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Critical discourse analysis of *Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family*: an inquiry into how social exclusion of childless women in Poland is built on theological arguments.

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Subject: Social Exclusion, Study of Religions	
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Title of Work: Critical discourse analysis of <i>Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family</i> : an inquiry into how social exclusion of childless women in Poland is built on theological arguments.	
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Women’s rights violations in Poland have become highly debated in recent years, not only within the country but also internationally. This thesis focuses on the group often omitted in the debates on women’s rights, namely, childless women. Childlessness is a relatively new research topic and lacks a developed theoretical framework. I decided to study the phenomenon using the social exclusion theories as a theoretical framework.</p> <p>The endorsement of parenthood in many discourses in Poland puts social pressure on women and may lead to social exclusion. Because the Catholic Church has a significant impact on Polish society, I chose to analyse the discourse of the Polish Episcopate and identify the areas for further research.</p> <p>The method chosen to accomplish this aim is critical discourse analysis. As an example of discourse produced by the Catholic Church in Poland, I picked a document from the Polish Episcopal Conference prepared by the Family Council <i>Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie</i> (Eng. <i>Serving the truth about marriage and family</i>), published in 2009. To my knowledge, the topic of childlessness in the discourse of the Catholic Church in the Polish context has not been explored before; hence my work is an invitation to do further research into the topic.</p>	
Keywords: social exclusion, Poland, childlessness, childless women, Catholic Church, Polish Episcopate	
Date: 6.12.2022	Pages: 81

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1. Introduction

The discussion about women's rights violations in Poland in recent years has reached international media (Unal, 2020; Nurminen, 2020). Many organisations fighting for women's rights wonder what caused the regression in women's rights recognition, what can be done to prevent this process in other countries, and how the Polish women could be helped (UN Women Suomi, 2021). Being Polish myself, I have been asking myself the same questions. This research is my contribution to the conversation. Women's rights are often equated with reproductive rights, even though they cover a much larger scope of personal and social life, e.g., right to political participation (OHCHR, n.d.). Nevertheless, the reproductive choices a woman is given influence other areas of her life, such as employment possibilities, or financial independence.

The heated discussions about a woman's right to decide about her body in Poland have mainly focused on individual cases of unwanted pregnancies. However, the ongoing debate does not acknowledge a growing number of women who cannot or do not want to have children. In the past years, the focus of the discussions has been on the abortion issue and has not included other reproductive rights, e.g., female sterilisation, which is illegal in Poland, or assisted conception.

This thesis focuses on the group often omitted in debates on women's rights, namely, childless women. As Miettinen et al. (2014) point out, childlessness is a new research topic and lacks a theoretical framework within which it could be studied. Current research on childlessness in Poland focuses mainly on finding the reasons why women decide to remain childless. The endorsement of parenthood in many discourses in Poland puts social pressure on women and may cause distress in certain situations (Ciesek, 2017). Hence my interest in approaching the phenomenon from a social exclusion perspective.

I decided to investigate the discourse of the Polish Episcopate on childlessness, because the Catholic Church still has a significant impact on Polish society. Szwed (2015) indicates that there is a need to include Catholicism in the discussion about women in Poland, because the Church impacts them at three levels: meta – by shaping the imaginary of gender roles; meso – with its political impact on women's lives; and micro – in day-to-day life in the parishes. Pawlikowska (2014) suggests

that Polish women are torn between their progressive beliefs and opinions, their need for independence and self-realisation, and the emotional burden of rejecting 'traditional Polish values' influenced by their religious upbringing within the Catholic Church. Besides its psychological or emotional dimensions, religion is also a form of social practice (Chidester, 2014). Since religion is embedded in social interaction, it can both maintain and challenge prevailing social structures. The relationship between the Church and the state in Poland is a subject of various research (see Mishtal, 2015; Obirek, 2021). The overview of this relationship will be explored further in the chapter on the Catholic Church in Poland.

Feminist discourse in Poland often accuses the Catholic Church of standing in the way of women's emancipation (Kościańska, 2012). However, Polish feminism can neither erase Catholicism's influence on the discussions about equality nor exclude Catholic women from the debate (Graff & Frej, 2015, p. 47). Most of the work on the topic, thus far, has been written from either a feminist or religious perspective and typically emphasises the differences between the two (Kościańska, 2012). However, mediating between those two perspectives rather than looking at them as competing opponents would allow for a more comprehensive description of reality.

Childlessness does not concern only women; however, according to research (Młodawska, 2012), women experience more social repercussions than men if they remain childless. The terms 'men' and 'women' used here can be understood as gender categories. Unlike biological sex, which in simplification, refers to the physiological characteristics of the body, gender refers to a social construct that assigns specific characteristics and roles to individuals (Garofalo & Garvin, 2020). In this study, I focus on cisgender women as the discourse of the Catholic Church recognises only binary sex and not gender (Roy-Steier, 2021). However, I would like to acknowledge that other gender theories exist where not all 'assigned female at birth' individuals identify as women. Moreover, transgender women may also experience social exclusion based on their childlessness.

I am a feminist. In my work, I aspire to use gender-inclusive language, and when I reference researchers whose gender I am not sure of, I use what I consider gender-neutral pronouns: "they/them". When choosing texts to reference, I decided to choose female and/or feminist authors when possible. I opted to do that to amplify the voices of women in the discussion on a matter that concerns them the most.

Nevertheless, I keep a critical perspective on the source materials by, e.g., looking at the author's background and including both lay and Catholic feminist scholarship. To provide context about the Catholic Church, I mainly focused on scholarly Catholic publications (such as sources from Catholic publishing houses and recognised Catholic authors).

1.1. Aim and objectives

This study contributes to the discussion on the social exclusion of childless women in Poland with a threefold aim.

The first and main aim is to conduct a critical discourse analysis of the most relevant document found among the publications of the Polish Episcopate on the topic of women and family life, *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* (Eng. Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family), in order to uncover the language practices that may contribute to the social exclusion of childless women. The second aim is to discuss the need of recognizing religion as an underemphasised and relevant factor in social exclusion theories. The third aim is to show how theological authority is used in this particular document to promote national, political and social agendas that contribute to the social exclusion of childless women in Poland.

In order to achieve these aims, my objective is to provide an in-depth analysis of the language used in the document and the ways in which it serves to theologially justify the social exclusion of childless women in Poland. This analysis is conducted in chapter five, where I describe the general structure of the document and analyse selected excerpts. Furthermore, in chapter two, I refer to social exclusion theories and point out the gaps in the theoretical framework regarding religion. Lastly, in chapter three, I describe the context of childlessness in Poland through a literature review that situates the tightly-knit relationship between religion, culture, nationalism and the role of women.

The text I chose to analyse is an important document that provides the language and sets the parameters for how women's role in the Church, marriage and the world should be discussed in the Polish context. However, as far as I am aware, it has not undergone scholarly analysis in its thirteen years of its existence.

1.2. Previous research

In the research process, it has been decisively easier to find previous scholarship on childlessness from a global or western perspective than research originating from and produced in a Polish context. From my observations, historically, the issues concerning womanhood, motherhood, and childlessness have not been widely discussed in scholarship or the media in Poland. However, numerous books and articles on the erasure of women from Polish history, reproductive rights and women's place in the Church in the Polish context were published in 2020 and 2021. Most likely, this recent influx of texts is the result of further restrictions on abortion in Poland, and more research is to be expected in the coming years. This latest scholarship proved to be helpful in providing the cultural and historical context for my research.

To my knowledge, only two books touching exclusively upon childlessness in Poland have been published, one being an academic monograph and the other one being more of a personal reflection. The first one, written by Dolińska (2014), *Bezdzietność: Perspektywa Społeczno-Kulturowa* (Eng. Childlessness: A Socio-Cultural Perspective), explores childlessness as a societal issue. Even though it is the most comprehensive book on childlessness in Poland, a third of its contents is dedicated to childlessness from a global perspective. The second, written by Broda (2019), *Szczerze o życiu bez dzieci* (Eng. Honestly about Life without Children), focuses more on the author's subjective experiences and observations about childlessness. The book is a result of the author's online career as a child-free blogger. Listening to personal stories as a valuable resource in academic inquiry has a long tradition in feminist discourse; hence, I decided to include this non-academic text as one of the references to give context to the issue.

Several articles have been published on the topic of childlessness. According to Tomaszewska (2017), the academic discourse on childlessness in Poland has been dominated by sociologists. They seem to share the same research focus, mostly exploring demographic trends, the perception of childless individuals, the paths to childlessness and the motivations behind this phenomenon.

The broader societal and cultural discourse around childlessness in Poland is not well-researched, and as far as I am aware, only two scholarly articles have been

published on the matter. The closest to my area of interest is an article by Młodawska (2012), “Tradycyjna polska stygmatyzacja czy ponowoczesne neoliberalne wykluczenie? Analiza internetowego dyskursu kobiecej bezdzietności” (Eng. Traditional Polish Stigma or Postmodern Neoliberal Exclusion? Analysis of the Internet Discourse of Female Childlessness). Młodawska (2012) investigates what kind of language is used in different internet forums and groups when describing those who have children and those who do not. That is in line with my personal interest in the matter. However, there is little emphasis in the article on the historical and cultural context, nor a clear explanation of what the author understands by either stigmatisation or social exclusion. The other article, written by Tomaszewska (2017), “Childfree? Praktyki dyskursywne osób bezdzietnych z wyboru w Polsce” (Eng. Childfree? Discursive Practices of Childless People by Choice in Poland), presents the results of the qualitative research conducted with 15 married heterosexual couples who decided to reject parenthood. The couples were asked to describe how they explain their decisions about remaining childlessness to others and their relationships with family and friends.

When it comes to better understanding the situation of women in the Catholic Church, I found two books that were particularly helpful in my research. The first one, by Radzik (2020), *Kościół kobiet* (Eng. Women’s Church), discusses the role of women in the Church from a more global perspective. However, since the author is Polish, the book also provides insights from a Polish perspective. It does not have the structure of an academic publication; nevertheless, it references some of the most prominent academics in the field of theology. The second one, by Szwed (2015), *Ta druga. Obraz kobiety w nauczaniu Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego i w świadomości księży* (Eng. The Other One. The Image of Woman in the Teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and the Perception of Priests), presents results of research conducted in one of the Polish dioceses. It also includes theoretical background on the role of women in the Catholic Church. Both publications have been a great source of information and a resource for finding further publications.

As far as I know, the existing research does not cover discourse analysis of the statements of the Catholic Church concerning childlessness in the Polish context.

2. Social Exclusion Theories as a Theoretical Framework

There is no unanimous agreement regarding the definition of social exclusion (Millar, 2008). It could be characterised as either a process or a state of being. For my discussion, the theories discussing it as a process are more helpful because I focus on the process that contributes to social exclusion and not the final result, 'exclusion'. Hence, the theories I introduce in this section of the text, apart from Riva and Eck's definitions, focus on social exclusion as a process.

The process of social exclusion is complex. Byrne (2005) suggests that by combining the words social and exclusion, the weight of the process is moved from individual interaction to a social phenomenon. In the literature, the term social exclusion is sometimes used interchangeably with ostracism (see: Wesselmann & Williams, 2013; North & Fiske, 2013). It also frequently appears alongside the term stigmatisation, without a clear distinction being made between them (see Młodawska, 2012; London & Rosenthal, 2013). In my understanding, the term social exclusion is a broader term than both of these terms. Social exclusion has many adverse outcomes both for an individual and society. On a personal level, it can contribute to anxiety, depression, and loneliness (North & Fiske, 2013). On a societal level, it creates a fragmented society and disparities among groups of people, which do not allow for full participation and development of the community.

Riva and Eck (2016) focus on the psychological aspects of social exclusion and use the term 'social exclusion' as an umbrella term for different types of experiences. According to them, "social rejection – defined as being explicitly told one is not wanted – and ostracism – primarily characterised by being ignored – represent the two core experiences of social exclusion" (Riva & Eck, 2016, p.ix). However, this definition does not take into consideration other factors than personal experiences of being excluded, such as the social structures that allow for the exclusion or the outcomes of that exclusion. Nevertheless, I do agree that ostracism is a form of social exclusion. According to Wesselmann and Williams (2013), the fulfilment of four fundamental human needs (belonging, control, meaningful existence, and self-esteem) is endangered by ostracism. That is why I think it is worth researching and why I chose Täuber's theory of 'moralisation as legitimisation for ostracism' as one of the theories that explain the process that may contribute to the social exclusion of

childless women in Poland. I explain Täuber's theory further in section 2.2. I provide there also a more detailed argumentation for my choice.

Humans can be described as social beings (North & Fiske, 2013). Thus, the potential of being excluded from a social group is an effective tool of social control (Abrams & Christian, 2008). Ostracism is used to deal with 'deviant or burdensome group members' and is supposed to encourage individuals to follow social norms important to the group (Wesselmann & Williams, 2013). Seeing those who disobeyed the rules being ignored is supposed to motivate 'the right behaviour' among other members. North and Fiske (2013) suggest that exclusion is an inevitable process in social interaction. They explain it by the sheer fact that including some individuals into groups based on particular characteristics also involves excluding those who do not fit in. How well someone conforms to the in-group norms is used as a fair justification for exclusion (North & Fiske, 2013). Even though this explanation does make sense on a micro-scale, on the societal level, it can be used as an excuse for not creating a more participatory society.

Social exclusion can be understood as a multidimensional process. The exclusion involves not only decreased living standards but also exclusion from "opportunities, choices and life chances" (Millar, 2008, p.2). Byrne (2005), building on Sen (2000), asserts that "being socially excluded is a matter of relational context in time and place" (Byrne, 2005, p.64). That is, social exclusion as a phenomenon should be analysed with the consideration of the specific setting in which it takes place. Burchard, LeGrand and Piachaud (2002, cited in Millar, 2008, p.4) propose the following four dimensions and measurement indicators for social exclusion:

- Consumption: measured by the capacity to buy goods and services and by savings.
- Production: measured by participation in economically or socially valued activities.
- Political engagement: measured by involvement in local or national decision making.
- Social: measured by regularity and frequency of meeting with family, friends and neighbours.

This classification does not include religion as one of the dimensions of social exclusion. Furthermore, I could not find a theory that explicitly identifies religion, spirituality or religious language as areas of social exclusion. This is a grave omission of the current theories of social exclusion, and through my work, I would like to highlight how theological discourses affect the processes of ostracism and show a concrete example of how the language of religion may function as a source of social exclusion.

Social exclusion research typically focuses on excluded people (Abrams, Christian, 2008). Focusing only on the targets of social exclusion can, however, be limiting for policymakers. The figure below (Table 1.), drawn from Abrams, Hogg, and Marques’s (2005) research, presents a framework for the analysis of social inclusion and exclusion that can be helpful for gaining a better understanding of the phenomenon. It includes different elements: “(a) the actors, (b) the structural level of the exclusion relationship, (c) the forms and modes of exclusion, and (d) the dynamics of exclusion” (Abrams, Christian, 2008, p.215). In order to effectively address social exclusion, these areas and the relationships between them need to be carefully identified.

Table 1. A relational dynamics framework for analysing social inclusion and exclusion.

Source: Abrams, D., Christian, J. (2008) A Relational Analysis of Social Exclusion, p.215

Actors in exclusion relationship (<i>who</i>)						
Sources			Targets			
Relationship Context (<i>where</i>)						
Transnational	Societal	Institutional	Intergroup	Intragroup	Interpersonal	Intrapersonal
Modes/Forms of exclusion (<i>how</i>)						
Ideological/Moral	Representational	Categorical	Physical	Communicative		
Dynamics of exclusion/inclusion relationship (<i>why/when</i>)						
Independent vs interdependent relationship		Resource inequality	Time frame	Motivational orientation		

When designing my research, I wanted to follow the typical path and focus on the targets of social exclusion, that is, childless women in Poland. However, during the literature review process, I realised there is a more significant gap in the research on

the sources of social exclusion of childless women. That is why I decided to analyse the discourse of the Polish Episcopate, which, in my opinion, can contribute to the social exclusion of childless women. The Catholic Church is the largest religious institution in Poland, and as such, has the actual power of including and excluding people not only from the community of faith (baptism and confirmation as including rituals, and excommunication as an exclusionary practice) but also to influence whole societies where it is predominant. If we look at the model above, voluntarily childless women in Poland can experience moral exclusion, as their life choices are seen as going against established norms and the perceived position of women in a wider social imagery. They can also be the subject of communicative social exclusion, when being questioned in a patronising matter about their life choices or circumstances that impacted their childlessness. They are being 'othered' for not following established social norms.

