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THE “VIRUS” OF RADICAL INDIVIDUALISM¹

Abstract

The pandemic of Covid-19 that brought to a stop not only the world's economies but almost all areas of social life provided numerous moments for reflection and for noticing the widely propagated primacy of individual interest elevated above the common good. The article is aimed to answer the question how the “virus” of radical individualism influences moral attitudes among contemporary people. The method applied in this article is based on the analysis of data contained in selected current theological, sociological and psychological publications and on the synthesis of conclusions drawn from the analysis of these data in relation to the principles of moral theology.

Keywords: pandemic, individualism, dialogue, openness, fraternity

„WIRUS” RADYKLANEGO INDYWIDUALIZMU

Abstrakt

Pandemia Covid-19, która zatrzymała nie tylko światową gospodarkę, ale niemal wszystkie dziedziny życia społecznego, dostarczyła także wielu okazji do refleksji i zwrócenia uwagi na szeroko propagowany prymat interesu indywidualnego wyniesionego ponad dobro wspólne. Celem artykułu jest odpowiedź na pytanie, w jaki sposób „wirus” radykalnego indywidualizmu wpływa na postawy moralne współczesnych ludzi. Metoda zastosowana w niniejszym artykule opiera się na analizie danych zawartych w wybranych aktualnych publikacjach teologicznych, socjologicznych i psychologicznych oraz na syntezie wniosków wyciągniętych z analizy tych danych w odniesieniu do zasad teologii moralnej.

Słowa kluczowe: pandemia, indywidualizm, dialog, otwartość, braterstwo

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INTRODUCTION

Year 2020 will certainly continue to be mentioned numerous times as a cut-off date in the memory and mentality of people of the 21st century. Maintaining a sanitary regime, queues in front of shops, impeded access to many sectors of social life – such problems that were previously known only from books or science fiction films – have become a reality. The pandemic scenario, which came into force at the end of 2019, brought an avalanche of fear, uncertainty, restrictions and difficulties on a global scale. The Covid-19 pandemic affected the lives of many people, usually causing negative effects not only on physical but also on mental health. Many people found it distressing to be ill in mandatory isolation or to stay in closed hospital wards, not to mention the pain of losing family members to the virus. Even if the illness did not affect everyone directly, it was overwhelming, including the omnipresent fear, the need to limit interpersonal contacts, which – for many – meant the forced transition to remote working and waiting for further messages about the availability of various services and goods. Obsessive-compulsive disorders and anxiety disorders, depressive episodes or other consequences of social fear have appeared or intensified among quite a number of people.

While the eyes of scientists and medics were drawn to the SARS CoV-2 virus, Pope Francis, in the pages of his encyclical on brotherhood, pointed to another extremely threatening disease whose consequences are not limited to the temporal dimension. The Holy Father pointed out that radical individualism is the virus most difficult to overcome (Francis 2020a, 105). Today's Europeans live in a culture that some have called 'postmodern' because everything seems fluid, changeable and relative (Bauman 2006, 7-8). However, as others have noted, even postmodern variability can be accustomed to and made a kind of certainty (Brinkmann 2019, 11-27). The postmodern interpretation of the world extinguishes in man the desire for faith in God and fidelity to Christian values. Contemporary culture seems to postulate the non-existence of moral values and principles, proclaiming moral permissiveness. Paradoxically, the propaganda of a world without clear rules and freedom as the supreme value does not result in the ease of making important decisions and courage among young people. On the contrary, today's young people run away from binding decisions and lasting relationships, fearing risks, mistakes and above all responsibility, as Pope Francis noted (Francis 2019, 140-43). As research on decision-making processes shows, culture and its respective scripts regarding decision-making have a significant impact on making or failure to make decisions (Yates and de Oliveira 2016, 106-118).

