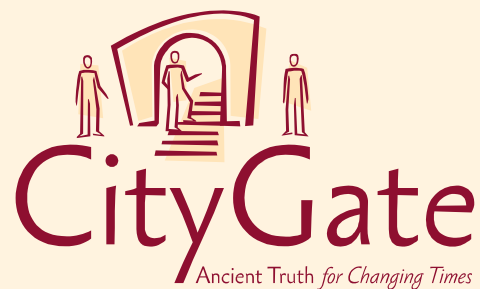


The Role of Father

A CityGate Field Study

Written by

Pavel Raus



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TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE REALITY OF CHRIST AND EVERYDAY LIFE**

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This is the first edition of this paper. We would like to thank all who shared their experiences and helped us with their insight. We would appreciate all your comments and critique. They might help us to fill the gaps we left out and correct our unintended mistakes.

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Introduction

A few weeks ago, my fifth-grade daughter's teacher asked her students, "Who has a good mother?" All of the children raised their hands. Then she asked, "Who has a good father?" Five students raised their hands.

What were those children expressing? Are these signs of a crisis of fatherhood? If so, what impact will it have on a new generation who cannot value their father and exhibit mixed feelings, anger and discouragement? What will this "fatherless" generation look like?

Recently a man described to me a conversation he overheard on a bus. There were two teenagers talking about their fathers. One of them asked the other:

"What about your father?"

"He's O.K.," his friend answered, "He leaves early in the morning and returns late at night."

I recall a conversation with an American friend who described the period after the Second World War as a time when men worked very hard. They spent very little time at home with their children. When they came home they were tired and irritated. As a result of that stress their approach to disciplinary problems was too strict and too authoritarian. According to my friend's interpretation this generation of missed fathers contributed to the student revolution and the rejection of authority in the 1960s.

What is happening in our country now could have a similar result, sons and daughters without fathers, a generation without any positive experience of a healthy male figure.

Are we now creating future problems for our society? What is actually happening around us? Can it still be stopped? What impact does it have on us? Can something be done about this situation? What should we do? Where do we start?

The Role of the Father.

This subject caught my attention more than a year ago when I was asked to give a lecture about men and maleness. During preparation I became more and more aware that a man and his problems can hardly be separated from fatherhood and his own experience with his father.

What I have in mind are the hurts and struggles often described as *Father void*, *Father wound* or *Father hunger*. It seems that when we are focused too much on ourselves and how much we are affected by a dysfunctional relationship with our father (even the best fathers are to some degree dysfunctional), we risk falling into self-pity in caring for our own hurts. Unless we are willing to go deeper in accepting our responsibility to grow, we may end up in a dead end street.

I suspect that those who refuse to go deeper in understanding themselves, their history and their relationship with their father, may also refuse to face their other problems on a sufficiently deep level. To avoid the temptation to manipulate others, to escape responsibility, we need to get to know ourselves and keep struggling for honesty in the family, workplace and even our ministry. Our relationship with our

father has a connection to what we are going through in our lives. Many issues in human nature are deeply hidden so that we may not be aware of what is going on. We may be escaping from ourselves and from God who confronts us.

This paper aims to encourage discussion and to stimulate research in an area of real importance which may be new to some. Like a diamond which has many facets and reflects light through each of them, we also have many surfaces as we reflect the image of God in His creation. When we are satisfied with only a few of them, we rob ourselves, others and finally God because we do not show His glory in its fullness.

This deeper and richer concept of life may seem strange and different to some, but its purpose is to increase God's glory as demonstrated in His creation. The more I reflect on fatherhood the more I am amazed at the wisdom with which the Lord of all creation has placed man in an order of relationships which meets a whole spectrum of human needs. I also wish to call us to a serious consideration of the role of the father that has sometimes been buried under many other interests which consume our time and energy. It may be that more than at any other time, we need to affirm our responsibility to renew the role of father, which has a unique place in God's cr

While working on this research I was going through a struggle with myself. I was more aware than ever before of how often I fail to be sensitive and concerned about others, mainly my family. Several times someone communicated a very important message to me and I did not respond or did not respond appropriately or my response was completely wrong. I was repeatedly disappointed with myself. But I felt also dependent on the Lord more than any time before. I was often surprised by the hardness of my heart as I easily justified myself and saw myself in a good light, and how seldom I really perceived messages from others.

All of this was made even more intense by meetings I had with people during this research. I was frequently struck by the importance of the subject. Usually at the beginning of a session our conversation would begin by establishing mutual understanding about what we were seeking to do in the research. At the end of our session we felt the urgency of what we were touching. We were aware of the deep impact our fathers had made on us. There were often comments like "This should be spoken about more," or "It is interesting that these things have never come to my mind before," or "This is really important," or "Something should be done about this". We realized how much had happened in our relationship with our fathers and how greatly it had affected each of us.

In framing this paper, going through meeting notes and questionnaires, I felt I was touching undiscovered territory, unique and powerful issues, parts of our personalities which seldom, if ever, come to the light, but which are very real and alive. Under the surface, I felt the pain and discouragement of people's relationship with their fathers when that relationship did not function properly.

One man described his father as a person who lived "only for himself". He only occasionally went to the forest with his children on Sunday afternoons. The son's comment was very strong: "It was Sunday we looked forward to the most". It showed the depth of longing for a father, for his attention, his time and interest. Another man told me that with his father there had not been much trust. Their lives ran parallel but separate from each other. His father's hobby was cooking. You can guess what the son's hobby was. Cooking too! Yet another man mentioned that his father liked to read books with content and now he likes exactly the same type of books. We may

think there is no connection but it can be an expression of overwhelming longing for identification with the father and it can reflect an enormous desire to share something mutual.

For myself, I have started to realize that I cannot change without God's help. The need to grow in sensitivity and attentiveness I can't develop by myself. My continuous prayer is: God change my heart. This is a prayer I invite you, the reader of this paper, to join in. Fatherhood is a unique task. And we can ask the Creator of fatherhood to continue changing us in heart and behaviour while He is changing our children through our modelling.

I would like to express my great appreciation and respect for those who were willing to share their lives and open their relationship with their father and make their experience available for the benefit of others. I believe that thanks to them and with God's help this paper can stimulate much wider interest and encourage people to think of ways to encourage fatherhood for this and future generations.

Reasons for choosing the subject

Some reasons for writing a paper about "The Role of Father" are:

1. Many personal problems, struggles and questions in our lives flow from our personality, the way we perceive the world and our internal make-up. That is connected with the basic direction in our lives. There is a level of our being which we cannot escape. Understanding the "core" of our personality means to understand our sinfulness and also deepest longings, the driving forces of our lives, the energy that feeds our striving and the way we "reinterpret" the external world for ourselves.

There seems to be part of that personality "core" which has a connection to our childhood and to people who have had an impact on us, parents and mainly the father. *The relationship with one's own father has a greater impact on us than any other relationship.*

2. The father has an important place in God's order of relationships. The Bible speaks about his role in many places; it explains how to fulfil that role, emphasizes his responsibility and encourages the relationship between the father and his son or daughter.

The calling of a father is a unique calling. His influence goes well beyond the eighteen years spent under one roof. His "touch" stays with us throughout our lives whether we are conscious of that or whether we try to escape that memory and end up rebelling against him.

3. Many problems that we face in society, church or family start at the level of the father's influence. It makes a great difference the people we work with have either a well-developed personality or are deeply hurt people dysfunctional in areas such as trust, responsibility, ability to build relationships and to face reality.

We seem to be facing such serious difficulties today that a cosmetic cure is not sufficient. We need address the root of problems. Crime, dishonesty, envy, distrust, alcohol, sex, drugs, etc., on the social level, make our lives difficult. In the church we are troubled by indifference, avoidance of responsibility, unwillingness to serve and various character defects. On the family level we struggle with affairs, dishonesty,

tendency to unhealthy independence, selfishness and other problems that often result in disintegration of the visible or invisible family.

I believe that the church should be the first place where these problems can be discussed openly and in-depth and where solutions are honestly sought to problems. Fatherhood, I believe, is a serious issue with deep problems and connections to many other critical issues.

4. I continually notice the hunger for a father. In different lectures, seminars and discussions about fathering I notice that at certain a point the atmosphere changes. People get involved and it is obvious that the subject we deal with touches them deeply. I often encounter expressed or unexpressed comments like: How I wished my father would speak to me more often and tell me what he thinks of me. Or how I wish my father had not screamed at me, how I wish my father had not rejected me, or how I wish my father had lived at home.

Sometimes we seem to create a world that is comfortable and technically developed with a great spectrum of choice, but we have often lost our fathers and there is only hunger for them.

5. Fathers don't seem to be functioning well in this current age. We as fathers are struggling more than at any time. In the past, the role of the father was not talked about so much probably because it was considered automatic that fathers were doing what they were supposed to. It was sufficient to stress the external difficulties of those who avoided their responsibilities because there was a structure of warm relationships inside. Today this can no longer be taken for granted. In the past, families where a father did not accept his responsibilities were the exception. Today the exception is the family where the father does what he is supposed to. Now, when the father is present at home, gives himself to his children and passes on to them "codes" of life, this does not happen automatically. Even men who are physically present at home are not always caring and involved parents. Lack of fathers is becoming a significant and sad characteristic of our time.

6. I believe that the Bible teaches us to have a living relationship with God. The Christian community has great potential for helping to resolve father-related problems. We know the real Father. We can learn from Him, be inspired and motivated by Him and find in Him the strength that we are often lacking. I believe that Christians have available the means of significant change. I also believe that in our times we are to live fully by God's truth and grace.

There are several more reasons why the father's role is significant.

In a way similar to the enormous energy released in a nuclear reaction, fatherhood creates great power in society. The process of increasing energy in a nuclear reaction works on a simple principle of multiplication of the number of involved atoms. Each atom releases one neutron and has an impact on its nearest neighbours. The atoms influenced by it have impact again on their closest neighbours. The power which results is greater than anything else. It is a power which, when out of control, cannot be stopped.

The family situation is somewhat similar. The father has an impact on the lives of those closest to him whether he wills it or not. If he fails to fulfil his role properly he creates great problems for his children. After they have grown up they may become fathers as well and probably will end up struggling with their role as well. They will

have impact on others that will in turn affect others. The result is an enormous power at work in society. It can be a very positive power with good fathers who raise well-adjusted children. Or it can be destructive when a father's influence brings only fear, anger and rebellion. The direction of that power either builds and strengthens the community, because it consists of healthy individuals, or it disintegrates society, destroying all good and contradicting constructive attempts at improvement.

Another observation is that fatherhood is effective not only at the individual level but also shapes the whole community. Individual experience touches deep into one person and at the same time this experience at a global level shapes nations and all of humankind. We can say that fatherhood is the most important political and moral power in our world. In a sense, it can and does change our societies.

Fatherhood is not an academic issue. It is very practical and includes every person. Everyone has his or her father, at least a biological one. To be a father, of course, doesn't mean only to conceive children. It means to help build a healthy mature person, protect, care for, develop and prepare one's children for life. The task of the father is to help children get what they need to be independent individuals who take responsibility for themselves and for others who will be dependent on them. To pretend that it is not necessary doesn't help. Leaving children to find their life path by themselves doesn't work very well.

Recently I travelled by tram and there was a young skinhead. His behaviour was very aggressive and at the same time his insecurity was obvious. He was damaged inside; a hurt, angry young man who had not received what he should have received. It might have been his father who, to a great extent, predetermined his behaviour. Nobody can really escape the experience of his or her father. That experience is more important for us than anything else. Perhaps only our relationship with God is more important than our relationship with our father.

Today we strive for independence. Most of schools of psychology view dependency on others as detrimental to mental health. In contrast, God created relationships to be mutually dependent. The husband and wife are dependent on each other. Children are dependent on their parents. Can we doubt this when we observe a small helpless child? Not long ago I spoke with a lady who described her relationship with her father. He was a very, very independent father. She expressed how desperately she longed for his attention. She wished he would have at least noticed her.

We are dependent by nature. First we are dependent on God. And to acknowledge this is not a sign of weakness and it is not an escape from personal responsibility. Just the opposite. It takes courage to accept the reality of my dependency, to accept my place within God's plan and take responsibility for those closest to me.

Dependency, of course, can be unhealthy and pathological. But the attempt to be completely independent is unhealthy as well. The real goal for us in relationships with our parents, according to God's desire, is the ability to be independent and the capacity to care for others the same way our fathers cared for us.

We depend therefore on things we received or did not receive from our father. We copy him or escape from him but we cannot erase him from our lives. Our father is with us for the rest of our lives in all circumstances. Are we able at all to appreciate

sufficiently the importance of our relationship with our father and his impact on individuals, communities, the Church and the whole world?

We live in a strange time. When we see the situation of families, their instability, incompleteness and dysfunction, it is obvious that we are in trouble. We know more today than at any time before about the importance of the family. Paradoxically, the result of our knowledge is not better conditions for the family. Just the opposite is true. Even though we know so much, we seem incapable of improving the situation.

Hardly anyone would disagree that the family plays a significant role in personality development, emotional stability, character development, shaping of identity and in shaping the future of a person. At the same time a great paradox and tension of our age is that on the one hand psychology and sociology confirm the great importance of the family and harmony at home in early childhood, and on the other hand we are not able to consistently draw all the possible conclusions. For some strange reason we cannot stop the disintegration of the family, which takes on almost catastrophic dimensions. It is as if we are stepping on our happiness and are unable to do anything to stop these negative trends: higher divorce rate, damaged family relationships, juvenile crime, abused children, sexual promiscuity, disrespect of authority, aggression, violence and homosexuality. These are signals of the loss of something that existed in our civilization for centuries and that, at least to some degree, was functional and provided for the healthy development of future generations. Though any comparison fails to some extent, hardly anyone could doubt we are today in a worse condition than in the past.

We have progressed in technology and scientific knowledge. We might expect in the same way that reason will be used to find solutions for the crisis of the family. We might expect a world congress would meet to discuss serious problems – the divorce rate, promiscuity, and the climate for formation of a new generation. We would expect serious research to be performed to evaluate the real impact of the sexual revolution. Surprisingly nothing like that has happened. Perhaps we might expect a committee to be formed to find the causes of divorce with final recommendations for world governments. No committee like that has yet been formed. If this were the case what questions would be raised? How has it been possible that what people have known for centuries about fatherhood, we did not know? How did our ancestors come to understand the role of the father? Did we do something wrong? Can we learn from those before us?

