

Robert Ciborowski

University of Białystok
e-mail: r.ciborowski@uwb.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-5562-342X

Aneta Kargol-Wasiluk

University of Białystok
e-mail: a.kargol@uwb.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0003-1915-2840

Marian Zalesko

University of Białystok
e-mail: mzalesko@uwb.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0002-1488-173X

**ECONOMIC RHETORIC IN THE THOUGHT
OF JOHN PAUL II**

Abstract. The aim of the article is to present the way of economic thinking particularly visible in the social teaching of the Church of John Paul II, through the prism of rhetoric and economic discourse. The authors use the method of analysis and synthesis, focusing on a man being at the center of economic activity. The paper shows the sensitivity of the great twentieth-century thinker to economic matters. His thought could be an inspiration for creating and implementing the concept of economic and social policy and then it would be able to constitute a huge potential of guidelines for a better understanding of the functioning of the modern world and building and implementing solutions that can have an impact on improving the human condition.

Keywords: economics, man, economic activity, free market, government, state, labor, rhetoric, encyclic, John Paul II.

Introduction

Economics is a social science. It deals with human action (often extraordinarily complex) in the socio-economic space. It is also a humanistic science, about which Jerzy Wilkin (2009: 301) wrote as follows: “The subject of economics are people: their needs, aspirations, preferences, values, behaviors, relations between individuals and groups, effects of their actions and many other aspects of human existence. Economics is a science

about man in his social entanglement”. These words show that economics is a science that examines human behaviors, and these are always motivated by a certain set of values (Mączyńska 2015: 88–101, Kargol-Wasiluk & Zalesko 2015: 74–87).

It is worth emphasizing that man is entangled in the economy and economic matters, which are indispensable in the everyday functioning of each of us. The economy, in turn, is entangled in the social context and, so, in social normative systems (systems of social norms and principles), i.e., morality. This shows that the functioning of socio-economic systems takes place primarily at the interface of the economy and the social teaching of the Church, which is the basis for formative work, preparing and providing guidelines for participation in social and economic life (Błąd 2015: 27–44). An excellent example of analyses showing the entanglement of man in the economy (understood as the science of human action) are the considerations of John Paul II. Rhetoric of an economic nature is visible in many of the Pope’s texts, but to the greatest extent in the encyclic: “*Centesimus Annus*” (1991). On its pages John Paul II argued that man is at the center of all processes occurring in the economy. The aim of the paper is to present the way of economic thinking, particularly visible in the social teaching of the Church of John Paul II through the prism of rhetoric and economic discourse (McCloskey 1983). The authors used the method of analysis and synthesis, focusing on man in the center of economic activity. The text is divided into four main parts with an introduction and conclusion.

A man at the center of economic activity

The encyclic: “*Centesimus Annus*” is the most pro-market in the history of the Church. However, John Paul II did not support the free market economy only because it is assessed as the “most effective” means and way of exchanging goods and supplying services. The key argument around which the Pope have concentrated is the focus on man and his dignity (Galarowicz 2014, Wojtyła 2023: 121–136), which is realized in free action. The influence of the Austrian school of economics can be noticed in it (Gniadek 2015). “In the field of economy, in which the discoveries and applications of exact sciences were used, a new structure of production of consumer goods gradually took shape. A new form of ownership appeared – capital – a new form of work – hired labor, the characteristic feature of which was that the burdensome rhythm of production was determined only by the

pursuit of increasing efficiency and multiplying profits, without taking into account such factors as gender, age or family situation of the employees” (John Paul II 1991; 3).

A man has become the central element of the operation of free market forces (Gocko 2006: 205–213). This does not mean abandoning the voluntary nature of participation in economic processes, but merely drawing attention to the fact that without a man no exchange can have a market character, because it is not free.

In the capitalist system, a clear division of society becomes visible. As the Pope pointed out, “(...) the division of society into two classes separated from each other by a deep divide”. The creation of a huge working class and its relations with the owners of the capital seemed to be very distant from each other and led to an obvious conflict. Importantly, this situation was very clearly overlapped by changes in the field of universally understood politics. It was a conflict between capital and labor, or – as the encyclic calls it – “the workers’ question” (John Paul II 1991; 4).

Namely, the Church speaks on specific human situations, individual and community, national and international, which allows it to analyze social phenomena and show directions for the proper solution of problems that result from them.

