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Children, Common Good, and Society

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A prominent American philosopher of law, Mary Ann Glendon, noticed the following common rule present in American society: “After divorce it is nearly always the mother who remains primarily responsible for the physical care of the children; the father’s standard of living typically rises, while that of the mother and children declines in all too many cases below the poverty line.”¹ I suppose this rule works similarly in quite a number of other countries. Divorced mothers with children usually bear a disproportionately heavier burden measured in economic terms when it comes to the situation of the breakup of the family, not to mention other types of burdens which are difficult to be measured and quite individually experienced by particular women and men. However, this statement does not intend to present the child as a cause of the burden. On the contrary, it aims at showing how mothers with children are often discriminated against in juxtaposition with men — fathers of these children, and how this points to the fact that the society at large does not adequately value motherhood, parenthood, and the good of the child. It does not value the persons well enough. A disproportionate burden put on the arms of the mother in such sad cases of divorce is a proof of how discrimination against women is connected with the discrimination against children, and how both types of injustices follow from the common and systemic mentality of treating persons as disengaged individuals

¹ M. A. GLENDON: “Feminism and the Family.” *Commonwealth*. February 14, 1997, vol. 124, Issue 3: 11—15, p. 13.

rather than persons within relations, and persons having not just rights but also duties towards others. In other words, the fact of discrimination rightly understood shows the antisocial climate of contemporary society, which does not seem to perceive the reality and continuity of *relations* as such. This paper aims to show the perspective of the good of the child within the perspective of the common good of society including the good of families and its individual members.

John Paul II noticed the connection between the aforementioned realities. In his letter to Gertrude Mongella, Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations he wrote: "Greater efforts are needed to eliminate discrimination against women in areas that include education, health care and employment. Where certain groups or classes are systematically excluded from these goods, and where communities or countries lack basic social infrastructures and economic opportunities, women and children are the first to experience marginalization."² We may wonder why the lot of women is so often so closely related to that of children. Part of the explanation may be provided by the systemic cause mentioned earlier: men are not perceived as responsible for their offspring as much as mothers are, so the social arrangements usually burden women with the almost sole responsibility for raising their children. In other words, we can note it as the institutional individualism paying a premium to men (incorrectly seen as disengaged individuals without commitments); individualism which thus causes anti-female and anti-child effects at the same time.

Another cause, though partly connected with the previous one, may be the female generally high sense of responsibility for the welfare of the child she gave birth to. The sense of responsibility itself does not, of course, constitute a problem but the exclusive way of attributing this responsibility to oneself, rather than sharing the responsibility with the father, may be the problem. Another side of this is that very often it may be the case that the social institutions treat mothers automatically as more related to the child than the fathers are. However, I claim that part of the problem may be the woman's own will of disconnecting the fathers from children, and attributing the sole responsibility for the children. However, whether this is the fault of women or the fault of the institutional solutions overburdening the women and freeing men from their duties, the problem is that the female strong relatedness to the child (or the social assumption of this relatedness) *allows* men (through the unjust policies legitimized by

² JOHN PAUL II: "It Is with Genuine Pleasure" Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to Mrs. Gertrude Mongella Secretary General of the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations, no. 6.

society) to escape their responsibilities towards their children and towards the mothers of their children.

Going further along this line, we may wonder about the source of this female strong relatedness to a child, which in turn may be the cause of social expectation of this relatedness. I choose to venture an opinion that besides the social influence exerted upon mothers to be linked very closely to their children, there is a great amount of the natural basis of this link, largely taking its root from the experience of pregnancy and breast feeding, while the father's link needs to be more consciously established and learnt by men. (This need of men's learning many aspects of fatherhood from the maternal example of child-care was noticed by John Paul II in his document devoted to women's nature and dignity entitled *Mulieris dignitatem*, 18) However, whether naturally or socially influenced, the fact of connection between the lot of mothers and children, particularly in cases of troubled familial situations, shows how (at least) the Western societies do not take under enough consideration the question of relationships together with their effects, namely children. Instead, their social mentality and practice is so individualistic as to relatively reward financially people without commitments rather than support people who are committed to the care of minors; in other words, women committed to their children.

