



## The Catholic Church and the ministry of “spiritual birth-giving” in the field of sexuality

Kościół Katolicki a posługa „rodzenia duchowego” w obszarze seksualności<sup>1</sup>  
<https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v3i51.1106>

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**Abstract:** In view of the omnipresent contemporary crisis of truth, it seems a purposeful and valuable activity to bring closer, clarify, as well as to correct or rectify the vision of the Catholic Church's teaching on the treatment of a human as a sexual being. The article is aimed at making an attempt to present selected elements of the teachings of the Catholic Church on gender and sexuality, considering the ways in which sexual education is understood and identifying persons who are most accountable for that area of education. The inquiry is conducted from the standpoint of an educator. The source literature for this study consists of selected documents of the Catholic Church. Some other studies on that topic were also analysed. On the basis of the document analysis, it may be concluded that the Catholic Church assigns a lot of importance to the issues of gender and sexuality, as well as sexual education. Such education should be based on the integral vision of the human being. It is emphasized that this sphere should be considered in the context of the development of the whole human being, whose fundamental task in life is love understood as a gift of self. Sexual education is therefore tantamount to education to love. It involves assisting children and youth in their search for the answers to the most important questions concerning the sense and purpose of life, as well as the ideas and values which determine the trajectory of human existence on the Earth. An element of this education is both the introduction of young people to the issues related in a strict sense to the biological functioning of a person as a being endowed with a sex, and to the formation of views and attitudes towards oneself and other people. Due to the strength and primordially of the natural family bonds, this responsible task is most often delegated to parents. It is parents who are to the greatest degree responsible for the formation of children to whom they have passed on their lives. All other educational institutions should conform to the principle of subsidiarity and should respect the precedence of parental rights and obligations. The ministry of “spiritual birth-giving” in the delicate sphere of gender and sexuality is a task of parents, who are the most important educators. All parents are obliged to undertake that difficult task, which requires the creation of a climate of trust, closeness and mutual respect in the family, as well as of gentleness and respect for children's intimate sphere. It is essential to pass all information in a clear way and to make it reach children in proper time.

**Keywords:** Catholic Church, sexuality, sexual education, mutual gift

**Abstrakt:** Wobec wszechobecnego współcześnie kryzysu prawdy celowym i wartościowym działaniem wydaje się przybliżenie, wyjaśnienie, a także sprostowanie czy też odkłamanie wizji nauczania Kościoła Katolickiego dotyczącego ujmowania człowieka jako istoty seksualnej. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest podjęcie próby przedstawienia wybranych elementów nauczania Kościoła Katolickiego dotyczącego płciowości i seksualności, rozważenie sposobu pojmowania wychowania seksualnego oraz wskazanie osób w największym stopniu odpowiedzialnych za ten obszar wychowania. Dociekania prowadzone są z punktu widzenia pedagoga. Literaturę źródłową niniejszego opracowania stanowią wybrane dokumenty Kościoła Katolickiego. Analizie zostały również poddane opracowania podejmujące wskazaną tematykę. Na podstawie dokonanej analizy dokumentów można stwierdzić, że Kościół Katolicki przywiązuje ogromną wagę do kwestii związanych z płciowością i seksualnością oraz wychowaniem seksualnym. Powinno być ono oparte na integralnej wizji człowieka. Podkreśla się konieczność osadzenia tej sfery w kontekście rozwoju całego człowieka, którego podstawowym zadaniem życiowym jest miłość rozumiana jako dar z siebie. Wychowanie seksualne jest więc równoznaczne z wychowaniem do miłości. Polega na towarzyszeniu dzieciom i młodzieży w poszukiwaniach odpowiedzi na najważniejsze pytania dotyczące sensu i celu życia, ideałów i wartości, które wyznaczają trajektorię bytowania człowieka na ziemi. Elementem wskazanego wychowania jest zarówno wprowadzanie młodych ludzi w kwestie związane w ścisłym znaczeniu z biologicznym funkcjonowaniem człowieka jako istoty obdarzonej płcią, jak i kształtowanie poglądów i postaw wobec samego siebie i wobec innych. Ze względu na siłę i pierwotność naturalnych więzi rodzinnych to odpowiedzialne zadanie przekazuje się przede wszystkim rodzicom. Są oni w największym stopniu odpowiedzialni za formację dzieci, którym przekazali życie. Wszystkie inne instytucje wychowawcze powinny przyjmować do wiadomości zasadę pomocniczości i uznawać nadrzędność praw i obowiązków rodziców. Posługa „rodzenia duchowego” w delikatnej sferze płciowości i seksualności stanowi więc zadanie rodziców, będących najważniejszymi wychowawcami. Wszyscy rodzice zobowiązani są do podjęcia tego trudnego zadania, wymagającego stworzenia w rodzinie klimatu zaufania, bliskości i wzajemnego szacunku, jak również delikatności i poszanowania sfery intymnej dzieci. Istotnym jest, aby wszelkie informacje były przekazywane w sposób jasny i docierały do dzieci w odpowiednim czasie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kościół Katolicki, seksualność, wychowanie seksualne, wzajemny dar

