



# The problem of the definition of abortion in Polish literature and reception of church teaching in this regard

Problematyka definicji aborcji w literaturze polskiej oraz recepcja nauczania kościelnego w tym zakresie<sup>1</sup>

<https://doi.org/10.34766/fetr.v49i1.788>

Stanisław Biały<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> *Associated Professor Stanisław Biały PhD, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6390-0087>  
Faculty of Family Studies, University Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in Warsaw*

**Abstract:** In the social discourse the subject of abortion is still up-to-date. A decisive part of the Polish society consists of people belonging to the Catholic Church. Its teaching is important to them from an ethical (moral) point of view. Therefore, the author presented the doctrinal position of the Catholic Church on the conceptual scope of the act of abortion, and then analyzed the reception of this position in the Polish literature. From the analysis presented in this paper it follows that although the definition of abortion cannot be found in such an important document as the Code of Canon Law, nevertheless, the Catholic Church has presented a sufficiently precise description of such an act in such documents as *Quesito de abortu procurato, Donum vitae, Evangelium vitae, Dignitas personae*, etc. However, what we find about the conceptual scope of abortion in various publications or statements referring to the Magisterium of the Church, often differs from its unambiguous subject statement. Seeking to justify such ambiguity and lack of specificity, the author referred to the theory that cognitive process is characterized by "intentionality" (relation of mind to object). This means that his objectivity may be hampered by volitional, ideological, conscious, contextual acts, etc. Moreover, people emphasize certain semantic aspects of the act of abortion, and ignore others depending on their goals: scientific, political, worldview, social, moral, canonical, etc.

**Keywords:** doctrine of the Catholic Church, canon law, conceptualization, cognitive intentionality, abortion, termination of pregnancy, responsibility

**Abstrakt:** W dyskursie społecznym temat aborcji jest ciągle aktualny. Zdecydowaną część polskiego społeczeństwa stanowią osoby przynależące do Kościoła katolickiego. Jego nauka ma dla nich ważne znaczenie z etycznego (moralnego) punktu widzenia. W związku z powyższym autor przedstawił doktrynalne stanowisko Kościoła katolickiego dotyczące aktu aborcji, a następnie przeanalizował recepcję tego stanowiska w literaturze polskojęzycznej. Z podjętej analizy wynika, że chociaż definicji aborcji nie można doszukać się w tak ważnym dokumencie, jakim jest Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego, to Kościół katolicki charakterystykę takiego czynu wystarczająco precyzyjnie przedstawił w takich dokumentach jak *Quesito de abortu procurato, Donum vitae, Evangelium vitae, Dignitas personae* itp. Jednakże to, co na temat zakresu pojęciowego aborcji znajdujemy w różnych publikacjach czy też wypowiedziach powołujących się na Magisterium Kościoła, różni się często od jego jednoznacznej przedmiotowej wypowiedzi. Poszukując uzasadnień takiej wieloznaczności oraz braku uściślenia, autor odwołał się do teorii, według której proces kognitywny cechuje „intencjonalność” (stosunek umysłu do przedmiotu). To oznacza, że jego obiektywizm utrudniać mogą akty wolicjonalne, światopoglądowe, świadomościowe, kontekstualne itp. Nadto ludzie akcentują pewne aspekty znaczeniowe aktu aborcji, a inne pomijają w zależności od założonych przez siebie celów: naukowych, politycznych, światopoglądowych, społecznych, moralnych, kanonicznych itp.

**Słowa kluczowe:** doktryna Kościoła katolickiego, prawo kanoniczne, konceptualizacja, intencjonalność poznawcza, aborcja, przerwanie ciąży, odpowiedzialność

## Introduction

The problem of responsibility for human life allows to pose a question, within the ethical and canonical responsibility binding in the Catholic Church, about the social perception of acts of abortion and their conceptualization. It is a matter of certain deficiencies of terminological precision, but also of

new conceptions of terms, which are revealed at the stage of cognition of these phenomena, as well as the interchangeable use of synonymous terms. There are doctrinal documents, which define what abortion is, what is its scope and what is the responsibility related to it. In spite of that, there are publications which indicate that there are some overinterpretations or controversial generalizations in the terminology

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

used here. Therefore, the analysis (or meta-analysis) addressed here will refer to the theological and canonical problem of conceptual identification of abortion acts, in which the (philosophical) terms used, such as conceptualization and perception, refer to the nature of the cognitive process (Petrozolin-Skowrońska, 1997, p. 974). This will be an attempt to take an interdisciplinary view, in line with the methodological profile of family science.

