

## THE CATEGORY OF FREEDOM IN CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

## POJĘCIE WOLNOŚCI W KATOLICKIEJ NAUCE SPOŁECZNEJ

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## Summary

Freedom is one of the core values explored in Catholic social teaching. It is part of human nature and is essential for human existence. It is realised in all subsystems of our social life, i.e., social, economic, political, and cultural. By using their freedom, people can develop integrally. The subject of the following paper is the operationalisation of the concept of freedom in Catholic social teaching. The paper presents, in a historically systematised fashion, the ideological dispute between the Catholic Church and liberalism, and describes a positive approach to freedom as an essential category in Catholic social teaching. The method used in this paper corresponds to the way the position of the Catholic Church crystallised in relation to freedom as a value. The article narrows its analysis down to socio-economic aspects. This has been dictated by the nature of the scientific discipline in the paradigm of which the problem was explored.

**Keywords:** freedom, liberalism, Catholic social teaching, human rights

## Streszczenie

Wolność jest jedną z głównych wartości eksplorowanych na gruncie katolickiej nauki społecznej. Należy ona do natury człowieka i jest sposobem jego egzystencji. Konkretyzuje się ona we wszystkich subsystemach życia społecznego człowieka, a więc w obszarze społecznym, gospodarczym, politycznym i kulturalnym. Człowiek korzystając z wolności jest w stanie rozwijać się integralnie. Przedmiotem niniejszego opracowania jest operacjonalizacja kategorii wolności w katolickiej nauce społecznej. Autor w tym celu przedstawia usystematyzowany historycznie spór ideologiczny Kościoła katolickiego z liberalizmem oraz przedstawia pozytywne ujęcie wolności, jako ważnej kategorii w katolickiej nauce społecznej. Przyjęta w opracowaniu metoda odpowiada formie krystalizowania się stanowiska katolickiego wobec wartości, jaką jest wolność. Autor artykułu zawęża jej ujęcie głównie do obszaru społeczno-gospodarczego, co podyktowane jest naturą dyscypliny naukowej, w której paradygmacie eksplorowany jest problem badawczy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wolność, liberalizm, katolicka nauka społeczna, prawa człowieka

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Freedom is a value desired by all people. As an attribute of the person, it is the primary form of individual expression in addition to reasonableness. Freedom has been scientifically explored from various perspectives, including philosophical, theological, legal, and social. It is such a valued good that it has become the essence of fundamental human rights, and, solely on the grounds of having dignity, the person has the right to live and freely choose their way of life, the right to freedom of religion and to freedom of conscience, the right to freedom of thought, and even the right to economic, social, and political freedom. All human rights, as well as liberties and social and collective rights, are directly or indirectly related to freedom. We value freedom and protect it with an array of rights.

Freedom can be defined in many ways; one of its broader definitions, which is appropriate here, describes it as not being constrained by limitations.

It is expressed in the constitutive power of the will which facilitates wanting and taking action at the individual's discretion (Krajewski, 2014). However, such a wide approach to defining freedom can cause some concerns as it raises the question about its limits. Classical representatives of modern liberalism seem to understand it similarly, at least at first glance. Considering freedom in negative terms, Thomas Hobbes linked it with the lack of any external impediments which would make it impossible or difficult for the individual to act; while in positive terms, freedom, in his opinion, is the ability to act, or refrain from acting, as the individual thinks fit. John Locke, too, argued that individual freedom is the ability to choose one's actions from the available options or to decide not to act (Krajewski, 2014).

The subject of this paper is the operationalisation of the concept of freedom in Catholic social teaching.

