

Rev. Bogusław Drożdź\*

## ON THE AREAS OF UPDATING THE SOCIAL MINISTRY OF CHURCH: A PASTORAL COLUMN\*\*

**Abstract:** Social ministry of Church joins complementary two forms of activity: social pastoral work and social apostleship. This ministry has its roots in fundamental functions of Church: teaching, sanctifying and pastoral. The social ministry of Church can be particularized by analysis of its theological foundations and characteristics of its dynamic presence in three field: teaching-educational, moral-ritual and community-organizational.

**Keywords:** social ministry of the Church, social pastoral work, social apostleship, pastoral theology, practical theology.

Theological science cannot do without methodical reflection, within which the definition of concepts in their denotative and connotative depth holds an irreplaceable place. No less importance should be attributed to the applied methods or other means through which the established goals can be achieved. These and other elements constituting the theological field of knowledge should stimulate sufficient motivation for the theologian, guided by the art of understanding the formal object, to objectively and thoroughly study the proper subject of his interests. These requirements are important. Keeping them in mind, however, one can sometimes – let's say, in a workshop-like manner – take a slightly different direction, which here, in this presentation, we call a pastoral column. Without characterizing this approach to present some “thing”, let us only signal that the strictly scientific methodology of practicing theology, though absent here, in the broadest sense of the word, it is at its core.

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\* Ks. Bogusław Drożdź – prezbiter diecezji legnickiej, doktor habilitowany (teologia pastoralna), profesor nadzwyczajny Papieskiego Wydziału Teologicznego we Wrocławiu, ORCID: 0000-0001-9453-2777; e-mail: drozd@perspectiva.pl.

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The chosen subject of our reflection is the social ministry of the Church, which complementarily joins two forms of activity: social pastoral work and social apostolate. This ministry is rooted in the fundamental functions of the Church: teaching, sanctifying, and pastoral. In the process of its definition, without specifying either the proper methods or subjects, at least four areas can be observed: the theological foundations of this ministry, its implementation in the field of education, next its presence in the area of customs and rituals, and its participation in the building of a community formed around the values of the common good.

#### 1. FROM THE BANK OF THOUGHTS ON THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SOCIAL MINISTRY OF CHURCH

The theological perspective on the social ministry of Church primarily calls for paying closer attention to the considerable confusion in understanding the concept of humanity and society as the natural environment for individual and social life. This likely arises from the fact that the distinction between the humanities and philosophy has been eliminated. Modern humanistic thought easily appropriates all philosophical reflections, which leads to various concepts of humanity and society being presented as justifiable and no less valid than others.

The teaching of the up-to-date Church, which respects rational premises and is supported by a well-developed realistic philosophy, especially metaphysics, carefully examines the humanities, particularly those that seek definitional projects determining the nature and destiny of humanity solely through psychological-social and historical-cultural premises. Therefore, a very clear pastoral conclusion emerges here: when undertaking pastoral and apostolic tasks, one should draw abundantly from the intellectual resources of the Church, which is a true expert on human being, his unique nature and fascinating vocation.

Knowledge of theological anthropology is essential for conducting a convincing social dialogue. By its nature, this dialogue should increasingly explore the truth about man, his social nature, the desired love, and the spontaneous openness to God, in whom only the human being can find happy fulfillment.

The currently sufficient, yet constantly expanding knowledge of humanity that the Church's teaching holds within itself harmoniously corresponds with the theological teaching about God and the Church community, which is the Mystical Body of Christ. This theological-ecclesial context of the recognized truth about man outlines at least several specific conditions that must be considered, especially when formulating pastoral conclusions within the framework of the social ministry carried out by the Church toward contemporary humanity.

First of all, the social ministry of the Church in defining its tasks cannot be satisfied only with the fact of initiating and sustaining social activism. If the Church needs sophisticated theological, philosophical, and humanistic knowledge for its social actions, it is also to ensure that it never loses sight of the personal bond with God, who wants humanity to come to Him together with others in the community established by Christ of the Church. The horizontality of actions must be built upon the verticality of trust in God and the Church, and must necessarily flow from it, which also means that every pastoral or apostolic activity within the human community has one goal of which is the spiritual construction of the Church community.

Secondly, the renewal of society in the religious and moral dimension is not possible without the continual conversion of individual Christians. A living, constantly refreshed internal dialogue with God provides a sufficiently strong motivation for Christians undertaking specific tasks within the human community.

