

Stanisław PYSZKA*

THE EVOLUTION OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING IN THE YEARS 1891-2002

Leo XIII

The proclamation of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* by Leo XIII on 15 May 1891 gave rise to what is today called the social teaching of the Church, or more precisely of the Catholic Church, since Orthodox churches did not take up the subject and Protestant churches became occupied with social issues only in the last decades of the twentieth century. Experts agree that the proclamation of this encyclical is linked with the beginning of the social teaching of the Church. There was no previous official social teaching, if we take social teaching to be a series of formal statements made by the Magisterium of the Church. At the end of the nineteenth century the Church witnessed radical political, economic and social changes, finding itself under various influences of the prevailing ideologies (CA 4). The so-called „second industrial revolution” in economic life took place in 1870-1914. *Rerum Novarum* is commonly considered the beginning of the social teaching of the Church in its modern approach¹. Until then the faithful were only warned of errors (Gregory XVI, *Mirari Vos*, 15 August 1832; Pius IX, *Syllabus*, 1864).

Before proclaiming *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII published a whole series of encyclicals, drawing on the ancient papal custom dating back to 1740 of publishing epistles on different pastoral matters, and began

* Dr Stanisław PYSZKA SJ; University School *Ignatianum*, Kraków,
Faculty of Philosophy.

¹ Czesław Strzeszewski, *Katolicka nauka społeczna w 20 lat po Soborze* [Catholic Social Teaching 20 Years after the Council], „Chrześcijanin w świecie. Zeszyty OdiSS” nos. 160-161, January-February, pp. 1-9.

to give them doctrinal authority. The ground for *Rerum Novarum* was prepared by the previous encyclicals: *Diuturnum Illud* of 29 June 1881 on the origin of government authority; *Humanum Genus* of 20 June 1884 on the dangers of freemasonry; *Immortale Dei* of 1 November 1885 on the Christian constitution of states; *Libertas Praestantissimum* of 20 June 1888 on the Christian concept of liberty and tolerance; *Sapientiae Christianae* of 10 January 1890 on Catholics' social duties; and *Graves de Communi* of 18 January 1901 – published after *Rerum Novarum* but rarely mentioned in the series of social documents – on Christian democracy².

Rerum Novarum gives not only doctrinal principles but also presents an analysis of the social situation, outlines tasks and proposes practical solutions. The publication of this encyclical took place at the climax of the social conflict of the time. The most important problem was the so-called *social question* – the situation of the industrial workers.

Leo XIII, basing theology on Christian philosophy in – although not exclusively – a neothomistic version, wished to prevent a crisis in the theology of the time. He did achieve unity and cohesion in this field. But in the long run he accelerated the crisis in Christian philosophy because it could no longer unambiguously function – as it had until then – as a theoretical basis for theology, social science and social teaching of the Church.

This insufficiency was first revealed by *the modernist question* of the twentieth century, and later by the so-called *théologie nouvelle* in the second half of that century. But the viewpoint adopted by Leo XIII as well as the continuity and homogeneity of issues in the social teaching of the Church were maintained continuously from Leo XIII through Pius XII up to John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961).

Pius X

Saint Pius X, the successor of Leo XIII, wrote no social encyclical in the strict sense of the word. But being acquainted with the contemporary movements: modernism, the first forms of Catholic Action, the Marc Sangnier *Sillon* movement³ and Charles Maurras's *Action Française*⁴ as well as legislation hostile to the Church, this Pope, with a charismatic and evangelical sensitivity in the face of the challenges of the time, was aware of the biggest threat – the laicization of all walks of life⁵.

² Tadeusz Borutka, Jan Mazur OSPPE, Andrzej Zwoliński, *Katolicka nauka społeczna* [Catholic Social Teaching], Paulinianum, Częstochowa 1999, p. 115.

³ This movement in its final stages proposed a „Christianity without a Church”.

⁴ This movement proposed a „Church without Christianity”.

⁵ Tadeusz Borutka..., *op. cit.*, p. 124.

Pius XI

Pius XI placed emphasis on Catholic Action and outlined its objectives in the encyclical *Ubi Arcano Dei* of 23 December 1922 and in the Pastoral Letter *Quae Nobis* of 13 February 1928. The aim of Catholic Action was to revive Catholic family and social life by christianizing all areas of life and by overcoming the laicism that separates culture from religion. The best known social document of this Pope is the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of 15 May 1931 on „the reconstruction of the social order” and „its perfection according to the sublime precepts of the law of the Gospel”. It proposed the so-called „corporation system” which – drawing on the experience of medieval guilds and the cohesion between the economy, culture and religion of the time – could inspire anew the twentieth-century societies. But the times had changed to such an extent that – despite the attempts to introduce the system in Austria and Portugal – the political, economical and social conditions were not conducive to its development. The next two social documents of Pius XI, directed almost simultaneously against the totalitarian systems of the time were the encyclicals: *Mit brennender Sorge* of 14 March 1937 on the situation of the Catholic Church in Nazi Germany and *Divini Redemptoris* of 19 March 1937 on „atheistic communism”, since its aims and methods of realising them cannot be reconciled with the Gospel.

