

# Reviews

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## Review of the book:

**Magdalena Krępa, *Powołanie kobiety do macierzyństwa i mężczyzny do ojcostwa w kontekście dyskursu katolicyzmu z ideologią gender w polskiej literaturze przedmiotu, (The vocation of a woman to motherhood and a man to fatherhood in the context of the discourse of Catholicism and gender ideology in Polish literature)*, Kraków 2019**

It is obvious that we live in an era of extremely dynamic changes. The technological revolution, the emergence of the Internet, and new opportunities brought about by the development of biology and biotechnology, made the world in which we live significantly different from the one that existed a few decades ago. Social and moral changes are also an important element of this process, and spectacular or even revolutionary changes occurred especially in the sphere of sexuality, family and the understanding of the role of women in society. These are the issues dealt with in the reviewed book.

Ms Magdalena Krępa focuses on an important aspect of the process of socio-cultural changes, namely the woman-man relationship in the context

of parenthood and family functioning. On the one hand, she sees some positive elements that have been introduced to the European culture by the emancipation and feminist movements over the last century especially in the first period of their activity. It also affected the reflection of the representatives of traditional Christianity, which resulted, for example, in the discovery of the „woman’s genius” and the development of a specific new „feminist theology” in the teaching of the Catholic Church. However, according to the author, in recent years a gender ideology has emerged, which has brought the postulates of feminist movements to extremes and even absurdity, and has become a serious threat to motherhood, fatherhood and the family. Thus, there is the need to challenge the assumptions and postulates of this ideology. The author does this from the Catholic perspective, seeing a remedy for the dangerous proposals of „apparent modernity” in returning to traditional ethical norms adapted to the changing world. Her attention is focused on the issues of “ a woman’s vocation to motherhood and a man to fatherhood in the teaching of the Catholic Church and the confrontation of this vision with the redefinition of gender in terms of gender ideology” (p. 13). The essence of the problem is the fact that, in place of sex complementarity, i.e. the idea of complementing and offering one’s diversity to each other, the gender ideology proposes a complete deconstruction and redefinition of sexuality, separating it from its natural (biological) roots and transferring its meaning to the sphere of culture. The author intends to argue with this position. Her analyses are based on material from several scientific fields (theology, philosophy, sociology, but also biology and psychology). She uses numerous documents of the Church, and is limited to sources published in Polish.

The book consists of an introduction, four chapters, conclusion and a rich Polish bibliography. In Chapter One, the author attempts to characterize the vocation of a woman and a man on the basis of contemporary challenges and cultural changes. It discusses a whole range of threats: difficulties in building a community, the presence of technology in our everyday life, the short-term nature of most relationships, and the disappearance of the sense of sin, as a result of which „evil begins to be perceived as one of the models of life” (p. 27). The wide availability of contraceptives and the general sexualization of life are also very important. In this circumstances, the perception of marriage is also changing. More and more often it is treated purely as a result of the choice of an individual and not as an institution playing a key role in the social order. There are also new forms of partnership relations: cohabitation, single, LAT (Living

Apart Together), single-parent families, as well as homosexual relationships. In the context of the problems presented above, we face the loss of the essence of femininity and masculinity – this is what the author deals with at the end of the first chapter. Two issues are particularly interesting: the first is the „beauty terror” that women are submitted to, and which makes beauty take the place of conscience (p. 51). On the other hand, the crisis of masculinity, which results from the breakdown of traditional social structures, is in fact caused by the crisis of the woman-man relationship (p. 56). The marginalization of fatherhood also has its religious consequences, leading to the disturbance of the notion of God the Father (p. 59).

In Chapter Two, Ms Magdalena Krępa focuses on how feminism and gender ideology contest the traditional (Catholic) ethos of femininity and masculinity. She begins by outlining the history of feminism, in the beginning of which she sees many important issues against actual discrimination of women. Over time, however, justifiable slogans became a reason for depreciating tradition and destroying proven norms of social life. The most radical expression of such an action is „treating biological sex as a kind of violence by nature against man” (p. 84). This is one of the examples that feminist movements turned into gender as an ideology, that is, „a specific closed system not only of thought, but also of worldview, the starting point of which is not scientific premises, but specific suspicions” (p. 86). As a consequence, the biological basis differentiating femininity and masculinity is undermined, and the actual gender differences between women and men are seen to derive from the “different socialization of boys and girls” (p. 93).