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It is important to note here that the Church has investigated freedom, as a significant value desired by people, since its inception. It was present in ancient Christian social thought, but it was not until the emergence of Catholic social teaching, which dates back to late nineteenth century, that a systematic study of this concept was undertaken. In this paper, I distinguish between two notions that need to be differentiated, namely social teaching of the Church and Catholic social teaching. The former is a social doctrine and, in historical terms, corresponds to the centuries-old teaching of Church Fathers, early Christian writers, texts published by councils, synods, episcopates, etc., so it has been developed for over two thousand years; while the latter is the result of studies conducted by Catholic scholars and forms part of a scientific discipline referred to by Pope Pius XI in 1931 in his *Quadragesimo Anno (QA)* encyclical as *disciplina socialis catholica* (Catholic social science). This paper focuses on the latter area of scientific endeavour, and hence, it seems reasonable from the methodological point of view to show the ideological background against which the idea of freedom has crystallised, starting from Enlightenment liberalism and nineteenth-century literature, mainly social encyclicals.

### Liberalism and freedom

In Catholic social teaching, the concept of freedom developed against a background of an ideological dispute between the representatives of this scientific discipline and liberals. Just like in the early years of Christianity the Church defined its position on dogmatic and moral matters and dealt with heresies, in the 19th and 20th centuries it clarified its stance on social issues in the atmosphere of an ideological debate, mainly with liberalism and communism. Representatives of modern liberalism who explored the issue of freedom include Friedrich A. von Hayek, Milton Friedman and Michael Novak. The first of these, the author of *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960), was an ardent advocate of liberalism. In his works, he focused on freedom in social life. In line with liberalism, Hayek considered freedom to be the ultimate social right and defined it as the freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of information, freedom of speech, freedom of opinion, freedom of economic activity, and political freedom. This freedom was not to be violated by any law adopted by any lawfully elected government authorities, as it was necessary precisely for the protection of citizens (Hayek, 1976); hence it (the law) imposed limits on, but did not violate, freedom. Arguing for a democratic State, Hayek claimed that democracy itself should avoid any extreme solutions, whether manifested as anarchy in social life or State authoritarianism. This model of social order needs moral principles and values, but understood in a specific way. Hayek considered both as the products of general

human *praxis*, not as universal values and norms dictated by reason. Consequently, in his opinion, they constituted specific conventions which were determined by social and historical factors, and, as a result, evolved alongside these. Stanisław Kowalczyk, a well-known social philosopher, argues that the above is a milder reinterpretation of classical liberalism, which accepts the relative-utilitarian profile of ethics (Kowalczyk, 1999).

M. Friedman, the author of such works as *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) and *Free to Choose* (1980), defined freedom in utilitarian terms, as the ultimate human goal. Applied to business, it becomes a synonym of interest, profit, and pleasure (Friedman, 1962), and has no ethical motivations. Analysing the relationships between economic freedom and political freedom, Friedman lists a few characteristics of liberalism in its primary sense. Such liberalism is understood as a set of theories related to human freedom. Their ultimate goal is freedom, their highest value is the individual, and the means to limiting the role of the State in economic matters in favour of individual initiative – laissez-faire (Friedman, 2008; Mazurek, 1996)<sup>1</sup>. Individual freedom is to be manifested in the right to private entrepreneurship, and free foreign trade is considered the means to maintaining peace and democratic integration of world's nations. In Friedman's view, the role of the government in economy should be limited to that of an institution which specifies "the rules of the game" on the market, an arbiter, if you will, who interprets and enforces the rules, and protects individual freedoms. Similarly to Hayek, Friedman believed that the control over economic activities by government authorities would be "a road to slavery" (Friedman, 2008)<sup>2</sup>.

M. Novak, an American economist and theologian, charged himself with the task of preparing a comprehensive study of liberalism and Catholic social teaching. His findings were published in Polish in a book entitled *Liberalizm – sprzymierzeniec czy wróg Kościoła?* [Liberalism – an ally or an enemy of the Church] (Poznań 1993). That publication has been critiqued, i.a., by the Lublin school of Catholic social teaching. Franciszek J. Mazurek, its prominent representative, polemicalises with Novak, asking if "Catholic liberalism" was possible. Mazurek, who, *nota bene*, argued that "individualistic liberalism philosophy has incidentally become the underlying ideology of capitalism" (Mazurek, 1996), accuses Novak that his book interprets Catholic social teaching and the social teaching of the Church from the point of view of liberalism rather than philosophical and theological anthropology. Moreover, Mazurek

<sup>1</sup> F.J. Mazurek argues that laissez-faire is not the product of liberalism, but rather was taken over by it from French physiocrats, the leader of whom was F. Quesnay (p. 213).

