

## CHAPTER 6

# CHRISTIAN ETHICS PROMOTING FACTORS OF THE TRADITIONAL MODEL OF THE FAMILY, WITH SPECIAL REGARD TO CANON LAW



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### Abstract

This chapter presents the assumptions of Christian ethics relating to the issue of promoting the traditional family model. I analyse the doctrine of particular churches and religious associations, considering both theological issues and the internal law institutions of various confessional entities. Given that the community of Christian churches is extremely broad, the scope of research has been narrowed to only a selection of entities: in light of the number of followers, the considerations mainly cover the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church; however, I also examine the position of selected Protestant and Orthodox communities. The internal law of particular churches and religious associations is characterised by a high level of diversity, and some of the confessions have structured sets of legal regulations. In the case of the Catholic Church, the term ‘canon law’ is used to describe internal law, which was systematised in 1983 as the Code of Canon Law. The internal norms adopted by the individual churches and religious associations reflect their religious doctrine and constitute their practical dimension.

**Keywords:** Christian ethics, internal law, church, religious association, family

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## 1. Outline of the issues

The teaching of Christian churches results from the gospel of Christ and promotes universal values. Respecting these values should be a point of reference for people of good will, regardless of their ideology. Human life is a superior value enrooted in the dignity of the human being as an innate and inviolable category. Personal dignity makes it necessary to promote ideas that protect human life from conception to natural death.

It should first be emphasised that there are some bioethical differences among Christians themselves, especially in matters concerning access to medically assisted procreation (e.g. *in vitro fertilisation*). A special place where respect for human life should be cultivated is the family, of which Christian churches take special care. In light of the obvious crisis that currently affects this institution, it is critical to present a Christian doctrine that affirms this basic social unit and promotes the implementation of the basic objective of marriage – the procreation and upbringing of children.

As the community of Christian churches is extremely wide, the scope of the research must be narrowed down to only some entities. According to the number of followers and the extensive doctrine on the issues included in the subject under study in this chapter, the considerations mainly focus on the Roman Catholic Church; however, the positions of some Protestant and Orthodox communities are also presented. In the first place, Christian ethics will be the subject of discussion. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the comprehension of this concept is not obvious, and the basis for the existing differences are divisions within Christianity. Great splits within the community founded by Jesus led to the separation of three basic movements, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox,<sup>1</sup> among which an evolutionary change in the approach to certain problems also appeared.

In studies on this subject, we can find an attempt to specify the terms of Christian ethics. Karol Wojtyła states that, by this concept, we understand those ethical truths that have been revealed by God and are given by the Church as principles of moral conduct. These truths are contained in the sources of revelation (i.e. in the Bible and tradition), and as they are revealed in a supernatural way, they are the object of faith.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, Józef Keller identifies Christian (Catholic) ethics with moral theology.<sup>3</sup> The link between ethics and theology is also noted in the Protestant doctrine. A characteristic component here is the doctrine of justification by faith (a factor conditioning evangelical theology), which is a grace given to everyone for free. This teaching includes issues such as the relationship between the law and the Gospel, the secular reality of faith, church–state relations, and the anthropology of the justified sinner. The Protestant doctrine also emphasises the

1 Dura, 1998, p. 178.

2 Wojtyła, 1991, pp. 32–33. For more, see: Dura, 1998.

3 Keller, 1957, p. 5.

fact that ethics tries to keep its philosophy, which is conditioned by the changing cultural and social reality, up to date.<sup>4</sup> Further, Margaret Olubiyi highlights the need to identify ethical behaviour with revelations included in the Holy Bible. A believing Christian considers the Church's social teachings and doctrinal indications in matters of faith in his or her daily life.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Adam Dura draws attention to the ambiguity of the concept of Christian ethics, which results from the eclectic nature of Christian morality. I also emphasise that Christian ethics is not a philosophical concept.<sup>6</sup> This chapter considers Christian teachings of both a doctrinal and social nature, which will allow a broader cognitive understanding of ethical issues.

The internal law of individual churches and religious associations is extremely diverse. Some of the confessions have organised collections of legal provisions. In the case of the Catholic Church, the term 'canon law' is used to describe its internal law. Internal norms adopted by individual churches and religious associations are largely based on their religious doctrine. Considerations of Christian teaching on the issues of family and respect for life are related to the principle of cooperation between the state and the Church, which was articulated in social teaching and became a normative rule thanks to its acceptance by the secular legislator. Both entities' interest in 'social problems' results from the fact that, as is emphasised in Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World, *Gaudim et spes* (n. 76),

... despite the different title, they serve the individual and social vocation of the same people. The better they will develop a proper cooperation among themselves, the more effectively they will carry out this service for the good of all, also considering the conditions of time and place.<sup>7</sup>

The doctrine points out that no specific rules of cooperation have been formulated in this passage but that both entities are left with the possibility of adapting their activities to the current conditions.<sup>8</sup>

The situation of families is closely related to the problem of the demographic crisis that is occurring in Europe. Therefore, both entities should try to find the areas of cooperation. In Poland, the assumptions adopted in the legal act 'Strategia Demograficzna 2040' (Demographic Strategy 2040)<sup>9</sup> should be taken into consideration. To achieve success in the field of demography, the document's authors

4 Mączka, 2019.

5 Olubiyi, no date.

6 Dura, 1998, p. 191.

7 Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World, *Gaudim et spes*, 7 December 1965 [Online]. Available at: <https://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/akty-korporacyjne/konstytucja-duszpasterska-o-kosciele-w-swiecie-wspolczesnym-286768068> (Accessed: 1 August 2023).

8 Sobczyk, 2005, p. 200.

9 Uchwała nr 224 Rady Ministrów z dnia 15 listopada 2022 r. w sprawie ustanowienia polityki publicznej pt. 'Strategia Demograficzna 2040' (Demographic Strategy 2040) (M.P. 2022 poz. 1196).

foreground the need for cooperation, participation, and communication between the authorities and other partners *working for demographic and family development*. Among these entities, the Act distinguishes, for instance, representatives of associations and non-governmental organisations, social and economic partners, the academic community, private entities, and *churches and religious associations*. For Poland, this cooperation is particularly important in the context of existing conditions. Poland is one of the countries with a fertility rate below the European average. The existing fertility rate of 1.42 children per woman places Poland in 190th place among 208 classified countries and territories. In Europe, several countries, including Italy, Spain, Finland, Greece, and Portugal, face even greater demographic problems. The Act stresses the fact that religious denominations and their organisational units in Poland have a significant influence on the development of family competences. The data for 2018 show that 1,800 religious entities and 700 foundations and associations were active in this area. The main areas in which religious organisations are involved in the development of family competences include education and upbringing (44.8% of organisations), formation activities (10.4%), and other activities (7.7%). Over 27% of church and religious organisations are also involved in social and humanitarian aid, 10.6% of which are related to activities supporting the family.<sup>10</sup>

The principle of cooperation between churches and other religious entities became a systemic principle after the passing of the current Constitution of the Republic of Poland in 1997 (Art. 25(3)).<sup>11</sup> Previously, these issues were regulated by laws defining relations between the state and the Church,<sup>12</sup> as well as the Concordat concluded between the Republic of Poland and the Holy See.<sup>13</sup>

This chapter is comprised of several parts. In the first part, the attitude of the Catholic Church and other churches and religious associations towards the protection of life from conception to natural death is described. The second part is devoted to the demographic issues. In the third part, matters concerning the protection of the family and its members in the teaching of the Christian Churches are presented. Due to the close correlation of the internal law of churches with their ethical teachings, these issues are discussed in the text without a noticeable separation of ethics and law.

10 Ibid.

11 Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 2 kwietnia 1997 r. (Dz. U. z 1997 r. nr 78 poz. 483 ze zm.).

12 See, m.in.: ustawa o gwarancjach wolności sumienia i wyznania z dnia 17 maja 1989 r. (t.j. Dz. U. z 2023 r. poz. 265) – Art. 16; ustawa z dnia 17 maja 1989 r. o stosunku Państwa do Kościoła Katolickiego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (t.j. Dz. U. z 2019 r. poz. 1347 ze zm.).

13 Konkordat między Stolicą Apostolską i Rzeczpospolitą Polską, podpisany w Warszawie dnia 28 lipca 1993 r. (Dz.U. z 1998 r. nr 51, poz. 318).

