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FAMILY AS A SOURCE OF MORAL EDUCATION

Introduction

Nowadays, the question about the meaning and value of human life is asked almost every day; what really is the greatest value for us? Looking at the image of modern society, it could seem that everything that has the material aspect is valuable: a sense of wealth, possession. It may be considered that material goods create and identify human history. However, this is only a shallow view of what today has a real, great value.

Christianity emphasizes the absolute value and sanctity of human life in every situation and at all times: in the prenatal period and at the end of life. The attempt on newly conceived human life reflects the values perceived incorrectly in contemporary society. Concern about the young generation, both in the prenatal period and in the educational process, should be primarily the responsibility of parents, legal caretakers. Micro and macro communities, the Church, and educational institutions should support parents and caretakers in a long-term, progressive process which is aimed at adapting the individual to function in the world in which the hierarchy of values will reflect what is the most important: respect for the dignity of every human being.

The analyzed material concerns church documents and materials based on publications in the field of moral theology and was presented during The International Congress of the European Society for Catholic Theology in Bratislava in August 2019. The topic of the conference was: “Hope. Where Does Our Hope Lie?¹”.

The dignity of human life as a social and moral value

In progress of current socio-moral changes, it seems important to remind that concern for the young generation should begin in the prenatal period and the reason for such a course of action is the position of the Catholic Church.

In modern, post-industrial society, human dignity is often threatened and violated. Moreover, the vulnerable members of our society are often deprived of basic conditions for achieving life goals. After all, love, freedom and a focus on development are the characteristics of a human person that make a man the highest being in the hierarchy of creation. The mind and free will are the natural basis for human dignity because “having dignity is the basis of inborn rather than acquired rights that cannot be abolished by anyone, they determine the fundamental equality of all

¹ Zob. <https://www.kuleuven.be/eurotheo> [29.01.2021].

the people”². Human dignity, given and inflicted, is actualized in common action. For that reason, it cannot rely on “(...) any use of freedom, it cannot rely on freedom of use (unrestricted freedom)”³.

Freedom covers all the aspects and spheres of human life, all of its relationships with God.

From the theological perspective, the concept of **unconditional dignity** applies to everyone and nobody can be deprived of it. Unconditional dignity “is (...) an indestructible image of God, identical in each of us (...). It is due to every human being and this basic dignity cannot be lost, just as the image of God in man cannot be destroyed”⁴. For these reasons, nobody can be treated as a thing, a tool or means to achieve a goal. Basic human dignity is usually neglected in a situation where ideology prevails over “(...) minimal respect for a man, and its questioning can naturally lead to various forms of relativism and pragmatism”⁵. Among the situations that endanger human dignity, it is worth quoting the one during which a person is released from “(...) orders and prohibitions, from all the obligations, responsibility for others, from a sense of guilt and fear of punishment, which only leads to blur the boundaries between the truth and false, good and evil (...)”⁶.

Christianity demonstrates human dignity in three aspects: “Its origin from God; the liberation that God deliberated through Jesus Christ; and finally, God’s invitation to it to participate in his life (immortality)”⁷. John Paul II in the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* addresses “to all the members of the Church, the people of life and for life”⁸ while claiming that every society should respect three basic principles of **culture of life**. The first principle refers to “(...) recognition of the unique value and dignity of every human being regardless of their age, origin, education, possession or race (...) Human dignity always puts him above the foolish world of creatures and gives him unquestionable priority”⁹. It is according to this principle that the idea of **culture of life** integrally fits in, which John Paul II reminds “(...) that we aren’t called to accommodate ourselves to our tired and often isolated culture, but to bring that culture the good news that there’s a life-affirming alternative”¹⁰.

In *Evangelium Vitae*, the Pope directly says that “(...) the dignity of this life is linked not only to its beginning, to the fact that it comes from God, but also to its final end, to its destiny of fellowship with God in knowledge and love of him”¹¹.

