

Article

The Role of the Faith in Jesus Christ in the Family Experience of Grief

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Abstract: Mourning is the state of grieving the loss of a close relationship. It manifests itself in multi-sided suffering affecting the mourner's mental, physical and spiritual sphere. A particularly painful form of mourning is the family experience of grief. Although ways of expressing grief depend on the culture, era and intensity of the interpersonal relationships, it is a universal human experience. This paper aims to answer the question about the role of the mourner's faith in Jesus Christ in the bereaved family experience, as a work in the field of Roman Catholic dogmatic theology. The method used is the analysis of selected material from psychology and Catholic theology (Christology, anthropology, protology, eschatology), in order to synthetically present theological and practical conclusions. The author also quotes mourners' testimonies. First, the author shows the elements of the psychology of mourning. However, his emphasis is on the next step, i.e., discussing the relationship between the mourner's faith in Jesus and the family experience of grief. Furthermore, he deals with theories concerning the relationships between the living and the dead, which are contrary to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church: annihilation, spiritism and reincarnation. Finally, the important role of the faith in Jesus in the mourning process is presented and completed by indicating possible directions for research on this issue.

Keywords: mourning; grief; family; Jesus Christ; Christian faith; Roman Catholic dogmatic theology; relationships; immortal soul



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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explain how relationships with Jesus Christ, established by the act of faith of family members, influence their ways of expressing grief after the death of their loved ones (spouses, children, parents, relatives). The following issues will be discussed: the relational nature of mourning; the Roman Catholic doctrine of Jesus Christ, God who became man by being born of the Virgin Mary of Nazareth, died as a result of crucifixion and rose from the dead, thus creating communion between the living and the dead; the nature of the Christian faith; as well as the nature of relationships between the living and the dead. The content will be discussed from the perspective of Roman Catholic dogmatic theology, enriched with psychological knowledge. Moreover, this paper will deal with theories that are not in line with the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, but may influence the way of processing grief in the family. They include the annihilation of man after death, spiritism and reincarnation.

Presenting the role of the faith in Jesus Christ in the family experience of grief is an issue that deserves detailed examination for the following reasons:

(1) Grief as a state of suffering caused by the loss of a loved one is a common human experience, particularly in time of war (e.g., in Ukraine and Israel), pandemics (e.g., COVID-19) and natural disasters (e.g., floods and earthquakes). There are attempts to eliminate death in the field of medicine or cybernetics, but according to the great religious traditions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, it is impossible to eliminate death, because its inevitability is evidenced by the revelation received from God, included in the sacred writings of these religions (Müller 2022, pp. 38–39, 92–94, 219–20).

(2) There is a close connection between the process of grief and the quality of life of those who suffer from the breakdown of relationships with loved ones as a result of their death. It is very often that people “left behind by those who have passed away” cannot find their way in a new situation for a very long time, which leads to a decrease in the comfort in their lives. Therefore, taking up this topic serves to show the bereaved how to deal with the death of a family member.

(3) Christianity has a two-thousand-year-old tradition of the mourning process, already attested in the New Testament (e.g., John 11:17–45, 19, 38–42, Mark 5:35–40) and Christian literature (Vovelle 1983; Berzano 2009, pp. 95–121).

2. Results

This section will present the results from our analyses of the research material. The syntheses of our conclusions will be demonstrated in seven points: 1. the relational nature of grief in the family; 2. the relational nature of the human person as the image of the Holy Trinity; 3. the immortal soul as the carrier of human relationality; 4. Jesus Christ as the mediator between the living and the dead; 5. the specificity of the Christian faith; 6. the relationship between a non-baptized person and Jesus Christ; and 7. relationships between the living and the dead.

2.1. Relational Nature of Mourning in the Family

The term “mourning” is used to describe the period after the death of a loved one and the psycho-spiritual state of the mourner resulting from the interruption of the relationship between him/her and the deceased. It is a very individual experience (Binnebesel et al. 2023). Men and women experience such a loss differently (Keirse 2004, pp. 58–61; Dudziak 2013, pp. 188–89; Hošťálková and Opatrný 2015, pp. 126–28, 131–32). Forms of mourning depend on the culture, epoch and the type of relationship between the mourners and the deceased (Keirse 2004, p. 15; Ziemann 2014, pp. 1565–66; Binnebesel et al. 2023, pp. 236–39). Some psychologists divide these forms into mature and immature, according to whether they help or block grief (Dudziak 2013, pp. 175, 189–90). Bereavement is a process with its own dynamics. Although there is an ongoing discussion on the current perception of the mourning process (Bielecka 2012), scientists have traditionally distinguished its phases based on the division of the phases of suffering of a dying person, as proposed by the American doctor and psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1926–2004)¹ in her book entitled *On Death and Dying* (Kübler-Ross Elisabeth 1999, pp. 34–121). The phases of mourning are: (1) denial and isolation; (2) anger; (3) bargaining; (4) depression; and (5) acceptance. This scheme has been used in many works on the process of dying and mourning, whose authors have introduced their own modifications (Czajkowska and Złotkowska 2005, pp. 31–36; Dudziak 2021, pp. 134–37). There are also different ways of describing the grieving process, e.g., understanding it as “job to be done”, divided into four tasks: (1) accepting the reality of the loss; (2) consciously experiencing the pain of loss; (3) adapting to the environment without the deceased; and (4) giving a new place to the deceased in the mourner’s life and learning to love life again (Keirse 2004, pp. 25–41).

The mourning process in the family is most often accompanied by emotions, namely sadness, regret, a sense of loss and abandonment and, consequently, a questioning of the current system of values and a belief in the pointlessness of further life (Keirse 2004, p. 52). One mourner described his condition as a lonely journey without a destination (Keirse 2004, p. 44). In addition to emotions, there are various types of spiritual and mental suffering, and often somatic symptoms, such as appetite and sleep disorders, a sense of general fatigue, ailments related to the improper functioning of the digestive system, resistance to treatment resulting in disability, and others (Dudziak 2013, pp. 184–86; Binnebesel et al. 2023, pp. 218–24).

