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## DISPUTE OVER THE SEX EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DURING THE INTER-WAR YEARS

My article will deal mainly with the pre-war discussion on the advisability of sex education for children and young people and not with what this education looked like in practice. There are several reasons for this. The article is based on handbooks for parents and sometimes even young people, articles in pedagogical periodicals and books which concerned sex education directly or indirectly. Though the sources seem to be rich, it is better to be careful in drawing conclusions. During the twenty inter-war years the majority of Polish society brought up their children without specialised pedagogical advice or “moralisers” instructions. This fact restricts our range of vision to a narrow social group, usually members of the intelligentsia, who were more inclined to rely on specialists’ advice than other groups of society. But in this case, too, it is better not to draw too far-reaching conclusions for the subject is poorly represented in diaries, memoirs and letters, i.e. sources which might supplement the declarative side (restricted to recommendations) of the article. What everyday practice was like, whether the pedagogical recommendations were obeyed and to what extent, is still an open question.

The relaxation of moral norms at the turn of the 19th century is a subject frequently discussed in literature<sup>1</sup>. The themes raised in modernistic art and painting could be regarded as rather indecent even today. It is true that the works of Gustav Klimt or Frank Wedekind found admirers among a relatively narrow social group, but this does not mean that the average man did not feel the pressure of the epoch. However, it was the First World War that undermined the traditional moral norms strongly enough for new patterns of behaviour, specific to the intellectual and artistic elite, to reach

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. B. W. Tuchman, *Wzniosła wieża (Sublime Tower)*, Warszawa 1987; M. Ekstiens, *Święto wiosny (The Rite of Spring)*, Warszawa 1996.

and become popular in, lower social strata. It is enough to say that even a provincial could hear a frivolous cabaret song on the radio, see an American film heroine in the cinema and read a cheap romance full of a sensuality which would make us laugh today. It is not surprising therefore that in a situation where patterns of behaviour were transmitted not only by parents and persons of the same age group but also by mass culture, the upbringing of young people became a pressing problem. How to save children and young people from depravation? The question kept many parents, pedagogues and priests awake at night.

As is usual in such cases, opinions differed. The liberals, influenced by the discoveries of Freud, Adler and Russell's educational theories, asserted that sex education of children and young people was an indispensable element of a proper upbringing. This assertion did not, of course, hang in midair. It was a result of a radical change in the image of the child. Freudism drew attention to infantile sexuality, to children's dormant sexual instincts and urges. The periods of early childhood and puberty were almost unanimously acknowledged to be the most important stages in human life. "It must be admitted", wrote a publicist, "that psychoanalysis drew the attention of contemporary psychology and pedagogy to the importance of early childhood for the individual's later development. In fact, upbringing starts today on the first day after birth and each educator must take those years into consideration if he/she wants to direct upbringing in a proper way"<sup>2</sup>. Paradoxically, such psychoanalytical terms as urge, suppression, sublimation were also used by advocates of traditional upbringing based on the teachings of the Catholic Church. This does not signify that the two sides, the liberal and the conservative, meant the same by "explanation of the facts of life" or that they agreed on details. If we exclude the views of extremists, who rejected the idea of acquainting children with matters concerning sexuality, the dispute was over who should do this and how.

The official Church attitude to sex education for children and young people was expressed in 1929 in the papal encyclical *Divini illius magistri* which said: "Especially dangerous is pedagogical naturalism in the sexual field... there are many people who in their stupidity proclaim and propagate this dangerous educational method known under the disgusting name of sex education. They wrongly think that by purely natural means, excluding the help of religion and piety, they will succeed in preventing young people from

<sup>2</sup> M. Friedländer, *Psychoanaliza a przeżycia wczesnego dzieciństwa (Psychoanalysis and the Experiences of Early Childhood)*, "Życie Młodych" 1938, N° 6, p. 183. This view was shared by an overwhelming majority of pedagogues and educators, cf. A. Klęsk, *Kwestia seksualna u małych dzieci (The Sexual Question in Small Children)*, "Młoda Matka" 1928, N° 5, p. 9. Explanation of the facts of life, *ibidem*, p. 11.

seeking sensual pleasure and debauchery. They include in these means the so-called explanation of sexuality to young people, irrespective of gender, even publicly; what is even worse, they think that young people should at an early date be given an opportunity to sin, so, as they say, that the souls of young people should get accustomed to these things and in this way be inured to the dangers of the period of puberty... These people are gravely mistaken. They do not recognise man's inborn imperfection... young people frequently fall into the sin of unchastity not so much because of a lack of knowledge as because their weak will is exposed to temptation and deprived of God's help"<sup>3</sup>. According to the encyclical, information on sex matters should be given at home by parents or the child's guardians and it should be individual, adapted to the child's age, needs and natural inclinations. Even in this case the encyclical recommended great caution, saying that this should be done when explanation turned out to be "an indispensable necessity".

It is also known that the question of sex education was discussed at a national catechetical course held in Cracow in 1930 with the participation of some 500 catechists from all over Poland. Prelate Antoni Ciepliński, a delegate of the Ministry of Education and chief inspector of religious instruction in schools, stated then that the Polish Episcopate, represented in the School Commission, held the view that explanation of the facts of life was an exclusive domain of parents, in particular mothers. Educators had that duty only if the parents were unable to do this<sup>4</sup>.

The official attitude of the Church was not always fully concordant with what the priest practised. It follows from educational instructions, school-books and pedagogical books that "indispensable necessity" was subject to different interpretations, depending on the author's views. Father K. Mazurkiewicz, author of the book *Pedagogika wobec kwestii seksualnej* (*The Attitude of Pedagogy to the Sexual Question*, Włocławek 1931) held the opinion that sex education was the duty of parents and that they should not dodge it. Otherwise, as he asserted, this would be done by the street, and that in the most vulgar way. In addition to parents, the child's guardian and the priest were entitled to talk with children and young people about sex matters, and occasionally, in a restricted way, also the teacher, who should

<sup>3</sup> Translated from the Polish text of Pope Pius XI' encyclical *Divini illius magistri*, ed. Jan Krzozonkiewicz, Warszawa 1929, pp. 62–63.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Father Henryk Weryński, *U progu uświadomienia. Wskazówki dla matek i wychowawców* (*On the Threshold of Learning the Facts of Life. Instructions for Mothers and Educators*), Lublin 1930, pp. 1–2.

treat the matter individually and preferably talk with the young person in private.