<sup>1</sup> Artykuł w języku polskim: <https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2022-3-Sorkowicz.pdf>

## Introduction

Mieczysław Łobocki points out that “education enters various spheres of reality with which boys and girls meet every day or may meet in the near or slightly further future. These spheres constitute a peculiar kind of education, which is usually called its specific area” (Łobocki, 2009, p. 257). Therefore, what is dealt with in the theory of education is, among other things, moral, aesthetic, patriotic, mental, religious and health education. One of educational areas is also sexual education.

It is also sometimes called “pro-family education”, “education for family life”, “education for love” (Łobocki, 2009, p. 269). The use of the aforementioned terminology is aimed at avoiding “unnecessary associations with the term *sexual education*, i.e. including only the biological aspects of human sexuality, stripped of all moral connotations” (Łobocki, 2009, p. 269). The point is not to raise the suggestion that sex life is not related to any moral evaluation (Łobocki, 2009, p. 269). Sexual education as “shaping socially and morally desirable attitudes towards human sexuality” differs from “sexual awareness”, which is only the transmission of knowledge about human sexual life (Łobocki, 2009, p. 270; Długołęcka, 2006, p. 237).

The presented article is an attempt to present selected elements of the Catholic Church teaching on gender and sexuality, to consider the way of understanding sexual education and to indicate the people most responsible for this area of education. The research will be conducted from the educator’s point of view. The source literature for this study will consist of selected documents of the Catholic Church. Some studies on the indicated topics will also be analyzed. The factor that prompts to take up the issues related to sexual education as perceived by the Catholic Church is the conviction expressed by John Paul II regarding the crisis of truth. In his *List do Rodzin [Letter to Families]*, the Polish Pope expressed his conviction that it was a crisis of truth which was dealt with nowadays, expressed primarily through a crisis of notions. “Do such concepts as: *love, freedom, a sincere gift*, and even the very concept of a *person* and therefore also a *person’s rights* – really

mean what they express?”; “If the truth about freedom, about the communion of persons in marriage and family regains its splendour, then the civilization of love can be realized” (Jan Paweł II, 2021, n. 13). The splendour of the truth is important “by contrast, because the development of modern civilization is related to scientific and technological progress often in a one-sided way. This regards a purely positivist character of this development. A fruit of cognitive positivism is agnosticism when it comes to theory, and when it comes to action and morality – utilitarianism. (...) *Utilitarianism* is a civilization of effect and use – a civilization of *things*, not *people*; a civilization in which people become objects of use, just as things are used” (Jan Paweł II, 2021, n. 13).

The proposal of the Catholic Church concerning the treatment of gender and sexuality as well as sexual education as education to love is faced with incomprehension today. Opponents of the Church’s approach to one of the most delicate spheres of human life see it almost exclusively as “a heavy yoke, prohibitions, shackles that must be rejected for the sake of human freedom and happiness” (Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, p. 94). Such a situation may stem from the negligence in the manners of speaking about the indicated issues. While the Church has always spoken consistently about the understanding of the body and gender, the people of the Church have done a lot of wrong, presenting a fearful or repressive approach to sexuality: either ignoring these problems in silence or limiting their statements to prohibitions (Persona Humana Declaration, 1990, 5; West, 2009, p. 24). These considerations are intended to bring closer, to explain and, in a sense, to correct and refute the vision of the Catholic Church teaching on gender, sexuality and sexual education.

## 1. Gender and sexuality in the teaching of the Catholic Church

Rev. Maciej Olczyk (2013) points out that both the adjectives *sexual* and *gender* and the nouns *gender* and *sexuality* are often used interchangeably. However,

the terms *sex* and *gender* are not synonyms. For Rev. Wojciech Bołoz (2003), it should be assumed that sex “refers to love understood as a manifestation of sexual drive experienced at the bodily level. Sexual activity implies the activation of the sexual organs”. Gender “means that sphere of a human being that permeates their entire existence and determines that they can live as a man or a woman” (Bołoz, 2003, p. 14-16; Olczyk, 2013, p. 223). Thus, the concept of gender is broader and “is not exhausted in the biological or genital dimension. It refers to the holistic approach to a person in their bodily, psychological and spiritual dimensions and reaches the fullness when it expresses love that is a mutual personal gift of a man and a woman lasting until death” (Bołoz, 2003, p. 14-16; Olczyk, 2013, p. 223). Gender, as one of the ways of a person expressing themselves, is therefore a kind of basis for sexuality, i.e. mutual love expressed in a physical way.

