

III. SOCIAL THEOLOGY

FAMILY AND ECONOMY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

ADAM ZADROGA*

ABSTRACT. The aim of the article is to show the interdependencies that occur between the family and the economic function it undertakes. The author points out and describes the mutual relations between the marriage and family bond, and economic conditions. The healthy state of the conjugal and family bond is generally reflected in the economic well-being of that particular community of people, and in a macro dimension, it provides a strong foundation for the whole society and its economy. On the other hand, economic processes and factors that create an economic and social environment of the family determine the way it functions as a household and also affect (at least indirectly) its inner harmony. The article shows not just the scale and depth of the connections between the family and the economic function it performs, but also how important these connections are in a moral and social sphere.

Keywords: family, economy, economic function of the family, marriage and family bond, human capital

1. Introduction

The family is the foundation of social life. The Church emphasizes that the family is the first and fundamental structure for the so called “human ecology”¹. Among the many specific functions that the family has to fulfil is its economic role. The subject of the article² are the problems of marriage and the

* Assistant Professor, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Faculty of Theology, POLAND.
E-mail: adam.zadroga@kul.pl.

¹ John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981), no. 42; John Paul II, *Encyclical Letter Centesimus annus* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), no. 32.

² This article is based on the research effects published by the author in Polish: Adam Zadroga, “Funkcja ekonomiczna w życiu rodziny,” in *Rodzina jako Kościół domowy*, ed. Antoni Tomkiewicz, Włodzimierz Wieczorek (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2010), 593–602.

family in this context. The aim is to show the interdependencies that occur between the family and the economic function it undertakes. Author points out and describes the mutual relations between the marriage and family bond, and economic conditions. The article tries to answer the following questions: How important is a healthy and strong family for socio-economic life? How do certain economic factors affect the functioning of marriage and the family? Which economic and social phenomena pose a threat to the family, and which ones support and strengthen the marriage and family bond?

2. Importance of the family for the socio-economic life

The family plays an important role in a macroeconomic dimension. Speaking more broadly, it is the pillar of the whole social life. Hence, in the first place, it is worth emphasising its more general importance for society and its development, which is not directly connected with economy. The family makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the good of society. What is more, a healthy family should always be the measure, a point of reference for all kinds of social trends. A society built on a family scale is the best guarantee against drifting off course into extreme social models based either on individualism or collectivism, because the family is the place in which the person is always at the centre of attention as an end and never as a means³. "Every social model that intends to serve the good of man must not overlook the centrality and social responsibility of the family"⁴. This is particularly true in the case of weak and vulnerable individuals who are at risk of social marginalization. It is the family (supported by welfare institutions), rather than any other institutions, that supports and protects those weak ones – from school children to the elderly no longer able to take care of themselves, from the disabled to the sick⁵.

Therefore, "it is patently clear that the good of persons and the proper functioning of society are closely connected with the healthy state of conjugal and family life"⁶. This is because "without families that are strong in their communion and stable in their commitment, peoples grow weak. In the family, moral values are taught starting from the very first years of life, the spiritual heritage of the religious community and the cultural legacy of the nation are transmitted. In the family one learns social responsibility and solidarity"⁷.

³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 213, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 214.

⁵ Stefano Zamagni, "Rodzina jako podmiot gospodarczy," *Spoleczeństwo* 13, no. 2 (2003): 231.

⁶ The Second Vatican Council, *The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et spes* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), no. 47.

⁷ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 213.

In economy, the importance of the family for economic development has been pointed out by G. Becker – a leading economist of the so called Chicago School. Becker has recognised the category of “human capital” and pointed out that the standard of living in a country is ultimately dependent on the development and use of what is the essence of “human capital” of that country, namely health, abilities, knowledge and skills of its people. In this sense, “human capital” is the most valuable “resource” for the entire economic system, as it enables the proper functioning and future of this system⁸.

In this context, the family turns out to be the unique foundation and indispensable source of “human capital”. The family, fulfilling its procreative function, is both the producer of human capital and its first investor⁹. Apart from caring for physical growth of its members, the family is also the “first and irreplaceable school of social life (...). The family is the cradle of and the most effective tool for humanisation and personalisation of the society: it cooperates fully and in the only proper way in the building of world making life truly human, in particular by guarding, preserving, and transmitting virtues and “values”¹⁰. The family is the first place where the future participants of economic and social life receive their education and formation. It is the place where children should be taught the proper attitude towards work, acquire interpersonal skills, and exercise an attitude of commitment and dedication. These personality traits are not only vital in today’s labour market, but they are also a precondition for a healthy and sustainable economic development¹¹.

Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* states that “the future of world and of the Church passes through the family”¹². To justify and confirm this thesis of the Holy Father, it is enough to consider the issue of increasing negative demographical trends. This shows how important a well-functioning family is for society and economy. The family is, after all, the main source of “renewal” of society. The problems in fulfilling this mission bring about serious consequences for social and economic life, as evidenced by the effects of present demographic changes that negatively affect the solidarity-based model of pension system¹³.

⁸ Gary Becker, “Znaczenie kapitału ludzkiego,” *Spółeczeństwo* 7, no. 1–2 (1997): 51–52.

⁹ Pontifical Council for the Family, “Gospodarka dla rodziny,” *Spółeczeństwo* 7, no. 1–2 (1997): 239.

¹⁰ *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*, no. 43.

¹¹ Jerzy Gocko, “O ekonomię w służbie rodziny,” in *Człowiek – miłość – rodzina. „Humanie vitae” po 30 latach*, ed. Janusz Nagórny, Krzysztof Jeżyna (Lublin: RW KUL, 1999), 328; Adam Zadroga, “Rodzina jako wspólnota osób wychowująca do pracy,” in *Wychowanie w rodzinie chrześcijańskiej. W 25. rocznicę adhortacji apostołskiej Jana Pawła II „Familiaris consortio”. Przesłanie moralne Kościoła*, ed. Tadeusz Zadykowicz (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2008), 167–175.

¹² *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio*, no. 86.

¹³ Zamagni, “Rodzina jako podmiot gospodarczy,” 230.

“It is now increasingly recognized that demographic dynamism is a necessary, yet not sufficient condition for economic development. The widespread belief that a high population growth is a cause of weak economic growth is now being abandoned. Having said that, it is true that population growth can place a significant burden on a country’s development and that some countries may experience temporary difficulties because of it. However, there is no country that would have growing economy in the period of demographic stagnation”¹⁴.

Apart from the key importance of family for demographic trends, another contemporary issue which shows a significant influence of the marriage and family bond on social and economic life is the crisis of conjugal life and growing problem of divorce.

“Family breakdown constitutes not only a serious threat to the development of spouses and their children, but also weakens the social structure and threatens the social order and the democratic systems. Additionally, the direct and indirect costs of family breakdown in terms of a country’s economy and its security are enormous. These costs are connected with high expenditure on social welfare and legal scrutiny systems. In many cases, a country’s economy gets distorted up to its critical point. (...) The family breakdown also results in the destruction of ‘human capital’ of its members, which, in the long run, always translates into real material costs”¹⁵.

Analysing the importance of the family in strictly economic terms, it is possible to identify at least two specific functions that the family has in economic processes. First, the family plays an important role in the mechanism of linking and redistribution of work income, which means that it collects and distributes the income of its members, in this way restoring equality. In this sense, the family is seen as a strong factor in social amortisation. Furthermore, the family acts as a sort of “filter” between the individual and the market in terms of consumer choices. This means that the consumer preferences of the individual are not usually a result of his/her personal, rational thinking. Instead, they reflect a set of values, customs, and lifestyles of the family to which this individual belongs. This means that it is the family that becomes the typical consumer¹⁶.

¹⁴ Gocko, “O ekonomię w służbie rodziny,” 330; Jean Didier Lecaillon, “Społeczne i ekonomiczne znaczenie rodziny,” *Społeczeństwo* 7, no. 1-2 (1997): 35.

¹⁵ Gocko, “O ekonomię w służbie rodziny,” 330–331.

¹⁶ Zamagni, “Rodzina jako podmiot gospodarczy,” 231–232.

3. Influence of family's economic function on marriage and family life

Sociological studies clearly indicate that the quality and stability of marriage and family life is determined not only by personality traits and certain demographic conditions, but also by a number of financial and economic variables¹⁷. In Poland, which has been undergoing political transformation, the most important factors heavily influencing the situation of families include: an increase in the cost of living, high dependency ratio and unemployment. These trends have a negative influence on the functioning of Polish families, which can be seen, among other things, in: low and unfavourable structure of consumption (most of the household budget is spent on food and housing fees), poor housing conditions and relatively poor provision with durable goods. Poor families quite often save on food. This dramatic situation is caused by ever-increasing housing maintenance costs as well as by increased costs of some health care and education services accompanied by a relatively slow increase in remuneration¹⁸.

What influence does it all have on the daily functioning of the marriage and family in a human and a social and moral dimension? How does it affect certain missions that the spouses and family are obliged to fulfil? Difficult economic situation of some Polish families is seen in the problem of child malnutrition (a reproach to the whole society), and in the fact that many families and entire social groups are living below the minimum subsistence level, which has a negative bearing on their health¹⁹. This translates into biological degradation of these people and it takes its toll on their lifestyles. A hard-economic situation of the family (especially in the case of unemployment) is very often a source of internal conflicts primarily between the spouses. It also creates the temptation for them to force minor children to take up employment. The stressful atmosphere in the family often results in pathological behaviours, including alcohol abuse and physical or psychological violence²⁰.

