ARTYKUŁY

FORUM TEOLOGICZNE XXIV, 2023 ISSN 1641–1196, e-ISSN 2450–0836 DOI: 10.31648/ft.9471

Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz*
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (Poland)

CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE DURING FAMILY LIFE. A CATHOLIC-DOGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Summary: This paper presents the question of the dynamics of the sacrament of marriage arising from the wedding vows according to the rite celebrated in the Catholic liturgy. The aim of the paper is to explain what it means to celebrate the sacrament of marriage every day, not only on the wedding day. The theme is developed based on the concept of ritual as a phenomenon involving the activities of introducing a person to a new state of life in society. According to researchers, ritual perpetuates certain values in culture and human consciousness. In the light of theological sources, in Christian rituals, marriage is a theological reality. This means that the sacrament of marriage involves the rite of a man and a woman making four promises concerning their future life together and including their relationship with God. These pledges are a promise of fidelity, love, honesty and accompanying the other person for the rest of their lives, which means 'dialogue of life'. Sacramentality, on the other hand, signifies a guarantee of access to God's grace, which is necessary to build a family community according to the Gospel. The sacrament of marriage appears here as a Christian ritual celebrated that commemorates every moment of life together, with references to the grace given by God. Looking at the sacrament of marriage as a ritual makes it possible to see two dimensions of the dynamics of the marital relationship: a horizontal relationship, involving the dialogue between the spouses, and a vertical relationship, involving the dialogue of the spouses with God. Viewed in this way, Christian marriage is a reality unfolding in the individual lives of persons, as well as socially and ecclesiastically.

Keywords: Sacrament of marriage, marriage vows, wedding, ritual, Catholic teaching.

The theme "Celebrating the sacrament of marriage in the course of family life" belongs to a reflection on the value of Catholic tradition in organizing the foundations of married life. I take up this theme in order to clarify the existential meaning of the sacrament of marriage. Many Christians fail to take into account the fact that the sacrament of marriage is the common life of two people, from the time of marriage until the death of one of the spouses. It is continuous and

^{*}Address: dr habil. Katarzyna Parzych-Blakiewicz, prof. UWM; e-mail: kaparz@uwm.edu.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-7965-9064.

not precedent-setting. It is not just a one-time sacramental rite, but a permanent celebration of a salvation event that takes place in married people at every moment of their life together. From the praxeological point of view, the celebration of the sacrament of marriage is a set of specific rituals that include activities related to personal, ecclesial and social life. The ritual helps to maintain the rhythm of family life in line with religious requirements. According to the Catholic definition of a sacrament, a sacramental ritual must be associated with a lifelong celebration of the sacramental event. In the article, I explain what this celebration is about, analyzing the phenomenon of ritual from the perspective of theological interpretation.

First, I will talk about how I understand the ritual, and then I will analyze the formula of the marriage vows taken in the act of sacramental marriage. I understand the oath as a Christian ritual of initiating a new stage in temporality. The stage of life started with the sacrament of marriage is understood as a constant, daily celebration of Easter joy, which can be called a ritual celebration of Christianity every day, in all spheres of the spouses' life. Then I will indicate three levels of daily 'celebration' of the sacrament of marriage: in personal life, in ecclesial life and in the world.

The explanations given below are based on theological sources and studies representing the state of research in Catholic theology in the area of marriage and family. The aim of the study is to broaden the spectrum of motives for the indissolubility of the sacramental marriage of Christians.

1. What are the Anthropological, social and religious dimensions of the ritual?

Rituals are an important element in human life. They stabilize human activities, giving a sense of functioning according to proven standards¹. They harmonize the inner sense of actions with social needs, pointing to the value of specific acts and perpetuating the principles that integrate the community² and communities, including family ones (Zagórska & Lipska, 2013, p. 119). They are a constant reminder of the uniqueness of specific moments of *chronos* – in other words, they implement *kairos* in *chronos*. From this anthropological

¹ Rituals give you the confidence to act in a certain order. They integrate the individual with society. In this sense, they have a protective meaning (Motyl, 2014, p. 76).

