



Attitudes of prospective spouses towards moral principles regulating procreative behaviours¹

Postawy narzeczonych wobec norm moralnych regulujących zachowania prokreacyjne²
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Abstract: The ability to transmit life is a precious gift for both spouses and society as a whole. This gift is protected by moral principles pointing to the need to reject anything that goes against responsible parenting. However, it can be noticed that when some people appreciate the ability to procreate and live in harmony with their own sexuality and fertility, others fight it. They do not recognize fertile and infertile days of the cycle, but eliminate fertility through contraceptives and even allow abortion. In the case of problems with conceiving, some decide to undergo in vitro fertilization considering neither instrumentalization and medicalisation of procreation nor the death of a number of embryos associated with the procedures undertaken nor the possible negative health effects. The article consists of three parts. It recalls passages from the Holy Scripture and numerous documents of the Catholic Church on procreation and moral principles in the field of transmitting human life. In this way, it answers the question 'how should it be?'. The answer to the question 'how is it?' becomes possible through survey leveraging a questionnaire prepared specifically for this purpose: *Attitudes towards marriage and family morality*. The respondents were people preparing for marriage as part of courses organized by parishes in villages around Lublin. It would seem that the inhabitants of smaller towns pay more attention to the opinions of others than the anonymous inhabitants of cities, with is conducive to maintaining moral norms and living in accordance with them. However, the polls of a large part of the respondents indicate serious discrepancies between the guidelines of the Catholic Church and the attitudes expressed. Although the vast majority define themselves as 'believers' and 'definitely believers', more than half of them perform religious practices: 'irregularly', 'on special occasions' or not at all. Many people reveal preferences in the area of procreation that are inconsistent with the moral principles proclaimed by the Church. This situation requires an answer to the question: "what needs to be done so that it is as it should be?" An opportunity and hope for improvement is a program implemented within the framework of the pre-marriage course, as well as the knowledge, skills and commitment of the priests and family life counsellors who lead it. It is also necessary to extend this responsibility to the whole of society, especially authority figures, i.e. parents, educators, teachers, journalists and other groups responsible for moral and family-oriented education.

Keywords: fiancés, engaged couples, moral norms, responsible parenting

Abstrakt: Zdolność przekazywania życia to cenny dar zarówno dla małżonków, jak i całego społeczeństwa. Dar ten chronią zasady moralne wskazujące na potrzebę odrzucenia wszystkiego, co sprzeciwia się odpowiedzialnemu rodzicielstwu. Zauważyć jednak można, że gdy jedni doceniają możliwości prokreacyjne i żyją w zgodzie z własną płciowością i płodnością, inni z nią walczą. Nie rozpoznają dni płodnych i niepłodnych w cyklu, lecz eliminują płodność poprzez środki antykoncepcyjne, a nawet dopuszczają aborcję. W przypadku problemów z poczęciem, niektórzy decydują się na zapłodnienie in vitro, nie bacząc na instrumentalizację i medykaliczację prokreacji, ani na śmierć części embrionów wpisaną w podjęte procedury, ani na możliwe negatywne skutki zdrowotne. Składający się z trzech części artykuł przypomina fragmenty Pisma Świętego i liczne dokumenty Kościoła katolickiego na temat prokreacji i zasad moralnych w dziedzinie przekazywania życia ludzkiego. W ten sposób odpowiada na pytanie „jak być powinno”. Odpowiedź na pytanie „jak jest” staje się możliwa dzięki przeprowadzeniu badań, specjalnie dla tego celu opracowaną, ankietą: *Postawy wobec moralności małżeńsko-rodzinnej*. Respondentami były osoby przygotowujące się do małżeństwa w ramach kursów organizowanych przez parafie w podlubelskich wioskach. Wydawać by się mogło że mieszkańcy mniejszych miejscowości, bardziej zważają na opinie innych, niż anonimowi mieszkańcy miast, a to sprzyja zachowywaniu norm moralnych i życiu zgodnie z nimi. Ankiety znacznej części badanych wskazują jednak na poważne rozbieżności pomiędzy wskazaniami Kościoła katolickiego, a wyrażanymi postawami. Mimo, że zdecydowana większość określa siebie jako ludzi „wierzących” i „zdecydowanie wierzących”, to ponad połowa z nich, praktyki religijne spełnia: „nieregularnie”, „od wielkiego święta”, lub wcale. Wiele osób ujawnia odniesienia wobec prokreacji niezgodne z zasadami moralnymi głoszonymi przez Kościół. Sytuacja ta wymaga odpowiedzi na pytanie: „co zrobić, aby było tak, jak być powinno”? Szansą i nadzieją naprawy jest program realizowany w ramach kursu przedmałżeńskiego, a także wiedza, umiejętności i zaangażowanie prowadzących go duszpasterzy i doradców życia rodzinnego. Konieczne jest również rozszerzenie tej odpowiedzialności na całe społeczeństwo, zwłaszcza autorytety wychowujące, czyli: rodziców, wychowawców, nauczycieli, dziennikarzy i inne grupy odpowiedzialne za wychowanie moralne i prorodzinne.

