

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ETHICS ACCORDING TO THE POLISH PRIEST JÓZEF MAJKA

Jan Mazur

Prof., PhD, The Pontifical University of John Paul II in Krakow,
e-mail: jm.osppe@wp.pl, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0548-0205>, Poland

Władysław Majkowski

Prof., PhD, Polonia University in Częstochowa,
e-mail: majk@wa.onet.pl, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3382-4511>, Poland

Hameni Blaise

PhD, John Paul II International University of Bafang,
e-mail: bhameni@yahoo.fr, <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9922-7947>, Cameroon

Abstract. The presented text is an attempt to answer the question: how was understood the social and political ethics by the Priest Professor Józef Majka (1918-1993) - one of the leading minds of Catholic social teaching in Poland? It is, of course, about capturing the specificity of this understanding, comparing it with the perspectives of other outstanding authors.

Views of Priest Majka on this subject were included mainly in His book: *Social and Political Ethics (1993)*. In His opinion, this kind of ethics is not only a group of philosophical considerations, but a real attempt to show Catholic social and political ethics. He wrote: "We do not think that it would be possible at all to develop a sensible system of social ethics, especially political, without referring to Christian principles and focusing on the message of the ultimate goal of a man in the Gospel message" (*Majka, 1993:12*).

It seems that this unambiguous reference to the values and principles of the Gospel, recognizing them as necessary in the construction of a sensible system of social and political ethics allows us to consider His concept as original, thoroughly Christian, marked by a testimony of faith and penetrated by intellectual depth.

It can be stated that the social ethics in the sense of Father Majka is not an ideology, but an integral part of Catholic social science, situating above all in the area of philosophy and theology, where it finds the necessary premises for moral principles and norms.

Keywords: social ethics, political ethics, moral values and principles, Catholic social teaching, priest Józef Majka.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23856/3408>

Introduction

It is not easy to analyze the sense of social and political ethics, which was preached by priest Józef Majka (1918-1993) - one of the scholars of Catholic social teaching in Poland. Fortunately, in 1993, the Center for Documentation and Social Studies [Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych] published his book entitled: *Social and political ethics [Etyka społeczna i polityczna]* (*Majka, 1993*). It is like a collection of author's previous reflections on Christian social thought, because - as you can see - it appeared in the year of his death. Considerations on ethical issues can also be found in other publications, especially in:

(*Filozofia społeczna*, 1982; *Etyka życia gospodarczego*, 1980; *Katolicka nauka społeczna*, 1986; *Majka*, 1987: part 1, 5-40).

The issue comes down to trying to answer the central question: how did Professor Józef Majka understand social and political ethics? It is, of course, about capturing the specificity of this understanding, bearing in mind the views of other outstanding authors.

First a question arises about understanding ethics. *The Universal Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [*Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*] defines ethics as a "philosophical discipline, encompassing a group of issues related to determining the essence of moral obligation (evil or moral good), with the determination of its detailed content (rightness), the ultimate explanation of the moral obligation and the origin of moral evil and ways to overcome it". In short, ethics means "the theory of moral obligation or moral value of conduct" (*Styczeń*, 2002: 269). Did Józef Majka understand this ethics?

What is social and political ethics?

In order to take up the issue, it is worth using his words in the book: *Social and political ethics*. By providing terminological clarification, he explained the following:

1. Presented social and political ethics is a system of normative ethics in the traditional, philosophical sense of the word. According to dictionaries, normative ethics deals with determining what is morally good and what is bad, and - on the basis of adopted assessments and related obligations - designates directives (standards) of conduct (*Dylus, Juros*, 1998: 155-158). In the sense of Father Majka, it is about ethics referring to human dignity and natural law, and is based on these premises to formulate moral obligations. These obligations would apply to all people. Any positive law should be based on them. This kind of ethics is definitely different from ethology or descriptive science about customs. In the latter, Father Majka only appreciates auxiliary functions as a means of describing and analyzing human acts. However, he strongly emphasizes that moral facts, their repetition, their statistics can not provide any basis for their substantive ethical assessment, let alone for the construction of norms or moral systems (*Majka*, 1993: 10).