Moreover, childless women are a part of a social group that already experiences social exclusion, that is, women. Houston (2008) suggests that as a group, women experience social exclusion in all four dimensions (consumption, production, political engagement, and social). It results from their assigned roles in society (Abrams & Christian, 2008). They are often excluded from full-time employment because of their 'family responsibilities', and looking after the home is not highly valued by society (Houston, 2008). Furthermore, women are less likely to participate in social activities outside of the household (Houston, 2008). However, those factors of women's social exclusion brought up in the literature do not necessarily concern childless women, as they often do not take a 'caring role' in the household. Hence the exclusion they experience is of a different nature. More on the manifestation of the social exclusion of childless women can be found in section 3.3.

The process of social exclusion is complex, and "our understanding of social exclusion is unlikely to be complete unless we take into account the multiple actors and relationships between them in a particular context" (Abrams & Christian, 2008, p.216). Even though everyone has more or less the same power to exclude individuals at a personal level, not all social groups or institutions have the same ability to exclude at a structural level (Abrams & Christian, 2008). If full participation in society does not require personal sacrifices and overcoming obstacles, voluntary social exclusion is unlikely; that is why any claims about the

voluntary exclusion of an individual should be met with suspicion (Houston, 2008). It would be interesting to investigate whether the discourse of the Catholic Church pushes people who cannot or do not want to have children towards voluntary exclusion from the religious community. My study further raises the question of whether new models of social exclusion need to be formed to exemplify better how and where religion plays into the processes of social exclusion.

2.1. Language as a site of struggle

Multiple theories emphasise the role of language in social exclusion debates. In this section, I will introduce the ones that are most fitting to my research. First is Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, which I only mention here and account for further in section 4.1. Then there are also the feminist theories on the struggle over language that I briefly introduce, and lastly, feminist theology theories that touch upon language as an element in the fight for equality.

Byrne (2005) suggests that Fairclough's (2000) text-oriented critical discourse analysis is the most interesting approach to investigating the interlinkage between language use and social exclusion. Even though many years have passed since it was first introduced, I found his model of conducting critical discourse analysis fitting, and I will use it as an inspiration for my research design. Critical discourse analysis can be regarded as both a theoretical framework and a method. However, I find the latter more applicable for this study. The methodological framework Fairclough developed focuses on examining the form of the text, as well as words and phrases used in order to uncover the patterns of social exclusion (Byrne, 2005). However, Fairclough's 'three-dimensional' critical discourse analysis model

combines the analysis of text (i.e., written and spoken language in itself), practices (i.e., the production, distribution, and interpretation of texts), and socio-cultural practices (i.e., the ideational level of ideology and systems of knowledge and beliefs, or the broader societal contexts in which texts are embedded) (Moberg, 2022, p.18).

In the methodology chapter, I describe the text analysis aspect of critical discourse analysis in greater detail.

The feminist struggle over language

In this section, I will introduce some of the arguments used by feminists to show how language can be used to oppress women but also other groups. At the outset, I would like to acknowledge that there is no ‘one universal’ feminist theory; simultaneously, the account of different ‘waves’ of feminism and their demands falls beyond the scope of this research.

The feminist struggle over language is concerned with exposing and dismantling the biases existing in the language structure, as well as taking the agency to tell one’s own story. Ciesek (2017) points to the importance of language awareness in feminist inquiries for equality because language, on the one hand, represents the social reality and, on the other, has the power to shape social relations. The arguments used by Ciesek are similar to those being at the core of critical discourse analysis theory. According to Bucholtz (2003), if feminist linguistic research is to have an emancipatory role, it needs to lean towards critical discourse analysis.

Critically examining the role of language as a tool for upholding bias towards women dates back to the 1970s linguistic activism (Pauwels, 2003). As Pauwels states: “Exposing and documenting sexist practices in language use and communication has been, and continues to be, a grassroots-based activity by feminists with an interest in language and linguistic representation of the sexes” (Pauwels, 2003, p.552). My analysis of the chosen document by the Polish Episcopate fits into this tradition. Fascinated by language and the power it may hold, I want to uncover the language practices of the Catholic Church that may contribute to the social exclusion of childless women.

Pauwels (2003) outlines three motivations behind linguistic activism, that is, “(1) a desire to expose the sexist nature of the present language system; (2) a desire to create a language which can express reality from a woman’s perspective; (3) a desire to amend the present language system” so that the representation of men and women is more equitable. (Pauwels, 2003, p.555). The incentive of my research could be placed within the first category, as my goal is to depict what is being said about childlessness and how. By showing the exclusionary nature of the language used by the Polish Episcopate, I hope to open up a dialogue about the need to revise the

language and contents of the analysed document (and other existing documents) and how the language it uses may contribute to social exclusion.

At the same time, I am aware of the critique such a study may bring. Bucholtz (2003) highlights how many linguists have expressed criticism towards the argument that gender is ever-present in language. According to those who disagree with that assumption, it causes a danger of overinterpretation of the communication process. However, our identities are always present in our communication, and the words being said or omitted reveal our biases.

Linguistic disruption is often achieved by the introduction by feminists of new, more gender-neutral or gendered words through speech or literature (Pauwels, 2003). One example of such a procedure is the introduction of the term ‘herstory’ (replacing history) to describe the past of feminist movements or institutions. There seems to be no agreement as to which path is ‘most’ emancipatory; however, any disruption of the current order brings about a change and can be a catalyst for more gender equality. No matter if people agree with proposed changes towards a non-sexist language, at least they become aware of the gender bias in the language that already exists (Pauwels, 2003). A similar conviction pertains to my research. Even though I do not provide an alternative, more gender-inclusive language, I want to bring awareness to the existing gender bias in the analysed document.

Feminist theology – language and liberation

Another approach to language as a site of struggle can be found in some works in feminist theology. Feminist theology can be considered a form of liberation theology and is one of the fastest-growing branches of modern theology (Gomola, 2010). As its starting point, one can identify incorporating second-wave feminism into theology, which was first implemented in liberal protestant churches (Gomola, 2010). There are different waves of the academic discipline of feminist theology that, to a degree, correspond with the waves of secular feminism (Radzik, 2020). The whole field of feminist theology is very diverse, and the postulates brought forward by the representatives of the movement can sometimes stand in opposition to one another (Gomola, 2010). There also exist several variants of Catholic academic feminism (Radzik, 2010), although they display some commonly shared characteristics.

One of the main goals of Catholic feminist theology is to fight the discrimination against women in the Church, for the most part, by focusing on the language in general and analysis of religious discourse (Gomola, 2010). The women's emancipation movement in the Church has an at least a fifty-year-old academic tradition, but there are records of women's resistance from the early times of Christianity (Radzik, 2020). The feminist movement in the Church is often associated with white, middle-class women. However, there also exist theologies by women of colour, e.g., womanist theology (by Black women) and *mujerista* theology (by Latina women).

One can notice an emphasis on the embodiment of human experience in the early feminist theology theories; that is, reality cannot be described as objective since people have bodily experiences that impact our understanding (Gomola, 2010). Feminist theology wants to not only portray but also change reality (Radzik, 2020). In more recent years, the embodiment postulates have moved towards critical analysis of concepts of sex and gender in the religious context (Gomola, 2010). My work will contribute to that discussion.

In the Catholic Church, modern feminist theology is closely connected with the changes brought by the Second Vatican Council (Gomola, 2010). The movement is roughly divided into two branches: radical revolutionary and reformative (Gomola, 2010; Radzik, 2020). The first one is lobbying for fundamental changes in how the Church is imagined, while the second has a more subdued approach and works for the inclusion of women in the context of existing Church structures, like having women in the roles of deacon or priest based on both historic evidence of those practices and re-interpretation of the tradition in a modern context. Radical Catholic feminist theologians, starting with Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza and then Rosemary Radford Ruether, began talking of the 'women's church' that would be an ecumenical space for women incorporating inclusive language (Radzik, 2020). Radzik (2020) suggests that the only thing that may unite all Catholic women is the struggle to fight the patriarchal structures of the Church, but then quickly adds that there are also women that thrive within that system or do not oppose it.

Catholic feminist theology in Poland is a relatively new field. Elżbieta Adamiak is considered the first Polish feminist theologian (Radzik, 2020). In 1999 she published the first book about the place of women in the Catholic Church in Poland, *Milcząca*

obecność. O roli kobiety w Kościele (Eng. *A Silent Presence. On the Role of Women in the Church*). The book is relatively short, and the chapter on feminism specifically is only eleven pages long. Adamiak (1999) describes how in the early years of democratic Poland, feminism, as well as anti-feminism, were seen as un-Polish and culturally foreign. Feminism has been equated with the sexual revolution and, as such, has been condemned by the Catholic Church in Poland because it poses a threat to traditional conceptions of marriage and the nuclear family model. Adamiak (1999) suggests that, at least in the early stages of post-socialism systemic political change in Poland, feminism was considered a continuation of Marxism, where the class struggle was replaced by gender struggle.

Polish Catholic feminists also highlight the role of language in upkeeping existing power dynamics. Radzik (2020) talks about the importance of using the correct grammatical forms when discussing the role of women in the Church. It is even more crucial in a highly gendered Polish language, where not only are adjectives declined according to the gender of the subject/object, but where also all nouns and verbs are gendered. The male form has for a long time been considered gender-inclusive.

I decided to introduce the concept of feminist theology in my thesis because my research touches upon the issues concerning both feminism and religion. People outside of the field of theology often do not know much about feminist theology. As Szwed's research (2015) proves, which I will raise in my analysis, the clergy in Poland is also not familiar with the term. Research on the social exclusion of childless women would greatly benefit from being examined from a feminist theological perspective. Therefore, even though in my work I focus mainly on secular theories of social exclusion, I want to raise awareness about feminist theology.

2.2. Moralisation as legitimisation for ostracism

Täuber's theory of moralisation as legitimisation for ostracism, even though not developed as a social exclusion theory, could be considered such. As mentioned earlier, the term ostracism is often used interchangeably with the term social exclusion in the literature. Riva and Eck (2016) indicate that a better way to look at their relation is to treat ostracism as a manifestation of social exclusion. Thus, the

theory explaining the reasons for ostracism can be viewed as a theory explaining possible sources of social exclusion.

Moralisation often precedes ostracism. According to Täuber (2019), “[m]oralization refers to a widely used strategy aiming to persuade others to change their attitudes and behaviour concerning an issue” (p.171). It is a process of adding moral value to an action. It happens in four stages. At first, new moral norms are suggested through ‘moralised persuasion’. Then society is categorised into morally good and bad people based on their observance of the new moral standard. This classification of people then creates “the basis by which people who deviate from these moral norms are more easily stigmatised, excluded, and discriminated against” (Täuber, 2019, p.171). Finally, the intergroup dynamics caused by moralisation create an environment that makes ostracism possible. “Governments and institutions, often the social agents advocating new moral norms, are more likely to ostracise those deviating from the moral norm by means of policy” (Täuber, 2019, p.171). That is, the agents that have the power to implement moral norms in the form of policies use the penal system to enforce them. Otherwise, social pressure and ostracism are used as the means of social control.

Even though Täuber’s theory is built around the introduction of ‘new moral norms’ and the issue of childlessness in no way is a new phenomenon, I believe this theory is fitting to explain the mechanisms surrounding the discourse on childlessness, especially in the Polish context. The Polish Episcopate regards the phenomena as new, and because of the dominant power position that the Church has, they use the same mechanisms that are described by the theory of Täuber in reverse. The Church documents regarding women frame marriage, family and motherhood as a default state of a woman so that childlessness could be considered ‘a new moral issue’ in this context. Framing childlessness as unnatural, and going against the norms, creates an environment that allows for the ostracism of childless individuals.

Once a social norm is given a moral value, individuals should not question following it (Täuber, 2019). Why individuals who disobey norms carrying a moral value are treated harshly for their choices can be explained in two ways: affective and cognitive. The affective refers to the emotional aspect of having a belief – “moral beliefs possess more affective strength than nonmoral beliefs” (Cole Wright et al., 2008, p.1462). The cognitive explanation “appeals to differences in the cognitive

structure of moral versus nonmoral beliefs” (Cole Wright et al., 2008, p.1462). Moral norms are not seen to be the subject of personal choice but as general rules.

However, cognitive and affective dimensions are difficult to measure separately, making it virtually impossible to determine which one plays a more significant role (Cole Wright et al., 2008). There is no straightforward explanation as to which factor plays a more substantial role in why insubordination is met with ostracism in the case of norms with a moral value. In the case of the theories of social exclusion, what is forgotten is that humans may be considered not only cognitive or emotional but spiritual beings. This means that norms that further carry a religious ‘imperative’ make the ‘burden of deviation’ even more substantial.

Exclusion is used to reprimand people who do not adhere to the moral rule in hopes it will change their behaviour (Täuber, 2019). It is supposed to be a mechanism that ensures societal security. However, it is subject to manipulation since the way in which social customs are assigned a moral value can be arbitrary.

Täuber (2019) points out that “given the right framing and timing, any issue can become a moral norm” (p.173). Once a moral norm is internalised, both the deviants and followers start to have an affective reaction towards the opposing side. Both those who conform to the moral standard and deviants are urged to ostracise the opposing group (Täuber, 2019). The problem is that some groups imposing those social norms have the power to enforce obedience structurally.

Whether or not moral convictions equate to religious convictions is a contested issue, with competing hypotheses about them being the same, closely related, or entirely different concepts (Skitka, 2018). However, some consensus exists about religious convictions providing motivation for moral norms (Skitka, 2018). Thus, it could be assumed that, even if not all moral norms are religious in nature, religious convictions have qualities of moral norms. Hence, I find Täuber’s theory suitable for explaining the process leading to the social exclusion of childless women in Poland.

As this study will show, the Catholic Church gives parenthood a religiously grounded moral value, so the decision not to have children can be met with stigmatisation from both the Church officials and society at large.

3. Childlessness and the Catholic Church: contextual background

This chapter not only provides a contextual background but is also an integral part of my research. It addresses one of the objectives of this research, that is, it shows how questions of religion are part of the mechanisms that potentially exclude childless women in Poland. Contextualisation of the problem reveals how embedded in religious discourse the question of childlessness is in a country like Poland. If we do not recognise religion in the theories of social exclusion, much of the experiences of social exclusion will not be understood.

3.1. Childlessness as a societal issue

The number of childless individuals is growing in Poland and in Europe in general. The research shows that the majority of adult Europeans remain childless for at least a decade (Miettinen et al., 2014). Some researchers predict that childlessness will worsen the problem of ageing populations at the macro and the micro-level (Präg et al., 2017). Childlessness concerns not only women; however, men do not experience the same level of resentment (Młodawska, 2012). The characteristics attributed to childless women are contradictory to the stereotype of femininity; that is, childless women are seen as being lacking either biologically (e.g., infertility) or emotionally (e.g., selfish, cold) (Dolińska, 2014, p. 201). Nonetheless, research shows that the assumption that childless women are highly educated and career-driven is a myth (Präg et al., 2017). Why and who perpetuates this myth is a valid question and a potential future research area.

