

# THE AFRICAN FAMILY AND THE TEST OF MODERNITY CHALLENGE

## INTRODUCTION

Human being is essentially a social being. This ontological characteristic is lived according to different cultures, because human being is not only a being of natural history but also a being of cultural history. However, irrespective of cultures, the family can essentially be regarded as the basic cell of social life. It is in the family that human being starts to experiment the coexistence with others.

Thus, in the black African culture, the family has always been regarded as essentially living the true love between spouses, continuing the divine creation by procreation and to initiate children to the fundamental values of human existence. The evangelization of black African countries by European missionaries<sup>1</sup> helped a lot to underline the sacredness of the family, as it was already very important in the life of black African people.

Indeed, the importance of the family in black Africa influenced the Church's recovery of the image of the family, thus illustrating its role in humanity; hence the designation of the Church as God's Family in Africa.

However, this image of the family that constitutes the expression of the Church is confronted by many challenges caused by the modern world. Family life is being relativized more and more: not only the fidelity between spouses is blamed but also the relationship between parents and children is more and more in crisis, hence the desacralization of the family. This desacralization has fatal consequences for the image of the Church as the Family of God in Africa. This situation provides many opportunities to reflect: what must we do so that the family remains the place par excellence of the marital love, the training place to fundamental value of existence so that it reflects the Holy Trinity love? This is the question I would like to address in this paper. Three points constitute its overall structure: the family as the fundamental cell of human society, the family in black African cultures, and the Church as God's family in Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> "The splendid growth and achievements of the Church in Africa are due largely to the heroic and selfless dedication of generations of missionaries. This fact is acknowledged by everyone. The hallowed soil of Africa is truly sown with the tombs of courageous heralds of the Gospel" (*Ecclesia in Africa* (EA), 35).

## I. THE FAMILY: FUNDAMENTAL CELL OF HUMAN SOCIETY

From an existential-ontological point of view, human being is not only a *being-in-the-world* but also a *being-with-others*<sup>2</sup>. The other is fundamentally registered as being part of our essence. He is always and already there originally present with the “I” as a subject of intersubjectivity, which is identified as existential phenomenon. In this way of thinking, the essence of human being is neither his ontological masculinity nor her ontological femininity but the *relationship*. Indeed, with the progress of biomedical technology in the contemporary society, it is possible for a person to renounce one’s masculinity or femininity<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, no person can deny being a *relationship being*. Even if the “I” is alone, his aloneness is related to others<sup>4</sup>. Thus human being is the *shepherd of alterity*.

Considering the ontological evidence that human being must always and only exist as a woman or a man, his being as a relationship being involves *complementarity* between both of them. Such complementarity might not be unidirectional in the sense that the man would receive more than women or vice versa. By the fact that human being refers to both men and women who constitute the two versions of humanity, no man can live a full humanity and neither woman can live a full humanity out of existential complementarity with the other which is different but equal in humanity. There is a fundamental equality and enriching complementarity between man and woman, which allows them to live in society as a community of persons or in couple as the unity of the two in a common humanity.

From a Christian perspective, this complementarity finds its ontological balance in the act of creation. Indeed, “having both been created in the image of God, man and woman, although different, are *essentially equal* from the point of view of their humanity”<sup>5</sup>. Such a balance which implies the unity of both is based on the being of God himself who appears as unity, as communion. In fact the unity of three persons in God reveals the being of God as love and

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<sup>2</sup> M. HEIDEGGER, *Being and time*, transl. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> To renounce one’s masculinity or femininity involves *Gender theory* and can not be regarded as ethically good. It is a violation of natural order. However, gay and transsexual groups promote this theory as a key to understanding and tolerance.