² Modern researchers are discovering the social value of rituals, also in the familiological area, as broadening the religious meaning. Rituals help to see the value of community life, especially family life. They give a sense of stability, and therefore also security. They serve as an element of intra-family therapy (Zagórska, Lipska, 2015, p. 22–23).

perspective, rituals should be seen as the original manifestation of culture, the framework for the formation of culture.

Rituals are also an important element in the functioning of society. From the social perspective, rituals should be perceived as acts that integrate generations, that is, reviving the intergenerational community in the historical dimension³. They are integrative actions that affect the community from the inside. Since they express the axiological profile of the social hierarchy of values, rituals allow us to recognize the priorities of a given community. Rituals encode a specific hierarchy of values in the tradition⁴. They form a mentality by consolidating the correlation of knowledge about values with experience.

Rituals accompany all religiosity – both developed in systems and practiced in small groups or even individually (Zimoń, 2012, col. 713). Generally, they concern the axiological sphere of human actions. The purpose of a ritual is to connect the sphere of the profane with the sphere of the sacred (cf. Zimoń, 2012, col. 714; cf. Nowakowski, 2010, p. 225–243), which consists in making the transcendent dimension, or simply the transcendental elements, available to a human being. From a religious perspective, rituals are often viewed as the earliest human-made means of communicating with the supernatural realm. Therefore, from a religious perspective, I see rituals as part of a liturgical and mystagogical activity.

2. The Oath in the sacrament of marriage

What is the Oath in the Sacrament of Matrimony? The sacrament of marriage is a ritual that initiates the life of a new social community made up of two Christians – a man and a woman.⁵ This community is theandric because it arises in an ecclesial community to which human persons belong – the living and all saints, Divine persons, as well as angelic persons. The sacramental wedding ceremony becomes an act of sanctification by being incorporated into the liturgy of the Church (John Paul II, 1981, n. 67).

According to the sacramental discipline of the Catholic Church, "Marriage is based on the consent of the contracting parties, that is, on their will to give themselves, each to the other, mutually and definitively, in order to live

³ The ethnographic perspective shows rituals in the context of an individual's "transition" from one status or social stage to another. The rite of passage introduces social order and outlines the cultural profile of a given society (Jaskulska, 2013, p. 80).

⁴ Hence, ritual is used even in the organization of the order of political power (Rycman, 2009, p. 69–82).

⁵ "The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses" (Francis, 2016, n. 72).

a covenant of faithful and fruitful love" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, n. 1662). Therefore, the rite of the sacrament of marriage focuses the attention of the bride and groom on four vows, which contain a declaration of mutual self-sacrifice of two people – a woman and a man.

a) The vow: I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life

Love is needed to maintain unity in the spirit of Divine truth through each moment of family life, especially in difficult situations. Its characteristic feature is the durability of the relationship between two people (cf. Mędrek, 2017, p. 133) in the mutual complementarity of the sexes. Here, the person becomes the Gift (Francis, 2016, n. 67; cf. Nagórny, 2009, p. 123–136; Parzych-Blakiewicz, 2013, p. 77–78). Unity in gender complementarity has a dialogical structure, which is a real meeting of two people who represent a different structure of the human person: female and male. This difference means a tendency to integration, as a result of which a new community is created – the lonely self transforms into a united us. The intimacy of marital relations here means a tendency to integrate into the sphere of common life (Francis, 2016, p. 123). It leads to the indissolubility of the relationship. As a result of its deepening, a new community is created – a lonely 'I' transforms into a united 'We'.

The vow of conjugal love is:

- Accepting the other person as her or himself, unique, irreplaceable.
- Consent to create a new structure for the life and existence of one's own person.
- Consent to the integration of one's own person with the person of the Chosen One.
- b) I promise to be true to you, or in the other vow: to have and to hold

This promise means fidelity, which is the protection of love (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997, n. 1646). The oath of marital fidelity is accepting another person and connecting your life with them. It means to preserve (update, refresh) the values expressed in love.

The vow of marital fidelity is:

- Declaration of full self-giving to another.
- Deciding to challenge one's own boundaries in relation to the variety of personal attractions that distract attention from the person of the spouse.

