

MAGDALENA PARZYSZEK

RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD AS A FAMILY POWER

INTRODUCTION

These days, in a period of constant transformations, insecurity, wrongly understood freedom, disintegrating marriage and also in the period of big expectations one can observe a growing interest in family. Facing marriage and family decline we cannot ignore and not react to problems and we cannot reduce a discussion just to “piquancy”. Under the influence of the appearance of unsettling events, scientists’ attention is focused mainly on family. Family problems are becoming the object of many discussions in which participate not only people who are interested in but also the mass media.

Very often controversial solutions are proposed and concern not only the quality of individual’s life but also the society and the whole nation because a human being is left to one’s own devices, to one’s family and to the society and at the same time is left for oneself and for the society in which one lives (cf. LR 9). There is a need to help married couples-to-be and married couples and discover their vocation and help them to understand the truth that they need to demand from themselves.

One of the issue that one needs to recall, comprehend, and read again is responsible parenthood. Complete understanding of this concept influences on marriage and family life. Recalling basic family principles formulated by John Paul II in *Familiaris consortio* might be helpful. We can enumerate:

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creating community, life service, participation in life and religious mission (cf. LR 9). The responsible parenthood is a part of life service.

AROUND THE DEFINITION OF RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

Responsibility is a philosophical term that needs to be examined from metaphysical and ontological point of view¹. S. Galkowki's work deals with the definition in pedagogy in the terms of upbringing². In Encyclopedia of Pedagogy of 20th century one can find the explanation of what the responsibility is. E. Albinska, who is the author, defines it as:

1. moral or legal obligation for which one has to take consequences of one's actions (lat. *responsere* – to be responsible for oneself, self-defence against the court);

2. feature of human conduct that is the result of behaviour manipulation towards the others and towards one's own development;

3. self-fulfillment, moral and social bonds attitude;

4. moral value that is manifested in psychological experiences and actions of an individual.

Words synonymous with *responsibility*: obligation fulfillment, taking the blame for someone, and explaining one's behaviour³.

Parenthood is connected with giving the gift of life, preparing a child to enter the world and fulfilling the roles of mothers by women and fathers by men⁴.

There is no term explanation for the responsible parenthood in pedagogic literature. This is noticed by T. Sakowicz who presents parental responsibility as a value and educational problem⁵.

¹ J. F i l e k, *Filozofia odpowiedzialności XX wieku*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak 2003.

² Por. S. G a ł k o w s k i, *Rozwój i odpowiedzialność. Antropologiczne podstawy koncepcji wychowania moralnego*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2003.

³ E. A l b i Ń s k a, *Odpowiedzialność*, in: *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, ed. T. Pilch, t. III, Warszawa 2004, p. 773.

⁴ Por. A. K w a k, *Funkcja rodzicielska*, in: *ibid.*, s. 321; por. D. O p o z d a, *Rodzicielstwo. Wybrane zagadnienia kontekstów edukacyjnych*, Lublin 2007.

⁵ Por. T. S a k o w i c z, *Odpowiedzialność rodzicielska jako wartość i problem edukacyjny*, in: *Odpowiedzialność rodzicielska jako wartość. Teoria i praktyka*, ed. U. Kazubowska, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne Akapit 2010, p. 33.

The Second Vatican Council's documents and encyclical by the Pope Paul VI about moral principles in the sphere of handing over life from 1968 one can find helpful. Then, the term responsible parenthood was used for the first time by the Pope. An incentive to responsible parenthood concerns partners' responsibility that is cooperation with the Creator about handing over life (HV 10)⁶.

THE HEART OF THE RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

Marriage goals were described by Saint Augustine, he enumerates three goods: offspring, fidelity and sacramental grace. On the contrary, scholastic theology along with Saint Thomas Aquinas emphasizes two marriage goals: procreation, offspring upbringing and sacrament, mutual help and soothing lust⁷. These goals are connected and coordinated, without a possibility to separate.

Parenthood is a part of marriage so partners should know their obligations in responsible parenthood.

