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## MERCY AS THE BASIS FOR SOLVING THE SOCIAL DISPUTE ABOUT JUSTICE

**Abstract.** The social dispute over justice that is in a great crisis, must not be limited to social and economical criteria only. This is proved by the elementary experience, since attempts to overcome injustice only on this level are not effective. The anthropological and personalist criterion is necessary here. Only this criterion allows one to integrally define a man – also in his relations with others – as a person. Also justice has a personalist character, and because of this it is not a value that is only added to a man. As such, it is also an objective value that has an obligatory character, which is difficult to justify, and the more so to make it come true, without the Christian Revelation. The event of Jesus Christ, with the preparation given in the Old Testament, shows man's sin as the fundamental source of injustice. This is why in an encounter with injustice only God's mercy is effective, as the only factor – through Jesus' paschal mystery – that overcomes sin. It is not tantamount to giving up justice, but to practicing it – as in Jesus' understanding surrendering to the criteria of justice is a necessary condition of mercy, so that the sin can be judged and overcome, and the man can be saved.

**Key words:** mercy, justice, social dispute, anthropological and personalist criterion.

The latest documents of the Church – including those written by the recent popes up to the current Bishop of Rome, Francis – has been paying so much attention to the poor and excluded within the social issues under scrutiny that proving the ongoing crisis of justice seems unnecessary. We may attempt to discuss the very concept of justice – how to understand it and according to which tradition. The disputes of this kind are not merely hypothetical. Many a time they turn into heated debates. It is hard not to perceive this as an unrefined attempt to exempt us from responsibility in the face of blatant injustice, regardless of – as it turns out – progress and standard of living and despite – surprisingly or at any rate alarmingly – a number of endeavours undertaken to overcome injustice or at least reduce it.

Assuming the classical definition of justice that refers to ancient Greek philosophy, according to which a just act involves giving everyone what is

rightfully due, we deem any attempt at defying it or seeking other interpretations tinged with ideology. Suffice to mention here the collectivist understanding of social justice, or the one what is dictated by the liberal concept of society. The detailed analysis of this issue, in view of extensive literature thereon and quite common knowledge thereon, may be – as it seems – considered unneeded. No matter how many pages we print or how much energy we spend on this problem, in the two aforementioned conceptions the crisis of justice in question has not been overcome, but has perhaps deepened, taking on a new malicious countenance.<sup>1</sup> Under such circumstances it is difficult to overlook the question of the proper nature of injustice, which is related to the necessity of pondering its causes. Naturally, this question also includes the problem of the interpretation and evaluation of often complex processes, whose results, however, seem simple when it comes to experiencing injustice and the sense of being wronged – and, on top of that, faulty understanding of justice and its insufficiency especially where it is perceived as lopsided, which is the fact to which Pope Francis drew attention, announcing the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy and presenting mercy as the fulfillment and, at the same time, foundation of justice.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. FALSE DIAGNOSIS

Wishing to evaluate the most common ways of interpretation of social injustice and its countermeasures, we have to enter the field of economics and sociology. This entails additional difficulties that stem from their proper methodology and tradition, which we have to take into account, as well as the lack of competence to solve the problems based on them and characteristic of them. This does not mean, however, that on the basis of the Christian reflection on faith we are completely deprived of the ability to form judgements about this subject and take a stance. The problem is touched upon by Pope Francis, who, on the one hand, respects the methodological differences

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (November 24, 2013), no. 53-7, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) [November 4, 2016].