The point is that elements of a volitional (world-view) nature cannot be excluded from the process of conceptualization. The problem of deficit or error is always inherent in this perspective. Such a state is sometimes referred to in philosophy as the “unveiling of intentionality” (Krokos, 2013, p. 11 n). It indicates the difference between a mental (moral, ethical, etc.) and a physical cognitive phenomenon. The social perception of abortions is “heterogeneous due to the difference in discourses: scientific, ideological, artistic, colloquial, as well as due to different human attitudes” (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, 2012, p. 7).

There have already been papers on similar subjects (Biały, 2018, p. 61-78)<sup>2</sup>. Studies of the abortion phenomenon “constitute a small percentage of papers in the social science journals analyzed, and the dominant perspective is to study abortion through the prism of public opinion on the issue” (Karolewska 2020, 170). However, it is known that “a clear polarization of views is evident at the level of definitions for manipulative purposes, or subconsciously vague definitions are used [...]. Defining is inseparable from treating the subject as someone who experiences reality and conceptualizes it. In the abortion discourse, there is a struggle over who, using language, will convince the viewer of their views” (Domańska, 2018, p. 97).

The results of the present analysis may encourage further research, e.g. for a better recognition of directions in which the discourse on the right to abortion develops, i.e. “its influence on different areas and levels of social life” (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, 2012, p. 7). They can also constitute a new (i.e., updated) knowledge when it comes to finding further rationale for protecting the subjective rights of human beings. It can be used by someone who is engaged

in pastoral ministry, as well as by someone who is a politician, parliamentarian, local government official, scientist, etc.

## **1. Catholic Church teaching on abortion**

The Church in its doctrinal teaching specifies the concept of abortion (from Latin *abortio artificialis*), having particularly in mind the termination of pregnancy and the disposal of embryos produced through in vitro procedures. In addition, it defines the moral evil of this act; in particular, when the act of abortion is subject to the penalty of excommunication (Stokłosa, 2016, p. 97-120). It is through such documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as *Quaesito de abortu procurato* (1974), *Donum vitae* (1987), *Dignitas personae* (2008), *Evangelium vitae* (1995), the Code of Canon Law (hereinafter: CIC/83) 1329 §1, 1398, the Catechism of the Catholic Church: 2270-2275, that the doctrinal context of the conceptual scope of abortion can be established. Thus, the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* (referring to the Church’s doctrinal heritage) quotes Pope Pius XII, who considered abortion to be “every act which directly aims at killing a human life not yet born” (John Paul II, 1995, p. 62). The Instruction *Dignitas personae*, on the other hand, in the context of embryo production by the in vitro method, refers to “selective abortion” or “early abortive action” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2008, no. 21-22). Furthermore, the “Declaration of the Pontifical Council for the Family,” referring to the above doctrinal findings and calling for the avoidance of “all vagueness and ambiguity” in this area, recalls that “«embryo reduction» is selective abortion” (Pontifical Council for the Family, 2000). Not surprisingly, the bishops who are part of the Council for the Family, in their Letter to Parliamentarians, also refer to in vitro procedures as sophisticated abortion (Council for the Family, 2007). In addition, other terms appear such as: “postnatal abortion, i.e. killing the child after birth” (Makowski, 2019).

2 The research was limited to the canonical, legal aspect.

According to this logic, the act of abortion should be understood as the killing of a human being in the prenatal development stage, done directly or indirectly. This can happen through any action (e.g., chemical through RU 486) involving the removal of a zygote, embryo, fetus, child, etc., from the mother's body (and this is termination of pregnancy), and by destroying the zygote, embryo, etc., when they are outside her body, e.g. on so-called glass (in vitro), in a test tube, etc. (in vitro abortion). In this regard, a distinction can be made between direct abortion, which means an intentional act as an end and as a means, and indirect abortion – an unwanted effect (miscarriage at fault for lack of due care). Causes of such a fault include, e.g., smoking by the mother, taking drugs or so-called “legal highs,” drinking alcohol, extreme sports, unsafe sex, etc., or when the physician caring for the child failed to exercise professional care. These are objective signs of carelessness.

