



# Responsibility of a man in the teaching of the Catholic Church<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Writing this article was inspired by the words of John Paul II spoken during his third pilgrimage to Poland, which concerned parental responsibility for life, for love, for upbringing and which were reinforced with the statement that a man should be the first to undertake this responsibility. This study is aimed at presenting some selected elements of the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the responsibility of men, as well as at considering the Church's position on defining a man in the context of his fundamental role, which is fatherhood. The source literature of this text consists of selected documents of the Catholic Church. The available studies on the indicated subject were also analyzed. On the basis of the conducted research, it can be concluded that the teaching of the Catholic Church draws attention to the divine origin of the human and treats parenthood as an area of special cooperation between the Creator and the creation. It is emphasized that human parenthood should be primarily responsible, therefore joint decisions of both spouses regarding procreation should be made freely and thoughtfully. A mature man is aware of his responsibility for building a world in accordance with the Creator's intention, and therefore he does not agree to any form of depriving marital coexistence of the double sign: of strengthening the mutual bond and of procreation. A man's responsibility for life is most strongly expressed through his opposition to any actions that violate human dignity in such a delicate area as procreation of life. In the context of a man's responsibility for upbringing, it should be stated that healthy fatherhood consists in conscious, permanent building of relationships first with the wife and then with the child. A man should actively participate in the child's life with true commitment. The education of successive generations of men requires the visible presence of a man-husband-father in the family, who does not liberate himself from his male obligations by reckless shifting them to a woman-wife-mother, but brings to the family all the features and behaviour patterns of a mature and responsible man, such as self-control, constant work on his own character and setting high requirements for himself. The undertaken issues seem particularly important from the perspective of the human being, whose one of the most important characteristics is development, permanent maturation to new challenges. Due to the unchangeable human nature, it can be said that the teaching of the Catholic Church on male responsibility remains valid despite the changing living conditions of successive generations.  
**Keywords:** Catholic Church, man, responsibility, fatherhood

## Introduction

The observation of contemporary trends in science and culture and the participation in social life allows one to conclude that what is dealt with currently is not discovering the truth about life and human nature, but rather the individual *creation* of subjective truth. Cognitive relativism allows everyone to have *their own truth*, because objective truth does not exist and everything is relative. Ethical relativism, on the other hand, undermines the objective nature of moral norms and "grants everyone the right to establish these norms *on an ongoing basis* at their own discretion" (Bejma, 2015, p. 164-169; Sławiński, 2014, p. 46). Objective reality and the obligation

to use the truth seem to belong to the past and are presented as oppressive to human freedom. In the matters concerning the most delicate spheres of life, there is a tendency to animalize the nature of the human person. The human is given the right to create their own nature according to any idea they choose. The slogan: "you can be who you want" is no longer an encouragement to consciously discover your individual possibilities, but suggests the right to "create yourself" regardless of the truth about the essence of humanity. It can be said that one currently deals with a tacit consent to the spreading subjectivism in the basic issues that define the human being.

1 Article in polish language: Odpowiedzialność mężczyzny w nauczaniu Kościoła katolickiego, [https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2023\\_4Sork.pdf](https://www.stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/2023_4Sork.pdf)

The realistic teaching of the Catholic Church draws attention to the need not only to create truth, but also to discover it and then build one's life based on the revealed truth. Therefore, it seems to be a good area for searching for unchangeable regularities that govern human life. The realistic approach, assuming respect for truth, requires searching for (and not independent creating) answers to questions about human nature and the tasks resulting from this nature. For believers, the teaching of the Church is binding, for people who do not identify with the Catholic religion, it may be an interesting suggestion. The Catholic Church is keenly interested both in the human being treated as the crown of creatures and in their relationship to themselves and the surroundings. The life of every person, every woman and every man is treated as a priceless gift and, at the same time, as an obligation to the Creator which should be treated with full responsibility.

This text was inspired by the words of John Paul II spoken in the Polish land in 1987: "A man must be the first in taking this responsibility" (for love, life, upbringing – A.S.; John Paul II, 1997, p. 455). The article is aimed at trying to recapitulate some selected elements of the teaching of the Catholic Church regarding men's responsibility and to consider the Church's view on defining a man in the context of his fundamental role, which is fatherhood. The source literature for this text are selected documents of the Catholic Church. The available studies on the indicated subject matter were also analyzed.