A result of that (and at the same time the underlying perspective causing this result) is the lack of adequate consideration of the good of the child (or even lack of the perspective of the child as a value in himself/herself). Not to sound banal and groundless, I would like to cite an argument supporting my statement, which comes from the study done by Helen Alvaré, who analysed the changes in American marriage and family law in the last decades. She claims that the children's good is now virtually removed from sight in individualistic perspective of law in the United States of America. On the basis of her findings she concludes that there can be observed a certain tendency to move away from self-giving towards self-seeking in law and its social application. For example, quoting results of research from some sociologists, she claims that easier divorce laws allow parents to ignore the good of children.³ Parents are largely seen there as individuals who want to end their marriage, rather than as people with duties towards their children, whose well-being should be considered during the decision making process of divorce. We may say that in an individualistic perspective children seem to be more or less invisible

³ H. M. ALVARÉ: "The Turn Toward the Self in the Law of Marriage & Family: Same-Sex Marriage & Its Predecessors." *Stanford Law & Policy Review*, vol. 16, issue 1, 2005: 135—196, pp. 136, 147.

in law or treated as burden to married people in the process of divorcing. The good of children connected with having a stable family (or at least stable relations with both parents, despite the fact of them being difficult to organize in cases of divorce) is largely ignored by the legal practice and by the mentality and culture dominated by the way of thinking which promotes individuals' right of seeking their subjective satisfaction as separated from their fulfilment of duties towards other human beings. Thus, individualistic culture built into the legal system acts mainly against the interest of children and in the long run also against the good of the parents, who after some time may find lack of deeper-level satisfaction which comes only from self-giving towards those dependent on them, namely their children. The long-term effect of such individualistic attitudes may be the lack of social cohesion, instability of social ties, lowering of the level of social trust, and rise of the level of egoism instead of very productive attitudes of altruism needed by society and appreciated by social thinkers.⁴

Similar tendency towards self-seeking can be noticed in the area of the so-called collaborative reproduction. Children's rights seem to be less important than the potential parents' will to start the child's existence artificially in whatever way technologically possible. There is an enormous difference between the natural act of creating the child and artificial techniques of child's production. The former may be planned but it is not controlled by possible parents in its natural dynamic, while the couple should concentrate on their mutual love and acceptance of possible outcome of their love-act. The artificial ways, on the contrary, concentrate on the unrestrained will of the possible parents to have a child, rather than to love someone with whom one may create a child as an effect of this love. Though in both cases the people may consciously choose to attempt the creation of a child, only the first case respects the dignity of the child as a human being, and not a product of one's will. That is because only in the first case the parents respect the natural processes not produced by them, which protect the right of the child to be created in a vital sense *independently* of the parents' or the doctor's artificial intrusion.

The social consciousness and debates often concentrate on the consequences of the child's existence or non-existence, while ignoring the matter of the dignity and rights of the child's way of coming to existence. Helen Alvaré rightly notes the following: "It is not sufficiently concrete or responsive to assert that the duty or benefit is in the fact of the child's

⁴ Cf., for instance, P. A. SOROKIN's fundamental study of altruistic attitudes analysed in his book *Altruistic Love: A Study of American Good Neighbors and Christian Saints*. Boston 1950.

existence versus nonexistence. Indeed, the opposite might be true. It is possible that, for the sake of the child as well as the wider society, one should avoid creating children using technology that experiments with their health; deliberately estranging children from their biological parents; and creating children without the benefits of stability, the network of love, and the biological relationships available in two-parent families.”⁵ The author enumerates negative conditions and effects of such a way of producing children. However, what is even more important, she notices the underlying basic cause of the problems which is connected with the aforementioned lack of respect for the natural way of creation of children. “The choices that inhere in collaborative reproduction seem to contradict an important paradigm of the parent-child relationship, one on which family law is generally based. This paradigm holds that merely by virtue of the birth of ‘this child’ to ‘this parent’, this parent has been ‘chosen’ to love ‘this child’. Parents are to be the chosen ones, not, as with collaborative reproduction, the choosers.”⁶ In other words, the impact of nature in this process causes the state in which parents receive the child rather than choosing or producing him or her, and by this fact the child is independent in his/her dignity and autonomy.

