

MAGDALENA PARZYSZEK

POPE FRANCIS' OUTLOOK ON CONJUGAL LOVE
AS AN INSPIRATION FOR THE PEDAGOGY
OF THE FAMILY

INTRODUCTION

Conjugal love has been the subject of research and reflection in various disciplines: philosophy, theology and psychology. As one of the most fundamental kinds of experience, it is often the subject of studies and a motif of art. Over the years it has been perceived as a feeling, common knowledge or mental strength (Kalicki, 1991, p. 19). Accordingly, three kinds of love have been distinguished: sensual, passionate or ideal love (Kalicki, 1991, pp. 21-22). Conjugal love has been depicted as searching for pleasure but also composure, discovering the deepest essence of love or the principle of conduct whose fruits are unity, ardency and perfection (Kalicki, 1991, p. 34). For some people love is the ultimate goal in their lives, for others it implies close relationships or even sacrifice for the sake of the other. It is sometimes equated with happiness, sense of security or great passion (Pawłowska, 1999, p. 43).

Among various issues raised by Pope Francis, one can notice topics that fall within the scope of the pedagogy of the family. In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia. On Love in the Family*. Francis teaches that conjugal love is “the love between husband and wife, a love sanctified, enriched and illuminated by the grace of the sacrament of marriage. It is an «affective union», spiritual and sacrificial, which combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside” (Francis, 2016, no. 120).

This paper will answer the following questions: How does Pope Francis understand conjugal love? What features of conjugal love does he indicate? What kinds of crisis in conjugal love does he emphasize? What does it imply for the pedagogy of the family in Poland?

1. CONJUGAL LOVE: A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

It is difficult to define love. Even in disciplines that deal with it there is no adequate definition. We have individual or even very subjective understanding of love: it is most often perceived as a feeling, an attitude, a mystery, the greatest happiness or the fulfillment of one's dreams. Poets have written about it, painters have depicted it and scientists have delved into it. The literature on the subject is extensive¹. Here we will analyze conjugal love according to Pope Francis.

Francis teaches that conjugal love is 'a firm decision to join paths' (Francis, 2016, no. 132). It is vivifying for it prompts one to make a decision (Francis, 2016, no. 132), helps to navigate in the realm of values (Francis, 2016, no. 163) and determines the growth of man on various levels: biological, psychological, moral and religious (Francis, 2016, no. 134). As an experience that engages the whole human being and determines their growth, it is our basic need as well as an incentive to act. It encompasses the whole person: one's emotions, feelings, intellect, will and spiritual growth. True love gives meaning to one's life, helps focusing on the most crucial matters and motivates to grow (Francis, 2016, no. 164). According to Pope Francis, conjugal love is a conscious, free choice. It implies giving oneself to the other. It is a free, spiritual and sacrificial act which encompasses tenderness, friendship and erotic passion (Francis, 2016, no. 120). As such it has an all-encompassing character proper only to the conjugal union. Since it embraces the whole person, 'this union is exclusive, faithful and open to new life' (Francis, 2016, no. 125). Thus understood it may be defined as an obligation taken by a man and a woman to:

- commit oneself to the other, definitely, come what may (Francis, 2016, no. 132);
- love faithfully and exclusively (Francis, 2016, no. 292);

¹ It is impossible to recall all the authors who have written about love. However, it is worth mentioning the following authors and their works: E. Fromm (2016). *The Art of Loving*; K. Bukowski (1994). *Oblicza miłości* [The Faces of Love]; John Paul II (1996). *Redemptor hominis*; Benedict XVI (2006). *Deus caritas est*; P. Ide. (2011). *Chrystus daje wszystko. Teologia miłości Benedykta XVI* [Christ Gives Everything. A Theology of Love According to Benedict XVI]; B. Wojciszke (2021). *Psychologia miłości* [The Psychology of Love].

– be open to receive offspring and to raise it (Cattaneo, 2017, 18).

