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Marriage and the family issues in the research and writings of Blessed Michał Sopoćko in the light of his scientific activity and legacy

Father Michał Sopoćko, the blessed of the Catholic Church described the issues of marriage and the family in the legal and ethical aspect in his doctoral thesis. It was published in 1926 and was called: *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na ziemiach polskich* [The family in the legislation on Polish soil]. This article presents this publication with the background note about the scientific activity of Father Sopoćko, the scientific disciplines which he worked on (pastoral theology, pedagogy, catechetics and homiletics) as well as the apostolate of Divine mercy (teaching, the cult, publications), which were his life mission. The dissertation presents the reasons why he described the issues of marriage and family: his concern for the Christian model of the family, of the family's rights based on the natural and on the revealed law in order to take them into account in the codification created in the freed Poland. Further on, the main content of the work consists of the vision of family and marriage, the mutual relationship of the spouses, the relationship between parents and children with regard to the natural law and to the Christian morality presented in the light of the legislation on the Polish soil under occupation. The final part in the conclusion of the article emphasises the indispensability to embed the constituted law on marriage and the family on the natural and the revealed law. This validity has not become out of date and should still be preserved. This statement adds value to the work of Father Sopoćko and makes it worth attention in the light of the contemporarily discussed issues of marriage and the family.

Key words: Father M. Sopoćko, scientific profile and scientific legacy of Father Michał Sopoćko, Father Michał Sopoćko as the apostle of Divine mercy, the family and the natural law, the family and the constituted law.

Father Michał Sopoćko¹ completed his studies in theology and pedagogy, then he started his scientific studies of the moral theology, pastoral theology, the aesthetic theology and pedagogy. Thus his scientific and research activity and literary activity concerned mainly these fields of studies. However, he devoted some time and research also to Divine mercy, mainly in the sphere of understanding the very truth of Divine mercy and the cult, which further resulted in the multifaceted literary output. He spent most of his life on the research of didactics, as a lecturer in a seminary and at university. His vast literary legacy consisted of numerous publications as well as of a rich literary collection of more popularising and journalistic nature. Most of his scientific legacy is presented and compiled in numerous minor publications, however, there are still many interesting aspects of the legacy that can be researched and used in a creative way. Doctoral theses, Master

¹ Michał Sopoćko was born on November 1th 1888 in Juszeyszczynna the county of Oszmiana. In 1914 r. he was ordained a priest in Vilnius. Between 1914 and 1918 he worked as a vicar in the parish of Taboryszki. Then he moved to Warsaw where he was studying theology and pedagogy at the Warsaw University and he worked as a military chaplain. In 1924 he came to Vilnius, still working in the military pastoral care and organized associations of the Catholic youth in the diocese. Between 1927 and 1932 he was a spiritual father in the seminary in Vilnius and since 1928 he worked as a lecturer at the Faculty of Theology at Stefan Batory University and in the seminary. Devoted to the scientific and didactic work, he was a zealous priest, organizing Catholic associations of the faithful; he was also a confessor in religious congregations. Between 1934 and 1938 he was the rector of Saint Michael's church and a chaplain of Bernardine Sisters. In 1933 he met Sister Faustyna Kowalska and became her confessor and the spiritual guide. He helped her recognise her revelations and got engaged into the apostolate of Divine mercy. He ordered Sister Faustyna to write her diary, he managed to organize the painting of the Image of the Divine Mercy, he printed the first prayers to Divine mercy. He asked the ecclesial authorities to establish the holiday and authorise the cult of Divine mercy. He worked on the biblical and theological bases of the cult publishing scientific works. He was the co-founder of the Congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus, as a result of God's demands from Sister Faustyna's revelations. In 1947 he left Vilnius and went to Białystok where he worked as a professor in the seminary, mainly in the chapel in 42 Poleska street. He consequently continued the apostolate of Divine mercy through his work as a preacher, through his scientific activity and numerous publications. He never stopped trying to convince the ecclesial authorities to introduce the holiday and to authorise of the cult. However, he did not live to see the effects of his efforts, but at his deathbed he trusted that his dreams would be fulfilled. He died in Białystok in 1975. Soon after his death the ecclesial authorities started to slowly allow to spread the cult until by John Paul II established the holiday of Divine Mercy on the second Sunday after Easter in 2000 during the canonization of Sister Faustyna. A zealous priest, a chaplain, an educator of priests, a guardian of nuns and mainly a tireless apostle of Divine mercy, he reaped the harvest of holiness of his life and he was declared blessed in 2008 in Białystok. His relics were transferred to the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy.

theses and other diploma works constitute the vast majority of the existing studies of the scientific and literary legacy of Father Sopoćko, but most of them have not been published. Therefore, it is necessary and advisable to conduct research of this precious legacy, to analyse it and creatively develop, drawing from this rich source of inspiration within the scientific fields that were dealt with by Father Sopoćko.

This is the main task of our scientific circle which initiated organizing conferences, like this one devoted to the marriage and family issues: 'The family in the thought of blessed Father Michał Sopoćko', in reference to his dissertation: 'The family in the legislation on Polish soil' based on his doctoral thesis. In order to introduce the reader to the presented issues as well as to draw a proper background to it, we firstly present the blessed Father Michał Sopoćko with his literary legacy and mentioning the fields of studies which he dealt with. The next part of this dissertation will contain descriptions of the reasons, conditions and circumstances in which he started his research on marriage and the family as well as a short description of his activity. The dissertation will end in the summary of Father Sopoćko's research, the juxtaposition of the main conclusions and findings of the work and indication of the validity of his view on marriage and family issues presented in this dissertation.

Theology and pedagogy studies and the beginnings of scientific and didactic work

Father Sopoćko showed his eagerness to gain knowledge since his childhood years. He was bestowed with mental abilities and zealously gained knowledge although the external conditions in which he lived (his impoverished parents, the czar's administration's restrictions) made it more difficult for him to access knowledge. The more knowledge he gained, the more useful it appeared to him in life. This made him even more willing for further education. After graduating from the seminary in Vilnius in 1914 and working for a few years as a priest, he decided to start new studies at the Faculty of Theology at the Warsaw University and in the Pedagogical Study in 1918. He was studying moral theology and additionally, he attended lectures of law and philosophy. In 1923 he graduated from his studies and got his Master of Theology degree². In his magisterial diploma it was noted: *postquam legitimis examinibus in Theologia speciatim in Theologia Morali laudabilem doctrinam probavit*³.

² M. Sopoćko, *Wspomnienia z przeszłości*, in: *Wspomnienia* (Białystok: 2018), 91-92.

