

Ryszard Hajduk<sup>1</sup>  
Faculty of Theology  
University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn

## Pope Francis' Renewal of Pastoral Care in the Logic of Mercy

### [Papieża Franciszka odnowa działalności duszpasterskiej w logice miłosierdzia]

**Streszczenie:** Bóg, okazując ludziom miłosierdzie, wskazuje Kościołowi drogę realizacji jego zbawczego posłannictwa w świecie. Zdaniem papieża Franciszka, odnowa działalności duszpasterskiej winna dokonać się w logice Bożego miłosierdzia. Jako bijące serce Ewangelii winno ono znaleźć się w centrum komunikowanego ludziom orędzia zbawienia, jak i nadać kształt duszpasterstwu. Operacjonalizacja prawdy o Bożym miłosierdziu prowadzi duszpasterzy do przyjęcia postawy wyjścia na peryferie egzystencji, niesienia ludziom zranionym grzechami przebaczenia i pociechy oraz gotowości do towarzyszenia im w osiąganiu pełni dojrzałości chrześcijańskiej. Ich motywacji do pełnienia posługi na wzór Jezusa Chrystusa, który jest doskonałym uosobieniem Bożego miłosierdzia, nie może osłabiać błędne jego rozumienie, zanik świadomości grzechu czy relatywistyczne podejście do wartości i zasad moralnych. Działając zgodnie z logiką miłosierdzia, Kościół daje świadectwo wierności Bogu i wnosi znaczący wkład w budowanie bardziej ludzkiego świata.

**Summary:** By showing people mercy, God points to the Church the way to fulfill her saving mission in the world. According to Pope Francis, the renewal of pastoral activity should be carried out in the logic of God's mercy. As the beating heart of the Gospel, it should be at the center of the message of salvation communicated to people and give shape to pastoral care. The operationalization of the truth about God's mercy leads pastors to adopt the attitude of going to the periphery of existence, to bring forgiveness and comfort to people wounded by sin, and to be ready to accompany them in achieving full Christian maturity. Their motivation to perform the service in imitation of Jesus Christ, who is the perfect personification of God's mercy, cannot be weakened by misunderstandings, the disappearance of sin consciousness or a relativistic approach to moral values and principles. Acting in accordance with the logic of mercy, the Church bears witness to her fidelity to God and makes a significant contribution to building a more human world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ryszard Hajduk, Department of Pastoral Theology and Catechetics, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, ul. Hozjusza 15, 11-041 Olsztyn, Poland, ryszard.hajduk@uwm.edu.pl, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8012-2184>.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kościół; ubóstwo; grzech; towarzyszenie; przebaczenie; łaska; moralność.

**Keywords:** Church; poverty; sin; accompaniment; forgiveness; grace; morality.

The modern world cries out for mercy. It presents serious problems, such as the destruction of the natural environment, but also crises of a social character caused by violence, aggression, divisions and social exclusion (LS No. 46). The reality is subjected to a process of globalization, which includes both the spheres of economy and culture, as well as the entire human existence. One can even speak of a globalization of indifference towards the suffering and the abandoned, whose fate is commonly considered to be much less important than the value of the currency on the market (EG No. 53; Scannone J.C., 2018, p. 32).

In this situation, Pope Francis calls for the preferential option in favor of mercy (Massaro Th., 2018, p. 117). For it is the most appropriate response in a situation where people strive for peace, justice, equality, a dignified life for the poor and refugees, and oppose the technocratic paradigm, the fetishism of money and the “terrorist system” that kills (Scannone J.C., 2017, p. 213). Therefore, the task of the Church is to bear witness to mercy to people, because only then can she be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt 5,13-14) and become able to persuasively proclaim the Gospel of Christ (MV No. 10; Espinosa Arce J.P., 2015, p. 30; Menke K.-H., 2017, p. 49).

Today it is therefore always essential that the entire life of the Church and her activities are filled with the good news of God who is ‘rich in mercy’, who wants to free people from evil and injustice and to support them in building a new humanity. It is God who bends down to the sinner to offer him “a new chance to look at himself, convert, and believe” (MV No. 21). Communicating mercy to the world has nothing to do with “cheap grace” or indulgence for sin, because its purpose is to overcome evil, heal wounds and show people the way to salvation (Polak M., 2015, p. 95).

According to Pope Francis, mercy plays the role in the Church of an architrave, on which her entire existence is based (MV No. 10; AL No. 310). In the logic of mercy, which embraces the logic of the Gospel, incarnation, openness, compassion, integration and Christian love, the renovation of the Church’s activity should take place (AL No. 307-312; Spadaro A., 2013; Zulehner P.M., 2018, p. 9). The most important in the process of renewal is a change in the thinking and attitude of pastors who, following the example of Jesus Christ in their pastoral efforts, should fill their entire activity with mercy that soothes the wounds of contemporary people. While pastors may encounter obstacles that prevent wounded people

from accepting God's forgiveness and support in their pursuit of a more dignified life, they should not become discouraged from acting. They imitate God, who never gets tired of forgiving, although people are sometimes "the ones who tire of seeking his mercy" (EG No. 3).