<sup>2</sup> In his analysis of liberalism, Mazurek, too, makes references to F.A. von Hayek and alludes to his work entitled *Der Weg zur Knechtschaft* (Erlentbach 1945).

argues that Novak uses manipulation by taking only fragmentary citations from Popes on social matters to demonstrate the value of liberalism for the emerging social doctrine of the Church<sup>3</sup>.

Analysing Mazurek's critical attitude to Novak's book, Maciej Hułas notes that the latter interprets Catholic social teaching in a spirit of liberalism, trying to present it in such a way so as to show that it agrees with the liberal concept of freedom, and especially the free market. This is a typical example of practising Catholic social teaching without considering its solidarist roots. Hułas makes this point when he states that the difference between solidarist and liberal approaches to Catholic social teaching lies in the fact that the former seeks to fundamentally redevelop the socio-economic system to make it meet the criteria of social justice without the need for redistribution. The latter approach, Hułas would argue, could be described as the "social taming of free market" through external measures. Economy is understood here as a pre-established harmony, which can be made more socially sensitive by external factors (Hułas, 2014).

### Freedom in selected social publications of the Church

Catholic social teaching is examining freedom mainly from a socio-economic perspective. Building on anthropological theories, socio-economic ethics defines freedom as the manifestation of humanity, which determines the absolute value of the person. Such ethics reject the complete emancipation of freedom, while also refuting complete subordination of individual will to social determinants. Freedom understood this way is prerequisite for growth, in both individual and social terms.

Bound up with the Church's concern for workers in the 19th century, Catholic social teaching has produced a number of publications related to the social teaching of the Catholic Church, which either directly or indirectly address the issue of freedom. In his encyclical *Mirari Vos* (1832) on liberalism and religious indifferentism, Pope Gregory XVI emphasises the dangers associated with freedom to publish any texts in press or books which undermine the Catholic doctrine. The encyclical was inspired, e.g., by actions taken by so-called Catholic liberals in post-revolutionary France, including F. Chateaubriand (1768-1848), F. de Lamennais (1782-1854), Ch. de Montalambert (1810-1870), and H. Lacordaire (1802-1861). According to them, social transformations brought about by the French revolution needed to lead to democratisation, republican social system, and freedom of thought and morals. De Lamennais, known for founding *L'Avenir*, the first Catholic daily paper in France, reduced the value of Catholicism

to its social dimension only. Czesław Strzeszewski argues that de Lamennais did not understand the essence of Catholic social teaching and the need to restrict individual freedoms for the benefit of public good, and hence in his approach individual freedom did not have any religious or moral limits. Seeking complete religious freedom, he even went as far as to advocate the separation of the Church from the State, which was a bold proposal in those times (Strzeszewski, 1994). His views, shared in the newspaper he founded, were directly condemned by Pope Gregory XVI in *Mirari Vos* (MV), in which the Pope, concerned about the social changes taking place at the time, wrote "Academies and schools resound with new, monstrous opinions, which openly attack the Catholic faith; this horrible and nefarious war is openly and even publicly waged. Thus, by institutions and by the example of teachers, the minds of the youth are corrupted and a tremendous blow is dealt to religion and the perversion of morals is spread" (MV, 5).