Słowa kluczowe: narzeczeni, normy moralne, odpowiedzialne rodzicielstwo

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Introduction

Marriage is a vocation and realization of a community of life and love (Vatican Council II, 1965, KDK 48). It is the foundation of a future family when out of the unity of husband and wife a new human is conceived and born. Conjugal love and procreation are two essential elements of marriage. “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized” (Code of Canon Law, 1982, Can. 1055, § 1). The good of spouses requires that they establish: an interpersonal relationship based on dialogue, understanding and empathy. The spouses should take care of both the sphere of intimate life and the one of spiritual growth. They must take into account intellectual, emotional, physical, economic and social development, both their own and their spouse’s (Król, 2018). Having become parents, spouses should be aware that their duty to their children is not only to give birth to them physically: at the most appropriate time, with pre-concept and prenatal care, but also psychological and spiritual begetting through proper upbringing. The essential tasks of spouses and future parents require appropriate preparation, described in detail in subsequent Instructions (Polish Bishops’ Conference, 1969, 1975, 1989). This preparation should take into account the following spheres: physical, mental, spiritual, social, economic, educational, moral, religious, preventive and organizational. The necessity of intensive and conscientious preparation is justified by the fact that the marital community is by definition durable and covers the whole life (Braun-Galkowska, 1984, p. 57). It is also, in addition to solitary, priestly and religious life, one of the paths of sanctification leading to eternal life. As a community it should be: faithful, exclusive and indissoluble, alien to betrayal and divorce, preventing the trivialization of human sexuality, or interfering with, manipulating and disturbing fertility. The Directory for the Pastoral Care of Families divides preparation for marriage into further, closer and immediate (Conference of the

Polish Episcopate, 2003, No. 18-33). It concerns: – family influence on a small child; – the impact of school and other educating authorities on a large child and a teenager; – as well as premarital catecheses and meetings at a Catholic Family Life Clinic in which adult prospective spouses participate.

It seems that when asked about marriage preparation, many brides will talk about: the date of the wedding, wedding halls available to rent, finding a suitable band, the prices of elegant outfits and inviting guests, rather than: understanding the meaning of the sacrament of marriage, experiencing the liturgy, building the marital bond, the development of the ability to love and the ways of expressing love, the planned number of children, shaping the educational environment in the family, or recognizing fertility. According to research and the experience of family life counsellors from Catholic Family Life Clinics, many Catholics coming to premarital education did not read Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae. On the Regulation of Birth* (in Polish translation: *On Moral Principles in the Field of Transmitting Human Life*) (Furtak, 2011, Katarzyńska, 2020). Probably, there is still a large group of prospective spouses who only have the first opportunity to learn the principles of observing symptoms and interpreting fertility indicators at the church clinic. It is possible that a significant number of people preparing for marriage were subjected to the pressure of contraceptive advertisements disseminated by secular circles much earlier. Perhaps some of them, under the influence of women who cause street riots and of liberal media, have assimilated arguments for the right to kill an unborn baby in various life situations, e.g. because of health or legal reasons. Others are inclined to approve of IVF and, despite belonging to the Catholic Church, they cannot explain why it is morally unacceptable.

Finding out about the attitudes towards procreation exhibited by fiancé and fiancée is possible through specific questions asked in a survey form developed for the purpose of this article. According to the paradigm used in pastoral theology, the obtained results, i.e. the statement ‘how it is’, can be compared with the moral principles in the field of

transmitting human life, that is, with 'what it should be'. This, in turn, will give the answer 'what needs to be done so that it is as it should be?' (Przygoda, 2009, 31-43). This knowledge is needed in theoretical and practical, individual and social, temporal and eternal dimensions. It may be useful to fiancés, spouses, parents, and those who help to prepare for marriage and family life.

Studying the positions of engaged couples towards procreation is a process consisting of three elements:

- recalling the moral principles in the field of transmitting life;
- obtaining and presenting opinions collected in an anonymous survey;
- providing possible tips on shaping moral attitudes in the field of procreation.

The above-mentioned issues will be the content of the following paragraphs. The conclusion will make it possible to draw attention to the most important takeaways from the research and pastoral indications, and the Bibliography will give readers a hint about publications expanding their knowledge on the most interesting issues.

1. Moral principles in the field of transmitting life

The issue of responsible parenthood was first and most extensively described in the encyclical *Humanae vitae* (Paul VI, 1968) on this subject. However, this theme was already taken up in the first centuries of Christianity, e.g. by Basil the Great (330-379), John Chrysostom (born before 350 and died in 407) and Saint Augustine (354-430). The fundamental basis of the moral issues proclaimed by early Christian authors was the Holy Scripture. In it, they also looked for a grounds for their position on abortion and contraception.

In both the Old and New Testament, human life was treated as a sacred gift from God (*Holy Bible*, 1980, Genesis 3:20; Ex 23:26; Ps 139: 13-16; 2Mch 7: 22-23; Luke 1:15 and 44), which must not be destroyed. The description in the Book of Exodus

shows that the accidental hitting of a pregnant woman leading to a miscarriage was to be punished with a fine (*Holy Bible*, 1980, Ex 21, 22). The Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, made in the 3rd century BC, distinguished between the views of a formed and unformed foetus at that time, and applied not only to an adult, but also to a formed foetus, the principle of 'life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth' (*Holy Bible*, 1980, Ex 21, 23).

