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AXIOLOGY OF THE ETHICAL AND SOCIAL TEACHINGS OF JOHN PAUL II: A RESEARCH PROBLEM

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the research problem of the reconstruction and presentation of the axiological layer of the ethical and social teachings of John Paul II, which is implicitly included in his papal writings and documents. The innovative nature of this research results from the fact that until now none of the known publications of his teachings have systematically and thoroughly laid out axiological problems, which constitute an immanent part of his teaching. Papal teaching is generally subjected to analytical and synthetic research from the point of view of theology, Catholic social science, sociology, political sciences and at times philosophy, but never from the point of view of the theory of values. The research will be the first attempt to synthesize the axiological thought of the transcendental humanism of John Paul II.

Keywords: axiology, values, doctrine of the Catholic Church, transcendental humanism, theory of values, socio-ethical teaching

AKSJOLOGIA NAUCZANIA ETYCZNO-SPOŁECZNEGO JANA PAWŁA II. PROBLEM BADAWCZY

Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest podjęcie problemu badawczego, jakim jest zrekonstruowanie i zaprezentowanie aksjologicznej warstwy nauczania etyczno-społecznego Jana Pawła II, która implicite zawarta jest w pismach i dokumentach papieskich. Nowatorski charakter problemu badawczego wynika z tego, iż do tej pory w żadnych ze znanych publikacji dotyczących tego nauczania nie ma opracowanej, w sposób systematyczny i gruntowny, problematyki aksjologicznej, która stanowi jego immanentną część. Nauczanie papieskie poddawane jest na ogół badaniom analityczno-syntetycznym z punktu widzenia teologii, katolickiej nauki społecznej, socjologii, politologii, czasami filozofii, natomiast nigdy z punktu widzenia teorii wartości. Przeprowadzone badania będą stanowić pierwszą próbę syntezy myśli aksjologicznej humanizmu transcendentnego Jana Pawła II.

Słowa kluczowe: aksjologia, wartości, doktryna Kościoła katolickiego, transcendentny humanizm, teoria wartości, nauczanie społeczno-etyczne

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the proposed research will be reconstruction and critical analysis of the axiological thought of John Paul II. We will also strive to illustrate the reception of the axiological thought of John Paul II. We believe that this project is the response to the lack of such studies in the area of axiological research. We assume that there is an integral and specific axiological system in the Pope's writings and statements that has not been described in detail to date, which must prompt consideration.

A series of arguments indicates that this is not a question which we have already positively answered. A) The synthesis of the axiological work of John Paul II has not been formulated to date. We can only guess it on the basis of the papal writings and statements, as well as a few scattered attempts of their axiological analysis. B) It is reasonable to argue that the Pope, due to the office he serves, must proclaim principles of axiology resulting from theological doctrine of the Catholic Church, of which he is the official depositary. However, this does not mean that scientific research on the issue itself should not be undertaken.

The fact that we are dealing with the thought of the Pope cannot negate the need for a critical analysis of his axiological thought. It seems interesting to investigate whether Pope John Paul II contributed something new to Christian axiology. An important example which arises in this context is the different approach to axiological understanding of the dialogue category. Pope John Paul II was an advocate of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue (he is frequently called "the Pope of dialogue"). He was also the organiser of regular meetings in Assisi with representatives and spiritual leaders of various churches and religions. Thus, he needed to go beyond the narrow and confessional understanding of the axiological doctrine of the Catholic Church, such as the kind of understanding proposed by Pius XI in his encyclical *Mortalium Animos* (Pius XI 1928). In that document the Pope criticised false ways to uniting religions, and thus also rejected dialogue, because he believed that it led to meetings, conventions, lectures and conferences, which could suggest that all religions are good and praiseworthy (Pius XI 1928). This text reveals a completely different perspective that John Paul II adopted in the area of dialogue.

We believe that it is erroneous to assume that John Paul II's ethical and social teaching, and hence, the axiology that set them (Jan Paweł II 2005) were unchanged in relation to his predecessors, because the Pope perceived new problems arising from the "spirit of the times" and took into account the truths and values that had previously not been sufficiently recognised, or have been noticed to a small extent. It seems to us that the Pope adopted a different approach to looking at and solving these problems, which resulted from a different perception of humanity and society. We believe that John Paul II did not derive the status of a human person, his dignity, human rights resulting from it and human "rightful autonomy" (Jan Paweł II 2005, 51-52) from the concept of natural law and Revelation which are a specific Christian humanism built on the biblical quotations – but rather emphasised the soteriological way of recognising the dignity of a human person, which guarantees the transcendental

character of the Church's action as well as the independence and autonomy of the earth reality. It seems, therefore, that John Paul II approached the concept of "natural law" cautiously, wishing to avoid framing humanity and society in such a way that would simplify reality, reducing it to broadly understood anthropocentrism, in which there is no place for such categories as sin, salvation, etc., and which are necessary for complete understanding and explanation of temporal reality.