The undertaken issues seem particularly important from the perspective of a human being, whose one of the most important characteristics is development and permanent maturation for new challenges. There is no need to justify the accuracy of the observation that every "person is responsible for their holiness, for their life, for the quality of their life" (Póltawska, 2018, p. 15). Believers additionally realize that the responsibility of both parents for life also applies to an eternal dimension, that "the father is supposed to lead the child not only here, in the world, but also to eternity" (Póltawska, 2018, p. 99).

A man's attitude characterized by immaturity, the desire to remain a never-growing boy, the need for constant changes, life at the expense of others, and the inability to face the facts is called the "Peter Pan Syndrome" (Zarębianka, 2008, p. 255-257). The observation of social life allows one to conclude that nowadays both types of men can be met: men whose behaviour indicates the above-mentioned condition, as well as men who consciously undertake the tasks of an adult man (see: e.g. Kornas-Biela, *Introduction*, 2014, p. 7). Many empirical studies also indicate the polarization of men's attitudes (Majorczyk, 2013, p. 44). In the light of the above, it seems advisable to re-read the teaching of the Catholic Church on extremely important social issues.

The wording of the title of this article somehow forces an answer to the question concerning what responsibility is. This issue has been addressed by various thinkers. An example of a broader philosophical approach to the concept of "responsibility" can be the text by Johannes Schwartländer (2004).<sup>2</sup> This article will include approaches that consider the indicated concept from the personalistic perspective.

Karol Wojtyła made a significant contribution to defining the concept of "responsibility". It is worth paying attention to the title of one of his most representative publications: "Miłość i odpowiedzialność" (Wojtyła, 2015).<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned work, as its author emphasizes in the Introduction, "does not constitute (...) an exposition of the doctrine. However, it is primarily a fruit of the constant confrontation of the doctrine with life" (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 13). As Wojtyła points out in the further part, the doctrine, or teaching of the Church, in the field of sexual morality is based on the Gospel, "whose statements on this subject are concise and at the same time sufficient" (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 13). Karol Wojtyła relates responsibility in love to responsibility for a person, "the one who is drawn into the closest community of being and acting, whom one makes in a sense one's own property by taking advantage of their devotion" (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 116). Therefore, in Wojtyła's terms, responsibility is the responsibility

2 J. Schwartländer, (2004). *Odpowiedzialność jako podstawowe pojęcie filozoficzne* (Responsibility as a basic philosophical concept).

3 K. Wojtyła, (2015). *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (Love and Responsibility).

for a person, “it flows from this person and returns to them” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 116). The above-mentioned author points out that the huge amount of responsibility for a person can only be understood by those “who have a thorough sense of a person’s value” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 116). Responsibility for love consists in caring for the real good of another person, and at the same time it is connected with mutual personal growth (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 116). A sense of responsibility involves caring, but never rudeness or pain. According to the author, one deals here with the enrichment and “extension” of the human (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 117). Wojtyła considers the separation of love from the sense of responsibility for a person as a denial of love itself and as selfishness. He writes: “the more of the sense of responsibility for a person, the more of true love” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 117).

According to Father Marian Nowak, “the sense of responsibility is connected with the awareness of the tasks to be fulfilled” (Nowak, 1999, p. 344). The same applies to Krystyna Ostrowska’s approach: the sense of responsibility consists in taking care of everything that “results from the assigned or voluntarily undertaken tasks” and in their conscious implementation (Ostrowska, 2004a, p. 22). Responsibility is also explained in terms of an attitude resulting from awareness and freedom, which allows for making decisions and accepting their consequences (Rynio, 2021, p. 11). The indicated interpretation seems to be extremely important and worth emphasizing in the context of considerations pertaining to a man’s responsibility.

## 1. A man – who is he?

The simplest answer to the above question is: a man, like a woman, is a human being. There is no human being who is not either male or female. Gender, i.e. masculinity or femininity, as a bodily reality is focused on reproduction. “This reality is not assigned at birth, or ever later. (...) gender is created at the moment of a child’s conception. (...) Biological reality goes deeper than anything that can be changed through cosmetic surgery and sex hormones” (Anderson, 2021, p. 14; Bassa, 2015, p. 29-30). At the same time, it

must be emphasized that gender dysphoria is a very painful condition and that people suffering from it should be approached with respect – they “neither choose it nor simulate it” (Anderson, 2021, p. 14). The issue of transgenderism does not fall within the scope of this study, therefore it will not be analyzed in more detail here.