It seems that never before have people possessed such extensive and systematised knowledge of the world and the changes or processes that determine it, and yet never before have they been so lonely and lost. Today's people can do more and more, but unfortunately it is becoming more and more difficult for them to form lasting bonds, which is evidenced by the increasing scale of divorces and informal relationships (Boertien 2020, 18-22), because people are afraid to vow eternal fidelity. In addition,

private interest increasingly takes precedence over the common good in numerous areas of politics, economics, science and culture. Meanwhile, as the current Bishop of Rome teaches, "individualism does not make us more brothers" (Francis 2020a, 105), and thus does not help us build either interdisciplinary or interpersonal bridges. The Covid-19 pandemic has become not only a difficult challenge, but also an opportunity to pause and to reflect on the values and goals that contemporary man wants to achieve.

The method applied in this article is based on the analysis of data contained in selected current theological, sociological and psychological publications and on a synthesis of conclusions drawn from the analysis of these data in relation to the principles of moral theology. The chosen methods will enable an answer to the research question posed and moral evaluation of the attitude of radical individualism and the human actions which stem from it. The article is aimed to answer the question how the 'virus' of radical individualism influences moral attitudes among contemporary people. An attempt to answer the question what values should be promoted and what skills should be developed in order to counteract the logic of radical individualism will be the next aim of the article. Searching for an answer to this question, based on the teaching of the Church and current theological publications, seems to be important not only for the development of moral theology's reflection, but also for the pastoral activity of the Church and for seeking directions for moral transformation of Western civilization.

1. RADICAL INDIVIDUALISM IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

The contemporary culture called as postmodern by some researchers seems difficult to be uniquely defined (Suwada 2007, 39-43). The current reality has created enormous opportunities for the use of technological achievements, thanks to which numerous industrial, medical, educational and social processes have been improved. Contemporary people understand not only the laws that govern the world, but – thanks to the development of natural sciences – they also become familiar with those that function in the universe. The continuous development of new technologies contributes to the development of science, which has a real impact on human life and health, a current example being the development of mRNA and vector technology used for the production of vaccines against Covid-19. The possibility and easiness of contacts using digital tools is another great achievement of the modern world. Widespread access to the Internet means that information spreads at the speed of light. This has opened the door to cooperation in many sectors of business, science and it has also enabled intercontinental exchange of ideas and opinions. Despite many advantages of the modern age, it must be stressed that there are numerous dangers, particularly in the field of ethics and morality due to eradication of the primacy or even rejection of God's existence and the lack of obedience in faith to the Creator. Man without God becomes an individualist with a narrow, because only temporal, horizon.

Individualism is based on the Latin word *individuum*, which means something indivisible and individual. The notion of individualism is associated with the 19th century and the period of the influence of post-revolutionary French thought, although the concept of individualism has its origins in the Middle Ages. In Philosophy, it was developed, among others, by Duns Scotus, and then it also found a place in Cartesian philosophy, English empiricists, Kantianism and many other philosophers. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that it was developed by Nietzsche, who applauded the power and strength of human beings and the necessity of making their actions independent of religion and morality (Duraj-Nowakowa 2013, 143-44). In his reflection Charles Taylor distinguished three types of this phenomenon, diversifying them into individualism of rational control, personal engagement and expressivist individualism (Barnat 2009, 2). In his concept of individualism, Taylor opted for the coherence of the three types of individualism as having their provenance in St. Augustine's philosophy (Barnat 2009, 3). The Canadian philosopher rightly pointed out that individualism should neither be glorified nor discarded, but that a proper interpretation of it should be continuously sought, because the question of an individual's place in society and the extent of his/her freedom will always raise justifiable questions.

Although easily observable in the postmodern world, individualism as a philosophical view is structurally founded on liberalism and proclaims the supremacy of the individual comprehended maximally in relation to society (Wierzbicki 1997, 178-179). The aspirations to equality and the ornate ideas promoted by liberalism do not in their true intention aim at a hierarchy of values creating a world based on a fair distribution of wealth. On the contrary, they call for a positive settlement of private interests (Legutko 2012, 133). Individualism was taken over and expanded by capitalism and developed especially in the United States as a paradigm of democratic and capitalist society (Duraj-Nowakowa 2013, 143). Outside the field of philosophy, individualism has been used as a concept in psychology to describe non-conformist behaviours towards a group or society. Apart from the humanities, it is also used in economic or political contexts.