## 2. Respect for life in the teachings of Christian churches

Human life is the greatest value and should be protected in an absolute manner. No political or social compromises justify interference in this matter. It is very difficult to define legal solutions that would fully guarantee the prohibition of interference in the existence of a human being at every stage of his or her development. In countries where the church and Christianity are still important parts of everyday life, there is huge social resistance to the introduction of a total ban on abortion. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church and other Christian communities promote a theology of life and respect for every human being.

### *2.1. The position of the Catholic Church*

It should be noted that since its foundations, the Church has taught that human life should be protected and supported in different periods of its development. The Christian doctrine was based on the Bible. One of the first surviving documents containing the principles of faith of the newly formed community founded by Christ is the *Didache*.<sup>14</sup> As noted by Józef Jankowski, this book is one of the first collections of church teachings and discipline from the first century after Christ (AD 50–80). The book is a collection of the morality, church law, catechetics, and homiletics of the Christian Church. Abortion of a human foetus and the murder of newborn children are strictly prohibited therein.<sup>15</sup>

The author of the 'Letter of Barnabas' (1st–2nd century AD) also warns against killing a foetus or newborn child. As Jacek Salij points out, since the Church encountered the problem of abortion, it has proclaimed that all actions against newly created life are disgraceful. Salij also discusses the views of the first Christian theologians who deliberated on this matter. Clement of Alexandria (approx. 150–212 AD) wrote that those who do not want to have children should not marry, which avoids the possibility of the act of infanticide. Origen, who lived at the same time (approx. 185–254 AD), taught that God commanded married couples to bring up all the children that they were blessed with, without any exceptions, and prohibited the killing of any of them.<sup>16</sup>

The negative attitude of the first Christians towards abortion is demonstrated by the canonical norms of that time. The provisions of the Synod of Elvira in 305 stated that 'if a woman became pregnant during her husband's absence and then she had an abortion, she could not receive Communion for the rest of her life because she had committed a crime' (can. 63).<sup>17</sup> Taking St. Augustine's standpoint on abortion into consideration, there is a dispute in the literature on the subject. Although St. Augustine

14 Jankowski, 1923.

15 Jankowski, 1923, p. 12

16 Poglądy autorów za: J. Salij, 2006.

17 Tamże.

declared the act of abortion to be shameless and immoral and strongly opposed the killing of unborn children, he introduced the idea of two phases of foetal life.<sup>18</sup> In his column entitled 'Women's Hell', Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński quotes St. Augustine's phrase, 'A woman who does the abortion before the soul enters the body is not an infanticide' (*Non est homicida, qui abortum procurat, antequam anime corpori sit infusa*).<sup>19</sup> This view is used by pro-abortionists as evidence that abortion is not a murder in the early stages of foetal growth. Salij disagrees with this information and attributes this quote to Iwo from Chartes, who lived 600 years later. In his work 'Panormia', the medieval lawyer recalled this interpretation in the context of the biblical verse from the Book of Exodus regarding the miscarriage of a woman trying to separate fighting men.<sup>20</sup> A similar controversy as in the case of St. Augustine relates to St. Thomas Aquinas who, referring to Aristotle's standpoint in his summation, accepted that a human embryo is not instantly a human being. As emphasised in the comments, this sentence, taken out of context, refers to Aristotle's concept of plant, animal, and rational souls. St. Thomas does not support this opinion but agrees that the soul is the form of the body. There is also a rational soul that fulfils the functions of a living being: vegetative, sensual. There are, however, natural changes that take place in the human embryo, but the soul is infused by God at the moment of conception.<sup>21</sup>

The value of offspring, which are the natural product of a Christian marriage, is also promoted in the modern teachings of the Catholic Church. In the encyclical *Casti connubi*, Pope Pius XI notes that offspring are the most important among the goods of marriage: a child is a gift of God's will and the perfect fulfilment of a marriage.<sup>22</sup> Although this document does not refer to the issue of abortion, it emphasises the supernatural source of human existence.

The protection of the dignity of human life was included in the encyclical of Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae*.<sup>23</sup> This document describes the Church's attitude to the issue of respecting the holiness of human life. *Humanae Vitae* had a great influence on the later teachings of popes. The Pope emphasises the fact that marriages and love are naturally directed towards procreation and the upbringing of offspring, and thus, children are the most precious gift of marriage (n. 9 *Humanae Vitae*). According to the Pope, it is absolutely necessary to reject any methods regulating the number of children, especially through direct abortion, even for medical reasons, as this would be morally impermissible (n. 14).

18 Kakiet, 2013.

19 Boy-Żeleński, n.d.

20 Salij, 2006.

21 Św. Tomasz o duszy [Online]. Available at: <https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/F/FA/echo201803-dusza>, (Accessed: 2 August 2023).

22 Encyklika papieża Piusa XI *Casti connubi* o małżeństwie chrześcijańskim z 31 grudnia 1930 [Online]. Available at: [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pius\\_xi/encykliki/casti\\_connubi\\_31121930.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pius_xi/encykliki/casti_connubi_31121930.html) (Accessed: 3 August 2023).

23 Encyklika Ojca Świętego Pawła VI 'Humanae Vitae' – O zasadach moralnych w dziedzinie przekazywania życia ludzkiego z 25 lipca 1968 [Online]. Available at: [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pawel\\_vi/encykliki/humane](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pawel_vi/encykliki/humane) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

The Second Vatican Council, held in the years 1962–1965, changed the Church's attitude and opened it to the world. Transformations that allowed the introduction of national languages into the church service were also initiated. The Council changed the Church's attitude to many issues in relations with state authorities. During the Second Vatican Council, some postulates for the alteration of canon law were also prepared. These alterations were finally adopted in 1983 in the form of the new Code of Canon Law promulgated by Pope John Paul II. The participants of the Council also spoke on ethical issues, such as the respect for human life, and the duties of the Catholic family based on the marriage bond.

The Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World, *Gaudim et spes*,<sup>24</sup> points out that spouses have the duty to procreate and educate their children. Spouses are God's collaborators in this activity; therefore, living in Christian families, they should care for both their own well-being and that of their present and future offspring. This document also emphasises spouses' responsibility, stipulating that they cannot act according to their own urges but always according to their conscience, which should be adapted to the teaching of the Church (n. 50). John Paul II was a supporter of the protection of human life and emphasised the values of growing up in a family. His encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (EV)<sup>25</sup> was devoted to these issues. The Pope refers therein to the importance and influence of modern medicine. This particular field of knowledge, which by nature is to serve, defend, and care for human life, becomes, in some cases, a tool directed against a human being, violating the dignity of those who practice it. The problem of overpopulation in some countries is solved in a way that is contrary to the truth and the good of people and nations because human beings at the early stage or those at the end of life are eliminated. Through such actions, the human conscience cannot distinguish between the good and the evil in matters concerning the protection of the fundamental value of human life (n. 4 EV). The Pope compares the attitude of policymakers who use anti-life methods to the biblical pharaoh who, terrified of the growing number of sons of Israel, gave the order to kill every male infant born to a Hebrew woman (n. 16 EV). John Paul II requests all people of good will, regardless of their religion, to defend and promote life in order to avoid the fall of civilisation and its incalculable consequences (n. 91 EV).

John Paul II devoted his apostolic exhortation 'Familiaris consortio' (FC) to the protection of the family and its rights.<sup>26</sup> Therein, the Pope warns about the birth of

24 Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World, *Gaudim et spes*, on 7 December 1965 [Online], available at: <https://sip.lex.pl/akty-prawne/akty-korporacyjne/konstytucja-duszpasterska-o-kosciele-w-swiecie-wspolczesnym-286768068> (Accessed: 3 August 2023).

25 Encyklika *Evangelium vitae* Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II do biskupów, do kapłanów i diakonów, do zakonników i zakonnice, do katolików świeckich oraz do wszystkich ludzi dobrej woli o wartości i nienaruszalności życia ludzkiego z 25 marca 1995 [Online] Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html) (Accessed: 3 August 2023).

26 Adhortacja apostolska 'Familiaris consortio' z 22 listopada 1981 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/familiaris\\_consortio.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/familiaris_consortio.pdf) (Accessed: 4 August 2023).

an anti-life morality that results from fears among ecologists and futurologists about the excessive growth of the human population. John Paul II emphasises that the Church firmly believes that human life, even when it is weak and suffering, is always a wonderful gift of God's goodness. The Church's natural aim is to defend life as this institution has always been in favour of life of every condition and at every stage of development. He criticises government actions that aim at restricting the freedom of spouses in deciding about their offspring. The Church disapproves of official pressure to use contraceptives, sterilisation, and abortion. In addition, the Pope observes that rich countries condition the economic support they provide to poor countries on the implementation of anti-life programmes that promote contraception, sterilisation, and abortion (No. 30 FC).