<sup>2</sup> “It would not be out of place at this point to recall the relationship between *justice* and *mercy*. These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love.” Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy (April 11, 2015), no. 20, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_bolla\\_20150411\\_misericordiae-vultus.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html) [November 6, 2016].

of social issues and their nature upon meeting theology and, one the other, demands social involvement on the part of pastors and theologians, as well as academic reflection on social processes.<sup>3</sup> What is more, this kind of entry into the field of the problems under scrutiny already has its tradition and consequences. It is enough to mention Johann Metz and his conviction of the validity of the Christian reflection on the faith's claims on social and political structures and solutions. Briefly speaking, their revision, therein rooted and substantiated, is in his opinion related to the proper eschatological horizon of theology, which, in the perspective of faith, is always superior and, thereby, it "corrects" all people's transient works.<sup>4</sup>

We must then begin by presenting arguments in favour of the interest in social issues – related to injustice – as well as the right to evaluate social processes that force themselves upon us, whenever we attempt to deal with the lack of justice. It does signify – let us say it once again – theological arguments in a situation of not only respecting the difference of social studies, but also allowing for making use of its achievements. The basic criterion of the former and the latter is Jesus Christ's incarnation – the Word taking on Himself entire human nature, accepting, at the same time, what is characteristic of man in his relation to others, i.e. the social dimension. Hence, this dimension was given also to the Church, which by means of her Founder's claim must not leave social issues off her interest. We cannot avoid Christian witness, especially where injustice is spreading.

Furthermore, we have to cope with the issue of the most common ways and models of solving social tensions – especially those resulting from injustice – which are based on grave errors and negligence. As long as the concepts of collectivism, which suggest utter submission of man to social dimension and may be treated as quite hermetic, closed-down systems, are generally considered things of the past in the modern world. A number of social solutions present especially in highly developed countries stem from these traditions. Today it is hard to justify and deem unimportant, solely on the basis on the flow of time, the fascination of western societies with socialistic solution, quite extensively commented in professional literature. Not only are the political and economic leaders attached to the solutions of liberal origin, but also owe them their achievements. We do not intend to analyse the flaws of both social and liberal solutions here; nevertheless, we

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<sup>3</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 182-5.

<sup>4</sup> Johann B. Metz, *Teologia polityczna* (Kraków: WAM, 2000), 313.

cannot evade at least general evaluation if we wish to solve the problem posed in this article. What then is the diagnosis of the most common ways of overcoming injustice, formed on the foundation Catholic social teaching and Catholic social theology – which not only can be, but should be talked about more and more? A lot of them by solving one issue at once generate a number of others – oftentimes even more complex and harder to solve. This frequently results from limiting oneself to tactics and practices that are not preceded by a thorough and exhaustive reflection. It cannot be replaced by such and such model that has been tested quickly, with no appropriate analysis of the circumstances. We need something more.

What is necessary is, above all, a thorough knowledge of man – an exhaustive and full vision of the human being, without which the solution of problems being born in the realm of his relation to others runs up against difficulties and ends up with grave errors. It is the incomplete, often reduced vision of man and society that lies at the foundation of failures in solving the problems and tensions cropping up between particular members of a given community and social groups. Likewise, the problem lies in narrowing down, reducing a human being to one dimension of human life (e.g. the social or individual one), or in general to the temporal one, thereby omitting his existential openness to transcendence. In the former case, debates that occur as the result of injustice and attempts to solve them are most frequently limited economical issues.<sup>5</sup> However, in the latter case, we endeavour to confirm justice in a purely legalistic way, which does not protect and prevent it from various pressure groups, relativisation and, eventually, abolishment – or at least negation of its binding – anyone, anywhere (under any conditions) – character.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, anywhere the justice is trying to cut off from a thorough – i.e. not reduced to one dimension – anthropology, by which we also mean its openness to transcendence, any evaluations of injustice and, thereby, its overcoming, are also doomed to one-sidedness and ineffectiveness. Therefore, not only theology is in need of social studies, but social studies also need a reflection that, passing down the full truth about man, fulfills its achievements with lasting values.

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<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 53-4.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Ouellet, “Sprawiedliwość Przymierza,” in *Bóg bogaty w miłosierdzie* (“Communio” 15), ed. Lucjan Balter (Poznań: Pallottinum, 2003), 126 and 129.