This seems to me to be the gist of the message: respecting nature is in this case (as in many other cases of respecting it) a way and expression of the respect and right of the child to be created without the total control, total choice, total planning and technological manipulation done by others. Despite the fact that in the artificial production of the child the process itself is not entirely controlled by parents or doctors, yet the amount of control is incomparably larger, handed over to a doctor from the exclusivity of parents, and finally, the intention of control is present as aiming at totality.

Thus, the logic of production of children is also the logic of self-seeking (someone intending almost at all costs to become a parent) within the perspective of the self as freely constructing or destroying ties with others, without the limits coming from nature or from any confines guaranteeing social stability that would come from outside individual unrestrained autonomy. Maybe even more importantly, it is the logic of the “technological making” rather than the logic of the *gift* of nature (or nature’s Creator). The perspective of the gift assumes the existence of the Giver, who gives out of the will to give, and this will to give is connected with the benevolent motivation towards those who receive the gifts. In Chris-

⁵ H. M. ALVARÉ: “The Case for Regulating Collaborative Reproduction: A Children’s Rights Perspective.” *Harvard Journal on Legislation*, vol. 40, no. 1, Winter 2003: 1—63, p. 46.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

tianity this motivation is perceived as love. The very coming to existence of a child is intimately connected with the dynamic of free giving and receiving. The technological production of children removes this perspective of giving and receiving from sight. It rather introduces the individualistic market perspective where particular people want to buy a product of their child rather than opening themselves to a free gift of a new person.

A Harvard political philosopher Michael J. Sandel considers hypothetical consequences of the development in genetic engineering which could be used for designing children by improving their genetic equipment. He discusses many cases which may seem possibly realized in future, although they are not practiced yet, but their possible ethical aspects need to be discussed ahead of practical application of the technological innovations. Sandel wonders about possible effects of situations in which parents who, with good intentions, would like to improve some qualities of their children with the help of genetic engineering. He claims that such improvement of children's characteristics by their parents may, if it ever gets done in practice, remove the dimension of natural giftedness from the ethical perspective of our lives.⁷ In other words, we may lose the consciousness of being gifted without our effort or planning. Even more, not just consciousness, but also reality of free giving and receiving would be exchanged for the reality of planning, designing, and actually buying certain desired qualities of children. Rather than being open to the unbidden and accepting whatever qualities our children may have, and trying to work with them in order to overcome the difficulties and thus develop their character, we would require them to be changing all the time in order to fit our dreams, put a lot of pressure on them to try to achieve ever better results instead of accepting them no matter what.

Sandel recalls the differentiation of the two aspects of parental love described by William F. May. This late American ethicist distinguished the aspects of acceptance and transformation, both present in the love of parents towards their children. Sandel points out that acceptance is largely diminished in the mental framework standing behind the genetic improvement of children. So, the harmony between the two dimensions of parental love is lost. The pressure put on the transformation of a child may be stronger than the accent put on the unconditional acceptance of the child. The will to change, activity, and work on the better "quality" of an individual becomes more important than the fact of being a gift as a person and a fact of having one's own characteristics also as gifts of nature which have not been planned by parents and which have not even

⁷ M. J. SANDEL: "The Case Against Perfection." *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 2004, pp. 51—62.

been possible to be fully planned by any human. The consequence of a possible new perspective of designing and planning of child's qualities, according to Sandel, may be the loss of the feeling or attitude of gratitude in many dimensions of social life. This would result in the loss of the sense of duty or social solidarity, since everything then could be worked out by an individual and/or bought by one's parents.

