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Marriage as a vocation

Marriage is a profound communion of life and love established by the Creator and normalized by His laws. It is the strongest bond that can exist between a man and a woman. The concept of marriage is closely connected with its monogamous character. Spouses in the sacrament of marriage get the proper grace from Christ, designed to improve love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. Nowadays marriage is experiencing a crisis. Therefore, it would be presented not only as a covenant community or an institution, but as a vocation. The vocation is an act of summoning, which involves the mission consisting in completing a given task. The essence of a Christian vocation stemming from baptism is a dialogue of the freedom of God and a man, preceded by the choice of the person and commission of the given mission. A sacramental marriage is the way of bounding with God and following Christ, that is the most appropriate way to holiness for spouses. Therefore, an important message for a modern man is to present marriage as a vocation that is addressed to two people, which should be accepted by them and implemented. This situation also requires a change of the pastoral perspective and new opening not only for spouses, for whom marriage is a way to bind with God, but there is the needed to be opened to those for whom marriage is only the fulfillment of the requirements by the Church to get married.

Key words: vocation of marriage, calling man to existence, vocation to love, vocation to the sacramental relationship, vocation for procreation, vocation to community and to the communion of persons, vocation to the apostolate, the call to holiness.

Introduction

Marriage is a unique human relationship which requires total commitment¹. It does not allow for any withholding or reserving any part of oneself, neither for the possibility to change the decision in the future (see FC 11). Beginning the life in marriage man should be aware that "the intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent"². In such a way, according to God's will, in contracting marriage a permanent institution is created in the society³.

Marriage is currently undergoing a crisis which has been increased because of the development of a theory which separates man from God the Creator. The theory is manifested in the fact that man rejects God's law although it does not destroy him, nor it deprives him of any freedom, but on the contrary, it gives it back to him and shows him the world of values. As a result of rejecting God's law more and more marriages and families are being broken although they should constitute the warranty of the integral education of children and young people, owing to the indissolubility of marriage⁴. Therefore, in such a reality, the true and honest doctrine on marriage and family should be proclaimed as "Since the Creator of all things has established the conjugal partnership as the beginning and basis of human society," the family is "the first and vital cell of society" (see FC 86)⁵.

¹ See "Familiaris consortio", the post-conciliar apostolic exhortation of John Paul II about the tasks of the family in the contemporary world (November 22, 1981), nr 13 [further FC].

² „Gaudium et spes”, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (December 7, 1965), nr 48 [further GS].

³ K. Wolski, *Małżeństwo*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, E. Ozorowski ed., Warszawa – Łomianki 1999, p. 228.

⁴ See A. Sarmiento, *Małżeństwo chrześcijańskie. Podręcznik teologii małżeństwa i rodziny*, transl. P. Rak, Kraków 2002, p. 15.

⁵ Marriage and the family are institutions which are different in their nature, although they are strongly connected. The family that is not rooted in a regulated marriage initiates various ways of coexistence i.e. civil marriages or homosexual marriages. Marriage which is not family oriented excludes the elements which constitute the family, such as indissolubility and procreation. Therefore, marriage eventually shapes and profiles the family. See *Przyszłość ludzkości idzie przez rodzinę*, W. Szewczyk ed., Warszawa 1992, p. 90.

The vocation of marriage

One of particular features of the vocation of marriage is that it is intended for two persons and it is accepted and realised by them. For man and woman the awareness of the marriage and family vocation means the deep community of life and love, constituted by God and regulated by His laws. The vocation of marriage is inscribed in the nature of man and woman who are created by God Himself. It is confirmed in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* proclaiming that "man was created "to the image of God," [he] is capable of knowing and loving his Creator" (GS 12). The dialogue of freedom between God and man, which is preceded by the voluntary choice of man and by providing him with his mission, constitutes the essence of the Christian vocation⁶.

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Vocation, that is the act of calling, is connected with the mission. It consists in fulfilling a certain task by the person called, after equipping him with proper skills and abilities. In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis emphasizes that: "Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church"⁷. Therefore, the response to the calling should be a free choice of the called man and it should be accompanied by a responsible action leading to the realization of the vocation⁸.

