

**CHRISTIAN MODEL OF PARENTHOOD IN THE OPINIONS
AND VIEWS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

JACEK DAJBROWSKI

Během období mládeží se odehrává nepřehledné množství důležitých událostí, které mají vliv na zbytek života, například navazování přátelství, postoje a chování k ostatním lidem, zklamání, prožitky štěstí a tragédie apod. Všechny výše uvedené situace ovlivňují proces rozhodování člověka po celý jeho život a mají vliv na podobu a stabilitu rodiny.

Klíčová slova: Křesťanství; mládež; rodičovství

Introduction

The greatly increasing transformation as well as liberalization of political, social, religious, sexual and cultural views oftentimes triggers a feeling of confusion and being lost. The lack of role models is what escalates this feeling. During the period of youth, many important events take place which affect the rest of life, including: making friendships, attitude and conduct towards other people, experiences of youth, disappointments, experiencing happiness and tragedy. All of the situations mentioned above affect the decision-making process throughout one's lifetime, which influence the shape and stability of a family.

Much attention was given to these issues as far as the Catholic Church's teaching is concerned. Taking into consideration its wide range of pastoral activity and multi-aspect perspective connected with parenthood and upbringing it would be wrong to deny that it performs a great role in creating specific opinions and views of people at all ages.

The aim of the following research was to show the state of consciousness of university students with reference to the model propagated by the Catholic Church, particularly the views of respondents on the planning and upbringing offspring. This aspect appears to be even more interesting considering the asserted decrease of the Catholic Church's popularity and teaching, even though the tendency to contract marriage in church has not really decreased.

Description of the Research Sample

The selection of a research sample was made at random but a survey containing 19 either open or closed-ended questions was the basic research tool.¹

The respondents came from various cities in Opolskie Voivodeship, however their common determiner was an affiliation to a group of university students. A definite majority of the respondents were women – 66.3%, 36.7% were men. In relation to the fact that all the respondents were full-time university students, they were all aged 19–25.

Regarding the subject of research the most important variable accepted was the ratio of the students to religion. Assuming that the consciousness of the respondents on the subject of the

¹ The research was carried through a casual interview. This method did not allow the collection of quantity data, however, it enabled the gaining of data showing determinants and circumstances shaping specific opinions and conducts, motivation and behavior of individual respondents. The casual interview was then an opinion poll amongst university students which was to help the author direct problems which were indicated in the basic research tool i.e. the survey.

model of a family introduced by the Catholic Church and the degree and way of its acceptance may be related to the level of their religiousness. They were therefore asked for a declaration of faith because religious self-identification presents a general picture of a role and importance of the religion in either one's or society's life. The results showed that:

55.0% of respondents maintained that they were **rather religious**. For 20.8% of respondents religion was an important issue since they defined themselves as **religious** – 10.8% or **very religious** – 10.0%. For 11.7% of respondents religion was not an important issue in personal life and this is an amount of people defining themselves as **unreligious**. 12.5% respondents could not define their attitude towards religion. As the results presented above show, a common respondent was between 22–24, they were 3rd or 4th year university students and were people for whom religion played an important role in life.

Analysis of Personal Research

The role and importance of a family in one's life has been the subject of discussion, research and either domestic or foreign publications for many years. Here different interpretations of its appropriateness arise. Vital laws and responsibilities of a marriage and family arising from the Catholic Church's teaching are frequently attacked by different groups and socio-political elites. In consequence, a cognitive disparity and world view clash is caused in social opinions and views. Causes of such reluctant or even hostile involvement of Christian values to a family life is worth analyzing and explaining.

The research carried out into university students was to answer the following question – the research problem: What is the awareness of university students in relation to having and upbringing children in a family living according to the Catholic Church doctrine?

Views of respondents on Responsibility of Transferring Life

The Church teaches that marriage in its nature is oriented to acts of marriage which in nature lead to the bearing of offspring.² This objective is the main law and aim of a husband and wife as it comes from the primal vocation, which is service to life.³

The Second Vatican Council teaches that birth and upbringing of children is an appropriate mission of a husband and wife which “they must perform in the sense of human and Christian responsibility”.⁴ The married couple would betray their mission if they did not want to have offspring. Those entering into marriage with such intention cannot marry each other.⁵

The Council's documents highlight a social and religious importance of giving birth by married couples because a new family is made of a Christian marriage, therefore new citizens. That is why the Church appeals to national authorities to secure a law of parents to give births.

As for its main responsibility, the country should acknowledge the security and development of the family. The country should also guard public morality and be in favour of family prosperity.⁶

² Code of Canon Law (CCL) (1984), canon 106, p. 1.

³ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church in the Contemporary World “*Gaudium et Spes*” (DCC) (1980), no 50, (07 December 1965); The Bible Millennium “Be fruitful and multiply” (chapter 1,28), 3rd Edition. Poznań–Warszawa.

⁴ DCC, no 50.

⁵ CCL, Canon 1101, p. 2; KRUKOWSKI, J.: *Wykluczenie potomstwa - Nowe tendencje w orzecznictwie Rotalnym. Kościół i Prawo*. T. 3. Lublin (1984), pp. 232–41.

⁶ The Second Vatican Council. CCL, “*Lumen Gentium*”, no 11, (21 November 1964); CCL no 52.

The law of giving birth not only is maintained without any significance to married couples, but is also spread throughout secular or church societies.

Married couples give proof of their maturity by an overwhelming desire to have children, their birth and upbringing. Quite often, unfortunately, the possibility of conceiving a child is treated as a danger which needs to be protected against by all means. As the earlier research results of the author showed, a relatively high percent of respondents support contraception (70.8%), termination of pregnancy is considered a private issue (54% of women and 39% of men).⁷ It cannot be denied that these are means which aim at preventing people from becoming pregnant. In the presence of such facts getting to know the plans of youth on having children appear highly interesting.

The first problem in this range concerned the issue of offspring. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on what a child should be for a married couple?

Among the respondents 84.2% claimed that having offspring through its birth should be “a free choice of a husband and wife”. A free choice in decision making process is often a vital priority for youth. This fact is confirmed here as well. Almost every 11th person claimed that a married couple has “a duty to conceive offspring” (9.2%), and it is a view in accordance with the Church’s doctrine. Some respondents (4.2%) had a different opinion on this matter, for example: “a child should be the most joyful thing for a married couple”, “...a compliment of a relationship between a man and a woman”, “...a divine grace”.

It was assumed that the level of religiousness could diversify views on this matter. However, it turned out that only in the group of **very religious** (16.7%) and **rather religious** (1.5%) was the following answer chosen: “it should be an absolute obligation”. This quite extreme view gained the lowest index of choice, i.e. 2.5% of respondents. Concerning the remaining cases religiousness did not fundamentally affect the respondents’ opinions.

Having a child is a natural component of a complete family. The decision of a married couple on having offspring has a great significance either individually or socially. As Skrzydlewski W. B. points out, **individually** since parents develop themselves mainly by bringing up their children, and **socially** because by a conscious parenthood they contribute to the development of society.⁸

It sometimes happens that a husband and wife are not capable of procreation, which is often irrespective of both spouses. Then there may be a willingness to solve the problem by technical means, i.e., a tendency aiming to make procreation independent of both sexual and family relations. Artificial insemination and animal cloning research are occurring as a result of this.⁹ These techniques are contrary to the Church’s view since the dignity of a person is a value in itself and cannot be subject to any manipulations.

The Church’s legislation does not allow for the possibility to give birth in an unnatural, inhumane way without the sexual cooperation of both spouses, i.e., laboratory environment¹⁰, therefore the Church stresses that “a child cannot be considered a subject of ownership”, something due to parents. The Child has a right to “be *the result of the act of conjugal love*” and

⁷ The Catholic Church strongly opposes such practices expressed among others in an encyclical on transferring life *Humanae vitae* (25th July, 1968); Declaration of abortion “*Quaestio de Abortu Procurato*” (18th November, 1974); encyclical on worth and sanctity of human life “*Evangelium Vitae*” (25th March, 1995).

⁸ SKRZYDLEWSKI, W. B.: *Planowanie rodziny – wyzwanie moralne*. Kraków, pp. 10–11.

⁹ KORNAS, S.: *Współczesne eksperymenty medyczne w ocenie etyki katolickiej*. Częstochowa, pp. 162–174.

¹⁰ All these issues are brought up in *Instruction on respect for nascent human life and dignity of its transmission Donum vitae*, 22nd February, 1987, Chosen Documents of the Holy See, For the sake of life., Tarnów 1998; The Holy See, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Family (CFRF) position 4b: *L’Osservatore Romano* 25 November, 1983.

as a person, since it has been conceived, it has also a right to be respected¹¹. A gift of a marriage, and as a gift it should be accepted.¹²

Table 1. Relationship between respondents' religiousness and acceptance of artificial insemination methods.