Mourners experience loneliness in all areas of their everyday lives. Loneliness indicates that death is perceived as an interruption to the contact with deceased family members (Keirse 2004, pp. 35–36). Thus, the mourners’ main desire is to restore their bonds with the deceased persons. This is indicated, for example, by the confessions of parents after

the death of their child, who put the following wish at the beginning of their wish list: “I would like my child not to die. I wish I had my child back” (Kulik 2021, p. 106).

In one of his teachings on the family, Pope Francis depicts grieving, especially after the loss of a child: “Death is an experience which touches all families, without exception. It is part of life; yet, where familial love is concerned, death never seems natural. For parents, surviving their own children is particularly heartbreaking; it contradicts the fundamental nature of the very relationships that give meaning to the family. [...] The whole family is left paralyzed, speechless. And the child left alone by the loss of one or both parents suffers in a similar way. [...] In these cases, death is like a black hole that opens up in the life of the family and for which we have no explanation. And at times we even go so far as to lay the blame on God. How many people—I understand them—get angry with God, blaspheme: ‘Why did you take my son, my daughter? There is no God, God does not exist! Why did he do this?’ We hear this so often. But this anger is basically what comes from the heart in great pain; the loss of a son or of a daughter, of a father or of a mother, is a great sorrow. This happens over and over in families. In these cases, I said, death is like a hole” (Francis 2015).²

It is therefore understandable that grief and mourning are associated with a deep shock experienced by a person after the death of a close family member, and the resulting loneliness can be described as “existential evil” (Nawrot 2016, p. 17; Chrostowski 2002).

2.2. Relational Nature of the Human Person as the Image of the Holy Trinity

As a result, the mourning process points to the relational nature of the human person, i.e., to his or her innate ability and need to build bonds with other people (von Balthasar 1992, p. 390; Müller 2022, pp. 357–58). The term “person” testifies to the human ability to relate to others, because “person” means a being who thinks, feels, can make decisions and with whom one can enter into dialogue. Man’s essence consists in “being-from”, “being-with” and “being-for” (Ratzinger 2017, pp. 206–207). Fulfilling the need for interpersonal relationships is, therefore, necessary for proper growth. A person lives in a network of relationships, and his or her life will be as good as his/her main relationships, namely with their father, mother, brothers, sisters and so on, as well as his/her basic relationships that are embedded in his/her essence (Ratzinger 1997, p. 18; von Balthasar 1992, pp. 365–67). The death of a loved one interrupts and prevents the fulfillment of this need, so death is “the lack of communication” (die Kommunikationslosigkeit) (Ratzinger 1978, p. 81) and “the absolute loneliness” (die Einsamkeit schlechthin) (Ratzinger 1968, p. 248).

In the light of Roman Catholic theology, based on God’s Revelation contained in the Old and New Testaments, man was created for relationships, because his Creator is not the Great Loner and did not create man to deal with his “feeling of loneliness” since He has no such feeling (Müller 2022, pp. 253–54). The nature of God the Creator is to live in relations because He is the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The divine Persons are *relationes subsistens* (subsistent relations), pure act of the love relationship (Ratzinger 2005, p. 155). Thanks to that, the Holy Trinity is not a closed monad, but “a dialogical unity, a being in relation” and, thus, able to go beyond themselves, towards people, to offer them a relationship of love (Benedict XVI 2008; Ratzinger 2022, pp. 448–52).

The relational nature of man and woman is “to be read” in their corporeal–spiritual nature. The body itself, its different structure in both sexes, proves that man and woman were not created for loneliness (von Balthasar 1986, p. 403). The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that “God created man and woman together and willed each for the other” (CCC, no. 371), since “not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are equal as persons (‘bone of my bones...’) and complementary as masculine and feminine. In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming ‘one flesh’, they can transmit human life: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.’ By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents co-operate in a unique way in the Creator’s work” (CCC, no. 372).

Consequently, the bond between man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:27), to create a family is the fundamental form of human relationships. The mutual suitability of man and woman as the basis for the possibility of living together in mutual support and creating a personal community of love is the basic condition and, at the same time, is the original model of all human communication and the creation of a similarly realized community in the family, in various groups, in the political and church community. From a biblical perspective, the relationship between man and woman is the basic form of human life in the community and in relation to others (Müller 2016, p. 119; Smuniewski 2014).

2.3. Immortal Soul as the Carrier of Human Relationality

Relationality, as an essential feature of the human person, does not disappear after death, since in the light of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, people still live in their immortal souls. Therefore, the soul, thus understood, is the carrier of the natural relationality of the human person. The term “immortal soul”, describing the possibility of building real relationships with the deceased, despite the death of their body, has been used in Catholic theology for a long time (Ravasi 2009; Nitrola 2010, pp. 98–137, 291–336; Müller 2022, pp. 121–208). Its use resulted in formulating a completely new concept of the soul, considerably different from all the ancient concepts of the *psyche*; this new concept is a product of the Christian faith and its requirements for reasoning. It is strictly Christian and could only be formulated on the basis of the Christian faith, expressing its vision of God, the world and man in the area of anthropology (Ratzinger 1978, p. 126; Müller 2022, pp. 215–18).

As a result of the 20th century theological controversies regarding the nature of human life after death, a descriptive definition of the soul was created, worked out by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church in its document on man’s fate after death. It reminds us that “the Church affirms that a spiritual element survives and subsists after death, an element endowed with consciousness and will, so that the ‘human self’ subsists. To designate this element, the Church uses the word ‘soul’, the accepted term in the usage of Scripture and Tradition. Although not unaware that this term has various meanings in the Bible, the Church thinks that there is no valid reason for rejecting it; moreover, she considers that the use of some word as a vehicle is absolutely indispensable in order to support the faith of Christians” (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1979). This way of understanding the soul was confirmed by the International Theological Commission (1992, p. 5) and the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, no. 362–68).