These obligations may be read in various aspects. "Taking into consideration biological processes, the responsible parenthood is the knowledge and respect for biological functions; the human brain discovers in the capability of giving biological rights that are a part of human being" (HV 10). Taking into consideration a psychological aspect, "when it comes to innate urges and feelings the responsible parenthood aspires to controlling them by the brain and will" (HV 10). Speaking of intra-personal and socioeconomic aspects "one needs to realize that marriage couples, who fulfill the responsible parenthood, are driven by their generosity and careful consideration and they decide to have many children or because of the moral values sometimes they decide not to have any children for temporary or indefinite period of time" (HV 10).

Analyzing above-mentioned statements, the main aspect to be decided in the responsible parenthood is "objective moral order set by God and the order of which a translator is its own conscience" (HV 10). A wife and husband

⁶ Por. K. M e i s s n e r, B. S u s z k a, *O małżeństwie*, Poznań: Oficyna Współczesna 2001.

⁷ Por. A. F. D z i u b a, *Drogi powstania i recepcji „Humanae vitae”*, in: *Człowiek, miłość, rodzina*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 1999, p. 20.

meet their “obligations toward God, toward themselves, their family and society with properly retained order and values hierarchy” (HV 10).

Adopting these principles, the pope teaches about “an internal order of marriage” and about “inseparable double sign function” (HV 12), he rejects, on the other hand, the freedom of choice. A moral marriage principle is an interpretation of fidelity with God’s plan. Obeying this principle, Paul II differentiates from a morally unacceptable way of limiting the number of children and from what is morally accepted. Morally unacceptable is “an immediate termination of one’s pregnancy” (HV 14), sterilization is “a direct infertility”, and “all actions in marriage intercourse or along its fulfilment or in the development of its natural results aim to prevent the birth of a baby or they lead to do so” (HV 14) – namely, all contraceptive methods including these that cause violation of corporal marriage intercourse structure. Morally acceptable is using the infertility periods. “If there are reasons to introduce breaks between the following baby births that result from physical or psychological conditions of partners or external circumstances, the Church teaches that in these circumstances married couples may follow natural cycle that is appropriate to reproductive functions and have sexual intercourse only during infertility period the same regulating the number of births without breaking moral values” (HV 16).

The source of the responsible parenthood is human love – true, complete, exclusive and fertile (cf. HV 9). The love requires making oneself acquainted with the principles of the responsible parenthood. The Pope Paul VI indicates five spheres of this responsibility: biological, drives, sagacious and generous reference to the husband and wife life, moral and religious situation (cf. HV 10).

Biological sphere is a point of departure and it is a cognitive aspect of the responsible parenthood. This is conscious parenthood that entails getting to know biological sphere that is connected with human sexual maturity and handing down life and readiness for familiarize oneself with mechanisms and functions of human organism. This sphere of responsible parenthood is presented by married couples who know and introduce methods of recognizing biological functions and fertility⁸.

⁸ J. N a g ó r n y, *Istota odpowiedzialnego rodzicielstwa. Refleksja teologa moralisty w 25. rocznicę ogłoszenia encykliki Humanae vitae*, in: *Płciowość – miłość – rodzina*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2009, s. 223.

Drive nature is another sphere that proves the responsible parenthood. Drives and feelings are rich equipment of an individual and they are condition to revise about the ability of handing down life because human love is “sensory and spiritual” (HV 10). The drives and feelings demand control by “the brain and will” (HV 10). “Rational and free drives’ control requires asceticism in order to love signs, appropriate for marriage life, are in accordance with the ethical order” (HV 12). The control of drives and feelings is a condition for free actions. “Human dignity requires people to act willfully, which means to make personal decisions, moved and directed by the internal voice and not by blind internal drives or outer pressure. The individual obtains this freedom when is free of any passion captivity and when he or she follows one’s own way and uses effective and first-rate aids” (KDK 17). This responsible parenthood dimension seems to be very important these days when it is generally believed that at the earliest one needs to “liberate oneself sexually” and forget, for instance, about chastity or virginity. Sexuality seems to be separated from responsibility and obligations and becomes a physiological and recreational activity.