More conservative priest reacted unfavourably to the idea of sex education. Father I. Kmiecik (member of the Order of the Reformati, rector of St. Anthony's college) held the view that parents should tell their child about the facts of life only if they saw that "the street" had already raised this question, and that the child was restless and asked "importunate" questions. But in his view, even a serious briefing by parents (which he contrasted with the "dirty information" given by the child's contemporaries in the street or by servants at home) was fraught with the danger of depravation and this is why Kmiecik did not recommend it; he warned against it for "... the best and most serious explanation only heightens curiosity in things which a child is taught to avoid, and curiosity intensifies the wish to experience them. Even in a most serious explanation a child looks first and foremost for what stimulates and rouses the sexual instinct, this is why even pious children listen so greedily to a conversation about these matters... Therefore, parents, be on your guard against sex education! It is a thousand times more important to bring them up in fear of God, arouse in them the sense of shame, and harden their will... The most effective way of protecting your children against the danger of lust and the ensuing depravation is to turn their minds and attention away from sex matters. The less your children know about this, the better for them. A religious upbringing makes the teaching of the facts of life unnecessary for a long time"<sup>5</sup>. Adolescent youth should, at the time of puberty, be given the necessary information, but only about the biological development. Father Stanisław Podoleński held a similar view: "... explanation of the facts of life should not be overestimated. It is by no means a way of protecting young people from depravity, for what defends them from evil is a strong will and the supernatural help of grace"<sup>6</sup>. In Father Podoleński's opinion the best way was to keep children in ignorance as long as possible although, as he admitted further on, "... this cannot be done for a long time yet, especially in our times"<sup>7</sup>. The talk with children about "delicate matters" should, in his view, be conducted in a soulful tone, full of dignity, so as to stimulate children's gratitude to God and their parents. He was against comparisons with the animal world for this would lower "the noble level of discussion". Accord-

<sup>5</sup> Father I. Kmiecik, *Praktyczne wskazówki o wychowaniu dzieci (Practical Instructions on the Upbringing of Children)*, Lwów 1928, pp. 164–165.

<sup>6</sup> Father S. Podoleński, *Podręcznik pedagogiczny. Wskazówki dla rodziców i wychowawców (Pedagogical Handbook. Instructions for Parents and Educators)*, Kraków 1921, p. 88.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 85.

ing to him, a child's knowledge should be restricted; first of all it should know that God is the beginning of all life and secondly that it was the mother's honourable role to carry the child under "her heart" until the moment when it was able to live independently. As this shows, the role of the father was discreetly ignored.

Sex education seems to have been more widely discussed by the clergy in the second half of the 1920s. Earlier guidebooks, e.g. the extensive book by Father Bolesław Żychliński, almost completely ignored this question<sup>8</sup>. This does not mean that the book did not refer to sexuality at all. On the contrary. It contained many remarks on this question but they concerned stern educational methods and control over children, which, in the author's opinion, drove away children's unrest and ensured that their thoughts "were sound".

Liberal circles had a completely different view of sex education. They did not confine it to explanation of the facts of life but regarded it as a comprehensive education dealing with man's sexuality. Pedagogues, psychologists and eugenicists frequently took part in discussions on this question. They were supported by propagators of the idea of a "conscious life", such as Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński and Irena Krzywicka. Mention should also be made of the works of Adolf Dryjski, Maria Benisławska, Cecylia Bańkowska, Gustaw Bychowski, M. Friendländer, Leon Wernic, H. Szczodrowski, S. Bogdanowicz and Teodora Męczkowska. Very interesting information can be found in a poll on students' sex life, held in 1934 by the Polish Eugenic Society and the Anti-Veneral Union<sup>9</sup>.

In the opinion of the authors mentioned above, sex education was the duty of parents and the school; the latter should scientifically explain the knowledge acquired by the young people at home or replace parents if these, for various reasons (usually shame and lack of experience), did not provide

<sup>8</sup> Father B. Żychliński, *Wychowanie młodzieży w czystości obyczajów obowiązkiem wobec Kościoła i narodu (It Is a Duty Towards the Church and Nation to Bring up Young People in Chastity)*, Poznań 1917.

<sup>9</sup> 23,000 copies of the poll were sent to "nearly" all (as the authors pointed out) academic centres in Poland, student hostels and centres of academic life (Faculty Circles, etc.). Nearly two-thirds of the replies were from military colleges. Most students gave serious replies; several dozen replies were "frivolous" but they were not taken into consideration. A total of 2,227 replies were accepted. Few women students, only 74, took part in the poll. The organisers emphasised that it was impossible to draw far-reaching conclusions on the basis of such a small number of replies. In addition to questions concerning their age, civil status, hereditary diseases, the age of reaching physical puberty and the age of sexual initiation, the students were asked who and in what circumstances had given them information on sexual life, what venereal diseases they had suffered from, what methods of contraception they applied, etc. Cf. Dr T. Welfle, *Życie płciowe młodzieży akademickiej (The Sex Life of Academic Youth)*, "Eugenika Polska" 1938, № 2, p. 101.

their children with adequate information. On the whole, these authors admitted that sex education at home was the most proper method because of its individual character and the possibility of adapting it not only to the age but also to the psycho-physical development of the child. But at the same time the authors stressed that sex education was not practised at home. Schoolmates were the most common teachers. According to a poll, 802 respondents, of a total of 1,249 mentioned schoolmates as their teachers, while only 45 mentioned parents. Parents occupied a place far behind literature, school (this was ambiguous, for “adult” friends may have been regarded as older classmates) and the social milieu<sup>10</sup>. But it was not only for practical reasons that the liberal intellectuals asserted that the school was obligated to provide sex education. Their demand resulted *ex definitione* from their view that the school was an institution which educated and socialised the younger generation. “... if, in accordance with the principles of modern pedagogy, the school is to embrace the child as a whole by its educational influence, can it exclude such an important field as sex from its educational work?”, asked a publicist<sup>11</sup>. Another author added that the school should secure physical and moral health and this cannot be done without introducing sex education into the curriculum<sup>12</sup>.

Let us draw attention to the fact that the liberal intelligentsia used the term “sex education” while conservatives stuck stubbornly to the term “information on the facts of life” and used the former term only in a negative connotation. Although both sides agreed that education should promote continence and should delay young people’s sexual initiation as much as possible, they differed in their choice of measures which they thought would be effective.

The liberal intelligentsia proposed to combine scientific rationalism with the recommendations of secular ethics. In their opinion, sex matters should be taught by biology teachers, physicians and hygienists. They pointed out that knowledge of the life of plants and animals was of great help in sex education, for through analogy young people could be told about the biological mechanisms of human sexual life. They stressed that “all instruction concerning the facts of life, including biology, should have an

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. T. Welfle, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

<sup>11</sup> M. Friedländer, *Szkola wobec zagadnień wychowania płciowego (The Attitude of Schools to Sex Education)*, “Ruch Pedagogiczny” 1930, № 3, p. 113.