The above clarifications are of particular importance in the context of the fact that if the concept of abortion defines an act, objectively (and intentionally) morally evil and always forbidden (Biesaga, 2004, p. 257-264), then it is not the perpetrator of indirect or direct abortion – in the situation, e.g., of destroying an embryo during in vitro procedures, that the Catholic Church imposes the penalty of excommunication *latae sententiae*. On the other hand, it does so for direct abortion (i.e., wanted as a means and as an end), understood as termination of pregnancy, “killing the child under the mother's heart” aborting the fetus, artificial miscarriage, etc. – CIC/83 can. 1398 (Stokłosa, 2016, p. 97-120). Awareness of these distinctions is the foundation of the natural law of “thou shalt not kill,” which binds the conscience of every human being at the most basic layer, i.e., in synderesis. This principle is reiterated in the Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, according to which “the darkness of error and sin can never completely extinguish in man the light of God the Creator. In the depths of his heart he constantly yearns for absolute truth and desires to know it fully, which is eloquently demonstrated by the tireless search that man makes in every field and in every area” (John Paul II, 1995, no. 1).

Therefore, it is worth knowing what, when in doubt, abortion is not. In this case, it is the act of giving help to a person whose life is directly endangered, the second effect of which is that another person (involved) dies. The Catholic Church defines such situations from the moral point of view as “an act with double effect.” However, this does not mean that a physician (as well as a mother) “with a Catholic conscience” can choose which life is more important and will save it or not. Hence, it follows that with the aim of saving human life, the physician (as well as the mother, etc.) can only agree to those therapies that will be sustainable in their effects. This means that therapy cannot be guided by the intention that someone must live and someone must die (or will surely die). If the Thomistic principle of “double effect acts” defines the relationship to the aggressor and requires not to exceed the limits of “necessary defense” (St. Thomas, 1970, q. 64, a 7), then all the more so does this requirement obligate the physician who cares for the child and his mother, and the mother who cares for her child, and even third parties. Morally good is only that action which in its object (to each individual person) is saving, curing, etc., and not killing. Under these conditions, the death that may occur will be unwanted, and the physician as well as the mother (etc.) will retain their dignity of conscience.

Therefore, it is only a rhetorical question whether this type of knowledge should not be popularized with even more care, e.g. in publications and regulations of a social nature, as well as in the form of in-depth scientific studies (Ministry of National Education, 2020).

## 2. Addressing the problem of abortion in Polish literature

It is impossible to present all available literature on the issue addressed here, and therefore the following research methodology will be adopted. The first stage is the classification of characteristic cases, and the second is their exemplification on the principle of illustrating the problem, e.g. for better precision through quotations. The author assumes that this attempt to present various positions on the subject of

conceptual scope of abortion does not refer to their authors, in the sense of assuming that they alone hold this view. The undertaken analysis (meta-analysis) is only an attempt to interpret the available texts on the basis of a previously assumed assumption.

### **2.1. Abortion – termination of pregnancy**

In the doctrinal literature referring to the teaching of the Catholic Church, the terms abortion and termination of pregnancy are very often used interchangeably, as if they were the same in the subject matter. This refers to those situations where the conceptualization of the act of abortion is determined by the content, which closely corresponds to the concept of termination of pregnancy (Lewandowski, 2016, p. 269-281)<sup>3</sup>. Such a state of affairs (unfortunately) does not take into account the killing of embryos in biotechnological procedures in vitro, cloning, etc., as well as does not refer to the transgression of killing a child immediately after its birth (postnatal abortion).

Such an option of perception (as it seems) is contained in the quotations: “The doctrine and magisterium of the Church, basing their teaching on the Old and New Testaments, [...] have clearly and precisely stood for the sanctity and inviolability of human life from the very beginning of its existence, i.e., from conception in the womb until natural death” (Leszczyński, 2001, p. 57). “It should be noted that in Polish society there is a very high moral consent to the abortion procedure. In surveys conducted over several years [...] only 49.2% of them recognized that abortion is an immoral procedure, thus identifying with the position of the Catholic Church, at the same time as much as 53.2% of the respondents allow the possibility of abortion” (Kultys, 2005, p. 116). “Only artificial miscarriage (i.e. caused by a factor external to the mother’s or child’s organism), performed with the woman’s consent, which results in termination of pregnancy, should be considered abortion in the strict sense of the word” (Pawlikowska-Łagód, Sak, 2016, p. 7). Abortion is “a procedure intended to

terminate human life during the fetal (intrauterine) period” (Kowalski, 2010, p. 53). “Abortion is a procedure that seeks to artificially terminate a pregnancy in its early stages, resulting in the expulsion of the embryo or fetus outside the mother’s body” (Pawlikowska-Łagód, 2018).

There are many other analogous publications in which the material scope of the term abortion is shown as if it were the same as termination of pregnancy. Just some of these are: “Abortion, sex education, and in vitro fertilization. Research Communication” (CEBOS, 2005, p. 1); “Demographic dimension of abortion” (Frątczak, Ptak-Chmielewska, 2009, p. 2).