³ A copy of the Master's diploma, Archiwum Archidiecezji Białostockiej, file XI, item 4 – further: AAB, XI 4.

Apart from his theological studies, Father Sopoćko attended the two-year pedagogical study (1922-1924) at the State Pedagogical Institute in Warsaw. It ended with an exam before the State Educational Board and he submitted a dissertation called '*Alcoholism among the school youth*' which was required in order to get a diploma of graduating from the study. Getting this degree brought Father Sopoćko the title and authority of a qualified teacher (Master of Arts) of pedagogical subjects in secondary comprehensive schools and in seminaries for teachers⁴.

After receiving the title of the Master of Arts in Theology, Father Sopoćko continued further studies preparing his doctoral thesis. He was writing it under the guidance of professor Franciszek Jehliczka at the chair of moral theology at the Warsaw University. It concerned the issues of ethics in the family in the light of the civil legislation. The study was of ethical and legal nature and the author wanted to present the extent to which the civil legislation which was applicable on Polish soil, was in accordance with the principles of Christian morality. This issue was up-to-date as a new personal law was being prepared in independent Poland and there were doubts concerning the fact whether the Polish and Christian tradition would have enough influence on it. It was the author's intention to indicate, among other things, the need to reconcile the civil law with the natural law and the revealed law in such aspects which concerned the family ethics⁵.

Father Sopoćko finished his doctoral thesis in spring 1926 and he defended his thesis on March 1st 1926⁶. On the same day he received his diploma which gave him the title of "Sacrae Theologiae Doctor" [Bachelor of Sacred Theology] within moral theology on the basis of the passed exams and the dissertation "Family ethics in the Polish legislation"⁷.

Receiving his doctoral degree helped Father Sopoćko enter the path of his further independent career in science. Apart from his priestly ministry, it was one of the most important aims of his life. Therefore, it became a part of his timetable. As long as his priestly duties and life conditions allowed for that, he tried to devote his time to science. Further on he devoted more and more time to it when he was employed in the seminary and at university⁸. At the same time, since his university years,

⁴ A copy of the diploma, AAB, XI 12.

⁵ See M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* (Wilno: 1926), 4-5.

⁶ *Curriculum vitae ks. Michała Sopoćko*, Vilnius May 20th 1928, (copy), AAB, IV 14.

⁷ Doctoral diploma. (copy) AAB, II 15

⁸ "Scientific work was among others one of the main tasks of my life. Therefore, I have never neglected it. However, sometimes I had little time for it. But I found at least a few hours a day on it". M. Sopoćko, *Dziennik* (Białystok: 2015), 86.

he started publishing his research results and scientific achievements, either as a stand-alone items or, mainly, in various religious magazines and science magazines. On the basis of his pedagogical training, apart from the issues concerning religion and theology, he took up the social and educational issues. His first publications were chats for soldiers: *Obowiązki względem Ojczyzny*⁹ [Duties for the Homeland], published in Warsaw in 1922 as a result of religious and patriotic education led by him while he was working as the military chaplain; as well as the article: *Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna*¹⁰ [Alcoholism among the school youth], based on the diploma dissertation in pedagogy, which was firstly published in *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* [Pedagogical Literature Review] in 1924, and later as a separate item¹¹ in Warsaw in 1925. In 1926 he published his Doctoral Thesis called: *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na ziemiach polskich*¹² [The family in the legislation on Polish soil] in Vilnius. Later on, especially when he was working in the Seminary in Vilnius where he was obliged to carry out his scientific work, his literary and scientific legacy developed significantly.

His pedagogical education gained in Warsaw resulted in the occupational proposals from educational institutions in Vilnius. The Kuratorium of the School District in Vilnius [Kuratorium Wileńskiego Okręgu Szkolnego] employed him to give lectures in psychology and pedagogy as well as to teach methodology of History, Polish, Mathematics and Sciences at the Higher Teachers Course in Vilnius during the school year of 1926/1927¹³, and to give lectures of the methodology of religion at the summer courses for teachers in Vilnius, Święciany, Oszmiana, Wilejka and Dzińska in the summer of 1926¹⁴, and later on in Oszmiana and Święciany in the summer of 1927¹⁵. Stowarzyszenie

⁹ M. Sopoćko, *Pogadanki. Seria I. Obowiązki względem Ojczyzny* (Warszawa: 1922).

¹⁰ M. Sopoćko, "Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna", *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* (1924), fasc. 4: 244-289.

¹¹ M. Sopoćko, *Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna* [Alcoholism among the school youth] (Warszawa: 1925).

¹² M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* (Wilno: 1926).

¹³ The letter of the Kuratorium of the School District in Vilnius: *Powierzenie nauczania na Państw. Wyższym Kursie Nauczycielskim w Wilnie na r. szk. 1926/27, dnia 15 IX 1926 r. N.I-20691/26*. (copy), AAB, XII 5.

¹⁴ The letter of the Kuratorium of the School District in Vilnius: *Powierzenie prelegentury religii na kursach wakacyjnych w roku 1926, dn. 10 VII 1926 r. L.I-14570/26*. (copy), AAB, XII 6.

¹⁵ The letter of the Kuratorium of the School District in Vilnius: *Powierzenie prelegentury religii na kursach wakacyjnych, dn. 4 VII 1927 r. N.I-16392/27*. (copy), AAB, XII 8; The letter of the Archbishop of Vilnius Romuald Jałbrzykowski

Chrześcijańsko Narodowego Nauczycielstwa Polskiego [The Christian National Polish Teachers Association] invited Father Sopoćko to give his lectures for the public school teachers at the Higher Philosophical and Mathematics Course organized by the Association for teachers in the school years of 1925/26 and 1926/27¹⁶. His engagement and devotion to the cause of training teachers was appreciated by the course organizers. The Christian National Polish Teachers Association concluded in the special gratitude note that it was Father Sopoćko's good will and selfless and dedicated work which proved his genuine citizen's concern to deepen and develop knowledge for the good of the teachers and for the benefit of them and of the Polish School¹⁷.

The Habilitationsschrift and the attempted professorial promotion

In 1927 Father Sopoćko was employed at the Faculty of Theology of Stefan Batory University in Vilnius and thus in the Metropolitan Seminary in Vilnius as it was a part of the Faculty. At first he was employed temporarily as a lecturer of the history of philosophy, later on, he became formally employed on the basis of the decision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Enlightenment on August 7th 1928 which validated his position of the associate professor at the Chair of Pastoral Theology¹⁸.