Thirdly, the religious and moral shape of personal life always becomes a testimony to society – a testimony that is either fully conscious or involuntary. This social testimony has an institutional character, meaning that the believer is a witness to the Church institution to which they voluntarily belong. The obligation to give a truly Christian testimony applies to all Christians, especially priests and apostles of social life, who understand that the name of the saving Jesus should become increasingly recognizable.

Fourthly, every person, and especially the Christian, enjoying inalienable natural and supernatural dignity, is called to realize in himself of God's sonship as participation in the sonship of Jesus Christ. The social ministry of the Church draws from the fact of the obedience of the Son of God to the Father a social relationship of incomparable love that is incomparable to anything, which connects God's fatherhood with God's sonship, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, bestows this loving bond upon every human community, even the smallest one.

Fifthly, the Kingdom of God preached by Christ is the perfect community of persons gathered around one Shepherd and guided by one law of God's love. The Church of Jesus Christ, calling every person to take their prepared place in God's Kingdom, simultaneously encourages them to authentic *metanoia*, offering them the word of God, sanctifying them through the sacraments, and sharing with them that pastoral love, which, while guiding, can never lose one's way.

Sixthly, it is important to listen to and understand the arguments of the teaching Magisterium regarding man, who is the most important route of the Church, because only in Christ is the human mystery fully explained, in its personal, social, and religious nature. This teaching, revealing the Christological context, is continually refreshed by the breath of the Holy Spirit who dwells permanently in the Church, and it sets the course for ongoing reflection, whether scientific or meditative, which should be diligently and thoughtfully practiced by all who, whi-

le spiritually rebuilding themselves, simultaneously act in the social field of the life of the Church and the world.

## 2. THE TANGO OF TWO: THE SOCIAL MINISTRY OF CHURCH AND THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD

From the fact that the Church of Christ is the salutary instrument, a fundamental general conclusion arises for the social updating of its ministry in the field of education. Both pastoral ministry and the apostolate of lay people in the human community require a constant awareness that the Church, by its nature, is a competent educational institution. In leading people to salvation, it teaches them love, which is especially manifested through forgiveness and justice, as well as the responsible use of freedom.

It is necessary to multiply those actions of the Church whose goal is the promotion of Christian pedagogy with its educational system, built around the axiology defined by the Church's teachings. Its center is the truth about man, God – the Creator and Redeemer, and the nature of community. The increased promotion of Christian education in a pluralistic society is an imperative. It will protect students from the destructive influence of anti-pedagogical tendencies, highlighted by those educational systems that appeal to a distorted and, therefore, incomplete concept of man.

If anti-pedagogy is supported by the alienations ingrained in culture, then calling Christians to embrace true cognitive, religious-moral, and community-building values is participating in Church pedagogy. The Church obliges everyone to take responsibility for Christian education, starting with marriages and families, through groups, movements, and Catholic associations, and ending with individual believers. Every entity within the Church, whether hierarchical-institutional, communal-charismatic, or personal-individual, must be constantly motivated to engage in mature educational actions, whether directly or as part of the fulfillment of other purposeful tasks.

In the promotion of Christian education, the participation of mass media must not be overlooked. They, shaping public opinion, significantly influence the education of children and young people. One must accept the thesis that the voice of the media today strongly modifies the educational message of parents, the school environment, or the parish community, more than might be apparent. Today's media create alternative educational spaces compared to what was, and still is, conveyed in a more institutionalized manner. Contemporary media, in fact, create educational environments and, beyond pastoral diagnosis, primarily require bold evangelical engagement. This means that they should truly become effec-

tive tools leading individuals to direct contact of the human being with Person of Christ Himself.

Therefore, the modern parish faces not only the task of launching a parish website, but also the use of other electronic devices, with mobile phones and digital platforms at the forefront, to convey the evangelical message. It is not about creating, for example, an internet café at every parish church. A more important issue seems to be the method or strategy of spreading existing Catholic websites among parishioners, which convey the Christian message of salvation in an engaging way. The process of spreading these websites should be well-planned, as only a properly conducted promotional strategy allows them to be recognized by the audience as highly attractive means of evangelical communication.