Lack of sufficient funds to cover current expenses forces many parents to take up additional work to earn money. As a result, the time they could devote to their family continues to shrink, which, in turn, may have a destructive influence on marriage and family life. First of all, permanent lack of time for the spouse and children makes it impossible to fulfil other fundamental functions of the family,

¹⁷ Gocko, "O ekonomię w służbie rodziny," 332–333.

¹⁸ Pełnomocnik Rządu do spraw Rodziny, *Raport o sytuacji polskich rodzin* (Warszawa: Departament Spraw Rodziny, 1998), 84–88.

¹⁹ Pełnomocnik Rządu do spraw Rodziny, *Raport o sytuacji polskich rodzin*, 82–90.

²⁰ Franciszek Kampka, "Bezrobocie i postawy moralne," *Spółeczeństwo* 5, no. 1 (1995): 64; Andrzej Derdziuk, Adam Zadroga, "Bezrobocie jako wyzwanie dla podmiotów życia społeczno-gospodarczego," *Kontrola Państwowa* 51, no. 6 (2006): 52–61.

apart from the economic one²¹. As a result, “higher levels” of family life are impoverished, overwhelmed by activities aimed at maintaining the family “on the surface”²².

Lack of family time, however, does not only affect people who are somehow forced to take up additional gainful employment. Those with excessive professional aspirations, earning relatively well, but lacking the virtue of temperance are also affected. They often get addicted to work (workaholism), a company becomes their “home”, and needs of their family (their spouse and children) are relegated to lower levels in the hierarchy of life issues. This frequently leads to a gradual “breakdown” of the marriage and family bond and usually ends in divorce. Let me here make a comparison with a garden which, when neglected, simply degenerates²³.

Another problem connected with time is how married couples and families spend their time off work, especially Sundays. It seems that today we can talk about a crisis of spending leisure time. Modern lifestyle characterised by rapid civilization changes, consumerism and increased reliance on technology makes physical and spiritual regeneration more and more difficult. Married couples and families succumb to a fashion of spending free time not so much on being with each other, but rather on being next to each other. This happens when there is no room for a real, emotionally engaging, interpersonal contact between the spouses and between parents and children. It is often easier and more convenient to watch TV together (even during so called “family” dinner), or do “family” shopping in a supermarket. However, spending free time in such a way does not provide us with an opportunity to enter into a meaningful dialogue and to build greater unity and stronger interpersonal ties.

Simple observations, confirmed by scientific studies²⁴, show that modern married couples and families are largely addicted to spending free time in a consumerist way. Booming “leisure industry” and marketing campaigns that create desires, rather than real needs are certainly responsible for such a situation. Advertising is an important mechanism that generates these needs and wants, which is reflected in ever increasing financial needs of marriage and the family. Especially children are vulnerable to the negative effects of advertising. It turns out that some of the marketing effort is just deliberately targeted at children, who, in turn, exert pressure on their parents to make “appropriate” purchases²⁵.

²¹ Zbigniew Tyszką, “Rodzina polska w okresie transformacji społeczno-ustrojowej,” in *Rodzina w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie*, ed. Piotr Kryczka (Lublin: RW KUL, 1997), 117–118.

²² Gocko, “O ekonomię w służbie rodziny,” 334.

²³ Krystian Wojaczek, “Wpływ przemian ekonomicznej funkcji rodziny na więź małżeńską,” *Roczniki Teologiczne* 51, no. 10 (2004): 103–104.

²⁴ Janusz Mariański, *Kościół a współczesne problemy społeczno-moralne. Kwestie wybrane* (Lublin: TN KUL, 1992), 127–128.

²⁵ Maria Braun-Gałkowska, “Reklama telewizyjna a dzieci,” *Edukacja i Dialog* no. 5 (1997): 15–20.

Another serious challenge for the conjugal and family bond is when one of the spouses or sometimes both of them stay abroad for a long time for economic reasons. Research²⁶ leaves no doubt about the consequences of the so called economic migration for married couples and families. Temporary separation of the spouses from each other and of parents from their children

“is not only connected with the oppressive longing for the loved ones, but brings about a number of negative perturbations in the conjugal and parental relations, which often undermine, or even annihilate what is the ultimate aim of the economic function for which this migration has been undertaken. (...) There is no doubt that separation for economic reasons, disrupts the conjugal bond, that is the process of a reciprocal gift of person to person, and consequently has a direct bearing on the conjugal love and bond”²⁷.