## 2. SOCIAL RELATIONS AND THE HUMAN PERSON

Who then is man in his relations to others if we present him integrally and confront him in this dimension of a binding principle of justice? Man is a social creature. It stems, above all, from the Revelation, although in the contemporary disputes about the shape of society and justice, as well as man himself, this message seldom comes through, which in turn translates to quite poor results of solving the debate we are interested in here.

“It is not good for the man [“Adam”] to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him” [Gen 2:18]. The quotation presents the state in which the process of the creation of man has not yet been fully accomplished. As we learn from the Biblical text, neither proximity of God nor man’s origins put up with the loneliness.<sup>7</sup> It turns out that in this respect it is also insufficient that man in his dignity is essentially different from all other creatures (he is higher – more perfect).<sup>8</sup> What is meant here is neither a helping hand in the work man was to do, nor help with his calling<sup>9</sup>, but rather personal likeness, social aspect, helping man’s loneliness and intellectual partnership.<sup>10</sup> The quoted fragment shows clearly that both social and individual dimensions of human life come from God and are not a mere external addition – something loosely connected with human nature. It is confirmed not only by man’s harmonious stay in Eden, but also by the crisis that appears and proves that sin – the fall of man – is also of social character.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the social dimension comprises the return to God – conversion – which has been sufficiently articulated in the New Testament through God’s revelation in Christ Jesus. “The very mystery of the Trinity reminds us that we have been created in the image of that divine communion, and so we cannot achieve fulfillment or salvation purely by our own efforts.”<sup>12</sup> The mystery in question not only

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<sup>7</sup> *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 1-6, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993-2007), 604.

<sup>8</sup> *Epos o Gilgameszu* (Warszawa: Agade, 2002), 5-9.

<sup>9</sup> Janusz Lemański, “Księga Rodzaju. Rozdziały 1-11,” in *Nowy komentarz biblijny – Stary Testament*, ed. Antoni Paciorek, Toman Bartnicki, Antoni Tronina (Częstochowa: Edycja, 2013), 233.

<sup>10</sup> Lemański, “Księga Rodzaju,” 234.

<sup>11</sup> Zdzisław Pawłowski, *Opowiadanie, Bóg i początek. Teologia narracyjna Rd. 1-3*, 13th vol. of “Rozprawy i Studia Biblijne” (Warszawa: Vocatio, 2003), 398; John A. Bailey, “Initiation and the Primal Woman in Gen 2-3,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 148; Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative. Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 176-9.

<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 178.

brings us closer to the truth about God, but also makes us aware of who man is by his nature – in his origins and ultimate destiny.<sup>13</sup>

As for the above remarks about theologians' competence in the evaluation of social issues, it is worth pondering the meaning of the revealed mystery of the Trinity in the course of ordering the research process. The truth about the innermost life of God, which was revealed to man, turns out to be an exhaustive reply to the question of why man does not fully realise and build appropriate social relations, egoistically closing himself down in his own self; as well as to the question about the reasons for profound crises in the case of unreserved submission to society, as if he owed almost everything to it.<sup>14</sup> Specialising and a subsequent division into various distinct disciplines of knowledge cannot be more important than the integral view of the human being, as any other view on it poses serious threats. This does not mean that specialising is wrong or redundant. It has to be deemed needed and indispensable, but only if it improves and strengthens the integral image of man.