In Chapter Three Christian (Catholic) anthropology is contrasted to the previously discussed ideology. The starting point refers to biology and presents a number of differences between men and women at this level. The author presents nine such significant differences (p. 93), and then indicates the functional, psychological and social differences resulting from them. This issue – concerning the dispute over the nature of the relationship between innate and acquired features – is of key importance to the discussion with genderism. According to the author’s opinion, gender supporters consistently question biological arguments, and „they consider as scientific only those studies that reject biological sex” (p. 107–108). In the next section, the Catholic concept of the vocation of a woman and a man is analyzed. In recent decades, undoubtedly also due to the impact of feminist movements, important changes have occurred in the teachings of the Church. The Church not only accepted the postulates regarding

the professional and social position of women who went towards equality, but especially through the thought of John Paul II, she discovered a specific „genius of women”, which modern societies especially need – these are „the ability to persistently and disinterestedly open to others, share and give birth in love” (p. 125). An interesting theological thought appears here that in the New Testament, God, through Mary, concludes a New Covenant with humanity through a woman (p. 134). This can be interpreted as a symbolic signal that the role of women in society is changing. The position of the man becomes even more complicated: he is in some way forced to seek a new identity in the partnership model. Certain forms of synthesis of tradition and novelty would be desirable, but at this point the author does not address the question of what exactly such a synthesis would contain. The last part of this chapter focuses on the issue of gender complementarity. This is a key issue for Christian anthropology. An alternative to it may be the struggle of the sexes. These considerations lead to the thesis that „a woman needs a man in order to discover her femininity fully, and a man who wants to find his masculinity must turn to a woman” (p. 157).

Chapter IV develops a reflection on the parental mission of the spouses. After a short, historical introduction, Ms. Krępa analyzes theological arguments pointing to the sacramental character of marriage (pp. 162–164). Additionally, there is a sociological argument based on research which shows that in religious families there is a lower level of pathology (p. 170). Then the role of sexuality in marriage is analyzed. Again religious arguments dominate here, such as that marital life not only serves for procreation, but is also „the realization of God’s plan for love in the human race” (p. 177). This argumentation is the basis which allows derivation of the thesis about the moral evil of extramarital life. Similarly, „pastoral argumentation” is applied to the problem of contraception, and parenthood – the author conducts her argument coherently, but from a position that can only be convincing to Catholics: what significance can a thesis such as: „Procreation is specific, God’s gift to man marked by a sacred dimension” (p. 186) have for a non-Catholic? Perhaps most interesting in this section are the theses that again point out the difficult role of the father. His previously dominant role has been questioned, to the benefit of marital relations. There emerges a question: how is the man supposed to find himself in his new roles. A lot depends on the resolution of this issue, because the correct position of the father is simply necessary for the stability of the family and for the development of children.

On the one hand, the presented book shows the inconsistencies of gender ideology and the dangers of its spreading. On the other hand, it reasonably

argues for the unchanging attractiveness of the Christian vision of man and the idea of gender complementarity. However I can see a weakness in the way Ms Magdalena Krępa conducts her arguments. She demonizes the gender ideology too much, and the counter-arguments she uses are derived directly from religion, which is a significant limitation for the scope of their influence: they can, which is also very important, consolidate the correct attitudes of Catholics, but they do not appeal to people outside this circle.

Let's consider, for example, the very important issue of contraception. The author writes that „gender disseminates contraception.” Meanwhile, contraception was adopted into general use as one of the modern „civilization gains”. It changed the space of human sexuality and procreation in an extremely profound way, regardless of one or another ideology. The author herself admits to this elsewhere: „Thanks to contraception... feminism received a powerful technical instrument, without which the gender revolution would have little chance of success” (p. 31). The separation of the act of intercourse from procreation has simply become a fact today and the teaching of the Church has to challenge it. An important evolution of the Magisterium has already occurred. The Church today admit that the parents have the right to decide on the number of children and the time of their birth. An equally difficult question is that of the indissolubility of marriage. Regardless of gender ideology, we are dealing with the phenomenon of extending human life. The result is that the spouses remain in a relationship for many decades and must take on different roles one after another: lovers, parents, partners (friends) after their children leave, carers in old age. This phenomenon can be and is for married couples a powerful „centrifugal force” regardless of their adoption of one ideology or another. However, this is an objective cultural change that challenges the Church, that maintains its teaching of the indissolubility of marriage.

Ms. Krępa looks at these and many other issues from the perspective of the teachings of the Church. This is very important and useful, because it strengthens the position of those who are attached to this tradition, and who today are additionally exposed to the temptation of various ideologies. However, it would be useful if the Author tried to use her undoubtedly great competences to also argue with those who reject justifications based on theological premises.