

## **Selected dimensions of Responsible Parenthood According to the Teaching of John Paul II in the Perspective of Third millennium**

**René Balák**

From the point of view of moral theology and from the moral standpoint it is necessary to observe the essence of responsible parenthood in the spirit of the following dimensions<sup>1</sup>, which point at the importance of a harmonious interconnection of particular dimensions of the problem in its totality. Particular facts create an integral unity and it is impossible for Christian parents to atone to a responsible realization of one without considering the content of other.

### **1. The Religious Dimension**

Moral theology emphasizes the irreplaceable position of the religious dimension of life in donating new life, giving the reason of an integral vision of a faithful man for this point of view. The religious dimension of life of the human person (also married persons and parents) is intimately, intensively and internally united with every reasoning, decision-making and acting of the human person in such a way that it is not possible to uproot the moment of deciding about new life from the religious life. Moral theology, atoning to the content and spirit of the biblical message that it is not possible to set aside any act in life of man from the connection with God (Cf. Rom 14:7-9), confirms the indispensability of a special consideration of the religious dimension in responsible parenthood, since the attitude of faith of the spouses is to be internally actualized in this matter as well.

The religious dimension shows married persons the moral obligation to see in every act of procreation the salvation plan of God the Creator, in which God gives concrete persons a unique opportunity to actualize the inward attitude of faith in an intimate, specific and honorable way. The personal and sacramental unity of married persons is open towards new life and towards a new person and parents are called to become aware of the fact that God wants this new living person for himself, i.e. for the good of this person, which he/she can experience in the family *communio personarum*, thus aiming towards his/her Creator. Through his primary, eternal and salvation intention, in the religious dimension of responsible

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. No. 10.

parenthood authentically actualized by the parents, God demonstrates his love for parents and his trust in the saved person.

Consequently, in terms of their free reply to God, married persons are called to become aware of the fact that they stand face to face to the mysterious power of God himself, therefore, the religious dimension points also at the mysterious primary initiation and presence. The fact that spouses ought to freely and responsibly become parents signifies an active cooperation with the Creator, namely, responsible parenthood becomes a way to salvation for the parents themselves and for their children, who are the gift of God and manifest God's love. To collaborate with the Creator through inviting new human beings to life means to make an effort to manifest and transmit the image of God, that is everyone born of a woman<sup>2</sup>.

Therefore, God himself is present in every human parenthood, since God (in his act of creation) gave man the ability to share in the honorable act of married persons through transmitting new life (Cf. Gen 1:28). The role of parents – collaborators of God who shows his image to the new human being, decides about the grandness of parents who are prepared to cooperate with the love of the Creator and Savior, who perpetually enlarges and enriches his family through them<sup>3</sup>.

Nowadays, in time of secularism and with it connected annihilation of the awareness of sin<sup>4</sup>, responsible parenthood is an extraordinarily difficult task. Therefore, the Pope speaks of the impossibility to eliminate the dimension of sacrifice, suffering and cross from the authentic Christian life according to the Gospel spirit. Consequently, family life without cross cannot achieve resurrection<sup>5</sup>, namely, without everyday sacrifice, that parents ought to bring to God, they cannot achieve the final goal and purpose of their lives. In terms of the religious dimension, the inward attitude of faith is an attitude of a responsible integration of suffering into the religious life that Christian parents live within the Church. Thus, it may be pointed at the **ecclesiastical dimension** of responsible parenthood in which parents take part in the growth of the Church, i.e. a responsible fruitful love of parents is thus open towards the ecclesiastical community.

## 2. The Moral Dimension

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Gratissimam sane*. No. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Reconciliatio et poenitentia*. No. 18. and Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. No. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 34.

Morality of man's action is a crucial dimension in human life, it is specifically important in the moment of deciding and giving new human life through parents. Nowadays, this dimension of responsible parenthood is remarkably threatened through the *anti-life mentality*<sup>6</sup>, which is from the psychological point of view attempting to justify the resignation of married couples and parents on the offspring. This vindication is justified by the fear from the complications of life, the fear from lowering the standards of living, by the consummate way of living and by destroying the spiritual value of human life, which, in the end, deprives parents of freedom in decision-making in their conscience.

Menaces of responsible parenthood are caused by the *civilization of death*, which is the fruit of a profound moral crisis manifested in the unnatural conception of freedom that perceives human sexuality in categories of usage and utilitarianism<sup>7</sup>. The civilization of death is manifested in devaluation (destruction) of conscience by endorsing legality of assaults against life that are obtaining juridical status in the state law (abortion, euthanasia)<sup>8</sup>, thus, this obscured conscience of married persons becomes incapable of affirming the objective moral norms.