<sup>12</sup> S. Bogdanowicz, *Zagadnienie wychowania seksualnego młodzieży szkolnej (Sex Education of School Youth)*, “Zagadnienia Rasy” 1930, № 9, p. 46.

ethical base"<sup>13</sup>. This is why in their view questions concerning maternity, the upbringing of children and responsibility for the family should be discussed during the same lessons (of biology and hygiene). In the opinion of the liberals, the physicians' task was particularly important. It was their duty to inform young people about venereal diseases (how they were transmitted, spotted and cured) and about hereditary diseases.

The latter question was strongly emphasised by eugenicists who advocated restrictions on the reproductiveness of persons suffering from hereditary diseases, by which they meant inborn mental deficiency, schizophrenia, epilepsy, deafness, blindness, "serious corporal defects" and alcoholism<sup>14</sup>. In their opinion, male pupils in senior grades should be regularly instructed about the blessings of sexual continence in the life of individuals and society. The eugenicists proposed two ways of improving sex education. The first was to prepare competent teachers. Teachers' training colleges should, in their opinion, include sex pedagogy in their curricula so that there should be no need to organise supplementary training for teachers. The other proposal concerned the teaching itself. Eugenicists proposed that a special commission composed of pedagogues and parents should work out the bases of sex education in school and at home<sup>15</sup>. Teodora Męczkowska advocated more liberalism in the working out of "programmatic guidelines". She proposed that a commission composed of a physician, a school psychologist, all form-masters headed by the school master, be set up at every school without the participation of parents<sup>16</sup>.

But even the supporters of school sex education were aware of many pitfalls. The first was that teaching was to be given to groups and the harm this might cause could outweigh the benefits. Some people thought that group education should be put off until the pupils reach relative puberty: "... group education would be possible in the highest grade of secondary school, that is, in the seventh and eighth grades, and in the equivalent grades

<sup>13</sup> M. Friendländer, *op. cit.*, p. 115; a similar view was held by T. Męczkowska: "Although biological facts are the starting point in any information on the facts of life", she wrote, "the educator supplying it must remember that suitable results will be achieved only if the birth of future generations is presented on the moral and social plane, not only on that of biology", in: *Wychowanie seksualne dzieci i młodzieży (Sex Education of Children and Young People)*, Warszawa 1934, p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> According to eugenicists, limitation of the reproduction of "undesirable types" could be achieved by isolating them behind closed doors or through the sterilisation of persons suffering from these diseases. Cf. L. Wernic, *O ustawach eugenicznych (Eugenic Laws)*, "Zagadnienia Rasy" 1935, № 1-2, p. 45.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. L. Wernic, *Rola eugeniki w wychowaniu (The Role of Eugenics in Upbringing)*, "Zagadnienia Rasy" 1936, № 2, p. 145.

<sup>16</sup> T. Męczkowska, *Wychowanie seksualne dzieci i młodzieży (Sex Education of Children and Young People)*, Warszawa 1934, p. 16.

of other schools... This will, of course, be not only biological instruction, for which it would be too late, but hygienic and socio-ethical instruction, which is absolutely necessary and useful to young people of that age. This means", concluded the author, "that the school can only provide the basis for biological instruction on the facts of life in biology lessons, leaving detailed instruction in this sphere to individual activity, which is possible mainly at home and in a boarding school"<sup>17</sup>.

This is why the liberal intelligentsia emphasised that parents should closely co-operate with the school in the sex education of children and young people. Only a joint educational effort could produce the expected results, that is, instil in young people clear ethical norms based on the following principles:

- sexual life should not be started before reaching full psycho-physical maturity (women were advised to be continent until the age of 20–21, men until 24–25),

- the sexual act should be a result of a profound emotional experience,

- a change of "the sex object" was permissible only in exceptional circumstances,

- concern for health and personal hygiene,

- continence and restraint in sexual life<sup>18</sup>.

It is striking that the age of sexual initiation recommended for men was much higher than the age mentioned in polls (16–18)<sup>19</sup>. Pedagogues were faced with difficult work.

It is interesting that continence and moderation in conjugal relations were advised not only for ethical reasons. Albert Dryjski, author of a tract on sex among school pupils, pointed out also other aspects: "Education should instill it in every individual that sexual intercourse should not occur too often, for an excessive exploitation of sexual energy leads to surfeit and exhaustion... Infrequent sexual intercourse promotes the creation of a healthy progeny, and this fact should be strongly emphasised"<sup>20</sup>.

In view of the above-mentioned principles it is clear why the Church refused to collaborate with the liberal intelligentsia in the field of sex education. There was no agreement on basic questions. The Catholic doctrine still forbids sexual relations before the wedding, stresses the indissolu-

<sup>17</sup> M. Friendländer, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. Dryjski, *Zagadnienia seksualizmu dzieci i młodzieży szkolnej (The Sexuality of Children and Young People)*, Warszawa 1934. The study was warmly received by pedagogical circles; cf. J. Ryngranowa, *Oceny (Evaluations)*, "Życie Dziecka" 1934, № 9, p. 265; T. Męczkowska, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. T. Welfle, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 414.



bility of marriage; a change of the “sex object” is therefore out of the question in the Catholic doctrine, with the exception of circumstances foreseen by the canon law. These basic differences gave birth to others, e.g. the method of sex instruction. The Church proposed allusive metaphoric instruction which would lay stress on the parents’ toil and the mother’s devotion to her child: “mummy has changed for she carries a human seed which is growing into a baby, and mummy carries it under her heart”; “Nine months pass. The baby is big. It presses heavily on mummy and has no longer enough room in this small living cradle which was called womb by old Poles. It must therefore leave this narrow cradle. When the baby gets out of mummy, mummy has great pains”<sup>21</sup>. The talks proposed by the liberal intelligentsia were to be completely different. Irena Krzywicka wrote that parents, asked “where children come from”, should reply: “They come from an egg. A human being does not lay eggs but has them inside the body. Yes, in the belly. Nine months. It is very painful... It seems, however”, added Krzywicka, contrary to the opinion of some pedagogues, “that these things should be discussed with children rather in a dry matter-of-fact way than sentimentally and poetically. This is a talk about a mechanism, nothing more”<sup>22</sup>. To a conservative such an opinion may have seemed to be yet another liberal heresy.