Pius XII

Pius XII did not publish any separate encyclicals but he is the author of impressive social teaching, starting with *Summi Pontificatus* of 20 October 1939 and ending with *Miranda Prorsus* of 1957. The entire social teaching of Pius XII can be called a doctrine of Christian social personalism, as influenced by Jacques Maritain's philosophy and his *Integral Humanism*. Pius XII best expressed this in his Christmas Message of 24 December 1942, (Nos. 1-117), where he outlined the fundamental conditions for social order and peace. This Message is almost universally considered a true declaration of human rights, a manifesto of Christian personalism⁶. The fact that this extensive text contains only ten footnotes – seven biblical references, two references to St Thomas Aquinas and one reference to St Augustine – testifies to the exceptional erudition of the Pope. During the pontificate of Pius XII the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office issued a special decree dated 14 July 1949, concerning not only doctrines but also individual Catholics

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 135.

who confessed their communist beliefs, who disseminated communist ideas or who collaborated with communists. According to this decree those persons were excommunicated *ipso facto*. Pius XII confirmed this decree in his Christmas Message of 1952. Many priests and religious in Poland and in the so-called „people's democratic countries” were imprisoned simply for reading this decree in public. In the same Christmas message of 1952 Pope Pius XII condemned *ex post* German and Italian national socialism, maintaining that its followers „tried to destroy and suppress the Church”. In scientific literature the fact that the pontificate of Pius XII in practice prepared the Second Vatican Council and that this Pope's statements are the most frequently quoted ones in the conciliar documents is commonly forgotten⁷.

After World War II huge political, social, economical and cultural changes took place and the pace of these changes has no equal in all human history. It is enough to mention such phenomena as the blurring of class divisions, the rise in general social and political consciousness, increased international interdependence, the development of radio and television, and the manufacture of atomic energy. The Church, with its unchanging moral rules, could not be indifferent to those monumental processes. Those changes had to be considered in the general social rules and they had to be expressed in the language of the new epoch. The social question took on global dimensions.

John XXIII and Paul VI The Second Vatican Council

The subsequent pontificates of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI as well as the Second Vatican Council both revealed a crisis in the Catholic social teaching and saw its official codification. The crisis that had arisen from basing the social teaching of the Church on „Christian philosophy” lasted until John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and the Second Vatican Council which definitively stated – with all due respect for St Thomas' philosophy and its other traditional trends – that instead of supporting theological development, they slowed it down.

John XXIII in his encyclical *Mater et Magistra* intended to promote again the social teaching of the Church despite various critical statements expressed within the same Church. He also intended to make its theoretical form more precise. But after *Mater et Magistra* the Second Vatican Council started its proceedings (11 October 1962 – 8 December 1965) which gave rise to a period of great changes. The fathers of the Council came to realise that the „Christian philosophy” that up till *Mater et Magistra* and the Council was supposed to be the

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 136.

basis for the social teaching of the Church was by itself not sufficient and needed to be complemented with „verified knowledge from economics and social sciences” that was a product of the modern society and did not exist in St Thomas' times or even in the nineteenth century. So the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* did not succeed in promoting the social teaching of the Church in its previous, although changed, form.

The social teaching of the Church was also in crisis during the Second Vatican Council which was very restrained on the subject and used the expression only once in its documents (in GS no.76 where it demanded for the Church „true freedom (...) to teach her social doctrine” but without defining its content more precisely). The text of this fragment is debatable and it should actually read: „true freedom to spread her doctrine on society” (compare the later qualification made by Roberto Cardinal Tucci S.J., a conciliar expert of the time⁸).

Literature of that time contains many critical remarks on the very idea of the social teaching of the Church. There were many reasons for that, including the end of a certain era in the history of the Church brought about by great conciliar and post-conciliar changes. But there was also an essential internal reason in the very nature of the social teaching of the Church, in its form proposed by *Mater and Magistra*: „The permanent validity of the Catholic Church's social teaching admits of no doubt. She has formulated, (...), a social doctrine which points out with clarity the sure way to social reconstruction. The principles she gives are of universal application, for they take human nature into account, and the varying conditions in which man's life is lived. They also take into account the principal characteristics of contemporary society, and are thus acceptable to all” (*MM*, Nos. 218, 220).

That form was accused of „having melted in Christian philosophy”. The fact that *Mater et Magistra* based the Church's social teaching on a „Christian philosophy” which, as a philosophy of correct reasoning, would be a philosophy not only for Christians but for everyone, was – paradoxically – understood as the basic reason for its weakness⁹. John XXIII wanted the Church's social teaching to be suitable for all „men of good will” and acceptable to all (cf. *MM*, nos. 220). The Church's social teaching in *Mater et Magistra* is in fact a philosophy and not a theology, and although theology cannot exist without faith, philosophy, on the contrary, does not assume faith as a rule¹⁰.

⁸ Lino Casati, Antonio Bonora, Gianni Ambrosio, Alberto Bonandi, Giuseppe Angelini, Giuseppe Colombo, *La dottrina sociale della Chiesa*, Edizioni Glossa Srl, Milano 1989 (Polish edition: *Nauka społeczna Kościoła*, WAM, Kraków 1998), p. 15.

⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*.

