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**Tożsamość sakramentalnego *mysterium* w przymierzu Chrystusa z Kościołem  
i w małżeństwie**

**The identity of sacramental *mystery* in the covenant between Christ and Church and marriage  
covenant**

*„For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,  
and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ  
and the Church” (Eph 5:31-32)*

**1. Marriage – an earthly reality and a salvific mystery**

**1.1 Marriage - a natural reality**

Marriage has been a natural institution established by the union of a man and a woman since the beginning of the oldest cultures. In many ancient cultures, this institution was protected by civil protection. For example, ancient Roman law stipulated that: „Marriage is a life-long relationship between a man and a woman, in which both parties are subject to the same laws: divine and human”<sup>1</sup>.

Already in this context of civil law, we find a general reference by the institution of marriage also to divine law, the foundations of which are contained in the Old and New Testaments. The Book of Genesis draws one’s attention to the clearly personalistic sense of the terms of the man called by the Creator to exist in the „image and likeness of God”, in the image of man and woman: „Then God said, «Let us make mankind in our image, in our

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. „Nuptiae sunt conjunctio maris e feminae et consortium omnis vitae, divini et humani juris communicatio”, V. MODESTINO, *Libro I Regularum, nel Digesto, Lib. 23, 2, De ritu nuptiarum, I, m*, cit. from: P. HAFFNER, *Il mistero sacramentale*, Città del Vaticano 2002, p. 210.

likeness (...)). So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; «male and female he created them»” (Gen 1:26-27).

The creation of a man in a sexually diverse man and woman is at the same time a confirmation of the same human dignity in both entities: „So God created mankind in his own image (...) «male and female»” (Gen 1:27). On the basis of the same equality of persons, the Creator entrusts both sides with the control of the earth (cf. Gen 1:28-29), and, in particular, his co-creative participation with him in the development of the human species through the gift of fertility given to both of them: „Be fruitful and increase in number (...)” (Gen 1:28). This gift given by God to a human couple is the subject of their essential vocation and the aim of creating man in a diverse sexual expression.

Human was created in the image and likeness of God as „man and woman”, remaining in a mutual personal reference. The image of God in human therefore refers unequivocally to man and woman, from which it follows that sexual differentiation is a gift given to man in the very act of creation. It would therefore be unreasonable to see sexual diversity as a consequence of the first sinful fall, as some ancient mythologies have said.

Based on data provided in the Revelations, it is clearly true that the sexual diversity of man and woman, and their mutual reference, belong to the eternal plan of the Creator. Therefore, the sexual differentiation of man as a man and a woman is an essential and appropriate form of existence, encompassing the entire person of man and not just his physical nature. This approach to the human person in his or her differentiation of man and woman is clearly confirmed by the decision of the Creator, who, after the creation of man, himself or herself assessed this act as „very good”: „God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Gen 1:31).

Based on Biblical Revelation, it must be assumed that there are no grounds for a negative understanding and treatment of sexuality, as Manicheans, among others, have done. It is, in fact, a gift from God given to man in his enduring historical existence and indicates the specific personal subject to whom this gift has been given. This subject is „man and woman” in their various dimensions, with an indication of their right to use this sphere for procreation and the continuation of history: „Then God blessed them, saying to them: „God blessed them and said to them, „Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it” (Gen 1:28). God's vocation to the existence of man in sexual divinisation does not presuppose the divinisation of sex and always remains a created and earthly reality which is an integral part of the human person in his or her earthly life.

The reading of Gen 1:28 quoted just now draws particular attention to the „fruitfulness”, to which man and woman are called by the Creator. It appears clearly as a gift from God and the fruit of his blessing. Therefore, fruitfulness, integrally linked to the diverse sexuality of man and woman, finds its source in God, the Creator of man. Since the sexuality of man and woman, and their mutual love leading to fertility, has its origin in God the Creator and his blessing, it is also in him that the sanctity of marriage comes from. The reality of marriage, as revealed by Revelation, which unites the sexual diversity of man and woman and their mutual love leading to fertility, sanctifies the marriage and calls unequivocally for a monogamous marriage to continue: „For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh” (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31).

The meeting of a man and a woman in their love that leads to becoming a kind of „one flesh” is simply an expression of the acceptance of a gift from God by spouses that belongs to the structure of marriage. Although the reunification of spouses in „one flesh” also has a procreative purpose, it is not limited to that. The aim lays deeper, because it is aimed at a personal community of both parties, which should lead them to a unity not only physical, but which fully encompasses all spheres of a person's personal conduct, mind and will. This union of man and woman in marriage is in close relation to God's plan, calling man and woman in the „image and likeness of the Creator” for unity between them by the gift given to them. The structure of the difference of their bodies is intended to respond to this call of the Creator to offer himself to another person and to accept the gift given to him. The act of mutual self-sacrifice does not only have a physical dimension, but is intended to lead to personal unity. Such an understanding points to the personalising nature of bodily unity between man and woman, which is in relation to their task not only of procreation but also of perfecting their own personality<sup>2</sup>.