The problem of sex education in schools was closely connected with the broader question of co-education. It was in mixed schools that the question of relationship between the sexes became particularly important. The liberals, who criticised a stiff division by sex, leaned towards co-education. Friedländer argued that in a co-educational school sex education would be received more naturally: “Young people who from childhood to maturity are brought up together develop a comradely relationship which is the best sublimation of the sexual instinct; joint work brings the two genders closer together spiritually; it teaches boys to appreciate the girls’ intellectual powers and turns girls away from purely egocentric interests, predominant during adolescence, to more intellectual and social questions in which boys are interested. The opponents of co-education must admit that this system has by no means injured the morals of the youth of either sex, and in view of its great benefits it must be recognised as one of the

<sup>21</sup> Father H. Weryński, *op. cit.*, pp. 16, 19–20. In talks of this kind a parallel was sometimes drawn (though rarely) to the plant world; references to animals were forbidden. Cf. Father T. Mazurkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Dr F. Schneider, *Twoje dziecko i Ty (Your Child and You)*, s.a., p. 149.

<sup>22</sup> I. Krzywicka, *Co odpowiadać dzieciom na drażliwe pytania (How to Reply to Children's Delicate Questions)*, “Wiadomości Literackie” 1933, № 7, p. 8.

the most important and fruitful means of sex education”<sup>23</sup>. However, contrary to these words, nearly all adversaries of coeducation emphasised the immoral aspect of this “pedagogical experiment”. They did this all the more willingly as the idea of co-education was strongly criticised in the papal encyclical *Divini illius magistri* in which the potential moral outrage was used as the main argument against co-education<sup>24</sup>.

But the separation of sexes, so strongly recommended by the Church, was becoming less and less possible when culture, and consequently morals, were changing rapidly<sup>25</sup>. New co-educational forms of entertainment and spending free time became widespread during that period. Summer camps for children and adolescent youth were one of them. Group trips to the sea or mountains became a platform for the socialisation of the younger generation, boys and girls. Pedagogues held the view that young people taking part in such camps, especially boys, should be told the facts of life<sup>26</sup>.

The discovery of child sexuality had important consequences; it led to a dispute not only over how to inform and instruct young people about questions connected with sex but also over how to deal with children and young people in everyday life, at home and in school. “How to deal with children so as to remove from their eyes that which might awake their premature interest in the question (of sex)?”, asked a reader of “Młoda Matka” (The Young Mother) and added: “A certain intelligent mother in the countryside who had a four-year old child told me that she did not keep dogs at home, for everybody knew what sights the child might be exposed to”<sup>27</sup>. According to pedagogues and educationalists, children were exposed not only to the wicked sight of mating animals (this could not be helped) but

<sup>23</sup> M. Friedländer, *op. cit.*, p. 119; cf. *idem*, *Koedukacja i koinstrukcja (Co-education and Co-instruction)*, “Ruch Pedagogiczny” 1926, pp. 151–156, 171–179.

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 67. In addition to the argument mentioned in the quotation, the encyclical strongly emphasised that the idea of co-education was at variance with human nature: “there is nothing in the whole of nature to prove that men and women should be brought up together or even given the same upbringing. Both sexes are the product of nature and each differs from the other by the construction of the body and also by inclinations and the way of thinking... This difference should be preserved in upbringing and teaching; it should even be emphasised by a suitable distinction and separation in compliance with age and conditions”, pp. 66–67 (translated from the Polish text of the encyclical).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. W. Gombrowicz’s remarks on the revolution in customs during the twenty inter-war years in: *Wspomnienia polskie (Polish Reminiscences)*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 38, 40–41, 75, 110–111.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. B. Bobrowska, *Kwestia drażliwe na kolonii koedukacyjnej (Delicate Questions at a Co-educational Summer Camp)*, “Życie Dziecka” 1934, № 5, pp. 153–164; W. Piotrowska, *Kultura i wychowanie erotyczne (Culture and Erotic Education)*, “Życie Dziecka” 1934, № 5, pp. 139–152.

<sup>27</sup> [Ewa], *Parę słów w dyskusji na temat: “Rozmowa z dzieckiem o zagadnieniach płciowych” (A few words in the discussion on “Talking with a Child on Sex Matters”)*, “Młoda Matka”, № 5, p. 13.

first and foremost to the disastrous influence of mass culture: "Literature, the theatre, cinema, newspapers and exhibitions stifle the voice of conscience, stimulate the sexual instinct, disturb the imagination and encumber it with rubbish, shatter nerves and kindle passions", warned a conservative publicist<sup>28</sup>. Another advised parents to eliminate "these sources of unrest" from the educational process. "There are no cinemas, radios and newspapers for children, so they should not amuse themselves in this way. An honest mother must tell herself this and keep watch"<sup>29</sup>. These views did not differ much from the opinions of the more liberal intelligentsia: "... if in the best of homes frivolous cabaret songs are sung in the presence of children, if the daily press describes various crimes, perversions, wrangles and scandals having a sexual background with surprising meticulousness, every mother without exception... should by her wisdom and foresight protect her children from everything related to the facts of life that might harm them, warp their normal healthy development"<sup>30</sup>.

Another field of social life over which parents were advised to have control were the amusements of young people. Modern dances, which were gaining popularity in the Twenties, such as tango, fox-trot, etc., were usually criticised by conservative publicists, but not only by them. J. Leśkiewiczowa, a supporter of sex education in schools, pointed out that: "... dance and amusements are connected with sexual stimulation, and this should come at the right time, not prematurely. Our school authorities have after profound reflection rightly restricted the duration of school parties; private households unfortunately still hold the view that young people may revel to 4 in the morning"<sup>31</sup>.

Increased control over the youth was to be complemented by a proper relationship between the child and its parents, guardians and servants. The general view was that it was harmful to spoil children, buy them expensive

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<sup>28</sup> S. Marciszewska-Posadzkowa, *Matka. Fundamenty wychowania moralnego (Mother. The Foundations of a Moral Upbringing)*, Lublin, s.a., p. 20.

<sup>29</sup> S. Barbara Żulińska, *Matka — obywatelka. Pogadanki o wychowaniu dzieci (A Mother-Citizeness. Talks on the Upbringing of Children)*, Lwów 1938, p. 81.

<sup>30</sup> W. Pełczyńska, *Na marginesie dyskusji "Rozmowa z dzieckiem o zagadnieniach płciowych" (In connection with the discussion on "Talking with a Child on Sex Matters")*, "Młoda Matka" 1931, № 7, p. 13.