Joseph Ratzinger, based on this concept of the soul, worked out a concept of life after death, which when used in an appropriate and accessible way to accompany the bereaved, can be useful in grieving the loss of their loved ones. His concept emphasizes the dialogical nature of immortality. The soul is not something mysterious that one *has*, some particle of substance that hides somewhere in a person. It is the dynamics of infinite openness, which also means participation in infinity, in eternity (Ratzinger 1978, pp. 127–29). This understanding of the soul results from the fact that it is not “produced” by the parents, but is created immediately by God (CCC, no. 366). To have a “spiritual soul” is to be a creature whom God wanted to make, whom he knows and loves, and calls freely into dialogue with him. “Having a soul” and “being a partner in dialogue with God” are two ways of expressing the same reality. By complementing each other, they protect against inappropriate dualism in the perception of the corporeal and spiritual nature of the human person, dualism which cannot stand against the dialogical and personalistic approach of the Bible (Ratzinger 1968, pp. 296–97).³

A good experience of the mourning process is possible when, on the one hand, the fact of the death of a loved one is not denied and, on the other hand, there is a guarantee of the possibility of continuing the relationship with the deceased who, even though they have completed the stage of their earthly lives, thanks to the immortality of their souls, have not ceased to exist and are still capable of forming interpersonal bonds. In other

words, in order for grieving not to have a destructive impact on the family, its members should be shown how to continue experiencing and developing the relationship with the deceased person (Keirse 2004, p. 41). This relationship cannot be imaginary, but must be real, i.e., there must be strong evidence of the continued existence of the deceased person. Merely remembering them is not enough, because every moment in which mourners did not remember the deceased persons, e.g., while sleeping, would result in their annihilation.

Therefore, the guarantee of the immortality of the souls of deceased persons and the hope of meeting them again is not human memory or even human love. Their lives after death must be sustained by an infinitely greater power, which, according to the Roman Catholic Church, is in the form of the love of God who remembers his children (Isa 49:14–15). “If all love wants eternity—God’s love not only wants it, but works and is it” (Ratzinger 1967, p. 399).

2.4. *Jesus Christ as the Mediator between the Living and the Dead*

For mourning to be processed well, God who sustains the human being in existence after the death of the body cannot be a projection of human desires, but must actually exist, loving and empathizing with the mourner. These features were possessed by Jesus Christ, God incarnate, who created man for immortality (Wis 2:23–24; Col 1:15–20) and promises that whoever believes in him will never die (John 11:17–27). Early Christians presented the figure of Christ as the true philosopher on the sarcophagi of their loved ones, because Christ was the only one in history who gave a complete answer to the question of what human death was and what happened to a dying person (Benedict XVI 2007, p. 6).

Introducing mourners to the faith in Jesus Christ can significantly help them get through their grief. Pope Francis recalled this in his catechesis on the family experience of grief: “Today it is necessary that Pastors and all Christians express in a more concrete way the meaning of the faith in regards to the family experience of grief. We should not deny them the right to weep—we must weep in mourning—‘Jesus wept’ and was ‘deeply troubled’ by the grave loss of a family that he loved (cf. Jn 11:33–37)” (Francis 2015).

Pope Francis continues that today: “[w]e can draw from the simple and strong testimony of the many families who have been able to grasp, in the most arduous transition of death, the safe passage of the Lord, Crucified and Risen, with his irrevocable promise of the resurrection of the dead. God’s work of love is stronger than the work of death. It is of that love, it is precisely of that love, that we must make ourselves hard-working ‘accomplices’, with our faith! And let us remember Jesus’ deed: ‘And Jesus gave him [the raised son of the widow at Nain, Luke 7: 11–17] back to his mother’ so he will do with all our loved ones and with us when we meet again, when death will be definitively conquered in us. It was conquered by Jesus’ Cross. Jesus will give us all back to the family!” (Francis 2015).

Jesus Christ is “Pontifex”, i.e., building the bridge over the abyss of death. He is the only one who, by virtue of his incarnation and the paschal mystery, has the ability to reconnect the relationships between the dead and the living, broken down by death (Müller 2022, pp. 311–12).

The incarnation is the assumption of the true human nature by the divine Person of the Son of God, whose nature is divine (O’Collins 2004, p. 148; Strzelczyk 2017; CCC, no. 461, 483). The paschal mystery is Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection through which “an innocent lamb merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us to Himself and among ourselves” (GS, no. 22). This means that the Incarnate Son of God, “by suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation, He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning. [. . .]. Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope” (GS, no. 22).

In the life of Jesus Christ, the paschal mystery includes the truth of the Christian faith about Jesus’ descent to hell, the content of which is not only the declaration of his real

death, but also the confession that in dying Christ descended to hell and is present where ultimate loneliness reigns (Ratzinger 1978, p. 84). A sign of Jesus' participation in this loneliness is his cry on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46) (Ratzinger 1968, p. 246). The man Jesus Christ, being God, overcame the absolute loneliness of death by voluntarily experiencing it. "Where no voice can reach us anymore, there He is. [...] But dying is no longer a path to icy loneliness [...]. The door of death is open since in death life: love, lives" (Ratzinger 1968, pp. 248–49). Everyone who enters into a personal relationship with Christ, will partake in his victory over death.

2.5. Specificity of the Christian Faith

Man realizes the possibility of living a life in a relationship with Christ, which he was given in the act of creation, through receiving baptism and the Christian faith. The Lord himself affirms: "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16) (CCC, no. 1257).

The Christian faith is a grace, a supernatural gift from God (CCC, no. 176–80). It is not merely an opinion or wish but a personal adherence of the whole man to God, involving an assent of the intellect and will to the self-revelation God has made through his deeds and words. This faith deepens the ontological relationship with Christ, established at baptism, a relationship that is also created at the baptism of small, unaware children. As they gain the ability to use reason, they should be engaged voluntarily in their relationships with Christ by participating in the holy sacraments and living in accordance with the Savior's teachings transmitted by the Church (CCC, no. 1266, 1254).