### **2.2. Destruction of embryos obtained by in vitro is “not an act of abortion”**

There are also publications which indicate that the concept of abortion excludes (explicitly or implicitly) the negative effects of the in vitro technique, which come down to the destruction of human embryos, the so-called “surplus.” An exemplification of the occurrence of such terminology may be the following quotations: “The method of artificial insemination proposed by Jarosław Gowin is not a form of abortion, Archbishop Józef Życiński said on «Kropka nad i»” (Gowin’s In vitro, 2008). “The press has quoted, e.g., this opinion: «It cannot be simply said that the destruction of embryos in the in vitro procedure, which is of course killing but is not abortion, falls under the ecclesiastical penalties that abortion entails»” (Wiśniewska, 2008). “In vitro fertilization, abortion sometimes occurs outright, and there is no debate about that,” but this occurs when it results in “the so-called reduction of excess pregnancies” (Strączek, Bardel, 2008, p. 60). The latter is the position found in the editorial discussion entitled “Admonish or Condemn” published in the monthly magazine *Znak*. It is a form of polemic with the bishops on the issue of the definition of abortion used by them in the “Letter to Parliamentarians” of 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Lewandowski rightly notes: “The Pontifical Council for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law has stated that abortion is the voluntary deprivation of life of an immature fetus, performed by any means regardless of the time that has passed since conception.”

A similar position is found in the paper “Abortion and its Legal Aspects,” in which the author, while giving a doctrinal definition of abortion, does not mention *in vitro* procedures as incidentally leading to abortion. “Over the years, therefore, the extremely important question has arisen – how to understand abortion? This question referred in all its essence to resolving the most important issue: whether abortion is only the removal from the mother’s womb of a fetus incapable of independent life, or whether this term should be understood as any human action resulting in the death of a fetus in the mother’s womb, regardless of the fact of its removal or not” (Leszczyński, 2001, p. 57-59).

### 2.3. Excommunication for an act of abortion

Another case of diverse social perception of the act of abortion may be evidenced by lexical generalizations, appearing in the context of described criminal consequences, attributed to the perpetrator of abortion in canon law. Here it is possible to think of statements referring to excommunication, which affects the perpetrator in a *latae sententiae* way (i.e. by force of law). It is about expressions such as: “excommunication after abortion – what does the canon law say” (Cipior, 2016). Ibid: “in the evaluation, however, it must be remembered that each abortion is a crime, with the result that if someone commits several abortions, the penalty of excommunication falls as many times as the crime committed.” But also significant is another statement, as long as it was quoted correctly by the author of the paper: “As the destruction of embryos is tantamount to abortion, also the one who conducts research on embryonic stem cells incurs excommunication on himself – emphasized in an interview for the Italian weekly magazine «Famiglia Cristiana» the President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo” (Tomczak, 2006).

A similar situation arises with the attempt to answer the question of whether MPs who vote for the *in vitro* project should count with the penalty of excommunication. “If they are aware of what they are doing and want such a situation to occur, if they do not act to limit the harmfulness of such a law, then in my opinion they are automatically

outside the community of the Church” (Sawicki, 2010). This situation also appears in a sentence like “excommunication falls on the perpetrator of abortion automatically, and if he is aware of this penalty, in order to obtain absolution, he must first be freed from it” (Sporniak, 2016, p. 4). Also in the context of a sentence: “excommunication for *in vitro* – yes, but...” (Sawicki, 2010), the correctness of the phrase depends on whether it refers to the spiritual consequences of the act of abortion (made effective by the *in vitro* procedure) or directly to censure under Canon 1398, 1398 CIC/83.

The point is that, according to the doctrinal teaching of the Church, the expression “excommunication for abortion” is correct only on condition that the concept of abortion used in it refers to the act described in Canon 1398 1398 CIC/83, i.e. precisely to the act of termination of pregnancy. If there are penalties in canon law, such as excommunication *latae sententiae*, the crimes to which it refers do not include abortion understood as the crime of destroying human embryos produced *in vitro* or through cloning.

