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FAMILIA CA RÂNDUIALĂ DIVINĂ ÎN VECHIUL TESTAMENT ȘI SFÂNTĂ TAINĂ ÎN NOUL TESTAMENT

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In the present work, entitled *„Familia ca rânduială divină în Vechiul Testament și Sfântă Taină în Noul Testament”* (“Family Understood as a Divine Oikonomy in the Old Testament and as a Holy Mystery in the New Testament”), I proposed myself to elaborate not a theory of the family, but rather to expound the spiritual life of the spouses, in a concrete manner, in the Orthodox Church, and the way in which this new spiritual life surpasses the one from the Old Testament.

Among the countless problems that invade us, the family ones are a priority, and the today’s society makes huge efforts which seemingly tend to give solutions to our problems.

We are all conscious of the complexity and gravity of the problems, and of the measures span that would be necessary and, at least at the level of principles it’s very

probable that we might initiate a joint effort to mend, or - why not? – to eliminate the problems.

Considering that such a situation have already been created and we witness a determination and this big plan would be already designed and ready to be followed, it is obvious that every domain of society would have a proper department, conceived by the experts on every domain. Such an extremely important domain is made up by the family, where we with no doubt consider that the Christian solution is the ideal to follow and apply.

Beyond the inherent critics and internal and external fights in the arguments and for the apology of the noble, superior solution offered by the Christian family, it is obvious that the next possible solution – widely recognized for its efficiency – is made up by the Judaic family. For these two directions of study, for our work we consider realizing an appropriate theoretical basis, necessary to define the two types of families: the Christian family and the Judaic family in their specific dimensions, after which we shall obviously proceed to justify the Christian family as superior to the Judaic one.

If we are to find a concise and very exact formula of what are we prepared to do in this work, then we think that the last paragraph is a very good summary.

Nevertheless we cannot talk about the Christian solution to the serious problems of the family and society today, while we, the Christians, let these non-Christian problems come on us, and are added to the usual Christian issues, and we cannot suggest our superiority

as long as we do not solve them in such a manner that we can give a positive example on the Christian family.

The concept and the reality of the Christian family is an everlasting value. We should only bring it back to life, starting with us, and then trying to offer it to the others as well.

What is more critical is that the today's and appreciated as natural both among Christians and non-Christians. God offered us the best means of surpassing any issue we meet. If we not manage to do that, it means there is somewhere in us, the Christians, an obstacle. Countless aspects contend against another, some in order to aggravate our problems, others to solve them, and what is more important is that we do not experience a situation with no way out, on the contrary, all can go back to normal and the problems can be solved. Thus, our main difficulty is the identification of the concrete situation in which lies the Christian family and the awareness of its superiority, first in relation to the noble Judaic family, and then to all other (types of) families.

Man has been created by God, he has neither come up by chance by transformation of matter, nor he descended from apes, nor was he created by gods, plants, animals and others of the kind.

Creation of „mankind in our image, in our likeness“ (*Facerea 1, 26*) - by Holy Trinity – it is gift and a call, a special gift and a call full of responsibility. And in the way the Creator is communion of Persons, that is *Trinity*, in the same manner man was created as communion of

persons, that is *family*; more than that, on the fullness of time, “the Christian Church was founded on the family model, as a community of love that shows a God Who invites every and all”¹, for in the Orthodox Tradition, family reflects in her structure the mystery of Holy Trinity, and in Wedding and Family a *trinity* is established, where the third, between man and woman, is Christ our God Whom we, married or not, should always have as an icon of love, that is to love each other in the way he loved us, with a divine love, man and woman uniting themselves in God, in the same way as the two natures, divine and human, unite themselves in the single hypostasis of Christ, so as Father and Son unite in the Holy Spirit².

By means of this gift, man has a **strong creative vocation**; for by the making of man, the latter receives in his turn the commandment to participate in the “creation” of other people: “Be fruitful, and multiply”. Thus *procreation* belongs to man by his inner nature – as well as to all living creatures which multiply by divisions, disseminations or births, function of each kind – but, unlike these latter ones, human procreation has an element that makes it fundamentally different from the other living creatures; by means of procreation, man

¹ Lect. Phd. Nifon Mihăiță, *Misiologie creștină*, Asa Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 72.