The reality of adherence to Christ through faith yields the experience of certainty that there is life after death (CCC, no. 157). "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). Benedict XVI explained this: "[...] through faith, in a tentative way, or as we might say 'in embryo'—and thus according to the 'substance'—there are already present in us the things that are hoped for: the whole, true life. And precisely because the thing itself is already present, this presence of what is to come also creates certainty: this 'thing' which must come is not yet visible in the external world (it does not 'appear'), but because of the fact that, as an initial and dynamic reality, we carry it within us, a certain perception of it has even now come into existence. [...] Faith is not merely a personal reaching out towards things to come that are still totally absent: it gives us something. It gives us even now something of the reality we are waiting for, and this present reality constitutes for us a 'proof' of the things that are still unseen. Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a 'not yet'. The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future" (Benedict XVI 2007, p. 7).

Faith that creates a relationship with Christ is a rational decision of will, but it also has repercussions on feelings. "The relationship with God takes place as an attraction to him and a passion of love for him" (Müller 2022, p. 217). "The passions are natural components of the human psyche; they form the passageway and ensure the connection between the life of the senses and the life of the mind" (CCC, no. 1764). Jesus experiences such emotions as sorrow, fear, suffering or compassion for mourners. Thus, human feelings are a space where God acts (CCC no. 1769), (Kulik 2021, pp. 22–26).

Saint Paul confirms that the bereaved experience unpleasant feelings, and so they need comfort, solace, relief, reassurance, etc. He writes to the Thessalonians who grieved for their loved ones: "We do not want you to be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so too will God, through Jesus, bring with him those who have fallen asleep. Indeed, we tell you this, on the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will surely not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself, with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore, console one another with these words" (1 Thess 4:13–18).

Thus, the Christian faith is not only based on knowledge, but also on personal experience of God's action. Revelation is not a theoretical teaching in the form of a treatise. It is essentially a personal, life-related cognition; like all interpersonal cognition it assumes a similar nature, sympathy, commitment, friendship or love (Laurentin 1998, p. 30). Also, the Holy Spirit allows mourners to experience what they have received through their acts of conscious faith. "For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven. [...] Now the one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a first installment" (2 Cor 5:1, 5). "The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:16–17). It is the Holy Spirit who causes faith to yield fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22–23; Rom 8:6; 14:7). As a consequence, mourners are certain that their grief over their loved ones becomes "the comforted sadness" ("die getröstete Traurigkeit"). Christians do not negate sadness and do not need to pretend that there is no sadness in their lives. Sadness remains and has its reasons, but is internally overcome by overwhelming consolation. Sadness is like a shadow. The disciples of Christ know that through their faith in Jesus, shadows are also signs of hope, because they are equipped to believe that shadows indicate the existence of great light. If this light did not exist, there could be no shadows. Christians believe that shadows are an inherent part of life on earth, but in the future, they will face the light that has been waiting for them, and this light will never go out, but will remove every shadow of sadness. As Ratzinger expresses, this is the "realism of the Christian man" ("der Realismus des Christenmenschen") (Ratzinger 1974, p. 294).

The reality of the comforted sadness is confirmed by mourners' testimonies. For example, a young priest who, standing at his father's grave, experienced the certainty that this could not be the absolute end of their relationship and confessed: "I am sure that my Dad did not stop existing! He really exists. He really lives! I am sure of that!" (Kulik 2021, p. 43). After the death of his friend Charles Williams, Clive Staples Lewis said that no event had strengthened his faith in eternal life so much as that of Charles's death. When the idea of death and the idea of Williams "met" in his mind, he changed his thinking about death as an absolute end (Kreeft and Tacelli 2006, p. 121). Moreover, Pope Francis reminds us: "In the People of God, by the grace of his compassion granted in Jesus, many families prove by their deeds that death does not have the last word: this is a true act of faith. Every time a family in mourning—even terrible mourning—finds the strength to guard the faith and love that unite us to those we love, it has already prevented death from taking everything. [...] In this faith, we can console one another, knowing that the Lord has conquered death once and for all. Our loved ones are not lost in the darkness of nothing: hope assures us that they are in the good and strong hands of God. Love is stronger than death. Thus, the way is to let love grow, make it stronger, and love will guard us until the day that every tear shall be wiped away, when 'death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more' (Rev 21:4). If we allow ourselves to be sustained by this faith, the experience of grief can generate even stronger family bonds, a new openness to the pain of other families, a new brotherhood with families that are born and reborn in hope. To be born and reborn in hope, this gives us faith. [...] All our loved ones who are gone, the Lord will give them back to us and we will be together with them. This hope does not disappoint!" (Francis 2015).

The role of the faith in Jesus Christ is not providing "cheap hope" (von Balthasar 1986, p. 275). This faith is rooted in God who really exists. We can talk about the therapeutic dimension of faith, because it is the fruit of the relationship with God who gives true life despite death. Faith does not want to offer people some form of psychotherapy, its

psychotherapy is the truth (Ratzinger 1993, pp. 89–93; 1997, p. 18). Knowing the truth about the existence of life, which is stronger than death, sets people free from despair after the death of their loved ones. “Jesus then said to those Jews who believed in him, ‘If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’” (John 8:31–32). Believing in life after death is not so-called “positive thinking”, i.e., a wish or dream, but it is “true thinking”, stating a fact. Thus, it is important to live in the awareness that our entire existence is heading towards meeting God and our loved ones (Benedict XVI 2012; Benedikt XVI 2016, p. 279).

2.6. Relationship between a Non-Baptized Person and Jesus Christ

Although according to the Revelation of God, contained in the Holy Scriptures and the teachings of the Catholic Church, baptism is necessary to build a real bond with Christ that lasts even after death, it is a required condition for those who have heard about Christ. The Catholic Church believes that a non-baptized person also has a personal relationship with Christ for two reasons: (1) by being created by God; and (2) due to the incarnation of the Son of God.

Before a person is united with Christ at baptism, he or she is already capable of a relationship with God because of the fact of being created by him. Hans Urs von Balthasar speaks of “the double light” that illuminates the mystery of man. One light comes from the beginnings, from the creation of man, the other comes from the final goal, the fulfillment of man’s meaning in Christ (von Balthasar 1990, pp. 76–77). In turn, Ratzinger speaks of “two dimensions of God’s fatherhood” towards man, shown by Jesus.

