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PREMARITAL PASTORAL CARE IN LITHUANIA AND ITS CHALLENGES: THE PROBLEMATIC AREAS OF UNDERSTANDING THE DECALOGUE

A b s t r a c t. Premarital pastoral care occupies an important place in the ministry of the Church and is relevant in every time period. The purpose of this article is to present the format of premarital pastoral care in Lithuania and its problematics in terms of the perception of the Decalogue. In Lithuania, the preparation for matrimony is regulated by the documents of the Universal Church and the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference. It is carried out in the format of a programme coordinated by the Family Centre. The programme includes essential elements of Catholic family life and faith, as the Sacrament of Marriage presupposes and requires faith. An integral part of the programme of preparing for marriage is the presentation and analysis of the Decalogue in harmony with family life. An empirical study indicates that the engaged couples question some aspects of the concept of the Decalogue in the areas of Sunday celebration, the value of the truth and respect for parents. These areas generate conflicting assumptions for the engaged and are the most difficult to perceive and accept. This reveals the need for constant renewal of the premarital pastoral care and deepening of its content in search of new relevant forms.

Keywords: premarital pastoral care in Lithuania; Catholic marriage; Decalogue.

INTRODUCTION

Responsible preparation for marriage and family life is a crucial factor for family sustainability. The family is an essential bond between the church and the state and therefore the stability and well-being of families is perhaps the most obvious goal pursued by both the state and the Church. Here the Church sees a particularly important field for pastoral care, because it is clear that while approaching a deeper faith and relationship with God, the spouses inevitably come closer to each other. Thus, premarital pastoral care has an important place

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and responsibility. The latter topic has been particularly relevant for the Universal Church in 2021–2022 which was proclaimed the year of *Amoris Laetitia* Family. This initiative not only encouraged to go deeper into the content of the teaching of Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, but also gave rise to an analysis of premarital and marital pastoral concerns in local churches. Stressing premarital and marital pastoral care, Pope Francis addresses the entire community of the Church: "The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centred on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties. This involves not only helping them to accept the Church's teaching and to have recourse to her valuable resources, but also offering practical programmes, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance. All this calls for a pedagogy of love, attuned to the feelings and needs of young people and capable of helping them to grow interiorly."¹ Therefore, it is necessary to use all the necessary means so that we can reveal to the engaged the extraordinary gift of indissolubility of the sacrament of marriage and encourage its full and sustainable implementation. Pope Francis reminds us that it is very important that experienced married couples who are able to bear authentic witness to the faith participate in such pastoral care. A place where experienced couples could help the younger ones is the parish.² In response to this call, many local churches drew attention to the situation, opportunities and challenges of the pastoral care of the engaged couples. Scientific analysis of various aspects and challenges of premarital pastoral care is presented and³ new opportunities to improve this service are sought. This article discusses the features of premarital pastoral care in Lithuania and the problematic aspects that are questioned by the engaged in relation to the Decalogue—one of the cornerstones of the teaching of the Church.

¹ Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, March 19, 2016, Holy See, accessed October 16, 2022, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf, 211.

² *Ibid.*, 223.

³ Grzegorz Korgul, "Oczekiwania małżonków wobec duszpasterskiego wsparcia miłości małżeńskiej," *Roczniki Teologiczne* 68, no. 6 (2021): 91–107, <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt21686-5>; Anna Zellma and Wojśław Czupryński, "Cultural Model of Marriage and Family, as Shown in Selected Polish TV Series. A Pastoral Challenge for the Catholic Church," *Nova prisutnost* 18, no. 2 (2020): 318; Antun Volenik, Slavica Blažeka Kokorić, and Maja Laklija, "Analiza različitih aspekata partnerskih odnosa kod polaznika zaručničkih tečajeva i važnost vjere u njihovu životu," *Obnovljeni Život* 76 (2021), 108.