² Paul Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, Delachaux et Niestlé, Paris, 1959, p. 295. Vezi trad. rom., *Ortodoxia*, traducere de Dr. Irineu Ioan Popa Arhiereu Vicar, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996.

transmits not only *the human nature as a support for biological life*, but especially, *human nature as a bearer of the image of God in man*, “*and image that is not defiled by the fact that human nature is divided in two sexes or in multitude of individualities*”³. This double-creational vocation that man received from God raises him above the animal life and loads the so called human sexuality with a function full of religious significance. It is not the manifestation of an “*irrational*” instinct that can be separated from the dignity on man as the image of God and as such unrestrained towards carnal desires which defiles this dignity⁴, but strongly related to the human vocation to gain the likeness of God and the molding of creation after his image.

Nowadays, the fact that family not only lost its biblical landmarks, but even the sense of its authentic existence, is a major handicap, that is *in* and *by* Christ. This is why the Christian family today, that lies in a similar situation, need more than ever to become aware of its landmarks, of its target and ethos, showed by the Holy Apostles, having as its base the teaching of our Savior Jesus Christ. Already in the last decades family have been the object and must continue to be the object of reflection and pastoral commitment of our Orthodox Church, and in this context we wish that our work will prove useful and might constitute a contribution to an

³ Cf. Pr. Dr. Vasile Răducă, *Antropologia Sfântului Grigore de Nyssa*, IBMBOR Publishing House, Bucharest, 1996, p. 78.

⁴ Pr. Drd. Nicolae Stoleru, *Viața morală a soților în cadrul unirii conjugale*, în Rev. ST, an. XXVI (1974), nr. 7-8, p. 538.

effort for towards a return of the society to a good moral, religious state.

Before starting this work, we will make some remarks concerning our subject. When we say “family in the Old Testament”, we do not refer to all the information about family in the way one can discover it in a detailed manner – as, for example, is presented by Moses, or as we can infer it from the Patriarchs` stories, but we refer to those general and common data that we have about family in the view of some nations that lived in the Old Testament period and which took part in the history of the Old Testament, nations as: Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Hindus, Greek, Romans, Hebrews, because our intention is to sketch the image of the evolution process that resulted in the Christian family, a process that we shall present in two stages: first, the ante-Hebrew (imperfect) stage, second, the Hebrew stage – the ideal one, standard in the concept of family.

Also, because of many aspects that we will present in the following, we find out that the word *marriage* is oftentimes used improperly, though the context shows us that what is discussed is the family; for this reason, we think proper to make some remarks on the words used and the most important example is that every time we refer to family, we will replace – any time we think it is possible and fit – the exact, usual term of “**marriage**” with “**wedlock/matrimony**” (rom. căsnicie), in order to avoid remarks as “*family founded by means of marriage*”, and we will make this replacement without associating it

with the Christian content, which we will explicitly mention any time the context requires it.

When we will quote from an author, we will obviously use the quotation terms, but as far as the work's discourse, we shall try to apply this reasoning: for instance, instead of "the aim of **marriage** is childbearing", we will say "the aim of **matrimony** is childbearing", for here we have a clear logical mistake, because *the aim of marriage* is only the founding of the family, and then the *aim of the family* will be the childbearing, though, as a consequence of the marital life, children may appear, and it is recommendable to be so, nevertheless this is no longer compulsory.

Also, when we say "family in the New Testament", we make reference to the Christian, general perspective about family, a perspective that we can build from the information we have about family in the New Testament books, which have been developed, enriched and practice by the Holy Fathers. On the one hand we'll show the characteristics of the Old Testament conception divided in two parts, that refers (1) to the family in non-Hebrew nations – where the conception, though having valuable intuitions, is incomplete, faulty – (2) and to the family as viewed by the Hebrew nation, this being the standard, superior and even ideal of the Old Testament, after that we will expound, separately, the New Testament view, underlining its superiority in comparison with the all Old Testament views, both regarding Judaism, and especially the non-Judaic nations.

There is no doubt that humanity cannot be conceived outside the family, and institution present in all ages, and even today, when it faces so much opposition, the number of those living in a family is greater than the ones with no family relation.

For every family, what is most important is the vision that lies on its base, as well as the moral, juridical, ethical, psychological etc. frame, but especially the spiritual quality of the family life, in other words, the relation between family and religion. The Ten Commandments and the Law Books, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, boosted forever the concept of family in the Hebrew nation, above all other forms known by the nations of those times, that were also interested in family. As divine teachings, the Old Testament Commandments bring the light of reason from the will of God in the family issue and expresses an ideal that cannot be surpassed, though in practice can still be attained by people, even from this age.