⁶ According to John Paul II, the image and likeness of man to God implies a vocation to love (cf. Mędrek, 2017, p. 132). According to Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, love is revealed by a person in his attitude towards another person, i.e. in deed, and deed is an expression of positive reference to the Absolute, which is the fullness of Good and Truth (cf. Blakiewicz, Kopiec, 2019, p. 71–85).

⁷ According to the Catholic theology of marriage, sexual dimorphism expresses the quintessence of similarity to God in human being, as a bodily being (cf. Kunka, 2013, p. 101–113).

 Declaration of opening towards the unknown, new, in the hope of creating history together. The religious accent points to the hope of creating history together with God's help.

c) I swear marital honesty to you

This promise expresses a declaration: from today, you are the person in the foreground in my life⁸. Marital honesty requires consistent action based on the accepted and declared principles of love and fidelity.

The vow of marital integrity indicates:

- The need to practically point out the other person's place at the forefront of my life.
- Marital honesty is a dialogical process in which efforts are consistently combined on the basis of gender complementarity in the creation of a new 'household' (family community). It is a constant endeavor to sustain and strengthen this community.
- Marital honesty involves truthfulness towards the other. It is a declaration of openness based on a dialogical relationship.

d) I will do this all the days of my life

In a sacramental vow, it is important to add 'all the days of my life'. The promise not to leave one's spouse until death conditions the fulfilment of the vows of love, fidelity and marital honesty. The fulfilment of these promises is possible under the conditions ensured in the indissolubility of the relationship⁹.

- The Pledge of Love is a promise to continually, i.e. until death, deepen intimacy in personal relationships.
- The Pledge of Fidelity is a promise to offer the Gift of a Person and to accept the Gift of another person.
- The Pledge of Marital Honesty is a promise to strive to maintain dialogue and build a life based on dialogue.

In view of the above, it should be said that the marriage oath contains the promise of love, fidelity, marital honesty and remaining until death. Expressed with all legal reservations and cultural conditions of a given milieu, it is an existential situation that changes the current personal status from a single to a community. Dialogue is a characteristic feature of the life of a community formed in the sacrament of marriage.

⁸ Consistent with the words of the Gospel of St. Matthew (19:5) that a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

⁹ There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live as one until death do them part, enjoying an enriching intimacy. The love they pledge is greater than any emotion, feeling or state of mind, although it may include all of these. It is a deeper love, a lifelong decision of the heart" (Francis, 2016, n. 163).

It is not possible to break this dialogue, but at the time of death, it is finally fulfilled. When one of the promises is not kept, anti-dialogue relationships are included in the marital dialogue of life, in which outsiders are usually involved. Such a situation hurts, introducing the wronged spouse into the dimension of suffering-martyrdom (cf. Parzych-Blakiewicz, 2016, p. 54).

Experience shows that there are various difficulties in maintaining the harmony inherent in dialogical relations. In these circumstances, the sacrament of Matrimony, as a rite that gives rise to an ecclesial cell, creates specific conditions of life aimed at helping spouses to preserve and develop the unity of their community. These specific living conditions can be understood as a ritual that gives a dialogical rhythm to everyday, weekly and annual life. A characteristic feature of these rituals is the orientation towards one common goal of Christian life – the realization of the universal call to holiness. From a Catholic theological perspective, the rituals associated with the sacrament of marriage entail a consistent and rhythmic adherence to the rules that help to keep the moment of making marriage vows relevant throughout one's life. It is about the permanent refreshing of the sacrament, the effect of which is the gradual sanctification of the spouses. In fact, it is the celebration of the sacrament of marriage extended to the whole life of the spouses – that is, the celebration of the sacrament of marriage in private, social and ecclesial life.