The biblical message of the truth about the creation of man and woman and their vocation to fertility and mutual love, all the way to personal union in „one flesh” (cf. Gen 1:25-28; 2:24), is the basic background to the structure of marriage as a natural reality called „from the beginning” by the Creator. This original pattern is referred to by Christ himself in response to the Pharisees' question about divorce. In his reply, Jesus stresses that the marriage established by the Creator „from the beginning” as a union between a man and a woman remains „monogamous” and „inseparable”: „Haven't you read,” he replied, „that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female? (...) For this reason a man will leave his

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. GRELOT, *La coppia umana nella Sacra Scrittura*, Milano 1968, p. 26-33.

father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Matt 19:4-6).

From this answer of Jesus, it follows that the bodily unity between a man and a woman is embodied in God's plan in the form of marriage. Therefore, marriage cannot be conceived of as an arbitrary shaping of human unity, but as a result of God's plan. It is an argument that God Himself has programmed cooperation in the creation of new human beings through the sexual diversity of man in a monogamous and inseparable marriage<sup>3</sup>.

Since Christ personally explains that marriage is not just a human institution but a fundamental element of God's creative plan, it must be considered to be a sacred thing, programmed by God himself as a specific part of that plan in relation to the identity of man and woman, and therefore as a vocation inscribed in their nature<sup>4</sup>.

## 1.2 Marriage - a salvific mystery

By emphasising the natural character of the marriage between a man and a woman, inscribed in their nature „from the beginning” by the Creator, the writings of the Old Testament do not blur its salvific dimension. Theology includes this dimension in the category of the sacrament, as a sign of man's personal encounter with God in Christ, leading to the entrance into supernatural contact with God through his grace, which is love. However, the term „sacrament”, used to describe the seven salvific rhythms in the life of the Church, does not appear in the Bible. However, in the New Testament, especially in the writings of Saint Paul, the term „mysterion – mystery” appears (cf. Eph 3; Col 1), which generally means „the hidden, saving plan of God for the benefit of man, revealed in the definitive times in Christ Jesus and developed in the history of the Church”<sup>5</sup>. Understanding the meaning of the term depends to a large extent on the meaning given to the term „mysterion”<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. G. CONCETTI, *La relazione della coppia*, in: Giovanni Paolo II, *Catechesi sul matrimonio*, Roma 1980, p. 45-59.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. ROCCHETTA, *Il Sacramento della coppia. Saggio di teologia del matrimonio cristiano*, Bologna 1996, p. 27-28

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. NEUNHEUSER, *Mysterium (mysterion)*, in: LThK t. 7, Freiburg 1968, col. 727-731; J. AUER, J. RATZINGER, *Il mistero dell' Eucaristia*, Cittadella - Assisi 1989, p. 59-70; G. BARTH, *Sakrament*, in: *Encyklopedia Katolick*, t. 17, Lublin 2012, col. 891-894.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. G. BORNKAMM, *Mysterion, myéo*, in: ThW IV, kol. 809-834; R. SCHULTE, *Il mysterion nel Nuovo Testamento*, in: *Mysterium Salutis*, t. IV/2, Brescia 1975, p. 82-85; R. PENNA, *Il „mysterion” paolino. Traiettorie e costituzione*, Brescia 1978, p. 51.

The term „mysterion” comes from the word „myein” and originally meant „to close” (e.g. lips) and hence etymologically meant something secret and hidden. In the Synoptic Gospels, on the other hand, it means „the mystery of the Kingdom of God”, and also Jesus himself as the Messiah. Finally, it also has a legal aspect, in the sense of a call to stand up for the faith<sup>7</sup>. In this ambiguous understanding of the term „mysterion”, contained in the Gospel of Saint Mark, one sense prevails (Mark 1:15): „The time has come,” he said. „The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”. In this statement by Jesus, the term „mysterion” means the revealed mystery of Christ and His works<sup>8</sup>.

The development of the meaning of the term „mysterion” occurs in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians, in which the Apostle uses the term in the sense of the already deepened „mystery” in the historical development of the Church and means Christ as the universal cause of unity and glory: „which is the Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). This reference of the sense of „mysterion” to Christ, as the cause of unity, is in close connection with the „mysterion” - the „sacramentality” of marriage, suggested in Eph 5:21-33.

Remaining in the fundamental current in the Old Testament of the idea of a „covenant” in showing the close relationship between God and the chosen people, and generally with man created in „the image and likeness of God” (Gen 1:26-27), Saint Paul takes up this idea and develops it. At its beginning, there is the Book of Genesis, which, presenting descriptions of creation, does not stop at the fact of creating the world and human, but shows God the Creator - transcendent to all creation and close to man - as entering into the covenant of love. Israel's reflection on the history of the origins and the salvation of the chosen people through God's interference in their history leads to the development of Israel's faith in the covenant, reaching its high point in Abraham. Important moments in the development of this faith of Israel are the awareness of its free choice by God and the salvific experience of „going out”. An example of this faith is the Book of Genesis, which, by describing the history of the „origins”, allows us to see the covenant of God with man, which is actually being implemented, corresponding to Israel's understanding of this salvific relationship (cf. Gen 2:4)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. SCHULTE, *I singoli sacramenti come articolazione del sacramento radicale*, in: *Mysterium Salutis*, t. IV/2, Brescia 1975, p. 89-97.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. C. RYCHLICKI, *Sakramentalny charakter przymierza małżeńskiego. Studium teologiczno – dogmatyczne*, Płock 1997, p. 106-107.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. SCHÖKEL, *Motivos sapienciales y de alianza en Gen 2-3*, *Biblica* 43 (1962), p. 285-316.