The formula of the Church's social teaching proposed in *Mater et Magistra* had no chance of success in John XXIII's time for two basic reasons: firstly, no attempts at promoting again St Thomas's philosophy to the role it had previously had were successful, secondly there was a huge explosion of various trends of post-conciliar theological thought, trends that no longer invoked St Thomas's philosophy and other traditional currents in „Christian philosophy” or even opposed them. Post-conciliar theology leant more towards the „return to the sources” and biblical research, favouring the connection of reason and faith over natural law.

The tendency, strongly emphasized by the Second Vatican Council, to return to the sources resulted in putting revelational law, especially the Gospel, not natural law, in the first place¹¹. Another advantage was achieved as a result: „the fact of moving from natural law towards the Gospel made the social teaching of the Church closer to the Protestant social teaching and almost identified the former with the latter”¹². This is in agreement with the Catholic Church's relationship to other Christian denominations and even with her quest for religious values outside Christianity. „Catholics can and should – whenever possible – collaborate with people of different ideological convictions to solve socio-economic or political problems, national or global”¹³.

Up till *Mater et Magistra* the social teaching of the Church was based on principles, reflecting the situation in developed industrialised countries, particularly in Western Europe and North America. It was demonstrated even in the hermetic, strictly Catholic ecclesiastical vocabulary and in the Eurocentrism of the consecutive papal social documents. In that approach the Church's social teaching was reduced to a strictly Catholic social teaching both in regard to its content, the audience to which it was addressed, and the vocabulary in which it was expressed. Even *Mater et Magistra* and the first chapters of *Pacem in Terris* „were – paradoxically – edited with scholarly coldness”¹⁴. „Meanwhile the social teaching of the Church, a cohesive doctrine up till then, started to disintegrate in the face of the real situation. The passage from general statements to particular advice and instructions was more than logical. In fact, the world became so diverse and complex that there was hardly any problem that could be raised in the same way in all the countries”.¹⁵

¹¹ Czesław Strzeszewski, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 4.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Michel Schooyans, *Katholisches Sozialdenken bis 1967*, in: „Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik” 23 (1979), pp. 164-175.

¹⁵ P. Herder-Dorneich, *In che modo la Chiesa può dare suggerimenti etico-sociali?*, in:

It is not difficult to say that this was contrary to the universal mission of the Church. It should be possible to apply her social teaching to the situations of all countries, peoples and nations. The social teaching of the Church is losing its doctrinal character more and more and becoming pastoral teaching. Already in John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1963) we can see the transition from the teaching based on principles to a pastoral type of teaching. For the first time John XXIII expanded the audience of the Church's social teaching to „all men of good will” (*PT*, Nos. 0), which since then has become a formula for every church document, especially social one, that followed. Thus theoretical, ideological and religious differences of opinion that could determine every possibility of co-operation on the reconstruction of a sound social order (*PT*, Nos. 8-10) were separated from the attempts – made on the basis of the virtue of prudence (*PT*, Nos. 5, 46-47, 153-156) – to reach consensus of all or at least of many, or rapprochement or advantageous meeting that only yesterday was considered improper.

Pacem in Terris includes the first – in the papal social teaching – clear expression of „rights” connected to „human dignity” (*PT*, Nos. 24, 26, 34-35, 38, 48, 89, 122, 144-145, 158). The Church's social teaching is based on ethical certainties, in regard to which a possibility of consensus of „all men of good will” is presumed¹⁶. The idea was soon perfectly developed in the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Religious Freedom „Dignitatis Humanae”* (7 December 1965).

During John XXIII's pontificate there occurred a change that was continued in the social teaching of Paul VI. This change did not mean a break in continuity and homogeneity. It meant that the emphasis was clearly moved from the „inner” perspective to the perspective of the earth and the whole humanity. So the worlds perspective (the first world and „the second that is the third world”) replaced the old „occidental” perspective, characteristic of the period from Leo XIII to Pius XII. In consequence, the character of the documents changed: they became less deductive and less concentrated mostly on principles; instead they became more inductive, descriptive, and concentrated more on facts (cf. *MM*, Nos. 47-49).

Secondly, this new perspective made a clear connection between all economic and social matters and world peace. Here we can find the absolutely correct conviction that the causes of war are to be found not only in the injustices of the economic and social system, but also in the complete violation of fundamental human rights (cf. *PT*, Nos. 9, 11).

„Concilium” 4 (1968), pp. 890-905.

¹⁶ Lino Casati..., *op. cit.*

One can say that with this characteristic „change”, modern social teaching „transcended itself”, and at the same time placed itself in the centre of the essential tensions of the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore it is fully adequate and it touches the deepest levels of the contemporary problems¹⁷.

