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THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR AS AN EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL LOVE

Poverty is not just economic lack of means of dignified life (a clear expression of which is famine, homelessness and unemployment). Cultural aspects of poverty are being increasingly emphasised (expressions of which are primary and secondary illiteracy, no access to education and know-how knowledge, no access to the truth and information, not to mention pseudo-culture that is “the culture of death”). Today it is possible to speak of poverty in political and social terms characterised by negation of the fundamental human rights. In the theological perspective one can not forget about the entire sphere of the moral poverty (loss of hope, sin, living “as if God did not exist”). Poverty is a “problem that more than anything else constitutes a challenge for our human and Christian conscience”¹.

The social teaching of the Catholic Church does not end on merely sociological, economical and political description of the phenomenon of poverty and does not stop on searching for the reasons or the effects of the said phenomenon. “The tragedy of poverty” is one of the signs of the times and at the same time a moral challenge that should be interpreted in line of the conciliar criterion *sub luce Evangelii*².

¹ John Paul II (2000), *Na ziemi pokój ludziom, których Bóg miłuje. Orędzie na XXXIII Światowy Dzień Pokoju 1 stycznia 2000 r.* (Watykan, 08.12.1999), no. 14, „L'Osservatore Romano” (Polish edition) 21,1(2000), p. 7.

² II Vatican Council, Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no. 4.

Involvement in solving the problem of poverty and hardship in the contemporary world has been defined in the social teaching of the Church as “the preferential option for the poor” or “preferential love for the poor and the rejected”.

Before John Paul II used the term in a document in the rank of the encyclical, which was in 1987 in the encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*³, the notion itself already had a long story. Nonetheless, as Donald Dorr writes in his monograph entitled: *Option for the Poor. A Hundred Years of Catholic Social Teaching*: “the term «option for the poor» entered the ecclesial scene about 40 years ago⁴, however since that time it has become the most controversial religious term since the Reformation motto *sola fide*”⁵.

The controversy, in the author’s opinion, originated from a hostile criticism that understood the option for the poor as a form of ecclesial accommodation of the Latin American attempt to merge Catholicism with Marxism. Despite criticism there were supporters of the idea of “the option for the poor”, who believed that the Church is called upon to make a choice for the sake of the poor not only in Latin America but all over the world. What is more, they found a base for this option not in Karl Marx, but in the very Bible⁶.

The expression: “The Church loves the poor with the preferential love” was not some sort of a “purely ecclesial theological novelty”. The entire history of the Church confirmed a concern of the community of those in need of support and assistance. It is confirmed not only by examples of many lives of the saints, but by numerous works of mercy undertaken in the spirit of the Christian *Caritas*⁷.

Today it is possible to say clearly that “the preferential option for the poor” is – as it has been reminded to us by pope Francis – an inseparable feature of a truly Christian attitude to “poverty of many”.

1. ORIGIN OF THE NOTION OF “THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR”

Although the roots of leaning towards the poor by the Church are commonly believed to be in Latin America, the first antecedents of this involvement should be sought in Europe. This was the case when the so called “social issue” emerged and the beginnings of the Catholic social teaching during the pontificate of Leo XIII

³ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, Vatican, no. 42 [further: SRS].

⁴ Now it has been over 40 years.

⁵ D. Dorr, *Option for the Poor. From Leo XIII to Pope Francis* (revised edition), New York 2016, p. 6; Ch. Curran, *The Changing Anthropological Bases of Catholic Social Teaching*, in: *Change in Official Catholic Moral Teaching* [Readings in Moral Theology, No. 13], Idem (ed.), Mahwah 2003, p. 187.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷ F. Francou, *L'amore preferenziale per i poveri*, in: *Libertà cristiana e liberazione. Saggi sui documenti della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede*, M. Agnes (ed.), „Quaderni de «L'Osservatore Romano»”. Vol. 3, Città del Vaticano 1986, p. 255.

based on firm Christian values and rules of social life that emphasised human dignity, common good, subsidiarity, common allocation of goods and solidarity. This teaching made the way for a better understanding the phenomenon of poverty⁸.

The notion “option for the poor” has been used for the first time in Lima in 1970 during the third national meeting of the Peruvian Movement of Priests. Option for the poor should be a manifestation of implementation of love of our neighbours⁹. Undoubtedly reflection on the Church’s ministry to the poor and their place in the community of the faithful could develop thanks to the attitude of priests. A person worth noticing in this respect is cardinal J.C. Maurer (Bolivia)¹⁰ and archbishop Helder Câmara (Brasil)¹¹.

