Catholic NGOs and CCIC

International Year
of the Family

Presentation

1994 was the International Year of the Family.

On that occasion our Institute convoked a first Colloquium in Rome entitled Families, which was attended by 60 Lasallians from all over the world. Institute Bulletin Nº 245 presented the problems of the theme as well as a series of practical conclusions addressed to all Lasallian educators.

12 years have passed.

It would be good if our educational communities took up again the basic reflection and the current practices on a theme so essential not only for children and the young but also for the indispensable collaboration between parents and educators.

This will allow us to see the present relevance of our conclusions in 1994 and the inspirational strength which they still have.

It is in this spirit that we propose here the assessment text of the Family group made up of Catholic NGOs assisted by the Catholic Centre for UNESCO (CCIC). This group tried to pick out the international advances as well as the resistance, reverses, challenges with which families were confronted in the world of 2004, ten years after the holding of the first International Year of the Family.

This text does not tell us everything but it presents a certain number of tendencies which could give us keys to the interpretation of our regional realities and thus encourage us to greater commitment in a field where Lasallians do not commit themselves sufficiently.

I would like here to heartily thank the FAMILY group of Catholic NGOs and the CCIC for the great stimulus they have offered us.

Bro. Nicolas Capelle

Introduction

In 1994, the United Nations invited all the States of the world to celebrate the International Year of the Family (IYF). An NGO Working Group was set up at UNESCO in which Catholic NGOs were a driving force.

In 2004, the United Nations will celebrate the tenth anniversary of the IYF. Catholic NGOs - in relation with UNESCO and in conjunction with the Holy See - wish to make a contribution to this event. It is clearly fundamental to enable the family, "the primary basic unit of society", to carry out the functions for which it is responsible, particularly in the fields of social, economic, ethical and cultural development.

It had already been noted ten years ago that support from the State and society is essential to enable the family to cope with its responsibilities. Furthermore, family models of reference are changing as a result of the economic, political and social context. The family presents a multi-faceted face: the nuclear family, the traditional family, the single-parent family the recomposed family… We felt that it was important to find out if this phenomenon is on the decrease, remains stable or is increasing and, on the basis of the findings obtained, draft action proposals that would be able to influence political leaders, economic decisionmakers and civil society.

In October 2002, a questionnaire was sent out to the General Secretariats of the NGOs/UNESCO which had formed part of the initial "Family Group" and to a certain number of interested organisations, asking them to disseminate it amongst a maximum number of their members working in the field (cf. appendices). They were invited to provide information on what they had been able to note as evolutions in family structures, behaviours within the family, the influence of society on families, family policies in their countries and the resulting actions. On the basis of these observations and experiences in the field, each and every one was encouraged to formulate action proposals in UNESCO's fields of competence: education, science and ethics, culture and development, communication and social and human sciences.

One hundred and fifty collective replies were received from fifty three countries in five continents, representing extremely different experiences, cultures and traditions. It is evident that the synthesis drawn up does not give an exhaustive inventory of the current evolution of the family and the authors have respected the viewpoints of those working in the field. In highlighting the strong points and underlining the convergences, this synthesis makes it possible to present relevant suggestions which reflect both the expectations and needs. These proposals are presented here to be taken into consideration in the general policy of States and influence public opinion.

OBSERVATIONS

While recognizing that the family has the role of basic unit of society and in affirming that there are families that are functioning well, the picture that emerged from the answers received is often gloomy.

We can put forward three reasons for this:

- the importance of expectations concerning the family,
- the main goal of a large number of NGOs who answered (the fight against poverty, education, the status of women, the protection of children and peace, all sectors which do not give rise to unbounded optimism),
- globalisation in its negative sense (succession of economic crises, individualism and consumerism, acceleration of changes).

1. The evolution of structures and models

A less clear-cut cultural and religious model

All the answers, no matter from which continent they came, refer to the fragility of couples. Divorces everywhere are on the increase and people marry much later in life. The causes of these late marriages include the refusal to commit oneself, the length of studies, poverty, cohabitation and the desire not to have children. In the Russian Federation, we were told that 42% of couples do not have any children.

All those who replied stated that cohabitation was on the increase. *"Why get married since society accepts free unions"*. One reply from Latin America specifies that the marriage often takes place when the child starts school. The notion of natural child is becoming commonplace; in Europe, people practically no longer make the distinction and several replies from Australia use the expression "de facto parenthood". In Slovakia, one child out of five is born outside marriage (one child out of four in the European Union). One reply from India, on the contrary, states that the proportion of unmarried couples is negligible in that country.

In Latin America, it is specified that marriage, as a religious act, has lost its aura to a greater extent than marriage as a social act. Some answers state that people no longer really know what a family is, but others, in Latin America, the Mediterranean Basin, the Philippines and India, lay emphasis on the number of religious or traditional marriages that last, thus showing the continuity of the institution more or less everywhere, and particularly in rural areas.

In Africa, where the same evolution as everywhere else can be noted, the ancestral tradition, however, remains strongly rooted and *"People do not get married to separate"*. In Senegal, there is a movement which is trying to impose elements of the Muslim family code on everybody. Several replies from all continents refer to the decrease in the number of children.

A certain number of answers state that a larger number of obviously homosexual couples can be seen. In New Zealand, it is specified that in vitro fertilisation is possible for single women and lesbians.

Transfers of responsibility

An increase was noted everywhere in the number of women who are heads of families following divorce, desertion or widowhood (increasingly due to AIDS, violence and intranational conflicts), or because they have chosen to remain unmarried. The effects, from an emotional and economic viewpoint, are often considerable, although luckily, greater attention is paid to these families in Europe and Latin America.

If it is considered that a family exists as soon as a child is born, we can mention here the frequency, often referred to more or less everywhere, of teen age pregnancies with several results: a more or less difficult cohabitation with parents, the girl's rejection of the family or the contrary (with all the dangers that this entails), and also pressure to have an abortion.

In Europe, the term of single-parent family also covers the notion of a father on his own, although this is often only a stage in his life. Recomposed families in this continent have greatly increased, with somewhat vague parental functions (what can the grandparents of the child of your stepmother be called?), and even more vague with regard to the function of father. But a new model of alternating custody is beginning to spread; the children living part of the week with the mother and the other part with the father. The increase in the number of recomposed families is often mentioned also in the Latin American replies. This phenomenon is often considered as being a cause of the lack of landmarks for children.

Mention is also made of the case of grandparents who have become heads of families when the couple has broken up, or when the parents have travelled far to seek work, or when they have died of AIDS: this is just as valid in Ukraine as in Argentina or Ouagadougou. Replies from Europe and Australia point out the importance of the role of grandparents in classical nuclear families when the two parents work.