While remaining within the limits of the subject of our reflection, reference should be made to the prophetic proclamation that introduces into the subject of the covenant the important, from anthropological point of view for the history of the covenant, the subject of marriage as a covenant („berît”) between a man and a woman. This image of a human covenant in marriage is used by prophets to present the supernatural image of God's covenant with mankind, which is the archetype of the marriage covenant. The legal aspect of this covenant derives from the fundamental elements that it is made up of: „love”, „fidelity”, „affectionate bond”. This covenant reality is found in the prophets in two aspects: the „imperfect” and the „eschatological” covenant. An example of the former is „Covenant at Mount Sinai”, in which the experience of love is seen from the human side: „nation - spouse”, resembles wounded marital love by the opposites of fate and other dangers such as adultery and prostitution. The second aspect of the covenant is the perfect „eschatological” covenant, in which love will find its proper face returning to its prototype in a love of paradise, impossible to achieve without redemptive grace. In this eschatological perspective, human love, lived in the sacrament of marriage which also sanctifies its sexual aspect, will find its essential properties: union in love, fertility and inextricability. It is, therefore, an ideal that a married couple should follow, not only on the original prototype of the first couple described in the Bible, but on their divine archetype. It is an action that is achievable, provided that it participates in the grace of the Redeemer reviving the marriage planned by the Creator<sup>10</sup>.

The idea of the „covenant of love” was taken up and developed in the New Testament in two respects: 1) The covenant of love between Christ and the Church and 2) The covenant of marital love. The New Testament writers use two sets of terms in characterising people entering into marriage: „man-woman” (aner-gine; arsen-thelus)” and „bridegroom and bride (nymfios-nymfe)”. Both sets of terms have different applications. It is significant that the New Testament texts relating to married persons almost always ignore the sexual meaning associated with them, with the exception of the allegations made by Paul against the heathen for their aberrations (cf. Rom 1:18-32). This is a significant difference from the Old Testament, where the terms „man - (zakar) and woman (neqebah)” are almost always used in combination with gender diversity<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. P. GRELOT, *La coppia umana nella Sacra Scrittura*, Milano 1968, p. 60-62.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. N. M. LOSS, *Il tema biblico del matrimonio*, in: A. M. TRIACCA, G. PIANAZZI (ed.), *Realtà e valori del sacramento del matrimonio*, Roma 1976, p. 38; C. RYCHLICKI, *Sakramentalny charakter przymierza małżeńskiego. Studium teologiczno dogmatyczne*, op. cit., p. 97-99.

In the Gospels and in the Apostolic Teaching, the most commonly used in relation to marriage are terms: „aner – gine”, which emphasise the unique nature of this earthly and natural institution, which, after the resurrection, would not be of any significance to date. This interpretation may be suggested by Jesus' statement: „At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Matt 22:30) <sup>12</sup>.

The earthly and natural dimension of marriage is also underlined by the terms „nymfios – nymfe”: „bridegroom – bride”, which generally relate to marriage as an earthly institution (cf. Matt 10:35). In certain situations, however, these terms refer only to Christ and the Church, as Jesus' statement about himself indicates: „Then John's disciples came up to him and asked him: «How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?» Jesus answered, „How can the guests of the bridegroom (ho nymfios – bridegroom) mourn while he is with them?” (Matt 9:14-15)<sup>13</sup>. The presence of Jesus as the Bridegroom present at the feast is also shown in the eschatological aspect of the parable of the prudent and unreasonable virgins in Matthew, where Christ the Spouse is identified with the Judge: „But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived [bridegroom – ho nymfios]” (Matt 25:10).

The examples mentioned here indicate that the Old Testament parallel of the covenant of love between God and Israel in the image of the Bridegroom - the Bride is also used in the New Testament to express an analogous relationship between the covenant of love of Christ and the new people of God, the Church. The presence of Jesus as the Bridegroom at the wedding feast, highlighted in both descriptions, is shown as an announcement of eschatological mating, understood as a moment of hope and joy at the end of the world. In this way the marriage of a man and a woman is also shown in relation to the love of Christ as the Bridegroom.

The same term of Jesus as the „Bridegroom” appears in Saint John 3:29. The Evangelist, describing the pioneering function of John the Baptist, presents it in marital terminology: „The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice.” (John 3:29).