Option for the poor has been the subject of discussion in the course of General Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate. In the final documents of the third Conference from Puebla de los Angeles in Mexico (1979) it was said that it was in Medellín, which is the second CELAM Conference “there emerged a clear and prophetic preferential and solidary option for the poor”¹². Latin American bishops emphasised the fact that the option was firstly a practice of the Church’s actions, followed by a theological (verbal) formulation.

From the etymological point of view “option for the poor” means “a choice-decision” (a choice that is a decision) to take measures to the sake of the poor. Formulation of the notion was surely affected not only by the meaning of the word “option” that can be expressed by such phrases as: “love for the poor”, “choice of the poor” and “solidarity with the poor”. What is at stake here is “a renewed attitude toward the poor, which takes into account the contemporary character of poverty”¹³.

⁸ J. Gocko, *Nauka społeczna Kościoła w poszukiwaniu własnej tożsamości*, Warszawa 2013, pp. 70-71.

⁹ G. Collet (1992), „Den Bedürftigsten solidarisch verpflichtet”. *Implikationen einer authentischen Rede von der Option für die Armen*, „Jahrbuch für Christliche Sozialwissenschaften” 33 (1992), pp. 76-77; W. Przygoda, *Opcja preferencyjna na rzecz ubogich*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 48, z. 6 (2001), p. 185.

¹⁰ José Clemente Maurer CSSR (born on 13.03.1900 in Püttlingen in Germany – died on 27.06.1990 in Sucre), a subsidiary bishop of La Paz, archbishop of Sucre. In 1967 pope Paul VI made him a cardinal.

¹¹ St. Hélder Câmara (born on 07.02.1909 in Fortaleza, Ceará in north-eastern Brazil – died on 27.08.1999 in Recife), a subsidiary bishop of Rio de Janeiro, later archbishop of Recife and Olinda (considered to be the poorest parts of Brazil). One of the leading theologians of theology of liberation. He was nicknamed “a red bishop”. He is the author of the famous saying: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist”.

¹² „Con rinnovata speranza nella forza vivificante dello Spirito, riprendiamo la posizione della II Conferenza generale (Medellín), che fece una chiara e profetica scelta preferenziale e solida a favore dei poveri”. *Enchiridion dei Documenti della Chiesa Latinoamericana*, n. 1757, P. Vanzan (ed.), Bologna 1995[further: EDCL].

¹³ A. Pietrzak, *Opcja na rzecz ubogich znakiem wiarygodności Kościoła*, Pieniężno 2002, p. 56.

To the concept “option for the poor” the following adjectives are added: “preferential”, “solidary”, “prophetic”.

And so, “preferential option” means some sort of “a priority”, that is granted above all to the poor in the pastoral activities of the Church¹⁴.

“Solidary option” is a protection against paternalism in actions for the poor. The poor are not to be treated as “an object” of charitable works or help, but are a real “subject” of common efforts to liberate them and their full participation in social life. A solidary option calls for maintaining friendly relations with the poor and an ability to support their actions¹⁵.

“A prophetic option” is manifested in disclosing all kinds of poverty resulting from social injustice and lack of solidarity¹⁶.

An adequate approach to the option for the poor in the ecclesial perspective has to encompass two aspects:

Firstly, option for the poor is closely linked to the work of evangelism, therefore the reasons to choose them do not result from some ideology, but are derived from the very substance and nature of the Church: “Preferential option for the poor aims at proclaiming Christ the Redeemer who will show their dignity, support their efforts to break free from any shortcomings”¹⁷. If the Church wishes to be faithful to her Founder, she must preach the Gospel particularly to the poor.

The final Puebla documents remind us that we can never forget the structural dimension of actions for the poor. Properly understood option for the poor must involve the transformation of structures of society and thereby also a change of mentality and transformation of people: “A necessary transformation of unfair social, political and economical structures will not be true and complete if it will not be accompanied by the transformation of mentality of individual people and human population”¹⁸.

Solidarity with the poor is not meant merely to help those who suffer poverty, but to convert the rich, for it teaches them to free themselves from their slavish attachment to material goods¹⁹. Therefore a subject of the preferential options are

¹⁴ Compare EDCL no. 828, 1005, 1356, 1757, 1765, 1768, 1776, 1788, 1840; J. Pixley, C. Boff, *Opção pelos pobres*, Petrópolis 1987, pp. 149-157.