<sup>4</sup> According to Garaudy: “In all contexts we are reduced to this fundamental truth of life: what is most intimate and essential in me is the presence and the love of the others. The other, the others, it is my transcendence, which calls me beyond my individual limits, which constitutes me as man. Humanity is not a solitary adventure. It is a conquest of community”; my translation of R. GARAUDY, *Parole d’homme*, Paris, Robert Laffont, 1975, p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> EA, 82. “One must speak of an essential ‘equality’, since both of them--the woman as much as the man--are created in the image and likeness of God” (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, 16). See also *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.

invites us to this love of God which we are the image and likeness<sup>6</sup>. Thus, the respect of the complementarity between man and woman can be guaranteed only by love. Thanks to this love, man can join his wife as life's companion. Such a relationship is not expected to remain sterile. It is quite fruitful. Through the marriage<sup>7</sup>, they become *one flesh* and can therefore raise a family as a communion of persons. The covenant between a man and a woman or their irrevocable personal consent is therefore the base of the family<sup>8</sup>. "The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons"<sup>9</sup>.

In this frame of reference, the family is a universal human institution, a place of love and communion. Its nuclear dimension denotes the father, the mother and the children. The extended family means a group of people affiliated by consanguinity or by alliance or affinity<sup>10</sup>. It is clear that both nuclear and extended families are a relationship place for living together, a network of relationships. How about the same-sex relationship?

In the light of the existential-ontological point of view that underlines the relationship as the essence of human being, it is true that the relationship between the same-sex is a dimension of man relationship being. However this dimension can not be more rewarding because it is limited to only version of humanity. It cannot allow the same-sex couple to enjoy the wealth of human being as man and woman and raising the family. The Church does not neglect this ontological consideration and underline that marriage remains the place par excellence where man and women can enjoy especially the complementarity between them, the sexual relationship that is more than consumer entity, and the children who are not the only end of marriage.

Considering the fact that having a child is also one of the ends of marriage, only the marriage is compatible with the responsibility of procreation that God gave to human being in order to avoid the destruction of human kind. Indeed, in view of the fact that the same-sex relationship is ontologically sterile, it cannot promote the continuity of human kind. In this

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Familiaris consortio* (FC), 11.

<sup>7</sup> Marriage "is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design" (*Humanae Vitae*, 8).

<sup>8</sup> *Gaudium et spes* (GS), 48.

<sup>9</sup> FC, 18.

<sup>10</sup> See for instance: L. DUMONT, *Introduction à deux théories d'anthropologie sociale. Groupes de filiation et alliance de mariage*, Mouton-Paris-La Haye, Presses d'Aubin Ligugé, 1971 ; J.-P. COLLEYN, *Eléments d'anthropologie sociale et culturelle*, Bruxelles, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1988.

way of thinking, homosexuality threatens the being of humanity. Therefore it is ethically unwelcome.

Between spouses there is a love relationship to live together, support each other and procreate. Their children will be both the ‘flesh of their flesh’ and as new beings, they will become autonomous persons in society. *Familiaris consortio* emphasizes that “in matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up – married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity – through which each human person is introduced into the ‘human family’ (...)”<sup>11</sup>. It is the agape<sup>12</sup> love that allows parents to seek mutual wellbeing and to love each other more and more through their children. Through the love for children, they try to satisfy their needs as food, clothing, education, affection, etc. Such an attitude grows children’s love towards the parents, which results in trust<sup>13</sup>, responsibility, gratitude, respect, obedience, dignity for family, etc.

Between brother, sisters and relative are established common habits, a common language, a common repertory of history, songs, jokes, which one finds spontaneously when one returns to the family home. Consciously or unconsciously they also learn common values such as hospitality, sincerity, respect, kindness, honesty, forgiveness, work, and the honor of the family. Between brothers and sisters there exists links of connivance and complicity that resist and strengthen even when they have left the family home<sup>14</sup>.

Contrary to what some sociologists say, even in Western society, the family is not limited to relationships between parents and children in the so-called nuclear family. The alliance between spouses involves the alliance of two families. That is why a child is normally expected to be in relationship not only with his maternal and paternal grandparents but also with his cousins of both families. Especially because the family is also a place of festival and celebration of life events as birth, birthdays, marriage, Christmas, New Years, and finally death. All these life circumstances provide to families opportunities to meet each other<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> *FC.*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> The notion of love as agape is well expanded in *Deus Caritas Est*.