We may wonder whether this ethical shift would really take place, should such genetic designing projects were possibly practiced. One may claim that social solidarity does not have to be connected with the fact of previous reception of gifts. After all, we may fulfil our social duties without the motivation coming from gratitude, and this would make us even more ethical. Yet, practically speaking, it may be very hard for humans to achieve such a level of altruism. Besides, the tendency to improve children genetically may have unintended and unforeseen consequences for their health and well-being. Additionally, these "improvements" seem to be based on a philosophy of enlarging autonomy of parents as "producers" or "planners" of children's qualities, and independently of whether this would diminish social solidarity, it definitely contributes to the decreasing of the level of openness to nature and raising the level of illegitimate intrusion in the planning of other human beings. In the name of one's own autonomy, one diminishes the level of autonomy of one's children. Jürgen Habermas wondered whether the human subjectivity, autonomy, and dignity would not be in danger because of genetic experiments.⁸ Autonomy is slowly being lost, paradoxically, in the name of autonomy itself. Autonomy broadly understood and practiced by parents is here combined with attempts of improvement of children. This, however, may be related to eugenics.

More importantly, it seems to me, we lose the perspective of the gift, together with the perspective of the Giver, be it nature (for unbelievers) or God as its creator (for believers). Parents do not see themselves as receiving the gift of a child to such an extent as was the case with the natural creation of the child without technological intervention, while the child may not perceive himself or herself as a gift and effect of love of his/her parents towards each other. The child's existence is not to be easily legitimized then, if the child is designed like a product ordered in a supermarket. The dignity of the child is disrespected not only by manipulating with the child as if it was an object, but also by depriving the child of his/her status as a gift which should be accepted as he/she is. All children and their way of coming to existence which is respectful of their dignity

⁸ J. HABERMAS: *Przyszłość natury ludzkiej. Czy zmierzamy do eugeniki liberalnej?* Trans. M. ŁUKASIEWICZ. Warszawa 2003.

remind us of the gifted way of our human condition. After all, our very lives, together with their many aspects, constitute the fundamental gifts for us, and our human dignity is also given in order to be later recognized and respected rather than socially created.

We may thus say that every child reminds the society that the world itself, including humans and life itself, is fundamentally given. In the words of John Paul II we can find an example of similar expression of the gifted character of spousal and parental love: “In giving origin to a new life, parents recognize that the child, “as the fruit of their mutual gift of love, is, in turn, a gift for both of them, a gift which flows from them.”⁹ Connected with the fact of our gifted nature is the consequence of the way we become actualized by accepting and presenting gifts, including the most important gift of our persons in relations to others. If we deprive the child of the status of the gift, we will also deprive the society of a clear sign of giftedness as the nature of our (social and personal) existence. Losing giftedness from our perspective and consciousness might cause not only the lack of gratitude and solidarity, as Sandel notes, but also the loss of touch with reality and increase of the illegitimate attitude of pride taken in the supposedly social self-constructionist activity. I purposefully use the adjective “social” because an individual is within this framework produced by the social design, that is by others, so he or she is not creating him- or herself, but the autonomy is practiced on the part of society, in this case represented by the parents and various kinds of social pressure contesting the acceptance of what is given in a child, while pushing for genetic “improvement” of a child.

Society broadly understood thus seems to be the agent considering itself legitimate to plan and produce children according to its design, while the traditionally understood autonomy and dignity of a child may not be protected, if such an outlook gets social acceptance. A similar attitude towards children is visible already in cases of in vitro fertilization: possible parents claim it to be their right to have and produce a child without the regard for the limits of nature which in this case protect the children from manipulating on them by artificial means. One of the so-called New Feminists,¹⁰ Michele M. Schumacher, writes that this view of “a right to a child” is also visible in claims of homosexual couples con-

⁹ JOHN PAUL II: *Encyclical “Evangelium vitae,”* no. 92. The citation inside comes from: JOHN PAUL II: *Address to Participants in the Seventh Symposium of European Bishops, on the theme of “Contemporary Attitudes towards Life and Death: a Challenge for Evangelization”* (October 17, 1989), No. 5: *Insegnamenti XII*, 2 (1989), 945.

