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MARRIAGE AND FAMILY CRISIS AS A CHALLENGE FOR ADULT MINISTRY

From the very beginning of its existence, the Church founded by Jesus of Nazareth has been particularly concerned with the family, for its Founder was born into the family. One could say that he himself gave a model of pastoral care for adults starting families, and he elevated marriage to the rank of a sacrament. It is in the family, through pastoral ministry, that human salvation is accomplished from the very beginning. It is there that the catechumenate occurs, being the foundation for the formation of the Christian life of the faithful. From the very beginning, the community of Christ's disciples has recognized the need for pastoral care and formation of adults in the family, so that it may be the place where the great responsibilities of parenthood are carried out, where the young generation is brought up according to the values of the Gospel, which is to be translated into an effective apostolic mission of the faithful¹. Therefore, there is no doubt that the reflection on the family, based on sacramental marriage, which is part of the pastoral care for adults in the Church, is one of the most important issues of the contemporary Church. The present world, including the ecclesial community existing in Poland and worldwide, must face the undeniable crisis of such institutions as marriage and family. However, one can find it consoling that the crisis,

¹ R. Kamiński, *Wstęp*, in: *Duszpasterstwo rodzin. Refleksja naukowa i działalność pastoralna*, R. Kamiński, G. Pyżlak, J. Goleń (ed.), Lublin 2013, p. 17.

apart from negative experiences, provides an opportunity, a hope of renewal and a greater awareness of the value of family and marriage, built on Christian values. Undoubtedly, the subject matter is very extensive and there is a great deal that could be said about it, so this paper is certainly only an outline of the diagnosis of the contemporary family and the pastoral proposals related to the care of adults living out their faith in marriage and the family.

1. Theological foundations of marriage and the family

Scripture begins with an account of the creation of the world, culminating in the Creator's calling into existence of man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God, and ends with a vision of *the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Rev 19:9). Throughout history, the Bible speaks of the covenant between a man and a woman and of the marriage „mystery,” its origin and God-given meaning, its beginning and goal, the various ways it has been fulfilled during salvation history, its hardship due to sin, and its renewal „in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 7:39), in the New Covenant of Christ and the Church (CCC 1602).

Religious marriage between a man and a woman, therefore, finds God's blessing from the very beginning. As the Word of God states: *[t]herefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh* (Genesis 2:24). Further Christ himself teaches: *Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female* (Mt 19:5). The theology of marriage is also beautifully portrayed in *Song of Songs* in the Old Testament, which tells the story of the love between a woman and a man who need each other simply to be themselves, yet remain distinct in their identity, opening up and revealing themselves in the mutual gift of self². *My kind is mine, and I am his (...). I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine* (BC 2:16; 6:3). Therefore, it should

² Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *A house with doors always open. Message of the Synodal Fathers to Christian families and all families in the world*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 35 (2014), no. 11, p. 6.

be stated that the institution of marriage is a natural reality and finds its foundations in the economy of creation, which is the work of God Himself.³

At the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus performed the first sign, at the request of his mother, at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:1-11). The Church gives great importance to the presence of Jesus at the feast of Cana. She views it as a confirmation that marriage is good and an announcement that from now on it will be an effective sign of Christ's presence (CCC 1613). It must be emphasized that the essential characteristics of the sacrament of marriage between a man and a woman, which is to be the beginning and the foundation of family life, are holiness, unity, and indissolubility. John Paul II states in his teaching on the family that "the family is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion: *communio personarum*".⁴

God calls man in marriage and family life to happiness. The profound community of married life and love is established and endowed with rights given by the Creator Himself; He is the creator of marriage. The vocation to marriage is inscribed in the very nature of man and woman, who came out of God's hand. Marriage and the family are therefore not purely human institutions, although over the centuries the way we think about them may have undergone many changes in different cultures, social structures, and spiritual attitudes. That diversity should not make us forget its common and enduring features (CCC 1603).

While reflecting on the theology of the family, one can never deny that it is the sacrament of marriage that is the foundation of the family and gives it durability and strength. The family is also the basic institution of every civil society. In its genesis, the family—one can

³ M. Żurowski, *Eklezjalny charakter małżeństwa i rodziny*, „Prawo Kanoniczne” 21 (1978), no 3-4, p. 108-109.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Letter to Families, Częstochowa 2013, no. 7.

say-is as much natural as pre-political,⁵ and therefore when one speaks of a crisis of marriage and the family, it must be assumed that the whole human community is weak. It should be emphasised that *[i]t is as though matrimony were first a human sacrament, where the person discovers himself, understands himself in relation to others and in a relationship of love which is capable of receiving and giving,*⁶ teaches Pope Francis. Marriage and the family are also of particular concern to the Church. In fact, a vast majority of the ecclesial community is made up of families. Pope Bergoglio asks directly: *Can we imagine the Church today without family communities? Without them it would be a Church of statues, a Church of lone individuals.* But the Creator Himself wanted families to be lights radiating the brightness of His love⁷.