The critical stance on contraception can be found in the Scripture story of Onan, who practised *coitus interruptus*, or interrupted intercourse (Genesis 38: 6-10). Avoiding fertilization by pouring semen on the ground was considered a shameful act and a grave sin: 'What he did was evil in the eyes of the Lord' (Genesis 38:10). The sinfulness of this sexual act could, however, be understood not only as the prohibition of contraception, but as the avoidance of compliance with the law of the levirate.

Patrologist Stanisław Longosz states that the clear condemnation of contraception is visible in the commentary of John Chrysostom to the Letter to the Romans (Longosz, 2007, 292-293). The golden-mouthed archbishop of Constantinople warns against adultery in the form of marital adultery and prostitution, which may result in contraception and abortion. He is also opposed to contraceptives and abortives when they are used in marriage. He also criticizes the behavior of people who 'make their nature barren' and mutilate themselves through sterilization (Jan Chrysostom, 2000, 345). Such an act may be tantamount to suggesting that 'the Creator made a mistake that must be corrected, which is an insult to God and an invention of the devil' (Longosz, 2007, 294-295). Both men and women *are to blame for abortion. In case of men that is because by sexually exploiting women who are able to 'produce offspring' they prepare them for 'murder'*. They make the female womb, 'the source of fertility', <the cradle of death> (Jan Chrysostom, 1998, 534-536).

An unequivocal objection to inducing miscarriages was expressed by the bishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia, Basil the Great (330-379): '*a woman who intentionally destroys a foetus is punishable as for murder. And it is not up to us to investigate carefully whether the fetus was already shaped or still shapeless [...]. Such women who*

provide the means of causing miscarriage are murderers, as are those who take poisonous substances and kill the foetus (St Basil, 1972, 187-191).

The same was understood by Marcus Minucius Felix, a Roman writer of *African origin* and Christian apologist from the 2nd / 3rd century AD, who wrote: *Women who, while drinking medicine, destroy the fetus of a future life in the womb, commit infanticide* (Minucius Felix, 2001, 64).

Saint Augustine (354-430), in his work *On Marriage and Virginity*, stated unequivocally: *Debauched this cruelty, or rather cruel debauchery, often goes so far as to use poisons against fertilization, and when they fail, it destroys the conceived fetus in the womb by some means and removes it* (Augustine *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, Cap. XV).

Continuing the previous teaching against the unethical counteracting of procreation, Pope Pius XI speaks in the encyclical *Casti Connubii* (1930). With the consent of both spouses, <honest abstinence> is allowed, and not *'honest abstinence' is allowed and not 'violating the natural act'* (Pius XI, 1930, II, 1).

In the 14th number of the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, Paul VI informs that direct deprivation of fertility, whether permanent or temporary, of both man and woman, and all measures to prevent conception, whether taken before, during or after the intercourse, must be rejected (Paul VI, 1968, 14). If there are good reasons for postponing conception, whether physical (health) or mental or other external circumstances, *'spouses are allowed to take into account the natural cyclicity inherent in reproductive functions and to have intercourse only in periods of infertility'*. Such regulation of conception is ethical and takes place without breaking moral principles (Paul VI, 1968, 16).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that *'spouses called to give life share in the creative power and fatherhood of God'* (CCC, 1994, 2367). The transmission of life and the raising of children is a mission in which the husband and wife are co-workers and expressers of the love of God the Creator. Therefore, they should carry out their task 'with a sense of human and Christian responsibility' (ibidem). Conception regulation based on the recognition

of fertile and infertile days in the cycle and periodic abstinence 'is consistent with the objective criteria of morality' (CCC, 1994, 2370). On the other hand, sterilization and contraception are clearly defined as morally unacceptable measures (CCC, 1994, 2399). 'For justifiable reasons, the spouses may wish to postpone the birth of their children' (CCC 1994, 2368). However, this must not result from selfishness, but is to be 'in accord with the righteous generosity of responsible parenthood' and in keeping with 'the objective criteria of morality' (ibidem).

The protection of the life of every human being, also in the embryonic stage of development, is ensured by the fifth commandment of the Decalogue 'You shall not kill' (Holy Scripture, 1980, Ex 20, 13; Dt 5:17).

Church's objection to the killing of a child developing in its mother's womb can be read in the document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Quaestio de abortu procurato*, approved by Paul VI, stating that: 'Life should be cared for and nurtured, both at the beginning and in different stages of development' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974, II, 6). Laws enacted by people that allow killing must not destroy the law of God who is Love (Scripture, 1980, 1 Jn 4: 7) and, as the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* emphasizes, God who is the Lord of life (John Paul II, 1995, 39). 'Man's life comes from God, it is his gift, his image and reflection, participation in his life-giving breath. That is why God is the only Lord of this life, man cannot have it at his disposal (ibidem). The arguments for life result from science, faith and morality as well as reason. 'It is not always easy to follow the voice of conscience in keeping God's law, especially as it can entail inconvenience and heavy sacrifice. It, sometimes, takes heroic bravery to remain faithful to moral standards. However, it must be clearly stated that constant fidelity to a true and honest conscience is the way to the authentic development of the human person' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974, 24).