As in every field, also in the area of gender and sexuality, the primary source of the Church’s teaching is God’s truth about the human being and God’s love for humanity (Dziewiecki, 2011, p. 18-19), as told in the Holy Bible. There are words in Genesis which as if constitute the basis of the whole teaching on the human being as a gender-endowed being: “God created mankind in his image, (...) male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). The above words are complemented by the Creator’s command addressed to the first people: “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28). The Catechism of the Catholic Church draws attention to the importance of the creation of a human being as a gender possessing being and states that “gender affects all spheres of the human person in the unity of their body and soul. It concerns especially affection, the ability to love and procreate, and – more generally – the ability to establish bonds of communion with other people. (...) Physical, moral and spiritual differentiation and complementarity are aimed at the good of marriage and the development of family life” (Catechism of the Catholic Church 2332, 2333). Sexuality becomes truly human in the context of the person-to-person relationship and the mutual gift of a man and a woman. Importantly, this gift should be total and unlimited in time (Catechism

of the Catholic Church, 2337). What seems an extremely important text that requires exploration from the perspective of the research undertaken in this study is the document of the Pontifical Council for the Family, published in 1995, entitled *Ludzka płciowość: prawda i znaczenie [The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality]*. It seems right to quote some selected fragments of the above-mentioned text: “Man is called to love and to self-giving in his bodily and spiritual unity. Femininity and masculinity are complementary gifts, so human sexuality is a part that integrates the concrete ability to love that God has inscribed in man and woman” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 10, p. 112-); “This capacity for love as self-giving is thus “*incarnated*” in the nuptial meaning of the body, which bears the imprint of the person’s masculinity and femininity” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 10, p. 113); “Human sexuality is thus a good, part of that created gift which God saw as being “*very good*”, when he created the human person in his image and likeness (...) As it is a way of relating and being open to others, sexuality has love as its intrinsic end, more precisely, love as donation and acceptance, love as giving and receiving” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 11, p. 113). It is easy to notice that, on the basis of Revelation, the Church strongly emphasizes not only the perception of a human as a sexual being, but also the relationality of the human person, which develops in the context of being with another person of the same personal dignity, but realizing their humanity in different ways: male or female (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2334, 2335). It also seems important to pay attention to the location of gender in the context of a mutual gift, fulfilled in a marriage which is a total and lifelong relationship, aimed at giving and receiving love: “When love is lived out in marriage, it includes and surpasses friendship. Love between a man and woman is achieved when they give themselves totally, each in turn according to their own masculinity and femininity, founding on the marriage covenant that communion of persons where God has willed that human life be conceived, grow and develop. To this married love, and to this love alone, belongs sexual giving, which “is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man

and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n.14, p. 115). The call to mutual love is therefore the essence of human vocation. It is supposed to be a love embracing both the body and the soul, maturing in the heart and will, and embracing “the person in their entire physical, mental and spiritual whole” (Jan Paweł II, 1981).

Love, as the postulative basis of all mutual human references, excludes a utilitarian approach, only love is the opposite of using a person “as a means to an end or as a tool of one’s own action” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 31-32). It is worth noting that the possible use of a person, also in the area of sexuality, may also apply to oneself. For this reason the Church teaches that the body itself must not be used contrary to its proper calling. A good illustration of this approach are the titles of Daniel Ange’s books: “Your Body Created for Love” and “Your Body Created for Life” (published in 2004). Catholic sexual ethics emphasizes the dignity and value of every human being (a person deserves only love) and excludes any objectification of the human person, even if it takes place with their consent. The recognition of human subjectivity is the foundation for a positive approach to the personalistic norm: “what I am not allowed to do in relation to myself, I am not allowed to do for the same right and for the same reasons in relation to any other self. (...). Only by affirming another human being for themselves, I meet the truth about myself” (Sztaba, 2012, p. 297). A human being is considered to be a bodily and spiritual unity: they are not only the body, nor only the spirit, they are a whole: an embodied spirit, that is, the soul that expresses itself through the body and the body formed by the immortal spirit (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 11). Whatever action within the body, both resulting from the relation to the other person and towards oneself, affects the whole person, “sexuality affects all spheres of the human person in the unity of their body and soul” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2332).

Although the teaching of the Catholic Church on the approach to issues of gender and sexuality has not changed throughout history, it is worth noting a change observed for several decades in the way of talking about the indicated issues. Father Marek Ur-

