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## Education for Interreligious Dialogue in the Family

*Abstract:* The magnitude of religious intolerance aimed at professing the Catholic faith in public in the world today is a major cause for concern. This article focuses on the most hidden forms of religious intolerance, namely those that occur between spouses and within a family circle. Religiously intolerant spouses often learn religious intolerance in their youth, since they have grown up in environments opposed or even hostile to faith. All the negative feelings, experiences, abuse and trauma in relation to religion from their youth are brought into their marriage and family. Research of marriage annulment cases at the Diocesan Ecclesiastical Court in Maribor confirms that religious intolerance is often transferred from one marriage to another, from one family to another. Victims of religious intolerance are always deeply religious spouses and minors. Therefore, fostering religious tolerance in families should be one of the most important priorities of the Catholic Church, which is nowadays particularly keen on new evangelization in the world and religious pluralism in families.

*Key words:* religious intolerance, marriage, family, Catholicism, abuse, trauma

*Povzetek:* **Vzgoja za medverski dialog v družini**

Skrb zbujajoče je dejstvo, da je danes v svetu veliko verske nestrpnosti zaradi pripadnosti in zaradi javnega izpovedovanja katoliške vere. V prispevku govorimo o najbolj skritih oblikah verske nestrpnosti, ki se dogaja med zakonci in v družinskem krogu. Versko nestrpni zakonci so bili pogosto tudi sami deležni verske nestrpnosti v mladosti. Ker so odraščali v okolju, nasprotnem ali celo sovražnem veri, so postali tudi sami versko nestrpni. Vsa negativna občutja, doživetja, zlorabe in mladostne travme v zvezi z vero so prenašali v svoj zakon in družino. Raziskave ničnostnih zakonskih pravnih na Škofijskem cerkvenem sodišču v Mariboru potrjujejo, da se verska nestrpnost zelo pogosto seli iz enega zakona v drug zakon in iz ene družine v drugo družino. Žrtve verske nestrpnosti so vedno globoko verni zakonci in mladoletni otroci. Zato mora biti skrb za versko strpnost v družinah ena najpomembnejših in prednostnih nalog katoliške Cerkve, ki je danes še posebno zavzeta za novo evangelizacijo v svetu in za verski pluralizem v družinah.

*Ključne besede:* verska nestrpnost, zakon, družina, katoliška vera, zloraba, travma

## 1. Rough path of marriage

Marriage is a common path of husband and wife. The Husband's task is to help his wife become more a woman and the wife's task is to help her husband become more a man. That is the spouses' mutual task, which overcomes the reciprocity of differences. Such kind of mutual assistance shouldn't only be felt by the spouses, but their whole family, especially the grandparents and the children.

Each family has an immense power and importance for humanity because its members assist each other and are mutually accompanied in the upbringing and growing up; family members also grow in relationships and share joy and happiness, as well as problems. The family is a perfect place where people develop as persons; the family as well presents »bricks« to build a society.

It often happens that the family life is very difficult, if both spouses are intolerant to each other. Especially painful is the *religious intolerance*<sup>1</sup>, which causes a lot of harm to spouses and children. Everyday life becomes difficult, sometimes even too difficult to be continued. Therefore, many marriages are being dissolved, due to religious intolerance (Forte 2014, 6).

Fiancés and fiancées are not required to have faith in order to be married in the Catholic Church; a minimum requirement, however, is to intend to do what the Church does. In this way, a trace of faith can be identified in fiancés and fiancées, which is necessary for the Christian marriage. »Where there is no trace of faith (in the sense of »belief« – being disposed to believe), and where there is no desire for grace or salvation found, then a real doubt arises as to whether there is the above – mentioned general and truly sacramental intention and whether the contracted marriage is validly contracted or not« (International Theological Commission. 1977, 2–3).