We may ask ourselves, what grants family such an important position, as far as the superiority of Judaic view on family - compared with that of the nations that lived until Christ - is beyond question, and can be easily proved and supported with many arguments, and the fact that, as time passed, part of the Jews have misinterpreted the teaching on family and only rarely and in small measure attained the religious ideal in the family life, does not reduce the value of the Judaic view, and neither the Christian one, that also witness today countless issues, though not of its fault; secondly, we

cannot totally blame those that defiled family in general through their attacks on the Christian view, but rather we may accuse a weakness or blindness, or maybe there was not the right time, Christians being a small and a single people; anyhow, it is clear that, adding to the people weakness and ignorance , we have the demons' assault. From the very beginning we should understand that the attacks aimed on family, are not because it has weaknesses, but because family causes unease by the benefits that brings to man, for the fact that it does not seek to enrich the family, but to destroy it.

What is most sure is that by the work of Christ, time has come for all people – Jews and Christians – to know both the truth and drifting, but, especially, time has come for people to experience the power of Holy Spirit in the family life. Only thus can we understand how the Christian family was raised in Christ above the Judaic and pagan teaching and practice altogether and of all times. Precisely this thing we try to approach in this work, striving to offer a comprehensive and honest look on the family (in the Old and New Testament), so that we can thus infer the constant progress from the pagan family to the Judaic one, and especially from the Judaic, specific to the Old Testament, to the Christian family that arises in Christ.

Eastern Fathers show explicitly that a family founded only on secular documents/practice, no matter how it is called: concubinage, “marriage”, alliance, and though it has all juridical aspects in order, we can still call it

“licentiousness”, and what we call Mystery, is referred to the union between spouses that is performed ritually in the church by the priest.

This is why Christian family is not only a simple cohabitation between man and woman recognized by society, but more properly a ecclesial commitment and dedication to the Gospel’s commandments, to Christ; any other idea or system of marital union has not the right, after the coming of Christ, to call itself family, despite the human practices. Also the levirate marriage is thought legitimate by Jews, but was abolished by Christ.

Another theological aspect of the Christian family constitutes the relation between Church and Christ, because both the family – *the small church*, and the Church, too – *the big family*, require the unity of the body, and the specific identity of person after the image of God in Trinity. And if society restrain at the level of simple observations about the corrupted and degrading of family, without resorting to causes, the reality oblige us to go back to the archetypal resources of the Orthodox Spirituality, of a spirituality experienced in a concrete manner on a interpersonal and family level. Unfortunately, for the desacralized man, the “forms” temptation is much more attractive than the durable content of the Orthodox Christian Tradition.

All these aspects have made us approach the subject of Christian family in comparison with other possible “solutions” and “situations” and mainly with the Jewish family, giving a special treatment to the provocations of

the XXI century, for these reason, we consider that the motivation of the present work is not one strictly gnosiological but pragmatcal, also because there have been much talk concerning the superiority of the Christian family. But what lies in this superiority? What precisely makes it so special? In the Orthodox Church this matter is clear, either on a scholarly level, or a common one, in a few words but brilliant, the majority of them being spoken while the Wedding Mystery is performed. One can believe that, following the today's crisis, when the family is attacked and disregarded even in the middle of Orthodoxy by sinful counterfeiting, would be necessary to set forth, in a detailed manner few of the important things, in order to answer those outside Orthodoxy: what is the Christian family in the Church teaching, what should be and what is in reality; what is the non-Christian family and what could become; how should spouses behave in a Christian family for the family to be fulfilled, and how they are in fact doing given a non-Christian environment; what problems does the Christian family meet and how they are managed; what are the conditions and the impediments for contracting a Christian family; what are the conditions, temptations and solutions that life offers for the Christian family, for instance: what the canons say about polygamy, virginity, divorce, abortion, perversions and others of this kind; what are the methods of giving a good and correct education to children - and how are these methods fulfilled in reality - for they to become

good citizens, on the one hand, and to take part in the family joy for the saving of the whole family, on the other.

We can mention here how important is for a Christian family the true living in Christ, for the parents to be a living example to children, though this is just an aspect, because, despite the family religion, personality is less like an illness that you get in contact or not, but rather a building that you permanently and voluntarily realize, by love and well-timed pedagogical, moral, pragmatic, axiological etc. efforts, but especially charismatic ones, by that living in Christ Spirit, which is not an easy task to fulfill! We meet hardships, strong temptations, world is full of lures, there periods of decline and returns, because by offering food, clothes and a roof to the children raised in the family does not mean education. In the same manner, to command, to punish, and to reward is not education. Also, answering to children desires, choosiness is not love, and to accuse them with too much authority does not mean Christian integrity. Or, in this work we want to mark out the bond and the very strong relation that exist between parents' Christian life and the (self)education of children, between attentive and consistent education and the redemption of both parents and children.

