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THE FAMILY AND THE CHILD: SELECTED CONTEXTS AND THE THOUGHT OF JOHN PAUL II

RODZINA I DZIECKO. WYBRANE KONTEKSTY A MYŚL JANA PAWŁA II

Streszczenie: Z uwagi na funkcję, jaką pełni w życiu człowieka, rodzina stanowi pierwsze środowisko wspierające rozwój dziecka. Zmiany w funkcjonowaniu współczesnej rodziny wynikają między innymi z trudności dotyczących sprostania nowym wyzwaniom, funkcjonowania w świecie, gdzie obowiązują zasady, do których rodzina nie była wcześniej przygotowana. Jan Paweł II wskazywał tutaj na potęgujący się relatywizm moralny i prawny, które nie stwarzają optymalnego stanu dla trwania rodziny. Niezależnie od dokonujących się przemian w sferze funkcjonowania rodziny pozostaje ona podstawowym środowiskiem formowania nowego człowieka, którym jest dziecko.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, dziecko, wychowanie, Jan Paweł II

Abstract: Due to the function it plays in human life, the family is the first environment supporting the child's development. Changes in the functioning of the modern family result, among other things, from difficulties related to meeting new challenges, functioning in a world where there are rules for which the family was not prepared before. John Paul II pointed to the growing moral and legal relativism, which do not create an optimal state for the survival of the family. Regardless of the changes taking place in the sphere of family functioning, it remains the basic environment for forming a new human being, which is a child.

Keywords: key: family, child, upbringing, John Paul II

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Introduction

Family – synonymous with warmth, love, security for most people – is a value of the highest order. In the teachings of the Holy Father John Paul II, the family occupied a special place. He emphasized its essence, rank, stressed its dignity. The family environment created by a husband and wife united by the oath of marriage was considered in the perspective of the most important covenant that a man can make with another man. It was the family, understood in this way, that became the cradle for a new life treated with due respect from the first moments of conception. The importance of the family's influence on the growing child, the growing young man, the Pope emphatically raised during countless homilies, speeches, catechesis. The present discussion is devoted to a look at selected contexts of the family, its essence, its key role in the upbringing of the child, but also a synthetic view of the factors affecting the observed crisis of the family. The author's idea was to relate the issues raised to the teachings and thoughts of John Paul II, as a person who placed his hopes in the family and saw its irreplaceable role in the formation of the young generation.

The essence of the family, the meaning of the concept

Family is one of the oldest human communities found in all types of societies and cultures known in history. It has been the subject of insightful theoretical and research considerations for centuries. The Holy Father emphasized that the family is the basic cell of society, the cradle of civilization (John Paul II 1981, p. 16). Family occurs in all historically known types of societies and cultures. Theoretical considerations on the subject were undertaken already in antiquity. Aristotle (4th century BC) considered family to be the basic environment of man, more important than the state, in it he saw motives for action, an important, enriching factor of human development. The founder of sociology – Comte considered family to be the most important, basic social group on which the entire society is based. The first attempt to define the concept of “family” was made by Plato, who described it as the basic cell of social life and the main educational institution. The Holy Father John Paul II, presenting the family, emphasized above all its context as a community of persons (*communio personarum*), and a community in the service of others. He repeatedly emphasized and reinforced the importance of human dignity, and also indicated his integral vision, originality and uniqueness (Stala 2015, p. 155). Family is an integral group in society in the legal, physiological and psychological sense. At the same time, as Virginia Satir (2000) emphasizes, it is one of the few social forms that occupy such a small geographical area and have such a small number of members that they can all be in one room and know each other. It is also considered the only social group that gives rise to a new life and acquires new members not from the outside, but precisely through the birth

of children (Adamski 2020, pp. 13–14). There is no other environment that could replace it in the process of introducing a child to the world of culture, especially in the early period of a person's life (Majdański 2001, pp. 14–15). However, the strongest educational influence of the family is in the early stages of human development, in childhood, when it is not yet subject to or is subject to the influence of other environments and institutions to a limited extent.

