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Between Home and Parish School: Parental Responsibility for the Upbringing and Education of Rural Children in Józef Legowicz's *Powinności gospodarzów wiejskich* [The Duties of Rural Householders] (1779)

Między domem a szkołą parafialną: Odpowiedzialność rodziców za wychowanie i kształcenie dzieci wiejskich w *Powinnościach gospodarzów wiejskich* Józefa Legowicza (1779)

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Abstract

Aim. Historiography of education in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth discusses family upbringing, parish schooling, and Enlightenment reform as separate fields. Józef Legowicz's 1779 guide for rural householders brings them together. The article reconstructs how Legowicz allocated responsibility for children's upbringing between parents, the household, and the parish school, and asks how the example set by adults made that responsibility credible.

Methods and materials. The study applies qualitative historical source analysis to the 1779 edition of *Powinności gospodarzów wiejskich* [The duties of rural householders]. It combines internal textual analysis with contextual comparison to the Commission of National Education's 1774 regulation for parish schools and with research on childhood, parish institutions, and the Catholic Enlightenment. The source is read as a normative programme rather than a transparent record of practice.

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Results and conclusion. Legowicz treated the home as the primary environment of religious and moral formation, but required parents to send children to parish school. Its curriculum combined catechesis and manners with reading, writing, arithmetic, and useful crafts. Schooling was justified simultaneously as obedience to God, service to the Church and country, and a long-term benefit to the family. Parental authority depended on conduct: obscene speech, anger, and violent correction contradicted the lesson being taught. Evidence from Korkożyszki shows that Legowicz supported this programme institutionally. The guide articulated a complementary home–school model of rural education. Although hierarchical and utilitarian rather than child-centred in the modern sense, it widened parental duty beyond domestic instruction to include access to schooling and the credibility of everyday example.

***Keywords*:** Józef Legowicz, parental responsibility, rural childhood, parish school, family education, Catholic Enlightenment, Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth

Abstrakt

Cel. W historiografii edukacji Rzeczypospolitej Obojga Narodów wychowanie rodzinne, szkolnictwo parafialne i reformy oświeceniowe bywają omawiane oddzielnie. Poradnik Józefa Legowicza z 1779 roku łączy te obszary. Celem artykułu jest rekonstrukcja podziału odpowiedzialności za wychowanie dzieci między rodziców, gospodarstwo domowe i szkołę parafialną oraz ustalenie, w jaki sposób przykład dorosłych nadawał tej odpowiedzialności wiarygodność.

Metody i materiały. Zastosowano jakościową analizę historyczną wydania *Powinności gospodarzów wiejskich* z 1779 roku. Analizę wewnętrzną tekstu połączono z porównaniem kontekstowym z *Przepisem do szkół parafialnych* Komisji Edukacji Narodowej z 1774 roku oraz z wynikami badań nad dzieciństwem, parafią, katechezą i oświeceniem katolickim. Poradnik odczytano jako program normatywny, a nie bezpośredni zapis praktyki wychowawczej.

Wyniki i wnioski. Legowicz uznawał dom za pierwsze środowisko formacji religijnej i moralnej, ale zobowiązywał rodziców do posyłania dzieci do szkoły parafialnej. Jej program łączył katechezę i dobre obyczaje z czytaniem, pisaniem, rachunkami oraz użytecznymi umiejętnościami. Nauka szkolna miała służyć Bogu, Kościołowi, krajowi i rodzinie, a jej przyszłe pożytki uzasadniały rezygnację z doraźnej pracy dziecka. Autorytet rodzicielski zależał od postępowania dorosłych: wulgarna mowa, gniew i brutalne karcenie przeczyły przekazywanym normom. Dane dotyczące szkoły w Korkożyszkach wskazują, że Legowicz wspierał ten program instytucjonalnie. Poradnik formułował komplementarny model domu i szkoły. Choć pozostawał hierarchiczny i utylitarny, rozszerzał powinność rodziców o zapewnienie dostępu do nauki oraz o wiarygodność codziennego przykładu.