Presentation of the vocation of marriage must not exclude its greatness, holiness and beauty. Especially that the mystery of man is explained in the mystery of the Incarnate Word. In the sacrament of marriage Christ bestows spouses with proper grace which is intended to improve their love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. "By this grace they "help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children"⁹. Spouses are also called by Christ to constantly cooperate with the grace which they receive in the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist¹⁰. The nuptial relationship of Christ and His Church realized in the Holy Spirit

⁶ See. S. Hareźga, *Powołanie*, [in:] *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, E. Gigilewicz ed., Lublin 2013, vol. 16, col. 142 [further EK].

⁷ "Amoris laetitia", the post-conciliar apostolic exhortation of Father St. Francis, *About love in the family* (April 8, 2016), nr 72 [further AL].

⁸ See E. Kasjaniuk, *Powołanie Boże*, EK Vol. 16, col. 147.

⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, Poznań, 1994, no. 1642 [further CCC].

¹⁰ Cf. J. Biedroń, *Bóg jako cel w urzeczywistnianiu się komunii osób*, „Studia Sandomierskie” 9(2002), p. 25-32.

is the spiritual model for marriage (Eph 5,21-33)¹¹. It is Christ in the epiphany of the mystery of the Father and His love Who shows man his greatest vocation (see GS 22)¹².

Marriage is meant as a mystery through its connection with the love of Christ and His Church. Therefore, Christ is shown as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride, Whom He married by the power of the Holy Spirit. Love and unity of marriage are implemented through the love and unity of Christ and His Church¹³. In Christ God reveals and implements the community vocation of man, which is the vocation of marriage and family life (see GS 32). It is the sacramental marriage which is the way of being in a relationship with God, following Christ – the most proper way for the spouses to approach holiness¹⁴.

Referring to the vocation of marriage we should pay attention to the fact that it is a gift and a task. Therefore, for the more complete understanding, we should refer to such elements of the vocation as: the vocation to exist, to love, to the sacramental relationship, to transmission of life, to communion and community of persons, to apostolate and the vocation to holiness¹⁵.

Calling into existence

For a Christian who is learning the mysteries of marriage and who treats marriage as a vocation, the theological aspect of this reality is of great importance. The Creator calls man into existence, which becomes a way of living and of uniting with Him. In such a way God bestows man with the human nature which gives particular emphasis to the intimate relationships of femininity and masculinity as well as to the vocation directed at creating a family¹⁶.

In the Holy Scripture this aspect is presented in two descriptions of creating man. The first description underlines that God, while calling a

¹¹ “Lumen gentium”, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (November 21, 1964), nr 41 [further LG].

¹² J. Bajda, *Powołanie małżeństwa i rodziny*, Łomianki 2010.

¹³ J. Janicki, E. Sztarfrowski, A. Zuberbier, *Małżeństwo*, [in:] *Słownik teologiczny*, A. Zuberbier ed., Katowice 1998, p. 273-274.

¹⁴ The Polish Episcopal Conference, *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie*, Warszawa 2009, p. 25, nr 30 [further SPMR].

¹⁵ See K. Wolski, *Powołanie małżeńskie*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 358. cf. A. Skreczko, *Teologia małżeństwa*, [in:] *Troska Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce o małżeństwo i rodzinę w okresie wielkiej nowenny (1957-1966). Studium teologiczno-pastoralne*, Białystok 2002, p. 185-245.

¹⁶ K. Wolski, *Powołanie małżeńskie*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 358.

human being into existence, distinguished him among other creatures (Gen 1, 26-28). In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis emphasises that the Book of Genesis presents the human couple in their fundamental reality "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1, 27). And so, unexpectedly, it is the couple of "male and female" that explains the parallel "the image of God" (AL 10).

As a result of being created in the image of God and in his being oriented to Him, man was put in the centre of creation. The second description (Gen 2,4-25) reminds that man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined [to his wife]¹⁷. Marriage contracted between a man and a woman is the symbol of the covenant contracted between God and people. Man created "in the image of God" (Gen 1,27; 2-7) was called into existence in order to cooperate with God in transmitting life and making the land subjected. God, while creating man out of love, calls him to love and not to loneliness (see GS 12). That is the "fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (CCC 1604). Creating man and woman God the Creator made them equal in their dignity but different in some aspects. The differences between man and woman make them complementary to each other as, among any other creatures, only man and woman recognise each other as their peers capable of supporting each other¹⁸. However, the resemblance to God does not absolutize either man or woman. It is revealed in the coexistence and complementarity and it helps them to achieve the fullness of humanity¹⁹. According to God's plan, man and woman become responsible for their own development and for striving to create a valuable relationship. It can only be done through the proper recognition of one's own vocation²⁰.