Another document referring to the gift of life the *Donum Vitae* Declaration, approved by John Paul II, emphasizes that: 'No one, under any circumstances, can claim the right to directly destroy an innocent human being' (Congregation for the Doctrine of

the Faith, 1987, Introduction, 5). This issue is also clarified in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: <Human life is sacred because from the very beginning it requires> God's creative action and remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, its only destination (CCC, 1994, 2258). Doubts, since when are you a human? are addressed by genetics, embryology, psychology and prenatal pedagogy. This is unambiguously explained in the aforementioned *Quaestio de abortu procurato* declaration, in the chapter Scientific Arguments: 'From the moment the egg is fertilized, a life begins that is not that of a father or a mother, but that of a new, living human being that develops independently of them' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1974, 12). <From the moment of conception, human life should be respected and protected in an absolute way. From the very first moment of his existence, a human being should be granted the rights of a person, including the inviolable right of every innocent being to life' (CCC, 1994, 2270, cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instr. *Donum vitae*, I, 1). This position was confirmed in the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, recognizing that "Human life, from the very moment of conception, must absolutely be cared for and respected". On the other hand, 'abortion is a direct violation of the fundamental right of every human being—the right to life' (CRF, 1983, art. 4). At the Second Vatican Council, the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church* stated that 'human life, once conceived, should be protected with the utmost care, and abortion, like infanticide, should be considered a disgusting crime' (KDK, 1965, 51). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* affirms that: 'From the beginning, the Church claimed that any induced termination of pregnancy was a moral evil. Teaching on the subject has not changed and remains the same. Direct termination of pregnancy, that is, intended as an end or measure, is deeply contrary to the moral law' (CCC, 1994, 2271). In the next issue of the *Catechism*, this act is called a serious offense and a crime against human life, for which the penalty of excommunication is imposed (CCC, 1994, 2271).

Since the birth of Louise Brown's 'first test tube baby' in 1978, IVF has become very popular, with an estimated 8 million babies born in this

way (Stachura, 2021). Some people describe the procedure of in vitro fertilization as a 'miracle of medicine' and 'a chance for the infertile', without making its moral evaluation. In this context, it is worth noting that not everything technically possible is ethically acceptable. Help to clarify this issue comes from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with *Instruction on respect for the new life and the dignity of its transmission*. It explains that 'the gift of life should be passed on only in marriage through proper acts exclusive to spouses, according to the laws inscribed in their persons and in their union' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987, Introduction, 5). 'The spread of technology that allows intervention in the processes of transmitting life raises very serious moral problems with regard to due respect for a human being from the very beginning, for the dignity of the person, for their sexuality and for parenthood' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987, Conclusion).

It is morally wrong to reduce human life to a laboratory issue, reify a person, instrumentalize sexual behaviour, risk death or deliberately take the life of the so-called supernumerary embryos, masturbate with the aim of obtaining sperm, endanger the health of a woman, administer hormonal stimulation causing hyperovulation, take gametes from strangers, undertake 'production' of people, allow the possible negative effects of artificial insemination. In the case of heterologous fertilization, it is worth emphasizing that 'the fidelity of spouses in marital unity entails mutual respect for their right to become father and mother solely through themselves' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987, II. A.1). In turn, the Church's opposition to homologous fertilization stems from the following: it takes place outside the bodies of the spouses, with the help of third parties who manipulate gametes and embryos. 'This kind of relationship of lordship is in itself contrary to the dignity and equality that should be shared by parents and children'. It is 'in itself wicked and contrary to the dignity of parenthood and marital unity, even if everything was done to avoid the death of the embryo' (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987, II. B. 5).

Presentation of issues related to procreation, by compiling the relevant documents defining how it should be, prompts us to learn about the attitude of people preparing for the sacrament of marriage (potential future parents) to define 'how it is'. By compiling the results of the survey, it will be possible to state whether or not the views of the engaged couples are compatible with moral norms in the field of the transmission of life.

2. Results of the survey of a group of engaged couples

The research was carried out in March, April and May 2022 in two communes near Lublin, one located to the south-east and the other to the north-west of Lublin. The survey took place during pre-marriage courses in parishes. These courses are held there once a year in order to attract more people at the same time. The current courses gathered the inhabitants of nearby villages planning to get married this year. According to the program, they attended lectures and workshops on responsible parenting. It was decided that the survey would be conducted before the beginning of the classes on the regulation of conceptions. This made it possible to register the knowledge and views with which the prospective spouses come to the pre-marriage course, without the influence of the content heard from the instructors. The survey forms were developed in accordance with the aim of the research, which was to diagnose a positive or negative relationship of the attitudes of future spouses and potential parents towards moral principles in the field of procreation.