The teaching of the Church on this subject is very clear and precise. The Second Vatican Council states that the marital community is established by God the Creator Himself, and it is established by the marriage covenant, that is, by irrevocable personal consent (*Gaudium et spes* 48). Marriage as an „institution” of natural law, established by God in paradise, was elevated by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. This marital “yes” is surely based on God’s intention. It is a Fatherly „yes” to the union of man and woman, open to life and its defence in all its phases. The family, therefore, is the “yes” of God as Love⁸. We can say that the family is thus a school of humanity, it

⁵ A. Kłos-Skrzypczak, *Korzyści płynące z rodziny zakorzenionej w małżeństwie sakramentalnym—perspektywa Amerykańskich Biskupów Katolickich*, „Family Forum” 7 (2017), p. 16.

⁶ Pope Francis, *In the family we learn to love and defend life*, „L’Osservatore Romano” 34 (2013), no. 12, p. 27.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Like a big family. Address at Croke Park Stadium*, Dublin on 25 April 2018, „L’Osservatore Romano” 39 (2018), no. 8-9, p. 17.

⁸ Pope Francis, *Letter on the occasion of the IX World Meeting of Families on the theme: The Gospel of the Family: Joy to the World*. 2018, „L’Osservatore Romano” 38 (2017), no. 3-4, p. 8.

becomes the foundation of human society⁹. *Thus the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society (Gaudium et spes 52).*

2. Sociological profile of the family community

It seems that there is no one in the world who would question the importance of the family in the development of human personality. Many artists have written, spoken, or sung about it, thus advocating family life and its value in human life. It was the family community and its atmosphere that gave birth to great rulers, mighty men or artists, while its absence or deficiencies, generated by the lack of parental and fraternal love, brought about numerous madmen who spread war and death. It is therefore undeniable that the family shapes not only the life of a single person, but also of entire nations, and affects the fate of a country and the history of the world. Everyone longs for it and everyone feels more secure when they can count on its support and assistance. The family is still one of the most important values in human life¹⁰.

The simplest definition of what a family means is that it is *a group of people linked together by marriage, kinship, affinity or adoption*¹¹. The family based on the marriage covenant of one man and one woman is, from a sociological point of view, an environment of socialisation. It is in the family that the process of human upbringing takes place. The family is a transmitter of knowledge and specific system of values. It is also, as Prof. Mariański notes, *a place of shelter from aggression and external threat, a social group providing a sense of security and support in life, but also a «space» in which a man is accepted as he or*

⁹ J. Dyduch, *Małżeństwo i rodzina w optyce dokumentów III Nadzyczajnego Synodu Biskupów*, „Polonia Sacra” 20 (2016), no. 1, p. 146.

¹⁰ K. Woś, *Uwarunkowania kryzysów w rodzinie. Analiza problemów*, „Pedagogika Rodziny” 4 (2014), no. 4, p. 104.

¹¹ Z. Tyszcza, *Socjologia rodziny*, Warszawa 1979, p. 74.

*she is, and can develop as a person*¹². The family, whose foundation remains marriage between a man and a woman, is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures (AL 126). This is where man learns and understands what co-existence in diversity should be about (EG 66).

3. Crisis and its significance

When addressing the issue of crisis in the family and marriage, it is necessary to look at the entire phenomenon of crisis and what meaning it holds for individuals and individual social groups. Apart from the difficult issues it brings along, can it become an opportunity and a new beginning, a kind of positive disintegration? If we speak about the crisis of the family and the institution of marriage today, is it possible to build a strong and more mature family, aware of its vocation and value, on the „debris”¹³? Many dictionaries define a crisis as a breakthrough, a turning point, a serious breakdown of the state of equilibrium, a sudden solstice or a disturbance of the existing reality and order. However, if one takes a look at the sociological and psychological conceptual setting, a duality of the situation resulting from the crisis can be observed in the crisis, which treats the crisis as an immanent feature of an individual personality favouring his/her development. *Crisis is therefore undoubtedly a very difficult and special situation, which disturbs the proper functioning of an individual or a group, such as a family*, but well worked through it becomes an opportunity. Much in the course of experiencing this specific state of human development depends on the personal characteristics as well as on the resources of the individual family community (e.g. the family being part of the Church community, its faith, determination, evangelicalism). This may prove decisive in terms of whether the community in question is able to cope with the crisis it

¹² J. Mariański, *Rodzina wobec wartości: rozpad czy transformacja?* in: *Rodzina: źródło życia i szkoła miłości*, D. Kornas-Biela (ed.), Lublin 2000, p. 90.

