

BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS / RECENZJE

Stanisław KOWALCZYK, *Idea sprawiedliwości społecznej a myśl chrześcijańska* [The Idea of Social Justice and the Christian Thought], KUL, Lublin 1998, pp. 224.

The idea of social justice belongs to a narrow group of philosophical concepts which have been frequently and eagerly discussed by moderns. Many different authors, not only philosophers, have recognized this idea as being crucial to any social approach – others have applied it with considerable enthusiasm to their own discourses on the social order. To mention Karl Marks and Frederic Engels is enough. Unfortunately, professional philosophical works dedicated to the idea of social justice have been scarce. It is so not only because the main issue of humanistic production on social justice up to now belongs mostly to writers, columnists or even politicians rather than to systematic thinkers, but also because the question itself is wide, complicated and laden with problems of application. The idea of social justice seems even to be somehow ideologically biased. Prof. Stanisław Kowalczyk, a fertile scholar of the Catholic University in Lublin, Poland, presents in his recent book the past and the present of the idea of social justice, doing so with good methodology and without ideological prejudices.

The work of Kowalczyk owes its methodological clearness to its simple but well structured program. In the first part of the study the author gives a comprehensive outline of different historical formulations of the idea of justice; in the second section analyzes how this idea is related to the other forms of justice, how it is structured and what are the consequences of such its structure and nature. Being based on such a scheme, the first chapter of the book is dedicated to the ancient idea of justice, to the biblical interpretation of it, to the patristic conception of justice, and, subsequently, to the idea of justice elaborated by St. Thomas Aquinas, scholastics, classic liberalism, neoliberalism and Marxism (separate chapters) – giving final presentations on the idea of social justice in the social doctrine of the Roman-Catholic Church and the

idea of social justice present in catholic literature. In its first chapters the second, analytical part of the book enumerates different types and notions of justice. It examines the three particular forms of justice: legal, of exchange and distributive, according to the distinction suggested once by Aristotle. The specific character of social justice is subject of a separate unit, accompanied by another that investigates the basis of this kind of justice; its spheres of activity, its international dimension and finally, the relation that unites the social justice with the social love.

The notion of justice is present in all main currents of social thought: liberalism, socialism and personalism. The threefold idea of justice (legal, of exchange and distributive), elaborated once by Greeks, is frequently discussed, and, generally, wide accepted by the authors of all three intellectual currents mentioned above. This is not the same with the idea of social justice. This category appears first in the German discussion on justice in the 19th century, entering the vocabulary of the social teaching of the Church and of modern authors.

The idea of social justice is rather strange to the liberals. The liberal conception of justice has more in common with the idea of a social contract or an agreement among equals, i.e.: individuals or groups of them. Such an understanding of justice explores what Aristotle called a „just exchange” and what would also be described as a particular, horizontal form of the very idea of justice. Consequently, the liberal understanding of justice frequently omits any direct and serious reflection on what classic philosophers used to call the „common good”. For this reason liberalism is also particularly unlike to accept the axioms of normative ethics or the doctrine of natural law. Instead, liberals like John Locke have introduced the notion of the „law of nature”, which corresponds with the natural state of man and his culture, but which has nothing in common with the purely metaphysical or at the same time the moral notion of natural law.

The Marxists also perceive justice in their own specific way. Social justice for them is necessarily connected with an authoritarian model of the social life, with the negation of private property (and sometimes even of privacy), and with the principle of revolution, of the continuous struggle between classes. Instead, socialism, a current far wider than Marxism itself, would identify social justice with a recognition of the dignity of each person and of each social group. This recognition would frequently mean emancipation of such persons or groups, but emancipation that, unfortunately, is usually submitted to the power of some, egalitarian ideology.

If the classic threefold doctrine of justice is so widely respected by all the main streams of social thought, even if not without some objection,

is it *really* necessary to introduce another concept, this of social justice, especially when this concept would often be criticized or wrongly understood by them? Yes, answers Kowalczyk. The notion of social justice is indispensable, autonomous and far different from all other forms of justice.