| Level of acceptance | Religiousness | | | | | | | | | | Altogether | |
|---------------------|----------------|-------|-----------|-------|------------------|-------|-------------|-------|-------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Very religious | | Religious | | Rather religious | | Unreligious | | It is hard to say | | | |
| | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % | No | % |
| Acceptable | 2 | 16.7 | 5 | 38.5 | 59 | 89.4 | 13 | 92.9 | 15 | 100.0 | 94 | 78.3 |
| Unacceptable | 8 | 66.7 | 3 | 23.1 | 2 | 3.0 | 1 | 7.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 14 | 11.7 |
| No opinion | 2 | 16.7 | 5 | 38.5 | 5 | 7.6 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 12 | 10.0 |
| Altogether | 12 | 100.0 | 13 | 100.0 | 66 | 100.0 | 14 | 100.0 | 15 | 100.0 | 120 | 100.0 |

In the presented research, university students were therefore asked if they could define their view on the subject of acceptability of artificial insemination. Answers are **given** in table 1.

In contrast with the previous question religiousness was sure enough an important matter here for the average attitude towards the possibilities of artificial insemination. The highest level of their acceptance was in the group which did not clearly specify their attitude towards religion. The lowest was amongst the **very religious** – 70% of respondents in this group opposed these kind of methods. Amidst the **religious**, views on this matter were divided, whereas the **rather religious** and **unreligious** were in favour of these practices. On average, every 20th person in these groups recognized these methods as unacceptable. Respondents who did not take a definite stand on this matter made the level of 10%.

The given results directly indicate that the respondents do not accept the Church's teaching concerning the use of artificial insemination in marriage. The respondents' consciousness orients the youth to have children regardless of the means. From such a tendency it does not appear that a child is a gift but something different – something due. If it is wanted, there is a readiness to reach the goal by all means, or if it is not wanted, all means are used to prevent it (contraceptives, abortion). It is probably another proof that contemporary youth govern themselves by the widely understood freedom of choice by adjusting it according to their needs, their own advantage, even if they could appear quite opposite to Christian norms and traditions, the followers of which they describe themselves as.

Views of Respondents on Upbringing of Children in a Family

According to the Second Vatican Council both spouses performing the duty of giving birth contribute to multiplying the people of God.¹³ However, the Council did not strictly indicate the number of children for the duty to be fulfilled. It only provides general rules which indirectly indicate the scope of the obligation to provide life, i.e.: guide oneself by the right conscience, obedience to the Majesty of the Church being responsible for parenthood and sacrificial adoption of further offspring.¹⁴

¹¹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, instr. *Donum vitae*, II, 8.

¹² *Catechism of Catholic Church* (CCC), 1994, no 2378.

¹³ DCC, no 50.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, no 50.

On the number of children, The Church leaves the decision to the parents. Moreover, they should care for their own good and children's good, either those born or anticipated in the future, take into account the financial and spiritual conditions of the family and society.¹⁵

Simultaneously, they are obliged to responsibility which would "guide the divine law" based on appropriately shaped conscience – at such a serious moment they cannot only count on law created by public authority.¹⁶ For experience shows that over decades, the happiness and good of a family were interpreted by individual governing bodies differently.

Decisions which were made in the end did not always contribute to ethical, moral or religious rights, demonstrated by the fact that at present in many European countries and recently in Poland a decrease in natural population growth is found. A fertility rate below 2.11 indicates a numerical reduction of society. In 1991 Poland's fertility rate reached 1.93 and that is why louder discussions about "responsibility of elected bodies (the Sejm, Senate, the Municipal Councils, administration and political parties) for activities supporting families" arose. There were proposals for appointing councils for different ranks for the family which would dynamize the national authorities', Church's, educational facilities', political parties' and social organizations' activity.¹⁷

The Catholic Church always condemns government's or other authorities' actions leading to the restriction of any freedom of a husband and wife in deciding on having a child.¹⁸ It is always in their hands and can never be handed over to national authority.¹⁹

Thus the respondents were asked about the ideal number of children in a family which they could potentially establish in the future. The gathered information shows that more than a half of respondents (59.2%) planning the number of children accept a rule: "as many as a husband and wife want to have". Almost every sixth respondent (16.7%) sees "two or three" children as an ideal number, while 15.8% of respondents empathise with the model family 2+2.

Only 2.5% of those questioned are in favour of a large family. What is interesting is the fact that none of those asked declared having a "family with no children" although Świda – Ziemba H. revealed in her research that such a tendency amongst youth exists.²⁰ On the issue of number of children in a family 3.3% of those asked have never thought about it.