The teaching of the Catholic Church in the words of John Paul II defines both masculinity and femininity in terms of “the original sign of the Creator’s gift” and at the same time a conscious gift, originally experienced by a human being, both by a man and a woman (John Paul II, 2020, p. 73). Both femininity and masculinity are “a primary fact of nature that a human must accept and personally fill with meaning” (Benedict XVI, 2012). Representatives of both sexes have “a *spousal* property inscribed in their bodies, i.e. the ability to express love, exactly this love in which a human being becomes a gift and fulfils the very sense of their existence and of their being through this gift” (John Paul II, 2020, p. 74). Father Bronisław Mierzwiński points out that “the body expressing the element of masculinity is a gift for a woman; the body expressing the element of femininity is a gift for a man” (Mierzwiński, 1999, p. 187). Marriage is the most important space that reflects the ability of a man and a woman to complete each other. It is important that no one chooses their gender, but it is given as a task (Póltawska, 2018, p. 91).

Therefore, the full answer to the question about the identity of a man is: he is a human fulfilling his humanity in a masculine way. Masculine means, among others: other than feminine, being in opposition to femininity, also: being “in a kind of life confrontation with a woman” (Ładyżyński, 2008, p. 146). The male way of experiencing humanity is neither better nor worse than the female one: representatives of both sexes are equal in their “inalienable” dignity, as emphasized by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Both men and women “in their *being men* and *being women* reflect (...) the wisdom and goodness of the Creator” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, 369). The teaching of the Church also states that the equal dignity of people, women and men, is realized in physical, mental and ontological complementarity (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,

2004, n. 8, p. 17). Recognizing the basic equality of men and women allows for calm, complex-free acceptance of the actual differences between the sexes. The Church also suggests that problems related to gender differences should be approached in the context of relationships, not competition or rivalry (*ibid.*). Understanding the nature of humanity as a relational reality (this term was used in the cited text of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, n. 6, p. 13) makes it possible to consider the role of both men and women in the world, without omitting the natural and justified differences between the sexes, simultaneously emphasizing the value of cooperation (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2004, n. 6, p. 13; Pokrywka, 2010, p. 130).

## 2. Marriage and responsible parenthood as human vocation

The natural space for the realization of the relational nature of a human being, created as a man and a woman, is marriage. It is here that both spouses equally are called to build a community of people between each other and with children to whom they pass on their lives. A man and a woman, equal in their humanity and at the same time different, by entering into marital life, which unites them with “the closest bond” (Paul VI, 2013, n. 12, p. 190), become capable “of giving birth to a new life, in accordance with the laws contained in the very nature of a man and a woman” (*ibid.*). The Creator planned the cooperation between men and women in the most delicate matter: the transmission of life. The Second Vatican Council teaches: “God himself said that *it is not good for a human to be alone* (Genesis 2:18), and *he made a human from the beginning male and female* (Mt 19:14), desiring to give them a special participation in his own creation, he blessed a man and a woman, saying: *be fruitful and increase in number* (Genesis 1:28)” (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1967, n. 50, p. 579). These words constitute a kind of program of human earthly life, designed by the Creator. Every human-woman and every human-man is called up to motherhood or fatherhood.

Both a man and a woman take part in the process of transmitting life in the literal sense, and both are responsible for ensuring that this most delicate process takes place in accordance with the Creator’s intention: “the birth of a child is a deeply human and highly religious event because it involves the spouses, who form *one body* (cf. Genesis 2:24), and at the same time involves God himself who is present” (John Paul II, 1995, n. 43, p. 78). The “image and likeness” come from God, as a property of the human being (John Paul II, 2021, n. 9, p. 23). Therefore, a man and a woman can never be considered “creators of a new life”, but only as collaborators of God the Creator (John Paul II, 2021, n. 9, p. 27). A husband and wife, by building mutual unity, also in the most literal sense, the most delicate, most intimate closeness, become parents of a third person – a child (John Paul II, 1999, p. 44). A transcendent source of human parenthood (fatherhood and motherhood) is God’s fatherhood (John Paul II, 1999, p. 44; Walaszczyk, 2015, p. 105). Therefore, the human being should make every possible effort to make their parenthood worthy of their humanity and, at the same time, of similarity to the Creator.

It is good if both parents feel they are gifted with parenthood as a consequence of their mutual love. Karol Wojtyła points out that parenthood is not only an “external fact” related to giving birth and having a child, but also an “internal fact”, i.e. “an attitude that should characterize the love of a woman and a man when they have marital life” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 231). Therefore, it would be appropriate to assume that when entering marital intercourse, both a husband and a wife should acknowledge the fact of potential parenthood (Ryś, 2015, p. 71). Both motherhood and fatherhood should be considered, according to Wojtyła, “on the personal level, not only on the *natural* level, it is like a new crystallization of the love of persons, which grows on the basis of their already mature union” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 231).