## **1. Divine mercy as the fundamental determinant of the Church's mission**

Mercy is God's way of being. It defines the relationship of the divine Creator with creation and gives form to His action aimed at the salvation of people (Espinosa Arce J.P., 2015, p. 30). The Church is involved in the implementation of God's works in human reality, becoming a tool of communication of mercy to the world. Therefore, mercy determines the goal of her activity, gives character to her structures and covers his entire mission. As the basic principle of the Church's mission, it determines the shape of all her pastoral activity using words, gestures and deeds that will allow people who are weak and enslaved by sin to experience God's grace (AL No. 297-299; Orth S., 2017, p. 5; Sandler W., 2017, p. 74; Schockenhoff E., 2017, p. 19; Massaro Th., 2018, p. 115).

### **1.1. Good News about God's mercy**

The Church, which proclaims God's mercy to people, shows them the way leading to the mystery of God (Espinosa Arce J.P., 2015, p. 29). Christians believe in God who is love, and this is expressed in mercy. In the Bible, this term refers to compassion, gentleness, warmth, or goodness of heart, and to comfort and help (MV No. 6; Schmidt S., 2014, p. 97; Söding Th., 2016, p. 20). Mercy is a form of the revelation of God's love towards weak and sinful people, "effected vis-a-vis the reality of the evil that is in the world, affecting and besieging man, insinuating itself even into his heart and capable of causing him to "perish in Gehenna" (Mt 10,28)" (DiM No. 7). It is "a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon" (MV No. 9). When God forgives sins in His mercy, His heart is filled with joy.

God's mercy shows His grace and faithfulness to those whom He cares for in His paternal care. The merciful God gives them a share in his full life, taking into account all human needs resulting from physical and moral limitations and weaknesses (DiM No. 3; Salas A., 1991, p. 37; Söding Th., 2016, p. 22). His affection and tenderness are not an expression of sentimentality, as they lead to actions aimed at the good of the poor, suf-

fering and despairing people. Mercy is a sign of the kindness and omnipotence of God, who pities sinners and forgives their sins (MV No. 6).

God is love and faithful to himself, He is absolutely sovereign in love; therefore, He is merciful (Kasper W., 2015, p. 47). In his action He is not “constrained” by the human understanding of justice. God in his generosity does not answer people with evil to the evil they have committed, thus opposing the tendency to compensate for the wrongs. He allows a human person to see that her life also does not have to consist of winding a spiral of evil by seeking revenge (Uriarte J.M., 1996, p. 93; Söding Th., 2016, p. 23).

God’s mercy does not bear justice, but his benignity and compassion surpasses it. Justice is inseparably connected with (merciful) love because justice is its foundation (MV No. 21) and its “minimum measure” (CiV No. 6). Mercy is therefore greater justice (Kasper W., 2015, p. 49). It opens justice to the action of a grace that does not reject the sinner, but brings forgiveness, heals wounds and allows man to be born again (ChV No. 123; Spadaro A., 2013).

The fullness of God’s mercy is shown in Jesus Christ, who reveals the truth about the merciful Father with his whole being (Espinosa Arce J.P., 2015, p. 28). In the light of the Gospel, each encounter with Him is associated with an experience of mercy. It leads people to conversion and change of life, consisting in striving to become like the Creator (Massaro Th., 2018, p. 116; Scannone J.C., 2018, p. 32). For God does not grant mercy to make man feel that he can live and act as he wants. Jesus did not come into the world to praise people, but to redeem, heal and direct them to good (Augustin G., 2016, p. 14).

The task of the Church is to proclaim to the world the good news of God’s love, which brings people redemption – liberation from sin. It is therefore the Gospel of God’s mercy, which prompts the Creator to pay attention to the miserable fate of man caught up in sin. It is not the righteous who need this good news, but sinners (Mc 2,17). Such a Gospel brings joy to people, because the Christian witness to a just and merciful God allows them to discover their dignity and the greatness of their vocation, find solace through forgiveness of sins and regain hope to be set free from evil. Then, when people meet God’s mercy in the words and deeds of Christ’s followers, they can properly understand the content of the Christian faith and discover the sweetness and lightness of God’s commandments (Mt 11,30; HV No. 25; Lohfink G., 1991, p. 76; Freiherr von Fürstenberg G., 2015, p. 30).

## 1.2. The practice of mercy in the Christian life

The experience of God's love moves a person to practice mercy towards others. Since God is merciful and acts mercifully, having mercy on his people, mercy should become the basis of all interpersonal relationships in God's people. Whoever has received mercy is obliged to pass it on to others. And people can only be merciful because God has shown them mercy (LF No. 64; Massaro Th., 2018, p. 116).

Jesus is the personification of God's mercy, made "visible" in him. He came into the world so that people can experience his love and mercy (ChV No. 177). The Son of God loves man so much that he died on the Cross to wash away human sins with his blood. Divine mercy, filling the whole earthly life of Christ, present in all His words and deeds, is the force that motivates people to practice mercy. While practicing mercy, he calls people to be merciful to one another (Mt 5,7). Then, when the followers of Christ live by mercy, forgiving their debtors, they imitate the merciful God and show that they are his children. Thereby, they are relieved of depression, anger, violence and revenge, and can live a life of joy, peace and happiness (MV No. 9; DiM No. 3; Augustin G., 2016, p. 12).

A Christian who practices mercy does not condemn or judge anyone (Lk 6, 37-38). For he remembers that he will one day stand before God's judgment, at which mercy will be the criterion for assessing to what extent he has become like his heavenly Father by showing goodness and kindness to others. The Divine Judge himself practices what is the criterion for assessing human life. People become worthy of belonging to the community of the saved when they follow the same principles in their life as the King of the universe who renders judgments (Sobrino J., 1992, p. 38; Augustin G., 2016, p. 13).