The second principle of **culture of life** predicates that a situation in which anyone is treated as an object, a tool or means to achieve the goal is a violation of the personal dignity of a man. The economies of many countries in the world treat people objectively, treat them as a tool of value only because of the alleged utility for achieving economic profit. Similarly, the Pope Francis, during the May audience

² J. Mariański, *Godność ludzka jako wartość społeczno-moralna: mit czy rzeczywistość?* *Studium interdyscyplinarne*, Toruń 2016, s. 82.

³ J. Mariański, *Godność ludzka...*, s. 82-83.

⁴ Tamże, s. 290.

⁵ Tamże, s. 291.

⁶ Tamże.

⁷ Z. Marek, *Podstawy wychowania moralnego*, Kraków 2005, s. 23.

⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 6 (1995).

⁹ https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/T/TM/pk201411-jp2_godnosc.html [27.07.2019].

¹⁰ <http://usccbmedia.blogspot.com/2013/09/john-paul-ii-and-culture-of-life.html> [27.07.2019].

¹¹ EV 38.

with members of *The European Food Banks Federation*¹² claimed: “What I care about is an economy that is more humane, that has a soul, and not a reckless machine that crushes human beings”¹³. During the meeting, the pope pointed out that “The economy (...) has become dehumanized; instead of serving humanity, it enslaves us, subjugates us to monetary mechanisms that are ever more distant from real life and increasingly difficult to control”¹⁴.

The third principle of **culture of life** recognizes that the deliberate killing of an innocent human being cannot be morally justified, regardless of the circumstances, especially abortion or euthanasia. John Paul II, during a homily during one of the pilgrimages to Poland, referring to the reflection of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, posed the following question: “If a mother is allowed to kill her own child, what can stop you and me from killing each other?”¹⁵.

In the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II presents the theological and ethical reflection on the phenomenon of human life, claiming that the sanctity of human life, also of this new conceived, appears as a special good for several reasons. First of all, it is separate from all living creatures: “The life which God gives man is quite different from the life of all other living creatures, inasmuch as man, although formed from the dust of the earth¹⁶”. This alterity was presented in the *Old Testament*, in the book of *Genesis*, as the fruit of a special God’s decision, and the crowning of his creative process is an action that led from chaos to the most perfect creation – the man.

Moreover, the value and the dignity of human life, despite original and later sin, have been reaffirmed and revealed in the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption¹⁷. The incomparable value of human life results from the fact that “Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence”¹⁸. Human life is the pursuit of fullness of life, of eternity.

In the light of the Catholic Church teaching ”(...) man is not the absolute master and final judge but rather-and this is where his incomparable greatness lies-he is the *minister of God’s plan*”¹⁹. After all, a man called to be prolific and breed, should treat human life as a treasure that cannot be squandered²⁰. During his pontificate, Pope John Paul II, often contrary to popular opinion, argued that Catholics should guard the values and dignity of human life from the conception to natural death. As he wrote in the *Evangelium Vitae*, God’s command “You shall not kill” is a real beginning of freedom, which leads to some actions to defend human life. It shapes social attitudes and its servants’ behaviour. “In this way – writes the Holy

¹² The audience took place in May 18th, 2019 in Rome, <https://www.deon.pl/religia/serwisy-papieskie/aktualnosci-papieskie/art,8205,papiez-marze-o-ekonomii-na-miare-czlowieka-ktora-bedzie-miala-dusze.html> [25.07.2019].

¹³ http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/may/documents/papa-francesco_20190518_banchi-alimentari.html [27.07.2019].

¹⁴ Tamże.

¹⁵ https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/T/TM/pk201411-jp2_godnosc.html [27.07.2019].

¹⁶ EV 34.

¹⁷ Por. EV 34.

¹⁸ EV 2.

¹⁹ EV 52.

²⁰ Por. tamże.

