

Aleksander Bobko

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0609-6982>

University of Rzeszów, Poland

## **An axiological approach to the problem of sexual education**

### **Abstract**

Among all sorts of technological and cultural breakthroughs affecting our civilisation which we have witnessed over the last few decades, the changes regarding the most intimate spheres of human nature, those of sexuality, may have passed unnoticed. A series of changes in social norms triggered after 1968 resulted in a situation which, as far as sexuality is concerned, can be described as a real „controversy over human existence”. This paper will briefly outline some of the characteristics of the social changes that have occurred over the past fifty years and which have had a significant impact on the understanding of the nature of sexuality. Then, two apparently competing visions of man, the traditional and the modernist will be compared. As far as the traditional concept is concerned, reference will be made to the teachings of John Paul II. The modernist approach will be illustrated based on the „Standards for Sexuality Education in Europa” formulated by the World Health Organisation. The objective is not to settle the dispute, but to try and highlight its substance as well as the consequences arising from adopting one or the other of the proposed approaches.

### **Keywords**

Human freedom, love, sexuality, John Paul II, WHO “Standards for Sexuality Education in Europa”.

Among all the kinds of technological and cultural breakthroughs affecting our civilization which we have witnessed over the last few decades, the changes regarding the most intimate spheres of human nature, those of sexuality, may have passed unnoticed. For ages, eroticism regarded as something impure, was restricted to the most private sphere of life. Consequently, tackling any problems arising in this area fell to the closest members of the family and was based on intuition and hints discreetly passed on from generation to generation rather than on sound knowledge. In the public sphere, eroticism and sexuality were considered somewhat of a taboo. From time to time some bold works of art or extravagant forms of behaviour brought up the subject. However this gave rise to embarrassment rather than inspiring a serious, public debate.

The situation has changed dramatically over the last fifty years. 1968 triggered a series of changes in social norms when more and more phenomena which used to be shyly covered in the private sphere became subject to open discussion. However, in Poland and elsewhere in Europe, conducting a sensible debate on sexuality encounters considerable difficulties. The issue is almost automatically reduced to the problem of the rights of sexual minorities which leads to a kind of ideological war involving political and emotional polarization of opinions, thus limiting the space for a reasonable exchange of arguments. Instead of attempts at dialogue and working towards constructive solutions, trenches are being dug and barricades set up, with advocates of tradition on one side and „missionaries of progress” wooing people with visions of sexual liberation on the other.

The question about the place and role of sexuality in human life is, in the light of scientific findings and cultural breakthroughs, a matter of utmost importance. The new practice guidelines, especially those connected with the upbringing of the new generation, shouldn't rest on emotions but on in-depth examination of the secrets of human nature. In my view, this problem is so important for human freedom that, avoiding unnecessary pathos, one can say that in the area related to sexuality there is taking place, to quote Józef Tischner's phrase, a virtual „controversy over human existence.”<sup>1</sup>

This paper will briefly outline some of the characteristics of the social changes that have occurred over the past fifty years and which have had a significant impact on the understanding of the nature of sexuality. Then, two apparently competing visions of man, the traditional and the modernist will be compared.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Tischner, *Spór o istnienie świata*, Kraków 1998.

As far as the traditional concept is concerned, reference will be made to the teachings of John Paul II. The modernist approach will be illustrated based on the „Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe” formulated by the World Health Organization. The objective is not to settle the dispute, but to try and highlight its substance as well as the consequences arising from adopting one or the other of the proposed approaches.

## 1. Changes in attitudes towards sexuality

We seem to underestimate the revolutionary impact of the discovery of effective contraception. Throughout centuries, the belief that the aim of sexual desire is procreation making it possible to ensure the continuation of the species was justified by the relationship between a sexual intercourse and its potential effect (the conception of a human being). The list of techniques designed to counteract this inevitable relation is long and varies, depending on times and cultures. It was, however, modern medicine that discovered and, more importantly, spread easy to use and reliable contraception on a massive scale. This new „technique” resulted in rapid changes in the mentality. Over the life span of one generation people have become aware that sexual life can be enjoyed regardless of the desire of having one’s own progeny. What for ages constituted a unity, has been severed to create two worlds completely independent of each other.