1. METHODS AND CONTENT OF PREMARITAL PASTORAL CARE IN LITHUANIA

The Pontifical Council for the Family distinguishes the following stages of preparation for marriage: remote, proximate, and immediate preparation.⁴ The courses of preparation for the sacrament of marriage belong to the proximate preparation. They should primarily rely on Catechesis based on listening to the word of God and interpreted in accordance with the Magisterium of the Church. This process hopes for an increasing understanding of faith to be witnessed by a specific life. Church documents say that appropriate teaching of the faith to young people should be carried out in a community environment, primarily in a parish, where families can participate and cooperate in the development of young people and expand their influence on other social groups according to their particular charismas and roles.⁵

In Lithuania, the preparation of the engaged couples for the sacrament of marriage is regulated by the documents adopted by the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference. The programme of preparation for the sacrament of marriage has been in force in Lithuanian dioceses for more than two decades⁶ and has helped numerous couples to receive this sacrament more consciously. However, it must be admitted that during these years there have been a number of changes that must be taken into account in the improvement of the premarital pastoral care. The Lithuanian Bishops' Conference stresses that during the preparation for marriage it is important to not only fulfil the legal requirements, but also to carefully organize the implementation of the preparation programme itself, to help the engaged couples understand the meaning and importance of the sacrament of marriage and the obligations arising from it, and to use this opportunity for evangelization. During the process of premarital pastoral care, the clergy are encouraged to sensitively accept the life experiences of the engaged and urge them to resume religious practice in case it has been interrupted.⁷ In Lithuania, the preparation of Catholic engaged couples for the sacrament of marriage is coordinated by the Family Centre. It began its activities in 1990 as a family section within the Caritas

⁴ Pontifical Council for the Family, *Rengimas Santuokos sakramentui* (Katalikų interneto tarnyba, 2000), accessed January 25, 2022, http://www.lcn.lt/b_dokumentai/kiti_dokumentai/rengimas-santuokos.html, 21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶ Lietuvos Vyskupų Konferencija, "Nutarimas dėl pasirengimo Santuokos sakramentui programos," *Bažnyčios žinios* 22 (1996): 1, <https://www.baznycioszinios.lt/old/bz9622/622lvk2.html>.

⁷ Lietuvos Vyskupų Konferencija, "Instrukcija dėl pasirengimo Santuokos sakramentui programos įgyvendinimo," *LVK*, March 29, 2006, p. 78, <https://lvk.lcn.lt/naujienos>.

organization, and since 1997 it has acted as a separate organization with the status of a religious community and is subordinate to the Lithuanian Bishops' Conference.⁸ The Family Centre is an “umbrella” organization with its own centres in each diocese. These are teams of laymen and clergy, employees and volunteers working in various parts of Lithuania with the engaged and families, organizing the preparation for the sacrament of marriage, as well as various events and programme aimed at strengthening relationships within families.

In Lithuania, the engaged are currently prepared for marriage in groups or individually according to the programme “Two are better than one... For if they fall, one will lift up his friend...” (Kohelet 4:9–10). It is an integrated programme for the development of catechesis and psychological knowledge and skills, covering both theoretical and practical aspects. Two hours are usually allocated to analyze one topic during a meeting in a group. It is also initiated to further deepen the topic in pairs individually, using the methodological material of the programme and discussing various situations. Feedback from the participants is recorded in both oral and written forms of open questions.

The content of the premarital preparation programme includes the following topics:

- ♦ **What is important to us.** This meeting examines Catholic morality and values and their impact on family life. There is a search for the important things for the engaged which may strengthen or weaken the future family. An attempt is made to discover what is the most important and connects the engaged couple in terms of the harmony of faith and life.
- ♦ **Communication and communion.** An analysis is made into what is needed for the communion to grow in marriage. Participants learn how to recognize and identify their feelings. The influence of not only communication skills, but also of the maturity of the personality on the communion of the spouses is analyzed.
- ♦ **Together through change.** The need to grow and improve in marriage is discussed, difficult life situations of a couple are analyzed and family-friendly attitudes are developed with diverse, comprehensive assistance.
- ♦ **Forgive and celebrate.** Personal and sacramental forgiveness, mercy in the family are discussed, the art of overcoming conflicts and forgiveness of hurt is studied.
- ♦ **Christian views on sexuality.** Myths and realities about sexuality are examined; the engaged are introduced to the Church's position on the issues of sexuality.