¹⁵ Compare EDCL 650, 671, 1357, 1757, 1759, 1763, 1768, 1771, 1779, 1781, 1840, 1858; E. Colom, *Scelti in Cristo per essere santi*. Vol. IV. *Morale sociale*, Roma 2008, p. 288.

¹⁶ Compare EDCL 715, 1753, 1757, 1761, 1762, 1764, 1768; G. Gutiérrez, *La force historique des pauvres*, Paris 1986, pp. 112-113.

¹⁷ EDCL 1776.

¹⁸ “Questa scelta, reclamata dalla realtà scandalosa degli squilibri economici dell’America Latina, deve portare a stabilire una convivenza umana degna e fraterna ed a costruire una società giusta e Libera. La necessita trasformazione delle ingiuste struttura sociali, politiche ed economiche non sarà vera e piena se non sarà accompagnata dal cambiamento della mentalità personale e collettiva nei confronti dell’ideale di una vita umana degna e felice, che a sua volta dispone alla conversione”. EDCL 1777-1778.

¹⁹ Compare EDCL 1779.

all people and it is not a luxury that could be afforded only and solely by wealthy people²⁰.

2. EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF “THE OPTION FOR THE POOR” DURING THE PONTIFICATE OF JOHN PAUL II

John Paul II has alluded to the option for the poor from the beginning of his pontificate. Although it must be admitted that in the beginning he used this term more cautiously. Only after the instructions *Libertatis nuntius* and *Libertatis conscientia*, i.e. after the idea of the option for the poor has been cleared of its links with liberation theology, he described it as one of the most important tasks in the evangelization mission of the Church (*ad intra et ad extra*)²¹.

“The preferential option for the poor” in *Sollicitudo rei socialis* appears in the direct vicinity of the phrase “love of preference for the poor”. The papal definition says, that “this is an option, or a special form of primacy in the exercise of Christian charity, to which the whole tradition of the Church bears witness. It affects the life of each Christian inasmuch as he or she seeks to imitate the life of Christ, but it applies equally to our social responsibilities and hence to our manner of living, and to the logical decisions to be made concerning the ownership and use of goods”²².

The quoted words reveal very clearly two essential dimensions of the preferential option:

The first one is a reference to the life of Jesus himself. The example of life of our Saviour presented in the New Testament should have a concrete application in life of the Church, as far as our attitudes are concerned, that is in “our manner of living” and with respect to the ownership and use of goods.

On the other hand John Paul II suggests numerous reforms of international institutions (concerning trade, the world monetary and financial system, technological exchanges and the international organisations)²³. The Pope points at the need of transformation of international structures that give rise to, maintain and often deepen the condition of poverty in the world²⁴.

Furthermore, in 1991 in the encyclical *Centesimus annus* John Paul II pointed at the option for the poor as a form of a radical social love. The social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation

²⁰ EDCL 1757-1788.

²¹ Ch. A. Astorga, *Catholic moral theology and social ethics. A new method*, New York 1993, p. 38; J. P. Wogaman, *Christian Ethics. A historical introduction*, Louisville 1993, p. 249.

²² SRS 42.

²³ Compare SRS 43.

²⁴ W. Przygoda, *Ubóstwo*, in: *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, R. Kamiński, idem, M. Fijałkowski (ed.) Lublin 2006, p. 875.

for action. The preferential option for the poor “is never exclusive or discriminatory towards other groups” and concerns the cultural and religious aspects as well²⁵.

Another important voice promoting the option for the poor was the apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (1994). The pope recommended to the Church “preferential option for the poor and the outcast”²⁶. He reminded Christians, that they should “raise their voice on behalf of all the poor of the world”²⁷.

Furthermore, in the letter *Novo millennio ineunte* he appealed “for a new ‘creativity’ in charity, not only by ensuring that help is effective but also by ‘getting close’ to those who suffer, so that the hand that helps is seen not as a humiliating handout but as a sharing between brothers and sisters”²⁸.

3. THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION AND SOCIAL LOVE

To duly show what social love is, one should accept the basic truth about man: “Human existence is coexistence – it is life with the others and for the others”²⁹. Social love can not forget about two dimensions of love that are vital for the personalistic vision:

First of all, one should remember about universalism of love. Universality of love commands to love each and every person, even enemies.

