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EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE LIGHT
OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a term coming from Greek language – *dēmos* ‘people’ and *krátos* ‘power’ and literally means rule of the people. It is a form of governance known since ancient Greece. The development of democracy was greatly influenced by ancient Rome and Western culture.¹

Democracy is considered as a most desirable and the most valuable form of governance in the contemporary world. The subject of democracy as a value is a reality which is embraced by many entities. John Paul II used to say that “freedom is not given, it is a task.” The same can be said of democracy, which is not given once and for all, but is a task for us. Society must take care of democracy, but it must also ensure that the young generation is educated in this democracy. Education for democracy is essential.

This article looks into the issues of education for democracy in the light of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The goal is to show that the Catholic Social Teaching is promoting the democracy and necessity of

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¹ See <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/3891717>; <https://www.britannica.com/topic/democracy> [accessed: 01.06.2024].

teaching for democracy. The Catholic Social Teaching is also showing the way how to conduct the education for democracy understood in proper way (democracy based on human dignity and values).

The article explains the idea of Catholic Social Teaching, then it is presenting the democracy as one of the human needs and one of the human rights and define the democracy in the light of Church's doctrine. It is also showing the bases for building proper education to democracy.

1. CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The Catholic Social Teaching is teaching of the Catholic Church on issues relating to the collective problems of communities or all of humanity. This teaching can be presented under such terms as: "social teaching of the Church" or "social doctrine of the Church," and "social teaching of the Church."²

The term "Catholic social teaching" or "Catholic social science" was first used by Pope Pius XI in his encyclical *Quadragesimo anno*, proclaimed in 1931. There, it is written: "And so, with Leo's Encyclical pointing the way and furnishing the light, a true Catholic social science has arisen, which is daily fostered and enriched by the tireless efforts of those chosen men whom we have termed auxiliaries of the Church."³

The original Latin language term used by Pope Pius XI in this encyclical letter is *Disciplina socialis catholica*. However, not Pius XI but Pope Leo XIII is considered as the main creator of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. In 1891, he published the encyclical *Rerum novarum*⁴. From that very moment, we can talk about Catholic Social Teaching as a doctrine.

One issue must be addressed here. The thinking that the social teaching of the Catholic Church started 133 years ago is mistaken. From that moment we can talk about social teaching as a doctrine or science. But the

² See *Kompendium nauki społecznej Kościoła*, Wydawnictwo "Jedność", Kielce 2005, p. 34ff; Majka 1987.

³ Pius PP. XI, Litterae encyclicae de ordine sociali instraurando et at Evangelicae legos normam erficiendo, in annum XL post editas Leonis XIII litteras encyclicas «Rerum Novarum» *Quadragesimo anno* (15.05.1931), AAS 23 (1931), pp. 177-228, no. 20.

⁴ Leo PP. XIII, Litterae encyclicae de conditione opificum *Rerum novarum* (15.05.1891), ASS 23 (1890-1891), pp. 641-70.

idea of taking care of social issues is present both in the Old and the New Testament [Banaszak 2015, 35-54]. For example, in the Gospel of St. Mathew, it is said "I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt. 25:40).⁵ From the begging, Church, following the example of Jesus Christ, was taking care of social issues.

The Catholic Social Teaching has own source in Divine Revelation explained and brought in Church teaching. It is worthy to name here the sources of Catholic Social Teaching positioned in three main areas: Natural law, Holy Bible and Church Tradition and Official and pastoral teaching of the Church (documents of ecumenical councils and synods, papal social encyclics, other statements by popes, judgements of papal congregations, Code of Canon Law, episcopal letters and statement given by bishops, sermons, homilies and speeches given by pope).⁶

The Catholic Social Teaching is promoting some principles which are coming from the above-mentioned sources. There are: Life and Dignity of the Human Person; Call to Family, Community, and Participation; Rights and Responsibilities; Option for the Poor and Vulnerable; The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers; Solidarity and justice; Care for God's Creation [Borutka, Mazur, and Zwoliński 1999].⁷

Catholic Church in its social teaching is also promoting the idea of democracy – the form of governance which serve for all people and taking care for all, also for those who are in need.

2. DEMOCRACY AS A HUMAN NEED AND HUMAN RIGHT

Democracy, understood as a political system which enables individuals to participate in governance and decision-making, is often seen as one of the fundamental needs of humanity.