The postmodern world, of which radical individualism is an essential component, has been identified by specialists as a good foundation for the development of a new philosophy. Postmodernity is not decadent, as postmodern philosophers want to create a better world (Bronk 2002, 934-935). The critique of Enlightenment philosophy is undoubtedly the advantage of postmodernity; however, along with the rejection of Kant's philosophy presenting the unlimited potentiality of human intellect, unfortunately there was no return to the medieval *ordo* with the primacy of God at the head. Promoted in the post-modern era, the separation from Christian anthropology postulates the negation of the existing comprehension of man's nature and his eschatological destiny, which causes questioning his value by reducing the human being to a product of evolution (Bronk 2002, 929-936). The postmodern background shapes the current culture of

the new man – an atheist, consumer and individualist, who does not have to regard anyone or anything.

The development of technology often causes the 21st-century people to forget that they derive their cognitive and volitional creativity for planning and action from the “*creatio continua*” of God, in whom they live, move and are (Acts 17:28). Promoted by the advertising world in the mass media and during various campaigns, the utopia of self-sufficiency tempts man to believe that he does not need God, but that he can build a new and better world by his own efforts alone. Pope Benedict XVI observed a civilisation without God is also empty of all hope (Benedict XVI 2007, 44). Based on a paradigm of radical individualism, the world postulates that only the development of medicine or the knowledge of the rules of economics is enough to lead a long and happy life. Online advertisements convince people that they can be eternally young thanks to dietary supplements or medical procedures, that they can be strong and prominent thanks to considerable sums of money deposited in private accounts, regardless of whether they were obtained honestly. The Covid-19 pandemic gave the lie to the delusion of a world where God, brother, sister or concern for one another do not matter. The prevalence of infection and a high number of daily deaths that persisted for weeks shook the sense of security that medicines or money were supposed to provide. The reality of the epidemic turned people’s eyes to death (Garber 2021, 1729-1730), which had previously been almost completely banished from Western culture and has been treated as the sad end of all pleasures not worth considering.

From a theological point of view, radical individualism is essentially an attitude of pride which blinds man, not allowing him to discover the truth that the human being is a mystery to himself, the explanation of which he receives in reference to his Creator (John Paul II 1979, 14). It is worth mentioning that the lack of reference to God does not result in the impoverishment of the spiritual side of man alone, but makes the whole person feel abandoned. Psychological studies illustrate the increase in the feeling of loneliness among the 21st-century people (Tiwari 2013, 321) which not infrequently leads to loss of meaning in life, depression or other diseases. Because of loneliness, people more easily turn to addictive substances and habits in which they seek relief for their pain and existential emptiness. As studies from Mexico show, the pandemic reality has also fostered a significant increase in anxiety and destructive forms of coping, such as the entry or deepening of addictions (Priego-Parra et al. 2020). During the Covid-19 pandemic, an increase in mortality among young people in Indianapolis was observed, however, not from the coronavirus infection itself but from drug overdose (Glober et al. 2020, 802-807).

The above-mentioned data can be read as a desperate cry in the hustle and bustle of modernity, expressing a desire to return to the Merciful Father’s house. Another way of compensating for inner emptiness is workaholism, which finds its extreme exemplification, among others, in the hikikomori syndrome, which became strongly visible in the era of the Covid-19 pandemic (Sarnowski and Dominiak 2021, 26-34). Man today wants to be free and independent, but the harder he fights for his

independence, the more he becomes a slave to addictions, money and work. The 'virus' of radical individualism fails to make man more free and fulfilled, but it leaves him lonely and frustrated. It is worth recalling the words of the eminent Polish psychiatrist Antoni Kępiński: "the greater the internal breakdown in man, the sense of his own fragility, uncertainty and fear, the greater the longing for something that will bring him back together, give him certainty and self-confidence". Certainly, the promotion of radically individualistic attitudes neither unites nor heals the human heart shattered by sin, as evidenced by the data cited above. However, it is also worth undertaking an in-depth theological reflection on the moral dangers posed by the issues discussed.