Wise and generous reference to the life situation of the spouses concerns numerous medical, physical, economic, social and demographic factors. In this regard, the teaching of the Pope about family planning “permits to take into account subjective determinants of life situation of the spouses (physical and psychological conditions), as well as objective factors related to the socio-economic situation of a family, and in the long term – of the whole society, and therefore also the associated demographic factors”⁹.

The awareness of dependence on God sets the moral and religious plane. The choice of responsible parenthood is made on the moral plane, taking into account the judgment of conscience, and takes place in a situation of right, non-eclipsed conscience which is shaped by the sanctuary meeting with oneself, God and other people. Indeed, conscience “is a testimony to the righteousness or the human wickedness to oneself, but also – and above all – is the witness of God himself, whose voice and judgment divine the man’s interior as far as secrets of man’s soul...” (VS 58).

⁹ Tamže, p. 224.

THE ROLE OF MOTHER AND FATHER
IN THE REALIZATION OF THE RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

In a properly functioning family, parental roles are particularly important. Their idea is to care for the integral development of its members, which shows the responsibility of the mother and father. In shaping a child's personality different role falls to a mother, and another to a father.

Being a mother in the sense of procreation of children gives a woman the dignity of a person capable of and intended for direct transmission of life. This and nurture of life represent a particular vocation of women. Though, to be able to transmit life, a woman must first accept it, then "nurture, feed, strengthen, prepare for life, fold up hands, raise heart and implant sanctity of life, faith and love in children's lives"¹⁰. "Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life that matures in the womb of a woman. Mother admires this mystery, with a special intuition, «understands» what is going on in it. In view of «beginning», mother accepts and loves the child, who she bears in her womb, as a person. This unique contact with the new human being creates, in turn, a reference to a man – not only to her own child, but every human in general, which profoundly marks the woman's personality" (MD 18). Between a mother and a child emotional and personal contacts are born very quickly. Additionally, emotional bonds, which influence the development and education of the child, are formed¹¹.

Pope John Paul II looks at motherhood from the biophysical and personality – ethics perspective. The biophysical understanding refers to the apparent passivity. A new life that is developing in a woman "happens", while she puts a lot of effort to make this being to take shape. Personality – ethics understanding – "is a momentous work of a woman, from which, in a substantial extent, humanity itself of a new man depends on" (MD 19).

M. Ozorowski notes that "just as a woman is not a mother without physical contact with the man, also man is not the father in terms of mental and spiritual conditions without the spiritual influence of women. It is a mother who gets a man to fatherhood, teaches him responsibility, tender love, mercy. A mother of his child is kneading man's ability to anticipate and to per-

¹⁰ Por. S. W y s z y ń s k i, *Dziela zebrane*, t. III, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo im. Stefana Kardynała Wyszyńskiego Soli Deo 1999, p. 234.

¹¹ Por. J. I z d e b s k a, *Dziecko w rodzinie u progu XXI wieku. Niepokoje i nadzieje*, Białystok: Wydawnictwo Trans Humana 2000, p. 180.

severe”¹². With the emergence of an offspring, man learns to be both a husband and a father. Obviously, the first way to express love and the first condition of the educational influence is the physical presence. This “presence in the educational process is not only important and necessary, but virtually impossible to replace. Father provides a baby with the incentives and models in its social and moral development, which the mother cannot completely or in such a wide range offer”¹³.

The tasks of the father in the family have been outlined by Pope John Paul II, among others in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. These include:

1. Responsibility for the lives conceived;
2. Together with his wife, being caring educators to fulfill obligations;
3. Professional work which builds the family ties;
4. Being a witness of a mature Christian life (cf. FC 25).