Therefore, in the social dispute about justice we need such an image which makes room for specialist, even if very narrow approaches, but not at the cost of excluding other methods of describing man, which may convey other dimensions of his life and abilities. The proposal of this kind is personalism, as a conception possible in fact thanks to the Christian revelation of the truth about the Trinity and about the Incarnation<sup>15</sup>, and, on top of that, as the integral vision – that does not leave out any of essential dimension of human life – of the whole sphere of human references and works, thereby becoming the most reliable approach to man and his reality. Christian personalism turns out to be a very concrete and reliable proposal to overcome the apparent – based on incomplete approaches to the phenomenon of the human person – antinomy between the individual and society.<sup>16</sup>

For the same reason, it is the reality of the human person that ought to serve as the point of departure for the reflection on society, and not the supposed competence that stem from misappropriation of the image of the human being by particular disciplines. Neither the disciplines in question nor social structures themselves ease the tension that crops up within the human

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<sup>13</sup> Grzegorz Barth, *Hermeneutyka osoby* (Lublin: KUL, 2013), 158-178.

<sup>14</sup> Claus Westermann, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 203-14.

<sup>15</sup> Barth, *Hermeneutyka osoby*, 50-5.

<sup>16</sup> Gerard Dogiel, *Antropologia filozoficzna* (Kraków: ITKM, 1992), 66; Czesław S. Bartnik, *Personalizm* (Lublin: KUL, 2008), 36 and 198.

being, between his individuality and sociality. The tension that cannot be eased satisfactorily by stressing only individuality and independence, and even more so – singleness and transience, which in fact limits the human being to an anonymous element of a non-personal – if not, above all, institutional – entity. Man cannot be understood as a mere element of a social mechanism either, because he “has something of God”; the “something” is the image of the Creator inscribed in the creation, which does not allow the subordination to any society.<sup>17</sup> What then guarantees the solution of the tension and, at the same time, full realisation of the human person, from which social dimension must not be excluded? The answer is the character of unity that in social relations refers to the abovementioned basic indicator that decides on the origins of man and his likeness to God. And thanks to what then man becomes most similar to God? Thanks to the fact that urged God to become like man and to be radically sympathetic to man – i.e. thanks to the selfless gift of Himself.<sup>18</sup> The foundation for such a gift cannot lie in social structures, as much as a refined, closed-down individuality. This foundation may lie only in a community, which is so characteristic of God, who reveals Himself to man [Gen 1:26], and so necessary to man so that he may not only be fully realised, but also understand Himself well. Only a community makes this kind of mutual gift and reception thereof possible. This allows man to develop and be enriched by means of what develops and enriches the other one in the same sense. In other words, this correlation of one’s own business and personal benefits with the common good, their improvement that best develops our dormant abilities and lets all the members of a given community realise themselves.

Who then is man in relation to any other man? What is the basis for solving social disputes, including those about justice? Merely sociological replies to the question thus posed are insufficient, which does not have to mean that they are completely unnecessary. It is the conviction that social studies, despite their unquestionable achievement, are not capable of solving many issues characteristic of anthropology. Here we also mean the criteria that allow for the distinction of the personal structure of man that consist of his *suppositum* as well – understood as a lasting foundation rooted in the subjectivity

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Cincinnati: Benziger Bros., 1947), I-II, q 21, a 4 ad 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), no. 1878; Karol Wojtyła, “Objawienie Trójcy Świętej a świadomość zbawienia w świetle Vaticanum II” in *Z zagadnień kultury chrześcijańskiej* (Lublin: KUL, 1973), 16; Janusz Nagórny, *Posłannictwo chrześcijan w świecie*, vol. 1: “Świat i wspólnota” (Lublin: KUL, 1997), 135.

and his experience that stresses the said subjectivity and the history of each human being in order to in this way make possible the solution – on any stage, at any moment – of the debate we are interested in. It is the debate, from which – for the sake of man himself – we must not exclude his social references and his unique and lasting individual existence. Finally, what we are left with is the solution that is possible only in the person, taking into account his internal, rich and unique structure. The one that, continuing to enrich and develop the person, which is impossible in its fullness on the level of merely social structures, or in a hermetic isolation – on the level of solely individual experience.