### 2.4. Holistic approach: termination of pregnancy is an abortion under Canon 1398

Among the publications (or statements) which present their attitude to abortion in an objective way, it is possible to find also those which are characterized by doctrinal terminological precision. The point is that the terms used in them do not have the signs of cognitive reductionism. It is worth indicating here the letter of the bishops to parliamentarians of December 18, 2007, entitled “Refined abortion – when embryos die in the *in vitro* procedure.” It can be treated as a testimony of cognitive concordance (perceptual as well as conceptual) of a whole group of people who share the same Christian worldview. A term appears in it which is important for the whole of the ongoing social discourse on the material scope of abortion. In its statement, the author emphatically stresses that the subject-matter of the concept of abortion, apart from the act of termination of pregnancy, is the destruction of human embryos, which can be carried out within the available *in vitro* biotechnology. On the other hand,

a reference to the meaning of this type of statement (also in the sense of the need to preserve terminological precision), can be noted in the paper entitled “The problem of the legal protection of life in the enunciation of the Polish Episcopal Conference in 1989-2011.” Ibidem: “The Polish Episcopal Conference has consistently sought respect for the inviolable right to life of every human being from the moment of conception” (Delong, 2017, p. 84).

Another example of terminological precision, which is worth quoting here, is the definition of abortion on the Infor.pl portal. In the “law” section, under the heading “abortion,” it informs the reader about specific regulations of the civil law, using the terms: abortion and termination of pregnancy interchangeably. However, it does so in such a way that the terms do not raise interpretive ambiguities. Ibidem: “The law allows for termination of pregnancy only in situations described in the Act on Family Planning. Any other termination of pregnancy is an element of the so-called crime of abortion under Article 152 of the Penal Code. However, according to the law, it is not the mother who decides on such a step but the person (physician) who performs an illegal abortion that bears responsibility” (Abortion, 2010).

Another clear, clarified, statement on the understanding of the act of abortion is that made by the Pontifical Commission for the Authentic Interpretation of the Code of Canon Law of January 19, 1988: “The final moment of abortion (until birth) distinguishes it from homicide, typified in canon 1397; while the *conceptio* (conception, in vivo fertilization), and not fertilization (*fecundatio*), above all in vitro, must be indicated as the initial moment of the crime, according to the 1988 interpretation. Hence, in the current state of the law, the killing of fertilized ova created in the in vitro procedure and not transferred to the womb cannot be considered a canonical crime of abortion” (Skonieczny, 2015, s. 198).

The issue of the responsibility of the Magisterium to use terminological precision, especially in matters concerning the protection of unborn life, was emphasized more than once by Pope John Paul II: “The Magisterium of the Church has intensified its speeches in protection of the sanctity and inviolability of human life in view of the gradual blurring

in consciences and in society of the awareness that taking the life of [...] a human being, especially at the beginning of its existence [...], is an absolute grave moral offense” (EV, no. 57; Grześkowiak, 2017, p. 127).

## 2.5. Rescue – not abortion

There is another example (in the literature) where it is possible to find an act of peculiar overinterpretation in the definition of abortion. It concerns the phrase: “a woman’s choice of life is not abortion.” According to its authors, the motivation for the above statement is that “ethicists refer here to the so-called principle of double effect. It was formulated in the 13th century by St. Thomas Aquinas in the «Summa Theologicae»” (Saving is Not Abortion, 2011). The problem is that it referred to the murder of the aggressor. St. Thomas allowed for the situation that “self-defense can result in two effects: the preservation of own life and the murder of the aggressor. The first effect is intentional and the second unintentional” (St. Thomas, 1970, q. 64, a 7). Although the above slogan (“a woman’s choice of life is not an abortion”) was made in good faith, a child carried lovingly under its mother’s heart (i.e., pregnancy) cannot be considered an aggressor. But a disease can. Thus, it seems that in a situation of so-called danger to the woman’s life due to complications in the delivery of pregnancy, etc., it is necessary, for the sake of the principle: “an act with double effect,” to seek absolutely other ethical clarifications than that “if the mother decides to save her life at the cost of the child’s life, she will not commit an immoral act” (Saving is Not Abortion, 2011).

One of such is authored by Rev. Prof. Stanisław Warzeszak, when he points out that “in the case of a threat to the life of a pregnant mother, Christian ethics emphasizes the need for heroism” (ibidem). However, this is a view that does not necessarily demand the mother to sacrifice her life. It assumes the situation that both the mother and the physician, in fighting the disease as aggressor, want to act according to the principle that: “the good end does not justify the evil means.” Therefore, in the case of conditions indicating uterine surgery or a threat to the mother’s

life in the case of a pregnancy with complications, e.g. ectopic, they should opt for all solutions that would preserve the probability of the child's birth (or even its natural descent). This would assume, e.g., maximum postponement of the surgery (heroism), taking into account the real (professional) possibility of saving the mother's life. Such an approach should ensure that the fight against the disease is not identified with the act of killing, removing from life, i.e. neither with abortion nor with neglecting to protect the life of the mother. These are the principles that St. Thomas Aquinas seems to have had in mind when he formulated the principle of the "double effect of an act" (Chyrowicz, 1997, p. 17).