<sup>13</sup> Trust is also one of the most important things in the relation between spouses. “It is important that the marriage of partners is based on trust in each other, and not only on a contract to stay together, for instance, in order to promote the wellbeing of the children” (A. DILLEN, *Responsibility in the family. The complementarity of ethics of children and marriage*, in J. DE TAVERNIER, J. VERSTRAETEN (ed.), *Responsibility God and Society. Theological ethics in dialogue*, Festschrift Roger Burggraeve, Leuven-Paris, Durbey, Petters, 2008, p. 253.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. P. MONSENGWO (Mgr), *L’Eglise à l’aube du troisième millénaire*, in *Revue Africaine de Théologie* 40 (1996) 151.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ib.*

Thus it is obvious that “the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another, grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society”<sup>16</sup>. Indeed, the family structure is a set of social networks.

There is a reciprocal conditioning between the family and global society. On the one hand, the harmony of global society depends on harmony within families. As a basic cell, the family produces and reproduces society by reproducing itself. It plays several functions such as biological and social reproductions. The latter involves an educational function, which is the essential process of individual socialization. “The family is the first and fundamental school of social living (...)”<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, society largely influences family organization and functioning. Political, economical and religious structures have a real impact on the family<sup>18</sup>. Considering this reciprocal influence, one can stress that the family remains the kingpin of human society.

However, despite its universal features, the family can not escape cultural gravity. How about the family in black African culture? Does it move away from the universal vocation of the family beyond its specificity?

## **II. THE FAMILY IN BLACK AFRICAN CULTURE**

In general, African family organizes its life in accordance with the universal vocation of the family. However, it has specific features focusing on some fundamental values. For showing this specificity, let’s have a look on the traditional African family before that which is known as ‘modern’.

### **a. Traditional African family**

Traditional African kinship is known in terms of a lineage, clan, and tribe. The members reckon their descent from a common ancestor. Such a lineage is constituted not only by the living but also the death and includes the future generation. Living members venerate

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<sup>16</sup> GS, 52.

<sup>17</sup> FC, 37.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance: H. JANNE, *Le système social. Essai de théorie générale*, Bruxelles, Ed. de l’Institut de sociologie de l’ULB, 1968.

common ancestors and worship God. They celebrate life events such as initiation, marriage, and funerals through common rituals<sup>19</sup>.

African families love life. As a community of life, the family must survive so that the lineage cannot be interrupted. Life is a gift from God that is protected by the ancestors. It is given and transmitted through the sacred act of procreation and it extends beyond death.

African family is not limited to nuclear family but includes extended family members. That is why in African contexts, the concept of *kinship* describes both sociological and biological relationships. For example, the concept of *father* refers to both father and his brother; *mother* denotes both mother and her sister. Thus, my father's brother is regarded as my father; my mother's sister is also my mother. Even if they are younger than me, I have to respect them as such. There is no difference between them and my parent. For this reason, they have an obligation to love me always as their own son or daughter. One can make a distinction between *parents* on the one hand, and father and mother on the other hand. These two concepts refer to many people beyond the biological parents and involve qualities of love and affection. They are not necessarily related to the fact of giving birth to a child<sup>20</sup>.

Concerning the son and daughter of my father's brother, they are my brother and sister, and must be treated in the same way as my brother and my sister of the same parent. The opposite is almost an insult to the spirit of family. Nelson Mandela is more explicit when he writes: "In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We do not make the same distinctions among relations practiced by whites. We have not half brothers or half sisters"<sup>21</sup>. Indeed, the words brother and sister refer commonly to all person (with whom one can testify liking or friendship) that one recognizes as human beings. According to Zamenga, popular writer and a noted scholar on African culture, the word cousin, uncle and aunt do not really exist in African culture. The black African has only fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children etc. The main thing is the fact of

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. SCEAM, *Eglise-famille de Dieu. Instrumentum Laboris pour l'Assemblée plénière de 1997*, p. 15, n° 55. See also J.-R., MOKAKA, *Les institutions matrimo-familiales en Afrique au carrefour des traditions et modernités*, in *Identité culturelles africaines et nouvelles technologies*, Actes de la XVIe Semaine Philosophique de Kinhasa du 10 au 16 décembre 2000, Kinhasa, FCK, 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. P. MONSENGWO (Mgr), *Ac.*, p. 153.