¹³ Z. Kroplewski, *Kryzysy kapłańskie*, Kraków 2010, p. 69.

is facing, and whether this difficult situation can contribute to either the development of addictions or the breakdown of the family, for example¹⁴.

Crisis is usually associated with negative, pejorative connotations; when someone says, e.g. *my marriage is in crisis*, no one congratulates them. In pastoral ministry, however, we must remember that every crisis also contains good news, a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart (AL 232). The noun 'crisis' is derived from the Greek verb κρινω (krino), which means 'separate'. And this is what a crisis is—a separation. Some realities must be separated in order to discern them anew and make a good choice. As if it were possible to stand between them and take a fresh look at these realities. This is the etymology of the Greek word 'crisis'. It is an immanent feature of the individual, which determines his or her line of development, which in human life constitutes a breakthrough, a turning point, often a breakdown, a breach of balance. Such a state in the life of a person or people interacting with him or her may have a destructive influence on the further course of events¹⁵. As far as the crisis that affects the family is concerned, it should be stated that it usually relates to difficulties in making unanimous decisions, in the inability to undertake tasks, which is due to existing barriers or deficiencies, resulting from the scope of functioning of the intra-family system of needs and wishes, professed values, as well as the goals and interests of individual family members¹⁶.

On the other hand, there is also a positive side to the crisis. In psychology, Erikson's theory states that crisis is part of human development¹⁷. We may therefore dare to say that even nowadays the crisis of marriage and the family can help the contemporary

¹⁴ K. Woś, *Uwarunkowania kryzysów w rodzinie. Analiza problemów*, op. cit., p. 108.

¹⁵ B. Nowak, *Rodzina w kryzysie złożonym—kontekst resocjalizacyjny*, „Resocjalizacja Polska”, 2011, no. 2, pp. 159-169.

¹⁶ M. Górecki, *Człowiek w kryzysie*, „Pedagogika Społeczna” no. 1, 2001, p. 77.

¹⁷ E. Torończak, *Teoria stadiów rozwojowych E. Eriksona a kształtowanie decyzji zasadniczej człowieka*, „Studia Gdańskie” 23 (2008), p. 96.

Church to realize anew the value of these two realities and their importance for the life of the ecclesial and world community. The Church must also have the courage to go through that crisis, to face it, and to look at those realities anew.

Hence, one can adopt a positive conception of the crisis, that it may prove to be developmental for the present community of the Church. It is the assumed direction of the ongoing changes, as well as the choice of appropriate strategies of action in a noticeable state of crisis that become decisive and answer the question: will the changes that have to be made have a more positive overtone (effective handling of individual and family developmental crises), or will they be negative and destructive, which will be the aftermath of the accumulation of problems, and what is worse, may depress the individual or the whole family through helplessness and lack of action to overcome the difficult life situation¹⁸? If the Church and the Gospel are embedded therein, it is worth noting that the Lord Jesus Himself says: *I have not come to bring peace, but a sword* (see Mt 10:34). He came to separate because the scribes began to mix a good ethic with an inhuman, Pharisaic ethic. It was an ethic that destroyed rather than strengthened relationships. Therefore, one may venture to say that Christ himself is the „crisis” of humanity. *I have come to bring a sword, to make clear: to separate the light from the darkness, to separate the good and the evil.* Following it as well as the meaning of the Greek word κρίνω, Christ is the crisis¹⁹. He comes to show man of all ages that it is possible to separate marriage and the family from ethics, from Christian morality, and to see what emerges therefrom. In a way, the answer comes to us when we look at the present time. Nothing good and no profound relationships.

¹⁸ M. Górecki, *Człowiek w kryzysie*, op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁹ K. Grzywocz, *Crisis in love-Love in Crisis*, conference delivered at the Academic Pastoral „Resurrexit” in Opole, 18 May 2015, <http://kskrzysztofgrzywocz.pl/pl/publikacje/video/item/20-akademia-damsko-meska-kryzys-w-milosci-milosc-w-kryzysie> (accessed on 31.08.2019).

4. A sociological approach to contemporary threats

The family and marriage are currently undergoing a kind of crisis, so it is worth reflecting on its causes. Difficulties accompanying the modern family can be divided into sociological, hitting the very organization of family life, fashionable lifestyles, state policy, as well as those resulting from religion itself, and which directly affect the spiritual condition of individuals and their morality. Certainly, there are many reasons behind these, but it is tempting to point to a few of them. As for the sociological ones, it is worth noting that the number of marriages contracted in Poland is plummeting. In 1990 Poles entered approximately 230,000 sacramental marriages and in 2016 only 136,000—according to the *Statistical Yearbook of the Church in Poland*²⁰. The effect is certainly a growing number of so called „free relationships” or de facto unions (which weaken the condition of the Polish family. Father Marek Dziewicki seeks to find lack of logic and misrepresentation in the very etymology of „free relationships”. If something is free, it is not bound by anything, so it is not in a relationship²¹. Society itself gives them tacit consent and is outraged when this institution is called concubinage or cohabitation.