2. If in descriptive ethology the starting point is the enumeration and description of ethical facts, in normative ethics the starting point is the search for criteria for moral evaluation in the light of which these facts can be analyzed and evaluated. But normative ethics is not just a team of assessments. The rating is not yet the norm. Well, the most basic question in normative ethics is the question of moral obligation and its final sources. Every assessment and norm must imply a reference to the ultimate basis of moral obligation and the final criteria of moral evaluation. Ethics deprived of these final references becomes some form of moral attitudeism (*Majka*, 1993: 10-11).

3. Differentiation of ethics to social and political does not mean that there are any two different ethics: "political" and "social", which could suggest that other criteria of behavioral evaluation apply in the life of the political community than in the life of other communities. Such a suggestion Father Majka strongly rejects, stressing that the particle (conjunction) "and" between the words "social" and "political" has a recurrent and not disjunctive meaning. In his view, there is only one ethic, because it has common basic principles, such as natural law or the dignity of the human person. However, the subject of ethics is many different areas of human life and activity. If there exists a diversity of "ethics", its "adjectival", its basis is not the otherness of principles or criteria, but the multiplicity of the material object. It covers all

human activities as a human being, as well as social life, whose creator and subject is a human person (*Majka, 1993: 10-11*).

4. The social and political ethics promoted by Father Majka is based on the reconstruction of a system of ethical principles based on the basic axioms of ethical thinking and the description and analysis of social institutions in terms of seeing their compliance or non-compliance with these principles. By social institutions, he understands certain established and accepted ways of social action, solving problems, achieving goals together with others. In a word, it is a path of ethical thinking, consisting in coming from the principles to assess the ways of life and social action found in contemporary reality (*Majka, 1993: 317-318*).

5. Father Majka was convinced that within the framework of social and political ethics one can and must assess each institution, its structure, manner of functioning, effectiveness and, above all, the purposes for which it was established and for which implementations it was adapted. Of course, it is about the assessment in the light of moral principles, and above all the basic principle of conduct and the ultimate goal of man (*Majka, 1993: 318*).

6. The considerations of Father Majka on social and political ethics are focused on the most important - in his opinion - social institutions, and thus individual communities, which are the subjects of social life. These include: natural communities (family, economic, cultural, national communities), arbitrary communities (coalitions, cooperatives, political parties, cultural and educational associations, charity associations, religious associations and criminal associations) and political communities to which priest Majka counts above all the state, taking a lecture on the ethics of state and international life. The entirety of his approach is preceded by an analysis of broadly understood philosophical and methodological foundations of ethics with reference and application to social ethics. It is worth emphasizing once again that the political ethics of priest Majka understand as a part of social ethics (*Majka, 1993: 317*).

The essence of morality

1. Father Majka begins the analysis of social and political ethics from the indication of what constitutes the essence of morality. In his opinion, morality refers to human activities that change people, contribute to the fact that they become more or less human. In essence, it is about human behavior as a human being, which we assess, and this kind of assessment implies the judgment about his personal dignity. The most basic moral question, which is in essence a question about the personal dignity of man, is: What does it mean to become more human? (*Majka, 1993: 15*).

7. Father Majka, answering this question, points to the dynamic character of the human person. At this point, it will be easiest to use his words: "The reference of the human person to the highest value shows us the entire range of the dynamics of this personality, its ability to transcend itself and its opening to the Absolute. We can speak about moral judgment and about moral attitude only when we consider some human action or attitude in relation to the Absolute ... whether and to what extent action approaches us to this Absolute or distances us from it. This dynamic aspect of personality, inherent in its structure, the pressure to transcend itself and to reach ever higher values, realize them in itself, and this constant direction on the Absolute as the goal of every action, is the very essence of the moral imperative that every human being has healthy personality structure" (*Majka, 1993: 16*).