<sup>21</sup> N. MANDELA, *Long walk to freedom. The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Boston, New York, London, Back Bay Books, 1995, p. 8.

having the same origin or the same ancestor, which is reckoned according to matrilineal or patrilineal line<sup>22</sup>.

It follows that in Africa the family remains first a communion, a style and way of life that are woven thanks to initiation and socialized living together, especially through work, sharing, experience of conflict, forgiveness, reconciliation and love. It is so obvious that African family is fundamentally characterized by its legendary sense of community and high capacity of reception. Its traditional elements or values that one highlights are: clannish solidarity and tribal cohesion, solicitude and generosity, hospitality, dialogue and palaver, respect for seniors and elderly, joy of living, religiosity...

Hospitality opens African family to any foreign person. Sometimes, the respect of this value implies deprivation so that the host can be well served. Thanks to solidarity and sharing, Africans can be in the service of community, which treats him as its most precious treasure. This fact proves why African family is an opened reality, a humane place where one learns to live in fraternity and solidarity, which is reflected in the presence, assistance and voluntary participation of all family members during the events that affect well-being and group cohesion.

With regard to the authority in family, the husband plays the role of securing material well-being. He is the first spiritual father of his community and has a sacerdotal function within his group according to some cultural norms. From the father's authority grow interpersonal relationships between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters, as well as between grandparents, parents and grand-children. Thus, the husband shall have the right to lead his wife or wives in polygamous family. The role of woman is to be wife, having a productive and reproductive role; children-bearer and mother. The children have the duty to obey and give honor to the family. Between brothers and sisters is required mutual respect, while grandparents live in joking relationship with their grand-children. All these relationships generate multiple connections and social behavior which guarantee the survival of the family. What has become of this African traditional family today?

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<sup>22</sup> ZAMENGA Batukezanga, *Sept frères et une sœur*, Kinshasa, Saint-Paul, 1975. See also SCEAM, p. 15, n° 54.

## **b. The African family facing modernization challenges**

It is evident that the contact between Africa and the West is not without consequences. The western civilization considered as modern in relation to Africa has affected African culture and hence the family<sup>23</sup>. For instance, the western notion of nuclear family is relatively new and ineffective in African society. In general, the West made *tabula rasa* of African culture and its fundamental values and realities. Indeed, African cultural realities were sacrificed because the West regarded that as the survivals of obscure fetishism, considered inoperative in modern culture. The damage caused to African culture has led to the disintegration of reference systems and breaking-up of family and social fabric.

However, the encounter between the West and Africa did not have only negative consequences. Despite its many unquestionable values, the traditional African family has some weaknesses. For instance: in some places, one can note precociousness of marriage without preliminary consent of future spouses, numerous misdeeds of polygamy on family organization, male-female segregation of roles, some customs and African practices depriving women of human rights, repudiation of the sterile wife, etc. Thanks to the contact with the West African family can enjoy the emancipation of women, equality between man and woman in the respect of difference, schools are likely available for children of both sexes, sanctification of the family within a Christian perspective, indissolubility of marriage even in the case of no procreation, and many other wonders.

Nevertheless, beyond negative and positive consequences, black Africa in general is confronted today with many challenges that undermine the family. Here are the most important and most common:

### ***1. Political instability***

The lack of respect to the process of democratization, the contempt of general interest for the benefit of selfish interests and the access to power by arms cause rebellions and wars that impose severe and painful experiences to innocent families. The tragedies of Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Darfur are illustrative. The love of the clan, which is recognized in traditional family degenerates into ethnocentrism, tribalism,

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<sup>23</sup> For more information one can read A.B.C. OCHOLLA-AYAYO, *The African family between tradition and modernity*, in A. ADEPOJU (ed.), *Family, Population & Development in Africa*, London & New Jersey, Zed Books Ltd, p. 60-77.

exclusion, and violence when it is manipulated for political purpose. The wars result in phenomena that destabilize the family:

- *Displacements induced by wars* do not only create refugee camps but divide members of several families.
- The phenomenon of *child soldiers* who obviously have lost their childhood and cannot benefit any more from basic family education and become dangerous even to their own families.
- *Violent rape of women*. Some of them are raped in the presence of their children and other family members. How can they still enjoy their dignity after such a crime?
- *Sexual abuse of minors* who will bear very long-time traumas.
- *Many forms of female genital mutilation* reflect women's dehumanization.
- *War orphans* who cannot any more enjoy parents' affection remain behind traumatized.

