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Marriage and Family in God's Plan of Salvation: in the Conciliar and Post-conciliar Teaching of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* in light of the *Relatio synodi 2015*

Małżeństwo i rodzina w Bożym planie zbawienia:
w soborowym i posoborowym nauczaniu
Magisterium Ecclesiae w świetle *Relatio synodi 2015*

The family is the first and fundamental school of social love. Everything must be done so that this school can remain itself. At the same time, family must remain strong enough with God – that is, with the mutual love of all who compose it – that it is able to remain a refuge for Man in the midst of all destructive currents and painful experiences (John Paul II, 1983a).

Abstract:

Matrimony and family are the center of God's salvific plan, inscribed in the nature of Man from the very moment of his creation. As an analysis of biblical texts shows, God established matrimony as a "deep communion of life and love" (cf. Gen. 2:24), which is a reflection of Christ's relationship with the Church (cf. Eph. 5:25-33). The purpose of this study is to present the magisterial teaching of the Church on matrimony and family understood in the perspective of God's plan of salvation. The immediate context of the conducted research is the message included in the 2015 Relatio synodi, which is a kind of synthesis of the post-conciliar magisterial teaching on the main problematic issue addressed in this

article. In the course of the research conducted, first of all, the method of in-depth, multifaceted and critical analysis of the final document of the 2015 Synod of Bishops was applied, presenting the elements of the Church's magisterial teaching on matrimony and family in the perspective of God's plan of salvation included therein. The next step was to compare this message with the teaching included in the documents and statements of particular popes from Paul VI to Francis. This made it possible to develop fundamental research conclusions. Synthetically, they can be presented as follows:

1. The Church's teaching, from Second Vatican Council to 2015 *Relatio Synodi*, balances between faithfulness to inviolable principles and pastoral discernment regarding irregular situations.
2. Matrimony and family occupy a key place in God's plan of salvation, a fact that has been constantly emphasized in the post-conciliar teaching of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae*.
3. Traditional teaching has emphasized primarily the sacramental nature of matrimony as an institution that aims not only to unite two people, but also to open to life and raise children in the spirit of faith.
4. The Second Vatican Council, in the *Gaudium et spes* Constitution, highlighted the importance of family as the basic cell of society and the place where love and responsibility are fulfilled.
5. The post-conciliar teaching of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae* emphasizes that family, as a community of persons, has the task of evangelizing and being witness to Christ in everyday life. Contemporary challenges, such as the crisis of matrimonial identity and the diversity of forms of family life, require the Church to be more open and understanding, as reflected in the 2014 and 2015 synodal documents.
6. In the context of the 2015 *Relatio synodi*, it was underlined that family is the place where a person experiences God's love and becomes a witness to that love in the world.
7. In the context of God's plan of salvation, marriage and the family are not only the path to holiness, but also the environment in which the Church's mission of preaching of the Good News is realized.
8. Supporting families in their hardships and joys and promoting Christian values becomes a fundamental task for the Church.

Keywords: matrimony, family, synod, God's plan of salvation, pope, 2015 *Relatio synodi*.

Abstrakt:

Małżeństwo i rodzina stanowią centrum Bożego zamysłu zbawczego, wpisanego w naturę człowieka od jego stworzenia. Jak wynika z analizy tekstów biblijnych, Bóg ustanowił