Whether the above statement is equivalent to what Agata Czarnecka wrote in her paper entitled *The principle of double effect in the dispute on abortion*, must be decided by the individual conscience of a theologian, ethicist, physician, etc. The point is the thesis that "for it is permissible, in the absence of any other alternatives, to take an action the purpose of which is to preserve the life of some human being, even if this would be tantamount to the death of someone else" (Czarnecka, 2021, p. 117). There is an ethical difference between actions of the type "equivalent to death" and actions of the type "presuming death," as it seems. However, it takes a conscience of adequate sensitivity to be able to understand here that there are situations in which: "a mother should never want her child to die," while a physician should "save at least one life."

### **3. Exemplification: survey research on the social reception of the doctrine of Catholic Church regarding the concept of abortion**

It is not a question here of conducting systematic research into the state of knowledge or the Polish society's views on abortion. It can be concluded not only from the concepts and terminology available in the subject literature (and their philosophical and legal interpretations), but also from published surveys, that many people misinterpret the scope

of such terms as abortion, artificial miscarriage, termination of pregnancy and the concept of excommunication *latae sententiae* as their effect. In order to better illustrate the issue addressed, the following exemplification can be used. It is about the research results that were presented in the study *Life attitudes of nursing students and their attitude to abortion* (Ostrowska, Szostek, Marcysiak, 2016, p. 38-58).

The data collected by the authors concerned not only the ethical attitudes of surveyed students, e.g., the relationship of their faith in God to their ethical beliefs, but also their terminological (conceptual) knowledge on the discussed issue. Thus: "more than half of the surveyed nursing and economics students – 61.2% recognized that abortion is murder committed on an unborn child, this statement was opposed by – 13.1% of the respondents." It can also be added that "with the statement that life begins at the moment of conception, agreed – 67% of respondents, while only 10.4% of respondents had an opposite opinion. The majority of students – 67.5% think that abortion is depriving the child of the right to life" (Ibidem, p. 38).

On the other hand, e.g. CBOS from time to time provides survey reports, in which the opinions of Polish people about the permissibility of abortion are listed (cf. Hermann, 2016, p. 1-10).

## **Conclusions**

The literature analysis of the social conceptualization of the term abortion allows some observations on the reception of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church in this regard. Firstly, the social discourse, which constantly takes place around the right to terminate pregnancy, shows significant differences in presenting the conceptual scope of the act of abortion. However, the fact that such differences exist is a natural fact, which is how the processes of perception and conceptualization function. The authors of various publications or statements, emphasizing various aspects of the understanding of the act of abortion, do it because of the preconceived goals (scientific, political, social, ethical, pastoral, canonical, etc.). Unfortunately, the social perception



of such a phenomenon may turn into even greater confusion of concepts and their meanings. However, the subject literature indicates that the Magisterium of the Church is not only a well-defined doctrinal teaching, but in its communication the pastoral concern of the Church for dialogue with the faithful (with society as such) is present, i.e. the concern for terminological precision.

Here, a good reference for understanding such a complex situation can be the position of J. R. Searle, who argues that “beliefs and desires are, as it were, attenuated forms of perceptions and intentions [...] With every perception there is an associated belief about the perceived object” (Gajewski, 2016, p. 27). The point is that if our relations to reality rely on subjective mental states, they can also affect the perception and definition of the act of abortion, and even more so when it comes to specifying its object scope. This capacity of the mind, referred to as intentionality, should not be equated with the act of intention. According to Searle, the intention “is, as it were, an amplified form of desire” (Ibidem, p. 25).

The fact of perceptual differences can also be applied to sociotechnics, i.e., the attempt to ignore existing distortions in this field or to use them for specific purposes. This can be of great (negative) importance due to the need to universalize ethical norms (Rusecki, 2003, p. 953-973), in the context of ethical relativism that is omnipresent today

(Kupiński, 2017, p. 137-150). Hence, if this is a thesis aspiring to be scientific, it is precisely because analyses with similar or even identical conclusions support it. Such as, e.g., “in debates, thus also in the discussion around abortion law, definitions have a dispute-resolving function; authors of linguistic definitions are assigned considerable authority as a result” (Domańska, 2018, p. 99); and that “human being includes man’s relation to meanings. Man is human only by understanding and shaping reality, both his world and himself, in relation to meanings and values” (Tillich, 1983, p. 54).

