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The necessity of virtues in family life The family as a point of self-assurance between social and individual ethics

Abstract: To think of family as a reality of its own means building adequate structures for families and reflecting on family's well-being. In discourse with concepts of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, the article searches for the relevance of different concepts for the well-being of the family. Especially when dealing with the questions of family, the necessity of thinking individual ethics and social ethics together is demonstrated.

Key words: virtues, family, magisterium of the Catholic church, Holy Family

Povzetek: **Nujnost kreposti v družinskem življenju: družina kot prostor zaupanja vase med družbeno in individualno etiko**

Razmišljanje o družini kot o stvarnosti sami po sebi zahteva, da gradimo ustrezne strukture za družine in razglabljam o dobrobiti družine. Članek razpravlja o konceptih cerkvenega učiteljstva ter med njimi išče ustrezne zasnove za dobrobit družine. Hkrati pokaže na nujnost individualno-etičnega in socialno-etičnega razmišljanja, posebno ko gre za vprašanja družine.

Ključne besede: Kreposti, družina, cerkveno učiteljstvo, Sveta Družina

The teaching of the Catholic Church concerning family (and marriage) has a high religious-moral claim. Family should be a kind of domestic church (LG 11), should have the effect of a subject for evangelization (Johannes Paul II. 1994, 16) and create the future (Johannes Paul II. 1982, 468). The Church should not minimize this claim, but it should give hints and help to families not in form of decrees (Klein 2007, 63), bans or duties for each family member (KKK 2003, 2214–2231). It would be better to offer assistance for a successful family life, especially for the everyday life of families.

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church has turned around, initiated by the Second Vatican Council: from the institutional-legal perspective on family (and marriage) to an anthropological-personal one. Marriage and family are now considered as a community of love and life between persons, founded in God's good creation, sacramentally confirmed in Jesus Christ. (Sutor 2009, 220) If taking this change of perspective seriously, the family should be interpreted as 'Zielgestalt'

(model figure) (Die deutschen Bischöfe, 1999), especially the character as way and process (FC 17) of family in general, but especially of the individual family can be stressed.

For a theological ethicist virtues are to be thought of as an adequate way of helping to build this process of becoming a family and of each family individually. The indicated 'moment of process' (Prozessmoment) is constitutive for virtues which have to be practiced and adapted. I refer back to the so called virtues of character, formulated by Aristotle, reformulated by new ethics of 'Lebenskunst' (Thomä 1992). Especially virtues are necessary in times of global patchwork families (multi-national and/or multi-local) (Beck 2011, 213) which have no longer one special place of living together in common.

What actually is meant by 'family'? Even in the field of 'family sociology', there does not exist a fixed definition of family. (Ulrich-Eschemann 2005, 26) Is family there where children are? (Sterzinsky 2007, XVII) »Auch wenn verschiedene Zugänge – häufig mit berechtigten Intentionen – Familie primär vom Kind her zu bestimmen suchen und als Definitionskriterium auf das Vorhandensein einer Zwei-Generationen-Beziehung abheben, lässt sich von der Partnerdimension nicht so leicht absehen. Sie gehört nicht nur in den Entstehungszusammenhang von Familie, sondern normalerweise auch in deren Lebenszusammenhang.« (Laux 2008, 270f.) Correlating the terms generation and gender can be seen as a key feature of family. The risks involved are pointed out by the social ethicist Bernhard Laux and have to be reflected in forming out different virtues for family.

The necessity of a structured practice and development of virtues in a family implies an important role of government and society for achieving adequate structures to live a family. A central position of the Catholic Church is laid down in the Charta of Family Rights from 1983, in which a frame of rights was formulated to achieve that the family is a 'social subject'.