This mutual self-giving requires deep reflection for 'given its seriousness, this public commitment of love cannot be the fruit of a hasty decision, but neither can it be postponed indefinitely. Committing oneself exclusively and definitively to another person always involves a risk and a bold gamble' (Francis, 2016, no. 132). This committing oneself to the other which binds spouses for the rest of their lives implies 'concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life' (Francis, 2016, no. 123). It presupposes 'the future' as it is the gift of one's future to the other. It has exclusivity 'expressed in the stable commitment to share and shape together the whole of life' (Francis, 2016, no. 123).

In Pope Francis' teaching, the marriage, and later the family, live by the promise of love and fidelity. This implies man's and woman's engagement in their marriage, receiving and educating children, taking care of the weak, the sick, those in need or 'in the peripheries'. On the other hand, fidelity is connected with "the promise of engagement which realizes itself by growing in free allegiance to the given word. Fidelity is trust which «wants» to be shared. It is hope which «wants» to be entertained together" (Francis, 2015).

Conjugal love is open to new life, it gives life. Therefore, it 'does not end with the couple... The couple, in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother' (Francis, 2016, no. 165).

2. CONJUGAL LOVE AND ITS CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Pope Francis' depictions of conjugal love may be of great cognitive interest:

- love nourished by human values
- realistic and ever-renewing love
- sexual love (Cattaneo, 2017, p. 26).

Conjugal love nourished by human values will be expressed through various virtues: patience, kindness, humility, benevolence, generosity, inner peace, forgiveness, joy, trust, hope and perseverance (Francis, 2016, no. 91-119).

In conjugal love the virtue of patience does not in any way imply that we consent to physical aggression or being treated as an object. Rather, it is the consent to the right of others to live as they are, as 'love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like' (Francis, 2016, no. 92).

Patience is “not a completely passive attitude, but one accompanied by activity, by a dynamic and creative interaction with others. The word indicates that love benefits and helps others. For this reason it is translated as «kind»” (Francis, 2016, no. 93) By being kind to each other, spouses experience the joy of giving oneself to the other.

In conjugal love there is ‘no room for discomfiture at another person’s good fortune (cf. *Acts* 7:9; 17:5).’ There should be no room for envy which is ‘a form of sadness provoked by another’s prosperity; it shows that we are not concerned for the happiness of others but only with our own well-being. Whereas love makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves. True love values the other person’s achievements. It does not see him or her as a threat. [...] It recognizes that everyone has different gifts and a unique path in life’ (Francis, 2016, no. 95).

Other virtues in conjugal love are: modesty, humility, being and caring for others, especially for the weak. Such a stance is characteristic of love for ‘if we are to understand, forgive and serve others from the heart, our pride has to be healed and our humility must increase’ (Francis, 2016, no. 98).

Moreover, in conjugal love there is no room for the dominance of one over the other, the strong over the weak. Rather, there should be gentleness and mutual kindness together with sensitivity and selflessness. Loving kindness helps us see beyond other people’s shortcomings. It ‘builds bonds, cultivates relationships, creates new networks of integration and knits a firm social fabric.’ (Francis, 2016, no. 100).

Another trait of conjugal love is generosity understood as selflessness, cherishing the good name of others, lack of indignation caused by external circumstances. Only in the spirit of sacrifice can the communion of persons be sustained. This is possible thanks to forgiveness, which is rooted in ‘a positive attitude that seeks to understand other people’s weaknesses and to excuse them’ (Francis, 2016, no. 105).

A good relationship is built on trust which is the foundation of the union’s stability thus ensuring happiness, security and freedom. ‘Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything. This freedom, which fosters independence, an openness to the world around us and to new experiences, can only enrich and expand relationships. [...] At the same time, this freedom makes for sincerity and transparency, for those who know that they are trusted and appreciated can be open and hide nothing’ (Francis, 2016, no. 115). They are not afraid of the future, but trust that changes for the better, growing and bearing fruit are possible (Francis, 2016, no. 116). Thanks to their positive attitude they can endure all adversities and overcome challenges. They love despite everything and believe in the victory of love.

