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Attitudes towards poverty

Abstract

Poverty, perceived as a lack of basic consumer goods, gives rise to a whole range of outcomes which affect not only the material dimension of human existence, but also influence social relations and references to spiritual values. Attitudes which could be associated with involuntary and unacceptable poverty include: doubt in the Divine Providence, bitterness, jealousy and envy, blaming others, lack of gratitude and in perceiving good, laziness, lack of initiative, escalating demands, gluttony and greed as well as meanness. However, joy, peace, freedom and solidarity with the poor, as well as work and enterprise, are symptoms of evangelical attitudes of the poor in spirit. Attitudes to poverty point to a wide range of human behaviours towards possessions and in effect, reveal an individual's sense of value.

Keywords

Poverty; attitude; joy; work; bitterness.

Poverty can either be a state of inability to satisfy one's material needs arising from inherited poverty, or deprivation of livelihood caused by one's own choices and actions. Sometimes, however, it becomes a part of the chosen way of life for people, who, for various reasons, renounce the excessive pursuit of wealth. In both these situations people adopt certain attitudes which indicate rebelling against, or acknowledging the situation in which they find themselves. Depending on the attitude towards a given situation, a will to fight and a desire to survive may arise in a person's heart, or alternatively resignation, which carries huge existential and moral consequences. The way poverty is experienced, with reference to God, people and the world, becomes a kind of test of mental toughness and reveals the inner attitude of the person who can approach the challenge of bearing real poverty in a holistic manner. In this respect, statements regarding extreme challenges such as "The way in which

a particular person experiences pain and suffering depends on whether it can be given a sense of meaning¹ can be related to personal attitudes. Hence, it is important to analyse attitudes towards poverty, search for the key to a better understanding of poverty and give it a meaning that will provide protection from escapism into doubt.

The subject of this paper is to present a variety of human attitudes towards poverty which result from induced motivations. Therefore, one can talk about the attitude towards poverty in terms of a person being affected by various circumstances; of evangelical poverty as a chosen attitude from a religious motive; and finally the attitudes which should reflect the choice of imitating Christ. For the purpose of this article, negative attitudes will be discussed in connection with poverty being presented as something not chosen and not accepted, which is experienced as a life's setback and an unbearable and undeserved bad luck, incumbent on a person with no escape from it. This does not mean that poor people do not have virtues and cannot rise above the current conditions which, although are unfavourable, do not completely determine human behaviour.

Positive attitudes will be discussed in the context of voluntary and accepted poverty, which is consciously chosen by a person, or that of an act of God. However, the author is aware that even such people experience difficulties when experiencing hardships and, in practice, are not always able to rise to the level of their ideals. It is also important to emphasise that the attitude towards poverty is something dynamic in the life of every human being and it may happen that at certain times of life, under different circumstances, a particular person will behave differently.

1. Attitudes resulting from an improper approach towards material goods

Poverty, perceived as a lack of basic consumer goods, gives rise to a whole range of outcomes which affect not only the material dimension of human existence, but also influence social relations and attitudes towards spiritual values. A poor man suffering from a restricted means of development is affected at the self-esteem level and experiences a sense of abandonment by

¹ M. Machinek, *Śmierć w dyspozycji człowieka. Wybrane problemy etyczne u kresu ludzkiego życia*, Olsztyn 2004, p. 171.

people and entrapment by difficulties. In such a situation a sense of injustice and misfortune can easily arise, for which others are accused. Frustration and discouragement does not have to be automatically linked with the actual state of poverty, but admittedly these attitudes gain an easier basis for their existence and development².

A wide range of feelings and behaviours accompanying those persons affected by involuntary poverty is dependent on the degree of their spiritual life and their ability to cope with difficulties. The encountered lack of success and accumulating difficulties, a shortage of things, coping with humiliation and blocked learning opportunities, or even the inability to break out of the circle of inherited poverty, cannot be said to carry one-sided negative repercussions in the life of a given person. Sometimes they can even stimulate outstanding individuals who through their own efforts, combined with a stroke of luck, can rise above their situation and cross the barriers created by the environment. However it seems appropriate to present a range of attitudes that can arise in situations of poverty and extreme deprivation.

This text describes attitudes towards poverty and analyses a range of challenges faced by the person experiencing material deficiencies. The aim of the research is to show the diversity of attitudes towards the material world depending on the adopted view of life and the chosen way of realising the vocation. Its object is to show the virtues and vices which appear in a person's relation to poverty. Obligations, arising from the moral evaluation of the described behaviours will also be pointed out.

1.1. Improper relationships towards people

Attitudes which could be associated with involuntary poverty include: doubt in the Divine Providence, bitterness, jealousy and envy, blaming others, lack of gratitude and the ability of perceiving good, laziness, lack of initiative, escalating demands, gluttony and greed as well as meanness³. Each of these imperfections may have a different intensity and manifests itself differently in complex cases, depending on temperament and personality traits. They are

² Cf. W. Surmiak, *Opcja preferencyjna na rzecz ubogich wyrazem miłości społecznej. Studium teologicznomoralne w świetle nauczania Jana Pawła II*, Katowice 2009, p. 47.