The evangelists cited the allegory of „marriage to Christ”, present at the time, in the pericopes quoted. It is therefore a continuation of the Old Testament theme of God's marriage

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. N. M. LOSS, *Il tema biblico del matrimonio*, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. W. GÜNTHER, *Matrimonio*, in: *Dizionario dei concetti biblici del Nuovo Testamento*, Bologna 1989, p. 983.

covenant with the chosen people. In the Apocalypse, however, we find a reference to Christ and the Church in the form of an image of marriage. The Church presented as the „Holy City”, the „New Jerusalem”, is shown here in the category of the bride („nymfe”) awaiting the coming of Christ, her Lord as husband („aner”), known as the „Lamb of God” (cf. Rev 21:2-9).

Frequent use of terms in New Testament writings: „nymphos – nymfe” to describe Christ's relationship with the Church, expresses between them a covenant of love. In this covenant's perspective, the nature of marriage between a man and a woman, which in Christ and the Church achieves its sacramental dimension, is also better explained. With this statement, the justified question is: To what extent can Christ's covenant with the Church be accepted as the archetype of conjugal love and then as the foundation for the sacramentality of marriage?

Terms „nymfios – nymfe” used many times in the New Testament as equivalents to the terms „Bridegroom – Bride” to present the relationship between the covenant of Christ and the Church as a covenant of love, they also help to better understand and explain the nature of human marriage. According to the methodological principle that the „Old Testament is explained in the New Testament”, it should be understood that, just as in the Old Testament, a certain terminology made it possible to define the internal relationship between human marriage and God's covenant with the chosen people, so, by analogy, in the New Testament, the terminology used becomes the key that opens up the possibility of perceiving the marriage of a man and a woman in Christ's covenant of love with the Church as the perfect model and source of human marriage and its sacramentality<sup>14</sup>.

When considering this analogy appropriate, it must be said that the idea of a covenant presented in the New Testament refers to the Old Testament tradition where a covenant is a bilateral pact of a spousal nature. In the Old Testament, „Covenant at Mount Sinai” was considered to be the solemn wedding of God to the chosen people. Gradually, the image of the covenant was enriched by the addition of a feast, associated with the sign of the wedding (cf. Jer 31:31), which also appears in the New Testament as a strengthening element of the alliance. Such a sense is confirmed by the feast in Cana of Galilee, where a marriage concluded according to the original model is enriched by the presence of Jesus, giving the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. C. RYCHLICKI, *Sakramentalny charakter przymierza małżeńskiego. Studium teologiczno dogmatyczne*, op. cit., p. 96-105.



marriage a messianic and sacramental character (cf. John 2:1-11)<sup>15</sup>. However, the basic text supporting Christian teaching on the sacramentality of marriage is the letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5:21-33).

This pericope encloses two realities which are internally linked: the code of conduct of family members and the doctrinal motivation in this matter. With regard to the institution of marriage, significant is the text of the letter to Eph 5:32: „This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church”. (*To mysterion touto mega estin, ego de lego eis Christon kai eis ten ecclesian*).

This text is the subject of extensive research by theologians into the sacramental aspect of marriage, and therefore falls within the scope of interdisciplinary knowledge, particularly of canon law. Important attention has been focused on the term „mysterion” („mystery”), which the Vulgate translates by „mystery” or „sacramentum”. In various places in the gospels, this term refers to the salvific mystery, guided and realised by Christ, as the cause of the unity of the people of God (the Church) with God. According to many authors, the term means, according to St Paul, the symbolic relationship between natural marriage and the unity of Christ with the Church. Such an understanding of Saint Paul's thought would be based on the pericope of the letter to Eph 5:21-33, the comparison of two realities: the marital unity of man and woman and the unity of Christ with the Church. This seems to be indicated by the following particles used by the Apostle: „hos” („like”) (line 23), „hos – houtos” (such as) (line 24), „houtos” (such) (line 28), „kathos” (like) (line 29)<sup>16</sup>.

Referring to the scene of the Creator calling man and woman to the „unity of the flesh” in marriage (cf. Gen 2:24), as a covenant of love in relation to God's covenant with Israel, the term „mysterion” used by Saint Paul in relation to the covenant: „Christ – Church” and „man – woman”, would indicate not only a simple symbol, but a strict analogy between the two biblical covenants and their reference to the relationship of the covenant of matrimonial love with the covenant of love between Christ and the Church. In this sense, Saint Paul's „mystery”, used in the letter to Eph 5:21-33, would mean that the mystery contained in Gen 2:24 It is great because it has achieved its salvific development in the relationship between Christ and the Church.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. C. RYCHLICKI, *Małżeństwo w Kościele katolickim, 2. Ujęcie systematyczne, p. 2*, in: *Encyklopedia Katolicka*, t. 11, Lublin 2006, col. 1067.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. SCHLIER, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, Zürich – Einsiedeln – Köln 1982, p. 253-260; cf. Y. CONGAR, *Kościół jako sakrament zbawienia*, Warszawa 1980, p. 25-29.