For quite a long-time informal relationships were called concubinage, *which literally means con-together, cubare-to lie down, con cubare therefore means as much as ‘to lie down together*. The term cohabitation is slightly different in a broad social context and is derived from the Latin *cohabitare*—meaning living together. The issue of sexuality and intercourse is not so explicitly emphasised, and the aspect of running a joint household comes to the fore. Today, this aspect is being watered down and justified more, thus giving more permission for this kind of informal relationship²². These

²⁰ <https://ekai.pl/gus-w-2016-r-wiecej-malzenstw-mniej-rozwodow/> (accessed on 31.08.2019).

²¹ M. Dziewicki, *Małżeństwo, krzywda i obrona*, https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/Z/ZR/malzenstwo_krzywda.html (accessed on 31.08.2019).

²² See M. Cieślowska, *Współczesna kohabitacja—charakterystyka zjawiska, w: Współczesna rodzina. Szanse—zagrożenia—kierunki przemian*, K. Pujer (ed.), Wrocław 2016, pp. 13-25.

days, you may even hear on many occasions during pastoral visits to parishioners: *But please don't call us a concubine*, as it sounds so bad. But does it not aim at blurring the awareness of sin and weakening the whole society built on insecure people?

Another sociological phenomenon which has an impact on the crisis of family life is the lack of respect for the elderly. In various European countries, where the pattern of multi-generational family disappears, grandparents are placed in nursing homes, and it is not uncommon for no one to attend the funerals of elderly family members. Pope Francis, crying out for repentance for modern people, teaches: *A society—listen carefully to this!—a society that does not value grandparents is a society that has no future. A Church that is not mindful of the covenant between generations will end up lacking the thing that really matters, which is love. Our grandparents teach us the meaning of conjugal and parental love*²³. Such a turn of events may be caused by the weakening of family ties due to the forced emigration of many couples and entire families, which has taken place in Poland in recent years. The distance separating members of particular families, the lack of important moments of life experienced together, such as the birth of a child or a grandchild, have certainly not contributed to the deepening of family relations.

The lack of time for the closest relatives is often generated by what is now known as a professional career and more and more often it affects women, who sacrifice family happiness for it. One can also observe a serious depreciation of the woman and her role as a housewife. On a cross-family social scale, the position of the housewife has undoubtedly been degraded today²⁴. When considering women's roles in the areas of parenthood and career, it is also essential to mention the 'mother guilt' syndrome, which results from a lack of time devoted to children as a result of a woman's involvement in

²³ Pope Francis, *Like a big family. Address at Croke Park Stadium Dublin*, op. cit., p. 20.

²⁴ F.Adamski, *Rodzina. Wymiar społeczno-kulturowy*, Kraków 2002, p. 206.

professional pursuits²⁵. Unfortunately, all of this takes its toll on the distorted view of motherhood. As a result, many Polish women do not decide to have children at all or make the decision to become mothers much later²⁶. Such an attitude of modern man towards childbearing and a consumerist, even hedonistic, contraceptive lifestyle leads to an antinatalistic mentality, which is also creeping into Catholic families. It should be remembered; however, that human sexuality and its proper use is inscribed in the greatness of God's plan and cannot be belittled, as is the case today in many communities not only in Europe²⁷. And it does not help to build a family united and open to life²⁸. Another cause determining the crisis of family and married life is work-related stress, which becomes the cause of addictions, depression and psychosomatic diseases. This happens under the influence of many stimuli, and there is probably no family that does not struggle with this kind of adversities. The dizzying pace of life, stressful work, the development of social networks and the availability of various drugs make it easy for individual family members, children and parents to fall into various addictions, neuroses and depressive states, which can manifest when there is no strong bond between family members²⁹. In the sociological observation of the society today, there is much talk of *homo tabletis*, i.e. people who manifest excessive use of tablets, smartphones or computers. Lack of interpersonal communication at home and lack

²⁵ See M. Bobulska, *Kariera zawodowa kobiet a rodzina*, in: *Współczesna rodzina. Szanse-zagrozenia-kierunki przemian*, K. Pujer (ed.), op. cit., pp. 49-64.

²⁶ R. Hryciuk, E. Korolczuk, *Pożegnanie z Matką Polką? Dyskursy, praktyki i reprezentacje macierzyństwa we współczesnej Polsce*, Warszawa 2012, p. 15.