The aim and wish of having a family has changed in people's minds – to which extent is subject to scientific discourse, but the wish for having a family has still remained a central goal (in life), also in the mindsets of young people. (Leven 2010, 57) »Gleichwohl hat auch die Familie im Zuge des neuzeitlichen Ausdifferenzierungsprozesses der Gesellschaft einen charakteristischen Wandel durchgemacht. Sie ist 'autonomer' und 'privater' geworden.« (Wilhelms 2010, 148)

This contribution is not about the virtues learned in family (FC 43; Bourg 2002, 377) but it deals with the question of which virtues seem to be necessary for family life. Special attention is paid on the well-being of family, an issue which is important for a moral theology that is concerned with leading a fulfilled life. In a first step the virtues suggested for marriage were analyzed, since marriage in Christian tradition is constitutive for family. The second part is about the specific virtues for family. Some are inspired by the teaching of the Catholic Church, some by the Bible. In a last chapter the virtues are analyzed in their importance for the 'subject character' of family.

1. Suggested virtues for marriage

The Second Vatican Council only spoke of the virtue of chastity (GS 51; FC 33) concerning marriage and family. It is supposed to help the spouses to decide on their sexual intercourse.

New theological literature works with the cardinal virtues concerning the needed virtues in marriage. Markus Wonka writes about prudence in marriage: »Die Klugheit entspringt dem Wissen, dass die mit der Ehe anvisierten Ziele und Güter in ihrer Realisierung gefährdet sind, so dass es auf den eigenen Beitrag entscheidend ankommt.« (2009, 246) To take the virtue of prudence serious means to accept crises and insecurity in marriage and to search for help if it is necessary for one of the partners. He considers the virtue of justice as motivation for the mutual honouring of the marriage promise (see for example the questions of justice in housekeeping). The virtue of fortitude is changed by Wonka into pertinacity, considered as power to be faithful to the partner. The author interprets the fourth cardinal virtue, temperance, as virtue for everyday life, which helps the inclinations orientating to the whole well-being in marriage, including enjoyment and renunciation. (2009, 269f)

The four cardinal virtues are describing the essentials for marriage. But are they enough for the families' problems and challenges? For a long time, questions on family were submitted by those who thought marriage alongside the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. (Anselm 2007, 297) Family was considered as natural consequence of marriage. Surely, the stability of marriage is a good prerequisite for founding a family, but the questions of theology and ethics should be applied to this new reality: family as a relatively independent reality.

Marriage and family are related in the Christian thinking, but family is no longer a natural consequence. Hans-Günter Gruber wishes a development in the Catholic Teaching from the family focused marriage to the marriage focused family (1994, 345). Even when marriage is the center, the focus nowadays should go to the family, too. It is not intended to break with the Christian substance concerning marriage: love, faithfulness, mutual support, durability, but to search for additional and complementary virtues for living family seems necessary. The relative independence of family should be supported by specific virtues which can be adapted to different stages of family (with younger children, with teens etc.)

2. Virtues for the family

To achieve a systematic approach, the contribution differs between two different directions of interpreting the family virtues: virtues for the inner living ('circle') of family and virtues for the relationship to society and state. Each family is a complex system which is in exchange with society. This way of existence is described in the magisterial term for family as 'Lebenszelle' (Päpstlicher Rat für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden 2006, 167) besides different other significations. (Hilpert 1995)

Family can be seen as interface between the private and the public sphere, with interactions between the outside orientated side of family participating on societal changes and the concerns of family orientated on the inner circle. Society and state can support many structural frames for families (Bayerl 2006) but depend on the inner processes of family. This relationship is idealiter that of subsidiarity, one of the Social Principles which describes the decree to help when it is necessary (Hilfestellungsgebot, Kompetenanzmaßungsverbot). Concerning family this means that the state should only invade into the family when the well-being of one of the members is in question. Support should be available when families think that they need it.

The basic acting inside a family is the acceptance of one another (Wenzel 2009, 159). This means that the family members are not leveled as persons but should rest in their otherness. This basic acting is now explicated in different virtues.

2.1 Virtues for the inner circle of family

In my opinion, four virtues are necessary for the welfare of a family. The first one is solidarity, which is often discussed in the context of family and which should be learned in family. The virtue of tolerance should demonstrate the acceptance of the other explicitly. The differences between families are manifested in the different persons of a family or more precisely the individuals in a family. To react to this diversity I formulate the virtue of confidence in the personal Charisma. Not only the diversity but also the real plurality of family forms must be recognized in our world. The fourth and last virtue is openness to different directions as explained in the following paragraphs.