Tasks of the family towards the child

The family, therefore, has a unique importance in the overall educational processes affecting the child. It is, as the Pope emphasized, the first place of upbringing where the child learns love, respect and responsibility (John Paul II 1981). From the tasks set before the family, it is clear that parents are obliged to take care not only of securing the livelihood needs of their children, but the scope of their duties is much broader. It includes recognizing all the needs of the child, realizing the child's rights, looking after the child's interests externally, as well as making children aware of their rights. As the Holy Father stressed, the task of both parents is to prepare children to make independent choices, in other words, to form in them a mature hierarchy of values (Adamski 2007, pp. 61–62). Thus, it is a matter of leading young people to independence and intra-sterility, that is, to consciously create their own lives. This is why the Pope emphasized that upbringing is not only a process, but also an art that requires both knowledge and love, he made it clear that children are a gift and their upbringing requires constant commitment and love from parents (John Paul II 2008). As the child grows, various outside institutions become involved in the process of upbringing, understood as the totality of both intentional and unconscious interactions that parents direct toward the child in teaching him to understand the world and live in it.

The child finds an area in his family home, where he is constantly assisted and managed, he can acquire experience and develop his own activity without a sense of threat and anxiety, in it he has the opportunity to develop his talents and skills, which is the basis of his future development (John Paul II 2005). The Holy Father emphasized that in the family environment, the child learns not only to perform basic activities, but perhaps above all, shapes the skills of acting for the common good, without which it would be impossible to function humanity (John Paul II 1997, p. 323). The family, therefore, plays the role of a level of shocks, a filter and a bridge towards the child. It protects them from too brutal contact with reality. It is a kind of base from which it could go into the vortex of a more personal world, extending outside the home. John Paul II said that the family is an environment that stimulates the development of personal and social potential inscribed in the essence of man, an institution that best suits his nature (John Paul II 1997, p. 13). The Holy Father defended the right of the family to self-determination and autonomy in the field of upbringing, believing that parents, as the first educators, have the right

to raise children in accordance with their own worldview (Sorkowicz 2014, p. 10). According to the Pope's teachings, the most important thing in upbringing is building a sense of value and identity, which the child must discover in himself (John Paul II 1998, p. 68). There is no doubt that the family is an important, and in turn the first, developmental and upbringing environment for the child. The first influence on the formation of the personality of children is exerted by parents and this influence usually dominates for many years. From birth until death, a person is influenced by what they think, what they believe in, what they value, what they strive for, and by what principles their parents and other family members act.

The figure of parents in the process of shaping a new person

Children are the hope of the world, and their identity is shaped in the love of parents and community, this message of the Pope shows the direction of education (John Paul II 1999, p. 62). The family is the first educator of the child, as the Holy Father said, it is the first school of love, in which the child learns to live in relationship with others (John Paul II 1994, p. 24). The way parents behave significantly influences the child's behavior at home, outside the home environment and later in adult life, which is why it is so important, as the Pope noted, to raise children to love and truth (John Paul II 1994, p. 31). The initial issue here seems to be the formation of one's own identity, self-definition, in the process of which a young person somehow finds himself anew. This is a certain continuum that lasts and takes place for a different length of time, individually for each person. However, it depends to a significant extent on the experiences in which the child is the subject, the events it observes, in which it participates and finally the attempts and experiments it undertakes. These are ultimately to verify the decisions it makes. However, when we talk about identity, in the light of John Paul II's thought we should not forget about its spiritual dimension, which is key in the life of every child (John Paul II 2003, p. 54). After all, it is in the family that the child receives the first and decisive ideas related to truth and goodness, shapes the understanding of what it means to love and be loved, in other words, what it specifically means to be a person (Sorkowicz 2012, p. 147). It is not only the child who shapes their sense of personal identity within the family. Parents, in turn, seemingly perfect their own established identity through their parental roles. Raising a child enriches their internal, reflective representation of themselves, providing new social experiences. By shaping their children, parents unintentionally shape themselves. In every case (according to Brzezińska 1994), the person who receives the influenced content affects the person who is the sender, and through this, also becomes a sender themselves. The Pope emphasized that the family is the first and basic school of socialization (John Paul II 1994), and in another statement he emphasized that a truly sovereign and spiritually strong nation is always composed of strong families (Iacobone 2014, p. 97), which shape

the system of values, views and culture of a young person. These factors influence the newly created human from the beginning of his life.