<sup>31</sup> J. Leśkiewiczowa, *Współpraca szkoły i domu w dziedzinie wychowania seksualnego dziewcząt (Cooperation between School and Home in Sex Education of Girls)*, "Eugenika Polska" 1939, № 1, p. 9.

clothes and toys, satisfy their whims and tolerate the pranks of teenagers<sup>32</sup>. It was believed that excessive attention would spoil the child. The clergy strongly warned against this. Father Mazurkiewicz's advice was: "Passionate nannies and servants who sometimes touch the child immodestly should be dismissed, strict control should be exercised over the child's amusements and playmates, moderation should be observed when we wash and bathe the child, when we caress and swing it, and rapid tossing should be restrained"<sup>33</sup>. In the sectin *Application* of his book *Biblical Catecheses*, Father Bielański, after presenting the history of the Deluge and Noah's ark, gave instruction on how to ensure that the child preserved modesty and chastity (so as not to bring down God's punishment analogical to the Deluge). "First of all, when a modest child gets up in the morning it should get dressed at once and not run about the room in a shimmy. When a modest child takes a bath it takes off all its clothes but makes sure that nobody sees it undressed"<sup>34</sup>. Father Kmiecik even wrote that "in order to bring up their children in innocence, parents must get rid of that deplorable blindness which does not allow them to see that passion is awakening in their children... Sensual appetite is inborn in every human being and it lies in wait at a child's cradle as well as at the bed of a decrepit old man"<sup>35</sup>. Consequently, he advised parents to use "utmost caution" and keep control over their child's friends, conversations and games. He suggested that when the child was taking a bath its "privy parts" should be covered and the mother should not touch them with bare hands but only with a towel or rag soaked in cold water. Elder brothers and sisters should not be present when a baby has its diaper changed, nor should they watch when one of them changes

<sup>32</sup> "Our century is called "the child's century". "Everything for the child" is a popular slogan today. Societies are trying to protect children by rescinding wrongful laws, by care of handicapped children... However, despite these slogans, the most primitive needs of many children are not met for lack of financial resources, frequently for lack of understanding... however, are the children who have been given all, even too much, happy? Do the children who are protected from the problems of life, from trouble and work, grow into really worthy individuals?... By growing up in an atmosphere of excessive affection a small child spoiled by unsuitable upbringing becomes a vain, stand-offish egoist". Unsigned (probably editorial) article entitled: *Czy słuszne jest hasło "Wszystko dla dziecka" (Is the Slogan "Everything for the Child" Just?)*, "Dziecko i Matka" 1935, № 22, p. 14. A radio discussion on the same subject was held on September 20 the same year. A similar opinion was expressed by C. Beniśławska, *Czy należy dzieci pieścić (Should Children Be Caressed?)*, "Młoda Matka" 1931, № 2, p. 10; *Kultura etyki seksualnej (The Culture of Sexual Ethics)*, "Życie Dziecka" 1937, № 1, p. 16; R. Górska, *Co to jest. A po co? (What Is This? What Is It for?)*, "Dziecko i Matka", № 10, p. 8; W. Miśkiewiczowa, *Prawo cierpienia (The Right to Suffer)*, "Dziecko i Matka" 1936, № 11, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> K. Mazurkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Z. Bielański, *Katechzyz biblijne na II i III klasę szkoły powszechnej (Biblical Catecheses for the Second and Third Grades of the Primary School)*, Lwów 1928, p. 102.

<sup>35</sup> I. Kmiecik, *op. cit.*, pp. 139–140.

clothes. Mothers should teach their children to relieve nature quickly; father Kmiecik recommended particular caution in this respect with regard to boys. "When instilling modesty in children", he went on, "no distinction should be made between boys and girls, as some unwise and unenlightened mothers do"<sup>36</sup>. Father S. P o d o l e ń s k i drew attention to the relationship between brothers and sisters. "Parents should keep watch over boys' relationship with girls. They should punish excessive familiarity and forbid them to sleep or bathe together; they should not leave them alone without supervision and in general, they should not rely on their children's innocence, which has already disappointed many"<sup>37</sup>.

These and other practical instructions on how to bring up children were strongly opposed by Tadeusz B o y – Ż e l e ń s k i, a translator, writer and publicist, author of a series of anti-clerical feuilletons *Our Occupiers*, who initiated a birth control campaign and advocated introducing sex education in schools<sup>38</sup>. "It should be clearly said", he wrote, "that preoccupation with the moral upbringing is in the hands, if not of erotomaniacs, then of persons who are abnormally sensitive to the question of sex, persons who cannot think of a bathing child without some *arrière pensée*. They thrust themselves with their dirty suspicions between the mother and the infant and, on the other hand, do not see the most dangerous problems of the period of puberty, being firmly convinced that hypocrisy will solve all problems..."<sup>39</sup> As a counterproposal to the books quoted above, the editorial board of the periodical "Wiadomości Literackie" advised parents to read Irena K r z y - w i c k a's fictionalised story about puberty *The First Blood*<sup>40</sup>. Another publicist linked to "Wiadomości Literackie", Paweł H u l k a – L a s k o w -

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 148.

<sup>37</sup> S. P o d o l e ń s k i, *op. cit.*, p. 83. Similar in tone were the opinions of Dr S c h n e i d e r, whose book *Twoje dziecko i Ty (Your Child and You)* was published by the Księgarnia i Drukarnia Katolicka S.A. in Katowice. Schneider says that it is dangerous "to leave children without supervision, for when playing undressed, they may accidentally touch their sex organs... This is probable when children lie near one another and are sure that nobody will surprise them. The danger is grave for such indecent playing leads to premature sexual development. As educators and children's doctors recommend, nighties should be ankle-length, each child should have a bed of its own, and brothers and sisters should sleep in separate rooms", *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. T. B o y – Ż e l e ń s k i, *Dziki wiek (The Wild Age)*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1932, N° 25, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> T. B o y – Ż e l e ń s k i, *Sprawy najdroższe (The Most Delicate Questions)*, "Wiadomości Literackie" 1934, N° 8, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> The first edition was published in 1930. The reprints appeared under the title *Gorzkie zakwitanie (Bitter Pubescence)*. Krzywicka expressed her attitude to sex education in schools in an article *Dzieci a sprawy drażliwe (Children and the Delicate Question)*, "Życie świadome" appendix to "Wiadomości Literackie" 1933, N° 17, p. 11. She said that instruction on the facts of life should be one most important points in school education.

ski<sup>41</sup>, translated several handbooks written for young people from the Catholic point of view but devoid of “educational piquancies”.