Another important trait of conjugal love is being realistic and capable of renewing. Being realistic means that we do not have excessive expectations but rather nurture courage, discernment and the ability to judge morally. 'Taking the trouble' to live together means that we go through various stages which are often a challenge: from feelings of attraction to realization that the other person is now a part of my life. "The pleasure of belonging to one another leads to seeing life as a common project, putting the other's happiness ahead of my own [...] As love matures, it also learns to «negotiate». Far from anything selfish or calculating, such negotiation is an exercise of mutual love, an interplay of give and take, for the good of the family" (Francis, 2016, no. 220).

Pope Francis warns against unduly high expectations regarding marriage (Francis, 2016, no. 221). For when they are not fulfilled, they may lead to the couple's separation. Therefore, we must remember that spouses are to mature: to change, to grow. The Pope writes: 'Might we say that the greatest mission of two people in love is to help one another become, respectively, more a man and more a woman? Fostering growth means helping a person shape his or her own identity. Love is thus a kind of craftsmanship' (Francis, 2016, no. 221).

If we assume that in marriage we are to grow, mature and overcome challenges, it is not a static reality, but dynamic communion which lasts. Therefore, conjugal love should be constantly rediscovered and renewed.

Another trait of conjugal love is sexuality. Conjugal love is expressed through body language. The body allows us to experience closeness and mutual gift of oneself, it shows the nature of human being capable of building unity with another human being. Thus, it is a power for the good of men who are to mature towards the communion of being. Therefore, the gift of sexuality should be protected, supported and purified so that it is transformed into genuine love.

Nowadays, sexuality has been vulgarized through pornography, and 'often becomes depersonalized and unhealthy' (Francis, 2016, no. 153). As John Paul II noticed, sexuality 'becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts' (John Paul II, 1995, no. 13). According to Francis, "in our own day, sexuality risks being poisoned by the mentality of «use and discard»" (Francis, 2016, no. 153). That is why we must emphasize the positive outlook on sexuality which has been created by God as 'a marvelous gift to his creatures' (Francis, 2016, no. 150). For sexuality "enriches the relationship of the spouses. As a passion sublimated by a love respectful of the dignity of the other, it becomes a «pure, unadulterated affirmation»" (Francis, 2016, no. 152).

Pope Francis, after Leo the Great, perceives sexual union as a 'nuptial mystery.' 'The meaning and value of their physical union is expressed in the words

of consent, in which they accepted and offered themselves each to the other, in order to share their lives completely. Those words give meaning to the sexual relationship and free it from ambiguity' (Francis, 2016, no. 74).

Sexuality must not be treated as a means of gratification or entertainment. 'It is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously, in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity [...] A healthy sexual desire, albeit closely joined to a pursuit of pleasure, always involves a sense of wonder, and for that very reason can humanize the impulses' (Francis, 2016, no. 151).

Thus the family, school and the Church face the challenge of sharing positive outlook on sexuality which is a gift. Pope Francis reminds us that "God created us as sexual beings. He himself «created sexuality, which is a marvelous gift to his creatures». Within the vocation to marriage we should acknowledge and appreciate that «sexuality, sex, is a gift from God. It is not taboo. It is a gift from God, a gift the Lord gives us. It has two purposes: to love and to generate life. It is passion, passionate love. True love is passionate. Love between a man and a woman, when it is passionate, always leads to giving life. Always. To give life with body and soul»" (Francis, 2019, no. 261).

Thus the above mentioned institutions must help us shape the erotic towards the loving understanding of the body and the dignity of this gift.