Second of all love is interpersonal and is a relation between individuals. This interpersonal nature of love is a necessary precondition of love³⁰.

What is thus meant by social love? Social love is a form of social existence of man, it is “a soul of social order”³¹, an important part of social ties³². The essence of society is a common effort to achieve some good. This is an interpersonal love that at the same time is open to creation of the common good. Although each love

²⁵ Compare John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Centessimus annus*, Vatican 1991, no. 57; R. J. Neuhaus, *Biznes i Ewangelia. Wyzwania dla chrześcijanina-kapitalisty*, Poznań 1993, p. 162.

²⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Vatican 1994, no. 51 [further: TMA].

²⁷ TMA 51; compare: M. Cisto, *Sekularyzm wyzwaniem dla Kościoła*, in: *Tertio millennio adveniente. U progu trzeciego tysiąclecia*, G. Witaszek (ed.), Lublin 2000, p. 265.

²⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, Vatican 2001, no. 50 [further NMI]; compare: J. Gocko, *Wzrastanie społeczne człowieka*, in: *Wzrastanie człowieka w godności, miłości i miłosierdziu*, M. Kalinowski (ed.), Lublin 2005, p. 49.

²⁹ J. Nagórny, *Posłannictwo chrześcijan w świecie*, Lublin 1998, p. 226. The author claims, in this context, that all “isolation, excluding oneself (or someone) from social life not only is a moral evil, but ‘an ontological evil’, since it prevents human development”.

³⁰ T. Gorringer, *Liberation ethics*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*, R. Gill (ed.), Cambridge 2001, p. 130.

³¹ *Caritas vero socialis quasi anima esse debet huius ordinis.*

³² J. Majka, *Etyka życia gospodarczego*, Warszawa 1980, p. 50.

is open to good of the other person³³, social love exceeds a narrow understanding of good and opens to something which in the social teaching of the Church is called *bonum commune*. The common good is understood not as a sum of individual goods, but as everything that is demanded of each individual living in a given community and what allows each member of this community fulfil his or her vocation. In the social love the highest purpose is not goods of an individual, but an individual as such³⁴.

A characteristic feature of the social teaching of the Church is the fact that love was talked about in a close relation with the virtue of justice³⁵. Very often it was justice that was the dominant feature, love being only of a subsidiary character, although already St. Augustine wrote in his *De civitate Dei*, that only love is capable of creating community. At the same time he noticed that there is love that unites and there is love that divides. He called the former social love and the latter egoistic love. He regarded the both of them as the source of community and social love. According to Augustine social love creates good communities and egoistic love creates antagonistic communities³⁶.

Practicing social love can therefore be described in two major aspects. Looking at the issue from the negative perspective, it must be underlined that social love is about opposition and rejection of any situation of violence, repression and violence. One should aim at rejecting everything that is expression of desire to dominate man by another man. Social love can never mean consent to evil, but may be of the character of the opposition and protest.

As far as the positive aspect is concerned, social love leads to a real involvement in creation of the common good. This is the sphere in which interpersonal relations are directed to creation of a community and unifying aspects³⁷. Such a definition of social love means an attitude of broadly understood care for spreading and creating universal brotherhood between people and universal responsibility.

³³ At this point it is worth to refer to reflections of Karol Wojtyła: "For we know, that one can seek other person to desire the same good as I do. Of course this purpose has to be recognised as good and made his or her own as well. Then between me and this person a special bond is made, a bond of common good and a common aim that binds us together. This special bond is not limited to seeking the common aim, but unites the acting persons 'from within' – and constitutes a vital core of every love. [...] the ability to love is constituted by the fact, that man is able to look for good consciously with the others or subdue to this good for the sake of the others or to the others for the same of this good. Love is an exclusive participation of persons". Idem, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, Lublin 1981, p. 31.

³⁴ J. Wadowski, *Personalistyczne podstawy miłości społecznej i jej orientacja na dobro wspólne*, „Społeczeństwo i Kościół” 3 (2006), pp. 55-57.

³⁵ G. Piana, *In novità di vita*. Vol. 3: *Morale socioeconomica e politica*, Assisi 2013, p. 164.

³⁶ K. Ryczan, *Miłość – miłosierdzie w życiu społecznym*, in: Jan Paweł II, *Dives in misericordia. Tekst i komentarz*, S. Nagy (ed.), Lublin 1993, p. 224.

³⁷ T. Borutka, *Znaczenie zasady solidarności w życiu społecznym*, „Sosnowieckie Studia Teologiczne” 8 (2005), p. 144.