The practice of mercy requires "a heart that sees" (DCE No. 31b; Chavez Avida M., 2003, p. 103). A person moved by mercy is able to see in the right light his own misery and the misery of others. Whoever wants good for other people has sensitive eyes and a heart that perceives human pain and comes out with mercy to people suffering from a lack of love. Showing mercy to his neighbor with generosity, "he feels at the same time benefitted by the person accepting his gift; and vice versa, the person who accepts the gift with the awareness that, in accepting it, he too is doing good, is in his own way serving the great cause of the dignity of the person; and this contributes to uniting people in a more profound manner" (DiM No. 14).

For those who believe in Christ, mercy is a fundamental virtue and a measure of perfection (Mt 5,48). It is not, however, the fruit of the efforts

of man who, through his own desires and endeavors, achieves the fullness of personal development and holiness, but the gift of the merciful God (Rom 9,16; GE No. 48). Conversion and the pursuit of Christian perfection without pre-emptive mercy would only be an ordinary human striving for moral renewal, and the path to salvation would lead only through the performance of deeds. A man who is open to God's mercy can recognize his limitations and, thanks to God's grace, gradually develop towards full Christian maturity, thanking the Lord and Creator for the gifts received (AL No. 295; GE No. 49-56).

The task of believers in Christ is to bear witness to the merciful God not only by word but also by concrete action. This happens when Christians perform corporal and spiritual works of mercy. According to the teaching of Sacred Scripture, they are a bloodless sacrifice that is more pleasing to God than ritual sacrifices made in accordance with the law (Hos 6,6; Mt 9,13). The Church's credibility rests on the constant desire to offer people mercy, because only those who help the needy willingly, generously and selflessly deserve it in the eyes of people (MV No. 16; Hajduk R., 2013, p. 32–33).

## **2. The Church's pastoral activity in the logic of mercy**

Pastoral service should reflect God's action towards man, dependent on his mercy. Contemporary pastors have the task of learning the logic of mercy from Jesus, who turns to people with an anticipatory and undeserved love. The Son of God comes to meet them to show mercy to sinners and to lift the sick and suffering, enslaved by the evil one and broken in spirit. He does it so that man, moved by God's grace, may unite himself with his Lord and Creator and enter the path of conversion (AL No. 27; Gallagher R., 2016, p. 9). Today, the saving mission of Jesus is continued by pastors who follow their Master to the periphery of the world, bringing mercy to people and accompanying them in achieving the fullness of life.

### **2.1. Exit to the existential periphery**

For Pope Francis, pastoral conversion is tantamount to following Jesus and adopting the attitude of going out to people, to bring them the Gospel whose beating heart is mercy (MV nr 12; Galli C.M., 2014, p. 32). Pastors who follow the logic of mercy cannot succumb to their predilections and limit their ministry to the faithful around them. For Jesus is not the shepherd of ninety-nine, but of one hundred sheep (AL No. 309; Hajduk R.,

2018a, p. 21). The task of the Church is to go out to all people, proclaiming God's mercy to both believers and practitioners, and to those who live as if God did not exist, or because of their life situation, they have lost faith in God's love. The Christian community which lives by "an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father's infinite mercy" (EG No. 24; Figueroa-Deck A., 2017, p. 247; Hajduk R., 2018b, p. 107), will be ready to bring God's undeserved love to every person, especially the excluded, marginalized and most needy.

The Word of God calls upon Christ's disciples to be mindful not only of their own interests but also of others (Phil 2,4). Being open to other people cannot be limited to staying in their mental or cultural neighborhood, because it is an option, that is, adopting a specific lifestyle and action with full commitment, to the point of "getting dirty" by confronting the concerns and hopes of contemporary people (EG No. 25; Freiherr von Fürstenberg G., 2015, p. 31). Since mercy is love that comes out to sinners, the pastoral care based on it cannot fail to perceive the truth about man and his spiritual condition. Its light makes it possible to perceive the weakness and confusion of a man who needs a space filled with love in order to reach personal maturity (Granados J. and others, 2016, p. 13; Bogner D., 2017, p. 22).

In the person of the Son of God, the Creator himself shows the Church how to fulfill her pastoral mission: to go in search of a man plagued by suffering and helplessness, lost "on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates" (MV No. 15). Then, carrying out the pastoral ministry consists not only of leading the flock, but also, if necessary, of letting lost sheep lead the pastors into the wasteland of this world. This pastoral attitude calls for leaving the "egocentric universe" in order to enter the world of others and direct all attention to people living in spiritual and material poverty (Spiegel P., 2016, p. 52).

Turning to the peripheries requires courage from priests, because it results in living in uncertainty and in less comfortable conditions. It is a "descent down", demanding to give up one's own ambitions and plans, and adopt an attitude in which there is no room for superiority to the people of the world (Bucher R., 2016, p. 15; Hajduk R., 2017, p. 188). By immersing themselves in human reality, pastors stop focusing exclusively on their personal perfection – it is no longer just about showing themselves good and defending their beliefs. The injustice and suffering they face leads them to abandon their obsessive defense of orthodoxy, thereby freeing them from the paralysis of fear of making doctrinal errors (EG No. 194; Hajduk R., 2018b, p. 106–107). The only correct attitude then is to plunge into the world with humility, love and attention directed at peo-



ple “living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ, without a community of faith to support them, without meaning and a goal in life” (EG No. 49).