The chronologically subsequent Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (7 December 1965) is not counted – unreservedly and in its entirety – by all specialists among the documents of the Church's social teaching. But it deals with subjects characteristic of the social teaching, although to a more limited extent than the former social documents of the Church. Despite some superficialities in its reflection on the modern world and its problems, the Constitution is distinguished by the fact that it really „connects ecclesiastical teaching with its biblical sources” and secondly, that „it shows the conformity of this teaching with the fundamental requirements of human development, generally accepted by the culture of our time”¹⁸. *Gaudium et Spes* is nonetheless strongly based on scholastic philosophy, much more than on the modern believer's way of thinking.¹⁹

New ways

The post-conciliar encyclical of Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* (1967) departs even further from the previous formula of the Church's social teaching. It is characterised by „absolutely rare references, clear or supposed, to the previously gathered body of «social teaching», actually never called in that way”²⁰. There is no attempt there to take up again or make more specific the idea of „the social question”, apart from the very significant statement that „today it is most important for people to understand and appreciate that the social question ties all men together, in every part of the world” (PP No. 3). The encyclical is characterised by a novelty of language, literature gender and methods of argumentation. The literature gender consciously employed there is „exhortation which is something more than teaching” (Paul VI, 1966). The encyclical aims at offering „a global perspective on man and human realities” (PP No. 13). Its lively logical argumentation appeals to the conscience. The original element of this encyclical was quotations from

¹⁷ Vittorio Possenti, *Interview with Cardinal Karol Wojtyła „Is the social teaching of the Church possible?”* of 21 June 1978 (the full text of this interview can be found in: Vittorio Possenti, *Katolicka nauka społeczna wobec dziedzictwa Oświecenia*, WAM, Kraków 2000, Supplement 1-30.

¹⁸ Lino Casati..., *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *Ibidem.*

²⁰ *Ibidem.*

contemporary living authors (e.g. Jacques Maritain, Marie-Dominique Chenu OP, Henri de Lubac SJ or Oswald von Nell-Breuning SJ).

A characteristic feature of the chronologically next document, the Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), addressed to Cardinal Maurice Roy, President of the Pontifical Commission *Iustitia et Pax* on the occasion of the eightieth anniversary of the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, is the fact that it looks at the whole body of social facts from the perspective of the natural „environment” of human life. This environment is not to be reduced to a set of natural resources, but it shapes or at least significantly influences the complex quality of man's life and personal consciousness²¹. According to *Octogesima Adveniens* the preservation of this environment is „a wide-ranging social problem which concerns the entire human family” (OA, No. 21). The Apostolic Letter says that new social problems, such as: urbanization, the difficult dialogue between youth and the adult generations and the role of women, must “take first place among the preoccupation of Christians” „in the years to come” (OA, Nos. 7-13). They really are „a true challenge to the wisdom of man, to his capacity for organization and to his farseeing imagination” (OA, No. 10). The Letter calls for „the specific character of the Christian contribution for a positive transformation of society” (OA, No. 36), not by easy reference to the biblical text, but thanks to the effort at „a global vision of man and of the human race” (OA No. 40). It is assumed that *Octogesima Adveniens* is a document of the papal teaching in which the awareness of the complexity of the historical and social judgement and the Christian responsibility reached – at the beginning of the 1970's – their peak²².

The next document, chronologically speaking, was *De Iustitia in Mundo* (Justice in the World, Nos. 1-70), published four months after the *Octogesima Adveniens* neither by the Pope, nor the Council but by the Synod of Bishops, restored by Pope Paul VI as a permanent institution, following its session in September–October 1971. It discusses the most important issues of the time: the crisis of universal solidarity, the right of all people to development. It points to „voiceless victims of injustice” (migrants, refugees, people suffering persecution for their faith, oppressed because of restriction of the rights of individuals, including prisoners of war, unborn children). The document demands truth in the communications systems, good living conditions and recognition for the role of families, the old, orphans, the sick, and the

²¹ *Ibidem*.

²² *Ibidem*.

rejected people in social life. It also points out (Nos. 30-64) the message of the Gospel and the mission of the Church in the field of justice as well as the Church's practice of justice through bearing witness, through education for justice, co-operation between local Churches, ecumenical collaboration and international activity.

There is another document that – although not rated among the documents of the Church's social teaching – is very close to Paul VI's thoughts and welcomed by him publicly. It is Cardinal Maurice Roy's unprecedented letter of response to *Octogesima Adveniens*, directed by him to Pope Paul VI on the tenth anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, in 1973 (this text, entitled *Riflessioni Nel X Anniversario Della „Pacem in Terris”* is found in *Enchiridion Vaticanum 4. Documenti ufficiali della Santa Sede 1971-1973*, EDB, Bologna 1978, pp. 1513-1595). It contains a very important postulate of moving from the category of „natural law” to the category of „human rights”.

There are quite a few scholars (Francesco Compagnoni OP, Oswald von Nell-Breuning SJ, Ph. Delhaye) who consider the transition from „natural law” to „human rights”, or from an „objective” conception of natural law to its „personalistic” conception, to be the significant aspect of the latest evolution of the Church's social teaching²³. In his letter Cardinal Maurice Roy searches for the contemporary equivalents of the idea of human „nature” and points out a „dynamic and historical character” of this nature which „does not exist in a pure state, but in living and real persons” (Roy, 2453). Human „nature” expresses itself more strictly in a certain „order of human acts”, established by God himself, (...), „in the conscience of man, made by the Creator in his image, as an intelligent and free being” (Roy, 1450).

An original contribution of Cardinal Maurice Roy's letter is the opinion that precisely because of the fact that moral „order” is linked to the „conscience” this „order” (or respectively „this nature”) has a „dynamic and historical character”. The invoking of „human rights” without reference to real forms of social life could end up in the similar way as the excessively formalistic invoking of „natural law” in the past.