2. AN ATTEMPT TO ASSESS A RADICAL INDIVIDUALISTIC ATTITUDE ACCORDING TO THE CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY

In the teaching of the Church, individualism is understood as an attitude which gives priority to individual people and their claims to freedom. For many reasons it has been negatively assessed in statements of the Church's Magisterium. The Successors of St. Peter, especially in the 21st century, have frequently drawn attention to radical individualism as a particularly threatening danger. The first argument pointing to the need to recognize radical individualism as an attitude endangering the integral development of man is the negation of God and the need for a relationship with Him. The proclamation that man can exist by himself and does not need to relate to the Creator promotes an erroneous anthropology. The Holy Pontiff in his exhortation on the European Church pointed out that: "Forgetfulness of God led to the abandonment of man". It is therefore "no wonder that in this context a vast field has opened for the unrestrained development of nihilism in philosophy, of relativism in values and morality, and of pragmatism – and even a cynical hedonism – in daily life". European culture gives the impression of 'silent apostasy' on the part of people who have everything that they need and who live as if God does not exist" (John Paul II 2003, 9). Although almost two decades have passed since these words were published, they have not lost their prophetic meaning and precision in diagnosing the diseases of the Old Continent.

In his teaching, John Paul II repeatedly pointed out the holistic dimension of the human person and his dignity, which finds its justification in reference to creation by the Holy Trinity out of love. Therefore, the Pope emphasized that man realizes himself in his full capacity as a person only when he evolves in relation to God, himself and to another person. If man rejected his spiritual dimension and tried to live only as a purely material creature, then his humanity would become incomplete (John Paul II 2005, 103). For man to be able to recognize and maintain the right direction of auto-transcendence towards Truth and Love, he needs to take care of the formation of his conscience. According to papal teaching, this transcendence of man should be read in the category of mutual dialogue between God and man (Szymonik 2015, 338-339). This demonstrates the need for constant care so that the spiritual life can have a significant influence on moral attitudes,

healing the human heart of the sinful wounds that concentrate man on himself, driving him into the illusion of self-sufficiency and autosoterism.

Pope Benedict XVI, in turn, presented in his teaching a constructive criticism of radical individualism, pointing out the grave consequences it produces on a personal and social level. Above all, the Holy Father recognised and drew attention to the link between individualism and relativism. Individualism, by convincing man of the validity of the judgments of his own conscience and his opinions, has found expression in the relativisation of reality, which is strongly present in Western culture, with the result that modern man understands himself to be almost omnipotent, and – therefore – the usefulness and benefit that can be derived from it is the only criterion for doing or not doing certain acts. As the then Bishop of Rome indicated, the failure to acknowledge God's love as a constitutive force in the history of humanity and the renunciation of reference to the Truth cause man to become short-sighted and to perceive reality in a fragmented way. Narrowing the field of cognition often leads to errors based on inference *pars pro toto*, which does not allow for objective axiological evaluation and the choice of the true good. It also results in a reductionist vision of the human person, who, in a way, 'ceases to be human' without reference to God and without the recognition of his rights as proper norms (Jaroszyński 2007, 483).

A second argument indicating the need to recognize radical individualism as a dangerous attitude for man is the erroneous conception of conscience which it entails. Saint John Paul II pointed out the need for the individual subject to respect the existence of objective truth and to follow the course it indicates. In view of this, liberalist and individualist paradigms demanding the primacy of the individual's moral judgement stand in opposition. The Polish Pope taught that:

"Instead, there is a tendency to grant to the individual conscience the prerogative of independently determining the criteria of good and evil and then acting accordingly. Such an outlook is quite congenial to an individualist ethic, wherein each individual is faced with his own truth, different from the truth of others. Taken to its extreme consequences, this individualism leads to a denial of the very idea of human nature" (John Paul II 1993, 32).