Any discussion that exists at all is mainly emotional, the atmosphere is tense and opinions are biased. The reality is that context is interpreted to conform to everyone's original presuppositions and therefore demonstrates an unwillingness to reveal our selfish interests. It is obvious that this discussion is not rational. There are religious convictions, deep life values and philosophies at stake, which we have to defend because we are actually defending ourselves. There is much more involved than seeking solutions. Discussion in our society is therefore not free and thus far not objective.

People operate in the midst of conflicting religious and philosophical convictions. There are also many temptations to go for escape solutions that are easily accessible. As the image of healthy fatherhood increases in value and the number of positive examples grows, the benefits are numerous and precious.

Today probably more than ever the church is facing a giant task to renew life-giving biblical truth.

Typical examples

James was a very nice young boy. You could chat with him about many subjects. When we were together we usually had a good conversation. The difficulty was to meet with him. When you arranged a meeting with him at a certain place and certain time it was certain that he would not arrive on time. When he did arrive, we would continue as if nothing had happened.

When this happened the first time it was not pleasant. When it repeatedly happened it became obvious that a deeper problem was involved. Besides the problem of being on time, he also had difficulties at school, which he was not able to finish. Our second meeting revealed that he lived only with his mother. His father left them years ago and lived abroad. He left his son, who struggled with his fear of failure and taking responsibility. His father did not stand with him, did not support him, did not lead or help him to cope with life's demands.

Krištof finished university. He found an undemanding job. Though he was very talented and intelligent, he did not have the courage to take risks. He preferred a small pond where he felt safe from the danger of greater responsibilities.

One night he called me and told me that he had been offered a new job with much greater responsibility. He was not sure if he should accept it. He asked me what I thought and I responded with the same question. He said he was not sure if he could manage. I encouraged him that I thought he could. It took him several more weeks to decide and then he finally accepted the offer.

A while later I met him and he mentioned that he struggled but that he was surprised how strong and secure he felt. What helped him was that someone supported him and he had someone to rely on, someone who helped him to be sure. Isn't that really the father's role? Wouldn't it have been good if he could have had such a conversation with his father? The father is the one who knows him and who sees what is in him, who trusts him and whose word has great value.

How many of our difficulties would cease if our fathers helped, affirmed and supported us. Wouldn't our lives be changed? Wouldn't our world be different?

In this paper, we decided to research the situation of fatherhood and its history, its connection to authority and how it had been influenced in the recent decades. We also were concerned with the father's motivation. We also researched the attitude of the church toward fatherhood.

This discussion tries to explore this subject, understand the current situation and recommend solutions for the future.

Hope for our time

Among the responses to the research questionnaire was one very exceptional response. It gave a positive view of our time. The answer went:

"I understand that the issue of fatherhood has been opened today and much has already happened. The fight goes on as never before!"

Fatherhood, apart from all observations and evaluation in this paper, is much more of a struggle than an academic discussion. Rational solutions are not sufficient. We cannot hope to learn the father's role only from books. It is a struggle within ourselves, and not an easy one. It is an important struggle. My wish is that after reading these pages every reader would have greater a desire to step into battle and accept the responsibilities laid down by God. Finally it is only He who can strengthen and give new hope.

Goals of the paper

This paper has three goals:

1. To open the discussion about fatherhood. To emphasize the importance of fatherhood and encourage future discussion and work in this area.
2. To describe historic and cultural developments of fatherhood and describe the current situation.
3. Suggest some solutions and directions for future development.

The paper is written mainly for church leaders, and those who for whatever reason are interested in family and relationships within the family. The goal is to look below the surface of Christian activities and see what is happening in families and in one of the most important relationships, the relationship with one's father.

Assumptions of this paper

The perspectives and considerations of this paper are based on certain assumptions that may not be obvious. We would like therefore to describe these at this point to clarify communication and prevent misunderstandings.

1. The family has an important place within God's plan

Man was created for relationships, the most important of which are the relationship with God and the mutual relationship between man and woman. Man and woman were created as separate though mutually dependent identities. They need each other, are supposed to complement each other but their relationship is not sufficient in itself. It cannot and should not replace the relationship with God.

2. The family plays an important role in any person's life

It is in a family that new human beings are formed. Man of all living beings spends the longest time to mature and become independent. The family is

irreplaceable for healthy maturation. For that reason the family needs protection and stability.

3. The functions of man and woman are not interchangeable

The roles of man and woman are not voluntary. Both are physiologically and psychologically designed for certain functions in which they naturally develop and find their satisfaction. Though these functions may be interchangeable on a surface level, especially under exceptional circumstances, the total exchange of roles is a distortion of God's original intention. Distortion occurs when either or both parties struggle with their respective God-given roles. It leads to more tension and produces other negative results. Even though it might not always be simple, original roles should be affirmed. We cannot sit back and simply accept the status quo.

4. The role of the father is critical for development of healthy mature personality.

The father has a unique task to pass on "codes" of life to his children. He teaches his family about God and is supposed to help his children enter the world. He should provide help in whatever way is necessary for his children to mature. The father teaches his children how to develop and behave in a close intimate relationship. He helps them develop personal identity and find their own place in life. He helps his children to get to know themselves and he passes on values. He enables trust to become a basic attitude in their relationship to other authorities and important figures.

(1)

In the research and analysis of results we tried to exclude both extremes, overly negative examples of fathers and overly positive ones, and focus more on the broad central group. Pathological cases and broken family situations, incomplete families, divorced families and single mothers are not the focus of this research.

Sociologically, we included a relatively broad spectrum of social groups. Finally, the middle class was the most represented group with its greater representation in Christian circles.

This paper deals with the situation in the Czech Republic. There are, of course, differences between regional, national, social and demographic groups. We attempted not to focus on differences but similarities and to follow the "mainstream" in our society.

Similarly, with the denominations, we sought unifying factors and commonalities in most of the churches, which face very similar problems in the area of fatherhood.

(1) For more detailed description see manual, P.Raus: Boží koncept otcovství, Parakletos, Praha 1999

Description of the method

This work is a combination of research and personal observations with the goal of discovering where families are in regard to father-son and father-daughter relations. The method of the work is not quantitative and statistical. The goal is rather to identify

the questions, to describe the present reality, and to explore the issues below the surface.

There were five means of obtaining information:

1. Questionnaire

Questionnaires about relationship with father, description of family situation, historical development of the role of the father, attitude toward authorities and attitude of the church toward the family were given to 80 people. Sixty-five completed questionnaires returned.

This completed questionnaires were received from two groups of people. The first were leaders of the local churches of the “Církev bratrská” denomination (Brethren Church). These were people involved in ministerial responsibilities. About 85% of people in this group came from Christian families; the others grew up in non-Christian families. The second group consisted of Church members, visitors and seekers. The majority of these were from non-Christian backgrounds.

2. Individual meetings

Detailed interview with individuals. These interviews were similar to the questionnaire but in more detail. They consisted of questions in eight main areas:

- personal experience with father,
- family of origin experience,
- cultural and historical context of family,
- ideals and the way fatherhood is seen by society,
- perceptions and thoughts about authority,
- motivation and de-motivation for fatherhood,
- passing on of values,
- the Church and the family.

Interviews averaged about two hours. Conversations were very personal and intense. We went through questions and people had sufficient time to respond and describe their experiences and observations and develop their thoughts and opinions.

Selection of the people for interviews was very careful. Criteria were: personal maturity so that discussions were open and honest, ability to express correctly their own experiences and their view of situation of family and fatherhood. People in this group were also expected to be in touch with other people in the group so that their views of the other people's experience could be included.

3. Discussions and conversations

Parallel with the interviews, many conversations on different levels and formal settings were held. There were some discussions at lectures about this or related subjects. There were often very interesting and insightful comments and opinions expressed.

On another occasion there were people whose experiences, responses and comments about fathering and understanding the processes of the relationship provided another good source of information.

4. Individual pastoral meetings

I am very thankful for meetings where people honestly discussed their relationship with their father. These conversations were valid for their depth because they went beyond social conventions. These were just very real views, which were of great value because many issues often remain unnoticed, misunderstood and misinterpreted.

5. Advice and comments of reviewers

Finally, there were several people who read the paper, commented on it and gave their recommendations, and who provided valuable contributions.

Material collected through those procedures was then arranged with the goal of not only describing the reality but also interpreting it, identifying the questions we are living with and suggesting solutions and conclusions.

The historical and cultural context of fatherhood

Because fatherhood undergoes historical changes and different generations can outwardly look different, attention was given at first to historical development. Have fathers' styles of dealing with their families changed during recent decades? Are these changes positive or negative? How many of them are neutral and how many are of decisive importance?

Historical development

Thanks to our limited life span, we can readily observe only the last two generations. Even though we are so limited we can still observe that there has been development and that fatherhood has undergone many changes. Where does mainstream development lead? Are these only "cosmetic" changes? What are the roots and causes of the changes?

Family roots

A surprisingly high number of people were not able to say much about their grandfathers, which is understandable in cases their grandfathers died early. Even in these circumstances it would be strange if they did not hear their parents tell stories about their lives, personalities and decisive moments in their grandpas' lives.

It raises a further question: What exactly do today's people know about their roots? How familiar are they with the heritage of their families? What shapes their identity? Is it only the superficial history of the last generation? Aren't we missing a long-term view of life which crosses generations and that helps us to better perceive life's dangers and the sanctity of life?

We can note the Bible's emphasis on roots in the long genealogies, which we do not like to read and often skip. It is obvious that within a biblical framework

genealogies have an important place. Isn't this a problem for us and our self-understanding? What impact would our missing genealogy have on us? Do we know where we belong? Do we understand ourselves? Do we know where we come from? Are we part of a long story? Or are we a chapter separated from the rest with no connection and unable to give meaning to what precedes and what follows?

There is, in today's world, a growing interest in exotic primitive cultures. What is so attractive in this for today? The stability of many generations, an awareness of belonging to and connection with previous generations makes a difference. Paradoxically these tribal cultures hold strong primitive traditions which we have rejected in our culture. Then later we seek them outside our culture. We have rejected our story and are looking for another story.

Even worse is the situation of children from divorced families, where whole pieces of the story are missing and there is a lot of confusion, insecurity and lack of clarity concerning the exact nature of their story? A woman who is in close touch with today's young people and has a good understanding of what moves them shared her observation. Some people who grew up in divorced families with their stepfather do not know significant parts of the lives of their parents. Father and mother never spoke about these parts because they were ashamed and it was not pleasant for them to share difficult periods. Some people even found it difficult to describe much about their own father. These "blank" spots have a far greater impact than merely unsatisfied curiosity. These are missing parts of themselves which are responsible for the confusion they often feel. Family roots are often injured, broken or severed completely. This trend deserves much more attention from everyone who has anything to do with today's family.

Changes of the role of the father

The research showed a clear shift in the understanding of the father's role. The last three generations were observed. From the perspective of a 30 year old, we can describe these generations: the oldest generation of grandfathers, the middle generation of fathers and the generation of today's fathers. The trend in the mainstream broader church community is depicted in the following table:

Period (father's period 20 years)

| | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. generation | 2. generation | 3. generation |
| 1930-1950 | 1955-1975 | 1980-1999 |

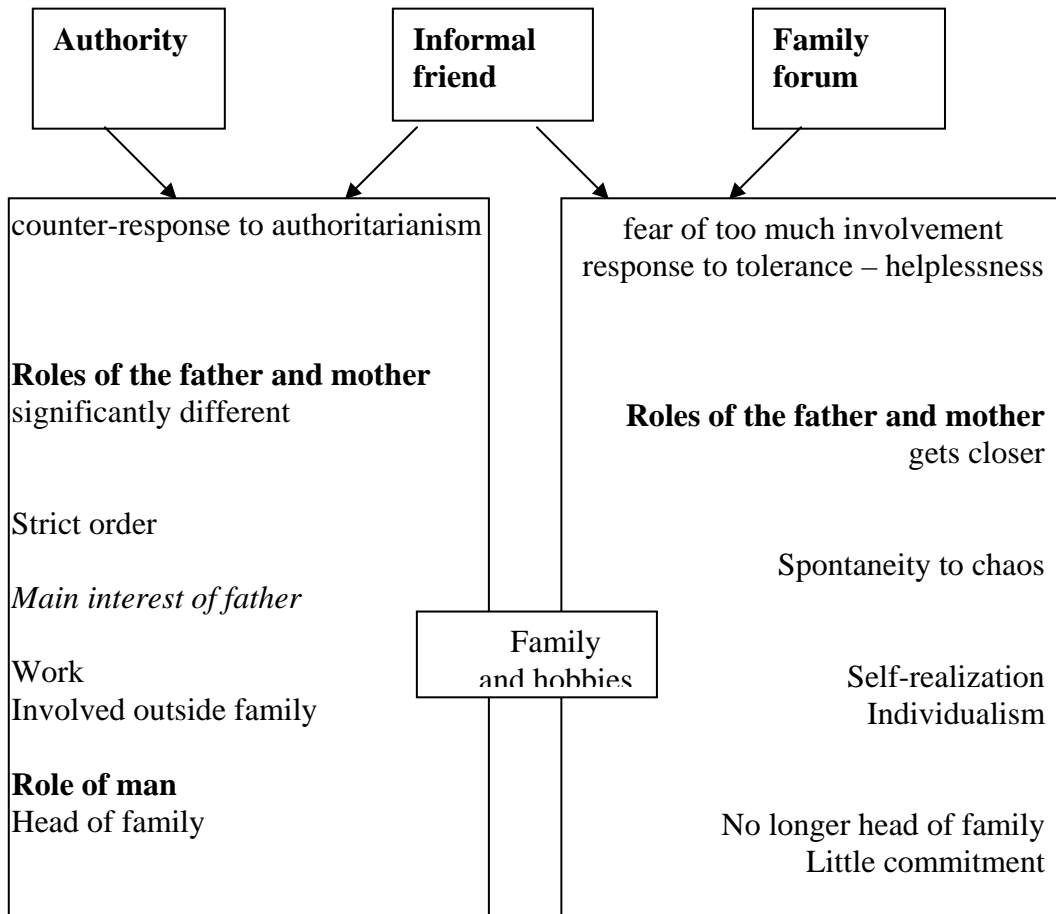


Fig. 1

In the illustration we see the shift in the way the father figure performed his role together with characteristics of different parenting styles. Those styles will be described in more detail later. The reasons and causes of the changes in the style of fatherhood will also be discussed. We will discuss how the research participants compared the fathers in three generations.