³ Cf. A. Derdziuk, *Ubóstwo. 2. Aspekt moralny*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Lublin 2013, vol. 19, col. 1269.

not necessarily related to poverty, as the sole reason for their existence, but can occur as a reaction to experiencing poverty and deprivation.

A person who is excessively focused on the tedious and little effective pursuit of acquiring the necessary means to live, can quite easily narrow his options and limit himself to his concern for survival. Dependent on himself, he sees the world as a hostile reality which does not offer any help but poses a constant threat. Such a vision of the world becomes more flattened and saturated with a concern for material things. If there is no appropriate spirituality, which will ensure an openness to count on God's help, doubt in Divine Providence will arise with accusations addressed to the Creator. Forgetting about God is a milder form of a hostile attitude towards the Creator, whilst outright hostility may manifest itself, accusing God of insensitivity and the wrong arrangement of worldly affairs. A person offended at God, stops praying and a sense of loneliness grows within, condemning him/her to an illusory self-sufficiency, that is counting only on oneself.

The outcome of distancing oneself from the Creator and Redeemer, as a result of disillusionment with God and belief in His insensitivity to human problems, is bitterness. It manifests itself as sorrow, due to a person's circumstances, and a reluctance to show joy even with things that he possesses. A bitter person sees the world through a prism of sustained losses and disillusionments, and deliberately displays his negative side, which confirms his pessimistic vision of reality. Combined with a lack of hope, disappointment leads to a sense of a lesser value in oneself and positions struggling with a difficult situation on the border of meaninglessness and absurdity. The weight of daily existence is so great that it overwhelms the ability to recognise good and thus the bitter person is more inclined to assert that all joy is unjustified, and those who are happy are hypocrites or madmen. Interpreting this as a Sisyphean task, condemned to fail in his efforts, causes the bitterness to block new initiatives and hinders accepting assistance.

One of the causes of jealousy and envy may be a lack of basic needs which are expressed in the belief that others have it easy and do not have any problems. A jealous person imagines that others do not experience difficulties, and that everything comes to them effortlessly. He is convinced of the injustice prevalent in the world, which makes sharing unequal, and created unjustified differences in terms of talents, skills and material wealth⁴. He is not only unable to enjoy

⁴ Cf. M. Graczyk, *Sprawiedliwość społeczna a rozwarstwienie ekonomiczne społeczeństwa*, in: *Moralne aspekty przemian cywilizacyjnych*, eds. J. Nagórny, A. Derdziuk, Lublin 2001, p. 70.

his neighbour's assets, but regards his position threatened by someone else who has any possessions. Arising out of the false belief that if one person has then another has not, a jealous person accuses God of a lack of generosity and restricts God's resources to what he can perceive. Appropriating the right to possess items belonging to others and to determine the manner and measure of distributing God's gifts to others, he is convinced that what others possess, is owed to him from the very nature of things, and considers it an injustice to necessarily increase his efforts to achieve something⁵.

Envy may appear as wishing misfortune on a neighbour who is better off. Not only does he enjoy the failures of others, pleased that they are unfortunate, just like him, but also provokes bad luck on them by his own words, deeds, or the assistance of dark occult powers. The drama of the envious person is that he sees no possibility of changing his situation, apart from worsening his neighbour's position. With no hope of improving fate, he is comforted by another person's misfortune, which only confirms his pessimistic view of the world. Envy is a moral flaw which opposes love and is one of the bodily deeds opposing spiritual rewards⁶.

One of the defence mechanisms against poverty can be to blame others, which includes both seeking culprits for the situation, as well as perceiving the wealth of others as something immoral and attained in an unjust way. If all people who are successful are considered responsible for the poor's deprivation, deprivation becomes part of a hostile understanding of the world, which is experienced as the arena in which one struggles for survival. Construing social relations as a class struggle does not have to be the result of an ideological stigmatisation with Marxism, but is born of a falsely conceived egalitarianism, according to which everyone should have equal amounts. Not taking into consideration the difference in needs and merit, envious people can discern the rich as exploiters and property thieves of something which belongs to everybody without effort. Sometimes these views are exploited by various demagogues who set the desperately poor into a revolutionary change in social relations and a forceful equalisation of inequalities.

Suspecting that rich people acquired their riches dishonestly, becomes a way of laying the responsibility for the existing social inequalities on them, and

⁵ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2539–2540.

⁶ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1852.

a form of self-justification of someone who is not resourceful in life⁷. Behind the developed aspiration to own things, which is not connected with the real effort involved in attaining them, lies an inability to soberly assess the situation, and an outpouring of negative feelings onto people who are more successful. Daydreaming and idleness are masked by lamentations over the world's cruelty and a search for the conspiracy theory, in which hidden forces allegedly operate, striving to slavishly exploit the poor. Social anger which swells during a crisis, caused by a dramatic materialistic deterioration or the provocative behaviour of the rich, can be a threat to the social order with a danger of it escalating into a rebellion.