Presenting marriage as a vocation we should also refer to the texts of the New Testament. Although they were created in different cultural and religious contexts, the perspective of salvation concerns the same "homo historicus". There is, after all, one God's plan for man and for marriage. It is realized in striving for unity, and it particularly concerns man, as he was distinguished among other creatures. In His

¹⁷ J. Bajda, *Rodzina miejscem Boga i człowieka*, Łomianki 2005, p. 195-196.

¹⁸ J. Miras, J. I. Bañares, *Małżeństwo i rodzina. Wprowadzenie teologiczne*, transl. B. Jakubowski, Poznań 2009, p. 12.

¹⁹ M. Filipiak, *Biblijne podstawy teologii małżeństwa*, „Życie i Myśl” 30:1980, f. 3, p. 14.

²⁰ G. Pyżlak, *Recepcja przygotowania do małżeństwa w świetle badań narzeczonych*, Lublin 2007, p. 50.

teaching, Christ recalls the fundamental features of marriage such as unity and indissolubility. This is the order established at the beginning, therefore, these features must not be changed. Although the original sin contributed to the distortion of God's plan towards marriage, it has not been changed and it preserved its relevance and validity²¹. As we read in the Catechism of the Catholic Church "the order of creation persists, though seriously disturbed" (CCC 1608).

Furthermore, the vocation of marriage is also aimed at creating a family. The family is seen as a foundation of the society as it constitutes a community which combines social functions and which should implement them. In His apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis pays attention to the fact that "The family is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one" (AL 276). In a well-functioning family a child shares the responsibility of cooperation with others. It is in the family as well where the child develops kindness and empathy when he or she is loved and properly educated²².

Vocation to love

The vocation of marriage should refer to the role of love in marriage. Documents of the Second Vatican Council teach about the value of the personal conjugal love. They indicate its personalistic dimension, as it is directed from one person to another at the spiritual as well as the physical level (see GS 49)²³. God created man out of love and to His image (see FC 11). Therefore, love results from the divine source and it is confirmed in the description of the first human couple existing. It is so strong that "a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2,24). God is the origins of this love as He, as the first one, loved man (see 1J 4,19). God's love is revealed as He sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him (1J 4,9). Jesus Christ has become the Herald of

²¹ J. Niewęglowski, *Małżeństwo i rodzina według nauki Kościoła katolickiego*, [in:] *Małżeństwo i rodzina w życiu i rozwoju człowieka*, K. Gryżenia ed., Warszawa 2009, p. 48-49.

²² E. Leszczuk, *Wychowanie prospołeczne*, [in:] *Wychowanie w rodzinie chrześcijańskiej*, F. Adamski ed., Kraków 1982, p. 391-401.

²³ See R. Sztuchmiller, *Miłość małżeńska w dyskusjach Soboru Watykańskiego II*, [in:] *Małżeństwo – przymierze miłości*, J. Misiurek, W. Słomka eds., Lublin 1995, p. 39-55.

God's love and He set the perfect example to man on how to combine his love for the good of God and of man²⁴.

The concept of love is connected with a wide variety of meanings. In a similar way we can express the conjugal love, which is mostly meant in the organic sense, as a relationship based on emotions, that is as a physical-sexual inclination. However, having in mind the increasing plague of divorce and "the so-called free love and other disfigurements" (GS 47) the Second Vatican Council calls fiancées and spouses to revive and strengthen their engagement with pure love and their marriage with indivisible love (cf. GS 49). For the spouses love should be real, eminently human, as it is interpersonal and it is meant for the good of the whole person. Love which contains both human and supernatural factors is superior to the "mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away" (GS 49).