Taking up the employment at University was connected with the obligation to achieve the subsequent University degrees. Father Sopoćko was obliged to prepare his Habilitationsschrift. The subject of the thesis regarded the issues concerning the spiritual education in Mikołaj Łęczycki's works (1574-1653), Łęczycki was a Polish Jesuit, theologian and educator. Father Sopoćko shared Łęczycki's pedagogical interests which resulted in his earliest studies at the Pedagogical Institute in

from July 4th 1927., Nr 2356, commissioning the lectures of Religious Education at development courses for teachers. AAB, XVI 25.

¹⁶ The letter of Oddział Okręgu Wileńskiego Stowarzyszenia Chrześcijańsko Narodowego Nauczycielstwa w Polsce z dn. 3 czerwca 1928 r. Nr 491-IV/28 addressed to Father Prof. Dr M. Sopoćko expressing gratefulness for lecturing at the Superior Course of Philosophy and Mathematics. (copy), AAB, XI 1.

¹⁷ The letter of The Christian National Polish Teachers Association of the District of Vilnius [Oddziału Okręgu Wileńskiego Stowarzyszenia Chrześcijańsko Narodowego Nauczycielstwa w Polsce], see above.

¹⁸ The letter of the Senate and the Rector's Office of USB in Vilnius to Father Doctor M. Sopoćko informing that the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education's regulation from August 7th 1928 Nr IVSW.8274/28 gave him the position of a substitute in the Department of Pastoral Theology on a full-time basis of professorship. AAB, XII 13.

Warsaw. He was also motivated by his ministry of a spiritual father in the seminary which he was doing at that time and by the practical need to gain deeper knowledge in pedagogy in the work of a priest and educator. Moreover, in his opinion, collecting and presenting the views of Łęczycki and his teaching concerning education could bring new positive inspirations to the current educational activity especially in the spiritual sphere¹⁹.

Mikołaj Łęczycki was an accomplished teacher and a hard-working writer, however, his literary and scientific legacy were not well-known or elaborated on. In 1933 Father Sopoćko finished his studies and wrote an essay called "The aim, the subject and the object of spiritual education according to Mikołaj Łęczycki", branded by the professors of the Warsaw University: Father professor Antoni Borowski, professor of moral theology and Father professor Zygmunt Kozubski, professor of pastoral theology. In 1933 he published the dissertation in Vilnius²⁰ and on the basis of the dissertation, his Habilitationsschrift colloquium took place at Warsaw University on May 14th 1934²¹.

Continuing his work on the scientific legacy of Łęczycki, Father Sopoćko, compiled the complete works on Łęczycki's teaching on spiritual education comprising it in a 4-part complete works called *Mikołaj Łęczycki o wychowaniu duchowym*²² [Mikołaj Łęczycki on spiritual education], which was published in Vilnius in 1935. In the professors' assessment the dissertation was a great basis to appoint Father Sopoćko a university professor²³. Unfortunately, despite the common approval of the most competent scientific circle of Father Sopoćko's candidature, he was finally not promoted to be a university professor. It probably resulted from financial reasons. After the Second World War the Faculty of Theology and its professors were forced to move to Białystok where it was not validated by the authorities of the Polish Peoples Republic²⁴. Thus the issue of Father Sopoćko's candidature for the position of a professor collapsed. Until the moment of retiring in 1962 he remained a lecturer in the seminary in Białystok.

¹⁹ M. Sopoćko, *Wspomnienia*, 121.

²⁰ M. Sopoćko, *Cel, podmiot i przedmiot wychowania duchowego według Mikołaja Łęczyckiego* (Wilno: 1933).

²¹ M. Sopoćko, *Dziennik*, 88; M. Sopoćko, *Wspomnienia*, 195.

²² M. Sopoćko, *Mikołaj Łęczycki o wychowaniu duchowym. Studium teologiczno-pedagogiczne* (Wilno: 1935).

²³ M. Sopoćko, *Dziennik*, 88.

²⁴ See S. Hołodok, *Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Stefana Batorego w Białymstoku (1945-1951)*, in: *Archidiecezjalne Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne w Białymstoku 1945-1995. Księga Jubileuszowa*, ed. S. Hołodok (Białystok: 1995), 46-70.

Fields of scientific studies and the literary legacy

According to the acquired specializations, the main fields of scientific studies and didactics of Father Sopoćko were pastoral theology, homiletics, catechetics and pedagogy. He wrote his dissertations in all of these fields. The effects of his studies were expressed in independent scientific and popular-science articles, encyclopaedic entries and reviews²⁵. The issues concerning Divine mercy and the cult of the mercy constituted a separate field of scientific searches, of research, of the polemic and of apologia. What is more, the issue of the priestly formation was one of the essential ones in literary works. Sopoćko's works also consisted of journalism which mainly concerned the current religious and social issues.

As far as the fields of pastoral theology and pedagogy were concerned, Father Sopoćko dealt with the issues concerning Christian education. His most precious scientific works were the studies of Christian education according to Mikołaj Łęczycki, the Polish Jesuit, an outstanding theologian and pedagogue whose scientific legacy contained in the dissertations on education, exerted a significant influence on the development of the Christian pedagogy. Due to Father Sopoćko's work, the idea of the Christian education in the literary legacy of Łęczycki was developed and introduced. The works included: "The aim, the subject and the object of spiritual education according to Michał Łęczycki" and "Mikołaj Łęczycki on spiritual education. Theological and pedagogical study"²⁶.

Later on Father Sopoćko dealt with the issues of marriage and the family in the light of the pastoral care. He had already elaborated on these issues while preparing his doctoral thesis. As it was mentioned above, his studies mainly concerned the institution of the family with regard to the legal aspects, nevertheless the subject was developed also as an issue for the pastoral reasons²⁷. Essentially he started to deal with the issues of the family in the late 1930s. He wanted to prepare an approachable lecture on the family issues and their role in the religious and social life, for priests and for the faithful. The outbreak of the war and the Nazi occupation interfered with publishing his already

²⁵ M. Sopoćko, *Wspomnienia, 195-196*; M. Sopoćko, *Dziennik*, 110. During his work as a professor at University and in the seminary until they were closed during the Second World War published 90 publications.

²⁶ M. Sopoćko, *Mikołaj Łęczycki o wychowaniu duchowym. Studium teologiczno-pedagogiczne* (Wilno: 1935); see A. Skreczko, "Wychowanie chrześcijańskie w ujęciu księdza Michała Sopoćki", *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej* 4 (2005): 59-98.