First of all, God is the true Father of man, because he is his Creator, the source of his being. Consequently, man is a true child and the image of God, his origin is divine and he himself is good (Ratzinger 2007b, pp. 171–72). Therefore, the very fact of being a human being leads to the existence of real bonds between man and God and, as a result of that, between people. However, creation is nothing else as showing the universal salvific will of God in the very beginning (Müller 2022, p. 253). In creation, God reveals his love as the One who “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human” (1 Tim 2:4–5).

Yet, there is another, deeper and stricter type of relationship between man and God. This relationship is created thanks to the ontological relationship between man and Christ. Ratzinger defines it as “the second dimension of the fatherhood of God”, meaning that Christ is “the image of the Father” in a special way (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). The German theologians reminds us that the Church Fathers state that when God was creating man in “his image”, he first looked at Christ and created man in the image of “the new Adam”, the ideal man. However, Jesus is above all “Son” in the proper sense of the word: he has the same essence as the Father. He wants to accept everyone into his sonship, so that they may fully belong to him. In this way, being a child became a dynamic concept. We are not yet fully children of God, but through our increasingly deeper communion with Jesus, we are to become and to be God’s children. Being a child is identified with following Christ. Therefore, the word “God the Father” is a call addressed to everyone: we are to live as his children, as his sons and daughters (Ratzinger 2007b, p. 172).

This is confirmed by the teachings of the Catholic Church: “by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man” (GS, no. 22), i.e., confirmed his ontological relationship with every human person. Thus, this bond with Christ “holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way” (GS, no. 22).

Furthermore, “[s]ince Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery. Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful.

Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He has lavished life upon us so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father” (GS, no. 22). Thus, “every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity” (CCC, no. 1260). “All people living before and after the birth of Christ can therefore be saved through Jesus, both through his grace and through their conduct of life in accordance with the truth and good. Through Christ, their immortal souls are directed towards the resurrection of their bodies and toward their eternal perfection in the triune love of God. [...] All people have stood before God since their creation and, in the intergenerational context, form a community of destiny on the path to salvation—despite all kinds of disaster” (Müller 2022, pp. 210–11).

2.7. Relationships between the Living and the Dead

From the human perspective, the possibility of continuing relationships between the living and the dead is a consequence of the fact that already at the level of created nature, God connects people with one another. Our hope for those who have gone to eternity is based on the promise that those who have not closed themselves to Christ will be with him forever. The existence of eternity is also confirmed by philosophical, medical, biological and psychological premises and observations in modern physics (D’Souza 2009; Ziemiński 2013). With this in mind, Christians should not speak about the deceased such that “they do not live.” They died but did not stop existing. Therefore, in the first Preface for the Dead, a prayer during funeral Mass, the Roman Catholic Church confesses with full knowledge of its meaning: “Indeed for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended” (Preface I for the Dead 2011, p. 622). Mourners must therefore live in such a way as to get to where, we trust, their loved ones are already. “Our imagination may be incapable of reaching these heights, but our heart does so instinctively and completely” (Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1979).

Consequently, the death of a loved one cannot be considered an absolute loss. Anyone who professes faith in Christ and eternal life has lost their loved ones only to a certain extent. He cannot see them, cannot talk to them like he used to. He has suffered a loss on both a physical and mental level. But on the ontological level, his relationships persist and, thus, can and should be maintained. It is not only about keeping alive the memory of the dead, but about showing them love, because they still exist in God and, therefore, they understand the living better than those who are still alive.

In the Catholic Church, the existence of real relationships between the living and the dead is expressed in the truth of faith defined as the *sanctorum communio* (communion of saints), possible through the uniting role of Christ, who as the Head forms one spiritual organism with all the baptized, “one Body” (1 Cor 12:12–27; CCC, no. 953, 957–58). In the communion of saints, man’s ability to create relationships, already obtained in the act of creation, is improved and expanded. This does not contradict the order of creation, but despite its real novelty, it is its continuation. Therefore, after the resurrection of the dead, at the moment of parousia (the second revelation of Christ in history), not only the souls, but also the renewed bodies will participate in the *sanctorum communio*, because matter is integrated in the human soul; thus, thanks to the power of God, matter reaches its fulfillment in the resurrection (Ratzinger 2007a, pp. 221–23). After the resurrection, there will remain a special bond of marriage, kinship, friendship, cooperation, spiritual dignity and fame, although it will always be an infinitely universalized and elevated bond, as well as a bond with an infinite wealth of colors, shades and aspects (Bartnik 2003, p. 883). For in eternity, no one loses anything of his/her own identity.

Yet, until this moment, for the living, the *sanctorum communio* is most fully expressed in the *communio eucharistica*, which means that the real connection with the dead, although most often not at the emotional level, is experienced during the Eucharist, which is celebrated both for the living and the dead, uniting the living on earth and in heaven

([International Theological Commission 1992](#), sec. 7.4). In Christ, we are not only brothers to one another, but also in his Eucharistic Body, we become members for one another. Jesus does not keep this perceptiveness of the human environment to the presence of God–Man, who is inside us and does not violate our freedom, but allows us to participate in it through the Eucharist. In this way, something absolutely new appears in anthropology: people can serve one another not only in external deeds, through which they bear one another’s burdens, but also on the level of inner relationships, which even death does not destroy. This happens when we can share the burden of another person’s sin or infirmity in the Eucharist of Christ ([von Balthasar 1992](#), pp. 384–85).

Participating in the Eucharist, we can have a real influence on other people’s fate, also on the fate of the dead. “Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective” (CCC, no. 958). It is God’s mystery how it happens ([von Balthasar 1999](#), p. 391). We can even speak of some spiritual “Meta-net”, infinitely faster and more independent than the Internet, a true and positive net. And this is also expressed by the *sanctorum communio*: we are all in profound communication and will recognize one another in eternity, even when we have never seen one another on earth, because the same Spirit, the same Lord, works in us ([Benedetto XVI 2010](#), pp. 245–46).