An escalation of demands nascent in a person's heart, whether due to an excessive desire for goods and an awakened consumerism, or caused by a revolutionary stance to take from others, is something unjust and virtually uncontrollable. On the one hand, the person with a 'demands stance' sees others as enemies, or at least rivals, who do not meet that person's expectations. On the other hand, the very measure of the demands is unjustified by that person's real needs and hence is immeasurable. The divide between nourished excessive expectations and realistic but limited possibilities of satisfying them causes a person to feel frustrated and to close himself to the hope of changing his situation.

A lack of gratitude and failure to perceive what is good constitute an improper relationship to worldly goods. A person whose heart is dominated by rebellion and bitterness, does not perceive the good shown by others and believes that whatever he received he earned by right. An excessive focus on acquiring material goods causes a loss of measure of saturation, and a person possessed by greed is incapable of experiencing happiness, since he has lost the ability to enjoy what he has. Therefore, he deems as suspicious the good shown by others, which, in his eyes, appears as a self-serving pretence of kindness or as a willingness to ingratiate oneself and gain some benefit. The ungrateful person treats the obligation of showing gratitude as a humiliation and a confession to being dependent on others. Wishing to indebt everything to himself, he is not familiar with the phrase "thank you", since he considers it to be a sign of an unwarranted payment or contribution to people who have conferred on him some favour⁸.

⁷ Cf. J. Nagórny, *Bieda jako problem moralny. Z polskiej perspektywy*, in: *Ks. Janusz Nagórny. Wezwanie do uczestnictwa w życiu społecznym*, eds. K. Jeżyna, J. Gocko, W. Rzepa, Lublin 2011, p. 635–636.

⁸ Cf. A. Dylus, *Wdzięczność*, in: *Słownik teologiczny*, ed. A. Zuberbier, Katowice 1998, p. 628–629.

1.2. A distorted relationship to things and responsibilities

A person with over-developed expectations actually does not know what he wants and does not satisfy his real needs, but those of the artificially created sensations demanding stimuli which emulate drugs. It is about seeking sensations, which reveal themselves in the shape of specific goods, but in effect, reveal, to the outside observers, the inner emptiness of the frustrated person⁹. This disturbed relationship with the world results in an inability to control desires and manifests itself in an excessive desire for things, or in their ill-treatment.

Generally, greed and gluttony become habits characteristic not only of the poor, who do not have the possibility of owning sufficient resources, but are also the vices of people who have many goods, who are incapable of appreciating them, and without due measure seek to multiply their possessions. Firstly, greed and gluttony represent a characteristic way of relating to food through excesses, exaggerated accumulation and consumption. The method and measure of food and drink intake, betray the gluttony and greed in the lack of distancing themselves from food. Greedy people, by consuming many foods, aim not so much as to physically satisfy their thirst and appetite, but to satisfy their experienced spiritual and emotional hunger.

Miserliness is also an attitude which may accompany an improper relation to worldly goods. It is understood to be a disordered desire to multiply goods and retain them exclusively for oneself¹⁰. Collecting, counting and meticulously hiding money, valuables and other things which define wealth form part of the hidden compensation for the experienced lack of self-esteem. A miser fears for his old age and wants to excessively protect it by collecting goods, which he is incapable of sharing. In fact, miserly persons, in their understanding, are terrified of a shortage in their current possessions, since, even savouring the accumulated wealth and boasting shows the need to prove to themselves that having something means something. Prioritising “having” over “being”, originates from experiencing a lack of “being”, and becomes a never-ending attempt to fill his nonfulfillment as a person with quantifiable goods in the form of material things and meaning within the community¹¹. The desire for

⁹ Cf. M. Pokrywka, *Antropologiczne podstawy moralności małżeństwa i rodziny*, Lublin 2010, p. 49.

¹⁰ Cf. T. Zadykowicz, *Skąpstwo*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Lublin 2013, vol. 18, col. 280–281.

¹¹ Cf. Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do młodzieży zgromadzonej na Westerplatte. 12 czerwca 1987*, in: *Jan Paweł II do młodzieży. (1978–2005). Listy, orędzia, przemówienia, homilie*, Poznań 2005, p. 410–411.

an illusory dominance over others, in terms of wealth and career progression, reveals a person's low self-esteem. They become persons who try to overcome it by transferring it onto the material plane. Therefore, in the case of miserliness, one is faced with an even greater degradation of a person who lowers himself to the level of reification, to be treated as a market commodity.

Poverty, experienced as a lack of things and an inability to provide oneself with a means of support, can cause discouragement and demobilisation, which manifests itself in avoiding work and being a parasite on others. Sometimes this attitude is a voluntary choice stemming from cynicism and contempt of this world. A man, desperate and doubting in the possibility of overcoming the encountered difficulties, suffers from a lack of initiative and does not want to take on new challenges. Laziness arising in this way, is the soul's enemy, and subjected to it, threatens not only with a collapse in spiritual life, but also contributes to experiencing difficulties in meeting daily responsibilities. A man who has committed himself to laziness harms not only himself but also others, and becomes a burden to his community. Laziness has a pervasive character and spreads from one activity, that someone does not want to do, to another. This means that, in a person, one weakness and a diminished enthusiasm affects other weaknesses, as in a linked system. The belief in one's own weakness and an unwillingness to overcome mounting difficulties, become a kind of way of thinking, which affects the performance of the activity-driven person.

