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The Family as a Rhetorical and Theological Construct in Polish Baroque Preaching: Functions, Metaphors, and Moral Formation

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Abstract

This article examines the image of the family in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baroque preaching, with particular attention to its rhetorical and theological dimensions. Rather than approaching the family as a purely descriptive theme, the study investigates its role as a powerful vehicle for communicating religious doctrine and shaping the moral imagination of listeners. The analysis adopts a qualitative framework that combines rhetorical and theological perspectives. It draws on selected sermons and homiletic writings of the period, including works by Piotr Skarga, Stanisław Papczyński, and Stanisław Bielicki. Interpreted within their historical and cultural context, these sources illuminate Baroque preaching not merely as a literary form but as a dynamic mode of religious communication. The study demonstrates that the image of the family fulfilled both normative and integrative functions within Baroque homiletic discourse. Marital and parental relationships were consistently framed through the lenses of moral theology and biblical exegesis. At the same time, preachers employed rhetorical devices such as analogy, exemplum, and the metaphor of the “domestic Church” (ecclesia domestica) to anchor theological meanings in the lived experience of their audiences. In this perspective, the family appears not only as an object of preaching but also as a significant instrument of moral formation and social legitimation.

Keywords: Baroque preaching; family; marriage; moral theology; homiletic rhetoric; homily; seventeenth-eighteenth centuries; Baroque religious culture; ecclesia domestica.

Introduction

The family has long occupied a central place in the religious, social, and moral reflection of the Catholic Church. In the Baroque era - marked by a strong emphasis on emotionality, form, and the performative dimension of religious communication - the family became not only an object of moral instruction but also a fertile domain of rhetorical elaboration and symbolic representation. As the principal channel of communication between clergy and laity, Baroque preaching played a significant role in shaping the image of the family as a community of salvation, a school of virtue, and a bastion of Catholic identity (Piotrowski, 2025).

Preachers of the period, such as Piotr Skarga, Blessed Stanisław Papczyński, and Rev. Stanisław Bielicki, portrayed the family as a structure embedded within theological order, social hierarchy, and spiritual responsibility. Their sermons, often delivered from the pulpits of the most prominent churches of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, functioned simultaneously

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as sites of theological reflection, moral instruction, and rhetorical artistry. Within them emerges not only the image of the ideal Christian family, but also the tensions, dangers, and challenges confronting the faithful of the early modern period.

This article seeks to examine the ways in which the family was represented in Baroque preaching, with particular emphasis on its rhetorical and theological functions. The analysis is based on selected homilies and sermons by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century authors, especially Rev. Stanisław Bielicki, whose homiletic legacy has not yet been fully explored from this perspective. The aim is to demonstrate how the image of the family served not only didactic and moralizing purposes, but also functioned as a means of evoking affective responses and shaping communal attitudes. Particular attention will be devoted to stylistic devices, symbolic imagery, metaphors, and emotional strategies characteristic of the homiletic discourse of the period.

Method

The methodological approach combines rhetorical and literary analysis with theological and historical contextualization. The study considers both the functional dimension of preaching - its aims and its impact on the audience - and its aesthetic and rhetorical dimension, including modes of expression and argumentative structures. The article is grounded in the assumption that the Baroque sermon was not merely a vehicle for transmitting doctrine but also a dynamic space for influencing the emotions, imagination, and religious identity of the listener.

The structure of the article reflects these research objectives. It begins by outlining the cultural and religious context of the period, followed by an examination of the image of the family in sermons and its rhetorical and theological functions. The analysis is further developed through a discussion of the family as a space of suffering and hope, two dominant effects of the Baroque imagination. The conclusion identifies directions for future research and highlights the interpretive potential of Baroque preaching within contemporary reflections on family and religious communication.