A new management of space

Many people note that migration movements from the country to the town, or towards richer countries, mainly for economic reasons, but also in the event of conflicts, are also a cause of the break-up of families. Reference is also made to the large-scale movement of women who leave to find work.

Several speak of the number of inter-generational families that exist for economic reasons: the difficulty of finding work, or the difficulty of finding low-cost accommodation. Children, and even adults, live with their grandparents and young people continue to live with their parents until they are well into adulthood. On the contrary, in developing countries, the intergenerational family is often broken up as a result of an unsuitable urban habitat. In the Russian Federation, it is stated that the traditional family, four grandparents, two married parents and children living in the same geographical place, no longer represents more than 2% of families.

This term of inter-generational is used in a questionnaire received from Benin to define the still frequent situation of very young girls married off by their parents to much older men. This situation is paradoxically also found in Australia, which attracts young Asian girls to marry much older Australian men.

In Europe, replies mention the increase in the number of persons who live on their own (11% of the European population): unmarried people or the elderly, and the growing number of old people who end their lives in institutions to which families hand over their responsibilities. The abandonment of old people is not mentioned in Latin America. Inversely, New Zealand and Australia mention retirement villages, although in aboriginal families, three or four generations continue to live together.

A certain number of questionnaires received from Latin America and Africa also mention the case of children left to fend for themselves and the appearance, in this category, of child soldiers.

Several replies talk of intercultural families which are increasing, given the population movements: a situation that is difficult to manage, particularly when the level of education in the couple is not the same; in South Africa, one answer pointed out that these

families have the same need for guidance and support as divided families. In countries such as Senegal, where culture is not particularly homogeneous on account of the different religions, intercultural marriages are either difficult or even clearly rejected, depending on the groups. Replies from New Zealand or Namibia present multi-cultural marriages as an enrichment *"a good example of humanity"* and even as being more stable.

The evolution already noted 10 years ago has therefore increased and become generalised: the family, by definition constantly changing with the passage of time, is becoming multiform, but it is still there, the subject of both expectations and criticisms.

2. Evolution of behaviours

New behaviours which are tending to become generalised

Changing family structures have repercussions on the behaviours of couples, parents (mother and father) and children.

We can therefore note:

- An absorbing professional life, often for both parents, although the mother remains the one who most often looks after the children. Consumerism, profit-seeking or, on the contrary, simply trying to find enough money to live and the difficulty of finding work, mean that parents are less available for their children. This is an almost unanimous observation.

- Greater difficulty in passing on family values, particularly when relational problems exist: the gap between generations is clearly present, although this is tending to be bridged in Europe, as well as in Latin America, as children are given a great deal of freedom. Religious, social and cultural standards are less clear-cut. Many replies speak of the bad example given by adults.

- The competition of "secondary groups" (friends, clubs, discotheques) and television which "socialise" in a different way, inculcating other values (giving no elements of critical judgement making it possible to call oneself into question, it is specified), and other habits.

- The fact that children are better educated than their parents, who have received little education or who are even illiterate. It sometimes results in a lack of trust, incomprehension (particularly when the conflict between cultures is added to this) and occasionally in a lack of respect.

- Economic difficulties that complicate the carrying out of family functions, particularly when these difficulties persist, disturb the whole lifestyle and are lived as a form of exclusion. The obligation for children to contribute to the economic support of the family is not necessarily harmful,

unless it is accompanied by violence, as long as it leaves the possibility of education.

• An excessive amount of out-of-school activities which concerns a certain number of children in industrialised countries. Providing material responses alone to the wishes of their children is a way, for parents who are not sufficiently available or divorced, to get rid of their guilt.

Dispersion of families

Whether this is due to the separation of the couple, the ravages of AIDS, the expatriation of one of the parents or of one or several children, this situation is very frequently mentioned.

Many replies underline that this complicates the carrying out of the many different roles of the family. It can be noted that when faced with the break-up of the family, due to the discord of the parents, young people are often less tempted to found their own families; their priorities are frequently personal development and their careers, or simply the need to assure their everyday lives, hence a feeling of insecurity with regard to the future. The decision to marry is often associated with the desire for a child and takes place when the first child is born; but this is far from always being the case in developed countries, as well as in Latin America.

The role of grandparents is often referred to: they are called on to take the place of the parents when there is an upheaval in the nuclear family for one or other of the reasons mentioned above. In their capacity as grandparents, they are judged as being very important as they pass on a more structured education than the parents, states one reply from Greece; for others, they have the advantage of being able to propose and not impose. The fact that they are not always close at hand is deplored more or less everywhere.

Weakening of the sense of parental responsibility

In Europe, above all, replies mention the regression of parental responsibility, which is partly assumed by certain social services. In Africa, disengagement on the part of the parents and their inaptitude to participate in the guidance and decisions which forge the lives and destinies of their children is also observed. The quest for

material comfort prevails, to the detriment of the educational role. Some people also note that families living in African villages have the same difficulties with their children as very poor families living in industrialised countries.

In these latter, the parents who have received little or no preparation for their role are disorientated by their children. "How to be a parent is not passed down correctly from one generation to the other", and the absence of dialogue is often quoted. Mothers, when they must assume family responsibilities on their own, do not always dare to oppose their children in case they lose their love. Children are urged to achieve personal success. It is noted that in the case of the separation of the couple, it is more difficult to exercise authority.

However, in Europe, but also in Latin America, general satisfaction was expressed at the fact that there is a greater investment on the part of the fathers and that parental authority is co-exercised (facilitated by the presence of two wage earners, stated one reply from Canada). The judgement of children, even young children, is increasingly taken into account.

Importance of cooperation between the family and the school

Many replies express confidence in the school, the place where knowledge and values are passed on, but in far too many countries, in the face of poverty and child labour, the family is unable to ensure normal schooling, or does not consider this a priority. However, in Ghana, one reply specified that the number of girls attending school had increased considerably, and, in Madagascar, one NGO stated that it had obtained free schooling from the local government for the group of extremely poor children that it supports.

In developed countries, replies note the lack of interest of young people for attending school, which is no longer the sole source of learning, all the more so as the new lifestyles do not encourage the cooperation of parents with the school. What is more, the majority of parents and teachers are ill-prepared for this cooperation.

A great deal is asked of the school: parents tend to transfer their responsibilities to it, while at the same time being less demanding with regard to the education given, than with the results obtained.

The rise of violence

Questionnaires received from all countries mention an increase in family violence, although certain replies say that they have not encountered it. In Africa, as in Europe or Latin America, blame is laid on the progression of individualism that breaks the social and family link, male chauvinism, difficult living conditions, alcoholism and unemployment, the dissatisfaction of those frustrated by consumerism, the opposition of cultures and the violence of society itself.