## 2.2. Communication of mercy in an interpersonal meeting

Life is at times filled with meetings and interpersonal relationships. Following the logic of mercy, pastors come into contact with people in need and suffering in order to convey to them the experience of being infinitely loved by God (EG No. 2; FT No. 66). It happens when they approach each person with attention, tenderness, compassion and understanding in order to comfort and uplift them (EG No. 288; FT No. 62; Galli C.M., 2014, p. 44).

Following Jesus, pastors take the side of sinners. However, they must not diminish the requirements of the Gospel, because this would not be in line with the attitude of the Son of God, who, full of compassion for human weakness, never gives up on offering sinners the true ideal of life. At the same time, however, because of the limitations and needs of his disciples, Jesus renounces severity. God’s Son acts like a wise spiritual guide who knows when to shake the smug and when to console the brokenhearted (AL No. 38; Rylaarsdam D., 2014, p. 77).

To become an advocate of sinners in imitation of Jesus, one cannot look at human reality only in black or white. It is generally very diverse, and people’s attitudes and decisions are influenced by psychological, historical and biological factors (AL No. 308; Hajduk R., 2018a, p. 25). In addition, awareness and responsibility for the moral choices can be reduced and even eliminated by factors such as ignorance, inattention, coercion, fear, habits, uncontrolled feelings, as well as difficulty in understanding “the values contained in the moral norm” (AL No. 302). All this means that the pastoral service will be fruitful when it is shaped not only by ecclesiastical doctrine, but also by pastoral understanding of the situation.

Pastors who perform a service in accordance with the logic of mercy fall neither into relativism (AL No. 307) nor into rigor (AL No. 311; Petrà B., 2016, p. 26). On the one hand, they shall not underestimate sin; on the other hand, they cannot focus solely on legal norms. Indeed, they must always put at the center the man who is loved by God bending over human misery. Without the primacy of love in pastoral care and without tenderness in approaching people caught up in sin and experiencing life difficulties, the Church would be defying the truth of the Gospel, and thus would not be faithful to God who is love. This would be tantamount to watering down the Gospel and resigning itself to not imitating Jesus’ attitude (AL No. 311; Hastetter M.C., 2017, p. 212).



In the Church that subordinates her action to the logic of mercy, pastors are not allowed to turn the Gospel “into dead stones to be hurled at others” (AL No. 49; Kasper W., 2015, p. 39). Their task is to bend over all suffering without showing any contempt for man for his entanglement in sin. Mercy orders them to look at the person they meet not as a sinner, but as someone wounded and troubled by life, who will not be supported by harsh judgments, formulated in the spirit of “a cold bureaucratic morality” (AL No. 296 and 312; Scheuer M., 2016, p. 6), but only by kindness, compassion and consolation.

For Francis, the Church should serve as a field hospital in the world (AL No. 291; Sandler W., 2017, p. 73–74). She is a mother who perceives human suffering and heals the wounded with mercy. Pastors who have experienced God’s mercy in their lives and are aware of their calling to pass it on to every person they meet join in this therapeutic mission of the Church. However, they don’t only do it by showing compassion for human limitations and weaknesses. In the therapeutic service, the most important thing is to communicate God’s saving love to people. It is she who attracts man and moves him to respond to this love. This is where the path to freedom from sin and happiness leads (EG No. 39; Hajduk R., 2018a, p. 27).

### 2.3. The service of accompaniment

The renewal of pastoral activity requires priests, religious and lay people to master the “art of accompaniment”, which will allow them to walk with people in a rhythm of intimacy with “a compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life” (EG No. 169). This accompanying presence of pastoral workers will strengthen people to persistently follow the path of love through life, and it will also encourage them to continue with the steps that they consider in their conscience to be the best response to God’s call at the moment (AL No. 303-305; Schockenhoff E., 2017, p. 23). For if the pastors’ attitude lacks understanding of the complexity of human life and patience, the activity of the Church will be perceived by people who are tormented by weakness, enslaved by sin and experiencing life difficulties, not as help, but as an expression of incomprehension towards their situation and a gesture of rejection.

To accompany people is to proclaim the Gospel, following the Son of God. The existential union of the pastor with the person of Jesus Christ plays an important role here. Only then he can properly understand the meaning of the norms and ideals that help people to stay on the path to

holiness. The logic of mercy, taken from Jesus, will not allow the Christian religion to be deformed, transforming into some system of commands and prohibitions, enslaving people and making their life difficult (EG No. 43).

The first moment of accompaniment is accepting the other person (Granados J. and others, 2016, p. 31). However, one should bear in mind that not everything can end with a friendly reception. The direction of accompaniment is determined by love that helps man to overcome adversities and motivates to realize good in life. The gentleness shown to those who are lost and wounded by sin encourages them to acknowledge their weakness and admit the wrongs they have committed, and the Gospel preached to them gives hope for a new life. The pastor should also surround them with prayer, asking God for the grace of transformation for them and for perseverance in following the path of conversion (AL No. 297).

Accompaniment requires gentleness and patience (AL No. 294). Earth time itself is God's mercy shown to man so that he may unite himself more and more with Eternal Love. So conversion takes place over time. It is not a single act; it has a beginning and is a continuous effort to attain the Christian ideal. Living in union with God doesn't exclude situations in which man will be tempted to do evil. The pastor should therefore give man time to gradually identify with Jesus Christ and progress in his moral life (Mattheeuws A., 2017, p. 590–591; Petrà B., 2016, p. 27).