This new, but real dualism has been strengthened by the widespread acceptance of abortion as well as by another new invention, that of the technique of in vitro fertilisation. Without entering into discussion about moral dilemmas concerning the application of the latter, it may be said that it has been used for over forty years to reinforce our conviction about the authority of man over procreation. Likewise, in the secularised culture prevailing in contemporary Europe, the notion that sexuality is an autonomous sphere of human life and that it is permitted to have sex simply for one’s own pleasure has been established once and for all. Whereas the link between sexuality and procreation remains obvious, the desire to have offspring is deemed to be independent of engaging in sexual activity.

It is worth noting that an institution as conservative as the Catholic Church has also changed its teachings on parenting education and sexuality significantly. The Catechism states that „for just reasons, spouses may wish to space

the births of their children.”<sup>2</sup> To exercise such option the Catechism imposes a series of conditions (the type of contraceptives used, the moral aspect of sexual relations as well as the readiness of spouses to have children) but it admits that although the child is a godsend, it is the parents who decide on the number of children and the time of their birth. This means that the relationship between sexuality and procreation is more complex than it had appeared for thousands of years, and people now have a greater impact on what was generally accepted as a twist of fate or a gift of Providence.

Another serious phenomenon which has a huge impact on the sexuality of contemporary man is a relatively easy access to pornography. This somewhat ignored phenomenon is sparking interest among researchers and could, for its part, be a matter of separate discussion. Here, however, it is enough to state the obvious: access to pornography may entirely distort an understanding of one’s own sexuality and is especially dangerous at a young age. It contributes to treating sexuality as an instrument, hindering or even making it impossible to associate it with higher spheres of the mind. Complementary to this process is the erotic content ubiquitous in all sorts of advertising to which we are involuntarily exposed all the time.

All of this leads to a radical change in the perception of sexuality. In the past, it had an aura of mystery and intimacy which, in a natural way, developed a feeling of modesty and stimulated some form of self-control although it often turned into excessive distrust and merciless rigour, associating erotic love only with sin and scandal. Modern trends, however, push sexuality into the structure of cheap commercialism, encouraging people to lose their inhibitions based on the assumption that the principal, or perhaps, the only goal of sexuality is making our life more pleasant and more attractive. Therefore it is hardly surprising that there emerge such worrying phenomena as the falling age of sexual initiation among young people or an increase in certain pathologies such as human trafficking, sexual harassment and paedophilia.

The overall conclusion is that in the last fifty years the cultural framework within which man derived fulfillment from his own sexuality has been radically transformed. Although for some people this could be a source of hope for a bright future, it constitutes a great danger, especially for the younger generation. This problem touches the core of human freedom and the question

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Section Two (The Ten Commandments), Chapter Two, Article 6/2368 [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM) (3.11.2020).

as to whether throwing off traditional restraints leads to the liberation of man or, on the contrary, „free sex” clears the path for his enslavement, becomes essential. It is around this issue that the actual dispute over human existence turns.

From what has already been said, it may be concluded that what the world needs now is some kind of wise sexual education, because an approach to the problems related to sexuality based only on intuition, as it was in the past, may be an inadequate response to the challenges and threats that we face today. Eroticism, via advertising, the Internet and art has entered our everyday lives and is here to stay. Yet, the question relating to the values and the vision of the human being upon which sexual education should be based, remains open.

## **2. The concept of man in the WHO „Standards for sexual education in Europe”**

The World Health Organization seems to have come to the expectations for a modern system of sexual education by promoting a document „Standards for sexual education in Europe.”<sup>3</sup> Its authors declare a broad and holistic approach to the problem. They treat sexuality as an important aspect of being human, concentrating not only on sexual intercourse itself but taking into consideration other aspects of sexuality. Education based on these Standards aims to “helps children and young people to develop essential skills to enable them to self-determine their sexuality and their relationships at the various stages of development. It supports them in becoming more empowered in order to live out their sexuality and their partnerships in a fulfilling and responsible manner.”<sup>4</sup> In this important, preliminary statement, three elements appear which are consistently developed later in the document.

To begin with, sexuality is considered an area in which a person can exercise his self-determination. Here one can observe a reference to the concept of man which predominates in modern philosophy: the essential characteristics constituting human beings have not been predetermined by nature, but result

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<sup>3</sup> The document is cited from the website: [https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/WHO\\_BZgA\\_Standards\\_English.pdf](https://www.bzga-whocc.de/fileadmin/user_upload/WHO_BZgA_Standards_English.pdf) (3.11.2020).

