



Rafał Kamiński,
*Narcyzm wrażliwy i jego wpływ na zdolność
do zawarcia małżeństwa kanonicznego*
[Vulnerable Narcissism and Its Impact
on the Capacity to Enter a Canonical
Marriage]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo
Naukowe Uniwersytetu Stefana Kardynała
Wyszyńskiego, 2024, 272 pages

The reviewed monograph constitutes an original study in the field of canonical matrimonial law. Its preparation required the Author to take into account the results of interdisciplinary research, particularly in the areas of psychology and psychiatry. The subject of the work is vulnerable narcissism understood as a specific form of personality disorder which, as a psychopathological condition, may lead to consensual incapacity and, consequently, to the nullity of marriage.

The Author formulated the following research objectives: (1) to present the achievements of psychology and psychiatry in the field of vulnerable narcissism; (2) to demonstrate the reception of the findings of these disciplines in canon law, particularly with regard to the question of consensual incapacity to contract marriage; (3) to analyze the jurisprudence of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota concerning the issue under study. In pursuing these aims, the Author carried out

a detailed analysis of twenty-eight decisions of the Roman Rota issued between 1994 and 2023 in cases that resulted either in a declaration of nullity of marriage, in a negative decision, or in the discontinuance of the proceedings on the grounds connected with a narcissistic disorder.

The monograph consists of three chapters devoted respectively to: (1) the phenomenon of narcissism (pp. 17–60); (2) vulnerable narcissism and its influence on the establishment and development of interpersonal relationships in the light of Christian anthropology (pp. 61–96); (3) the influence of vulnerable narcissism on the nullity of marriage in the jurisprudence of the Roman Rota and in the doctrine of canon law (pp. 97–244). However, a certain disproportion may be observed in the structure of the third chapter, since the Author devotes only a few pages to doctrinal questions, whereas the principal part of the analysis is concentrated on the examination of jurisprudence. Each chapter concludes with a concise, yet substantive summary, which systematizes the presented material and facilitates the identification of the main conclusions.

The characteristic feature of the reviewed publication is its clear structure and well-defined research plan, which the Author consistently follows throughout the successive parts of the work. In the first chapter, he undertakes an analysis of the phenomenon of narcissism, presenting its development in psychological literature, the various ways in which this concept has been defined, and its place within the classifications of personality disorders. The Author discusses narcissism as a social phenomenon, as a developmental stage of the human person, as a personality trait, and also as a personality disorder, referring to the principal theories of depth psychology, in particular those by Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg. The presentation of these theories should be regarded as necessary, since they constitute an important point of reference for contemporary analyses of narcissistic disorders, also in the context of assessing the capacity to assume the essential obligations of marriage. The Author also makes use of the DSM and ICD classifications, which gives the argument an ordered character consistent with the standards of psychological science.

It may nevertheless be observed that contemporary psychological and neuroscientific research increasingly points to the complex determinants of narcissistic disorders which include not only psychodynamic factors, but also biological, genetic, and epigenetic conditions, as well as neurobiological correlates related to emotional regulation and the capacity for empathy. Taking these perspectives into account could provide a more complete link between the findings of psychology and the canonical evaluation of consensual incapacity, complementing the predominantly psychoanalytic framework to which the work mainly refers.

Despite the undeniable value of this part of the work, one may nevertheless gain the impression that at certain points it is predominantly descriptive rather than

analytical in character. The Author presents a broad overview of psychological positions, yet only occasionally attempts a critical evaluation of them from the perspective of Christian anthropology or canon law. In view of the purpose of the study, namely to determine the influence of vulnerable narcissism on the capacity to contract marriage, a more explicit connection between the psychological theories presented and the issue of consensual incapacity would have been desirable already at this stage of the argument.

The second chapter, devoted to vulnerable narcissism and its influence on the establishment and development of interpersonal relationships in the light of Christian anthropology, constitutes an important bridge between the psychological analysis and the specifically canonical issues. The Author rightly observes that the assessment of the capacity to contract marriage cannot be based solely on clinical criteria, but must also take into account the integral vision of the human person which, in the teaching of the Church, forms the foundation for understanding marriage as a community of life and love. In this context, the difficulties that may arise in persons affected by vulnerable narcissism are presented in a convincing manner, especially with regard to the capacity to form mature interpersonal relationships, to assume commitments, and to make a gift of self, which constitutes an essential element of the marital covenant. In this context, it may also be noted that certain contemporary psychological approaches, particularly those emphasizing the search for meaning and personal responsibility, as in the logotherapy of Viktor E. Frankl, may constitute a valuable complement to the reflection on preparation for marriage and the accompaniment of spouses, by showing the possibility of integrating the psychological, anthropological, and spiritual dimensions in the assessment of the capacity to assume the community of life and love.

Also in this part of the work one may notice a certain disproportion between the presentation of psychological approaches and a more in-depth anthropological and canonical reflection. The Author refers to Christian anthropology, yet does so in a rather synthetic manner, without developing more fully the theological and canonical implications for the understanding of consensual incapacity. In view of the subject of the monograph, one might have expected a more extensive reference to the personalistic concept of marriage as developed in the doctrine of canon law, particularly in the context of the interpretation of can. 1095 of the Code of Canon Law.