The Bishop of Rome warned against an individualistic ethic based on the subjective judgments of conscience, which does not wish to seek the truth in confronting the actions and attitudes of life (John Paul II 1994, 14). The present world is struggling with a crisis of the truth and, as a result, people are becoming more and more confused about who they really are. In his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, the Holy Father stated that it is a mistake to believe that every individual judgment of human conscience is true. It cannot be claimed that everything that is formed as the individual's proper judgement is authentic. The consent to such formation of the criteria for the authenticity of judgments would imply that anyone could construct his own truth and place himself as superior to others, which is the opposite of the logic of service and self-giving for which God calls in Christ (John

Paul II 1993, 32). Assigning an absolute dimension to the personal freedom of specific individuals leads to a lack of social solidarity and, thus, also to inequality, divisions, domination of the richer and stronger over the poorer and, consequently, to the denial of man's primal vocation to live in community with God and his brothers (Bartoszek 2005, 239-241). A misformed conscience makes it impossible to know and to act the truth. An attitude of honesty is one of the foundations of the civilisation of love. As Benedict XVI taught: "Without truth, without trust and love for what is true, there is no social conscience and responsibility, and social action ends up serving private interests and the logic of power, resulting in social fragmentation, especially in a globalized society at difficult times like the present" (Benedict XVI 2009, 5). What is needed, then, is concern for the proper formation of conscience and for the authenticity of life, which means an attitude of living the truth in love (Derdziuk 2019, 41). To properly form one's conscience, man must acknowledge his finiteness and sinfulness and reject radical individualism in favour of humble surrender to the formation of God acting in his Church.

On several occasions both in his speeches and documents, the Holy Father Francis has stressed the need to take care of fraternal relationships, because they cause the community of the Church to give authentic witness to the world. Moreover, the Pope points out the need to perceive the causal relationship between the anthropological error and various disasters in numerous areas of social life. Individualism has a destructive effect on many cultural spaces and, what is worse, it weakens, deforms and often gradually breaks family ties altogether (Francis 2013, 67). Deception, conflict, verbal and physical violence are allowed in the name of pursuing the interests of an individual. A hedonistic attitude of the spouse or family member becomes not only an unbearable burden, but also a cause of division between other subjects of family life. Radical individualism is combined with ego-centrism, both of which only lead to more and more frustration and dissatisfaction with life, for which others are always blamed. Families without evangelical paradigms become a permanent battlefield and a zone of struggle for influence, a place where the aspiration to dominate and subordinate others is realized. The Holy Father posed an extremely important question that cannot go unheeded: "Amid the fray of conflicting interests, where victory consists in eliminating one's opponents, how is it possible to raise our sights to recognize our neighbours or to help those who have fallen along the way?" (Francis 2020a, 16). In the monthly magazine about Christian life called "W Drodze" in issue 3/2022, M. Terlikowska in her article entitled *The Ruthlessness* drew readers' attention to the problem of radicalization of interpersonal relations and the issue of increasing hostility and ruthlessness in society. The author noticed that attitudes and words that were once disgraceful are now commonplace or even desired; the modern world is becoming increasingly ruthless not only in its judgements, but also continues to push the boundaries of degrading, hating or calumny (Terlikowska 2022, 44-51).

Francis observes that globalization and ethnicization make us live closer together in theory, but – in reality – we are not more brothers. Many moral transgressions in

all areas of life are ultimately caused by sin, which makes man fail to acknowledge the Lordship of God, but makes him want to decide for himself about evil and good. Meanwhile, the pursuit of power, weapons and money does not make for a safer and more cohesive life. The unfair distribution of wealth is causing an increase in the number of suicides among groups of people living in poverty, who are unable to access medical care and other social goods, as confirmed by current research (Bachmann 2018, 5-23). The individualistic world means that a person has no-one to lean on, and thus more easily loses the sense of life and self-esteem. The Pope states that the concept of neighbour presented in the parable of the Good Samaritan has no limits, which calls for a multi-dimensional conversion of the secularized West (Francis 2020a, 80-83). It would therefore be valuable to return to this parable again and again, especially when deciding by one's own fate as well as the fate of fellow human beings.