At the beginning we can say that without exception every person was clear about the shift and felt it was significant. There was a difference between how grandfather understood his role, that of his son, and finally, his grandson.

The question, of course, was whether the move was in a positive or negative direction. Unfortunately it seems that each of the following forms of fatherhood was

more a response to the former one, not the correct answer to the problem in the former generation and a move towards the ideal.

Generation 1: Grandfather's Generation

Description

Grandfather's generation was described in the questionnaire responses and interviews as

- “Little communication”
- “Father was a strong personality”
- Everyday raising of children was left for grandmother and grandfather cared for character development, solution of conflicts and discipline
- “Grandfather worked hard and little time was left for family”
- “Grandfather reserved a little time for the “unimportant talks””
- Work was most important for grandpa
- Public opinion was important
- Wife was left with raising the children
- Duties were important
- Order and clearly defined rules governed life
- Father represented stability
- Social position was valued
- Existential conditions were more difficult
- Principles gave security

Weaknesses of that father were seen as:

- not sensitive enough
- lack of communication
- nonexistent deeper relationship
- distance in relationship
- only work (ministry) mattered
- legalism, schema, law were more important than the person

In that “first generation” man was clearly “the head”, a leading figure. He expected respect and he got respect. Members of family showed that to him. The man made decisions and cared for his family. The woman was dependent on him, therefore part of the respect she showed to her husband might not have been out of “conviction” but might have been purely pragmatic and necessary because of the position of the man in the family structure.

Unfortunately we have to recognize that probably more often than not the man misused his position. When he became hard and arrogant, he demanded obedience and submission without understanding and love. He demanded respect for himself but did not always show respect to others.

A weakness of that generation was high involvement outside the family and the importance of that involvement. The man was mainly the breadwinner of the family. He therefore often did not put sufficient value on his involvement inside his family. His role outside was so critical for him and consumed so much of his time and energy that he had not much of either left for family, and sometimes let others at home serve him more than he served them. He did not always give appropriate priority to building relationships within the family and to caring for the needs of his wife and his children.

The far greater problem was the model of fatherhood that was established through an impersonal distance in family relationships. What mattered was the order that had to be obeyed. What someone felt was of little importance. Emotions were an uncomfortable burden, and many men did not know what to do with them. Finally they became impersonal, distant, over-strict and unapproachable. They focused on externals and were hard on themselves and others as well. Their weakness was in communicating love and they struggled to build real intimacy and often failed to build close relationships.

On some occasions the father became unapproachable. On the one hand he was a great example, an ideal person and at the same time he was so distant that this example led to inferiority and guilt. He was wonderful but lacked understanding of his children's experiences. He received respect and obedience but the question was whether he helped his children to live their own lives, if they saw him as he was, and if they were well equipped with life skills.

Positive examples

In research there were several examples of good fathers in that generation. Those were the fathers who both carried their responsibilities, cared for their families and at the same time were involved and interested in their children's lives. They were loving, approachable and wise, with a lot of grace toward others. Their children loved and respected them. They expressed how deep an impact such fathers had on them. Their fathers showed them the way.

Not surprisingly when involvement, firm guidance and consistency were accompanied with love, kindness, grace and wisdom, the result was very good fathers. Interestingly enough, they sometimes had an impact not only on their own children but also on their grandsons and granddaughters. Several people mentioned that a really significant male figure for them was their grandfather. One young man had his own father who was continually abdicating his responsibility for the family. He gradually lost trust in him when he found that he refused to admit the obvious moral failures in his life. The decisive influence on him had been, according to his own words, his grandpa who lived not far away so he could visit him every day. Grandpa talked to him about many things, would take him places as he worked, showed interest in him, and at nights he would read the Bible and stories to him. He described his grandfather as a strong character, an example of a man with a natural ability to lead his family. Finally this young man accepted strong values not from his father but from his grandfather. He said he learned from his own father too but he learned what a father should not look like: "This is not the way it should be done", he said. He coped with problems in his family and was able to learn a lesson, though negative,

from his father because he had a positive example which showed him a way that was very important for his growth.

In the lives of several other people the role of the grandfather was evident. A mature, adult man who managed to find his way through the dangers of life, who did not get bitter and did not resign, who did not focus only on unimportant things but could see life in a broad perspective, could perhaps be a key figure in the lives of his sons and grandsons. He was a man who became a real leader, guarded and supported and who gave security with his wisdom, helped his external family deal with difficult struggles, one who truly made an impact on future generations. We may be missing these “patriarchs” today the most. They may be the ones whom we cannot replace and whose influence cannot be replaced by studies or by listening to lectures or by reading books.

The father is in the midst of a battle. He must proceed and cannot delay; he must respond quickly. The father cannot see in sufficient depth what is going on because he is too closely involved to have an appropriate distance from everyday situations. He is developing, and many times he is stretched to his limits. He needs someone with greater perspective who understands and can help him, who supports him and who is available when necessary. He needs someone who stands with him. Another man who has already experienced what father is experiencing and who is willing to share; this is a great blessing.

Positives aspects of the model of fatherhood

The strengths of this earlier generation were willingness to take responsibility, involvement and guidance. There was love also which was expressed in disciplining.

Generation 2: Father’s Generation

Description

The Father’s generation was described as

- striving for justice
- appreciation of fair behaviour
- mutual tolerance
- mother had taken over almost all care of the children and raising the children
- wife mostly employed
- mother often dominant
- emphasis on material care
- less clear difference between “male” and “female” responsibilities

The weak parts of fatherhood were seen:

- they did not build relationships
- the family was more entertainment than a conscious attempt to understand children and wife in their needs
 - practical duties were on the mother
 - man moved his responsibilities to his wife
 - men avoided their responsibility
 - weak fathers, who did not lead children or whose guidance was directive quickly got rid of the problem, they did not go deep
 - spontaneity was the program of the family

Frequently in these families, the mother was dominant. She tried to take responsibility on herself, tried to lead and make decisions. Her emotions often determined the home atmosphere. When she felt well home the home atmosphere. Was good. When she felt bad, things were difficult.

The man in this generation tried to be a friend and companion but at the same time there was a vacuum regarding real interest and involvement in his children's lives. Responsibility for discipline and raising children moved to his wife. The woman often carried the weight of practical responsibilities too. Man was no longer a strong authority.

“To be a friend is easier. Differences between good and evil do not have to be addressed.”

An interviewee

A man can be an authority and lead when he believes in truth outside himself. When he does not believe in truth which is objective and absolute, (i.e., applies to everyone), he denies himself the right to decide what is good for his child. When there is absolute truth the father has to struggle to be in that truth himself and to lead his children to that truth as well. When there is nothing like that he can do whatever he wants but also his children can do whatever they want. One of the most tragic results of the rejection of absolutes is seen in the family and in relationships between father and children.

It was just in this generation where, in practical life, the results of the rejection of God as the centre of all human endeavours became visible. The world which rejected God, at the same time, rejected the foundational view of man. Now man will be viewed either too highly or as too low. First people who rejected God and denied him the right to say something in their lives thought it was not so difficult to replace God's principles. Isn't there a common awareness of values? But later it was more and more clear that without absolute criteria they did not win the battle with their own selfishness. It is not easy when there is egotism and self-deception behind my decision and where I am sufficiently uninvolved to see objectively and trust to my perceptions. These people operated as if they owned absolute truth, but actually they became victims of their own subjectivity and self-deception. It was not so difficult for others to see that the truth which they used as objective truth was often nothing more than weakness which led to a temptation to assert themselves over others. In that very moment authority descended into authoritarianism. And authoritarianism became a

burden for other people and produced resentment as a response when others saw that what was declared as “God’s” was only human.

As Christians we know that all real authority is derived from God. He is both the example and source of all power. It is not surprising then that, without God, parental power was distorted.

Response to authoritarianism

Unfortunately it doesn’t seem that the second generation found a solution to authoritarianism. The problem of authoritarianism was not so much firm principles (provided that an authority figure was measured consistently by the same principles) but the central problem was the impersonal, distant approach that the father took. He never allowed anyone to get close. In fact, he was afraid of real contact. Partially because he himself was not completely sure of himself, or of how he would allow himself to be measured by his own standards (which would be sure happen if he allowed closeness) and by the demands which he applied to others? And then he would not be sure if there was anything behind the mask that he offered to others. His mask had become his identity. He identified with his external role to such an extent that it was the measure of his success and value.

Another strong motive is the fear of people’s opinion. What would they think when they found that not everything was as it should be. It was not so important if that fear was real or not. It became the driving force of his behaviour, gave him direction and pushed him from behind so that he could not do anything else but push others the same way.

An authoritarian person is actually afraid. He is afraid of himself and of others. The distance which he has to keep from others shows that lack of freedom. He cannot be free or spontaneous because he would lose his image and does not know who he would then be.

The authoritarian man strives to be an authority in areas where he gets an illusion of being an authority. But in fact he completely fails to bear responsibility where he should. He may fail to care for others in a practical way and also to help develop their personalities. He doesn’t nurture a deep spiritual level. He shows himself unsuccessful in loving and sacrificing. His goal is his own satisfaction, not the satisfaction of others.

Such a man is not an authority; he only pretends to be an authority.

A generation of fathers who reacted against authoritarianism tried to be more friendly and informal. Unfortunately instead of intimacy they only achieved tolerance. Tolerance did not always lead to closeness in relationship. One lady expressed it this way:

“My father tried to play with us and have a lot of fun. But still he did not understand us and he did not listen. He loved us but his aim was fun not development of a deep serious relationship.”

One young lady wrote:

“My father is a non-confrontational person. Differences he solves calmly without complaints. In our relationship, though, I cannot share what is inside me. We chat about things which do not require us to be open.”

Another man, whose father overreacted to authoritarianism and went to the other extreme, described the impact of being raised in that way:

“I had to do everything myself. I did not know how to share deeply. I had to rely only on myself.”

Tolerance was supposed to replace authoritarianism as a better option, but this plan in fact failed. Without an understanding of the real illness it was hard to find appropriate medicine. Finally an old problem was just replaced by a new problem. The new one was perhaps a bit better but it still was a problem.

A fight with authoritarianism is not only an issue of our decision and our will. In another words it is not enough that I know what I do not want. One man told me: “I do not want to deal with children strictly but I find that often I deal with them in this manner”.

The only real solution is a healthy personality.

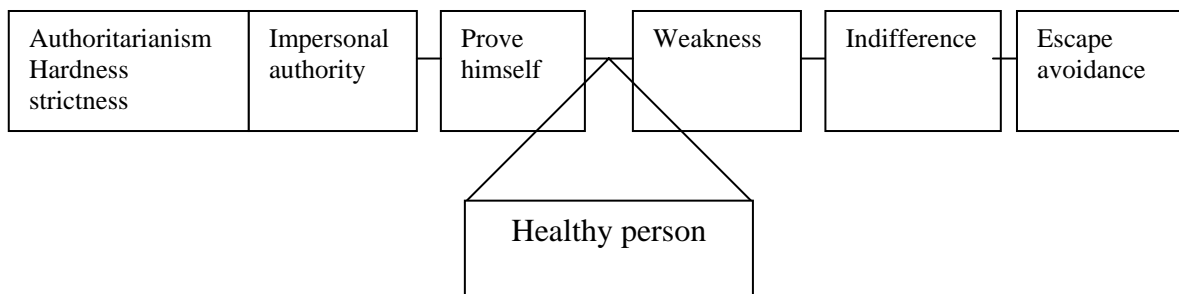


Fig. 2

In real life it is hard to achieve and maintain equilibrium. It is easy to go to either extreme. Either the one we try to escape or just the opposite one.

What we need is a different dimension. We need not only to rely on what we know but what makes it possible to develop a new quality and dimension to fatherhood.

An unhealthy personality cannot behave other than in surviving mode. It can either slip into one or the other extreme which may be relatively comfortable for him but destructive for others. Or he can limit his possibilities and stay in the middle. The danger is that this may consume all his energy so that the person no longer continues to invest in relationships. An unhealthy personality even with the best knowledge and best effort cannot create a healthy relationship.

On the other hand, only a healthy person can develop a healthy relationship with another healthy person. The problem of authoritarianism is an unhealthy personality who does not understand when to be consistent, and when to be loving and accepting.

An authoritarian person does not want and is not able to let his child get close to him so that s/he can get to know the father and vice versa.

A tolerant friendly father has a problem in many ways similar to that of an authoritarian father. He runs away from the same thing only from the other side. In the same way he does not allow anyone to get close. He tries but instead of real closeness he can only be informal and wants to show that he has broken through official, formal distance from his children and doesn't expect their formal respect any more. But there is still a hunger for a father who understands and gives himself wholly.

Positive aspects of this model of fatherhood

One positive aspect of the friendly father was an informal and spontaneous approach. He often knew how to play with children and spend time with them. This father knew what he wanted to avoid and he did. His parents worked hard and could not deal with unimportant things. For them external social prestige and order were important. The father-friend was informal, non-conventional, with humour and he did not strictly insist on obedience. In this respect this generation had a good chance to create a better father than the generation before. Unfortunately this was not always the case.

Because this type of fatherhood represented a strong reaction against authoritarianism, some practices were more gestures and proclamations of "I will never be like that". But children who first liked it later found what was missing. While it tasted good, it was more like chocolate than substantial food. It was good but still somehow it did not nourish them very well and left them unsatisfied.

The father in this generation changed some problems of the former generation, some problems did not change and he also added other problems.

Generation Now

Description

Today's generation of fathers is described as

- individualistic
- scattered family
- man is no longer head of family
- today ministry is emphasized but the difference is that God is important throughout life not only in ministry
- relationships are important

- emotions are important, what I feel, empathy
- social position and prestige again begin to be important
- understanding of the other is important, not so much discipline

Weak parts of that fatherhood are seen as:

- position of father is weak
- examples and ideals outside family
- man no longer represents stability
- weaker family connections in general
- man is unreliable

Whereas in the former generation there was often a dominant mother, in this generation it is a more independent mother. A woman who knows how to organize her program herself, can earn money and does what she wants to do.

The shift was described by notes like:

Today father “fails”, “he is standing in the background”, “he doesn’t get the respect which he deserves”.

“Authority and responsibility of fathers today has disappeared”.

Results of tolerance

Response to the tolerance of “father’s” generation (Generation 2) is helplessness and confusion in this new generation. There is still a fear of authoritarianism. It is only expressed differently. Today it is more a fear of dictating, and interfering too much in the children’s world and pressing upon them values of which fathers are not sure. How can fathers know what is best? Tolerance produced helplessness.