Thus the greatness of this mystery („mysterion – mystery”), realised or revealed by Christ, makes the covenant of Christ's love for the Church the real norm for the marriage covenant of man and woman. The greatness of this mystery („the mystery is great”) results from the „true recreating” in human marriage of the relationship of love on the part of Christ towards the Church. Since Christ's relationship to the Church is a covenant of love, like God's Old Testament covenant with the chosen people, its „true recreation” in marriage is a relationship of love between husband and wife, according to the will of the Creator expressed in the act of creation<sup>17</sup>.

Based on the relationship between marriage to the covenant of Christ and the Church as understood by St Paul, the well-known biblical scholar R. Schnackenburg stresses: „Christ and the Church are therefore not only a ideal and model for Christian marriage, but at the same time an element which determines the nature of marriage and the behaviour of the spouses in their mutual relationship. Line 32 (Eph 5:21-32) is therefore the interpretation of Gen 2:24 in the light of Christ and the Church”<sup>18</sup>.

In the light of the theological and biblical analysis of the letter to the Ephesians (Eph 5:21-32) it should be concluded that „a marriage which derives its natural dignity from an act of creation acquires a new theological meaning through participation in the «great mystery», understood as God's plan of salvation, relating to a new community of believers”<sup>19</sup>.

From this „great mystery” natural marriage derives its special dimension, which is the „love of Christ”. Since, from Christ's relationship with the Church, marriage derives its nature, it is based on Eph 5:21-33 it should be added that Christ's love for the Church is not merely reproduced in natural marriage, but truly recreated. In this way, marriage is not merely a unique earthly reality, but truly reproduces within itself the inextricable covenant of love between Christ and the Church, thus participating in the salvific economy.

So if the covenant of love between God and Israel, and then between Christ and the Church, is inscribed in the marriage covenant of man and woman, then marriage as a good gift from the Creator to man is a holy and sanctifying institution. This natural status cannot be limited to the recognition of his or her dignity, but it sets out natural obligations towards the spouses themselves and responsibility for the family through the marriage that is formed.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. R. BATEY, *The mia Sarks Union of Christ and the Church*, *New Testament Studies* 13 (1967), p. 270-281.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. R. SCHNACKENBURG, *Die Ehe im Neuen Testament*, w: *Theologie der Ehe*, Regensburg 1969, p. 22.

<sup>19</sup> C. RYCHLICKI, *Sakramentalny charakter przymierza małżeńskiego. Studium teologiczno-dogmatyczne*, op. cit., p. 112.

## **2. Contemporary challenges for marriage and family**

### **2.1 Unity and indissolubility of marriage**

As has already been mentioned above, the Old Testament sources of the Revelation speak directly of the Creator's calling to the existence of man in „the image and likeness of God” of man and woman to become „one flesh”. From the psychological point of view, the formation of a married couple from a man and a woman takes place on the level of emotional bond. However, the formation of such a relationship between two people may be of different motives, but in essence it is the very nature of this relationship that leads to the formation of conditions of permanence and the ability of both parties to engage with each other for the sake of the formed relationship. It is important, however, to bear in mind the differences in the relationship in which its partners remain, so as not to confuse a relationship formed solely on an emotional basis with a legally concluded marriage.

The partners of a relationship based solely on an emotional basis, which can also be expressed in sexual relations, usually limit themselves to idealising their experiences and perceptions towards the other party. The relationship of real love between them, oriented towards making an effort for the good of both of them and creating a family, closes before making such an effort. This happens when even one party is not able to accept the other without changing its own projections concerning it. In such a relationship, fractures quickly occur, inability to stop conflicts, which in turn leads to the disintegration of marriage. This is the result of an overly subjective understanding of the other party, when you actually only have your own vision of love for them in mind. It is the result of an error in treating love solely on the basis of feelings. When it comes to love, it is helpful to stop looking only after oneself and assessing oneself in the prism of the other party. The ability to include one's own emotional sphere in the sphere of love means the desire for common commitment to shape the future. This is the ability to discover the meaning of love and to understand it properly. This kind of behaviour, however, requires a maturity that was already formed in the premarital period in terms of emotional, intellectual and sexual maturity.

The current reality, with the increase in separations and divorces in marriage, is a clear signal calling for greater efforts, including, speaking in priestly terms, to prepare young

people for marriage better. This is not only about the well-being of individuals, but also about weakening the moral and cultural crisis which is devastating social life<sup>20</sup>.

It must be made clear that such concern for a well-functioning marriage and a family based on it does not come about only for religious reasons, but also with a view to social order and the right understanding of the good in the person and society. From a religious point of view, marriage and the family are a sacred and, at the same time, a human reality, which is a task for man with a duty to take care of their proper development, because the future of humanity is contained within them. The future of humanity is shaped mainly by a well-functioning marriage and family. This is why an integrated marriage has an exceptional value, because only such a marriage will be a platform for the proper formation of people in the family, which is their humanising value and testifies to their responsibility for the good of another person and the community in which they live.

John Paul II, in the Apostolic Exhortation entitled *Familiaris consortio*, speaks of love as the principle and strength of unity between spouses and in the family between its members (cf. FC, 18). Faced with the serious problem of divorce, the Pope speaks of the indissolubility of marriage: „rooted in the personal and complete self-giving of the spouses and required for the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in God's plan, as expressed in the Revelation” (FC, 20).