Under the influence of laziness a person gains the wrong view of reality, and even the smallest effort becomes a heroic task that scares the idler with its enormity. Being subjected to lazy reflections over a range of tasks, exaggerated by his own imagination, a person avoiding work sees the world as an intolerable gendarme, who always expects something from him. "An idler philosophising over his sad fate sees himself as a hero burdened with thousands of responsibilities which he is unable to bear. In accordance with the principle that people get more tired with what they have to do than with performing the actual task, an idler gets tired just thinking about what he has to do and is already exhausted even before attempting the task. Therefore, some moralists ironically call laziness rest before work"¹².

If, instead of pondering over his awaiting tasks, an idler did them straight away, he would have long since forgotten about the effort invested in the

¹² A. Derdziuk, *W trosce o posiadanie Ducha Pańskiego. Rozważania nad Konstytucjami Braci Mniejszych Kapucynów*, Lublin 2008, p. 59–60.

realisation of the activities imposed on him. However, in procrastinating,, he experiences their increasing burden, which becomes even more intolerable and incomprehensible. An idler strenuously wonders why it is he who must perform the given duties, and looks for the guilty party responsible for this situation. Laziness makes the postponed activity actually more difficult and requires more mental energy in its fulfilment. Indeed, one is then in more of a rush, and in addition, new activities appear for the forthcoming days.

Laziness introduces chaos into the work of a person with this flaw, and impedes the functioning of the community in which the person lives. Neglected duties mean that somebody else needs to carry them out, which contributes to tensions and accusations. The idler pushes his duties aside and performs them carelessly, causing indignation in others, and the need to remedy the consequences of negligence. Laziness, as a major flaw, is also the root of other sins, since a person without a proper activity, wastes his time in an unproductive manner and it is easier for temptations to breed in his thoughts. A body demands increasingly more and invents increasingly more exorbitant cravings when it is subjected to the dictates of its mind and spirit. Subjecting to laziness manifests itself as negligence of duties, may result in the loss of neighbourly love and contributes to falls in the realm of impurity. Furthermore, people wasting time are not lost for words and speculatively spread rumours instead of concentrating on their own business. In this context, poverty when it is a result of a lack of employment opportunities, contributes to a person's degradation because the person then feels useless and begins to have doubt in his self-esteem and usefulness to society¹³.

2. Motivation for choosing evangelical poverty

Poverty which is voluntarily chosen as a conscious imitation of Jesus Christ stems from a positive attitude towards the world, which is treated as God's creation, but which cannot completely fulfil a person's expectations, who is aware of his vocation to transcendence. However, this does not mean that a negative treatment of material things is something bad, but emphasises the relative and temporal nature of earthly goods that are transitional and should serve man.

¹³ Cf. A. Derdziuk, A. Zadroga, *Bezrobocie jako wyzwanie dla podmiotów społeczno-gospodarczych*, „Kontrola Państwowa” 51 (2006) No. 6 (311), p. 54.

Hence, the attitude of poverty refers to the ability of such self-control as not to get entangled in dependence on things which, if treated as something extremely important, may lead to desiring them, thus enslaving the person.

A realism of looking at the world in which a person perceives the need to use things, and becomes aware of his personal insufficiency and fragility, is associated with poverty. Being a corporeal-spiritual entity, a person cannot completely renounce food, clothing and work tools which safeguard his daily existence. This indicates the status of a person as a creation bound by limitations of nature, and who is aware of the need to respect the conditions of world in which one lives. Respecting these limitations does not need to be associated with the feeling of being trapped in a body, but can be an opportunity to perceive the positive sensations which are only accessible through the body¹⁴.

A follower of Christ, aware of his vocation to eternal life, sees the transience and fragility of things and their temporary nature. Being aware of the damage caused by the original sin, a person also discovers one's attraction to things, revealing their seductive dimension, appearing attractive and tempting. Therefore, the motivation for choosing evangelical poverty may sometimes be a wish to escape from the allurements of this world in order to protect oneself from its influences. However, such a stance does not protect the heart's freedom because it is still linked to the fear of succumbing to pleasures as it did not explicitly choose the Supreme Good, which is capable of satisfying all desires.

The imbalance between one's hidden desires and actual ownership, which exists in a person, creates a "hunger" for things which may be of varied intensity. The tension arising from a lack of satisfying certain needs has the ability to transform itself into other desires in the form of compensatory mechanisms, when one unmet need is satisfied by another act or possession of another thing. "Substitutes" for human needs tend to be frequently subconscious and become something insidious. This implies, amongst others, that a person deciding on a conscious level, does not realise that, in fact, it is not about a particular thing but an attempt to restore equilibrium from the imbalance caused by the pressure of hidden desires, also called lust.

Today's knowledge of how the brain functions provides information on mechanisms which produce specific amino acids and hormones which stimulate the neural system and influence the flow of information between nerve cells, and how they are responsible for a person's mood, his desires and cravings.

¹⁴ Cf. I. Mroczkowski, *Osoba i cielesność. Moralne aspekty teologii ciała*, Warszawa 2008, p. 78.