Describing the current reality of postmodern society, the phenomenon of darkening of conscience must be mentioned and the fact that no circumstances or attempts to silencing cannot totally diminish the voice of God who resounds in every human conscience must be emphasized. In other words, in that hidden sanctuary of conscience, man as well as a potential parent may convert and return to the way of love through opening himself to service for human life by the way of responsible parenthood.

The moral dimension indicates that a responsible moral attitude of parenthood through parents is to be actualized by the way of a properly formed conscience, therefore, spouses are called to decide and act so that they atone to the natural objective moral norms as well as to the moral imperative and call of God's revelation. The development of married persons' personalities, who are responsibly deciding to possibly give new life, is conditioned by the development of their conscience that ought to be formed in a proper way. Since conscience of every person is a subjective disposition of a personal and individual character, conscience of married persons is not given as a static and absolute propensity, rather, it is given as a dynamic possibility to harmonize the normative status of conscience through the objective order of the Creator who expresses his will in given natural and supernatural norms with their inward attitude.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Gratissimam sane*. No. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 11.

Thus, the dimension of responsible parenthood points at (besides other issues) the inward unification of a personal belief of parents with their conscience, which is an aptitude of the human being as a person in the spirit of undertaking the responsibility. From the theological-moral point of view, it is indispensable to highlight the fact that conscience, by which married persons are supposed to be directed, is a subjective norm of the human individual's action, it is the sanctuary of an encounter and a dialog, it does not create the objective ethical norms but rather, becomes acquainted with them. Conscience, as a categorical voice of the Creator, cannot proceed neither from man nor from society and parents are called to respect the truth, that this phenomenon cannot be clarified without God.

From the theological-moral point of view of reflecting on conscience of parents, who are responsibly deciding about giving new life, it is urgent to highlight the fact that owing to their conscience and in their conscience married persons are capable of recognizing their personal challenge and call to the good and its realization in a concrete situation. It is proper to point at the interconnection of the religious and moral dimension of the subject, for only conscience is a phenomenon, which is religious and not merely moral or ethical from its ontological essence, i.e. God, who is present in man, speaks to him through conscience as well as through moral challenges.

Therefore, it is a question of an encounter of married persons with the living and acting God and conscience is a place of an intimate encounter, in which the decision-making about giving or not giving life occurs. Conscience is the most secret core and sanctuary within man where man he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths<sup>9</sup>, namely, it echoes even in the heart of married persons spiritually open to a responsible giving of life and reveals norms which this life-giving ought to follow.

Thus, the natural objective ethical norms (imprinted in the nature of man as *lex naturalis* which ought to be respected by man) are to become an integral part of married persons' lives and light for their conscience in the spirit of a free affirmation or a liberate harmonious interconnection.

Another dimension of the moral dimension of responsible parenthood is the transcendent dimension of God's revelation and moral norms for life of Christian married persons following from it. The Church highlights the moral dimension of responsible parenthood in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, "Married people should realize that in their behavior they may not simply follow their own fancy but must be ruled by conscience – and conscience ought to be conformed to the law of God in the light of the teaching

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. No. 16.

authority of the Church, which is the authentic interpreter of divine law.”<sup>10</sup> A liberate affirmation of divine law does not deny the dignity of neither human person nor of married couples, rather, it confirms their human nature and their particular call to procreation.

Theological emphasizing of the moral responsibility of married couples in their conscience intends to point out to the importance of the God-given autonomy of the subject (married persons) as well as to the necessity to respect the naturalness of this subject by the subject itself. This (respecting the naturalness and dignity of the subject) is logically impossible without giving satisfaction to the natural (*lex naturalis*, whose originator is the Creator) and to divine law presented in the biblical revelation. Therefore, the moral requirement (following from faith) or the moral imperative that parents make decisions and act in the spirit of these objective moral criteria in the sanctuary of their conscience is not for their enslavement but for their good, and satisfaction to the free human nature and dignity is this good.

Accordingly, the moral dimension of responsible parenthood presents the necessity of a mature Christian conscience of married couples, where this conscience acts on the awareness that the moral imperatives and demands are neither a strict non-personal pressure on the human freedom of the spouses nor a collection of artificial norms but a vocation and a call to realization of married persons by the power of Christ’s grace. Christian married couples perceive freedom in the Holy Spirit, who fills conscience of married persons who through responsible parenthood become incorporated in the life of Christ and in his God-human existence, and thus become a new creation in which conscience of married couples becomes conscience of Christ who dwells within them (Cf. Gal 2:20).

