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CONTEMPORARY ASPECTS OF FATHERHOOD

Introduction

Whole societies benefit from the social and economic development that we witnessed in the 20th century. However, the price for that development is significantly high as it resulted in a very negative image of a father, who is absent, overworked and socially and educationally incapable. The development led to the present-day crisis of fatherhood. Familiologists frequently refer to that issue as the fatherless civilization or society¹. The aim of the article is to analyze the present-day fatherhood with the support of the works of contemporary family scientists and the science of marriage of the 20th and 21st centuries. It will discuss the reasons of the present fatherhood crisis and the absence of fathers in contemporary families.²

1. The contemporary definition of the role of father

At present, one can observe a redefinition of the situation of a father, who plays new roles in the society and family. The traditional approach is replaced by a new one that is based on the symmetry of sexes, the participation in household chores and a fundamental role in upbringing the children. That results in the decrease of the authority of man. The former functions of men, i.e. procreation, upbringing of children and the provision of means for life have been shuttered by the need of women to take up employment and by the increased consumption needs and requirements of families. Moreover, the work is accompanied by the feeling of discomfort caused by growing unemployment and a continuous increase of the employers' expectations.³

¹ M. Janukowicz, *Czy współczesne ojcostwo, to ojcostwo nieobecne?*, *Małżeństwo i Rodzina*, 2002, No. 1, pp. 43 – 45.

² D. Kornas – Biela, *Kulturowo – społeczne przyczyny kryzysu ojcostwa*, w: *Ojcostwo wobec wyzwań współczesności*, collective work edited by D. Kornas – Biela, Wydawnictwo Fundacja Cyryla i Metodego, Lublin 2006, s.40.

³ Z. Dąbrowska, *Ojcostwo jako wartość. Studium empiryczne*, *Małżeństwo i Rodzina*, 2003, No. 4, p. 13

All the cultural, economic, psychology and religious changes have their impact on the new image of fatherhood. They affect significantly the relations between men and women and the models of marriage and family⁴. The present image of father is based on two masculine patterns: the traditional and contemporary one. The traditional paradigm is associated with self-control, power, social prestige, success, procreation and domination over women and children. It is easy to notice that the above factors assume an emotionless attitude, as if emotions were the sole domain of women. The other pattern considers the equality of man and woman. Domination ceased to be the principle of mutual existence and is replaced by partnership. The emotional sphere of man is becoming similar to that of woman together with the acceptance of several functions and features that were formerly superseded by the traditional pattern.⁵

Both fatherhood and maternity are invaluable and integrally connected. They are complementary⁶ and form the entity that is referred to as parenthood⁷. Thus, the issue under investigation is not the result of a disturbed identity of a man but the effect of the crisis of marriage and family⁸. Due to the open borders between EU countries and an intensive tourist exchange, patterns that are typical for other cultures become widespread. The westernization of behavior in family and marriage is reflected in the increase of women's professional aspirations that are the sources of their life satisfaction. The man in the relationship becomes only the woman's partner and not - as before – the father of her child. Such a situation leads to reluctance to get married or to postponing the decision on the marriage to some undefined future. Moreover, the durability of marriage is weakened and the number of divorces and cohabiting couples is increasing⁹. All those factors do not encourage men to take the role of a father and to start families. They take away the motivation to undertake "good fatherhood" and strengthen the feeling of incompetence. Fatherhood is perceived as a difficult duty that is

⁴ J. Augustyn, *Ojcostwo. Aspekty pedagogiczne i duchowe*, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2009, p. 40.

⁵ K. Arcimowicz, *Męskość w kulturze współczesnej*, *Małżeństwo i Rodzina*, 2004, No. 2, p. 11.

⁶ J. Stala, *Rodzina fundamentalne źródło kształtowania człowieka. Pedagogiczno – katechetyczne impulsy pomocy młodym w przygotowaniu do życia w małżeństwie i rodzinie*, in: *Małżeństwo i rodzina wciąż fundamentem nowej cywilizacji. Refleksja na kanwie dokumentu Konferencji Episkopatu Polski pt. „Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie”*, ed. R. Kantor, M. Kluza, Tarnów 2011, pp. 15-26.