Pope Leo XIII devoted two encyclicals, i.e., *Immortale Dei* (1885) and *Libertas* (1888), to freedom. In the former, the Pope argues that genuine freedom has an axiological basis created by such values as truth and ethical good. In addition, the encyclical elaborates on the theory of freedom on two levels, individual and social. In the encyclical from 1888, the Pope identifies two problem areas, namely the Christian concept of freedom and the liberal concept of freedom. The Pope explicates freedom in *Libertas* (LB) by describing it as "the highest of natural endowments, being the portion only of intellectual or rational natures", and arguing that it is ambivalent in nature, as it can be the source of both good and evil. Leo XIII presents the Christian vision of freedom on the basis of Thomistic philosophy. This interpretation includes references to such aspects as the sources of freedom, limits of freedom, the role of natural law in freedom, codified (positive) law and freedom, and the role of the Church in defending the "Gospel of Freedom". The second part of *Libertas* is a critical assessment of the stance taken by the supporters of liberalism. The Pope describes them as naturalists and rationalists, and the first objection he makes against them is that they consider human reason to be the supreme authority in all matters, thus refusing the authority of God and His law. And by rejecting the eternal divine law (*lex aeterna*), human reason stops looking for the eternal order of the world, and by proclaiming its own independence, constitutes itself the supreme principle and source and judge of truth (c.f., LB, 15). This results in increasing secularisation and naturalisation of law and morals, while ethics become relative and utilitarian in nature. As noted by Kowalczyk, the *Libertas* encyclical by Pope Leo XIII is the first in the history of the Church to provide a fairly complete description of the Christian position on the idea of freedom. The Pope deserves credit for emphasising

<sup>3</sup> For more information, please see my book entitled *Między moralnością kamieni a prawami człowieka* [Between the "morality of stones" and human rights], Lublin 2015, pp. 42-48.

the personalistic and axiological foundations of freedom, and for opposing the liberal notion of freedom, which, he believed, could not be reconciled with the Christian interpretation of freedom (Kowalczyk, 1999).

Achievements of Leo XIII in relation to the idea of freedom were acknowledged by Pope Pius XI in his well-known social encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. The document dates back to 1931 and elaborates on the social approach to freedom in the context of workers' rights and growing socialism. The liberation of the proletariat, which became the core idea advocated by communist movements across Europe, led in the opinion of both those socially involved Popes to an even greater enslavement of workers. The main proposal put forward by socialists – that private ownership of means of production should be done away with – was to be the remedy for the misery of workers, but in reality, the cure proved worse than the disease itself. Pius XI links workers' freedom with their right to private ownership. In his encyclical, natural-right arguments in favour of private ownership are supported by a number of other social rights, which are to strengthen the position of workers; these include the right to fair wages and the right to participation in ownership, profit and company management. The reforms listed by the Pope as necessary for the redevelopment of the socio-economic system include the need to "curb" free-market economy with moderate State interventionism. He further argues that the economic system should not be left to the mercy of free competition, and that it is important to harness higher and nobler forces, such as social justice and social love, and these require involvement from the State and its institutions in developing fair structures. Pius XI describes this as follows "Just as the unity of human society cannot be founded on an opposition of classes, so also the right ordering of economic life cannot be left to a free competition of forces. For from this source, as from a poisoned spring, have originated and spread all the errors of individualist economic teaching. Destroying through forgetfulness or ignorance the social and moral character of economic life, it held that economic life must be considered and treated as altogether free from and independent of public authority, because in the market, i.e., in the free struggle of competitors, it would have a principle of self direction which governs it much more perfectly than would the intervention of any created intellect" (88).

Ten years after the encyclical by Pius XI, his successor commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the first social encyclical with an address broadcast on the radio, in which he stressed that while the publication of *Quadragesimo Anno* took place during the times of social unrest, economic crisis and ideological turmoil associated with liberalism and socialist, that time (1941) was burdened with the horrors of war. Many Catholic social teaching

experts believe the address by Pius XI to be the first proclamation of human rights in the history of social teaching, even though the first catalogue of such rights, defined by the Church as a teaching authority, was actually published in the post-War encyclical *Pacem In Terris* by John XXIII.