Benedict XVI reminds us of the importance of prayerful memory of the deceased persons whom we loved; this memory is not a superficial form of saving them from oblivion, but above all a sign of faith in our uninterrupted relationship of love with them, which really exists despite death and, as it were, beyond it. The prayer of the living can help the soul of the deceased person who is being purified after death. That is why the Church encourages us to pray for the dead and to visit their graves ([Benedykt XVI 2012](#), p. 187). Thus, prayer for the dead expresses the social relational nature of salvation and mourning ([Müller 2022](#), p. 332).

3. Materials and Methods

We have selected texts considering their substantive content and the competences of their authors in particular areas related to the issue being discussed. Therefore, we intend to examine works concerning psychology and various branches of Roman Catholic theology: the theology of Jesus Christ (Christology), the theology of man (theological anthropology), the theology of creation (protology), as well as the theology of death and eternity (eschatology).

As regards publications in the field of psychology, we considered the following: ([Kübler-Ross Elisabeth 1999](#); [Keirse 2004](#); [Dudziak 2013](#), pp. 175–98; [Dudziak 2021](#)). They are complemented by texts selected from a large group of guides on Roman Catholic spirituality, e.g., ([Czajkowska and Złotkowska 2005](#); [Pindel 2008](#); [Alexander 2021](#)).

The main theological studies include works by German, Swiss, Italian and Polish Roman Catholic theologians; first of all, in the field of Christology ([Ratzinger 2005, 2007b](#)) and eschatology ([Ratzinger 1978](#); [Nitrola 2010](#); [Müller 2022](#)) and, additionally, theological anthropology ([von Balthasar 1992](#)) and protology ([Nawrot 2016](#)).

Roman Catholic theology is inextricably linked with God’s Revelation written down in the Holy Scriptures, translated and transmitted by the Church under the direction of the Magisterium of the Church. For that reason, of fundamental importance to this study are references to the Old and New Testaments ([The New American Bible 2022](#)) and texts containing the official teachings of the Catholic Church ([Catechism of the Catholic Church 1993](#), CCC), ([The Second Vatican Council 1965](#), Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, GS), papal teachings ([Benedict XVI 2007, 2008](#); [Benedetto XVI 2010](#); [Francis 2015](#)), and statements from the [Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith \(1979\)](#) and the [International Theological Commission \(1992\)](#).

We have primarily used the method of analysis and synthesis of the data contained in the selected publications. When analyzing the materials, we have deliberately not focused on the psychology of the grieving process, since this issue, unlike the theology of mourning, has been developed in numerous works. Although both aspects complement each other, one

can hardly find studies on the mourning process from the point of view of Roman Catholic theology. In this article, referring to the psychological dimension of the process of grief and mourning is only a starting point for presenting the theological dimension, which indicates the role of the ontological relational structure of human existence recognized in the process of “rightly” processing grief, a state caused by the interruption to relationships with loved ones as a result of their death. According to psychologists, a proper experience of grief and mourning should end with accepting the loss and peacefully entering a new stage of family life (Kübler-Ross Elisabeth 1999, pp. 99–138; Keirse 2004, pp. 283–85). Synthesizing the data in the selected psychological and theological texts aims to demonstrate that the mourner should be helped by faith, i.e., adopting the Christian vision of God and the human person. One God in Three Persons (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit) makes each human person a unity of the spiritual element (the immortal soul) and the material element (the body), which are temporarily separated at the moment of death, but will be reunited through the power of God at the moment of the resurrection of the body. In the meantime, the immortal soul is able to maintain a personal relationship with the living through the mediation of Jesus Christ (CCC, no. 362–67).

In order to confirm the important role of the Christian faith in the process of grief and mourning, we quoted testimonies from those who, thanks to their living relationships with Jesus Christ, managed to cope with the loss of their family members by building relationships with them in a new way. However, empirical research showing relationships between faith and mourning were not analyzed. This research has been presented in other publications, such as (Walsh et al. 2002; Draper et al. 2014; Guzowski et al. 2014; Christian et al. 2019; Binnebesel et al. 2023).

4. Discussion

In this section, we will discuss three hypotheses that are completely incompatible with the Revelation of God concerning the relationships between the living and the dead through the faith in Jesus Christ, transmitted in the teachings of the Catholic Church. These are the theories of annihilation, spiritism and reincarnation.

4.1. Annihilation

Strictly speaking, the theory of annihilation is a Protestant and Catholic hypothesis concerning the posthumous fate of those who have condemned themselves through their conscious and voluntary rejection of the relationship of love offered to them by God. Their annihilation by the Creator concerns his grace and mercy, because it would free them from experiencing eternal punishment, consisting of endless suffering (Finkenzeller 2000, pp. 217, 220–21; Hryniewicz 2016, pp. 271–80). This vision of death was taught, for example, by the philosopher Epicurus (ca. 341–271 BCE) and the poet Lucretius (ca. 99–55 BCE) and, in the time of Jesus, by the Jewish party of the Sadducees (Acts 23: 8) (Tatarkiewicz 1997, pp. 142–43, 145; Müller 2022, pp. 202–203, 258).

This idea occurs outside theology, in the belief of those who are convinced that after death the entire human person is annihilated because after the death of the material element (body), the spiritual element (soul) ceases to exist. For this reason, there is no possibility of establishing a real personal relationship with the deceased. The dead do not exist. The bond with them is reduced to the memory of them and is not associated with any expectation of meeting them again. The conviction on the annihilation of the dead may be considered a secularized type of coping with the fear of death, the fear of an unknown afterlife or the loss of a loved one. If death ends all relationships, because a person ceases to exist, then one should stop worrying about death and deal with the problems of earthly life (International Theological Commission 1992, p. 1).

As a theological theory, the hypothesis of annihilation contradicts the Revelation in the Holy Scriptures: “For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him” (Wis 2:23). Consequently, God is the One whom a person can address: “But you have mercy on all, because you can do all things; and you overlook the sins of

men that they may repent. For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have made; for what you hated, you would not have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O LORD and lover of souls, for your imperishable spirit is in all things!" (Wis 11:23–26; 12:1). Therefore, neither the annihilation of man by God nor the self-annihilation of the human being is possible. In his existence, man is completely dependent on the act of his creation and his ontological relationship with the Creator, who gave him existence, and this excludes non-existence (Ratzinger 1978, p. 131; Müller 2022, p. 357).