⁸ Lietuvos Vyskupų Konferencija, “Lietuvos Šeimos centras,” *LVK*, 2022, https://lvk.lcn.lt/p_strukturos/lsc.

- ♦ **Fertility cognition. Life before birth.** The engaged are introduced to the main signs of fertility and the development of a child before birth, bioethical life issues are discussed. Information about natural family planning is provided.
- ♦ **God and the Church.** Personal and communal relationships with God and the Church are analyzed, and it is reflected on why church marriage is important.
- ♦ **Vows.** The text and meaning of the wedding vows are examined; the sacraments and the benefits of marriage are analyzed.

Thus, the purpose of the premarital pastoral care is not only to provide knowledge of marital life and the teaching of the Church on family matters, but also to catechize the engaged in the hope of an ever fuller understanding of the faith and its witness in their specific life. This is an extremely important task given the challenges of secularization and religious “lukewarmness”: according to the data of a sociological study conducted in Lithuania, more than half of the Lithuanian population (more than 60%) who consider themselves Catholics are not interested in matters of the Christian faith, because most believe that they have enough of what they already know. A recent study found that the majority of those who consider themselves Catholics do not have a clear concept of faith. More than a third of Catholics, especially those of a younger age (18–34 years, i.e. those who make up the main age group of the engaged couples), think that to “believe” means to go to church occasionally and sit in silence. This suggests that the faith is often understood as a personal psychological state that is more typical of the New Age religiosity rather than the Catholic religion.⁹ Or is it an unconscious attempt to seek a relationship with God that has not yet been realized? In any case, it is obvious that in premarital pastoral care it is important to help the engaged move from an uncertainty to a more personal encounter with God and a positive experience of the Church.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE DECALOGUE AND ITS PLACE IN THE PREMARITAL PREPARATION PROGRAMME

From a theological point of view, the Decalogue is the foundation of biblical ethics on which the moral principles of the two greatest monotheistic religions—Judaism and Christianity—have grown. On the other hand, it is closely connected with the natural law, which is the primordial moral sense that allows human reason to distinguish between good and evil, truth and falsehood. From this point

⁹ Irena Eglė Laumenskaitė, “Ar užbaigėme tikėjimo metus?”, *Katalikai.lt*, 2014, accessed January 10, 2022, <http://www.katalikai.lt/index.php?id=6&nid=10403>.

of view, it can be understood as the basis of a universal moral order and a source of ethical wisdom, common not only to the Judaism and Christianity, but also to humanity as a whole, since it is based on the reality in which all mankind participates. It can be said that in its essential features it is common to all. Church documents state that in its original text the Decalogue reflects both primary and potentially very rich ethics at the same time.

The Pontifical Biblical Commission,¹⁰ discussing the limitations of the Decalogue, distinguishes among the following aspects:

- ♦ Exteriority: “In considering the literal sense, exegetes insist that originally every prohibition concerned external, visible and verifiable actions, including the *hamad* (desire) which introduces the last two commandments (Ex 20.17); the desire envisaged is no mere thought or ineffective and interior plan (a wish), but rather a concrete intention to put an evil plan into action (a desire which is ‘expressed in action’, a ‘proposal’).”¹¹
- ♦ Essentially communal nature: “This liberated people was in urgent need of precise rules to order its collective life in the desert. The Decalogue corresponds broadly to this demand, in such a way that in it we can see a fundamental law, a primitive national charter.”¹²
- ♦ Mainly negative formulation of moral requirements: “Eight of the ten commandments are formulated negatively, they are prohibitions, more or less like railings on a bridge. Only two are expressed in positive form, precepts to be fulfilled. The accent lies, therefore, on abstaining from socially harmful actions. This evidently does not exhaust all the possibilities of morality, whose purpose is broadly that of stimulating human activity to good action.”¹³