The NGOs which are close to these situations list violence in the couple (particularly against the woman which can result in her death, sometimes followed by the husband's suicide), violence against the children (which often causes them to leave home, even the girls, with all the dangers that this entails), violence against the elderly and the emergence of violence of young people against their parents.

In almost all the answers, it is mentioned that violence is increasing in society, in the family and at school, but it is quite often suggested that there is a greater awareness of the phenomenon of violence in the family and that it is more easily denounced: the media show unbearable examples of violence but they also help to make people aware of this problem.

A number of specific problems

The family and the status of women: the survey shows that equality between boys and girls is often fictitious (a point mentioned in India, for example). It can, however, be noted in Europe that girls follow the same studies as boys and that there is real progress towards professional equality…

Boys continue to be less asked to do domestic tasks. More is expected of girls who, nevertheless, are often more successful at school. Often (Africa, Asia), an ambiguous situation exists: for girls, there is greater access to education, including a university education, hence improved prospects of professional life and greater freedom in the choice of marriage and a husband. Nevertheless, an increase in the number of girls between 14 and 18 years of age engaged in prostitution can be noted, as well as many victims of excision and family violence, as well as difficul-

ties in the field of employment causing tension when the girls remain in the family home.

It is also mentioned that progress in the equal treatment of boys and girls, may be accompanied by too much promiscuity, and, given the context of freedom in which young people are raised, this facilitates cohabitation with far too many cases of teenage pregnancies.

In the rich countries, with the importance given to the body, an increase of the phenomena of anorexia and bulimia can be observed. The task of women in the family is more complex, as a result of the importance given to personal fulfilment, which is added to the need to work outside the home, the precariousness of conjugal relationships and the many different uncertainties concerning the children's education. Through the actions supported by the NGOs, mothers of destitute families can be seen improving their educational ability, while at the same time investing their efforts in training programmes and programmes to improve their living standards.

Contraception means freedom of choice (the child that I want when I want it), the primacy of the woman's decision and the couple's participation in the implementation of population policies, considered by a certain number of replies as being necessary for development. It also facilitates irresponsible behaviours, especially amongst men, specify certain answers which see in this situation the return of the "woman-object".

Children left to fend for themselves: following the refusal of family discipline and various deficiencies or violence in the family, children periodically or permanently leave the family and are exposed to the influence of gangs, sects, increasingly organised drug and prostitution networks, violence and delinquency. Latin America and Africa mention the distressing case of street children.

In Africa, where the extended family is a possible safeguard, it was noted that this is tending to disappear, at least in the towns.

Immigrant families: disorientated by having to share their way of life between the lifestyle of their culture of origin and that of the receiving country, they run the risk of continuing to live on the fringe and of experiencing difficulties of integration, particularly when they are victims of unemployment that is harmful to

parental authority. The parents do not know how to act with their children, who are more permeable to the culture of the receiving country; they have also difficulty in showing them examples of successful inclusion. Furthermore, the native population see, in these new arrivals, a threat for their employment, particularly in poor countries. In Muslim families, the problem of adaptation is more difficult for women and girls.

Family links often become looser either by necessity or by choice. Emotional factors play a considerable role in behaviours and adapting to an unstable situation calls for changes in the roles of each and every one.

3. Influence of major social problems on the evolution of the family

Families are the reflection of social problems, specifies a reply from Latin America, and society reflects the problems experienced by families. It could be added that the social question is, to a large extent, conditioned by the economic situation, whether the origin of this latter is globalisation or circumstances that are specific to countries.

We can discern some significant main lines that can be found in the replies received from all continents.

Most people live from day to day

Unemployment is the recurrent problem that destabilises families, whether this is endemic, as in many countries, even in Europe, or the result of an economic crisis that has disrupted the social fabric, such as in Argentina, where middle-class families have suddenly been plunged into poverty (two million persons in six months, states one reply).

Young people in industrialised countries experience difficulties in finding a stable job and delay their projects to found a family. Heads of families, whatever their qualifications, can be affected by long-term unemployment and it is then up to women to assume the role of economic provider, a situation which can destabilise the family. Structural unemployment affects a very large number of families and, when both parents are unemployed, receiving too much social assistance kills the value of "work" deprives the parents of their dignity and of part of their responsibilities (Europe, Argentina). Central and Eastern European countries are also strongly affected by unemployment.

Poverty is the effect, but also the cause of unemployment: insufficient qualifications, lack of access to the labour market, not enough confidence in oneself, etc. Almost all the replies mention the gap that is increasing between the rich and the poor in their countries. Poor families establish survival strategies which often depend on informal work: in Latin America, all the members of

the family are involved, including very young children who succeed better in certain small jobs, but they are much more easily exposed to the dangers of the street and risk losing the exercise of their specific rights: the right to education, the right to play, the right to protection… In Africa, it is specified that mothers generally cope better than fathers with ensuring everyday survival. In these cases, the role of "mothering" is often entrusted to the eldest daughter. Prostitution, unfortunately, is a survival strategy that is increasingly widespread.

Poverty is harmful to the family as it deprives its members, particularly children, of opportunities of personal and social development, states one reply from Poland; it can also generate alcoholism and violence. However family solidarity often prevents the family from sinking into poverty and despair and it is frequent that children are a source of hope and energy.

Migration is an extremely widespread response to poverty and unemployment. Rural dwellers abandon an agriculture which no longer brings in enough money or move from one end of the country to the other, because the policies followed increase inequalities between regions, such as in India. Rural areas are becoming depopulated and urban suburbs are becoming deprived areas where the new arrivals finding it difficult to reconcile rural and urban cultures, are often exploited, excluded by those who arrived earlier and are sometimes victims of sects which contribute to the break-up of families.

When migrant families arrive in industrialised countries from developing countries, the cultural clash is even greater. The replies talk about the inadequacy of schools to meet the needs; the women, who have not had much education and do not know the language, find it difficult, along with their children, to have access to the public services. Many replies conclude that a certain number of families integrate well, with work being the mainspring of this integration.

In Namibia and the Dominican Republic, the replies testify to the difficulty of developing countries to welcome migrant families or refugees from neighbouring countries.

Many answers refer to the repercussions of the dispersion of families on their members: grandparents who play the role of parents or who can no longer carry out their role of grandparents; aged

parents who are far from their children; parents who can no longer benefit from the support of the extended family; the wife who must assume family responsibilities when the father is absent three weeks a month, or on the contrary who becomes a child again because she and her children live with her parents while the husband is away.