In marriage meant as the vocation of man, attention is paid to the human love which is both sensual and spiritual. These two areas of the activity of love are very important in shaping man's act of free will. Love recognizes equality of people and it respects human dignity, excluding the possibility of using the person in order to achieve one's goals²⁵. Love which is created in such a way is mature and it allows to accept the other person the way he or she really is, to take care of him or her in order to implement the undertaken life tasks together²⁶.

Conjugal love, as a gift from the Creator for man, possesses its source value which has not been essentially changed, even by redemption of Christ. After the act of creation of man the value was mutilated, but Christ restored its original beauty and chastity (cf. GS 48). Therefore, in the document of the Polish Episcopal Conference *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* bishops indicate that it is necessary to help particularly those threatened with divorce so that they would be able to return to their original love. While the people who "enter life" must be demanding with themselves, especially when they are planning to get married and start a family (see SPMR 10).

In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis claims that conjugal love combines all the aspects of conjugal life. As a dynamic process, it is gradually enriched with God's gifts, and in this way it is

²⁴ Cz. Murawski, *Małżeństwo i rodzina jako wspólnota w Duchu świętym*, [in:] idem, *Teologia małżeństwa i rodziny w nauczaniu biskupów polskich 1945-1980*, Sandomierz 1988, p. 130-131.

²⁵ See Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*. To bishops, priest and deacons, consecrated persons and all the lay faithful on Christian love, Kraków 2008, p. 15-17, no. 5.

²⁶ W. Pluta, *Podręcznik duszpasterstwa młodych małżeństw i rodzin*, Gorzów Wielkopolski 1971, p. 61.

enduring and “Its essence derives from our human nature and social character” (AL 131)²⁷. Love makes man resemble God. Spouses who need each other to achieve spiritual-physical unity, are an expression of love meant in such a way and they become the image of loving God and, like Him, the source of new life²⁸.

Sacramental relationship

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God is the Creator of monogamous marriage (cf. CCC 1603), that is an indissoluble union of one man and one woman, which is to last till the end of life. In God’s plans contracting marriage was possible thanks to the orderly nuptial love of man and woman. The original sin distorted the original God’s plans for marriage. The weakness of humans distorted God’s laws, both in the field of monogamy as well as indissolubility. Therefore, Christ in His teaching demanded people to return to the original nature of marriage and its qualities. He raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament of the New Covenant (see CCC 1617, 1127). From the beginning Christ showed the role for marriage and the family in His plan of salvation (see Eph 5,32). Teaching about marriage He quotes the words from the Book of Genesis adding: “a man shall leave (his) father and (his) mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (see. Mt 17,5; Mk 10,7; 5,31).

Baptism of the spouses is the foundation of the dignity of the sacrament of marriage, as it makes them irrevocably belong to the nuptial covenant of God and His Church (see Rom 11,29). In the sacrament of marriage Christ gives the man to the woman and the woman to the man in order to make them realize the mystery of salvation which the spouses are to spread all over the world. Therefore, the Second Vatican Council described the sacrament of marriage as a vocation which is meant as calling the spouses to maintain the adopted baptismal commitment²⁹. During Baptism a person is individually introduced into the nuptial relationship of Christ with His Church. While the nature of the sacrament of marriage consists in calling to the community (“as a couple”) realization of the promises made during the sacrament of

²⁷ W. Góralski, *Adhortacja apostolska „Amoris laetitia” papieża Franciszka. Prezentacja dokumentu z komentarzem do nn. 300-308*, Płock 2016, p. 18.

²⁸ Cf. R. Janiec, *Miłość jako istota wspólnoty małżeńskiej*, [in:] *Spółczesność i Rodzina: The Stalowa Wola studies of the Catholic University of Lublin*, 2008, no. 2, p. 68-78.

²⁹ Cz. Rychlicki, *Sakramentalny charakter przymierza małżeńskiego. Studium teologicznodogmatyczne*, Płock 1997, p. 324.

baptism³⁰. Pope John Paul II emphasized that marriage is the only sacrament which does not refer to the activity directed at achieving goals which are directly supernatural. Because of the nature of this relationship it is meant to aim at procreation and educating the off-spring³¹.