małżeństwo jako „głęboką komunię życia i miłości” (por. Rdz 2,24), która jest odzwierciedleniem relacji Chrystusa z Kościółem (por. Ef 5,25-33). Celem niniejszego opracowania jest prezentacja magisterialnego nauczania Kościoła dotyczącego małżeństwa i rodziny rozumianych w perspektywie Bożego planu zbawienia. Bezpośrednim kontekstem prowadzonych badań jest przesłanie zawarte w Relatio synodi z 2015 r., które stanowi swoistą syntezę magisterialnego nauczania posoborowego dotyczącego głównej kwestii problemowej podjętej w niniejszym artykule. W trakcie prowadzonych badań zastosowano, w pierwszym rzędzie, metodę pogłębionej, wieloaspektowej i krytycznej analizy dokumentu końcowego Synodu Biskupów z 2015 r., eksponując zawarte w nim elementy magisterialnego nauczania Kościoła na temat małżeństwa i rodziny w perspektywie Bożego planu zbawienia. Kolejnym krokiem było porównanie tegoż przesłania z nauczaniem zawartym w dokumentach i wypowiedziach poszczególnych papieży od Pawła VI do Franciszka. To pozwoliło na wypracowanie krytycznych wniosków badawczych. Syntetycznie można je przedstawić następująco:

1. Nauczanie Kościoła, od Soboru Watykańskiego II do Relatio Synodi 2015, balansuje pomiędzy wiernością nienaruszalnym zasadom a pastoralnym rozeznaniem co do sytuacji nieregularnych.
2. Małżeństwo i rodzina zajmują kluczowe miejsce w Bożym planie zbawienia, co jest nieustannie podkreślane w posoborowym nauczaniu Magisterium Ecclesiae.
3. W tradycyjnym nauczaniu podkreślano przede wszystkim sakralny charakter małżeństwa jako instytucji, która ma na celu nie tylko zjednoczenie dwojga ludzi, ale także otwarcie na życie i wychowanie dzieci w duchu wiary.
4. Sobór Watykański II w Konstytucji Gaudium et spes zwrócił uwagę na znaczenie rodziny jako podstawowej komórki społecznej i miejsca, gdzie realizuje się miłość i odpowiedzialność.
5. W posoborowym nauczaniu Magisterium Ecclesiae podkreśla się, że rodzina, jako wspólnota osób, ma za zadanie ewangelizować i świadczyć o Chrystusie w codziennym życiu. Współczesne wyzwania, takie jak kryzys tożsamości małżeńskiej czy różnorodność form życia rodzinnego, wymagają od Kościoła większej otwartości i zrozumienia, co znajduje odzwierciedlenie w dokumentach synodalnych z 2014 r. i 2015 r.
6. W kontekście Relatio synodi 2015 zauważono, że rodzina jest miejscem, w którym człowiek doświadcza Bożej miłości, a także staje się świadkiem tej miłości w świecie.
7. W kontekście Bożego planu zbawienia, małżeństwo i rodzina są nie tylko drogą do świętości, ale również środowiskiem, w którym realizuje się misja Kościoła, czyli głoszenie Dobrej Nowiny.
8. Wspieranie rodzin w ich trudach i radościach oraz promowanie wartości chrześcijańskich staje się fundamentalnym zadaniem dla Kościoła.

Słowa kluczowe: małżeństwo, rodzina, synod, Boży plan zbawienia, papież. Relatio synodi 2015.

1. Introduction

*The Final Report of the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops of October 24, 2015 (Synod of Bishops, 2015), is a document summarizing the synodal discussions related to contemporary problems as to the perception and functioning of matrimony and family. The document was edited into three parts, divided into twelve chapters, preceded by an introduction and summarized with a conclusion. It covers 94 points in its scope. It served as a source base for Pope Francis and guided his post-synodal exhortation *Amoris laetitia*. In this way, the synodal message was integrated into the flow of the Church's official teaching on the subject concerning matrimony and family in God's plan of salvation. The Church, as an environment, instrument and way of salvation, serves to save people through the Word of God and the sacraments, as if by "two hands" through which the world experiences sacralization. Above all, the sacraments find their confirmation and authentication in the Word of God. They are salvific means of sanctification. They should benefit, like medicine, the sick person, who should receive them with dignity, importance and faith, otherwise Christ's saving words and deeds will not heal a person unless they are received consciously and voluntarily. Hence, by the will of Jesus, the sacraments were given to everyone as a chance for salvation (Napiórkowski, 1984). The Church, as the Body and at the same time the Fullness of Christ, animated and guided by the Spirit of God, professing faith in Triune God, brings man into the salvific mystery of the God-Man. It is brought to life in various ways. However, a special space for the implementation of God's plan of salvation is matrimony and family. It should be borne in mind that the sacraments exist and operate in the context of the Church's faith professed and confirmed by deed (Testa, 1998, p. 7). Hence, it cannot be overemphasized that matrimony is not only the smallest family cell, but is at the same time a *remedy*, that is, it is a countermeasure, a kind of medicine, to give family life a "sacramental" dimension, as a result of which the entire history of salvation will gain the mark of sacramentality (Skowronek, 1996 cf. the last page of the cover). Contemplating the excerpt from part two of the synodal *Final Report*, that is, the teaching of the Church's *Magisterium* on the family, we notice that in the plan of salvation, marriage is placed in the first place. This is a logical consequence of the close association of matrimony with family. Although we find most mentions of matrimony in this very section of the*