## **2. Economic crisis and social disorientation**

The financial crisis affects the entire world this last time. However, poverty and unemployment are long every day experience in Africa. Because of the majority of Africans live with less than half a dollar a day, most parents cannot satisfy any more the existential needs of the family<sup>24</sup>. They become unable to assume family responsibilities. In many families, mothers engage in petty trading to ensure the survival of the family. They spend days in the market place and do not have any more time to take care the children's education. In other families the children assume the responsibility of the parents to provide food for the life of family members. Thus, economic and social crisis result in phenomena that destabilize the family:

- *The prostitution of adults and minors* to provide for family needs. Some girls neglect ethical norms and parents close their eyes on any wrong behavior on behalf of the children if that can enable them to cope with poverty.
- *The increases of very early pregnancy and abortion*.
- *The loss of parental authority* which is harmful to children's education.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. ADEPOJU and W. MBUNGUA, *The African family: on overview of changing forms*, in A. ADEPOJU (ed.), *Ib.*, p. 52.

- *The street children* who give up family home to survive especially thanks to stealing and prostitution.
- *The increase of uneducated and unemployed young people*, which is detrimental to future African family<sup>25</sup>.
- *The false understanding of solidarity* that generates laziness, infantilism and parasitism.

### **3. HIV/AIDS pandemic**

The widespread poverty and inadequate medical care go hand in hand with the rapid spread of HIV. This deadly sickness induces suffering, flattening believe, division and death in many African families<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family is considerable:

- *Increase of seropositive family members* weakening the family on social security and the progress of lineage.
- *Prenatal and infant mortality in many families.*
- *High morbidity in some families.*
- *Increase in single-parent families*
- *Increase of HIV Orphans and poverty.*
- *Inability to cope with family members suffering from AIDS* creates divisions between family members.

### **4. The new religious movements**

These religious movements are fundamentalist and define themselves in opposition against Catholic, Protestant, Islam and traditional African religions. They are Pentecostal and do not accept interreligious dialogue. Their teachings lead to family divisions and they admit as brother or sister only the person who shares their faith. This faith has other impacts on the Family:

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<sup>25</sup> “The economic situation of poverty has a particularly negative impact on the young. They embark on adult life with very little enthusiasm for a present riddled with frustrations and they look with still less hope to a future which to them seems sad and sombre. That is why they tend to flee the neglected rural areas and gather in cities which in fact do not have much more to offer them. Many of them go to foreign countries where, as if in exile, they live a precarious existence as economic refugees” (EA, 115).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. A. ADEPOJU, *Introduction*, in A. ADEPOJU (ed.), *Ib.*, p. 16-17.

- They regard African customs and values as diabolic and incompatible with the Gospel. Even solidarity is transformed into servitude.
- With their so-called “prophecy” or “revelation”, they are able to divide family members. A prophecy consists in indicating, with the assistance of what they believe to be the Holy Spirit, the person who is the cause of infertility, illness, death or any misfortune that affects the family.
- Thus, they can, according to the prophecy, require divorce of a couple because God reveals that neither wife nor husband was created to live together in marriage. And when the pastor prophesied, his word has the force of dogma. As indisputable, it increases hatred and division.
- They constitute one of the causes of the *street children* whom they accuse as witches and cause of poverty or misfortune for the family.
- They also incriminate the elderly as sorcerer that are the basis of the death of family members. Consequently, the elderly who was regarded as living libraries are today dismissed as criminals, nasty sorcerers.

Facing these challenges one may ask how the African family can act. How can the values of traditional African family survive while facing these challenges? To address these questions black Africa needs:

- Good political leadership, promotion of constitutional states and family law, reinforcement of democracy to ensure good management of resources and fair distribution of public income.
- Reorganization of the educational system.
- Development of appropriate strategies to support *street children* and *child soldiers* in order to facilitate their reintegration into families.
- Combining traditional and modern values.
- Revitalizing the structures of health care and make health care accessible to all families.
- Legal restriction of new religious movements and control of their social doctrine in order to prevent abuses.