Motherhood can be imposed on women through the “cultural, ideological, psychological, and political forces of pronatalism” (Moore, 2018, p.2). Pronatalism centres the motherly role of a woman as natural and inflicts “a moral, patriotic and economic obligation on women to reproduce” (Turnbull et al., 2017, p.334). Pronatalist ideologies and discourses indicate that all births impact individuals, families, and society positively (Gedvilaite-Kordusiene et al., 2020). Hence going against the ‘natural calling of a woman’ brings with it the risk of exclusion (Turnbull et al., 2017). Phrasing it in such a way, which indicates the possibility of social exclusion, poses social pressure on women to have children.

Nevertheless, the number of childless women is growing in Europe. However, very few declare that it is a personal, permanent choice but rather express uncertainty about their reproductive plans (Sobotka, 2017). Factors such as education, race or religious background may impact one's readiness to proclaim that one's childlessness is a choice (Moore, 2018). Because "able-bodied, middle-class and upper-middle-class, White women who remain childless are attacked", they may be less likely to declare their childlessness desired (Moore, 2018, p.2). Multiple studies suggest that higher levels of self-reported religiosity are associated with higher fertility intentions and a higher number of children (Peri-Rotem, 2016). It would be interesting to conduct further research on whether religious women reportedly want to have more children than non-religious women due to the social pressures of pronatalism imposed through theological arguments.

It is difficult to establish an exact age at which a woman can be considered permanently childless since, due to the development of medical science, women can also give birth in the later stages of their lives. Sobotka (2017) suggests that by the age of 46, women can be considered permanently childless. However, that takes into consideration only biological motherhood.

Multiple factors that contribute to childlessness have been determined, e.g., lack of a suitable partner, a woman's social position, material resources and social status (where high resources in developing countries contribute to a higher number of children while in a developed country, they impact fertility negatively) and liberal values (Miettinen et al., 2014). The body of research that explain the reasons behind childlessness in terms of something that needs to be addressed to raise fertility is disproportionately larger than research on any other aspect of childlessness.

A lot of stigma and stereotypes are tied to voluntarily childless women (Peterson, Engwall, 2019). One of the stereotypes is that they replace children with pets. The current Pope Francis has also made statements on this topic, which I bring up in my analysis. In their article, Peterson and Engwall (2019) present both types of research: one suggesting that childless individuals use pets as an unhealthy replacement for having children and the other indicating that only a minor percentage sees companion animals as a substitute, and the majority do not like pets. Therefore, it is impossible, in light of existing research, to establish whether companion animals are used as a form of replacement for having offspring.

Childless or Childfree?

In the literature, one can come across different terms such as childless, involuntarily childless, circumstantially childless, temporarily childless, voluntarily childless, childless by choice, and childfree (see: Moore, 2014; Miettinen et al., 2014; Turnbull et al., 2017). They all have slightly different meanings; nevertheless, they are all still pronatalist terms because they describe a woman in relation to a child (Venkatesan & Murali, 2021). Attempts to change the language around that phenomenon have been made.

Most of the terms I presented above can be considered as descriptive and neutral; however, the term childfree can be regarded as “a conscious, communicative articulation of identity [which is] historically and culturally situated in resistance to pronatalism, resulting in stigma and stereotyping, which must be discursively managed by individuals who choose to communicate their choice to remain childless” (Moore, 2014, p.159-160). Another way of addressing this particular life situation without using the suffix ‘less’, suggesting lack of something, is saying ‘woman with no children’, which focuses on a person’s identity as a woman first (Turnbull et al., 2017). However, the adjective ‘childless’ can be used without the emotional baggage attached to the suffix ‘less’ as a mere description.

Existing terminology suggests that childlessness is either forced or desired; however, researchers suggest that “we should rather talk about a continuum that would define the degree to which life without children is a state that is actually desirable” (Mynarska, 2013, p. 72). However, such a scale is difficult to establish because there are no available tools to do that. Fertility intentions may change due to circumstances, so it is virtually impossible to unequivocally categorise not having children as planned or forced (Mynarska et al., 2014). As stated by Moore (2014), “further consideration must be given to language used when labelling and/or talking about people who make the choice to forgo having children” (p.159). Nevertheless, in my thesis, I do not aspire to find solutions to that problem, and I am using the term ‘childless’ as the broadest and most widely accepted term.

3.2. Childlessness in the Polish context

Poland is a country with a specific approach to the problems of childlessness, shaped on the one hand by the Catholic Church and the national cult of the Polish Mother and on the other - by the experience of a country belonging to the former Second World, which underwent a political transformation (Dolińska, 2014, p. 227, my translation). The Catholic Church, the cult of the mythical Polish Mother, and the political changes have all impacted the discourse on childlessness in Poland. To what degree the Catholic Church influences the perception of childlessness has not been researched, hence my interest in this topic. Nevertheless, demographic tendencies observed in Poland are interesting because, contrary to the expectation of high fertility due to high levels of religiousness, the birth rates in Poland are relatively low. As stated by Miettinen et al. (2014), “Central and Eastern Europe and some Southern European countries have long been characterised by [...] low fertility but relatively low level of childlessness”, which could be explained by “adherence to the values of traditional marriage and motherhood and negative attitudes to voluntary childlessness” (Miettinen et al., 2014, p.4). The Central Statistical Office (GUS, 2022) reports that in 2020 the fertility rate was 1.378, the lowest since 2016. The fertility rate since 2000 oscillates between 1.2 and 1.4. Miszczak (2016) suggests that the trend of resignation from parenthood will grow but will not become dominant. There is, however, “a generalised anxiety about the decline of the heterosexual Catholic family perceived to be threatened by low fertility” (Mishtal, 2012, p.154). Nevertheless, there is no relationship between voluntary childlessness and low birth rates in Poland (Dolińska, 2014). Accusations that childless women are to blame for low birth rates are unjustified.

Childlessness is not socially accepted, causing a pathologisation of a relatively common phenomenon. Women who do not become mothers experience isolation and commiseration (Mynarska et al., 2014). The ‘perfect’ family model consists of a married couple and one or two children, as both not having children and having ‘too many’ children are seen as a deviation from the norm (Mishtal, 2012). Social pressure is used to control individual women’s reproductive decisions. According to Mishtal (2012), “[t]he powerful cultural and Catholic stigma against voluntary childlessness makes childbearing less a free choice than a highly constrained one; still, Polish demographers are observing a slow increase in voluntary childlessness”

(Mishtal, 2012, p.162). No precise data exists on the extent of this phenomenon. Searching for one's individual life path outside the culturally and religiously imposed one is becoming more popular among Polish women (Pawlikowska, 2014). That also explains the increase in research on this phenomenon in recent years.

The number of childless women in Poland has increased. Mynarska (2013) states that, among Polish women born between 1945-1955, about 8% never gave birth to a child, while for women born in 1965, this number is 15.5%. For those born in 1970, this number increased to 17% (Mynarska et al., 2014). Contrary to the image of a woman created by conservative journalists who - by definition, because of being a woman – wants to have children, there is a group that consciously gives up parenthood (Dolińska, 2014). According to Eurobarometer 2011, only 1% of women aged between 18 and 40 proclaim voluntary childlessness (as cited in Miettinen et al., 2014, p.36). However, this research is already eleven years old, and the current situation might differ from the one captured in 2011. Available research does not definitively explain the reason behind such a low number of self-proclaimed voluntary childless women.

Family is highly valued in Poland; however, economic and institutional constraints may stop some from starting their own family (Brzozowska & Mynarska, 2017). Interestingly, “new demographic theories propose that gender inequities experienced by women are decisive in discouraging motherhood as the burden of care work combined with desired, or necessary, employment proves too overwhelming for many women to manage” (Mishtal, 2012, p.154). If that were the case, there is a need for structural support for those who, under other circumstances, would like to become parents.

It is believed in Poland that the ‘deadline’ to have a first child is before a woman turns 30. This belief may impact some women’s childbearing decisions if they think they ‘missed their chance’. There is a strong pressure to start a family early, and “if a woman does not have a child by the time she is 30, the chances of her becoming a mother later substantially decline” (Mynarska, 2010, p.354). It has little to do with biology and current European trends. The mean age for a woman at the birth of the first child in most European countries is close to or slightly over 30, which means that an equal number of women have their first child before and after they turn 30. According to Mynarska (2010), “Women [in Poland] may neither expect nor fear any

social sanctions for having a child after they are 30. They do, however, anticipate severe consequences if they are not able to have a child afterwards” (Mynarska, 2010, p.363). That is, as long as they can conceive, they will not face social repercussions other than possible pressure to have children earlier. However, if the women postpone their childbearing plans and cannot have children because of their age or other medical reasons, they may face stigmatisation.

The Polish Mother and the Mother of God

The myth of the Polish Mother (Matka Polka), a heroic figure, is deeply ingrained in the collective imagination. This ideal “defines womanhood through the loving and self-sacrificing role of a mother – a woman convinced of her irreplaceability as the manager of family life” (Gedvilaite-Kordusiene et al., 2020, p.232) and makes it more difficult to opt out of the role of mother. The myth of the Polish Mother is a result of the country’s complicated history (Imbierowicz, 2012). It was created in the nineteenth century when Poland was under occupation, and taking care of the continuity of language and culture was primarily the women’s role (Wężyk, 2021). Polish nationalism impacts the production and sustainment of gender roles, where women are to take care of the families and national heritage while men protect them (Graff, 2008). In such a case, not wanting children can be considered anti-patriotic (Wężyk, 2021). That could be a possible explanation as to why childless women in Poland may experience ostracism.

Mother of God, Mary, is portrayed in Poland as a role model for mothers and plays an essential part in creating the figure of the Polish Mother (Kościańska, 2012). Mary is also considered a protector and a symbol of the Polish nation (Młodawska, 2012). As Kościańska (2012) claims, the Polish Marian cult is the cult of the Mother of God, and not the Virgin Mary (Kościańska, 2012). The image of the Mother of God, the Polish Mother and Poland as a mother are blended in the collective imagination and do not reflect any realistic qualities of women (Graff, 2008). The connection between them is taken for granted, the same way the relationship between Poland and Catholicism often goes unquestioned (Kościańska, 2012). However, there is a need for a critical analysis of both of these phenomena.

3.3. Childless women and social exclusion

Femininity and womanhood are often associated with procreation, with motherhood as its leading component (Garncarek, 2017). Being childless can be seen as going against the natural state of affairs, so choosing it can be seen as “a threat to the normative social order and hence subject to ridicule and ostracisation” (Venkatesan & Murali, 2021, p.121). Childlessness can be regarded as a result of either emotional or somatic deficiency, and society does not accept either, leading to stigmatisation (Dolińska, 2014). Women who openly admit to not wanting children are “stereotyped as child-hating, selfish, materialistic, career-driven, non-nurturing and unwomanly” (Turnbull et al., 2017, p.334). Nevertheless, there is no indisputable evidence to confirm that stereotype.

The women who proclaim their choice of remaining childless are at a higher risk of social exclusion. According to Turnbull et al. (2017), it can happen in all areas of life: social (e.g., contraction of social networks, insensitive and judgmental interaction), civic (e.g., sterilisation and supported conception laws), and economic (e.g., being expected to work more, or doing inconvenient shifts for example during holidays). Research on this aspect of childlessness is scarce. The validity of the choice to remain childless is often questioned (Gedvilaite-Kordusiene et al., 2020). Moreover, childless individuals experience “misunderstanding and intolerance related to this choice and the pressure exerted by the environment to change their decision” (Tomaszewska, 2017, p. 81). They are expected to argue their choices because having children is seen as the norm.

Australian research results suggest that women who do not have the characteristics of ‘a perfect mother’, e.g., single, disabled, in a same-sex relationship, were less pressured to have children (Turnbull et al., 2017). According to Miszczak (2016), in the Polish context, single childless women do not experience reproach because of the ‘common assumption’ that children should be born into a ‘complete’ family.

Voluntary childlessness is, nevertheless, accepted by those for whom it could be a possible alternative, e.g., young people, women, educated people, and childless people (Dolińska, 2014). By accepting others’ choices, they, in a way, keep their options open or confirm their own decision. Those who are most likely to express their negative attitudes towards childless women are, according to Dolińska (2014),

men, religious people with conservative-right-wing views, poorly educated and elderly; that is mainly people who are not personally affected by pregnancy and childbearing.

Młodawska (2012), on the basis of research on the internet discourse around childlessness in Poland, calls for new terminology to describe the situation of childless women. Because they experience both privileges and marginalisation on the cultural level due to their status, the existing terminology do not capture it.

According to Młodawska (2012), there is a need for new concepts going beyond ‘traditional stigmatisation’ and ‘postmodern exclusion’.

3.4. Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic Church is the largest and most widespread Christian denomination (Walsh, 2016). The statistics regarding the number of believers are unreliable, as it is challenging to establish what exactly constitutes a believer; however, the Statistical Yearbook of the Church estimates it to be approximately 1.3 billion people (Walsh, 2016). That means that roughly one out of six people in the world are Catholic.

Back in the early stages of Christianity, the word ‘catholic’ was used as an adjective to describe the unity of different communities, the global Christian community (Cunningham, 2009). Only in the fourth century did the adjective ‘catholic’ start to be used as a synonym of ‘true’ to distinguish the Church from other deviating groups (Cunningham, 2009). That is, the meaning of the word evolved from being a description for all Christians to describing only certain Christian groups.

The first major schism of the Catholic Church took place in the early Middle Ages. With the separation of the Church of the East and the Church of the West in 1054, it “became customary, and somewhat confusingly, to describe Eastern Christianity by the term ‘Orthodox’ and Western Christianity as ‘Catholic’ even though each church would insist that it was both orthodox (right believing and right worshipping) and catholic (universal)” (Cunningham, 2009, p.7). Nevertheless, when discussing the Catholic Church, what is being referred to is, unless specified otherwise, the Western tradition. The second major division in the Catholic Church was the sixteenth-century Reformation.

From the times of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the teachings of the Catholic Church have been conceived of as a homage to the ‘Scripture and Tradition’ (Thiel, 2007). Framing it in such a way was a response to the Reformers’ accusation that the Church had deviated from the Bible in its teaching. Even though an emphasis is put on Tradition and continuity, the need for the Church to continually reform (*ecclesia semper reformanda*) was voiced around the same time. The Tradition is also deemed continuous and supposedly carries true wisdom and is thus essential to understanding current issues. However, despite this presupposed continuity and unity, Catholicism presents itself inversely in different countries.

Regardless of those divides, Catholicism keeps a strong identity of continuity from the beginning of Christianity (Obirek, 2021). The pope is seen as a descendant of Saint Peter, and bishops as linked to the apostles (Cunningham, 2009). This supposed continuance of institutions and connection to Tradition is used as proof of the legitimacy of the Church.

In my thesis, I am using the terms Catholic Church and Catholics. However, the Roman Catholic Church is a more precise name that refers to Western tradition. My choice is dictated by the fact that in the popular imagination, those are synonymous, and the noun ‘Roman’ is often omitted.

Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) as a turning point towards modernity

The Second Vatican Council marked a turning point in the Church’s attitude toward modernity (Casarella, 2007). The idea behind calling the Council into session was to focus on internal reform and to show “a willingness to address an audience beyond that of the Catholic Church itself” (Cunningham, 2009, p.212). The internal reform included *ressourcement* – going “back to the sources of the Catholic tradition to reappropriate the best insights and the most authentic witness to the essentials of belief and practice” and *aggiornamento* - “the need to speak to the contemporary world” (Cunningham, 2009, p.216). The practice of looking to Tradition for answers remains prominent in argumentations of the Church’s stance on many moral issues. This fact is essential when discussing the Church’s stance on different topics because no ‘new’ statements can oppose what has been said before. Hence, Church documents usually include many references to previously produced documents.

As in many cases, the changes proposed during Vatican II were met with strong reactions. Some felt the changes were too extreme, while others suggested they were not radical enough (Cunningham, 2009). Progressives tend to overemphasise the innovation of ideas presented at Vatican II, while traditionalists focus on the pre-modern values that the Polish Pope John Paul II highlighted in his teaching (Casarella, 2007). Whether the pontificate of John Paul II followed the spirit of the Second Vatican Council or went against it remains a contested issue.