3. Celebrating the sacrament of marriage in private life

What is the celebration of the sacrament of marriage in private life? It is the introduction of rituals related to religious life into family life (Błasiak, 2019, p. 50). In other words, the extension of the sphere of family life to the *sacrum*. The marriage contract begins the stage of life in which a human person connects his intimate life with that of another person. Intimacy involves the most personal and hidden spheres of a person's life. In the life of the sacramental spouses, it is such that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" 10. The sacrament creates a new reality, composed of two worlds of people from different families of origin. In this new reality, the parents are no longer in the first place, but only the wife or husband 11. A characteristic feature of the life of Christian spouses is the symbolization of the intimate reality of God (Francis, 2016, n. 11).

¹⁰ Mt 19:5-6 (see: *The Holy Bible*, 1994^{5th}).

¹¹ "Marriage is a means of expressing that we have truly left the security of the home in which we grew up in order to build other strong ties and to take on a new responsibility for another person. This is much more meaningful than a mere spontaneous association for mutual gratification, which would turn marriage into a purely private affair" (Francis, 2016, n. 131).

Intimate relationships cover all personal spheres: from organizing a common household to sexual activity. It is the level of marital relations at the level of natural conditions, the so-called common table and bedroom. Intimacy in conjugal love requires patience and also respect for personal freedom (Francis, 2016, n. 99). No other human being is allowed into these intimate relationships, neither parents nor siblings. All mutual references of Christian spouses are strengthened only by the presence of God. In such a constellation – of a theandric nature – the spouses have constant access to God's grace, the source of which is in the spouse. Therefore, daily marital relationships of all kinds and intensities – especially those having the character of private rituals strengthening mutual trust and love – are a celebration of the sacrament of marriage in private life. The condition for the duration of marriage is the preservation, development and enrichment of love in a continuous manner (Zienkiewicz, 2022^{2nd}, p. 187).

4. Celebrating the sacrament of marriage in social life

What is the celebration of the sacrament of marriage in social life? At the time of marriage, Christian spouses assume the responsibility of functioning in a wider community, i.e. in the world (Carbajo Núñez, 2019, p. 9–17). The fruit of the sacrament of marriage in the world is the activity of mature Christians in the field of evangelizing culture, responsibility for a pure testimony of faith, and mediation in the use of the grace of salvation deposited in the Church. The specificity of the presence of Christians in the world is the realization of the universal call to holiness, according to the Bible: *Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy*¹². Everyone is wanted by God – and God's closeness is a state of holiness (Parzych-Blakiewicz, 2021, p. 288–289).

Christian identity is the realization of the call to holiness in two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. Vertically, it means deepening your personal relationship with God. In the horizontal dimension, it means morality relating to relationships with people. Sacramental spouses fulfil their call to holiness by constantly increasing the hagiological quality of their person, on the basis of a personal dialogue with God and by translating into deeds those hagiological competences, which are the moral good done in relation to other people. Commitment to the universal vocation to holiness is a permanent celebration of the sacrament of marriage, consisting of a constant openness to the action of God's sanctifying grace and a readiness to mediate God's love given to the betrothed person. The constant enrichment by God's grace, guaranteed by the sacramental reality,

¹² Lev 19:2 (see: *The Holy Bible*, 1994^{5th}).

gives a Christian the support to fulfil ecclesial tasks in society. The daily celebration of the sacrament of marriage appears in social life like a lit candle placed on a candlestick and not under a cork (cf. Mt 5:15; Lk 11:33).

According to Catholic teaching: The daily marriage ritual of Christians celebrating the sacrament of marriage in social life includes activities that implement responsibility for human life, the environment and politics so that they function in accordance with the assumptions of the kingdom of God (cf. Parzych-Blakiewicz, 2021, p. 296–297).

5. Celebrating the sacrament of marriage in ecclesial life

What is the celebration of the sacrament of marriage in ecclesial life? Christian marital relationships also encompass a religious social space. Beginning with the marriage vow, a Christian begins a new stage in his personal life, but also in the Church.

The fruit of the sacrament of marriage is the development of the Ecclesia – that is, the divine-human organism – the Mystical Body of Christ, in which the marriage of Christians is realized in becoming a sign of the depth of God's love. The fundamental dimension of the relationship arising from this sacrament of communion is the personal relationship between the spouses. Within these relationships, there exists a process of drawing individuals closer to one another and uniting them through love, even to the point of sacrificing their entire lives for their spouse and offspring. The daily marriage ritual of Christians who celebrate the sacrament of marriage in ecclesial life includes participation in the celebration of the liturgical year in the Catholic Church. Christian spouses correlate the activity of the family with the ecclesial order that determines the weekly and annual schedule as well as personal participation in the sacramental life.