4.2. Spiritism

Some people, experiencing painful grief after the loss of a loved one, resort to spiritism, i.e., the belief in the existence of spirits who you can contact at your own request. This theory completely differs from the Catholic belief in invoking the intercession of the saints in heaven and the souls, being purified after death (International Theological Commission 1992, sec. 7.2) "The meaning of 'evocation': it would involve any method whereby 'the effort is made by human techniques to establish communication in the external order with spirits or disembodied souls in the hope of acquiring various kinds of information and forms of help'" (International Theological Commission 1992, sec. 7.2). In this way, the bereaved, trying to regain relationships with the deceased, ask for help from those who are supposedly able to contact souls (mediums) or use spiritualistic practices, e.g., mediumism, channeling, automatic writing (psychography), invoking spirits and others (International Theological Commission 1992, sec. 7.2; Zalewski 2013, pp. 398–415; Posacki 2016, pp. 167–68; Noworol 2017, pp. 229–41).

These practices contradict the teachings about the relationship between the living and the dead though the faith in Jesus Christ and are rejected unequivocally in the Old and New Testaments (Deut 18:10–14; Exod 22:17; Lev 19:31; 20:6, 27; Acts 13:6–12; 16:16–18; 19:11–20). A model example, condemning the practice of invoking spirits, is the story of King Saul asking to invoke the spirit of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 28:3–25). The result of this behavior was Saul's rejection by God and, consequently, his death. "Thus Saul died because of his rebellion against the LORD in disobeying his command, and also because he had sought counsel of a necromancer, and had not rather inquired of the LORD. Therefore, the LORD slew him, and transferred his kingdom to David, the son of Jesse" (1 Chr 10:13–14) (International Theological Commission 1992, sec. 7.2).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly rejects these practices as sins against the first commandment: "You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me." "All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone" (CCC, no. 2116).

Any attempt to invoke spirits is a manifestation of "amoral anti-personalism", because it reduces both the medium and the summoned spirit of the deceased person to the role of an instrument serving to fulfill the wishes of the seeker of such a contact. Such practices are often fraudulent, but they also involve the risk of demonic interference leading to possession. Without the will of God, no soul of a deceased person can contact the living, while evil spirits may try to take advantage of the opening of participants to these types of practices to the spiritual world (Posacki 2016, p. 168). Therefore, interest in "life after life" should be characterized by prudence resulting from sound faith and reason, which does not allow people to exceed permissible limits and which protects against directing oneself or others to spiritism, occultism or other spiritual threats (Dudziak 2021, p. 161).

At the same time, one cannot exclude the possibility of contacts between the living and the saints in heaven or the souls experiencing purification. This is proven by the

saints' testimonies approved by the Church and confirming the truth of the communion of saints. "One evening, one of the deceased sisters, who had already visited me a few times, appeared to me. [...] As a sign that she only now was in heaven, God would bless our house. Then she came closer to me, embraced me sincerely and said, 'I must go now.' I understood how closely the three stages of a soul's life are bound together; that is to say, life on earth, in purgatory and in heaven [the communion of saints]" (Kowalska 2005, no. 594). Such contacts are possible only through the sovereign consent of God and are not subject to any compulsion or manipulation, which are motives for invoking spirits (CCC, no. 2115).

4.3. Reincarnation

Reincarnation (*metempsychosis*, *metempsychosis*, *palingenesis*) (Filipowicz 2010, p. 191) is a diverse set of beliefs about the so-called "transmigration of souls" after death, which consists in taking on new bodies by the soul of the deceased person and being reborn again to life on earth. There are four main elements to the reincarnation theory: (1) the possibility of many subsequent earthly existences of one human person; (2) the existence of a law of nature causing a continuous process of human improvement in subsequent incarnations, which excludes the possibility of final condemnation; (3) achieving subsequent degrees of perfection through one's own effort, eliminating the need for God's saving intervention; and (4) the completion of the reincarnation process involves the independence of the spiritual element from the material body.

This reincarnation rejects God's Revelation in the Bible, since "[j]ust as it is appointed that human beings die once, and after this the judgment" (Heb 9:27). Reincarnation is also contrary to the main truths of the Christian faith. It denies the fact of the creation of man as a spiritual–corporeal unity destined for eternal life by virtue of the relationship with Jesus Christ, the crucified and resurrected redeemer of man. The theory of reincarnation rejects the uniqueness of human existence, the possibility of damnation (hell), the necessity of redemption by God and the resurrection of the body (CCC, no. 1013) (International Theological Commission 1992, p. 9).

Reincarnation, appearing in non-Christian systems of philosophy and religion (Kasper 2000, pp. 120–24; Filipowicz 2010, pp. 192–96) is considered by some, including those who have been brought up in Christian culture, to be a comforting opportunity to rebuild relationships with the deceased by having them come back to life in new forms. However, this possibility should be considered apparent, because according to the theory of reincarnation, a person who begins another earthly existence starts "from scratch." He does not remember his experiences from previous incarnations, so he is unable to renew the relationships with his loved ones from before his death (Ziemiński 2013, pp. 201–205; Lohfink 2018, p. 48).

The possibility of building close relationships resulting from the relational nature of man is also contradicted by the law of karma, present in the theory of reincarnation and the resulting obligation toward self-improvement. Karma means that every action by a person affects his or her fate in subsequent incarnations. Therefore, each person must make an independent effort to correct his or her fate, and others should not interfere in his or her situations, even those that cause suffering, such as illness. This would be an interference with the law of karma and, consequently, not a kind of help, but an obstacle to the development of the particular person (Lohfink 2018, pp. 41–44). Thus, reincarnation concepts contradict reason (Ziemiński 2013, pp. 201–22; Müller 2022, p. 224).