Vatican II also brought changes to the field of moral theology. Until the Council, most people involved in teaching and developing moral theology were ordained priests. Following Vatican II, more lay people, particularly women, became interested in the field and, as a result, brought new and different perspectives on issues of morality (Cunningham, 2009). The inclusion of women in the discussion on morality presents many opportunities. However, based on the research I encountered, it appears that the potential has been missed, and those approaches do not seem to have found space among the Polish church authorities.

National and local varieties of Catholicism

Even though the Vatican's guidelines seem clear-cut, the Catholic Church's teaching is not homogeneous (Béraud & Portier, 2015). The national branches and local communities are given much freedom. There are significant discrepancies between how episcopates of different countries react to the pressing moral issues concerning family and human life.

This discrepancy in the teaching and emphasis on moral issues could be a result of the way in which Catholicism spread. The main goal is to maintain the essence of Catholicism through the process of inculturation, while the other aspects are left for interpretation (Cunningham, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a universal Catechism of the Catholic Church, which presents the official stance of the Catholic Church on various issues, accepted in 1992 by pope John Paul II and published in 1994. It "was issued to be used by the bishops of the world as a template for the writing of catechisms for various age groups and different cultural needs" (Cunningham, 2009, p.145). As such, it is supposed to capture this 'essence'. Regardless, the readings of the Catechism are not unanimous, which leaves me questioning whether such a thing as the universal Catholic Church does or can even exist.

Pope and the hierarchy of the Church

Understanding the hierarchy of the Catholic Church is essential for comprehending the discourse analysis I conduct. Many outside of the Church, as well as some of its members, believe that the hierarchy in the Church is shaped like a pyramid with the Pope at the top (Walsh, 2016). In truth, the Pope does not have causative power over the local dioceses governed by bishops (Hailu, 2017). The highest authority in the Church belongs to the ecumenical councils of bishops, which so far have been called upon twenty-one times “to decide matters of doctrine or, sometimes, important matters of internal Church discipline” (Walsh, 2016, p. 49). Bishops are also responsible for the national and local communities (Hailu, 2017). Hence, the power of the Pope is more symbolic.

A particularly widespread misconception is that of the Pope’s infallibility. During the Church council, known as the Vatican I (1870), the Pope was declared infallible, meaning that his words were to be regarded as dogmas (Walsh, 2016). Even though there are specific criteria for that to happen, the character of Catholicism from Vatican I is highly influenced by the Pope’s ideology (Obirek, 2021). Many see the words of the Popes as introducing new dogmas; nevertheless, they should not be regarded as the official teaching of the Church unless otherwise specified.

Influence of the Catholic Church

The impact of the Catholic Church on society in modern times has arguably decreased and is expressed “in the changes in certain laws in the domain of ethics, which until very recently, were profoundly marked by the Christian vision” (Dobbelaere, Pérez-Agote, 2015, p.7). Even though the power of the Church and its influence on policies has diminished due to secularising trends, my experience shows that it still has political power in many places, particularly in my home country Poland.

A decline in the control the Church has over society can also be noticed at a personal level. As Cunnigham (2009) points out, “[t]here was a time when a person’s religious and moral life was pretty much shaped by family, church, local mores, and the limited exposure one got in schooling” (p.249). While currently, there are many ‘experts’ speaking publicly on matters of morality and beliefs. What used to be a domain of the Church and family is now open to all sorts of influences.

Modern problems, old as time solutions

The most difficult for the Church seems to be convincing the general public how the ‘modern’ moral issues have been ingrained in Christian values since their inception. Cunningham (2009) suggests that in debates on ethical issues, the arguments are “simplified down to ‘liberals’ versus ‘conservatives,’ when, in fact, the deeper issues concern the very significance of what it means to say what makes a human a human and to what degree is human life valued and worthy of protection” (Cunningham, 2009, p.238). It is, therefore, more appropriate to discuss the dignity of humans.

The question of what makes ‘a human’ has been of interest to the Catholic Church since its beginning. That is, by redirecting the weight of the issue from a very practical matter regarding real problems to an abstract discussion on morality and the value of human life, the Church puts itself in the role of an expert. This is, even though those in power in the Church (e.g., bishops) are not, and never will be, directly influenced by the problems they ‘solve’.

Laicisation of arguments

One of the most noteworthy tactics used by the Catholic Church when addressing issues concerning morality is the language used to support its arguments. For example, in the case of the Belgian Episcopal Conference discussing the moral implications of euthanasia, when addressing Catholics, the arguments were theological and doctrinal, whereas when talking to the general public, the focus shifted to philosophical and anthropological argumentation (Voyé & Dobbelaere, 2015). This tactic is not an isolated case. “Pope John-Paul II himself did not escape from this tendency. When he visited the UNO and the European Parliament, he de-dogmatised his speeches speaking of Human Rights” (Voyé & Dobbelaere, 2015, p.21). The same situation has been documented in France, where arguments against same-sex marriage were framed as a concern for children’s rights violations (Béraud & Portier, 2015). This tendency to laicise argumentation and speak of human rights is interesting in two ways; first, it does not require any knowledge of the Catholic discourse for the recipient to understand, and second, whatever is being said sounds more neutral and can be understood as a general truth.

This is all the more interesting when we consider the Church’s stance on the declaration of human rights in general. “In the 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*,

Pope John XXIII gave the church's full backing to the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights" (Beattie, 2009, p.57). However, since the issue of reproductive rights was raised at the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, "this enthusiasm has cooled" (Beattie, 2009, p.57). That is, the Church supported the UN and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as long as it did not voice its support for women's sexual liberation.

3.5. Catholic Church in Poland

Whenever discussing social phenomena in the Polish context, one cannot disregard the influence of the Catholic Church's role in its occurrence. The country is considered culturally and religiously homogeneous, and one cannot separate culture from religion in the Polish context because they are closely intertwined. This homogeneity results from the country's tragic history - the borders of the country being moved and decided upon by western powers and the genocide of the Polish nation (e.g., Polish Jews) in the early twentieth century (Graff & Frej, 2015).

As mentioned earlier, estimating the number of believers or members of the Church is challenging. And so, the statistics available for Poland also give different estimates. Bein et al. (2021) recall the results of a recent Pew Survey on religion in Europe and note that 87% of Poles are affiliated with the Catholic Church, while 61% attend religious service at least once a month, which is the highest value among all surveyed countries. Meanwhile, Vrublevskaya et al. (2019) point to statistics that hold that "the percentage of Poles who self-identify as religious in a way that corresponds to the teachings of the Catholic Church has, however, decreased from 66 per cent in 2005 to 39 per cent in 2014" (Vrublevskaya et al., 2019, p.208). All of those numbers may be correct, as affiliation, participation in service and following the teachings of the Catholic Church relate to very different aspects of being a member of the Church.

The character of Polish religiosity is often described as folk religion (Kościńska, 2012). Research shows that the people are not particularly familiar with the tenets of the Catholic faith, and a large group of Poles select which doctrines they observe (Szwed, 2015). Obirek (2021) distinguishes between religious and cultural Catholicism in the Polish context when discussing this matter.

Being Polish is often equated with being Catholic, so anyone opposing the Church can be accused of being anti-Polish (Wężyk, 2021). Multiple factors contribute to the significance of the Catholic Church in Poland.

Irena Borowik (2010) singles out the following: the historical role of Catholicism in buttressing and maintaining national Polish identity; the civic role of religion and its political instrumentalisation during the transformation period; the general decline in social security caused by rapid social and structural changes; the enduring efficacy of traditional mechanisms of religious socialisation; and the possibility that more significant changes in religiosity of Poles are still not discernible on the surface although such changes might have occurred on individual level (as cited in Vrublevskaya et al., 2019, p.208).

In the following sections, I will look at the role of the Church in shaping Polish history and culture and discuss the political power ascribed to the Church, mainly by the current political opposition. All these aspects are vital for understanding why I assume that the discourse of the Catholic Church on womanhood and fertility has an impact on the social exclusion of childless women in Poland.

Historical and cultural significance of the Church in Poland

Poland's conversion to Roman Catholicism took place in 966 CE. In the Polish popular imagination, this date marks the formation of the country. There is no linear progression in how Catholicism took precedence over the other religions present at that time (Porter-Szucs, 2017). The Reformation never gained enough support in Poland; however, from the sixteenth century onward, the distinction between Catholic Poles and non-Catholic Poles started to grow in importance (Porter-Szucs, 2017). Until the eighteenth century, the country was culturally and ethnically diverse, with people practising different religions, although Catholicism was dominant (Mishtal, 2015).

The Polish Constitution of May 3, 1791, names Roman Catholicism as the national religion (Porter-Szucs, 2017). The Catholic Church's status grew between 1795 and 1918 during the occupation (by Russia, Prussia and Austria) as it was designated "the bearer of Polish national identity" (Mishtal, 2015, p.19). However, according to Porter-Szucs (2017), before Poland gained its independence in 1918, the Church

opposed the national liberation movement. The eruption of the Second World War marked another milestone in the growing position of the Church. By the end of the war, Poland “became ethnically and religiously nearly homogenous as a result of the deportation and extermination of the Jewish population and the shifting of the borders westward, which caused the loss of the Orthodox Ukrainian, Russian, and Byelorussian populations” (Mishtal, 2015, p. 20). The significance of the Church kept rising between 1947 and 1989 when Poland was under communist rule, and the Church became the only place where people could express their dissatisfaction with the Communists (Nowicka, 1996).

After the fall of communism, politicians were afraid to oppose the Church for fear of losing the Church’s support (Wężyk, 2021). The Church is often portrayed as crucial in forming the country and sustaining the nation’s culture. The Church in Poland “has essential educational and socialisation functions and describes how the various roles in society should be fulfilled – including the role of the mother” (Środa, 1992, p.13 as cited in Imbierowicz, 2012, p.147). And as I will argue in the following subsection, the Church also has the political power to impact legislation.

The political power of the Church

Obirek (2021) suggests that the Catholic Church in Poland should be analysed from a sociological or political science perspective rather than a theological one because the theological aspects of the religion seem to be only a cover-up for the political agenda of the Church. Polish theology is isolated from international trends, and documents from the Vatican are not subjected to critical analysis (Obirek, 2021). Polish Catholicism has been equated with John Paul II’s teachings (excluding openness to interreligious dialogue) until recently and has been more strongly influenced by cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who called people to distrust catholic intellectuals and theologians (Obirek, 2021). This could explain why theological analysis of social phenomena may not be the most accurate in the Polish case.

Since the 1990s, public debates on Catholic issues in Poland have been shaped by the priest Tadeusz Rydzyk and run by his media platforms (Obirek, 2021). I did not include any discourse produced by them in my analysis because it is not representing the official stance of the Church. However, the TV Trwam and Radio Maryja could

be interesting material sources for further research on childlessness since they have the power to shape people's imagination and, in turn, legislation.

Poland's constitution grants separation of the state and religion; however, the Catholic Church has an influential position on the country's political stage. The close relations between politics and religion in Poland pose many risks, especially for groups that the Church's officials stigmatise, e.g., women who do not conform to the role assigned to them by the Church, the LGBT+ community and religious minorities.

Undeniably, "there is much at stake for women and their rights to equality, autonomy and bodily integrity in how religion and politics intertwine" (Razavi, Jenichen, 2010, p.844). In Ireland, another European country that has been under the strong influence of the Church, "[t]he enshrinement of elements of the doctrine of the Catholic Church in the Constitution has been typically viewed as one main reason why Irish governments have been slow at recognising family diversity and developing active policies towards families" (Laplante et al., 2020, p.8). Only once those influences had been addressed, and the public discourse started shifting did Ireland implement laws giving its citizens personal freedom, such as a right to same-sex marriage and access to abortion. I believe similar advancements could take place in Poland, which is why I have decided to focus my thesis on the Church's discourse and its impact on a minority group.

Since the fall of communism, the political scene of Poland has been unstable, and the Church's political support is invaluable, so also "the left-leaning parties, even if they would like to limit the Church's incursions into the public sphere, tend to avoid any direct confrontation with it for fear of the electoral consequences" (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010, p.843). The political power of the Catholic Church is maintained by keeping the illusion that society is profoundly religious; however, that may not be the case.

The example of protests in October 2020 against the abortion ban (e.g., nearly 500 locations across the country, over 100 000 participants in Warsaw) showed that the population at large does not agree with laws being dictated by Catholic values. Motak et al. (2021) call those demonstrations (Women's Strike) "first large-scale anti-church manifestations" (Motak et al., 2021, p.594). However, I think this term is

misleading because many people, including some Catholics, demonstrated in favour of reproductive rights and not against the Church per se (Jędrzejek, Szwed, 2021). Many anti-clerical symbols were used during the protests following the abortion ban, but it is an exaggeration to say it focused on anti-Church rhetoric. Painting it in such a way erases the participation of those Catholics who, regardless of the recommendations from the Episcopate, stood against the further tightening of the abortion law.

Ironically, the institution that is considered one of the leading powers in Poland's fight for freedom has become an institution responsible for limiting women's rights (Mishtal, 2015). "After 1989, various campaigns were launched to propagate Catholic values, especially concerning the traditional role of women in the family and public life, together with a range of issues regarding personal morality, including contraception" (Mandes & Rogaczewska, 2013, p.264). The chaos of transformation also helped the Episcopate demand many things in exchange for stabilising the atmosphere (Wężyk, 2021). Even though more and more Poles leave the Church, it is not reflected in its engagement in the political sphere (Obirek, 2021).

In this chapter, I have shown how influential questions of religion are in Polish society. What is described as Catholic theology in Poland and the way women are treated in the Polish religious climate are not closely associated with theology arising from the Catholic Church or statements from the Pope. It is instead a national version of Catholicism linked to the particular history and context of the formation of the Polish nation. All of this shows that if we want to understand the experiences of social exclusion of childless women in Poland, we need to count religion as an influential factor in social exclusion theories. If we want to understand the experiences of social exclusion of childless women in Poland, we need to examine teachings issued on the role of women and family life created in Poland. Thus, my interest in the analysis of the Polish Episcopate's document.

4. Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the research method I chose to adapt to conduct my analysis: critical discourse analysis. I characterise what discourse is and how it is performed according to Fairclough's model. Next, I present the research design. Finally, I identify the limitations of the research.

4.1. Research method – Critical Discourse Analysis

Social constructionism is the meta-theory behind critical discourse analysis. Even though there are many definitions of social constructionism, they mostly agree with the following assumptions about knowledge production, that is, being critical towards the taken-for-granted knowledge, being historically and culturally specific in the production of knowledge, assuming that what we call knowledge is the result of social processes and that no objective reality to be described exists (Burr, 1995). In social constructionism, “subjective experience is provided by the discourses in which [people] are culturally embedded” (Burr, 1995, p. 59). That is, framing reality as meaningful is possible only through available to individual discourses. Hence, studying what they entail, what and to whom they say is essential to a better understanding of human experience.

Discourse can be described as “a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events” (Burr, 1995, p.32). They each paint a specific picture of reality. Discourses primarily become manifested through language, in texts: “in speech, say a conversation or interview, in written material such as novels, newspaper articles or letters, in visual images like magazine advertisements or films, or even in the ‘meanings’ embodied in the clothes people wear or the way they do their hair” (Burr, 1995, p.34). Any form of communication (including, e.g. images, symbols) can essentially be identified as a text expressing a particular type of discourse.