Conclusions

The celebration of the sacrament of marriage in family life begins at the moment of marriage when two people make their marriage vows in the presence of the ecclesial community. Marriage vows define the specificity of common life in an ecclesial community. It is a new form and a new quality, consisting in integrating one's own personal life with the wife or husband and in the participation of God, angels and saints in this life. The community established in the sacrament of marriage is theandric.

Sacramental marriage lives in two dimensions: vertical (relationship with God) and horizontal (social relationship). Due to its comprehensive specialization, marriage and family life covers all the agendas of a person's life. Therefore, they can and should be called 'the dialogue of life'. The purpose of functioning in such a community is to guarantee constant access to God's grace, used to build human communities and society on the assumptions of the Gospel (i.e. the kingdom of God). Therefore, the sacrament of marriage is constantly celebrated, from the ritual of initiating marriage, through daily marital relationships that strengthen the mutual ties of two people and their relationship with God, and systematic religious practices, organized by the institutional Church. This is during the celebration of the liturgical year, until radiating holiness on the community human, which results in the implementation of evangelical values in social life, fundamental for the kingdom of God.

Bibliography

Błasiak Anna, 2019, Rytuały rodzinne jako czynnik stałości i trwałości systemu rodzinnego w dynamicznie zmieniającym się świecie, Horyzonty Wychowania, vol. 18 (48), p. 43–51; doi: 10.35765/HW.2019.1848.04.

Carbajo Núñez Martín, 2019, *The importance of family relationships for the economic development of socjety*, Forum Teologiczne, vol. 20, p. 7–18; doi:10.31648/ft.4799.

Francis, 2016, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Amoris Laetitia" (19.03.2016), in: The Holy See [online], access: 27.03.2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco esortazione-ap 20160319 amoris-laetitia en.pdf>.

Jaskulska Sylwia, 2013, "Rytuał przejścia" jako kategoria analityczna. Przyczynek do dyskusji nad badaniem rytualnego oblicza rzeczywistości szkolnej, Studia Edukacyjne, no. 26, p. 79–96.

John Paul II, 1981, *Apostolic exhortation "Familiaris consortio"* (22.11.1981), in: *The Holy See* [online], access: 27.03.2023, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.

Katarzyna Blakiewicz, Maksym Adam Kopiec, 2019, Conscience in the light of the Truth and the light of the Good in the context of the necessary correlation of religious studies and natural sciences, Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne, vol. 34, s. 71–85; doi: 10.14746/pst.2019.34.05.

Kunka Sławomir, 2013, *Mężczyzna i kobieta obrazem Boga. Pleć a obraz Boży w człowieku*, Teologia w Polsce, no. 7,2, p. 101–113.

Mędrek Tomasz, 2017, *Nierozerwalność małżeństwa według św. Jana Pawła II na podstawie wybranych dokumentów*, Studia Koszalińsko-Kołobrzeskie, no. 24, p. 127–147; doi: 10.18276/skk.2017.24-08.

Motyl Karol, 2014, *Rytual – od antropologii kulturowej do analizy transakcyjnej*, Edukacyjna Analiza Transakcyjna, no. 3, p. 65–78; doi: 10.16926/eat.2014.03.04.

Nagórny Janusz, 2009, Płciowość – miłość – rodzina, Wyd. KUL, Lublin.

Nowakowski Marcin, 2010, Czym jest rytuał?, Studia Redemptorystowskie, vol. 8, p. 225–243.

Parzych-Blakiewicz Katarzyna, 2016, Teologia dialogu, Olsztyn.

Parzych-Blakiewicz Katarzyna, 2013, Sakrament małżeństwa jako wyzwanie dla współczesnych chrześcijan wobec laickiej wizji małżeństwa i rodziny, in: Jacek J. Pawlik (ed.), Dom – rodzina – małżeństwo, Wydział Teologii UWM w Olsztynie, Olsztyn, p. 71–85.