Already in this reflection it was possible to see numerous points of contact between the solidarity and social love. “Solidarity is not only an indefinite sympathy or superficial affection against evil that affects close and distant people. On the contrary, this is ‘strong and durable willingness’ to engage for the sake of ‘the common good’, which is good of each and every person, for we are ‘all’ responsible ‘for everybody’ ”³⁸.

Solidarity is the attitude of mutual respect and assistance. Some people can not exploit the others, we are all brethren³⁹. Solidarity is the exclusion of all forms of egoism and egocentricity that ruin healthy relationship between human beings. Solidarity is also a “recognition and respect for the personal human dignity. It entails a willingness and readiness to protect those who are in distress, need, extreme life situations, threat or suffer from poverty⁴⁰”.

A peculiar form of love that is able to offer remedy for dramatic restlessness of the contemporary world is merciful love – mercy. “Mercy is an indispensable dimension of love; it is as it were love’s second name and, at the same time, the specific manner in which love is revealed and effected vis-à-vis the reality of the evil that is in the world, affecting and besieging man, insinuating itself even into his heart”⁴¹. This love is able to reach down to every prodigal son, to every human misery, and above all to every form of moral misery, to sin. When this happens, the person who is the object of mercy does not feel humiliated, but rather found again and “restored to value”⁴².

To achieve challenges of social love in a proper manner, “new imagination of mercy” is needed⁴³, which is the new sensitivity of human hearts and renewed spirit of solidarity with neighbours⁴⁴. The attitude of “the imagination of mercy” is expressed in “the look of love, to see a brother, who lost his job, a roof over his head, possibility to support his family in a dignified way and secure education for his children and therefore feels abandoned, lost and experiences hopelessness. ‘The imagination of mercy’ is necessary to help a spiritually and materially poor child, not to turn away from a boy or a girl lost in the world of various addictions or

³⁸ SRS 38. Cardinal C.M. Martini comments on this definition of John Paul II as follows: “Si noti come stando a questa definizione, la solidarietà tenda ad assumere il ruolo tradizionalmente assunto dalla giustizia – la virtù orientata per eccellenza al bene comune – assurgendo quindi la solidarietà quasi al ruolo di virtù sociale fondamentale”. M. Cacciari, C.M. Martini, *Dialogo sulla solidarietà*, Roma 1999, p. 13.

³⁹ SRS 40.

⁴⁰ R. Nęcek (2005), *Solidarność, jako fakt, zasada i cnota w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, „Sosnowieckie Studia Teologiczne” 8(2005), p. 112.

⁴¹ John Paul II, Encyclical letter *Dives in misericordia*, Vatican 1980, no. 7 [further: DiM].

⁴² DiM 6; G. Weigel, *Czym jest katolicyzm? Dziesięć kontrowersyjnych pytań*. Translated by A. Gomola, Kraków 2003, pp. 38-40.

⁴³ NMI 50.

⁴⁴ J.A. Kłoczowski, *Rekolekcje o nadziei*. Kraków 2005, p. 64; A. Derdziuk, *Nadzieja jako owoc głoszenia miłosierdzia*, in: *Nadzieja chrześcijańska a nadzieje ludzkie*, J. Nagórny, M. Pokrywka (ed.), Lublin 2003, pp. 167-167.

crime, to give good advice, consolation, spiritual and material support to those who engage in an internal struggle against evil. This imagination is needed wherever people in need cry unto the Father of mercy: 'Give us today our daily bread'⁴⁵.

Call to social love has to be linked with one more aspect of the Christian vision of community. What is at stake here is the truth about human weakness, due to which man commits certain sins and contributes therefore to creation of structures of sin. It is impossible without social love to overcome in social life everything which is born out of sin. This vision reinforces the conviction that in shaping social life it is not enough to appeal to justice, but it is necessary to build a community on merciful love that is capable of forgiveness and reconciliation. Civilisation of love up to the point of merciful love "encompasses life in all its dimensions and human culture in all its dimensions shaped by love up to the limits of mercy"⁴⁶.

Motivation for the implementation of the preferential option for the poor is first of all a creative motivation, which emphasises the fact, that man is by nature a social being, for "social love is a vital and even constitutive element of social bonds".

