULD LIKE.

POOR PARENTAL MENTAL HEALTH CAN IMPACT ON PARENTS' ABILITY TO DEVELOP A WARM, SENSITIVE AND NURTURING RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR CHILD. THIS HAS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, AS THE PROCESS BY WHICH CHILDREN LEARN TO THINK AND UNDERSTAND OCCURS FUNDAMENTALLY THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTIONS WITH OTHERS. THE FOUNDATIONS OF EARLY LANGUAGE SKILLS ARE LAID WHEN PARENTS RESPOND POSITIVELY TO THE CHILD'S EXPRESSIONS AND VOCALIZATIONS. WHEN A PARENT FAILS TO RESPOND TO A CHILD'S COMMUNICATION WITH ATTENTION, GESTURES, OR SPEECH, THE CONNECTIONS IN THE CHILD'S BRAIN THAT SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL SKILLS DO NOT FORM AS THEY SHOULD.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED THE LIVES OF MANY ON A GLOBAL LEVEL. IN DECEMBER 2019, THE CORONA VIRUS FIRST APPEARED IN WUHAN, CHINA. THE VIRUS KNOWN AS COVID-19 HAS SINCE SPREAD GLOBALLY, AFFECTING MORE THAN 229 MILLION PEOPLE, WITH DEATH RATES EXCEEDING 4.70 MILLION. ON MARCH 11, 2020, THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) HAS SINCE DECLARED COVID-19 A GLOBAL PANDEMIC. BY SEPTEMBER 2021, THE GLOBAL INFECTION RATE WAS 230,326,827 CASES AND 4,722,924 DEATHS WERE RECORDED. THE COVID-19 VIRUS HAS BEEN FOUND TO GENERALLY SPREAD BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS THROUGH THEIR RESPIRATORY DROPLETS FROM COUGHING AND SNEEZING. THE SYMPTOMS OF THE COVID-19 VIRUS HAVE BEEN FOUND TO BE SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE FLU, INCLUDING SHORTNESS OF BREATH, A SEVERE COUGH OVER TIME, AND FEVER. FINDINGS SUGGEST THAT AFTER EXPOSURE TO THE VIRUS, INDIVIDUALS CAN BE CARRIERS OF THE VIRUS FOR 2 DAYS TO 2 WEEKS

KEYWORDS: PANDEMIC, ISOLATION, FAMILY, INSECURITY



INTRODUCTION

Families have certainly been affected by the pandemic and the social engineering projects implemented in the context of the great social and economic reset. The family is, in fact, the place of the most intimate and meaningful relationships for human persons, where they are born, grow and develop. Here we experience the fundamental relationships of sexual affectivity and generation: being husband and wife, father and mother, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters.

At the start of the pandemic, organizations such as the WHO, along with governments around the world, worked together to put emergency plans in place to prevent, combat and support health care systems that were under strain as a result of COVID-19. Some of these emergency plans put in place included testing via nasal and throat swabs, screening in numerous places, social distancing and isolation just to name a few. This pandemic and the emergency plans implemented have affected the lives of many families in numerous ways.

These are all body-based relationships. Now, COVID-19 is a pathology that strikes through relationships and through the body, and strategies to prevent contagion are based on social distancing. This had huge consequences primarily for the family, triggering potentially epoch-making changes. How did the family react to these mandatory changes, which led to isolation, the digitization of work and school, and the isolation of people?

It should be mentioned first of all that the family, which has always been involved in social and cultural changes, has known in the last sixty years, especially in the more developed countries, in different forms and to different degrees, a deep and accelerated process of transformation, in which this new dramatic and disturbing event was inserted. What are the family's possibilities to withstand and recover from the pandemic?

From these initial observations emerge the three fundamental points around which my concern will be structured: 1) I will try to outline the family transformation phenomena that were already underway before the pandemic; 2) I will address the impact that the pandemic has had on families, i.e. the stress it has caused and is causing on family life; 3) I would like to propose some possibilities that the event of COVID-19 has opened up for the future of the family and its role in a post-pandemic society.

TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE FAMILY: TOWARDS A POST-FAMILY SOCIETY?

Long before 2020, the family underwent dramatic changes, culminating in the so-called "sexual revolution" of 1968, which affected and disrupted its previously seemingly immutable fundamental anthropological structure.

The famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss had asked: "if there is no natural law that makes the family universal, how can we explain why it is found practically everywhere?" (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 338) Even in the plurality of its concrete manifestations and in the plurality of its historical and cultural models, the family appeared to him as a kind of "natural society" founded on a double bond, the "horizontal" bond, as so to speak, given by the sexual relationship between man and woman, and the "vertical" link given by the generational relationship between parents and children. In the same sense, the sociologist Pierpaolo Donati from Bologna speaks of the family as a set of primordial relationships, characterized by a kind of "genome", that is, a latent structure, which, in a manner analogous to the biology of living organisms., can be expressed in a diversified manner, but which does not cease to be the permanent core of this reality. (Donati, 2008)



As mentioned above, this structure was severely shaken by the "sexual revolution". The struggle against repression was identified with the struggle for the authenticity of the individual, understood as a pure affirmation of vitality. The systematic denigration and ridicule of "common sense modesty" has been used to destroy conventional normative boundaries. This involved a change in the very idea of happiness as the goal of one's actions: the core of life's happiness was to be "sexual happiness" (Wilhelm Reich, 1945), because only through absolute, unlimited sexual freedom could human beings free themselves from their neuroses.

This revolution began with the separation of sexuality from procreation and thus with the introduction of contraception (sex without children) and artificial procreation (babies without sex). It continued with the separation of sex from the context of marriage and love, and finally resulted in the practice of "plastic", eccentric sexuality, devoid of even reference to the difference between man and woman. Sex has been increasingly reduced to the pursuit of individual pleasure and has become legitimized in all its expressions by gender ideology, which denies that there is any meaning in body language.

The monogamous family, as it is known by tradition, was then naturally made to be the quintessence of a repressive social institution and the chief enemy of authenticity. Therefore, it had to be removed. And this was done not only through a direct struggle against its basic structures (the indissolubility of the conjugal bond, paternal authority, procreation as the end of sexuality), but also through the promotion of a plurality of "liquid" models, which in practice constituted a "liquidation" of the family as such. The fight against the family has become the battle to expand the idea of family to include any way of living together that has a sexual context.

But playing with sexuality always has important and unpredictable social repercussions not only for the individuals involved, but for society as a whole. Here, I would like to refer to the analysis provided by the CISF (Centro Internazionale Studi Famiglia) Report 2020 on the family in Italy, a country very affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Taking globalization into account, in my opinion this overview can also be useful in detecting analogous traits in other technologically advanced societies of the East and West. Pierpaolo Donati states that we are now entering a "post-family" society, in which the family is progressively losing its social functions. (Donate, 2020)

He speaks of a "family heating", i.e., an increasing "overheating" of the family that causes it to evaporate: strong and institutionally sanctioned bonds are lost and emotions predominate, so that relationships become precarious and unable to cope life challenges. Family relationships are becoming increasingly complex and fragmented and at the same time increasingly detached from formal structures and responsibilities. The interconnection between the relationship of spouse and parenthood dissolves: one can be a couple without the commitments of marriage and even without living together; one can be parents without having produced children through natural relationships, but by resorting to reproductive techniques, including surrogate motherhood. All this is made possible by today's cultural context, which combines a libertarian mindset with technological innovations, especially in the fields of biomedicine and information and communication technology.

The impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the families

What impact has the COVID-19 pandemic and isolation and social distancing measures had on families already caught in a revolutionary process of transformation?