### **3. The Dimension of the Will On the Level of Instincts**

Nowadays, the dimension of the will is being eliminated in a very effective way, while its importance from the point of view of moral theology, which emphasizes the dimension of freedom and responsibility, is apparent, for it is related to a responsible affirmation on the side of man. This dimension of responsible parenthood, related to the level of instincts, has a crucial meaning when referring to personal human dignity of man gifted by reason and free will in relationship to urges, instincts, passions and emotions.

The dimension of the will indicates the indispensability of controlling one’s own instincts and passions through reason and the will, and married couples (parents or potential

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. No. 50.

parents) as rational and free beings are called to this in the spirit of responsibility. It is possible only when married persons are free in their relationship to the sexual urge and in the spirit of this freedom they are able to renounce their sexual cohabitation when it is necessary in certain periods of life either regularly or irregularly. In this way, every person living in matrimony confirms his or her (spiritual and biological) diversion from every other living creature and directs his or her action towards fulfilling human dignity in the perspective of the noble primary God's intention.

Pope John Paul II emphasizes that moral law in every case obliges married couples to control their instinctive tendencies and passions<sup>11</sup>, which, too, are gifts of God enabling them to give satisfaction to the call of man to respect the natural order of the relationship between the human spirit and the natural divine order. Therefore, married couples are called to be free in relationship to their sexual urge, to their passions and instincts, and thus they *de facto* confirm the personal human dignity with all the features proper exclusively to man. Thus, in the dimension of the will, there is a strict unity between the moral dimension and the biological level of life, while man is called to respect the primacy of the moral dimension of human life.

The moral dimension of married couples is the basis for a free actualization of the will, which is directed not only to the control of the sexual urge, passions and emotions in the context of a free relationship of married persons to these gifts, but it practically also leads to moderation of married persons. Married couples, becoming acquainted with the objective moral norms and the objective truth about the particular gifts (sexual urge and instinct, passions and emotions) through their reason are, for certain time, called to be able to renounce those expressions of love that lead to conception of new life. This moderation, achieved by the will, may not be motivated by egoism but is to be incorporated into the responsible attitude of married persons towards life, and so the sacrificial character of love of married persons is demonstrated.

The dimension of the will in responsible parenthood is a unique opportunity for married couples to sublime the physical desire and the physical dimension of conjugal love and the interpersonal gift to unification of the hearts in the spiritual dimension of spousal love. The dimension of the will, authentically realized, verifies the spiritual maturity of married couples who are called to strengthen their conjugal love through an intentional intensification of mutual sensitivity and respect in all dimensions of mutual love. This sensitivity and respect in some moments of life of married couples become the decisive moral

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. No. 50.

quality of a harmonious life and relationship of married persons. However, this virtue cannot be attained without sacrifice, renouncement and moderation through the will and freedom, thus expressing the nobility of human dignity.

Accordingly, giving satisfaction to human dignity resides in respecting the primacy of the human spirit who with the help of the reason enlightened by faith and above all through the will truthfully, authentically and specifically humanly actualized, engages in a harmonious relationship to God-given urges, instincts and passions. It is not a matter of some forced dominance of the reason and the will over the natural gifts of God (instincts and passions) in married persons' personal life or violation of these gifts. On the contrary, it is a matter of hierarchization and harmonization of these gifts into the life of married couples, thus satisfying to the nature of a free being of the human person.

#### **4. The Dimension of Knowing On the Biological Level**

In terms of this dimension, it is indispensable to emphasize its importance in order to understand the meaning of other dimensions of responsible parenthood. However, its meaning is of a pre-disposition subsidiary character, while at the same time it points out to the possible harmonious unification of rational knowledge and to authentic attitude of faith. Namely, the dimension of knowing, related to the biological level of human life, points to the primary concrete God-given gifts of biological abilities which man (as a responsible parent) ought to use in harmony with his nature and integrally incorporate them into his human, personal and spiritual life.

The Pope emphasizes that, in the spirit of the primary divine intention, human parenthood is rooted in biology and surpasses it at the same time<sup>12</sup>. Thus, it indicates the importance of a true view of the issue, for human transmission of life is not mere preservation of human species but, primarily, it is an expression of love and responsibility. The theological-moral conception of responsible parenthood asks Christian married couples to become acquainted with the specific methods that would enable them to regulate - control birth in a responsible and natural way as well as in concordance with Christian conscience (which is guided by objective moral norms).

It is apparent, scientifically proved and (especially medically) incontestable that it is possible nowadays to know the natural rhythm of woman's fertility, while according to various methods, which (if correctly used) are, from medicinal standpoint, examined and

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Gratissimam sane*. No. 8.

reliable<sup>13</sup>, as well as universal, fully physiological, harmless to health and from the economic point of view not burdensome on family. Nonetheless, this may not be claimed about diverse unnatural contraceptive intervention into the body of man or woman, whose negative side-effects are not mentioned or intentionally suppressed or even presented as a treatment method with a contraceptive effect.