document, when considering the underlying logical and factual premises of the entire final document, it is important to keep in mind this virtual sacramental sign called matrimony as the starting point in leaning towards the family. For it is impossible to talk about family without simultaneously tying it to matrimony and *vice versa*. An example of the preservation of such logic in Church teaching can be found in the document of the Second Polish Plenary Synod (1991–1999) on *Vocations to Life in Marriage and Family* (Second Polish Plenary Synod (1991–1999), 2001, pp. 29–48).

As an introductory motto to the Council's and Pope's doctrinal teachings related to marriage and family, let us take two phrases based on biblical accounts, which were extracted from the two introductory points in the whole of the second part of the *Final Report of the XIV Synod of Bishops*, discussing the issue of *Family in God's plan of salvation*:

1. “The vocation of matrimony and family to the communion of love and life continues in all stages of God's plan of salvation, despite many human limitations and sins”. In turn, the foundation of this vocation is Christ the Redeemer, as conveyed in Eph. 1:3-7. Christ shapes and perfects the original matrimonial covenant, healing the heart of Man while empowering him to love like Jesus loved the Church (cf. Eph. 5:32) (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 35).
2. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, matrimony becomes a source of graces in the course of life, including fertility, forgiveness, pro-existence, among others. In other words, it is fulfilled in the community of life and love, so that the whole family can become a subject of evangelization (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 35). Without losing sight of the above two seemingly leading sentences of the synodal fathers, after outlining the historical and theological realities of the Church's rulings, the message of Vatican II and the post-conciliar popes on matrimony and family will be presented.

2. The Council's concept of matrimony and family as “a community of life and love by divine appointment” according to *Relatio synodi 2015*

The Second Vatican Council developed a “renewed” vision of matrimony and family. Theologians have repeatedly commented on this subject, both during the Council and in the post-conciliar period. The Council, penetrating extensively into the earlier statements and findings of the Church's Ecclesiastical *Magisterium*, sought not only to indicate a clear basis for modern teaching on marriage

and family (Koch, 1999, p. 351), but renewed it, taking into account the context of social change and the current state of human science. The Council also emphasized the validity and immutability of matrimonial doctrine, especially with regard to its constitutive qualities such as unity, exclusivity, permanence, indissolubility and procreation (Wróbel, 2006, col. 1075).