8. However, the notion of the Absolute priest Majka does not limit himself to a rational idea, but he understands in Christian terms. He wrote: "The image of God in man makes him more like God than to the world and that he sets himself up for all his actions with God, that he approaches or goes away. Thus the dimension of morality places a man in the space between his material existence and the resulting needs and aspirations, and his supernatural vocation, which is equivalent to the fact that he is more like God than to the world. And it is the basic reference of man to the Absolute, which is a consequence of his rational nature and the deepest source of his dignity, constitutes the essence of morality" (*Majka, 1993: 18*).

At this point, it must be pointed out at once that in the perspective of Father Majka, the essence of morality does not differ from the essence of ethics. He uses both concepts with some terminological freedom, usually interchangeably, which distinguishes him, for example, from the father of Mieczysław, Albert Krąpiec. The latter, like many other ethicists, emphasizes the significant difference between morality and ethics. Morality in the strict sense is one, and ethics as a theory of morality can be many (*Krąpiec, 2002: 284-285*).

In any case, Father Majka, pointing to the essence of morality, recalls the basic principles of morality, which he also describes as the basic ethical principles. He understands them as obvious, general reasons that do not require justification, which are the premises for moral norms and judgments. In his opinion, their obviousness is determined by the fact that they constitute a component of the structure of the practical mind (*Majka, 1993:31*). To this kind of basic principles he includes: 1. The moral transcendence of man, whose source is the rationality of the human person; 2. Freedom as the opening of a man for good; 3. Love as a way of self-realization (*Majka, 1993: 32-45*).

Then, in the context of basic ethical principles, Father Majka formulates the moral or ethical principles of social life, which he carefully differentiates from philosophical social principles. To the most important ethical principles of social life, most often mentioned - as he himself points out - in the social documents of the Church, he includes: 1. Truth, 2. Subsidiarity; 3. Solidarity; 4. Social justice; 5. Social and political peace; 6. Development (*Majka, 1993:31-36*).

Final remarks

A picture of social and political ethics in the understanding of Fr. Józef Majka would have to be compared with other such shots. Certainly it would be an interesting study and bring a lot of valuable light to capture the specifics of this ethics. At this point, such renowned authors come to mind in the field of social and political ethics, such as priest Jan Piwowarczyk, professor Czesław Strzeszewski, priest Władysław Piwowarski, priest Tadeusz Ślipko, priest Tadeusz Styczeń, and even German authors: Oswald von Nell-Breuning, Arno Anzenbacher or Bernhard Sutor (*Piwowarczyk, vol. 1, 1960, Piwowarczyk, vol. 2, Londyn 1963; Strzeszewski, 2003; Styczeń, 1995; Ślipko, 1982, Ślipko, 2002; Piwowarski, 1993: 50-51; Anzenbacher, 1998; O. von Nell-Breuning, 1985; Sutor, 1994*). For a comparative analysis, a separate study is necessary that exceeds the scope of this sketch. Nevertheless, it can be noticed that the ethical concepts promoted by these authors are in a certain sense compatible with each other, for it is difficult to find an example of such a moral action, whose evaluation within individual ethics would be different. In their understanding, it is always ethics - as Pope Benedict XVI expressed it - "friendly to man" (*Benedict XVI, 2009:45*), and thus referring to human dignity and natural law, which based on these premises, formulates commitments moral in all people, in this respect the interpretation of human dignity and

natural law is important. In the opinion of Father Majka, this interpretation can not not be Christian.

At this point, it is worth quoting his own words: "The development of ethical principles in this [Christian] understanding becomes possible only when we look at every human action in the light of human nature and its vocation, its ultimate goal (...). In the light of the teaching of the Council [constitution *Gaudium et spes*], one can not speak of integral social and political ethics without recourse to (...) the full Gospel message with all its implications. (...) Without taking into account the doctrine of the Incarnate Word, we are not able to construct a full picture of man with all its references, nor to explain the dignity of the human person" (*Majka, 1993:12*).

Author of the book *Social and political ethics* does not hide that, according to his plan, this kind of ethics is not just a team of some philosophical considerations on this subject, but an attempt to show Catholic social and political ethics. He wrote: "We do not think that it would be possible at all to develop a sensible system of social ethics, especially political, without referring to Christian principles and teaching the final goal of man focused in the Gospel message" (*Majka, 1993:12*).