From the theological-moral standpoint the basis of the dimension of knowing resides in the moral attitude of married persons, in their relationship to the God-given biological ability of man to responsibly transmit new life, using the knowledge of biology of the human person. Pope John Paul II underlines that moral law obliges to honor and respect biological rights written into married persons<sup>14</sup>, namely, into the biological nature of the human person, who has his/her own dignity and in the spirit of this dignity married couples are called to perceive these gifts of God and use them with responsibility. In the spirit of serving responsible parenthood, this respect authorizes married couples to use natural methods of the regulation of birth, thus giving satisfaction to the divine creation plan.

These natural methods (possibilities given to man by God and a unique opportunity for man to confirm the dignity of the human person) are from the scientific standpoint each time more precise and they grant concrete opportunities to make free and responsible decisions in accordance with the Gospel moral norms as well as with the authentic Christian moral values. Negligent of the theological or religious perspective of delving into the natural methods of birth control of married couples it is proper to remark that these methods are not an exclusive privilege of Christians, theologians or the Church, and so they do not have a Christian, theological, ecclesiastical or confessional foundation. Accordingly, a frequent refusal of these natural methods for these reasons does not have a rational support, for they may be actual for every person, thus for non-believing person, a non-Christian or a stubborn adversary of God as well.

The theological-moral conception of responsible parenthood does not deny or reject human biology, on the contrary, it presents it in the spirit of the criterion of truth, drawing

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<sup>13</sup> Natural methods such as Ogino-Knaus Method (Kiusako Ogino from Japan, Herman Knaus from Austria), Billings Ovulation Method, Rötzer Sympto-thermal Method and others are a real possibility for Christian married couples to give satisfaction to the moral imperative of Christian faith as well as to the biological nature of man. Pearl's index of several natural methods (Billings and Rötzer Method), presupposing their correct usage, achieves great values. This index shows the number of pregnancies that happen within a year to one hundred women using a certain kind of contraception. Natural methods of birth control are in no way to be considered a type of contraception, since they are responsibly used as a God-constituted biological nature of man, while contraception of any kind is an arbitrary and artificial intervention into the natural rhythm of woman's or man's fecundity, which does not necessarily always have a contraceptive or abortive effect.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 97.



from the objective knowledge of other scientific disciplines, while it perceives it as an integral part of a whole, which is responsible parenthood.

## **5. The Social Dimension in the Context of the Common Good**

Nowadays, in the whole theological-moral conception of responsible parenthood this dimension acquires more and more importance, since it is related not only to the persons of parents but it also points to the conversational dimension of life of married couples within society in the context of common good, while human life unambiguously belongs to this good and is by its nature always good. A new human life is good not only for married couples but also for the family and relatives, for the parochial community, for the nation, for society and for the whole humanity.

The social dimension means that married couples ought to be guided by a noble intention and generosity when deciding about accepting a more numerous offspring or they may postpone the birth of the next child for serious reasons, and that for a limited or unlimited time. Christian parents, being guided by responsibility for the gift of life, are obliged to consider their unique and unrepeatable conditions of diverse character, in which they experience a personal community in marriage and family. Potential parents are frequently unable to influence or wholly predict these conditions or they are only partially capable of it. A great responsibility results from this and married couples take it upon themselves, especially if diverse life conditions are sometimes unclear.

### **5.1 The Social-economic Situation**

In the context of theological-moral category of responsibility, parents are called to take the particular social-economic conditions in their family into consideration, since those, too, render an integral development of the human person, which parents want to call to life, possible. Therefore, in terms of actualization of their sacramental vocation to marriage, married persons and potential parents, wanting to responsibly atone to the moral requirement of responsibility for new life, consider the current and the presumed future social provision as well as the actual possibility of a responsible material care and formation of the already born or of presupposed children. Married persons (parents), being aware of their moral responsibility before God, before themselves, before their nation and society, simultaneously consider material conditions in their family as well as their living conditions. Thus, not the fictitious dominance of conditions of this kind but the necessity not to underestimate the importance in the sphere of an integral formation within the family is to be indicated.

Unhesitatingly, it is indispensable to refuse the moral attitude of potential parents, who are motivated by an egoistic attitude and fear of lowering their standard of living. From the theological-moral point of view, it is extremely complicated to designate where the universal limit line separating the egoistic refusal of another child from a responsible renouncement to give new life is, for the conditions are unique and unrepeatable in every family as well as the internal motives of deciding and moral action of married couples are known exclusively to them and to God. Nonetheless, a contrary extreme exists, when parents irresponsibly give birth to a great number of children, while in advance, they are well aware of the fact that they will not be willing to atone the duty of their future responsible education. Concurrently, they do not consider their social-economic conditions, moreover, the children are reduced to utilitarian means of enhancing their social-economic situation, and thus the social support system of the state is being misused.