However, it is especially important that the Decalogue also contains a potentially rich ethic that retains its relevance in modern society: “Three other characteristics, however, make of the original Decalogue an irreplaceable foundation for an inspiring morality that appeal to modern sensibilities: its range is virtually universal. It fits the theological frame of the covenant; it is rooted in a historical context of liberation.”¹⁴

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the truths of the Decalogue about the relationship of man to Transcendence and to other men have an undeniable value.

¹⁰ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality: Biblical Roots of Christian Conduct*, Holy See, accessed October 17, 2022 https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20080511_bibbia-e-morale_en.html.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

It is no coincidence that the Decalogue is also given an important role in the process of preparation of the engaged. The themes of the Decalogue and God's commandments are analyzed in detail already in the first topic of the engagement programme "What matters to us." This topic discusses in detail each of the Ten Commandments in harmony with the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.¹⁵ Participants are also invited to analyze various practical tasks and problems that pose challenges to the couple's harmonious experience of life and the Decalogue. Thus, the engaged are provided with an opportunity and incentive to reflect and deepen the internalization of the Decalogue in person and in the couple at the essential levels emphasized by scholars:¹⁶ cognitive, emotional and behavioural. Questions of the harmony between God's Commandments and personal life are also directly and indirectly touched upon in other topics of the engagement programme,¹⁷ which are related to self-determination and relationship with God, such as "Forgiveness and celebration," "God and the Church," etc. We can say that the internalization of the Decalogue as one of the most important parts of the teaching of the Church is an important task in the pastoral ministry of the engaged. However, when observing the complicated moral state of today's society, the question arises: to what extent can this universal ethical code be treated authentically in the context of modern human life? What moral objections to the concept of the Decalogue arise for the modern people who attribute themselves to the Catholic Church and prepare to create a family according to its teaching? In order to answer these questions and to identify the directions of improvement of premarital pastoral care, it is inevitable to reveal and elaborate on the problematic aspects that interfere with the internalization of the Decalogue for the engaged.

3. THE PROBLEMATICS OF THE DECALOGUE FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE ENGAGED

3.1 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

To understand in what direction we need to improve the premarital pastoral care, we need to know the mindset of modern people and the problem areas that

¹⁵ Lietuvos Šeimos centras, *Programa sužadėtiniams. „Dviem yra geriau negu vienam... Jei vienas iš jų suklumpa, kitas padeda bičiuliui atsikelti“ (Koh 4,9-10)* (Kaunas: Lietuvos Šeimos centras, 2015), 4–7.

¹⁶ Vanda Aramavičiūtė, *Auklėjimas ir dvasinė asmenybės branda* (Vilnius: Gimtasis Žodis, 2005), 167.

¹⁷ Lietuvos Šeimos centras, *Sužadėtinių rengimas santuokos sakramentui: užrašai kūrybingiems pasimatymams* (Kaunas: Lietuvos Šeimos centras, 2018), 107.

arise for them. This is particularly important both at the conclusion of the *Amoris Laetitia* Family Year (2021–2022), both in the current context of the Synod of the Church and in the overall mission of the Church. One of the important factors of knowledge is the analysis of the opinions and views of the engaged preparing for the sacrament of marriage.

This article analyses the opinions of 968 engaged people from Lithuania (484 couples) on the most questioned and problematic commandment or aspect of the Decalogue from their point of view. The research was conducted in western Lithuania in 2021. The respondents were engaged couples preparing for the sacrament of marriage in Telšiai diocese. The analysis is characterized by both qualitative (in terms of content) and partially quantitative (in terms of intensity of content manifestation) assessment.