We put forward the hypothesis that although John Paul II's axiology is anthropocentrically oriented, this anthropocentrism has a specific character, which may be described as, following the trend of John Paul II's statements, as transcendental humanism or "true humanism". The justification for this formulation can be found in: John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, no. 10. The Pope writes: "The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his own being – he must approach Christ with his anxiety, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death" (Jan Paweł II 1982, 19), which remains more closely associated with Christ (Jan Paweł II 1982, 19), since, according to the Pope, "in Christ and through Christ, humanity has achieved full awareness of its dignity, its elevation, the transcendental value of its humanity, the sense of its being" (Jan Paweł II 1982, 21), and "people cannot fully understand themselves without Christ. They cannot understand who they are or what their proper dignity is, or what their ultimate vocation and destiny are" (Jan Paweł II 1979, 22). We put forward the hypothesis that John Paul II's transcendental humanism is rooted in his earlier philosophical thought, from the period of his work in teaching and research. This hypothesis is naturally justified by the fact that Karol Wojtyła ascended to the papal throne with a developed axiological background. He came to the papacy with a specific axiological background. He was a determined theologian, a scholar of Thomism, as well as phenomenological philosophy, especially the theory of values of Max Scheler, who was the subject of his habilitation dissertation (Wojtyła 1991). In addition to Christian axiology, the Pope also had a broad experience with the ideologies of Marxism, Leninism, Nazism and fascism as systems of denying Christian values. He also had a deep awareness and experience of progressive secularisation and practical atheisation. We therefore believe that the official papal documents and statements had to contain his earlier intellectual legacy in the area of axiology.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PROJECT AND THE CURRENT STATE OF KNOWLEDGE

Reading and analysis of scientific literature on the social teaching of John Paul II makes it clear that there is no position in the publishing market that would systematically and explicitly show the axiology to which John Paul II referred his ethical, social as well as theological teaching. Meanwhile, the subjects raised by scholars of papal thought, both in Poland and abroad, the range of which is impressive, are limited to more or less accurate presentation or interpretation of the Pope's thought, which emerges from the available documents and speeches.

Nevertheless, we have not found any monographs that would be strictly devoted to attempts at reconstructing the axiology on which John Paul II's ethical, social and theological teaching are based on or to which they refer. Indeed, many of these items take up such issues as human dignity, work, peace, justice, dialogue, human rights, solidarity, the issue of women, ecumenical dialogue, interreligious dialogue; however, such texts have a purely descriptive character and usually reduce to quoting speech fragments, without drawing or reconstructing a comprehensive overview of a given value along with its genesis, or its ontic or epistemological status. It may seem that authors writing on this subject fear making far-reaching axiological interpretations.

These publications are usually theological analyses, sometimes sociological, rarely theological, and practically never axiological. There are also frequent texts without any deeper understanding, being rather religious journalism instead. It should be noted that the existing publications, especially those with multiple authors, often "pretend" to be monographs, being *de facto* publications of loosely related post-conference materials with a new title. On the publishing market it is easy to find books that are the aftermath of finalised and funded research projects, which relate to various aspects of the writings and pastoral work of John Paul II, but their substantive quality is unsatisfactory. For example, in the book *Jan Paweł II i Europa [John Paul II and Europe]*, published by a major scientific publisher, one of the researchers writes: "The Pope's *de facto* controversial words in the encyclical *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* remain somewhat at odds with what John Paul II does to deepen the dialogue" (Janiak 2009, 294). This fundamental mistake of the writer's ignorance which was not picked up either by the book reviewers or corrected by its editors shows a certain superficiality, dilettantism and even a lack of competence in undertaking research in this area.