Theological-moral analyses of the structural arrangement of interpersonal relationships within society point to such an arrangement of society, that (in a programmed way?!) does not help and, in fact, in a cunning way disables (also potential) parents to responsibly give new life for the reason of an objective impossibility to adequately atone to the essential and standard requirements of a social-economic character. Despite a sincere and maximum effort of married persons and parents to provide sufficient social-economic conditions for giving and formation of new life – the child, married couples and parents, in terms of taking these conditions into consideration, are frequently forced to responsibly resign on giving new life for some time and occasionally for an undetermined longer time interval. Concomitantly, both parents are spiritually and wholly open to the possibility to responsibly give new life but society is structurally arranged in such a way, that restricts married persons and potential parents in actualizing one of the principal dimensions of married life, which is a responsible transmission of life.

Such an arrangement of society is from the theological-moral viewpoint impossible to accept, for, objectively, it refers to unjust structures that restrict the freedom of a responsible decision-making of parents in connection with the presented concept of responsible parenthood. The structural arrangement of society at the break of millenniums has subordinated spiritual good to material good. Moreover, it has made the existence of spiritual good dependent on material good, and thus the natural order of things has been reversed. Moral theology points out to the truth that social-economical determinants may not be neither the controlling criteria nor the restrictive reality for married persons who want to responsibly give life and are prepared to bring sacrifices for this new life in sense of social-economic

renouncement of certain material standards. Nevertheless, this renouncement may not become an existential threat of living and a responsible integral formation of the already born children and their parents.

## **5.2. The State of Health of Married Persons**

It is, primarily, the personal physical condition, i.e. the state of health of married persons that ought to be considered if the fundamental purposes of marriage are to be atoned to. Marriage is perceived as a vocation to a profound interpersonal love directed towards giving new life. In a sense, this state of health of both married persons is a certain medicinal criterion for responsible parenthood in terms of the social dimension. Therefore, the state of health of married persons is a reality which is, indeed, primarily their personal matter. However, it is also imperative to see this reality in relationship to the society, which in theological sense is an expression of participation in responsibility of the neighbor with whom married persons make interpersonal relationships of a diverse character.

Theological conception of responsible parenthood stresses the responsibility of married persons in the sphere of their state of health, through which married persons ought to responsibly judge the adequacy of giving new life or resigning on the option of giving another life. In terms of the unrepeatable conditions of married persons, when considering their state of health, they may be called by God to see their actual physical possibilities in the spirit of objective truth. Thus, the state of health of married persons ought to presuppose not only the possibility to give new life but married persons also ought to be capable of a responsible care of their existing as well as potential children.

It is apparent, that married persons are able to only partially predict certain health reality with regard to the future and they do not have any certainty and guarantee for an adequate state of health in the future. As well, they need to be aware of their moral duty to provide an integral education for their already born children. Thus, their state of health, with regard to the future, is an objective hindrance to providing such education for the following children, therefore, in terms of a responsible discerning, they should give up the option to give new life. In spite of that, they would still draw from the steadfast conviction that in the hierarchy of values, children are on such a high level that if the state of health of married persons were objectively sufficient for a responsible parental care for another child, they would be spiritually open to giving new life.

This is not to point to the opportunity for a responsible conduct of married persons who are open to the option of giving new life but with regard to the indeed unsuitable state of

health they resign on this possibility, thus considering their responsibility for their already born children. Apparently, their state of health must not become an excuse for not giving new life in case of an egoistic attitude of potential parents. On the contrary, married persons are called to be prepared to bring sacrifices in favor of a new life within the limits of a sane judgement.

### 5.3 The Demographic Situation

In the context of the social dimension of responsible parenthood it is also indispensable to take into consideration the demographic conditions of society, in which married persons or potential parents live. Namely, the whole theological conception draws from the fact that man is a common good for the family as well as for humanity, and so married persons, when deciding about their future offspring, are called to consider the problem of aging of population or the very high natural growth of population<sup>15</sup>.

The competence of considering the demographic situation is apparent from theological point of view, since it is the question of the perspective of a co-responsibility of parents for the common good of the whole society and the whole humanity. However, this competence of birth control has its limitations despite the fact that the too rapid growth of population (population explosion) or insufficient natality (population collapse) have negative effects on the society, the nation or the whole humanity on various levels of life.