***Słowa kluczowe*:** Józef Legowicz, odpowiedzialność rodzicielska, dzieciństwo wiejskie, szkoła parafialna, wychowanie rodzinne, oświecenie katolickie, Rzeczpospolita Obojga Narodów

Introduction

The history of family education in the early modern Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth has been reconstructed most fully for noble households, whose diaries, letters, pedagogical treatises, and material resources left a comparatively rich record. Research published in this journal has likewise demonstrated how parents, relatives, tutors, and domestic routines formed an educational environment in elite families (Kahl, 2011). The broader history of childhood confirms that care, discipline, work, religious formation, and preparation for adulthood were closely interwoven, while also warning against reducing premodern childhood to a single model (Żołądź-Strzelczyk, 2002). The stories of rural families are more difficult to reconstruct. Their own voices appear less frequently, and historians must often work through visitation records, statutes, sermons, catechisms, and prescriptive manuals written by clerical or administrative elites.

Józef Legowicz's *Powinności gospodarzów wiejskich* [The Duties of Rural Householders], printed in Vilnius in 1779, offers an unusually focused perspective to this problem. Its author was the parish priest of Korkożyszki in the Diocese of Vilnius and a prolific writer whose publications translated pastoral doctrine into instructions concerning worship, work, health, neighbourly relations, household management, and education. Scholarship has established the principal features of his life and writing (Girininkaitė, 2017; Rok, 1996, 1998), examined his wider counsel on family life (Bartnicka, 1993), and analysed motherhood and early childcare as discussed in another of his manuals (Ziomek, 2016). The identification of extensive Lithuanian reuse of *Powinności* in a 1797 sermon manuscript further demonstrates that the text circulated as practical religious instruction beyond a single parish (Pajėdienė, 2022).

What remains insufficiently isolated is the educational architecture within the 1779 guide: the relation between home and parish school, the meaning of parental duty, and the connection between authority and example. This article therefore asks three questions. First, what educational tasks did Legowicz assign to parents and to the parish school? Second, how did he justify the cost of schooling to rural householders whose children also contributed to domestic work? Third, why did the conduct of adults matter to the effectiveness of instruction? The argument is that Legowicz formulated a complementary home–school model. The school extended rather than displaced parental responsibility, while the home remained the place in which religious and moral teaching either acquired or lost credibility through daily practice. Education consequently appeared as both a family obligation and a contribution to several communities: parish, Church, and country.

Source, Concepts, and Method

The primary source is the 1779 edition of *Powinności gospodarzów wiejskich*, published in Vilnius by the Academy Press. The title's key noun, "powinność" [duty], deserves attention. Puzynina (2015) shows that in the history of Polish language, the word increasingly acquired the sense of a serious internal moral duty, even as "obowiązek" [obligation] became more common in legal and administrative language. Legowicz did not maintain a rigid lexical distinction, but the title situates his advice within a moral account of the householder's role rather than a neutral handbook of technique. The addressee was not simply a biological parent. "Gospodarz" denoted the person responsible for a productive household that could include a spouse, children, servants, and dependants. References to parents must therefore be read within a wider, hierarchical domestic unit.

The analysis proceeds in three stages. First, it identifies statements concerning children, schooling, discipline, and example set by adults and reconstructs their internal relations. Second, it places them beside the Commission of National Education's *Przepis do szkół parafialnych* [Regulation for parish schools] of 1774 and historical studies of parish education in the Commonwealth, especially in the Lithuanian department (Kamińska, 2018; Komisja Edukacji Narodowej, 1774/1925; Litak, 2004; Szybiak, 1973). Third, it situates Legowicz's pastoral language within the Catholic Enlightenment, understood as an effort to combine confessional renewal, moral reform, useful knowledge, and service to society rather than as a simple secularisation of religious culture (Lehner, 2016; Ślusarska, 2012; Witecki, 2017, 2018, 2025). The long Polish catechetical tradition remains part of this context (Słowiński, 2005), but it does not exhaust the curriculum described by Legowicz.