The leading *Vaticanum II* documents in which we read the Council's teaching on matrimony and family are: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (see CC, nos. 11; 35; 41) and Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (Przybył, 2005, nos. 47–52). The 2015 *Relatio synodi* recalled that the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* "dedicates an entire chapter to the dignity of matrimony and family" (Przybył, 2005, nos. 48–52), calling it "one of the loftiest expressions of the magisterial teaching" proposed by Second Vatican Council on the family (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 42). It was on the basis of the provisions of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (PCO, nos. 48–50) that the definition of matrimony and the family as a "profound community of life and conjugal love" was formulated, which, "established and endowed with rights by the Creator, comes into being by virtue of the marriage covenant, that is, irrevocable personal consent. In this way, through the human act in which the spouses transmit and receive each other, an institution is created by divine disposition which is also permanent in relation to society" (CCC, no. 48). "True love between husband and wife" (PCO, no. 49), leads to a mutual gift of self, in which the sexual and emotional dimensions are included, thus responding to God's plan of salvation (cf. PCO, no. 48–49). Thus, marriage and the conjugal love that animates it "are by nature directed toward fertility and the rearing of offspring" (PCO, no. 50). The *Relatio synodi* 2015 further emphasizes the rootedness of the spouses in Christ, who "through the sacrament of marriage goes out to meet the Christian spouses" (PCO, no. 48), while at the same time abiding in them (*sacramentum permanens*). Complementing the above statements contained in PCO, no. 48 as seen in *Relatio synodi* 2015, is the teaching contained in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (CC, no. 11) that Christ "takes ... human love, purifies it, brings it to its fullness, and gives the spouses, through his Spirit, the ability to live it, permeating their lives of faith, hope and love. Thanks to this, spouses are, as it were, consecrated to build up the Body of Christ and constitute the domestic Church through the grace proper to them." Hence, it is the Church that, in order to fully understand her mystery, "must look at the Christian family, portraying that family in an authentic way" (Przybył, 2005, no. 11; Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 42). It seems that more clearly than the *Final Report* 2015, captures the same thought by the direct clause in the *Lumen Gentium* Constitution: "For from Christian matrimony springs family, and

in it are born new citizens of human society, who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, become sons of God through Baptism, so that the People of God may endure through the ages" (CC, no. 11). In their teaching, the Council Fathers sought to go beyond the biological and juridical treatment of matrimony, emphasizing its personal dimension. They emphasized that the matrimonial bond is first and foremost a community of "life and love," which has its roots and participation in Jesus' love for the Church (Rahner and Vorgrimler, 1987, p. 222; even more extensively and emphatically Wróbel, 2006, cols 1075–1076). They also emphasized the idea of covenant, which, in their view, is of high significance in ecumenical relations and in dialogue with other religions (Drzyżdżyk, 2002, p. 34).

3. Paul VI's concept of dignity of matrimony and family

Pope Paul VI consistently implemented the conciliar doctrine on matrimony and family in the life of the Church, the preceding expression of which was the program encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (1964) (Paul VI, 1964, pp. 642–655) and the Motu proprio *Matrimonia mixta* – laying down regulations on mixed marriages (1970) (Paul VI, 1970, pp. 256–263). Also, of great importance in the Church's magisterial teaching on matrimony and family is Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* (1968) (Paul VI, 1968). In it, the Pope extensively discusses, among other things, the issues of responsible parenthood and conjugal love, portraying matrimony and family primarily as a personal community (Skowronek, 1996, p. 48). It was in this document that Paul VI included very important pastoral indications regarding matrimony and family. Although he clearly reaffirmed the Second Vatican Council's position on the understanding of matrimony and family, the document generated much discussion. There were both voices of acceptance and strong disapproval. Paul VI clearly taught that the love of spouses should be truly human, complete, faithful and in a certain sense exclusive, as well as lifelong and directed toward giving birth to offspring (Granat, 1974, p. 340). Critical voices pertaining to the encyclical, were mainly concerned with the second part of the encyclical, which seemed to signal a return to a biological concept of nature. In the encyclical, Paul VI highlighted the difference between the natural regulation of conception and the artificial methods used, which allow us to control the processes of fertility at will, thus committing arbitrary control of one's own body (Skowronek, 1996, p. 48; Wróbel, 2006, cols 1076–1077).