The sphere of negative consequences of the population explosion or population collapse does not only deal with the problem of sufficient nutrition of population, natural resources, sources of potable water or proportional economic development or employment. From theological-moral standpoint, the core of the issue resides in the accepted theoretical alternatives or conceptions, which are, in the spirit of neo-Malthusian ideas, often a means to totally govern thinking, decision-making and moral acting of potential parents in the realm of parenthood within the whole nations. The theological concept, taking into consideration these realities in the spirit of teaching of the Magisterium<sup>16</sup>, highlights that it is impossible to deprive parents of the fundamental human right to responsibly give new life. Nevertheless, parents are called to co-responsibility not only for the good of their *familiaris consortio* but also for the good of the nation and of the whole humanity.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Gratissimam sane*. No. 11 and Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II. Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. No. 50, 87 and Paul VI. Encyclical *Populorum progressio*. No. 37

However, it is apparent that from theological-moral viewpoint no one can be forced to give life to a greater (or smaller) number of children or to restrict parents in their decision-making about the number of their children regardless the fact whether this restriction should have a juridical or another form. At the threshold of *tertio millennio*, there exists no juridical norm for the restriction to natality, since the sensitivity of man for maintaining the basic human rights is increasing. This restriction would be a denial of human dignity, primarily in the context of liberty and responsibility. Rather, this restriction is realized by regulating the subsidiary support of the state or of the society towards the parents or by a mass-medial creation of a picture of the demographic situation, which is thoroughly different from the truth.

## **6. *Tertio Millennio* As a Moral Challenge For a Personal Engagement**

The third millennium renders man the possibility to solve situations in the realm of responsible parenthood by the way of a personal engagement in the spirit of a responsible discernment of the signs of time. Every person is in terms of his or her specific life vocation called to undertake the responsibility for propagation of the culture of life by the way of the a responsible attitude towards transmitting life. From theological standpoint of looking upon the question, the divine call to a more intensive activity of all members of the Church, who, by the way of a personal engagement in the realm of responsible parenthood according to the Gospel proclaim Christ before the whole world (Cf. Mt 10:32), clearly follows.

In terms of the dynamic aspect of the development of moral theology it is indispensable to present clear moral postulates addressed to theologians, so that they may correctly, thoroughly and truthfully present the essence of conjugal love, thus educating both parents to responsible parenthood in the spirit of respect for life and according to the divine call<sup>17</sup>. Christian formation in the spirit of a true theological concept of responsible parenthood is a moral challenge of the third millennium and is a non-separable part of new evangelization focused on the person of man.

In this formation and evangelization process, moral theology ought to play an important role. As a scientific discipline reflecting the Gospel as the message of new life, love and truth (Cf. Eph 4:15) it ought to authentically form every faithful member of the Church in the realm of morality, while taking into consideration the normative dimension of the

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 97.

biblical Revelation and having regard to *signum temporis* of this time<sup>18</sup>. Faithfully reflecting and interpreting the teaching of the Magisterium in the sphere of morality and faith, moral theology is called to guide married persons to the ability to bear a moral judgment as well as to make an effort to grasp the true good<sup>19</sup> in the sphere of responsible parenthood. This moral postulate is connected with the formation of conscience of married persons in the spirit of the Gospel truth<sup>20</sup>, i.e. in the spirit of the New Covenant, it is a moral challenge to an active moral engagement, addressed to different subjects.

Responsible parenthood is a real opportunity for actualization of Episcopal and priestly service to married persons, parents and all those who are called to life in marriage or are responsibly engaged in the sphere of responsible parenthood in the context of new evangelization. Christ, who consigned the call to unanimously serve God's people according to the measure of Christ's personal example to bishops and priests in this sphere of priestly service (at various levels), through the mouth of his visible head challenges to realization of the task to protect marriage and family, while he considers this the holiest duty which was consigned to bishops and priests in this time<sup>21</sup>.

In the spirit of the priestly service (at various levels), the teaching on marriage and family ought to be presented clearly and in accordance with the teaching of the Magisterium, namely, in obedience to Christ in the Holy Spirit (Cf. 1 Cor 1:10). This vocation of serving and gospel responsibility, which primarily belongs to bishops and priests, who are in the spirit of serving the Church in the sphere of marriage and family called to support family not only in moral and liturgical matters but also in personal and social matters and that requires a timely and profound study preparation<sup>22</sup>, enabling concrete persons to truly atone to the intrinsic call of this service. Without professional personal preparation it is impossible to atone to the moral responsibility of bishops and priests before God, the Church and the faithful for the good of marriage and family in this time of indifference or even an antagonistic attitude towards marriage and family, which is reflected in the realm of responsible parenthood as well.