Following Skinner's (1969) contextualist caution, the article asks what intervention the guide could make within its contemporary vocabulary and institutions. It does not treat a prescriptive text as proof that families followed its rules. Nor does similarity establish direct borrowing from the Commission's regulation; it establishes a shared field of reform unless documentary dependence can be shown. Modern theories of modelling, credibility, and parenthood are introduced only in the discussion as controlled analytical comparisons, not as sources of Legowicz's ideas. All English renderings from *Powinności* are the author's translations; page numbers refer to the pagination printed in the 1779 edition.

A Parish Programme with an Institutional Setting

Legowicz wrote at a moment when educational and pastoral reform increasingly converged. The Commission of National Education's 1774 regulation treated the parish school as a place for elementary learning suited to social condition and practical

life, while retaining moral and religious formation. In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, implementation was uneven and depended on local clergy, patrons, teachers, funds, and parental cooperation (Kamińska, 2018; Komisja Edukacji Narodowej, 1774/1925; Szybiak, 1973). Parish institutions had long carried educational functions, but their reach varied considerably (Litak, 2004). The programme associated with Bishop Ignacy Massalski intensified the expectation that the Vilnius clergy would improve both religious practice and everyday conduct (Ślusarska, 2012). Sermons and small devotional or instructional books were therefore instruments of social formation as well as vehicles of doctrine (Mačiulytė, 2006; Witecki, 2017, 2018).

Korkożyszki supplies more than a geographical label on a title page. Girininkaitė's (2017) reconstruction shows that Legowicz financed a school building, paid the teacher Stanisław Ulewicz, and covered practical expenses such as heating and light. A record from 1781 listed eleven pupils — five noble and six peasant children — while a later source mentioned twenty. Ludwika Wróblewska taught girls reading and religion. These data do not prove that the manual's full curriculum was implemented or that attendance was regular, yet they materially connect its prescriptions with an attempt to make elementary education available. Legowicz's educational appeal was thus backed by expenditure, personnel, and space. This fact is important because his argument demanded sacrifices from parents; his own institutional commitment made the demand more than a purely rhetorical transfer of responsibility.

The Household as the Primary Educational Environment

At the opening of the manual, Legowicz defined knowledge of Christian faith and morals as the main duty of rural householders and required them to ensure that their children, servants, and "the whole household" also possessed it (Legowicz, 1779, p. 1). Education began, therefore, through domestic responsibility. The scope was collective: the moral state of the household was attributed to those who governed it. Parents were not merely expected to provide food and labour discipline; they were responsible for what dependants knew, practised, heard, and observed.

This starting point could appear to confine education to catechesis at home, but Legowicz immediately moved beyond that boundary. His instruction was unequivocal: "Send children to parish schools for instruction" (Legowicz, 1779, p. 3). The imperative changes the meaning of parental responsibility. A parent fulfils the educational task not only by teaching personally but also by granting the child access to an institution with structured content and a teacher. Home and school consequently have distinct but interconnected functions. The household initiates belief, habit, and conduct; the school systematises them and adds literate, numerical, and vocational competences.

Legowicz reinforced the imperative by describing schooling as "a duty imposed upon parents by nature" and at the same time as an act of obedience to God, the Church, and the desire of the country (Legowicz, 1779, p. 4). Nature gave the obligation a foundation more fundamental than convenience, while the religious and civic references increased its beneficiaries. The formulation also prevented delegation from becoming abdication. Sending a child to school was itself a parental act for which parents remained morally accountable. Bartnicka's (1993) interpretation of Legowicz as a guide to family life is especially relevant here: advice on education belonged to a larger attempt to order relationships, not to an autonomous theory of schooling.