The role of the laity in the Church

The next post-synodal document is Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* of 8 December 1975. Strictly speaking, it is not a document on the social teaching of the Church, but it is worth considering because Paul VI returned in it – although in a very concise way – to the term „social teaching” of the Church. Although the term as

²³ *Ibidem*.

such does not appear in the document, it is included in the reflection on the relationship between the fundamental ministry of the Church that is „evangelization” and the tasks of the Church in the field of „human development” or „human liberation”.

The Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is not very specific on the internal content of the Church's social teaching, but it places this teaching or doctrine within the fundamental framework of the „evangelizing” ministry. There are several very important statements in this Exhortation: „ The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, (...). Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed” (*EN*, No. 20). „ Above all the Gospel must be proclaimed by witness (...). All Christians are called to this witness, and in this way they can be real evangelizers” (*EN*, No. 21). „Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the kingdom of God and therefore of salvation in Jesus Christ, without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded” (*EN*, No. 70). „Evangelization is to be the result [of the new humanity], with that unity in variety which evangelization wishes to achieve within the Christian community” (*EN*, No. 75).

The contribution of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II

There is an important text that – although not published until 1991 – illuminates the social sensibility of the later pontificate of John Paul II. It is an interview that Cardinal Wojtyła gave to Doctor Vittorio Possenti of Milan University *Sacro Cuore* on 21 June 1978 and entitled: *Is social teaching possible within the Church?* This text was not published because Cardinal Wojtyła – soon to be chosen as the next Pope – did not wish it to be, but it contained the germs of almost all the main themes of his following three social encyclicals and present social teaching.

There is no doubt that a new historical period in the Church's social teaching – following the crisis of the teaching after *Mater et Magistra*,

passing it over during the conciliar and post-conciliar time and criticising it in Europe and Latin America – began with Pope John Paul II.

His first „social encyclical” *Laborem Exercens* (1981), published on the ninetieth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*, raises – referring to the „social question” of Leo XIII – the problem of „man in the vast context of the reality of work” (*LE*, No. 1). Work is at the very centre of the „social question” (*LE*, No. 2). In his encyclical John Paul II does not summarize the previous teaching, but only mentions briefly the development of „social teaching” on justice and peace. *Laborem Exercens* is permeated with a clear intention to set out a certain kind of „biblical theology of work”²⁴. The emphasis put by John Paul II on „work and industriousness” that „also influence the whole process of education in the family” (*LE*, No. 10) is considered very original, but by some people too strong; it may suggest that work and industriousness are perhaps more important than family and society: „Work constitutes a foundation for the formation of *family life* (...). In a way, work is a condition for making it possible to found a family, since the family requires the means of subsistence which man normally gains through work” (*LE*, No. 10).

Many things point to the fact that John Paul II's success in promoting again the social teaching of the Church is – at least indirectly – related to the liberation theology (cf. Vittorio Possenti's interview with Cardinal Karol Wojtyła: *Is social teaching possible within the Church?* of 21 June 1978 and the latter's *Opening Address at the Puebla Conference of 28 January 1979*, No. 39, in which – already as John Paul II – he encouraged a return to „the social teaching of the Church, overcoming doubts and distrust” as well as the new formulation of this teaching in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 1987, No. 41). It is indicated by the concurrence of the two „Instructions” of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (”Instruction on Certain Aspects of the „Theology of Liberation” *Libertatis Nuntius*” of 6 August 1984 and „Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation *Libertatis conscientia*” of 22 March 1986) preceding this encyclical. The second of the „Instructions” is especially important, as, while opposing the liberation theology, it proposed the social teaching of the Church as the positive alternative. The fifth and final chapter entitled *The Social Doctrine of the Church: for a Christian Practice of Liberation* says that „the supreme principle of Christian social morality, founded upon the Gospel and the whole of tradition since apostolic times and the age of the Fathers of the Church up to and including the recent statements of the Magisterium” is „the great commandment of love” and it specifies that „the Church's social

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

teaching is born of the encounter of the Gospel message and of its demands summarized in the supreme commandment of love of God and neighbour in justice with the problems emanating from the life of society" (LC, nn. 71-72).

This will find its clear and consistent expression in the statement in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* that the social teaching of the Church belongs to „the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly of moral theology" (SRS, No. 41). The Central-European political theology (Johann Baptist Metz) and the South American theologies of liberation (Gustavo Gutiérrez, José Luís Segundo, Hugo Assmann, Leonardo Boff and others) are similar in their criticism of the Church's social teaching. They pointed out two main objections against it: firstly, its inefficiency, inappropriateness and objective inability to fulfil Christian tasks in the contemporary society (both the bourgeois western kind and the poor Third World one). Secondly, its betrayal of Christianity, „hiding Christianity in the folds of social ethics"²⁵, swimming with the tide of history instead of facing it, joining international capitalism and changing theology – from critical authority – into a compliant political ideology. As a result of both accusations „the social doctrine of the Church" was „rejected with disdain" by those trends (Instruction *Libertatis Nuntius* X, No. 4).