An important pastoral issue is also the so-called media apostolate. It may involve dialogue conducted on the parish website or in the pages of the parish magazine. Dialogue among parishioners can be particularly effective, as it not only engages the intellectual involvement of the participants but also teaches self-control over the emotions that are triggered. In this situation, dialogue becomes an Areopagus for witnessing one's own Christian life. It is no longer just a space for ordinary polemics or discussion, but a place of encounter with the evangelical truth.

Priests and apostolically engaged lay Catholics should be constantly motivated to engage in social activity through means of communication. There are many opportunities for their proper preparation, with the appropriate spiritual, intellectual-technical, and emotional formation. These opportunities are available at the diocesan level, and often at the deanery or parish level. It is important that those who are already competently prepared be involved with decisive courage and administrative-financial determination in the pastoral-apostolic life at every possible diocesan-parochial level. This task, which falls on the diocesan bishop and the parish priest, must be updated with full responsibility. The common good of every parish community demands this, as well as the uniqueness of the Good News, the dignity, and the vocation of man. If we can speak today of a new parish function, then certainly the "novelty" of the modern parish is not possible without Christian pedagogy, which utilizes a variety of means of social communication.

The updating of the social ministry Church sensitizes to it that true education is not possible without genuine dialogue. Without it, education becomes indoctrination, and on a practical level, it manifests as a disciplining drill. On the other hand, the dialogue without education is merely an exchange of views or just a monologue. In present-day times, dialogue with people of good will on religious and moral topics seems more desirable than ever, as the person of the early 21st century, formed in an atmosphere of specialization, professionalism, and fragmentation, often loses sight of the whole. Focusing the mind and will on sought-after things, undertaken actions, settled matters, and expected impressions,

without a broader context, not only makes it impossible to educate toward true values but also directly dehumanizes, turning a person into, if not a producer, then certainly a consumer. Keeping this in mind, it is essential to engage in dialogue about God, the salvation of the soul, and the greatness of human vocation. From a pastoral perspective, if the situation demands it, pastoral or apostolic dialogue should be preceded by a dialogue on other topics that particularly interest the conversation partner. Hence, sensitivity to a more expanded thematic conversation by those initiating and leading such dialogue should not only be declared but, above all, consciously enforced. Of course, this requires thorough preparation of the priests and apostolically engaged lay Catholics. As a result, it may turn out that the pluralism of views and ideas that fills today's culture no longer hinders the path to God but instead provides a "fortunate" starting point for the dialogue of salvation.

### 3. THE DOMAIN OF CUSTOMS AND RITUALS IN THE EMBRACE OF THE HEALING POWER OF CHURCH MINISTRY

The area of customs and rituals is another multifaceted domain of the pastoral realization of the Church's social ministry. This area encompasses three cultural environments that are crucial for the individual as well as for a specific community of believers. First, it is about family, followed by the difficult human situations that cry out for help, and also the challenging struggle of the individual, particularly in the sphere of Christian values, with cultural patterns functioning in a given society, which, although already established, are constantly subject to further changes.

In the such outlined cultural environments, the goal of the Church's social ministry is the real reception of the model "civilization of love" developed by the Church. This reception should bring about the following effects. First, the social ministry of the Church, carrying the message of the "civilization of love" into the situations of married and family life, should primarily be updated in such a way that the redemptive message of Jesus Christ trigger the existential need to be truly faithful to God and His commandments. If the "civilization of love" is being built through the "civilization of faithfulness", then truly "domestic churches" will be built, where the process of personalizing individuals through education will result in the personalization of the life of entire societies, first local, and later broader. The "civilization of faithfulness" must, of course, be transposed into specific pastoral and apostolic tasks. Their enumeration in various church programs is already abundant. Nonetheless, their implementation requires constant, long-term, and well-thought-out efforts.

The Church's charitable ministry, through which the social ministry of the Church, as pastoral and social apostolate, seeks specific people to provide help with their existential-material and educational-spiritual needs, actively builds the