Stimulating the brain through specific experiences results in desires, whose existence reveals itself in the form of excitement and tension, as well as, dissatisfaction. This may cause psychological discomfort leading to a sense of anxiety. The person is convinced that he is not fulfilled and feels a sense of loss, which in reality may only be about a lack of a certain element, in the form of a psychoactive substance or activity to which he has become accustomed, and sometimes even becomes addicted to. The brain reacts to excessive amounts of neurotransmitters by sending out signals about the need to satisfy the given expectations, whose fulfilment will restore the biochemical equilibrium from the imbalance caused in this way¹⁵.

Becoming aware of these mechanisms allows a person, who is familiar with one's corporeal-spiritual character, to have a more cognisant control of one's conduct, which is vulnerable to a dependence on certain activities and things. Knowing one's own weakness and personal hurts, which were caused by previous choices and actions, a person must know how to keep one's distance from the world and learn how to have a positive impact on one's thoughts, feelings and desires. Hence, shaping the attitudes which accompany the conscious choice of evangelical poverty is something necessary and places human development on the level of cognition, motivation, desires and decisions as well as their accompanying behaviours.

Evangelical poverty is born with the discovery of a prevenient love of God who is concerned about his children and surrounds them with care in the world. Christians believe that God, through his wisdom and power, not only called the world into existence, but also through his Providence maintains it and leads it towards integral development which serves man. The basis for choosing poverty lies in a deep conviction of God's invitation to use his gifts which are at man's disposal. Recognising a child-like dependency on God is not only an expression of faith in the fulfilment of God's promises, but also a personal weapon in the face of various challenges and an ability to maintain internal peace when faced with shortages and threats. A person who completely trusts God discovers, in his life, proof of the guarantee of the Saviour's caring intervention and learns to overcome fears and difficulties which inevitably arise on the road of faith.

Jesus Christ, the teacher and model of evangelical poverty, said of himself that "Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son

¹⁵ Cf. I. Mroczkowski, *Natura osoby ludzkiej. Podstawy tożsamości człowieka*, Płock 2012, p. 151.

of Man has nowhere to rest his head”¹⁶. The Saviour saying to his disciples “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat (or drink), or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”¹⁷, not only pointed to the example of the birds of the sky, and wild lilies, but was even more able to call upon his own example, when he repeatedly showed them his totally unaltered trust in the Father. Completely giving himself to the Father, Jesus maintained peace in the face of shortages and inconveniences, and pointed out the infallibility of His intervention. He reproached his disciples for not remembering miracles and allowing themselves to be infected with the acid of the Pharisees. “You of little faith, why do you conclude among yourselves that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand, and do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many wicker baskets you took up? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you took up?”¹⁸. Jesus constantly reiterates the need to adopt a child-like attitude, which lets Christ’s disciples participate in the Kingdom, where promises of salvation are fulfilled¹⁹.

3. Spiritual fruit through experiencing poverty properly

Joy, an important test of the attitude towards poverty, is born in response to discovering a trusting dependency on God and freedom from the transitory conditions in the world. The quest for happiness is natural for man and ensures that he obtains satisfaction from his life. This contributes to greater enthusiasm and zeal and intensifies mental resistance and activity. Man, set on the pursuit of happiness, in as much as not confusing it with a mindless accumulation of pleasures, may be capable of making sacrifices and offerings, if he sees in it a long-term plan of selfless actions, bringing him specific rewards in the future. “Eudemonism does not necessarily lead to egoism, since the innate human desire for success as a subjective experience being

¹⁶ Mt 8:20.

¹⁷ Mt 6:25.

¹⁸ Mt 16:8–10.

¹⁹ Cf. Mt 18:3.

the drive for his actions, can be purified by reason and will, and targeted as a service for another man”²⁰.

An altruistic attitude towards others does not preclude achieving happiness, which can be verified through obtaining satisfaction from providing good neighbourly help. Such a concept was adopted by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, who, although emphasising a person’s inviolable dignity, objected to the over-emphasised pursuit of self-realisation, but pointed man towards self-transcendence, noting that “man cannot fully discover himself, except through sincere self-sacrifice”²¹. An active desire for success leads to the search for happiness, not only in what we experience and possess, but also in what we do and what we achieve²².

The joy flowing from evangelical poverty is expressed in the conviction of the certainty of meeting the necessary needs and an inner peace, which characterises somebody who retains a sense of security even in the face of difficulties. An awareness of remaining in the sensitive care of our heavenly Father gives man hope that his expectations will not be disappointed if they are in accordance with the will of God.

The joy of evangelical poverty is related to the discovery of freedom, as a lack of dependence on material goods and career progression²³. Satisfaction from what one owns does not result from resignation and a lack of aspirations for a better life, but it is recognised that the person’s superiority does not come from owning possessions, but from being able to love, which is man’s fundamental vocation. The quality of life of a poor person is not based on the amount of wealth and tools possessed to facilitate his daily existence, but on being satisfied with what is currently available and an openness to the love surrounding the person.

A man living in poverty by choice, enjoys freedom from concern for safeguarding his wealth and anxiety about its possible loss, or theft²⁴. The truly poor in spirit do not have to worry about the struggles to maintain their position in the marketplace and the need for constant search for opportunities, in order

²⁰ A. Derdziuk, *Teologia radości chrześcijańskiej*, in: *Teologia moralna u kresu drugiego tysiąclecia*, eds. J. Nagórny, K. Jeżyna, Lublin 1998, p. 258.