⁵ See https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX [accessed: 01.06.2024].

⁶ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html [accessed: 01.06.2024].

⁷ *Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*, <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching> [accessed: 01.06.2024].

One of the basic human needs is the need for freedom and self-determination. Democracy allows individuals to express their views, participate in the decision-making process, and influence politics and social life. Democracy, especially in its representative form, strives to ensure the equality of all citizens before the law and equal access to political decisions. It also promotes a sense of community because it engages citizens in the decision-making process and encourages cooperation and solidarity. People have an innate sense of justice, which is satisfied by democratic systems that promote equality and transparency. Democracy fosters personal development by providing citizens with access to education, information, and opportunities to express their own views.

The Catholic Church in its teachings often emphasizes the importance of democracy as a way of realizing the principle of the common good. According to the Catholic Social Teaching, democracy is a tool to ensure that every person has the opportunity to influence decisions which is consistent with their dignity as individuals created in the image of God.⁸

Democracy may be considered as one of human rights. As such, it refers to the recognition of democratic principles and institutions as an integral element of the dignity, freedom, and equality of every individual. Fundamental human rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to participate in public life, and equality before the law, are crucial for the democratic functioning of society. Democracy is closely tied to the dignity of each individual. It allows individuals to express their views, participate in decision-making processes, and engage in social life. In addition, democracy is an essential component of individual freedom. It provides individuals with the opportunity to choose their representatives, shape public policy, and express their opinions.

Democracy ensures equality before the law and equal access to participation in public life for all citizens. Democratic institutions and procedures serve as mechanisms for the protection of human rights. Democracy promotes the peaceful resolution of social conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. It is also the common heritage of humanity and an integral part of international human rights standards.

⁸ Ibid.

3. DEMOCRACY IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Democracy, as a form of government, is often analyzed by various institutions and organizations, including the Catholic Church, which has its own teachings on that subject. The Catholic Church's approach to democracy can be understood through the analysis of papal documents, the Church's social teaching, and the main ethical principles by which it is guided.

First of all, the teaching of the Catholic Church emphasizes the dignity of every human person as created in the image of God. Every individual has inalienable rights which should be protected and respected. According to the Church, democracy is consistent with this premise as it promotes equality and citizen participation in the decision-making process.

Secondly, the Church views democracy as a system which can promote freedom and responsibility. In documents such as Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Centesimus annus*, it is stressed that true freedom must be combined with responsibility, and democracy should support the freedom of conscience, expression of opinions, and participation in social life.

The Catholic Church has a rich tradition of social teaching which has developed since Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum novarum*. Documents such as *Gaudium et spes* from the Second Vatican Council⁹ and Pope Francis' *Evangelii gaudium*¹⁰ expand on these principles, emphasizing the importance of social justice, community, and solidarity which should be the bases of each democratic system.

On the other hand, the Church often criticizes forms of democracy which excessively focus on economics and technocracy, neglecting the ethical and moral dimension of political decisions. In the encyclical *Laudato si'*,¹¹ Pope Francis highlights the need to integrate social and ecological issues with democratic politics.

⁹ Sacrosanctum Concilium Oecumenicum Vaticanum II, Constitutio pastoralis de Ecclesia in mundo huius temporis *Gaudium et spes* (07.12.1965), AAS 58 (1966), pp. 1025-116.

¹⁰ Franciscus PP., Adhortatio apostolica *Evangelii gaudium* de Evangelio Nuntian-do nostra aetate (24.11.2013), AAS 105 (2013), pp. 1019-137.

¹¹ Idem, Litterae encyclicae *Laudato si'* de communi domo colenda (24.05.2015), AAS 107 (2015), pp. 847-945.

There is a close relation and connection between proper understood democracy and Christian Values. First of all, we should point to the importance of community. Democracy is seen as a way to realize community and the common good. The Church promotes the idea that governments should serve not only the interests of individuals but also the common good. In this context, democracy is a tool that allows for the realization of these goals.

In addition, there is an importance of responsibility for the common good: In the encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI emphasizes that democracy should serve as a mechanism that enables participation in decision-making and the care for the common good. The Church points to the need for an ethical dimension in politics, where decisions are made based on moral values and the pursuit of the common good.