The second „social encyclical" of John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987), was published on the 20th anniversary of Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* in which the main subject of analysis was the question of the just development of peoples. A panorama of the world in the discussed 20 years does not give much cause for optimism. Despite some positive signs (e.g. greater sensitivity to man's dignity and human rights, concern for peace and natural environment), the general diagnosis is negative. „In general, taking into account the various factors, one cannot deny that the present situation of the world, from the point of view of development, offers a rather negative impression" (SRS, No. 12,13).

Among the negative phenomena the Pope enumerated the persistence and often the widening of the gap between the rich and the poor as well as the limitation of the right of economic initiative in the name of an alleged „equality" which in effect means „leveling down". The whole encyclical is imbued with concern for the right moral character of societies and nations. The just development is possible only as the fruit of authentic solidarity because „we are all really responsible for all" (SRS, No. 38). In Nos. 5 to 10 and 41 SRS raises the very important issue of the identity of the Church's social teaching.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

The third social encyclical of John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991) is the broadest and deepest document from all his social encyclicals. It is a summary of the Church's social teaching, pointing to its most important elements. John Paul II proposes to look back into the past, to look around the present and to look forward into the future. After a century Pope Leo XIII's diagnosis is astonishing because of the perspicacity of its fundamental opinions (e.g. about the future disintegration of communism and socialism). John Paul II seems to be sure that it is not enough to destroy the structures of communism, but that it is necessary to conquer it within ourselves (cf. J. Tischner, *Widnokrag...*, „Znak” No. 433/1991, p. 43).

The encyclical returns to the problem of the wrong concept of man (*PUE*, No. 20). Such concept stems from – among others – socialistic atheism which deprives the person of his foundation (*CA*, No. 13) and leads to disregard for the person's dignity and responsibility (*CA*, No. 13). It has its source in the Enlightenment rationalism that was characterized by an excessively optimistic concept of man, and hence a false conception of human freedom. This freedom has been separated from the duty of searching for truth (*CA*, No. 4). If human freedom is detached from obedience to the truth, there is a risk that its sense is distorted. Such freedom may lead to contempt for God and neighbour and may refuse to be limited by any demand of justice (*CA*, No. 17).

This is the first papal encyclical with a Polish element, because the contribution of the Polish people to the transformation of 1980-1989 is an illustration of the real influence of the Church's social teaching on history [see the prophetic sentence of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła in his interview of 21 June 1978: „Even (most often) without formal knowledge of its content, people and nations will be spontaneously, so to speak, aware of this teaching [the Church's social teaching]. (...) Christians can experience in a special way the truth of the Church's social teachings as the social Gospel of our times” (*WOJ*, Point 30)].

The Church's social teaching „is itself a valid instrument of evangelization. As such, it proclaims God and his mystery of salvation in Christ to every human being, and for that very reason reveals man to himself” (*CA*, No. 54). „In order to know man, authentic man, man in his fullness, one must know God” (Paul VI, *Speech on the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council* of 7 December 1965; *CA*, No. 55; cf. ks. Tadeusz Borutka et al. *Katolicka nauka społeczna*, pp. 164-167). This encyclical is dated the 1st of May, for decades reserved for the socialist workers' movement. It means that the church has taken the initiative and responsibility for man and shows the final fiasco of those ideologies that take upon themselves the exclusive responsibility for the world of labour.

Another kind of social teaching by John Paul II are his speeches made during his journeys, when he skilfully expresses the unchanging moral principles in the language of facts.

Letters of National Episcopates

In the course of the development of the Church's social teaching that has taken place especially since the pontificate of John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council, one cannot ignore the fact that in the 1980s national Catholic Episcopates in various countries began to publish documents more important than before, documents that stemmed from their own experiences of the local social reality and referred to it. Three of those documents are worth mentioning because of their importance and size. The first document is a statement of the Permanent Council of the Catholic Episcopate of France, published in 1982 under the title *Pour de nouveaux modes de vie*. The second is the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter published under the title of *The Challenge of Peace* in 1982. The third is an extensive pastoral letter of the US Catholic bishops *Economic Justice For All. A Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* of 18 November 1986, Nos. 1-365. These three documents may be considered as representative of the relationship between the Church's social teaching and public opinion²⁶. The third document in particular draws its inspiration from the recent social teaching of the Church, especially from the social teaching of John Paul II, but it has also had some influence itself on the Pope's subsequent encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (30 December 1987) in which one can find a broader interpretative background, defined by the meaning of the term „development”. The pastoral letter of the American bishops *Economic Justice...* applies the principles of the Church's social teaching to the analysis and evaluation of the U.S. economy.

In this sense the contemporary social teaching has also incentives to reflect on the ways of action in our society, in different sectors of its life, including the sector of Polish economic life which continues to be in crisis and which urgently needs any invigorating, healing and dynamic inspiration. Taken into consideration, the U.S. Bishops' letter makes us see „the urgent need for healing the moral thinking and moral responsibility, also in relation to the Polish economy” (cf. the introduction to the complete Polish edition of the Letter in: „Życie Katolickie” [Catholic Life], Year VII, No. 5/1988, p. 5ff). It is also necessary to mention here the pastoral letters of the Millennium Primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, and of the Polish Episcopate during his primacy, letters that

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

laid the foundations for the Solidarity movement. This phenomenon should be continued at least on the same level.