A living environment that is dependent on political and economic life

Housing is a problem which often comes to the fore: in an increasingly urbanised society, there is very little accommodation available and it is therefore expensive, or cramped, or insalubrious, or a long way away. Consequently, young people delay getting married or founding a family. For poor families, after employment, housing is the main problem that can disturb the family link, but health is another problem. In Latin America and Africa, obtaining the necessary papers to legalise the occupation of a housing unit, however insalubrious it may be, is also a cause of great concern. Housing is a problem which often comes to the fore: in an increasingly urbanised society, there is very little accommodation available and it is therefore expensive, or cramped, or insalubrious, or a long way away. Consequently, young people delay getting married or founding a family. For poor families, after employment, housing is the main problem that can disturb the family link, but health is another problem. In Latin America and Africa, obtaining the necessary papers to legalise the occupation of a housing unit, however insalubrious it may be, is also a cause of great concern.

The lack of public services complicates life even more and reinforces exclusion in deprived areas, a problem that the tendency of current governments to privatise does not help to solve: "a social debt very often corresponds to the external debt", stated one reply from Latin America. It is again in this region that replies indicate the link between social policies and work, which excludes the families of the unemployed even more. We are witnessing the emergence of public services for the rich and others for the poor.

Health is also frequently mentioned in the replies as an important problem for families, intensified by the lack of dispensaries. Replies referred to the effects of tuberculosis, aggravated by insalubrious accommodation and malnutrition which is gener-

alised everywhere amongst the poor classes. There is also AIDS, strongly underlined in the African replies, with its hosts of orphans and HIV-positive children, but other diseases such as malaria and sexually transmitted diseases must not be forgotten as they are even more present with the increase of prostitution.

Reference is made to the prohibitive price of medication and the little impact of international research on the health of African families. The limited reimbursements, as in Canada, make access to health care more difficult.

It was also mentioned that even if abortion is prohibited in many countries, particularly in Latin America, many women have recourse to this illegally, with all the risks that this entails for them and, consequently, for the family.

The environment is a relatively new concern when we speak of families. In Europe, it can be observed that the environment and the family form part of a common concern for the future; the question of research on GMO is also raised.

In the majority of continents, replies mention the impact of drought, floods and deforestation on rural families. In Canada, reference is made to the tension on the labour market caused by changes in the exploitation of natural resources: fishing, wood.

A common quest for values

The practice of religion is pointed out as being on the decrease in countries where there are a majority of Catholics, as it is attacked by the pervading atmosphere of materialism. There is a certain spiritual vacuum. An absence of religious education combined with a tolerance that is not properly understood, can lead to a syncretism that is not very formative, hence the rapid expansion of sects or fundamentalisms which offer a framework and reassuring certainties. The new arrivals are crammed into the large urban estates which have no decent amenities, each group puts pressure on the other wishing to protect its identity, problems arise from the "struggles" between the religions and cultures with which the different populations identify themselves.

Religious structures, however, continue to play an important social role in education, the fight against poverty and the respect of human rights.

The media are unanimously criticised in the replies received because they contribute to distorting the meaning of values *"they render commonplace conjugal infidelity, divorce, abortion, homosexuality, pornography and violence"*, stated one reply from Europe and a reply from Africa pointed out that *"imported television or radio series alienate young people and harm parental authority"*. Unfortunately the institutions (political class, religious authorities, schools) are subject to a lack of confidence and have great difficulty in making people take into consideration those values that are able to balance the influence of the media which, for certain people, have become the primary educators.

Amongst the advantages of the media, a reply from America quoted, however, that e-mails maintain links amongst families that are geographically separated.

Violence would appear to be on the increase, family violence, but also violence suffered in communities and conurbations where promiscuity, the loss of social links, unemployment and many kinds of frustration are rampant.

War, most often civil war, is also a painful reality which families living in areas of conflicts must take into account in their everyday lives, along with the feeling of the fragility of their lives and the precariousness caused by insecurity. This is the cause of many family migrations.

The lives of the majority of families are therefore marked by a great instability imposed by economic, political and social circumstances. These families adopt strategies of life which sometimes reinforce the links between their members, in spite of the difficulties, but which do not always suffice to maintain family unity.

4. Evolution of Family Policies

All the countries in the different continents mention the existence of innovations, progress and changes in family policies, social services, or the action carried out in their countries, except for a few (Djibouti, Lithuania) and when countries do not have any specific family policies (India), education and housing programmes are established for specific groups (children, young people, women, minorities).

Policies and actions in the field of family life

Several countries, especially in the industrialised world, have taken measures to provide facilities to aid the lives of couples: parental leave, flexible working hours, nurseries, day-care centres, canteens.

In all countries, laws exist to regulate conjugal conflicts and divorces, intervene for the custody of children and the payment of maintenance allowances.

Certain countries provide underprivileged families with financial aid for accommodation, but it is necessary for more countries to adopt such measures. Some governments have instituted benefits for the elderly which help to maintain family links. In Benin, the Ministry of the Family encourages women to work, as they are the main support of the family.

Homosexuality, a subject which was long taboo, appears to be more openly displayed and certain replies mention that it seems to be developing. It is sometimes legally recognised or simply tolerated, or even strongly reproved. Some replies showed concern about such recognition: in France, the Pacte Civil de Solidarité (PACS) (Civil Solidarity Pact) falls within the context of a policy to make homosexuality something commonplace. Those who expressed themselves on this subject disapprove the adoption of children by homosexual couples.

Several answers deplored the fact that policies to fight against the sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, as well as the exploitation of child workers, are insufficient. A minority regretted

that many family policies tend to reinforce individualism and foster the disintegration of families.

Policies and actions in the health field

Progress in the fields of mother and child care and medical cover is real, although it is judged to be still too insignificant, as it is essential for the well-being of the family. A number of answers from developed and developing countries denounced the high cost of care, even for children.

Abortion is one of the major issues dealt with in the replies; legislation differs according to country, some authorise it, whilst others prohibit it (in Africa, in Latin America) but this does not prevent it from being practised illegally in the countries where it is forbidden. The authorisation of abortion is denounced in several replies and greatly debated by a certain number of young people. The morning-after pill is prescribed for adolescents in certain countries, without parental agreement.

An increasing number of countries have set up family planning centres, to the satisfaction of many. They are diversely appreciated or even accused of harmful repercussions by some (Togo). A number of people feel that their action is more technical than status-enhancing as they limit their action to distributing the pill, without focusing on the dignity of the person.

There were few replies dealing with policies concerning the fight against AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases; those from developing countries regret that nothing has really been done in this field, apart from recommending abstinence (Ghana) or the use of condoms.

Finally, euthanasia is often mentioned, with replies stating that it is prohibited by law and is possibly contrary to culture (Africa). Various comments express support for the development of palliative care and have reservations about the prolongation of life by artificial medical means.

Social services

Many replies expressed satisfaction that social services for families had been developed, especially for underprivileged families or families in difficulty, single-parent families and orphans. More

such services are needed. All too often, the aid given is only of an emergency nature and encourages the dependence on assistance denounced in Europe and South America. In this latter region, certain countries denounce corruption and vote-catching gimmicks which stand in the way of access to public services. In spite of the millions of dollars given over to the social services, states one reply (Canada), poverty, vagrancy and violence continue to exist.