²¹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 24.

²² Cf. J. W. Gogola, *Rady ewangeliczne. Teologia, praktyka, formacja*, Kraków 2003, p. 153–154.

²³ Cf. T. Zadykowicz, „*Sequela Christi et imitatio hominis*”. *Paradygmat naśladowania we współczesnej refleksji teologicznomoralnej – źródła perspektywy*, Lublin 2011, p. 240–241.

²⁴ Cf. J. A. Nowak, *Osoba konsekrowana*, T. 1, *Ślub ubóstwa*, Lublin 1992, p. 83.

not to be overtaken or taken advantage of by the competition. While this attitude may seem naïve, and many feel that it is linked with the resignation from greater aspirations, it is however a poor person's joy of life and the accompanying inner peace which compensates for the discomfort of not keeping up with the latest fashion and attaining top positions in the community. The person placing his trust in God, experiences evidence of forethought in the Divine Providence, which comes as help in unexpected and surprising ways. A measure of God's generosity on this plane is the magnitude of a person's trust and ability to radically rely on God's leadership.

The authenticity of evangelical poverty is expressed by solidarity with the poor and a willingness to share with others²⁵. Adopting renunciations in the spirit of the Gospel does not flow from a lack of respect for things, but is born from perceiving them as a reality, which by itself, does not add value to a person. That is why a man who respects the poor does not judge and evaluate them through a "possession and earthly honours" filter. Appreciating a man's personal dignity one cannot regard the pauper as being fully guilty for his situation and hold him responsible for his condition. Condemning the poor and a harsh treatment of them for being a burden on society is not within the logic of the evangelical attitude of poverty chosen as a readiness to imitate Christ. The poor, in the spirit of the Gospel, are able to understand those who are affected by poverty, both material and spiritual. Experiencing a lack of material security and the possibility of freely disposing of money, they can empathise with the situation of people without work and those having difficulty improving their fate.

In accordance with the principles of communal love, a man truly rooted in the Gospel, treats the poor preferentially, which means through a stance of solidarity, and a readiness to help them based on the principle of subsidiarity²⁶. Therefore, one cannot relieve them of their duties thus immobilising them in a way that will deepen their indifference and helplessness, and make them dependent on donors. Empowering a person demands securing support in the form of creating conditions for independent living and securing a livelihood. Legal and institutional solutions fall within the terms of these actions. Concrete material assistance is also necessary, although it does not have to be long-

²⁵ Cf. J. A. Nowak, *Osoba konsekrowana*, p. 98.

²⁶ Cf. Surmiak, *Opcja preferencyjna na rzecz ubogich*, p. 86; A. Wuwer, *Zasada subsydiarności. Perspektywa nauczania społecznego Kościoła*, Katowice 2011, p. 52.

term. By undertaking various initiatives with an aim to providing specific aid, people driven by the preferential option for the poor do not only support them materially, but also reveal the merciful face of God who cares about the fate of each of his children. Guided by the image of charity, these people devote their strengths and heart to the poor and those deprived of hope²⁷.

A person, poor in the evangelical sense, is capable of sharing what he has with others. Convinced that all his resources are due to Divine Providence, he is certain that an everyday allocation of goods rests on his resources, and he is ready to lend them to those in greater need. The foundation of true solidarity with the poor is justice and love, which draw attention to people's dignity being equal and the need to provide everybody with what is rightfully owed to them, according to their needs and merits. The essence of sincerely sharing with others is not donating only what is superfluous and not required by the donor, that is *bona superflua*, but also a willingness to share that which is not only useful, but even required by the person providing assistance²⁸. The point is not to unreasonably get rid of livelihoods, but to recognise total dependence on God, who calls for radical love.

A person, who penetrates deeper into the truth about ontological and moral dependence on God, becomes aware not only of his own destitution, but also of the wealth, available to him, if only he becomes a participant in God's life. By affiliating with the only-begotten Son of God, which is the aim of God's actions, one is led to becoming God's heir and coheir with Christ. By calling God, Father, a person driven by the ideal of evangelical poverty lives with an awareness that the father's words directed at the elder son in the parable of the prodigal son, "everything I have is yours"²⁹ are true and address the person.

4. Work and Entrepreneurship in the attitude of poverty perspective

The attitude of poverty cannot be understood as a *dolce far niente*, but is a realistic approach to life and a proper use of one's ability to work. Human resourcefulness does not mean abandoning one's reliance on God, but blends well with grace. A poor man must be industrious, because he knows that the

²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Novo Millennio ineunte*, Vatican 2001, 50.

²⁸ Cf. Mk 12: 43–44.

²⁹ Lk 15: 31.

basis of his upkeep is work performed with his own hands, and not accumulated wealth, from which he gets paid dividends. A poor man is not a rentier receiving income from accumulated capital, but every day is concerned about bread for himself and his close ones, being aware that the Lord gave him grace to work. The motive for working is not greed, or lust for profit, but striving to use God-given gifts.