Therefore it is very important that a person to get married is open to the light of faith in the Lord when deciding for marriage. Only those who are open to God's truth can understand the greatness of married and family life. Jesus taught his disciples that a man himself basically can not do what is necessary to achieve real good. Refusal of what God offers actually leads to a deep imbalance in all human relationships (Benedict XVI. 2012), also marital, enabling a man to place himself in a selfish self – centredness. Therefore, we cannot ignore the fact that in the case if a fiancé or a fiancée has no faith, the wellbeing of the spouses can be undermined or even excluded from the agreement. Lack of faith can seriously hurt the wellbeing of marriage, and make it difficult for spouses to build their marriage according to the ideas of the Catholic Church in relation to God's plan.

Therefore, faith in God is a very important element of mutual self – giving and marital fidelity (Benedict XVI. 2011b). Faith is important to realize the true good of the spouses and it means constant desire for good (for) another in terms of true

<sup>1</sup> The ecclesiastical court in Maribor (Republic of Slovenia) has recorded an increase in pleadings for annulment of marriage since year 2000. Among the specific grounds for nullity of marriage is the *religious intolerance*, which means that religious spouse complains that the marriage crumbled because of the faithless spouse's hatred for the Catholic faith and religious practice in the family. Pleas records of such content got the tag on the ecclesiastical court: »plea file – religious intolerance.«

and indissoluble lifelong community (Can. 1055). The purpose of Christian spouses to live the true marital union is dynamism, which is typical for faith. Faith enables a man to be capable of self – giving. In faith, the love of the spouses grows and implements itself, providing space to triune God and therefore marital life lived in such a way is »good news« in the eyes of the world (Benedict XVI. 2013, 171).

## 2. The study of religious intolerance

From the archives of the Metropolitan ecclesiastical court in Maribor, we selected 29 claims (from a total of 136), which deal with religious intolerance in marriage, in the period from 2003 to 2013 (NCS – MB 2003 – 2013). Even the first data processing (Slatinek 2014, 295–303) shows that the issue of faith is one of the most important issues when concluding a church marriage. Therefore, it is extremely irresponsible if the question of faith in the preparation of the marriage is being neglected. In many countries of the world, the church has recommended the utmost care regarding the preparation of fiancés and fiancées and ex – ante verification of the essential requirements for a valid conclusion of the sacrament of matrimony. At the same time I would like to repeat the words of Pope Benedict XVI., written at the Bishops Synod on the Eucharist: »The good that the Church and society as a whole expect from marriage and from the family founded upon marriage is as great as to call for full pastoral commitment to this particular area. Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, for whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself.« (2007, 29) This is also confirmed by this study, which draws attention to the necessity of religious dialogue in the family. Religious intolerance between spouses often leads to discouragement, infidelity, violence and strife. Religious intolerance is most painfully experienced by the children. A religiously intolerant spouse is always the one who has never deepened his/her faith and turned it into a genuine personal faith. Therefore, in relation to the faithful spouse and children he/she is intolerant, offensive, curt, violent, and in some cases hostile.

religiously intolerant spouse	number	has caused violence	impeded religious upbringing	was causing strife
Man	17	8	5	4
Woman	12	1	8	3
Together	29	9	13	7
%	100 %	31 %	45 %	24 %

**Tabela 1:** *Forms of religious intolerance*

From Table 1 it is evident that in the period from 2003 to 2013 there were more religiously intolerant men than women in marriages. Men mainly expressed their impatience with violence towards their spouses and children, while women were

religiously intolerant in a way that they impeded their spouses and children in religious education. In some cases religious intolerance was expressed in the form of family quarrels. From the pleadings it can be seen that religious intolerance was the most painful for a (more) faithful spouse and children, especially when the impatient spouse interfered with religious practice in family and religious upbringing of children. The most painful spot for a religiously intolerant spouse was everyday life through faith and systematic teaching of Christian doctrine. The impatient spouse bitterly opposed and rejected the family celebration of religious holidays and religious education of the children.