There is a plethora of definitions of discourse analysis. According to Moberg (2022), “[a]t its most general, the analysis of discourse can be described as the analysis of language in use” (Moberg, 2022, p.18). The adjective *discursive* or *discoursal* is being used to describe multiple approaches to research – both theories and methods,

as well as general research framework (Taira, 2016). My interest lies in critical discourse analysis as a method to conduct research, as I find it the most accurate method to study social exclusion. As said by Hjelm (2016), the main goal of critical discourse analysis is “to ‘unmask’ the ways in which power imbalances are sustained through discourse [...] by drawing attention to the suppression of alternative constructions of the world” (Hjelm, 2016, p.22-23). That makes it, in my opinion, the right tool to use when wanting to expose the language that underpins and justifies social structures that lead to social exclusion. Fairclough (2001) suggests that discourse is a social practice. As such, it “does not merely ‘reflect’ a reality which is independent of it; social practice is in an active relationship to reality, and it changes reality” (Fairclough, 2001, p.31). Discourses can both support the existing power dynamic and lead to social change (Hjelm, 2016). Pointing out the current power behind particular discourses can contribute to the transformation of society and lead to a more diverse community.

Even though everyone participates in the reproduction and creation of various discourses on many different subjects, not everyone has the same level of influence over the formation of the dominant discourses. In this sense, institutions are of particular interest in critical discourse analysis research since they often hold “disproportionate power to produce and circulate discourse and because they promote dominant interests” (Bucholtz, 2003, p.57). As Fairclough (2001) expresses it, “[t]he idea of ‘power behind discourse’ is that the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power” (Fairclough, 2001, p.46). The less obvious the power holder and the ideology within discourse are, the more effective the message is. The process of concealing the power takes place when “ideologies are brought to discourse not as explicit elements of the text, but as the background assumptions which on the one hand lead the text producer to ‘textualise’ the world in a particular way, and on the other hand lead the interpreter to interpret the text in a particular way” (Fairclough, 2001, p.71). Pointing out the ideologies and power holders behind discourses is an integral part of all efforts to bring about social change. That is what I am particularly interested in doing in the analysis of the chosen document.

According to Taira (2016), Fairclough offers the most comprehensive toolkit to analyse texts in detail. He uses the achievements of linguistics and the study of

rhetoric to conceptualise his idea of discourse analysis. For the purpose of my research, I find Fairclough's level model of description, interpretation, and explanation the most suitable method of discourse analysis. Moberg (2022), drawing on Fairclough, gives the following summary of the stages: "if the main objective of description is to account for *what* is being said and *how* it is being said, and the main objective of interpretation is to account for *whom* is saying what to *whom*, then the main objective of explanation is to account for *why* it is being said" (Moberg, 2022, p.27). Once again, there are no strict rules as to how to conduct the analysis, only guidelines. In the following paragraphs, I will describe each of the stages.

In the description stage, the analysis focuses on the formal properties of the text (Moberg, 2022). It is concerned with vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. Each of those aspects can be viewed as a separate stage of analysis. Regarding vocabulary, one may want to study what kinds of words are used, whether there is overwording present, and what metaphors are used (Fairclough, 2001). Analysis of grammar includes determining the modality of the text (what level of authority the words used show, e.g., must, should, possibly, certainly), the logical connectors (words such as, e.g., even though, nevertheless, but), use of inclusive and exclusive 'we' (Fairclough, 2001). The main concern of this stage is what is being said and which linguistic and grammatical means are used.

The next stage, interpretation, requires certain language and cultural competencies; that is, "interpretations are generated through a combination of what is in the text and what is 'in' the interpreter, in the sense of member's resources" (meaning their background knowledge) (Fairclough, 2001, p.118). It entails defining the genre and style of the text, as well as examining its intertextuality and interdiscursivity (Moberg, 2022). Determining the author, recipient and overall message of the text, as well as the context in which it is presented and distributed, is crucial in this phase.

The final stage, explanation, is highly influenced by the analyst's point of view and the theoretical perspective they adopt. According to Fairclough (2001), "[t]he objective of the stage of explanation is to portray a discourse as part of a social process, as a social practice, showing how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them" (Fairclough, 2001, p.135). Even though everyone experiences living in a society, different people will focus on distinct aspects of the

phenomena described or assign different meanings to elements of the text (Moberg, 2022). In the explanation stage, one wants to provide a theoretically-grounded explanation for why things are being said in the particular way they are being said.

4.2. Research design

Various authors highlight the importance of research design in critical discourse analysis. The whole process is complex and cannot be achieved by simply applying the existing formula mechanically (Hjelm, 2016). Designing a study needs to be an individualised procedure. Wodak (2008) observes that

it is important to be very precise when attempting an analysis; to define one's concepts and to provide working definitions; to be aware of the epistemological background of each approach which one might employ; and to consider carefully whether the framework selected makes sense in relation to both the data being investigated and the theoretical claims and research questions which necessarily guide every analysis (Wodak, 2008, p.21).

All these factors play an essential role in the justification of the result of the research.

Hence, I decided to give a comprehensive socio-cultural and historical background on childlessness and the Catholic Church before analysing the document *Shżyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* (Eng. Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family). In addition, I provided a description of social exclusion theories that I find particularly helpful when examining the chosen document.

I adapt Fairclough's model in my research in the following way: first, I describe the document, and then I conduct a textual analysis, focusing on selected excerpts. I picked forty-seven fragments from the document: eight support my arguments, and thirty-nine provide the base for my analysis. The selection process is further described in section 5.2. The analysis is complemented with examples from other Church documents and secondary sources describing them.

4.3. Limitations of the research

This research has several limitations, starting with the text I analyse being written in my mother tongue, Polish. If we were to assume that “different languages make different constructions of the world possible, which will also affect the character that a particular discourse takes across particular linguistic context” (Moberg, 2022, p.20), analysing text written in a different language than the language of the analysis poses its own challenges for what is already a complex process. Nevertheless, a discourse of an international institution such as the Catholic Church transcends language barriers. Even though I have an educational background in linguistics I am not a professional translator. To provide transparency, I give all the direct citations I use for my analysis in the original language of the document and their translations.

Childlessness is a complex phenomenon that should be addressed multidisciplinary; however, the existing research often focuses on its particular aspects separately, e.g., in terms of medicine, psychology, sociology or demography (Dolińska, 2014). The lack of comprehensive analysis and the early stage of the research on childlessness poses a risk that the definitions I use are oversimplified and do not capture the intricacy of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, I rely on the available academic literature and build on some of the most recent research results.

Moreover, the line between wanted and unwanted childlessness is thin, so specifying the criteria for their classification may be challenging. However, for the purpose of this research, the distinction is not necessary. Therefore, whenever I talk of childless women, unless otherwise specified, I speak about all women who do not have children (neither biological nor adoptive/foster) and do not take on a motherly role (e.g., for a partner’s child). The concerns regarding the vocabulary used in the existing research are further explored in the section “Childless or Childfree?”.

5. *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* – discourse analysis

The topic of childlessness is not central to the teachings of the Catholic Church. That is why I cannot use single source material in my analysis to look at the Church's stance on the matter. There are, however, Church documents and commentaries about, e.g., womanhood, desirable life paths of Catholics, and contraception. In her book on childlessness, sociologist, Beata Dolińska (2014), assesses that deciding about having children, the time when it is to happen, that is, controlling one's own fertility, contradicts the teaching of the Catholic Church, which opposes any conscious regulation of conception (Dolińska, 2014, p. 216, my translation). I agree with the above statement, and my understanding of the available sources on the Church's teaching is that voluntary childlessness is not desirable, which I will expand on in the following subsections. Sometimes the things omitted in the discussion are also saying something about one's attitude, so even though childlessness by choice is not directly addressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, from the way parenthood is portrayed, motherhood and not childlessness is the desirable life path for women.

What seems to be the most substantial document on an international, institutional level concerning the topic of my research is the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, written by Paul VI in 1968. To this day, it is considered a good source for those who want to understand the moral principles of responsible parenthood (Dudziak, 2019). Even after over half a century, it still elicits strong emotions among its adherents and opponents – the former believe it upholds the tradition and moral compass, while the latter think it is outdated and harmful (Terlikowski, 2018). Nevertheless, its importance cannot be understated. Beattie (2014) suggests that ever since the publication of this document, “the official teachings of the Church have become increasingly detached from the real lives of ordinary Catholics as far as sexuality is concerned” (Beattie, 2014, p.1088). Another crucial source regarding women, parenthood and childlessness are documents and books written by the Pope of Polish origin, both before his election (written as Karol Wojtyła) and after. John Paul II, in his teachings, talked about ‘the civilisation of life’ and ‘the civilisation of death’. As the cause for the emergence of the civilisation of death, John Paul II points to positivism (which leads to agnosticism) and utilitarianism regarding moral values (Czachorowski, 2019). His encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* from 1995 reinforces the

teaching of previous popes on sexuality and fertility (Obirek, 2021). John Paul II's pontificate has been deemed controversial because of his conservative views that deepened the gap between the Church's teachings and the realities of the changing world (Obirek, 2021). This growing disparity between the official teachings of the Church and what average believers think and do in their lives may lead to a crisis. The signs can already be observed in how the role of the Church in the public sphere in many countries diminishes.

The problems women experience in the Church are, to a degree, universal because the official teachings are formed centrally in the Vatican (Radzik, 2020). However, it would be wrong to assume that a shared experience of womanhood among all catholic women exists (Radzik, 2020). As mentioned in chapter three, the national and local Catholic communities are very diverse; therefore, analysing texts from the Vatican would not be appropriate for my research. Womanhood in Poland is contextualised in a specific form of Catholicism - the Polish one - and thus, to understand that experience, the documents for the analysis ought to stem from that context. Hence, I decided to choose a document of the Polish Episcopate. There are two documents of the Polish Episcopate that talk about family as the pillar of society: *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* (Eng. Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family, my translation) from 2009 touching upon marriage and family and *W trosce o człowieka i dobro wspólne* (Eng. Caring for the Human and the Common Good, my translation) from 2012 referring more to the general aspects of human existence (Miszczyk, 2016). Neither of them explicitly addresses childlessness. I chose to focus on the first one because it addresses womanhood more unequivocally.

5.1. Description of the document

The text I will analyse - *Służyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* (Eng. Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family) - is a document from the Polish Episcopal Conference prepared by the Family Council. It was written in Polish, so whenever I give a quotation in English, it is my translation of the text, as there is no official English translation of the document. I put the Polish text in the footnote for those who can and would like to refer to the original.

The document was published in 2009 in Warsaw by the publishing house Biblos in the form of a booklet (A5 format, 108 pages). This text is already thirteen years old; however, I could not find a newer source or a more specific text that would touch upon the issue of childlessness. I have reached out to the spokesperson of the Episcopate and was forwarded to contact the Family Council. However, I did not receive an answer as to whether there is a more recent or explicit document on childlessness.

The document consists of six parts:

- I. Introduction
- II. Doctrinal foundations
- III. Human Body as a ‘Value’
- IV. Pastoral Inspirations
- V. Responsibilities of the Secular Community
- VI. Ending

Out of forty-three titles of subsections of the document, five directly refer to passages from the Bible. There are also many references in the text both to the Bible and other Church documents, mainly from the Vatican. Hence, the text is marked by a high degree of both intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Paragraphs are numbered; the whole text consists of one-hundred and seventy-four sections.

Introduction

In the “Introduction” (p.5-14), we can learn about the structure and the purpose of the document. The addressee of the text is not explicitly stated, nor is the purpose of the booklet. However, considering the form and language, I assume it is not intended for the general public. It is mentioned that it is not supposed to be a theoretical study but a pastoral reflection. Hence, I would identify the addressees of the document as priests and other workers of the Church. The authors acknowledge that it is not a comprehensive monograph but suggest that the issues it touches upon are the most essential aspects concerning marriage and family for the Polish Church at the time it was written. The way the text is composed is interesting, as a large part of it consists of the authors fending off the attacks from undefined sources.

In paragraph fourteen, we learn that the title of the document directly refers to a book published by pope Benedict XVI and is a tribute to the pope's "devotion to the truth about humans and family"¹. These words are actually a citation from another document by the Pope's Family Council. Hence, the Polish Episcopate not only includes the name and title of the book, which was a starting point for writing the analysed document but also refers to another document that touched upon this book. At the time of publication of the document, he was a residing pope. The authors praise him because he "continues the spiritual struggle of his Great Predecessor"². The Great Predecessor, in his case, was the pope from Poland, John Paul II. The capitalisation of the title used in the text ('Wielki Poprzednik') suggests that the title given to the previous pope shows utmost respect and is not a mere description of John Paul II. Texts written by 'the Polish pope' are referred to in the text more frequently than the ones written by Benedict XVI, so it is interesting that the analysed document is supposed to be a tribute to his work. The document gives the impression that the tribute to the reigning Pope is a formalia, and the real dedication is to the teaching of the Polish Pope, John Paul II.

Doctrinal foundations

The chapter "Doctrinal foundations" (p.15-34) starts with an explanation that the fundamental elements of Church teaching shall be reiterated and that they can be a source of inspiration. In paragraph fifteen, we can read that the outline of doctrines is shared with joy and pride because the church is

the only institution that so consistently and with such determination
defends the dignity of human beings, marriage, and family³

The authors of the text express pride in what they believe in and what they will bring forward in this chapter. They also mention that the teachings they will present could be an inspiration to priests, catechists, and Church communities and movements. The text could also be potentially used as a source for deepening one's faith or understanding, and given to 'regular' members of the Church.

¹ "wdzięczni za Jego wielkie oddanie prawdzie o człowieku i rodzinie" (Papieska Rada ds. Rodziny, 2008, p.2), p.13

² kontynuując duchową walkę swego Wielkiego Poprzednika, p.14

³ jedyną instytucją, która tak konsekwentnie i z taką determinacją broni godności człowieka, małżeństwa i rodziny, p.15

This part has the most extensive footnotes that explain the dogmas and give references to the source materials. The footnotes include whole passages from the Pope's John Paul II homilies, speeches, and documents. This is what is referred to in critical discourse analysis as manifest intertextuality, i.e. the direct inclusion of parts of other texts. Out of seventy-two references, thirty-six refer to his texts explicitly. Only two refer to works of Josef Ratzinger, that is, Pope Benedict XVI. Considering that the text is supposed to be a tribute to the work of the latter, I find it rather fascinating that his works are not cited or referred to more extensively in the document. Which further highlights that the Catholic Church in Poland is highly influenced by the teachings of John Paul II.

Human Body as a 'Value'

This chapter (p.35-54) provides arguments as to why the Church feels the need to get involved in the debates on human bodies. It describes the intrinsic dignity of humans, the sanctity of bodies, and gender differences as God's plan. It also provides some arguments in favour of purity culture. I will present some of them in the following subsection, where I will look at different themes found in the text.

The dignity of humans and the sanctity of bodies is a radical claim in a neo-liberal and capitalistic society. In this section of the document, we can read about the need for the protection of the human body and its physiological, emotional and spiritual aspects. Even though in itself this call for protection has a positive undertone, it can be easily misinterpreted in the discussions on bodily autonomy and self-governance. The potential these claims have, instead of being used to speak against humanitarian crises such as sex trafficking, is often utilised to 'control' women's bodies.

There are sixty-five references in this chapter. Forty-one of them refer to the texts and speeches of John Paul II, while Benedict XVI is referred to only twice. This additionally advances my claim that the text seems to be rather a tribute to the teachings of John Paul II.

Pastoral Inspirations

The opening statement of this chapter (p.55-81) is worth reflecting on:

Calling for responsibility for marriage and the family, we want to consider in the first place what the Church can do to carry out its mission better and more effectively in this respect. At the same time, we would like to invite all people of good will to cooperate with us in this service ⁴

First of all, it shows the Church wants to take an active role in ‘strengthening the families’ but also asks for help in doing so. In the first chapter, to which I will get back to later in my analysis, the authors of the document made a claim about the Church possessing complete truth and knowledge. So, it is fascinating to see that the authors of the document ask lay people for help (the term ‘people of good will’ often refers to the lay part of the Church). However, I wonder in what capacity they are asked to contribute. In this chapter authors again remind readers of the rules of chastity and that “each child must be born”⁵.