Father – we exercise our responsibility towards the persons entrusted to us and we show, in deeds and in truth, our gratitude to God for the great gift of life”²¹.

Congregation for the doctrine of the faith also refers to the issue of protecting human life, claiming that “From the moment of conception, the life of every human being is to be respected in an absolute way because man is the only creature on earth that God has wished for himself and (...) his whole being bears the image of the Creator”²². Developing this thought, it can be read further in the document that parenthood requires the spouses to cooperate responsibly with God’s fertile love because the gift of life should be passed on through marriage through proper and exclusive sexual acts²³.

The role of the family in the educational process

In the children and adolescents’ upbringing, various educational communities play an important role, which at the initial stages of development provide the first criteria for the action. Therefore, it is worth pointing out that the role played by a specific, first, fundamental upbringing community – the family – in raising a young person.

Not only the biological reproduction process takes place in the family, but also the psychosocial condition of its members is shaped, values and norms are transmitted. “The children’s moral physiognomy depends to a large extent on the parents’ example. It is shaped by the style of relationships that are built within the family (...). The family is the first school of life and the moral formation received in it, determines the future development of the person”²⁴.

The duty of postmodern society is “caring (...) for all those who are unable to exist on their own, which means, they are unable or cannot satisfy the basic, and thus necessary for life needs and fulfill their own tasks. Undoubtedly, the family belongs to such communities”²⁵. People living in a specific social environment are given specific values and resulting from them, norms of proceeding. The family, as the basic social unit, often transfers these values to people who are under its influence, often in a spontaneous, unintentional way. Regardless of the way of action, educators should be aware of “the first-class method of moral education, which is to set an example of moral behavior”²⁶. It is in the family that the child “for the first time (...) meets the concept of good and evil, permitted praised and condemned things,. Parents through their behaviour, reveal what is important in life, what to consider, in what conditions and to what extent”²⁷.

²¹ EV 76.

²² Congregation for the doctrine of the faith, *Instruction on respect for human life in its origin and on the dignity of procreation replies to certain questions of the day*, s. 5, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html [28.07.2019].

²³ Por. tamże.

²⁴ J. Mariański, *Godność ludzka...,* s. 393.

²⁵ H. Skorowski, *Rodzina i jej prawa we współczesnym społeczeństwie demokratycznym w świetle Katolickiej Nauki Społecznej*, w: *Kościół, rodzina, wychowanie*, red. B. Olszewska, Warszawa 1998, s. 215.

²⁶ S. Jasionek, *Wychowanie moralne*, Kraków 2004, s. 89.

²⁷ Z. Zaborowski, *Rodzina jako grupa społeczno-wychowawcza*, Warszawa 1980, s. 110.

The modern family crisis, which is the basic upbringing community, raises concern. The problems of the modern family translate into attempts to redefine the family as a relationship that does not have to be bisexual. The future of the world depends on a family consisting of two spouses in a good bond in a marriage communion. John Paul II in the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* indicates that the family, being a community of people (man and woman) should fulfill several key tasks.

First of all, it is designed to live the reality of communion in continuous action for the community of people. "The inner principle of that task, its permanent power and its final goal is love: without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons"²⁸.

To be able to bring up a generation of young, shaped wisely in life people, families need to be aware of their identity, responsible, defined by love and responsibility. Parents are the first educators. It is thanks to them that the fundamental values that are the basis of social order are transferred.

Love, both between spouses and other members of a close and distant family, leads the family "(...) to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family"²⁹.

In every family, children should be treated with due care from the moment of conception. Each child coming into the world should be adopted by the spouses, surrounded by love, respect and various (material, emotional, educational and spiritual) service. Children in a Christian family, have the opportunity to grow up "in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man"³⁰. With the conception of a new man, parents face the calling: to raise a child in love. This calling transcends worldliness and opens up to eternity. Everyone, already in the prenatal period, is intended to give full expression to their humanity. The appearance of a child in the world is the culmination of marital love, however, "the genealogy of the person is thus united with the eternity of God, and only then with human fatherhood and motherhood, which are realized in time. At the moment of conception itself, man is already destined to eternity in God"³¹.