Consecrated persons, who through their personal testimony of chastity and through their own professional engagement are able to perform the service of love for the neighbor<sup>23</sup> in diverse forms, beginning with catechization and ending with charitable care in this sphere,

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. No. 110-112.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. No. 113.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 35 and Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 95-96.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. No. 28-30.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 73.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 74.

may be an important help for the activities of the Church in the matter of responsible parenthood. Within the frame of their spirituality, religious communities may thus become a place of formation, dialog and refuge in the context of the apostolate of the family as well as of assisting to its authentic good, which is inseparably united with responsible parenthood.

Lay persons have a special role in the matter of responsible parenthood, for marriage and family is the primary place of their engagement<sup>24</sup>, which follows from their state and their lifelong vocation. Lay persons, engaging themselves in these matters, can see and experience all problems related to responsible parenthood in their personal life, but from them as well a professional preparation of diverse orientation is required<sup>25</sup>. In some cases, regarding the specifics of their vocation, lay persons may well use this professional preparation to present Christ in society and in the world in a more effective way than priests.

Various ways and methods of how to bear the burden of this activity exist, while cooperating in the Gospel spirit of mutual help (Cf. Gal 6:2). However, it is lay persons who may found centers for responsible parenthood, which may become a place of evangelization and a real effective aid to family. Centers of help for families may help solve the great difficulties of life in our time in family which is in an urgent necessity of help<sup>26</sup> and there a tight collaboration with the hierarchical Church is indispensable, since this call is the holiest duty of the Church<sup>27</sup>.

The moral postulate addressed to parents who accept the specific educational obligations towards their children, refers to the moral duty of bestowing maternal as well as paternal love upon their children. This requires a full personal and internal engagement in the spirit of the perspective of the gift. Thus, it is primarily the call of parents, who are invited to become the transmitters of life on the basis of the ever-restored awareness of the sense of parenthood, perceived as an important event pointing to the fact that human life is a gift which parents accept in order to give it away<sup>28</sup>, protect it and responsibly guide it towards perfection.

Formation of social virtues in their children, which are primarily selflessness and self-sacrifice, is the moral obligation of parents as well as education to authentic freedom in the spirit of truth, which enables children to cross new horizons on the way of their personal growth towards perfection. In this matter, the father plays an important role, he who is called to an internal testimony of realizing an attitude of faith in the diagonal dimension of the

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Christifideles laici*. No. 40.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 75.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. 88.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. No. 30.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 92.

human person, thus he infuses fundamental trust in the gift of life into the heart of a new human person – child.

The Pope entrusts a special role in propagating the culture of life and responsible parenthood to woman<sup>29</sup>, who directly experiences the personal encounter with the new person in a process of formation through the gift of motherhood. Motherhood is a noble and dignified consequence of the conjugal union between man and woman, i.e. of that biblical knowledge that refers to merging of two in one body (Cf. Gen 2:24) and so, from the side of woman it performs the noble self-donation as accentuation of conjugal love<sup>30</sup>. In motherhood, woman is called to a direct profound experience of the God-given creative ability to participate in formation of humanity of a new human being as well as to morally act in the spirit of the biblical example of the Mother of God, namely, to participate in the role of new creation (Cf. 2Cor 5:17) in the spirit of biblical New Testament.

Proper education in the moral sphere (in the spirit of truth) is a specific moral imperative of parents and pedagogues, which is one of the essential moral obligations for parents who are called to educate their children to chastity<sup>31</sup>. Parents ought to atone to this responsible call by the way of a truthful presentation of the Christian conception of human sexuality, which is an undeserved gift of God. Revelation of the truthful view of the human person in the context of biblical and a personalist concept of sexuality is the first step towards educating children to responsible parenthood.

The essential moral duty of parents is a sensitive guidance and care for the vocation of their children<sup>32</sup>, where parents ought to become a guiding light for their children. At the same time, parents are called to respect the subjectivity of their children at guiding and taking care of them in the spirit of authentic love. An intrinsic engagement of Christian parents (within the formation to the lifelong vocation of their children) is also related to the sphere of responsible parenthood, so that within a proper maturity and in compliance with the example of Jesus Christ, they might undertake full responsibility for their lives.

Realization and atoning to these moral obligations of parents presupposes collaboration with other factors of education to responsible parenthood. One of them is school, which ought to participate in education to true liberty finding its support in truth and love. In the context of respecting the fundamental human rights, any formative institution is at

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*. No. 18 and Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 99.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Mulieris dignitatem*. No. 18.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 97.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Apostolic letter *Gratissimam sane*. No. 16 and Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 97.



least morally obliged to act in harmony with the religious belief of parents and their children, consequently, it is not sufficient for it not to act against their belief.