Two phases in the development of Catholic social teaching

To sum up, we can note a two-phase development process in the teaching of the Church and, before that, in her attitude to the social question. First of all we see *the transition from the widespread teaching of moral theology*, social philosophy, pastoral encouragement and the catechism maxims (the Decalogue type ones such as „do not steal” or those, like „do not cheat workers of their wages”, that come under the category of sins which „cry out to heaven for vengeance” and as such are handed down unchanged from generation to generation, to the mighty and the lowly alike) *to the formal teaching of the Popes that summarises, affirms, revises and appreciates the old and new Christian social thought.*

Four stages

From a historical point of view, there are four principal stages in the gradual development of the papal social teaching.

The first stage was rather negative. Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus* (1864), understood as a list of the condemned errors of the time, is an important and symbolic expression of the attitude of Pius IX and of his predecessors, for example when opposing freemasonry and other secret associations, laicisation and anticlericalism, liberalism, socialism, etc. It should be noted that the centuries-old practice of the Church, also during the proceedings of the councils, was to oppose, reveal and condemn errors, rather than to take positive approach to different issues. The positive theses, including dogmas, often resulted from the previous condemnations.

That practise was probably based on a certain historical and cultural premise which by the end of the nineteenth century was almost out of date: namely, that there is a Christian civilisation or a Christian character of nations (at least in the West) which are connected by the fact of accepting the common principles of faith, and that the Church should feel obliged to condemn everyone who opposed that state of affairs, doing it for the salvation of the faithful, herself and the civilisation itself. Less attention was given to direct intervention, especially in social problems, either because the true meaning of those problems was not felt or understood by the ruling classes (ecclesiastical and civil), and perhaps because of the generality of the term „people”, with the possible exception of the working class; or because it was easy to mistake those problems for political problems which included the principles of social order, the foundations of government, of the state, etc.

It should be added here that the attitude of the Church could have been influenced by a widespread – and, in fact, fully justified – conviction that she should stick to the ethical and religious matters that are her domain and let the development of economy and society take its own course. The Church, or rather the Holy See – unfortunately to some extent affected by the worldly power wielded in both the Ecclesiastical State and episcopal states, and in her relations with other countries – got involved in the matters of this world rather from the political perspective, as its part and subject co-responsible for its order. Hence the interference of the Church in the political movements of the time was mostly negative and her attention to social problems was insufficient, unless they touched on the subject of religious faith, morality or the principles of political order. The Church's attitude was defensive, which was partially connected with the period and the people of that time.

However, it is possible to find in this attitude an element that is up-to-date even now, what is more, that is understood today more than in the past as fundamental for the Church: the element of respect (and not only alienation or escape from responsibility) in the face of the gradual changes of society and its institutions which were separate from the ethical and religious order proper for the Church but which were taking place in its context and – if need be – were stopped and purged of distortions they so easily acquired.

In *the second stage* the growing awareness of the role of the Church in social matters resulted in her taking a new position, facilitated also by the new political conditions in which the Church found herself, having definitely lost her worldly power (1870). In effect the Church started to approach the problems connected with social phenomena – which the Church began to recognise – from the viewpoint of the Magisterium of the Church (for example, in economics: the phenomena of capitalism, monopolies, anonymous capital groups, workers' problems, etc.; in socio-economics: the phenomena of co-operatives, corporations, trade unions, etc.; in politics: the phenomena of totalitarian regimes, democracy, internationalism, acceptance or rejection of the possibility of wars, etc.)

Since the time of Leo XIII and his successors it has become more and more clear that Christians, beside the religious revival, should collaborate on the social revival within the framework of the redemptive function which the Church has towards all values, institutions and forms of human life. This has opened a new way of approaching and dealing with the world problems, which for the hierarchy is the teaching of the Magisterium and for „Catholics“, that is the members of the Church who want to follow her inspiration and teaching, is their social and political activity. It is a way that is controversial and difficult from

the beginning. It shows, although not quite completely, why and how the Church and Catholics are involved in social life. But in the course of time and events we can see more and more clearly that the Church occupies the position of the „master” in regard to ethical and social principles, principles which can and should be an inspiration for the contemporary *civitas* (society).

Also, when with Pius XI and Pius XII the papal documents went deeper into the legal and political questions about the organisation of society (cf. Pius XI's comments on the corporation system and Pius XI's call for a democratic system against totalitarianism), all the statements of the Church followed the teaching of the Magisterium. The same can be said about the documents of John XXIII and Paul VI which also touch on some technical aspects of the contemporary social development.

However, one can observe that the attitude of the Magisterium from Leo XIII until Pius XII was different from its attitude later on. In the first period it was mainly deductive. It confirmed and demanded that the principles of natural law and of the Gospel should be adhered to, and then deduced from them the solutions to the problems we should face, judging them – so to say – in advance. It does not mean that this deductive Magisterium did not know the problems, but it considered and dealt with them precisely from that perspective.

In the *third stage* Pope Pius XII in his radio broadcasts and then Pope John XXIII in his two encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in Terris* (1963) still followed the form of doctrine, almost treatise, but they devoted more attention to „social phenomenology”. Especially the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* was written from the new perspective, although it did not use the inductive method only. Also Paul VI's encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and his apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971) followed the same method in their doctrinal parts. The situation is similar with other conciliar and synodal documents.