⁷ M. Machinek, *Małżeństwo – dar, który zobowiązuje*, in: Jan Paweł II, *Mężczyzną i niewiastą stworzył ich. Sakrament. O Jana Pana II teologia ciała*, T. Styczeń, Lublin 1999, pp. 249-276.

⁸ K. Slany, *Alternatywne formy życia małżeńsko – rodzinnego w ponowoczesnym świecie*, Kraków 2002, p. 82

⁹ P. Szukalski, *Kohabitacja w Polsce w: Rodzina w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie polskim*, red. W. Warzywoda- Kruszyńska, P. Szukalski, Łódź 2004, pp. 49- 74.

difficult to cope with. Thus, an open relationship seems to be an easier option as it bears no consequences related to starting family, just like the decision to stay single appears to be a recipe for good life¹⁰. The popularity of the “stay single” approach results in the depreciation of the role of family and its image of a relict that restricts one’s freedom and opportunities of self-fulfillment¹¹. The widespread practice of divorces confirms the belief that a father may easily free himself from the responsibilities to his child and can be simply replaced by another partner.¹²

2. External determinants of fatherhood

Temporary procrastination of procreation is another significant factor that changes the character of present-day fatherhood. It is reflected both by postponing the conception of a child to the remote future and the legalization of abortion. The economic factor is becoming crucial as regards procreation. A man is supposed to have all the attributes that would ensure his wife and children the highest standards of living. Materialism exceeds the desire of reproduction and damages the durability of family. Fertility is identified with the life plan where changes are not expected and is usually taken into consideration at the far end. A long-term perspective in family planning is desirable but the gift of new life must be given preference over consumptionism.¹³ Contraceptive mentality ravages the way of thinking of both men and women. The acceptance of contraception is correlated with the lack of responsibility for sexual relations. The consequences are limited by technical means that are responsible for the prevention of conception. Another danger of the use of contraceptives is the limitation of man to decide on procreation, which results in the conviction that woman can manipulate male fertility. Such attitude leads to the unconscious use of violence, refuge in alcoholism, workaholism or relationship with other women. In order to gain in self-valuation men use force, show their thriftiness by possessing objects and take they the attitude of a

¹⁰ J. Kłys, *Sytuacja ludnościowa Polski u progu XXI wieku. Uwarunkowania kryzysu ludnościowego w Polsce u progu XXI wieku*, in: „*Arena bitwy o życie*”. *Aktualna sytuacja demograficzna w świecie i w Polsce*, collectiva work edited by K. Majdański, M. Schooyans, J. Kłós, Łomianki 2000, pp. 19-32.

¹¹ T. Zbyrad, *Po co ślub? – czyli o nieopłacalności małżeństwa*, in: *Współczesne zagrożenia rodziny*, ed. J. Zimny, Sandomierz 2006, pp. 256-279.

¹² A. Kwak, *Alternatywne formy życia rodzinnego – ciągłość i zmiana*, w: *Rodzina polska u progu XXI wieku*, red. H. Cudak, Łowicz 1997, p. 127.

¹³ Papieska Rada ds. Rodziny, *Rodzina a ludzka prokreacja*, in: *W trosce o dobro małżeństwa i rodziny. Dokumenty Papieskiej Rady ds. Rodziny*, t. I, red. M. Brzeziński, Lublin 2010, p. 320.

superman in intimate situations.¹⁴ In societies where abortion is legal man's awareness of the conception is shifted to woman, who decides on having a child. She frees him from the obligation of conscious parenthood and care over the child. By the decision on abortion a woman sends a clear message that such a solution is an adequate method of solving the problem. Moreover, she is left alone with that decision and the care over her and the child is reduced to financing the abortion.¹⁵ Abortion does not devoid fathers of fatherhood – it results in sad fatherhood. The lack of child means the lack of real fatherhood that is realized by a true relationship with a child. The father loses everything that is associated with the task of upbringing.¹⁶ He is convinced that he disappointed the person with whom he planned to live. The loss of a child damages his self-image and generates lower self-evaluation. Finally, such feelings appear as anger, dissatisfaction with life, sadness and other destructive emotions and reactions that have an impact on male psyche¹⁷.