From the above, it can be seen that Paul VI was undeniably and clearly concerned with defending the rights relating to matrimony and family. This is what

the Synodal Fathers also seem to have had in mind, recalling in their *Relatio synodi 2015*:

1. An excerpt taken from the *Humanae vitae* Encyclical, highlighting the indissoluble link between conjugal love and the transmission of life: “Married love, therefore, requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood, which today, rightly enough, is much insisted upon, but which at the same time should be rightly understood (...). It is part of the task of responsible parenthood that spouses recognize their duties to God, to themselves, to the family and to society, with due regard for the order of things and the hierarchy of values” (HV, no. 10) (Paul VI, 1968, no. 10; Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 43).
2. The second passage included in the *Relatio synodi 2015* was taken from the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) (Paul VI, 1986, no. 71). Shorter than the first excerpt, though no less important than it, it deals with the relationship linking family to the Church. According to the exhortation, family has earned the somewhat unusual title of “domestic Church,” as the Second Vatican Council emphasized, because “in every Christian family there should be various aspects of the universal Church. Besides, family, like the Church, must be the place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates” (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 71).

In conclusion, Pope Paul VI is to be commended for attempting to implement in depth the Church’s conciliar teaching on matrimony and family with an emphasis on their dignity dimension.

4. The family “the way of the Church” in the teaching of John Paul II

In 2015 *Relatio synodi 2015* some important elements from Pope John Paul II’s teaching on matrimony and the family were recalled. This was done in the form of fourteen lines emphasizing that the pope „devoted special attention to the family in his catechesis on human love and on the theology of the body. In them, he left the Church a wealth of reflections on the spousal significance of the human body and God’s plan for marriage and the family from the very beginning of creation. In specifically treating ‘conjugal love’, he described how the spouses, through their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness in his *Letter to Families* (John Paul II, 2000) and, especially, his Ap-

ostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (John Paul II, 1981). In these documents, the Pope called the family the ‘way of the Church,’ gave an overview on the vocation of man and woman to love and proposed the basic guidelines for the pastoral care of the family and the presence of the family in society. « In matrimony and in the family a complex of interpersonal relationships is set up-married life, fatherhood and motherhood, filiation and fraternity-through which each human person is introduced into the “human family” and into the “family of God,” which is the Church»” (John Paul II, 1981, no. 15).

Looking holistically at the body of John Paul II’s teaching achievements relating to matrimony and family, it should be acknowledged that it is very enormous and significant for Church teaching. An important part of it is the message related to the Sixth Synod of Bishops of 1980 on the family, the post-synodal exhortation *Familiaris consortio* of November 22, 1981, and the collection of speeches, catechesis and homilies of John Paul II on the family from 1978–1982 should also be cited (John Paul II, 1983b, pp. 1–382). Despite such a rich legacy of John Paul II, in the *Relatio synodi 2015*, little space is devoted to John Paul II’s teaching and initiatives on the family, although some titles and subtitles were taken directly from his exhortation *Familiaris consortio* for the use of the 2015 *Final Relatio*. Several significant conclusions can be drawn from the synodal Fathers’ message regarding the magisterial legacy of John Paul II:

1. about John Paul II, who presented a comprehensive vision of the vocation of man and woman to love, pointing to the family as “the way of the Church” and presenting at the same time “a comprehensive vision of the vocation of man and woman to love.”
2. John Paul II suggested basic guidelines for the pastoral care of families and the presence of the family in society. It is unfortunate that the 2015 *Relatio synodi* only referred to the *Familiaris consortio* Exhortation and the Letter to Families *Gratissimam sane*;
3. John Paul II gave special attention to the family through his catechesis on human love and on the theology of the body, leaving the Church with “a multitude of contemplation on the spousal meaning of the human body and on God’s plan for matrimony and the family from the very beginning of creation.”
4. John Paul II, writing on conjugal love, presented “the way in which spouses, in their love for each other, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live out their vocation to holiness.”