In the light of God's mercy, every human desire for good has a value. Therefore, in spiritual accompaniment, the pastor can rejoice in the appearance of even the smallest "grains capable of growing" where the path to perfection still seems very long. The pastor who carries out the ministry of accompaniment shall not solely focus on the maximum good; he must also bear in mind the possible good in situations where people get hurt and suffer from evil that affects them. Meeting with the acceptance of the possible good, a person can come closer and closer to the Absolute Good and become more fully involved in the life of the community of believers (Grillo A., 2016, p. 31–32; Hajduk R., 2018b, p. 108).

### **3. Difficulties in transmitting mercy to the wounded world**

The Church has repeatedly made it clear how much mercy is needed by today's man. It is needed by married couples and families whose lives "remain imperfect or lack peace and joy" (AL No. 5), the poor and excluded who demand justice (EG No. 188), young people at risk of drug addiction, aggression and sexualization (AL No. 260), as well as all those who are

lost, desperate and affected by nihilism preventing them from seeing the true meaning of life (EG No. 114).

The fact that contemporary man needs mercy does not mean, however, that he is always willing to open up to it. He is prevented from doing so because of an incomplete understanding of the truth about God's mercy, the conviction about unlimited human freedom and a relativistic approach to morality, as well as the fear of losing his human dignity, for which the threat is "being dependent" on someone else (including God's) grace.

### 3.1. Reducing mercy to social activity

Nowadays, the dominant belief is that the Church gains importance in society when people benefit from its presence in the world. It is particularly important to strengthen the social order and to undertake charitable works that contribute to satisfying the most important human material and psychological needs (Danneels G., 2003, p. 50–51). It is considered less important to proclaim God's merciful love, bringing people salvation.

This is how the hospitality shown to war refugees and economic emigrants is understood. It is supposed to be – as Jacques Derrida claims – "absolute hospitality", that is, unlimited and unconditional, in contrast to the hospitality promoted in Christianity that is conditional, because it imposes specific laws and norms on the guest (Derrida J., 2000, p. 77). According to Derrida, if a host takes the initiative by inviting a person to his home, encouraging him to feel at home in it, he is also letting the guest know that this is not really the case. It is still not his house and he must respect the rules of the host and applicable to his property (O'Gorman K., 2006, p. 51).

Meanwhile, according to the French thinker, true hospitality does not require reciprocity or identification with the new environment. There is no law that may restrict or make the practice of hospitality conditional upon the guest meeting certain conditions. Hospitality must be above all laws (Derrida J., 2000, p. 25). The guest is allowed to act as he wants. There is no obligation or pressure for him to adopt a specific attitude and be guided in life by the host's axiology (Friese H., 2014, p. 87).

From the beginning, followers of Christ considered the practice of hospitality the greatest of all good deeds, although they regarded it as a sign of penance and an expression of faith rather than a work of mercy. Christians attributed to it, like almsgiving, an expiatory function, believing that love in the form of hospitality covers many sins (1 Pet 4,8–9). Moreover, its practice was not only about providing the visitors with shelter and food, but also about bearing witness by showing the beauty of Christianity

and conveying the truth about God's saving love. Christian hospitality served the communication of salvation, and its aim was interpersonal communion, allowing guests to experience life in a world transformed into the kingdom of God by the power of the Gospel (Daniélou J., 1951, p. 345).

In this context, it should be emphasized that practicing works of mercy towards the body or commitment to multiplying the common good and spreading justice in society cannot become the only plane for Christians to engage in building the kingdom of God. The Church's interest cannot be "contained in the simple and restricted dimension of economics, politics, social or cultural life; it must envisage the whole man, in all his aspects, right up to and including his openness to the absolute, even the divine Absolute" (EN No. 33). Therefore, care for earthly life should be accompanied by the proclamation of the Gospel of God's merciful love, which brings man liberation from sin, Satan's slavery and death. The Church's service must always take into account "the whole man", and thus not only his material, but also (above all) his spiritual needs, because of his call to eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. It is also in this spirit that we should approach the option for the poor, because „the worst discrimination which the poor suffer is the lack of spiritual care" (EG No. 200; Polak M., 2015, p. 100).

### 3.2. Relativism and the loss of the sense of sin

In today's postmodern era, man has the impression that he is completely free when he is not constrained by any commandments or moral norms, objective good or evil. All values are relative (dependent on the individual) and all behavior is allowed (Wielgus S., 2001, p. 35; Twomey V., 2009, p. 137). Since man always in his actions has in mind the good that he constantly strives for, he himself gives moral significance to his actions. In this way, relativism comes to the fore, in the light of which different values "collide" with each other and each of them is uncertain, and a person must determine what is best for him at a given moment (Müller J.B., 1997, p. 177).

In such a situation, it is difficult to talk about sin, the awareness of the existence of which and the need to eliminate are conditions for perceiving the value of God's mercy. Mercy that forgives human faults is not needed for people fascinated by modernity (which is today a synonym of good) and rejecting individual responsibility for evil in the world, because in their opinion there is only "systemic evil". When the category of personal sin is omitted, social structures, established by unjust governments or economic systems, become responsible for actions that harm people. Then sin is perceived impersonally, and the removal of evil from people's lives de-

pendes only on their reform efforts in the social sphere (Marshall Green M., 1991, p. 219).