The issue of protecting unborn children was discussed by John Paul II in his next apostolic exhortation, entitled 'Christifideles laici' (Ch.L.).<sup>27</sup> This document points out that no one can estimate the number of unborn children killed in mothers' wombs (no. 5 Ch. L.). The Pope also emphasises that the Church has never given up the struggle against any kind of violence directed towards the right to life. This right belongs to all human beings at all stages of development, from conception to natural death. The right to life exists whether a person is sick or healthy, in good physical shape or with disabilities, rich or poor. All practices that undermine the dignity of human life have been defined as shameful and infecting human civilisation (n. 38 Ch L.). In 'List do rodzin – *Gratissimam sane*' (Gs),<sup>28</sup> John Paul II teaches that a child's life is a gift that God gives to parents and relatives. The process of conception, development in the mother's womb, and giving birth serves to create the appropriate space for the new man to reveal himself as this gift (n. 11 Gs).

John Paul II's teachings on respect for life were also continued by Pope Benedict XVI. In the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* (CV),<sup>29</sup> he emphasises that one of the most obvious aspects of development today is the issue of respect for life. In some countries, demographic control practices such as promoting contraception and even imposing abortion are implemented. The anti-life law is widespread mainly in economically developed countries. There is a so-called 'anti-natalist' mentality that some seek to pass on to other countries as if it were a form of cultural progress. Benedict XVI emphasises that openness to life represents true development. As society tends to negate and annihilate life, there is no motivation or energy to engage in the service of a human (n. 22 CV).

27 Jan Paweł II Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska 'Christifideles laici' o powołaniu i misji świeckich w kościele i świecie. Dwadzieścia lat po Soborze Watykańskim II z 30 grudnia 1988 [Online]. Available at: <https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/christifideles-laici.pdf> (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

28 Jan Paweł II, List do rodzin – *Gratissimam sane* – Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II z okazji roku rodziny z 2 lutego 1994 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/list\\_do\\_rodzin.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/list_do_rodzin.pdf) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

29 Benedykt XVI, Encyklika o integralnym rozwoju ludzkim w miłości i prawdzie – *Caritas in veritate* z 29 czerwca 2009 [Online]. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html) (Accessed: 10 August 2023).



In a speech on 26 February 2011 addressed to the members of the Pontifical Academy 'Pro Vita', Benedict XVI teaches that it is crucial for all of civilisation to defend the right to life of a conceived being for the true good of women. According to the Pope, a decision to abort a foetus will always be against this true good. At the same time, he notes that it is important to provide any necessary care and assistance to women who have had an abortion.<sup>30</sup> The Pope's speech to the Christian Associations of Italian Workers also emphasised that the protection of life from conception to natural death, wherever it is endangered, trampled upon, or insulted, is the first duty that expresses the true ethics of responsibility.<sup>31</sup>

In his apostolic exhortation 'Amoris Laetitia',<sup>32</sup> Pope Francis foregrounds the fact that a child is a gift for the family. Unfortunately, many children are rejected at the beginning of their lives. For the Pope, this is shameful and unacceptable. Parents should make every effort to ensure that a child could never think he or she was a mistake (AL n. 166). Francis addresses every pregnant woman to enjoy the gift of motherhood. Nothing should influence a pregnant mother to have any doubts and fears about giving life (AL 171).

Respect for human life is not only included in the papal teaching: other institutions of the Church also refer to these issues in their documents. In the report for Pope Francis from the Synod of Bishops, which took place on 24 October 2015, attention is drawn to the fact that the fertility of the spouses is spiritual.<sup>33</sup> The act of procreation should be perceived as an expression of parents' responsibility for the care and upbringing of children (n. 50). It was also emphasised that the presence of large families in the Church is a blessing for both the Church and all of society. It is necessary to show common gratitude to those families who decide to have children and raise them with love, especially when the children have disabilities. The bishops inform the Pope that economic, cultural, and educational factors often influence decreases in the number of births; therefore, there is a need to disseminate documents promoting the culture of life (n. 62).

The Charter of Family Rights (CFR)<sup>34</sup> is a Holy See document that tries to comprehensively protect the institution of the family and its rights. The indications contained in the Charter are addressed to all entities that believe that the security of the

30 Polskie Stowarzyszenie Obronców Życia Człowieka, 2023.

31 Dla dobra człowieka i całego społeczeństwa, – przemówienie do chrześcijańskich Stowarzyszeń Pracowników Włoskich L'Oser-vatore Romano – wersja polska 26 (2006) nr 4 s. 27.; cyt. za: Lubiński, 2014.

32 Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska Amoris Laetitia Ojca świętego Franciszka z 19 marca 2016 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/07\\_papa-francesco\\_esortazione\\_ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_pl.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/07_papa-francesco_esortazione_ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_pl.pdf) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

33 Synod Biskupów. XIV Nadzwyczajne Zgromadzenie Ogólne. Relacja końcowa Synodu Biskupów dla Ojca Świętego Franciszka (24 października 2015) [Online]. Available at: <https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Synod-o-Rodzinie-dokument-ko%C5%84cowy.pdf> (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

34 Karta Praw Rodziny przedłożona przez Stolicę Apostolską wszystkim ludziom, instytucjom i władzom zainteresowanym misją rodziny w świecie współczesnym (1983) [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/karta\\_praw\\_rodziny.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/karta_praw_rodziny.pdf) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

family is something important and desirable. The introduction directs society, the state, and international organisations to do everything possible to provide significant assistance that can contribute to reinforcing the family's unity and stability so that it can meet the challenges it faces (CFR lit l). Human life should be protected from conception and should be surrounded by care and respect. Consequently, the act of abortion is a direct violation of the fundamental right of every human being to life (CFR Art. 4 lit. a i b.).

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the instruction *Donum vitae* (IDv)<sup>35</sup> on 22 February 1987. The introduction of this instruction emphasises that the life of every human being from conception should be respected in an absolute way because it is blessed. Moreover, it holds that the authorities should respect the natural rights of individuals, such as the right to life and physical integrity from the moment of conception until death, the right of the family and marriage as an institution, and the right of the child to be conceived, born, and brought up by his or her parents (IDv n. 1).

The instruction *Dignitas personae*<sup>36</sup> of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith deals with bioethical problems related to, among other things, *in vitro fertilisation*. It is strongly emphasised here that the cryopreservation (freezing) of human embryos is incompatible with the expected respect for them. In this process, human embryos are exposed to the danger of death or the violation of their physical integrity because a significant number of them do not survive freezing and multiplication.

The Catholic Church speaks out on many biotic issues that both directly and indirectly concern interference in human life. The North American Episcopate posed a question to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding sterilisation in Catholic hospitals.<sup>37</sup> The position clearly indicates that any sterilisation, by its nature, directly aims at preventing procreation and, therefore, is contrary to the teachings of the Church. The Church absolutely prohibits direct sterilisation, regardless of its intention. Christians cannot be justified by any regulations of a public authority, even if they may be imposed on the society in which they live, because this would violate the dignity of a human being. The Congregation emphasises that as life is a gift, its beginnings and final stages cannot be rejected in any way; on the contrary, each phase of life must be given special care (n. 1).

35 Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, Instrukcja o szacunku dla rodzącego się życia ludzkiego i o godności jego przekazywania. Odpowiedzi na niektóre aktualne zagadnienia – *Donum vitae* (22 luty 1987) [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/donum\\_vitae.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/donum_vitae.pdf) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

36 Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, Instrukcja *Dignitas personae* dotycząca niektórych problemów bioetycznych [Online]. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20081208\\_dignitas-personae\\_pl.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_pl.html) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).

37 Kongregacja Nauki Wiary, Odpowiedź na pytanie Konferencji Episkopatu Ameryki Północnej dotyczące sterylizacji w szpitalach katolickich – *Quaecumque sterilizatio* [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/quaecumque\\_sterilizatio.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/quaecumque_sterilizatio.pdf) (Accessed: 9 August 2023).