Already from the above statements, it can be concluded that John Paul II developed the Church’s doctrinal teaching on matrimony and the family, set-

ting it on an anthropological and theological foundation. At the same time, the starting point for anthropological reflection is, according to John Paul II, Man called to the realization of love in personal integrity, that is, spiritual-bodily unity, being the subject of his own conscious and free acts. On the other hand, John Paul II takes as the basis of theological reflection the fact of vocation inscribed in the nature of man and woman, who are created in the “image and likeness of God and are called and gifted to realize it” (John Paul II, 1981, nos. 22–29; Wróbel, 2006, col. 1077). Therefore, the Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* is a kind of summary of the magisterial teaching of the Church relating to matrimony as a sacrament, which is the foundation of the family. By presenting God’s plan related to marriage and the family, John Paul II makes it possible to understand that the Church carries within herself the awareness of the value and dignity of this sacramental union, but also of the dangers of our modern times. Hence, the Pope tried to meet the needs of Christian families and marriages by pointing out to them four basic life tasks: 1) Creating a community of persons; 2) Service to life; 3) Participating in the development of modern societies; and 4) Participating in the life and mission of the Church (John Paul II, 1981, no. 17).

5. Benedict XVI’s appeal to respect family integrity

In his apostolic letter *Porta fidei* (January 6, 2012) proclaiming the 2013 Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI wrote, among other things: “Faith that works through love” (Galatians 5:6) becomes a new criterion of thought and action that transforms the whole life of Man (cf. Romans 12:2; Colossians 3:9–10; Ephesians 4:20–29; 2 Corinthians 5:17). (Benedict XVI, 2011, no. 6). With this message, Benedict XVI embraced all marriages and families, which are already undergoing a profound transformation during his pontificate, especially with the still-expanding tide of liberalism and hedonism. Analyzing the 2015 *Relatio synodi*, it is not difficult to see that the synodal Fathers referred in similar proportions to Benedict XVI’s teaching on matrimony and family as to that of John Paul II. Reference was also made to two documents by Benedict XVI. The first is the *Deus caritas est* Encyclical (2005) (Benedict, 2006), which reveals the Christian image of God and the image of Man encoded in and derived from it, with his ability and gift to love. In his teaching on matrimony and the family, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted exclusive and definitive love as their basic element. He sought to thoroughly justify his position on this matter biblically (B.A., 2006, col. 1066). According to him, matrimony based on exclusive and definitive love becomes an image of God’s

relationship with His people, and vice versa: “the way God loves becomes the measure of human love (Benedict, 2006, no. 11)” (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 45). After analyzing the Old Testament texts (see DCE, no. 5), Benedict XVI pointed to the novelty of biblical faith, namely the image of God and the fundamentally related image of Man. He stressed that the biblical message is permeated by the idea that Man is somehow incomplete, and hence intrinsically seeks to find in the other the completion of his wholeness, which he achieves in the union of man and woman. At the same time, the closing of the biblical message ends, as it were, with a prophetic reference to Adam: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:24) (Benedict, 2006, no. 11). Hence, according to Benedict XVI, two facts should be highlighted here: *eros*, which is, as it were, rooted in Man’s nature, and 2. because of the orientation contained in the creative act, *eros* directs Man toward matrimony, a relationship characterized by exclusivity and definiteness, through which his deep destiny is realized (Benedict, 2006, no. 11).

Benedict XVI’s second thought was taken from his encyclical *Caritas in veritate* (Benedict XVI, 2009). It is about highlighting “the importance of family love as a principle of life in society and the place where we learn to experience the common good” (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 45). Addressing demographic growth, Benedict XVI refers to Paul VI’s *Populorum progressio* Encyclical, writing about the inalienable values of life in general and family love. Without going into the causes of the economic, financial and social crises, Benedict XVI sees the decline in births as a significant problem. Hence, concerned about human development, in his teaching he draws attention to the need to respect human dignity, and thus the values that families should be guided by in their lives. He therefore encourages the education of families, and thus the permanent improvement of their competence in all aspects of life. He sees this as a way to counteract the political-materialistic forms of violent-destructive attempts to influence families. Therefore, Benedict XVI, referring to the various trends of modern times negatively affecting families, said that it is something socially and economically necessary for ecclesiastical, state and social institutions to respond to the deepest needs of the heart and dignity of the human person. Hence, it is the task of states to promote policies that respect the integrity of the family “based on matrimony between a man and a woman, which is the first and vital cell of society with concern for its economic and fiscal problems, while respecting its relational nature” (Benedict XVI, 2009, no. 44).