²⁷ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *On the trivialisation of sexuality. In relation to certain interpretations of The Light of the World*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 32 (2011), no. 2, p. 57.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Letter for the 7th World Meeting of Families 2012*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 31 (2010), no. 11, p. 8.

²⁹ K. Woś, *Uwarunkowania kryzysów w rodzinie. Analiza problemów*, op. cit., p. 111.

of marital dialogue³⁰ can also lead to various types of violence in families and marriages: physical, psychological, sexual, or economic. This is connected to another danger, which is the phenomenon of consumerism, that is using another person to satisfy one's own hunger for love. To satisfy the fear of loneliness. Anxiety and loneliness are among the greatest emotional threats to the family at the turn of the millennium. From a sociological point of view, there are probably many other hardships associated with family and marriage. However, we cannot ignore what has been dragging on for centuries in Polish society, namely the problem of alcoholism in families. The population with different categories of alcohol problems are illustrated in the table below (estimated data)³¹.

Tab. 1

	In Poland 38.6 Mio	In a city of 100,000 inhabitants	In a city of 25,000 inhabitants	In a mu- nicipality of 10,000 inhabitants	
Number of alcohol addicts	approx. 2% of the population	approx. 800,000	approx. 2,000	approx. 500	approx. 200
Adults living in an alcoholic environment alcoholic (spouses, parents)	approx. 4% of the population	approx. 1.5 Mio	approx. 4,000	approx. 1,000	approx. 400
Children growing up in alcoholic families	approx. 4% of the population	approx. 1.5 Mio	approx. 4,000	approx. 1,000	approx. 400

³⁰ S. Waluś, *Homo tabletis wyzwaniem dla współczesnego rodzicielstwa*, in: *Współczesna rodzina. Szanse zagrożenia – kierunki przemian*, op. cit., pp. 111-123.

³¹ <http://www.parpa.pl/index.php/33-analizy-badania-raporty/132-statystyki> (accessed on 31.08.2019).

	In Poland 38.6 Mio	In a city of 100,000 inhabitants	In a city of 25,000 inhabitants	In a mu- nicipality of 10,000 inhabitants	
Harmful drinkers	approx. 5-7% of the popu- lation	2-2.5 Mio	5,000-7,000	1,250-1,750	approx. 500-700
Victims of do- mestic violence in families affected by alcoholism	2/3 adults and 2/3 children in these families	total approx. 2 Mio persons: adults and children	approx. 5.300 persons: adults and children	approx. 1,330 persons: adults and children	about 530 persons: adults and children

5. Threats to family and marriage religiosity

Sociological difficulties aside, we must also mention those connected with man's religiousness, which plays a significant role in the scale of his needs. With regard to the experience of faith, it is necessary to point out the profound cultural crisis of today. The family as well as other communities are exposed to attempts of disintegration through the ideology of secularism (See EG 64). This is reflected in the secular style of experiencing love, often misunderstood, detached from God and His commandments. The manifestation of the worldly philosophy of love, which determines married life, emphasises only the dimension of carnal pleasure, which leads to the consolidation of an anti-natalist and anti-conceptual mentality. John Paul II linked such a way of thinking also to the development of the pornographic and contraceptive industries (FC 30). Today's cultural trend seems to contradict the truth that a marital community, established through an oath, should be permanent and fruitful.³² Therefore, there is no place here for degenerating and calling marriage a relationship that is not one, such as same-sex couples or informal relationships.

³² G. Pyżlak, *Aktualność teologicznego ujęcia przysięgi małżeńskiej*, w: *Sakramentalna przysięga małżeńska w obliczu wyzwań współczesnego świata*, P. Landwójtowicz, S. Pawiński (ed.), Opole 2017, p. 59.

This is closely related to another threat posed to the religiousness of marriage and family, which is the ideology of *gender*. It is a specific challenge for the contemporary Church to face, because it is an ideology that denies the difference and natural complementarity of man and woman. It strikes at the decisions of God Himself to call into existence man and woman as persons equal in dignity and at the same time in need and complement to each other. However, the contemporary voice of the Church remains unambiguous: *There is no basis for comparing or assuming any analogy, even a distant one, between homosexual relationships and God's plan for marriage and the family*. Such relationships cannot be called marriages, but men and women with homosexual tendencies cannot be discriminated against³³. The contemporary culture of promiscuity and sexual revolution is certainly reflected in the growing number of divorces. The CBOS (Public Opinion Research Centre) statistics are alarming, informing that in Poland around 65,000 divorces are pronounced annually by the courts. Unfortunately, it should also be added that the number of marriages has declined since 2008. In 2017, Poles contracted about 193,000 marriages, which is only 13,000 more than in 2013, when there was the lowest number of marriages in history (180,000). And it shows that statistically, there is one divorce for every three marriages contracted in Poland³⁴. What is worse, there is also a growing group of those who are decisive supporters of divorce³⁵.