How about the role of Catholic Church as God’s family in Africa?

### III. CHURCH AS GOD' S FAMILY IN AFRICA

Besides the above challenges, the church in Africa also faces violence of dictatorships, incentive to tribal hatred, fratricidal confrontations, and the abandonment of the families to their sad fate. The reign of violence, destruction and death constitutes a great challenge to the evangelization which is the promotion of the Good News of life and fraternal communion.

To take up this challenge, the Fathers of the synod for Africa tried to promote an ecclesiology conceived on the model of the Church as God's family in which the faithful live in communion. The family itself would be a *domestic church*. Indeed, "not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the *Church as God's Family* (...). The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the Church's nature, particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust"<sup>27</sup>.

However, it is astonishing to note that the Churches of Africa took as a starting point the model of the family at the time when almost everywhere in the world, the family is sick<sup>28</sup>. It is true that African Synod Fathers were inspired by a model of the healthy African family that still scarcely exists despite the crisis. It is also true that the notion of the Church as God's family has its theological foundation in God himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit<sup>29</sup>. No family can live with perfect accuracy the ideal love of the Holy Trinity. However, a child who makes a negative experiment of family life will have a great difficulty to regard the Church as family. For this reason, the Church has the worthy mission of increasing the value of family in order to protect its image as God's family in Africa. Thus, "the new evangelization will (...) aim at *building up the Church as Family*, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favouring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the particular Churches, without undue ethnic considerations"<sup>30</sup>.

The challenge lies in an effective transformation of the family into *Ecclesia domestica* so that it can receive the triple mission of Jesus-Christ, Prophet, Priest and King. The family will

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<sup>27</sup> EA, 63.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. P. MONSENGWO (Mgr), *Ac.*, p. 165.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. NGOY Katawha (Mgr), *A la recherche des fondements théologiques du concept «Eglise famille de Dieu»*, in *Revue Africaine de théologie* 51 (2002) 69. See also *Eglise-famille; Eglise-fraternité. Perspectives post-synodales*, Actes de la XXe Semaine Théologique de Kinshasa du 26 novembre au 2 décembre 1995, Kinshasa, FCK, 1997.

<sup>30</sup> EA, 63.

become community that believes and evangelizing, a community in dialogue with God and a community in the service of human being through love. To achieve this purpose, it is necessary that the Church itself, as God's family, becomes really a community of persons. Like the parents in the family or the clan in African family, the Church must become more responsible for spiritual, intellectual, moral and human growth of its children through education. The Church must play more its prophetic role to denounce with words and deeds what oppresses human being, scorns love, justice, truth, peace and all that leads human family into crisis.

## CONCLUSION

As being-with-others, human being is by essence a *shepherd of alterity*. His relationship being involves complementarity between both man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God. The respect of this complementarity can be guaranteed only through love. Thanks to this love, both man and woman can join their marriage and raise a family as a communion of persons.

Indeed, the family as a universal institution is a network of relationships, the first school of socialization. At its turns out, society influences family organization and functioning. But the family can not escape cultural gravity.

In Africa, the family presents itself in terms of a lineage, a clan, a tribe. It is more than merely nuclear. Its fundamental values are: clannish solidarity and tribal cohesion, solicitude and generosity, hospitality, dialogue and palaver, respect for seniors and elderly, protection of juniors, joy of living, religiosity...

Despite the negative consequences of the meeting with Western culture, this encounter allows African family to enjoy some western values as the emancipation of woman, the sacralization of the family in Christian way, the right of every child male and female to get education.

Nevertheless, the black African family is confronted now with many challenges from political instability, economics crisis and social disorientation, HIV/AIDS pandemic and the new religious movements. These challenges destroy the foundation of the family and tarnish the image of Church as God's family in Africa.

To take up this challenges, the Church must play more and more its prophetic role and transform the family into *Ecclesia domestica*. However Africa needs political stability, democracy, intensification of solidarity, fight for justice and peace, union of forces on the levels of universal Church and international community in order to act against HIV, and the cessation of arms trade that sows poverty, divisions and death in African families. In fact it is not easy to promote fairest family love in the context of political, economical and social crisis.

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