Cultural and Religious Context of the Baroque Period

The Baroque era, particularly in Catholic Poland, was marked by a profoundly religious worldview. In the aftermath of the Council of Trent, the atmosphere of the Counter-Reformation reinforced the conviction that human existence was defined by a dramatic struggle with sin and by the continual need for divine grace. The world was perceived as a realm of transience and existential threat (memento mori), yet simultaneously as a theatrical stage upon which divine providence directed the course of human history. The Baroque individual was deeply conscious of personal sinfulness while persistently striving for salvation, a tension vividly expressed through literary and artistic motifs associated with vanitas et omnia vanitas.

Within this climate, preaching became a crucial instrument in shaping religious consciousness. Baroque clergy - particularly Jesuits and Bernardines - understood their mission as one of instructing the faithful in orthodoxy and moral conduct. Sermons abounded in biblical references, examples drawn from salvation history, and expressions of mystical sensibility. The preacher was regarded as a mediator between God and the people: one who interpreted doctrine, called for repentance, and reinforced Catholic moral norms. The language of sermons was frequently ornate and highly imagistic, corresponding to the theatrical character of Baroque religious ceremonies, including processions and solemn liturgical celebrations (International Theological Commission, 2006, p. 142, sec. 1.6).

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Within Baroque clerical teaching, the family occupied a position of particular importance as the fundamental unit of both social and religious life. Following the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church strongly emphasized the sacramental nature of marriage and the necessity of its proper canonical form. After the promulgation of the decree Tametsi (1563), the presence of a priest and witnesses at the wedding ceremony became a requirement for the validity of marriage (International Theological Commission, 2006). This sacramental framework reinforced the understanding of marriage as a divinely instituted covenant. At the same time, marriage and family life were increasingly understood in terms of the "domestic Church" (ecclesia domestica): through Christian marriage, the community of spouses became a manifestation of the covenant between Christ and the Church (International Theological Commission, 2006).

This theological framework strengthened the perception of the family as both a primary locus for the transmission of faith and a setting for the cultivation of Christian virtues. In Baroque thought, the family household was therefore viewed as a microcosm of the Church, in which the piety of parents contributed to the salvation of their children, while filial obedience constituted an essential element of the broader social order.

The preaching of the period also reflected classical socio-moral models embedded in the Old Polish understanding of the family. Hierarchy and harmonious relational order were strongly emphasized: the husband as head of the household, the wife in a subordinate role, and children bound by obedience. In his Parliamentary Sermons (Kazania sejmowe), Piotr Skarga frequently invokes the biblical symbolism of creation. God, he argues, first created man to be the head and father of all humanity, while woman was given to him not as an equal in authority but as one subject to him, lest two should rule within a single household. Skarga writes: "For monarchy is an imitation of heavenly governance…" (Skarga, 1925, p. 47; orig. ed. 1597). These words illustrate a distinctly patriarchal understanding of marriage, in which the husband, as head of the family, exercises benevolent authority over wife and children.

Similarly, Blessed Stanisław Papczyński, in one of his sermons, exhorts listeners to remain faithful to their parents, asking whether they have allowed "the hard and cold ice of uncultivated resentment" to extinguish their filial love toward father and mother (Papczyński, 2016, p. 121).

This metaphor suggests that love and obedience toward parents were regarded in the Baroque era as foundational domestic virtues, without which the family risked moral disintegration. Preachers therefore appealed to mutual respect among family members, encouraging children toward pious obedience, and spouses toward marital fidelity and shared responsibility for their offspring. The man and woman designated by God to create the unity. As a husband and wife they are called to create the family. Husband is a head of the family. Wife is to help him in every possible way to built the domestic church. The ideal image of the family is when the family become little church. The image of the family in Baroque preaching thus emerged from both post-Tridentine Catholic doctrine and prevailing patriarchal social imaginaries. Marriage was understood as a divine sacrament, independent of changing social customs, while familial order - with its network of reciprocal duties - was regarded as a reflection of the divine order itself. Consequently, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sermons continued to reproduce traditional teachings concerning marital hierarchy and domestic virtues such as obedience, chastity, and mutual support (International Theological Commission, 2006). These convictions found expression not only in theology but also in the literary language of Baroque homiletics.