Family transformations or crises?

The underlying cause of the observed cultural crisis is a moral crisis and, above all, a crisis of conscience, reflected in interpersonal relations, including family ones (Kopiec 2020 p. 226). According to Plopa (2005), changes in the functioning of the modern family result, among other things, from difficulties in meeting new challenges, functioning in a world where rules apply that the family was not previously prepared for. Family relations are loosening, emotional ties are weakening. Roles in the family have been “blurred” (Plopa 2005). The visible modification of social roles in the family, manifested among others by women entering areas previously accessible only to men, unfortunately does not go hand in hand with men taking over traditional roles of women (Sorkowicz 2007). We observe the striving for autonomy of individual family members. On the one hand, unemployment is becoming a huge problem, on the other hand, more wives and mothers are taking up professional work. The number of non-family institutions and environments that have a different impact on the family is also growing. It is worth noting that each family member is increasingly living their own life. Are these just natural stages of change within the broadly understood relationships and situation of the family, or should we speak with concern about a crisis of this basic social unit? In his teachings, the Holy Father indicated numerous disturbing symptoms of the weakening of marriage and family. The false understanding of independence from persons, the weakening of the authority of parents and the generation of grandparents, the availability of divorce, the ease of making decisions about termination of pregnancy came to the fore. The Pope often emphasized the disastrous perception of the economic factor as the most important in the process of building and shaping a family, the rejection or relativization of moral and ethical norms related to marital and family life. The observed phenomena emphasized by John Paul II that have a threatening effect on marriage and family should become, in the light of his words, a contribution to constantly renewed and deepened reflection on marriage and family (John Paul II 1997, pp. 4–8). Today’s family struggles with many difficulties that disrupt its proper functioning. This, in turn, may have a negative impact on a child’s socialization (Rembowski 1986). A significant social problem is the increasing unemployment, the shrinking time span of the family, the ease with which it often breaks up, the weakening strength of family ties (Banach 2007, p. 13). We are dealing with a qualitative change in the relationship between parents and children. John Paul II, emphasizing that the crisis of the person causes great fear in today’s societies, emphasized that it is felt most strongly by people who are aware of the current situation of man and are in a relationship with God. Here he pointed to the increasing moral and legal