Parish Schooling: Formation, Useful Knowledge, and Long-Term Benefit

The curriculum is deliberately composite. Parish schools were to teach the mysteries of faith, piety, Christian discipline, and good manners, but also useful crafts, reading, writing, and arithmetic – everything that could be useful throughout life (Legowicz, 1779). Religious formation and practical knowledge were not competing alternatives. Literacy and numeracy strengthened the future householder's competence; manners and discipline ordered relationships; catechesis oriented the whole toward salvation. This arrangement accords with the broader Catholic-Enlightenment tendency to combine confessional purposes with practical improvement (Lehner, 2016; Witecki, 2025). It also parallels the Commission's programme, although without allowing us to claim textual dependence.

The argument was calibrated to a rural economy in which a child's attendance could mean the temporary loss of labour. Legowicz answered that problem by shifting the time issue. Educated children would become more capable helpers and better householders. Parents were asked to exchange an immediate contribution for a more durable competence. The fourfold list of benefits makes the logic explicit: God would gain exemplary Christians, the Church good sons, the country good householders, and parents more able assistance (Legowicz, 1779). Education was simultaneously soteriological, ecclesial, civic-economic, and domestic.

This reasoning should not be romanticised. The child was valued partly through anticipated usefulness, conformity, and the reproduction of an ordered rural society. It was not a declaration of equal opportunity in the modern sense. Nevertheless, the programme challenged a narrowly short-term understanding of the household's interests. It considered with holding schooling a failure of foresight and duty, not merely a private choice. The documented presence of peasant pupils at Korkożyszki shows that the addressee was not merely theoretical (Girininkaitė, 2017). The presence of a woman teaching girls is equally significant, although the evidence does not establish an identical curriculum or status for both sexes.

Example, Correction, and the Credibility of Parental Authority

School attendance did not exhaust the educational programme because children returned to a communicative environment shaped by adults. Legowicz warned that obscene speech, indecent stories, songs, jokes, and other bad examples corrupted rural children (Legowicz, 1779). The concern was not only with explicit lessons. Ordinary conversation and entertainment could also teach by making the conduct familiar. In modern analytical language, the observation resembles learning by modelling: behaviour supplies information about what is accepted even when spoken rules say otherwise (Bandura, 1977). This resemblance is heuristic; it does not turn Legowicz into a precursor of twentieth-century psychology.

The most forceful formulation concerns parental inconsistency: "Parents who do not repent of evil before their children plant their own crimes and offences, through their bad examples, in the children's hearts from their earliest years" (Legowicz, 1779, p. 12). The agricultural metaphor is precisely suited to his audience. The example is seed; repetition and proximity allow it to take root. The household can therefore undo the catechism and manners taught at school. Authority works pedagogically only when adults subject themselves to the norm they impose.

The relation between a norm and its social communication finds a useful comparative framework in Piotrowski's (2026) analysis. Working with a different source corpus, he shows that a norm operates through communication, justification, and its location within the structure of a community. This is not evidence of influence on Legowicz, but a controlled structural comparison: a parental command communicates a norm, while the parent's conduct confirms or undermines it.

Legowicz applied the same logic to correction. He condemned punishment administered in anger, humiliating curses, and brutality toward children and servants because these practices did not produce improvement. They made the punished person prone to anger, disobedience, resentment, and hatred (Legowicz, 1779). This was not an abolition of hierarchy or coercive discipline. The householder retained authority and a duty to correct. Yet the legitimacy of correction was limited by purpose, proportion, and effect: violence that reproduced the vice it purported to remove defeated its own educational claim.

A complementary comparison is offered by Piotrowski (2025), who argues, in a different field, that durable credibility results from coherence between declared norms and observable action rather than from messages alone. His analysis concerns restitution, reputation, and public relations, not family education; it is not evidence of historical influence. Applied cautiously, however, it clarifies Legowicz's mechanism. A parental command communicates a norm, while the parent's conduct either confirms or contradicts it. The credibility of education is thus relational and cumulative. By financing a school while requiring attendance, Legowicz also supplied an institutional example of the congruence he expected from householders.