Mercy that brings forgiveness only acquires meaning in relation to sin, which is a deliberate disregard for the will of God known to man, a love of self that goes so far as to despise God (Drożdż B., 2013, p. 112). Sin is a betrayal, a denial of the truth about the human person created in the image and likeness of God. Only by being aware of committed wrongs and the disorder caused by her actions, is a person willing to turn to God, who constantly strives to restore relations with people who break them by violating His law. Mercy that forgives people's sins becomes a human value and desire only when he recognizes an objective moral order and is aware of his tendency to evil (CCC No. 405).

Another condition for man's openness to God's mercy is the proper functioning of human conscience, which needs formation so that it can formulate "its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator" (CCC No. 1783). Only in a mature and sincere conscience can arise a desire for authentic good, for freedom from various conditions and manipulations to which human life is subjected. Due to the spread of moral permissiveness, emotivism and situationism, the Church should engage in shaping public opinion so that it becomes more aware of the existence of true values, the meaning of which is revealed in the light of God's truth. Only then can a man discern the moral rightness of his actions, and in the case of committing a sin, he will turn to God asking for mercy (Woolfolk A., 2004, p. 71; Wright K., 2011, p. 15).

### 3.3. The desire for absolute independence

Divine mercy encounters resistance from those who do not want to be dependent on anyone and to owe something to others (Wiesemann K.-H., 2016, p. 2). For many people, the possibility of accepting mercy is strange and repulsive; for if someone were to show mercy to them, their dignity would be offended. In everyday language, there is actually no place for the word "mercy," because the most important thing is to achieve success in life and as far as possible – without anyone's help. This principle also applies to God. Even if God wants people to be happy, his intervention in their lives seems to be unnecessary, because man is able to take care of himself.

It is difficult for today's man to experience mercy in everyday life. People are usually guided by the principle of justice or reciprocity *do ut des*. For many, mercy is a sign of weakness, which is characteristic of both those who show it (cannot get what is rightly due to them) and those who

are its beneficiaries (cannot take care of their own affairs and honor). Therefore, people often cannot imagine the absolute love and boundless mercy with which God comes to meet man in order to make him happy. They confuse it with credulity and *laissez-faire*.

In fact, mercy is not a cheap amnesty for criminals or an incentive to repeat sins. It is not a tolerance that neither removes evil nor heals a person. Those who find mercy are invited to look truthfully at their life and to admit to the wrong they have committed. It is then that God enables man to live according to the law of the Gospel, sets him free from his wounds and supports him in the pursuit of full humanity. Nothing is stronger than God's compassionate and forgiving love that overcomes sin and death and helps people to enter the path of conversion (Granados J. and others, 2016, p. 14–16; Petrà B., 2016, p. 27).

Since the beginning of Christianity, people have seen Christ's religion as an opportunity for a new life that begins with the forgiveness of sins. Thanks to God's mercy, they receive the power to live free from evil. All of this is a gift from God who is the only Lord. The Creator is not subject to anyone's law, but sovereignly grants his gifts to men (Rom 9,14-18). Mercy, then, indicates God's rule. It is not a sign of his weakness, but of strength (Markschies Ch., 2006, p. 246; Lehner W., 2016, p. 79), and trust in God's mercy neither leads to enslavement of man nor humiliates him. Moreover, by showing people mercy, God communicates how precious they are in his eyes, how much he loves them and respects their freedom.

Therefore, in order for people to experience the sweetness and transforming power of mercy, a space is needed in which it is practiced. The duty of communicating mercy in word and deed is primarily on the Church which is called to proclaim the message of God's grace and to create an environment in which people can experience forgiveness and liberation. Then, by participating in the life of the Church, they can find out that God's mercy does not deprive them of their dignity or freedom, but, on the contrary, frees them from selfishness and enables them to show merciful love to their neighbors (DiM No. 14; Wahl H., 1997, p. 255).

\* \* \*

The Gospel is not only a source of Christian truth, but also a model of action for the Church, which must constantly renew itself in her spirit. It has the task of proclaiming Christ and faithfully continuing his saving mission. If the heart of the Gospel is the message of God's limitless merciful love, which brings people liberation from evil and sin, then the same love should define the way of the existence of the Church in the world and her approach to people today. Then the teaching proclaimed by the Church



is reflected in action, thanks to which the word of the Gospel becomes reality in the eyes of the world, and the experience of meeting Christ's followers confirms the truth of the Christian message.