When referring to vocation and its realization in the life of man it must be underlined that marriage and the family are perceived not only in the human reality. In the document *Stużyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* Polish bishops pay attention to the fact that “the decision to contract sacramental marriage is not and must not be the choice of a proper place to make the ceremony more spectacular but it should correspond to the choice of lifestyle. That is because it is the answer to God’s call for man and woman” (SPMR 33). The spouses are the ministers of the sacrament and marriage is the sacramental sign from the moment when the marriage contract is created³². The first and immediate effect of marriage (*res et sacramentum*) is not supernatural grace itself, but the Christian conjugal bond (FC 13)³³. By the power of the sacrament the conjugal bond becomes a sacred bond and not only a natural bond as it used to be (see GS 48). Ignoring the bond of the baptised persons with God’s Mystery means disregarding the foundations of marriage (SPMR 28). Therefore, the essential qualities of the bond are endowed with a particular power. By the power of the sacrament of marriage Christian spouses express the mystery of unity and fertile love, render mutual help and service in their conjugal life, in procreation and educating the off-spring for their sanctification (LG 11). Therefore, instead of calling the relationship of two spouses “a church wedding”, we should rather call it “the sacrament of marriage” (see SPMR 28).

In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis emphasizes that “marriage is not something that happens once for all. Their union is real and irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the sacrament

³⁰ Cf. K. Glombik, *Sakrament małżeństwa w nauczaniu Josepha Ratzingera/ Benedykta XVI*, [in:] *Matrimonio et Familiae. Z problematyki małżeństwa i rodziny*, P. Landwójtowicz ed., Opole 2016, p. 59-77.

³¹ John Paul II, Address to the officials and advocates of the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, *Marriage and the family are inseparable* (1.02.2001), no. 8.

³² It is worth noticing that the practice of the Church and many authors treat marriage as a sacrament of two baptised persons. If only one of them or none of them is baptised and they are being baptised after contracting sacramental marriage, from the moment of baptism their marriage is raised to the dignity of a sacrament as well.

³³ Cf. “*Humanae vitae*”, the encyclical of Paul VI about the moral principles in the sphere of transmission of the human life (July 25, 1968), nr 9 [further HV].

of matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a lifelong project” (AL 218). The basic condition for man and woman to last in the sacrament of marriage is to care for their bonds with God and with the other spouse. It was God Whom the spouses called the witness and defender of their conjugal bond: ”what God has joined together, no human being must separate” (Mt 19, 6)³⁴.

Vocation for procreation

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Family based on marriage is the place meant by God for every human being who is born to this world (cf. HV 1). For this reason the community of the family constitutes a worthy environment to receive and protect a human being from the moment of conception to the natural death. Transmission of life is a personal act which defines the way of realizing parenthood as parents bring to life a person who is a separate being and who has his own dignity³⁵. In view of the cooperation between spouses and God in the act of procreation it should only take place in a monogamous and permanent marriage and it should be connected with the conjugal act which expresses love of the spouses. What is more, spouses should regard the respect for the human life in every stage of its development³⁶. The apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* further elaborates on this in the part which refers to the act of procreation indicating that ”between Christ and his Church, is fully realized in the union between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death and are open to the transmission of life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a leaven of new life for society” (AL 292).

However, the new mentality which rejects or distorts the truth about procreation has been currently spread under the influence of the great cultural crisis. The life of the contemporary man is permeated with the separation of sexuality from procreation due to the use of contraception and abortion. It results in depersonalisation and objectification of sexuality causing separation from the aspects which are essential for its full meaning such as dignity and the ability to be an authentic

³⁴ M. Dziewiecki, *Małżeństwo: sakrament miłości*, <http://diecezja.radom.pl/home-mainmenu-1/czytelnia/74-artykuy-rone-ale-ciekawe/377-maestwo-sakrament-mioci> (access 31.11.2016)

³⁵ Cf. J. Bajda, *Rodzicielstwo a odpowiedzialne planowanie rodziny*, [in:] *Teologia małżeństwa i rodziny*, vol. I, K. Majdański ed., Warszawa 1980, p. 105-119.

³⁶ W. Bołoz, *Prokreacja*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 368.

sign of conjugal love. Therefore, the Polish Episcopal Conference in the document *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* reminds that "the holiness of the human body is even more emphasised by the fact that although the sacrament of marriage is contracted by the words of the conjugal vows, marriage can only be fully constituted with a conjugal sexual act" (SPMR 61). *The Code of the Canon Law* states that the common life of spouses in its nature should aim at realization of two particular goals: the procreation and education of children according to the teaching of the Church (FC 14)³⁷. The Church supports Her teaching that the conjugal act is the only worthy way to transmit life (CCC 2376 n)³⁸.