The above Benedict XVI’s indications are not easy to translate into today’s very hermetic language, which is further exacerbated by taking these two sen-

tences, quoted by 2015 *Relatio synodi* from *Deus caritas est* and *Caritas in veritate*, out of their entire substantive context.

6. Family a “school of mature faith” according to Pope Francis’ teaching

The first point that the synodal Fathers point out is the close bond that takes place between faith and the sacrament of matrimony and the family. Thus, reading Pope Francis’ instructive submissions, we can easily see that “the Church is the Mother who teaches us to speak the language of faith,” (Francis, 2013b, no. 38), while in turn “faith has a sacramental structure,” (the Pope here refers to the conciliar Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* Vatican II, 2002, no. 59; cf. Francis, 2013b, no. 40), of which baptism and the Eucharist are particular expressions, but also matrimony and the family born of it. Hence, according to Francis, the very structure of the first sacrament (baptism) highlights the momentousness of the interaction of Church and the family in the transmission of the faith. The Pope, recalling the thought of St. Augustine, emphasizes that “parents are called not only to give their children life, but also to lead them toward God, so that through baptism they may be reborn as children of God and receive the gift of faith.” (quoted in Francis, 2013b, no. 43). And the highest expression of the sacramental nature of faith is the Eucharist, in which the two axes on which faith is supported intersect: it is the axis of history and the axis running from the visible world to the invisible (Francis, 2013b, no. 44). We can also relate this, albeit in a slightly different sense, to matrimony and the family. This is why Francis, in his *Lumen fidei* Encyclical, draws attention to the close connection between faith and the family. Following the Pope, the Synodal Fathers, also, point to the close connection between faith and the family. They referred directly to the description in the Letter to the Hebrews, which, among other things, mentions Abraham’s journey toward the future city, when the author of the Letter, mentions the blessing passed from parents to children (see Hebrews 11:20-21). Following Francis, the Synod Fathers emphasize that “the first environment in which faith enlightens the city of people is the family.” With this, Pope Francis is primarily referring to the permanent union between a man and a woman as realized in matrimony (Francis, 2013b, no. 52). This union arises from their love, which is a sign and expression of the presence of God’s love, and also arises from the recognition and acceptance of the goodness of sexual difference, by which – according to Genesis 2:24 – the spouses can become one flesh and are thus capable of giving birth to new life. All this is a manifestation of the Creator’s goodness, His wisdom and the plan of His love (Francis, 2013, no. 52). Only on the

basis of such love can a man and a woman pledge their love for each other until the end of their lives. The concluding statement of these thoughts is that “the pledge of love forever becomes possible when we discover a plan greater than our designs” (Francis, 2013b, no. 47).

To summarize, it should be emphasized that there is a close causal relationship between faith and the family, grounded in Scripture, especially in the New Testament, which makes it possible to see that in a lasting marriage, faith contributes to expanding the space of life, and that marital-family love is trustworthy because it has been established on the foundation of fidelity to God (Francis, 2013b, no. 53).

The second point highlighted by the synodal Fathers is the central location of the family in the midst of the cultural challenges of our time. This thought was quoted by the Synodal Fathers after Francis' apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* – “On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World” (2013) (Francis, 2013a). The Pope warned of cultural threats destroying matrimony and the family. He listed the most significant of these: the attack on religious freedom, new forms of persecution of Christians, relativistic indifference combined with an extremely dangerous state of hatred and violence, relativistic indifference to various sentiments of totalitarianism (Francis, 2013a, no. 61), or finally globalization, secularization, secularism, etc. (Francis, 2013a, nos. 62–65). Hence, Pope Francis clearly poses an extremely important problem for Christians, inviting a new stage of evangelization in the form of charting the Church's paths for the coming years, including the path for modern marriages and families, while taking into account the signs of the times (Francis, 2013a, nos. 1, 51).