It is sufficient to choose and make a comparative exposition of the family of the Old Testament and the family of the New Testament and thus we will cover efficiently and sufficiently the possible attacks on the

Christian family, both the small one – the home, and the big one – the Church. It is enough, for the entire non-Christian population of the world – In America, Africa, Asia, Europe, India recognizes and take as a model the Old Testament family, with the Jewish family on its top. It is all the more useful because the Christian family is a fulfillment and a top of the Jewish family, and a description of the issue together with the Christian family solutions can close big parts from the domains where the Christian family is attacked and can furnish counter-arguments to those who sincerely look for what is best, against non-Christian attacks on family, but especially in favor of the testamentary family – Jewish and Christian. For this reason we thought best to direct the work discourse into a successive exposal of the Jewish and Christian family in a comparative and axiological manner in order to discern the elevation of the family role in the New Testament comparative to the Old one. If we will manage to do this, our aims will be attained.

There are many who believe things, many more that knows them, though not believe in them, because the beginning of the third millennium gives us the false impression that we are a modern society, which means, more exactly, that we are a society drawn into a countless problematic and paradoxical situations, because it mainly fights against family and the Church. In other words, traditional institutions and solutions are rejected, in order to be replaced with anything different, with realities that have man in the center of its interests. Nevertheless, the

institutions are not rejected as such, but only their traditional form – religious and ethical – that are thus replaced with administrative structures, which seem traditional in form, but in essence are whole different. Founded more on juridical, economical, biological, or only rhetorical fundamentals, family feels strongly the threatening distance between the divine order and human institutions, produced by the institutionalization and depersonalization of the interpersonal relations.

Nowadays, things are stunningly changing within the frame of an unknown logic. Precepts, institutions and customs very well established for hundreds and thousands of years are turned upside down, and values that lately were reckoned eternal and being questioned, so that at a certain moment one has the impression that nobody knows what to do exactly. But the one who manages to keep the Christian traditions is set apart from such a confusion and lives blessed by God, in the same way He is blessing the faithful for ages.

We are caught in a continuous fight between Modernism – no matter what! – and Tradition, in any visible form it has in society. Against the Christian family, Church, values are turned upside down, normality becomes abnormality and vice versa, and all that in the old was thought inconceivable, today is accepted in the name of libertinism, specific to contemporary society. But we do not witness an open combat, with the wish to compare an chose in order to win something, but a combat in which solutions are imposed because they are

called solutions, but having the hidden intention to destroy humanity, because family represents one of the humanity essential coordinates, and it is a fight in which the human needs are not formally rejected, i.e. explicitly and noticeable; but at the level of essence and implicitly, all the efforts, forms and institutions that through Tradition are proved as positive form man, are made inefficient by this relentless campaign for “renewal” and “updating”. Today almost nobody seems to support an explicit combat against God, Who is let somehow for “personal administration”; the only recognized fight “targets” are the God-created people, which is yet a fight against Him, because all the attacks of disbelief and pride ultimately come to condemn or only to accuse God. Attacking Church, family, marriage, sexuality, procreations, children education, the unity of body and soul is excluded, and by the modernist alternatives it is implicitly inoculated the idea that what God created is faulty, wrong and should be fixed, remade, i.e. God is not God, in the way He’s known from the Scriptures’ Revelation and, as a last conclusion, God, and all that is related to Him must be removed, and, where possible, replaced or erased from the people’s soul and life.

This contemporary target of the fight against Christianity is utopic mainly because *Homo religious* - to quote from Mircea Eliade⁵ - is at once time and measure, a

⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Sacral și profanul*, (traducere din limba franceză) Brândușa Prelipceanu, ediția a III-a, Bucharest, Humanitas Publishing House, 2005, p. 122.

family man and man of the traditional customs. So, here's how can we understand the fact that today's fight against God is led by attacking the traditional institutions, particularly the (small) family and Church (big family). In the eyes of contemporary man, the world state does not seem worse than the one from the time of the first coming of Christ, but this state is in fact worse, because then people had among their values responsibility and religiosity, while today there are no (firm) values, they being replaced with objectives, goals and ideals, and what is today called value, are exactly the opposite. Rejecting the absolute attribute of divine creation and replacing it with substitutes of the demonic "creation", thought of as human only where was possible; we were driven from the sphere of values and fell into nothingness, in something that cannot even be named, and this is the reality in which we live today.