The main difficulty of “tolerant” fathers is lack of values. Tolerance then is not a real tolerance but only a cover for a value vacuum, insecurity and avoidance of having a clear standard. Tolerance cannot replace values. Tolerance without values leads to disorientation and chaos, to dissatisfaction and finally destroys relationships.

The family forum is a form of leadership in the family which causes the father to withdraw from his duty as Father and give up his leading position. By that he shows that even he does not know the way. He is on a level with everyone else.

If the father today has not resigned and already left the family, either emotionally or physically, he withdraws into an attitude: “Do not ask anything of me, I am only one of you”. Another result of that position is the father-coordinator, manager. The man who organizes and works on connections rather than give direction and make decisions. Today’s fathers tends to protect themselves, avoid being leaders and leave responsibilities to their wives. They get irritated when they are asked something. They are overburdened, tired and insecure.

The need of today’s fathers is not so much a healthy personality, though that is always important, but internal security, courage and willingness to take responsibility. They need encouragement, affirmation and support. Because they often try to get

these things from their wives, more tension develops in their marriage. A second great need is renewed basic understanding of what a marriage is, what a family is and what is a father's role.

Tolerance and relativism, which are recognized values in today's world, are not sufficient to break through a shallow relationship. Relationships tend to become an amorphous, undefined feeling. When I feel it I will express it because it is the real me. Because I do not feel it I do not try to pretend what is not real. In today's modern world it is of greater value to leave a marriage than to be hypocritical. Love is a restless bird which one day flies in and the next it might fly somewhere else. Such a view is a poor foundation for relationships that have the potential of a deep impact on another person, either to hurt or to enrich and develop.

Hunger for father

What I strongly perceive about young children of friendly fathers is a longing for a father who would have been involved. It is a longing for someone whom they can trust but who would be the initiator towards them and who would tell them what he thinks of them. One man said to me:

"I wish there was someone who told me who I am. It can be difficult. I only wish that I could trust him".

The father-friend style has produced in fact a hunger for a real father. These fathers experience inner conflict. On the one hand they are afraid of authoritarianism and have no basis for any clear firm guidance, on the other hand their children reject them and are angry with them though the fathers had done their best. The cause of anger is the small involvement of fathers and their failure to touch real needs. They found themselves in a position from which they cannot return, where they cannot stay and they cannot move forward; they do not know where to go. This insecurity, which is a sociological and psychological disease of our time, destroys people and feeds their confusion.

Fathers and children are hurt because their insecurity makes them hurt each other without intending it or understanding what they are doing. Tensions grow, families fall apart, and the pain increases.

Positive aspects of that model of fatherhood

The "Family forum" model of fatherhood has its strengths. First, there is equality in the family. No one has greater or smaller value.

That, of course, does not mean they all can have the same role or that roles in the family are arbitrary or interchangeable.

Our goal in this section has been to establish and examine the historical and cultural trends of fatherhood.

A note that described the opinion of people between the second and third generations presented characteristics of unmarried people commenting on their parents: “Not like them! This is not the way!” It is a conclusion of the young generation when observing their parents. It is an expression of disappointment, discouragement and refusal. It is a decision to seek another direction, it is an expression of longing to find something better.

Is there a way out? Is there a solution? The way out which I see is renewal of God’s order of creation. We need again to find a way to apply that order in our generation by understanding the real design of fatherhood. Our view of father and his role will not just be an emotional response to what is lacking but our personal experience will be related to God’s supernatural plan.

Authority

In the previous section we have already touched on the connection between the role of the father and his authority. Now we are going to explore the connection between the father’s role and authority in general.

The role of the father can hardly be separated from authority. The father is an authority within certain limits and his role is a very important one. Authority, how it is perceived and seen in society is reflected in respondents’ attitudes towards their father. Therefore as part of the research we included questions about authority and how authority is seen.

The view of authority today was expressed in the following ways:

“The view of authority is definitely negative today.”

“Authority is something inappropriate.”

“It is something uncomfortable. It needs to be dealt with indirectly.”

These basically negative expressions indicate authority at best makes things more difficult and more complex.

Similar feelings, probably closely related to personal experience, were reflected in the following view:

“The perception of authority is negative. It is someone who only gives orders, is arrogant and proud, wants to rule and misuses his power.”

We can see the picture of the father described here. The whole spectrum of experience in the family is really broad and this is the view of a father who is a hard, impersonal, arrogant man who deals inappropriately with his own insecurity by using power and command with no compassion or understanding.

Certain fears towards authority are expressed in the following response:

“Authority today is felt as a restriction”.

Automatically it is presumed that a person in authority will misuse his position. There is no expectation that authority can help to develop, care and be concerned for another.

Another more explicit connection of authority with one’s own father is obvious in the following descriptions:

“I have an authoritarian father, therefore I have no respect for authority”.

“My attitude towards authority generally is not good. I tend to rebel, distrust and fear, “I am hiding under the table”.”

We can feel the anxiety, worry, distrust, anger, rejection and rebellion.

That in striving for independence it is difficult to rely on and to submit to someone who stands above me is expressed in following observation:

“Today everyone wants to be his own authority.”

It is uneasy to risk another negative experience. It is better to rely on myself. Though it is demanding, life is not easy and though the burden is heavier it seems that disappointment can be avoided when trust is not given to authority.

What has value on the other hand is that:

“The ideal is natural authority.”

And another opinion:

“Young people obey natural authority. Such authority they can easily accept. They would have problems with a formal official authority.”

Today authority based on position is not sufficient. The man in authority has to fight for respect to be accepted by others and to deserve the right to lead. He can get respect but it does not happen automatically, ex-officio; it costs a lot and it takes time.

The way respect can be gained is described as follows:

“Authority is gained by building a relationship, interest in the other person and willingness to admit one’s mistakes.”

“Authority and respect result from natural wisdom.”

It seems that a wise, experienced, stable and mature person can have a great impact and play an important role in other people's lives. These comments also show a longing for real authority. We live in the midst of a society that has not completely rejected authority. People still have ideals. These above-mentioned attitudes show more resignation than rejection of authority.

A similar view is described in this sentence:

“Authority in general is perceived rather negatively but we are missing it more and more in society.”

It says: authority doesn't have a good reputation but it is still necessary; missing, we cannot live without authority. There is an empty place left which waits to be filled.

The fact that society sees authority negatively and is against any authority is evidence that real authority did not meet needs. Experience with authority is in great part negative. People do not have a conviction that those who are in positions of authority are unselfish, honest and just. Those who have power use it for themselves and do not consider others. They do not serve others but want others to serve them. Distortion of authority is no longer an isolated case, but has become a rule so that many people do not expect it to be different.

A general anti-authority climate in society also contributes to another view of authority. People tend not to trust anyone. They want to prevent someone from controlling them and do not want to risk misuse by someone who abused his position of power. Experiences are then filtered by prior distrust. Even if there is an ideal authority it may be rejected and face distrust.

In conclusion we can quote a valid and positive viewpoint:

“We face today a decline of authority. But never before was there such a beautiful time for authority to be built.”

It is an invitation not to resign. Just the opposite, our time is a time of great opportunities. We can strive for change. There are opportunities for change and we, as Christians should set the example.

Father as an authority

Parents, mainly the father, are the first authority in a person's life. In the family we get closely in touch with authority. And we get to know that authority very well. Not only through words but much more in what might never be said by a father who communicates and teaches his children. Children easily sense what is inside. Not what they are told they should get but what really is there.

A father is an authority whether he wants the responsibility or not and whether he is aware of it or not. Starting from first days he gives an important message to his son or daughter. Even when he is not present or the way he leaves (in case he does not live with the family) is a powerful message to children as they try to interpret it.

The family is a means for transferring and building lifelong convictions. But the only certain part is given by verbal communication. Family is a place that predetermines the basic attitudes of a young person.

Children, who observe their father, test how firm his claims are. They often provoke him and want to see his behaviour because they are interested to see what is really inside. A father may wish to pass on to his children certain values. He will not only pass on what “appears to be”, what he may pretend insincerely, but also the hidden parts. Children will accept what was real, not pretended.

On the other hand it is just the father who has a unique opportunity to prepare his sons and daughters to meet other authorities in their lives. They will be teachers, bosses at work, the church and ultimately God himself. The primary, foundational experience for all those relationships is their experience with their father.

Examples of authority in society

Besides family, other authorities one meets are teachers (in Czech schools mainly female-teachers), bosses in the workplace, politicians, officials who represent the state, and pastors and elders in the church.

During communism the perception of authority was distorted because what people saw were people with a great gap between their claims and their behaviour. Nothing destroys the position of a person in responsibility as much as this contradiction, insincerity and selfish motives. It was difficult, almost impossible, to find among communist officials a person who could honestly be respected. Just the opposite was the case. These people clearly placed personal interest first ahead of their character, integrity and honesty. The profile of communist leaders provides a very sad picture.

The ones with real influence were actually involved in unofficial and illegal structures. The gap between what was presented as official and reality got ever wider. Together with that gap people became ever more sensitive to those dishonest contradictions and compromises of the leaders.

Communism presented a very negative, a false authority. A state, which was supposed to care for its citizens, grew into a repressive power that ruled with a terrifying, heavy hand over the people. The state did not respect individuals and did not listen to them. The state ignored its citizens; in fact the state was not at all interested in their personal welfare. People were only a cog in the machine, with no value of their own. People’s response today still continues to be shaped by a fear that authority can again be exercised in such a way.

Another communism “contribution” was the separation of official and unofficial authority. Official authorities were outwardly respected out of fear, not because people thought they deserved respect. The ones who were respected were unofficial, often persecuted, “authorities”. This is why natural authority is of such value today.

Authority and the Church

The way authority is exercised in the church is always influenced by society’s views more than we may wish to acknowledge. Authority in reality is mostly a result of two tendencies. The first copies trends and development in society. The second tries to compare these with Scripture and biblical principles.

It is not so easy to describe the way authority functions in the church. The church often fights with abuse of authority, with manipulation, crossing boundaries and

authoritarianism. The church, on the other hand, has with any very good examples of authority that show respect, understanding, guidance, interest and love.

The need of a healthy authority is great and leaders are not always in as plentiful as one interviewee observed:

“Authorities are missing in the church. That creates a vicious circle. How can the church teach about authorities without having them?”

Surely the best way the church can teach about authority is by having good examples available.

New view of authority

It is hard not to see that something is happening with authority today. Authority seems to be an explicitly negative term. People do not trust authorities, are afraid of them, rebel against them and feel threatened by them. Authority is a synonym for restriction, abuse, manipulation and misused power and position.

Two questions arise in that context: (1) What was the contribution of fathers to our situation? To what extent is rejection of authority a result of the experience of men and women with their fathers? (2) What impact do today's views of authority have on fathers?

(1) Authority is without doubt being greatly misused today. The expression of one lady was:

“The idea of authority is closely related with fear for me. I am afraid of someone who will judge me, who exercises power over me, who can scream at me and beat me.”

The relationship between attitudes toward authorities and experience with fathers was part of our research. With the exception of two answers, all respondents saw clearly the connection between authority and experience with their father in their family. When the father built a good relationship with his son or daughter, when he cared for family and lovingly developed his children, they had a positive view of authorities. They became stable people with fewer problems in trusting and letting others lead them.

When a father was not good, when he misused his position, when he was hard or selfish and when he did not control himself, the resulting attitude toward authorities was negative, they would respond to authorities with distrust and aggression.

Many fathers failed as authorities. There is no doubt, that they have a great, perhaps a decisive, part in the rejection of authorities today. Is life completely without any authorities the solution? Would it be at all real? Isn't it better to renew and reconstruct authority rather than avoid it?

(2) How are fathers influenced by today's view of authority?

To be a father is not made easier by today's views. A father as authority over me is not welcome. Fathers are either afraid to be seen as authority or tend to be too harsh. A kind of vicious circle is started. Fathers who do not represent good authority support an atmosphere of distrust to authorities and their rejection in society. Such a view in society weakens the father's position at home.

It can, though, help a father to understand more deeply what real authority looks like. The situation today leads to many questions. We have to think how and when the authority of a father was misused. Do we misuse it also? What should right authority look like? Where are the correct boundaries for authority?

We realize at the same time a growing hunger for authority. People are hungering for an authority that is compassionate, vulnerable, honest, full of understanding, willing to be modest, direct and consistent. This hunger is for someone who doesn't see me just on the surface but is willing to look inside themselves; someone who doesn't respond with quick answers but who is willing and able to understand in depth. This hunger is for someone who doesn't answer just to get rid of the problem but gives himself wholly and seeks the best for me. This hunger is hard to satisfy and people seem to suffer chronic "malnourishment". Behind the striving for independence is often willingness to take responsibility in contrast to an unwillingness to risk disappointment.

Another question is to what extent are current problems with authority, extreme individualism and independence signals of Western and Eastern cultures' inability to find a unified, integrated world view, feelings of belonging, the need for and dependence on others, security and trust between people which are based on character and respect not only to others but also on mutually respected values. Do we miss today someone or something we are supposed to respect, but also can assume that that respect is shared by others? Is it the result of a vacuum, the non-existence of a power which is big enough to unify us but not to suppress uniqueness at the same time? Aren't difficulties with an authority only the results of our broken world where each person has to rely on and care for himself? Isn't autonomy which is so highly valued only explained by a lack of trust in the source of all authority -actually only Satan's Paradise lie which says "you will be like gods"? In another words, you will need no one and you will not depend on anyone? Can we bear that independence? Aren't pluralism and relativism only sad expressions of the inability to find this unifying power?

One of the characteristics of our thinking today is a move from hierarchical vertical organizations to networks and horizontal structures. It is an expression of resignation from any authority and denial of anyone to stand in a position of authority. Although through these structures more information or more people can be involved, what is missing is depth. It is interesting that a similar process is going on in families.

Christian authority

The biblical message clearly states that we are not independent. We were created to be dependent. From that fact, a concept of authority develops which is fundamentally different from independent, autonomous individuality.

Christian authority starts with God's authority. We cannot think of any authority without consideration of its source and example, which is the all-powerful, eternal God. We cannot have a correct view of authority unless we have a correct view of God. We cannot develop a healthy authority which at the same time ignores God who gives content to the whole concept. We cannot rebel against God and at the same time demand obedience and submission of others. This is a basic contradiction from which we cannot escape.