¹⁰ I use capital letters in the name “New Feminism” in order to differentiate this kind from other new feminisms in history and to refer to the specific stream of feminism inspired by Catholic theology of woman as offered by John Paul II.

cerning adoption: “When [...] homosexual couples insist upon the ‘right’ to adoption, the Church never tires of proclaiming the right of the child over any presumed right to a child.”¹¹ Schumacher here refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2378 and claims that this right is rooted in the personalistic perspective, which is opposed to the individualistic view of the human freedom. Personalism offers an attractive alternative to both individualistic unbounded autonomy and social domination over individuals. It is a standpoint respecting the dignity of each person (e.g. by protecting one’s natural way of coming to existence and not allowing the others’ interference with one’s genetic equipment) and a standpoint perceiving each human as related to others within various types of communities. These communities should not dominate over persons but come from natural and socially affirmed ties which serve personal development and fulfilment. Human freedom is here accepted, recognized, and yet, not treated as conflicted with others’ freedoms. Another New Feminist, Helen M. Alvaré states: “A new feminism understands freedom as an inherently communal project — it is not only about oneself.”¹² She includes this statement within an article considering the matter of parental duties towards their family, claiming that both mother and father have to treat childcare as their priority task over their jobs which need to become secondary and serving the purposes of familial, personal relations. Serving the persons within family becomes the top priority above the professional goals. The latter are also perceived as serving the society but as naturally more distant than the members of one’s own family. Both the family (with its particular members) and society at large are treated as the common good. It thus constitutes an example of a social philosophy of the common good including the good of the child within family relations.

Such a perspective of linking the good of persons with the communities is, however, possible if the goods are not opposed, and this in turn is realized when what constitutes the common good is not just the sum of conditions favourable for individuals’ development, but the person himself or herself. The self-actualized person, the person realized through the webs of relationships, stands at the centre of this model. Every person is then the focal point of the common good of society in general, while particular people in their different situations and stages of life constitute the focal points and common goods of particular communities. In John Paul II’s *Letter to Families* it is claimed that “*in the newborn child is real-*

¹¹ M.M. SCHUMACHER: “A Plea for the traditional family: Situating marriage within John Paul II’s realist, or personalist, perspective of human freedom.” *The Linacre Quarterly* 81 (4) 2014: 314—342, p. 330.

¹² H.M. ALVARÉ: “When Both Parents Work. New Feminism and the Family.” *Liguorian*, August 1998, pp. 26—29, p. 28.

ized the common good of the family. Just as the common good of spouses is fulfilled in conjugal love, ever ready to give and receive new life, so too the common good of the family is fulfilled through that same spousal love, as embodied in the newborn child. [...] *The common good of the whole of society dwells in man*; he is, as we recalled, ‘the way of the Church’. Man is first of all the ‘glory of God’: ‘*Gloria Dei vivens homo*’, in the celebrated words of Saint Irenaeus, which might also be translated: ‘the glory of God is for man to be alive’. It could be said that here we encounter the loftiest definition of man: *the glory of God is the common good of all that exists*; the common good of the human race. Yes! *Man is a common good*: a common good of the family and of humanity, of individual groups and of different communities.”¹³ Of course the word “man” used in this context refers to the human being, and the whole quote is a kind of glorification of humanity as the central value of society within the broader context of God’s creation. Consequently, since the human being is the common good of all, then the way society treats every newborn child constitutes a test of whether it can recognize the common good properly and whether it can live up to its ideal by accepting each human life well. John Paul II offered this kind of a test or a measuring rod for the adequate way of treating one person by another. In his *Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris consortio”* he wrote as follows: “Concern for the child, even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another.”¹⁴ We may say that this is the test of a good society: the acceptance and good treatment of every new human is the proof of the proper attitude towards others and the adequate condition of society.

The same concerns the social treatment of parents and families. Since they form the closest circles for their children and when they take care of the children well, their tasks should receive proper recognition from the society at large that benefits from parental care of the members of new generations. Mary Ann Glendon claims that “when mothers and fathers raise their children well, they are not just doing something for themselves and their own children, but for all of us. Governments, private employers, and fellow citizens would all have to recognize that we all owe an enormous debt to parents who do a good job raising their children under today’s difficult conditions. There’s something heroic about the everyday sacrifices that people have to make these days just to do the right thing

¹³ JOHN PAUL II: *Letter to Families “Gratissimam sane,”* no. 11.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II: *Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris consortio,”* no. 26.

by their nearest and dearest.”¹⁵ What is more, in the light of the test criterion mentioned above (the acceptance and care of a child being a test of a good society), societies should not just value the work of parents for the their job of bringing up the socialized individuals. It should also notice that through accomplishing this task the parents embody in its fullest the general goal of the human society, namely the day-to-day practical realization of the openness and even the loving attitude towards persons embedded in the web of tight and warm relations.