The extreme marginalization of the role of man and the instrumentalization of his functions is reflected by storing the genetic material in sperm banks, which is becoming more common and acceptable by society. The legalization of in-vitro fertilization and its refunding results in the fact that men accept it either for economic benefits or as a proof of their masculinity. In the USA approximately 30 thousand babies are born annually as a result of the anonymous donor fertilization and 10% of them are born by women that are not in a relationship with a man.¹⁸ It is a clear signal to men that they are only products necessary to achieve a particular target. It is the greatest deviation of fatherhood, which leads to the fall of the personal relationship in the act of conceiving new life. Such a situation is a proof that a man can become a biological father without any relationship and identification with the

¹⁴ M. Raław – Markowska, *Od jednorodności ku różnorodności, modernizacja rodzin w Polsce*, „Problemy Rodziny” 230 – 231 (2000) 2 -3, pp. 22 – 29.

¹⁵ D. Kornas – Biela, *Psychologiczne konsekwencje aborcji u ojców*, in: *Międzynarodowy Kongres „O godność ojcostwa”*. Warszawa. 5 -7 November 1999, collective work edited by E. Kowalewska , Gdańsk 2000, p. 235.

¹⁶ D. Kornas – Biela, *Psychologiczne konsekwencje aborcji u ojców*, in: *Międzynarodowy Kongres „O godność ojcostwa”*. Warszawa. 5 -7 November 1999, collective work edited by E. Kowalewska , Gdańsk 2000, p. 245.

¹⁷ D. Kornas – Biela, *Psychologiczne konsekwencje aborcji u ojców*, in: *Międzynarodowy Kongres „O godność ojcostwa”*. Warszawa. 5 -7 November 1999, collective work edited by E. Kowalewska , Gdańsk 2000, pp. 103 - 120.

¹⁸ D. Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America. Confronting our urgent social problem*, Basic Books, New York, p. 178.

child¹⁹. It is also a signal to men that fatherhood is not associated with the responsibility for the conceived life and – even more – the women themselves free them from that responsibility. Industrialization is becoming a significant factor that influences the change in the role of a father. Fathers tend to be absent in family everyday life as work and journey to work take most of their time. Originally, men worked at their households and relationships were made directly by their physical presence. They showed how to perform everyday tasks, created the icon of masculinity and their own authority.²⁰ Industrialization resulted in urbanization and migration, which consequently led to loosening or even breaking family bonds, limiting contacts with relatives, abandoning the norms of the place of origin and breaking links with local homelands²¹. The introduction of high-technologies to everyday lives results in the lack of dependencies among family members. Physical strength, courage, DIY skills and the abilities to perform various tasks in the household matter no more.²² According to M. Janukowicz's study on the issue of the absence of fathers in families, as many as 79% of men that are professionally active perceive work as an asset of a parent. The escape to work is an escape from everyday problems and a way to raise man's value in the eyes of his wife and the family.²³ Thus, workaholism is a civilization disease that affects the family and contacts with children. Parents devote their whole energy to work and, as a result, very little motivation and energy is left for upbringing and taking care of the children. The excessive work and the lack of sufficient rest result in substantial frustration and aggression, which often shows in physical abuse and alcoholism²⁴. During wars the lack of physical presence was typical but the absence of father due to his professional duties differs significantly.

¹⁹D. Kornas – Bieda, *doświadczenia rodziców – użytkowników wspomaganiej prokreacji*, in: *Socjalizacja i wychowanie we współczesnych rodzinach polskich*, collective work edited by H. Cudak, Akademia Świętokrzyska w Kielce, Piotrków Trybunalski 2001, pp. 329 – 330.

²⁰ J. McDowell, *Jego obraz. Mój obraz (His image, my image)*, Towarzystwo Krzewienia Etyki Chrześcijańskiej, Kraków 1990, p. 86.

²¹*Rozwój techniki oraz naznaczony panowaniem techniki rozwój cywilizacji współczesnej, domaga się proporcjonalnego rozwoju moralności i etyki*. Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika "Redemptorhominis"*, Watykan 1979, pp. 113 – 114.

²² J. Ostroch, *Mężczyzna w kryzysie?*, w: *Sapientia et Adiumentu. W trosce o rozwój innych*, collective work edited by Michalski, Olsztyn 2006, pp. 213 – 225.