It seems that this unambiguous reference to the values and principles of the Gospel, recognizing them as necessary in the construction of a sensible system of social and political ethics allows us to consider his concept as original, thoroughly Christian, marked by a testimony of faith and penetrated by intellectual depth. It can be concluded that the social ethics in the sense of Father Majka is not an ideology, but an integral part of the Catholic social science, situating in the area of above all philosophy and theology, where it finds the necessary premises for moral principles and norms.

References

- Anzenbacher, A. (1998). *Christliche Sozialethik. Einführung und Prinzipien*. Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich: Schöningh. [in German].
- Benedict XVI. (2009). Encyclical letter "Caritas in Veritate", 45. [Electronic resource]. Retrieved from http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html. [in English].
- Dylus, A., Juros, H. (1998). *Etyka*, in: Zuberbier, A. (Ed.). *Słownik Teologiczny*. Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 155-158. [in Polish].
- Etyka życia gospodarczego*. (1980). ODiSS. Warszawa, series: *Chrześcijańska myśl społeczna*, 5. [in Polish].
- Filozofia społeczna*. (1982). *Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych (ODiSS)*. Warszawa, series *Chrześcijańska myśl społeczna*, 3. [in Polish].
- Katolicka nauka społeczna*. (1986). *Studium historyczno-doktrynalne*, Fundacja Jana Pawła II, Rzym. [in Polish].
- Krapiec, M. A. (2002). *Etyka jako teoria moralnego działania*, in: *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, vol. 3, 284 -285. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu. [in Polish].
- Majka, J. (1980). *Etyka życia gospodarczego*, ODiSS, series: *Chrześcijańska myśl społeczna*, 5. [in Polish].
- Majka, J. (1982). *Filozofia społeczna*. *Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych (ODiSS)*, series: *Chrześcijańska myśl społeczna*, 3. [in Polish].
- Majka, J. (1986). *Katolicka nauka społeczna*. *Studium historyczno-doktrynalne*. Fundacja Jana Pawła II, Rzym. [in Polish].

- Majka, J. (1987). *Nauka społeczna Kościoła, jej charakter i miejsce w orędziu ewangelicznym*, in: Radwan, M., Dyczewski, L., Stanowski, A. (Eds.). *Dokumenty nauki społecznej Kościoła, part. 1*, pp. 5-40. Rzym – Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL. [in Polish].
- Majka, J. (1993). *Etyka społeczna i polityczna*. ODiSS, series: *Chrześcijańska myśl społeczna*, 4, pp. 10-12, 15-18, 31-66, 317-318. [in Polish].
- Nell-Breuning, von, O. (1985). *Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit*. München: Olzog. [in German].
- Piwowarczyk, J. (1960). *Katolicka etyka społeczna, vol. 1*. Londyn: Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy „Veritas”. [in Polish].
- Piwowarczyk, J. (1963). *Katolicka etyka społeczna, vol. 2*. Londyn: Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy „Veritas”. [in Polish].
- Piwowarski, W. (1993). *Etyka społeczna*, in: *Słownik katolickiej nauki społecznej*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax - Wydawnictwo Misjonarzy Klaretynów „Palabra”, pp. 50-51. [in Polish].
- Strzeszewski, Cz. (2003). *Katolicka nauka społeczna*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL. [in Polish].
- Styczeń, T. (1995). *Wprowadzenie do etyki*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL. [in Polish].
- Styczeń, T. (2002). *Etyka*, in: *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, vol. 3, 269. [in Polish].
- Styczeń, T. (2002). *Etyka*, in: *Powszechna Encyklopedia Filozofii*, Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, vol. 3, 269. [in Polish].
- Sutor, B. (1994). *Etyka polityczna. Ujęcie całościowe na gruncie chrześcijańskiej nauki społecznej* [title of the original: *Politische Ethik: Gesamtdarstellung auf der Basis der Christlichen Gesellschaftslehre*]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Fundacji ATK „Kontrast”. [in Polish].
- Ślipko, T. (1982). *Zarys etyki szczegółowej*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy. [in Polish].
- Ślipko, T. (2002). *Zarys etyki ogólnej*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM. [in Polish].