In his encyclical letter on ecology, the Pope also condemns the so-called 'romantic individualism' based on efforts to protect the environment and particular animal species without any sensitivity or concern for other humans, for climate problems cannot be effectively solved without efforts to change the mentality of exploitation and consumerism in favour of equality and fraternity. The Pope said: "If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships" (Francis 2015, 119). Relativism and individualism cause man to stop looking towards others with kindness and willingness to cooperate, but to look for opportunities to make money out of other people. According to Francis, it is precisely relativization and individualisation that make all tricks permitted, which gives rise to exploitation, slavery as well as an anti-life culture that seeks to eliminate the conceived human beings, the handicapped and the elderly. If everything is perceived as relative, it creates the ground for a logic of one-time use and rejection also in interpersonal relationships (Francis 2015, 123). It can be said that the attitude of individualism has spread almost like the Sars-CoV2 virus and will remain with us perhaps until the end of time as a temptation to ignore others. Certainly, a lot of effort is needed to shape new patterns that will allow bridges to be built across divisions. That is why it is already worth reflecting upon the directions for changing the face of the modern world to one that is friendlier and more open to everyone.

Radical individualism is a 'virus' extremely difficult to eliminate, because it offers easy, quick and seemingly effective actions to ensure happiness, which is why so many today succumb to this illusion. Radical individualism, like the Sars CoV-2 virus, spreads in an instant and causes long-term consequences in the mentality of people in the modern era. Among them we can highlight the promotion of atheism and erroneous anthropology, the dispensation from the obligation to pursue and learn the truth and the formation of conscience as well as the reassurance of man in the neo-liberal slogan that he does not have to pay attention to anyone in the pursuit of his desires. These are only some of the consequences of the phenomenon

under discussion, but they are sufficient not only to assess radical individualism as a morally destructive attitude, but also to reflect on ways of preventing its effects.

3. SHAPING EMPATHETIC AND FRATERNAL APPROACH AS CHRISTIAN WAY OF DEFENDING AGAINST INDIVIDUALISTIC ATTITUDES

Radical individualism can be understood not only as a particular attitude present in the mentality and actions of individuals and societies, but also as a spiritual disease. The aim of the last part of the article will be to seek, on the basis of Church teaching and current theological reflections, an answer to the question of which values to promote and which skills to develop in order to counteract a radically individualistic logic. The human being is by nature *capax Dei*, which means open to the Creator (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2009, 27). With reference to this truth, one discovers that the first way and the *sine qua non* of transforming a human heart infected by the ‘virus’ of extreme radical individualism is to take care to live by faith, because “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights” (James 1:17). St John wrote in his Letter: “this is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). This is why today there is a particular need for a more intense concern for the life of faith in order to overcome pride, the illusion of self-sufficiency and the logic of exploiting others for one’s own ends.

Without faith understood as a personal relationship with God and following Christ, it is difficult – if not impossible – to fulfil God’s commandments, especially the call to love one’s enemies (John Paul II 1993, 15-17). Without humble faith there will be nothing but a world of individualists and egocentrics. In order to change the mentality of the 21st-century man, it is necessary to grow in the virtue of faith and to call trustfully on the gifts of the Holy Spirit who, coming on the Pentecost Day, caused a revolution of love in the minds of the Apostles. They experienced at that moment the metanoia, the conversion of hearts and thoughts, which later became the experience of pagans and the whole world. In the face of today’s neo-pagan Western civilisation, there is a need for the courageous proclamation of the truth about man according to the Gospel and a call for the action of the Paraclete, because “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Rom 10:17), and without the help of the Holy Spirit, no one can confess Jesus as the Lord (1 Cor 12:3) and follow His law. For this reason, in his Exhortation to the young the Holy Father Francis wrote: “The Holy Spirit wants to stimulate us to leave our world, to take others in our arms with love and to strive for their good. For this reason, it is always better to practice our faith in a communal way and to express our love in community life” (Francis 2019, 164). The Pope reminded that prayer and patiently asking for the gifts of the Holy Spirit broadens the horizons of the heart and makes it easier to perceive the needs of others, and thus, by cooperating with God’s grace, man can be changed from a radical individualist into a follower of the Good Samaritan.