The characteristic of the respondents is that the prevailing age ranges from 20 to 32 years, and from the point of view of faith, they attribute themselves homogeneously to the Roman Catholic faith and strive for sacramental marital life. With regard to the Decalogue, the engaged presented their attitudes after the theoretical and practical teaching on the Ten Commandments, integrated in the programme topic “What matters to us.”¹⁸ Before submitting their views and opinions, the participants had an opportunity to further reflect on and consider the Ten Commandments. Both sides of the engaged couple participated in the survey, but the questions were formulated in a differentiated manner in order to assess the answers of the fiancé and the fiancée separately. The analysis of the study was carried out by reducing and classifying the responses into categories and using labels. It should be noted that only less than a tenth (8%) of respondents declared that the Decalogue was acceptable and understandable to them and did not raise any problematic questions. In this article, we will discuss some of the most questioned aspects of the Decalogue and analyze the motives for their questionability. It is likely that this analysis will help to identify problem areas and foresee further opportunities for improvement of the quality of the premarital pastoral care.

3.2 PROBLEMATIC AREAS OF THE CONCEPT OF THE DECALOGUE

3.2.1 *Holiness and Celebration of Sunday*

Analysis of the data revealed that more than a third of the respondents (34%) find the commandment for the celebration of the Lord’s Day the most controversial and the most difficult to accept. Objection to this commandment is more common for men (3% difference) than women.

¹⁸ Lietuvos Šeimos centras, *Programa sužadėtiniams*, 4.

The basis for the origin of catechetical formulations of the Third Commandment of the Decalogue “Celebrate Sunday” are found in the books of Exodus 20:8–11¹⁹ and Deuteronomy 5:12–15.²⁰ In the context of the New Testament, the Sabbath, which marked the end of the first creation, was replaced by Sunday, reminiscent of the new creation begun with the resurrection of Christ.²¹ Therefore, Sunday is like Easter repeated every week, and the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday is a special moment of witness to the Christian life.

The analysis of the data of the study indicates that the essential aspects of this commandment that are being questioned relate specifically to the concept of the celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday, the concept of rest and the concept of sacredness of Sunday.

The concept of the celebration of the Eucharist. For many respondents, Holy Mass on Sunday evokes associations of forcible formalism: “attending Mass cannot be an obligation,” “not attending Mass does not diminish faith in God”; the most important thing is “how much” of God is in your heart, not how many times you attend Holy Mass, and whether you do it every Sunday”; “I can pray not only in the church, but also in my mind, in my heart.” It is therefore assumed that the celebration of the Eucharist is not perceived as the centre of Christian life. Apparently, the confusion of priorities and the inability to combine sacramental and social life become evident, and there is a clash between different duties: “I cannot attend Mass because I have to work for the well-being of the family.” However, there is no discussion of the possibility of exceptional cases, no search for ways to harmonise these responsibilities.

The concept of rest. Work and rest, alternating each other, form a certain rhythm of human life. Sunday rest serves for the well-being of both an individual and the society. It is like some form of resistance to the culture of excessive work.

¹⁹ “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8–11).

²⁰ “Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the Lord your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:12–15).

²¹ *Katalikų Bažnyčios Katekizmas* (Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai, 2015; henceforth KBK), 2190.

In this regard, the analysis of the opinions of the **informants** not only reveals a certain lack of spiritual discipline: “I can’t rest because such is the nature of my work”; “Sunday is the best day to run the errands and stock up on goods”; but also indirectly points to the problematics of self-esteem: “household chores never end—how could I rest on Sunday?” Therefore it seems that a common problem that people have today is the inability to stop. It can be assumed that this may also be related to the lack of the ability to adequately love and appreciate oneself. Scientists notice that this problem is becoming more relevant in various contexts and services,²² not only from a moral point of view, but it can also provoke a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, prolonged stress and burnout.