Educational policies

Many countries endeavour to implement policies for the promotion of education and schooling, with emphasis on equality between boys and girls, especially in Africa. All countries try to provide quality primary education that is accessible to all and the extra food that is often distributed in these schools is judged as being essential for many children.

A great deal still remains to be done to provide access to higher education for a greater number of students.

Certain replies considered that the measures taken by States in the field of sex education (Latin America) were inadequate, incomplete or not applied.

Financial policies

Economic aids and tax measures for families exist but are considered as being still too low; these vary from country to country.

Amongst the positive actions, tax reductions, access and support for micro-credits and the encouragement of foreign investors who are creators of jobs in the poor countries are particularly worthy of mention. It was stated that in the Dominican Republic, there exists a programme of support for families if the children, even non-declared, attend school. In France, the single-parent allowance gives recognition to the mother and helps her to raise her children in greater security.

Concerning negative aspects, the replies mentioned the omnipresence of benefits which sometimes result in people no longer wishing to work and lead to a harmful dependence as far as the carrying out of family responsibilities is concerned. The ease with which loans can be obtained places certain families in situations of being heavily in debt.

This chapter could not be concluded without mentioning that certain countries have drafted and implemented a Code of the Family (Nicaragua et Panama) and that the family is at the core of a White Paper in Italy.

The evolution of family policies, appreciated by some and criticised by others, is a reality. All too often regrets are expressed about the fact that these policies are insufficient, unsuitable, not implemented and lack continuity and financing.

PROPOSALS

There are several common features in the proposals of the NGOs which replied to the questionnaire:

- when implementing measures concerning the family, their repercussions on all of its members must be taken into consideration,

- these measures must encourage the participation of families,

- in the majority of cases, families need facilitators and not persons or institutions who assume responsibilities for them,

- the best way of working to help families is by networking. As families form part of communities and are connected with institutions, they must all evolve together,

- through their knowledge of the milieu and the structures they have established, the NGOs can be important partners of the public authorities in supporting the family.

1. Education

Given new behaviours in the family and the transformations brought about by the new technologies, many replies underline the need to educate parents, the impact of the school which is complementary to the family and the role of religious structures, associations and States in making better provision for young people and children. But nothing can be done without funds, so requests for financial aid arrive from all over.

Education for parenthood

This is a fundamental and general request *"as the expression of love and a sense of responsibility are not evident, particularly for the first child"*; one reply suggests that a good time for this is during the pregnancy and that it is necessary to produce small and easy-to-read brochures to inform the future parents on the health, development and psychology of the child and on the educational role of parents.

This education for parenthood would make it possible to support the parents in the exercise of their parental authority and in passing on to their children the culture to which they belong, as well as fundamental values. It is also necessary to make the parents understand the influence of their behaviour on the psychology of the child (for example, the consequences of the separation of the couple).

Suggestions included: organising courses on television (languages, health care…), organising training workshops and extending the role of pre and post-natal consultations.

One Slovakian association proposed creating "family centres" with workers specialised in different fields: family law, sociology, psychology, medicine, sexology, ethics, pedagogy, theology…

But to give such support, it is above all necessary for teachers and those in charge of social and denominational institutions to be better prepared and agree to dialogue with the parents.

The family, partner of the school

Even if the family is recognised as the primary educator, everybody is in agreement in stressing the essential, but not unique, role of the school, as long as the teachers are competent. In Africa, this concern is strongly expressed, particularly *"for the better training of teachers in village schools"*. The effects of AIDS on the number of well-trained teachers are also underlined.

Some go further and state that the parents should ask to form part of the educational system and that the school must be resituated in its educational role, complementary to that of the family.

Certain replies mention the need to establish a contract of joint objectives between parents and the school and identify the common values to be taught. Parent-Teacher meetings should be organised to harmonise educational methods and techniques. It is also suggested involving the children in these meetings. Parent-Teacher Associations should be revitalised to reinforce the links between school and family.

Some think that, even if the family should keep its primary role in religious education, this latter should also be introduced into the school curriculum, at the same time as civic and moral education, given in secondary schools by specialists, including jurists. Several answers suggest that education in a religious, philosophical and humanistic culture should be compulsory in all schools, while at the same time leaving room for an optional specific religious education.

It is necessary to support the NGOs in their role as facilitators of cooperation between family and school and encourage partnerships between the formal school and the informal school which makes it possible to reach children that it would be difficult to educate in the existing official system.

Education for values

The family and the school must be open to the world; one reply from Africa calls for creating a balance in the neighbourhood school centres between the use of the vernacular language and the teaching of a language of international communication, thus enabling the children to be made aware of the multicultural

dimension. If it is well used, Internet should also make it possible to attain this objective.

The first requirement is an education in duties, at the same time as an education in rights; secondly, the setting up of consultations with and between parents, in line with the example of certain centres in Central America, to support them in this task; finally, support for the associations which encourage education for human and religious values.

One reply proposes discussion workshops for young couples on family values, the passing on of these values, the current situation of the family and the means of solving the problems encountered. It also proposed working in networks: the school, parents, religious structures, social institutions and NGOs, to promote the values of tolerance, knowing how to live together and interculturality.

It is necessary to give a broader education in listening to people and conflict resolution, to foster dialogue in the family and to train professionals in this regard, as well as specialists for families and children in difficulty.

Sex education

Children and adolescents should be given sex education and, in the long term, be taught to become future responsible parents; they should also learn to have a better knowledge of their bodies and natural contraception methods. Other proposals include implementing an AIDS prevention policy and setting up reception and guidance centres for couples, families and young people. In South America, emphasis is laid on the fact that sex education should be included in the school curriculum. The associations working to prevent AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases in developing countries should be given more support.

It is considered important for themes referring to sexual abuse and sexual violence, particularly against children, to be part of the university courses preparing for careers in the fields of health, education, police, justice…

Funds for education

Many of the replies to the survey suggest that different funds should be found:

- for the lifelong training of teachers for a kind of education calling for cooperation between the school, the family and society,

- to offer grants or scholarships to underprivileged families,

- to enable all girls to attend school,

- to fight against dropping out of school owing to poverty and ill-adapted curricula,

- for research and documentation centres in the schools,

- for out-of-school support for those families and cases at risk,

- for education in public-spiritedness and tolerance.

NGOs, which, for the majority, have an educational strand in their action in the field in favour of families, consider education as a prime necessity. It must take into account all the members of the family and include all the aspects of life.

2. Science and Ethics

Needs

The joint idea is to protect the family, the basic unit of society and the bearer of its future, from all scientific developments which could be harmful to it. It is certain that the family is at the core of the evolution of current research in bioethics.