<sup>4</sup> „Standards, p. 5.

from their freedom of choice which makes it possible to explore, in an autonomous way, their potential opportunities, thus creating their identities. Sexuality seems to be a good example in illustrating such a concept of man. On the one hand, it comprises a wide spectrum of factors<sup>5</sup> which determine the identity of a person. On the other hand, however, man's identity and his actual behavior result from „self-determination”, ie a complex process by which, in the most autonomous way, man specifies and expresses his preferences, objectives and social roles. Therefore, education should aim at making young people aware of the different options that are open to them as well as preparing them for autonomous decisions regarding their sexuality. The idea of human rights plays a role here too, as „sexual rights”<sup>6</sup> are defined with reference to fundamental rights in the sphere of politics. In this context it is hardly surprising that the term „family” is not used in this discourse – sexuality is an individual thing and social relationships are fading into the background. This is confirmed by the fact that in certain countries marriage preparation classes „can hardly be called <sexuality education> initiatives.”<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the WHO document points to the fact that experiencing sexuality is designed to give pleasure. This, on the one hand is obvious, as eroticism is a beautiful sphere of life particularly rich in positive and intense feelings and emotions. Nonetheless, should pleasure, in this context, be the most fundamental element influencing our behavior? While reading the Standards, one gets the impression that this is the case: that it all comes down to equip and empower “children and young people with information, skills and positive values to understand and enjoy their sexuality.”<sup>8</sup> In this sense, sexual education changes into a subtle and complex „instruction manual”. The purpose of the game is to rediscover and confirm one's identity while achieving maximum satisfaction. The authors seem to believe that pursuing this individual objective may have wider positive implications as the satisfaction of particular persons grows, thus:

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<sup>5</sup> Let us recall here part of the definition of sexuality formulated by the WHO: “Sexuality is a central aspect of being human throughout life encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships”, [https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual\\_health/sh\\_definitions/en/](https://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/sexual_health/sh_definitions/en/) (3.11.2020).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. „Standards”, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> „Standards”, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> „Standards”, p. 20.

„It enables them to make choices which enhance the quality of their lives and contribute to a compassionate and just society.”<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, it is emphasized that, while experiencing their sexuality, people should be guided by a sense of responsibility, and raising awareness of this aspect is an important task of education. This responsibility is not only closely tied up with our own health as sexual life involves risks which also extend to other persons – sexual exploitation and endangering their health is impermissible. Moreover, eroticism is a sphere in which empathy and tenderness are very important because it is easy to cause great harm to somebody. Apart from natural sensitivity, all this also requires knowledge, therefore sexual education becomes crucial. In the absence of any other restraints in the domain of sexuality, responsibility for oneself and for others seems to be the only device capable of bringing the dynamics of sexual desires under control. Therefore, one of the major challenges of sexual education is to make young people aware of the problems and to provide them with „technical knowledge”<sup>10</sup> which will enable them to lead a full life in a responsible way.

### 3. The Christian vision of sexuality

Although the Christian concept of man has evolved over two thousand years and is commented on in countless meaningful treatises, it is not, as is often assumed, a monolithic structure “cast in stone”. There are also many topical documents presenting problem of sexuality and its education from the perspective of Christian anthropology.<sup>11</sup> As the limited space here does not allow for a wider approach to the subject, I will concentrate on the work „Love and responsibility” by Karol Wojtyła. Published in 1960 it sets out deep reflections on the nature of man from the perspective of sexuality. In my opinion, Wojtyła’s

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<sup>9</sup> „Standards”, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> An example of focusing on „technical issues” is „Sexuality education matrix” which provokes major controversy by, for instance, recommending masturbation in the education of 0 – 4 year old toddlers. (“Standards”, p. 38).

<sup>11</sup> Let us indicate only a few very important examples of such documents: The Pontifical Council For The Family, *The Truth And Meaning Of Human Sexuality. Guidelines For Education Within The Family*; Sacred Congregation For Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love Outlines for Sex Education*; Congregation for Catholic Education, *Male and female he created them*.

point of view sends out an important message concerning the principles upon which the debate on sexuality should be based.

Human experience was always at the centre of Wojtyła's philosophical considerations as "the experience of man; this experience, which man has of himself, is the richest and apparently the most complex of all experiences accessible to him."<sup>12</sup> He begins his analysis of sexual ethics by indicating the two values which distinguish man from other creatures – the ability to reason and freedom. He strongly emphasizes the meaning of the latter: „Thanks to the fact that man – a person – possesses free will, he is also a master of himself.”<sup>13</sup> This sense of freedom, combined with an awareness of one's wish and will which nobody else can appropriate, gives man specific sovereignty over himself and the world around him.