In the *fourth stage* the papal statements (and similarly the statements of Bishops' Conferences and of the Synods of Bishops) are not so much doctrinal treatises, but they are primarily addresses, appeals and sometimes even announcements, addressed to both the believers and non-believers, although based on doctrine and describing social phenomena. It can be said that the Church reached a *prophetic dimension* in her statements on social matters, perhaps also in reaction to a certain general „over-sensitivity” to „social doctrine”, questioning not only its legal validity but also its very existence. There is no doubt that a prophet's mission is difficult and full of dangers. It is easier to find fault with the words and actions of a prophet than with treatises. One can also find there debatable points, appeals falling on deaf ears, and even errors in historical and ideological evaluation. Hence the *prophetic dimension* may mean that the severity and certainty of the Magisterium will be softened and it may turn out to be more flexible than other ways of action. Under

specific historical conditions it may become the obligatory way of carrying out the Church's „evangelizing mission to the poor”, because the aim is always, regardless of different ways and dimensions, to proclaim the Gospel – as St Paul said – „in time and not in time”.

As Pope Paul VI wrote, „it is necessary to situate the problems created by the modern economy in the wider context of a new civilization. (...) In the present changes, which are so profound and so rapid, each day man discovers himself anew, and he questions himself about the meaning of his own being and of his collective survival. Reluctant to gather the lessons of a past that he considers over and done with and too different from the present, man nevertheless needs to have light shed upon his future – a future which he perceives to be as uncertain as it is changing – by permanent eternal truths. These are truths which are certainly greater than man but, if he so wills, he can himself find their traces (cf. 2 Cor 4:17)” (OA, No. 7; cf. also: Paul VI, *Speech to the members of the Pontifical Commission „Iustitia et Pax”*, „L'Osservatore Romano” of 9-10 December 1977: „*Les principes de la doctrine sociale de l'Eglise sont toujours valables, mais ils doivent, pour être compris et être efficaces, trouver de nouvelles explicitations en fonction des données de notre temps et de ses besoins. [The principles of the Church's social teaching are always valid but if they are to be comprehensible and effective, their content has to be explained with regard to our times and their needs]*”). The Church acts and teaches in this wider perspective. And the more it is faithful to her mission in regard to the methods, persons and spirit, the more it will be convincing and it will be able to support man in all aspects of life, including social changes.

The main ideas, more or less strongly present in individual documents and dominant in all the Catholic social teaching expounded in them in the light of natural law, are as follows: 1) the value and rights of man as a person; 2) the necessity of building a well-ordered society that upholds principles of peace; 3) positive value of culture, progress and social development; 4) the teaching function of the Church which is familiar with human problems, open to progress but also „an expert in humanity” (compare Paul VI, *Speech to the United Nations Organization* of 4 October 1965, No. 1), in regard to evolution and building a new society. The teaching function of the Church is also a fundamental service that society needs, because it ensures a higher objectivity of truth without which justice is illusory and co-existence in happiness and peace is impossible.

Three problems

Putting it still in another way: as far as the evolution of Catholic social teaching is concerned, we can distinguish three problems.

The first one concerns *the meaning of the present social teaching of the Church*. From Leo XIII's time until today Catholic social teaching has undergone great evolution both in regard to its content and the very

meaning of its formulations, so that nowadays the same expressions mean things that in some respects are continuation of the past achievements, but in others are deeply different. Many Catholics, ignorant of the evolution of the post-conciliar Catholic social teaching, understand it as it was meant before the Council and therefore they are ready to reject it spontaneously.

The second problem concerns *the general usefulness of the Church's social teaching for solving the problems of the contemporary world*. The influence of the Church in the field of social relations seems, to many people, to be infected with exaggerated moralism that fails to get to the objective structural roots of evil, especially so because the political and social experiences inspired by that teaching appear not to have got the expected results.

The third problem is even more important: it concerns directly *the legal validity of the Church's social teaching*. Today many people do not agree that „social teaching” can be derived from the Gospel and they reject the fact that the Church can express her opinion in socio-economic matters.

Others contend that in fact „Catholic social teaching” necessarily collaborates with social conservatism, especially in such matters as divorce, abortion, euthanasia, contraception, homosexual marriage, genetic engineering, etc.

Still others are aware of the fact that during the pontificate of John Paul II and thanks to his personality Catholic social teaching has not only achieved cohesion and identity but also has reached an unprecedented influence and expansion, confirmed by the return to the concept of human rights and, consequently, by the events that took place in Central and Eastern Europe after 1980, by the end of the cold war, by the break-up of the Yalta Treaty arrangements, by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, by the extension of NATO and by the extension, still in progress, of the European Community.

Stanisław PYSZKA

EWOLUCJA KATOLICKIEJ NAUKI SPOŁECZNEJ

Streszczenie

Powyższy artykuł jest nieco skróconą i poprawioną wersją angielską artykułu opublikowanego po polsku pod tym właśnie tytułem w „Forum Philosophicum”, 8: 2003, s. 121-150.