³³ J. Dyduch, *Matżeństwo i rodzina w optyce dokumentów III Nadzwyczajnego Synodu Biskupów*, op. cit., p. 153.

³⁴ Public Opinion Research Centre, *Poles' attitudes to divorce*, Research Communication 7 (2019), p. 1.

³⁵ The CBOS research shows that the number of those in favour of divorce has been increasing year by year and in Poland there are three times as many of them as of those who are declared to be against the breakdown of marriages. Every eighth respondent (12.0% of the population) is a declared supporter of divorce and every third respondent (32.0%) considers such a way of marriage breakdown when there are difficulties in the relationship. The largest group of the survey respondents remains those (52.0%) who do not support divorce but think that under certain circumstances it may happen. Ibid, p. 2.

Undoubtedly such thinking is not unfamiliar to many Catholics, for whom the sacrament of marriage and the good of the family should be understood in an evangelical way, as one and indissoluble.

This is certainly related to another threat to human religiousness, which is “spiritual desertification”. It is beyond doubt that nowadays, in this era of history in which an ill-understood freedom is promoted, the only obstacle on the way to the “happiness” of lost man is God and all religious and moral restrictions. Unfortunately, such an understanding of reality leads to moral relativism and religious syncretism. It puts man, not God, in the centre. Hence, also in the family God is not in the first place. This can be clearly seen when it comes to absence of attendance at Sunday Eucharist and lack of prayer in many Polish families. The 2017 figures show that 38.3 per cent of the Catholics attend Sunday Mass and 17 per cent take Holy Communion³⁶. No Christian community can grow without nurturing persistent prayer. As Pope Francis reminds us, in prayer, [the family] express[es] their faith and their trust, and God reveals his closeness, also by giving us the angels, his messengers³⁷.

This approach to the Blessed Sacrament and lack of faith in the Eucharistic Lord gives rise to another threat to religious life, which is the lack of mutual forgiveness in families. There are so many families today who are ‘in conflict’ with one another, who have been torn apart by various financial affairs. The affliction of the Church are Catholics who receive the sacraments and do not see the problem that they are stuck in conflict, which generates an anti-evangelical attitude and scandal (See Mt 5, 24). Meanwhile, the power of forgiveness, as the present Pope reminds us, is a real antidote to the sadness caused by resentment and the desire for revenge. Forgiveness leads to joy and serenity. Retained resentments inflame a person’s mind and tear

³⁶ <https://ekai.pl/religijnosc-polakow-w-liczbach-najnowsze-dane-iskk/> (accessed on 31.08.2019).

³⁷ Pope Francis, *A powerful call to prayer, to faith and to witness*, “L’Osservatore Romano” 36 (2015), no. 7-8, p. 41.

the heart, which consequently leads to a disturbance of rest and peace in the family and society³⁸.

Nor can we pass over in silence, when it comes to the threats to the faith of modern families, the scandals of sexual abuse in the Church, which have shaken both the clergy and the lay members of God's people, and for many have become an occasion for contesting the faith. This is a great wound on the organism of the Mystical Body of Christ. However, it is worth listening to the voice of Benedict XVI, teaching: *Jesus Himself compared the Church to a fishing net in which good and bad fish are ultimately separated by God Himself. There is also the parable of the Church as a field on which the good grain that God Himself has sown grows, but also the weeds that «an enemy» secretly sown onto it. Indeed, the weeds in God's field, the Church, are excessively visible, and the evil fish in the net also show their strength. Nevertheless, the field is still God's field and the net is God's fishing net. And at all times, there are not only the weeds and the evil fish, but also the crops of God and the good fish*³⁹.

6. The Family Strong in God. Pastoral care for faith in family and marriage

Since marriage is holy with the holiness of God Himself, it is an image of Christ's spousal love for the Church, it must also be a sign of opposition. Why is there such a fierce battle for the family and its Christian shape happening right? The question may remain rhetorical, but it is important to know what the Church and the families within it do when face various experiences, quite often crises? It is certain that there is a need for people who will live out their faith more and more consciously in such situations, mature Catholics

³⁸ Pope Francis, *The power of forgiveness as the true antidote to resentment and revenge. Homily delivered at the Holy Mass in the Basilica of St. Mary Major on 1 January 2016*, "L'Osservatore Romano" 37 (2016), no. 1, p. 27.