The data obtained here may be used to deepen awareness of possible encumbrances in the construction of concepts on the basis of individual perception (i.e. worldview). Terminological confusion is a situation that can be misleading for some and outrageous for others. If in Poland “some acknowledge the embryo’s personal status, [...] while others reject this fact” (Szyran, 2012, p. 1), if there are many interpretations of the “act of double effect” (Chyrowicz, 1997), etc., this must have its impact on the further process of conceptualizing various acts and phenomena concerning life and its dignity, causing controversy. The results obtained here in this sense can be a starting point for further reflection, e.g. about the need for universalism and objectivity in education based on reason, religion and goodness (Chrobak 2017, p. 89-100).

## Bibliography

- Aborcja, (2010). (from: <https://www.infor.pl/prawo/prawo-kanne/inne/218434,Aborcja.html> (access: 12.12.2020)).
- Biały, S. (2018). Przemiany wielokulturowe a zakres pojęciowy przestępstwa aborcji: refleksje w świetle kanonu 1398, *Prawo Kanoniczne*, 4, 63-78, <https://www.doi.org/10.21697/pk.2018.61.4.03>.
- Biesaga, T. (2004). Status embrionu – stanowisko personalizmu ontologicznego, (w:) T. Biesaga, (red.), *Bioetyka polska*, 257-264, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT.
- CEBOS. (2005). Aborcja. Edukacja seksualna, zapłodnienie pozaustrojowe. Komunikat z badań, (from: [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2005/K\\_037\\_05.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2005/K_037_05.PDF) (access: 22.12.2020)).
- Chrobak, S. (2017). Uniwersalizm miłości wychowawczej w systemie prewencyjnym św. Jana Bosko, *Seminare*, 1, 89-100.
- Cipior, K. (2016). Ekskomunika po aborcji – co mówi prawo kanoniczne, (from: <http://www.frona.pl/a/ekskomunika-po-aborcji-co-mowi-prawo-kanoniczne,79454.html> (access: 31.11.2020)).
- Chyrowicz, B. (1997). *Zamiar i skutki. Filozoficzna analiza zasady podwójnego skutku*, Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Czarnecka, A. (2021). Zasada podwójnego skutku w sporze o aborcję, *Znak*, 4(38), 109-119.
- Delong, M. (2017). Problem prawnej ochrony życia w enuncjacjach Konferencji episkopatu Polski w latach 1989-2011, *Journal of Humanites and Social Sciences*, 1(2), 84-97.
- Domańska, M. (2018). *Medialny obraz Czarnego protestu w kontekście dyskusji o aborcji*. Praca magisterska, (from: <https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/16756/3000-MGR-FP-235729.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (access: 2.11.2020)).
- Frątczak, E., Ptak-Chmielewska, A. (2009). Demograficzny wymiar aborcji, (w:) B. Chazan (red.), *Aborcja. Przyczyny, następstwa, terapia*, 63-73, Gdańsk: Wektory.
- Gajewski, K. (2016). *Umysł wobec świata. Intencjonalność w filozofii Johna Searle’a*, Olsztyn: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN.
- Grześkowiak, A. (2017). Ochrona życia w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II, *Studia Prawnicze KUL*, 2 (72), 125-166.