Nowadays, there is a trend according to which parents, either voluntarily or for independent reasons, are deprived of their children's duties. Lifestyle, materialism or consumerism are not favourable to cultivate and build proper family relationships. "The falling number of births, the rush to one's own career (...) are examples of some dangerous reevaluations in our culture"³². In order for educational work to bring results, it is necessary for the family to be aware of their identity, responsible, full of love and respect for God and each other. Family upbringing has a two-sided dimension: "(...) entities give themselves what they are, i.e. their humanity. This is the truly personalistic nature of this love, which is giving"³³. Parents, as John Paul II writes in the letter *Gratissimam Sane*, are God's collaborators in the conception and birth of a new man. Parents have not only biological rights, because "(...) God

²⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Familiaris Consortio* 18 (1981).

²⁹ Tamże.

³⁰ Tamże, 26.

³¹ Jan Paweł II, *Gratissimam Sane* 9 (1994).

³² R. Czekalski, *Personalistyczne podstawy wychowania*, Warszawa 2009, s. 37.

³³ Tamże, s. 38.

himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood quite differently than he is present in all other instances of begetting on earth”³⁴.

Education towards dignity

It seems that modern society does not need to be convinced of the need to educate young generations, especially the need for moral education. Observing the customs that are made more specific in social and family life, one can notice its serious deficit. That is why, everyone who has a contact with children or young people in their private or professional life should show minimum care for the moral aspect and all this so that the young generation will grow up to be good, respectful of themselves and other people.

The secularization process, which is common in post-industrial society, aims to reduce the issue of faith to the private sphere of every human being. This process caused a personal weakening of the sense of sin, an increase in relativism, permissiveness, mainly among young people. After all “(...) the Church insists on the existence of objective moral norms which are valid for everyone, there are those in our culture who portray this teaching as unjust, that is, as opposed to basic human rights. Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals”³⁵. Contemporary, IT society “(...) which bombards us indiscriminately with data – all treated as being of equal importance – and which leads to remarkable superficiality in the area of moral discernment”³⁶. In the course of the presented problems, it is necessary to have an education process that would teach critical thinking and propose the process of maturing in a circle of values.

A proper view on the moral order is extremely important, as it implements God’s plan for every human being: to stimulate, sustain and lead to full happiness. Pope Paul VI in declaration on Christian Education writes: “(...) the circumstances of our time have made it easier and at once more urgent to educate young people (...) Men are more aware of their own dignity and position; more and more they want to take an active part in social and especially in economic and political life. Enjoying more leisure, as they sometimes do, men find that the remarkable development of technology and scientific investigation and the new means of communication offer them an opportunity of attaining more easily their cultural and spiritual inheritance and of fulfilling one another in the closer ties between groups and even between peoples”³⁷.

In the course of their moral life, the spouses should continue their continuous progress and strive for better understanding of the values constituted by God’s law. As John Paul II writes, the spouses “(...) cannot however look on the law as merely an ideal to be achieved in the future: they must consider it as a command of Christ the Lord to overcome difficulties with constancy”³⁸. Hierarchical ordering and grading is necessary for values to fulfill the proper role in the life of a young person. There is a huge role of parents and caretakers. It is up to them that the pupil should know that the priority should be given to spiritual, not material or

³⁴ GS 9.

³⁵ Franciszek, *Evangelium Gaudium* 64 (2013).

³⁶ Tamże.

³⁷ Paweł VI, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965).