Fatherhood takes on a new dimension. A father is an example of authority. Experience with him builds a view of other authorities later in life. The family determines if that view will be built upon trust, and willingness to be led, or upon rebellion, anger, fear, apathy and resignation.

Impact of Communism on a family

The questionnaire and interviews included also questions about the period of Communism and its impact on the family, male identity and the role of father.

Communist ideology's view of family

Social security

Communism emphasized material and social security as the highest values. These securities were presented as the highest contribution of the communist state to the family. Parents did not need to be afraid that they were going to lose their jobs. They did not need to be fearful that they might not be able to provide their children with bread on the table. Ideologically, it was precisely this security that was supposed to lead to the disappearance of injustice and conflicts within society and, to some extent, in family. It was the idea that by changing social-economic relations within society people and their mutual relationships were going to change

One result of this security, of course, was the right of the state to control almost all parts of the society. Entrepreneurship and creativity did not have much place in the communist state. The high price of a dysfunctional, centrally-operated economy based on a single ideology that hermetically restricted social and personal lives, was paid with social security.

A great success used by propagandists to prove social progress was the growth of female employment. The measure of success of the socialist system was the fact that any women who wanted could find a job. The problem of unemployment was solved and whoever wanted to could (and had to) work. The other side of this issue was not so much emphasized. It was that women had to work for the economic survival of their family

That "privilege" expressed the general communist view of woman. Her value was in her productivity and involvement in society. Raising children and caring for the family, though verbally sometimes appreciated, in reality did not have high value. A woman who was in the production process got respect, not the mother whose work at home was not as visible. Family and giving oneself to children, even though good

social help was provided for mothers during a child's first years, was not valued, it was just tolerated.

Production

The emphasis on production and narrowly defined social involvement diminished the importance of the family. Good workers, party officials, socially involved politically-correct leaders of the proletariat were heroes. Their private lives were not important. In fact their family was often falling apart. All that was important happened on the social level. The family was tacked on to it, a necessary burden because there was still no better way of raising and educating children.

Collective education

Collectivism was an indispensable part of communist ideology. It developed as a mixture of Marxist ideology and the collectivist tendencies of eastern Slavs. As seen by that ideology, the masses were the real social power. An individual had no historical task. Just the opposite: when he or she refused to conform to the progressive working class, he was dangerous and prevented social progress from moving ahead. It was necessary to suppress individuality to subordinate it to working class interests.

The family was somewhere in between the individual and social class. Its place was never very clear. The family had no historical calling but at the same time it was not so easy to abolish the family or ignore it completely. Expressing individuality was definitely not encouraged. Just the opposite: collective education had priority from kindergarten through to university, trade unions and other social organizations. A completely collective education system was the ideal. Ideological purity was the controlling factor.

The centre of attention was non-dangerous social involvement that was valued and appreciated. Attention was not paid to family which could easily run out of control as an independent centre of resistance. Collective education was a better means of control. The family's independence made it difficult to infiltrate.

One result of communism was a strong stress on conformist mediocrity: whatever was different was dangerous. Especially during "real socialism" this pressure to be mediocre was very strong. The family strove to resist that and survive.

The pressure of collectivism and mediocrity did not produce an easy situation for the family. It had to resist the pressure of the environment and fight for its space. Certain parts of family life were almost illegal. What was said at home was often just the opposite of official education at school. Children had to develop double ways of thinking.

Communism and family faithfulness

The moral foundations of marital faithfulness and firm marriage commitment were removed. Whenever the family was supported it was for pragmatic reasons. A worker could work harder if he did not divorce every fifth year, and working teams were more productive when there were stable relationships within them. Communism, which at the beginning fought against bourgeois hypocrisy and rejected the morality of the middle class, created a mixture of avant-garde bohemian morality and working class immorality strengthened by poverty, social status, hard life, alcoholism and

despair. After the foundational period with its avant-garde tendencies and the revolutionary period of falling heads, communism gradually moved to the “real socialism” phase. This phase was built upon stiff middle class morality characterized by the fear of being different. Marriage commitment was less and less part of that morality. The communist state was not very keen to strengthen the family. The state could not have a standpoint because there was no foundation to build it on. The situation got worse and worse. The divorce rate increased. Many changes were not obvious from the outside.

During communism a great change within society happened. Marriage faithfulness was no longer a value and family stability was no longer built on a firm commitment. Family ties loosened and the family often stayed together for other reasons than moral conviction. Divorce might have been seen as socially negative but it was no longer an issue of morality.

The State as big Protector

Responsibility was taken off men by the state. The state pretended to be a Great Protector who values loyalty more than anything else. Initiative, except in the narrow area of improvements to the production process, was not appreciated and was often almost dangerous. By taking responsibility away from people, the state interfered in the personal and private space of citizens and violated their worlds. In response people were, and often still are, afraid of manipulation and control. That violation of boundaries and thought control took place surprisingly not only between society and the individual but within families as well.

The tendency to control and manipulate was not unusual in families either. Boundaries were violated in private and public spheres which led to the anxious protection of people’s personal worlds.

Because of the powerful state, accepting responsibility for our own lives and community was not encouraged. That responsibility belonged to the state. All that was expected was to trust, submit and switch off the brain. The natural tendency of men to take responsibility was then weakened even further.

The impact of materialism, atheism and determinism

Man was seen in a materialistic-atheistic perspective as an exclusively physical being functioning through natural laws and completely circumscribed by those laws. Psychological needs were acknowledged but were secondary to physical ones. Spiritual needs were non-existent. This view was, of course, reflected naturally in the view of children and their needs. Responsibility for family meant, then, to take care of the physical needs of its members. Other needs were not emphasized and for the most part were ignored. Parents (and society too) fulfilled their duties when they gave the children everything they needed for physical survival, healthy development and a good education. That was all. Nothing else was important and nothing else existed.

The impact of determinism, which claims that our behaviour is driven and shaped exclusively by our external environment so that we cannot really make decisions, focused on shaping that external environment. Everything was controlled by an ideology which was the key to all parts of the educational process. The inner world of ideas and feelings was not important and very little attention was paid to it.

The real impact of Communism

In order to survive under the communist regime people had to divorce the official and unofficial spheres of their lives. In the official part of society there was a lack of freedom to breathe freely. Only a small space for a variety of life's expressions was unrestricted by the unwritten rules of survival. Not to respect these rules was dangerous. Most people therefore created an "unofficial" environment where they could at least for a while be without pressure and control. A self-defensive and self-protective layer of humour, irony and "švejk-ism" was shared with the closest and most trusted fellows to resist oppression of the narrow ideology-ruled society. Often that small circle was identical with the family.

Ideological proclamations and everyday realities were two completely separate issues. A Russian worker never found his home in Czech society. For the most part he was the subject of jokes and ironical notes. But still, though, the communist ideology, political oppression and repressions, social pseudo-securities, collectivism and the climate of "new morality" had their impact on family life.

A reflexive withdrawal to the family was a response to the first wave of oppression in the time just after the Communists came to power. To create a small safe space at home, an island of security, was necessary to survive. There was no safety at work, at school or in society at all. Your attempt to express your own opinion when heard by improper ears could have far-reaching consequences. State police started to be everywhere. This external pressure resulted in the development of strong bonds in families and the family grew in value. It was one of the few places where others could be trusted (unfortunately not always).

Reasons for the growth of family importance were not deep. It was not a moral conviction about the necessity of an integrated family. It was not recognition of the "sanctity" of marriage and a rejection of disintegration as evil. It was not necessary to protect and hold together the family at any cost. Finally, there were external circumstances responsible for this change. A natural tendency to withdraw into safety resulted in the increased value of the family. People desired at least for a time to close the door and hide from the turmoil and violence. Because these external circumstances were responsible for the greater meaning of the family, family bonds and stability changed as those circumstances varied. During the time of the first persecution the family achieved a unique position. With decreasing pressure and a freer atmosphere in society in the sixties, the family bond grew weaker.

Later, after the first oppressions, a philosophy was born which one man described as "not to be visible in the crowd", and not to be involved too much. To survive was a primary goal. This philosophy of "survival" became the ruling philosophy for most people. The family was an organic part of such a philosophy in the sense of protecting that small community, with high trust (usually surrounded by a group of trusted friends) having high priority over other values. The family had to stay together. There was no survival outside the family. For the sake of their children's future, many people compromised their convictions. Their motivation was for children to be accepted in school and to save them from having a difficult life. The family, at least from the outside, served as the justification for many compromises by parents. To

avoid difficulties for family members, they joined the Communist party, voted and were externally loyal whenever danger was faced.

In the sixties there was relief in society, and people started to have more hope of freedom. That period was very short and the level of freedom so low that the family continued the same trend.

During the “normalization” period (seventies and eighties) the family was still withdrawn but for other reasons than in the time of oppression during fifties.

Now the reason was resignation, scepticism, despair and loss of all hope. Materialism, a consumerist lifestyle, and “survival” philosophy celebrated their victory over the nation. When there was no hope for change in the wider world we could at least design our own small world as we wanted. Outside we had to survive, not get involved too much, but we could find self-realization in the peripheral parts of life, in hobbies, personal interests, cottage, car and family. We could find meaning in children. So the family became a place where a lot of energy was focused. Many people found their secondary realization in families. A lot of effort and energy which could not be exercised in society was focused on the family.

There was still a microclimate of trust within a family. There I could express what I really thought, express my frustrations and in that way resist the pressure of the outside totalitarian society. Many issues with which I disagreed at least were not in front of my eyes and did not confront me directly. Deep chronic frustration separated me from them. And the family was helpful in that survival. The family was of real value. The family was high on the scale of priorities as one girl described: “My parents always kept saying: Whatever happens, the most important thing is that we love one another!”.

The family at the same time served as an escape. The decision to care for family and care for my wife was not a conscientious decision. It was an escape zone. I got involved there because I could not be involved anywhere else.

There was another change under communism. This change was less obvious because it happened in the minds of people. Family commitment was less and less a moral issue. Especially during the last two decades of the communist regime this change was accelerated. Growing distrust of institutions, rejection of anything official and the decreasing ability of people to build a permanent relationship within marriage and with growing tensions inside isolated families, marriage was less and less considered a firm permanent commitment. The marriage bond continued weaken, and marriage was no longer untouchable. Pragmatic reasons to keep the family together were less and less effective. The family was no longer held together by moral commitment and started to disintegrate from the inside.

That massive shift, which was not limited to the Eastern bloc, created new, unfortunately not better, conditions for the family. Marriage faithfulness, stability, and unchangeable commitment in marriage and sex were also excluded from the realm of morality and became matters of personal choice.

Apart from reasons which led to such changes in western countries, several other factors were at work in Czechoslovakia.

At first there was complete frustration, discouragement, feelings of hopelessness and meaninglessness. Especially after the collapse of the 1968 attempt to reform communism, people saw no hope for the future. For the most part, the goal was to

survive. And that survival was not easy. Everyday life in a dysfunctional, isolated, stiff community became a burden. It was so easy at least for a short while to forget and make a grey reality a bit more colourful. The less people had anything to believe in, the greater temptation it was. The faith one could rely on was a commodity in short supply. What remained was only despair and hopelessness. When there is nothing to hope for, then moral standards seem to be hard to reach and become burdensome. One who tries to survive usually doesn't focus on the distant future and its benefits but on the current moment and on things which seem to be helpful here and now. There was a certain segment of society which adopted nihilism and saw no meaning.

Communist ideology was a second factor in this change. There was nothing eternal, or transcendent in communist ideology. Morality was an issue of social agreement or social class struggle. It was connected only to the visible and limited only to earthly life.

Morality was also misused by the communist regime. The rude interests of one social group were imposed on every other groups. Violence and cruel repressions were justified by the moral demands of one class against others. Hatred wore the robe of justice. Man as God's creation no longer had value. Not every person had the same value. People were divided between those who were serving working class interests, who became the good guys, and those who opposed or did not comply with those interests, who were the bad guys. People's convictions, family background and the side they stood on separated them into two groups and were measures of their value. Morality was no longer universal or transcendent but utilitarian and narrowly pragmatic. Morality was misused and contaminated by the selfish claims of a certain small group of people in the name of the noble ideals of all humankind and in the name of progress. The representatives of these ideals were finally proved to be of little moral worth. As a vivid result of this "new morality", society was led by individuals under the justified suspicion of following their selfish desires and their own well-being supposedly on behalf of those whom they were leading. They were hard to respect. Their personal qualities were in doubt and were hidden under layers of hypocritical phrases and ugly lies. It is not surprising, in such circumstances, that many people resigned their noble values and had no strength to stand as individual islands in the midst of a general decline.

Longing for freedom was the third factor in the loss of moral values. Freedom under communism became an unreachable dream, far from everyday experience. Escape from a society which controlled most of life and where there was only a very limited place for self-expression and preservation of one's own identity became an addictive substitute for free living with dignity. I remember a brief meeting with one young man in the eighties. He just left a psychiatric hospital and told me that the reason for his difficulties was hopelessness in society because of the suffocating controlling power of the communist regime. Any illusion of freedom seemed more real than distant values.

The interaction of these three factors produced a weakening of moral values, and society quickly departed from them. Among other areas it was the family which was most significantly affected by this moral change.

The Impact of Communism on Manhood

The picture of men during the time of is one of resignation, men who refused or were not able to take full responsibility to make decisions and act on them. It was a man who unloaded his responsibilities onto his wife and found self-realization in his hobbies and interests. In the realm of social life, his attitude was passive resistance and he gave up on great goals and plans. He also had no great ideals. Nothing could be done with those things which are really important, and change there was unthinkable. At his work he was frustrated. He knew that whatever good was developed was going to be destroyed by incompetent decisions of the communists in key positions. He was depressed and bitter. Politics was reduced to TV news, political jokes and ironic discussions in the pub.

Man's identity was being systematically destroyed. Significant attributes like initiative, activity, rationality, a meaningful purpose to change the world, and the need to see the results of his endeavour, had no place and were not appreciated in the communist state. Sometimes that could be dangerous. He was denied all these things and as his frustration and anger grew he could not express them by using his energy to change the situation. His passive resistance was strengthened more.

Men in a totalitarian regime were discouraged from taking initiative and responsibility. The desire of men to change and improve this world, already sufficiently weakened, was further shrunken by the narrow space for free expression and the little possibility of seeking creative solutions. The man withdrew, avoided his calling or developed it only within the narrow limits defined area of his profession and personal interests.