As it was said, the Church supports the idea of democracy and promotes democracy in its proper form. But, in Church's teaching there is also a critical view on Democracy. The Catholic Church points out the danger of moral relativism in democracy, where every opinion may be considered of equal value. In the Church's teaching, moral truth is not subjective and cannot be shaped solely by the majority of society. The Church also warns against populism and demagoguery, which can distort democracy and lead to injustice. Authentic democracy should be based on respect for human rights and the pursuit of the common good, not on manipulation and exploiting societal weaknesses.

Catholic Social Teaching is not only a theoretical science or theoretical doctrine. The Church's teaching about democracy has its practical implication. The Church encourages its faithful to actively participate in political and social life. The faithful are called to promote Christian values in politics, such as justice, solidarity, and care for the most vulnerable. In addition, the Church promotes civic education aimed at forming conscious, responsible, and engaged citizens. Moral education is crucial for democracy to function justly and effectively.¹²

In conclusion, it may be said that democracy, in the light of the Catholic Church's teaching, is seen as a potentially good system of governance which can promote human dignity, community, and the common good. However, the Church emphasizes that democracy must be closely linked to

¹² *Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching*.

morality, truth, and responsibility. Through active participation in social and political life, the faithful are encouraged to promote Christian values and strive for social justice.

4. EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE LIGHT OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

As it was already stated in the introduction to this article, democracy is not given to us for ever. It is a task people should care about. Catholic Church presents a complex approach to democracy which integrates moral values with politics while simultaneously promoting active citizen participation in social life. Democracy is crucial, and therefore, education for democracy is also important. Education for democracy is a key element in promoting a just and equal society, particularly in the context of Catholic Social Teaching. It emphasizes the dignity of the human person, the importance of community, and the necessity of participating in social life, which are linked to the principles of democratic governance. The principles of Catholic Social Teaching are particularly important for democracy and at the same time, they can be considered as goals of education democracy. Therefore, it is important to say that there is a necessity of building the educational systems based on those principles.

First of all, it is necessary to educate about human dignity. Every person is created in the image of God and possesses inherent dignity. Education should promote respect for the dignity of every person, reinforcing a sense of equality and human rights, which are the foundation of democracy.

Secondly, education should prepare people to be ready to care for the common good. The common good refers to the conditions necessary for the development of all people. Education for democracy should focus on the common good, encouraging students to think beyond their own interests and consider the welfare of the community and society as a whole.

Thirdly, it is important to promote solidarity in the educational systems. Solidarity means recognizing our interdependence and acting for the good of others. Education should foster a sense of solidarity, teaching students to support others and collaborate in solving social issues and promoting justice.

In addition, subsidiarity is very crucial. Decisions should be made at the lowest possible level, empowering communities, and individuals. Education for democracy should empower individuals to participate in local decision-making and governance, ensuring their voice is heard and respected.

Talking about transferring the principles of Catholic Social Teaching to the educational systems, we should not forget about preferential option for those who are poor and marginalized. Societies must prioritize the needs of the poor and marginalized. Therefore, curricula should incorporate themes of social justice, educating students on the importance of advocating for the less privileged and ensuring their participation in the democratic process.

Education for democracy based on the principles of Catholic Social Teaching is especially important in contemporary reality. Currently, young people seem to be confused and not so sure what is right and what is wrong. The younger generation is bombarded with various ideas and viewpoints which do not always promote goodness. They are often exposed to a vision of the world, which is based on selfishness, a lack of loyalty, disregard for others, and a lack of respect for human dignity. Contemporary human being, especially a young person, is spending huge part of his or her life in the virtual world [Banaszak and Filutowska 2022, 131-40]. There are many good things which can be found on the Internet but also there is content which can be very harmful. It may be said that virtual world and virtual reality has the problem with value's system.¹³ There are many situations where in the modern world, there is huge conflict of values and some kind of fight between values and anti-values.¹⁴ Therefore, it is necessary to educate people according to values which are driven from Catholic Social Teaching. The world and the societies built based on those values are good. Those who incorporate those values and principles will be able to build a better democratic world.

In conclusion, educational systems should be built taking into consideration the principles of social doctrine of the Catholic Church. Education should prepare young people to be a full member of society – democratic society. Therefore, teaching for democracy should be based on ethical and

¹³ More on value system in virtual world see: Sitek 2022, 646-58.