Contrary to what Boy-Żeleński wrote, far-reaching cautiousness or even rigorism in the parents’s relations with their children was advised not only by the clergy. In such periodicals as “Młoda Matka” (The Young Mother) and “Dziecko i Matka” (Child and Mother) pedagogues repeatedly warned parents not to show excessive affection to their children. Cecylia Bańkowska, a pedagogue, author of a pseudonymous handbook for parents on how to explain the facts of life to their children, warned: “Excessive affection, tenderness, caresses, such as passionate kisses, the hugging, stroking and cuddling of a child, are definitely harmful. Apart from being unnatural, they awake the sexual instinct prematurely”<sup>42</sup>. A similar opinion was expressed by Adolf Klęsk: “Mothers should take care not to go too far in their caresses under the misapprehension that the child understands and feels nothing. This remark applies even more to servants, who are sometimes degenerate and who, unfortunately, are often the first to inform an innocent child about the facts of life”<sup>43</sup>.

Suspiciousness of children, which Boy-Żeleński could have regarded as “dirty”, was also expressed by Freudists, e.g. Gustaw Bychowski and Józef Mirski<sup>44</sup>. Their instructions referred to both nursing care and everyday relations with children. The protest of persons linked to “Wiadomości Literackie” was due partly to their dislike of the methods proposed by the clergy (especially corporal punishment), but it would not have been so violent had the advocates of a reform in customs given themselves the trouble of reading and understanding the books of Freud and his collaborators. Many years later Irena Krzywicka admitted: “My book, *The First Blood*, was probably one of the first novels in literature, not only Polish, to raise the question of puberty. I was frequently asked afterwards... what influence Freud, Jung or Adler had exerted on me. The reply is simple: none

<sup>41</sup> A. M. Wood, *O czym każda panna wiedzieć powinna* (What Every Girl Should Know), Łódź 1925; Stall Sylwan, *O czym każdy chłopiec wiedzieć powinien* (What Every Boy Should Know), Łódź 1925, and *idem*, *O czym młody małżonek wiedzieć powinien* (What a Young Husband Should Know), Łódź 1925.

<sup>42</sup> C. Bańkowska, *Czy należy dzieci pieścić* (Should Children Be Caressed), “Młoda Matka” 1931, № 2, p. 11; cf. *idem*, *Charakter czy dobre nalogi?* (Character of Good Habits?), “Młoda Matka” 1928, № 5, p. 11.

<sup>43</sup> A. Klęsk, *Kwestia seksualna u małych dzieci* (Sexuality in Small Children), “Młoda Matka” 1928, № 5, p. 10.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. G. Bychowski, *Zagadnienia wychowania seksualnego* (Questions of Sex Education), “Zagadnienia Rasy” 1930, № 9, p. 38; J. Mirski, *Rozwój i wychowanie płciowe dziecka w świetle freudyzmu* (Children’s Sexual Development and Sex Education in the Light of Freudism), Lwów 1925.

at all. It is perhaps unpleasant to admit ignorance, but at that time I did not read Freud, who was not yet fashionable in 1930"<sup>45</sup>.

Another educational problem related to the sexual question was the proper planning of the child's occupations. Laziness was regarded as the greatest enemy of a child's favourable sexual development. It was believed that if a child stayed in bed too long, had too much free time and was not interested in anything, the result would be deplorable: moral degradation. Both the conservatives and the liberals lamented over children's onanism. The conservatives regarded it as a symptom of illness or even perversion. It was believed that masturbation led to diseases of the reproductive organs, diseases of eyes and the heart, headaches, asthma, epilepsy and even insanity. Although opposite opinions stressing the moral aspect of the question were slowly gaining ground in the Twenties, they did not dispel the nightmare of potential diseases resulting from the "clandestine sin". The clergy attached great importance to this problem and discussed it at length in books dealing with the upbringing of children. Father Żychliński, for instance, devoted 25 per cent of his book to this question. According to him, onanism not only caused diseases but also brought down God's most severe punishment on the culprit: death. "The clandestine sin will destroy everything, it will devastate and ruin the body, health, mind, memory, the good qualities of the soul and all virtues. Poor, poor child. It has just begun to live and is already carrying the seed of death, it has hardly left the cradle when the cold grave is opening up before it"<sup>46</sup>. It was the parents' duty to react quickly and ruthlessly to the child's sinful practices, all the more so as the child's depravity was unmistakably shown by symptoms ("sings on the body and soul"); these symptoms included salivation, gnashing of teeth when the child was asleep, dullness and langour, profuse perspiration of hands, sadness, aversion to company and, the most important symptom, changes in the face. "It is there that one can see the dreadful revenge taken by nature for the sins committed against it. This is where the sin manifests its rule over the hapless victim"<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>45</sup> I. Krzywicka, *Wyznania gorszyielki (Confessions of a Scandaliser)*, Warszawa 1992, ed. A. Tuszyńska, p. 227. Aversion to psychoanalysis was manifested by another pillar of "Wiadomości Literackie", A. Słonimski. "I am reading Dr. Bychowski's book *Psychoanalysis* and now and again roar with a loud indecorous laughter. What is most amusing and most irritating in Freudists, as well as in Marxists, is their appalling arbitrariness and their primitive division of the world into but two categories. Marx reduces everything to a fictitious capitalist system and Freud bases everything on sex. Proletariat and capitalism, or female and male organs". *Moje walki nad Bzdurą (My Struggle against Humbug)*, Warszawa 1932, p. 269.

<sup>46</sup> B. Żychliński, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 196.

It is not difficult to see that most of these symptoms (perhaps with the exception of the gnashing of teeth) are typical of pubescence, but Żychliński does not use this term. His book, published in 1917, illustrates the change in the clergy's attitude to the upbringing of children, for in the handbooks written in the 1920s and 1930s stress was laid on puberty. Psychophysical changes were linked to the biological development of the organism and not to unchaste practices. The stress laid by the clergy on the necessity of curbing the child's impermissible sexual practices did not decrease but the methods of combating them changed.