Several basic principles must be constantly reaffirmed:

- the human being cannot be considered as a commodity,
- laws must take into account the dignity of the person,
- in the field of ethics, it is impossible to impose what is contrary to the deep moral conviction of the person,
- it is necessary to provide education in the respect for life and for what this entails as a responsibility.

All the replies showed a certain feeling of helplessness in the face of the complexity of the problems and mention the importance of the role of the State, both in legislation and financing: it is urgent to legislate, specified replies from New Zealand and Lithuania. Stress is also laid on the need to develop one's critical spirit, as the political guidelines and the information relayed by the media are sometimes biased from a moral viewpoint.

The replies to the questionnaire are generally more developed in the countries active in scientific research.

Means

There is a temptation in the replies to recommend the slowing down of scientific development, but emphasis is rather laid on better information and training, on the initiative of the State, the university world, religious structures or civil society, thus fostering dialogue and the building of bridges between the different viewpoints and long-term challenges:

- *"To enable families to remain a school of life and human and Christian values, they must have honest and complete*

information on the forms of birth, survival and death" (reply from Argentina).

One recommendation is the creation of high-ranking and credible National Committees of Ethics, wherever these do not exist, and ethical committees and workshops in hospitals, universities and parishes.

Another recommendation is for religious structures and educational bodies to produce publications, targeting different publics: parents, teachers and young people. Publications should also be produced by young people for young people. More use should also be made of the media (radio, television, Internet) to make the true challenges known and make things simple without making them simplistic.

Parents in particular need to be informed and trained in the fields of pre-natal diagnosis, in vitro fertilisation, seeking anomalies and gene therapy. One reply from Russia mentions the recent creation of an institute in the town producing children on request for $7000. At the other end of life, it is necessary to reaffirm the value of old age, keep senior citizens active, create more palliative care centres and specify at what point the artificial prolongation of human life begins.

Cloning is hardly mentioned and when the problem is dealt with, reproductive cloning is rejected.

As for birth control, it must be treated from the angle of the responsibility of the future parents. A reply from Senegal reiterated the importance of the control of fertility for the development of the country.

Need for particular attention

Civil society should be more present in the field of ethics and deal more broadly with the "Common Good", as up until now, it has been principally concerned, through associations, with economic problems:

- *"It would be desirable to create areas of reflection on the collective influence of personal behaviour for an ethics of community co-responsibility"* mentions one reply from Burkina Faso.

The breakthroughs in science, including in the field of genetics, do not - or rarely - reach the poorest families and developing countries and this, in itself, is an attack on ethics: the public authorities and international mutual aid should remedy this. The importance of agricultural research, which concerns the activity of a large part of the human race and the survival of all, should not be overlooked.

The reinforcement of justice, tolerance and peace, the rights of the weakest, the fight against corruption, the denunciation of abuses and the reassertion of the value of adults and the elderly at the expense of "the cult of youth" so in fashion today, also belong to the field of ethics.

Amongst the more everyday themes than bioethics that also merit our reflection, the replies quoted:

- the environment, with the repercussions of science on water, air and agriculture,
- relationships between men and women,
- health, including reproductive health,
- development,
- human rights,

To sum up the general feeling, it is necessary to place the progress of science at the service of the quality of life of all families.

3. Culture and development

Families and values

A certain ambiguity reigns concerning the word culture: on the one hand, it is stated that the handing down of the culture that is lived every day and is therefore something living, should be carried out at the same time as the passing on of values within the family. On the other hand, some replies specify that the economic crisis and globalisation destabilise the cultural identity of countries and that the family cultural heritage is disappearing.

It is necessary to support families (and even carry out campaigns in favour of the family, state Spanish and Lithuanian replies) for their consolidation in time and history is the basis on which the identity of the person and receptiveness to the other is built. Without the passing on of values, an action that begins in the family, the national and religious identity cannot be developed harmoniously.

But which values? the answer is not always evident when one considers, for example, a Russian questionnaire, in which it is stated that: *"40% of the women interviewed complain that it is difficult to bring up children according to the ideas and the principles that one had before on how to live in society (being honest, generous, trying to be well educated…) as this will prevent them from succeeding in life".*

It is important to support the positive role of grandparents and foster inter-generational relationships for the passing on of values.

Families and the social link

It was suggested working to reconstruct the social link in families and between families in the communities, in order to reinforce the feeling of belonging, tolerance and citizen-based participation. In this perspective, neighbourhood community centres, denominational or non-denominational, would be extremely useful for developing cooperative work, leisure, sport, festivals and optimising the local crafts and literature.

– In France, it was proposed revitalising neighbourhood and village life, closer to the families, and reflecting on the idea of "living well"; reference was made to the benefits of parental leave of absence (from work) and of rediscovering time devoted to the family, in order to build a coherent identity in respecting each one of its members.

– In Brazil, the request was also made to preserve rural life by support for agricultural work, the promotion of a policy facilitating access to land ownership and loans for the development of the land. The proposal was also made to develop regions that were still underdeveloped, while at the same time defending the rights of the native families.

– Several proposals were made in Burkina Faso:

- to organise a family festival every year,

- to encourage each village school to write the history of the village and, for the city-dwellers, foster holidays in the families of origin (a return to sources),

- to give more value to the country's different languages and encourage exchanges between families of different cultures,

- to create areas of encounter between young people and the elderly, who are the custodians of memory,

- to put a forceful end to certain pernicious customs (excision, inequality of boys and girls, the status of widows) in principle forbidden by the law.

Families and identity

Emphasis was generally laid on the need for joint work between the school, communities, religious structures and NGOs to highlight the cultural heritage of communities, the role of families in the passing on of this heritage and how to overcome the difficulties that they encounter in doing this.

A joint reflection of families with suitably trained professionals would enable them to better understand what they are living and identify the know-how they have to participate in development.

School, social workers and the family must aid the child in seeking his or her own identity and pass on the national cultural iden-

tity, while at the same time being open to diversity. One French reply spoke of the dramatic rupture caused by taking children into care (almost always from very poor families) following a decision of the social aid structures, when the parents are judged incapable of bringing up their children. One reply from New Zealand stated: *"The grandparents are a marvellous source of passing on family history and the relationships of the family with History".*

The school and the institutions of the receiving country must make migrants aware of the importance of getting to know and respect the culture of the country to facilitate integration, without devaluing the culture of origin.

The lifelong education of all the members of the family will enable the development of culture, as well as the low cost of cultural activities in the full sense of the term. In Benin, the importance of teaching mothers to read and write in order to write and pass on the history of their family was underlined.

The State, through the school and the allocation of grants and scholarships, should encourage intercultural exchanges between young people and support the actions that foster the cultural development of families. The teaching of national history must be given greater value, including recent history.

