

In recent years, the crisis of paternity, of its meaning and of its understanding has been increasingly spoken of. There are many discussions about the role of the father; what fatherhood is, what it means to be a father, who can be considered a father. Modern discussions on gender equality, the division of parental roles, the *in vitro* method, same-sex relationships, divorces in which the issue of the father's absence and the possibility of his replacement is discussed, are all part of this discourse. The general social climate and the model of the man and his role in society and in the family, as well as the discussion on the role and model of the family, appear to be problematic. Therefore, it is necessary to lay down certain foundations, some patterns of paternity characteristic to our cultural circle. As part of theological studies, therefore, questions arise as to how, and to what extent, early Christian writers, who were some of the builders of the cultural and ideological foundations of our civilization, can be of help. What foundations and patterns of fatherhood did they leave in their writings? To what extent is their vision of paternity realised or how can it be, or should it be, realised? These are the questions that form the basis for the research project being presented.

Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church were, on the one hand, the children of their time and of the Greco-Roman culture in which they lived, and on the other they were interpreters and messengers of the Bible with its Judeo-Christian rules. In their writings, they referred to the customs and laws of the Empire, but also referred to biblical anthropology and the images of the father conveyed in it, and, thus, they created a unique image of the father, which was in force everywhere where the message of the Christian religion reached. They interpreted the characters of the first parents, patriarchs, biblical fathers, heroes of the parables, from which they drew conclusions about the role and tasks of the father in the family. Over many centuries, the Church Fathers became the messengers and creators of the idea of the father in Christian culture, and remain to this day a reference point in the Christian vision of the father. Despite their fundamental role in the transmission and creation of the model of the Christian father, this issue has not yet been fully and comprehensively developed in any examination of their works and doctrine in modern theological literature. Although the subject of God as a father and spiritual fatherhood has been discussed many times, the physical side of fatherhood, or issues related to conception, birth, protection, upbringing, education, offspring, the father's life and death were rarely dealt with in the research on the theology of the Fathers of the Church. Meanwhile, early Christian writers took up the above topics in their works, and therefore, regarding this project, as a problem to be solved; the question arises as to what exactly the image of the physical side of fatherhood contained in the works by early Christian writers. The scientific goal of the proposed project is, therefore, an innovative, comprehensive study of the teaching of the Church Fathers and early Christian writers on the subject of physical fatherhood and related issues, in order to examine and identify in their works this image of the Christian father in his physicality. Some of these writers were fathers themselves (Augustine, Paulinus of Nola), many experienced the unique atmosphere of a father's home and fatherly authority in their lives (Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa), but there were also those who lost their fathers early on (John Chrysostom, Ambrose, Origen) or whose fathers were sometimes not the best examples of someone fulfilling the father's role (Augustine), and they also included their experiences of fatherhood and sonship in their works. Thus, the collecting of all intuitions, views and statements regarding physical fatherhood in the works of the Latin and Greek early Christian writers, examining them and publishing them and translations of some of their works into Polish will help answer the question of how, based on Revelation and Tradition, as well as on cultural and historical circumstances, they understood physical fatherhood, whether they really treated it with contempt and did not attach any importance to it, ignoring it in their teaching, and how, in the context of Christianity, they adapted the Greco-Roman view of the role and tasks of the father. The specific goal is to present their views on the very process of conception and childbearing, upbringing and education, the characteristics of a father, the obstacles to becoming a good father, issues of the recognition of fatherhood, the physical presence of a father with offspring, issues of a father's influence on his offspring and their choices, issues of a father's old age and infirmity, and finally his passing away, death and any testamentary issues related to the father. Such a broad review of paternity will allow us to assess how the Fathers of the Church looked at physical fatherhood, and also to what extent their views found a place in the current parenting system and to what extent they can, or even should, be used or rejected.