The study shows that men expressed their religious intolerance verbally: with insults (humiliation and contempt of the faithful spouse and children) curses (God and the saints) and reproach (remembering errors made by the Church and priests throughout history). Men who opposed the life through faith and religious education were also (physically, psychologically, emotionally) violent against the faithful spouse and children. Religiously intolerant women in the family mostly opposed to everyday life by faith. They deterred their husband and children from all forms of religious behavior (worship, apostolate). In some cases, therefore, they were also controversial, in relationships difficult and inclined to conflicts. Only in one case a religiously intolerant woman was even violent.

religiously intolerant spouse	number	religiously educated in his youth	was baptized at the wedding	was confirmed at the wedding	member of another religion
Man	17	3	5	7	2
Woman	12	3	4	4	1
Together	29	6	9	11	3
%	100 %	21 %	31 %	38 %	10 %

**Tabela 2:** *Faith of spouses at marriage*

From Table 2 it is evident that religiously intolerant spouses were mainly Catholics. A few spouses (10 %) were members of other religions (Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim). Research has shown that the vast majority of religiously intolerant regimes received introductory sacraments (baptism, confirmation, confession, communion) only at the wedding (69 %). Only a few spouses (21 %) received religious upbringing in their youth by their parents or grandparents. Even those who had had religious education at a young age had not awakened the personal faith. Research shows that, despite the fact that they have been baptized in their youth, or that they received introductory sacraments (baptism or confirmation) before the wedding, most religiously intolerant spouses define themselves as non – believers or otherwise faithful. From the pleadings it is shown that some spouses received sacraments (baptism or confirmation before the wedding) just so they could be wed in Church. Personally they remained without (practical) personal faith.

religiously intolerant spouse	number	had a negative experience of faith	had unbelieving parents	parents members of the Communist party	lived in environment without faith	had unbelieving friends	practiced new age religion
Man	17	1	1	4	3	7	1
Woman	12	3	2	0	0	1	6
Together	29	4	3	4	3	8	7
%	100 %	14 %	10 %	14 %	10 %	28 %	24 %

**Tabela 3:** *The causes of religious intolerance*

Research (Slatinek 2014a, 300) found that religiously intolerant men were mostly affected by faithless or otherwise religious friends, while women were much more under the influence of modern religions (New Age, yoga, esoterics, magic e.a.). The analyses of the pleadings show that religiously intolerant women before and later in the marriage gave full advantage to the contemporary religions against Catholicism. In their religious intolerance they had tried to dissuade their husband and children from the Catholic faith and persuade them of different forms of belief. Religious intolerance of spouses was also influenced by their parents who were without faith (10 %) or members of the Communist party (from the period of the old Yugoslavia). Some spouses (14 %) had a negative experience of faith at a young age (rigorous religious upbringing etc.) because of which they practically rejected the Catholic faith (Can. 1041 §1,4), or became hostile towards the faith and the Church.

religiously intolerant spouse	number	without a father	father was a manual worker	father was an employee	father was a Catholic	father was a different (non) believer
Man	17	2	12	3	12	3
Woman	12	1	10	1	7	4
Together	29	3	22	4		
%	100 %	10 %	76 %	14 %		

**Tabela 4:** *Impact of the father on religiously intolerant spouses*

From Table 4 it is clear that religiously intolerant spouses mainly had a father. A few spouses (10 %) were in their youth without a father. The absence of the father was in all cases due to civil divorce of their parents. The study showed that the fathers of the spouses were mostly manual workers in different occupations (driver, farmer, trader, policeman, waiter, mechanic etc.), and only in some cases, employees (teacher, doctor, professor id.). Religiously intolerant spouses had largely a father, who was of the Catholic faith (66 %). Only a quarter (24 %) of religiously intolerant spouses had a father who had different belief or was even unbelieving. The study shows that in only two cases the father of a religiously intolerant spouse was not baptized, i.e. defined himself as unbeliever (atheist).