In the New Testament, Eph 5:25 and Matt 19:4-6 have a source value for this attribute of marriage. This is a truth rooted in the consciousness of man from the beginning of his history. If, therefore, a marriage between Christians is to truly recreate in itself the love of Christ for the Church, as a gift given to the Church by Christ (cf. Eph 5:31-32), it must be inseparable. Like the free gift of love given by Christ to the Church, spouses also give each other the gift of love on the day of marriage by saying the words of the oath: „I vow you love, loyalty and honesty in marriage and that I will not leave you until death”<sup>21</sup>.

In his commentary on this gift of Christ's love for the Church, reproduced in marriage (cf. Eph 5:25-32), Professor H. Schlier writes that: „Marriage, as a recreation of Christ's heavenly marriage to the Church, was elevated to the highest dignity (...). He, as the heavenly

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. T. ANATRELLA, *Le confusioni affettive e ideologiche che colpiscono le coppie contemporanee*, in: PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER LA FAMIGLIA, *Famiglia e questioni etiche*, Bologna 2004, p. 53-66.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. CCC, n. 1640: „The marriage knot was therefore established by God himself, so that the marriage of the baptised can never be dissolved and completed. The knot resulting from the free human act of the spouses and from the completion of the marriage is henceforth an irrevocable reality and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God's faithfulness. The Church does not have the power to speak out against this resolve of God's wisdom”; cf. FRANCISZEK, *Adhortacja apostolska Amoris laetitia*, 19 III 2016, n. 62-63.

recreation of Christ's marriage to the Church, deserves a dignity that was later recognized as «sacramental character». (...) In every earthly marriage, regardless of the consciousness of its counterparties, not only is the relationship of creation between Adam and Eve reconstructed, but also the relationship of redemption: Christ - Church”<sup>22</sup>.

A certain exegesis difficulty, which is transferred to the area of theology and canonical law, is the text in Matt 5:31, in which Christ, in his „Sermon on the Mount”, explaining his relationship to the Law, states that he did not come to earth to abolish the old Law but to fulfil it (cf. Matt 5:17-20). In explaining the sixth commandment, „Thou shall not commit adultery”, he refers to the old Law, where it is said: „Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce”. With regard to this style, He gives his own explanation: „But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (parektos lógou porneías), makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt 5:31-32)<sup>23</sup>.

When analysing this text in the context of God's Old Testament covenant with Israel, it must be assumed that to consider adultery as a sufficient motive for divorce would be a deep descent into the time before God's covenant with the chosen people, as described by Hosea (2:1-25). In this sense, Jesus addressed this problem in a conversation with the Pharisees, who, in order to put it to the test, put a question to him, referring to the practice of the „certificate of divorce” indicated by Moses. In response, they heard: „Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning” (Matthew 19:8).

Since Christian marriage symbolises God's covenant with Israel and then recreates Christ's covenant of love with the Church, this adultery cannot be a motive for divorce<sup>24</sup>. This doctrine means applying the principle of monogamous marriage to a specific relationship

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. H. SCHLIER, *La lettera agli Efesini*, Brescia 1973, p. 441.

<sup>23</sup> Term *porneia*, translated as *adultery*, is interpreted differently in different Christian denominations (relationship invalid or adulterous) and also as separation, Cf. X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Rozwód*, in: *Słownik Nowego Testamentu*, Poznań 1986, p. 552-553; „The covenant, which should link man to God by a bond of faithful love, is presented by the prophets with the symbol of inseparable marriage (Hos 2:21n; Isa 54:5n) [cf. Bridegroom]. So they stigmatise infidelity to the people as adultery and whoredom (Hos 2:4), because the people give in to the cult of idols like a harlot to their partners - for the benefit (Hos 2, 7; 4, 10; Jer 5, 7; 13. 27; Ezek 23, 42n; Isa 57, 3). Jesus takes this image to condemn the lack of faith. He calls the „faithless tribe” of unbelievers, demanding signs and unbelievers, who are ashamed of Him and His Gospel (...). Through this condemnation, we see more clearly absolute fidelity as equivalent to the requirement of love”, M. F. LACAN, in: X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Słownik Teologii Biblijnej*, Poznań – Warszawa 1982, p. 170 – 171.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. K. H. MENKE, *Sacramentalita'. Essenza e ferite del cattolicesimo*, Brescia 2015, p. 89; J. RATZINGER, *Zur Theologie der Ehe*, Theologische Quartalschrift 149 (1969) p. 65; C. RYCHLICKI, *Bóg jest miłością. Refleksja nad encykliką Benedykta XVI*, Płock 2006, p. 13-18.

between a man and a woman. Since the beginning of history, the institution of marriage has been characterised by two important attributes: unity and indissolubility. In Christian marriage, they are strengthened by Christ's elevation of the natural relationship between man and woman to the dignity of the sacrament<sup>25</sup>.