This motivation, however, goes much further. In the Christian practice of life a tremendous role is played by its dimension that originates from the Eucharist. For it is the Eucharist that obliges Christians to solidarity with the poor and the weak. The Eucharist is the time and place of cultivation, proclamation and formation of communion, for it is the sacrament of unity⁴⁷.

Vocation of man in the perspective of the mystery of the Eucharist refers to involvement in social life in the spirit of responsibility for the temporal world⁴⁸, which "can not be deprived of solidary cry for bread on behalf of all those who suffer from hunger"⁴⁹. "Each of us is partly responsible for this unfair condition. Each of us, one way or another, touches upon the issue of hunger and poverty. Let us share our bread with those who have none, or have it much less than we do! Let us open our hearts for the needs of our brothers and sisters who suffer poverty and deprivation! Sometimes they are ashamed of this and try to hide their poverty. We should give them our brotherly and helping hand discreetly". In this respect life of Brother Albert (Adam Chmielowski), a Polish saint, and his personal

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ W. Słomka, *Orędzie Miłosierdzia Bożego a budowanie cywilizacji miłości*, in: Idem, *Źródła postaw i życia chrześcijańskiego*, Lublin 1996, p. 97.

⁴⁷ J. Gręźlikowski, *Świętowanie dnia Pańskiego. Ważniejsze zagadnienia prawno-teologiczne*, Toruń 2005, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁸ S. Czerwik, *Sprawowanie Eucharystii objawia i buduje Kościół. Społeczny wymiar liturgii mszalnej – analiza liturgiczno-teologiczna*, in: Komisja Episkopatu Polski Duszpasterstwa Ogólnego, *Ewangelizacja i Eucharystia. Program duszpasterski na rok 1992/93*, E. Szczotok, A. Liskowacka (ed.) Katowice 1992, pp. 64-65.

⁴⁹ Jan Paweł II, *Homilia w czasie Mszy św. odprawionej na zakończenie Międzynarodowego Kongresu Eucharystycznego* (Wrocław, 01.06.1997), no. 4, in: *Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny*, Kraków 1997, p. 878.

motto, are very significant: “You must be as good as bread, which for everyone rests on the table and from which everyone, if hungry, may cut himself a piece for nourishment”⁵⁰.

In building more human society that is worthy of man it is necessary to appreciate love in social life, in economical, political and cultural dimension. It is also necessary to make it the constant and supreme norm of action⁵¹. It is impossible to shape social life and solve its problems by applying solely the rule of justice. Justice is often merely a minimum of love. Love is also the loftiest and most noble form of relationship possible between human beings⁵². Love is the highest commandment also in social terms. It is social love that is, as it were, the counterweight to the egoism and individualism⁵³, for the contemporary systems of everyday life gave birth to withdrawal into oneself and closed circles of friends and indifference to the needs of our neighbors or even hostility taken to the extreme of exploitation, persecution and absolute liquidation of man. Therefore we should rebuild healthy, biblical love, that is new sensitivity to someone who is right next to us – “for he is not ‘an alien’ after all. This is our brother in our environment, in our city, in our human family”⁵⁴.

SUMMARY

This article presents the issue of the preferential option for the poor that appears to be a natural consequence of the social love. At first the author presents poverty as an expression of a great injustice in the world and later on points at historic origins and evolution of the preferential option for the poor presented in the Catholic social teaching. In the final part of the article the author reflects upon the question, whether the option for the poor is a theological *passé*, or still constitutes a living element of the social teaching of the Church especially with its regards to relation between justice and love.

Słowa kluczowe: ubóstwo, preferencyjna opcja na rzecz ubogich, miłość społeczna, sprawiedliwość, katolicka nauka społeczna

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church*, Vatican 2005, n. 581 [further: CSTC].

⁵² Jan Paweł II (2003), *Zawsze aktualne zadanie: wychowywać do pokoju. Orędzie na XXXVII Światowy Dzień Pokoju 1 Stycznia 2004 r.* (Watykan, 08.12.2003), nr 10, „L'Osservatore Romano” (Polish edition) 25 (2004), no 2, p. 7.

⁵³ CSTC, n. 581.

⁵⁴ A. Dereń, *Nowa „wyobraźnia miłosierdzia”*. in: Komisja Duszpasterstwa Ogólnego Konferencji Episkopatu Polski, *Naśladować Chrystusa. Program duszpasterski na rok 2003/2004*, P. Kurzela, A. Liskowacka (ed.), Katowice 2003, p. 208.

Keywords: poverty, preferential option for the poor, social love, justice, catholic social teaching

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