State of Research and Homiletic Sources

Research on Baroque preaching in Poland, particularly from historical and theological perspectives, has been developing for decades, yet the field still remains characterized by a

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relatively limited body of secondary scholarship. Scholars of homiletics and Church history emphasize that preaching constitutes an especially valuable source for understanding the religious and social life of the period, as it reflects the remarkable situational and cultural complexity of the age (Brzozowski, 1988, pp. 149–153).

Studies devoted to the Baroque period frequently highlight its close association with the Counter-Reformation vision of the Church and the enduring continuation of medieval rhetorical traditions. Significant scholarly contributions include studies on the theology of preaching in the works of Piotr Skarga and subsequent generations of homilists (including M. Brzozowski, K. Traba, J. Czaja, and L. S. Pilch), as well as analyses of the poetics of conceptus in Old Polish rhetoric (e.g., F. Kowalicki's Jesuit Baroque Preachers). At the same time, the literature points to several important research gaps. In particular, synthetic studies devoted to the social ideas expressed in homiletic discourse and to the image of the family as a preaching motif remain scarce (Brzozowski, 1988, pp. 149-150). Whereas scholarship has traditionally focused on political, moral, or eschatological questions, the role of the family and familial relationships continues to be comparatively underexplored.

Existing studies reveal two principal lines of inquiry. The first concentrates on reconstructing the theology and stylistic features of individual Baroque authors, especially Jesuit preachers - for example, analyses of Skarga's rhetorical style, studies of the structural organization of Papczyński's Passion sermons, or research on major eighteenth-century homiletic collections. The second encompasses literary and rhetorical approaches concerned with issues such as the function of conceptus in Polish sermons and the use of medieval exempla in Lenten homilies (Brzozowski, 1988). Comparatively little attention, however, has been devoted to the representation of the family. More attention was paid to the rhetorical approaches to the family than practical suggestions how the family should function and exist. Scholars rarely undertake systematic analyses of the ways in which images of marriage, parents, and children operate within Baroque homiletic discourse—whether as metaphors, moral injunctions, or theological reflections. A clear research gap therefore becomes apparent: although the family appears in sermons, for example as a foundation of social order, comprehensive studies dedicated specifically to this aspect remain lacking.

Among Baroque preachers, the Jesuits played a particularly significant role within the Polish tradition. For the purposes of the present study, the most relevant figures are Piotr Skarga, Stanisław Papczyński, and Stanisław Bielicki. Their works survive in numerous printed collections of sermons and constitute important source material for both literary and historical-theological research.

Piotr Skarga (1536-1612), a representative of the transitional Polish Renaissance whose activity extended across the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gained renown as a parliamentary preacher and an influential interpreter of civic and social virtues. His Parliamentary Sermons (Kazania sejmowe, 1597) became a celebrated example of patriotic preaching and were reprinted numerous times. In addition, collections of his Sunday and festal homilies were published in multiple editions from the seventeenth through the nineteenth century (e.g., Sermons for Sundays and Feast Days of the Entire Liturgical Year). Characteristic of Skarga's style is the use of vivid symbolism combined with a strong moral and patriotic message. His sermons typically opened with a biblical citation (thema), followed by the development of a tripartite sermonic structure, frequently drawing upon analogies from nature and social life (Kazania sejmowe, 1597).

For example, in one of his Parliamentary Sermons, Skarga addresses the political elites of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the following terms: "You are our fathers and guardians, and we are your orphans and children. You are like our mothers and nurses; if you abandon

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us and counsel poorly on our behalf, we shall perish - and you yourselves shall perish as well" (Skarga, 1925, p. 48). By associating political elites with parents and the people with offspring, these words exemplify the familial metaphor characteristic of Skarga's rhetoric. In his vision, the state appears as an extended family, and social harmony depends upon parental care for the well-being of children. The passage concludes within the broader context of justice and love of the homeland: "Look upon us, lest we perish…" (Skarga, 1912, p. 40).