A second way of counteracting radical individualism is to implant and promote attitudes of empathy and openness towards others. On multiple occasions, the current Successor of St. Peter has pointed out the need for openness, dialogue and the development of the ability to relate to the pluralism of human world-views with respect. Dialogue is not about abandoning our own opinions, but rather about readiness to listen to the messages of others and to seek the truth together. The aim of dialogue is to build unity, which is not irenicism, conformism or uniformity (Wielebski 2016, 52-53). The readiness for sincere dialogue is a capacity linked to the operation of God's anticipating grace, which not only inspires faith in human fraternity, but it also makes it possible (Francis and Ahmad Al-Tayyeb 2019). The ability to listen to the voice of other people without haste or pretension is the first important element in forming and developing a dialogical attitude. At this point it is worth recalling a passage from the teaching of the Holy Father Francis:

“The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives. Yet today's world is largely a deaf world...” (Francis 2020a, 48).

At first glance, the above text deals with an obvious notion, namely an elementary skill in human relationships. However, the contemporary individualistically-oriented man has to learn this skill from the beginning. Moreover, the growing interest in coaching, psychological trainings, and mindfulness methods indicate the actuality of this issue. Hence, it is worth appreciating the wealth of psychological knowledge, which can be helpful in authentic and integral development. Frequently, many problems in interpersonal relationships are related to the lack of good contact with one's emotions and self-cognition, and the inability to express and control one's emotions, which results in numerous conflicts in families and societies. Therefore, it is worth paying attention to the issues of attentiveness, empathy and openness, because without them it is very difficult to imagine valuable meetings and profound bonds. Without developing these skills, man will cease to be the crown of creation and will become a cog in the machine and a slave to technocracy. Efforts are required to awaken and shape sensitivity and openness to others, because without them the world will not be a better place. In the second volume of *Lapidarium*, Ryszard Kapuściński aptly put the necessity of caring for the values in question in the words: “I am afraid of a world without values, without sensitivity, without thinking. A world in which everything is possible. Because then evil is the most possible”.

The third value that cannot be omitted in countering radical individualism is love. In Tallinn during a meeting with those benefiting from charitable services, the Holy Father Francis recalled that “charity breaks the chains that isolate us and separate us. It enables us to build a large family in which we can all feel at home. Love has a taste of compassion and dignity” (Francis 2018, 35). As St Paul wrote, love is over all virtues because love binds all together in perfect unity (Col. 3:14)

and it is what really counts. Today we need to be involved in the development not only of science and technology, but also of love and charity. It is now a virtue that is extremely deformed in the mass media and reduced to a merely emotional experience. In his exhortation on the family, Pope Francis is pained to see the signs of the times, pointing to the volatility and impermanence of relationships, the fear of binding declarations and the lack of responsibility (Francis 2016, 39). The Successor of St. Peter points out that:

“We treat affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop. Then, goodbye. Narcissism makes people incapable of looking beyond themselves, beyond their own desires and needs” (Francis 2016, 39).

There is a need to properly define love in the modern world, and therefore to proclaim the truth about God who is love and the source of it. Benedict XVI pointed to love as the only paradigm on which solidarity and fraternity could be founded. The world is not purely mathematical, therefore even this minimum of love can make an enormous contribution and be of huge value, because a Christian is someone who loves, as the Pope preached in one of his sermons (Ratzinger 2017, 342).

Therefore, priests, parents, catechesis teachers and other teachers have an important role to play in promoting the above-mentioned Christian values. The condition of society is a reflection of the state of life of married couples and families, and for this reason the family should be an important object of educational and supportive action on the part of the State as well as a pupil in the eye of the pastoral action of the Church. It is important that, thanks to the efforts of pastors, state institutions and parents, families should become schools of empathy, sensitivity and fraternity towards others. An invaluable role in the transmission of values is played by the testimony of parents and family members, which becomes an attractive model for subsequent generations. Therefore, it is important that such testimony be of Christian love, which does not exclude, but goes out with an open heart toward brothers and sisters. There is also a need for renewed concern for inter-generational dialogue and cooperation between family entities, since they are complementary to one another. Giving up the richness that each person's age-appropriate experience can bring is an invaluable resource that would be a great loss (Francis 2019, 191).