The Pontifical Council for the Family (now, the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life), issued a declaration on the reduction of embryos.<sup>38</sup> This declaration states that every embryo should be considered and treated as a human being with the due respect to its dignity. An unborn child possesses fundamental human rights, particularly the right to life from the moment of conception, which cannot be violated in any way. The reduction of embryos, which is based on the direct and deliberate elimination of an innocent human being, should be regarded as selective abortion.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC),<sup>39</sup> which is a body of doctrinal principles, states that conjugal love is destined to be productive and to be realised in the common work of preserving creation (CCC 1604). This document devotes a separate title to abortion, which strongly conveys that human life should be respected and protected in an absolute way from the moment of conception. From the first moments of existence, a human being should be granted certain rights, most importantly, the inviolable right of every innocent being to life (CCC 2270). The CCC also emphasises the fact that the Church has always taught that every abortion is morally wrong. Direct and intentional abortion is against the moral law (CCC 2271). The Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983,<sup>40</sup> penalises crimes against human life, but it does not contain a term defining who a human being is and from when it begins. Undoubtedly, the ecclesiastical legislator should consider whether such a provision should be included in this document.<sup>41</sup> In can. 1398, the ecclesiastical legislator specifies that any person who undergoes an abortion, after having obtained its effect, will be subjected to excommunication by the force of the law itself. In the commentary on the Code of Criminal Procedure, the authors point out that effective termination of pregnancy is required for it to be considered the commission of an abusive act. It is irrelevant whether the death of the foetus occurs inside or outside the womb: the criminal nature of the act is not changed by the circumstances accompanying the successful termination of pregnancy. However, there is no crime if the action taken is not aimed at aborting the foetus, even if it could accidentally cause it. The means used to induce the abortion are also irrelevant to the fact of committing the crime.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the passage of years, the teachings of the Catholic Church have not fundamentally changed regarding issues that concern the respect for human life and its dignity. This largest Christian denomination takes an uncompromising attitude in the face of its enemies and critics. The Church does not ‘keep up to date’ in terms of basic principles; thus, it cannot be demanded to reject its centuries-old teachings because then the Church would no longer be the Church. Naturally, the doctrine has

38 Deklaracja Papieskiej Rady ds. Rodziny w sprawie redukcji embrionów z 12 lipca 2000 [Online]. Available at: [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WR/rady\\_pontyfikalne/r\\_rodziny/redukcja\\_embryonow\\_12072000.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WR/rady_pontyfikalne/r_rodziny/redukcja_embryonow_12072000.html) (Accessed: 9 August 2023).

39 Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego z 11 października 1992 [Online] Available at: <http://www.katechizm.opoka.org.pl/> (Accessed: 9 August 2023).

40 Kodeks Prawa Kanonicznego z 1983 r. – stan prawny na dzień 18 maja 2022 r., Pallotinum 2022.

41 Pankiewicz, 2020, pp. 27–47.

42 Krukowski, Lempa and Wójcik, 1987, p. 278.

evolved with regards certain issues, such as those related to state–Church relations. However, the protection of innocent lives is a value that cannot be ignored under any circumstances.

On 18 July 2023, European bishops gathered in the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) and issued a statement criticising the draft of the amendment to the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which provides the right to abortion.<sup>43</sup> According to the bishops, the proposed amendment would restrict the dignity of the human being and would, thus, be in direct violation of the current law of the European Union. It was emphasised that human dignity is the dominant value in the Treaties and the EU Charter of Rights and that respecting it at every stage of life, especially in situations of complete vulnerability, is a fundamental principle in a democratic society. The bishops also pointed out that the European Union has no competence to regulate the issue of abortion. In addition, the European Court of Human Rights has never recognised the right to abortion as a human right protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, while recognising the right to life as such. COMECE also declared that the care of pregnant women is a duty of both the Church and the public in the European Union.<sup>44</sup>

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### 3. Positions of selected Protestant and Orthodox Churches

This part of the chapter presents the positions of the Protestant and Orthodox Churches that have a regulated legal situation. Along with the Catholic Church, these entities belong to the family of Christian communities. Their religious doctrine, teachings on ethical matters, and internal law are largely similar, although there are also some differences. Since the Reformation initiated in the 16th century by Martin Luther, several currents of Protestantism have developed, including Lutheranism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, Baptism, Methodism, and Pentecostalism (the Pentecostal movement) founded in the 20th century.<sup>45</sup> Tadeusz Jacek Zieliński notes that individual Protestant denominations do not form identical organisational entities; instead, they consist of many communities (religious associations), most often of a national range, but remain in contact with other Churches of the same denomination. To assess whether a given religious association can be considered Protestant, its doctrine and whether it belongs to a worldwide Protestant organisation should be verified.<sup>46</sup>

The official statements of the Protestant confessions functioning in Poland provide insights into the basic doctrinal principles of these communities. The protection of

43 Payne, 2023.

44 Ibid.

45 Zieliński, 2015, p. 82.

46 Zieliński, 2015, pp. 82–84.

human life is a concern of the Evangelical-Augsburg Church in Poland, which issued a document on this subject in 1991.<sup>47</sup> The document's authors clearly state that the Evangelical Augsburg Church in Poland is in favour of the protection of life from the moment of conception. However, it is not the Church's duty or obligation to impose penalties for the act of abortion; this is a matter for the secular authorities. The use of abortion pills was strongly criticised, whereas discussions on the permitted or prohibited means and methods of prevention were considered pointless since they have no biblical justification. This Church does not raise any objections to the use of preventive methods in conjugal intercourse (except for abortion pills) in order to introduce conscious parenthood in family planning and to protect women's health. Nevertheless, the Church is strongly against abortion on demand. However, it considers itself to be incompetent to compile the catalogue of risks in the case of pathological pregnancies. The decision on abortion was, thus, left to the parents and the medical council in the case of a threat to the mother's life. There is also no indisputable opinion presented on the possibility of terminating pregnancy in situations where the foetus has defects, for example, a failure in nuclear or chemical mechanisms. According to the document's authors, this issue requires extensive analysis by competent specialists in genetics, medicine, ethics, and theology.<sup>48</sup>

The possibility of using contraceptives in the family planning process is also expressed in the position of the Supreme Council of the Pentecostal Church in the Republic of Poland. This community also excludes abortion pills and considers abortion a sin (n. 10). This position is consistent with the teachings of the Assemblies of God Church in the United States, which is the largest Pentecostal community in the world. In 2010, this community issued a statement that the practice of abortion is wrong and is against God's commandments. This statement also conveyed that at the moment of fertilisation, the embryo becomes a human being and, therefore, should be protected.

Protestant churches are more open-minded on issues of contraceptive application than the Catholic Church. Basically, they stipulate no obstacles to using contraceptives except for abortion drugs. Abortion is criticised and treated as a sin, although some communities do not express themselves clearly regarding situations in which the mother's life is endangered or the foetus has defects. Some differences can also be observed in the case of penalties for a possible act of abortion. While the Catholic Church implements excommunication for this act, which means exclusion from its ranks by the law itself, some of the Protestant communities assign a possible punishment for abortion to secular authorities.

In addition to Catholicism and Protestantism, the third existing variety of Christianity is Orthodoxy. The term 'Orthodoxy' itself denotes the doctrine, liturgy, and

47 Oświadczenie Kościoła Ewangelicko-Augsburskiego w sprawie ochrony życia z 1991 [Online]. Available at: [https://old2020.luteranie.pl/o\\_kosciele/oswiadczenia\\_kosciola/w\\_sprawie\\_ochrony\\_zycia.html](https://old2020.luteranie.pl/o_kosciele/oswiadczenia_kosciola/w_sprawie_ochrony_zycia.html) (Accessed: 9 August 2023).

48 Ibid.

organisation of the Christian churches separated from Rome in 1054. The division of Christianity into Eastern and Western varieties was the result of struggles between Rome and Constantinople over the supremacy of Christianity. The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC) has been present in Poland since 13 November 1924 after the head of the Orthodox Church in Poland asked the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Gregory VII, for autocephaly. Officially, this decision was announced on 17 September 1925.<sup>49</sup> According to the data presented in the Small Statistical Yearbook of 2023, Orthodoxy is the second religious denomination after Catholicism, with about 504,000 followers. The largest Orthodox communities are PAOC with 503,966 believers, the Eastern Church of the Old Believers in Poland with 1452 believers, and the Old Orthodox Church of the Old Believers with 500 believers.<sup>50</sup> The Orthodox Church also presents a strong standpoint on bioethical issues, declaring abortion unacceptable. According to the leader of the PAOC, a conceived child is a fully valuable person who reacts to external conditions, and his or her murder is not acceptable under any circumstances. The act of procreation itself is considered not only as a human activity aimed at sustaining the species but also as a gift from God.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout all branches of Christianity, the Christian respect for human life and dignity is a common feature. Although there are some differences regarding stances on certain issues, even the existing doctrinal alterations do not affect the perception of Christian communities as promoters of pro-life civilisation. The current culture of the secularisation of life, which is focused on removing religious features from the public space, necessitates the cooperation of all Christians in protecting the inviolable values.