ban points out that “the Church has been maturing for centuries to speak out publicly on the issues of sexuality (...) Maybe now is the time when the fight for a human takes place around the truth about their sexuality and its proper use” (Urban, 2011, p. 13). The same author believes that “the Church is still learning how to talk about the essence and beauty of sex and sexuality to contemporary people” (Urban, 2011, p. 13). Instead of the manichaeism of negating the value of all matter, including the human body, for several decades there have been voices describing human sexuality in the most positive terms. The most important representative of the new language of the Church is John Paul II and his theology of the body. In his experience, this author was obliged to respond to the demands of the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s. He proposed a view on sexuality that would exclude the question (present in the previous preaching of the Church): “What am I not allowed to do?” in order to seek an answer to the question: “How can I express my physical love in a way that suits my dignity as a person?” (Urban, 2011, p. 14). What is dealt here is the replacement of legalism with freedom. The Pope asks questions about the essence of sexuality, what the truth about love-triggering sex is, why the human was created as a man and a woman (West, 2009, p. 25). The Holy Father John Paul II, while still a Krakow priest, had the opportunity to get to know different shades of human love. As a result, he competently dealt with the subject of love relationships, the body and sexuality, “he did not treat a human as an organism, but as a person who has a body and a spirit, and assigns sexuality the role of a language to express the deepest layers of their humanity” (Skrzypczak, 2015, p. 5). John Paul II was aware of the need to explain to the believers the contents of Revelation and the teaching of the Church so far. Delighted by the beauty of every human body, he drew attention to its relational nature: “The human body is not only a somatic basis for sexual reactions, but is also a means of expression for the whole person, for a person who expresses the self through their *body language*. This *language* has a significant interpersonal meaning, especially when it comes to the relationship between a man and woman” (Jan Paweł II, 2020, p. 427). The Polish Pope emphasized the value of the

communion of spouses, expressed in the fullest way through sex life, which is the crowning of mutual love and a sign of the sacrament of marriage. He wrote: “true love, love internally complete, is the one in which we choose a person for their own self, that is, the one in which a man chooses a woman, and a woman chooses a man not only as a sexual partner, but as a person whom they want to give their life to” ; “It is love that makes a person fulfil themselves through the sincere gift of self. For love is giving and receiving a gift. It cannot be bought or sold. It can be only given to each other as a gift” (John Paul II, 2021, n.11). It can be noted that John Paul II, while lecturing on theology of the body, which was considered a time bomb, strongly emphasized the need to enhance the evaluation of the human body. Whereas the supporters of Manichaeism framed the body and sex in terms of anti-value, then the aforementioned author taught that it is a “not-enough-value” (Jan Pawel II, 2020, p. 178). Thus, what is dealt here is the affirmation of a human being as a corporeal and spiritual being, without deciding which of these aspects is better, because they are inseparable (Grzelak, 2009, p. 333).

The successor of John Paul II – the Holy Father Benedict XVI – also clearly expressed the need to treat the human body with respect and warned against rejecting the body and treating the human being only in spiritual terms. “If a human strives to be only a spirit and wants to discard the body as only animal inheritance, then the spirit and the body lose their dignity. And if, on the other hand, a human being renounces the spirit and, therefore, considers matter and body as the only reality, that person loses their greatness in the same way” (Benedykt XVI, 2005, n. 5). Pope Benedict XVI draws attention to the danger of falling into angelism on the one hand, which consists in perceiving a human as a spirit residing or imprisoned in the body, and on the other – animalism, promoting bodily pleasure as the highest human fulfilment, encouraging unrestrained indulgence in one’s erotic needs (West, 2011, p. 53-54). As Christopher West points out, “both approaches result from the lack of integration of spirituality and sexuality” (West, 2011, p. 55). The author of the encyclical *Deus caritas est* admits that in the past Christianity tended to oppose cor-

porality (Benedykt XVI, 2005, n. 5). It is worth noting, however, that it is unauthorized to confuse “the reasoning of the Church with the reasoning of people who are in the Church. The Church’s reasoning has always defended the body and marital love against the attacks of various heresies. Unfortunately, the official condemnation of such movements as Manichaeism, Gnosticism and Jansenism – which despise the body and sexuality – apparently had less influence on Christians than the heresies themselves” (West, 2011, p. 58). Benedict XVI also drew attention to the reciprocity of the gift of spouses: “whoever wants to offer love must receive it as a gift as well” (Benedykt XVI, 2005, n. 7).

Following the example of his predecessors, Pope Francis reaffirms and recalls the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, according to which marriage is first and foremost a “profound communion of life and love” (Konstytucja duszpasterska o Kościele, 1967, n. 48). In *Amoris Laetitia*, he reminds us that sexuality is neither a reward nor an element of entertainment. It is “an interpersonal language where the other person is taken seriously, with their sacred and inviolable value” (Franciszek, 2016, n. 151). The erotic dimension of love, according to Francis, is not an evil or a burden that should be tolerated for the good of the family, but is a gift from God embellishing the meeting of spouses, “the realization of pure, exclusive affirmation” (Franciszek, 2016, n. 152). The proper use of sexuality also shows the greatness of the human heart and is a factor that triggers happiness (Franciszek, 2016, n. 152). “Sexuality inseparably serves this marital friendship because it aims to ensure that the other person lives to the full” (Franciszek, 2016, n. 156). The Holy Father Francis warns against using sexuality solely for one’s own self, satisfying one’s own desires and drives, that is, against the poisoning “use it and throw it away” spirit (Franciszek, 2026, n. 153). Marital sex life should never be a source of suffering and manipulation (Franciszek, 2016, n. 154), as this would contradict the basic function of sexuality, which is showing and accepting love. Therefore, people should be defended against the false perspective of sex without love, which is often associated with the sphere of violence, exploitation and harm (Olczyk, 2013, p. 240).