The Catholic Church teaches that natural law requires that each marital act should retain its internal aim to transmit life (Paul VI, 2013, n. 11, p. 189). This concerns respecting the natural laws of fertility and its periods, which “by themselves introduce (...) breaks between subsequent con-

ceptions” (ibid.). “Therefore, if these two essential elements of the marital relationship are preserved, i.e. the signification of unity and parenthood, then it fully retains its meaning of mutual and true love and its reference to the very lofty task to which the human is called – namely, to parenthood” (Paul VI, 2013, n. 12, p. 109; cf.: John Paul II, 2021, n. 12, p. 40). The teaching of the Church indicates the need to maintain an integral vision of the human able to keep the internal order of the marital relationship by responsibly adapting their decisions to the current situation of the marriage and family, i.e. being guided by “prudential consideration and generosity” (Paul VI, 2013, n. 10, p. 188 ). Thus, parenthood should be, above all, responsible. Both spouses ought to know and respect the biological natural laws governing human fertility and to skilfully control “the innate drives and passions” (ibid.). Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae vitae* opposes the reduction of humanity to its biological dimension and draws attention to the full importance of intimate marital relationships. It is emphasized that the creation of this document (*Humanae vitae*) was related to the desire to experience sexuality without fertility emerging in the world. What seems worth noting is that nowadays one also deals with the search for procreation without sexuality – by using the in vitro technique. Both ways of separating the double sign of marital intercourse, i.e. both deepening the marital bond and procreation, are in contradiction with the view of the human as a being created in the image of God and endowed with the dignity of a person.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly states that the human is “not something, but someone. The human is capable of learning themselves, of self-control, of giving themselves freely and of forming a community with other persons” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994, 357). A responsible approach to life is fulfilled through respect for every conceived person and is expressed both in the enlargement of the family and in the decision to postpone the conception for a specified or indefinite period (Jankowski, 1999, p. 313-314). Therefore, according to the Church, the issue of transmitting life should be considered from the perspective of the entire human vocation,

including both the natural and temporal order, as well as the supernatural and eternal one (Paul VI, 2013, n. 7, p. 185). It is emphasized that the human should not be a passive executor of the Creator’s will, but can recognize the laws implanted in their nature and can freely respond to them. The actions of a wife and husband can therefore be fully personal, that is: reasonable, free and responsible (Mierzwiński, 1999, p. 187; Pokrywka, 2010, p. 261). The Catholic Church, in the words of John Paul II, teaches that: “It is obvious that responsible parenthood does not only consist in adapting to the biological rhythm. It is rather about expressing the truth about a person, who is a deep unity of spirit, mentality and body. This unity can never be reduced to a set of biological mechanisms. Only in the context of the spouses’ mutual love, total and unconditional, can conception – this event that concerns the future of humanity – be experienced in its full dignity (John Paul II, 2004, n. 2).

Both parents, the mother and father, experience parenthood in their own way. It is obvious that the woman and her entire biological organism is more involved in transmitting life. It can be said that she herself has been shaped towards motherhood from the very beginning. Her body prepares in many ways both for the conception of a child and later for providing the little person with everything they need, before and after the birth. “Biological facts” impose on a woman much more involvement in the process of giving birth to a human being (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 231). Motherhood, which has its biological determinants, engages all levels of a woman’s mentality (Olearczyk, 2011, p. 89), “her full psychological readiness is conditioned by biological readiness (...), the direction towards motherhood is so obvious to a biologist that it cannot be denied in any way” (Póltawska, 2009, p. 230). However, a man as an equal “perpetrator of parenthood” is “biologically distant” from it (John Paul II, 2021, n. 12, p. 44). Physical paternity exists outside the male human body. At the psychological level, fatherhood “begins” later than motherhood (Olearczyk, 2011, p. 89). Therefore, a man must somehow learn to be a father: “fatherhood must be specially developed and raised” (Wojtyła, 2015, p. 231).

To sum up this part of the discussion, it can be said that the teaching of the Catholic Church draws attention to the divine origin of the human being, and treats parenthood as an area of special cooperation between the Creator and the created being. It is emphasized that human parenthood should be, above all, responsible, i.e. the spouses' decisions regarding procreation should be made freely and thoughtfully.