On a preliminary note, it should be noted that the current crisis has shown the illusory nature of the transhumanist project (see, for example, Singularity University of California),



which predicted unlimited linear growth due to the so-called fourth industrial revolution. based on massive digital innovations. Against such optimistic predictions, we have entered a scenario where virus-related diseases have added to developmental and hyper nutrition-related diseases, resulting in the so-called "triple burden of disease." (Gómez Dantés, 2011, pp. 36-40) The authors identify three elements: 1) the accumulation of common infections, malnutrition and maternal and infant mortality; 2) the emerging challenges of noncommunicable diseases related to hyper nutrition (cancer, diabetes and heart disease); and 3) issues related to globalization, such as pandemics and the consequences of climate change.

According to the economist Stefano Zamagni, this requires more humility and caution: inhumane megacities have been built, destroying the natural habitats of animals and increasing social inequalities, and this is precisely the context that has favored the pandemic. (Zamagni, 2020, p. 31-38)

And yet, despite everything, family was the rock on which people stood firm. Even if it is opposed, abandoned or torn apart, the family is still a point of reference, confirming itself to be a vital economic and social subject for the whole society, showing us that relationships - in the family as elsewhere - matter more. than money.

The family, however, has experienced and is experiencing tremendous pressure. There was an overload of responsibility for the family, mostly due to the lack of support from institutions. Families were not always able to manage the stress and alleviate anxiety caused by concerns about health and the future, fueled by the discomfort of feeling "caged" due to restrictions on social contact.

Two phenomena typical of the period of isolation have affected family life: working from home and distance learning. As work and school time overlapped with family time, people had to negotiate home spaces and IT equipment, which did not always lead to cooperative sharing, but often led to conflict situations. Parents have had to try to improve their digital literacy and update their technological savvy, sometimes without much success.

Due to economic, social and cultural inequalities resulting from income, household composition, education level and geographic location, there are wide differences in the consequences of the crisis. A report by Aloysius John, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis, published in June 2020, shows how low-income households in the West, as well as the poorest in the most disadvantaged countries, were the most vulnerable and most negatively affected, so "the impact of the coronavirus has increased inequality, and inequality has worsened the spread of the pandemic." (John, 2020).

One issue in particular deserves attention, insofar as it threatens to seriously disrupt society, namely that the pandemic has caused a generational clash. This has dramatically highlighted the condition of loneliness and often total abandonment in which the elderly live in our developed societies. They proved to be the most fragile and vulnerable, while young people did not accept and respect social distancing, believing, rightly or wrongly, that they were somehow "invulnerable". (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2012)

As was the case a few years back, younger generations have turned their backs on the problems of unborn life, limiting themselves to the selfishness of the couple and, with abortion, denying the unborn the same dignity that is given to life already born, so they now ignore the problems of the third and fourth ages. Thus, the generational conflict that has emerged in the pandemic crisis is not only a question of demography, but also of social justice.

To summarize this overview of the impact of the crisis on the family, three points can be highlighted. First, the pandemic showed the importance of social relations inside and outside



the family, and especially within the boundaries between inside and outside: it was significant that now they had to define, even legally, who were relatives and what was meant by "stable conditions". In fact, without relations mediated by the body the virus does not exist.

For reasons relating to health, such relationships should be avoided, but how can one live without relationships? Second, digital communication technology has entered the scene on a massive scale, claiming not just to compensate for a temporary body-mediated lack of relationships, but to replace them. But this disembodied way of relating has revealed troubling new dangers for the individual and the family. Third, I noticed how, nevertheless, the family has surprisingly reasserted itself as the decisive factor for a healthy and prosperous society. But to what extent can the family continue to do this in a social context hostile to an authentic family culture?

THE OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN BY THE PANDEMIC

Can the pandemic also offer positive possibilities, as some economists and social engineers have argued? If so, in what sense? The decisive question is the criterion used to evaluate the change. Pope Francis stated that the problem is this: "Since we never come out of a crisis the same way we came out before, the problem is how to come out better and not worse." But by what criteria do we judge improvement or degradation? Will we use the one adopted by the World Economic Forum or the one of the good lives, according to the principles of experience, heart and natural law?

To those who would like to exploit the current crisis to redesign the family in even more individualistic and private terms, they must propose the opposite path, the one that leads to a relational and generative family, capable of defending the identity of the human person.