Summarizing this part of the discussion, it should be stated that in the teaching of the Catholic Church, sexuality is subordinated to the marital love of a man and a woman (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2360). Sexuality is understood in terms of a gift from God to a human being who is both a spiritual and a corporeal being. At the same time, due attention is paid to the communicative aspect of sexuality: it is the most intimate way of expressing and receiving marital love, which is incarnate love (Dziewiecki, 2011, p. 26, 99). “The existence of a human as a man and a woman has a bond-forming, complementary, spousal and procreative meaning. Gender distinctiveness is indispensable for the unity of the two that carries the physical, mental, social and spiritual life” (Dudziak, 2017, p. 23). It seems important to note that the Church’s respect for marital sex life is also expressed in the fact that excluding such sex life is synonymous to declaring the marriage annulment (Dziewiecki, 2011, p. 99).

It is obvious that gender differences are a condition for the existence of mankind. However, the procreative meaning of the marriage act is not the only one pointed out by the Catholic Church Magisterium. The openness to the possibility of conceiving a child must be in harmony with the spouses’ attitude to the deepening (through physical closeness) of their mutual relationship. These two aspects of marital sex life, the procreative and the bond-creating one, are a condition for experiencing sexuality in a way planned by the Creator. Therefore, physical love is an act of worship to God of two people bound by marriage (Urban, 2011, p. 13). The statements of the Catholic Church emphasize the importance of gender and sexuality and treat these spheres as the God’s reality that requires an integral approach.

## 2. Sexual education in the teaching of the Catholic Church

“Integration in the field of gender means accepting and understanding one’s gender, as well as mature functioning in personal and social life as a woman or a man. (...) Sexuality is a very complex area of human life and affects all its dimensions. For this

reason, it cannot be isolated from the whole of education. On the contrary, sexual education should be integrated with shaping the full human personality” (Pokrywka, 2010, p. 305). The Catholic Church seriously treats a person’s ability to direct the power of their sexuality and to consciously and reasonably acquire freedom from drives and instincts (Dziewiecki, 2011, p. 99). The connections between the sexual dimension of a person and their ethical values imply such an approach to education that would lead “to a knowledge of moral principles and recognition of them as a necessary and valuable guarantee of responsible personal growth in the field of human sexuality” (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 37). Therefore, it is purposeful both to open up the human person to the skill of self-education and to “provide motivation to undertake the effort of such self-education” (Meissner, 2017, p. 11).

The basis of all sexual education should be the conviction that issues related to human gender and sexuality are sacred (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 122, p. 163). Participation in social life allows one to state that for many people these aspects of human life are considered a godless reality. The Manichean approach to the body as a contaminated (because material) reality is interconnected with some trends resulting from the so-called sexual revolution, which leads to reification, that is, the objectification of a human and, at the same time, the deification of their sexual sphere. John Paul II described this approach as the *new Manichaeism*, in which neither “the body lives by the spirit, nor the spirit gives life to the body” (John Paul II, 2021, n.16). Thus, what is dealt here is a radical separation of the physical and spiritual reality. The human ceases to be a spiritual-physical unity, that is, ceases to be a person and a subject, and becomes only an object, similar to “all other bodies in nature” (John Paul II, 2021, n. 16). Believers as well can either completely ignore the issues related to educating a person as a being endowed with gender and sexuality, or “silently” adopt the trends of contemporary culture, suggesting the isolation of these spaces from the rest of human experience. It seems that in the practice of life of a large group of Catholic believers there is a lack of healthy *eternal* admiration (John Paul II, 2021, n. 16) and the joy-

ful acceptance of human corporality as a gift of the Creator. This results not only in relegating gender and sexuality to the sphere of profanum, but also in unreflective acceptance of the propositions offered by the *civilization of use* (Jan Paweł II, 2021, n. 13) and the consent to permissive sexual education.