In practice, mercy means adopting an attitude marked by openness to the needs of people, especially those who are lost, marginalized and enslaved by evil. It must be accompanied by respect for every human being and faith in the boundless goodness of God, who never destroys anyone and reject anyone, but constantly comes to people with his forgiving and sanctifying grace. Then the man embraced by God's mercy will himself become its witness and instrument in the world.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1992, <https://www.usccb.org/sites/default/files/flipbooks/catechism/> (28.01.2021).
- Augustin George, 2016, *Thematische Hinführung*, in: Augustin George (ed.), *Barmherzigkeit leben. Eine Neuentdeckung der christlichen Berufung*, Herder, Freiburg i. B., p. 9–15.
- Benedict XVI, 2006, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 98, p. 217–252.
- Benedict XVI, 2009, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 101, p. 641–709.
- Bogner Daniel, 2017, *Prägender Einfluss*, Herder Korrespondenz, No. 10, p. 21–24.
- Bucher Rainer, 2016, *Mehr als Stellschrauben*, Herder Korrespondenz, No. 6, p. 15–16.
- Chavez Avida Monica, 2003, *El sufrimiento a la luz de la misericordia*, Colección Sinergia, Madrid.
- Daniélou Jean, 1951, *Pour une théologie de l'hospitalité*, La Vie Spirituelle, No. 11, p. 339–347.
- Danneels Godfried, 2003, *Kościół w ogniu krytyki*, Pastores, No. 2, p. 49–57.
- Derrida Jacques, 2000, *Of Hospitality. Anne Douformantelle invites Jacques Derrida to respond*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Drożdż Bogusław, 2013, *Grzech a dekonstrukcja wiary*, in: Przygoda Wiesław, Święs Kazimierz (ed.), *Duszpasterstwo wobec kryzysu wiary*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin, p. 103–119.
- Espinosa Arce Juan Pablo, 2015, *Misericordiae vultus: pistas para su lectura*, Mensaje, No. 12, p. 27–31.
- Figueroa-Deck Allan, Francisco, 2017, *Obispo de Roma. La revolución de la misericordia*, in: Aranguren Gonzalo, Alfonso, Palazzi, Félix (ed.), *Desafíos de una teología iberoamericana inculturada en tiempos de globalización, interculturalidad y exclusión social*, Actas del Primer Encuentro Iberoamericano de Teología, Convivium Press, Miami, p. 238–247.
- Francis, 2013, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 105, p. 1019–1137.
- Francis, 2013, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 105, p. 555–598.



- Francis, 2015, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae vultus*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 107, p. 399–420.
- Francis, 2015, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 107, p. 847–945.
- Francis, 2016, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 108, p. 312–446.
- Francis, 2018, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exultate*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 110, p. 1111–1161.
- Francis, 2019, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html) (28.01.2021).
- Francis, 2020, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encyclica-fratelli-tutti.html) (28.01.2021).
- Freiherr von Fürstenberg Gregor, 2015, *Zustand permanenter Evangelisierung*, Herder Korrespondenz, No. 11, p. 30–33.
- Friese Heidrun, 2014, *Grenzen der Gastfreundschaft. Die Bootsflüchtlinge von Lampedusa und die europäische Frage*, Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld.
- Gallagher Raphael, 2016, *The Reception of Amoris Laetitia*, *The Pastoral Review*, No. 4, p. 4–9.
- Galli Carlos María, 2014, *La teología pastoral de Evangelii Gaudium en el proyecto misionero de Francisco*, *Teología*, No. 114, s. 23–59.
- Granados José, Kampowski Stephan, Pérez-Soba Juan José, 2016, *Acompañar, discernir, integrar. Vademécum para una nueva pastoral familiar a partir de la exhortación Amoris laetitia*, Fonte, Burgos.
- Grillo Andrea, 2016, *Le cose nuove di „Amoris laetitia”. Come Papa Francesco traduce il sentire cattolico*, Cittadella, Assisi.
- Hajduk Ryszard, 2013, *Ewangelia na forum świata. Od apologetyki do marketingu narracyjnego*, Homo Dei, Kraków.
- Hajduk Ryszard, 2017, *Miłosierdzie duszpasterskie w Tradycji kościelnej i w Amoris laetitia papieża Franciszka*, *Forum Teologiczne*, No. 18, p. 181–195.
- Hajduk Ryszard, 2018a, *Apel Franciszka o „nawrócenie pastoralne” w Amoris Laetitia*, *Homo Dei*, No. 1, p. 19–30.
- Hajduk Ryszard, 2018b, *Łagodność pastoralna*, Homo Dei, Kraków.
- Hastetter Michaela C., 2017, *Via Caritatis – Pastoral Care of the Divorced and Remarried. An Ecumenical Comparison in the Context of Amoris Laetitia*, in: Knieps-Portle Roi Thomas (ed.), *A Point of No Return? Amoris Laetitia on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage*, Lit Verlag, Berlin, p. 195–214.
- John Paul II, 1980, Encyclical Letter *Dives in misericordia*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 72, p. 1177–1232.
- Kasper Walter, 2015, *Papst Franziskus – Revolution der Zärtlichkeit und der Liebe. Theologische Wurzeln und pastorale Perspektiven*, Bibelwerk, Stuttgart.
- Lehner Wolfgang, 2016, *Ruf in die Zeit – das Jahr der Barmherzigkeit. Barmherzigkeit in medialen Mechanismen*, *Klerusblatt*, No. 4, p. 78–82.
- Lohfink Gerhard, 1991, *Wie hat Jesus Gemeinde gewollt?*, Herder, Freiburg i. B.
- Markschies Christoph, 2006, *Das antike Christentum. Frömmigkeit, Lebensformen, Institutionen*, C.H. Beck, München.
- Marshall Green Molly, 1991, *Sin*, in: Cox James W. (ed.), *Handbook of Themes for Preaching*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, p. 118–222.