relativism, which do not create an optimal state for the continuation of the family (Pyszka 2006). The modern family is becoming less and less stable. The Holy Father has repeatedly emphasized that a dramatic phenomenon characteristic of today's societies is the breakdown of many marriages and families, which is often preceded by conflicts between the parents who are separating (Majkowski 1997). Angelo Scola's thought clearly states that when a person thinks and talks about love, they desire it to last, but unfortunately contemporary culture does not support the realization of this desire (Krupka 2024, p. 183). A new hierarchy of family goods is being shaped. The feeling of satisfaction with family and marital life has become of great importance. The decline in the ethos of marital life is also becoming clearly visible, as evidenced by the increasing number of marital infidelities (Krzysteczko 2006). John Paul II firmly defended the indissolubility of marriage (John Paul II 1982). However, observation of social life shows that the primary good is no longer the permanence of the family, but the quality of family life, and above all, individual life. The conviction is spreading that the institution of the family, as an irreplaceable form of social life, finds alternative forms in modern society. They are usually defined by various types of "being together, but apart". The Pope called these various attempts and proposals of forms of community life other than the family "sick civilization", emphasizing that it is the family that is currently the most glaring reflection of the crisis affecting society, and as an example he referred to the conflict between the Christian model of the family and the patterns of modern civilization (Kornecki 2008). It is worth emphasizing here that the direction of family transformation in this dimension in the community of European countries was adopted by the European Parliament in 2003. It was then that it was proposed to extend the concept of family to include cohabiting and homosexual relationships (Kawula 2008). In this new cultural situation, the percentage of new marriages and the "inclination" to enter into them is decreasing in the vast majority of European countries. Pope John Paul II also emphasized that an important factor influencing the noticeable crisis of the family is the disregard for the sacrament of marriage and lowering its value as well as the value of the family itself, instead of strengthening the importance of the individual (Majkowski 1997). One of the most frequently mentioned factors significantly influencing the phenomenon of crisis in the family is the material aspect. Professional work of adult family members analyzed from the perspective of a factor destabilizing family life can be considered in many ways. On the one hand, the bonds between spouses are sometimes weakened by social bonds established in the workplace. On the other hand, workaholism present in the professional sphere of parents leads to disturbing and destructive consequences for both individual family members and entire families (Kubiak 2008). Unemployment is also an important aspect influencing the quality of family life. John Paul II noted that unemployment, which affects the family, forces personal and religious maturity of adult family members and also children (Stala 2015). It weakens the need for acceptance and a sense of security. Finally, it causes situations that

make direct contacts between family members difficult. This concerns separation caused by the need for one of the parents to take up work in another town or even in another country. The separation of family members therefore very often becomes a consequence of one of the parents choosing a place of work in a foreign country. Migration is a significant problem for Polish families, which was noticed by John Paul II and many people dealing with the family on a scientific and practical level. However, regardless of the reasons for it, the separation of spouses significantly limits or even prevents the process of communicating feelings to the spouse. Spatial distance therefore causes emotional distance and can even lead to the breakdown of the family, because family ties, interpersonal ties are a network of human relationships that are fundamental to the survival of the family (John Paul II 2000). Aristotle already pointed out that the family, like a lens, reflects the entire society, the condition of the family therefore shows the general situation of a given society: where the family collapses, it becomes unstable, emotionally cold, the children raised in it enter a society impoverished in the tendency to act for the benefit of others. Referring to Aristotle, Comte emphasizes that human societies consist of families, not individuals, and further that it is the family that forms a bridge between the individual and society, and finally, it is through the family that a person enters society (Kawula et al. 1998, p. 13).

Conclusion

John Paul II placed the family at the center of his mission. His teachings were based on his conviction that the fate of humanity is played out in the family more than in any other area of life (Scabini 2014, p. 93). Education is a dynamic and creative process, and its essential content is an ever deeper self-knowledge, learning to “be for others.” Franciszek Adamski emphasized that being oneself is achieved primarily through interpersonal bonds, while a person’s personal life is enriched thanks to other people (Adamski 2006, p. 352). It seems significant (Łobocki 2007) that so far it has not been possible to create more favorable conditions for the development of children and adolescents than those available in a properly functioning family environment. Searching for reasons and factors that are significant for the family situation, as well as asking questions about the moral condition of modern man, the Holy Father John Paul II emphasized important philosophical, theological, cultural and social reasons (Wielgus 1997). The systematic loosening of family ties, the relativism of norms and values, the constant pressure of the mass media contribute significantly to the fact that the family crisis is unfortunately deepening. This is reflected in the lack of ability to conduct a dialogue and spend time together. The lack of dialogue makes it difficult to create a bond that is so necessary for the development of a sense of closeness and security, and yet the Holy Father’s thought so clearly echoed the message that shaping a child’s identity is not only about imparting knowledge, but above all about building relationships (John Paul II

1994, p. 53). Young people in particular unconditionally need support, which should be guaranteed by the family, because, as the Holy Father emphasized, education in truth, goodness and beauty is the task of the entire family community, and the foundation of a young person's identity is growing up in an atmosphere of love and understanding (John Paul II 1997, p. 29; 2005, p. 37).

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