The concept of the sacredness of Sunday. As discussed earlier, Christians, who inherited the Hebrew tradition, adopted from the Jews the tradition of celebrating the Lord’s Day, but this day leaves the celebration of the Sabbath and passes into the celebration of the first day of the week, that is the day on which Christ rose. This justifies the sacredness of Sunday, during which the faithful gather to worship the Saviour, to thank Him and to experience a sense of communion with other people who believe in and profess Christ. Analysis of the survey data shows that one of the most common questions is “why can’t I dedicate any other day to God?” It must be assumed that there is little perception of exclusivity and importance of Sunday as the day of Christ’s resurrection.²³ At the same time an individualistic approach that justifies separation from the community emerges: “I don’t need community, I can ‘contact God’ whenever I want and wherever I want.” This is a rather dangerous trend, which encourages the rejection of community and common celebration of the liturgy, and therefore requires a particularly sensitive pastoral concern.

From the perspective of tradition, holy day was a special day for Lithuanians. Today we see a radical change in this aspect. It can be undoubtedly argued that deviations in this traditional concept could also have been caused by the pandemic situation with the emergence of a certain virtual sacredness of the distance. There is dominance of a certain “culture of excuse.” However, it should be emphasized that these trends already occurred long ago. Paradoxically, the age of technical progress does not reduce the rush, and in human life there is even less time left to stop and celebrate.

²² Luisa J. Gallagher, “A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry”. *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 1 (2019): 134.

²³ KBK, 2191.

3.2.2 *The Value of the Truth*

More than a quarter of the respondents (26%) declared that the Eighth Commandment of God is the most questionable. Objection to this commandment is more common for women (4% difference) than men.

The basis for the origin of the catechetical formulation of the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” is found in the texts of Exodus 20:16²⁴ and Deuteronomy 5:20.²⁵ The value of the truth is also emphasized elsewhere in the Bible, where it is forbidden to distort the truth in communication with other people.²⁶ This moral attitude follows from the call to witness God, who is Himself the truth and seeks the truth. The analysis of the research shows that the aspects of this commandment that are being questioned are the interpretation of lesser evil and the area of gossip.

Interpretation of lies as lesser evil. Respondents’ responses show a tendency to treat cases of untruth as an option for lesser evil. Most often they are categorized as “innocent lies”: “there are moments in life when you need to tell a “white” lie to help a person.” An emphasis is frequently placed on the need to lie in order to achieve some good, to adapt, “untruth for a noble purpose” is justified: “Sometimes the truth has to be bent so that it doesn’t hurt another person.” There is a parallel category of concealing the truth arguing that: “by keeping silent or not telling the truth painful things are avoided”; “there are situations when you help a person by lying, by hiding some unpleasant news or situation,” “to avoid misunderstandings in a relationship or family, it is sometimes good not to tell the truth.” Concealing the truth is treated ambiguously, more often as an unwillingness to harm or as a desire to protect a close person. Obviously, these interpretations involve certain moral risks.

Area of gossip. Another category of the Eighth Commandment of the Decalogue that is being questioned includes the level of gossip. This area is perceived as extremely lax: “I do not think that this commandment prohibits telling negative things about another person when it is not a lie.” Often gossip is justified as doing good or even as an indirect help to another person. It is often pointed out that “gossip or speaking of vices can be positive in order to help a person.” It must be assumed that gossip is confused with the concept of constructive criticism or brotherly advice. It should be noted that respect for the good name of a person

²⁴ “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16).

²⁵ “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Deuteronomy 5:20).

²⁶ “Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit” (Exodus 23:1–3).

prohibits any actions and words that can undeservedly harm them. Therefore, moral evil is attributed to hasty decisions made without sufficient basis, which attach a moral vice to another person. And also gossip, when, without objectively necessary grounds, somebody's transgressions and vices are revealed to others.²⁷ On the other hand, there is also an important aspect of moral sensitivity, where helping to identify and correct errors is a Christian duty. However, this goes beyond the concept of gossip. Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed the dangers of gossip, describing it as a morbid, divisive phenomenon that destroys community and relationships.²⁸

3.2.3 *Respect for Parents and Elders*

More than a fifth of the respondents (21%) find the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue the most debatable. Objection to this commandment is more common for women (4% difference) than men.