- Massaro Thomas, 2018, *Mercy in Action. The Social Teachings of Pope Francis*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.
- Mattheeuws Alain, 2017, *Le discernement pastoral après Amoris laetitia. Manifester le kairos*, Nouvelle Revue Théologique, No. 4, p. 587–604.
- Menke Karl-Heinz, 2017, *Macht die Freiheit wahr?*, Herder Korrespondenz, No. 3, p. 46–49.
- Müller Johann Baptist, 1997, *Religion und Politik. Wechselwirkungen und Dissonanzen*, Duncker & Humblot Verlag, Berlin.
- O'Gorman Kevin, 2006, *Jacques Derrida's philosophy of hospitality*, Hospitality Review No. 8, p. 50–57.
- Orth Stefan, 2017, *Papst Franziskus am Scheideweg*, Herder Korrespondenz, No. 1, s. 4–5.
- Paul VI, 1968, Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 60, p. 481–503.
- Paul VI, 1976, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. 68, p. 5–76.
- Petrà Basilio, 2016, *Amoris laetitia: accompagnare, discernere e integrare la fragilità. La morale cattolica dopo il capitolo ottavo*, Cittadella, Assisi.
- Polak Mieczysław, 2015, *Kairos der Barmherzigkeit. Barmherzigkeit als Prinzip einer missionarischen Seelsorge*, *Poznańskie Studia Teologiczne*, No. 29, p. 91–104.
- Rylaarsdam David, 2014, *John Chrysostom on Divine Pedagogy, The Coherence of his Theology and Preaching*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Salas Antonio, 1991, *Jesús ¿Hombre violento?*, Agustinos de El Escorial, Madrid.
- Sandler Willibald, 2017, *Sakramentale Barmherzigkeit für Menschen in „komplexen Situationen“. Zutritt von wiederverheirateten Geschiedenen zu den Sakramenten nach Amoris laetitia*, *Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego*, No. 1, p. 55–78.
- Scannone Juan Carlos, 2017, *Hacia una colaboración teológica con la pastoral del Papa Francisco*, in: Aranguren Gonzalo, Alfonso, Palazzi, Félix (ed.), *Desafíos de una teología iberoamericana inculturada en tiempos de globalización, interculturalidad y exclusión social*, *Actas del Primer Encuentro Iberoamericano de Teología*, Convivium Press, Miami, p. 213–224.
- Scannone Juan Carlos, 2018, *Magisterio del Papa Francisco: teología del pueblo; ética social*, *Yachay*, No. 68, p. 11–48.
- Scheuer Manfred, 2016, *Barmherzigkeit will ich... Zum Jahr der Barmherzigkeit*, *Klerusblatt*, No. 1, p. 2–9.
- Schmidt Sebastian, 2014, *Die Begriffe Caritas – Barmherzigkeit – Diakonie in der Frühen Neuzeit*, in: Collinet Michaela (ed.), *Caritas – Barmherzigkeit – Diakonie. Studien zu Begriffen und Konzepten des Helfens in der Geschichte des Christentums vom Neuen Testament bis ins späte 20. Jahrhundert*, Lit Verlag, Berlin, p. 79–114.
- Schockenhoff Eberhard, 2017, *Theologischer Paradigmenwechsel und neue pastorale Spielräume. Das Nachsynodale Apostolische Schreiben Amoris laetitia*, *Studia Teologiczno-Historyczne Śląska Opolskiego*, No. 1, p. 15–25.
- Sobrinho Jon, 1992, *El principio – misericordia. Bajar de la cruz a los pueblos crucificados*, *Sal Terrae*, Santander.
- Söding Thomas, 2016, *Barmherzigkeit – Gottes Gabe und Aufgabe. Neutestamentliche Orientierungen in einem zentralen Begriffsfeld*, in: Augustin George (ed.), *Barmherzigkeit leben. Eine Neuentdeckung der christlichen Berufung*, Herder, Freiburg i. B., p. 19–34.

- Spadaro Antonio, 2013, *Intervista a Papa Francesco*, [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130921\\_intervista-spadaro.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/de/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130921_intervista-spadaro.html) (28.01.2021).
- Spiegel Pirmin, 2016, *Die Kraft der Peripherie – Wege der Barmherzigkeit und Gerechtigkeit*, Klerusblatt, No. 3, p. 50–55.
- Twomey Vincent, 2009, *Kościół nie ma prawa ingerować w sferę polityki?*, in: Hajduk Ryszard (ed.), *Współczesne herezje*, SQL, Olsztyn, p. 127–142.
- Uriarte Juan Maria, 1996, *Esperanza, misericordia, fidelidad*, PPC, Madrid.
- Wahl Heribert, 1997, „*Alles ist Fragment*” – *aber Fragmente sind nicht alles!*, Theologisch-Praktische Quartalschrift, No. 3, p. 245–255.
- Wielgus Stanisław, 2001, *Postmodernizm*, in: Czekalski Ryszard (ed.), *Katecheza wobec wyzwań współczesności*, Płocki Instytut Wydawniczy, Płock, p. 33–48.
- Wiesemann Karl-Heinz, 2016, *Die Herausforderung der Barmherzigkeit für die Kirche – heute*, Diakonia, No. 1, p. 2–8.
- Woolfolk Alan, 2004, *The Dubious Triumph of the Therapeutic. The Denial of Character*, in: Imbir Jonathan B. (ed.), *Therapeutic Culture. Triumph and Defeat*, Routledge, New York, p. 69–90.
- Wright Katie, 2011, *The Rise of the Therapeutic Society. Psychological Knowledge & the Contradictions of Cultural Change*, New Academia Publishing, Washington.
- Zulehner Paul Michael, 2018, „*Ich träume von einer Kirche als Mutter und Hirtin*”. *Die neue Pastorkultur von Papst Franziskus*, Patmos, Ostfildern.

#### Abbreviations

- AL – Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*
- CCC – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- ChV – Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Christus vivit*
- CiV – Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate*
- DCE – Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas est*
- DiM – John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in misericordia*
- EG – Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*
- EN – Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*
- FT – Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti*
- GE – Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exultate*
- LF – Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*
- LS – Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*
- MV – Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy *Misericordiae vultus*