The essence of this attitude can be noticed since the early beginning of the experience of children in their mothers’ wombs. Let me quote again from John Paul II: “A mother welcomes and carries in herself another human being, enabling it to grow inside her, giving it room, respecting it in its otherness. Women first learn and then teach others that human relations are authentic if they are open to accepting the other person: a person who is recognized and loved because of the dignity which comes from being a person and not from other considerations, such as usefulness, strength, intelligence, beauty or health.”¹⁶ A paradigm of social acceptance of a human being is in the woman’s acceptance of her child evident in the physical, bodily relation between a mother and her child.

Man’s participation in the creation of a new human being does not involve his body as much as it involves the body of a woman. The woman accepts the sexual act as well as its fruit inside her body, so her openness to the new human being (both the man and the child) is literal and expressed bodily. What is more, the child is being accepted unconditionally as he or she is completely unknown as concerns his or her qualities. Though the father should also accept the child this way, yet he does not literally make space for the child in his body, so the mother’s acceptance does seem to constitute the literal paradigm of total receptivity and inclusion. No wonder then why it is the mother who in a sense teaches the man how to fulfil his paternal role. Furthermore, it can be claimed that both parents can through this process of parenting teach the rest of society how to treat each new human being and all human beings for that matter, too. Mere humanity in a person is thus recognized to be worthy of social acceptance, respect, and care.

Moreover, the parental acceptance of a child, physically embodied in the early maternal experience of pregnancy, provides a perfect solution of the imagined liberal problem of the assumed possible conflict between freedom of the mother and freedom of the child, and an equally strongly assumed conflict between freedom and love. The conflictual model envi-

¹⁵ M.A. GLENDON: “Feminism and the Family...,” p. 14.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II: *Encyclical “Evangelium vitae,”* no. 99.

sions the possible conflict between the child's right to life and the mother's right to choose her child's life or death for various reasons starting from the mother's difficult situation and ending with her will as such. Instead, if we treat the child as the human being to be received with acceptance, the woman's personal fulfillment would involve the best care for the child, for herself, and for their mutual relation rather than the choice of abortion as killing the baby, destroying the relation, and doing harm to the woman herself. Marzena Szczepkowska rightly pointed out in her article that pro-life activities are usually set opposite to the women's rights attitudes. In her opinion, these issues should not be seen as opposed but strongly linked together because what requires the proper care is the relation of mother and child. One-sided fight for children's rights to life with the lack of care for the woman's situation or one-sided concentration on the woman's rights without the concern for the life of the child is bad for both sides, while the proper concern for woman may secure the child's safety and allow the relation to be well protected.¹⁷

The perspective of noticing the importance of relation is based on the concept of anti-individualistic freedom which finds its full realization in love as relating persons according to their will but also involving long-lasting commitments and duties beyond the change of one's will. A person is treated as unique in one's dignity but related to others and finding one's development in these relations. While the individualistic concept of freedom may assume independence from relations in terms of one's fulfillment (freedom from being forced to relations or freedom from being dependent on relations), the personalistic model is based on the concept of freedom as finding its goal in love (freedom to being related to others in a deep sense of the word). John Paul II identified the essence of love in relatedness which at first seems as limiting one's freedom, but on a deeper level shows itself to be connected with the mature kind of freedom. In his homily given in Jasna Góra during the first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979 he claimed that such an example of freedom as fulfilled in love is clearly shown in the experience of mothers taking care of a sick child whose care is not treated as limitation but as affirmation of liberty.¹⁸ It looks like his example from the homily makes a strong argument for such an understanding of freedom by the whole humanity but in order to make it understandable and persuasive, the humanity needs to seriously take into consideration the female experience of relatedness to a child. This does