First, it differs from legal justice. Both of them would be called the „justice of the common good”, for this kind of good is their proper object, but when legal justice tries to evaluate and to build this good mostly on the base of positive law, social justice refers always to what is more fundamental: to the natural law, to the dignity of the human person and its life. Legal justice, especially in the liberal interpretation, would justify many inequalities in the social status of the members of the given society; social justice would instead stress the necessity of reconciliation among the groups and, also, the right of each member of the society to the full participation in the process of construction of what is good for all.

Social justice is something different from exchange justice which has strong individualistic bias. This last form of justice perfectly describes the reality of the market and of the direct exchange of goods and services in it, but it fails to explain, or even recognize, the real core of human culture. Even economics is described by social justice in more complete way, because social justice perceives actors on the economic stage not only as subjects of the exchange, but also as persons and as a community of persons, all searching to recognize and to develop all possible relations that unify them.

Social justice distinguishes itself from distributive justice. The last one is usually understood as a proper redistribution of the net national (or corporate) product or other goods. Sometimes it is also identified with the optimal social policy or with a well functioning system of public and social services. Social justice instead concerns with more fundamental reality. It resides in both horizontal and vertical dimension of the society, but within the last one would be defined as a full participation of each individual in the creation, consumption and responsibility for common good.

What is characteristic to the idea of social justice and what *really* distinguishes it from any other form of justice is the clear presupposition of solidarity. Social justice, like any justice, is a virtue, what means that it has a moral nature, anyhow none of the other forms of justice stresses so much the very fact of moral unity of all humans as social justice does. It does not mean that social justice is just a vague, general virtue. It is rather more fundamental than others, if to use personalistic terms, or it is more „necessary”, if to use Kantian ones. For this reason social justice always resists to any form of violence, ideology or

totalitarian interventionism, and always prefers those instruments of social policy which openly and directly develop solidarity among men. Social justice not only wants to overcome social tensions and mutilations, to better the standards of human life, but it also seeks to define and to develop all conditions of human existence.

Kowalczyk's study brings many particular questions for the discussion on the idea of social justice held in modern times, especially among Christian philosophers. The decisive contribution of the pope Pius XI, and of his successors, esp. Pius XII, John XXIII, is synthetically presented, as well as the contribution of such important authors as J. Höffner, O. von Nell-Breuning, J. Messner.

What lacks is may be the wider discussion with liberalism, socialism and more recent intellectual trends. Kowalczyk gives a comprehensive presentation of the idea of justice, but does it mostly in the place where the idea was born: within the borders of Christian philosophy which has a strong theological background, long scholastic and personalistic tradition, and specific language. Entering bolder into a direct discussion with the particular works of the authors representing different approach, using freely their language and arguments, and finally presenting his own reasoning by their means Kowalczyk would gain more. Nevertheless, his study remains useful, abundant and unique.

Krzysztof MADEL SJ

Jakub GORCZYCA SJ, *Chrystus i ethos. Szkice o etyce filozoficznej w kondycji chrześcijańskiej* [Christus und Ethos. Skizze einer philosophischen Ethik in christlicher Beschaffenheit], Kraków, WAM 1998, 76 Seiten.

J. Gorczyca doziert Ethik an der Gregorianischen Universität in Rom. In seinem Entwurf einer christlichen Ethik geht er über die traditionelle Auffassung einer philosophischen Ethik hinaus, einer Ethik, die sich der deduktiven Methode bedient, um mit Kraft der Vernunft normative Prinzipien für das menschliche Handeln systematisch aufzubauen. Dagegen betrachtet Gorczyca die philosophische Ethik aus der anthropologischen Perspektive, d.h. aus der Perspektive des Subjektes des ethischen Denkens. Der objektive Hauptinhalt seiner Ethik bekommt dadurch eine neue Dimension.

Jedes Subjekt des ethischen Denkens, auch ein Christ, existiert in einem geschichtlich-kulturellen Kontext. In solch einem Kontext wird er zum Subjekt der philosophischen Reflexion über Moral. Zugleich aber lebt der Christ aus dem Glauben und in einer kirchlichen Gemeinde, die mit der Welt eine gemeinsame Geschichte teilt.