Both the clergy and the advocates of a liberal upbringing of children warned parents not to use Draconian measures, that is, not to bind the child's hands (or feet) before sleep, not to put cardboard gloves on its hands, not to deprive it of food or lock it up "so that it should give some thought to its behaviour"<sup>48</sup>. The general view was that the best way to prevent onanism in children was to apply preventive measures, that is, sport (it was believed that physical exercises increased the individual's control over his body and developed strong inner curbs) and intellectual work (D r y j s k i said in his work that mathematics in particular was an excellent precaution against sexual excitement)<sup>49</sup>. The dominant view was that the body was an enemy of virtue, which was interpreted in a restrictive way by the clergy. "There are many means to weaken it [the body and its temptations — M. G.]", instructed Father Ż y c h l i ń s k i ; "you can mortify it, that is, deny it what it demands not because it needs it but because it wants to make the most of life and suit itself; then you can fast, that is, deprive the body of food and beverages, you can keep vigil in order to shorten the time of sleep, you can harden the body by exposing it to inconveniences"<sup>50</sup>. This is why it was recommended that children should rise early, sleep under light bed-clothes, take cold baths, etc. The aim was to develop self-control mechanisms in children through discipline and intellectual and physical effort, and to divert their attention from nascent sexuality. Interesting information on measures restricting the sexual impulse can be found in polls. Of 1052 students, 322 admitted that sport was the best remedial measure, 244 mentioned physical and intellectual work and 130 replied that they tried not to think about matters connected with sex. The remaining replies were greatly diversified. In addition to cold baths, prayers, physical mortification, cinema and the

<sup>48</sup> Cf. M. Benisławska, *Kultura etyki seksualnej (The Culture of Sexual Ethics)*, "Życie Dziecka" 1937, № 1, p. 16; K. Mazurkiewicz, *op. cit.*, p. 17; A. Dryjski, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>49</sup> A. Dryjski, *ibidem*, p. 412.

<sup>50</sup> B. Żychliński, *Młoda Polka — katoliczka. Mały przewodnik duchowy dla dziewczyn (The Polish Catholic Girl. Spiritual Handbook for Virgins)*, Poznań 1927, p. 56.



theatre, four respondents mentioned tea with soda. The young people's ingenuity went far beyond the generally accepted ways of promoting a virtuous life.

The basic conflict between the participants in the discussion (excluding single pronouncements) was not over the fundamental theses concerning the child's sexuality or over the necessity of taking the sexual aspect into account in the educational process, but over priorities. As I have repeatedly pointed out, the clergy held the view that one of the parents' most important tasks was to ensure that their children observed continence until they married. According to psychoanalysts, the stressing of chastity as the highest educational ideal restricted man's erotic and sexual sphere to physiology. "The raising of chastity to the rank of the highest ideal with a view to stifling the sex urge may have equally harmful effects as the lowering of erotic life to the level of brutal crude sensuality", wrote Gustaw B y c h o w s k i ; "as a result of an overestimation of the ideal of chastity, sensuality, being condemned, drops to the lowest level and is freed of all emotional additions. If, as is usually the case, the sex urge finds vent despite attempts to stifle it, this takes place in a brutal vulgar form. A split occurs between the two fundamental elements of eroticism, the sensual and the emotional... Sex education should prevent a split between emotion and sensuality by stressing genuine eroticism in man's life, not by stifling it by the ideals of artificial chastity..."<sup>51</sup> This is why liberal publicists advised parents to be cautious in their attitude to children and young people, reduce restrictions and completely eliminate corporal punishment as an educational measure<sup>52</sup>. The clergy's instructions went rather in the opposite direction; in their opinion parents should with full severity root out their children's bad habits and inclinations with the help of the rod, the inseparable attribute of parental authority. "The aim of punishment is to help the child overcome its passions", instructed Father Ireneusz K m i e c i k , and went on: "The rod must be linked to the prayer «Our Father» and each stroke should be accompanied by the words God bless you"<sup>53</sup>. Corporal punishment was also recommended by Father Jan S o b o l e w who, criticising "liberal pedagogy" and the "pagan worship of the child", advised parents: "Thrash the child hard, pity for the child's body is unreasonable"; in another place he said: "the lashes should be

<sup>51</sup> G. B y c h o w s k i , *Zagadnienia wychowania seksualnego (Questions of Sex Education)*, "Zagadnienia Rasy" 1930, N° 9, pp. 43–44.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Zagadnienie karności w wychowaniu (The Question of Discipline in Upbringing)*, Poznań 1931.

<sup>53</sup> I. K m i e c i k , *Praktyczne wskazówki o wychowaniu dzieci (Practical Guidelines for the Upbringing of Children)*, Lwów 1928.

administered on the naked body, not on the child's clothes", this is why "at the teacher's order the boy himself should let down his breeches"<sup>54</sup>. But liberalism did exert some influence on the clergy's attitude. Alongside Father Kmiecik's or Father Sobolew's pronouncements on the benefits of the rod, the opinion was expressed, for instance by Sister Barbara Żu li ń s k a , that corporal punishment should absolutely be eliminated in Christian families<sup>55</sup>.

What is also worth stressing is the distrust, rigorism and suspiciousness recommended to parents in their dealings with children. The majority of pedagogues and moralisers believed that the child was a sexual being, capable of receiving all external stimuli. This is why children were forbidden to become too familiar with servants, to sleep in one bed with a sister or brother, to watch a baby sibling being nursed. Parents were warned not to keep indecent literature at home (nota bene Father P i r o ż y ń s k i regarded the works of Balzac and Dumas as indecent), not to make ambiguous gestures, tell obscene jokes, sing frivolous cabaret songs.

Fear of scandalising a child is deeply rooted in European culture. Philip A r i è s writes that the discovery of childhood and of the child's innocence in the 17th–18th centuries demanded a new attitude of parents<sup>56</sup>, an attitude which would protect the child from the sordidness of life, in particular from adults' sexuality. The parents' anxiety not to scandalise their children seems to have increased in the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th. There were several reasons for this. The reform of customs in the 19th century disciplined European societies and changed their attitude to man's sexuality which, as Ariès points out, was tolerated and even accepted in the modern era. This naturally had an impact on the upbringing of children. Secondly, the Enlightenment belief in the child's innocence was submitted to harsh criticism. It seems that there was nothing against which moralisers warned parents more strongly in the twenty inter-war years than the child's "fictitious" innocence. Belief in the child's "culpability" was older than the theories of psychoanalysts who, as I have mentioned, asserted that the

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<sup>54</sup> J. Sobolew, *Karanie wychowawcze jako środek oddziaływania na dusze w okresie chłopięcym (Punishment as a Way of Influencing Souls during Boyhood)*, Lublin 1933, p. 69.