³⁹ Benedict XVI, *The Church and the scandal of sexual abuse*, letter of 11 April 2019, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/41013/full-text-of-benedict-xvi-essay-the-church-and-the-scandal-of-sexual-abuse> (accessed on 26.03.2022)

who treat their vocation to marriage and family properly and with responsibility before the Lord. By mature individual, we mean a person who manages himself skilfully and wisely⁴⁰. The pastoral care of the ecclesial community for marriage and the family is undoubtedly a necessary matter in conducting the pastoral care of adults and should lead to a higher level of maturity. The higher the level of human, psychological and religious maturity of the people forming the family, the better will be the matter for God to make Himself present in marital and parental love, since those relationships of the more mature spouses find their translation in the mystical co-operation of the natural with the supernatural⁴¹. The missionary experience of the Church shows the importance of pastoral care for adults in marriage and family. There the truth emerges that the ecclesial community will be as strong as the family community. The parish itself is called by pastoral theology a “community of communities” (family communities in the first place). Therefore, when missionaries went to distant countries, discovered villages, baptised people, catechised them and went on, after some time, even when the previous missionary died and someone else reached a village somewhere far away in the mountains or the bush, he found faith in God. Why? Because it persisted in the family. It is marriage and the family that have been the depositories of the true faith. Therefore, the pastoral conclusion related to the pastoral care for couples and families is that the family is the subject and not only the object of evangelisation (AL 202). The Church will be as strong as a faith-strong and morally sound family. Hence, when discussing the genius of the family as an environment for the formation of religious life, it is worth emphasizing that a characteristic of the conjugal community

⁴⁰ W. Łukaszewski, *Szanse rozwoju osobowości*, Warszawa 1984, p. 206.

⁴¹ P. Landwójtowicz, *Małżeństwo sakramentalne a terapia*, in: *Sakramentalna przysięga małżeńska w obliczu wyzwań współczesnego świata*, P. Landwójtowicz, S. Pawiński (ed.), op. cit., p. 145.

is to 'guard' the deposit of faith, stresses Pope Francis.⁴² Therefore, following the path of deduction, one must conclude that it is no coincidence that today the fight against the Church is a fight for the family.

The shepherds of the Church must realise that they need to undertake pastoral tasks to be as close to families as possible and to support married couples with all their strength. In his encyclical *Humanae vitae*, Pope Paul VI defined the pastoral care of families as *the most urgent mission, the most important work and duty in our time* (HV 20). John Paul II stressed: *Every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church* (FC 65). Afterwards, the Polish Pope signalled a general principle applicable to the pastoral care of adults, including the pastoral care of couples and families: *Pastors must know that, for the sake of truth, they are obliged to exercise careful discernment of situations* (FC 84). When analysing the crisis of marriage and family observed today, as well as diagnosing the difficulties and dangers faced by contemporary people of faith, it is worth drawing a few conclusions and pastoral postulates, which may contribute to coming out of the crisis successfully and make the crisis itself creative in terms of the functioning of a marriage and family community.

- A change in the mentality of the clergy, who should put care for marriages in the first place - a pastoral return. This process of change must begin in the formation of clerics or the priesthood, so that they will be better prepared to engage more effectively in ministering to spouses and so that they will better understand the complex problems currently facing families (AL 202).
- Solid, scholarly reflection related to the pastoral care of families.
- Prayer for vocations, not only to the priesthood, religious and mission, but also for vocations to holy matrimony. The Church

⁴² Pope Francis, *Patient love that generates joy*. Homily of the Holy Father at the Mass for Families, "L'Osservatore Romano" 34 (2013), no. 12, pp. 12-13.

will have such priests as Christian families are like. It is they who become the first seminaries and role models for many people.

- Promotion of the family built on sacramental marriage. The greatest danger is the liberal approach to marriage, the attitude depreciating the sacramental bond, which contributes to generating definitions of marriage according to social expectations and worldviews. The Church should only be promoting and indicating the only and proper way of love between a wife and husband, completely free, absolute, and faithful, which is expressed in their opening to life⁴³.
- Greater involvement of lay Catholics on behalf of the family. Acquiring theological education and psychological skills. Involvement in parish family counselling centres and the sound organisation of pre-marriage courses.
- Placing more emphasis on the pastoral care of engaged couples and more effective premarital courses, which would allow couples to find answers to the question: *how do I know that I am ready for marriage, is this the right person?* Apart from the traditional forms of organising preparatory meetings at parishes, following the American pastoral guidelines, it is worth thinking about preparing films devoted to marriage, its theology, meaning, informing candidates for marriage about formal and organisational issues of a wedding ceremony or a wedding reception in a Catholic way⁴⁴.
- As far as marriage and the family are concerned, Pope Francis clearly places at the heart of the contemporary Church the skill of accompaniment, which makes it possible to be close to the other person. Without such a form of pastoral closeness, there will be no real spiritual encounter. Such spiritual accompaniment and pastoral care can help spouses on their journey of growth and save

⁴³ A. Kłos-Skrzypczak, *Korzyści płynące z rodziny zakorzenionej w małżeństwie sakramentalnym – perspektywa Amerykańskich Biskupów Katolickich*, op. cit., p. 24-25.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31

them from life's mistakes. In the document *Amoris laetitia*, Jorge Bergoglio points out the importance of accompanying young couples, in particular, on their journey of strengthening their bonds and reaching perfection, and of helping them to acquire competence in their upbringing, which is to be reflected in the prudent accompaniment of parents to their children. Another important role is that of accompanying divorced persons or those who have lost their spouse through death (AL 296).