### 3. A man responsible for love and life

One of the most representative examples of the teaching of the Catholic Church on men's responsibility seems to be the chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* entitled: "A man as a husband and father". John Paul II draws attention to the fact that "a man is called to live in the awareness of his gift and the role of the husband and father" (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 45). The basic task of a man is to recognize his own nature and find the answer to the question of who he is.

Realizing who a man is and what his role in the world is concerns every man, not only the one who intends to raise a family. Wanda Póltawska draws attention to the commonness of the vocation to fatherhood (Póltawska, 2018, p. 47, 98). It is obvious that not every person becomes a parent in the biological sense. The Catholic Church mentions spiritual fatherhood, which is to be a path of every man without exception (Augustyn, 2008, p. 138). Thus, it can be concluded that every man is called to fatherhood, which can be fulfilled either literally, i.e. both biologically and spiritually (in marriage and in the family) or spiritually (which applies to celibate men). The most important task of a man is to discover who he is and to recognize how he can "father", i.e. serve other people entrusted to him (Pulikowski, 2008, p. 160).

John Paul II points out that it is through a woman's motherhood that "the mystery of a man's masculinity is fully revealed: the parental, fatherly meaning of his body" (John Paul II, 2020, p. 95). Therefore, a man realizes his human vocation primarily through fatherhood, which, as noted above, does not need

to have a biological dimension. In a marriage that transmits life in the strict sense, both the man and the woman are called primarily to mutual affirmation. This is a fundamental element of responsibility of both of them for love. Marital love is fulfilled through participation in the reality of being "with someone" and "for someone". This mutual "for", that is, a relationship of mutual gift, is to be experienced by spouses as the basic principle of their personal existence (John Paul II, 2020, p. 72-73). The teaching of the Church indicates that a man should live with his wife "in a special form of friendship between persons" (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 45) and should develop a "new attitude of love" (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 45). A man is to love his wife with a subtle and at the same time strong love (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 46). It is love for his wife and children that enables him to understand himself and "to fulfil his fatherhood" (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 46). A conscious approach to one's own development serves not only the man himself, but also the people entrusted to him.

The teaching of the Church emphasizes the need for a man to take *generous responsibility* "for the life conceived under the mother's heart, by carefully fulfilling the duty of upbringing shared with his spouse, by work that never breaks up the family but strengthens it in coherence and stability, by giving testimony to mature Christian life" (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 46-47). A man: husband and father, is therefore responsible for life, for upbringing, for working for the family and for being and becoming an increasingly more mature Christian.

As mentioned above, the spouses' responsibility for an unborn life begins at the moment of making the decision about sexual intercourse, "responsibility must precede a conception" (Póltawska, 2009, p. 232). It is therefore necessary to acknowledge that all laws of nature are not the work of the human and therefore should not be violated. Believers recognize that the Creator is the author of reproductive physiology, which must be known and accepted. Therefore, the need for a man to take on this *generous responsibility* requires becoming aware of the fact of potential fertility. "A man, aware of the procreative possibilities of his body and gender, is at

the same time free from the coercion of his body and gender” (John Paul II, 2020, p. 74). It is worth remembering that a person never has the necessity to engage in intercourse. This regularity applies to both women and men. Due to the personal nature of human bonds, intercourse cannot be treated as an activity necessary to preserve life or physical or mental well-being. The compulsion of sexual activity would deny freedom as a typically human property and would undermine the logic of mutual giving between the spouses: “freedom is understood (...) as having oneself (as self-possessing)” (John Paul II, 2020, p. 75). The awareness of the spousal nature of the human body excludes any use of the body of another person or the spouse, as well as any, and thus sometimes self-harming, action directed towards one’s own body. It is good when every person fulfils their own sexuality, viewing it as a gift.

It should be noted that nowadays it is possible to precisely identify the periods in which, as a result of sexual intercourse, a child may be conceived. A mature man strives to manage his behaviour consciously and responsibly – especially the one related to engaging in sexual life. Due to the fact that a female body functions cyclically, “a man is much more of a father than a woman is a mother; in fact, potentially a man is always a father. (...) by engaging in a sexual act, he always transmits life” (Póltawska, 2009, p. 232). It is the woman who bears the greatest consequences of intercourse. Therefore, she should be taken care of to the fullest possible extent by her husband, with whom she jointly and consciously makes decisions regarding the most important issues. Thus, on the part of the man, there can be no question of any transfer of responsibility for joint action to the woman. Conceiving a child should be a joint matter of the wife and husband from the very beginning. It can be said that the test of a man’s level of responsibility for life is his approach to the situation of conceiving a child, regardless of whether the conception was planned and regardless of the conceived child’s health condition. It seems obvious that in the case of the so-called unplanned conception, also men may have difficulties with accepting this fact. This state of affairs is expressed in shock reactions, disbelief, denial, and even, in extreme cases, hostility. However, it is worth taking into account the possibility

of personal development in the case of initiating an unplanned pregnancy (Lichtenberg-Kokoszka, 2010, p. 170). Male, fatherly responsibility is expressed through his relationship with all people entrusted to his care.