In its teaching, the Catholic Church warns against the trivialization of human sexuality, which cannot be a form of entertainment (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 37; Benedykt XVI, 2009, n. 44). Consequently, sex education cannot be reduced to informing without referring to moral principles, i.e. introducing children and young people to experiencing pleasure, which may lead to the loss of serenity and to corruption (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 37). The lack of reference to the goals of gender and sexuality and to the world of values results in treating sexual activity only as a source of pleasure and emotional satisfaction. Gender and sexuality are “presented as *duly belonging* to a person, and therefore not only do not require steering, but are simply uncontrollable, driven by emotions” (Meissner, 2017, p. 13). Such a presentation of sexual activity: in terms of actions not related to rational and free decision-making by a human, is sometimes called “muzzle education” (Olczyk, 2013, p. 238-239). It proposes only “*mechanical*, not *personal* preventive solutions against the effects of sexual behaviour” (Olczyk, 2013, p. 238-239). In this approach, the most important is the knowledge about the reproductive consequences of sexual intercourse and about sexually transmitted diseases (Ryś, 1999, p. 484-485; Szymański, 1999, p. 122). There is no issue of self-control. This approach results in generating an attitude of resignation, permissiveness or even decadence among young people (Olczyk, 2013, p. 238). The Catholic Church is against teaching how to prevent pregnancy “while encouraging to break taboos and to experiment in order to increase personal sexual satisfaction” (Olczyk, 2013, p. 243). Such an attitude of the Church does not result from the negative attitude of the Church to the issues related to sexuality, but from real care for the quality of human life, which has its structure and purpose. No man ever wants to be an object of abuse. Everyone, on the other hand, strives for love. Sex education cannot therefore be reduced to the “genital level” (the term used by Pope Francis) “thus

degrading the person, but is to serve the development of true love and mature personality (...) of the pupil” (Sztaba, 2014). It is supposed to be “positive and prudent” and “clear and subtle” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 125, p. 164) education to love understood as a gift of self: “sexuality is in fact the wealth of the whole person – of the body, feelings and the soul – revealing its deep meaning in leading a person to make a gift of self in love” (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 37).

Therefore, as perceived by the Catholic Church, sex education consists in educating the sexual impulse in the process of getting to know oneself and in developing the ability to control oneself (Franciszek, 2016, n. 280), which are aimed at a joyful meeting with other people and their mutual enrichment. Gender distinctiveness is indispensable for the unity of two complementary people (Dudziak, 2017, p. 23). Existence in a feminine or masculine way causes lack of self-sufficiency of a person and, at the same time, causes striving for a relationship with another, completely different human being. The task of educators is therefore to help young people “in accepting their body as it was created” (Franciszek, 2016, n. 285), in appreciating one’s body in its femininity or masculinity (Franciszek, 2016, n. 285). Pope Francis also draws attention to the need to cultivate healthy modesty, which is a natural defence of a person against objectification (Francis, 2016, n. 282). Sex education is aimed at learners’ becoming free and responsible subjects of their own activities. As mentioned above, in the teaching of the Catholic Church there is a conviction that sexuality is in the service of love and the main place of fulfilling mutual love between a woman and a man is marriage and the family. Thus, it is good to approach the issues related to sexual education not in terms of young people’s expectations from sexual life, but rather in terms of their expectations from family life and everything that they can bring to it (Meissner, 2017, p. 15).

The view expressed by Kinga Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, according to whom three elements can be distinguished in sex education, seems to be an appropriate summary of this fragment in the discussion. The first is appropriate awareness (“the instruction concerning both the bodily sex-reproductive sphere

(...) and the mental and moral order in this area”). The second part of sex education is shaping a child’s views. The third element is developing the ability to properly manage the sexual sphere while developing both a culture of feelings, as well as willpower and the ability to control drives and passions (Wiśniewska-Roszkowska, 1998, p. 24). Educators focus on the human body, which is always a sign of a person, and their effort is directed towards the rational and free integration of the bodily sexuality with the spiritual sphere of the person (Heinsch, Kochel, 2021, p. 198).

### 3. The ministry of “spiritual birth-giving” in the field of sexuality

The fact of passing a life down to a child implies not only the right, but also the obligation to bring up the child in accordance with the system of values that is closest to the parents. This is confirmed by both Polish constitutional provisions and the acts of international law of which the Republic of Poland is a party (Prucnal-Wójcik, 2018, p. 206-207). *The Declaration on Christian Education* of the Second Vatican Council states that “As they have given life to their children, parents have the utmost obligation to educate their children and must therefore be recognized as their first and principal educators. This educational task is so important that it would be difficult to replace it if it was missing” (Deklaracja o wychowaniu chrześcijańskim, 1967, n.3). The Catechism of the Catholic Church confirms the aforementioned obligation: “The fruitfulness of marital love also includes the fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which, through education, parents pass on to their children” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1653). John Paul II complements these statements of the Church and emphasizes that “the right and duty of parents to educate is *essential* and as such is related to the transmission of human life itself; it is *primal and has priority* over the educational tasks of other people, because of the uniqueness of the relationship of love between parents and children; it *excludes substitution and is inalienable*, therefore it cannot be completely transferred to others or appropriated

by others” (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 36); Therefore, parents are the first and most important educators of their children. Upbringing is a simple consequence of the fact that life is passed on in the biological sense and is synonymous to “spiritual birth” (Jan Paweł II, 2021, n. 16).