- Well-prepared venues and times of Mass and services for whole families, including children.
- Retreats for whole families combined with recreation, which will not be in the form of spiritual exercises typical of movements, groups, and religious associations.
- Spiritual direction offered to spouses and devoting time to them in pastoral care.
- Organising help for the poorest families and a parish family volunteer service, which could help pastoral workers to discern the current state of families within the parish.

* * *

The Christian ideal of the family is right and proper not because it is conveyed by the Church, but because it promotes this ideal and represents an objectively good value. No nation or community can survive if it is built on false and inappropriate foundations. Undoubtedly, the crisis of family and marriage has already existed in the Church in Europe and in Poland. However, it may turn out to be a creative crisis if the Church experiences it wisely and understands anew that there is no other way, and that Christian marriage and life in the family will be so attractive, beautiful, and appealing when it is anchored in the love of God. Each member of the family, spouses, parents, grandparents, and children are called to find love and live for the glory of God, as icons of his love and holiness in the world⁴⁵.

⁴⁵ Francis, *Like a big family. Address at Croke Park Stadium Dublin*, op. cit., p. 18.

The family is the basic cell not only of society but also of the ecclesial community, where man can experience love together with others. It is not enough simply to be born into a community, but to grow within it. This requires cooperation between the individual members of the family, but also cooperation with the Creator and the use of the means He offers to reach the goal of salvation⁴⁶. Pastoral care for marriage and the family is therefore a priority for the modern Church, because when faith is saved in families, the Church will also survive in those places where it seems today there is its greatest crisis. The family-the domestic Church-is the evangelising environment. Parents are the first evangelisers for their children. Therefore, adult pastoral care is so important. Jesus himself gives an example during his earthly ministry, where he taught adults and blessed children and took them on his lap. The Church, proclaiming the Gospel of the family entrusted to her by Christ and taught in the Church from the beginning, proclaims that the family is the subject and object of evangelization⁴⁷. Why are family and marriage the object of reflection in the pastoral tasks of the contemporary Church? Pope Francis responds *we should kneel down before these families, who are a true school of humanity in saving societies from barbarity*.

Summary

Nowadays crisis of marriage and family based on Christian foundations has been quite visible recently. Less and less people believe in God and express the willingness to receive the sacramental bonds of matrimony as a relationship between a man and a woman that is one and indissoluble. However, Christ calls His Church to guard firmly the truth about marriage and family as the highest values. It needs to be done in ministry for adults who have to become more aware of the responsibility for taking up their vocation and more mature in their faith through the pastoral care of the ecclesiastical

⁴⁶ J. Prado Flores, *Idźcie i ewangelizujcie ochrzczonech*, Poznań 2016, p. 150.

⁴⁷ J. Dyduch, *Małżeństwo i rodzina w optyce dokumentów III Nadzwyczajnego Synodu Biskupów*, p. 150.

community. Crisis experienced with faith as study of drawing conclusions for future will not become their destruction, but their great chance.

Key words: Ministry for adults, marriage, family, crisis, faith

Streszczenie

W obecnej dobie daje się zauważyć istniejący kryzys małżeństwa i rodziny opartej na chrześcijańskich fundamentach. Coraz mniej osób wierzy w Boga i chce zawrzeć sakramentalne małżeństwo jako związek, który jest jeden, nierozzerwalny i zawarty między mężczyzną i kobietą. Chrystus jednak wciąż wzywa swój Kościół, aby niezachwianie stał na straży prawdy o małżeństwie i rodzinie oraz bronił jej jako najwyższej wartości. Ma się to dokonywać w duszpasterstwie osób dorosłych, którzy poprzez pastoralną troskę wspólnoty eklezjalnej mają się stawać bardziej świadomi odpowiedzialności za podjęte powołanie i dojrzaści w wierze, którą wyznają. Kryzys, przeżyty z wiarą oraz będący nauką i prowadzący do wyciągnięcia wniosków, może okazać się nie zatraceniem a szansą.

Słowa kluczowe: duszpasterstwo osób dorosłych, małżeństwo, rodzina, kryzys, wiara

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