³⁸ FC 34.

economic values. This fact requires undertaking such measures which will refer to the hierarchy of values adopted by a man. From an early childhood, the source of gathering experience is the atmosphere in the family home, which is hospitable to discover values and accept its rules, norms and rules of conduct. “The accumulated experience of applicable moral norms is conducive to (...) transformations taking place in the sphere of judgments about moral evaluations. These judgements particularly refer to the distinction between good and evil which takes place in the child’s comportance”³⁹. For that reason, the experience accumulated in early childhood, should be regarded as the beginning of the processes of moral development. In later development, young people acquire values by putting something *above something else*. In case of an adolescent person, this process “(...) begins with external recognition, and should be completed with internal cognition, which can be called mental recognition. It already appears in the external cognition, when sensory impressions are subject to intellectual interpretation”⁴⁰. This mental cognition is also noticeable during the assessment of acquired sensual experiences. It is at this moment that a higher degree of cognition takes place: internal recognition, which is characterized by the fact that previously acquired knowledge allows further interpretation of acquired, subsequent sensory experiences⁴¹.

According to Zbigniew Marek, moral education cannot be considered “(...) as one of the types or divisions of education but as the internal form of each type of education, whether physical, mental, social, cultural or ideological. For this reason alone, moral education is nothing other than the formation of a man and not in the sense of his development as a species but in the sense of improving each individual in all the areas of life and activity”⁴². Therefore, the role of the parents depends on moral education understood as shaping the whole person. The parents familiarize children not only with the moral norms that apply to them but also arouse a sense of the need to comply with these norms and adopt them as their own. “This education is about consciously shaping a man, improving his life and activities in order to achieve a mature personality”⁴³. What has a positive and negative impact on the issue of moral education is the process of socialization, which is understood as all activities aimed at developing the child’s potential opportunities to such an extent that they can effectively communicate with the community to which they belong. It is the family that, in the process of socialization, is a kind of filter through which all the other external influences pass. An important role played by a mother and a father in the educational process is the fact of shaping correct relationships with God, his image, which are developed by the young man primarily in the course of interpreting the acquired experience. Parents should shape in children a sense of closeness and friendship between God and people. In the image of God, a young, maturing man should find the inspiration for moral behavior, doing good and opposing the evil. The effectiveness of these efforts, can be decided by values recognized by him and taken from the family home, which will give him a sense of security and love, also this one written by capital “L”. It seems necessary to quote a Bishop Józef Rozwadowski, who claims that “the ultimate task of Christian

³⁹ Z. Marek, *Podstawy wychowania...*, s. 91.

⁴⁰ Tamże, s. 91-92.

⁴¹ Por. tamże, s. 92.

⁴² Z. Marek, *Podstawy wychowania...*, s. 62.

⁴³ Tamże, s. 64.

education means – to achieve the integration of the divine and the human, to facilitate the full unification of a man with God – Love”⁴⁴.

Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine any educational process without moral education shaping the correct judgment about what is good and what is bad. It seems that nowadays the society presents various concepts of education, thus ignoring its essence: shaping the correct attitude of a young person towards himself, family and loved ones, society, and above all, God. This modern reflection should encourage all those who care about social good to reflect and conduct actions for moral education of children and youth. Parents through the constant care for the essence of the sacrament of marriage and the communion with God of all the family members and society by protecting the family in both legal, economic and spiritual aspects. Every citizen, both in a micro and macro scale, deserves respect and care for his life and health.

To conclude, it is worth recalling the statement of Pope Francis from General Assembly of the United Nations: “I wish to express the joy that we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another. And so, what better wish can I express for every nation and for the whole of mankind, and for all the children of the world than a better future in which respect for human rights will become a complete reality throughout the third millennium, which is drawing near?”⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ J. Rozwadowski, *Integralny związek czynnika nadprzyrodzonego i naturalnego w wychowaniu chrześcijańskim*, w: *Wychowanie w rodzinie chrześcijańskiej*, red. F. Adamski, Warszawa 1973, s. 51.

⁴⁵ Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the 34th General Assembly of the United Nations, s. 21, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19791002_general-assembly-onu.html [27.07.2019].