¹⁷ M. SZCZEPKOWSKA: "Pro life znaczy pro love [Pro-life means pro-love]." *Imago. Czasopismo Fundacji Pro Humana Vita*, no. 4 (4) 2011, pp. 41–43, p. 41.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II: *Homilia wygłoszona w czasie Mszy świętej na Jasnej Górze, 4.06.1979* [audio document]. In: *Musicie być mocni. I Pielgrzymka Jana Pawła II do Polski 2–10 czerwca 1979*. Warszawa 2005. CD-ROM.

not only constitute an appeal to acknowledge the special value of pregnancy but it also notices the meaning which the existence of the child, dependent on others in his or her existence, has for the rest of society, namely his or her being a gift to be loved and thus allowing others to fulfill their freedom and realize their humanity.

From all the above we may draw a conclusion that the child has a right to be loved, which gives the proper meaning to all other particular rights, while the mother has a right to be recognized in her socially significant difference from the father (besides the obvious and very important overall similarity and exchangeability of the parents' roles). From the theoretical discussion we may then follow on to the practical application of these findings. The social teaching of the Catholic Church included such directives as it is shown in John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem exercens*: "Experience confirms that there must be a social re-evaluation of the mother's role, of the toil connected with it, and of the need that children have for care, love and affection in order that they may develop into responsible, morally and religiously mature and psychologically stable persons. It will redound to the credit of society to make it possible for a mother — without inhibiting her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination, and without penalizing her as compared with other women — to devote herself to taking care of her children and educating them in accordance with their needs, which vary with age. [...] It is a fact that in many societies women work in nearly every sector of life. But it is fitting that they should be able to fulfil their tasks in accordance with their own nature, without being discriminated against and without being excluded from jobs for which they are capable, but also without lack of respect for their family aspirations and for their specific role in contributing, together with men, to the good of society. The true advancement of women requires that labour should be structured in such a way that women do not have to pay for their advancement by abandoning what is specific to them and at the expense of the family, in which women as mothers have an irreplaceable role."¹⁹

The document does not suggest restricting women's activity to the private sphere. Instead, it tries to point our attention to the value of women's specificity in making clear the central value of human relatedness, personhood, and love, which need to be respected and valued by everyone, and that is why the female role of mothers (whether joined with their professional careers outside home or not) calls for special recognition by society and its various institutions which may let women choose how they want to contribute their femininity to the rest of society. Paying due value to

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II: *Encyclical "Laborem exercens,"* no. 19.

a child and to the mothers (and fathers!) who witness and embody the social value of acceptance of persons may result in various pro-family policies which may include flexible work possibilities, opportunities for combining work outside the home with family duties, promoting long and paid maternity leaves as well as institutional guarantees for mother's return to work after her leave, the right to stay at home with a sick child guaranteed by law to a mother or father, the social recognition of the significance of work done at home (by a woman or a man) while taking care of family members (which could be expressed by counting this work into GDP and for the purpose of retirement), and accepting the family (not the individual) as the basic unit for taxation and social programs.²⁰ Propositions and solutions of this kind need to be consulted with parents and in their practical application decided freely by both of them as to the sharing of duties. However, as it was mentioned earlier in the argumentation by Helen Alvaré, the sole fact of having a family should make the family tasks a priority for both mother and father if they work professionally. This seems to me a practical conclusion drawn from the fact of perceiving the family, the child, and the relations as central among other social values.

The aim of the article was to present the interconnectedness between the issues of the good of a child, the child as constituting the good in himself or herself, and the common good of society. It juxtaposed the perspective of personalism and individualism; rights versus duties, goods, and commitments, while linking the issues of freedom and love as fulfilment of freedom. The paper discussed these issues by examples of tendencies towards growing individualism noticed by some authors in changes of American divorce laws, the so-called collaborative reproduction, and in the possibilities of genetic engineering. Finally, the article called for the social recognition of the child (and every person) as the common good and pointed to the social attractiveness of the perspective of giftedness of human nature and social relations exemplified especially in the links between the mother and the child, which should be recognized by various institutions of society.