Responsibilities of the Secular Community

This chapter (p.83-101) starts with an open declaration that

in the history of our homeland, the Catholic Church has always addressed the rulers, reminding them of the duties and principles of moral conduct ⁶

That is, the authors of the document admit to the Church being involved in Polish politics. The Church reminds the rulers about the “duties and principles of moral conduct”, which presumably are consistent with those of Catholic teaching. The Church “must be the voice of the voiceless” ⁷. However, in a country where mainstream politics is permeated with Christian rhetoric, the use of this phrase seems misguided.

⁴ Wzywając do odpowiedzialności za małżeństwo i rodzinę, na pierwszym miejscu chcemy się zastanowić, co Kościół może uczynić, aby lepiej i skuteczniej wypełniać swe posłannictwo pod tym względem. Równocześnie pragniemy zaprosić wszystkich ludzi dobrej woli do współpracy z nami w tej służbie, p.55

⁵ ”trzeba urodzić każde dziecko”, p.72

⁶ W dziejach naszej Ojczyzny Kościół katolicki zawsze przemawiał do rządzących, przypominając o obowiązkach oraz zasadach moralnego postępowania, p.83

⁷ Kościół musi bowiem być „głosem tych, którzy nie mają głosu”, p.83

Ending

The last chapter (p.103-106) is relatively short in comparison. The opening statement reads:

a hard fight against the powers of darkness is part of everyday Christian life⁸

It is mentioned that Satan is particularly interested in destroying love, marriage, and families. Nevertheless, the authors of the document have hope for the future. They encourage families to pray the rosary (at least one mystery) together every day and urge all believers to make a pilgrimage to Jasna Góra, one of the major places of worship in Poland, and there to offer one's struggles. They also ask to

let the 'Appeal of Jasna Góra' be a time of spiritual unity of Polish Catholics by the heart of the Mother 'given to us for protection'⁹

The 'Appeal of Jasna Góra' is an evening prayer to Mary, 'the Queen of Poland'. In that prayer, Mary is asked to 'sanctify families'. Hence, the protection of which the authors of the analysed document speak may be the protection of family values.

5.2. Analysis of selected excerpts

In order to highlight what kind of language is used in the analysed document of the Polish Episcopate and how it may contribute to the social exclusion of childless women, I picked some excerpts from the text. First, I read the document as a whole to understand its structure. Then, I highlighted in the text excerpts that deal with or brought up themes that relate to or otherwise pertain to childlessness. Finally, I divided them into themes, putting together fragments from distinct parts of the documents that talked about the same or very similar thing.

I identified in the text three themes in relation to my thesis topic: marriage and family life, fertility and childlessness, and women's role (their appointment) in the Church and society. After reading the document and realizing that the theme of attacks on 'traditional' values and the Church is repeated throughout the text, I

⁸ Ciężka walka przeciwko mocom ciemności to chrześcijańska codzienność, p. 103

⁹ Niech „Apel Jasnogórski” będzie coraz bardziej czasem duchowego jednoczenia się katolików polskich przy sercu Matki „danej nam ku obronie”, p. 106

decided to include some quotes that touched upon that topic. The analysed document also contains a section on how the teachings of the Church cannot be comprehended by 'scholarly analysis'. Since I conduct critical discourse analysis, I also decided to include those fragments. Appeals to theological authority are a way of using power and appear to be designed to undermine the type of analysis conducted. I chose thirty-nine excerpts from the document as the base of my analysis.

The mentioned above themes are put into nine subsections. Their order is dictated by the topic they cover. The first three (The Truth, The authority of the Church over marriage and family, The attacks against marriage and family) touch upon the position in which the Polish Episcopates places itself in the debate on marriage and family life. The next three (Marriage, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1,28), Human dignity and abortion) discuss the issues of marriage, family life, fertility, and human dignity. The following two (Women's appointment and gender differences, Life outside of marriage and childlessness) cover women's role and appointment (calling) as seen by the Church and the possibility of an alternative life path. And the final section (Analysis of Church documents is impossible) addresses the claim that scholarly analysis of this text is impossible. I decided to put them in this order to start with the most general statements, then go through the main topics of the document and areas of my interest and end with my response and thoughts on Church documents supposedly being beyond scholarly analysis.

My analysis follows those themes and not precisely the stages of Fairclough's analysis. However, I include elements of each of them. For most of the excerpts, I examine what kind of words are used in the text and what kind of meaning they carry, as well as determine their modality (description stage). Next, I interpret the text and, where appropriate, point to the intertextuality. Finally, I tie back what is being said in the analysed document to the theories I explained in chapter three and introduce other explanations of the text.

The larger part of the text is not included in my analysis. The published version of the document has one hundred and eight pages, so an in-depth analysis of each section goes beyond the scope of a master's thesis. Even with the criteria described above, the selection process was, to a degree, subjective. Thus, the conclusions I draw cannot be generalised to apply to the entirety of the document.

The following subsections include not only excerpts from the analysed document but are also contextualised in a larger body of Catholic documents. The translations of analysed quotes are in block quotations, and the original text is in the footnotes.

The Truth

I decided to start my analysis by looking at the title. The document is titled *Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family*. From this, one could deduce that its function is to uncover this truth to serve it. The document claims to be a tribute to ‘The Truth’. I was curious how often the word ‘truth’ and its variations will appear in the text. To count them, I used the electronic version of the document (KODR, n.d.) published on the website of Krajowy Ośrodek Duszpasterstwa Rodzin (Eng. National Center for Family Pastoral Care) and the built-in search feature of the web browser Mozilla Firefox. As can be seen, the word ‘truth’ (prawda) appeared in the text a total of forty-one times, and the word ‘true’ (prawdziwy) twenty-four times. The way the word ‘truth’ used in the text is, in most cases, interchangeable with the word ‘fact’. In this context, it is an indicator of strong modality. The word ‘true’ is used mainly to emphasise proper, correct behaviour.

Table 2 Frequency of usage of the words 'prawda' and 'prawdziwy

PRAWDA	41	PRAWDZIWY	24
prawdzie / w prawdzie	14	prawdziwy	6
prawda/ prawdą	12	prawdziwie	6
prawdy	7	prawdziwa	5
prawdę	7	prawdziwej	3
prawd	1	prawdziwym	2
		prawdziwi	1
		prawdziwymi	1

The word ‘truth’ appears frequently, possibly to convince the audience that whatever is written is ‘true’ and non-negotiable. In paragraph twelve, the authors claim that

the truth about marriage and family exists¹⁰

¹⁰ Prawda o małżeństwie i rodzinie istnieje, p.12

and has been revealed by God, which makes it objective. This statement shows that the authors are not open to debate, as their knowledge and certainty come from a higher power.

The authority of the Church over marriage and family

According to the authors of the analysed document

God is the creator of marriage and family ¹¹

This statement is characterised by high modality – the verb ‘is’ does not leave space for interpretation. If God created marriage and family, the institution supposedly speaking in his name and helping believers should have every right to talk about them. Nevertheless, the priests and bishops representing the Church do not have families of their own, which is often brought up as a counterargument in the debates. Whether or not one can speak on matters one does not have experience on is a contested issue.

The authors justify their right to speak on the matter of marriage and family in multiple ways. The word ‘truth’ is used in the Introduction twelve times in different contexts for that purpose, e.g., in paragraphs one and two:

wisdom and truth of the Gospel are a gift to the whole world¹²

The Church has truth to offer to the world ¹³

The quoted excerpts suggest that the authors believe the Church has the truth. This claim is most likely based on the supposed connection to the authority on the truth, God. The word ‘dar’, translated here as a ‘gift’, may have multiple meanings, this one being the most straightforward. It could also be translated as ‘offering’ or ‘benevolence’, alluding to the Christian tradition. This truth is given as a “gift to the whole world” and as such cannot be claimed by Christians. Nevertheless, the high modality words used in this excerpt suggest that its authors usurp some authority over it.

¹¹ Sam Bóg jest twórcą małżeństwa i rodziny, p.23

¹² Mądrość i prawda Ewangelii są darem dla całej ludzkości, p.5

¹³ Kościół ma do zaoferowania światu prawdę, p.6

In paragraph five, the authors bring up the claim that the Church is accused of not having being vocal in the past about atrocities happening in the world. They use this accusation to justify why they speak up about issues concerning family and marriage now. The authors ask for ‘the freedom of speech’ the Church should be granted to talk about ‘human degradation’. Recalling a right usually attributed to a more secular discussion is an interesting stylistic choice and goes along with a tradition I described in the previous chapter, where arguments are laicised to gain strength.

Another justification of why the Church has the authority to speak up can be found in the first paragraph. The word that translates into English as ‘lie’, but directly translated would be rather a ‘non-truth’ (nieprawda) is used twice to say that what ‘is being said’ about faith (that it is a private matter) and human existence (as relative, helpless and pessimistic) is not accurate. Thus, faith should not be regarded as a private matter and the Catholic Church as an institution has the right to speak and to paint a less pessimistic image of the world. However, it is not explicit who says those lies nor in which context they appear. Fending off attacks from undetermined sources is prevalent in the whole document.

In paragraph six, we can read that

Righteous people argue without prejudice but with seriousness, realism, and fairness. [...] The question is not who will win the discussion but whether we are able to discern which path actually leads to the objective happiness of man and the world¹⁴

However, if we look at the previous statements that the Church has ‘the Truth’, the argument that it is not about “who will win the discussion” takes on a different meaning. According to the authors of the text, any disagreement should be focused on finding the right path; however, if one party ‘has the truth’, there is not much space for debate. Therefore ‘finding the right path’ through a discussion means agreeing with the Church. Once again, the words used in this excerpt are characterised with high modality.

¹⁴ Prawi ludzie dyskutują bez uprzedzeń, z powagą, realizmem, uczciwie [...] Nie chodzi przecież o to, kto zwycięży w dyskusji, lecz o to, czy zdołamy rozeznąć, która droga rzeczywiście prowadzi ku obiektywnemu szczęściu człowieka i świata, p.9

The attacks against marriage and family

In the subsections of the document titled “Arrogant attacks against marriage and family”, we can read about

increasing pressures both in the ideological sphere and in the realm of legislation aimed at destroying traditional marriage and family ¹⁵

The authors voice regret that those attacks are supported by organisations such as the United Nations or the Parliament of the European Union. The title itself shows the attitude towards those who oppose the Church’s stance - disagreements are perceived as ‘attacks’ and are ‘arrogant’, so unjustified. One could think that the word ‘attacks’ would be enough to paint a negative picture of the opposition. Interestingly, the authors of the document felt the need to use the adjective ‘arrogant’ in this context, most likely to add even more negative connotations. Even though in English the word ‘arrogant’ can also take a meaning that is close to ‘ignorant’, the Polish word does not carry the same meaning and has rather pejorative connotations.

It relates to the authors of the text having found the path to the truth. Anyone who disagrees has either evil intentions (attacks), is ignorant (and therefore requires being thought the right path), or is too arrogant to understand the truth. It further shows that there is only one way of constructing meaningful realities.

In paragraph eight, we can read about

regulation removing the concept of ‘father’ and ‘mother’ from the public language so as not to ‘discriminate’ against ‘minority relationships’ by ‘imposing’ the heterosexual nature of the family (quotation marks within the quote are original) ¹⁶

The fact that the words ‘discrimination’, ‘minority relationships’ and ‘imposing’ are put in quotation marks can suggest that they are not treated as genuine issues, as one could use quotation marks in Polish to indicate not being serious about the term in use. There is also no reference to what legislative regulation they are talking about, making it unreliable information since it cannot be fact-checked. Nevertheless, it

¹⁵ mnożące się naciski zarówno na płaszczyźnie ideologicznej, jak i w sferze prawodawstwa, których celem jest zniszczyć tradycyjne małżeństwo i rodzinę, p.9

¹⁶ rozporządzenie usuwające z publicznego języka pojęcia „ojciec” i „matka”, aby nie „dyskryminować” „związków mniejszości poprzez „narzucanie” heteroseksualnego charakteru rodziny, p.10

adds to a gruesome description of the reality the authors present, where “the traditional Christian values are under attack”. Phrasing it in such a way is also an appeal to sympathy.

In paragraph thirteen, the authors ask a rhetorical question:

How much spiritual arrogance must one have in order to try to change the meanings of such age-old words as marriage and family?¹⁷

The wording of the question is interesting. It suggests that anyone who would like to redefine marriage and family must have an abundance of spiritual arrogance. It also indicates that the definitions of marriage and family are ‘age-old’ and ‘never-changing’. This is not the truth, as the nuclear family as we know it now is a relatively new concept (Scott, 2017). Making it seem like something that has been unchanging for centuries creates a false narrative. It suggests the permanence of the term and ridicules anyone who would like to redefine it.

The authors of the document are calling to

instead of enduring this psychological harassment passively and with a sense of their own helplessness, people of good conscience, especially believers, should organize themselves and demand unequivocal respect for their world of values¹⁸

According to them, the traditional family is under attack, and some of the political elites, culture creators, and journalists want to impose their vision of the world that is in opposition to that of Christian values. And because God is the creator of marriage, according to the authors of the document, only God should decide what marriage should be. If that is recognized, then the expectations set by God are not imposed on people but become the “deepest inner sense”¹⁹. The words used here, ‘psychological harassment’, and ‘helplessness’ in the context of what believers experience, is an interesting choice. The phrase ‘should organise themselves’ shows high modality.

¹⁷ Ileż duchowej zarozumiałości trzeba mieć w sobie, by usiłować zmienić znaczenie takich odwiecznych słów, jak małżeństwo czy rodzina, p.13

¹⁸ Zamiast biernie i z poczuciem własnej bezradności znosić to psychiczne molestowanie, ludzie prawego sumienia, a zwłaszcza ludzie wierzący, powinni się organizować i domagać się jednoznacznego poszanowania dla swego świata wartości, p.24

¹⁹ najgłębszym wewnętrznym sensem, p.25

A whole section, paragraphs one-hundred-thirty-five through one-hundred-thirty-seven, is dedicated to a citation of one of the homilies of John Paul II given in Skoczów in 1995. It is a prime example of intertextuality. This choice to bring those words up is justified by saying that they are even more topical now than they were back then. John Paul II, in his homily, said that, the language of tolerance is used to cover intolerance, especially towards believers. Supposedly,

there is a tendency to push them to the margins of social life; they are made fun of and ridiculed for what might be, for them, the greatest holiness. These forms of recurrent discrimination are worrying and must be a cause for concern ²⁰

Who is (or was in 1995) discriminating against Catholics in Poland, or how, is not clear. Nevertheless, believers are called to be cautious because the future of the country depends on conscience and morality.

Marriage

Marriage is presented in the analysed document as one of the life vocations, alongside vocation to monastic life, that people can choose to follow Christ. The sanctity of sacramental marriage is highlighted. At the same time, no other acceptable way of living is being presented. Marriage is described as the most common life path, and based on this document, the only alternative seems to be a consecrated, celibate life. Sacramental marriage is a choice of a particular lifestyle, that carries some requirements. It is “a response to the calling that God has given man and woman” ²¹.

The authors of the document define marriage as

a permanent, exclusive and inseparable union of one woman and one man, based on a deep community of life and love, focused on the well-being of the spouses and on the birth and upbringing of children²²

²⁰ Zauważa się tendencje do spychania ich na margines życia społecznego, ośmiesza się i wyszydza to, co dla nich stanowi nieraz największą świętość. Te formy powracającej dyskryminacji budzą niepokój i muszą dawać wiele do myślenia, p.85

²¹ Jest to bowiem odpowiedź na powołanie, które Bóg zadał mężczyźnie i kobiecie, p.27

²² Małżeństwo zaś, to trwały, wyłączny i nierozzerwalny związek jednej kobiety i jednego mężczyzny, oparty na głębokiej wspólnocie życia i miłości, nastawiony na dobro małżonków oraz na zrodzenie i wychowanie dzieci, p.23

This definition is excluding different groups of people, e.g. same-sex couples or open marriages but also people who cannot or do not want to raise children. Social exclusion takes here place in the social and political engagement dimensions. People who do not fit within the frames of this definition may experience adverse reactions from their family, friends or neighbours for whom the Catholic Church's opinion is significant. In the case of Poland, where the Catholic Church has the power to influence policymaking, framing marriage in such a way has an impact on how marriage is framed in the legislation and who can profit from the civil benefits offered to marriage. The authors see only one path for a legitimate marriage: woman and man, raising children together. Any other possible companionship, or even a legal civil marriage, is not recognized as such. The progression of this excerpt implies a natural progression of life stages by identifying the subjects: "one woman and one man", establishing the conditions: "a permanent, exclusive and inseparable union", citing the medium: "deep community of life and love", and setting an end goal: "upbringing of children". To deviate at any stage from this defined life path is not acceptable.