Virtue of Solidarity

»Die Solidarität geht aus der Liebe hervor und wächst in der Liebe, und deshalb gehört sie wesentlich und strukturell zur Familie dazu.« (Päpstlicher Rat für Gerechtigkeit und Frieden 2006, 246) The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace stresses the important role of mutual support in family. Solidarity is one of the Social Principles. But why is it helpful to speak of solidarity as virtue in the context of family? As indicated above, the process in a family is essential. The virtue in general is called to rethink the way of acting in different situations. Specified for families, the virtue of solidarity means that the mutual support has to be adapted to different constellations in and of family.

On another account, it is possible that there are times for family where the basic family is challenged to be open for the generation of grandmothers and grandfathers. The virtue of solidarity remains to the support adequate to the stage of family constellation. Another challenge can be considered in times of world families who no longer have one common place for living together. Help for the second grade cousin in another country or continent is asked so that solidarity may get to its limits.

Virtue of Tolerance

Tolerance is often not seen as a virtue and therefore often misunderstood. In the name of tolerance intolerance is reigning instead. For the family, the virtue of tolerance means to accept others in their otherness, to recognize them in their singularity and individuality. Tolerance does not mean passively enduring views and actions of others but actively accepting them.

It should be explained why it is helpful to see tolerance as virtue. As the thinking of virtue, especially of a 'virtue of character', wants to get rid of a pure technical exercise and achieve a creative process of adapting and re-thinking the virtue. The virtue of tolerance should increase the understanding between the generations – a real understanding and perhaps 'othering' ('Ver-ändern') by the views of the younger or/and elder generation.

Virtue of Confidence in the personal Charisma

Until now, the Holy Family has not been an issue in this contribution yet. What can we learn for our own families from the description of the Holy Family in the Bible? Apart from the fact that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus, we can find a loving mother who has to learn to let go of the beloved son. Joseph as father is responsible for fleeing to Egypt in order to protect his family. »In einer solchen Familie, in der des Zwölfjährigen Weglaufen in den Tempel nicht mit Drohungen geahndet wird, in der also Widerspruch und Anderswerden nicht mit Gemeinschafts- und Liebesentzug bestraft werden, kann ein Vertrauen heranwachsen, das das Ich stark macht: für ähnliches Vertrauen und für die Liebe.« (Fuchs 2011, 36)

This observation from the Scripture should be formulated as virtue of confidence in the personal charisma. It is a virtue to realize the potential of the other family members and perhaps to strengthen each person: qualification and reaching competence. As Maria accompanies Jesus in his dreadful hours as well or as Jesus entrusts Maria with his being God's Son is exemplarily for this virtue. But this virtue should also include the confidence in one's own charisma. To find one's own role in the family is no longer a social role model but must be found in a process and re- or newly found in different stages. This is especially needed in the plurality of contemporary family forms.

Virtue of Openness

The last virtue that is to be dealt with here – the list of the virtues for the inner circle of family is definitely not concluded with these suggestions – is this of openness. Especially the thought of passing on life should be set within the frame of partnership and family. As long as the mother is in the reproductive state, the possibility of more children should be discussed.

In the postmodern management of family, different goods have to be weighed against each other: »Auf der anderen Seite stehen die tragenden Leitbilder für

ein Leben als Familie nicht einfach mehr zur Verfügung. Vielmehr ist es Aufgabe der einzelnen Paare und ihrer Kinder geworden, das familiäre Glück irgendwie auszugestalten: Wie viel Kinder möchten die Partner? Sind beide berufstätig oder bleibt einer zuhause? Verwaltet man sein Geld getrennt oder gemeinsam? Ab wann besuchen die Kinder die Kinderkrippe und den Kindergarten? Welche Freizeitangebote möchten die Eltern wahrnehmen und können sie sich leisten?« (Römel 2009, 40) The virtue of openness is oriented to the negotiated family goals which change (GS 50).

