

The Role of the Family in National Development

Christopher E. Umoh
St. Joseph Major Seminary
P. M. B. 1039
Ikot Ekpene

Abstract

This paper examines the role of the family in national development, focusing on the turbulent times especially with regard to the eroding of values and premium that hitherto stood the family out as fundamental in society. It also highlightd the many erroneous and false definition of the family and family life especially in the present century bedeviled by moral relativism and the 'anything-goes' syndrome. Adopting an analytical method, the paper finds out that human culture as it is today no longer offer any more a time-tasted system of values, accountability and transparency. The paper thus suggests that he virtue of generosity through offering of self to one another by husband and wife in the family should be the bedrock of every family which is seen as a primary social capital foundational to the secondary one which is the nation. When the primary social capital is rooted in love, solidarity and commitment, our national development will certainly be a reality.

Keywords: Family, National Development, Accountability, Transparency

Introduction

The family has long been considered the domestic Church. But more than this, the family does not just have its bearing on the Church, but on the society itself. As the nucleus of society, the family is the “original cell of social life (Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2202).” And, “[T]he state measures its true strength by the stability of family life among its citizenry ... [since] the family is the social cell (Catholic Bishop of US: 1949).” Thus, the family, understood in this light, becomes the most fundamental structure upon which the society and its values rest. Surely, weak families will make up a weak society; strong families will produce a strong society. Thus, the family cannot be left as one of those institutions which structures are dependent upon values that are not themselves rooted in the authentic building up of the person. The family is the primal institution, the foremost institution. As a matter of fact, the family is truly the “School of humanity” (Gaudium et Spes, 52).

In examining the role of the family in national development, it is important that we take into focus the turbulent times that we find ourselves in especially with regard to the eroding values and premium that hitherto stood the family out as fundamental in society. It is also important that we pay attention to the many erroneous and false definition of the family and family life especially in the present century bedeviled by moral relativism and the ‘anything-goes’ syndrome. These shall help us to understand our perspective on the family and the irreplaceable role of the family in building a more just, humane and peaceful society.

The theme of national development and the role of the family in this regard is a very exciting one in our contemporary society as we are struggling to consolidate our young nascent democracy in our country Nigeria. In our work, we shall examine first, the general notion of the family and then we shall look at the understanding we have of the family from the early Church,

through the 14th century and the 19th century, before we enter into the 20th and 21st century. It is after this brief survey that we shall consider the role of the family in National Development as we know it in the 21st century.

The General Notion of the Family

The general notion of family is that it is made up of father, mother and children. This is called the nuclear family. It is the foundation of the structure of the human society. This notion of the family is very popular in the Western world. In addition to this notion, there is another concept which is called extended family. This notion of the family includes the relations of the husband and wife. It is commonly found in Africa. The entire human society could also be called a family. The Church in a sense is also a family, a great family of God's people. In each of these two cases, the family is characterized by affection, intimacy, solidarity and love. It is different from a club or an association to which a person belongs or staying in a hotel where many people are found. In this sense, a family whether nuclear or extended, is different from any other association or institution to which we belong. It is sacred, unique and foundational to the entire human society.

Consequently, the family in the context of our discussion is a stable institution which provides for the economic, educational, interpersonal and psychological needs of the people. It is considered as a major social institution that has its basic internal justice. This is the way the Church views the family and teaches that it should be upheld by members of the family themselves, the state and the entire human society. The history of the Church shows how the Church has been consistent in this teaching from her early existence till date.

The Family in the Early Period of the Church

There were three attitudes towards marriage and family in the early period of the Church. These attitudes taken together gave rise to a deep ambivalence. There was in the first place a rejection of family ties, sometimes even open hostility. The message of Christ then was presented as a "sword" of "division" bringing family members against one another (Mt 10:34-39, Lk 12:51-53). They were to call no one "father" on earth (Mt 23:9) and were asked to "hate" father, mother, spouse, and children. They all lived in anticipation of a new age that would exclude marriage, (Mt 12:25, 22:30, Lk 20:35). This is the first ambivalence or apparent contradiction in the teaching of the Church about family. One has to do the proper interpretation of this biblical text in order to know the reason why the Church assumed this attitude.