The attempt to reconstruct the axiology of the ethical and social as well as theological body of work is justified by the inadequate state of research into this specific aspect of it. The fact that not even one modest book can be found, which is devoted strictly to the axiology of the ethical-social issues, especially in Poland – where papal teaching have seen a vast bibliography of shorter and longer texts – can be somewhat surprising. One must remember that John Paul II, being a trained philosopher of ethics, expressed in his texts the belief that every moral norm and social principle in fact protects specific values, which are necessary for truly human life – for example, the norm "thou shalt not kill" protects the value of human life and "thou shalt not steal" protects someone's property. Therefore, the analysis of specific moral and social norms that emerge from the entirety of the Pope's teaching, will allow us to explore the broad spectrum of the world of values that John Paul II appreciated. This is also important and interesting from the point of view of the scientific biography of Karol Wojtyła. He was deeply immersed in Thomism, if only because of his studies in Rome's Angelicum, or because of his academic and didactic work in the Lublin philosophical school. This school, however, rather negated the need to distinguish axiology as a separate discipline, because, as its leading representative and outstanding scholar, Prof. Father Stanisław Kamiński wrote: "Therefore there is no need to practice axiology as a separate philosophical discipline, since the important overall findings fit within the theory of being, while specific issues

can be found in anthropology, philosophy of religion, ethics and aesthetics, or possibly in the philosophy of culture” (Kamiński 1989, 305).

However, Karol Wojtyła’s philosophical interests in phenomenology, such as Max Scheler, as well as his numerous contacts with the so-called Krakow milieu, drew the future Pope to reflect on the world of values, which later found a proper place in his teaching. Thus, the discovery of this spectrum of values, and thus exposing them in the way that the Pope understood them in the metaphysical, epistemological, semiotic or humanist sense (Kamiński 1989, 305), would enrich existing analyses undertaken in relation to his thought. It is also worth noting that in modern times, when, to quote M. Heidegger, thinking according to values is often considered the greatest blasphemy against being, a book about the philosophical issues of values in the Pope’s teaching could be a *sui generis* guide in the world of values.

2. INNOVATION AND RELEVANCE OF THE PROJECT

The innovative nature of the project stems from the fact that to date, none of the known publications on the selected research subject (including in foreign literature available to us), no author has systematically and thoroughly presented the axiological issues which, it would seem, are inherently contained within it. Papal teachings are generally subjected to analytical and synthetic studies from the point of view of theology, Catholic social teaching, sociology, political science, and sometimes philosophy, while never from the point of view of the theory of values. If axiological problems appeared, it was usually only in the area of education and upbringing, which is a strongly reduced approach in relation to the wealth, as we postulate, of the axiological content hidden in the legacy of John Paul II.

The subject of analysis are not only the most important documents published by the Pope, i.e. Encyclicals, exhortations and apostolic letters, but also proclamations, speeches, sermons, etc., since relevant content for the issues taken up in this work may be found even in organisational or pastoral documents. The publication of the planned monographs, it may be hoped, will not only make it clear that not everything in papal teachings has been discovered, that there are still relevant and interesting areas for intellectual exploration, the extraction of which may contribute to the re-reading of the written legacy of John Paul II and become an inspiration and an incentive for exploration and innovative interpretation.

The project will be of crucial importance in the development of knowledge about the axiological thought of John Paul II. The study will be the first attempt to synthesize the axiological thought of transcendental humanism of John Paul II. The research will be used in the analysis of the formation and development of Catholic social teaching, which until John Paul II’s pontificate developed in the area of Thomism, while John Paul II wanted to go beyond this philosophical tradition (personalism, phenomenology). Achieving the goals of the project will contribute to a better understanding of the philosophical foundations shaping Catholic social teaching. The study will help to reveal not only John Paul II’s theory of values, but will also say a

lot about the historical period in which John Paul II lived and served his mission, and capture the development trends of European culture. Also not without insignificance will be the contribution of the study to the development of Polish philosophical and social thought, of which John Paul II remains a representative.

As a result of the research, two monographs will be published. One will be devoted to the axiology of ethical and social teaching. The second will focus on the axiological dimension of the theological and religious thought of the Pope. Writing two complementary monographs will be an important contribution to the development of Polish knowledge about one of the most important intellectuals and spiritual leaders not only in Poland, but in the world. The exploration of the Pope's axiological thought may reveal an important *novum*. The publication of these monographs will provide potential readers with knowledge about the genesis, significance and meaning of the axiological issues in John Paul II's teachings. The monographs will attempt to methodologically integrate the studies from an area in accordance with the competencies of the project authors. These works will show how Pope John Paul II (somewhat) synthesised the Thomist methodological scepticism towards the theory of values and praxeological values with the absolute affirmation of such trends as phenomenology, the Baden school, or the French school of philosophy of the spirit. Certainly an interesting clue would be the discovery of how much the Pope knew these last two trends, as well as the degree to which the views of these major axiological schools were reflected in the papal texts.