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#### 4. Demographic issues in the teachings of the Church

Churches and religious associations recognise existing demographic problems in their teachings. The rapid population growth that took place in the 20th and 21st centuries and the related problems have been reflected in official statements and issued documents. Whereas developing countries face the phenomenon of overpopulation, the problem of depopulation is a challenge in some European countries. The inability to replace the generations implies very negative consequences that mainly affect the economic sphere, although this is not the only area exposed to danger. The economic effects of the demographic decline include, for instance, decreases in

49 Romanowicz, 2015, pp. 159–160.

50 Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny Polski 2023 r.*, Warszawa 2026 r., p. 117.

51 Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny Polski 2023 r.*, Warszawa 2026 r., pp. 179–185.

the state income, working-age population, and retirement and disability benefits; the need to extend the retirement age; or the need to eliminate the shortage of employees by replacing them with emigrants.<sup>52</sup> Both the economy and the educational system are painfully affected by a shrinking population. Schools are being closed, especially those in small towns. Universities have also been forced to shut down some fields of study, meaning teachers must retrain for other professions.

Countries affected by this phenomenon must take various actions to encourage families to raise more children. It is extremely important for the authorities to cooperate with various institutions in activities that can contribute to improving the existing situation. Churches and religious associations seem to actively support the authorities' efforts to increase population growth.<sup>53</sup> The Catholic Church, which affirms life and criticises all attempts to shorten its duration, directly supports activities aimed at slowing the decrease in birth rates. It is worth emphasising, however, that in the official teachings of the Church, there are also references that directly focus on the issue of demographics.<sup>54</sup> The Papal teachings of the 20th century began to directly note the issue of the world's population. A comprehensive interpretation of this phenomenon is contained in Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Mater et Magistra*,<sup>55</sup> in which the Pope responds to the problem of overpopulation in economically less-developed countries. In connection with this situation, some opinions that sought to counteract the phenomenon of overpopulation through all possible means of birth control emerged. Believing in the wisdom of people to use the gifts of the Earth to meet human needs, John XXIII warns against implementing particular solutions that 'violate the moral order established by God'. According to the Pope, demographic problems cannot be solved by applying methods that would be disgraceful for humans, which result from a materialistic concept of life; rather, the solution should be found in economic development and social progress that respects true human values, both individual and social. Global cooperation that can enable the proper use of human potential is required.<sup>56</sup>

The Second Vatican Council focused on the issue of demography in the Pastoral Constitution on the Contemporary Church *Gaudium et Spes*. The Fathers of the Council first emphasised the need for international cooperation to assist those countries affected by the problem of overpopulation. They proposed that support from richer countries should include both direct donations and help in the field of education so that less-developed countries can overcome the emerging difficulties themselves. However, the Council warned against implementing publicly or privately recommended, and sometimes even imposed, solutions that are against the moral law (n. 87).

52 Wójcicki, n.d.

53 Młyński, 2016, p. 154.

54 Makowski, 2011, pp. 241–302.

55 Jan XXII, Encyklika *Mater et Magistra* o współczesnych przemianach społecznych w świetle nauki chrześcijańskiej z 15 czerwca 1961 [Online]. Available at: [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan\\_xxiii/encykliki/mater\\_magistra\\_15051961](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/jan_xxiii/encykliki/mater_magistra_15051961) (Accessed: 10 August 2023).

56 Ibid.

Paul VI considers demographic issues in the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (PP).<sup>57</sup> The Pope admits that the accelerated demographic growth is blocking the development of societies, and that the population seems to exceed the available resources. In many people's opinion, this situation requires taking radical measures that could reduce the number of births. Within the boundaries of their competence, public authorities can interfere in these matters provided that the actions taken are consistent with the moral law and respect the freedom of spouses. Paul VI speaks of depriving the individual's dignity when the right to marriage and procreation is interfered with and notes that it is the parents' right to consciously determine the number of children they have (n. 37 PP).

In his statements and published documents, John Paul II also refers to the phenomenon of overpopulation. He continues the teaching of Paul VI in the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (Srs).<sup>58</sup> The Pope divides the world into a 'South zone' and a 'North zone'. In the South zone, overpopulation is a huge problem affecting the region's development, whereas the North zone is witnessing a decrease in the birth rate and, as a result, an ageing population. John Paul II clearly states that the problem is not only the rapid increase in population but also its decline. Campaigns aimed at reducing the number of births have been criticised as these actions often represent a form of blackmail: rich countries make their economic aid dependent on the implementation of such campaigns. This favours the introduction of racist forms of eugenism and is a false and incorrect conception of true human development (n. 25 Srs). In the apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul II emphasises the need to intensify efforts to communicate the authentic teachings of the Church in relation to the problem of overpopulation. The Pope directs his words to theologians, who should clarify the biblical foundations, ethical motivations, and personal reasons in accordance with the Catholic doctrine. This should be done in an accessible way so that as many people as possible are familiarised with the position of the Catholic Church, given that misunderstandings about the institutions of marriage and the family result in a deformation of the truth about Man (No. 31 FC).

Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in veritate* also deals with the challenges of overpopulation and depopulation, perceiving both phenomena as dangerous. A morally responsible openness to life is, in the Pope's opinion, a social and economic wealth. Large countries have been able to lift themselves out of poverty owing to their large populations and the skills of their people, although the decrease in birth rates is becoming a serious problem for rich societies. The Pope also presents the negative

57 Paweł VI, Encyklika o popieraniu rozwoju narodów, *Populorum Progressio* z 26 marca 1967 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mop.pl/doc/html/encykliki/Encyklika%20Populorum%20progressio.htm> (Accessed: 10 August 2023).

58 Jan Paweł II, Encyklika *Sollicitudo rei socialis*. Skierowana do biskupów, kapłanów, rodzin zakonnych, synów i córek Kościoła oraz wszystkich ludzi dobrej woli z okazji dwudziestej rocznicy ogłoszenia *Populorum progressio* z 30 grudnia 1987 [Online]. Available at: [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30121987\\_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html) (Accessed: 8 August 2023).



economic effects of depopulation, for instance, crises in the social welfare system, a reduction in savings, a decrease in investments and a reduction in the number of qualified employees. A small number of people in families can also lead to the failure of social relationships and the impossibility of guaranteeing effective forms of solidarity (n. 44 CV).

In addition, Pope Francis draws attention to the issue of demographics in his teachings. In the encyclical *Laudato Si (Ls)*, he accuses some people of suggesting that the birth rate should be reduced instead of solving the problems of the poor. The Pope notes that blaming demographic growth for existing problems, rather than the culture of extreme and selective consumerism, is a way of neglecting the real threat (n. 51 LS).

The reasons why the Catholic Church deals with the phenomenon of demographics seem obvious. These reasons include the respect for human life from conception to natural death and the concern for respecting the inherent and indisputable dignity of every individual. In their official statements and documents, Popes not only highlight the problem of rapid population growth on a global scale but also note the negative consequences of the decrease in birth rates in some regions.

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## 5. Protection of the family and its individual members in the teachings of Christian churches

As the most basic social unit, the family is a point of interest for both the state and individual churches and religious associations. Young people's attitudes, which are later employed in adult life, are formed within the family. The importance of the family in shaping the personality and character traits of its individual members cannot be underestimated. Parents, who apply the right and duty to bring up their children, are particularly responsible for that task. Both secular and ecclesiastical legislators constantly express their respect for this institution. It is worth quoting the regulations included in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, where Art. 18 states that marriage, as a union of a man and a woman, family, motherhood, and parenthood are under the protection and care of the Republic of Poland. The well-being of the family should also be a point of reference for the state's cooperation with churches and religious associations (Art. 25(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland).

### *5.1. The Catholic Church and the rights of the family*

The Catholic Church supports the traditional family model based on the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. The Church believes that families

should be provided with appropriate support from the state in material and spiritual matters in order to properly meet their needs.

The teachings of the Popes of the Catholic Church are full of statements concerning the institution of a family and its rights. It is impossible to present all of these numerous statements and regulations; therefore, the most representative of the Catholic doctrine are selected here.

On 10 February 1880, the encyclical of Pope Leo XIII dedicated to Christian marriage – *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (ADS) – was published.<sup>59</sup> Therein, the Pope points out that the source and beginning of the family, and consequently of the entire human community, is the marriage of a man and a woman. Spouses should demonstrate the utmost mutual love, fidelity, and care for each other. The husband is the head of the family, and the wife is his companion. Divorces, which have a destructive effect on the upbringing process of children, seem to be a threat to the institution of marriage; therefore, it is significant for both the Church and the state to take steps to counteract them (n. 5–17 ADS).