Parzych-Blakiewicz Katarzyna, 2021, »Sanctity of life« as a familiological issue in the statements of Pope Francis, Nova Prisutnost, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 287–299; doi: 10.31192/np.19.2.4.

Rycman Anna, 2009, Rytuał jako sposób budowania rzeczywistości politycznej, in: Jacek Wódz (ed.), Między socjologią polityki a antropologią polityki, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2009, p. 69–82.

The Holy Bible. New International Version, 1994^{5th}, Hodder and Stoughton: London–Sydney–Auckland. Zagórska Wanda & Lipska Anna, 2013, "Tak kiedyś zostało ustalone". Rytuały rodzinne z perspektywy autobiograficznej młodych dorosłych, Psychologia Wychowawcza, no. 4, p. 117–137.

Zagórska Wanda & Lipska Anna, 2015, *Rytuały rodzinne – koncepcje, badania, funkcje psychologiczne*, Psychologia Rozwojowa, vol. 20, no. 2, p. 11–25; doi:10.4467/20843879PR.15.007.3479.

Zienkiewicz Aleksander, 2022^{2nd}, *Miłości trzeba się uczyć*, Bratni Zew, Wrocław.

Zimoń Henryk, 2012, Rytuał, in: Encyklopedia katolicka, vol. 17, Lublin, col. 713–716.

Świętowanie sakramentu małżeństwa w życiu rodzinnym. Perspektywa katolicko-dogmatyczna

Streszczenie: W artykule zaprezentowano problematykę dotyczącą dynamiki sakramentu małżeństwa, wynikającą z przyrzeczeń ślubnych według rytu celebrowanego w liturgii katolickiej. Celem opracowania jest wyjaśnienie, na czym polega świętowanie sakramentu małżeństwa każdego dnia, a nie tylko w dniu ślubu. Temat został podjęty na podstawie koncepcji rytuału jako fenomenu obejmującego czynności wprowadzenia osoby w nowy stan życia w społeczeństwie. Według badaczy rytuał utrwala określone wartości w kulturze i ludzkiej świadomości. W świetle źródeł teologicznych w rytuale chrześcijańskim małżeństwo jest rzeczywistością teologalną. Oznacza to, że sakrament małżeństwa obejmuje obrzęd złożenia przez kobietę i mężczyznę czterech przyrzeczeń dotyczących przyszłego, wspólnego życia oraz uwzględnienia relacji z Bogiem. Przyrzeczenia te są obietnicą wierności, miłości, uczciwości i towarzyszenia drugiej osobie do końca życia, co oznacza 'dialog życia'. Natomiast sakramentalność oznacza gwarancję dostępu do Bożej łaski, niezbędnej do budowania wspólnoty rodzinnej według założeń ewangelicznych. Sakrament małżeństwa jawi się tu jako rytuał chrześcijański celebrowany, czyli wspominany w każdej chwili wspólnego życia, z odniesieniem do łaski udzielanej przez Boga. Spojrzenie na sakrament małżeństwa jako na rytuał pozwala dostrzec dwa wymiary dynamiki relacji małżeńskich: poziomy – obejmujący dialog między małżonkami oraz pionowy – obejmujący dialog chrześcijańskich małżonków z Bogiem. Tak pojmowane małżeństwo chrześcijańskie jest rzeczywistością rozwijającą się w obszarze indywidualnym osób, a także społecznym i eklezjalnym.

Słowa kluczowe: sakrament małżeństwa, przysięga małżeńska, ślub, rytuał, nauka katolicka.

Proofreading by a native speaker: Mark Jensen

Weryfikacja artykułu – finansowane ze środków Ministerstwa Edukacji i Nauki na podstawie umowy nr RCN/SP/0292/2021/1 z dnia 1.11.2022 r.; kwota środków finansowych stanowiących pomoc przyznaną w ramach programu "Rozwój czasopism naukowych" 19 610 zł.