The second attitude manifested itself when the Christians saw the Church herself as their family. Those who were without a family (like widows and orphans) received protection of the Church (Acts 6:1, 1Tim 5:3, James 1:27). For those that left their natural families, the Church was their new home (Mtt 10:29-30). The Church at this point in time gave the Christians a kind of membership and belonging that was neither slave nor free, male nor female among them (Gal. 3:38). This was done, of course with the promise for the future where we shall stay together with God seeing Him face to face in the company of the Saints. Though this promise was futuristic, it could be experienced here on earth were the Christians irrespective of their different backgrounds, tribe and tongue could live together. This future and present experience brought the third attitude to the fore. It made marriage and family to be seen in the new life of faith of the Christians. While others might be called to leave all things and follow Jesus, the rest could also be called to have family units, or households (Acts 10:2, 11:14, 16:15). It was this last group that brought about the rules for households in the early Church (Eph 5:21, Col 3:18, 1Peter 2:18).

Above all, it assisted the Church to correct the impression of the non Christians who accused her of being troublemakers and those that disrupted family ties.

With these three attitudes the Church opposed Gnosticism in the 3rd century that was anti-marriage, anti-sex because the body was considered as evil, belonging to Satan, and the soul was to be liberated from it. Marriage was affirmed as good, as part of creation at this point in time, though celibacy was considered better. The Church taught the Christians at this time the discipline of marriage which was exclusivity and permanence – monogamous marriage that accepts no third party (Farley 1994: 371-381). In the 4th century, Monasticism with its teaching on waiting for the future promised also created places where people went into for a life that was more closely similar to the one lived in the family. The Church at this time began to sense the danger done to marriage and family in this moment by insisting that those that married should not go into the monastery. Christians were called to give due respect to marriage and family bonds and duties. Though the importance of the family was upheld, this was done in terms of the functional roles. The family had to prepare persons for important things in life. The wife had a role to play, the husband and the children in the family. The Christian notion of the family was stated though it reaffirmed perfect union with God, universal unity of human beings and unity of body and soul.

The Family in the 14th Century

The humanists in this period brought about a change in the other worldly way of thinking. In place of this they emphasized on social responsibility instead of renunciation and withdrawal. They also talked of self-discipline and achievement in the world where the family and the reproductive labour were combined. The reformation of our separated brethren brought to completion this new movement. This eventually brought about a new understanding of the place of the family in Christian life. The work of Christians was not primarily in the monastery or the sanctuary. They were to work in the marketplace, factories, etc. In the Catholic Church the notion of the family in the early period remained intact. Though marriage was raised to the dignity of a sacrament in the 12th century, it remained a lesser vocation in the Christian community, subordinate to celibacy and instrumental in relation to Church and society. The only thing that took place at this time was the reconsideration of the nature of marital bond and the purpose of sexual activity, till the end of the 19th century.

The Family in the 20th Century

It was in the 20th century that a more positive attitude toward marriage and the family came up in the encyclicals of the Popes, statement of bishop's synods and the document of Vatican II. The family became in this new situation, the foundation of society as well as the first cell of the Church or the domestic sanctuary (*Gaudium et Spes* no.52). It is to be noted that in this new situation, warnings have been given about excessive self-love, worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human life in the family (*Gaudium et Spes* no.47). In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II, praised the family and affirmed the superiority of celibacy over marriage because of the singular link which celibacy has with the kingdom of God. Marriage and family are presented as “things of this world” and married men and women are taught to grow in their love for God and all humankind. It is in marriage that sexuality can rightly be expressed between a man and a woman. The family becomes primarily the sphere of women who work with their husbands for their welfare, that of the children, Church and society (Farley 371-3810).

The Structure of the Family

The structures of the Christian family are rooted in God's plan, which are known through reason and revelation. They include the free consent of husband and wives, sexual exclusivity, indissolubility, and openness to procreation, a hierarchical relationship and differentiations of roles for husbands and wives. The free consent of the husband and wife brings about an intimate life of love between them. This life of love is called *conjugal love*. It is different from all other forms of friendship. It involves the most complete sharing by man and woman of their life and love and of their very persons. The characteristics of this love is "totality" of the self-giving between the spouses (John Paul II, 11). This love is a reflection of the interior love of the Trinity. John Paul II affirms this love in the document *Familiaris Consortio* where he says in the same paragraph cited that God created every human person for love because God created us to share the divine life which we know as Christians to be love. Every person is called to be fulfilled as a human being. This means that everyone is a mysterious union of body and soul by making a complete gift of one's self to God, in all of one's unified totality.