²⁷ M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* (Wilno: 1926).

refined literary works. He only published an article which concerned the preparation for marriage. It was published as a separate leaflet publication²⁸. In reference to the encyclical of Pius XI on marriage *Casti connubi*, which recommended preparation of young people for marriage, Father Sopoćko published an approachable concise work consisting of the issues concerning marriage, its essence and tasks, the duties of the spouses for each other, for the children and for the family and the religious duties of a family. The well-prepared dissertation was finally published but in a limited edition and in the collected works only after the war in 1947. It was called "Pastoral care in the family". He wrote about the tasks of the family and of its meaning to the society and to the Church, about pastoral care of marriage and the family and about the care over the family in the broader sense, concerning the family members, relatives and in-laws. It was an approachable compilation of the essential and basic issues concerning the family life, duties and tasks of family members, which ordered the insights on family in the light of the pastoral care of the family²⁹. The leaflet on the preparation for marriage called "Nauka przedślubna" ["The pre-wedding studies"] was reprinted and republished after the Second World War³⁰. A short article from 1930s about the duties and tasks of God parents was a complementary text to the issues of pastoral care of the family³¹.

Father Sopoćko dealt with the issue of the sacrament of penance and reconciliation and confession mainly from the pastoral perspective. It appeared in the publications directly concerning confession or accompanying other issues especially the ones concerning Divine mercy. These publications contain the presentation of the subject of the sacrament of penance mainly in the light of Divine mercy³².

²⁸ M. Sopoćko, "Przygotowanie do małżeństwa. Nauka przedślubna", WAW 13(1939): 180-183, 196-200, 209-215, 226-231; M. Sopoćko, *Nauka przedślubna* (Wilno: 1939).

²⁹ M. Sopoćko, *Duszpasterstwo w rodzinie*, in: *Nauka pasterzowania*, ed. Z. Pilch, vol. II (Kielce: 1947), 5-31; see A. Skreczko, *Rodzina w nauczaniu ks. Michała Sopoćki*, in: M. Ozorowski, W. Nowacki (ed.), *Rodzina drogą Kościoła. Księga Jubileuszowa na 25-lecie posługi pasterskiej Biskupa Łomżyńskiego Stanisława Stefanka TChr* (Łomża: 2005), 379-382.

³⁰ M. Sopoćko, *Nauka przedślubna* (Wrocław: 1948).

³¹ M. Sopoćko, "Obowiązki rodziców chrzestnych", *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 38(1936): 183-185.

³² M. Sopoćko, "Kapłan jako szafarz Miłosierdzia Bożego", *Głos Kapłański* 13(1939): 356-358; "Spowiedź młodzieży szkolnej", *Przegląd Katechetyczny* 31(1948): 22-28, 51-59; "Nałogowcy i recydywiści", *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 51(1949): 61-67; "Spowiedź jako czynnik postępu w doskonałości", *Głos Karmelu* 21(1952),

Similarly, the issues of alcoholism and preventing alcohol addiction were presented by Father Sopoćko in the light of Divine mercy. These aspects are revealed in the already mentioned diploma dissertation *Alcoholism among the school youth*. During his whole life Father Sopoćko frequently mentioned this issue in his publications and dissertations. He lectured on this, published diverse articles and sermons³³.

In the field of homiletics his legacy was collected in numerous publications devoted among others to: preaching technique, retreats and folk missions. He prepared a handbook for homiletics but it only remained a typescript. A collection of sermons either published or in typescripts and manuscripts was an important dimension of Father Sopoćko's literary and scientific legacy in homiletics³⁴.

Similarly, in the field of catechetics, his legacy was revealed in numerous studies concerning the issues of: teaching catechetics in seminaries, organization of religious courses and catechetical conventions, organization and methods of catechising, correlation of religion with other school subjects. What is more, he prepared an extensive script for teaching catechetics in seminaries³⁵.

The field of pedagogy was the object of his scientific specialization and his personal passion since his youth; his interest in it appeared when he worked as a teacher in a small school in the parish of

104-113, *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego*, vol. III (Rzym – Paryż – Londyn: 1962), vol. IV (Paryż: 1967).

³³ M. Sopoćko, *Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna*, in: *Księga pamiątkowa kursu katechetycznego w Krakowie* (Kraków: 1929), 206-219; "Abstynencja a trzeźwość", *WAW* 4 (1930): 191-194; "Alkoholizm a moralność", *Trzeźwość* 12 (1937): 132-138; *Alkoholizm a moralność* (Warszawa: 1937); "Alkoholizm a młodzież i jej wychowanie", *Caritas* 4 (1948), 314-322; *Alkoholizm a młodzież i jej wychowanie* (Kraków: 1949); "Bractwo trzeźwości", *Homo Dei* 18 (1949): 420-430; *Szkic kazania o pijaństwie*, *WAW* 8 (1934): 3-11; *Szkice kazania o abstynencji*, ibidem, 10 (1936): 25-29; "Na Tydzień Wstrzemięźliwości. Szkic kazania o abstynencji", *Nowa Biblioteka Kaznodziejska* 50 (1936): 40-47; *Szkice kazań o abstynencji i pijaństwie* (Wilno: 1936); "O trzeźwości", *Współczesna Ambona* 5 (1950): 268-272.

³⁴ M. Sopoćko, *Wygłoszenie kazania* (Kielce: 1938); "Rekolekcje i misje ludowe", *WAW* 12(1938): 40-42, 58-60, 72-75, 89-93, "Program homiletyki w seminariach duchownych", *Kazalnica Popularna* 2 (1938), 153-163; *Homiletyka*, Sekcja Wydawnictw Skryptów Koła Teologów USB (duplicator), Wilno; *Podręcznik homiletyki*, (typescript) AAB, LXXVI.

³⁵ M. Sopoćko, *Program katechetyki w seminariach duchownych*, in: *Pamiętnik Siódmego Zjazdu w Wilnie 19 VI – 21 VI 1933*, Wilno 1934, 309-319; "Organizacja kursów religijnych, dni i zjazdów katechetycznych", *WAW* 9 (1935): 336-342, 354-358; 10 (1936), s. 7-13; *Organizacja kursów religijnych, dni i zjazdów katechetycznych* (Wilno: 1936); "Łączność i jednolitość nauczania religii z innymi przedmiotami", *Miesięcznik Katechetyczny* 26 (1937): 369-386; *Korelacja w nauczaniu religii z innymi przedmiotami* (Warszawa: 1937).