The most extensive part of the work is the third chapter, in which the Author analyzes the influence of vulnerable narcissism on the nullity of marriage in the light of the doctrine of canon law and the jurisprudence of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota. An unquestionable merit of this part of the monograph is the detailed analysis of Rotal decisions from the years 1994–2023 concerning

the cases in which the existence of consensual incapacity connected with narcissistic disorders was examined. The collection and study of such source material required considerable effort and must be evaluated positively, especially since the Author does not limit himself to a simple summary of the individual decisions, but attempts to identify recurring elements of the reasoning and the criteria applied by the judges of the Roman Rota in assessing the capacity to contract marriage.

At the same time, a clear disproportion is visible in the structure of this chapter. The greater part of the discussion is devoted to the analysis of jurisprudence, whereas the presentation of the positions found in the doctrine of canon law is very brief and limited to only a few pages. Consequently, the title of the chapter, which announces an analysis of both jurisprudence and doctrine, is not fully reflected in its actual content. The lack of a broader reference to the opinions of canonists, especially those who have dealt with the problem of consensual incapacity in the context of personality disorders, must be regarded as a significant limitation of the work.

It may also be observed that the Author relatively rarely attempts to provide his own more in-depth synthesis of the material under analysis. In many places the exposition has a predominantly descriptive character, whereas a clearer formulation of more general conclusions concerning the influence of vulnerable narcissism on the capacity to assume the essential obligations of marriage would have increased the theoretical value of the study. This applies in particular to the relationship between psychological diagnosis and canonical evaluation, which in cases concerning the declaration of nullity of marriage is of fundamental importance.

Particular emphasis should be placed on the methodological correctness of the work. The Author clearly defines the research objectives, consistently applies the adopted analytical-synthetic method, and bases his conclusions on a broad range of sources. The bibliography includes both psychological and psychiatric literature, as well as canonical studies and the jurisprudence of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota, which demonstrates the Author's solid scholarly preparation and his ability to conduct interdisciplinary research.

The decision to address the issue of vulnerable narcissism in the context of the capacity to contract marriage should be regarded as both appropriate and timely. In the practice of ecclesiastical tribunals, cases are increasingly encountered in which personality disorders constitute the basis for examining consensual incapacity, while at the same time the canon law literature specifically devoted to vulnerable narcissism remains limited. For this reason, the reviewed monograph constitutes a valuable contribution to existing research and may prove useful not only for canonists, but also for expert psychologists and judges of ecclesiastical tribunals.

Special attention should also be given to the timeliness of the addressed issue. Contemporary practice of ecclesiastical tribunals increasingly encounters cases

in which various personality disorders play a decisive role in the assessment of the validity of matrimonial consent, and these disorders are not always easy to classify within the traditional categories of psychopathology. Vulnerable narcissism, as a form of disorder with subtle and ambiguous symptomatology, constitutes a particular challenge both for experts and for judges of ecclesiastical tribunals. For this reason, the attempt to provide a systematic treatment of this phenomenon from psychological, anthropological, and canonical perspectives responds to real needs of judicial practice. Rafał Kamiński's monograph may prove especially helpful in those cases in which difficulties in interpersonal relationships, excessive sensitivity, emotional instability, or an impaired capacity for self-gift do not take the form of classical and easily identifiable disorders, but instead require a more in-depth analysis of personality in the context of can. 1095 of the Code of Canon Law.

This study may, therefore, prove useful not only for scholars of canon law, but also for practitioners and judges, defenders of the bond, and expert psychologists and psychiatrists cooperating with ecclesiastical tribunals. Particularly valuable in this respect is the analysis of the jurisprudence of the Roman Rota, which makes it possible to grasp the manner in which psychological categories are gradually received in canonical jurisprudence and applied in the assessment of the capacity to contract marriage. For this reason, the monograph possesses not only a theoretical character, but also a clear practical value, which should be regarded as one of its significant merits.

Despite the critical remarks indicated above, it must be stated that the reviewed publication constitutes a valuable scholarly study addressing a difficult subject that requires interdisciplinary competence. The monograph makes a significant contribution to the development of reflection on consensual incapacity in canon law and may serve as a useful point of reference for further research on the influence of personality disorders on the validity of matrimonial consent.

In conclusion, it should be stated that Rafał Kamiński's monograph constitutes a serious and necessary attempt to address a complex issue requiring both a solid knowledge of psychology and psychiatry and competence in the field of canonical matrimonial law. Despite the disproportions in the structure of the work noted above, as well as certain predominance of descriptive elements over more developed synthesis, the study is characterized by scholarly reliability, methodological correctness, and an appropriate use of source material. The decision to address the question of vulnerable narcissism in the context of consensual incapacity should be regarded as particularly timely and justified, and the analysis of the jurisprudence of the Roman Rota presented in the work constitutes a valuable contribution to contemporary canonical reflection on the interpretation of can. 1095 of the Code of Canon Law. For these reasons, the reviewed monograph deserves a positive

evaluation and may serve as a useful study both for scholars of canon law and for those engaged in the administration of justice in ecclesiastical tribunals who, in their work, encounter the problem of personality disorders as a possible ground for the nullity of marriage.

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