The basis for the origin of the catechetical formulation of the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue, "Honor thy father and mother," is found in the texts of Exodus 20:12²⁹ and Deuteronomy 5:16.³⁰

When analyzing the data, it is not so surprising that this commandment raises questions, but its quantitative aspect is astounding: the huge scale of damaged relationships between children and parents in our society.

The following aspects are most often questioned: the family relationship, the concept of authority and the wording of the commandment. A whole range of socially sensitive issues and pathologies are revealed in this area. Responses in this sphere are characterized by personality, sensitivity and emotionality.

Pathology of the family relationship. When analyzing the respondents' answers, the consequences of a distorted relationship with parents are often evident. Parents are recognized as unworthy of respect. This attitude may serve as a defence mechanism in the aftermath of a wounded relationship: "how to respect parents who do not respect your choices, force you to choose the studies you do not want?.."; "since I was not raised by my parents, I always get upset when

²⁷ KBK, 2477.

²⁸ "Popiežius Pranciškus: Nesantaika ir apkalbos – mūsų liga," *Bernardinai.lt*, September 4, 2015, accessed January 24, 2022, <https://www.bernardinai.lt/2015-09-04-popiezius-pranciskus-nesantaika-ir-apkalbos-musu-liga>.

²⁹ "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12).

³⁰ "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (Deuteronomy 5:16).

I hear about him”; “my father is an alcoholic, so it is very difficult to respect him.” The anger is often caused by unfulfilled needs and childhood grievances: “what about those who abandoned their children, hurt them, or even killed them?”; “Does a person whose parents abused him/her have to respect them?”; “I don’t think parents deserve respect just for giving life.” Consequences of not only addictions, but also of other toxic relationships are observed, which interfere with adequate and mature relationships in adulthood: “It sounds very awkward, but it seems to me I’m still afraid of her, she is already 85 years old, but I don’t know how to change something.” The lack of mutual responsibility for the execution of this commandment is also emphasized (i.e., not only from the side of the children, but also from the side of the parents): “If you are not respected, why should you still respect?,” “some parents do not deserve respect or they have lost it,” “I think it should be written: respect your father and mother just as they respect you,” “respect must be earned reciprocally, not just because the person is older”; “how should I observe this commandment if it is not mutual.” From a biblical point of view, respect for parents means, first of all, social concern for old people.³¹ However, the crises and pathologies of the present family relationships raise a significant barrier to the acceptance of this aspect.

Crisis of the concept of authority. The Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue also includes respect for those in legitimate power. Analysis of the opinions of the respondents shows that this aspect of the commandment is also sensitive and controversial: “Why should I respect the people who are in power? If, in my opinion, they are wrong and lead badly,” “it is incomprehensible why one must respect those who are entrusted with power?” Disapproval in this regard allows us to argue that there is a problem of acceptance and recognition of authority of government and leadership. The teaching of the Church states that, although citizens have the right to reasonable criticism of the government, they are also obliged to respect it and cooperate for the benefit of the society.³²

The context of the formulation of the commandment. Another problematic aspect is the wording of the commandment, which, from the perspective of the Old Testament, includes the promise of a long and successful life. Analyzing the responses of the engaged, it is clear that this wording is difficult to understand and raises debate about the expression of the promise: “Why, respecting your parents, should you live longer?” “I don’t understand what respect for parents has in common with the land where you live.” From a biblical point of view, this hope of the promise relates both to the historical circumstances of the life of the Israe-

³¹ Reterer Friedrich Vinzenz, *Dievo teisyas ir gyvenimas* (Vilnius: Aidai, 1997), 201.