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Out of love the family is called to be open to every person whom they are to treat as members of the family of God's children. In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* John Paul II indicated that "Fruitful married love expresses itself in serving life in many ways" (see FC 41). It also refers to the married couples who are not able to procreate. Such spouses should live a deeply conjugal life anyway both in the human and in the Christian perspective. They are to be shown various forms of engagement for the good of others, such as intense participation in the life of the parish as well as providing aid to large families³⁹.

Vocation to community and to the communion of persons

Family as a community participates in the nature of the Church. It is called "the community of faith, hope and love" which indicates the deeply theological nature of the community of persons in the Church (LG 8). Furthermore, the Church constitutes a family community called the community of life and love (GS 48). Speaking of the community of persons we should refer to the Holy Trinity as the basic example of the perfect unity of persons. It results in the fact that it is not possible to

³⁷ Code of the canon law, Poznań 1984, can. 226 § 2, can. 793 § 1.

³⁸ The Church opposes to the medically assisted procreation which consists in the intracorporeal artificial insemination (in vivo) and the extracorporeal insemination (in vitro) etc. The Church states that artificial insemination deprives the act of procreation of its natural integrity. It results from the fact that it is detached from the act of free will of the parents who decide to have a baby rejecting the sexual act which transmits life. See W. Bołoz, *Prokreacja*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 368.

³⁹ Cf. See the Conference of the Polish Episcopate, *Dyrektorium Duszpasterstwa Rodzin*, Warszawa 2003, p. 50, no. 67 [further DPC].

understand the meaning of the community of persons in the strictly contemporary categories⁴⁰.

Discussing the issue of marriage as a vocation it is necessary to indicate the communion of persons. On the basis of the biblical assignations on creating man and woman John Paul II used the comment which develops the vision of calling for the "communion of persons". He called this relationship *communio personarum*⁴¹. The notion *communio* expresses the form of a personal union which is different from a community in the way that in the community everything is common. While in the other community, the *communio*, it is about the way of being and acting of the persons. The Pope calls it a unity in which the two persons are the mutual gifts for each other. It means that every person selflessly exists for the other person through his or her life⁴².

God's love and the love of man to woman are the foundation of the conjugal communion. Man and woman are predestined to create *communio personarum*. It has the spiritual and corporeal dimensions and thanks to it spouses become "one flesh: (Gen 2,24). The communion of people consist in the community of the life of spouses and the community of conjugal love⁴³. The first one is realized through cohabitation, parental and educational duties, work and spending free time together etc. while the community of conjugal love enriches the community of people with mutual help and care for each other, with mutual presence and with the external expression of feelings, love and kindness⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ J. Bajda, *Powołanie do małżeństwa*, [in:] *Teologia małżeństwa i rodziny*, vol. 1, K. Majdański ed., Warszawa 1980, p. 99-100.

⁴¹ John Paul II, *List do rodzin Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II*, Wrocław 1998, p. 13, nr 6; K. Wojtyła, *Rodzina jako „Communio personarum”*. *Próba interpretacji teologicznej*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 83:1974, p. 347-361.

⁴² John Paul II, *Mężczyznę i niewiastę stworzył ich. Odkupienie ciała i sakramentalność małżeństwa*, Vatican 1986, p. 33; A. L. Szafranski, *Łaska sakramentu małżeństwa*, [in:] *Małżeństwo i rodzina w świetle nauki Kościoła i współczesnej teologii*, A. L. Szafranski ed., Lublin 1985, p. 99-120.

⁴³ In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis indicates the family communion. He states that "A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God" (AL 316). cf. J. Nagórny, *Małżeństwo i rodzina jako „communio personarum”*, [in:] *Człowiek. Miłość. Rodzina. Humanae vitae po 30 latach*, J. Nagórny, K. Jeżyna eds., Lublin 1999, p. 85-116.

⁴⁴ M. Ozorowski, *Komunia małżonków*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 198-199.