This fundamental vocation to love "totally" implies the solemn gift of the whole self to God, including the gift of the body, in one of the two vocational calls – marriage and celibacy. In celibacy one makes this total gift of self directly to God, in marriage the spouses make this total gift of the self to each other directly and through each other to God. In each of this the ultimate destiny of this total gift of self is God. This is because God is the ultimate happiness of the human person.

This means that marriage in its deepest meaning is a divine institution. It is intended to be a gift of self, through a love which bears the mark of totality. This love is a dynamic element that enables the spouses to realize fully all the purposes and ends of marriage. Thus marriage has its laws, the laws of the Creator, to which the spouses have to remain faithful. It is ordained towards the happiness of the married partners as well as that of the entire human race. Thus the goods or benefits that God intended by instituting marriage are – good of children, good of fidelity, which perfects the love of the couples and the good of the sacramental bond, that helps to sanctify the couple. The ends of marriage are: procreation and education of children, mutual help and support of partners, remedy for concupiscence. The misunderstanding of these ends has brought untold problems to the Church after Vatican II. These problems have led to the total subordination of love-sharing to life given in marriage (procreation). In the Western world, many people have given up the idea of having children. They talk mostly of making a career in life. The consequence of this way of life is a reduction in the population growth of their nations. In this case the labour force of the nation has been drastically reduced and menial jobs have to be done by foreigners or immigrants with the infiltration of radical Islamic movement into their countries; the threat to their existence in the face of terrorism is obvious.

In the poor countries of the world, the issue of having few or children is not a problem instead there are so many children but the education of these children for life and national development is a big problem. There is a great deal of irresponsible parenthood and the generation of children appears to be only from human instinct and societal pressures. In neither of these cases is the issue of having family for the common good or national development taken into serious consideration by many people. In fact, there is a tension now between the private goods of married persons and the common good which is important for both the society as a whole and the individual person. With these problems before us, many now are talking of the redefinition of marriage to mean establishing of loving relationship or partnership between two adults, the partners may be man and man, or woman and woman. If it is between man and

woman, these people have argued that the use of contraceptives in this case will enhance the love sharing of the partners to the total forgetfulness of their living-sharing. This is done according to them in order that they may not have many children to take care of as a result of the biting economic and over populated situation of the contemporary society. The question is, does such a mentality contribute to our national development? Is it not a selfish mentality of merely seeking pleasure and not thinking of the common good of the nation?

The answer the Church and other well meaning citizens will give to this question is that such a mentality would not bring any good to our nation. The generation of children by parents without any proper upbringing too, like the street children, hawkers, Majiri, etc. would not do the nation any good. On the part of children too like students, not taking seriously the educational advantages and opportunity offered to them by their parents and benefactors and leaving the school without any certificate is most harmful to our nation. This is because these are the young people that are easily prone to violence, destruction of live and property, armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, etc out of frustration. The role of the youth here in the family as future leaders is very important. The more submissive and docile the youth are to their good parents, the brighter would be the future of our nation and the Church. This type of life would make parents live longer and would also strengthen their faith in God for giving them such wonderful children. According to Burke, (1990: 126).” “a permissive society means a society which professes no fixed moral principles.” When this is the case, such a society inevitably generates a large mass of irresponsible people. And when people in general are irresponsible, a growing percentage is going to turn out violent. It is important that we constantly keep in focus the point that, the way the family is structured determines the general structuring of the society. Patrick Udoma (2015: 18) supports this view in this way: “One has to work at making good family in the knowledge that it is a labour of love, and by consciously practicing the Christian ethic of love in the way we treat one another.” According to him, “how we experience love from our parents affects the way we tend to love others; and the kind of affirmation and support we receive has influence on our ambitions, motivation, and our ability to handle our problems later in life (Udoma 2015: 18; Akpan 2015).”