Stanisław Papczyński (1631–1701), founder of the Congregation of Marian Fathers, was a highly regarded preacher and confessor, particularly known for his Passion and Marian rhetoric. In his sermons, Papczyński emphasized patriotic, social, and moral values, which later earned him the designation "the Skarga of the seventeenth century." His homiletic style combined rigorous moral exhortation with contemplative piety. In his preaching, he frequently praised purity, obedience, reverence for the Church, and devotion to God as fundamental principles of spiritual and familial life.

A collection of Papczyński's Passion sermons has survived (Papczyński, 2016, p. 1384), whose editors point to parallels with Skarga's preaching as well as to the probable existence of now-lost manuscripts of his Lenten discourses. A distinguishing feature of Papczyński's preaching is its dramatic narrative style and its ability to engage audiences, particularly in the context of Lenten homiletics.

Stanisław Bielicki, SJ (1657–1718), represents the period of the late Baroque. His extensive corpus of sermons was published during his lifetime in several volumes, including Niedziele kaznodziejskie (Preaching Sundays, Częstochowa, 1712) and Święta kaznodziejskie (Festal Sermons, Kalisz, 1717).

Bielicki was a respected monastic preacher and missionary. Like Skarga's works, his homilies frequently employ biblical and Old Polish exempla (including the tradition of postils), enriched by elaborate metaphors and rhetorical conceits. In Bielicki's preaching, strongly shaped by the Jesuit milieu of Kalisz, the motif of the pious family occupies a prominent place, for instance through portrayals of saints as exemplary wives, mothers, or fathers in faith: "such people emerge from homes and domestic hearths as have first been formed through custom and example" (Bielicki, n.d., p. 146). Each of Bielicki's volumes was richly supplemented with moral observations and anecdotal material, making them useful instruments of parish pastoral ministry. His Niedziele kaznodziejskie exemplifies characteristic features of late Baroque homiletics, including elaborate verbal stylization, dramatic modes of expression, and the frequently employed tripartite sermon structure (expositio, argumentation, and application). Even the title of the first volume - Niedziele kaznodziejskie, to iest, kazania na niedziele całego roku… (Preaching Sundays, that is, Sermons for All Sundays of the Year; Częstochowa, 1712) - indicates the didactic orientation of the collection.

This triad of Baroque homilists - Skarga, Papczyński, and Bielicki - belonged to the most esteemed preachers of their age. Although Skarga's activity preceded the mature Baroque period, he became for later generations a symbolic embodiment of the national moral conscience; his sermons continued to be republished long after his death, and subsequent generations of preachers regarded him as a paradigmatic authority. Papczyński, later beatified, was in his own time recognized as a significant religious voice, frequently invited to preach in parish and regional contexts. His homilies, marked by vivid and accessible language, earned the esteem of ecclesiastical and noble audiences, who valued him as a preacher of fervent patriotic and familial themes. Bielicki's sermons, in turn, were widely circulated among religious communities and clergy; employing language accessible to broader audiences, his works often found a place in monastic libraries. Contemporary assessments suggest that, through their

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preaching, these authors reinforced the Baroque Catholic model of the family: the father as moral leader, the mother as guardian of the household, and children as learners of obedience.

Sources also indicate that, for contemporary audiences, the sermons of Papczyński and Bielicki functioned as materials of religious and moral formation; they influenced catechetical instruction and devotional literature oriented toward family life. The literature of the period particularly emphasized Skarga's role as a founding figure of Polish preaching, Papczyński's image as a model patriot-pastor, and Bielicki's reputation as an exemplary educator of the faithful from the pulpit. In this way, their homilies and their conceptions of family life became deeply embedded in the spiritual culture of the Baroque Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The Image of the Family in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Preaching