Upbringing in a family is understood in the Church in terms of service. John Paul II used the term “educational service of parents”, which should “focus on the culture of sexual life so that it would be truly and fully personal” (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 37). At this point, it is worth emphasizing that the Catholic Church strongly highlights the need to respect the principle of subsidiarity. According to it, “the larger communities should provide supplementary aid to smaller communities, and all of them together to a human person. This help has two aspects: the negative and positive. The negative one consists in respecting the initiative, competence and responsibility of individuals and smaller groups, i.e. refraining from helping in those matters in which they are self-sufficient. The positive aspect is providing help where it is needed. This most often concerns the so-called help for self-help, i.e. single and relatively effective help so that individuals or smaller communities can continue to develop on their own” (Bełch, 2020, p. 155). In the field of sexual education, it is particularly necessary that it takes place “under the watchful eye of the parents”, and that the school and other educational institutions should be controlled by parents and should act “in the same spirit that animates the parents” (Jan Paweł II, 2000, n. 37). Therefore, teachers and educators of children and youth need to be aware that they work in an institution that supports but does not relieve parents in their duties. It is worth emphasizing that the belief in the priority role of parents in children’s sexual education is also close to some researchers who do not identify directly with the teaching of the Catholic Church (Długołęcka, 2006, p. 254).

The recognition of sex education in the teaching of the Catholic Church in the categories of parental rights and duties results not only from the primordial nature of the relationship between parents and children, but also from the awareness of the strength of this natural relationship. In one of the



texts addressed to parents on this issue, there are the following words: “You are the most suitable person for this task, because you know your children better than anyone else. You probably know them better than they know themselves. You see their flaws and advantages, you can recognize their level of maturity (or its lack), and you have competences that they often do not have – you have experience and can predict how their sexual activities today may shape the rest of their lives. You have the power! Take advantage of it!” (Evert, Stefanick, 2020, p. 8). The parents’ right to and duty of sexual education means showing their children “the true meaning of human sexuality” (Skreczko, 1999, p. 10). It is also parents’ responsibility to educate their children about the moral principles necessary to develop as a gender possessing being. If it is recognized that sexual education consists of both sexual awareness and shaping appropriate attitudes towards one’s own gender, sexuality and sexual activity (Długołęcka, 2006, p. 237), the work aimed at supporting parents in taking up their educational tasks seems right. Alicja Długołęcka, referring to the research results, states that “parents recognize their role in the sexual education of their children, however, they often feel unprepared to fulfil this task” (Długołęcka, 2006, p. 241). The mentioned author also draws attention to the lack of open conversations in homes about matters related to sexuality (Długołęcka, 2006, p. 254). Children are sometimes left to themselves. Parents avoid talking. In many families, sexuality “is not the subject of a child’s conversation with parents”, “does not harmoniously enter into the whole of the child’s experiences”, which may result in the fact that it constitutes an area that causes anxiety or problems (Meissner, 2015, p. 8). It is indicated that parents should be able to pass down the world of values to their children, and not limit contacts with the child to orders and bans (Meissner, 2015, p. 8). A ban, as Wanda Póltawska writes, “has no power to form an attitude, probably only in the case when it comes from the person themselves” (Póltawska, 2011, p. 192). It is extremely important that gender issues are approached from the positive side as a value and that all provided information is adjusted to the child’s perceptual abilities (Ryś, 1999, p. 486).

The Church, in its teaching on sex education in the family, in the document *Ludzka płciowość: prawda i znaczenie*, identifies four principles that should be taken into account by parents. The first of them draws attention to the fact that each child is unique and unrepeatable and should receive an individual formation. Loving parents, as the people who know their children best, are able to choose the most appropriate moment to provide the information. The teaching of the Church emphasizes the need to communicate everything related to intimacy, both in the biological and emotional aspect, through a personal dialogue “with love and trust”. It is recommended that such talks should be conducted with parents who are of the same gender as the child: mothers should talk to their daughters, and fathers to sons. Of course, there may be a situation in raising a child in an incomplete family. Then, asking for help is suggested from a trusted person of the same sex as the child (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 67, p. 142). The second principle pertaining to sex education stresses the requirement that all explanations should always have a moral dimension. Catholic parents are expected to pay attention to the positive value of chastity and the related ability to love people in marriage, in the consecrated life, or in celibacy. It is emphasized that chastity should be treated in positive terms and presented in the context of giving. “Instead of taking something away, chastity has something to offer to young people (Evert, Stefanick, 2020, p. 16); “It teaches (...) how to overcome selfishness in order to be free and love truly” (Evert, Stefanick, 2020, p. 16). All repressiveness is rejected: reprimands or orders that may be perceived by children as a fruit of a parental fear “of social repercussions or of the public opinion”. The Church suggests that parents should rather convince their children “on a rational level as well as on the level of faith, and therefore with a positive and high understanding of the dignity of the person.” Thanks to this, children can more clearly feel the parental love “concerned about their own good” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 68-69, p. 142-143). The third rule concerning sex education emphasizes the necessity to provide all information about human sexuality in the broader context of education to love. Therefore, what is out of question is the mere