In the encyclical *Casti Conubi*, Pius XI also teaches about the necessity of the permanence of marriages. The stability of marriage is the source of honest life and the purity of morals. The preservation of these values ensures the happiness of a state. The condition of a state is reflected by the condition of its families and citizens; therefore, initiatives aimed at protecting the stability of marriage serve the common interest. The family is more important than the state, and those who are likely to have children with disabilities should not be restricted from marrying. Moreover, state authorities cannot interfere in the family system but should ensure social and economic conditions that allow the heads of families to earn enough to provide the whole family with the necessary support. The state should act in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. If private expenses are not efficient enough to meet the needs of the family, the state is responsible for filling the deficiencies. The Pope encourages the authorities to avoid introducing the institution of divorce.

Identifying the tasks of the family and the Church in the upbringing of children was emphasised by Pius XI in the encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri*.<sup>60</sup> As the Church and the family both come from God, they carry out a similar mission. The family is obliged to bring up children and be responsible for this process. This is a family right of a primary nature, which cannot be removed by anyone, even the state authority. Pius XI teaches that the mission of upbringing belongs to the family and the Church, not the state.<sup>61</sup>

59 Leon XIII, Encyklika *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* o małżeństwie chrześcijańskim z 10 lutego 1880 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/leon\\_xiii\\_arcanum\\_divinae.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/leon_xiii_arcanum_divinae.pdf) (Accessed: 10 August 2023).

60 Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* – O chrześcijańskim wychowaniu młodzieży z 1929 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ekai.pl/dokumenty/encyklika-divini-illius-magistri/> (Accessed: 10 August 2023).

61 Ibid.

Taking the teachings of the Second Vatican Council into account, in *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI teaches about the inseparable relationship between conjugal love and the act of procreation. The mutual love of spouses requires them to identify their tasks in procreation. Responsible parenthood appears when spouses can recognise their duties towards God, themselves, the family, and society (n. 10 EV). In *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II draws attention to the difficult economic situation of families in the poorest countries. He regrets that marriages and families are often left with their own problems. There are many examples of extreme poverty, deprivation, and insecurity, where human suffering reaches its limits and women are subjected to extreme harassment. In such circumstances, the Pope states that standing for life and defending it becomes a heroic act (n. 11 EV).

As Pope Francis emphasises in the encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, the necessity to pass on the faith is the duty of parents. Particular care should be given to young people who are going through complicated, amusing, and important periods of their lives. Young people must feel the closeness and care of the family and the ecclesial community as they mature in faith (n. 53).<sup>62</sup>

The papal teachings on the family were not only included in encyclicals: other documents also draw attention to the important role of this institution in a society. Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii nuntianti* (En), focuses on the relationship between the family and the Church.<sup>63</sup> In the mission of the family in the area of the secular apostolate, all its members should be involved in this work appropriate to their age and abilities. The family is to become a 'proclaimer of the Gospel', for other families as well as for the environment in which it functions (n. 71 and 72 En). John Paul II often spoke about the need to value the importance of the family. In the apostolic exhortation *Redemptoris Custos*, he refers to the significance of the Holy Family. The Pope emphasises the fact that the modern family is given the mission of guarding revelation and spreading love. As the Holy Family, all families should create a 'domestic Church' where faith and love will grow (n. 7).<sup>64</sup>

The exhortation *Christifideles Laici* is devoted to the role of the laity in the Church. John Paul II teaches therein that marriage and the family are the basic ground for the social commitment of lay Catholics. The family is also the source of life and love and where they are born and grow. The family has an irreplaceable value for society; therefore, this institution should be given special care. The Pope mentions actions directed against the family, including abortion campaigns and totalitarian politics. Today's hedonistic and consumerist mentality does not promote the development of

62 Franciszek, Encyklika *Lumen Fidei* – o wierze z 29 czerwca 2013 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/franciszek-lumen\\_fidei.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/franciszek-lumen_fidei.pdf) (Accessed: 11 August 2023).

63 Paweł VI, Adhortacja apostolska – *Evangelii nuntianti* – O ewangelizacji w świecie współczesnym z 8 grudnia 1975 [Online]. Available at: [https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pawel\\_vi/adhortacje/evangelii\\_nuntianti.html](https://opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pawel_vi/adhortacje/evangelii_nuntianti.html) (Accessed: 11 August 2023).

64 Jan Paweł II, Adhortacja apostolska – *Redemptoris Custos* – o Świętym Józefie i jego posłannictwie w życiu Chrystusa i Kościoła z 15 sierpnia 1989 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/adhortacja\\_redepmptoris\\_custos.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/adhortacja_redepmptoris_custos.pdf) (Accessed: 11 August 2023).

the family. The task of the laity in the Church is to ensure that the family is aware of its identity and recognises the fact that it is the first and basic social unit with a special mission. The family itself should be an active and responsible promoter of its rights. Families should demand respect for their rights from authorities. The Pope states that civilisation and the stability of nations depend primarily on the condition of families. The Church is, thus, aware that the future of humanity depends on the family condition (n. 40 Ch. L.).

The text of the exhortation of John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, is devoted entirely to issues concerning the family. This document basically recognises the value of family and marriage, which are some of the most precious goods of humanity. As the foundation of society, the family has tasks to perform in the fields of creating a community of life, serving life, participating in the development of a society, and participating in the life and mission of the Church. Though the basic tasks of the family in relation to society are the procreation and education of children, they cannot be limited only to these issues. Families should act to meet the needs of society, including the care of the poor and those in need (Nos. 17 and 44 FC). The Church strongly defends family rights from both society and the authorities, especially in situations where these entities assume that they can replace the institution of the family. In the exhortation, the Pope formulates a collection of family rights, which includes intimacy of spousal and family life; the permanence of bonds and the institution of marriage; expressing faith and defending it; bringing up children with the necessary means, tools, and institutions according to one's own religious and cultural traditions and values; obtaining physical, social, political, and economic security, especially for the poor and the sick; homes that allow for a suitable family life; representation of the family to public economic, social, and cultural authorities and lower authorities, either directly or by associations; associated with other families and institutions for the proper and passionate fulfilment of the family's tasks; the protection of minors by appropriate institutions and legislation against harmful drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.; appropriate entertainment that also serves family values; living and dying with dignity and in a manner respectful of a human being; and the emigration of the whole family to find better living conditions (No. 46 FC).

The announcement of the FC exhortation resulted in the development by the Holy See of the Charter of Family Rights (CFR).<sup>65</sup> This document was created at the request of the Synod of Bishops, which was devoted to the tasks of the Christian family in the modern world. The purpose of the CFR is to present believers and non-believers with the Church's perception of the family and its rights.<sup>66</sup> The institution of the family is based on a marriage of a man and a woman and is permanent,

65 Karta Praw Rodziny przedłożona przez Stolicę Apostolską wszystkim ludziom, instytucjom i władzom zainteresowanym misją rodziny w świecie współczesnym z 1983 [Online]. Available at: [https://www.srk.opoka.org.pl/srk/srk\\_pliki/karta.htm](https://www.srk.opoka.org.pl/srk/srk_pliki/karta.htm) (Accessed: 11 August 2023).

66 Ibid.

voluntary, public, and willing to procreate. Moreover, the family is perceived as a natural and primary relationship in relation to both the state and other communities, with its own indisputable rights. As a legal, social, and economic subject, the family is also a community of love and solidarity. Its competences include the transmission of cultural, ethical, social, spiritual, and religious values that are important for the development of both its individual members and the development of society. National authorities and international organisations should do everything to secure the needs of the family at the political, economic, social, and legal levels (Introduction – CFR). The family has the right to exist and develop; thus, public authorities should recognise and support basic family values such as dignity, independence, intimacy, integrity, and stability (Art. 6 of the CFR). The sphere of social security is essential for the proper functioning of the family. Therefore, benefits received by the family should ensure its success and stability, and the opportunity for healthy recreation (Art. 10 of the CFR). Payment for work should be sufficient to establish and maintain a family. In addition, it is necessary to provide housing that is suitable for family life and adapted to the number of its members (Arts. 10 and 11 of the CFR).