The issue of freedom is addressed in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (PCC). In that document, freedom is discussed from both ontological and social points of view. It emphasises the imperative stemming from human dignity, which requires that people's behaviour be guided by conscious and free choice rather than blind impulse or external pressure (PCC, 17). Man, as a person is a physical and spiritual being, characterised by reason and freedom. Therefore, people are multi-dimensional in nature, with moral, intellectual, physical and social dimensions, and are dynamic and have a potential for growth. Freedom is a necessary condition for this multifaceted human development to take place. Moreover, individuals are not self-sufficient in terms of their growth but need other people, institutions, and communities, which directly indicates their social nature.

From the social perspective, freedom, according to *Gaudium et spes*, manifests itself in respect for the social rights of the person. In particular, the Constitution discusses at length the right to private ownership, which, in a way, builds on human freedom "Private property or some ownership of external goods confers on everyone a sphere wholly necessary for the autonomy of the person and the family, and it should be regarded as an extension of human freedom" (PCC, 71). In addition, human freedom in social terms is actualised when the individual exercises their right to choose their way of life, enter into marriage and have a family, as well as in civil liberties, participation in economic life, etc. The potential character of human nature demands that the individual achieve integral growth across all subsystems, i.e., social, economic, political, and cultural. In each of these areas, freedom is prerequisite for growth.

### Freedom of the person upheld by human rights

Freedom is such a significant attribute of the person that it is hedged around with personal, subjective, inalienable, inviolable and supra-systemic rights, which are based on human dignity. Human rights are related to many areas of human existence. Based on their subject matter, they can be categorised according to criteria adopted in Catholic social teaching. These categories include liberties, and social and group rights<sup>4</sup>. First generation human rights refer literally to the freedom of the person, but the second and third generations also guarantee

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the theory of human rights in Catholic social teaching, see S. Fel, Prawa człowieka [Human rights], In: *Etyka. Cz. II: Filozoficzna etyka życia spełnionego* [Ethics. Part 2. Philosophical ethics of a fulfilling life], Eds. S. Janeczek, A. Starościc, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2016, pp. 495-520.

freedom, only indirectly. When these rights are respected, requirements for the freedom of the person can be considered satisfied. Human rights, if respected, guarantee that freedom is used correctly because such rights not only establish the extent of such freedom, but also – because of the correlations between the responsibilities stemming from these rights – define its intransgressible bounds.

The problem discussed above has been explored at length by Pope John Paul II, who is referred to as the Human Rights Pope for a reason. He addresses human freedom in greatest detail in his encyclicals *Centesimus Annus* (CA) and *Veritatis Splendor* (VS). His position should be considered integral, as the issue of freedom is examined in these documents from multiple perspectives, such as anthropological, axiological, and social. In anthropological terms, freedom stems from human nature, as described earlier in this article. Axiological aspects are discussed by the Pope mainly in relation to truth as a value of fundamental importance for human freedom. In a world without truth, freedom loses its foundation and man is exposed to the violence of passion and manipulation, both open and hidden (c.f., CA, 46).

*Centesimus Annus* was written against the background of political and socio-economic transformations that took place in Europe in early 1990s. The democratisation of former Communist countries, Pope John Paul II would argue, is associated with the interest of many groups in human rights. Countries which are reforming their systems need to give democracy an authentic and solid foundation by explicitly recognising these rights. The most important of these rights, as mentioned in the encyclical, include the right to life, the right to live in a united family and in a moral environment conducive to the growth of the child's personality, the right to develop one's intelligence and freedom in seeking and knowing the truth, the right to work, and the right to freely establish a family, and to have and to rear children (CA, 47).

The *Centesimus Annus* encyclical is, to a great extent, dedicated to freedom, which was bandied about all the time and everywhere in former Communist countries in the 1990s. In political terms, it was to be guaranteed by a democratic system of government, while in economic terms, by a capitalist economy. John Paul II treated both these with reserve. He would argue that a democracy without values can easily turn into the tyranny of the majority. Capitalism, as an economic system, too, can backfire on people. While the encyclical published in 1991 tentatively accepts capitalism, it has many reservations about it. This is pointed out by Aniela Dylus who analysed the document and concluded that the Pope denounced "cruel capitalism" and rejected the economic system if it was understood as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast

to the free and personal nature of human work (Dylus, 2016).