The respondents were: – assured of anonymity, discretion, as well as the scientific nature of the research, – located in the room so that the work could be independent, – equipped with pens and a list of questions, – formally instructed how and where to answer open and closed questions (by marking the selected answers and entering their own in the dotted spaces), – also asked to carefully and accurately fill in all the fields of the received printout.

The questionnaire, entitled Attitudes Towards Marriage and Family Morality, contained 25 questions, 3 of which required defining of such terms as:

abortion, contraception and natural family planning. 10 questions required circling the answer of choice. The other questions, which involved selecting YES, NO or IT DEPENDS, required marking and explaining the chosen answer. Some of the questions concerning procreation will be elaborated on in this text. The other questions related to sexuality will be the subject of the next article. Questions concerning personal data covered: age, which as it turned out was in the range of 22-34; the number of children in the generational family (of one's own and of their fiancé/fiancée) and the planned number of children of your own family—2-3 children were mentioned most often. The last question made it possible to refer to who influenced the respondent's attitudes towards marriage and family, where the father was mentioned the most frequently and the mother immediately after.

Out of the questions requiring a definition, the answers concerning abortion turned out to be the most correct. One can see that this is a well-known topic for the engaged, and does not pose any difficulties in explaining. A question about contraception was answered partially with the respondents claiming, for example, that it is pregnancy prevention, but not mentioning the means by which it is done. The biggest problem was explaining: what is natural family planning? Many people did not answer at all, others answered incorrectly. An example of incorrect or incomplete statements are the following statements: 'Natural family planning is living together on days that favour fertility' K6; 'No contraception M28'; 'Related to the use of the calendar' K3, 'safe method when you are not ready to be a parent, unfortunately very unreliable' K10.

People who know any of the methods of natural family planning constitute 36% of the surveyed group, however, most of them admitted only knowing the calculation method known as the calendar method. The discovery of this method by Kuysaku Ogino (1882-1975) and Herman Knaus (1892-1975) was a breakthrough in the 1920s and 1930s (Thieri, 2000). Currently, however, observation methods are more precise than the calculation method, taking into account the individual fertility indicators on an ongoing basis (Dudziak, 2001, 75-83; Taż 2002, 81-101. This group consists of: the thermal, Billings

and symptothermal methods, also known by the names of the people who developed it: in Poland, Teresa Kramarek, in Austria: Josef Rötzer, in the United States John and Sheila Kippley, founders of the Couple to Couple League. The Multiple Index Double-Check Method, which originated in the United Kingdom, takes into account changes in the cervix in addition to the calendar calculation and changes in temperature and mucus (Dudziak, 2001, 91-95). It began with a Pole living in England, Jan Mucharski (also known as Paul Thym), and was developed, described and disseminated By John Kelly and Anna Flynn. In Poland, the first course for natural family planning teachers, in accordance with the principles of the Multiple Index Method, took place in 1988 followed by the next one in 1989. The lecturers included Anna Flynn, who works at the Queen Elizabeth Birmingham Maternity Hospital and Alina Lichtarowicz a doctor of Polish descent based in the United Kingdom.

Among the respondents assessing their knowledge of the NDP methods, 61% chose the answer 'I don't know, but I will learn', 3% said: 'I don't know and I don't care'. A reluctant attitude towards fertility recognition methods or the lack of knowledge and the ability to apply them is not conducive to the attitude of responsible, competent and prepared parenting. Most prospective spouses learnt about natural family planning neither in the family home nor at school. However, it is hopeful that people who have not yet acquired knowledge in the field of NFP have a chance to make up for it during pre marriage courses organized in parishes.

Educational background of the prospective spouses participating in the pre-marriage course and completing the questionnaire is presented in Figure 1. It shows that most of the surveyed graduated from secondary education (more than half of the respondents). 39% of the surveyed group graduated from higher education, and 7% graduated from vocational education. The level of education would not be a barrier to learning observational methods of fertility recognition and birth control with their help. Experience shows that this is not a problem even for the illiterate. In 1989, John and Evelyn Billings, who delivered a lecture at the John Paul II

Catholic University of Lublin, admitted that they taught the symptomatic method in 60 countries and it was possible also in tribes of people who could not read and write. It is obvious to people who cultivate the land that nothing grows during the drought and that the soil produces crops during the rainy season. Transferring this into the phases of the cycle and referring to the woman's cervical mucus, which plays an important role regarding in the man's sperm, they understood when there is the fertile period is and when there is not (Figure 1).