In 1994, John Paul II addressed a letter to the families entitled '*Gratissimam sane*'. According to this document, the family is the path of the Church: it is the first and most important path, special, unique, and irreplaceable, just as a human being is (n. 2 Gs). As in the past, the family is currently perceived as the basic expression of the social nature of Man. The Pope emphasises the importance of a woman and a man in the institution of the family. The family is a community of living together – *comunio personarum* (n.7 Gs); thus, there is no difference in the missions of a husband or a wife, which are both equally important. As the most basic and smallest unit of society, the family demands respect for its rights. John Paul II emphasises that the family primarily expects recognition of its identity and subjectivity. Consequently, as a union of a man and a woman, marriage serves the well-being of the family and aims at the procreation and education of children. The Pope excludes the possibility of accepting unions other than heterosexual unions as marriages. According to the Pope, movements that aim to legalise same-sex marriages are dangerous for the future of the family and society (n. 17 Gs).

There are also references to the Christian family in Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG).<sup>67</sup> It has been noted there that the family is currently undergoing a deep cultural crisis, as are other communities and social bonds. However, in the case of the family, this situation is particularly dangerous because it affects the basic unit of society, where people learn to live together in a society and in diversity, and where parents pass on the faith to their children (n. 66 EG). A postmodern and globalised individualism, which favours a lifestyle that deforms familial bonds, is a threat to the identity of the family. A Christian's duty is to care

67 Franciszek, Adhortacja apostolska – *Evangelii Gaudium* z 24 listopada 2013 [Online]. Available at: [https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/adhortacja\\_evangelii\\_gaudium.pdf](https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/adhortacja_evangelii_gaudium.pdf) (Accessed: 11 August 2023).

for others; therefore, initiatives aimed at protecting rights and building social and cultural progress are reasonable in Pope Francis's view (n. 67 EG).

Social issues and the economic situation of families were included in the final report of the Synod of Bishops for Pope Francis.<sup>68</sup> The bishops point out that as a place of joy and experience, the family is the first and basic school of society (n. 2). Public authorities are obliged to act to support the family through appropriate pro-family policy and the activation of civil society. Actions supporting families should be specified in such a way as to create a modern social welfare system. This will allow for a rational redistribution of funds and for levelling the negative effects of social inequalities.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church specifies that some communities, such as the family and the state, correspond more directly to human nature (n. 1882 CCC). State authorities should care for the common good, which is realised in social well-being and community development. The authorities should also settle disputes concerning particular interests. However, it is necessary to provide everyone with the foundations that allow them to lead a truly human life. Food, clothing, work, education, culture, reliable information, and the right to establish a family are the most crucial of these foundations (n. 1908 of the CCC). The deepening interdependence between people requires the community of nations to take specific actions. Refugees and emigrants dispersed all over the world should be given special care, and special actions should be taken to support the families of these people to ensure they have a dignified life (n. 1911 CCC).

In the Code of Canon Law, the ecclesiastical legislator states that married couples have a special duty to contribute to the building up of the People of God through marriage and family. They should do this in a way that is consistent with their vocation. Parents, therefore, have an essential duty and right to educate their children because they have given their children life (can. 226). The Catholic Church takes special care of the family, which is the basic social unit and is believed to be the foundation of the Church and the state. Both these communities should, thus, guarantee the rights that allow the family to develop with dignity. Consequently, the teachings of the Church highlight that the marriage of a man and a woman is the source and beginning of the Christian family and that any attempts to interfere with the essence of this institution should be considered forbidden. Spouses are obliged to care for each other for the security of the family and their offspring.

Analysing the teaching of the Catholic Church indicates an evolution in the perception of the roles of men and women: whereas the encyclicals of Popes from the beginning of the 20th century emphasised the dominant role of the father in comparison to a woman, it is now stressed that the roles of both spouses are identical. Undoubtedly, this is the result of social changes and the guaranteeing of women's

68 Synod Biskupów. XIV Zwyczajne Zgromadzenie, Relacja końcowa dla Ojca Świętego Franciszka (24 października 2015) [Online]. Available at: <https://kodr.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Synod-o-Rodzinie-dokument-ko-C5%84cowy.pdf> (Accessed: 12 August 2023).

rights by secular authorities. An example can be found in the provisions of the Polish Constitution, in which Art. 33 sec. 1 provides that a woman and a man in the Republic of Poland have equal rights in family, political, social, and economic life. The Church also emphasises that parents have the primary right to bring up their children in accordance with their own beliefs. No institution can impose a model of upbringing and education that would be contrary to the expectations of parents and legal guardians.

### *5.2. The family in the teachings of non-Catholic Christian churches*

The priority of the family and the rights of parents in the upbringing of their children are also a significant part of the teachings of non-Catholic Christian churches. This part of the chapter presents the positions of select Protestant and Orthodox communities, as expressed in their official documents and internal laws. In the creed of the Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest Protestant organisation in the United States, there are elements regarding the institutions of marriage and the family.<sup>69</sup> Chapter VIII, entitled ‘The Family’, states that God established the family as the basic institution of human society. This institution consists of people related by blood or joined by marriage or adoption. Marriage is the union of one woman and one man who commit themselves to persevere in a mutual covenant for the rest of their lives. Husband and wife are of equal value for God because they have been created by Him. A husband’s duty is to love his wife and provide for her, and to protect and guide his family. Accordingly, a wife’s duty is to accept her husband’s leadership as the Church submits to Christ’s headship. In addition, her duties include respecting her husband and helping him in running the home and raising children. Children, thus, are the blessing and inheritance of God from the moment of conception. It is the parents’ responsibility to teach their children God’s vision of a marriage. In addition, parents must teach their children spiritual and moral values and prepare them to make Bible-based choices. In turn, children are obliged to respect and obey their parents.<sup>70</sup>

On 3 May 1997, the Baptist Church of Poland presented its position on marriage and the family.<sup>71</sup> In this document, the institution of marriage is acknowledged as a permanent union between a man and a woman, which can only be ended by the death of the spouse. Divorce is considered inconsistent with God’s will and is possible only in the cases listed in Mt 19:9 (fornication, adultery) and Cor 7:15 (Paul’s privilege – leaving a non-believing person). Spouses have the right

69 Comparison of 1925, 1963, and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message [Online]. Available at: <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp> (Accessed: 12 August 2023).

70 Ibid.

71 Stanowisko Kościoła Chrześcijan Baptystów w RP w sprawie małżeństwa i rodziny – Uchwała Międzykonferencyjnego Zjazdu Delegatów Kościoła Chrześcijan Baptystów w RP z dnia 3 maja 1997 r. w sprawie małżeństwa i rodziny [Online]. Available at: <https://baptysci.pl/naszawiara/stanowiska/stanowisko-kosciola-w-sprawie-malzenstwa-i-rodziny> (Accessed: 12 August 2023).

to plan their family according to their own will using contraceptives, except for abortion pills.<sup>72</sup> The Supreme Council of the Pentecostal Church in Poland has also expressed its position on marriage, divorce, remarriage, and family planning.<sup>73</sup> This position is largely consistent with the teachings of the Baptist Church in Poland: it emphasises that marriage is an institution established by God and a monogamous and permanent union between a man and a woman. Marriage is contracted in public in accordance with current legal (secular) and church regulations. Divorce is believed to be immoral but possible in some cases (the so-called ‘Matthew clause’ and two ‘St. Paul clauses’). Spouses may freely and conscientiously plan their family life using methods of contraception, with the exception of abortion drugs.<sup>74</sup>

The holiness, indissolubility, and divine origin of marriage are also underlined in Orthodoxy based on the biblical tradition. The domestic Church is born out of conjugal love, and when children are born, they bring a new quality to fatherhood and motherhood. Children and the time of their upbringing are treated in the Orthodox Church as a sign of God’s blessing, and any interference in the unborn life is unacceptable.<sup>75</sup> The vision of the family in the whole of Christianity is similar. The institution of the family, which comes from God, is based on the inseparable union of a man and a woman. The Christian family has independence in the methods it uses to bring up its offspring. However, there are differences in the views on family planning and the use of contraceptives compared to the teachings of the Church.

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## 6. Summary

The ethics and internal laws of various churches and religious associations support ideas aimed at solving demographic problems. By affirming human life from conception to natural death, Christian communities attempt to preserve lives regardless of social status or health. Christian churches perceive the issue of population from a dual perspective: on the one hand, there has been a rapid increase in population on a global scale, while on the other hand, some countries are facing a significant decrease in population. There is a need to intensify the cooperation of the entire international community in order to deal with the emerging problems. Unfortunately, human nature has been unchanged for centuries, and there will always be some countries that desire to impose their standpoints on others, regardless of

72 Ibid.

73 Stanowisko Naczelnej Rady Kościoła Zielonoświątkowego w RP w sprawie małżeństwa, rozwodu, powtórnego małżeństwa oraz planowania rodziny z 10 maja 2010 [Online]. Available at: <http://sienna.waw.pl/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/stanowisko-nrk-mrpmpr.pdf> (Accessed: 12 August 2023).