An interesting list of the features of a real, i.e. responsible, man is suggested by Stanisław Sławiński. The author indicates, among others: protectiveness (towards the woman with whom a man shares life and towards all other women) and self-control (over emotions and sexuality). The second mentioned property is particularly important. Sławiński draws attention to the periodic functioning of a woman’s body and the resulting possible instability of moods and weaker control of her own reactions. A man in control of himself will faithfully stand by a woman, regardless of her current psychophysical condition, will provide her with a sense of security and with his own well-balanced reactions (Sławiński, 2014, p. 48).

To sum up this part of the considerations, it can be concluded that a man responsible for life does not agree to any form of sterilization of the marital act. Moreover, a man’s responsible love will not allow procreation without sexuality. Therefore, he will oppose the use of male reproductive cells to create new human beings outside the context of mutual closeness between a woman and a man. A mature man is aware of his responsibility for building a world in accordance with the Creator’s intention and this is the main reason for the opposition to assisted reproductive techniques. Not all technically possible actions can be considered fair. A man’s responsibility for life is expressed through his opposition to any actions that violate human dignity in such a delicate area as transmission of life.

#### **4. A man as a responsible educator**

“Taking into account the biological process of human conception in the mother’s womb – the union of 23 chromosomes contained in the sperm head with 23 chromosomes contained in the egg cell – the equal participation of both parents in the further continuation of parenting and caregiving tasks should be perceived as a natural phenomenon. Apparently, the asymmetry in the degree of involve-

ment of both parents in their basic functions was introduced by cultural conditions” (Fijałkowski, 2001, p. 286). The quoted statement by Włodzimirz Fijałkowski determines the direction in the discussion undertaken in this section of the text. Considering the equal dignity of women and men, as well as “the quantitatively balanced contribution to the conception of a child” (Fijałkowski, 2001, p. 286), what should be first emphasized is the need for joint involvement of both parents in raising a child, which is a spiritual continuation of the biological birth (John Paul II, 2021, n. 16, p. 66). The promotion of biparentality from the conception, through all stages of a child’s development, seems to be the most just and natural consequence of the creation of a human as a man and a woman (see: e.g. Ostrowska, 2004b, p. 87-88). At the same time, it is worth remembering that just as masculinity should always be perceived in relation to femininity, fatherhood should be viewed analogously: always in relation to motherhood (Augustyn, 2009, p. 31). Considering the natural order of creation, in which “the male-female dualism appears as an essential element of God’s plan” (Johnson, 1998; after: Augustyn, 2009, p. 31), it is difficult to accept any other explanation for this subject matter.

The consequence of perceiving female and male parenthood and the most important task of mothers and fathers, which is raising children, in the context of a mutual relationship, is the focus on the purposefulness and importance of the marital bond for the development of children. The basis for each parent’s “separate” relationship with the child is a strong and lasting bond with the spouse, which remains the most important for both spouses throughout the entire time in which marriage and family last (Sorkowicz, 2014, p. 80-88). Both the wife-mother and the husband-father build their motherhood and fatherhood on the foundation of mutual closeness and complementarity. “Both parents hug the child in their own way with their hands”, which, however, are different (Ładyżyński, 2008, p. 154). It is a truism to say that the mother

brings different values into a child’s life than the father. The woman’s predominance in up-bringing may result in the child being exposed to her overprotection. However, male dominance may result in the accumulation of excessive requirements without appropriate care. It is emphasized that although joint care of a child may cause conflicts, they will be of a developmental nature and will serve the entire community (Ładyżyński, 2008, p. 155). The child needs to experience difference and permanent cooperation of both parents. Thus, the husband-father is obliged, as already mentioned, to “carefully fulfil the duty of upbringing, shared with his spouse” (John Paul II, 2000, n. 25, p. 47). Therefore, a man must be aware of the differences resulting from gender conditions and must respect them. He absolutely should not try to be a substitute mother. His responsibility is expressed in being a man, not a second mother (Janas, 2022, p. 106).