As God's creation, the body is expected to be treated with the highest degree of piety. The purity of the body is supposed to be "the practical consequence of the sense of the sanctity of the human body and treating it with 'reverence'" (quotation marks within the quote are original)²³. Education for chastity, by the Polish Episcopate, is seen as the only path towards deep marital happiness.

Families are considered the starting point of the country:

Poland begins with the love of wife and husband, grows under the hearts of mothers, develops, and matures in morally healthy families ²⁴

As such, families should be protected by the government. This excerpt is another example of nationalism within the Polish Episcopate's discourse. The country cannot exist without 'morally healthy' families; hence, rejecting motherhood can be seen anti-Polish. Perceiving families "based on a heterosexual, fertile and indissoluble marriage" as the primary nucleus of society is widespread in the Catholic Church (Béraud & Portier, 2015, p.56). The Church recognises only a narrow definition of a

²³ praktyczną konsekwencją poczucia świętości ciała ludzkiego oraz traktowania go z „czcią”, p.38

²⁴ Polska poczyna się z miłości żony i męża, rośnie pod sercami matek, rozwija się i dojrzewa w moralnie zdrowych rodzinach, p.88

nuclear family, which does not reflect the current trends (blended families, single-parent families).

“Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1,28)

The creation of a man and a woman as complementary beings is seen by Catholics as God’s plan and a sign of grace (Cunningham, 2009). They are expected to seek companionship in marriage, and “marriage’s precise purpose is to allow a man and a woman to be for each other a mutual support, a mutual source of love, and a relationship which is oriented towards the raising of a family” (Cunningham, 2009, p.239). Marriage can be understood as the primary vocation of a human.

In his teachings, John Paul II, frequently referred to in the analysed document, has emphasised that the sexual acts are a sign of marital love and should not be separated from its ‘indissoluble function of fertility’ (Terlikowski, 2018). This teaching has been one of the deciding factors for me to examine childlessness in the Catholic Church discourse. The fertility aspect of marriage is highlighted in many Church documents and texts describing the Catholic doctrine and history, to the point that one may get the impression it borders on an obsession. Family is often described as the domestic church. Interestingly, it seems like the countries that have been considered traditionally Catholic experience the most noticeable decline in childbirth rates, falling below the population replacement rate (Cunningham, 2009).

Natural methods of controlling fertility are not, contrary to popular belief, permitted by the Church as a contraceptive method that all could use under all circumstances (Terlikowski, 2018). The Catechism addresses the issue of family planning and says that “spouses may wish to space the births of their children. It is their duty to make certain that their desire is not motivated by selfishness but is in conformity with the generosity appropriate to responsible parenthood” (CCC, §2368). If one of the spouses expresses a lack of desire for offspring, it is a base for marriage annulment (Miszczak, 2016).

One of the accusations against the Church pointed out in the analysed document is that the Church is “allowing sexual intercourse only for the procreation”.²⁵ There is no identified ‘accuser’, so it is impossible to know who puts forward such

²⁵ zarzuca się kłamliwie, że dopuszcza on współżycie płciowe jedynie dla zrodzenia dzieci, p.38

allegations. Such information is called a straight-out 'lie'. I think this 'lie' results from an overwhelming emphasis in the Catholic discourse on growing and raising one's family once married. Many Catholic sources highlight that the sexual act should be 'open to life', which may lead to overinterpretation, and generalisation.

What is more, a couple of paragraphs later, in section fifty-eight, we can read that

when, for important reasons, the spouses do not plan to conceive another child, then in the fertile period, they are, in a sense, mobilized to express love towards each other in non-erotic areas ²⁶

Such phrasing can be easily misinterpreted. It refers to sexual abstinence during the 'fertile period'; however, the phrasing 'fertile period' can be easily omitted, and the recommendation of abstinence if a married couple does not plan to have a baby can be generalized to any time. Nevertheless, it shows that the authors of the text understand female fertility and menstrual cycle. They ask couples who do not plan to have children to abstain from sex during the 'fertile period'. In that way, by not using other method of contraception, couples remain 'open to life' but only in the periods that, due to the biology of the human body, have a meagre chance of creating life. The physical expression of love to one another is not forbidden. Yet, it is reserved only for spouses, that is, heterosexual, sacramentally married couples.

In paragraph thirty-five, we can read that

Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem clearly shows that conception, a pregnant woman, a child moving in the womb, [...] giving birth, wrapping a baby in swaddling clothes, protecting the baby and mother, the mother's womb and nursing breasts should be viewed as something worthy of the deepest reverence ²⁷

Devoting a large part of the text to a detailed description of a pregnant and nursing woman is interesting; however, I cannot explain what function it has in the text. The image expressed in this excerpt relates to the feminist theological discussions on the

²⁶ Gdy z ważnych przyczyn małżonkowie nie planują poczęcia kolejnego dziecka, to w okresie płodnym są w pewnym sensie zmobilizowani do wyrażania miłości wobec siebie na płaszczyznach pozaerotycznych, p.41

²⁷ Jezus Chrystus narodzony w Betlejem pokazuje jasno, że na poczęcie, na kobietę brzemienną, na dziecko poruszające się w matczynym łonie, [...] rodzenie, owijanie niemowlęcia w pieluszki, ochronę dziecka i matki, matczyne łono i piersi karmiące należy patrzeć jak na coś godnego najgłębszej czci, p.28

underlying eroticism around the female body. Mentioning “Jesus Christ born in Bethlehem” may be used to highlight the sanctity of conception and birth.

The desire for offspring is called

one of the greatest unfulfilled desires in Poland ²⁸

Economic struggles are named in the analysed document as one of the main obstacles to its realisation. The word ‘unfulfilled’ is used here most likely to show that the birth rates in Poland are relatively low compared to the declared importance of family. The decision to have a child may condemn people to poverty and lack of security in retirement age. The way it is reasoned is a rather interesting one:

a mother dedicated to working at home does not even have the right to a pension, and her children will work for the pensions of the childless and those with smaller families ²⁹

The role of mothers as the creators of life is highlighted in the text. At the same time, the lack of systemic support for mothers is contested. However, the dedication of mothers to care for their homes and families is contrasted with childless people who supposedly will in the future benefit from pensions paid from taxes of other’s children. Childless people are here blamed for the poverty or otherwise mistreatment of mothers. Putting the two, mothers and childless, against each other in this context increases social polarisation. This excerpt is the only one in which ‘childlessness’ is addressed directly.

The analysed document does not address infertility. The Bible praises fertility as it supposedly signifies God’s grace and blessing (Terlikowski, 2018). In Psalm 128, verses 3-4, we can read: “Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. Yes, this will be the blessing for the man who fears the Lord.” Fertility is presented as a reward for following God’s word. So, one can deduce from this that infertility may be a punishment for a sinful life. However, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we can read: “The Gospel shows that physical sterility is not an absolute evil” (CCC,

²⁸ Pragnienie dziecka jest jednym z największych, niezrealizowanych pragnień na polskiej Ziemi, p.93

²⁹ matka poświęcająca się pracy w domu nie ma nawet praw do emerytury, a jej dzieci pracować będą na emerytury osób bezdzietnych i małodzietnych, p.93

§2379). This is in itself interesting because of the use of the word ‘absolute’, which suggests that infertility is evil, albeit not entirely. Moreover, “Spouses who still suffer from infertility [are encouraged to] unite themselves with the Lord’s Cross, the source of all spiritual fecundity. [And to] give expression to their generosity by adopting abandoned children or performing demanding services for others” (CCC, §2379). Childlessness is talked about in the Catechism only in the context of the great suffering of infertile couples (see CCC, §2374). When “children are seen as a gift from God to parents, family and the whole society” (Bein et al., 2021, p.3), inability to have them can create a void in the people struggling to conceive.

Human dignity and abortion

The Church condemns abortion entirely. The encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (1995) by John Paul II is the first document on social teaching that focuses on abortion (Beattie, 2009). According to John Paul II, no circumstances could justify abortion (Szwed, 2015). By not differentiating between early and late abortion, the Catholic Church has some of the strictest stances towards abortion among religious groups (Beattie, 2009). Even though abortion is prohibited in many predominantly Catholic countries, e.g., in Latin America, the number of abortions is the same or even higher than in countries with legal access to abortion (Beattie, 2009).

The first argument regarding human dignity, often associated with anti-abortion, that is brought up in the analysed document is that

in practice, every human must be respected at any stage of their life, recognizing that a human exists from the first moment of conception and that only God can define the end of their existence³⁰

Recognition by the Church of the dignity of humans “from the first moment of conception” is the main argument against abortion. The claim that God is the only one who can “define the end of their existence” is also used in the anti-euthanasia debates. I want to point out here also that when I used the Google translate tool to consult my translation of this quotation, the AI used the words ‘man’ instead of ‘human’ and the possessive pronoun ‘his’ instead of used by me more gender

³⁰ Trzeba w praktyce respektować każdego człowieka na jakimkolwiek etapie jego życia, uznając, że człowiek istnieje od pierwszej chwili poczęcia i że tylko Bóg może wyznaczyć kres jego istnieniu, p.16

inclusive pronoun 'their'. The use of the gendered 'male' choices to describe humanity is an interesting area of research in the context of language as a place of struggle, which scholars have recently addressed.

In paragraph twenty-two, there is a direct address to Catholics saying that

Catholics cannot come up with the initiative of such a law that would betray the revealed truth about the sanctity of human life and disregard the Christian vision of the person ³¹

Later on, the text goes on to specify that those laws include in vitro fertilisation, abortion or euthanasia, making it clear that politicians that belong to the Catholic Church should openly oppose any projects that would support more lenient rules towards either of them. By promoting laws that contradict Catholic teaching, those politicians would hijack the right to decide on moral issues, which does not lay within their competence. This provision is interesting because it suggests that legislators should not consider any ethical issues by themselves but blindly follow the teachings of the Church.

It is the duty of the Magisterium to discern the moral law, and it is the duty of politicians to implement it ³²

From that excerpt, one could understand that the Church is interested in politics. However, it does not want to do it directly but rather through the work of Catholic politicians.

In paragraph one-hundred-fifteen, we can read that

the Church has long warned that contempt for human life and usurping the right to manipulate it will result in aggression towards old and disabled people ³³

There is talk in the analysed document of young people's selfishness for not wanting to care for elderly family members and how the care one experienced in childhood should be reciprocated towards parents. This kind of argumentation is often criticised

³¹ katolicy nie mogą wychodzić z inicjatywą takiego prawa, które zdradzałoby objawioną prawdę o świętości życia ludzkiego oraz lekceważyło chrześcijańską wizję osoby, p.20

³² obowiązkiem Urzędu Nauczycielskiego jest rozeznawać prawo moralne, a obowiązkiem polityków jest je realizować, p.22

³³ Kościół od dawna przestrzega, że pogarda dla życia ludzkiego i uzurpowania sobie prawa by tym życiem manipulować, zaowocuje agresją wobec osób starych i niepełnosprawnych, p.73

by those who do not want to have children. They argue that while being called selfish, they are not the ones that ‘created’ someone to take care of them when they are old (Broda, 2019). Some, like Starzyński (2021), claim that having children is morally wrong and that there are no non-selfish reasons to reproduce (as cited in Broda, 2022). Antinatalism philosophies seem to permeate the everyday world.

In paragraph one-hundred-thirty-nine, we can read that

Catholics involved in politics [...] have a solemn responsibility to bear witness to the Gospel where God has placed them ³⁴

Believing Catholics are expected to share Christian values in their politics, and their devotion to their family is supposed to be a guarantor of morally sound political representation. The authors of the text openly say that

both parliamentary and local elections are a practical action within the framework of lay apostolate and can significantly contribute to the evangelization of the world ³⁵

The Church’s firm stance on abortion, euthanasia and in vitro fertilisation has been voiced in the analysed document multiple times. It is also said that

laws contrary to moral principles do not apply because they are unlawful ³⁶

Hence, no one can force a doctor or any other healthcare worker to conduct medical procedures that stand against their moral values. What is more, they should not even be considered legal. It is interesting that the Polish Episcopate decided to include that remark, as it could have been omitted because there is already a ‘consciousness clause’ in Poland that protects this right.

This section of my analysis further shows that the Catholic Church in Poland encourages political and public involvement that advances the Church’s agenda. It is even more interesting, considering that this document is dedicated to marriage and family. By calling for political participation in a document regarding family, the Polish Episcopate is blending the division of the public and private spheres.

³⁴ Katolicy zaangażowani w politykę [...] mają poważny obowiązek dawać świadectwo Ewangelii tam, gdzie Bóg ich postawił, p.86

³⁵ Wybory zarówno parlamentarne jak samorządowe są realnym działaniem w ramach apostołstwa świeckich i mogą się wydatnie przyczyniać do ewangelizacji świata, p.87

³⁶ prawa sprzeczne z zasadami moralnymi nie obowiązują, gdyż są bezprawiem, p.97

Women's appointment and gender differences

For Catholics in Poland, women have only two desirable life paths: motherhood or consecrated virginity, which contains aspects of spiritual motherhood (see: Radzik, 2020, Szwed, 2015). Many Church documents concerning women highlight their ability 'to create life' as their primary calling (Radzik, 2020). Womanhood is discussed within the Church in the context of women's bodies and sexuality or reproduction and motherhood (Radzik, 2020). "The image of femininity promoted by the patriarchs of the Catholic Church is rather associated above all with maternity, marriage, sacrifice, devotion, service, and care" (Leszczynska, 2016, p.460). According to Szwed (2015), there is no clear answer as to whether living in solitude and rejecting mothering roles outside of monastic life is a valid realization of 'God's calling' to holiness. However, the rejection of a 'caring role' seems to be unacceptable.

A whole section of the analysed document, paragraphs sixty-five through seventy, is dedicated to explaining 'God's idea' about the differences between men and women. The Polish word used in that section – 'płeć' - without a further clarification could be understood as either sex or gender. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the Church does not recognize gender as a separate category, so it is safe to assume the word refers to biological sex. To justify this division for men and women being different, the authors of the text refer to Genesis, where their difference and complementarity have been described. Hence, if they were created distinct, this difference "is neither accidental nor insignificant but is a part of the original intention of the Creator"³⁷. As such, to show gratitude, one is not supposed to engage in anything that blurs those sex/gender differences.

Szwed (2015) suggests that men are the default in the Church's teaching, both at the global level and in Poland. Szwed's research focused on interviewing priests from one of the Polish dioceses to determine their perception of women's place in the Church. The interviewees pointed to motherhood as the primary vocation and calling of women. Choosing non-motherhood and living outside marriage is seen by the majority as a failure and deviation from the norm. However, the trend is less prominent among younger priests. Szwed (2015) brings up an interesting point about

³⁷ zatem odmiennosc płci nie jest ani przypadkowa, ani nieistotna, lecz stanowi element pierwotnego zamysłu Stwórcy, p.47

the femininity of nuns, which would be interesting to look more into at a later point, as it falls beyond the scope of this research. The respondents portrayed motherhood as the essence of womanhood, so in order to acknowledge nuns' femininity, they emphasized the aspect of spiritual motherhood of nuns. When asked about gender discrimination, the interviewed priests spoke of "equal opportunities, not equal results". They seem convinced that Poland is devoid of gender discrimination and pointed out different cultural gestures occurring in Poland, such as kissing a woman's hand or opening doors in reverence. Feminists were accused by the interviewed of negating the maternal role of a woman and demanding abortion (Szwed, 2015, p.220, my translation). Almost a third of the respondents denied that feminism could be combined with Catholicism (Szwed, 2015), which to some degree stands in opposition to, e.g., the teaching of John Paul II, who preached about the 'new feminism'. This 'new feminism' is supposed to fight discrimination against women without 'masculinization' of women and with 'respect for human life' (Adamiak, 1999). Secular feminism often orientalises religion and religious people, seeing them as a mass devoid of agency and history, thus, it takes away the voice and agency of religious women, ignoring or diminishing their efforts to decolonise religion (Kościańska, 2012, p. 150, my translation).