In teaching natural family planning, a greater role than educational background seems to be played by the willingness to acquire this knowledge and the opportunity to attend classes with an appropriate instructor. Religious formation may also play a role in motivating the acquisition of this knowledge, its adoption and application. A consequential parameter of religiosity is respect for moral norms, and one of them concerns responsible parenthood that excludes abortion, contraception and in vitro fertilization (Paul VI, 1968; John Paul II, 1995; Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, 1987). The following Figures 2 and 3 show the attitude of the prospective spouses towards faith and religious practices. In the group

Education of prospective spouses

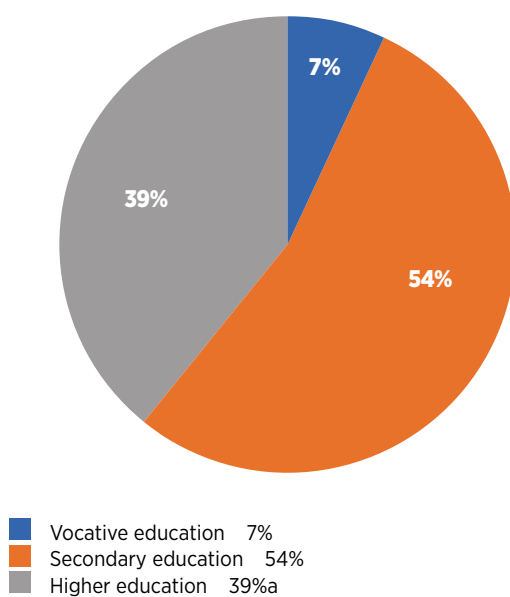


Figure 1. Percentage of the surveyed prospective spouses depending on their education.

of fiancés preparing for the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic Church, 96% declared that they were ‘believers’ or even ‘definitely believers’, 4% said that they had no opinion on faith and were not interested in it. Entering into marriage with a non-believer is possible under the condition of declaring no obstacles to the fulfilment of the spouse’s religious practices and the Catholic upbringing of children. However, it is a difficult situation that requires special pastoral attention (John Paul II, FC 78). The Catholic side takes on greater and often independently fulfilled duties related to the baptism of children and the implementation of religious practices. In applying the natural regulation of conception, the non-believer will be devoid of religious motivation, but may appreciate other arguments, e.g. ecological, health-related or economic as well as respecting the dignity of the spouse and not creating obstacles to building the marriage bond (Figure 2).

The manifestation of professed faith is the implementation of religious practices. The questionnaire made it possible to mark one of several possible answers regarding the frequency of fulfilling religious practices. It is appropriate for respondents to describe themselves as ‘systematically practising’ or ‘practising more than is mandated by the laws of the Church’. It appeared, however, that the responses of those preparing for marriage were more varied. As we can see in Figure 3, 43% of people practised regularly. The same number of people from the study group admitted that they practiced irregularly. Those practicing more than what is required by Church’s regulations accounted for 3%, however on-practitioners constituted 4% and those who practiced extraordinarily, on special holidays 7%, which gives a total of 11% Those practicing, as it is dictated by the regulations of the Church or even more, made up 46% of the surveyed group. The majority constituting 54% of the surveyed group did not fulfil the practices as they should or they did not practice at all. These statements allow us to predict that the declaration of respecting the moral standards that protect marriage and family life would be far from the expected. One should also notice an inconsistency in the responses of people claiming that they were <definitely believers> and at the same time writing that they <practice irregularly>

Attitude towards faith of future spouses

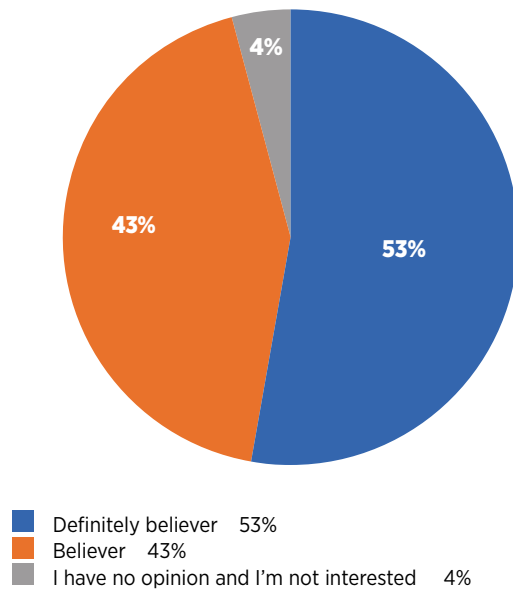


Figure 2. Percentage of the surveyed prospective spouses depending on their self-declared attitude towards faith.

Religious practice

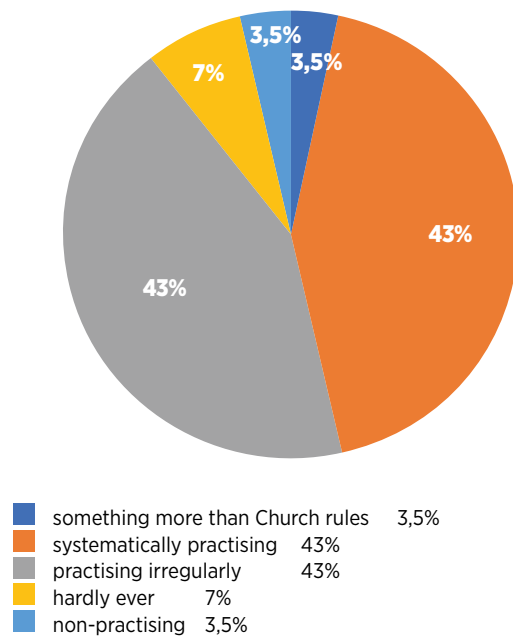


Figure 3. Percentage of the surveyed prospective spouses depending on frequency of their religious practices

(21%) or even <exceptionally, hardly ever> (7%). The sense of dissonance creates a clear discrepancy between a verbal declaration and acts motivated by

faith Words alone without being matched by proper deeds are from maturity that requires the integration of choices (decisions) and actions. The situation of lack of religious maturity may negatively affect future relationship in marriage and family life, especially the upbringing of children who need a clear, unfeigned testimony, the right model to follow (Figure 3).