Zabrzezie. His studies in the Institute of Pedagogy prepared him in a professional way which he used in education in Vilnius and later at University and in seminary while teaching pedagogy. The works of M Łęczycycki presented above touched upon theology and pedagogy. One of the most interesting dissertations on the basis of pedagogy was an article which was a published version of a lecture presented in the Catholic Studies on education in Vilnius in 1936, which concerned Polish and Catholic ideals and educational systems. In his lecture he indicated the importance of the educational system in Poland which emphasised the essential core of the Catholic ideal that is the idea of "God-Human"³⁶. In a different article he developed the current and important issue of that time which concerned the relationship between the nature and the supernatural, the relationship between the will and grace and between the inherent means of education and the supernatural means in the educational process. This was the answer to spreading of the naturalistic course which posed a threat to the presence of Religious Education classes at schools and might have meant removing religious practice from the process of upbringing. He perceived upbringing as a process aiming at the internal harmonisation of the human powers that means submitting your passion to the rule of your intellect and will in order to achieve internal harmony between the physical and spiritual body powers and thus implement the main aim of the Christian education which is in God Who is the greatest good, truth and beauty as well as the eternal happiness of the man. Furthermore, he indicated the need for the complementarity of the state education and the religious education³⁷. He also worked on the lectures on pedagogy for students collected in a script³⁸.

Apart from the scientific disciplines indicated above, which were the subject of Father Sopoćko's research and which were his scientific legacy, he also conducted research and left a legacy in other disciplines of his priestly and pastoral as well as educational and social interests, which was reflected in numerous publications and dissertations. These include his active participation in the priestly formation which resulted in a series of dissertations devoted to the formation issues and published in "Wiadomości Archidiecezjalne Wileńskie" [The

³⁶ M. Sopoćko, *Polskie i katolickie ideały i systemy wychowawcze*, in: *Pamiętnik II Katolickiego Studium o wychowaniu* (Poznań: 1936), 169-198; *Polskie i katolickie ideały i systemy wychowawcze* (Poznań: 1936).

³⁷ M. Sopoćko, *Przyrodzone i nadprzyrodzone czynniki wychowania*, in: *Pamiętnik ósmego zjazdu w Częstochowie 15-17 IV 1936* (Kraków: 1937), 274-288; *Przyrodzone i nadprzyrodzone czynniki wychowania* (Kraków: 1937).

³⁸ M. Sopoćko, *Pedagogika* (Wilno: 1933).

Archdiocesan News in Vilnius] and the articles which concerned the general pastoral issues and those devoted to preaching³⁹. The educational and formational influence of Father Sopoćko also involved the lay people. It was revealed in the direct contact and cooperation with them but also in his publications which presented his intentions and aims and in which he chose religious, social and national subjects. His first works of this kind were the publications of diploma theses mentioned above, which were written during his University years in Warsaw: *Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna* [Alcoholism among the school youth]⁴⁰ and *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* [Family in the legislation on Polish soil]⁴¹ as well as the moral – religious chats for soldiers *Obowiązki względem Ojczyzny* [Duties towards my homeland]⁴². As a continuation of the last one Father Sopoćko published a dissertation *O obowiązkach społecznych* [About community duties] in Vilnius in 1931. According to the title he devoted it to the important issue of the civil duties towards the society. The reason why he took this subject was the need to make the general public aware of the existence of such duties which used to be seriously neglected according to the author. Among these he enumerated the duty to work. He strongly emphasised the need to strive for the basic social virtues such as justice, truthfulness, humbleness, love and friendship. These features contribute to the proper fulfilment of the social duties and protect from the vices of laziness and parasitism and thus they ensure the order and social development, peace in the family, in the society and in the state⁴³. Another dissertation of a similar educational and formational profile concerning the social life and the civic attitudes was the work called

³⁹ M. Sopoćko, “W jedności siła”, WAW 5(1931): 27-28; “W jedności siła”, ibidem: 44-45; “W jedności zbawienie”, ibidem: 58-59; “Sacerdos alter Christus”, ibidem: 75-76; “W jedności pomyślność”, ibidem: 90-91; “Lauda Sion Salvatore...”, ibidem: 141; “I zebrał się apostołowie... (Acts 15,6-12)”, ibidem: 186; “Na pasterkę”, ibidem: 294. “Christus factus est pro nobis... (Philippians 2,8)”, ibidem: 105-107; “Et principem fecit illum...”, WAW 6(1932) 149-152; “O czynną i ofiarną miłość kapłańską”, ibidem: 166-168; “Lauda Sion Salvatore...”, WAW 5(1931): 105-107; “Veni Creator Spiritus”, ibidem: 156-157; “Cogitationes Cordis eius in generationem et generationem”, ibidem: 171-172; “Pośrednictwo N.P. Maryi”, WAW 6(1932): 198-201; “Quam magnificata sunt opera tua...”, WAW 5(1931): 123-124; “Konferencja o św. Janie od Krzyża i mistyce”, WAW 5(1931): 267-268; “Ufność kapłana w miłosierdzie Boże”, *Głos Kapłański* 7-8(1939): 298-304; “Kapłan, jako szafarz Miłosierdzia Bożego”, *Głos Kapłański* 9(1939): 356-358; “Wspólnota Chrystusowa”, WAW 6 (1932): 292-295.

⁴⁰ M. Sopoćko, *Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna* (Warszawa: 1925).

⁴¹ M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* (Wilno: 1926).

⁴² M. Sopoćko, *Obowiązki względem Ojczyzny* (Warszawa: 1922).

⁴³ M. Sopoćko, *O obowiązkach społecznych* (Wilno: 1931).

Z zagadnień etycznych [Of the ethical issues] published in 1937. Father Sopoćko presented in it a lecture on the basic principles of ethical conduct. This publication resulted from the lack of unity in the society, in nation and in the state. Seeking the reasons of this condition, he indicated the loss of homogenous moral norms which would regulate the life and conduct of citizens. According to the Catholic teaching he indicated that the norm is inscribed into the human nature bestowed with intellect and freedom but still remaining dependent on God the Creator and the lawgiver. Human deeds should therefore be judged on the basis of such a norm. Then they will bear good fruit. Globally speaking, any human activity should be subordinate to the final aim which is bringing glory to the Creator as it is the man's personal happiness as his direct aim⁴⁴.

Furthermore, father Sopoćko published a dozen reviews for various publishers. They mainly concerned the fields of his scientific specializations that is pastoral theology, pedagogy, homiletics. They were reviews of books and articles. He earnestly evaluated works and their presentation emphasising their best qualities and encouraging to read them⁴⁵.