The totalitarian regime seemed only to be functional on the assumption that men gave up on the task to fight for justice, stand against evil, seek and fight for truth and protect real values. Totalitarianism only existed within a society built of weak passive men. The man who was controlled by his insecurity, afraid to act, and had surrendered his responsibility was then willing to pass many of his rights to the state. He falsely thought that in this way he was going to make his life easy and bring a solution to his tensions. It was, though, only a question of time before he discovered his great mistake. Totalitarianism quickly started to crush him and he found that his rights could no longer be taken back.

Men with a weak personal identity preferred the illusory identity provided by a dictator –the archetype of the strong man, the leader, the person who impressed by doing what they were afraid to do and were not capable of doing. The leader shocked them with his courage and power to such an extent that they were blind to the signals of abusive power and violence. The man who was afraid to step into the struggle for personal identity preferred instead to identify with a strong leader who made great promises and provided a seemingly painless pseudo-identity. Many decisions and complex life dilemmas were more understandable and easier. Painful struggle and seeking became simpler when replaced by sheer obedience. It was no longer necessary to think and ask hard questions. The subtle and mechanical acceptance of ready made answers was sufficient.

The question is to what extent the victory of a non-democratic regime was made possible just because men gave up their duty to protect truth against lies and good against evil. They were mistaken and let themselves be betrayed by promises which

could not kept. They underestimated alarm signals and did not mobilize early enough against the totalitarian power which then kept them under an iron hand for long decades.

Men found themselves in a state which restricted their freedom and found themselves suffering because a totalitarian state had taken away their initiative.

Because of the experience of many men with communism, the awareness of correct boundaries between society and the individual, between private and communal, between decisions which belong to me and those made collectively, was destroyed. The boundary between responsibilities which are up to me, things in which I must be active and be the initiator, and things which I should expect from the state and society became vague and movable. Experience with a regime in which activity could be dangerous, robbed us of the courage to take action instead of protesting and venting frustration. It was not easy to acknowledge that there were many things which nobody would do for us. When the right to make decisions for ourselves was given to someone else we had no right to complain.

It is now very difficult and painful for many post-communist men to take initiative and decide where they can allow someone else to act on their behalf. It is far from easy to redraw the violated boundaries of my own world and my own responsibility.

The right to make free decisions that men surrendered affected not only society but their own families as well. It was the mother who more often than not took leadership because of man's withdrawal. A vacuum was created by men no longer maintaining their role in the family and there was often no other choice for women than to assume this role. The man was weak and avoided his responsibility. In contrast, the woman was strong and decisive. In several of the interviewed families the mother was significantly dominant. As a result of this, boys who grew up in such families, developed additional problems with their male identity, and girls' view of men in such families was that men were weak and needed to be cared for. Furthermore the correct image of a father's role could hardly have been passed on by a by dominant mother. Just the opposite was the result. Feelings of failure were strengthened in men.

Communism was, as described by one person, "destructive" for man. It strengthened his tendency to avoid responsibility. It taught him not to prefer risky actions. It led to passivity and resignation.

The impact of Communism on the father

During the difficult years of the totalitarian regime, men withdrew into their families. Rather than an intention to build the family, escape from society was the hidden motivation of such behaviour. Because self-realization in external society was difficult, impossible or dangerous, men found the family a place of security. Their effort, initiative and activity seemed to be meaningful and valuable there. Not always, though, were they giving their family members what they really needed and expected and not always were they creatively working on their responsibilities as fathers. Not always did they accept their role with an awareness of their responsibility to care for others, which finally became a source of joy in accomplishing the unique task of the father.

During the communist period the personal integrity of men was also damaged. The effect of a double life practiced by men in society and in private bore fruit at home as well as in public. Contradiction between behaviour and speaking at home and outside the home not only led to internal conflict, but it took a lot of energy from man and paralysed man's courage to pass "eternal" "life -and-death" values on to his children. Men made compromises and became victims of their dull life philosophy. They struggled with feelings of failure and bad conscience. Not surprisingly they were not eager to disclose these feelings in front of their children. As a result of stumbling when facing the moral dilemma of their time, they found themselves with nothing to offer. They lost their "life message", or that message lost its power and was no longer trustworthy. Often that message degenerated into several stereotypical instructions or bitter life lessons.

Not surprisingly, the respect of children toward such a father was weakened. Trust diminished with respect. Such a father was passing on a poor image of a man and a father.

Nor did communism strengthen the personal dignity of men. To express one's own opinion and defend it became in many cases illegal. The legal room for being creative was narrow. Men could only rarely fully exhibit their capabilities and gifts without clashing with the ideological political interests of the ruling party. Many of their convictions and views became dangerous for them and people close to them. These opinions were therefore hidden and it required a careful decision who to share them with. This did not help their self-respect either. Furthermore a man who no longer had a heroic vision - to fight for justice - found his male attributes were denied. As result men started to view themselves as weak and insecure, with many self-doubts. The dignity, which they themselves lacked, could hardly be passed onto their children.

A withdrawn and passive man was usually not very attentive towards his children. Fatherhood was rarely joyful for him, and he did not invest in becoming a better father. Often he was radiating a rather non-verbal message "Do not bother me! I have enough of my own worries!" which was perceived by his children. Fathers mostly withdrew into themselves and were not able to connect with their children and help them to grow into mature independent individuals.

The time of communism was not easy. It produced many changes both in internal family functions like the role of the father and externally in the functions of the family in society. Inside the family, an important shift took place. The family became more self-protective and at the same time moral marital commitment was gradually weakened, becoming utilitarian and pragmatic.

Communism also disclosed the failure of men as guardians of truth and justice. Men's identity and initiative and other manly attributes were shaken.

The role of the father was made more difficult by moral dilemmas, by shaken self-respect and passivity.

This period had a great impact on the family and great changes happened during communist rule. Not all of them were immediately visible but some became obvious in the next period of political freedom.

The impact of the fall of communism on the family

Although the changes which took place after the fall of communism are still fresh and dynamic, we will attempt an analysis especially of those changes that affect the family.

The family, which had been driven inwards by external oppression and lack of freedom, and denied self-realization in the outside world, found itself overnight in completely new circumstances.

Old circumstances changed:

External pressure disappeared. It was this pressure which had formerly instinctively unified the family. The oppression, which had focused the family inwards suddenly, disappeared. Society was now no longer perceived as hostile and dangerous. This change is still not complete, nor has it happened as fast as we might wish, but the feeling of being under threat is no longer valid. These new conditions have become a test of the real causes and motives of previous family stability. What impact is it having? What have been the responses of the family? How is the change being reflected in everyday family life? Will outside pressure prove to have been the only integrating factor for the family?

A broad new spectrum of opportunities for social involvement has arisen. In the workplace risk, creativity and invention can be exercised in new ways.

Opportunities outside the family have grown significantly in number. Self-realization is no longer restricted to the family, the cottage and hobbies. New competitors to the family have arisen. The family no longer has a monopoly on opportunities for self-actualisation. There is a positive side to this change--increased personal satisfaction and the loss of a sense of hopelessness and resignation.

Opinions and convictions can now be freely expressed outside the family and a close group of trusted people. Society is no longer closed, but open. Danger does not lurk behind every door, at least not in the political realm. I do not need to hide my opinions and be careful in expressing them. The family, in this context, is losing its function as an asylum and hiding place. Or, rather, the function of asylum is surviving, but for other reasons than political oppression and ideological manipulation. The tendency of the family to hold together in this new era is more due to economic pressure and other factors that will be discussed later.

New circumstances arose:

Existential insecurity. The stability and security, which were key parts of communist propaganda, are no longer guaranteed. That stability was shown to have been an illusion based on future promises that were not realized. As broad opportunities and new realities appeared, so did risk and insecurity together with worry about losing one's job and fear of the future.

After 1989 there were a great number of mostly very significant **changes** in almost every sphere of life. Nearly every aspect of social life was in motion.

Lack of time and busy-ness. Most people's workload increased significantly. The intensity of work, work pressures and the time demands of jobs do not in comparae with the past. Employers demand much more energy from their employees. That, of course, apart from the negative effect of less time being given to the family, has also a positive effect in better self-realization and use of one's abilities with the result of less frustration, hopelessness and helplessness. Men who find self-fulfilment at work come home tired and exhausted, but not frustrated and disappointed.

Similarly, passivity can no longer be justified by saying, "I will not serve a regime I disagree with." Passive resistance, which shifts all activity to the external, less important areas of life, no longer has any reasonable justification. Though passive resistance can still be found, it is today rather an unwillingness to take initiative and act. To be active and struggle to change things is not easy, but it is possible.

More space for a man's activities is a positive sign for his family, because it makes better use of his abilities. It can, however, happen that a man uses his activities to escape family responsibilities. But that tendency has always existed in men.

A great number of other opportunities for self-actualisation apart from daily work have created further competition for the family. A whole spectrum of activities ranging from hobbies to work in the Church and various ministries provides men with broader opportunities than before. These activities again demand time and energy.

Parents today seem to be less interested in how their children spend their time. They themselves are busy and focused on their own problems, so that there is less time for their children. The "housing estate" generation of children is growing. Though they have both a father and mother, they do not get much of their attention, interest or guidance.

One of the women interviewed said, "The bringing-up of children today is either liberal--parents do not get involved in their children's lives, are not very concerned about them and are very permissive, or just the opposite--parents are strict and only give orders." Parents don't always give enough of their time to their sons and daughters. Mothers and fathers then solve the situation in one of the above-mentioned ways.

Along with lack of time there is also **fatigue**, which results from a higher workload and the using up of the best capacities at work. Furthermore, a lot of energy is also taken up by the need to deal with insecurities, the need for often radical decisions and changes in one's personal, family and social life. Men coming home from work are often tired, with little energy left for their families. Fatigue has become one of the symptoms of our time. Many people do not seem to have the strength to make the necessary decisions or devote energy to the new direction that ensues from taking responsibility for their own lives. The study of this feature would be worth a more detailed analysis, which exceeds the limits of this paper. Fatigue is real and has an impact on the family in the way a father treats his children.

Consumerism and materialism. The pre-1989 situation, when bananas, though cheap, were available only at Christmas, and then only after standing in a long queue, suddenly changed and we found ourselves in new circumstances. Choosing from the broad range of previously unavailable products was now constrained only by finance. Not surprisingly, money is so desirable for many people that it has become their main aim in life.

There is a problem with this goal, however. The desire to own better, more efficient and perfect products can make one blind to real values. We may fail to deal with our acquisitiveness, and lose perspective on what makes us rich. Things we own can give us security, a feeling of control over our lives, comfort and power over others. What they cannot give us is fulfilment. Real, permanent satisfaction cannot come from these things. Materialism limits our life to only the visible realm. It can become a hunger which is never satisfied, and which in the end robs us of what really matters. Such a danger was already present during communism, but together with the growing range of things to purchase, materialism is becoming more influential.

Consumption becomes one of the highest values. Use and forget. Instant satisfaction and short-term perspectives surpass in importance and higher and longer-term considerations. What matters is satisfaction here and now. Importance is placed on the readily available, on things that don't take much effort and which involve in instant gratification. Together with the growing impact of materialism, the danger of consumerism also grows. Both are a part of our society and this has an impact on the family as well. Materialism includes the idea that when a child has enough things, he has all he needs. Consumerism encourages superficiality, emptiness and utilitarianism in relationships.

Little communication in families. In most families, the children attend various after-school programs and in the evening the family watches television. There is not much time left to talk and share thoughts and feelings together. Family members can easily live alongside one another without knowing what is going on inside the others. Each member can, in short, be alone and have his/her life touch the others only minimally and communication, which requires time and effort, can be restricted to only superficial subjects. Families are relationships, however. Unique relationships, because of their depth. Such relationships cannot develop without a struggle to make communication deeper.

Alienation. The mass use of computers and the great impact of media like television have created conditions for impersonal entertainment. Computers and computers games can be useful up to the point where they start to replace relationships. Rest and entertainment in which the whole family takes part are important moments when a number of things are communicated and learned. Children learn to cooperate. They get a better understanding of the personalities of their parents and of themselves. They learn to cope with the frustration of failure and losing, and they learn to be part of a team and develop their capabilities by observing other team members. Such dynamic mutual cooperation during a game cannot be substituted by any impersonal entertainment means. A new area has developed which the family needs to deal with.

One great positive change is the possibility of discussion. There is now freedom to seek solutions to problems families face. Many new ways by which families can be helped are available. We can now be more open than ever. We can formulate questions and seek answers to them. There is not as much limitation in the external environment we live in as there is in ourselves. Much can be done.

Free access to information is also an important positive change, whether it is literature, seminars or other programs that introduce new viewpoints and bring a new understanding of many aspects of family life and the relationships within the family, and provide good insight into the processes and struggles there. Relatively good

access to inspiring books, contacts with those who have something to offer and help in marital issues and child rearing we have only begun to learn to use, but they have great potential to improve the family situation and to encourage fathers.

Moral climate

Freedom has uncovered the state of society. What was hidden in the past is now obvious and visible. This has been a positive change. Problems do not disappear when we refuse to see them and ignore them. It is much better to face reality which may not be pleasant but is inescapable. Change can happen only after we acknowledge the real state of affairs.

Some of the factors that characterize today's moral climate are:

- poor moral condition at the end of the communist period,
- lack of a unified base for moral criteria and definition of morals,
- thanks to the ideological experimenting of the 20th century, shaken moral convictions of society,
 - reaction against fear of totalitarian power--desire for complete and absolute freedom, "escape from totality",
 - process of seeking, often chaotically and nervously, new basic convictions in society - the past has been rejected and it is not clear where the future is heading.

What effect do those things have on families and fatherhood?

There was a time when family stability, marital commitment and care of children were moral issues. Responsibility for the family, wife and children was not only by mutual agreement on a human level, but was an absolute commitment with eternal consequences. It was because their view of life was not limited exclusively to earthly existence, and such a commitment was built on faith in a Being and values which went beyond our limited life experience.

Faith was a relationship with an absolute, all-compassing, and all-transcending Being, who was at the same time loving and merciful. This relationship gave meaning to responsibility, gave it content and made it living and fresh. Commitments were not confined only to a human level, but were made in relation to Him who was Creator and the Lord of life. Therefore it made sense to fulfil them even when it might have been difficult and painful.