In John Paul II's view, freedom has two dimensions, internal and external, and so is an inherent trait of the person but can also be actualised in interactions. The Pope seems to understand this freedom in dual terms, negative, as *freedom from* (pressure or evil), and positive, as *freedom to* take constructive action. However, this dual nature of freedom must not be interpreted dichotomously but rather integrally. This concept corresponds to the paradigm adopted in Catholic social teaching. This is emphasised by Stanisław Fel, who interprets freedom as the basis of the social market economy, as defined by Oswald von Nell-Breuning. For Fel, a complete concept of freedom takes into account its positive and negative aspects but considers the latter as being of secondary importance. Priority is given to positive freedom, because the ability to make choices and to decide and act freely constitutes the essence of a complete development of freedom, which is much more than the lack of pressure (Fel, 1994).

The social teaching of Pope Benedict XVI was expounded in his 2009 encyclical *Caritas In Veritate* (CV). Its keynote largely builds on the literary works of Pope Paul VI. The successor of John Paul II wrote about freedom in the context of the growth of the person and nations "Integral human development presupposes the responsible freedom of the individual and of peoples" (CV, 17). This view of growth is at the core of Paul VI's *Populorum Progressio*. Human development is notably social in nature and is achieved through work, including professional career; hence unemployment impinges on this process and disturbs it. Benedict XVI recognises this risk, arguing that being out of work or dependent on public or private assistance for a prolonged period undermines the freedom and creativity of the person and his family and social relationships (CV, 25). In this context, it seems particularly useful to follow the strategy of the subsidiarity principle, which protects the subjectivity of the person in development, without crippling their freedom, but instead looking for the resolution of the problem, while making the beneficiary as actively involved as possible.

*Caritas In Veritate* also addresses at length the ways in which human activity affects the natural environment. Benedict XVI argues that human beings interpret and shape the natural environment through culture, which in turn is given direction by the responsible use of freedom (CV, 48); with 'responsible use of freedom' being one that follows the dictates of the moral law. This topic is explored further by Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* (LS). In this document, the Pope refers to the position taken by his predecessor, who argued that the degradation of the environment resulted from misunderstood human freedom. The natural environment, similarly to social milieu, has suffered extensive damage as a result of irresponsible human

behaviour. All this damage is “ultimately due to the same evil: the notion that there are no indisputable truths to guide our lives, and hence human freedom is limitless” (LS, 6)<sup>5</sup>. In view of the above, freedom in the context of the recent issues being addressed today by Catholic social teaching covers such problem areas as integral ecology, intergenerational justice, and sustainable development. Human freedom, Pope Francis argues, has irresponsibly led to “progress”, which is now backfiring on us. But the Pope also expresses hope that “we have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral” (LS, 112).

### Conclusions

Freedom is one of the core values explored by Catholic social teaching. It is part of human nature and a form of human existence. It is actualised in all subsystems of our social life, and by using it, people can develop their personality. This value

requires legal protection. In democratic societies, such protection is provided by the constitution and codified law, which should safeguard human rights. Efforts taken by scholars as part of interdisciplinary studies in the field of Catholic social teaching focus mainly on ethical and social issues and seek to create socio-economic order. This order is necessary for the individual to use their internal and external freedom; and freedom itself should be interpreted integrally with other values such as human dignity, truth, justice, social love, solidarity, responsibility, and trust. If freedom is separated from these values, it can prove detrimental to the good of individuals and societies, taking the form of social pathologies and totalitarian systems. Figuratively speaking, it is no overstatement to say that freedom to the individual is like water to a fish. Małgorzata Bogunia-Borowska, a renowned sociologist, describing values, including freedom, as the foundation of a good society, wrote “freedom is like water – you can choke on it and drown” (Bogunia-Borowska, 2015).

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<sup>5</sup> Here, Pope Francis makes reference to an address delivered by Benedict XVI to the Bundestag, Berlin (22 September 2011), AAS 103 (2011), 664.