Diligence is a virtue that flows from justice when a man, being aware of having received the grace to work in the form of job opportunities, whether intellectual or manual, places himself at the disposal of others, taking responsibility for the activities entrusted to him. Work is an expression of obedience to God, who commanded people to work the given world. Sharing the fate of the working people, a person poor in spirit endeavours to overcome laziness and become master of one's body, which is subjected to the spirit.

Two fundamental dimensions are identified in the Christian vision of work which allow for personal human development and improving the world³⁰. The work, performed by a person with an awareness of fulfilling the mission received from God, has both a subjective and an objective dimension. Through the subjective dimension man realises his vocation to work the given earth and improve himself. In this respect, the work is of a perfectionistic nature and improves the person by increasing his virtues and overcoming his flaws. Through this, it steers a person to improve himself and attain holiness. Intelligence and physical effort, revealed through work, cause a person to learn more about himself and at the same time develops his capabilities. Exercising in a reasonable execution of entrusted duties, and acquiring skills in technical and practical activities, requires a man to use his creative potential and acquire skills which can be used on other occasions. Through work, man develops himself since he becomes his own master, subjecting his body to being controlled by his mind and spirit as well as defeating, as appropriate in human nature, laziness or a passion for comfort.

Work does not only shape the mind and physical prowess, but also helps to develop a person's character, when he is able to overcome tiredness and laziness or exceeds his own workload, serving others and caring about the

³⁰ Cf. J. Gocko, *Praca ludzka*, in: *Jan Paweł II. Encyklopedia nauczania moralnego*, eds. J. Nagórny, K. Jeżyna, Radom 2005, p. 413–416.

needs of others³¹. Work, understood as an activity of the spirit, to which matter is subjected, makes man co-creator of the world and gives him a taste of participation in the divine care of things created. Being God's co-worker, man discovers the need for acting according to certain regulations and sees the need for God's assistance. By working, he expands his tight circle of opportunities and recognises the need for coexistence and cooperation with others. By this, man discovers his place in communion with God and people.

The objective dimension of work is understood to be the technical aim of activities: that of making certain changes in the world surrounding man. Performing various activities, man organises reality and gives it a shape as intended by himself. Through this he feels master over the creatures given to him by God. However, at the same time he feels a calling from the very things, which by their nature demand human involvement in their safeguarding, development and processing. You could say that in this objective dimension of work man is harnessed into a system in which he experiences mutual dependencies of tasks undertaken and responsibilities.

Reflecting on the spirituality of work allows the effort undertaken by man to be seen as a tool in overcoming himself and opening up to another, whom one is serving in a selfless gesture of giving one's time and energy³². Avoiding laziness cannot be the only reason for undertaking work, because it would show work only in the light of a threat or perceived as punishment for sin. In fact, the consequence of sin is the burden of work. However, the love that guides a man open to the message of the Gospels makes work more bearable and enjoyable and can even bring happiness. Imitating Christ, who worked with his own hands, causes the believer to see in work liberation from a tight egoistic circle and an opportunity to confirm his value as a fully-fledged and productive member of the human community³³. Work is not man's goal, but a tool to express his willingness to serve, emanating from justice and love.

Taking advantage of the opportunity to acquire material resources, a poor man does not shed the burden of his upkeep on others, but takes the trouble to carry out his responsibilities, which relate to everyday menial jobs. This

³¹ Cf. S. Kowalczyk, *Praca. I. Aspekt antropologiczny*, edn: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, T. 16, ed. E. Gigilewicz, Lublin 2012, col. 211–213.

³² Cf. I. S. Ledwoń, *U źródeł chrystocentryzmu w teologii. Święty Franciszek z Asyżu*, Kraków 2004, p. 108–109.

³³ Cf. *Catechism of Catholic Church* 2427–2428.

is done maintaining cleanliness and ensuring his existence and undertaking paid work, which is to help in providing tools and resources for the further development of his mission in life. In accordance with Jesus' statement "For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many"³⁴, Christians should see in work an opportunity to serve others. The fruit of conforming to the Lord Jesus is availability and generosity. The attitude of poverty includes within itself a person's ability to distance himself from himself and tends towards sacrificing oneself rather than saving oneself and avoiding exertion. The point is not that the poor man does not value himself, but sees his value in serving, and not being served.

Entrepreneurship is quite an unusual attitude of expressing poverty. The principal determinants of entrepreneurship are: the ability to perceive the needs, improve ideas and a willingness to take risks. Entrepreneurship is associated with creativity and innovation and allows for the bold undertaking of new challenges. Showing an ability to cooperate with others, the entrepreneur shows them his trust and, taking into account the calculated risk, is willing to entrust in them future ventures which will be undertaken jointly³⁵. Entrepreneurship, as a personal attribute, confirms the principle that the basic capital, and a decisive factor in economic and social development, is man himself and his integral development. "The value of *human capital* is expressed in the knowledge of the workforce, in their willingness to build relationships, their entrepreneurship, their ability to wilfully take on new challenges when working together, and the skills to pursue common goals"³⁶.