The teaching on Divine mercy and the apostolate of Divine mercy cult

Apart from the presented scientific and journalistic publications of Father Sopoćko which revealed his comprehensive engagement into scientific, pastoral, educational and social activity, he was also appreciated for his great contribution into spreading the truth about Divine mercy and its cult. The revelations of Sister Faustyna, whose confessor

⁴⁴ M. Sopoćko, *Z zagadnień etycznych* (Wilno: 1937).

⁴⁵ M. Sopoćko, Rec.: "Encyklopedia kościelna, vol. 33, Włocławek 1933", *Słowo* (1934) nr fasc. 12 X.; Rev.: "Homiletyka duszpasterska. (Zbiorowy podręcznik nauki kaznodziejskiej dla polskiego kleru). Kielce 1935", WAW 10 (1936): 17; Rev.: "A. Borowski: Warunkowe szafarstwo sakramentalne. Włocławek 1936", WAW 10 (1936): 358-359; Rev.: "M. Klepacz, Kierunki organizacyjne oraz ideały wychowawcze we współczesnym szkolnictwie polskim. Katowice 1937", WAW 11 (1937): 369; Rev.: "P. Gantkowski, Technika żywej mowy. Kielce 1937", WAW 11 (1937): 117; AK 40 (1937): 531-532; *Przegląd Homiletyczny* 15 (1937): 241-242; Rev.: "W. Kochański, Przewodnik Drogi Krzyżowej w Kalwarii pod Wilnem. Wilno 1937", WAW 11 (1937): 201; Rev.: "K. Mazurkiewicz, Wychowanie w świetle chrześcijańskiej prawdy, Potulice 1938", AK 42 (1938): 199-201; *Gazeta Kościelna* 15 (1938): 45-46; *Przegląd Homiletyczny* 16 (1938): 280-181; WAW 12 (1938): 18; Rev.: "F. de Hovre, P. Tochowicz, Podstawy współczesnej pedagogiki, Włocławek 1938", WAW 12 (1938): 355-356; Rev.: "A. Borowski, Warunkowe szafarstwo sakramentalne. Włocławek 1936", AK 41 (1938): 94-95; Rev.: "W.F. Potempa, Więcej psychologii w duszpasterstwie czyli teologia pasterska w świetle psychologii, Włocławek 1938", WAW 12 (1938): 129.

he was, aroused his interest in this truth. He was zealously devoted to the apostolate of Divine mercy through teaching, spreading the cult, striving for the Church authorities for the approval of the cult. From the pre-war years he started to investigate the truth of Divine mercy, he published a series of works presenting both the truth and the introductions which contained the justification of introducing the cult of Divine mercy. The first article was called “Divine mercy” and it was published in the Archdiocesan News from Vilnius [Wiadomości Archidiecezjalne Wileńskie] in 1936 and at the same time in the compact publishing with the same title. Apart from the teaching on Divine mercy, both works indicate the need to admire God in particular for this feature of mercy, the very thought of it was put forth from the Bible and from the teaching of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church⁴⁶. During the next year he published a new article devoted mainly to the cause of God’s mercy cult and the holiday to celebrate it in the periodical ”Misterium Christi”⁴⁷. These first pioneer dissertations became the beginning of a numerous strand of publications devoted to this subject and published till the end of his life. During the war time he made copies and published a leading treaty in Latin which introduced the teaching on God’s mercy and the need for the cult: *De Misericordia Dei deque eiusdem festo instituendo. Tractatus dogmaticus ac liturgicus*⁴⁸. After the war he published next works which presented essential arguments, mainly pastoral and liturgical, for introducing the cult of Divine mercy. It also contained the teaching on Divine mercy presented in a brief way but right to the point and based on the Bible and on the teaching of the Church. He also introduced the case of the private revelations of Sister Faustyna in a proper way⁴⁹.

His further works written in 1950s and 60s were mainly focused on the biblical and theological development of the teaching on Divine

⁴⁶ M. Sopoćko, “Miłosierdzie Boże”, WAW 10 (1936): 44-46, 104-106, 118-121, 134-137, 152-155, 167-170, 181-185; M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boże. Studium teologiczno-praktyczne* (Wilno: 1936).

⁴⁷ M. Sopoćko, “Idea Miłosierdzia Bożego w liturgii”, *Misterium Christi* 8(1937): 102-116.

⁴⁸ M. Sopoćko, *De Misericordia Dei deque eiusdem festo instituendo. Tractatus dogmaticus ac liturgicus* (Vilnae: 1940). The treaty was printed after the Second World War on the initiative of cardinal Augusta Hlonda, the Primate of Poland: M. Sopoćko, *De misericordia Dei deque eiusdem festo instituendo. Tractatus dogmaticus ac liturgicus* (Varsaviae: 1947).

⁴⁹ M. Sopoćko, *O święto Najmiłosierniejszego Zbawiciela* (Poznań – Warszawa – Lublin: 1947); *Miłosierdzie Boże jedyną nadzieją ludzkości*, edition 1 (Londyn: 1949); edition 2 (Londyn: 1949); *Poznajmy Boga w Jego Miłosierdziu. Rozważania o Miłosierdziu Bożym na tle litanii* (Poznań: 1949); *Godzina święta i Nowenna o Miłosierdzie Boże nad światem* (Poznań – Warszawa – Lublin: 1949).

mercy. His arguments for introducing the holiday and the devotion were also introduced again in the later years but only as a way of repeating and strengthening the previous requests. Some of his works were translated into different languages at that time.

The basic work of Father Sopoćko at that time was the 4-volume work called *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego* [Divine Mercy in His Work]. Further volumes appeared during the years 1959-1967. In these volumes he presented the revelation of Divine mercy in the work of God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit Who is present and active in the Church now. The fourth volume was devoted to showing the presence of the mystery of Divine mercy in the liturgy, showing Virgin Mary as the Mother of mercy, Divine mercy in Christian education and in the pastoral mission of the Church⁵⁰. Even at the end of his life he published a few articles devoted to the issue of approval of the cult of Divine mercy in the Church⁵¹. Many of his works containing the basic dissertation *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego* [Divine mercy in His work] were translated into different languages.

The serious engagement of Father Sopoćko into the apostolate of Divine mercy, which was reflected in his scientific and journalistic activity, is the reason to acknowledge him as a person particularly meritorious for the idea of Divine mercy, as the author and promoter of the cult of Divine mercy. Inspired by the revelations of Sister Faustyna, after his own private recognition and conviction of the beneficial effect of the truth about Divine mercy and its cult on Christian life, he was the first person to take up this challenge. His literary legacy, apart from the other forms of apostolate, played an important role in the preparation of the final approval of Divine mercy cult.