The moral standards acceptance that the prospective spouses were asked about concerned parenthood excluding contraception, abortion and in vitro fertilization. Do young people preparing for the sacrament of marriage have views in line with the morality of marriage and family? The answer to this question is illustrated in Figure 4.

The data shows that attitudes towards procreation that are inconsistent with moral norms are displayed by: 79% of prospective spouses when it comes to allowing the use of contraception, 68% regarding allowing in vitro fertilization and 43% in terms of allowing the killing of a child by abortion. This condition needs to be corrected by a thorough religious formation taking into account moral education, both for children and adults. You cannot pass on to others what you do not have yourself. The current attitudes of a significant proportion of prospective spouses do not guarantee successful education and

moral formation of their future children. This applies to both views and conduct, especially since a large proportion of the respondents, when asked what methods / means they intend to use in their future marriage, they responded in violation of norms applicable to Catholics: 46% write that they would use contraceptives, of which 11% specify that they would be hormonal pills, 7% chose mechanical means, condoms, one of the men said: ‘Whatever we will find’ Every fourth fiance (25%) writes: ‘We do not know yet’ (eg K 9, M5, K 18,), ‘we have not talked about it’ (M 20), ‘we have not established yet’ (K19). The use of natural family planning in a future marriage is declared by 29% of respondents, half of whom write that it will be the calendar method. There was also an intention to combine natural family planning with barrier contraception, such as the use of condoms during the fertile days. Some people also expressed the desire to combine natural family planning with hormonal contraception This idea, besides being morally unacceptable, is illogical and impossible to put into practice. The hormone-induced cycle disorder makes it unrealistic to determine the fertile and infertile days by observation while taking the pills. The deficiencies in the knowledge of the physiology of fertility and the methods of its recognition, as well as the issues of marital and family morality, found in prospective spouses, place high demands on counsellors and priests.

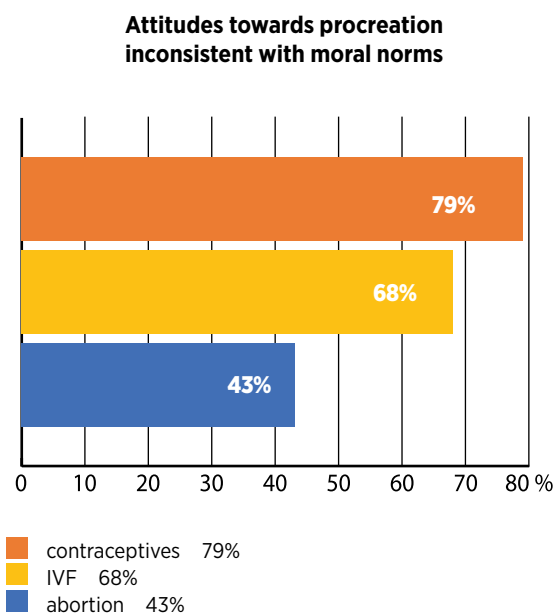


Figure 4. Percentage of the surveyed prospective spouses with attitude towards procreation not in compliance with moral norms (complete or partial approval of morally unacceptable behaviour).

3. Postulates of shaping morality in the procreation sphere

The commitment to the Catholic upbringing of children during the wedding liturgy (Rites of the Sacrament of Marriage, 2007) also applies to moral formation. This should be done through the parents’ own testimony, but also through conversations with the child expanding knowledge, sharing books and magazines, developing moral sensitivity choosing good over evil, motivating and creating opportunities for moral behaviour (Łobocki, 2009, 12-13). The state of knowledge of future spouses shows insufficient efforts in this area. It is possible that this topic is considered a ‘taboo’, which is not discussed

in many households. It is possible that the parents did not have well-established biomedical and moral knowledge in the field of responsible parenting and family planning methods. It is possible that the prospective spouses did not obtain this knowledge at family home to a sufficient degree, or they have either forgotten it or rejected it under the influence of others. From the answer to the question of who influenced the current attitudes of engaged people, the most frequently mentioned person is father (61%) and mother (53%), followed by: grandmother, friends, grandfather, priest, teacher, books, siblings, myself. There is also a response <life> that points to your own life experience.