Another danger that should be mentioned is connected with the fact that

“the spouses that live far away from one another do not live in a social vacuum. Frequent meetings with others, corresponding to the optimization of the process of emotional attraction, can eventually lead to a situation in which feelings to the spouse will gradually be replaced by feelings to someone else. This is one of the most common causes of marital breakdown among couples that are separated for economic reasons”²⁸.

One way in which the family often fulfils its economic function is running a family business. Let me point out here that it is one of the most effective ways the family can perform its economic role, and it helps to build strong interpersonal relationships, though, of course, potential conflicts are also possible. When running a company together, people share not only “normal” conjugal and family life, but also a concern to build a thriving business. The focus on achieving a common purpose (in this case, the economic one) should help to strengthen the bond

²⁶ *Wyjazdy zarobkowe. Szansa czy zagrożenie? Perspektywa społeczno-moralna*, ed. Konrad Glombik, Piotr Morciniec (Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2005); *Migracja zarobkowa do Włoch. Próba podejścia interdyscyplinarnego*, ed. Dorota Bryk, Bohdan Rożnowski, Maciej Stanisław Zięba (Lublin: Oficyna Wydawnicza EL-Press s.c., 2008).

²⁷ Krystian Wojaczek, “Rodzina w konfrontacji z migracją zarobkową,” in *Wyjazdy zarobkowe. Szansa czy zagrożenie? Perspektywa społeczno-moralna*, ed. Konrad Glombik, Piotr Morciniec (Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2005), 209–210.

²⁸ Wojaczek, “Rodzina w konfrontacji z migracją zarobkową,” 212; Krystian Wojaczek, “Rozłąka z przyczyn ekonomicznych, czy więź małżeńska?” in *Ad plenam unitatem. Księga pamiątkowa dedykowana księdzu arcybiskupowi Alfonsowi Nossolowi Wielkiemu Kanclerzowi Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego z okazji 25-lecia święceń biskupich oraz 70. rocznicy urodzin*, ed. Piotr Jaskóła, Rajmund Porada (Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 2002), 607.

between them. In the case of marriage and the family, this will naturally give them the opportunity to spend more time together, which would not be possible if they worked full time in different places. However, such a situation may lead to dilemmas how to reconcile business objectives with the needs of family members, or how to achieve these objectives not harming relations within the family²⁹.

Building the family bond without having some basic material resources is hardly possible. Firstly, it is extremely important for a family to have their own place to live, a home. Especially nowadays, when most people do their professional work in factories, administrative organizations, offices, and stores, they need a home to return to at the end of the day, a home which offers them peace and a congenial atmosphere. Secondly, the living community of parents with their children finds a particularly intimate expression in the common table. At the family table, an apportionment is made in a selfless way to each one according to his or her needs³⁰.

“In the modern family, the table is not only the site of the common meal, but also the place of common conversation, of play, of entertainment. Unfortunately, however, a questionable silence has come over many families which no longer allows cordial, personal talk to arise as it did in the time of engagement or in the first years of marriage. For weeks on end a family might talk in a matter-of-fact businesslike way about household expenses, for instance. It is a tension-filled muteness. They are mute next to one another and against one another, whether the tension exists between the father and the mother, or between the parents and the grown children, or between the children”³¹.

The family's care for physical needs finds its specific expression in the sacrifice of women to take care of the household. Unfortunately, this effort is often underrated not only by the so-called public opinion and the state, but also by men themselves. This often creates tensions in marital relationships, especially if the husband fails to notice the value of the work done by his wife in the home. But the truth is that running a household is an extremely demanding job.

²⁹ Grant Thornton, *Biznes rodzinny*, trans. Anna Kanclerz (Gliwice: Helion, 2004).

³⁰ Joseph Höffner, *Chrześcijańska nauka społeczna*, trans. Stanisław Pyszka (Kraków: WAM 1993), 87–89.

³¹ Höffner, *Chrześcijańska nauka społeczna*, 89.

4. Conclusions

To sum up, the family and economy are mutually dependent. The healthy state of conjugal and family bond is generally reflected in the economic well-being of that particular community of people, and in a macro dimension, it provides a strong foundation for the whole society and its economy. On the other hand, economic processes and factors that create economic and social environment of the family determine the way it functions as a household, and also affect (at least indirectly) its inner harmony. The article shows not just the scale and depth of the connections between the family and the economic function it performs, but also how important these connections are in a moral and social sphere. Concern to provide for the material needs of the family may have positive as well as negative influence on the conjugal and family bond. Work, different forms of family consumption of material goods or ways of spending money have ambivalent effects for the family. But what ultimately determines the character of these effects? It seems that the key to the proper (which means, respecting human dignity and the family value) way of exercising economic function by the family lies in the moral attitudes of individuals following well-formed consciences in their everyday ethical choices³².

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³² Zadroga, "Funkcja ekonomiczna w życiu rodziny," 601.

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