But openness does not only aim at reproduction. The openness towards faith has to be included in a Christian context as well. In the catholic teaching the family is described as domestic church (LG 11). Family is church in miniature form and is the primary place for passing on faith (Blasberg-Kuhnke 2010, 409). The virtue of Openness challenges all family members to stand open in face of different stages of faith searching and keeping (as baby, as teenager, as elderly person etc) and to develop an own spirituality for each family.

2.2 Virtues for the interaction with other systems

Family is often described as last resort for privacy and retreat. But only resting in this privacy is not enough for a family's well-being. »Es bedarf einer Überbrückung der Kluft zwischen familialen und nicht-familialen Handlungsräumen, im Interesse der Person und des Gemeinwohls.« (2011, 155) The social ethicist Günter Wilhelms writes that the person and the public welfare profit from interaction and exchange. In this context the following questions arise: 'Which virtues and capacities can be learned in family for the development of society?' 'How many children are necessary for the survival of a nation, state, community?' Family in this context is seen as a place with human ecology relevance: »The first and fundamental structure for 'human ecology' is the family, in which man receives his first formative ideas about truth and goodness, and learns what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person.« (CA 39)

But this contribution is about how these interactions should be accompanied by different virtues which should facilitate this difficult relationship. The virtues of reserve, calmness, reliability and flexibility are suggested in this contribution. Therefore I pay close attention to family as partner for interaction.

Virtue of Reserve

»Zugleich wird offenkundig, dass eine der großen sozialen Fragen der Gegenwart nicht mehr vorrangig die Frage nach der intergenerationellen Gerechtigkeit, also nach der Gerechtigkeit zwischen den Generationen, ist, sondern vielmehr die nach der intragenerationellen Gerechtigkeit, also zwischen den Kinderlosen und den Eltern aus der jeweils gleichen Generation.« (Nothelle-Wildfeuer 2009, 280) This quotation from the social ethical context may be astonishing at first but explains the true problem behind it: justice in one and the same generation, be-

tween for example couples without children (intended or not) and couples with children is as important to recognize as justice between the generations that are already thought of in the virtue of solidarity.

Often families need support from society and from the state. How friendly a society is towards children differs from nation to nation. But structural support should be sufficiently given so that couples or families do not feel forced to renounce on having (more) children because of financial risks.

Intra-generational justice means to react on the necessities of all members of society and not to favor one group. Family is a form in society that needs support, but not in devaluation to other forms. A justice of distribution is needed. The suggested virtue of reserve helps the families not to be self-righteous in discussions about taxes etc. The question of support for families should not on the one hand dominate societal and political discussions and should not be neglected on the other hand as well.

Virtue of Calmness

Children in western societies are highly appreciated. Often families got smaller and the few children left are the project for the parents. Already in the pre-natal status, the best qualities would like to be chosen by parents (See the medical and technical questions concerning pregnancy). Education is on the one hand a battlefield between very ambitious mothers and fathers and more reserved parents on the other hand. Which kindergarten, which school is the best for my child? To which point is support from society and politics still good for my children?

It is not easy to stay calm face to face to all these questions. But the virtue of calmness is important in front of the challenges und claims of society, state and other parents to remain parent and not become 'project manager' for one's own children. It means to trust in the capacities and possibilities of the individual child. As a consequence you have to be cautious when facing different prenatal tests and to have a look on the righteousness of not knowing (Nicht-Wissen). The grounding principle of Social Ethics, personhood, is touched. Founded in the human being the image of God it can be read as a kind of reserve (Virtue of calmness) concerning forming the child.