conveying information that is not linked to objective moral principles. In the teaching of the Church, there is a conviction that “parents should always present positive models and appropriate ways of engaging their own vital energies, and teach the importance of friendship and solidarity.” In particularly difficult situations, parents are also recommended to seek help from specialists, preferably “with a Christian orientation” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 70-74, p. 143-145). The last, fourth rule related to sexual education highlights the need to provide information “with the utmost gentleness, but in a clear and timely manner” (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 75-76, p. 145-146). It is important that the parents’ words are neither too blunt nor too vague. Both passing on too many details, especially to too young children, and delaying children’s access to information are considered unreasonable (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 75-76, p. 145-146). Pope Francis also points out that information on gender and sexuality should reach children “in a timely manner and in a manner appropriate to the experienced stage” (Franciszek, 2016, n. 281). Children should not be permeated “with data without developing a critical sense in the face of an invasion of proposition, in the face of uncontrolled pornography and overstimulation that can mutilate their sexuality” (Franciszek, 2016, n. 281). Maria Ryś emphasizes that it is extremely important for parents to answer all the child’s questions truthfully and in an atmosphere of trust. This is possible when children can observe their parents who follow the truths they preach. The effectiveness of upbringing largely depends on the example of the parents’ lives and their testimonies (Ryś, 1999, p. 486). Observation of parents is the basis for children of shaping their ideas and expectations from themselves and others (Długołęcka, 2006, p. 254-255). Introducing children to the area of thinking about gender and sexuality in the family should be marked by a dual concern of parents: on the one hand, it is to be “anticipatory and critical upbringing, and on the other – bold exposing the wrong actions of the authorities”, which would abuse and deform the sensitivity of children and adolescents (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, p. 131-132). Both attitudes are unacceptable: the parents’ fearful attitude resulting from perceiving their own sex life

in a negative and fearful manner, and the too liberal attitude. The latter consists in over-focusing on the sexual sphere, in separating it from experiencing love and responsibility (Skreczko, 1999, p. 487).

The document of the Pontifical Council for the Family, mentioned many times in this study, also contains specific guidelines for parents who undertake the responsibility of sexual education of their children. One of them is the recommendation to associate with other parents to defend their values and to oppose harmful forms of upbringing. The next guidelines concern parents’ familiarization with the content and methods of sex education at school or other non-family institutions, including the parents’ presence in classes. The last directive deals with the careful monitoring of all forms of non-family sex education. The teaching of the Church obliges parents to withdraw their children from classes that they find harmful (*Ludzka płciowość...*, 2010, n. 114-117, p. 161-162).

Summing up, it should be stated that sex education in the family is aimed at the sexual integration of children and adolescents, achieved primarily through participation in family life, obtaining information about gender and sexuality from their parents, open communication without prudery, providing children with a sense of emotional security, parents’ gentleness and respect for the intimate sphere of their children (cf.: Skreczko, 1999, p. 487). In other words, all this pertains to the serious and honest treatment by parents of this sphere of education (Ryś, 1999, p. 486).

## Conclusions

The teaching of the Catholic Church not only emphasizes the need for sexual education, but also attributes a lot of significance to the fact that this education should be carried out in a manner respecting human dignity. Acknowledging the primacy of family ties, the Church grants parents the right and obligation to undertake the ministry of “spiritual birth-giving” in the area related to gender and sexuality. The documents of the Catholic Church emphasize the need for sexual education, based on an integral vision of the human being. They also emphasize the need to place this sphere in the context of the development

of the whole human being. Recognition of the adult generation's need to undertake sexual education is related to treating a person as a being whose basic life task is love, understood as giving to other people everything that constitutes their own humanity. This is also related to accepting the social nature of the human person, focused on building and maintaining lasting relationships with another human being. As Józef Augustyn points out, "the role of sexuality is not limited to physical action, and the essence of sexuality significantly exceeds the genital sphere itself" (Augustyn, 2015, p. 71). Sexual education can be defined as education to love related to "the most important problems of human life – its sense and pur-

pose, ideals and values" (Ryś, 1999, p. 485). This view of sex education results from accepting humanity as a mystery, as a form of being with others and for others, as a relationship. Sex education should always be understood in its broad sense: as accompanying a young person in their search for answers to the most important questions, as education to love. It is worth emphasizing that sexual education prepares a young person for self-education, for taking responsibility for their life (Ryś, 1999, p. 486). Apart from the information on issues of human gender and sexuality, the formation of a whole, full human being is dealt with here – a human whose sexual life can therefore be poetry rather than a craft (Pawlukiewicz, 2019).

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