It seems worth emphasizing as well that a healthy relationship between a man and a woman also literally protects the lives of children. Research results show that women experiencing violence from their partners are more likely to decide to have an abortion (*Ekologia prokreacji. Vademecum*, 2021, p. 162-168).<sup>4</sup> The lack of support from a man-father and his selfish avoidance of taking responsibility for conceiving a child encourage a woman to kill the child in the prenatal period of life (*W obronie życia. Kompendium niezbędnej wiedzy*, 2020, p. 36).<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it can be said that the first task of a man resulting from taking on the responsibility for raising children is to faithfully maintain a relationship with his wife and, at the same time, constantly build this unique bond.

Another task of a man-father is related to building a relationship with the child. If a man is emotionally mature and has built a strong relationship with his wife, he will also naturally feel comfortable in the relationship with his child (Augustyn, 2011, p. 123). It is important to take into account the need for contact between the father and the child from the beginning of the child’s life. It is good

4 *Ekologia prokreacji. Vademecum* (Ecology of procreation. A Vademecum), (2021).

5 *W obronie życia. Kompendium niezbędnej wiedzy* (In defence of life. A compendium of necessary knowledge), (2020).



when a man has the opportunity to share with his wife the first joys and worries related to the period of waiting for the birth, when he participates in the delivery and care of the infant (Fijałkowski, 2001, p. 287-290; Kornas-Biela, 2014, p. 163). It is worth noting that a man's attitude towards his wife who expects a child is also his attitude towards the child. Therefore, a responsible man makes sure that contacts with his wife are as tender as possible (Kornas-Biela, 2014, p. 163). The situation is similar after the childbirth: the wife-mother strongly and at the same time very personally feels the involvement of the husband-father in providing the child with everything the child needs.

It is clear that a child needs specific equipment and financial security to live. However, limiting the father's role to providing financial support for the family is contrary to an honest view of male responsibility. One of the most important elements of responsible upbringing of children is the presence of the father and the constant and reliable experience of his peaceful closeness. Obviously, the father's presence at different stages of the child's life and development varies. However, what remains unchanged is the need to consciously accompany the child, show unconditional acceptance, and spend time together selflessly. The latest research report on Poles' attitudes towards parenthood and fatherhood presents interesting results: for contemporary Poles, the term "father/dad" is most often associated with upbringing, support and authority (Wadowski, 2023, p. 9, 36-38). It seems important to highlight that the father's mature approach to the role of an educator of his own children, "his not counting the time spent together", his being in a relationship with the child, not only has a positive impact on the young generation, but also enables the man's personal growth.

Summing up the considerations regarding a man's responsibility for upbringing, it should be stated that the man's involvement in building a bond with his wife and conscious and full participation in the child's life is extremely important. A responsible man does not agree to be just the "mother's husband", but he actively takes on the tasks of a father. What is more, all his actions are well-thought-out and rational.

## **5. Instead of the ending: education of a responsible man**

According to Father Karol Meissner, the formation of a young man for fatherhood is a task that requires, first of all, paying attention to everything that distinguishes a human as a being with a gender from animals and indicating the consequences of this state of affairs. The second element of supporting young people in the educational process is emphasizing the relational nature of fatherhood and motherhood. Another task of the adult generation in the context of educating men is to name the difficulties related to fulfilling the role of a father in the family and to present ways of dealing with them. The last task faced by educators of young men is, according to the above-mentioned author, proposing such educational activities that can prepare a young man to take on the tasks of a husband and father (Meissner, 2011, p. 139-140).

The aforementioned suggestion seems to be extremely apt and up-to-date, especially in relation to the cognitive and ethical confusion of the contemporary humanity. Therefore, every boy should be made aware of his responsibility for life as early as possible: his own life and the life he may create in the future (Póltawska, 2011, p. 134-135). A proper education of a boy should lead to respect for his own body. Young people should be shown the parental sense of gender, the spousal meaning of the human body and both the equal dignity and sexual difference of men and women should be clearly emphasized. It also seems important to approach parenthood in terms of the "incredible privilege" of participating "in the creative role of God the Creator" (Póltawska, 2011, p. 133-134).