One of the tasks particularly neglected by the media is to contribute to making local and national cultures more dynamic and to making international culture known.

Minority cultures must be safeguarded and better known.

In short, it is necessary to ensure that persons and families are placed or maintained at the core of development, while at the same time preserving the continuity of time and space.

4. Communication

The media, essential elements of communication and daily life in all the countries of the world, are strongly criticised and are the subject of urgent demands.

Their impact is often denounced as being harmful and even destructive for the families. As Latin America points out, the media culture has deteriorated and, in its turn, deteriorates family and social behaviours, as the media all too often give priority to the accumulation of wealth, violence, transgression and the abuse of power.

For a moralisation of the media

Violence, sex and the call for consumerism are the main subjects of all the media: television, radio, advertising, magazines, cinema and Internet. This is all the more serious when we consider a reply from Australia which states: "all the media influence our way of thinking". The answers also mention the fact that parents frequently abdicate their parental responsibilities where the media are concerned.

All the replies unanimously called for an ethics and a moralisation of both the oral and written communication media. A danger exists in concentrating the media in the hands of a few producers who unload foreign films and broadcasts which are not compatible with the culture of the country. This does not mean closing the door to what is foreign: one answer from Namibia clearly states: *"cultural diversity must be respected, we must both accept other cultures and keep our own"* and in Benin, one person added that, through television, he would like to learn about the life of developed countries in order to draw inspiration from this.

More often than not, family values are either non-existent, or even badly covered in the media and this requires mobilisation on the part of communities and the State.

Each country would therefore like the State to control the production of television programmes, video cassettes, Internet websites and advertising. In Latin America, reference is made to the

need *"to draft a policy for the regulation of the media"* and in Europe *"for an ethics in the media and the promotion of a balanced description of reality"*. Some replies recalled that the boycott by consumers could prove an effective arm.

A proposal was made to train people working in the media sector, in order to bring about an improvement in the quality of productions. The State, through financial incentives and agreements with production societies, could make it possible to have high-quality programmes (free of charge, it was specified in Latin America) and thus pass on *"constructive teachings able to counterbalance the culture of globalisation in the minds of young people"* (Africa).

For educational media and education in the media

Encouraging educational media, in particular, an educational television, is a necessity for all, developed and developing countries alike.

Europe expressed the wish for "parents and children to learn discernment in order to appreciate the wealth, but also assess the dangers of media consumption". Children need a "guide" to be able to get the best out of the communication media. Australia called for parents to be trained in this regard. Even publicity can be harmful if it is not controlled and decoded. One proposal underlined that education in the media should be given to children from a very early age. The parents of deprived families need to be supported in this role of educator.

A suggestion from Europe: "so that it will not disappear under the pressure of oral communication, greater value should be given to written communication, with emphasis on literary training". Is the school not failing in its role by drawing inspiration, all too often, from the programmes and the vocabulary of television, on the pretext of interesting the pupils?

The new information technologies (ICT) are less often mentioned than television, but are also the subject of proposals. For Ghana, the government should promote the ICT *"so that everyone can benefit from their economic and educational advantages"*. In Australia, it was suggested that a better financing of the educational media would lead to an improvement in knowledge. In North America, replies proposed that interest-free loans be made available to enable families to buy the necessary equipment.

Everyone expressed the hope that better access of all to the ICT would bridge the gap between rich and poor countries and between town and country.

One reply from Africa judged it necessary to control the cost/efficiency ratio of national programmes concerning the use of these new technologies.

Admittedly, the media are called into question, but they are recognised as being inescapable, indispensable and able to provide the best, as Latin America noted: *"good communication is the basis of interpersonal and educational relationships".*

If the new communication technologies and television are of a high quality and well used, they are an out-standing means of bringing families together.

5. Social and Human Sciences

In general, the replies emphasise the need to work for a better sharing of wealth, the protection of the weakest and the improvement of the quality of life of families. Knowledge and the respect of human rights are considered as being absolutely essential.

The role of denominational and non-denominational social action organisations is often highlighted in the fight against poverty, as well as a lack of commitment on the part of the business world and public authorities.

A number of major guidelines can be identified:

Research on poverty should be carried out to a successful conclusion

This was a request particularly made in Europe and Latin America calling for the human sciences to be mobilised on the causes of poverty; that the results of this research would then be disseminated amongst political and economic decision-makers, religious structures, social workers and NGOs; and that finally, these results would be adapted into community programmes with the participation of the families concerned.

Fighting against poverty

It is certain that this is the priority for the largest number of replies. Everything must be done to support the State and local and regional authorities, religious structures and associations in their work for the poorest families, in all the fields where their lives are made fragile, as they represent the very future of their countries.

Of course, unemployment is found in first place as the cause of the poverty of families. Measures are called for to fight against unemployment and exclusion, but also to guarantee access to education, health care, justice and the promotion of development. Replies from Burkina Faso propose revitalising work at family level and encouraging initiatives in the trading sector which generate jobs and income at local level.

It is often the public authorities that are asked to act:

- by seeking peace, fighting against criminal networks, corruption and the waste of State funds,
- by the creation of a Ministry of the Family, when this does not already exist, to coordinate all the actions in favour of families,
- by an employment policy and quality jobs,
- by general support for the fight against exclusion:
  - Either directly, through programmes of support for poor families, in meeting their real needs, and without harming parental authority (Africa mentions the importance of the development of staple crops and micro-loans). Special support should be given to poor immigrant families.
  - Or indirectly, by the promulgation and enforcement of fairer economic laws, particularly tax abatements, to aid the families who have to pay the heaviest expenditure in society and which, for this latter, are the bearers of the future.
  - Amongst the indirect support, we also find the encouragement of voluntary work, proposed by Canada, and more cooperation with the social action NGOs.

Thus, in Europe, there are requests to aid and finance social centres for families and young people, encourage the municipalities and the social services to be more accessible and ready to listen to families, help the most vulnerable to find work, supervise and possibly sanction financial bodies which work in the field of granting loans to families, and increase the prestige of the family in society.

In Latin America, emphasis is laid on the access to social services and the need for civil society to organise itself into networks: it would thus be more efficient in its actions and better equipped to bring pressure to bear for harmonious support policies for families.

Replies in Asia call for action to facilitate the return of workers from abroad and regulate child labour.

Promoting the values conveyed by the family

This wish comes from Asia in particular, but also from Australia where the State is asked to help parents in their role of handing down values enabling society to be better balanced, more open and more just: confidence in the other, honesty, solidarity, the sense of effort, citizenship, tolerance…

In Latin America, reference is often made to the role that civil society can have in lobbying for family values, through boycott campaigns, events, articles and advertising…

Fostering the exercise of fundamental rights and freedoms

Replies from Latin America are extremely focused on the enforcement of all rights and on the knowledge of these rights by families, including the most under-privileged. Replies from Africa point out that it is particularly important for women to know their rights.