## **2.2 Marriage in the situation of cultural crisis and priestly challenges**

Although no epoch is completely free of problems that also affect marriage and the family, this problem has become quite alarming in our times. Analysing the various situations in which it is involved, it is clear that in the progressing changes in marriage and in everyday life, the problem is primarily one of human formation. This means that the problems are multiplying and relate to the essence of marriage and life. The lifestyle and behaviour of many people in specific situations does not correspond to the image of a marriage institution established by the Creator for its benefit and the development of other people with whom marriage is genetically linked. It will not be an exaggeration to say that many forms of behaviour in everyday life indicate the dehumanisation of a person. This is evidenced by a crisis of correct reasoning and a crisis of values, and this leads to the downfall of a person who is often unaware of the danger in which he or she turns and where they are going<sup>26</sup>.

One of the dimensions characterising the phenomena that deform marriage and the family is cultural policy, expressed in loud form in many parliaments and at international level, which has a negative impact on public opinion. This mainly concerns the legislation that stays contrary to the natural law. In the name of democracy and pluralism, ethical relativism is promoted. John Paul II often reacted to this situation by appealing to the conscience of politicians and legislators<sup>27</sup>.

Many of the declarations announced on the subject of marriage show that „objective truth” is simply defined by the will and decision of the parliamentary majority. When marriage and the family are understood in terms different from natural law, everything seems

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. CIC, can. 1056: „The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament”; also CIC, can. 1055 - § 1.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. JAN PAWEŁ II, Encyklika *Evangelium vitae*, 25 III 1993, n. 95-96.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. JAN PAWEŁ II, Encyklika *Veritatis splendor*, 6 VIII 1993, n. 97; ID., Encyklika *Evangelium vitae*, op. cit., n. 13, 27, 72 i 90.

to be justified and fair. The same attitude applies to the right to life in terms of abortion, genetic engineering, etc.<sup>28</sup>.

In view of the changes taking place in matters of such importance to individual life and social order as the problem of marriage and the family, the problem of people „divorced and re-married” has now become a high-profile pastoral issue. At this level, a pastoral problem has arisen with regard to those who are in such a relationship and who wish to receive Holy Communion. This problem should be considered in the light of the „truth” revealed by Christ, which should be at the heart of the pastoral care of the Church. This concern was clearly expressed in our time in John Paul II's exhortation entitled *Familiaris consortio*. This document highlights various aspects of family pastoral care, paying particular attention to difficult situations in our times, which require exceptional sensitivity, clarity and prudence towards those involved. This is particularly true of people who are divorced and in new civil unions<sup>29</sup>.

This problem should also be a unique challenge for the pastoral care of the Church in our times: „For the Church, established for the guidance of all people, especially the baptised, to salvation, cannot leave to her fate those who, already bound together by a sacramental bond of marriage, have tried to enter into a new marriage. He will also make untiring efforts to put at their disposal the means of salvation at their disposal”<sup>30</sup>.

On the basis of what grounds should such pastoral guidance be implemented for people in complex marital situations? The motive for the pastoral care of divorced and new couples is their „ecclesiastical status”. It is from their „ecclesiastical status” that their „rights and duties” towards the Church arise, and vice versa: the „rights and duties” of the Church towards people who are divorced and in new couples.

The ecclesiastical situation of these people is governed by a double line of conduct:

- 1) Divorced persons and persons in new relationships are still members of the Church;
- 2) Divorced persons and persons in new relationships do not fully enjoy the necessary ecclesial community.

For each of these forms, a legitimate and necessary form of ecclesiastical pastoral care flows out.

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. A. LÓPEZ TRUJILLO, *Le nuove sfide della famiglia e della vita. La pastorale familiare e i matrimoni in difficoltà*, in: PONTIFICIO CONSIGLIO PER LA FAMIGLIA, *Famiglia e questioni etiche*, Bologna 2004, p. 67-73.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. JAN PAWEŁ II, Adhortacja apostolska *Familiaris consortio*, 22 XI 1981, part IV, notably n. 83-84.

<sup>30</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, Adhortacja apostolska *Familiaris consortio*, op. cit., n. 84.

The permanence of church membership for those who are divorced and in a new relationship stems directly from baptism received and indirectly from the Christian faith. As we know, baptism „squeezes” a permanent sacramental character, including into Christ and His Church. In this situation, also a divorce and a new relationship cannot make an ontological change in the baptised person. With regard to the preservation of faith by divorced persons, it should be added that even the loss of faith in the insolubility of the marriage knot does not necessarily lead to a loss of faith in other Christian truths. In this light, people once baptised, despite the break-up of an important marriage and in a new relationship, do not lose their membership of the Church. Based on this situation, divorced and newly married people can participate in the life and mission of the Church, according to their ecclesiastical situation, as Pope John Paul II says in his Exhortation entitled *Familiaris consortio*, while specifying their rights: „I warmly call on the shepherds and the entire community of the faithful to help the divorced, to make loving efforts to ensure that they do not feel disconnected from the Church when they can, yes, as baptised, participate in her life. May they be encouraged to listen to God's word, to attend Mass, to persevere in prayer, to multiply the works of love and community initiatives for justice, to educate children in the Christian faith, to nurture the spirit and penance, so that they may ask grace of God every day”<sup>31</sup>.