There is an important connection between the human life transferring and upbringing of offspring. Service for life to which parents are submitted is not only about conception but also concerning for its full development, both physical and spiritual. Since parents have given life to children, they have an obligation for their upbringing, therefore they must be considered the first and the main guardians.²¹

The obligation of parenthood to bring up children has been highlighted in a myriad of documents of the Catholic Church i.e.: Declaration of Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis*, Catechism of the Catholic Church, Charter of Fundamental Rights of a family, Code of Canon Law and speeches of Popes on this particular matter. The above documents state that upbringing is the primary and unending right and responsibility of parents.²²

¹⁵ DCC, no 50; CFRF, position 3.

¹⁶ DCC, no 52 and 87.

¹⁷ *Polska u progu katastrofy demograficznej.*, *Słowo Powszechne*. 1992, no 108, p.14.

¹⁸ John Paul II: *Familiaris Consortio*, 22 November, 1981, no 30.

¹⁹ DCC, no 87.

²⁰ ŚWIDA-ZIEMBA, H.: *Wartości egzystencjalne młodzieży lat dziewięćdziesiątych*. Warszawa 1997, pp. 186–187.

²¹ CFRF, position 5; John Paul II, *Familiaris...*, no 36; Second Vatican Council, Declaration of Christian Education *Gravissimum educationis (DCE)*, no 3 (28 October, 1965).

²² CCC, no 2221; and DCE, no 3; CCL, canon 226 p.2, 1055 p.1, 1136; DCC, no 50.

Law – the responsibility of parents to bring up children is connected with human life transferring itself, and that is why it has a priority over upbringing activity by virtue of bonds joining parents and children.²³ The obligation of personal child rearing was clearly indicated in article 27 of the *Family and Guardianship Code*, where the issue of “personal efforts to bring up children” appears. Thus parents who allow others to look after their children at all times do not **fulfil** the obligation.

*The family constitutes the beginning and basis of the whole of human society, for preparation of children and youth to play responsible roles in it in the future, and this places an obligation on the country to establish favourable conditions which will help to shape moral and social values.*²⁴ This obligation covers: **the right** of a family to be established, have children and bring them up according to one’s moral and religious beliefs; **the right** to confess one’s faith, bring up children according to it with all needed means and institutions; **the right** to work and receive work, dwelling place; **the right** to have medical assistance or be entitled to family allowances; security of safety and health conditions, especially **in terms of** such dangers as: drug addiction, pornography, alcoholism, etc.; **the right** to associate with other families.²⁵

The realization of a professional career. This opinion is supported by every 11th respondent. The second type of opinion was related to bringing up children by both parents. The rejection of such an obvious fact by 20% of respondents is quite surprising. It may seem that for this group of people children represent an obstacle in life rather than a real parental calling. Świda-Ziemba H. considers such phenomena as a “new symptom of civilization” which could be interpreted as the insensitivity of youth towards the Church’s teaching or a sign of rebellion against its commandments.²⁶

The third view concerned a family situation where a husband should earn a living and a wife should take care of the household and children. As well as in the first instance the majority of respondents (80.8%) did not agree with this possibility. Only 13.3 % of respondents did agree with this option. The last but not least option concerning taking care of children by national institutions. Views on this matter were divided. Two fifths of respondents said that it is a proper solution for children living in very bad conditions, however, every second respondent did not concede anybody the right to do that. Some even gave an explanation of their choice: “parents deciding to have a baby should, in a sense of responsibility, provide it with such conditions so that there was no need for any help from state facilities”.

That kind of justification is surely accurate, however, we know that oftentimes reality writes its own script different from assumed claims.

Analyzing opinions on the subject of the Catholic model of marriage and family, it was interesting how the university students deal with the issues related to religious upbringing. The Majesty of Church in the Declaration of Christian Education Gravissimum educationis distinguishes two types of upbringing: natural and Christian (religious).²⁷ Both have a wide range. These ranges coincide in some way since it is hard to divide issues connected with the both, for example: moral upbringing which enters the scope of either Christian or natural upbringing, though with different contents. The natural one is a responsibility of all parents, whereas the Christian one is a

²³ John Paul II, *Familiaris...*, no 36.

²⁴ *Ibid*, no 1.

²⁵ CCC, no 2211.

²⁶ ŚWIDA-ZIEMBA, H.: *op. cit.*, pp.186–187.