Vocation to the apostolate

Apostolate of the laity means the participation of the lay people in the saving mission of the Church through implementing this mission in Church and in the world⁴⁵. Marriage and the family are also present among the targets of apostolate as "since the Creator of all things has established conjugal society as the beginning and basis of human society and, by His grace, has made it a great mystery in Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5,32) [therefore,] the apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society"⁴⁶. Continuing the thought, *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* indicates that the life in marriage and in the family constitutes a perfect school of apostolate which permeates human life with Christian piety. While learning about their vocation spouses realize that they should "find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children" (LG 35).

Pastoral
theology

Spouses are threatened with rejecting the most precious values of marriage and therefore they need help and testimony of Christian married couples. Pope Paul VI indicated this aspect of married life in his teaching⁴⁷. Furthermore, in the document *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* the Polish Episcopal Conference emphasizes that the Catholic family should set example to the families who do not believe as well as to those Christian families who do not live according to their faith. The document adds that "everybody who watches spouses and their relationships with their children and with the grandparents should always be impressed by the greatness of a Christian family. Family life should bring hope and power to the families in crisis and it should call the erring ones to repentance" (SPMR 129)⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ W. Przygoda, *Apostolstwo świeckich*, [in:] *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, R. Kamiński, W. Przygoda, M. Fiałkowski eds., Lublin 2006, p. 70; B. Mierzwiński, *Apostolat rodzinny*, [in:] *Słownik małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 22.

⁴⁶ The Second Vatican Council, Decree on the apostolate of the laity *Apostolicam actuositatem* (18.11.1965), no. 11.

⁴⁷ Paul VI, *Speech to the Equipes Notre-Dame* (22.09.1976), p. 31.

⁴⁸ *Directory for the pastoral care of the family* indicates the importance of the preparation of the family to the apostolate through proper formation. It should be implemented in two directions: the family should be the object and the agent of evangelisation. In the first case the formation of the family concerns the Word of God in the life of the family, the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation in the life of the spouses etc. (see DPC 51-59). The other direction of formation concerns such issues as: The family and their children, The family and the elderly and the sick, The family and children with problems. Etc. (see DPC 60-65).

What is more, in their teaching the Popes John Paul II and Pope Francis also indicate the apostolate for young spouses. In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* John Paul II emphasized that providing help to married couples in discovering and experiencing their new vocation and mission is one of the most important tasks of the members of the local ecclesial community. These indications of the Pope were addressed to young married couples who, in a context of new values and new responsibilities, are exposed to "to possible difficulties, such as those created by adaptation to life together or by the birth of children"⁴⁹, especially in the first years of marriage. The assistance of experienced married couples will be most effective in helping young married couples⁵⁰.

Continuing the teaching of John Paul II on young married couples, Pope Francis indicates the need for pastoral accompaniment which should be taken after the celebration of the sacrament of marriage (see AL 223). Holy Father Francis indicates the parish as the place where "experienced couples can help younger couples, with the eventual cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities" (AL 223).

Spouses are called to implement the apostolate within the conjugal-family community. They are to be apostles for one another and for the children, they should interact through the word but in particular through the example of Christian life expressed in praising God, practising their faith, love and service in everyday situations. Therefore, it should be indicated that family is built on the sacrament of marriage which enables Christian parents and their children to live the life according to the apostolate of the laity, to proclaim the Kingdom of God in the Church and in the world (FC 47)⁵¹.

The call to holiness

The call to holiness is addressed to everyone, however, at the same time, it is a personal vocation. Therefore, every baptised person can

⁴⁹ E. Antonelli, *Christian family as the subject of evangelisation*, The closing speech at the International Congress „Christian family as the subject of evangelisation” organized by the Pontifical Council for the Family in Rome (25-27.11.2010), „Sprawy Rodziny” 27:2011, no. 93, p. 62.

⁵⁰ Cf. G. Pyżlak, *Duszpasterstwo rodzin wobec młodych małżeństw*, [in:] *Matrimonio et Familiae. Z problematyki małżeństwa i rodziny*, p. 99-114.

⁵¹ T. Cuber, *Apostolat rodziny chrześcijańskiej w świetle dokumentów Kościoła współczesnego 1965-2013. Studium teologiczno-pastoralne*, Sandomierz 2013, p. 29.

and should treat his life as an occasion to answer God's call (cf. LG 39-40). Marriage is a substantiation of the Christian vocation by the grace of the sacrament of marriage. Therefore, in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* we can read that "Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life" (cf. LG 41).