The document of the Polish Episcopate also talks of

equality in the diversity of tasks and functions³⁸

That is, women and men are to be considered equal in their dignity as human beings, but their responsibilities and life purposes should not be the same. That statement stands in opposition to the postulates of lay feminists and radical feminist theologians, who accuse that approach of being an 'illusion of equality.' The words 'equality' and 'diversity' are typical to the human rights discourse, so the above excerpt is an example of described in chapter three laicisation of argument tactic.

In paragraph forty-four, women's career aspirations are addressed

the Church has high hopes for the active presence of women in education and childcare, in culture, health care and the whole world of human

³⁸ Jest to równość w różnorodności zadań i funkcji, p.47

suffering, in business and political life. It is essential, however, for a woman everywhere to retain her identity³⁹

The choice of words: ‘childcare’, ‘health care’, and ‘world of human suffering’ is not accidental and shows in which areas of life the authors of the document see women excelling. Almost all of those roles (except maybe business and political involvement) are an extension of traditional household responsibilities. At the same time, the authors of the document are urging readers to oppose the secular mentality, which suggests that any activity outside the household is liberating and staying at home and caring for family is oppressive.

Since motherhood is the primary calling of women,

a woman must be provided with working conditions that respect her vocation as a wife, mother and educator, so that her professional development does not stand in opposition to that vocation⁴⁰

True social advancement of women requires, according to the authors of the document, such organization of working life that ‘allows women to be women’ and thrive in a motherly role.

Life outside of marriage and childlessness

A direct reference to childless women is not common in the Church’s documents. One such example can be found in the “Address to Women” of pope Paul VI, where he called on “women living alone [to] realize what [they] can accomplish through [their] dedicated vocation” and mentioned that “[n]ot even families can live without the help of those who have no families” (Paul VI, 1965). This example again implies that the family is the default, and “women living alone” should assist those who choose to have children.

Pope John Paul II has referred to motherhood as ‘feminine genius’. Two of the documents he wrote are particularly interesting in the context of my thesis: *Mullieris dignitatem*, John Paul II’s pastoral letter from 1988, which talks about women’s

³⁹ Kościół wiąże duże nadzieje z aktywną obecnością kobiet w szkolnictwie i wychowaniu, w kulturze, służbie zdrowia i w całym świecie ludzkiego cierpienia, w działalności gospodarczej oraz w życiu politycznym. Istotne jest jednak, aby kobieta wszędzie tam zachowała swoją tożsamość, p.33

⁴⁰ Należy zapewnić kobiecie warunki pracy respektujące jej powołanie żony, matki i wychowawczyni oraz zagwarantować, że jej rozwój zawodowy nie będzie stał w opozycji do tego powołania, p.34

dignity and the encyclical *Evangelium vitae* from 1995. In light of his teaching, not taking on the mothering role would be considered going against God's will. If a woman cannot have children or decides to live in celibacy, she should still take on a caring role in society. Hence, childlessness is not a viable life choice.

John Paul II's theology of the body promoted by the Catholic Church is presented as an answer to the corruption of the present-day 'sinful' ways of life. However, "beneath its ostensibly positive representation of married sexual procreative love, it is rooted in resistance to feminism, including women's rights, and to homosexual rights [and sustaining the gender imbalance in the Church] by appealing to the 'feminine genius' and maternal vocation of women" (Beattie, 2016, p.104).

Examples of what Beattie talks about can also be found in the analysed document, where lengthy excerpts describe the beauty of marital love while excluding non-heterosexual couples. John Paul II, in his teaching, suggested that the socio-cultural changes that occur in the modern/postmodern world are going against the nature of women (Szwed, 2015). Once again, such phrasing may lead to ostracism and the exclusion of women who go against the supposed women's nature.

Pope Francis has condemned the childless by choice in two instances, first in 2014 and then at the beginning of 2022. In his homily on June 2, 2014, Francis claimed that "Jesus does not like people who do not want children" (Glatz, 2014). On January 5, 2022, at the general conference, the Pope said that "many couples do not have children because they do not want to, or they have just one - but they have two dogs, two cats [...] And this denial of fatherhood or motherhood diminishes us, it takes away our humanity" (as cited in Berlinger, 2022). He perpetuated the stereotype that childless people replace children with pets. Nevertheless, as mentioned in chapter three, his words are not to be taken as the official stance of the Church since when he voiced them, he was not speaking in the name of the whole Church. Regardless, since many people see the Pope as an influential figure, his repeating of potentially hostile stances is not without significance.

As mentioned earlier, to my knowledge, there is no separate stand of the Episcopate of Poland on childlessness. The word "childlessness" (*bezdziętność*) appears in the analysed text only once, when the authors talk of childless people as recipients of pensions that children of devoted mothers will work for (see p.59).

In paragraph ten, we can read that

marital love cannot be allowed to be profaned by selfishness, by seeking only pleasure at all costs, and by closing yourself to life ⁴¹

That is, childlessness is not welcomed in marriage. The phrase ‘closing oneself to life’ refers to the Catholic Church’s teaching that people taking part in any sexual act should be open to welcoming offspring into the world as its possible consequence. Also, the phrase “profaned by selfishness” is worth a reflection. By saying that selfishness profanes marital love, it is suggested that marital love is sacred in its nature. Moreover, marriage is one of the sacraments in the Catholic Church, and as such, this act is what helps marriage become sacred.

One of the subsections of this chapter, paragraphs one-hundred-twenty-one through one-hundred-twenty-three, is called “It is not good for the man to be alone (Gen 2,18)”. It uses a quotation from the Bible to legitimise what is going to be said later. This section is one of the most interesting in the context of childlessness. It starts with a relatively neutral, if not optimistic, assertion that

there are positive, in accordance with God's will, and spiritually fertile choices of solitude ⁴²

It gives examples of people who decided to live as a hermit to serve the Church or those who cannot contract marriage for different reasons. However, already in paragraph one-hundred-twenty-two, we can read that

the vocation to family life cannot be opposed to being the so-called single, i.e. loneliness by choice manifesting an aversion to marriage, which does not want to build exclusive and lasting relationships ⁴³

This excerpt is challenging to translate, as the original sentence has multiple dependent clauses where the relationship between subjects and objects is unclear. When dividing those clauses and analysing them separately, understanding the message is more manageable. That is, being single is not a viable alternative to being

⁴¹ Nie można przecież dopuścić, aby miłość małżeńska była profanowana przez egoizm, przez poszukiwanie za wszelką cenę jedynie przyjemności oraz przez zamknięcie się na życie, p.12

⁴² Są pozytywne, zgodne z wolą Bożą i płodne duchowo wybory samotności, p.76

⁴³ Nie można jednak powołaniu do życia w rodzinie przeciwstawiać bycia tzw. singlem, czyli manifestującej niechęć do małżeństwa samotności z wyboru, która nie chce budować wyłącznych i trwałych relacji, p.76

married and the state of being single means choosing loneliness because one has an aversion towards marriage. The way the last part of this excerpt is formed would suggest that it is the 'loneliness' that "does not want to build exclusive and lasting relationships"; however, I think it is safe to assume that this description is used to refer to the people who chose to be single and not personified loneliness. Those who want to remain in the lay society but do not want to get married, according to the authors of the document, do not wish to build monogamous long-term relationships.

Not marrying without an acceptable reason is not a viable life choice, according to the Polish Episcopate. However, it is unclear what reasons would be considered actual arguments and which would be considered mere excuses. The text openly states, though, that the choice to become 'single' is

born of a selfish desire to take for oneself without any obligation of reciprocation ⁴⁴

As if one cannot have meaningful relations of caring for each other outside of marriage. The 'selfish' 'taking' without 'giving' is condemned in the document.

Analysis of Church documents is impossible

One of the most remarkable sections concerning my analysis was paragraph twenty-one, where we can read how no interpretation of written texts can help people understand the Church. Which, in a way, undermines the legitimacy of research like mine. This claim appears in the document early on, setting the tone of the text. It draws on a trope often used by religious institutions, saying that

the Church is a Divine-human institution ⁴⁵

As such, the Church is not bound by human laws. It is an institution 'out of this world' for which the legal records do not carry the ultimate power. The secular legislation shall be respected, but it does not have the highest authority. The same idea also goes for the Church documents. Hence, in

⁴⁴ rodzi się z egoistycznej chęci brania dla siebie bez zobowiązań, p.76

⁴⁵ Kościół jest instytucją Bosko-ludzką, p.20

seeking answers to existential questions, we are not bound by the legal, but theological method ⁴⁶

By including such a clause in the document, the authors ‘protect’ themselves from critique. One cannot simply analyse the documents to understand the Church’s stance on particular issues. According to the authors of the text,

it is understandable, therefore, that it is not the formal skills of interpreting individual texts, but humble fidelity to God, who reveals himself in the Church, that ultimately determines the attitudes of life ⁴⁷

Therefore, any attempt of mine to identify the Polish Episcopate’s perspective on childlessness can be dismissed as not inspired by God. Even the most skilful analysis of the text cannot help in defining the right way of life. However, as my analysis showed, the arguments made by the Polish Episcopate are characterised by a high modality, and their agenda is much more ‘worldly’, and politically nationalistic than any statements by God ever would be.

⁴⁶ W poszukiwaniu odpowiedzi na egzystencjalne pytania obowiązuje nas nie prawnicza, ale teologiczna metoda, p.20

⁴⁷ Zrozumiałe zatem, że nie formalne możliwości interpretacji pojedynczych tekstów, ale pokorna wierność Bogu objawiającemu się w Kościele decyduje ostatecznie o życiowych postawach, p.20

6. Conclusions

In this thesis, I aimed to analyse the most relevant document found in the publications of the Polish Episcopate on the topic of women and family life, *Shżyć prawdzie o małżeństwie i rodzinie* (Eng. Serving the Truth about Marriage and Family), in order to uncover the language practices that may contribute to the social exclusion of childless women. Furthermore, I aimed to show how the case of childless women in Poland proves that religion needs to be part of social exclusion theories and show how theological authority is used in the analysed document to promote national, political and social agendas that contribute to the social exclusion of childless women in Poland. The document I chose for my analysis is highly influential, as it is the only such extensive document by the Polish Episcopate touching upon the issue of marriage and family. As such, it provides the language and sets the parameters for how those phenomena should be talked about, as it 'reveals the truth about them'.

My thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter one is an introduction to my research. In chapter two, I introduced social exclusion theories as a theoretical framework for my research. In two subsections of this chapter, I described different approaches that I found the most helpful in understanding the social exclusion of childless women in Poland phenomenon, that is, approaches that identify language as a site of struggle (critical discourse analysis, feminist struggle over language and liberation feminist theology) and moralisation as legitimisation for ostracism theory. In chapter three, I provided an extensive contextual background for my analysis. I first described childlessness as a societal issue, childlessness in the Polish context, and the social exclusion of childless women. Then I moved to the description of the Catholic Church and its role in Poland. In chapter four, I gave a detailed description of the method I adapted in my research, critical discourse analysis, and described the research design and limitations of the study. In chapter five, I conducted the analysis of the selected document. Chapter six provides a conclusion and chapter seven lists references.

Discourse analysis is a complex process that, as a research method, can be a great tool to highlight cases of social exclusion. As explained in chapter four, its goal is unmasking the power dynamics sustained through discourse. Hence, my choice of

using it in this research. Social exclusion is a complex process, and ostracism, as one of its manifestations, is a powerful tool of social control. Not adhering to social norms, particularly if they are assigned a moral value, poses a threat of falling victim to ostracism. Being ignored by group members endangers one of the basic human needs of belonging. That is why I decided to explore this aspect of social exclusion.

The text I analysed discusses marriage and family issues within the Catholic Church in the Polish context. At first glance, it is not concerned with any form of discrimination; however, a closer look at the text allows us to see that the language used in the document can contribute to the social exclusion of groups that do not fit the 'traditional family model' described in it. That is, same-sex couples, singles, and childless. There seem to be only two life-path alternatives: ordained life as a priest, monk or nun, and heterosexual marriage with children. However, there is no definite answer as to whether living outside of marriage and consecrated life is a viable life path according to the Tradition, so examining it could be an interesting research topic. By adding a moral component to motherhood and childlessness, the first being praised and the second being criticised, the Catholic Church sends a clear message about which members are welcomed in the community. The moral and social pressures are not the only methods used in the analysed text. The excerpts I chose have many religious and theological arguments, e.g., "the Church is a Divine-human institution", to justify its authority. The authors rationalise that those religious and theological arguments require using moralising language because faithfulness to God demands that. My critical discourse analysis revealed that the religious language used in the document is a vital component of the process of how ostracism is built up in the arguments and how thus social exclusion of childless women in a Polish context is actually promoted by the authors.

Childless individuals are accused in the text, indirectly, of being selfish and responsible for the poverty of mothers who dedicated their lives to raising children and could not work towards a pension. This ties back to the available research on the social exclusion of childless women (being accused of selfishness). Even though childlessness may concern anyone, e.g., women, men, and non-binary individuals, women face the harshest reactions if they decide not to bring forth offspring. Hence my interest in the subject. In a Polish context, the childless woman does not just defy

her role as a female in the God-given order of things, she also goes against the Church and the nation-state.

To my knowledge, the topic of childlessness in the discourse of the Catholic Church in the Polish context has not been explored before. My research has proved the need for religion to be included in social exclusion theories, which currently do not account for religion, or relegate religion to cultural role. It has shown how theological arguments and religious texts can be used to moralise and exclude people. The textual analysis revealed that much of the arguments of the Polish Episcopate contain claims that go beyond the teachings of Catholic faith, and show a nationalistic and political agenda within the teachings of the Church in Poland.

The findings of my research could be used in concrete actions of feminist theology, or further research. The analysis I conducted exposed gender bias in the discourse of the Church, so a radical solution would be to call for the dismantling of the patriarchy within the Church. A more liberal action would be to make the rules of separation of the state and the Church clearer and withdrawal of the Polish Episcopate from political involvement. A more mediating way would be to bring in more female voices and listen to how both Catholic and secular Polish women express their theology concerning having children/no children.

Based on the research gaps I encountered during the literature review, I would suggest further examining the possible sources of social exclusion of childless women. There appears to be an agreement that childless individuals in general, and women in particular, experience exclusion, stereotyping and negative attitudes, but I could not find research that would investigate what causes such a state, neither within the narrow national context of Poland nor on a global scale. Another aspect of childlessness I encountered which I find worthy of further investigation, is why most childless women do not assert it as a personal, permanent choice but rather communicate ambiguity. My hypothesis here would be that by not explicitly stating their intentions, they protect themselves from stereotyping and ostracism.

The existing research on childlessness in Poland is meagre, and the analysis of discourse on childlessness is even less prominent, not to mention its contextualisation within Catholic Church discourse. Some texts, however, discuss the role and place of women in the Church in the Polish context and could provide a

basis for further study. It would also be interesting to look at the communication coming from the Holy See regarding childlessness and analyse it in the global context, for the local documents are based on the interpretation of the documents and voices from the Vatican.

One of the factors contributing to social exclusion is the language used by those with the power to shape the social imagination. Analysis of the language of institutions, informal interactions in everyday life, media, and the internet can be a great source of information on who shapes the attitudes towards childless women, and how.

Future research in this area is needed.

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