5. Conclusions

Manu Keirse, a clinical psychologist, medical doctor and head of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Hospital in Leuven, Belgium, wrote a book entitled *Helpen bij verlies en verdriet. Een gids voor het gezin en de hulpverlener* (Helping with Loss and Grief. A guide for the family and the care provider) in order to help people in mourning (there have been many quotations from the Polish edition of his book in this article). As Keirse admits himself, he wanted to provide a guide to all those who are grieving the loss of their loved ones, so that

they can process their grief and regain their faith in life (Keirse 2004, p. 287). Although the book is written by a psychologist and deals primarily with the psychological dimension of grief, the author reminds us of the positive role of Christian mourning rituals that unite people around mourners to support them in grieving the “right way.”

Keirse mentions the following Christian mourning rituals: praying for the deceased persons in church services, ringing the bells at the moment of death of a villager or a city resident, hanging a crucifix on the door of the deceased’s house, wearing mourning clothes, organizing a party for the family and relatives of the deceased, so-called wakes, ordering masses for the peace of the souls of the deceased, e.g., on the anniversary of their death or birth, ending the mourning period for the whole family with a Holy Mass, collecting offerings for masses for the deceased from neighbors, funeral processions, keeping the groom’s shirt until the day of his death as part of the bride’s dowry. All these rituals emphasize the communal, i.e., relational, nature of mourning (Keirse 2004, pp. 23–24). Hence, Keirse confirms the thesis that the human person is a psycho–physical–spiritual unity and, therefore, in order to help him/her in grief, his/her needs should be taken care of in all three dimensions (Dudziak 2021, p. 159). In his opinion, the problem concerns the contemporary underestimation of this social form of grieving the loss of a loved one, because mourning is a process that should not be experienced alone, but only in relationships with others.

In view of that, there is no real conflict between psychology and theology. Both sciences contribute to integral knowledge about man and the mourning process, even though each uses its own scientific language to describe different aspects of human existence (Gajdowie 2012, pp. 11–12).

If drawing from both fields of science is to really help mourners, the psychological layer of grief and mourning must be respected when transmitting religious knowledge (Keirse 2004, pp. 275–77). A mourner who believes in God is also a specific person with his or her entire psyche, which cannot be underestimated. Therefore, difficult questions should not be answered with quick and easy religious answers, such as: “This is God’s will, which one must accept.” Such a message may cause someone grieving a loss to experience a blockage in the mourning process at the stage of grief and cause a rebellion against God (Keirse 2004, p. 53). If a mourner is to come to know Jesus Christ, believe in him and, thus, find a new way of real communion with the dead, he or she must first be patiently heard, with loving and understanding attention. It is often the listener’s attitude, not his words, that is the first testimony of faith in God, who is near and worth trusting in matters of life, death and eternity. Keirse recognizes that there are people who do not seek a reference to transcendence in their mourning. However, he reminds us that believers can see the death of their loved ones from a broader perspective, i.e., from the perspective of eternal life after death, which gives hope for a reunion with their beloved deceased (Keirse 2004, pp. 275–77).

The aforementioned comments prove that from a psychological point of view, when faith in Jesus Christ, along with its consequences presented here, are appropriately proposed to mourners and accepted by them, they play an important role in the family experience of grief. This is confirmed by the testimony of the Iraqi Catholic Doha Sabah Abdallah, a mother mourning the death of her four-year-old son and other family members who were killed in the 2014 attack by ISIS. During the Mass celebrated by Pope Francis in Qaraqosh, she said that her strength was undoubtedly born from her faith in the resurrection of the dead, the source of hope, and imitating the suffering of Christ testified to the power of love that conquers all. “My faith tells me that my children are in the arms of Jesus Christ our Lord [...] And we, the survivors, try to forgive the aggressor, because our Master Jesus has forgiven his executioners” (Westcott 2021). Her words testify that the Catholic teachings about Christ, the human person, death, the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body and communion between the living and the dead (*sanctorum communio*), which we have presented here, not only change the knowledge of its receivers, but also their lives in the emotional and spiritual sphere.

At this point, we can refer to the words of Cardinal Gerhard Müller that “the cure for mortality is identical with the Savior” (Müller 2022, p. 107); from the theological point of view, it is Christ who heals the mourner’s wounds because, as the Creator, he has access to the ontic layer of human existence, which is deeper than the psychic layer and which affects it. It is through this layer that Christ enables us to have true relationships between the living and the dead. This is most fully realized in every Eucharist, which is a “specific place”, i.e., an encounter between time and eternity, and thus an encounter between the living and the dead (Zatwardnicki 2022; Liszka 1992, pp. 143–54). Therefore, there is no need to resort to spiritism or the annihilation of the dead or their reincarnation, for the grieving process to end with finding happiness in a new life situation after the death of loved ones. The cure for grief can be Jesus Christ, if only the mourner receives him, his teachings about life, death and eternity, in an act of faith, i.e., by his/her free consent of reason. This decision, repeated persistently, will sooner or later have its soothing repercussions on the mourner’s emotional sphere, because relationships with God do not leave those who enter into them unchanged (Ratzinger 2022, pp. 450–52).

This analysis could be continued in further research on connections between the family mourning process and mourners’ faith in Jesus Christ. It would be worth examining the role of faith concerning losses of individual family members: children, spouses, parents or grandparents. In particular, it would be valuable to look at the grieving process as a result of suicide, homicide, chronic disease, sudden accident or miscarriage. Each grief after the death of a loved one is different and worth studying in order to help those who experience the interruption to relationships with deceased persons.

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Abbreviations

CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
GS	The Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World <i>Gaudium et Spes</i>

Notes

- ¹ For the controversies related to some opinions put forward by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, see (Dudziak 2021, pp. 134, 153).
- ² On the topic of the experience of grief by children, see, for example (de Kergorlay-Soubrier 2012; Keirse 2004, pp. 63–85).
- ³ This concept was criticized by the Polish theologian Czesław Stanisław Bartnik who wrongly accused the German theologian of the mortality of the soul understood in this way and the rejection of its substantiality (Bartnik 2004, pp. 317–19).

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