Just as a tree whose roots have been cut cannot continue living for long, morality which related human behaviour to the absolute Being could not survive for long after separating from that Being as the basis of moral values. The new morality did not, however, start to take effect overnight. At first it was unimaginable to leave the good results of the original concept. An attempt was made to keep that blessing while at the same time to get more freedom for freedom's sake and for what seemed to be immediately satisfying. That attempt, however, gradually grew to be accepted. Because it was now cut from the source which made it alive, morality became only a stiff and inflexible imitation of the original moral system in which life was present. The new system, which denied anything beyond the horizontal, could not make principles come alive which were stiff and dead. Greater and greater energy had to be given to convince people to accept and live out the principles that were more and

more difficult to justify. Morality degenerated into moralism. In the '60s that conflict became obvious when the younger generation refused to accept the morality-moralism of their parents, which seemed to them to be so insincere.

The new morality "Let everyone do whatever he wants" is not a historical response to Christian morality but to moralism in its different forms, ranging from pseudo-Christian to completely secular.

In our post-communist context this new western morality of the '60s meets with an unofficial morality that developed during the communist regime. That morality can be characterized as "No one has the right to speak to me about anything. I will do it my way," but at the same time respecting certain values. Today's shift has been made not only in view of what is and is not moral, but in the very definition of morality itself.

As already described, during communism great changes happened in the areas of family, marriage and sex. After the collapse of communism, these changes were simply made visible. At the same time, a new definition of morality and the formulation of new terms are being sought in society. What does morality include and what doesn't it include? What are the matters of personal choice and personal preference? Who has a mandate to formulate morality and "preach" it? What really is a family? What are parents' responsibilities? What is the role of a man and woman in marriage? What is sex and what is it for?

These are the deep dilemmas of our time. Though they go beyond the purpose of this research it is obvious that these questions are growing in importance.

What is the impact of all this on family and on fatherhood?

Many things are fluid today, and the family is no longer protected by a fence of moral principles. Responsibility and commitment in marriage are seen today as unimportant and a matter of free choice.

Also fatherhood, though not seen negatively in society, does not appear among the highest values. Good fatherhood, however, is perceived as something commendable.

Because of the current prevailing moral concept, which is undergoing change, is in part in agreement with Christian one, in part similar to Christian one and in part contradictory to it, man strives to be a father amidst the tension and confusion of competing systems and influences. Therefore clear, biblical and thought-through teaching about fatherhood is indispensable in the Church, as it addresses the reality which fathers face.

What seems to be key for Christians is that they not only talk and preach about morality but also give it content by living it. We should give meaning to responsibilities in marriage and fatherhood. We should not only speak about being good fathers but strive to be them and let people around us experience the fruit which grows from biblical principles. The present time gives us great opportunity for it.

The impact on fatherhood of the change in the moral climate

Every father has his moral struggles. It has always been like that. The struggles are only sharper and deeper today. Marital unfaithfulness, partners living together with no commitment, a hyper-sexed society, and sex outside of marriage are influences men

have to cope with. It is easy to compromise moral principles and ideals when exposed to these pressures. And still it is part of a father's task to pass those ideals and values on to the next generation. A man who is not firm in his own life can easily face inner conflict. He can try to pass principles and ideals which, when not lived out, are stiff, insincere and false. Anywhere except his home it might work but not with those people who are closest to him. Because it is so difficult to open oneself up to personal failure, it seems easier to avoid passing on any values at all. By doing that he shows, however, that not much is left of what he really believes in.

As a result of individualism the father is alone. Often isolated in guilt and anger, he struggles, seeks but doesn't see a way forward. He is missing a firm stable connection with others. His relationship with his own father and the older generation is often broken and dysfunctional. In his relationship with his wife there is a lot of hurt. It is hard to trust her fully because of the suspicion that she wants to manipulate him. He is alone in the end. There is no one who understands, feels with him and helps him. He is often so consumed by his own struggles that, exhausted, he doesn't have much to give. He finds himself fighting for his own survival.

The question we must face is: Are men going to survive the lack of roots and missing hierarchy of relationships which gave them a firm place in the world? Are men able to deal with the deep moral dilemmas which they have to face after stepping over and destroying old boundaries?

Changes in views of young people

A discouraging observation of one of the people interviewed can serve as a sad motto of this section:

“Today's younger generation did not get to know the role of the father.”

That quotation might look like a generalization, but it expresses the way certain people perceive reality, and the group of people this view represents is probably going to grow in the future. There are many young people today who have no real experience of a healthy relationship with their father, and often they have not grown up in a normal functional family.

How will that affect their personality? How will their worldview be affected? What impact will it have on the way they build relationships? What are they going to do with the hunger for real relationship? What values will they adhere to in their own lives?

Another sad feature of our time is the incomplete family where children live only with their mother. To what extent can she replace and play the role of a father? How is the identity of a man or woman who have lived only with his/her mother being built? How will their relationships to themselves and to the opposite sex be affected?

The family is no longer a secure place for many people. Many people do not understand what a family is and what it is for. They are aware theoretically of its value, but practically they do not know what something so dysfunctional with little

good in it is for. Subconsciously young people still see the importance of the family, but they do not see many sound reasons for it. It is more of a longing than reality for them.

Sex is definitely separate from marriage and family. And liberation of sex brings new questions. When the family is no longer the exclusive place for physical intimacy between a man and a woman and sex can well exist outside the family - what then is the family for? What is the purpose of the family?

There seem to be a lot of confusion and many questions within a certain group of today's young people. Indubitably many of those questions are related to their own personal experience with the family they grew up in.

Motivation of the father

As part of our research, the motivation for a man to be a good father was included. What motivates a man to be a better father and to face up to his responsibilities as a father?

Natural motivation comes from the conviction that there is value in doing something, and from success in doing it.

Contrary to this, where one is facing his failures, feels inadequate for the job and the only reward is condemnation and mockery, he will not be keen to persevere. He may then find many reasons why the thing is not so important after all, and why there are other more attractive activities.

Fatherhood doesn't get too much credit among men. They probably do not boast about their successes, do not desire to excel in their families and do not get recognition from other men and our society for being successful fathers. We can hardly imagine a man greeting his friends in a pub by saying: "I've gone bankrupt and have no money, I have no success with women, am no good at playing football and yesterday I crashed my car, but one thing I did well: I brought up my son!" He would hardly get an excited response. We will have to wait still some time before there will be European and world championships in fatherhood and the winner would be welcome home by excited crowds.

Men do not tend to be open about their struggles at home and with their struggles with their children. They do not naturally encourage each other and do not seek answers together.

More usually it is women who remind men of their responsibilities for the family, unfortunately only when everything is not O.K. Men perceive these attempts as pressure, feel guilty and try to avoid and ignore such comments, or get irritable and angry.

All this, however, doesn't mean men do not want to be good fathers! In fact a majority of men, at least at certain moments, desire to be good fathers and to be able to give the best they have to their children.

What are some things which can help them in that?

What can help a man to be better father?

Generally, **the support of a man's wife**, her understanding, and a harmonious marriage were seen as highly positive. Does she maintain a pleasant home where her husband is respected and where he feels welcome and happy? A woman seems to be important to help a man to make a stronger commitment to be a better father. She may not be able to change his decision completely, but she can be a significant stimulus for his decision not to escape from home but to keep on in his role.

A wife can, however, also make a man's situation more difficult by not respecting him, criticizing him and attacking his self-esteem, or by losing her patience and trying to provoke him only to make him do what she thinks he should be doing. For him it is much more difficult to struggle with himself when watched by a woman who is critical and disrespectful.

A good, healthy example by the man's own father. A man who did not experience a good relationship with his father knows very little about the value of fatherhood, about thankfulness and joy on the faces of his young children, and the deep positive impact he can have on them. If he did not experience a healthy father-son relationship as a child, he missed an important preparation for his role as a father. Many times a man wants to be a good father, but he doesn't know what to do. That delicate art is studied over a period of many years under a unique personal mentor in one's own home where future fathers are formed.

Another significant aspect of fatherhood is that it is softly spun into our whole personality. It is not a profession that can be managed after a three-month course. Every aspect of our being is uniquely called into play. For that reason, the best equipment for that task is our healthy, mature, balanced personality. That personality is again to a great extent formed by our relationship with our own father.

Other descriptions of what helps a man to be a better father were:

“A correct understanding of the role of a man as the one who should sacrifice himself and serve.”

Man can be confused when he doesn't understand what is expected of him. Should he be strict, hard, non-compromising? Or should he be tolerant and friendly? Is it moulded by his personality and environment he grew in, or are there universal principles he should follow?

Many practical dilemmas are hidden in that question. Should he insist on his way with his child and not yield, or can he step back? Should he be highly involved or will things settle down themselves? It is a great help when a man has a clear, firm and proper idea about what it really means to be a father.

“I think that men and mainly fathers gradually gave up. There are very few real men and fathers. It is an issue of their faith and motivation. They also lack education and training.”

Another significant part of fatherhood is a man's firm decision to become a good father. This decision a man has to renew and be faithful in again and again. It is really an issue of faith and motivation.

Education is also very important. A willingness to learn wherever he can. A commitment to read books, take part in seminars and meet with those who can help him. And to do all that with the recognition that a good father is not one who always knows what to do, but one who is willing to seek and receive help.

“A man has to be willing to invest his time in his family.”

A man has to sacrifice something. It costs something to be a good father. It is impossible to have everything. It is an issue of the right priorities in one's life and the willingness and courage to organize one's life around them and make decisions accordingly. Rest is important and we need it, it simply has to fit where it belongs.

“A relationship with God. God's goodness motivates me. When I experience what God has done for me, I want my children to experience the same.”

“The example of God as Father, His care and discipline. A relationship with Him.”

These two views express a relationship with God to be a strong motivation to be a better father. God, who Himself is a father and whose relationship to His children is described by such beautiful stories as the parable of the prodigal son, provides both motivation and an example for men in the position of a father. There is hope and strength in Him. He is the ideal Father.

What prevents a man from being a better father?

What stands in the way to better fatherhood was described as:

Perfectionism

The father who tries to be overly perfect can be blocked by just that effort to accomplish his goal. He may be so consumed with his goal that he doesn't have the capacity to see his child, understand him and care for him.

Discouragement with himself--he does not accept himself

A man who struggles to prove his ability to be a responsible father can focus more on his fear of failure than on his son or daughter whom he is supposed to lead.

Lack of time

Time management is a real struggle for many men. The problem is very real for them and it is not easy to balance their responsibilities in such a way that sufficient time is left for family and children.

“When a man is not taken seriously and is not accepted. When there is no real agreement with his wife in the bringing up of children--they have different values.”

As mentioned above, a man's relationship with his wife is one of the key factors which contribute to a man's desire to be a good father and to fulfil his role in the family, or to a tendency to escape and avoid his responsibility. Unity between

partners, having the same values and a spirit of cooperation with his wife in seeking ways to help their children are also critical for a man to enjoy his part at home.

Struggle with anger though he has good intentions

A lot of men struggle with anger. Often it surfaces only in the family and with his children whenever deeply important things for a man are being touched, such as his personal fears, desires and goals. To change his behaviour is, then, not sufficient, a man has to be willing to look deeper inside himself.

Burden of responsibility.

There is a burden of responsibility laid on the shoulders of every man. He feels its weight and tries to get rid of at least those burdens he is able to shed. Unfortunately it is very often the family that seems to be the first in the row.

Man's vocation has first priority.

One of the more difficult dilemmas of a man's life is the tension between his family and his vocation. A man needs firm principles and clear boundaries which will help him keep the two in balance and find correct solutions for the tension.

Egotism and selfishness: when a man puts himself in the first place

Selfishness is most clearly seen in close intimate relationships where not much can be faked. Fathers have to be prepared to find that their role is a great fight against their selfishness and egotism. It is at the same time, however, a great opportunity to learn not to see only oneself, but to be sensitive and perceptive toward others and to grow in serving them.

Laziness

Another struggle a man faces is his laziness and tendency to find and be happy with only comfort for himself. It is easy to avoid a difficult decision. It is easy not to lead one's family and seek God's ways for them. And it is not easy to make an effort to understand what others need and to do the best to help them. The cost paid by a father and those closest to him is then high: tense and broken relationships, hurt, anger, sadness and frustration.

This is a list of things fathers themselves admitted to fighting with, or which people saw their own fathers to have been struggling with. The list is very real. It includes battles with one's character, the burden of responsibility, priorities and external circumstances: all this a man has to fight when he is a father.

Family and the Church

Attitudes of the Church towards the family

The last part of our research contained questions about the relationship between the family and the Church. Does the Church really support the family and not just in words? Is the Church really helping fathers? Is there a tension between ministry and the family?

The following part presents some of the answers and puts forward some thoughts about the relationship of the family to the Church.

The first group of answers dealt with people's perceptions of the real attitude of the Church towards the family. Most of the answers confirmed that the Church has a positive view of the family. Real help for the family, however, people saw as being insufficient. Two of the answers may stimulate further reflection:

“The Church supports the family with words. The reality, however, is not so glorious.”

“In the Church there is only formal support of the family. The Church doesn't acknowledge the problem and see the crisis in families. They are helpless in seeking solutions. They preach about problems that do not exist. They do not stress the family. And there is no program for fathers in the Church.”

The purpose of the Church in relation to the family, and what practical care for the family might consist of, is mentioned in the following responses:

“The Church should be a help in time of crisis.”

“The Church should focus on teaching about the family.”

It seems that it would be appreciated if the Church had an effective system for helping families in crises. It would be even better if the Church were involved in crisis prevention by having good programs that consist of teaching about the family and marriage. Good teaching cannot only help crises to be avoided, but more importantly can develop positive family life even when a crisis has not been present. There is a great need for partners and families to deepen their existing relationships.

Not respecting the boundaries between the Church and the family on the part of parents is described in the following note:

“Parents often pass the responsibility for developing their children on to an institution, the Church.”

An interesting observation about families who are not able to break down the barrier of mutual alienation was:

“Families are closed. There is an isolation and lack of honest, open sharing in most Churches.”

Openness and honesty are necessary for families to be able to help each other in Christian fellowship. Their mutual relationships and sharing are important. Healthy

attitudes, openness and sincerity, towards people outside one's family, have an impact on one's own family and the interaction between family members.

Another answer opened the sometimes-weighty subject of Church leaders and their families. This view was mentioned only once, but we include it.

“Some Christians admire those who serve in the Church a lot, even though they do not have time for their families.”