Pope Francis has drawn attention to cultural deconstructionism (Francis 2020a, 12), which is a consequence of living in a constant rush, lacking mutual respect and the ability to listen to one another as well as openness in intergenerational dialogue. This is expressed in nowadays culture, among other things, in the form of the slogan ‘put the past behind’. It calls for building a new world without God, without brotherhood interpreted according to Christianity, without reference to history or

tradition. In contrast, it is worth noting that in many Eastern cultures the elderly are identified with sages and the value as well as wisdom of tradition and of historical experience is appreciated, the antagonists of which are postmodernists (Goncalo and Staw 2006, 96-99). The Pope warned young people against a world which rejects its roots, because then the next generation risks reproducing the fatal errors of the forefathers (Francis 2020a, 35). It is necessary not only to have knowledge of universal history, but – above all – of the economy of salvation, which shows that true heyday of individuals and societies comes from the acceptance and observance of God's laws and directives, since they not only indicate the way to the true good, but also make it possible to discover the brother in another person. In order to build a civilization of love, it is necessary to know the pages of history so as not to repeat the same mistakes and not to fall back into the blind alleys of individualism, but – instead of building walls of division – to build bridges of brotherly love. In order to overcome individualistic and narcissistic attitudes, there is a need to return to the Christian understanding of love and to ensure that it is the motive and goal of all personal and social actions. It therefore seems necessary to take new pastoral and educational initiatives aimed at forming a fraternal mentality in families and local communities.

The challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic can help people perceive that we are members of the same human family, so we need to reconsider how to provide access to health systems for poor people, because if we are more fraternal, we will be more human (Gocko 2020, 122). The Covid-19 pandemic has helped us notice that we are not separate monads. Remarkable words were spoken by the current Bishop of Rome in Moment of Prayer and 'Urbi et Orbi' Blessing presided over by Pope Francis on 27 March 2020. In his mediation in an empty St. Peter's Square at the time of the pandemic the Pope said:

"In this world, that you love more than we do, we have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything. Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick. Now that we are in a stormy sea, we implore you: Wake up, Lord!" (Francis 2020b).

We are all 'in the same boat', therefore fraternity is the only way that can allow humanity to grow in the right direction (Francis and Ivereigh 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic – as a time of omnipresent threat of disease, death, loss of health, work, and safety – has become an opportunity to verify what really matters and a call to evaluate the axiology of today's world. It is worth taking advantage of this crisis to give God his rightful place and to discover that "love, linked to truth, is the force that forms a community and unites people in such a way that there are no barriers or borders" (Benedict XVI 2009, 34).

CONCLUSIONS

The experience of the pandemic of Covid-19 has provided an opportunity to reflect not only on viruses that cause somatic diseases, but also to see the threats posed by the attitude of radical individualism. This text is the result of an attempt to answer the questions how the 'virus' of radical individualism influences moral attitudes of contemporary man and what actions should be taken to counteract the logic of radical individualism.

As a result of applying the method of analyzing selected theological, psychological and sociological sources and the method of synthesis, it was noticed that radical individualism is an attitude which strongly influences the culture of the 21st century. It causes grave consequences for health and life, which are not limited only to the physical, but also psychological and spiritual aspects. These are some of the effects which were observed: anxiety, losing the sense of life, addictions, divorces, conflicts and divisions in families and societies. Radical individualism should be classified as a highly dangerous threat, especially in the spiritual dimension for several reasons, some of which include the denial of God and the need for a relationship with Him, the promotion of an anthropological error and a deformed concept of conscience as well as the social consequences of hostility, ruthlessness, conflicts and divisions.

The research into recent Papal teaching in order to find answers to the question of how to counter individualistic logic has led to several conclusions. The need to value the virtues of faith, love and attitudes of openness and fraternity has been recognized. The family and the Church should work together to instill in successive generations a concern for the life of faith and love and their development, and attitudes of openness and fraternity towards others should be promoted. Certainly, these tasks are not simple, nor are they achievable quickly. However, they are worth undertaking because this axiological crisis is forcing humanity to take decisive steps. As Pope Francis wrote in his book 'Let us dream', we will come out of this experience better or worse, but never the same (Francis and Ivereigh 2020, 7). It is worth taking just one step to move from radical individualism to faith, love and fraternity.

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