Parental Responsibility between Family and Common Good

Legowicz's model distributes tasks without dissolving responsibility. The parish priest organises and exhorts; the teacher provides systematic instruction; parents enable attendance and govern the domestic environment; the wider community gains a future Christian and householder. None of these agents is sufficient alone. The model may be described as an educational ecology, provided that the modern term is not mistaken for Legowicz's vocabulary. Its central insight is institutional interdependence: a functioning school requires parental participation, while domestic formation benefits from knowledge and discipline that the household may not itself be able to provide.

Świerczek (2017), writing about contemporary Catholic teaching under entirely different demographic and social conditions, describes parenthood as a responsibility directed toward the family, society, and God, and stresses the intergenerational transmission of values. The comparison reveals a durable structural question rather than uninterrupted continuity: how can parental responsibility remain intimate and personal while producing public consequences? Legowicz's answer was clearly defined. Parents had to secure instruction, regulate the moral environment, correct without destructive anger, and prefer the child's long-term formation to immediate utility. Country and Church benefited through the same acts that were supposed to strengthen the household.

The limits of this vision are equally important. Children did not appear as autonomous participants in defining educational aims, and the social horizon remained estate-based, confessional, and patriarchal. The manual addressed the male householder most directly, even where it invoked parents more broadly. Yet its closing list of projected publications included a separate work on the good Christian and orderly upbringing of "rural children of both sexes" (Legowicz, 1779, p. 47). Together with evidence of girls' instruction at Korkożyszki, this phrase prevents the programme from being intended for boys alone. It indicates an acknowledged educational responsibility toward girls, while leaving the content and equality of that responsibility underdetermined.

Discussion

The analysis refines three possible simplifications. First, Legowicz's rural pedagogy was not merely a domestic catechesis. The home remained primary, but parental duty included creating access to parish schooling. Second, parish education was not represented as literacy detached from moral formation. Its curriculum integrated faith,

conduct, elementary skills, and useful work. Third, authority was not reduced to command and punishment. Because children learned from the behaviour of adults, the moral self-government of parents formed part of their educational obligation.

These findings place *Powinności* at the intersection of histories that are often narrated separately: the family, the parish, the Commission of National Education, and Catholic reform. They also help explain the manual's adaptability. Pajėdienė (2022) demonstrates substantial correspondence between Legowicz's text and a Lithuanian sermon manuscript prepared by Kiprijonas Lukauskas in 1797. That evidence supports textual transmission and adaptation, not the successful transformation of household practice. Nevertheless, it shows that a compact programme written for Korkożyszki could be repurposed for another linguistic and pastoral setting.

The study has clear limitations. One prescriptive manual cannot represent all rural parents in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, and the surviving evidence is stronger for Legowicz's intentions and institutional activity than for children's experience. Records of attendance provide a snapshot rather than a longitudinal measure. The modern comparisons with social learning, communicative credibility, and parental vocation illuminate selected relations but cannot be used to attribute contemporary concepts to an eighteenth-century priest. Further research should compare *Powinności* with visitation protocols, school registers, and other parish manuals, and should examine whether girls and boys encountered the proposed curriculum differently.

Conclusion

In *Powinności gospodarzów wiejskich*, Legowicz defined rural education through a division of labour combined with continuing parental accountability. The household introduced faith, morals, habit, and example. The parish school extended formation through catechesis, manners, literacy, arithmetic, and practical competence. Parents were obliged to connect the two by sending children to school and by ensuring that domestic conduct did not invalidate institutional teaching.

The justification of that duty operated on four levels: God, Church, country, and family. Schooling was presented as a long-term good that could outweigh the immediate value of a child's labour. At the same time, the credibility of parental authority depended on adults' willingness to obey the standards they communicated and to reject correction that merely increased anger and resentment. This model was hierarchical and oriented toward an ordered Christian rural society, but it also imposed demanding responsibilities on those who governed the household. Legowicz's originality lies less in any isolated recommendation than in integrating the home, the school, example, and the common good into one practical pastoral programme.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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