It is true that the family, like other communities, is undergoing a profound cultural crisis and that social bonds are fracturing at various levels. However, in the case of the family, and therefore matrimony, the fragility of ties becomes a particularly serious problem, Francis states, “because this is the basic cell of society, the place where human beings learn to coexist in diversity and belong to others, and where parents pass on the faith to their children. There is a tendency to see matrimony as a pure form of emotional gratification that can be established in any way and altered according to everyone's sensitivity. However, the indispensable contribution of matrimony to society, transcends the level of the couple's affection and needs” (Francis, 2013a, no. 66; Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 46).

Concluding the presentation of Pope Francis' teaching on matrimony and the family viewed from the perspective of the message of the 2015 *Relatio synodi*, it should be noted that in the *Final Report* of the Synod Fathers of 2015, it was added, as if as a precautionary measure, that Pope Francis, in addition to the

issues listed and only mentioned in the document in question, and related to the family and matrimony, devoted a comprehensive series of catechesis to the issue of matrimony and the family, deepening the issues raised here (Synod of Bishops, 2015, no. 46). This raises questions: Should not Pope Francis' message on matrimony and the family have been presented in the broader context of his social teaching, rather than as a mere issue that is, on the one hand, quite important, but on the other hand, not fully read and interpreted? Second: Is matrimony and the family presented in the magisterial teaching of Pope Francis only selectively, should not a more complementary approach including the principle of "hierarchy of truths and values", as Polish theologians have repeatedly signaled.

7. Conclusion

Summarizing this paper on the topic: *Matrimony and the Family in God's Plan of Salvation in the Conciliar and Post-conciliar Teaching of the "Magisterium Ecclesiae" in the light of the "2015 Relatio synodi,"* some basic conclusions can be made:

1. Spouses, aware of their role in God's plan of salvation, thanks to sacramental grace, should persevere in building the matrimonial and family community, resolving conflicts and difficulties, and serving life by bearing offspring and raising children (Zarembski, 2016, p. 317).
2. Pope Francis draws attention to the important function assigned to the Christian family in building up the domestic Church, which can only be realized if spouses maintain a living awareness of their Christian identity (Zarembski, 2016, pp. 317–318).
3. The Church should take measures to demonstrate the value of the sacrament of matrimony, doing so through teaching, liturgical and pastoral activities (Zarembski, 2016, p. 318).
4. The Church finds particular encouragement to defend the institution of matrimony and the family in the teaching of the post-conciliar popes, who, in the context of rampant selfishness, a culture of temporariness and a rejection of the sacramentality and indissolubility of marriage, call for affirming the value of the family with an even greater determination (Francis, 2013c, p. 3; Zarembski, 2016, p. 318).
5. The Christian family is the best place for acceptance and human intimacy. It is a special school of generosity and sharing of spiritual values. It teaches responsibility. It is an institution that educates to overcome individualistic mentality (Francis, 2014a, p. 31; Zarembski, 2016, p. 318).

6. The Church should clearly show God's plan for the family and help spouses joyfully realize it in their lives (Francis, 2014a, p. 23; Zarembski, 2016, p. 318).
7. It remains current to remind and emphasize the need to prepare young people even better for matrimony, so that they can discover the beauty of the matrimonial bond based on love and responsibility, allowing them to overcome difficulties and various kinds of selfishness through mutual forgiveness (Francis, 2014b, p. 28; Zarembski, 2016, p. 318). Hence the importance of the Church's teaching passed down through the centuries, with the goal of saving Christian values related to matrimony and the family, which should not be separated from each other or marginalized. Saving marriage and the family as a fundamental value is one of the essential tasks resulting from participation in the fulfillment of God's salvific plan.

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