The ability to plan future ventures presupposes not only the magnitude of imagination and breadth of thinking, but also trust in God's providence, which supports the bold and creative. The entrepreneurship of people living in real evangelical poverty indicates a willingness to act in a situation which is current, here and now, without waiting for the fulfillment of clearly defined environmental parameters³⁷. A truly poor person soberly assesses the reality and is aware of the challenges that it brings, but does not await any special

³⁴ Mk 10: 45.

³⁵ Cf. A. Zadroga, *Przedsiębiorczość z perspektywy nauki społecznej Kościoła. Zarys problematyki*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 55 (2008), workbook 3, p. 154–155.

³⁶ Papieska Rada Iustitia et PAX, *Kompendium nauki społecznej Kościoła*, Kielce 2005, No. 278, 337.

³⁷ Cf. W. Kawecki, *Zasady moralne w budowaniu nowoczesnego społeczeństwa*, in: *Moralne aspekty przemian cywilizacyjnych*, eds. J. Nagórny, A. Derdziuk, Lublin 2001, p. 39–41.

circumstances which will make the activity easy. The entrepreneurial attitude of the poor person is expressed in his willingness to take action, even when he does not have full material security. Deciding on large projects, a man completely trusting in God is aware of his inadequacies and seeks God's help the more. Therefore, he prays and seeks God's blessings, whilst at the same time appeals to human kindness and takes advantage of the support provided by the people.

Entrepreneurship comes from a personal availability to work and a willingness to devote oneself to the task, which is considered to be important for oneself and others. "An entrepreneur's creativity, and with it that of the entire enterprise (a community of people which is simultaneously a "work community") may apply to, for example, the creation of new jobs, development of skills, an expansion of consumption possibilities, the search for new investment, creating social, economic, political, cultural and ethical networks"³⁸. An entrepreneur is capable of mobilising himself as well as others to intensive actions, aimed not only at material objectives, but mainly to multiply the good which engulfs all spheres realising human vocations.

At the core of an entrepreneur, who is directed by evangelical poverty, lies such a degree of trust in God, that it bears a non-violated belief in the generosity of the Creator, who over the centuries willed certain works and is ready to support them, as long as man trusts Him. An example of such an attitude are the saints who have as their sole capital an unmeasurable trust, who undertook great projects and implemented visions calculated on the cooperation of many entities. Such persons include, among others, St. John Bosco who initiated the construction of the Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians in Turin, St. Albert Chmielowski who organised food and shelter for the poor and homeless, Bl. Bartolo Longo who restored a dilapidated church in Pompeii, St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe founded a monastery in Niepokalanów (Poland), or Saint Pio of Pietrelcina, who began plans to open a hospital to be named Home to Relieve Suffering in San Giovanni Rotondo.

Another expression of the attitude of poverty is thriftiness, understood as the appropriate respect for things and savings³⁹. Not treating things as tools which confirm one's value, a poor man does not despise them, but at the same time does not treat them nonchalantly. Knowing that their acquisition and upkeep often costs somebody a lot of trouble, he treats them with respect and carefully

³⁸ A. Zadroga, *Przedsiębiorczość z perspektywy nauki społecznej Kościoła*, p. 157.

³⁹ Cf. A. Derdziuk, *Oszczędność*, edn. *Encyklopedia katolicka*, Lublin 2010, vol. 14, col. 995–996.

protects them. Mismanagement and squandering things through carelessness and stupidity in fact opposes poverty, because it not only destroys things, but also shows contempt for the donors and is a sign of ingratitude towards them. However, savings cannot be combined with miserliness and should not lead to an unreasonable deprivation in the use of things. They are to serve man and belong to the range of transitory goods. Therefore, their wear and tear cannot be regarded as a tragedy and one should not become too attached to them.

* * *

An analysis of the attitudes of poverty indicates a wide range of human behaviours towards possessions. A lack of acceptance of poverty can breed a sense of uselessness and frustration which prevent a person from acting and thus to shift the burden of responsibility for a certain situation onto others. The ease with which others are blamed for causing material hardship becomes a defence mechanism and modifies the perception of the world. Adopting an attitude of evangelical poverty which is, driven by a need to imitate Christ, triggers in a person a readiness for action, which is open to cooperation with others. In fact, by experiencing a lack of materialistic collateral reveals a person's level of sense of their own value. When a person does not experience inner joy and happiness as a result of existence or being loved, he usually tries to satisfy his sense of not being valued with material things which are unable to satisfy him. Hence an escalation of needs and claims arises, which cause the image of the world and of the person himself to become increasingly pessimistic and dramatic.

This raises the question on whether a lack of things reveals an unsatisfied sense of life, or whether a lack of self-esteem and nonfulfillment results in an escape into consumerism, which triggers intemperance towards material goods. These considerations show an intrinsic correlation between the held motivation of life and poverty, in which certain attitudes are revealed more distinctly and occupy more space in the general attitude to life. Therefore, a reflection on the relationship between man and things is needed as part of the verification of the vision of accepted reality and may become a contributory factor in the discovery of true values capable of providing happiness and satisfaction. Thus, a wilful and voluntary adoption of life's conditions with a submission to God's will not only changes attitudes, building joy, love and freedom, but also triggers industriousness and entrepreneurship capable of transforming a person's fortune.

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