The most appropriate way to show the relational nature of fatherhood and motherhood seems to be the living example of parents who love each other and care about their mutual bond. A boy has a bigger chance of becoming a responsible man when he has the opportunity to grow up in a full, mutually supportive family, where mutual selfless help is treated as an ordinary element of life in a community of people. The teaching of the Catholic Church not only confirms the right of every child "to grow up

in a family, with a father and mother who can create an appropriate environment for their development and emotional maturation”, but also emphasizes the need to mature “in a relationship, confronting the masculinity and femininity of father and mother”, which makes it possible to achieve emotional maturity (Congregation for Catholic Education “Stworzył ich jako mężczyznę i kobietę” z myślą o drodze dialogu na temat kwestii gender w edukacji, 2019, n. 38).<sup>6</sup> According to the Church, “it is in the family community itself that a child can be educated to recognize the value and beauty of gender difference, equality, and biological, functional, psychological and social complementarity” (ibid.).

Achieving male maturity by a boy will be easier if the son has the opportunity to observe his father’s ways of dealing with difficulties and when these difficulties do not overshadow the entire family life (it is worth remembering here that the son does not expect his father to be infallible and blameless in everything, Augustyn, 2009, p. 44). “The father is the one who brings love, peace, security, wisdom and makes the son independent. The father never forgets about his responsibility for the family, he gives his son special responsibility – he demands and expects a response, he gives his son demanding tasks that make him responsible. He is a servant of the child whom he should teach responsibility and service” (Rynio, 2021, p. 377). To describe the desired fatherhood Wanda Półtawska uses, among other things, such terms as: “generous” and “permanent” (Półtawska, 2011, p. 134). A natural way to raise a young man to responsibility is also to agree to his full participation in family life by taking on specific duties and performing them reliably without waiting for special gratification. The boy will become a responsible man when, instead of fighting for power in the family, he will be able to observe mutual service.

When educating a boy to take real responsibility for his own life and the life of his loved ones in the future, it is also worth drawing attention to the need to strengthen the father’s presence in upbringing while

striving for the cooperation with his wife in every area of their shared life. What can be sometimes noticed is a dangerous tendency for the mother to usurp the right to a certain “parenting monopoly”, to exclude the husband-father from making decisions concerning the children. This can result from an incorrect marital relationship and from the transmission of some unfavourable cultural patterns involving the glorification of the role of the Polish Mother who can cope with all challenges on her own. There are situations when the mother shows extreme immaturity, which makes it difficult for the man to mature (Augustyn, 2009, p. 32). This is about the maturing of both an adult man and a boy-son. From the very beginning, both spouses-parents should want to raise a man, not a never-growing boy. A father responsible for life and upbringing, through his conscious and constant presence, should protect all children, especially sons, against motherly overprotection.

Moreover, a healthy marital relationship, combined with the awareness of parenthood perceived as cooperation with the Creator, are an antidote to educational shortcomings. As Danuta Opozda emphasizes, “achieving maturity in parenthood depends on the ability to create a mature relationship in marriage” (Opozda, 2019, p. 56). Spouses-parents need to realize that children are not their property at any stage of development, but are, in a sense, “loaned” to them for some time. Too strong and immature relationships between a mother and a son seem to be a factor that significantly disturbs the process of educating the boy towards male responsibility. Therefore, a father who is aware of his educational duties (especially towards his son) will ensure that appropriate proportions of care and healthy requirements are maintained.

Healthy education of subsequent generations of men requires the visible presence in the family of a man-husband-father who does not release himself from his masculine obligations by recklessly passing them on to a woman-wife-mother, but brings to the family all the good features of a mature and responsible man. What seems worth emphasizing is the

6 Congregation for Catholic Education, *Stworzył ich jako mężczyznę i kobietę z myślą o drodze dialogu na temat kwestii gender w edukacji (He created them male and female with a view to dialogue on gender issues in education)*, (2019).

extremely positive activity of numerous associations gathering men, the aim of which is to help men find their own male identity and to prepare them to play the role of a father in a mature way (Korab, 2015, p. 174-176). It seems important to point out that every man, even the one who did not have good role models, can grow into fatherhood.

A man's conscious taking responsibility for the most important matters: life, love, raising children, the family as a whole, is the concern of new generations. Jacek Pulikowski believes that "if the world is

threatened with destruction, its fundamental source is the crisis of male love and responsibility, which becomes a crisis of fatherhood" (Pulikowski, 2008, p. 171). Re-reading the logical, orderly and consistent teaching of the Catholic Church regarding the indicated subject matter, looking for inspiration in this teaching for the most difficult work, which is working on oneself, seems justified both from a personal perspective and for the sake of the common good. This article does not exhaust the subject. It can only become a contribution to further searching.

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