The sphere of healthcare is remarkably important in the context of *signum temporis*. Paradoxically, it often becomes a place where the natural attitude of respect for the gift of God, immanently connected with the theological concept of responsible parenthood, is absent. The moral imperative (in juridical dimension of this question effective and not declarative steps towards true respect for the gift of life should be taken) for the sphere of service for human health resides in the fact that in the spirit of responsibility this sphere ought to be oriented to an authentic service to life in the spirit of an unconditional respect and honor for the human life.

This is related to the fundamental attitude of confidence in the relationship between patient and doctor, for if a worker of health service is not a true protector and servant of life, mutual respect and confidence slip away, while this relationship grows into a depersonalizing instrumentalization of the human person. Christian medical doctors (and all Christian workers) are not only called to a professional attitude of a medical doctor within the accomplishment of their vocation, but their action is also to be based on faith<sup>33</sup> as well as on the Gospel, which they are called to portray in their profession in a specific way.

Thus, a particular responsibility of workers of health service is of a professional character and it is closely connected with the ethical dimension of this vocation<sup>34</sup>, which may be helpful for a responsible action of married persons in the matter of responsible parenthood. Persons engaged in health service are called to the role of professional counselors, who from the medicinal standpoint may participate in propagation of the dimension of knowing in responsible parenthood.

All intellectuals and scientists focused on scientific research and expert activities related to marriage and family are involved in this process. With regard to their professional competence, atoning to the criterion of truth, these persons may become a positive stimulus for other persons' engagement in the sphere of the control, regulation and direction of birth using natural methods<sup>35</sup>.

The issue of responsible parenthood is a moral challenge to responsibility addressed also to workers of social communicative means. The means of social communication may have a beneficial effect on the relationship to family, however, there is a danger which must

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. No. 27.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 89.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. No. 24.

not be underestimated<sup>36</sup>. Therefore, the ambivalent character of mass media is a witness to the significance of the personal responsibility of every human towards marriage, family and especially towards the issue of responsible parenthood.

Mass media professionals are called to respect the moral obligation of fidelity to truth<sup>37</sup>, which is related to the problems mentioned above, for the future of humanity and of the Church is ontically connected with family. This moral obligation refers to mass media professionals in a specific and profound way. Any falsification of the issue has an undeniable alienation influence not only on marriage and family in the context of responsible parenthood but also on every human person in the planetary dimension.

For this reason, the moral imperative to atone to their call in the context of respect for the common good (which is the sphere of morality, family and transmission of life) stands before concrete state representatives and public authorities. It is primarily the question of programs of the regulation of birth, which must not be in contradiction with human freedom and biological naturalness of the human person, while the demographic problems of population increase, on political level, can be solved within the global dimension through a responsible pro-family politics and through taking into account the principles of solidarity and subsidy<sup>38</sup>.

Theology does not reject the realization of the obligation of public authorities to control population demography, but this obligation may not be identified with the primary and irrevocable right of parents<sup>39</sup> to freely and responsibly give new life. A more just sharing of material and spiritual goods is more proper, searching thus for solutions in the global dimension, which is not possible without creating a true economy of community and participation in the good on international and national level<sup>40</sup>. Therefore, state and public authorities of any degree and significance ought to become involved in the solution-making process in a way of a true expression of the authentic necessities of family and parenthood, and so, an authentic human progress in the matter of the demographic evolution would be achieved.

From theological-moral standpoint of looking upon the issue of responsible parenthood it is apparent, that no public authority may be disposed of their personal

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. John Paul II. *Messaggio per la giornata mondiale delle comunicazioni sociali. Atteggiamento attivo delle famiglie di fronte ai mass-media*. In: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*. III, 1 (05-01-1980) p. 1042

<sup>37</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. No. 76.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Paul VI. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. No. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 91.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. John Paul II. *Apertura dei lavori della IV Conferenza Generale dell' Episcopato latinoamericano – Santo Domingo. Nuova evangelizzazione, promozione humana, cultura cristiana: Gesù Cristo ieri, oggi e sempre*. (10-12-1992), 15, AAS 85 (1993), p. 819

responsibility for creating the juridical system, whose regulations must not be directed against the common good and family<sup>41</sup>. The principle of the demographic majority is never a guarantee that the juridical system would respect the principles of justice and truth. For this reason, it is impossible to accept the juridical positivism, which creates an appearance that everything that is in harmony with the positive law is also in harmony with objective moral principles. Authentic engagement of public political authorities resides in respecting the primacy of the moral norm before the juridical norm. Namely, in order to atone to the respect for the dignity of the human person, it is indispensable to create and apply juridical norms that promote protection and development of family and provide authentic freedom of decision-making in the realm of parenthood.

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. No. 90.