“civilization of love”. Keeping in mind, however, that the particular tool enabling its “reign” in human society is the knowledge and actual reception of the Church’s social teaching, there arises the condition that every help given should especially occur in an atmosphere of ethical-social principles, exceptionally the principle of subsidiarity. Let the “civilization of love” always be the “civilization of subsidiarity”. This pastoral conclusion is important for several fundamental reasons. First, subsidiarity always sees in the person in need an irreplaceable and inalienable human dignity, and through faith – a person in need of Christ. Second, subsidiarity most effectively educates toward self-help, just as education leads to self-education. Neither subsidiarity nor education will fulfil their mission, if they do not find two cooperating attitudes on the horizon of their actions: self-help and self-education. Third, subsidiarity in its very name urges the giving of help even when the appropriate church structures are not yet functioning or when it seems that available resources and means are insufficient. Subsidiarity simply always has something to offer. Achieving the “civilization of love” expected by the Church is not possible through so-called shortcuts. It cannot be built through mere slogans or a series of such or other decrees or appointments. Similarly, proclaiming pastoral or apostolic programs without clearly defined goals, the updating of which must be subject to control in terms of the implementation of specific stages and the selection of means, will likely not yield the expected results. The “civilization of love” simply demands a courageous “civilization of faith and reason”. This condition is intended to serve as a constant reminder that the cultural patterns functioning in society, i.e., customary, religious-moral and legal patterns, are currently such, because the normative codes are as they are and no other.

Just, these codes must be consistently satisfied with Christian values through various pastoral and apostolic actions. To put it mildly, in the community of God’s people, it is not acceptable to support attitudes of “being offended” on those who think or act differently, much less to discredit the functioning of various social or state structures and institutions, which often operate in their environments based solely on a laboriously obtained social consensus. To bring about real changes in customs, religious-moral values, or laws, one must take the pathway of “small steps” in individual and communal apostolate and enter these different cultural environments in order to evangelize them from within. The “civilization of faith and reason” will be realized to the extent that the promotion – so to speak – of the “interior” will be more important than the “external” side of things in every dimension of pastoral-apostolic activity: spiritual-ascetical, marital-family, associative, and decision-making-organizational, as well as in the moral-social sphere regarding civic behavior.

The construction of the “civilization of love” in the light of the social ministry of the Church is thus concretized and reduced to three overlapped pastoral-apostolic processes: the “civilization of faithfulness”, the “civilization of subsidiarity”,

and the “civilization of faith and reason”. The Church is confident that pastoral work and social apostolate, by penetrating the sphere of customs and rituals in the individual and communal life of human beings, empowered by the Holy Spirit and the testimony of Christians, is able of effecting a moral transformation of the person in the spirit of Catholic faith.

#### 4. THE SOCIAL MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH AS THE ARCHITECT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNITY

The full unity of every human being with God, as well as the joy of being in communion with others, is a fundamental goal of the Church’s social ministry. The format of the community, as well as the way it is built based on the teachings of the Church, are clearly defined in general principles. The content of these principles is rooted in and stems from the mystery of the most perfect Community of the Triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Its essential model is also revealed in the image of love between Christ – the Bridegroom – and the Church – the Bride. Clear assistance in understanding what is happening within the community of God’s people is also found in the process of increasingly recognizing the common good of the Church. Its two characteristic dimensions: immanent and instrumental, suggest how and why the common good of the Church has such a significant impact on the formation of ecclesial community, as well as every other community in the temporal order of social life. It is, after all, the common good of all humanity. The pastoral conclusion regarding the continuous deepening of knowledge about the common good of the Church appears particularly important in the present reality, which is often defined as pluralistic. The awareness of pastors and lay Catholics should be raised in this matter, as a well-illustrated common good of the Church will certainly stimulate action aimed at building human unity on various levels of social and cultural life. In the common good lie the forces that set free new motivations; within it are also hidden initiatives and goals, as well as criteria for selecting pastoral and apostolic means.

The concept of the common good of the Christ’s Church has not been, and is not, a special subject of study in pastoral sciences. It seems that intensifying academic reflection towards more systematic analyses of the common good of the Church could eventually introduce methodologically important premises into pastoral theology, the consideration of which would result in new reflections or even theories. New achievements in pastoral theory will certainly open up additional areas of action in ecclesial practice.

The dynamism of the Church’s common good, expressed through the realization of salvation in the proclaimed Word, the sanctifying Sacrament, and the building pastoral Love, results in a more conscious participation of Christians not



only in the life of the community of God's people but also in the life of the political or international community. Love for God and neighbor, being a personal love for the common good of the Christ's Church, can and should be a model for the love focused on the temporal common good. It is this love that unites the various spheres of human life – local, regional, national, or international – with the gift of unity. A good Christian is and should be a good citizen. Sensitivity to the common good is simply a desirable social virtue that should be constantly practiced, and for Christians, the residents of particular communities, it becomes a binding element of a proper pro-social attitude.