²⁰ Consideration of such policies is to be found in the book by J. H. MATLARY: *Nowy feminizm. Kobieta i świat wartości* [New feminism. Woman and the world of values]. Trans. M. RATAJCZAK. Poznań 2000, pp. 52–56, 115, 138–139.

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ANETA GAWKOWSKA

Children, Common Good, and Society

Summary

The article presents the interconnectedness between the issues of the good of the child, the child as constituting the good in himself or herself, and the common good of society. It juxtaposes the perspective of personalism and individualism, rights versus duties, goods, and commitments, while linking the issues of freedom and love as fulfillment of freedom. The paper discusses these issues by examples of tendencies towards growing individualism noticed by some authors in changes of American divorce laws, the so-called collaborative reproduction, and in the possibilities of genetic engineering. Arguments quoted or discussed are taken from John Paul II, Helen M. Alvaré, Michele M. Schumacher, Mary Ann Glendon, Michael J. Sandel, and Jürgen Habermas. The article calls for the social recognition of the child (and every person) as the common good and points to the social attractiveness of the perspective of giftedness of human nature and social relations exemplified especially in the relation between the mother and the child, which needs to be recognized by various institutions of society.

ANETA GAWKOWSKA

Les enfants, bien commun et société

Résumé

L'article a pour objectif de présenter les corrélations existant entre les éléments liés au bien de l'enfant, à l'enfant en tant que bien et au bien commun en tant que tel. En unissant les questions de la liberté et de l'amour compris comme une réalisation de cette liberté, on y juxtapose la perspective du personnalisme et de l'individualisme, celle des droits de l'individu et de ses devoirs, des biens, des obligations. L'article analyse ces problèmes à l'exemple de la tendance croissante de l'individualisme aperçue par des auteurs particuliers dans le domaine des changements dans le droit de divorce dans la soi-disant procréation assistée ainsi que dans des possibilités éventuelles créées par l'ingénierie génétique. Les arguments cités et décrits ont été relevés des textes des auteurs tels que Jean-Paul II, Helen M. Alvaré, Michele M. Schumacher, Mary Ann Glendon, Michael J. Sandel ou Jürgen Habermas. L'article contient un appel visant à reconnaître socialement l'enfant (et toute personne humaine) comme un bien commun et dirige l'attention sur l'attractivité sociale de la perspective du don et celle de la gratification liée à la nature humaine et aux relations sociales, ce qui est visiblement accentué dans la relation d'une mère avec son enfant, ce qui — de son côté — exige la reconnaissance de la part de différentes institutions sociales.

Mots clés : enfant, bien commun, société, droits, devoirs, dignité, personne, relations sociales

ANETA GAWKOWSKA

I bambini, il bene comune e la società

Sommario

L'articolo tratta le correlazioni tra le questioni del bene del bambino, il bambino come bene e il bene comune in sé. Vi vengono contrapposti la prospettiva del personalismo e dell'individualismo, i diritti dell'individuo e i doveri, i beni, le obbligazioni unendo le tematiche della libertà e dell'amore inteso come soddisfacimento della libertà. Il testo analizza questi problemi sull'esempio della tendenza del crescente individualismo scorta da alcuni autori nel campo dei cambiamenti nel diritto americano sul divorzio, nella cosiddetta "procreazione assistita" e nelle possibilità eventuali create dall'ingegneria genetica. Gli argomenti citati e discussi sono stati attinti da scritti di autori quali Giovanni Paolo II, Helen M. Alvaré, Michele M. Schumacher, Mary Ann Glendon, Michael J. Sandel, o Jürgen Habermas. L'articolo include un appello al riconoscimento sociale del bambino (e di ciascun essere umano) come bene comune, e fa notare l'attrattiva sociale della prospettiva del dono e del donare correlata alla natura umana ed alle relazioni sociali, cosa che è fortemente messa in evidenza nella relazione tra la madre e il bambino e che richiede il riconoscimento da parte di diverse istituzioni sociali.

Parole chiave: bambino, bene comune, società, diritti, doveri, dignità, persona, relazioni sociali