The State must take action to better combat exclusion and marginalisation, especially children exclusion, which is often inherited from the parents, by ensuring access to fundamental rights and freedoms (the right to education, to health care, to justice and to development).

Replies from India and Africa also request governments to take the necessary measures to ensure that every human person has the right to knowledge and that the rights of elderly or disabled persons are respected.

The State must also see that the most vulnerable are protected: in North America, replies call for special attention to be given to women and children through economic aid and legal assistance, whilst in South-East Asia it is the protection of these persons against the dangers of prostitution that is requested.

The answers stress the priority role naturally played by families in protecting the rights of the most vulnerable of their members, children, the unemployed, disabled persons and the elderly. This forms part of the many different resources of the family and this is why it is important for the State to give it its support.

Solving the problem of housing

This problem is very present in the replies, particularly in Europe, where the hope is expressed *"that all families will be guaranteed healthy accommodation in a healthy environment"*. In Latin America, housing for the poor is often insalubrious and illegal. Governments are asked to base their action on the culture of mutual aid practised in the under-privileged suburbs, "villas miserias", to undertake rehabilitation campaigns.

It is necessary to foster, through housing, a greater social mix which will be favourable to the integration of the largest number of people, as this mix has practically disappeared in the major metropolises.

Finally, in the framework of support for the family, suggestions concerning the action of all were put forward:

- reinforcing prevention and establishing ongoing assistance for the families which are the most in difficulty: extreme poverty, taking children into care, disabilities, drug abuse, AIDS, sects, delinquency…,

- developing consultation and information before decisions are made concerning the family,

- assessing the enforcement of laws intended to support the family; the NGOs must be involved in this assessing process,

- developing solidarity and the awareness that all are concerned by the fight against poverty and injustices everywhere in the world, as the world is interdependent.

Social and economic measures involving the public sector but also civil society are indispensable for supporting families in their many different roles. Underprivileged families must be at the core of national and international concern.

Conclusion

At the end of this survey, the findings showed an outstanding convergence: everywhere in the world, changes concerning the family structure have rapidly increased over the last decade. Socioeconomic evolutions and migrations said to be due to globalisation have led to the break-up of family groups and the disintegration of community networks. Inside the family the roles of the different protagonists have changed. These upheavals do not happen without creating obstacles to how the family should function well. **But, in spite of everything, the family remains the basic unit of society and, as such, has the right to support and encouragement from States and institutions.**

Given the strong demand for education in all the fields noted in the survey, it must be repeated that **the family is the primary place of education**. It is there where the child learns to live according to the values which will guide him or her: love, solidarity, being receptive to others and respect for life. It is in the family that he or she acquires his or her identity and that he or she experiences a spiritual life in accordance with the family tradition. The school continues this with the teaching of basic knowledge and an opening-up onto the outside world.

But the family encounters difficulties and is subjected to contradictory influences: poverty, the dispersion of families, materialism and the role of the media and different social groups. It is therefore necessary to support families and several guidelines are suggested in the replies:

- carrying out research on poverty and exclusion so as to be able to combat these more effectively,
- providing parents with the opportunities to better assume their educational responsibilities,
- enabling parents to offer their children a quality school education,
- encouraging partnerships between schools and families.

Another reason for States and decision-makers to give their support: **it is the family that fashions future citizens**. It helps the chil-

dren to become autonomous, it gradually gives them responsibilities in line with their possibilities, which prepares them later to take an active role in society and the development of their country. The many different relationships which intersect within the family fuel and determine all other types of human association, ranging from the personal relationship to the State itself.

The family is the privileged place for exchanges between generations and shares it with those who cannot be self-supporting: it is the first laboratory of social ethics. But this function of the family is thwarted by profit-seeking, corruption, violence, war… The participants in the survey recommended a certain number of measures to decision-makers. These measures include:

- introducing or re-introducing the teaching of civics and religious, philosophic and humanistic culture, particularly in the school,

- renewing the social links in and between families, for example by encouraging a quality output in the media,

- encouraging the handing down of the cultural heritage, while at the same time being receptive to the culture of the other,

- fostering the participation of families in the drafting of decisions concerning the future of societies, in the fields of bioethics, the environment, national and international solidarity…

As a basic component of society, the family is the hub of all the activities of private and social life: procreation, education, ethics, culture, economics, communication… States should therefore ensure that **family questions are placed at the core of all policies** including those which apparently do not have any direct relationship with the family, but whose repercussions will have - through the individuals concerned - an influence on the functioning of the family unit.

In spite of the difficulties encountered, the family therefore remains crucial because of the many different functions that it carries out. Its effective functioning and its well-being concern the whole of society; it is for this reason that it must be supported in a coordinated way by States, institutions and the different organi-

sations of civil society. **The NGOs who replied did not in any way request that they should act in the place of families, but that their many different resources should be reinforced.**

This survey highlighted emergencies and demands: it now remains to strongly hope that these will be taken into consideration by decision-makers at all levels and will lead to **the drafting of an international text on the family.**

For sharing

1. Over the last 12 years, what has your education community put in place to take into account the varied situations of families (for example at the economic level, relations between couples, relations between parents and children, accompanying spiritually, creating equipment…)?

2. What conclusions of Bulletin N⁰ 245 have you put into practice?

3. In your opinion what are the present-day tendencies in the lives of the families in your region?

Origins of the replies

AFRICA

Benin – Burkina Faso – Cameroon – Djibouti – Ghana – Madagascar – Mali – Mauritius – Namibia – Senegal – South Africa – Togo

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina – Bolivia – Brazil – Colombia – Cuba – Dominican Republic – Ecuador – Guatemala – Haiti – Mexico – Nicaragua – Panama – Paraguay – Peru – Uruguay – Venezuela

NORTH AMERICA

Canada – USA

ASIA

China – India – Macao – Philippines – Viet Nam

EUROPE

Belgium – Belarus – Czech Republic – Finland – France – Greece – Italy – Lithuania – Luxemburg – Malta – Poland – Russia – Spain – Slovakia – Switzerland – Ukraine – United Kingdom

OCEANIA

Australia – New Zeland

Members of the group of Catholic NGOs on Family

- International Association of Charities.
- International Catholic Child Bureau.
- International Catholic Society for Girls.
- Caritas Internationalis.
- Catholic International Education Office.
- Pax Christi International.
- World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations.
- World Union of the Former Pupils of Catholic Education.
- With the participation of the International Catholic Centre for Cooperation with UNESCO.
- The Catholic NGOs members of the "Family" Group are active in 180 countries and represent over a hundred million persons.

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