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The family here is expected to be a domestic Church. This means, according *Lumen Gentium* “a school of deeper humanity.” It is a place where the parents are the first teachers of the children in the ways of faith. The ways of faith here means the contribution of parents to the sanctification of their children. In *Gaudium et Spes* no. 48, children are also expected to respond to the kindness of their parents with sentiments of gratitude, with love and trust in a reciprocal way. Such responses would help good Christian parents to be always mindful of certain essential attitudes and virtues necessary for the Christian life. It follows here that good parents are good teachers of the truth of Jesus Christ through both their words and examples.

The separation of love-sharing marital act of love from the life giving one in cases of contraceptives and gay marriages is not a good sign of exemplary family life. This shows itself in a greater dimension in cases of abortion or anti-life attitudes in marriage and family life. As indicated above, the act of same-sex union is an act of self enclosure and self-absorption in selfish seeking of pleasure for oneself in the relationship and not being open to allowing God bring through the couple a new life into the world. The role of the family in this attitude of life has been considered by modern studies in Sociology. The research in this area of studies talks of capital good of the human family. The Sociologists who have propagated this study sees the

family as *social capital*. By this they mean that humanity as a whole will go down or would be destroyed if the family is not taken seriously. Their argument is that it is in the family that we have love, affection, friendship, solidarity and commitment needed for personal development and the development of the entire society. Furthermore, they have argued that it is in the family that this trust, cooperation and solidarity, etc is cultivated and that when the family is ignored or proper supported and taken care of, the entire human society will collapse or go down.

The family for these thinkers is the *primary social capital* while the society or nation is secondary to the family. The *primary social capital* which is the family is then the institution that enhances a flourishing nation. Indeed, The family constitutes an essential decisive element of society's common good. It is the basis of civil life. (Melina 2011: 68-70). It produces children with virtues and commitment who later on would become committed patriotic and hardworking citizens of the nation. In fact, the state is expected here to support the family by creating jobs for the parents giving them period of leave to take care of their families and building schools, roads and other infrastructures for the children in the family (Udoh 2015: 52-53). The environment where the children are trained in this primary social capital set-up where the father and mother play their unique role is very important as well. The adoption of a child into a relationship where only two men or two women are living together for their pleasure is an issue of injustice to the child in the family and the enactment of a law in support of the adoption of such a child is appalling. In fact, such a law is an unjust law and does not help in the development of the nation because it would produce children who psychologically lack basic family training needed for responsible and committed citizenry. This is the truth that the Church calls on all of us, especially you our young students to bear witness to in your various institutions of learning, with public arena, especially in the political sphere of our nation.

Conclusion

When Napoleon was asked what could be done to restore the prestige of France, he replied simply: "Give us better mothers!" (Piper & Grudem 2006: 372). Indeed, good mothers are the pillars of the family. The family is a dwelling place or habitable place for every human being. It is an environment where we are accepted for what we truly are and where we are helped to become what we should be in life. It is a place where we are to be free, a place we look with greater confidence on the future, a place which helps us to hope and love. It is in the family that commitment, patriotism, hard work and solidarity is learnt and taught through the experience that one experiences in the primary social family. It is unfortunate that many of the families today have become places where we find many people who are tired and exhausted because the culture in which they live offer them no hope and no integral vision of life.

In our own case our culture does not offer us any more a time-tasted system of values, accountability and transparency. In the Western world the culture appears one sided because it is after pleasure drive, anti life and grounded only in the merely biological order of life. This culture both in the Western world and in our own situation has to be evangelized in order to bring out the transcendent vision of human life which is integral, respecting human life at its inception in the womb, during its entire existence on earth, at old age and in sickness. The virtue of generosity through offering of self to one another by husband and wife in the family should be the bedrock of every family which is seen as a *primary social capital* foundational to the secondary one which is the nation. When the primary social capital is good is rooted in love, solidarity and commitment, our national development will certainly be a reality. The family, therefore, ought to be and should be a place of shelter for all members. It should truly be, as the

Catholic Bishops of Nigeria assert, “the first school of virtue. ...the first school of faith, and an indispensable pastoral collaborator” (CBCN 2015, no. 12)

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