²³ M. Pytches, *Miejsce ojca. Ojcostwo w zamyśle Bożym*, przekł. B. Kuglarz, Wydawnictwo M, Kraków 1993, pp. 75 – 78.

²⁴ M. Janukowicz, *Czy współczesne ojcostwo to ojcostwo nieobecne?*, *Małżeństwo i Rodzina*, 2002, No.1, pp. 43 – 45.

3. Internal dimensions of changes in the role of contemporary father

Civilizational, economic and cultural changes are the external factors that cause the absence of fathers and stop them from undertaking family duties. Moreover, they show the helplessness and weakness of a significant number of men, which is reflected by their lack of confidence, emotional immaturity, excessive ambitions and oversensitivity about their masculinity. Being a father requires energy and courage. On many occasions men can overcome their weaknesses at work, when doing extreme sports and in the gym. However, that external surface hides a person who is afraid of contacts with other human being and fears to face the challenge of child upbringing. Love, which requires devotion and courage, the sacrifice of oneself, time and freedom, exceeds the capabilities of a man, who surrenders and escapes from the unwanted reality.²⁵

The difficulty to undertake the role of father frequently results from the lack of the positive experience of a man that was brought up without a father²⁶. A man who is bereft of his father or who has no masculine example in his surrounding feels at a loss, which consequently leads to an excessive identification with the mother. That results in effeminacy and, eventually, prevents him from taking the role of a father in a family because of his inability to detach from the mother²⁷. Some men lack the emotional and mental maturity, which in psychology is referred to as the Peter Pan complex. They infantilize the reality; they tend to be kind, well spoken and dressed but in their behavior and the way they treat other people they apply a child-like system of thought and value. Their immaturity shows by the tendency to enjoy life, the unwillingness to build stable relationships; they concentrate on themselves and their own feelings. In such cases women adopt a motherly attitude. They make decisions in all matters and their husbands do not feel responsible for their wives and children. Such man will never provide security to their children and will not pass self-confidence onto their children²⁸. A man who has not experienced the proximity of the father

²⁵ J. Augustyn, *Ojcostwo aspekty pedagogiczne i duchowe*, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2009, p.

²⁶ Mother is the home we come from, she is nature, soil, the ocean; father does not represent any such natural home (...) But while father does not represent the natural world, he represents the other pole of human existence; the world of thought, of man-made things, of law and order, of discipline, of travel and adventure. Father is the one who teaches the child, who shows him the road into the world. (...) Fatherly love is conditional love. Its principle is "I love you *because* you fulfill my expectations, because you do your duty" E. Fromm, *O sztuce miłości*, (The Art of Loving) Dom Wydawniczy Rebis, Poznań 2007, pp. 51 – 52.

²⁷ Por. Jan Paweł II, *Święty Józef objawieniem godności ludzkiego ojcostwa. Przemówienie w Terni 19 marca 1981 r.*, w: *Rodzina w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, pr. zb. pod red. J. Żurakowski, Kraków 1990.

²⁸ D. Kiley, *Syndrom Piotrusia Pana. O nigdy nie dojrzewających mężczyznach*, Wydawnictwo System, Jacek Santorski & Co, Warszawa 1993

will never be able - or will find it difficult - to build close relationships with his wife or children.²⁹ The rejection of painful experiences, frustration, the inability to accept oneself, the lack of sense of life, resentment and confusion are some of the reasons of alcohol abuse among men. That is their form of escape and way to forget about their problems, which eventually increases their breakdown.³⁰

Conclusion

The article presents the complexity of problems of contemporary fathers, their tasks and difficult choices they face in the present-day reality. On the one hand there is the will to ensure the best possible status to the family and - on the other - there is their continual absence and the lack of participation in child upbringing. Family is a great gift both to a man and a woman. They should both decide on its form and the rules that govern the family, having in mind the rights of each of the sexes.

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²⁹ M. Pytches, *Miejsce Ojca. Ojcostwo w zamyśle Bożym*, przekł. B. Kuglarz, Wydawnictwo M, Kraków 1993, pp. 80 – 82.

³⁰ A. Zwoliński, *Seksualność w relacjach społecznych*, Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2006, p. 58.

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