¹⁴ More on conflict of values promoted by Catholic Social Teaching and anti-values promoted in social media see: Banaszak 2023, 552-70.

moral education implementing values such as honesty, inclusiveness, and compassion. It should promote ethical decision-making which aligns with the common good and respects the dignity of all people. It should promote social justice and incorporate teaching about human rights, the importance of community, and principles of justice. It should emphasize the need to understand and address issues such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination. It is also necessary to teach students to think critically about social, political, and economic issues and to encourage active participation in volunteering and democratic processes, such as voting and civic discourse. Also, in education to democracy, we should promote a culture of respect and understanding for diverse perspectives and backgrounds, emphasize the role of individuals in shaping society through participation in democratic processes and encourage students to engage in dialogues, debates, and actions that influence public policy and social decisions. In addition, we need to be sure that education is accessible to everyone, regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic background, or other factors.

CONCLUSION

Catholic Social Teaching is a collection of principles and doctrines of the Catholic Church concerning social, economic, and political matters, aimed at promoting values such as social justice, human dignity, and the common good. These values are achievable in a world where people operate based on the principles of democracy.

Democracy is one of the fundamental needs of humanity, as well as one of the basic rights of the individual and society. Democracy is not only a need and a right of humanity, but it is also a task. Therefore, it is necessary to educate young people for democracy.

Education for democracy in the light of Catholic Social Teaching is more than just preparing students to participate in democratic processes. It is about shaping individuals who are committed to justice, the common good, and the dignity of every person. Integrating the principles of Catholic Social Teaching into educational practices allows for the formation of a generation of responsible, compassionate, and active citizens who contribute to the creation of a just and democratic society.

Such an approach not only aligns with the core values of social teaching of the Catholic Church but also ensures that democracy is not just a political system but a way of living together in harmony and mutual respect.

To conclude, we have to say, that teaching of the Catholic Church based on Christ's preaching is timeless and valid in each and every place and time. Currently, we are experiencing huge social, political, economic, cultural and civilization changes. But unchangeable Church teaching is still valid and important. The forms of preaching are adapted to modern conditions, but the principles of this teaching are still the same.¹⁵ And those timeless principles should be promoted while the education for democracy is implemented.

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¹⁵ More on Church's teaching in the context of cultural and social changes see: Sitek 2023, 117-26.

Education for Democracy in the Light of Catholic Social Teaching

Abstract

The subject of democracy as a value is a reality that is embraced by many entities. John Paul II used to say that “Freedom is not given, it is a task.” The same can be said of democracy, which is not given once and for all, but is a task for us. Society must take care of democracy, but it must also ensure that the young generation is educated in this democracy. Education for democracy is essential. In this article I would like to look at the issues of education for democracy in the light of the social teaching of the Catholic Church. The goal is to show that the Catholic Social Teaching is promoting the democracy and necessity of teaching for democracy. The Catholic Social Teaching is also showing the way how to conduct the education for democracy understood in proper way (democracy based on human dignity and values).

Keywords: democracy; catholic social teaching; education; education to democracy.

Edukacja do demokracji w świetle katolickiej nauki społecznej

Abstrakt

Temat demokracji jako wartości jest rzeczywistością, którą podejmują liczne podmioty. Jan Paweł II zwykł mawiać, że „wolność nie jest dana, jest zadaniem”. To samo można powiedzieć o demokracji, która nie jest dana raz na zawsze, lecz stanowi dla nas zadanie. Społeczeństwo musi dbać o demokrację, ale także zapewnić, aby młode pokolenie było wychowywane w duchu demokracji. Edukacja na rzecz demokracji jest niezbędna. W tym artykule chciałbym przyjrzeć się kwestii edukacji na rzecz demokracji w świetle nauki społecznej Kościoła katolickiego. Celem jest pokazanie, że nauka społeczna Kościoła katolickiego promuje demokrację i konieczność nauczania demokracji. Nauka społeczna Kościoła katolickiego wskazuje także, jak prowadzić edukację na rzecz demokracji rozumianej we właściwy sposób (demokracja oparta na godności ludzkiej i wartościach).

Słowa kluczowe: demokracja; katolicka nauka społeczna; edukacja; edukacja do demokracji.

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