The issues concerning marriage and the family in the doctoral thesis: reasons, conditions and the circumstances of writing it

The best validation of the scientific activity is putting it in practice in everyday life, in service for the man, for societies, for nations, in the religious dimension to religious communities, in Christianity – for the

⁵⁰ M. Sopoćko, *Miłosierdzie Boga w dziełach Jego*, vol. I (Londyn: 1959); vol. II (Rzym – Paryż – Londyn: 1962); vol. III (Rzym – Paryż – Londyn: 1962); vol. IV (Paryż: 1967).

⁵¹ M. Sopoćko, “Duch liturgii Niedzieli II Wielkanocy”, *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą* 22(1971): 37-52; *Duch liturgii II Niedzieli Wielkanocy*, w: *Powołanie człowieka. “...bo Jego miłosierdzie na wieki” (Ps 135)*, vol. 2, ed. L. Balter, (Poznań – Warszawa: 1972), 377-392; “Duch liturgii Niedzieli II Wielkanocy”, *Msza Święta* 29(1973): 88-89

Church. Such a reference can easily be found in the intentions and in the activity of Father Sopoćko as a priest and as a pastor, as a theologian, a pedagogue and the man of science. Since his childhood years, due to his religious and moral education, he was able to discover the meaning of the creative effort in life and of gaining knowledge in order to shape his future and fulfil his life tasks also in the relationship with other people and with the people from various communities in which he would live. Already in his childhood he chose his life target – his vocation for priesthood and service as a priest and everything was based upon moral principles coming from faith, Decalogue, love for his homeland. The difficult life conditions combined with work on the farm since his early childhood, remote education opportunities due to high costs and the limitations forced upon by the czar's administration, on the one hand tempered him in life but on the other hand they were not positive but they motivated for a greater cry out to God and for the stronger trust in His care. When he was finally able to start his education at schools, Michał studied diligently because it was necessary for him as he wanted to be admitted to the seminary. And the more knowledge he gained, the more zealous he was to explore it for his better development as he realized that education would give him better life perspectives. He was open to other people and he cared for them which was another reason to gain more knowledge, to be able to share the effects of his education with others and to take more life tasks also in the service for others.

Everything that Michał was planning to achieve and his life targets before he was admitted to the seminary, started to realize. After graduating from the city school in Oszmiana, he was invited by the parson in his home parish Zabrzeż to start teaching children in the new parish school. At that point he could share the gained knowledge with the children and make a good use of it. Then his pedagogical interests arouse. He wanted to gain the skills to properly carry out teaching and organize the process methodologically. This is what he wrote about teaching at school: "It was so nice to work here, the work was full of faith and enthusiasm; we created various projects, plans concerning the organization the Polish education and the method of teaching which I did not know at that time"⁵². When he arrived in Vilnius in the dormitory to prepare himself to join the seminary, he met there an exemplary home-room teacher Józef Zmitrowicz, who awoke his passion for teaching and became his role model of a home-room teacher. After graduating from the seminary and being ordained to the priesthood, he was sent to the parish of Taboryszki. There he zealously entered into his priestly ministry and into

⁵² M. Sopoćko, *Dziennik*, 70-71.

education, he started a few country schools and collected the teaching staff providing for their proper pedagogical preparation. In order to achieve that, he organized various methodical courses. It all helped him to recognise and discover the value of specialist knowledge, and, in case of pedagogy, in order to raise the level of teaching and education. He also felt the need to develop his theological knowledge, also within the pastoral scope, in order to fulfil his priestly ministry more effectively. The gained knowledge helped in the more comprehensive undertaking of the challenges brought by time and life. This visible challenge in Taboryszki, which he took, consisted in an urgent need to teach children and young people after the period of imposed restrictions under the rule of the czar. This experience from Taboryszki motivated him even more to take up the theological studies at the Warsaw University as well as in the Pedagogical Institute. These were not the studies taken up to gain knowledge out of personal ambitions, but the choice resulted from the practical life needs in order to do his priestly ministry and pastoral ministry in a more effective way also in the educational and pedagogical dimension. Later in life, when he became a lecturer in the seminary and at the Faculty of Theology of the Vilnius University, one of his students gave a significant testimony about Sopoćko's teaching intentions. In his memoirs the student presented his professor who was teaching for life and not for knowledge. The testimony confirmed the motivation which accompanied Father Sopoćko in taking up his studies and during his whole life and in the priestly and educational tasks which he performed.

The indicated motivation to develop and deepen his knowledge and skills was revealed during his studies in Warsaw. Sopoćko proved to be open to the challenges of the changing times. The problems and needs which appeared on his way influenced the profile of his education and the range of his research. While studying at the Pedagogical Institute he addressed the issue of risk of alcohol addiction among young people. He encountered this problem while working as a military chaplain when he was taking care of orphans from families of soldiers. The research which he conducted confirmed the scale of the threat. His dissertation was published and thus this problem was made public. The society was sensitized to the threat for the Homeland according to Father Sopoćko's intention when he released the research results. Moreover, Father Sopoćko sent his dissertation to the members of the Sejm of resurgent Poland asking them to introduce an anti-alcoholism legislation. The members of the Sejm established a special committee to fight alcohol addiction and invited Father Sopoćko to the committee's meetings. Through engaging the Prime Minister and

a few members of the Sejm and the anti-drinking activist the proper legislation was finally introduced⁵³.

The way he could sympathise with the current needs, challenges, recognition of the circumstances in order to take proper practical actions to meet the challenges were revealed in his research on the family and in the elaboration on these issues in his doctoral thesis. Although Father Sopoćko pointed out that the subject of the thesis had been suggested by rev. prof. Franciszek Jehliczka, who was his promoter, it does not prove that he himself did not notice the need to write such a dissertation and its value. His engagement into the research and into writing the thesis proved his motivation. He definitely wanted to do something for the good of marriage and the family, even more as he as a priest and a pastor must have known the family issues, its value and role in the society. Through his research under the guidance of a distinguished professor, rev. prof. Jehliczka, he could more precisely contribute to promote the proper Christian way of perceiving the family and emphasise its position and role in rebuilding Homeland which had been in the partition of occupants. Rev. prof. Jehliczka, who was a Czech by origin, was described by Father Sopoćko as a theologian with thorough knowledge, deep thoughts, a long-established virtue, who was the author of numerous works on the moral theology. With such a distinguished guide and master, Father Sopoćko zealously devoted himself to his work on the doctoral thesis and, as he mentioned, spent a great amount of time on preparing it.