Virtue of Reliability

To name the virtue of reliability, originated by fidelity, seems a bit surprising in the list of virtues for the interaction with other systems. Fidelity is asked in the marriage and family as one of its basic substances, in analogy to the fidelity JHWH gives to Israel. The value for the family is seen in its model character by the moral theologian Eberhard Schockenhoff: »Damit die Familie eine soziale Grundeinheit des Lebens bleiben und Kinder an einem Ort aufwachsen können, an dem sie die unbedingte Verlässlichkeit des Lebens modellhaft erleben, sollten die Eltern selbst in ihrer gegenseitigen Beziehung solche Verlässlichkeit repräsentieren.« (2008, 303)

Reliability in marriage and family helps to grow the well-being of a family. But there are enough partnerships that fail. Sometimes, the children cut the connections to the original family. The virtue of reliability should be achieved but there are situations which open the families to other families, friendships or support. Reliability can be learned in family but not exclusively. The virtue of reliability in the context of interactions should be adapted to the various forms of family. Perhaps it is necessary to search for this reliability in a newly formed family (the so called patchwork families). All these reflections are the cause why the virtue of reliability should not be concentrated to one single family.

Virtue of Flexibility

The Holy family was mentioned explaining virtues for the inner circle of family. But it can also be a source for inspiration for this context. If you look on the attitude Jesus has toward family in general it is surprising that he confronts his mother and siblings with a new understanding of family. »A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, 'Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you.' And he replied, 'Who are my mother and my brothers?' And looking at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.'« (Mc 3, 32–35) Maria and his siblings are his original family but the disciples are his new family, the family of all Christians. The disciples are also asked to leave behind their families to follow him.

But what does this scene in the Bible say about having family? What is family? For Jesus, these are the persons who he feels near to and who have the same goals. The original family is important but in the context of faith and church, family can be seen in a wider sense. For example, you can think of a community of order. Like in the virtue of reliability, the limitations of family shouldn't be focused on father, mother, and child(ren) – better considered as historical category (Bürgerliche Familie in the 20th century), – but should be worked with as an analytical category where relations are lived exclusively. The virtue of flexibility should remind on the fact that the limitations of family can be recognized.

3. Conclusion

John Paul II formulates a high claim for family: to succeed as primary place of socialization, to be a partner to the partner, to support the society in its formation, to realize the participation in life and mission of the Church. You should read these claims in the theological context in form of a correctly understood difference in salvation like the moral theologian from Vienna, Gerhard Marschütz, writes. The deep longing of the human for fulfilled love is not the wife or husband, but the longing can find its end only in God. (2011, 92) This liberation of expectations is also important for the family.

This thinking of contingency can be considered as typical for the virtue. The virtues have to be practiced and need their time. To stress for families duties, like the KKK does, implies the strict fulfilling of duties without searching for new and creative ways for the family. Often the fulfillment of duties is not enough for the well-being of a family. Virtues help to keep open the eyes for changes also initiated from society.

The Catechism of the German Bishop Conference stresses how important family is in its effect to others: »Vom Leben der Familie kann und muß die Kirche die Maßstäbe gewinnen, um sich selbst als 'Familie Gottes' zu erweisen.« (KEK 1995, 244) In the Charta of the Family Rights the social subject character of family is pronounced. The Church appreciates the Christian family admitting the social subject character to her.

But what does this mean precisely? To see family in its subject character would mean to realize family in all its differentiations and changes. To see family in its subject character would mean to accept family as relative independent reality to marriage. To see family in its subject character would mean not only to see the family as church in miniature but to see her as independent subject of preaching. The subject character is best expressed in forming virtues which differ from family to family. Each family has its own subject character and can fulfill its own tasks.

Abbreviations

- CA** – Johannes Paul II. 1991. Enzyklika *Centesimus annus*. VAS 101. Bonn: Sekretariat der Dt. Bischofskonferenz.
- FC** – Johannes Paul II. 2011 [1981]. Apostolisches Schreiben *Familiaris consortio*. VAS 33. 7. Auflage. Bonn: Sekretariat der Dt. Bischofskonferenz.
- GS** – Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil. 1965. *Gaudium et spes. Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute*.
- KEK** – *Katholischer Erwachsenencatechismus*. Vol. 2. *Leben aus dem Glauben*. 1995. Freiburg i. Brsg. u.a.: Herder.
- KKK** – *Katechismus der katholischen Kirche*. 2003 [1993]. Neuübersetzung aufgrund der Editio typica Latina. München: Oldenbourg.
- LG** – Zweites Vatikanisches Konzil. 1965. *Lumen gentium. Dogmatische Konstitution über die Kirche*.

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