The second line of pastoral ministry refers to „divorced and new couples” who, while in this state, do not participate in the necessary „full communion with the Church”. This restriction means that those who are divorced and in a new relationship are in conflict with the Gospel of Christ and with the Church, who require Christians to be faithful to marriage and to its indissolubility. By remaining in that situation, the people in question suffer a certain restriction of their ecclesiastical rights, not because of the imposition of these restrictions by the Church, but because of their life situation. These restrictions mainly affect the visible sphere of receiving the sacraments, especially the Eucharist<sup>32</sup>.

One can understand the unpleasant feeling of people who find themselves in a situation that prevents them from joining Eucharistic communion, and who are still sensitive to religious problems. The motive for refusing to give Communion to divorced and new couples is theologically explained in the exhortation *Familiaris consortio*: „The Church reaffirms her practice, based on Scripture, of not allowing divorced and remarried couples to receive Eucharistic communion. They cannot be admitted to Holy Communion from the

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<sup>31</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, Adhortacja apostolska *Familiaris consortio*, op. cit., n. 84.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. D. TETTAMANZI, *La Famiglia via della Chiesa*, Milano 1991, p. 281-296



moment when their state and way of life objectively contradict this bond of love between Christ and the Church, which is expressed and realised by the Eucharist. There is also another particular pastoral motive: admission to the Eucharist would mislead the faithful or cause confusion about the Church's teaching about the indissolubility of marriage”<sup>33</sup>.

The second statement of this document draws attention to the pastoral position of the Church with regard to relations: „the sacraments and people who are divorced and in new relationships in certain situations”. The judgement on admissibility to the Eucharist could depend on two factors that could influence pastoral behaviour and depend on the change in the life situation of people who are divorced and still have a new relationship because of certain motives. One of these would be divorced people who have physically separated or are in a new relationship for a specific purpose. In this case, the Church's document mentioned so specifies: „Reconciliation in the sacrament of Penance - which would open the way to Eucharistic communion - can only be available to those who, regretting that they have violated the sign of the Covenant and faithfulness to Christ, are still ready for a form of life that does not conflict with the indissolubility of marriage. Specifically, this means that when a man and a woman who, for important reasons - such as bringing up children - cannot fulfil their obligation to part, decide to live in complete abstinence, that is, to refrain from acts that only the spouses are entitled to”<sup>34</sup>.

Analysing the pastoral efforts of the Church, it can be read that, while being aware of the serious violation, or even denial in some cases, of the source value of marriage, the Church is still looking for ways to help those experiencing the drama and preserving the faith to help them overcome the burden of the drama within the limits of their ultimate possibilities. This should be understood as a pedagogy of God's mercy to keep the human person in crisis. Such pastoral efforts are an expression of the Church's witness to the value of man and Christian marriage. The Church's voice in this matter is also a call for the responsible preparation of candidates for marriage on the part of pastors, and the candidates themselves for courage and effort to overcome difficulties and crises.

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<sup>33</sup> JAN PAWEŁ II, Adhortacja apostolska *Familiaris consortio*, op. cit., n. 84.

<sup>34</sup> IBID., n. 84; cf. FRANCISZEK, Adhortacja apostolska *Amoris laetitia*, op. cit., n. 296-300.

## Conclusion

The close link between the anthropological and theological dimension of marriage triggers a series of problems and requirements in the key of Christian ethics. Marriage, as a good gift from the Creator to man in the act of creation (cf. Gen 1:26-27), is a natural institution and at the same time elevated by Christ to the dignity of the sacrament. In this way, it is the subject of secular and theological studies, including canon law. In the dimension of a natural institution in the Old Testament, it is a symbol of God's covenant of love with Israel, which is its greatness and, at the same time, a responsible challenge to cooperate in the creative work with God (cf. Gen 1:28). With the development of history, as the privileged work of the Creator, marriage is the focus of particular attention from Jesus Christ, who develops its meaning and value in the key of the new covenant of love between Christ and the Church. In St Paul's message, marriage no longer merely symbolises the covenant of love between man and God, but is a „real recreation” of that covenant of love (cf. Eph 5, 31-32). In this way, the marriage, called by the Creator at the beginning of history, achieves, in the covenant of love of Christ with the Church (the new People of God), its sacramental dimension, as an institution „recreating love” of God for man. This unique value is a requirement for a man and a woman, united in marriage, of the fidelity and permanence of their covenant, as in God's covenant of love with man. Over the centuries, Christian tradition has noted, in the matter of the unity and indissolubility of marriage, examples of their faithful observance and, at the same time, their drastic departure from them. The cultural changes in our era clearly indicate drastic changes in the institution of marriage and the family, which, not only in religious but also in natural terms, lead to the dehumanisation of the human person. The destruction of marriage and the family, as the basic basis of society, leads directly to its weakening and degradation in cultural and existential terms.