The main aim of the dissertation was to present the Christian worldview and the principles of the Christian faith, and further on, the teaching of the Catholic Church on the need to base the state law on the family on the natural law inscribed into the creation by the Creator and complement it with the revealed God's law. The constituted state law must involve the natural law or renounce it without violation of the essence of marriage and the family with their aims and rights and welfare. It was a pressing problem and it was necessary to remind and indicate this connection between the state legislation and the natural law and the principles of the Christian morality as at that moment the Sejm was working on the family act. As Father Sopoćko emphasised in the introduction to his doctoral thesis, at that moment the press spread the information about the trend to depart from the Polish tradition and from the customs concerning the family which used to be based

⁵³ M. Sopoćko, *Wspomnienia*, 194; M. Sopoćko, "Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna", *Przegląd Pedagogiczny* (1924), fasc. 4: 244-289; M. Sopoćko, *Alkoholizm a młodzież szkolna* (Warszawa: 1925); M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* (Wilno: 1926).

on the natural law and on the divine law. He did not feel entitled to instruct the members of the committee who were preparing the act or to give them indications, but he was really concerned to draw the attention of citizens that is the voters, and mostly the members of the Sejm and to remind that the law cannot be adopted in the by any available means but it must be adopted in accordance with the eternal law inscribed in the nature of the creation, which regulated the life of the family and its members⁵⁴.

The main assumptions and contents of the work, essential findings and conclusions

Father Sopoćko studied applicable legal codes in each individual partition as far as the issues regarding marriage and the family were concerned, with regard to the observance of the natural law and the moral law taught in the Catholic Church. Then he indicated the possibilities to harmonise the civil law with the moral teaching, tradition and customs preserved through centuries in Poland since the introduction of Christianity. In this respect he respectively dealt with understanding the concept of the family, of its role and meaning in the society as well as of its legitimate rights owed and binding. Next he dealt with the concept of marriage, with the problem of indissolubility of marriage and its unity and with the mutual relationships of the spouses with regard to their rights and duties as well as with the property law concerning the spouses. In the end he worked on the issue of the relationships between parents and children with regard to their mutual duties and fundamental right⁵⁵.

The conducted research indicated that the legislations existing on the Polish soil under partitions consisted of numerous contradictions, mainly they were inconsistent with the natural law and with the Polish traditional customs. However, the situation also had some positive aspects like some regulations favourable for the family welfare and in accordance with the Christian principles⁵⁶.

Father Sopoćko noticed that in the process of standardization of the law which concerned marriage and the family, with the inalienable principle of basing the legislation on the natural law, on the positive revealed law and on the formerly Polish common law, there was a threat of giving in to the influence of the contemporary anti-ethical

⁵⁴ M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich*, 5.

⁵⁵ See M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich* (Wilno: 1926).

⁵⁶ M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich*, 150.

currents, of the excessive interference and of subordinating the family under the state's law and separating the school from the Church and the Church from the state. Therefore, he indicated that getting over these harmful trends can be done through the faithful respecting the principle that the human law must not be established freely but it must be based on the eternal law that is the one inscribed into the nature of the creation in the natural law. This law was confirmed in the revealed science, guarded by the Catholic Church, when it is preserved in the state legislation, it will become the guarantee of the proper regulations. On the basis of this law, legislators can build the legal standards which, however, must never be contradictory to the law.⁵⁷

As it was noticed earlier Father Sopoćko undertook the challenges of time, responded to them with his practical approach. Like in the case of his dissertation on alcoholism among young people, he consistently presented his research to the groups working on the anti-drinking act, he published his doctoral thesis in 1926 and sent it to the people who were preparing the codification of the law concerning marriage and the family and to the Sejm members. He enclosed his request for the faster establishment of the family act. He motivated his request with the phenomenon of the increase in the amount of problems in families while it was the condition of the family which mainly influences the education of the young generation of Poles, as he convinced the addressees. However, his petition did not bring the expected result. After many years he wrote in his memoirs from the past [*Wspomnienia z przeszłości*]: "Unfortunately my request was a lone voice in the wilderness. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland did not establish or even prepare such an act throughout the whole interwar period"⁵⁸.

The prerequisites of the timeliness of Father Sopoćko's dissertation for the contemporary issues concerning marriage and the family

The issues presented by Father Sopoćko in his doctoral thesis almost one hundred years ago, regarding the legislation concerning marriage and the family, which were popular at that time, have not devalued their currency. Making a reference of the state legislation to the natural law and to the revealed law of God concerning marriage and the family as well as regarding other dimensions of citizens' lives: their social, economic, political life should definitely be reflected nowadays.

⁵⁷ M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich*, 151-152.

⁵⁸ M. Sopoćko, *Wspomnienia*, 194.

Unfortunately, there are more and more obstacles on the way. The ones which were indicated by Father Sopoćko in his time have not ceased to exist but on the contrary they have increased. In this respect we can talk about the currency of Father Sopoćko's dissertation in contemporary times. And the principle about the reference of all the constituted laws to the natural law mentioned by him still requires to be defended and voted for. It is also a great challenge to convince others and to justify the existence of the natural law.

The insights expressed by Father Sopoćko in his dissertations, concerning the role and the meaning of the family for nations, states and smaller communities and for the civilisations which were being shaped in the history of humanity, are everlasting and more vivid. The first insight concerns the fact that the family is a foundation of each society, particularly of a state, and its natural laws, which are based on the natural law, constitute the basis of the state's laws and the guarantee for the rights to be preserved. Thus the situation requires a perfect harmony between the family and the state: the family should educate the citizens and the state should protect the rights of the family and enable the family to fulfil its tasks⁵⁹. Secondly, as a great warning for the contemporary European civilisation and for the similar civilisation and states. Where the natural rights of the family were not protected and where the family was finally destroyed, even the most prosperous state collapsed⁶⁰. The next insight about the reasons for dissolution of marriage is also very convincing. The spouses do not break up because they were mismatched but because they were careless while contracting marriage. Divorces do not change the characters of the spouses and it is not possible to build a new proper life in a new relationship without a personal change. It is difficult to cure or change the immature attitudes of the spouses, thus the way to protect the society from the frequency of divorces is to take care of the prosperous families which will spread the proper educational atmosphere⁶¹.

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⁵⁹ M. Sopoćko, *Rodzina w prawodawstwie na Ziemiach Polskich*, 149.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 150.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 152-153.

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