Today's society is seriously sick from many points of view, particularly religious, which makes the present state resemble the one two thousand years old, when Christianity came into the world. Yet there are some differences, because two thousand years ago people did not know the Christian faith, nevertheless, in one way or another they were very religious people, a fact that helped them easily receive the Christian faith as a proper solution to the society of that time, all the more because any religion has its importance. In contradistinction to those times, "the religiosity" that was then very present,

today is missing, that constitute an handicap in comparison to the period prior to the primary Church.

On the one hand, the difficulty lies in the amplitude of the fight, and on the other, in its dilution or it dividing into two levels. Thus, on the main level, lies the Christian missionary fight, and on the second, it is about a huge fight of a completely new type, for the recreation of a new religious attitude. In case on a common Christian plan of action, every confession would exert its pressure along with its interpretation, but, above all these tendencies, it should exist a unitary and convergent effort to support all the measures that would lead to a creation of a religious attitude. The ancient people, be them pagans or Christians, were right in saying that a society with religions (either incomplete or devious) is better than a society without religion, as is the present one.

Without conceiving such a huge fight, we cannot talk about solutions, for any domain, not even to recommend the Christian solution as the best one. Our society must be first helped to realize that is extremely sick and needs medicine, and to feel the need for it, to look and receive the best medicine.

Only after performing these steps can we infer the seriousness of the situation today and the amplitude of the fight necessary for getting back to normal, for we have solutions, and this is the most important thing. To put it concisely: Christian family must be or should become again „the small church“; at the same time the Church must become again „the big family“ a family of

the sons of God; in this restoration process, all nations can partake in the simultaneous effects that can be produces and together we can come to ourselves.

For us, the Christians, this fight is not much easier only from the fact that we know what weaknesses we have and the way to cure it. We have though an advantage by knowing that God is beside us helping us, for all we wish to do for the people's good. Our only concern is that we, the Christian people, though some of us are not affected in the same measure as those of the non-Christian nations, posses in great measure the symptoms proper to non-Christian nations, and, as a consequence, we must use the well-know and verified medicine in order to rebirth the general religious health. In other words, we are passing ourselves, Christians and non-Christians quarantine in the same "building" as the other nations, and we cannot elude ourselves of the world for a period of healing, somewhere on the outskirts, and after that to return and heal the other nations, but there is need to heal ourselves together with the other people, that are not Christians, and probably do not wish our cure, and even worse, are not aware of their state and refuse any help or suggestion from our part, and who sometimes hinder us in our efforts.

For attaining these objectives we divided our work as follows; first we structured it into two great parts: a **theoretical part** and a **practical part**.

In both parts we grouped the information in several chapters starting with the **historical** aspect, continuing

with the conceptual one, defining the principles and finishing with the pragmatic one, of solutions and remedies, trying to enumerate and cover all the necessary dimensions of the discourse.

More precise, in **Part I, Chapter I**, we have general notions by which we try to define the family from the Old Testament perspective; in **Chapter II**, the same family is define from the New Testament perspective; in **Chapter III** we have a presentation of family and marriage from an Orthodox point of view; **Chapter IV** presents the Christian family from a inter-confessional perspective. We turn to **Part II**, where in the **Chapter I** we expound the juridical and canonical framework of the family; in **Chapter II** we continue with theoretical aspects, functions and objectives of the family; then we face four chapters, concentrating on family life issues, moral aspects, and spiritual health by means of the children Christian education and the prophylaxis of some sins and violence turned against family. Thus, **Chapter II** was dedicated is entirely dedicated to the children education in the Christian family, in which chapter we try to present the moral character of the Christian family; an extremely important aspect is approached in **Chapter IV**, related to the changes that Christianity has brought in the family life, that is the relation between ascetic life and marital life form the view of the influence that exists over sexuality by the Holy Spirit. For this reason we thought fit to approach sexuality, virginity and monasticism in Christianity from the view of their limitation

in the Jewish conception. Finally, in **Chapter V** we showed the problems of the Christian family today. Before drawing the **Conclusions**, we reserved **Chapter VI** for the pastoral-missionary solutions. We closed the work by presenting the **Bibliography**, the **CV** and the **Declaration of Honesty**.

In conclusion our theoretical effort is doubled by the need of forming a Christian foundation and practise from a moral point of view for the today's families and it is this need that motivated us in elaborating the present project as doctoral thesis.

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