Among the pastoral conclusions, one should recognize the call for conscious and voluntary participation in political and economic life. A Christian has much to offer to the community in which they live, bearing witness to their faith. Regardless of the type of community – whether natural, in accordance with nature, or free – each one is an important place where the living word of the Good News of the Savior should be heard.

The Church is the instrument of the saving Christ, and therefore a Christian, whether a priest or a lay Catholic, individually or as a member of a Christian association, cannot be unaware of the Church's social teaching. In light of this teaching, they can not only discern the threats that destroy the social and political-economic life, but above all, they can discover their irreplaceable place within it. The Church's social teaching is a tool for active political-economic life, which every Christian should effectively use. It should be especially utilized by members of Catholic associations: movements, communities, groups, and particularly associations. Church hierarchs are obliged to do everything possible to ensure that the light of the Church's social teaching reaches every Christian. Today, in a pluralistic society where various political ideologies are almost unrestrictedly promoted, this imperative seems to be a priority in pastoral work and social apostolate.

Certainly, in the sphere of political engagement, the issue of peace must be emphasized. A Christian must know that the path to peace is through justice and love, which should be realized daily at every level of personal and social life. This means that peace “fit for” a redeemed human being cannot be achieved without transcendent references that elevate human dignity to God's sonship, and without respecting God's laws, which alone truly explain the basic human rights. Building peace is a constant obligation for the Church's social ministry. Specific tasks on how to do this morally well and effectively should be continually developed and implemented in the practice of ecclesial life.

The sphere of economic life, which affects all people, particularly connects members of the Christ's Church. Its moral renewal, aimed at placing all economic and financial matters at the appropriate level within the hierarchy of values, is a priority for the Church. Promoting the personalistic dimension of work as a fundamental principle and lifestyle, where the focus should first be on “being” rather

than simply “having”, is meant to remind the faithful of the Church – and through their testimony, all others – that consumerism, in light of Christian ethics, generates morally destructive human attitudes that directly prevent the full personal and social development of a person.

In the context of globalization processes, the social ministry of the Church has much to offer the modern world. Above all, the Church calls for the creation of such economic order in which no person is excluded from benefiting from goods due to an unjust distribution. Even if not all goods are rightfully theirs due to their relationship with the work they undertake, or if they have been unjustly taken from them, everything must be done in the spirit of evangelical care to ensure that the lack of basic goods necessary for life and development does not push the individual and their family to the social margin. The integral development of all peoples, strongly promoted today through the Church’s teachings, calls for justice and freedom, which, in the context of solidarity, reveal the face of Christ in the heart of every person, building family, national, and universal community.

## CONCLUSION

The above presentation, on the one hand, raises issues related to the social ministry of the Church, and on the other hand, treats them merely as a subject of personal reflection, devoid of a scientific framework. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning a certain achievement. This column is an intentional attempt to capture the entirety of the issues suggested in the article’s topic. The author, setting this goal, sought a way to avoid oversimplifying the multifaceted nature of the Church’s social ministry, while simultaneously staying within the loosely defined methodological requirements of what was initially framed as a pastoral column. Therefore, these reflections are only an attempt to gather the “poppy” of the issue scattered across the socio-cultural space of pastoral struggles. This reflection, though not comprehensive, has been framed in a workshop style. Such a study-oriented approach allowed for the recognition of a colorful palette of pastoral issues that arise at the intersection of the mutual interplay between the Church community and society, which is more or less immersed in various interpretations of meaning.

O OBSZARACH AKTUALIZACJI SPOŁECZNEJ POSŁUGI KOŚCIOŁA:  
FELIETON PASTORALNY

**Streszczenie:** Społeczna posługa Kościoła łączy w sobie dwie uzupełniające się formy działalności: duszpasterstwo społeczne i apostołstwo społeczne. Posługa ta ma swoje korzenie w podstawowych funkcjach Kościoła: nauczaniu, uświęcaniu i duszpasterstwie. Społeczną posługę Kościoła można uszczegółowić analizując jej podstawy teologiczne i cechy jej dynamicznej obecności na trzech polach: nauczająco-wychowawczym, moralno-obrzędowym i wspólnotowo-organizacyjnym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** posługa społeczna Kościoła, duszpasterstwo społeczne, apostołstwo społeczne, teologia pastoralna, teologia praktyczna.