religiously intolerant spouse	number	has been without mother	mother was a housewife	mother was an employee	mother was a Catholic	mother was different, (non)religious
Man	17	1	14	2	10	6
Woman	12	1	10	1	7	4
Together	29	2	24	3		
%	100 %	7 %	83 %	10 %		

**Tabela 5:** *The impact of the mother on religiously intolerant spouses*

Research has shown that the religiously intolerant spouses spent their youth without a mother only in two cases (7 %). The absence of the mother was in both cases due to civil divorce of the parents. Mothers (of religiously intolerant spouses) were mainly housewives (83 %) and only in rare cases employees (doctor, teacher). More than half mothers of religiously intolerant spouses were Catholics (59 %), while one – third of mothers were not baptized, were infidels or professed other beliefs (34 %).

### **3. The results of the research and the search for the root causes of religious intolerance**

The results of our study showed that religiously intolerant spouses were in average married for 6 years. At the civil divorce, however, they were aged around 25 years. Therefore, we conclude that they were born between 1979 and 1988. Probably their parents were also aged about 25 years back then. If this is true, then their parents were born between 1953 and 1963. To understand why there was so much religious intolerance between spouses during the period from 2003 to 2013, it is good to know some of the characteristics that happened in Slovenia in two periods and in the years 1953 – 1963 and 1979 – 1988. In doing so, we are interested in finding out what was the disposition towards religion and the Church at that time, and how was religious education being held at that time.

First, let's look at the period in which parents of religiously intolerant spouses lived their youth. This was the time between 1953 and 1963. Slovenia was then a part of communist Yugoslavia. During that time various forms of consolidation of the communist authorities took place, then it became milder in the following years (Bahovec 2014, 44). It should be stressed that the Church in that period was un – free and oppressed. The Communist government implemented atheisation, particularly through schools, the media and the whole of social life. All this led to changes in the mindset of the Slovenian man and his/her relationship to faith. Because Christians were inferior in the society, some of them denied their faith or accepted the membership in the Communist party. The children were given merely a traditional religious education. They attended religious education classes and received the sacraments, but they grew up without personal faith (SBC 2002, pt. 23–26).

We note that in this period parents of religiously intolerant spouses grew. The study shows that they mainly received a traditional religious education. Some of

them later remained passive in relation to religion, un – relaxed and fearful. Due to the communist system and because of their religion they were not able to climb up to better jobs. Men were mainly employed as manual workers, women remained at home as housewives. Many of them were hamstrung in their ability and courage to religious upbringing of children by fear and negative religious propaganda induced by the Communist government. Because of religion they were often marginalized from public life, and therefore remained lukewarm in personal faith or, despite the fact that they were baptized, identified themselves as non – believers and atheists.

The period between 1978 – 1988 is characterized by a rapid decline in church religiosity among the Slovenes. During this period, namely, religiously intolerant spouses spent their youth. Each year there were fewer church marriages; moreover, there were more newborns outside the marriage; fiancés and fiancées have been mainly married civilians. A traditional form of faith had been in decline. Slovenes became »elective« believers. They no longer accepted faith in the »package« from their parents and surroundings, but they, infected with the secularization, became more critical and even impatient to religion (Perše, 2011, 245–248). Many of them were attracted to new age religiosity (yoga, esoterics, horoscope e.a.). Especially women have started to take interest in »instant« faith. Even their friends were mainly faithless or members of other religions. Since the traditional religiosity fade, many of them received only baptism at a young age. Those who had lost their religious education received baptism and confirmation only at wedding. In spite of all that, this did not bring them closer to the Church, nor did it deepen their personal faith. We find that the practice of granting the sacraments (Baptism and Confirmation) before the wedding was not positive for them at all. Many such spouses did not consolidate their personal faith because of it, but later changed their attitude towards religion and become even hostile to everything that is associated with the Catholic Church.