### 3. NOT-ONLY-STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF INJUSTICE

If we wish to solve the social debate about justice, it seems that we should understand the justice itself and evaluate it in the same way as we have attempted to present the social dimension of man, i.e. personally, and not as an added value only loosely related to man. Not only do social structures – democratic ones included – not solve many problems that we come across between particular persons in society, but they cannot ensure justice. They are not sufficient to lay its foundation. Aristotle spoke of justice as a settled disposition, thanks to which people are capable to perform just acts and desire what is just.<sup>19</sup> And as such this disposition cannot be rooted in changing and unstable social structures and relate the deep desire, so characteristic of human nature, to them. St Thomas Aquinas is even more expressive in this respect. He terms justice an anthropologically founded ability<sup>20</sup>, which means that it evades being reduced to mere calculations of the opposing sides. It is not the case that justice has no social significance. The basic meaning in its social realisation certainly lies with the objective character of values, which should be accepted unquestionably by a given society. Any kind of deficiency – even temporary or pertaining to particular dimension – in this respect, sphere and circle leads to the necessity of external reinforcement of justice by virtue of power (the police), which can hardly be seen as consistent with its ontic (anthropological) grounding, and thereby efficient.

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Newburyport: Focus, 2002), 98.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Cincinnati: Benziger Bros., 1947), II-II, q 58, a 1.

In this context, Marc Ouellet pays attention to the far-reaching arbitrariness in the reading of the above stated principle of giving everyone what he is rightfully due and relativity, which is caused – in his opinion – by contemporary legalism, detached from the law of God and deprived of the anthropological foundation<sup>21</sup>, which simultaneously denies justice its character of the objective value that pertains to everyone. Bearing in mind our previous reflection, we, in fact, have to speak of the personalistic foundation that allows us to overcome the doubts that appear more efficient and point to concrete solutions. To do so, we need the Christian revelation and the system values characteristic of it that makes possible not only a proper evaluation of justice or lack thereof, but also obliges us to bear witness – to evangelise social structures. Even more so when all the problems of present-day societies with justice stem from their detachment from transcendence and eradication of religion from public space. Thus, the debate concerns not only overcoming injustice – how to and using what methods – but pertains also to justice itself, to how to understand it and how to build social relation in justice. This lack of a religious criterion signifies the lack of the sense of sin and, at the same time, lack of knowledge or being closed down to it with regard to the basic source of injustice and the most adequate way of overcoming it – i.e. the Redemption

The Biblical idea of justice is identifiable with sanctity. Therefore, the model of justice in the Bible is God, who judges Israel and demands replies commensurate with obligations, the specification of which is the Covenant. The Old Testament clearly juxtaposes justice with sin, which is considered injustice. The just is the one who is righteous and without sin [Gen 18:23, 1 Kings 8:32]. Respectively, justice consists in acting in accordance with God's will, which concerns both individuals and the whole nation.<sup>22</sup> In the view of the New Testament, Jesus is the fulfillment of justice. He does all that is just [Mt 3:15], which is equal to fulfilling the Father's will.<sup>23</sup> He

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<sup>21</sup> Ouellet, "Sprawiedliwość Przymierza," 126.

<sup>22</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 20: "In the Bible, there are many references to divine justice and to God as 'judge.' In these passages, justice is understood as the full observance of the Law and the behaviour of every good Israelite in conformity with God's commandments. Such a vision, however, has not infrequently led to legalism by distorting the original meaning of justice and obscuring its profound value. To overcome this legalistic perspective, we need to recall that in Sacred Scripture, justice is conceived essentially as the faithful abandonment of oneself to God's will."

<sup>23</sup> Andre Feuillet, "Dwa aspekty sprawiedliwości w Kazaniu na Górze," *Communio* 1-2 (1981): 73; Andrzej A. Napiórkowski, *Bosko-ludzka wspólnota. Podstawy katolickiej eklezjologii integralnej* (Kraków: WAM, 2010), 93.

transcends human justice, giving it a deeper meaning through the conversion of the heart, and not keeping to external rules. Nonetheless, the religious and anthropological roots of justice cannot serve as a justification for cutting it off from the social dimension. Therefore, Christians are obliged to bear witness to the truth, wherever it is absent and, thereby, injustice – sin – is spreading. Any kind of separation of the hope for the kingdom of God – kingdom of justice and peace – from the most existential human issues, including working toward justice in the world<sup>24</sup>, would mean losing the hope and abandoning faith.