- In vitro Gowina to nie aborcja, (2008). (from: <https://tvn24.pl/polska/in-vitro-gowina-to-nie-aborcja-ra80703-3721949> (access: 24.12.2020).
- Jan Paweł II, (1993). *Encyklika Veritatis Splendor*.
- Jan Paweł II, (1995). *Encyklika Evangelium vitae*.
- Karolewska, I. (2020). „Socjologia aborcji”. Sposoby przedstawiania aborcji we współczesnym dyskursie nauk społecznych, *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej*, 2, 170-187, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.16.2.10>.
- Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego*, (1994). Poznań: Pallottinum.
- Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego*, (1984). Poznań: Pallottinum.
- Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, (1974). *Instrukcja Quesito de abortu procurato*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, (1987). *Instrukcja Donum vitae*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, (2008). *Instrukcja Dignitas personae*, Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Kowalski, J. (2009). Aborcja, (w:) A. Muszala, (red.), *Encyklopedia bioetyki. Personalizm chrześcijański*, 53-59, Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne.
- Krokos, J. (2013). *Odstąpienie intencjonalności*, Wydawnictwo Liberi Libri.
- Kultys, J-A. (2005). Aborcja: problem religijno-filozoficzno-społeczny, *Stupskie Studia Filozoficzne*, 5, 95-116.
- Kupiński, M. (2017). Młodzież bez Facebooka – dojrzałość czy niedostosowanie, *Seminare. Poszukiwania Naukowe*, 1, 137-150.
- Leszczyński, G. (2001). Aborcja i jej aspekty karne, *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne*, 10, 57-65.
- Lewandowski, P. (2016). Aborcja w perspektywie kanoniczno-prawnej. Zaciągnięcie i zwolnienie z ekskomuniki, *Teologia Praktyczna*, 17, 269-281, <https://doi.org/10.14746/tp.2016.17.18>.
- Makowski, M. (2019). *Aborcja postnatalna, czyli zabicie dziecka po narodzinach*, (from: <https://stacja7.pl/felietony/aborcja-postnatalna-czyli-zabicie-dziecka-po-narodzinach/> (access: 23.12.2020).
- Ostrowska, B., Szostek, K., Marcysiak, M. (2016). Postawy życiowe studentów pielęgniarstwa a ich stosunek do aborcji, *Innowacje w Pielęgniarstwie i w Naukach o Zdrowiu*, 1(3), 38-58.
- Papieska Rada ds. Rodziny. (2000). Deklaracja, (from: <https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WR/radypontyfikalne/rodziny/redukcjaembrionow> (access: 23.12.2020).
- Pawlikowska-Łagód, K. (2018). Aborcja – wskazania, regulacje prawne, podziemie aborcyjne [wyjaśniamy], (from: <https://www.medonet.pl/ciaza-i-dziecko,aborcja---wskazania--regulacje-prawne--podziemie-aborcyjne,artykul,1726059.html> (access: 23.12.2020).
- Pawlikowska-Łagód, K., Sak, J. (2016). Aborcja – problem etyczno-moralny współczesnego świata, (w:) K. Maciąg, P. Wiatr, (red.), *Filozofia wobec dylematów współczesności*, 7-20. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe TYGIEL.
- Petrozolin-Skowrońska, B. (1997). Percepcja, (w:) B. Petrozolin-Skowrońska (red.), *Nowa Encyklopedia Powszechna PWN*, t. 2, 974. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Rada ds. Rodziny. (2007). List Rady ds. Rodziny do parlamentarzystów na temat in vitro, (from: <https://info.wiara.pl/doc/171775.List-Rady-ds-Rodziny-do-parlamentarzystow-na-temat-in-vitro> (access: 19.12.2020).
- Ratowanie to nie aborcja, (2011), (from: <https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/F/FE/gn201111-podwojny.html> (access: 29.12.2020).
- Rusecki, M. (2003). Uniwersalizm, (w:) T. Pilch (red.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, t. 6, 953-973. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”.
- Sawicki, K. (2010). *Ekskomunika za in vitro – tak, ale...*, (from: <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/106908-ekskomunika-za-in-vitro-tak-ale> (access: 2.11.2020).
- Skonieczny, P. (2015). Sprawa aborcji: głos w dyskusji nad przestępstwem z kan. 1398 KPK, *Annales Canonici II*, 195-216.
- Sporniak, A. (2016). Zamieszanie wokół aborcji, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 49, 4.
- Stokłosa, M. (2016). Uwolnienie penitentów z kar kościelnych w zakresie wewnętrznym sakramentalnym. *Symposium*, 2, 97-120.
- Strączek, K., Bardel, M. (2008). „Upomnieć czy potępić”. Dyskusja Redakcyjna, *Znak*, 635, 60-66.
- Szyran, J. (2012). Życie ludzkie jako przedmiot i podmiot prawa, *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej*, 11, 141-150.
- Św. Tomasz z Akwinu, (1970). *Suma teologiczna. Sprawiedliwość* (II-II q. 57-80) t. 18. tł. F. W. Bednarski, Londyn: Veritas.
- Tomczak, J. (2006). Ekskomunika za zabijanie poczętych dzieci, *Nasz Dziennik*, 150(2560).
- Trybunał Konstytucyjny, (2020). *Planowanie rodziny, ochrona płodu ludzkiego i warunki dopuszczalności przerwania ciąży*, Wyrok. Sygn. akt. K 1/20. Warszawa.
- Tyllich, P. (1983). *Męstwo bycia*, tłum. H. Bednarek, Paryż: Editions du Dialogue.
- Ustawa z dnia 7 stycznia 1993 r. o planowaniu rodziny, ochronie płodu ludzkiego i warunkach dopuszczalności przerwania ciąży, (1993). *Dziennik Ustaw*, nr 7 poz. 78.
- Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, E. (2012). *Aborcja w dyskursie publicznym. Monografia zjawiska*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.
- Wiśniewska, K. (2010). In vitro dzieli polski Kościół, (from: <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,7922274,in-vitro-dzieli-polski-kosciol.html> (access: 17.12.2020).