To allow parents to fulfill their mission of serving life with dignity, they must see and understand how wrong the mentality of opposing life is (cf. FC 30), understand sexuality in the integral vision of man and his vocation (cf. FC 32), educate to self-control (cf. FC 33), have a proper look at the moral order, its values and standards (cf. FC 34) adequately and integrally conceive education stemming from “vocation of married couples to participate in the creative work of God” (FC 36), and perceive fertility of married love as expressed in various forms of service to life (cf. FC 41).

Irresponsibility, thoughtlessness, axiological chaos caused that love is at stake. When the family is strong? Only when those, who make up a family, are responsible for each other. When they know that they are equal and have a common task to fulfill. When they complement each other not only physiologically, but also mentally and physically. Each person is a distinct personality, yet, it has to learn to work together. A man and a woman must complement one another, because there are differences between them which concern various, but common tasks.

¹² M. O z o r o w s k i, *Prymasowskie dni Kościoła Łomżyńskiego w setną rocznicę urodzin Kard. S. Wyszyńskiego*, Łomża 2001, p. 43.

¹³ J. W i t c z a k, *Ojcostwo bez tajemnic*, Warszawa 1987, p. 16.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

The unity of a man and a woman is not something automatic and cannot be reduced to the unification of the flesh. Unity is the result of an undertaken effort – the subordination of will and intellect in order to give oneself to this person, and share everything. A shared way of devotional life is the path of purification of selfishness.

Spouses cannot only search for fun, closing themselves at life.

The vision of sexuality has a personalistic character – the man is a person, the unity of spirit and flesh, who enters into relationships with others. The man is distinct and unique. The human body deserves the attention and care.

Responsible parenthood cannot be reduced only to the knowledge of natural methods and thus taking into account the cognitive aspect. Responsible parenthood is achieved at the moral and religious plane. It connects with the dignity of a person as a free human being.

Responsible parenthood is expressed in the adoption of the consequences of action because it is a measure of maturity.

Human life cannot be reduced only to the natural and temporal order described by the laws of biology, psychology, demography, sociology and education, but also to the supernatural order.

What is human – is a value and is essential for life. Truly human love exists and is the most important.

Marriage has a significant impact on society. It develops and plays the leading role in the history of mankind. Procreation cannot be observed only in the bio-physiology.

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S u m m a r y

These days, in a period of constant transformations, insecurity, wrongly understood freedom, disintegrating marriage, and also in the period of big expectations one can observe a growing interest in the family.

One of the issues that one needs to recall, comprehend, and read again is responsible parenthood. Complete understanding of this concept influences marriage and family life. Responsible parenthood cannot be reduced only to the knowledge of natural methods and thus it should take into account the cognitive aspect. Responsible parenthood is achieved at the moral and religious plane. It is connected with the dignity of a person as a free human being. Responsible parenthood is expressed in the adoption of the consequences of actions because it is a measure of maturity.

Key words: responsible parenthood, marriage, family.

ODPOWIEDZIALNE RODZICIELSTWO JAKO SIŁA RODZINY

S t r e s z c z e n i e

W dobie licznych przemian czy źle pojmowanej wolności, rozpadającej się instytucji małżeństwa, ale i wielkich nadziei wzrasta zainteresowanie rodziną. Stając w obliczu degradacji małżeństwa i rodziny, nie wolno bagatelizować problemów i nie reagować.

Jedną z zasadniczych kwestii domagającą się przypomnienia, zrozumienia oraz ponownego odczytania jest odpowiedzialne rodzicielstwo. Właściwe zrozumienie tego zagadnienia wywiera znaczący wpływ na całokształt życia małżeńskiego i rodzinnego. Pomocne wydaje się przypomnienie podstawowych zadań rodziny nakreślonych przez papieża Jana Pawła II w *Familiaris consortio*. Należą do nich: tworzenie wspólnoty osób, służba życiu, udział w rozwoju społeczeństwa oraz uczestnictwo w życiu i posłannictwie Kościoła (por. FC 17). W służbę życiu wpisane jest odpowiedzialne rodzicielstwo.

Słowa kluczowe: odpowiedzialne rodzicielstwo, małżeństwo, rodzina.