Such a study would shed new light on the intellectual figure of John Paul II as a philosopher implicitly cultivating, in the course of his pontificate, this discipline, to which he devoted his theological and philosophical studies and his teaching and research work in his youth. These studies can therefore bring important elements to the biography of the Pope.

3. THE CONCEPT AND PLAN OF RESEARCH

The concept and plan of the research is shown in the following schema showing the research proceedings: collecting texts which are the subject of analysis; analysis of their axiological dimension (status of values, understanding the values, hierarchy of values, structure); axiological challenges/dilemmas of modernity as the socio-politico-historical context of the resulting texts, from which axiological statements were taken; outline of specific axiological problems from the perspective of John Paul II's thought, such as secularism, human rights, the promotion of women, work, the social question, social rules); search for philosophical inspirations for the axiology of John Paul II (Scheler, Mounier, Maritain, Ingarden, Styczeń, Tischner); attempt at synthesis.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The analysis of the axiological nature of the teaching of John Paul II requires a clear definition of the way of understanding the axiology through the prism of which we will

analyse papal writings. It is an objectistic axiology in terms of existence and knowledge of values. In our understanding, the world of values exists beyond the cognitive subject. It is possible to discover in rational and emotional acts, where reason, intuition and emotions play an important role both in the existentialist and essentialist aspect. Values are possible to discover as transhistorical and transcultural entities. Values, therefore, can be systematised and categorised. We thus reject the subjectivist approach, which claims that the source of values is the evaluating consciousness of the subject and its preferences related to the structure of transcendental consciousness or individual empirical consciousness. We also reject any historical and cultural determinism in the sense of values. In terms of exploration of values, we stand in the position of classical axiological absolutism. Getting to know the values in our understanding is possible and certain in *a priori* acts thanks to intuition and intellect combined with emotions. We therefore reject the perspective of relativism and axiological probabilism.

From the methodological point of view, the type of texts which will be the subject of the axiological analysis must also be specified. These will be papal writings and speeches of an ethical, social and theological nature. This requires, therefore, making it clear that we are interested in two types of statements: strictly theological, as well as those that go beyond this issue and are related through issues of morality, society, politics, culture, etc. The axiological analysis will therefore concern two areas, which in the scientific language of the discipline represented by the project authors will be defined as: transcendence and immanence; the sacred and the profane; the temporal and supernatural order.

We will strive to reconstruct the mechanism of formulating the papal documents of significant axiological importance. It is common knowledge that the Pope consulted the documents and speeches he authored. The “co-authors” of the papal documents were: Episcopacies of individual national Churches, theological commissions, recognized intellectuals in the clergy and laity. We therefore believe that these milieus could leave their mark on the axiological thought of John Paul II, even by identifying and taking into account the state of spiritual and national development of a specific society or the particular ethical and social, political, economic and cultural problems of the world at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Another starting point for the applied research method is the assumption that new humanism, otherwise known as transcendental humanism, proposed by John Paul II in his teaching, implies a certain axiological background in the form of a system of values rooted in the supernatural. Taking into account the fact that John Paul II, as a philosopher, comes from a particular philosophical tradition, i.e. Thomism (studies at the Angelicum, work in the Lublin philosophical school), which negates the need for the existence of axiology as a separate discipline, there is a need for the reconstruction of the system of values which despite this, is implicitly contained within his teaching and which we wish to clearly show in the writings analysed. The planned research will be informative in nature. The basis, and the first stage of the study is a broad research query which will include predefined texts characteristic of the papal teaching. The study will be aimed at problematisation of the axiology discovered in John Paul II's text.

The research will be comparative in nature. The comparative methodology will consist of the comparison of the axiological issues of philosophical character with axiological issues of theological character. From the broad range of positions in contemporary comparative studies, we select those that are best suited to the aims of the research intended to highlight axiological issues within the socio-political and religious-theological teachings of John Paul II. We will prefer the search for “network” connections between these two axiological areas. We hypothesise that there will be a dominance of the attitude of dialogue and interaction between religious values typical of the theology of Christianity and the cultural, social and utilitarian values resulting from the inculturation of the Gospel. However, we are not excluding issues typical of generic comparative studies (reception, filiations).

The proposed research methodology will be interdisciplinary. This will be manifested in the attempt to synthesise the axiology of Catholic socio-philosophical thought of John Paul II with the axiology of this theological thought. Their separate identification and problematisation will be complemented with an attempt at an integral reading of them as a coherent system of values. The research will lead to the drafting of two problem monographs, synthesising John Paul II’s axiologies in the dimension of the philosophical foundations of Catholic social teachings and its axiology resulting from the theological premises.

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