In order to bring the presented reality <how it is> to <how it should be>, it seems useful to introduce adult catechesis in parishes on the issue of marital and family morality, to open counselling centres not only for engaged couples (as some see it), but also for married couples, conduct thematic courses and training, retreat teachings and, on responsible parenting for spouses in formation movements and communities. Both engaged and married couples need the support of the family pastoral workers. Shaping the attitude of responsible parenthood aims at the situation when 'the spouses obey God's call and faithfully express God's plan for the family' (Goleń, 2013, 112). To counterbalance the widespread promotion of contraception and in vitro fertilization, and the frequent voices that justify the killing of children through abortion, it is right to conduct radio and television broadcasts teaching responsible parenthood. There is also a need for numerous publications, both scientific and popular, on selected issues in natural family planning. In the sphere of procreation-related and moral education of society, spouses have a lot to do, following the attitude of responsible parenthood, known from the *Humanae Vitae* encyclical. It is good for all Catholic couples to know that 'The vocation to marriage also includes the call to the apostolate. (...) By virtue of the sacrament of marriage, husband and wife are missionaries of love and life' (Adamczyk, 2022, 126).

The fact that more than half of the interviewed prospective spouses admit to <irregular religious practices> that have occurred 'extraordinarily, on

special holidays' or not at all, significantly limits the possibility of pastoral influences useful in shaping moral attitudes. However, you cannot give them up. Also pre-marriage courses should be treated very responsibly, conscientiously filling the classes with the necessary content. It is also worth paying attention to the activity of associations teaching methods of fertility recognition as well as education and counselling carried out through their websites. The well versed in biomedical issues teachers' knowledge about natural family planning should be supplemented with content in the field of moral education, and catechists and priests should be invited to participate in fertility recognition training. It is worth using the help of graduates of family sciences, who, as few from among those with higher education, have lectures and exercises in their curriculum which allows learning about fertility recognition methods.

Professional development is also useful for teachers. It should consist of aspects of moral education and biomedical foundations of family planning. This is important for all teachers, irrespective of the subject taught, because each teacher is also an educator and has form time to arrange. The subject of moral education cannot be ignored during this time. Biologists who are familiar with biomedical knowledge should step up their own moral education. On the other hand, catechists, as the only teachers who had the subject of moral theology (general and specific) in their university studies, should supplement their knowledge in the field of fertility physiology and natural family planning. The role of the school is, of course, not to replace parents, but to support the educational process and proper, integral education that takes into account the human body, psyche, spirit and social relations. The educational responsibility of teachers should mobilize them to self-evaluation and place demands not only on students or their parents, but also on themselves. Jarosław Kamiński (2010, 411) rightly states that "the testimony of their own lives is a big challenge for people responsible for moral education of the young generation. The point is that the behavior of parents and educators should be an object of identification for children and an example worth following.

It is worth considering what healthcare facilities can do for responsible procreation, pre-conceptual and prenatal care. Perhaps, instead of offering contraception, abortion and in vitro fertilization, former natural family planning clinics existing next to gynaecological surgeries could be reinstated or newly established? Perhaps local governments and non-governmental organizations could support the organization of training and preconception counselling? Perhaps pro life movements could expand their activities?

Responsible parenting is beneficial for the physical and mental health of children, for the bond of spouses and for the spiritual formation of families. Procreation ensures the existence of next generations, determines the future of the nation, societies and the world. For these reasons, it is a social issue, not only an individual one. Therefore, the concern for mature and responsible procreation attitudes should be a call to everyone. Therefore, parenthood as a great and important task cannot be accidental, unprepared, instrumentalized, treated as a divine punishment, an 'accident an intruder that is avoided and fought. Prospective spouses should see in their future parenthood a gift received and offered in love.

Conclusion

We obtain the knowledge on procreation, which is a gift and a task, already in first chapter of the Book of Genesis, after the creation of the world and man. God shares his creative power with the first human couple, inviting them to cooperate: Then God blessed them saying to them: <Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it' the *Holy Bible* 1984 (Gen 1,28a NIV). According to the message in the Books of the Old Testament, parenthood has been treated

for centuries as a gift and a sign of God's blessing (e.g. Gen. 24:60; 15, 5; 22:17; 26, 4; 16:10; Ps 128: 3; 127: 3-7; 5). The child 'was someone who ensured the continuity of the family, gave conviction about a well-fulfilled duty and meaning in life, and ensured the respect of the community (Zarych, 2015). However, procreation does not end in conceiving and giving birth to offspring. After being born physically, there is a need for a mental, spiritual and social begetting that takes place through upbringing. The child, the fruit of conjugal love, together with its parents creates a family, the first and most important place for human development and upbringing. Proper development requires caring love and an example of life that shows the norms and values that need to be learnt, internalized and implemented every day.

The results of surveys conducted among people preparing for marriage indicate that many of them who choose contraceptive measures, approving in vitro fertilization, and even allowing the killing of a child by abortion, do not guarantee a good educational example for future children, and even constitutes a threat to them. This implies a great and difficult task to be performed by family counselors and priests who conduct pre-marriage courses. The challenge is to help these young people make up for the shortcomings and errors in education in terms of morality, knowledge and reproductive responsibility in a few sessions. This situation highlights the need to undertake numerous activities in different social groups and to prepare the society for cooperation through various trainings. Those should involve: parents, teachers, students, health care workers, journalists, activists of local government organizations, politicians. It is thanks to procreation that the society exists, therefore the task of the whole society should be to prepare for responsible procreation in accordance with moral norms.

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