In Baroque sermons, the family is frequently presented as a model of community endowed with fundamental moral and religious significance. Preachers such as Stanisław Bielicki, Piotr Skarga, and Stanisław Papczyński employ familial imagery to illustrate Christian obligations and ideals. In his Niedziele kaznodziejskie (Preaching Sundays; Jasna Góra, 1712), Bielicki portrays the family as a miniature Church, emphasizing the duties of its individual members (Żurek, 2017, pp. 146–176). Skarga, by contrast, particularly in his funeral sermons, draws upon figures from royal families and their interpersonal relations in order to appeal to the emotions of his audience. In his sermon for the funeral of Queen Anna Jagiellon, the characterization of the monarch and her family culminates in a powerful metaphorical appeal: the queen is presented as the mother of the Commonwealth, whose death should be mourned by all as children grieve the loss of their parent (Piecuch, 2014, pp. 19–34). This rhetorical strategy employs the image of the loving mother to evoke empathy (pathos) and reinforce a sense of communal obligation.

Baroque preachers closely associate the image of the family with theological and moral functions. The family is represented as a school of virtue and the primary sanctuary of faith—the domestic Church in which God's commandments are learned and embodied. Sermons place particular emphasis on marital chastity, filial obedience, and the piety of fathers and mothers. Stanisław Papczyński instructs the faithful regarding the necessity of showing parents "the deepest attachment, the greatest respect, and the most tender love" (Papczyński, 2016, pp. 119-120), grounding this obligation in the divine commandment to honor one's father and mother. Such biblical imperatives of familial love are situated by the preacher within the broader context of sacramental life. The family becomes a community of believers in which the sacramental dimension of Christian existence - marriage, baptism, and the Eucharist - is lived and experienced. From this perspective emerges the family's moral function within homiletic teaching: fathers and mothers, acting as primary catechists, transmit Christian life to their children through the credibility of personal example.

Baroque sermons also articulate clearly defined familial roles. The father is presented as the head of the family - a spiritual guide and guardian of order. Just as God the Father stands at the head of the Church, so too the father bears responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the household. The examples of Christ and of Saint Joseph, the silent guardian of the Holy Family, provided preachers with paradigms of paternal responsibility. The mother, in turn, appears as the guardian of the domestic hearth and the pillar of her children's upbringing. Maternal tenderness is frequently reinforced through Marian imagery and comparisons with the Blessed Virgin Mary, while ideals such as the devoted mother or queenly mother are developed in sermons concerning saintly spouses or royal women; the charitable works of holy queens are at times compared to a mother's care for her household. Children, meanwhile, are portrayed

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in the homiletic discourse of the period as disciples of faith, called to obey their parents and cultivate a rightly formed conscience. Sermons repeatedly invoke biblical injunctions such as "Honor your father and your mother," as well as examples of the humble followers of Christ, described as those who "believe in Christ, if we acknowledge Him as our Lord and head" (Skarga, 1925, p. 47). Such moral instruction served not only religious formation but also the preservation of social and spiritual order: the father sustains discipline, the mother nurtures love, and children embody gentleness and humility.

Thus, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century preaching presents a distinctly articulated vision of familial roles and responsibilities. In order to underscore this hierarchy of duties, preachers employed numerous metaphors and family-centered images as elements of didactic rhetoric. The family could be compared to the Church - the household of God - or to a nurturing mother; familial imagery also informed depictions of saints, mourners accompanying the dead, and broader communal experiences of suffering and devotion. Moreover, preachers extended the metaphor of the human family to the national community, thereby linking domestic order with collective religious and social identity.

The invocation of paternal and maternal imagery serves to stimulate the emotional engagement of listeners. Skarga employs the motif of the mother in reference to both the homeland and the Church in order to emphasize shared heritage, sacrifice, and communal belonging. In the sermon cited above, the homeland is portrayed as the mother of the nation, while the faithful appear as her children (Piecuch, 2014, pp. 37, 41). Similar metaphors also emerge, such as streams flowing from mountains (fathers) to irrigate fields (children), suggesting that the younger generation draws nourishment from the wisdom of its elders. The rhetorical function of such imagery is twofold: it strengthens the credibility of the preacher's message through appeals to familial tradition and moral authority (ethos), while simultaneously mobilizing emotional responses by awakening concern for spouses, parents, and offspring (pathos).