In one of his last speeches, on the occasion of his Christmas wishes, Pope Benedict XVI issued a cry of alarm precisely on the topic of the family. According to him, today the family is radically challenged in its natural characteristics as a relationship based on marriage as a stable bond between a man and a woman, aimed at the procreation and education of children. He asserted that what is at stake here is not just a specific social construct, but the human being himself in his fundamental dignity. In fact, when such a commitment is repudiated, the key figures of human existence also disappear: father, mother, child. If we lost these original experiences that give us identity, we would live in a society of individuals who no longer know themselves as sons and daughters, who live in the confusion of sexual genders, who, like only children, have no brothers or sisters. , who no longer want to be fathers and mothers. Cut off from identity-giving family relationships and separated from God, the isolated individual becomes weak and fragile, the predestined victim of all forms of manipulation by the powers that be.

But as was said, there is an alternative. It is necessary to promote the "relational family, in which relations between men and women, as well as between generations, are characterized by trust, cooperation and reciprocity as a project that reflects life. That is, the family is a social structure of care relationships which, thanks to the couple's generativity and the transmission of life to the next generations, has in itself the ability to realize a certain life project lived in common (...). The relational family does care for others, but it does so by looking to the goodness of family relationships and the fruit they produce, prioritizing relationships over individual interests, realizing that only relationships that have the natural family genome I can assure you. the human, sexual and generational identity of each person, in the synergy of differences." (Campbell, 2020)



This is where the second characteristic of the family that must be promoted: its generativity, that is, the ability to receive life and know how to pass it on. The family is the "sanctuary of life", as Saint John Paul II said¹⁸, the place where human life, especially when it is weak and fragile, is received, preserved and allowed to grow, where an authentic culture of life can take form.

Family generativity goes beyond the procreative dimension and becomes the capacity to produce relational goods, such as the virtues that enable society to exist and grow. The ancient Roman philosopher Cicero defined the family as *seminarum rei publicae*, the nursery where the common and public life of society is cultivated. Today, we are talking about the family as a producer of social capital. This concept refers to cultural heritage and resources that support relationships of trust, cooperation and reciprocity between people. It can be easily understood that, in order not to become inhumane and self-destructive, a society must be based on the values of mutual trust, loyalty and solidarity, precisely in the sphere of primary family relationships. The family constitutes the primary social capital, which then provides the basis for all the secondary social capital, consisting of networks and associative relationships in the civic sphere. Social capital is therefore a relational good produced and enjoyed together, necessary for the existence of society.

The reasoning here is extremely simple: society has a vital interest in promoting the primary agent in the formation of social capital, which is the stable monogamous family based on the fruitful union of a man and a woman. In recognized sexual difference there is the archetypal form of receiving the other in his identity and otherness, which is the foundation of reciprocity. Only to the extent that the connection is stable can it have a positive function for the people involved and fulfill its role in education. Only in the generation and education of children does society secure its future. Only in the support of the weakest and the elderly, guaranteed by the family, is society able to adequately respond to emerging and increasingly important social needs.

From the point of view of Christianity, moreover, the family is at the center of the experience of faith. The family is the first original witness of the Creator: in fact, there is no family without reference to the Creator, as the mother of the seven martyr brothers testifies in the Second Book of Maccabees. The sexual difference, the stable and faithful covenant between a man and a woman, and the generous openness to life are fundamental elements of the wise plan of the Creator, in correspondence with what the wisdom of humanity has recognized as constitutive of the natural law.

CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic is obstructing our breathing, not only physiologically through the sometimes-lethal effects of the viral disease COVID-19, but also socially and humanly through the fear caused by social isolation.

The family is where we can begin to breathe, within those fundamental relationships that give us identity and reveal our role in the world, generating new social relationships. The challenges of the Great Reset cannot be met with forms of social engineering that distort the family, close it in on itself, and privatize it, causing even greater isolation of individuals. Rather, meeting these challenges requires fostering a family that is consistent with its natural character and in accordance with the original divine plan, a family that is both relational and generative, capable of receiving life and make it grow



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