³² KBK, 2238–2241.

lites of that time and to the authority of God.³³ In addressing His children, God testifies to His action: He, not man, can bestow the gift of a long and successful life on those who recognize the authority of God and the importance that He places on parents. It is clear that today's man needs a deeper presentation and explanation of the wording of this commandment.

FINAL REMARKS

The premarital pastoral care is an important part of the pastoral activity of the Church, which includes the development of the harmony between faith and life. The content of the engagement programme covers various topics relevant to Catholic family life. During this process, it is important to reflect on faith on the basis of the word of God and the instructions of the Magisterium. The sacrament of marriage is not fulfilled without the internalization and practice of faith, therefore, in the process of preparation of the engaged, it is important to discuss possible challenges and propose appropriate solutions or ways of assistance to respond to emerging problematic situations.

The role of the Decalogue is one of the essential factors for building the moral foundation of the family. The data of the study performed within the pastoral care of the engaged in Lithuania reveal sensitive problematic aspects in the understanding of the Decalogue in the areas of Sunday celebration, the value of the truth and respect for parents. These are significant areas of Christian morality, and, therefore, the deepening of their perception is an important factor in the formation of the future family as a "home church." The results of the study and the highlighted problem areas encourage rethinking and updating the elements of the premarital pastoral care in order to deepen the understanding of the Decalogue and its internalization. Although the Decalogue contains all the necessary elements to justify a harmonious and ever-relevant moral thinking, the study confirms the statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission that it is not enough to translate the Hebrew original into a modern language.³⁴ The church is called to offer a balanced ideal for today's people, conveying the teaching of the Decalogue in the faithful content, but in new forms, relevant to the modern person. The task of the present pastoral care of the engaged is to cultivate conscience, but not to replace it.³⁵ This obliges us to respond to the spiritual needs of today's human being, allowing for a

³³ Vinzenz, *Dievo teisybas ir gyvenimas*, 203.

³⁴ Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Bible and Morality*, 30.

³⁵ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, 37.

deeper understanding of the teaching of the Church and in the hope that the ultimate decision on the acceptance, profession and witnessing of the faith will be made by people themselves and, in this case, by a faith-based family.

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DUSZPASTERSTWO PRZEDMAŁŻEŃSKIE NA LITWIE
I JEGO WYZWANIA: OBSZARY PROBLEMATYCZNE
W ROZUMIENIU DEKALOGU

Streszczenie

Duszpasterstwo przedmałżeńskie zajmuje ważne miejsce w posłudze Kościoła i jest aktualne w każdym czasie. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie formatu duszpasterstwa przedmałżeńskiego na Litwie oraz jego problematyki w kontekście postrzegania Dekalogu. Na Litwie przygotowanie do zawarcia małżeństwa regulują dokumenty Kościoła powszechnego i Konferencji Episkopatu Litwy. Realizowane jest ono w formie programu koordynowanego przez Centrum Rodziny. Program zawiera istotne elementy katolickiego życia rodzinnego i wiary, co jest związane z wymową sakramentu małżeństwa. Integralną częścią programu przygotowania do małżeństwa jest prezentacja i analiza Dekalogu w harmonii z życiem rodzinnym. Badanie empiryczne wykazuje, że zaręczeni kwestionują niektóre aspekty koncepcji Dekalogu zwłaszcza w obszarach świętowania niedzieli, wartości prawdy i szacunku dla rodziców. Obszary te generują dla zaręczonych sprzeczne założenia i są najtrudniejsze w odbiorze i akceptacji. Ujawnia to potrzebę ciągłej odnowy duszpasterstwa przedmałżeńskiego i pogłębiania jego treści w poszukiwaniu nowych, bardziej adekwatnych jego form.

Słowa kluczowe: duszpasterstwo przedmałżeńskie na Litwie; małżeństwo katolickie; Dekalog.