Reflections on the implications of the strength that man derives from his free will bring to the foreground the question of "usage". Eroticism opens up an extremely attractive space, offering many opportunities to enjoy the good things of life by making the most of one's natural potential and by intimate interactions with another human being. Freedom favors the use of all that is available in a natural way. Here Wojtyła points to the fundamental truth that emerges from „the natural moral order”: "Whenever the person is an object of action in your conduct, remember that you may not treat him merely as a means to an end, as a tool, but [you must] take into account that person himself has or at least should have his end."<sup>14</sup> This paraphrase of Kant's categorical imperative underlines the fact that sexuality is not entirely autonomous in the tide of human affairs but is part of a greater whole. Wojtyła demonstrates this kind of relationship using the concept of „the traditional moral order”. What is important here is a change of attitude towards the other person who shouldn't be treated as an instrument (a means, an object) but as an independent end in their own right. This belief expresses more than the sense of responsibility for the safety of another person – it implies a particular type of affirmation of values incarnate in them.

Thereby the status of the pleasure principle is changed. It is still an important issue – „to use means to experience pleasure”, sexual engagement remains to be

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. The beginning of K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, Springer 1979.

<sup>13</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 11.

seen as “a proper source of variously colored pleasure or even delight.”<sup>15</sup> It is a serious mistake, however, to consider “pleasure alone as the only or the greatest good, to which everything else in the action of man and of human society should be subordinated.”<sup>16</sup> Such a conclusion has far-reaching consequences resulting in a simplification of the discourse: it can be assumed that pleasure is either the only inter-subjective criterion defining human activities or it is part of a broad spectrum of values where experiencing pleasure is not the most important. The Christian vision of humanity is certainly in favour of the latter.

The consequence of this vision is a different understanding of social relations. Erotic experiences are ephemeral and the beauty of a sexual relationship is focused on the moment whose intensity seems to touch the infinity of existence, but the spell soon breaks. This may lead to treating the essence of mutual relations as a fleeting emotion, a pleasure-giving but non-obliging partnership. The Christian understanding of sexuality as part of a bigger whole introduces the notion of love to eroticism. Wojtyła expresses it using the formula of „positive personalistic norm”: „the person is a kind of good to which only love constitutes the proper and fully-mature relation. And this positive content of the personalistic norm is precisely what the commandment to love brings out.”<sup>17</sup> Every person carries inside themselves great quantities of goodness that cannot be touched by a relationship which is reduced to a kind of contract and partnership, even if this contract is based on respect and is mutually beneficial. The key to the depth of humanity is love. But how does one talk about love in the commercialised world?

The Christian message is clear: “For love can survive only as a unity in which the mature “we” is manifested; it will not survive as an arrangement of two egotisms in the framework of which two “I’s” are manifested. Love has a structure of interpersonal community.”<sup>18</sup> Here we are touching the unique „paradox of love” – on the one hand man, the subject of love, is graced with unique dignity, on the other hand this dignity comes to light and materialises as a gift for the other, beloved person. This is what gives love its stable structure of „interpersonal community”.

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<sup>15</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 71.

To better understand the remarkable potential contained in the Christian message, let us look at the thought of Benedict the Sixteenth expressed in his encyclical „God is Love”. Here the Pope juxtaposes a term „eros” indicating „wordly” love and „agape” referring to love grounded in Christian faith. He writes: „this word expresses the experience of a love which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.”<sup>19</sup> God’s love for humanity affects relations between people and develops strong bonds of friendship. Eros, the Greek god of love portrayed, for instance, in Plato’s Symposium, was a force which constantly drove man upwards. Yet, on the way to securing everlasting fulfilment in a world of absolute goodness, beauty and truth, all prior experiences, including important or beloved people passed into oblivion. Christian love, however, contrary to our natural egoism and the tendency to focus on our own aims and ambitions, induces us to be open to one another and to try and achieve happiness and perfection by caring for others, especially the most needy.