"To those who fear that the training of the passions and of sexuality detracts from the spontaneity of sexual love, Saint John Paul II replied that human persons are «called to full and mature spontaneity in their relationships», a maturity that «is the gradual fruit of a discernment of the impulses of one's own heart». This calls for discipline and self-mastery, since every human person «must learn, with perseverance and consistency, the meaning of his or her body» [...] As such, «the human heart comes to participate, so to speak, in another kind of spontaneity»" (Francis, 2016, no. 151).

3. THE CRISIS OF CONJUGAL LOVE

At the beginning of our analysis, we may ask the basic question: what is a crisis? This is important as in social science it is underlined that crisis may imply a threat and destruction but also an opportunity and building (Gielarowski, 2016, Skuczyński, 2018). It may be dealt with through spiritual, intellectual, religious, individual or communal activity. Pope Francis shares this viewpoint. In his address to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, he said: "our time is dominated more by the concept of crisis. There [are] so many crises that engender fear and

profound confusion in our contemporaries, who look for a new way of envisioning the future. Yet the term «crisis» is not necessarily negative. It does not simply indicate a painful moment to be endured. The word «crisis» has its origin in the Greek verb *kríno* [κρίνω], which means to discern, to weigh, to assess. Ours is a time of discernment, one that invites us to determine what is essential and to build on it. It is a time of challenge and opportunity” (Francis, 2017).

Thus, Pope Francis encourages ministers, parents and spouses to discern the situation of marriage and family, their crises as well as solutions. He notices that ‘the life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. [...] Life together should not diminish but increase their contentment; every new step along the way can help couples find new ways to happiness.’ (Francis, 2016, no. 232).

Challenges are the inevitable part of living in marriage. However, ‘there is no need for couples to resign themselves to an inevitable downward spiral or a tolerable mediocrity’ (Francis, 2016, no. 232). It is necessary to ‘to create opportunities for speaking heart to heart.’ (Francis, 2016, no. 233).

In Pope Francis’ teaching on marriage, family and conjugal love there is also the analysis of manifold difficulties that a couple may encounter. We will analyze some of them.

Selfishness is the antithesis of conjugal love understood as a conscious and free act which entails self-giving and faithfulness. Selfishness shows in many ways. It is connected with ‘the fears associated with permanent commitment, the obsession with free time, and those relationships that weigh costs and benefits for the sake of remedying loneliness, providing protection, or offering some service’ (Francis, 2016, no. 39). It is not only about selfishness of one person, but selfishness of the couple, the family, one that may be called ‘social egoism’. Egoism in marriage always affects two people. Its basic symptom (which undermines conjugal love and strengthens ‘a culture of the ephemeral’) is using the other person. This attitude breaks their life ‘into pieces’ (Francis, 2013, pp. 10-11) as the spouse becomes a means to an end. The aim is pleasure; it also becomes the only norm of one’s actions, together with luxury, abundance which go hand in hand with appearances and narcissism. (Francis, 2015).

Conjugal love is real only when it is focused on the good of others, when it is capable of sharing. Since it is constantly attacked by egoism and cannot easily free oneself from it, spouses are obliged to work on mutual kindness and respect for each other (Jaworska, 1999, p. 123).

‘A culture of the ephemeral’ dominated by the mentality of ‘use and discard’ (Francis, 2016, no. 153) means that we are together only when it brings pleasure. This also contributes to the mentality of divorce and ‘the speed with which people

move from one affective relationship to another. [...] 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' (Francis, 2016, no. 39). The fundamental reason for this is the lack of responsibility, trivialization of sexuality and the spread of hedonism in which sexuality is free from any morality and responsibility. This destroys the ethos of marriage and conjugal love. Selfish sex 'becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts' (Francis, 2016, no. 153). In consequence there is no respect for the dignity of the other and the separation of sexuality from fertility. That is why Pope Francis calls us to 'cultivate that strength of love' (Francis, 2016, no. 119) through 'the warmth of friendship and erotic passion' (Francis, 2016, no.120).