To summarize our findings, we can cite three root causes of religious intolerance of the spouses in relation to religion and religious education of children:

1. The general cause: The traditional concept of religion (i.e. religious education) shrank from generation to generation and because of the impact that communist regime had, it became just a part of the family »customs«.
2. The internal cause: Each new generation experienced religion (i.e. religious education) as »forced«. Therefore, internal (emotional) reluctance to practice religion in (personal and family) everyday life strengthened from generation to generation.
3. The external cause: various influences from outside strengthened religious intolerance from year to year, such as the privileges of the unbelievers, anti – Church (media) propaganda and the emergence of new religions.

In parallel with this, we find that religious intolerance among Catholic spouses during this period (2003 – 2013) was not an isolated phenomenon, which could unexpectedly infect Slovenian families. Religious intolerance has been present in many different ways throughout Europe during the course of history and even

today. The consequences of religious intolerance between spouses have marked some people and their families very fatally (Lenin, Hitler e.a.). Therefore, it would be illusory to think that a modern family (since year 2000) could avoid religious intolerance. It appears as an extremely dangerous infection, and religiously weakest spouses usually cannot resist it; then they spread dangerous germs to their family, children and relatives. For our discussion, therefore, it is of great importance to draw attention to some practical principles that can positively affect religious tolerance and the growth of interfaith dialogue in the family.

#### **4. Some practical principles for interreligious dialogue in the family**

Philosopher Janez Juhant in the discussion *Violence and compassion in the ideologies and religions* warns that we, the Christians in Slovenia, are upon serious challenges when looking at the suffering of the innocent (Juhant 2014, 186), among who are a large number of Catholic families in which violence and intolerance rule due to manifesting one's religion. In order to make more sense in the (Slovenian) families for interreligious dialogue, here are some practical principles:

1. Freedom of religion is one of fundamental human rights. Religious freedom is »the cornerstone of all other human rights« (Stres 2004, 15) and it includes the freedom to choose what religion you think is correct and to profess your faith publicly (EG 255). To this must be added that religious freedom is not limited to purely private sphere. Freedom of religion is private and public, individual and common (16). Therefore, every man, especially spouses must be enabled to live their faith in the fullness inside and outside the marriage.
2. Even the *Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia* determines the position of faith and points out that the profession of religion is free (Article 41). The Constitution prohibits all forms of marital violence (Article 21) and allows parents to educate their children (Article 54), in accordance with their conscience and religion (Article 41). The state must protect, respect and promote that right. The state has to protect religious spouses with appropriate laws and penal means against every religious intolerance in the family. Especially when the faithless spouses cannot get rid of the former historical lies about the Church and cure their trauma with family violence (Juhant 2014, 184).
3. The family is a community of love and solidarity, qualified to teach and provide spiritual and religious values to their children. Therefore, the fundamental duty of faithful parents is to educate their children in the faith (Can. 1136). The right and duty of parents to provide religious education for their offspring is essential. This task is irreplaceable and cannot be transferred to others, nor can others own it.
4. In the religious education of children the mother's and father's role are equally necessary (LG 52). Religious education of children is a shared task of both parents



(Can. 1135). If parents coordinately raise the child in the faith, it will lead to a personal faith. However, when family suffers from religious intolerance by one of the spouses, the religious spouse is expected to raise children in the faith considerably, but also strongly and firmly, consistently and wisely, according to one's efforts, even though he/she will have to endure something unpleasant.