From this perspective, Baroque preachers presented the family not merely as a moral theme but also as a significant instrument of persuasion. Images of filial obedience and maternal love were closely intertwined with religious imperatives and ecclesiastical teaching, thereby deepening the theological resonance of sermons. The use of familial metaphors enabled preachers to construct a message that was at once accessible and rhetorically effective. Upon hearing references to the mother, the father, or the head of the household, listeners could more readily identify with the virtues under discussion. In this way, Baroque homiletics integrated spiritual instruction with the realities of everyday life, transforming the family into both a pedagogical instrument and a foundation of Catholic ethos (Papczyński, 2016, p. 96; see also Piecuch, 2014, pp. 35-49).

Rhetorical Means of Representing the Family

In Baroque preaching, the image of the family fulfils not merely a descriptive function but, above all, a persuasive and normative one. Operating at the intersection of moral theology, biblical exegesis, and classical rhetoric, preachers of the period employ the family as a figure of both natural and supernatural order, enabling abstract doctrinal concepts to be effectively grounded in the everyday experience of their audiences. The family thereby becomes a privileged site of ethical argumentation in which the private, the social, and the religious converge.

The primary rhetorical device employed in the representation of the family is analogy. Marital and parental relationships serve as reference points for describing the relationship of God to

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humanity, Christ to the Church, and the priest to the community of believers. Such analogical reasoning is not merely illustrative but constitutive in character: the familial order is inscribed within the orders of creation and salvation, thereby acquiring the status of a theological norm. Of particular importance is the analogy derived from the Epistle to the Ephesians (Eph 5:21-33), frequently invoked in early modern preaching, in which marriage is presented as a figure of the Christ–Church relationship. This rhetorical strategy enables the preacher to transfer the authority of Revelation onto concrete domestic relationships, transforming them into a space for the enactment of salvific order (Aristotle, 2004, Books I-II; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 2002, pp. 371-389).

A second significant device is the metaphorization of the family as a “domestic Church” (ecclesia domestica). Present within the patristic tradition and further developed in post-Tridentine reflection, this metaphor acquires a distinctly pastoral dimension in Baroque preaching. The family home is portrayed as the setting of primary catechesis, the cultivation of virtue, and the internalization of moral norms. The rhetorical force of this metaphor lies in its inclusivity: every listener, regardless of social standing, can recognize themselves within the structure of the household as a sphere of responsibility and obedience. At the same time, the metaphor reinforces a hierarchical image of familial relations consistent with the social and theological order of the period (Lausberg, 1998, §§ 558-562; Michałowska, 2002, pp. 412-418).

Another frequently employed strategy is argumentum a communi experientia, that is, the appeal to the shared experience of family life. Preachers evoke marital conflicts familiar to their audiences, the challenges of raising children, and tensions arising from social and vocational obligations, using these realities to illustrate the moral consequences of vice and virtue. Such exempla are not anecdotal in character but fundamentally didactic; their aim is to produce an effect of recognition (agnitio) conducive to the acceptance of the sermon’s normative message. In this way, the rhetoric of lived experience makes possible an effective integration of doctrine and everyday life (Skarga, 1972; Pelc, 1993, pp. 145-158).

No less important is the role of affective rhetoric, grounded in the evocation of emotions associated with family bonds. Images of paternal care, maternal sacrifice, or filial ingratitude serve to intensify the moral message and strengthen its persuasive impact. In this sense, the family becomes a vehicle of pathos which, in accordance with classical rhetorical theory, is intended to direct the listener’s will toward the desired course of action. Such affectivity, however, remains closely regulated by theological frameworks, so that emotions support rather than replace rational argumentation (Aristotle, 2004, Book II, 1-11; Lausberg, 1998, §§ 257-266).