In the document *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* the Polish Episcopal Council indicates that "It is not possible to understand marriage, the family nor any problem concerning human life if the truth that man and his vocation involve not only the natural but also the supernatural and eternal order is omitted" (SPMR 37). In order to understand the vocational dimension of marriage we should bear in mind that spouses constitute not two but one flesh. Marriage unites the persons who constitute it in every aspect of the conjugal relationship embedded in the vocation to love. The personal answer of each spouse to the call of baptism must not reject separate identities of husband and wife. Every spouse retains his or her individual nature before God, that is why everyone should personally answer the call to holiness. It is necessary to notice different kinds of piety of spouses or their ways of maintaining different spiritual traditions. It can result in the care of one spouse for the constant deepening of the Christian formation while the other spouse experiences weak faith or when he or she does not practise it⁵². In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* Pope Francis adds that "showing love for a spouse who is not a believer, bestowing happiness, soothing hurts and sharing life together represents a true path of sanctification. Love is always a gift of God. Wherever it is poured out, it makes its transforming presence felt, often in mysterious ways, even to the point that "the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband" (1 Cor 7,14; see AL 228). Therefore, it is the mission of spouses to help the unbelieving spouse to discover God's love while experiencing their common conjugal reality⁵³.

⁵² Cf. S. Wawrzyszkiewicz, *Małżeństwo drogą świętości. Duchowość małżeńska w doświadczeniu Equipes Notre-Dame*, Kraków 2005, p. 106 nn.

⁵³ See J. Miras, J. I. Bañares, *Małżeństwo i rodzina. Wprowadzenie teologiczne*, p. 163-164.

Conclusion

Civilizational changes in the recent decades have led to the crisis of marriage. It results in rejecting God's law which further causes the increase in the number of broken marriages and families. The Church, being the guardian of the sacramental marriage, shows it as the community of life and conjugal love constituted by God. Therefore, showing marriage as a vocation, which is meant for two persons and which should be accepted and realized by them, is a mission for the contemporary man. What is more, the situation requires the change of the pastoral approach and a new opening not only to the spouses for whom the conjugal relationship is a way of creating a bond with God, of following Christ and of approaching holiness. It is also necessary to be open to those for whom the conjugal relationship means only the fulfilment of the demands set by the Church in order to contract marriage.

MAŁŻEŃSTWO JAKO POWOŁANIE

Małżeństwo jest głęboką wspólnotą życia i miłości, ustanowioną przez Stwórcę i unormowaną Jego prawami. Jest najsilniejszą więzią, jaka może zaistnieć między kobietą i mężczyzną. Pojęcie małżeństwa łączy się ściśle z jego monogamicznym charakterem. Małżonkowie w sakramencie małżeństwa otrzymują od Chrystusa właściwą im łaskę, przeznaczoną do doskonalenia miłości i dla umacniania ich nierozzerwalnej jedności.

W obecnych czasach małżeństwo doświadcza kryzysu. Warto byłoby zatem ukazać je nie tylko jako przymierze, wspólnotę czy instytucję, ale jako powołanie. Powołanie jest aktem wezwania, które wiąże się z posłannictwem polegającym na wypełnieniu określonego zadania. Istotą powołania chrześcijańskiego wynikającego z chrztu św. jest dialog wolności Boga i człowieka, poprzedzony wyborem osoby i zleceniem jej misji. To właśnie sakramentalny związek małżeński jest sposobem związania się z Bogiem, pójścia za Chrystusem, czyli najwłaściwszą dla małżonków drogą kroczenia do świętości. Dlatego ważnym przesłaniem dla współczesnego człowieka jest ukazanie małżeństwa jako powołania, które skierowane jest do dwojga ludzi i powinno być przez nich przyjęte i realizowane.

Słowa kluczowe: powołanie małżeńskie, powołanie człowieka do istnienia, powołanie do miłości, powołanie do relacji sakramentalnej, powołanie do przekazywania życia, powołanie do wspólnoty i komunii osób, powołanie do apostołatu, powołanie do świętości.

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