The proximity of God's reign – announced by Jesus – that is at hand, which is firmly stated in the Gospel of John [Jn 12:31], seems to be predominant in our reflections on the causes of injustice. Jesus's works and words, as well as the images He refers to bring us closer to the reality of the kingdom of God, show us the greatest opponent of the kingdom and, as a result, justice.<sup>25</sup> The social dimension, according to which the kingdom of God suffers cleavages, does not fully exhaust or explain this.<sup>26</sup> The opponent is Satan and his kingdom, where the law is constituted by sin – which is essentially unjust. Announcing the kingdom of God, Jesus clearly implies that what lies at the foundation of all justice, which has far-reaching and complex social consequences, is the sin of man and not any kind of structural "leaks" that makes shirking from responsibility possible.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, the idea of fulfilling the kingdom of God may not be trivial to the Church, who is faithful to her Founder. We must not give up evangelising

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<sup>24</sup> Ouellet, "Sprawiedliwość Przymierza," 137.

<sup>25</sup> Juliusz S. Synowiec, *Oto twój król przychodzi. Mesjasz w pismach Starego Przymierza* (Kraków: Wyższe Seminarium Duchowne OO. Franciszkanów, 1992), 20.

<sup>26</sup> Announcing the proximity of the kingdom of God (God's reign), Jesus does not encircle it in any social conditions, pointing to the clear eschatological dimension of this reality. However, he does not allow for the detachment of God's reign from the temporal dimension of human life and the solution it resorts to. Jesus's claim is far-reaching and we have no right to weaken it because of the so-called methodological – or any other – correctness. In His understanding, this is not one of the options to choose from, but the only right and true one. Defending it, he is hanged on the cross. The solution put forward by Jesus is based on the concrete system of values and their unshaken hierarchy, which we can express in a statement: The more kingdom of God there is in us, the better the just social structures will be.

<sup>27</sup> Napiórkowski, *Bosko-ludzka wspólnota*, 93; Gerhard L. Müller, "Chrystologia – nauka o Jezusie Chrystusie," in *Podręcznik teologii dogmatycznej*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Kraków: M, 1998), 189; Leonhard Goppelt, *Teologia del Nuovo Testamento. L'opera di Gesù nel suo significato teologico a cura di Jürgen Roloff*, vol. 1 (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1982), 196-9; Joachim Gnllka, *Jesus von Nazaret. Botschaft und Geschichte*, (Freiburg-Basel-Wien: Herder, 1993), 87-165; Peter Neuner, "Eklezjologia – nauka o Kościele," in *Podręcznik teologii dogmatycznej*, ed. Wolfgang Beinert (Kraków: M, 1998), 252.

social injustice. What is more, in contrast with a number of alternative proposals, it must not be understood and carried out in a way that multiplies its victims or improves the situation of some at the cost of others. Does then the Church – and Christians – have a concrete proposal to do away with injustice and social inequality? “The Church, as Pope Francis stresses, quoting Benedict XVI, cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice.”<sup>28</sup> Dealing with this issue, the current Bishop of Rome refers all the ones interested to the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which has a rich tradition and unquestionable achievements. Moreover, in more particular issues, mainly pertaining to concrete regions or groups of people, the Pope leaves an exact and objective analysis to the Christian communities of individual countries.<sup>29</sup> First of all, however, the Church – and only the Church – possesses the appropriate means to overcome the source of injustice – its main author – before it takes on social dimension. Therefore, she does not stop here and limits herself to the final point, because it hard to treat only the symptoms of an illness, without addressing the causes. Social structures and justice are indispensable. Nonetheless, in the face of the one who is the source of injustice, they turn out to be insufficient.<sup>30</sup> What is then sufficient? What should prove useful for the Church and Christian theology to combat injustice, the social one included?

