

FAMILY 2012

## Europe shouldn't be afraid

Interview with card. Péter Erdő CCEE president

**Experts define the phenomenon as "demographic winter".** The situation of birth-rates in Europe is unprecedented: the fertility rate is almost everywhere under 2.0 per woman in fertile age. In those countries marked by high immigration rates figures are less worrying (Belgium, Luxembourg, Scotland, Spain...). In those countries with no immigration, like Eastern Europe, ageing rates are higher. Figures regarding children born out of wedlock are also on the increase and in some countries of Northern and Eastern Europe they represent over 50% of all births. On this subject, Maria Chiara Biagioni interviewed for SIR Europe cardinal **Péter Erdő**, Archbishop of Esztergom-Budapest, president of the Council of the Bishops' Conferences of Europe (CCEE). CCEE dedicated the 2010 plenary meeting in Zagreb to the theme of the family and birth-rates in Europe. On the eve of the World Meeting of the Families due to take place in Milan May 30 - June 1, Cardinal Erdő, commented the findings of a demographic survey presented in Zagreb ([click here](#)).



Cardinal Péter Erdő

**Europe is experiencing an unprecedented economic crisis. In addition to the economic factor, what are in your opinion the other causes that discourage people from having children today?**

"First of all, there appears to be an internal, anthropological reason, due to a widespread mindset that finds it hard to make a choice when confronted with a set of possibilities. It's a difficulty experienced by individuals when deciding on their vocation, profession, and thus also when faced with marriage commitment. Moreover, many young people view all those commitment that require stability as a threat. Perhaps not openly but underneath there remains a mentality that considers immediate enjoyment the most important aspect while it strives to conceive a far-reaching life project for the future. If this how a person lives, that person will unquestionably fear commitments. It happens in the life of couples: they are happy together today, but there is always the fear that tomorrow something might change. The same goes for professions: many students are unable to complete their university courses, others change faculty. Thus it is often hard to accept stability in a profession with a project for the future. It is a common attitude that becomes evident in many aspects of life, not only in marriage".

**Another figure emerges from the research, namely, one every three children is born out of wedlock. Why is there a fear of the family based on marriage?**

"The fear regards the family based on a Christian marriage, since people know that here they are bound to fidelity. And this fear affects not only marriage celebrated in church but also in the case of civil marriage, which proposes greater stability compared to spontaneous, occasional, or short-lived cohabitation. Figures show that couples united in marriage have more children than couples that were not united in marriage. I believe these two aspects are linked to each other. Accepting the birth of a child is a great responsibility thus the fear of being united in marriage involves the fear of parenthood. Conversely, it appears to me that people from large, happy families find it less hard to create their own family. At least, this is our pastoral experience. Having been raised in large families is an incentive to create new families".

**How can people be helped to overcome this fear?**

"What we're trying to do is transmit the faith to the youth. If we believe that God exists and human life is not by chance as it is part of God plan for us, then also the realistic program for the life of each one of us falls within this Divine project. It can be said that in a certain way we are the collaborators of God for the achievement of His plan. This is true not only for the family but for everything that we do in life. This fear can be healed through faith and through the experience of the community".

**Which role is the Church called to play for the family in Europe?**

"The Church is called to give the perspective of Christian faith that helps clarify the meaning of a family today. It is also necessary to help the families in their daily commitment. There are countless families that help each other, when a child is born or when someone in the family is ill. It's important that no family is - or feels- left alone".

**What do you expect from the meeting in Milan?**

"I believe it will be a great feast of and for the family. Celebrative meetings like the WYD have their own Spirit. All those who participate are touched by this experience, by their experience of faith and of the Divine, in an Assembly gathered around the Eucharist, the Pope and the community. This sentiment is not a transitory feeling: I know for example many young priests who received a calling to their vocation on the occasion of a WYD".

(16 May 2012)