74 Ibid.

75 Leśniewski, 2016, pp. 124–129.



the social costs. The current Russian invasion of Ukraine directly affects problems related to the world's demographic situation. Cutting off the possibility of supplying grain and food to countries affected by famine is an inhumane act that interferes with the essence of society. Christian churches and religious associations mostly criticise Russia's aggressive actions; however, unfortunately, there are some communities that try to justify these actions. To remain reliable, Christianity needs to present a unified and consistent standpoint that criticises existing evil. Summarising the above findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The teachings of Christian churches are based on the Gospel of Christ and express universal values, which should be a point of reference for people of good will, regardless of their ideology.

Human life is a superior category enrooted in the dignity of a human being as an inherent and inviolable value.

Human life is the greatest value and should be protected in an absolute manner. No political or social compromises justify interfering in this matter.

It is very difficult to define specific legal solutions that would fully guarantee the prohibition of interference in the existence of a human being at every stage of his or her development. Even among Christians, there are some differences in their views on bioethical issues, especially those related to medically assisted procreation and the use of contraceptives.

The understanding of the concept of Christian ethics is ambiguous. The basis for the existing differences includes divisions within Christianity, which led to the separation of three basic movements: Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox.

The internal law of individual churches and religious associations is recognised with a large level of diversity. Some of the confessions have arranged collections of legal provisions. In the case of the Catholic Church, the term 'canon law' is used to describe the internal law. Internal norms adopted by specific churches and religious associations are largely based on their religious doctrine.

Christian teachings on the issues of a family and respect for life are related to the principle of cooperation between the state and the Church, which was articulated in the social teachings of the Second Vatican Council and became a normative rule owing to its acceptance by the secular legislator.

In the doctrine of the Catholic Church, marriages are directed by their nature towards procreation and the upbringing of offspring. Children are the most precious gift of marriage. Limiting the number of children, especially through direct termination of pregnancies, even for medical reasons, should be absolutely rejected as morally unacceptable.

The teachings of the Second Vatican Council clarify that spouses have a duty to procreate life and raise children. Parents are God's collaborators in this work; living in Christian families, they should care for their own well-being as well as for that of their present and future children. The teachings also emphasise that parents should not act according to their own urges but always according to their conscience, which is adapted to the teachings of the Church.

John Paul II promoted the protection of human life and emphasised the values of growing up in a family. The Pope was aware of the existence of an anti-life morality that stems from fear among ecologists and futurologists about the excessive growth of the human population. According to John Paul II's teachings, human life, even when it is weak and suffering, is always a wonderful gift of God's goodness.

The teachings of Benedict XVI highlight that the law against life is popular mainly in economically developed countries. There exists a so-called 'anti-natalist mentality' that some try to impose on other countries as if it represented cultural progress.

Benedict XVI emphasises that openness to life is the true approach to development. In a situation where society tends to negate and annihilate life, there is no motivation or energy to engage in the service of human good.

Pope Francis stresses the fact that a child is a gift for the family. Unfortunately, many children are rejected from the beginning of their lives. For the Pope, this is a shameful and unacceptable situation. Parents should make every possible effort to ensure that a child could never think that he or she was a mistake.

Respect for human life is not only covered in the papal teachings: other institutions of the common Church also refer to this issue in their documents.

The Code of Canon Law, promulgated in 1983, penalises crimes against human life but does not contain norms defining who a human being is and when his or her beginning is. Undoubtedly, the church legislator should consider the legitimacy of establishing regulations relating to these issues.

The Catholic Church's uncompromising stance on bioethical issues faces enemies and critics. The Church does not 'keep up to date' in terms of basic principles. However, the Church cannot be demanded to reject its teachings because then it would no longer be the Church.

The religious doctrine of non-Catholic Christian communities, including their teachings on ethical matters and their internal law, is largely in line with the position of the Catholic Church, although there are some differences.

The Evangelical Augsburg Church in Poland supports the protection of life from the moment of conception. However, the Church does not believe that it is its task to impose penalties for the act of abortion – this is the responsibility of the secular power. The doctrine of this Church strongly criticises the use of abortion drugs, whereas it considers discussions about legal or illegal preventive measures and methods pointless as they have no biblical justification.

The Evangelical Augsburg Church in the Republic of Poland does not clearly express its views on the possibility of terminating a pregnancy in situations when the foetus shows defects. This issue requires extensive analysis by experienced specialists in the fields of genetics, medicine, ethics, and theology.

The Orthodox Church also takes a strong stand on bioethical issues by declaring abortion unacceptable. A conceived child is a fully valuable person who reacts to external conditions, and his or her murder is not acceptable under any circumstances.

The act of procreation is perceived not only as a human activity aimed at prolonging the species but also as a gift from God.

Churches and religious associations recognise existing demographic problems in their teachings. The rapid population growth that took place in the 20th and 21st centuries and the related problems have been reflected in official statements and issued documents.

The Catholic Church deals with the phenomenon of demography owing to its respect for human life from conception to natural death and for the inherent and absolute dignity of each individual.

In affirming life and criticising all attempts to interfere with its duration, the Catholic Church directly supports activities aimed at stopping the decrease in birth rates. Papal teachings in the 20th century began to directly examine the issue of the world population.

Pope John XXIII emphasises that demographic problems cannot be solved by means that are disgraceful to Man; rather, the solutions should be found in economic development and social progress that respects true human values, both individual and social. Global cooperation that can enable the proper use of capital and human potential is required.

Pope Paul VI teaches that public authorities can get involved in matters of demographics within the limits of their competence, as long as the actions taken are in accordance with the assumptions of the moral law and respect the freedom of spouses. Paul VI speaks of depriving the individual of his dignity when the right to marriage and procreation is interfered with. It is the right of parents to consciously determine the number of children they have.

John Paul II states that the problem is not only the rapid growth of the population but also its decrease. He criticises campaigns that aim to reduce the number of births, perceiving them as a form of blackmail because rich countries make economic aid conditional on the implementation of such campaigns. This favours the introduction of racist forms of eugenism and is a manifestation of an incorrect concept of true human development.

Benedict XVI notes that wealthy countries were able to get out of poverty thanks to their large populations and the skills of their inhabitants and that the decrease in births is becoming a serious problem for rich societies. A small number of people in families can also weaken social relations and make it impossible to guarantee effective forms of solidarity.

Pope Francis points out that blaming demographic growth, rather than the culture of extreme and selective consumerism, for existing problems is a way of avoiding the real threat.

As the most basic social unit, the family is a point of interest for both the state and individual churches and religious associations. The attitudes of young people, which later serve them in adult life, are formed within the family. Particular responsibility lies with parents who implement the right and duty to bring up their children.

The Catholic Church supports the traditional family model based on the institution of marriage between a man and a woman. Families should be provided with adequate state support in material and spiritual matters in order to properly meet their needs.

According to the teachings of Pius XI, the family is more important than the state, and those who are likely to have children with disabilities should not be restricted from marrying. Moreover, state authorities cannot interfere in the family system but should ensure the social and economic conditions that allow heads of families to earn enough to provide the whole family with the necessary support.

John Paul II draws attention to the difficult economic situation of families in the poorest countries. He regrets that marriages and families are often left with their own problems. In addition, he states the family has a unique value for society and that this community should, therefore, be given special care. The Pope mentions actions directed against the family, including abortion campaigns and totalitarian politics. The hedonistic and consumerist mentality also does not support the development of the family.

John Paul II perceives the family as the foundation of a society, with tasks to perform in the fields of creating a community of life, serving life, participating in the development of society, and participating in the life and mission of the Church.

In the teachings of the Catholic Church, the institution of the family is based on the marriage of a man and a woman and is permanent, voluntary, public, and open to procreation.

The Catholic Church also teaches that the family is a natural and primary relationship in relation to both the state and other communities, with its own indisputable rights. As a legal, social, and economic subject, the family is also a community of love and solidarity.

An evolution in the perception of the roles of men and women can be noted in the teachings of the Catholic Church. While the encyclicals of Popes from the beginning of the 20th century emphasise the dominant role of the father in comparison to a woman, it is now stressed that the roles of both spouses are identical.

The priority of the family and the rights of parents in the upbringing of their children are also a part of the teachings of non-Catholic Christian churches.

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