Another reason for the crisis of conjugal love is false understanding of freedom perceived as eschewing of 'permanent decisions' (Francis, 2016, no. 33). This leads to perceiving the gift of one's self in marriage as losing one's freedom. Such miscomprehension of freedom 'degenerates into an inability to give oneself generously to others' (Francis, 2016, no. 33). And yet love based on true freedom can shape one's personality, prompts us to choose what is most important and follow ideals, seeks the truth and helps attain true happiness. (Słabek, 2005, pp. 52-53). Freedom must never be understood as arbitrariness that is liberty to do whatever one wishes. Freedom (which is the gift of one's self to the other) is based on inner discipline of the gift.

The attitude of eschewing of 'permanent decisions' is connected with the so-called cohabitation which are based on the so called free love and 'the practice of living together before marriage is widespread, as well as a type of cohabitation which totally excludes any intention to marry' (Francis, 2016, no. 54).

Pope Francis points out that nowadays young people do not want to start a family because they lack possibilities for the future. Many 'postpone a wedding for economic reasons, work or study. Some do so for other reasons, such as the influence of ideologies which devalue marriage and family, the desire to avoid the failures of other couples, the fear of something they consider too important and sacred, the social opportunities and economic benefits associated with simply living together, a purely emotional and romantic conception of love, the fear of losing their freedom and independence, and the rejection of something conceived as purely institutional and bureaucratic.' (Francis, 2016, no. 40). And yet a relationship based on free love is inherently wrong. It is devoid of any recognized public and institutional bond, both civil and religious (Krzemińska, 1999, p. 469). The very term 'free love' or 'free relationship' refers to a variety of situations like: cohabitation, rejection of marriage as such, inability to commit

oneself permanently. Those who create such 'free relationships' on the basis of free love may not be capable of securing the sincerity and fidelity of the union of man and woman (Francis, 2016, no. 43).

Pope Francis also enumerates other dangers to conjugal love that are connected with: demographic crisis caused by antinatalism, improper understanding of 'reproductive health', the sexual revolution, the fear of overpopulation, the weakening of faith and religious practice, loneliness, the lack of dignified or affordable housing, children being born outside of marriage, migrations, families with people with disabilities or the elderly.

CONCLUSION

The 21st century is a time of intense political, economic, legal, moral and social changes. As far as the family is concerned, we have a mosaic of various forms of family life: cohabitation, polygamous relationships, reconstructed families, mixed marriages, open and childless marriages as well as alternative families. Man as a being capable of love needs help in order to realize this potential.

The above paper shows that Pope Francis' teaching conveys a specific proposal which may be inspiration to the Polish pedagogy of the family. This includes:

- deepening our understanding – theoretically and through research – of love fed by human values, love which is realistic and constantly renewing;
- cultivating the power of love through the tenderness of friendship and erotic passion;
- accompanying persons in the crisis of their love (Francis, 2016, no. 200);
- pastoral care of families, with the help of teachers and counsellors, family and community physicians, social workers, juvenile and family advocates (Francis, 2016, no. 204);
- preparing and putting into practice premarital preparation programs (Francis, 2016, no. 205-211);
- organizing training courses for engaged couples and young marriages (Francis, 2016, no. 217);
- creating specialized consultation centers (Francis, 2016, no. 242);
- creating centers of pastoral care for the family (Francis, 2016, no. 201);
- encouraging and supporting laypersons devoted to culture and socio-political life (Francis, 2016, no. 201).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- CATTANEO, A. (2017). *Przygotować się do małżeństwa pod kierunkiem papieża Franciszka*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM.
- Francis. (2013). *Każdego dnia odbudowujemy pokój w rodzinie*. *OssRomPol*, 12, 10-11.
- Francis. (2017). *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union in Italy for the Celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Treaty of Rome*, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2017/march/documents/papa-francesco_20170324_capi-unione-europea.html (05.08.2021).
- Francis. (2015). *Dzieciatko Jezus prawdziwym pocieszycielem*, www.papiez.wiara.pl/doc/2894675. Dzieciatko-Jezus-prawdziwym-pocieszycielem (access: 30.07.2021).
- Francis. (2016). *Amoris laetitia. O miłości w rodzinie*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo M.
- Francis. (2019). *Christus vivit*. Poznań: Pallottinum.
- GIELAROWSKI, A. (2016). *Kryzys kultury, kryzys człowieka. Fenomenologiczna krytyka kultury: Husserl, Lévinas, Henry*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM.
- JOHN PAUL II (1995). *Evangelium vitae*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo M.
- JAWORSKA, A. (1999). Egoizm małżeński.. W: E. Ozorowski (red.), *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny* (123-124). Warszawa-Łomianki: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej.
- KALICKI, P. (1991). *O miłości, małżeństwie i rodzinie. Od starożytności do Jana Pawła II*. Poznań: Stowarzyszenie Wydawniczo-Produkcyjne ROY.
- KRZEMIŃSKA, D. (1999). Wolna miłość. W: E. Ozorowski (red.), *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny* (469-470). Warszawa-Łomianki: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej.
- ŁOBOCKI, M. (2006). *Teoria wychowania w zarysie*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls.
- OKOŃ, W. (2001). *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo ŻAK.
- PAWŁOWSKA, R. (1999). Wpływ przemian psychospołecznych na miłość erotyczną młodzieży. W: R. Pawłowska, E. Jundziłł (ed.), *Miłość i seks w percepcji uczniów* (43-69). Koszalin: Bałtycka Wyższa Szkoła Humanistyczna.
- SKUCZYŃSKI, P. (2018). Pojęcie kryzysu w filozofii i naukach społecznych a kryzysy prawne. *Filozofia Publiczna i Edukacja Demokratyczna*, 1, 250-275.
- SŁABEK, P. (2005). *Jan Paweł II do młodych*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo M.
- SZLENDAK, T. (2015). *Socjologia rodziny. Ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- WOJTYŁA, K. (1986). *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- ZARZECKI, L. (2012). *Teoretyczne podstawy wychowania. Teoria i praktyka w zarysie*. Jelenia Góra: Karkonoska Państwowa Szkoła Wyższa.

POPE FRANCIS' OUTLOOK ON CONJUGAL LOVE
AS AN INSPIRATION FOR THE PEDAGOGY
OF THE FAMILY

SUMMARY

The paper shows Pope Francis' understanding of conjugal love, the causes of its crisis and inspirations for the pedagogy of the family. This topic has not been dealt with in Polish pedagogy, therefore, the author aims to draw attention to the innovative, pedagogical potential of Pope Francis' teaching. The following questions are addressed here: What is Pope Francis' outlook on conjugal love and what features does he indicate in particular? What kinds of crisis of conjugal love does he emphasize? What does it imply for the Polish pedagogy of the family?

Keywords: conjugal love; features of conjugal love; crisis of conjugal love.

MIŁOŚĆ MAŁŻEŃSKA W UJĘCIU PAPIEŻA FRANCISZKA INSPIRACJĄ
DLA PEDAGOGIKI RODZINY

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule ukazano rozumienie miłości małżeńskiej w ujęciu papieża Franciszka i przyczyny kryzysu miłości małżeńskiej oraz wynikające z tego inspiracje dla pedagogiki rodziny. Tematyka nie została dotąd podjęta na gruncie polskiej pedagogiki, dlatego celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na nowatorski, pedagogiczny potencjał, jaki zawiera nauczanie papieża Franciszka w zakresie pedagogiki rodziny. Opisana problematyka podejmuje się odpowiedzi na następujące pytania: Jak papież Franciszek rozumie miłość małżeńską i na jakie jej cechy wskazuje? Na jakie kryzysy miłości małżeńskiej zwraca uwagę? Jakie propozycje stawia przed polską pedagogiką rodziny?

Słowa kluczowe: miłość małżeńska; cechy miłości małżeńskiej; kryzys miłości małżeńskiej.