Finally, Baroque preaching reveals a discernible instrumentalization of the image of the family as a micro-model of society. Domestic relationships - such as filial obedience, marital fidelity, and paternal responsibility - serve as figures for public and ecclesial order. This strategy possesses a distinctly rhetorical character: by naturalizing familial hierarchy, the preacher legitimizes the broader social order, presenting it as consistent with divine will and natural law. In this context, the family functions as an intermediary argument linking individual morality with communal order (Delumeau, 1994, pp. 201-215; Kumor, 2001, pp. 98-104).

The deployment of these rhetorical devices demonstrates that the image of the family in Baroque preaching does not constitute a neutral description of social reality but rather an instrument for the formation of conscience. The family becomes a privileged space in which rhetoric and theology intersect most closely, creating an effective mechanism for the transmission of moral and doctrinal norms.

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Conclusions: The Functions of the Image of the Family in Baroque Preaching

The analysis of the image of the family in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century preaching demonstrates that it cannot be understood merely as an element of social background or a neutral reflection of the realities of the period. On the contrary, the family emerges as a central rhetorical and theological figure through which Baroque preachers organized their vision of the world, the human person, and the relationship between the natural and supernatural orders. In this sense, the image of the family fulfilled an integrative function: it connected Church doctrine with the everyday experience of listeners, rendering abstract theological concepts communicable and existentially meaningful (Delumeau, 1986, pp. 241-256).

From a rhetorical perspective, the family constituted one of the most effective instruments of homiletic persuasion. By appealing to widely recognizable experiences of marriage, parenthood, and child-rearing, preachers were able to employ forms of argumentation grounded in analogy, exemplum, and shared experience (argumentum a communi experientia). The image of the family home facilitated the production of an identificatory effect between listener and sermon, thereby significantly strengthening the normative and moralizing force of the message (Lausberg, 1998, §§ 363–370). Such rhetoric was not incidental but deeply rooted both in classical rhetorical theory and in the post-Tridentine conception of preaching as an instrument for the formation of conscience (Pelc, 1993, pp. 97-112).

At the same time, the image of the family fulfilled a clearly defined theological function. Familial relationships were interpreted in the light of Revelation, particularly through references to biblical conceptions of marriage and the fatherhood of God. The family was presented both as a space for the realization of the order of creation and as a sphere of human cooperation with grace. The metaphor of the domestic Church enabled preachers to emphasize the sacred dimension of everyday duties proper to one's state in life, thereby making family life an integral component of the path to salvation (Ratzinger, 2012, pp. 221-228). In this way, moral theology penetrated the private sphere, while the practices of domestic life acquired the status of religious acts.

An additional feature of Baroque preaching was the instrumental use of the image of the family as a model of social and ecclesial order. The hierarchy embedded in familial relationships - particularly in the figure of the father as head of the household - served to legitimize public order, authority, and ecclesiastical discipline. The family thus functioned as a microcosm of Christian society, within which obedience, responsibility, and mutual obligations possessed explicit theological justification (Tazbir, 1983, pp. 183-194). This strategy formed part of a broader homiletic program aimed at reinforcing moral and social stability during a period of profound cultural transformation.

In conclusion, the image of the family in Baroque preaching should be understood as a multidimensional instrument of religious communication in which rhetorical and theological functions remain inseparably intertwined. The family was not merely a topic of sermons but a structuring principle of homiletic thought, enabling the effective transmission of moral norms, the interpretation of social reality, and the integration of everyday life within a Christian vision of world order. For this reason, the analysis of this motif constitutes a significant contribution to research on Baroque religious culture and on the mechanisms of influence characteristic of early modern preaching. The family has always been interesting subject for the research of scientifical project. Limitations of the study are connected with very few sources for Polish Baroque in the literature. There is hope for new discoveries in this area. This would only enrich the knowledge about the era of religious life of Baroque.

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