Grounded in religion this „radically unnatural” concept of altruistic love dedicated to the other person over centuries exerted a considerable influence on European political philosophy and social practice including the way of understanding sexuality. Although religious arguments are no longer used in the public domain, the „altruistic concept of love” can be found in many important ideas and institutions such as human rights or the welfare state. Do the Christian vision of man and the Christian concept of human love still have a place in a reflection on the phenomenon of sexuality? Does Wojtyła’s message appeal to us: Spousal love, which bears in itself the interior need to give one’s person to another person – a need crystallized between a woman and a man also in bodily self-giving and in full sexual intercourse – possesses its natural greatness. The measure of this greatness is the value of the person who gives himself, and not only the degree of sensual-sexual delight linked to this selfgiving.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, art. 6, quoted from: [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html) (3.11.2020).

<sup>20</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. G. Ignatik, Boston 2013, p. 110–111.

#### 4. The main points of contention

The juxtaposition of the two concepts of man in the context of the discourse on sexuality as presented above is of a general and even abstract character. So let's try to be more specific about the differences between them and see how they impact sexuality education. We will concentrate on two issues: chastity or sexual abstinence and the understanding of parenthood and procreation.

While proceeding to elicit the axiological differences it is worth noting that these two distinct anthropological points of view have one thing in common – the affirmation of personal freedom. Both Christian tradition and modernist concepts perceive man through the prism of freedom which is considered to be a fundamental principle. The debate revolves around how freedom should be used by humanity to their advantage.

##### Chastity

An attempt at a sensible discussion about sexual abstinence encounters considerable difficulties in the contemporary world and the very word „chastity” seems to be anachronistic, or even antiquated. It seems to have fallen into disuse akin to „telegraph” or „knight's armour”. Has chastity really lost its traditional meaning? The WHO Standards are unequivocal in this respect – although some sexual education programmes „focus primarily or exclusively on abstaining from sexual intercourse before marriage, known as “how to say no” or “abstinence only” programmes”, in the authors' opinion such programmes „have no positive effects on sexual behavior”<sup>21</sup> This opinion is justified by the results of surveys carried out in the USA.<sup>22</sup> Discussing this kind of argumentation would imply entering into a sociological discourse, which I would like to refrain from doing here. What is important for our considerations is that the above opinion concurs with the adopted anthropological concept: if the aim of sexual engagement is obtaining satisfaction and pleasure in a responsible way, then abstinence presents itself as something illogical. The only possible argument in favour of some kind of self-restraint could be recommendations similar to those offered by a dietician – give up or cut down on eating some foods to prevent indigestion.

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<sup>21</sup> „Standards”, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> P.K. Kohler, L.E. Manhart, W.E. Lafferty, *Abstinence-only and comprehensive sex education and the initiation of sexual activity and teen pregnancy*, ”Journal of Adolescent Health” (2008).

Within the framework of this kind of axiology it is difficult to pinpoint the appropriate moment for sexual initiation. Hence it is recommended to gradually introduce sexuality as a source of satisfaction starting from the preschool stage. The moment of becoming sexually active remains an individual decision: no restrictions are indicated here apart from making young people aware of the consequences that their decisions might have.

The Christian conviction that love is the foundation of human relations changes the way of looking at the problem of chastity. Love entails giving – to love means to offer oneself to the other person. Eroticism opens a space in which the vocation to love can be realised. Offering oneself requires preparation, an appropriate environment, it cannot be done carelessly and anywhere because it is easy to squander the gift. This is connected with self-control, introduces an element of self-discipline and, as a consequence, abstinence. The giving of oneself to the beloved person involves some kind of inner wealth being the fruit of one's efforts and experience, not only one's inborn talents. These attributes are conveyed by the traditional virtue of chastity, as only in relations between pure people can sexuality reach its full potential. Sensual pleasure plays an important role here but is neither the only factor nor the central factor – it is a moment of love and of the „great mystery of life” in general.

What has been said so far may seem too grandiloquent and unrealistic, especially in the context of modern times permeated by cheap eroticism or even pornography. However, the question arises whether sexual education shouldn't sensitize young people to the existence of a higher, more sublime level of spiritual emotions. Reaching out to this ideal has much potential to offer as it opens the door to a beautiful, organized life. The very awareness that there exists a dimension exceeding sensual pleasures raises questions about the implications of sexual engagement and its deeper meaning. This may lead further to the reflection that self-discipline and abstinence make sense. Sexual education which does not even touch this dimension seems to be extremely superficial, reducing the most intimate interpersonal relationships to instructions on how to use your body, changing eroticism into a callous mechanism.