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<sup>28</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 183; Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Deus Caritas est* (December 25, 2005), no. 28, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hfben-xvi\\_enc\\_20051225\\_deus-caritas-est.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hfben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html) [November 6, 2016].

<sup>29</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 184.

<sup>30</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 20: „For his part, Jesus speaks several times of the importance of faith over and above the observance of the law. It is in this sense that we must understand his words when, reclining at table with Matthew and other tax collectors and sinners, he says to the Pharisees raising objections to him, “Go and learn the meaning of ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice.’ I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners” [Mt 9:13]. Faced with a vision of justice as the mere observance of the law that judges people simply by dividing them into two groups – the just and sinners – Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation. One can see why, on the basis of such a liberating vision of mercy as a source of new life, Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the other teachers of the law. In an attempt to remain faithful to the law, they merely placed burdens on the shoulders of others and undermined the Father’s mercy. The appeal to a faithful observance of the law must not prevent attention from being given to matters that touch upon the dignity of the person.”

## 4. MERCY DOES NOT ABOLISH JUSTICE, BUT COMPLETES IT

What it all boils down to is the attitude and conduct of Jesus's disciples, carried out in the Church, that, doing away with injustice, makes it possible to retain and fulfil what is just [Jn 3:13-17]. Jesus announces it at the Jordan and consistently carries it out through the mentioned proclamation of God's reign, the primary addressees of which – as is stressed by Pope Francis – are the poor. The current Pontiff, reflecting on the fundamental issues in the social dimension of evangelisation, points out to the “inclusion of the poor in society.”<sup>31</sup> Moreover, making reference to Scripture, to both the New and Old Testaments, he notes that there is nothing that urges God to intervene more, no other prayer that is heard by Him than the prayer of the poor, who calls in oppression and injustice [Ex 3:7-8, Judg 3:15, Deut 15:9, Sir 4:6, 1 Jn 3:17].<sup>32</sup> Alluding to the Gospel of Mark, on the other hand, and Jesus's words written there: “Give them some food yourselves” [Mk 6:37], Pope Francis has no doubts that Christian's task is to cooperate in overcoming structural causes of poverty and promoting the integral development of the poor. Furthermore, offering everyday help to people afflicted with various forms of misery, as well as making gestures of Christian solidarity, so characteristic of the Church of the first decades, and today – as Pope opines – slightly forgotten or even worn.<sup>33</sup> Such solidarity is hard to attain without mercy that Francis defines as a category “more theological than cultural, sociological, political or philosophical,” considering the poor as the main addressees of mercy.<sup>34</sup>

However, the preferential option for the poor has its own history, both complex and difficult. In no way can the stage of the attempt to subordinate the Christian doctrine to ideology be excluded from it. This took place in certain trends of the theology of liberation, which referred to the Marxist analysis in the evaluation of social processes. This is not satisfactorily accounted for by the accusation of such an attachment to doctrinal issues that veils suffering and harm done to the poor.<sup>35</sup> What turns out to be the right solution in the debate is placing mercy at the very heart of the doctrine, which distinguished the community of believers from the very beginning of its existence,

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<sup>31</sup> Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, no. 185.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 187.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 188.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 198.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 194.

right after leaving the Cenacle in Jerusalem [Gal 2:2-10]. Another question, however, appears: Do we not leave off or debilitate justice, while placing mercy at the centre of the teaching of the Church and her mission in the world?