²⁷ Other canonists divide upbringing likewise using different names, for example, cf. SYRYJCYK J.: *Catholic Church’s concern about the education of children in the canonical criminal law*, CP 30 (1987), n. 3–4, pp. 204–205.

responsibility of those of the Christian faith, and the parents should bear in mind that their educational tasks acquire a sense of calling through the sacrament of marriage. As Christians they are the first proponents of faith for their children and it comes to life by word and personal example.²⁸ Parents are obliged to evangelize their children from the early ages presenting them with liturgy as an essential element of a human life.²⁹ The responsibility to provide children with the truths of faith, rules of moral and religious conduct, implementation of the apostolate rests with their Christian parents³⁰, supporting them in the recognition and choice of calling and conduct according to the Christian teaching.³¹ They are therefore obliged to lead their children to the sacrament of baptism, prepare them to receive Eucharist, teach them how to pray, to finally enter them into the life of the Church developing awareness of the given gift of faith.³² It is therefore unwise to believe that the obligation of a religious upbringing concerns mainly the Church and its teaching and the only responsibility parents are under is to make sure the child takes part in the Eucharist and participates in religious instruction lessons. These activities are certainly a part of parents' responsibilities, however, they do not constitute to the religious education.

Respondents being asked for their opinion on whether parents should raise children in the spirit of the religion they profess answered as follows: "parents should raise their children religiously if they are religious themselves". The respondents agreed on religious upbringing of children, subject to the stipulation that their parents are (78.3%). Every ninth respondent claimed that religious upbringing is unnecessary "until the child has been able to make decision itself" (10.8%). Out of 8.3% of respondents only 3.3% said that "religious upbringing is mainly the church's (-s') obligation; all of the remaining ones "did not hold any view" on this subject. Amongst the population of the respondents there were some who did not find anything important for upbringing in religious education (2.5%).

Analyzing the attitude of respondents to religious education in family liberalism, which appeared in the answers, is worth mentioning. Despite the fact that most of the respondents declare themselves to be religious, the number of those treating these issues indifferently or unwillingly is considerable. It is therefore not difficult to notice that there is a contradiction between declaring one's own religiousness and raising children in the spirit of adopted religion.

The above data indicates that planning and raising children in a family is such an important issue that in the future they intend to undertake tasks and responsibilities connected with it. The data gathered shows that the concept of upbringing differs amongst the respondents, especially in the subject of: having children, way of raising them, planning the number of children or religious upbringing. Changeability in opinion may be caused by significant changes which are taking place in the modern world or by accumulated experience acquired in one's own family from which new roots take hold.

Summary

Above all, the introduced research was of a diagnostic character. Its task was to find the opinion of university students on the subject of the Catholic model of a family. The empirical material allows us to make the following conclusions:

²⁸ Ibid, n. 39; CCC, n. 11; CCL, canon 1246, p 127.

²⁹ CCC, n. 2205, 2757; MISIACZEK, K.: *Wychowanie chrześcijańskie w świetle Katechizmu Kościoła Katolickiego*. Wprowadzenie do Katechizmu Kościoła Katolickiego. Warszawa, p. 127.

³⁰ CCC, no. 2225.

³¹ CCC, no 11.

³² DCE, no. 2.

- The Church’s teaching indicates that the aim and sense of a marriage is to conceive children and raise “new people”, whereas all of 84.2% of respondents stated that having offspring is not an obligation of a married couple but their free choice. Thus they can but do not have to have a child, they can remain a childless married couple focussing on a professional career. It is also worth mentioning the extremity of views as far as the issue of artificial insemination is concerned; when the married couple decides on having a child but are not able irrespective of each other. Regardless of the justification of the Church on the use of artificial insemination, almost 80% of respondents considered it acceptable. It may seem peculiar but even among the group of very religious respondents – those who should know and obey the Church’s teaching – not quite 17% would allow this possibility.
- Awareness of the need for religious upbringing was declared by 78.3% of respondents but an observation appears here – if most of the young do not accept the way imposed by the Church, why do they consider having their children thought religious by practices connected with their faith? Maybe that tendency is a sign of an inner need of seeking the truth which the parents did not find in themselves, or maybe it only helps the parents to look after their child which with a properly shaped conscience, has a chance to become “a better person”.
The research proved the thesis that the majority of university students’ points of view on the subject of planning a family diverges from the one proposed by the Catholic Church.

Shrnutí

Křesťanský model rodičovství v názorech a pohledech studentů univerzity

Představený výzkum měl především diagnostický charakter. Jeho cílem bylo zjistit názory univerzitních studentů na problematiku katolického modelu rodiny. Empirický materiál umožňuje učinit následující závěry:

- církevní učení uvádí, že cílem a smyslem manželství je zplodit děti a vychovat “nové lidi”, oproti tomu 84,2 % respondentů uvedlo, že mít potomky není povinností, nýbrž svobodná volba manželských párů.
- povědomí o potřebě náboženské výchovy deklarovalo 78,3 % respondentů.
Výzkum prokázal, že názory většiny studentů vysokých škol na problematiku plánování rodiny se liší od těch, která předkládá katolická církev.