## Procreation

The line taken by the authors of the „Standards” that „sexuality education is much more than giving facts about reproduction and the prevention of disease”<sup>23</sup> is understandable. What is surprising, however, is that none of the eleven aims of the sexual education calling itself holistic, contains such words as procreation, family or parenthood. Only point 10 mentions that sexuality makes it possible to build relationships based on equality, mutual understanding and respect. Thus it is confirmed that according to the „Standards”, sexuality is a completely autonomous sphere of human life and making intelligent use of eroticism is a value in its own right. The transmission of human life and building a family are activities falling outside the scope of sexual education. They are discussed in a different context, often using legal nomenclature related to human rights.

It is particularly noteworthy that when talking about procreation, modern European language uses the term „reproductive rights”, which has replaced such words as motherhood, fatherhood or parenthood in the public discourse. This illustrates how consistently the modernistic concept of man is being promoted. According to it, man is free to exploit, in a rational way, the potential with which he is endowed by nature. Procreation is perceived in the same perspective: willingness to have children is my autonomous decision. If I take it, I will exercise one of my numerous rights. I also have the right to expect that I can take such a decision regardless of my gender, sexual preferences, family status, fortune etc. Otherwise it would entail exclusion and discrimination.

The Christian vision of parenthood is totally different. Procreation is an integral part of human sexuality and through it the vocation of giving oneself to the other is materialized. Eroticism initiates the process of building relations with the beloved person and procreation is the actual realization of the mutual gift of two people. This is the foundation of a lasting communion emanating positive emotions to other people. This communion of love and gift creates not only attractive possibilities of a perfect fulfillment, but shows the way to a life in freedom. It is obvious that freedom does not imply here the noncommittal liberty of doing anything provided we do not harm others, but is closely linked to „long-term” responsibility.

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<sup>23</sup> „Standards”, p. 36.

## 5. An attempt to arrive at a conclusion

It is clear from what has been said that the dispute about how sexuality should be understood is not just an abstract academic discourse, but it translates into specific recommendations and life models determining personal and social relations. In this sense it turns into a real controversy over human existence, over the understanding of freedom and its practice. The main point of contention in this discourse is the question of the preferred model of a family.

The traditional family model is a logical completion of Christian understanding of the nature of man and his sexuality – it is permanent love that creates a space in which man can realize his vocation to live in freedom. However, the message is emerging from the WHO Standards that sexuality is an autonomous component of human nature and it is essential to define correctly one's sexual identity so as to develop relations with others accordingly in order to achieve maximum satisfaction. Thus the acceptance of partnerships which should enjoy the same rights is obvious. Hence sexual education should foster tolerance and acceptance of sexual diversity, because in the past there was a single dominant model and otherness was veiled or condemned. The efforts to amend this state of affairs have become a kind of „mission” of the Standards' authors and in order to pursue this objective effectively, these authors advice that education should be started from birth.

In the traditional concept, the fact that part of the population has different sexual preferences is accepted and homosexuality or transsexualism – albeit rare – have always been present in everyday life. Unfortunately, sexual minorities were in the past, but are also today the target of social exclusion or even persecution. In spite of this educating for tolerance is not the basic aim of sexual education, but is part of a general culture which should teach kindness, empathy and respect towards all forms of otherness. The primary aims of sexual education should be those of developing the ability to love, and the preparation for the building of a stable community based on love and openness to the acceptance of progeny.

It is difficult to try and pinpoint the specific argument which would settle this dispute. Both concepts are based on the underlying principle of freedom – it is man who chooses the path he will follow and the way he will use his rights. Being confronted with such a choice, however, involves a risk. Apparently attractive means of liberating people may lead to slavery.

Nevertheless, based on the conducted analyses, the substance of the dispute about human existence is clear: on the one hand we have the concept reduced

to hedonism and utilitarianism and on the other hand the concept which opens man to a kind of „greater good”; extreme individualism (singles’ culture) versus a vocation to create a community based on mutual giving and receiving.

Since the notion of freedom does not provide a conclusive argument in favour of the right choice, it is the history of our civilization which gives us some indications as to where the paths traced by either of the above proposals may lead. The culture of Western Europe which is based largely on Christianity – apart from some dark pages in its history and pathologies regarding family life – is a pledge that the axiology which it advocates creates a friendly space for freedom. The modernistic approach, in turn, may seem an enticing promise of extending freedom. However, it is, in fact, a kind of social experiment whose actual impact may be hard to foresee.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> A novelty which seems to extend the potential of one’s sexuality is digisexuality which involves satisfying sexual needs using digital entities. Once eroticism is reduced to getting sexual pleasure, there is no reason to counteract such trends.

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