Responding to it, we shall invoke John Paul II's teaching. It is he who in the encyclical *Dives in misericordia* does even more than put Divine mercy at the heart of the doctrine. His merits in the social involvement of the Magisterium cannot be overestimated. Voicing his opinion on the Christian vision of society, John Paul II speaks of a necessity for identifying it with the practice of Christian life. What it means is that a Christian must constantly realise the unique and profound need for proclaiming Divine mercy, following in the footsteps of the Old and New Testament and, above all, Jesus Himself.<sup>36</sup> If every Christian should, first and foremost, be the messenger of Divine mercy, Divine mercy should be found at the heart of the Christian doctrine. Years ago Józef Majka in the light of the mentioned John Paul II's encyclical defined mercy as the "basic principle of social life."<sup>37</sup>

In the encyclical *Dives in misericordia* and Jesus's parable about the merciful Father and prodigal son that is analysed there [Lk 15:11-32], we encounter the experience of misery, poverty, misspent goods, loss of dignity and safe home, yet, above all, the experience of rejection of justice. After all of this, in a situation of extreme poverty and humiliation unworthy of human dignity – the prodigal son "longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any" [Lk 15:16], which may be called situation of exclusion, he thinks about his plight and decides to go back, without even considering asking the Father for forgiveness [Lk 15:19]. He wants to bring himself to justice, in spite of realising that nothing could testify against him more. Only that kind of decision and willingness to enter through a narrow gate of justice leads to mercy that makes a fallen and unjust son into an heir, which is symbolised by the ring given him by the Father [Lk 15:22].

Therefore, mercy, at least along the lines of Jesus's parable, is not unconditional, as though grace were given automatically to all who because of their bad decisions, harm done to others and trampling justice, experience misery, in comparison to which the return seems less burdensome. The

<sup>36</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis* (March 4, 1979), no. 9, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_04031979\\_redemptor-hominis.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html) [November 6, 2016]; John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia* (November 30, 1980), no. 3, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30111980\\_dives-in-misericordia.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html) [November 6, 2016].

<sup>37</sup> Józef Majka, "Miłosierdzie jako zasada społeczna w świetle encykliki 'Dives in misericordia,'" in John Paul II, *Dives in misericordia* (Kraków: Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, 1981), 176-84.

prerequisite of mercy is the decision to bring oneself to justice, to fulfil its fundamental requirements. Mercy is not reserved to a group of people, and the preferential option for the poor does not consist in recognising them as a privileged group. Mercy as a foundation of the understanding of the doctrine of the Church is but fulfillment of justice, because it turns toward the one that is the main reason of poverty, harm and injustice – toward sin, which can be absolved and thereby defeated by God alone. “If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. On the contrary: anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end, because one begins to feel the tenderness and mercy of God. God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice. We must pay close attention to what Saint Paul says if we want to avoid making the same mistake for which he reproaches the Jews of his time: ‘For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified’ [Rom 10:3-4]. God’s justice is his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the Cross of Christ is God’s judgement on all of us and on the whole world, because through it he offers us the certitude of love and new life.”<sup>38</sup>

That is why Christian, obliged to the proclamation of the Good News, and thus to opposing and changing structural inequity, without which no social problem may be solved. And this signifies the lack of consent to be blocked and limited in the issue of seeking solutions to deal with poverty and flagrant inequity only on the economical level and the one-sided solution characteristic of it. We are in need of solution conformed with Jesus’s strategy – i.e. the theological one. Economy that is not improved in practice by means of values, ethics and, finally, the Gospel, does not turn out to be a sufficient answer to change the situation of the poor and afflicted satisfactorily.<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>38</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, no. 21.

<sup>39</sup> Paweł Góralczyk, “O większą sprawiedliwość w ekonomii i polityce,” *Communio* 20 (2000), no. 5: 110-29.

example here may be the so-called economic axiom of the “invisible hand of the market,” which in regard to solving urgent social problems triggered by poverty and inequity comes down to being content with solutions based exclusively on economic calculation. The economic principle of the “invisible hand” without ethics, Gospel and mercy often turns to a “clenched fist.”

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