The way I understand that note is that it tries to stress that to serve in the Church and at the same time not to care for one's family is neither a solution nor a good example. It is of little use to devote oneself to ministry and at the same time deny one's family. That observation only brings to light the depth of the dilemma of every married Church leader who has to give a lot of his effort to continuously maintain a balance between ministry in the Church and ministry in his family.

The Church and fathers

Our research showed that Churches often do not pay special attention to fatherhood. They suppose that fathers are in their place, operate well, know what to do and do it. Perhaps they feel the need to deal with the subject more substantially but do not know exactly how to do so. Typically the subject doesn't appear frequently.

The situation is a little different in Churches where there are groups of new Christians who grew up in non-Christian families. Such Churches are aware of the pressing need to open up new questions, and fatherhood in a spiritual and physical sense is one of them.

There are several Churches that have good teaching about fatherhood. They pay attention to the subject and support fathers. They do not try to substitute for fathers, but aim to strengthen men in that role.

They feel a need, however, for a systematic program to build up fathers. Most Churches currently have no such program. Though they are positive towards such an idea and feel the need, they do not have a specific program of help, encouragement and support of fathers. Because of a real lack of good fathers and because the role of the father is so damaged, such a program seems to be indispensable.

Many new people coming to the Church today have had a bad experience, or sometimes even no experience, with their father. Their relationship with their father has been rather poor or almost nothing. These people then need special care. It is critical for the Church to seek ways to supplement and substitute that role.

Pastor's kid

Though it was not originally a part of our research to deal with the specific situation of children of pastors, we finally decided to mention it here and to open the question rather than come up with solutions. It seems to be one of the subjects which

is not spoken about, but that doesn't mean that it is notreal, or that it has been resolved.

The children of pastors are a specific group of people who have grown up in specific circumstances. These circumstances were not always healthy for their development. They grew up watched by people in the Church and other Christians, and more often than not they were expected to be perfect with no problems. Their parents were under great pressure to be perfect and experienced other types of pressure as well. They were busy with not much time left for the family. Their home was often an integral part of the congregation, which may have had a good as well as a bad effect. Children frequently were too visible and observed by others, with little space to express themselves. They perceived unexpressed, many times unreasonable, expectations of them. Their fathers, because they could not afford to have problems at home that might disqualify them in their work, sometimes had a tendency to use quick, simplified solutions and thereby made the situation even worse.

Even though there are many good examples of children who, in such a situation, developed in a healthy way, we should not be surprised by the sometimes almost tragic cases of pastor's kids who experienced a very difficult childhood. One man interviewed characterized his childhood experience by saying that he missed his father, who was a pastor, 90% of the time.

It seems to us that it would be of great benefit to pastors, their children and to their congregations to open up this subject and seek help in it.

Some proposed solutions for the relationship between the family and the Church

With a few exceptions all the other people interviewed saw tension between the family and work in the Church. One answer can serve as an example:

“There is significant tension between the family and ministry. In our family we almost got to the point of filing for divorce. Over-involvement in the Church, which takes time from one’s wife and family, is a satanic plan. Thank God that in Him there is victory!”

That tension is very real. Often it leads to conflicts that painfully touch us. Can we understand the depth of conflict of a man who is supposed to preach convincingly on Sunday morning about God’s love, and before he leaves home, his house is the scene of a fierce conflict with his angry, frustrated and exhausted wife? The tension is sometimes that real and painful.

Church leaders are expected to have a perfect family where there are no serious misunderstandings and conflicts. How easily it can lead to attempts to mask and ignore problems, and in relation to the family it can lead to attempts at a quick fix and removal of the source of pain and threat. As a result, there can be great pressure to bury the difficulty at any cost.

On the other hand, the tension is also a great opportunity. It is an opportunity to be honest and to sincerely expose the reality in one’s life, and let others see what that reality looks like. Through this God’s power can be revealed and others encouraged to acknowledge their own struggles (surprisingly, after a while each will have some struggle to admit as a result of an honest look inside). The emphasis is laid on God’s perfection not our perfection.

The area of honesty is where the Church is being confronted with what it really believes. Is the Church a fellowship where people are open to the extent of revealing and uncovering the reality of their struggles, or does it encourage only hypocrisy and the dishonest game which one plays when seen by others. What we teach others are not our real experiences with God, but rather methods and techniques of how the game is to be played.

Another part of that struggle is the natural impossibility to reach perfection. To have a family without any blemish is to be an excellent, appreciated minister or to please every person. This is the struggle to accept the fact that we are not perfect. We wish our ministry and our family to excel, but the reality is different. There are tensions and troubles in them.

Another aspect of the tension is that the situation in each family is changing all the time. And these changes need our continuous attention. To take responsibility for one’s family does not only mean to do what should be done. It doesn’t mean simply to learn to behave in a certain way. It takes much more. We ourselves have to grow. We ourselves need to be changing. This needs our capacity, time and prayers. We need to see our family as an integral part of our ministry.

It is of great importance to understand the different purposes and goals of the Church and the family. The Church cannot and should not play the role of the family and the family should not play the role of the Church.

The family has a specific purpose. A detailed description of that purpose is not possible in this paper, but we can simply say that the family is a place where intimate relationships are to be learned and developed. Values are also passed on in the context of the family, and a person's whole personality is formed, including deep life convictions and introduction to a relationship with God. When the family doesn't function that way, the Church can try to substitute for the family to a certain extent. It is not correct, however, when the Church deliberately replaces the role of the family. A wise church would rather encourage, strengthen and support the family in its role.

Some of the difficulties in the Church today are a result of families not functioning properly. When a family does not do what it was supposed to do, then it is going to have an impact on the Church as well. Correction is a change, in first place, in the family's functioning, not a change for the Church to perform. The Church can offer help, but change by the Church is not sufficient to bring a solution.

There are certain churches and Christian fellowships that actually substitute for the function of family. Because many new people who come to churches today grew up in broken, dysfunctional families or did not experience what a family is all about, it is necessary for the Church to respond and offer certain functions of a family. It has to create smaller, more intimate fellowships, closer to everyday life. Probably one of the reasons why today's young people long for openness is that it reflects their desire for intimacy they did not get at home. The Church has to help them and adapt to them. The Church has to be aware, however, that this is not the final solution. It is important long-term that there are again families themselves which start to work, and the Church has to see their task in strengthening families, not weakening them by replacing them. Pressure, expressed or unexpressed, of a fellowship on families for them to be involved in Church activities when their home responsibilities are suffering, would be a distortion of the Bible's message. It would also be a shortsighted and self-destructing strategy. It is in the interest of the Church to build up the family and stress its importance, not to undermine it.

The Church has her undeniable and irreplaceable purpose too. Whatever critical place the Church has within God's plan, it has been the Creator's intention to use the family to bring people up to physical, mental, and to a great extent also spiritual, maturity.

On the other hand, unless the family is surrounded by a broader group of people, it has to play the role of that broader fellowship. The family is unable to do this, and it leads young people to conflicts and problems.

There is an internal reason for the family needing a church (a broader fellowship circle). A family cannot be effective, healthy and survive when in isolation. The family has to protect its members and set firm boundaries when children are small. Later, however, when they grow up they need to enter the bigger world, and it is important for the family to help them and encourage them, to prepare and equip them for independent living. Is there any better environment, or "broader family", than the Church, where people can be trusted, where people respect healthy principles, where young people can make friends and identify with a worldview built on the Bible and the Gospel? It is of great value when a family recognizes that need early enough and

is part of the Church, so that it can send out their children into the big world through the gate of the Church. It is, of course, also desirable that the Church is neither isolated nor inward focused, so that it prepares young people to understand and live openly with those outside.

There is an external reason for the Church and family to work together. This is the role of the Church in God's plan. Because the hunger for intimacy is so great today, and because not every Church is able to adapt to it, it is easy, especially for those hurting inwardly to be completely satisfied with a small group of intense relationships. The purpose of the Church is not, however, to help people to feel better, but to heal and give correction to whatever is distorted and weakened. Even though it is important that the Church encourages deep relationships, it is also important that those relationships are part of the broader fellowship in the same way as the parts of the physical body are coordinated into the whole being, behaving as a whole. Intimate relationships in small groups need to avoid the danger of isolation and exclusivity and grow into the broader Church of Christ.

In the case of the family it is very similar. It needs its members to develop a healthy openness and to consider themselves part of the Church. A family which is isolated can avoid some hurt and create its own small world. However, it doesn't prepare wisely for its future and doesn't develop a connection for its members to enter the real world around them.

The Church has its calling in the world. The Church has its members and its head, who is Christ. It is built of those whom He has saved and cleansed. Members of the "body" are to enrich each other by their gifts, to encourage and exhort each other, and they are to learn to love one another and to worship God and be a witness to the world. The family is part of that calling as well. Practically it takes part in it by being part of the life of the Church.

Summary and proposed solutions

Man faces a great dilemma in relation to his role as father. If he accepts his role and exercises it, it is not only the result of his willingness or desire to be a good father. Actually, most fathers who hold a newborn baby in their hands experience a strange feeling of touching a great miracle of life. There is a new person like them. And he or she is completely helpless and depends on the care of his or her parents. But one day he or she will grow into an adult and mature man or woman. They will have their own personality, opinions and experiences. What lies ahead for them? What is their way? What do they expect of their parents?

Most fathers in such a moment are willing to do anything to protect that small person from difficulties that the father himself had to go through, and by giving them their best fathers have to prepare their way. Probably most fathers who watch the cradle and observe the progress of their offspring feel warm inside and this makes them promise to be good fathers.

Later though, the father's love will be tested, like everything else in life. There will not always be moments of fulfilment and satisfaction. Men will go through periods of exhaustion when they can't see ahead and feel they cannot go on any longer. They may face situations when they feel they are up against a wall which they cannot climb

over. They may doubt their ability to accomplish the task of father. They may feel they have nothing to give.

Sometimes they will struggle with their own insecurity, deep doubt about themselves and the truths they believe in.

As Christ's Church we need to understand and appreciate the struggle of fathers and stand behind them and discover and develop ways to help them.

Proposed steps that may increase a father's effectiveness are:

1. Help men by respecting them, supporting their role in family and in the church, by strengthening their identity and calling,

2. Systematic education program for fathers which may start before marriage and continue until mature age,

3. Special programs for people from broken families who lack experience with family and healthy relationships,

4. Support of fathers from the church in understanding the problems they deal with, creating opportunities for men to share, speak honestly about fatherhood struggles and offer practical help as well,

5. Continuous encouragement from older fathers to younger fathers, seeking the ways that they can be of help to each other and share their thoughts and feelings when secrets of life are passed on to their children.

In each of these areas a lot can be done. We as the church have to appreciate freedom and the means we have available today. We are today forming the next generation and passing on to it the precious message of the gospel manifested in our own lives. We need to understand God's design for marriage and the family. The more families in our culture are falling apart and the further away they are from biblical principles, the more clearly and deeply we ourselves have to live and communicate what is in God's plan. Our task is not easy but it is great, valuable, precious and important, all at the same time.

Conclusion

An historical shift in the ways a father exercises his role in the family, the impact of social changes during the last fifty years on fathers, and the result of a change in the view of authority on fathers and the relationship between the church and family were outlined in the paper. We can see that a lot is going on and the changes are significant enough for the church to need to understand and respond.

The role of a man as father is most assuredly one of the most important male tasks, and the work of the church is closely connected to family and the close relationships that develop in the family. The healthy church therefore will always be looking for ways to support fathers and give them a proper place.

In the introduction we said, “the fight goes on today as never before!” Several other people also mentioned access to information as a unique feature of our time that generations in the past did not have. We have books, seminars and many opportunities on different occasions to discuss these issues. If we are interested we can gain a good knowledge and understanding.

Is the situation of the family today worse than it was in the past? I do not think so. Certain changes do make life more difficult for the family than ever. The foundation of the value and importance of the family is being eroded, and the whole concept of the family is shaken. There are new factors at work too: impersonal communication like TV, video, audio sets, computers, and the Internet which make it much easier for a person who wants to avoid personal contact. To live an illusion is easier in our time. It is easy to build our world of things in such a way as to avoid confrontation with painful reality.

On the other hand anything that is being misused for bad purposes can be also used for good. Information resources for parents are today much broader than ever. Many ideas and good insights are accessible. We can explore quickly and rather easily a variety of viewpoints on a given problem. Mutual communication is easier too. Discussion between interested people can be broad. It is only up to us what kind of information we are looking for. But for those interested, there is a wealth of good insights and opinions that can help us better to understand how to live in relationships, especially in the positions of fathers or mothers.

Do we face problems today? Yes, we do. In a sense these problems are deeper than before. But, today we have the means also to work on the problems.

Probably the greatest task for us now is to work. We can withdraw, give up and be sceptical and nostalgically escape to the past or we may nurture a hopeless and helpless anger when we realize that whatever we do we will never be enough to change the historical, cultural, and moral streams of our age. We can become passive with feelings of confusion and insecurity. But we also can resist these feelings. When non-Christian ideas can be spread why can't Christian ideas be spread? When non-Christian alternatives are being developed why can't Christian alternatives be developed?

In my opinion, the key words that characterize the condition of our time are “we can”. We can work. We can change things. It will not happen by itself. It doesn't have to happen at all. It is surely not going to be easy. But it is possible. We do not need to avoid problems and do nothing. We can do a lot. When we do not agree, we can create something out of our disagreement that is better than our previous ideas. Let us not allow Satan to push us into bitter passivity.

It is our hope which is being tested today as it has been in all previous ages. What do we really believe? We need to act on our belief.

I often think that the words of Revelation 22:11-12 are very descriptive of spiritual climate of our period:

Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong, let him who is vile continue to be vile, let him who does right continue to do right, and let him who is holy continue to be holy. Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.

It seems to me a strong characteristic of our time that evil is more developed and cleverer. But good too is more perfect, clearly formulated and well thought through. In the evangelical community as well as in many other communities things improve. There are many theories and approaches. There is no unifying factor in our society which shows resignation in the face of pluralism and the lack of a coherent worldview. Things get expressed and polarized. Evil is more obvious and good is clearer. It is almost as if a foundational conflict is more sharply and visibly expressed.

What we need in our time is persistence and work in the right direction.

This research collected some information and tried to describe the situation in one important area - in fatherhood. We also tried to present some solutions. We hope the paper will be helpful. What this paper cannot do though and what finally appears to be most important is for someone to make decisions and make steps to bring real change in his own life. God's power, strength and guidance are necessary here. We have to trust Him that He is going to do His part. Let's do our part! We can!