<sup>55</sup> B. Żu li ń s k a, *op. cit.*, Lwów 1938, p. 72.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Ph. A r i è s, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, Editions de Seuil 1973.

child had a sexual instinct almost from the cradle<sup>57</sup>. It may seem surprising that on many points the advice expressed by conservatives on the upbringing of children did not differ from that of progressive pedagogues. Modern psychology which was pushing forward in the inter-war years as well as 19th century prudery are only seemingly contradictory. Different analyses of the child's nature frequently led to similar conclusions. This was often reflected in the recommendation of a strict upbringing of children and in the questioning of its emotional side, a factor which is now emphasised the most strongly. As I have tried to show, it was not only the stern clergy (stern on the moralisation level) who warned parents against kissing and hugging their children but also a whole galaxy of secular pedagogues. On the other hand, the frequency of these warnings and recommendations shows that life went on as usual, irrespective of the warnings and recommendations of specialists in child upbringing.

In conclusion let us examine what sex education was like in practice. Did the home and school take into account knowledge of human sexuality? What was the attitude of teachers and parents to this question?

If we take a look at the periodical "Młoda Matka" we shall see that despite the recommendations of psychologists and pedagogues, sex education was a controversial question<sup>58</sup>. The predominant view expressed in an extensive discussion in the periodical was that it was pointless to acquaint the child with the facts of life too early and that it was better to wait until some undefined moment when the child was older. All women readers agreed that stories about storks, cabbage and ladies in white coats distributing children were harmful, but this does not mean that they agreed that the question should be explained in a scientific way. An experienced mother and pedagogue wrote: "I firmly maintain that a four-year old child... will not ponder over where it came from; it is but a small worm which is

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<sup>57</sup> Maria Czapska reminisces that in her childhood at the turn of the 19th century she was punished for various "offences", e.g. for keeping her hands under the quilt, looking at a naked body, for "any unchastity of the flesh". Her younger brother had always his napkins changed behind a screen; an innocent remark about the anatomy of an animal always brought forth a sharp reprimand. Information on the facts of life was supplied gradually, the euphemistic information that the mother carried her baby "under her heart" completing the domestic education in this field. As a result, the heroine of the reminiscences had many experiences which seem funny to us today; cf. *Europa w rodzinie (Europe in the Family)*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 221–227.

<sup>58</sup> Some authors advised parents to tell their children about the facts of life at a very early age. See the following articles: H. J o d ł o w s k a, *Uświadamianie najmłodszych (Presentation of the Facts of Life to the Smallest Children)*, "Dziecko i Matka" 1935, № 2, p. 7; *Uświadamianie dzieci starszych (Presentation of the Facts of Life to Older Children)*, *ibidem*, 1935, № 3, p. 7; Maria B e n i s ł a w s k a, *Jak uświadomić dziecko (How to Tell the Facts of Life to a Child)*, *ibidem*, 1931, № 13, p. 5; A. K l e s k, *Uświadamianie seksualne (Sex Education)*, "Młoda Matka" 1928, № 9, p. 11.

beginning to notice interesting things which are directly in front of its eyes, so it does not yet react to abstraction... older children may for some time content themselves with the information about the pollination of flowers, and the false conviction that this is how all fertilisation takes place can be enough for them for a long time<sup>59</sup> [emphasis mine — M. G.]. Another woman asked: “Is it not better to tell the child that God gives rise to all life; this general explanation will tell it more than all the details we know... For despite the enormous progress of technology, has anyone created a living grain of corn with the help of chemistry, physics or mechanics?”<sup>60</sup>

The discussion in the periodical shows that even modern women had doubts about sex education or even clearly disliked the idea.

Until the end of the Twenties no clear programmatic instructions on sex education in schools had been worked out by pedagogues. The discussion on this subject died out in the second half of the Thirties. The growing threat of war, the tense international situation and the growth of authoritarian trends turned the attention of publicists and pedagogues to other problems. Despite the lack of pedagogues’ uniform attitude to the question of sex education and the short duration of the discussion, schools could implement some of the above-mentioned proposals, but only to a limited extent and mainly in large towns, where literature both of a scientific and a popular character was available. It depended on the individual teacher whether questions concerning sex were raised or passed over in silence. In small towns and in the countryside the situation was completely different. Peasant children were mentioned in the discussion only as a potential threat to their colleagues in towns, it being recognised that from their early years they were so familiar with sex matters that they could exert a harmful influence on their colleagues in towns or in the neighbouring manor. But as regards large towns, one should not underestimate the pressure of Catholic circles which contested the school’s right to raise “delicate questions”. Teachers could introduce elements of sex ethics but only on their own responsibility. Krzywicka says that her book *Bitter Puberty*<sup>61</sup> was read and analysed in a Warsaw school. Account by Catholic publicists also show that despite prohibition, teachers “took the liberty” to discuss “indecorous” subjects. Nor should one ignore the circular of the Ministry of Religious Denominations

<sup>59</sup> W. Kalinowska, *Na marginesie artykułu “Rozmowy z dzieckiem o zagadnieniach płciowych”* — słów kilka. *Głos w dyskusji (A few words in connection with the article “Talking with a Child on Sex Matters”. A voice in the discussion)*, “Młoda Matka” 1931, № 3, p. 16.

<sup>60</sup> J. Iwo-Hikierowa, *A na cóż nam to potrzebne? Głos w dyskusji na temat: “Rozmowa z dzieckiem o zagadnieniach płciowych” (What Do We Need It For? A voice in the discussion on “Talking with a Child on Sex Matters”)*, “Młoda Matka” 1931, № 6, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> I. Krzywicka, *op. cit.*, p. 252.

and Public Enlightenment of November 10, 1919 concerning the “special task of the school teacher” which says: “the school teacher should in every class devote several hours a year to lectures and discussion on hygiene. Irrespective of individual education, the biological, ethical and social aspects of sex should be discussed, especially in the last class, in a most tactful way, taking into consideration the sensitivity and excitability of adolescent youth...”<sup>62</sup>

It is interesting that all those taking part in the discussion agreed that sex education should not be treated as a separate subject, for it was part of general education. Even the boldest proposals put forward by progressive pedagogues did not envisage instruction on contraception and sexual techniques, although books discussing these subjects were already available in Poland at that time<sup>63</sup>. Some of them were best-sellers stirring up polemics and indignation (also admiration), but they were addressed to adults. According to liberal principles, sex education was to encourage young people to be continent, it was not to protect them from the consequences of a prematurely started sex life. The discussion on sex education shows the evolution of liberalism in customs from the moral rigorism of the inter-war years to the permissiveness of our times.

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted after M. Friedländer, *Szkola wobec zagadnień wychowania płciowego (The Attitude of Schools to Sex Education)*, p. 113.

<sup>63</sup> The most popular were the following books: Th. H. Van der Velde, *Perfect Marriage*; M. Hodan, *Sex and Love*; R. Gerling, *Man's Erotic and Sex Life*; A. Hocke, *The Dangerous Age of Man*.