5. The Pope Francis in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* notes that bureaucratic methods of administering the sacraments still dominate in some parishes (EG 63). The survey, which we conducted confirms that. A very large percentage of the married receive the introductory sacraments merely before the wedding. Despite the received sacraments many remain without personal faith. This will require a profound reflection on the value and appropriateness of granting the sacraments (Baptism and Confirmation) before the wedding. Taken into consideration the all abovementioned, it became clear that the administration of the sacraments and education in personal faith belong inseparably together. That is to say that, more than anything else, we need a thorough pastoral plan for engaged couples, who do not yet have the introductory sacraments, to be well prepared for the receiving of the sacraments and after the wedding to be offered adequate spiritual accompaniment, which will lead them to personal faith. Only in this way will the number of religiously intolerant spouses decrease in years.
6. Pope Benedict XVI has championed for the good preparation of fiancés and fiancées. In his address to the Roman ecclesiastical court in 2011, he said: »It should never be forgotten, however, that the immediate objective of this preparation is to promote the free celebration of a true marriage, that is, the constitution of a bond of justice and love between the spouses, characterized by unity and indissolubility, ordained for the good of the spouses and the procreation and for upbringing of their offspring, and which among baptized people constitutes one of the sacraments of the New Covenant. Instead it is a unique pastoral opportunity – one to be made the most of with the full seriousness and attention that it requires – in which, through a dialogue full of respect and cordiality, the pastor seeks to help the person to face seriously the truth about himself or herself and about the his or her own human and Christian vocation for marriage.« (2011a)
7. The new evangelization calls every Christian, especially spouses, to proclaim the Gospel to the unbelieving and other believers. It is often the case that the faithful spouse is the one who witnesses the Gospel to his/hers faithless or otherwise religious spouse. In this perspective, it is necessary to read the Apostle Paul, who says: »For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.« (1 Cor 7:14). Each spouse is in a way a missionary in his own family (EG 120). This is a challenging and difficult task, on which the faithful spouses should not forget. Personal faith is a gift from God that changes the faithful spouse from the inside in such a way that he consequently changes even his attitude towards non – be-

lieving or otherwise faithful spouse and strives for the common good of the wider community (SBC 2012, 44).

8. The Plenary Assembly of the Church in Slovenia has done a good analysis of the situation in our society and culture. Plenary Assembly notes that to our weakness belongs to superficial faith and low trust in God (SBC 2002, 18). Our study, however, also included religious intolerance in families among the weaknesses. This is a wound (of exclusion), which we recognize in the Church in Slovenia. It is a wound of division, which is the most painful for the children. Christian spouses are therefore called to heroic commitment to religious dialogue (EG 250) for forgiveness (Slatinek 2014b, 140–142) and reconciliation. Only in this way can we overcome hatred that drives people to violence against themselves and against each others, and this is the cause of suicides and genocides (Juhant 2013, 346).
9. The Church invites the faithful parents to be witnesses of faith, hope and Gospel – *likelove*. Social doctrine of the Church emphasizes that the Christian testimony should be a duty which cannot be waived (KDnC, 2007, 570). The Church is convinced that the faithful spouses and children in families suffering from religious intolerance are the true martyrs of faith. Martyrdom is a testimony of the love of God and is expressed in the highest form, as well in the selfless sacrifice of himself (Fisichella, 2011, 90).
10. The faithful parents are also particularly responsible for religious dialogue in the family. It is essential that children are orderly and gradually acquainted with the fact that the parents can be of different faith. In particular, it is essential that the child develops a deep sense and a great respect for every human being (especially the parents), which is otherwise religious. Dissident (parent) should not be understood as an opponent, or even as a renegade (Turnšek 2013, 39). Only in this way will interreligious dialogue move through the family in society and in the world and become the yeast for a peaceful and pleasant coexistence.

## Abbreviations

**LG** – Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) from 21<sup>st</sup> November 1964.

**KDnC** – Papeški svet Pravičnost in mir. 2007. *Kompendij družbenega nauka Cerkve* [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*].

**NSC-MB** – Archbishop ecclesiastical court Maribor 2003–2013.

**SBC** – Slovenian Bishops' Conference [Slovenska škofovska konferenca].

**EG** – Franciscus. 2013. The Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

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