In this way, following the political theory dominant at the time, attempts were made to support, through proper laws or, on the contrary, through deliberate refraining from any intervention, complete economic freedom. At the same time, the growth of the role of workers began to appear in an organized form and in a manner that was often violent. A different concept of property and economic life began to appear, the assumption of which was the introduction of a new system of political and social life.

In “*Centesimus Annus*” John Paul II did not show the so-called third way, i.e., something intermediate between capitalism and Marxism¹. The social teaching of the Church is also not an alternative to other economic systems or ideologies. Catholic social teaching is an in-depth reflection on human economic activity in the light of the Gospel. John Paul II did not reject economic laissez-faire, but he pointed out that a free-market economy cannot exist in a vacuum. Behind decisions about production and consumption are specific moral and cultural choices, through which a specific concept of life is revealed. Capitalism, in addition to private property and the free market, needs moral values and principles (Pawnik 2008, Palmer 2011). The government should intervene in the economy only in exceptional situations, and to an extremely limited extent at that. Otherwise, both economic and civic freedom will be restricted.

Socio-economic system – a man – labor – government

The most essential element creating a good socio-economic system (See: Mączyńska & Sadowski 2008) is private property. It is an extension of human freedom, within which a person has the right to make autonomous decisions. It is the foundation of a free market economy. The encyclic indicates that it must be a type of free market that guarantees a close relationship between a person as a subject of labor and the right to the fruits of this work in the form of private property.

The fundamental fault of socialism is anthropological in nature because it treats a person as a mere element and part of a social organism, in such a way that the well-being of an individual is completely subordinated to the socio-economic system. Moreover, it maintains that the well-being of an individual can be realized without taking into account their independent choice and regardless of their individual and exclusive acceptance of responsibility for good or evil (John Paul II 1991; 9). Such thinking leads to the identification of man with a certain set of social relations, while at the same time the concept of a person as an independent subject of moral decisions, who by making them creates social order, disappears. The result of this mistaken concept of a person is the deformation of the law that determines the scope of human freedom, as well as opposition to private property. Every person, deprived of everything and the possibility of earning a living through their own entrepreneurship, becomes dependent on the social machine and on those who control it, which makes it much more difficult for them to understand their dignity as a person and closes the way to creating an authentic human community (John Paul II 1991; 10). John Paul II calls this type of concept the “subjectivity” of society, which, together with the subjectivity of the individual, was annihilated by “real socialism”.

Every form of socialism poses a threat of the disappearance of subjectivity and entrepreneurship based on private property. It is obvious that there should be a sphere of justified autonomy of the economy, in which the government should not interfere. However, it has the duty to define the legal framework within which economic relations develop, and in this way the basic conditions of a free economy are created, which assumes equality between the parties, so that one of them cannot be so strong that the other practically enslaves it (Wilkin 2007). This requires that both society and the government accept responsibility for such situations. Historically, this has been presented in two ways leading to convergent results: 1) economic policy, aimed at balanced growth and creating conditions for full employment, and 2) social security and employment policy. In addition,

it should be assumed that society and the government should guarantee such a level of earnings that is sufficient to support the employee and his family and allow for the accumulation of some savings (John Paul II 1991: 11). In addition, the government should guarantee respect for “humane” working and rest time, as well as the right to express one’s personality at work, while the employee’s freedom of conscience or dignity may not be violated in any way.

Progress – entrepreneurial man – property – labor

An essential element raised by the Pope is the role of scientific and technological progress, which should contribute to human well-being. Very often, technological progress is transformed into a tool of war: science and technology are used to produce weapons that are constantly being improved and increasingly destructive. This causes a crisis in the economic system and limits people’s possibilities of life and their future development.

Another factor that negatively affects people is undoubtedly the inefficiency of the economic system, which should not be considered as a mere technical problem, but rather because of the violation of human rights to initiative, to property and to freedom in the economic sphere. This aspect must in turn be linked to the cultural and national dimension: it is impossible to understand a person by analyzing only his economic activity, just as it is impossible to define him only based on his class affiliation. Understanding a man is more comprehensive when he is seen in the context of culture, through language, history and attitudes adopted towards basic existential facts, such as birth, love, work and death (John Paul II 1991: 17).

Disregarding the nature of man, created for freedom, is not only impermissible from an ethical point of view, but also practically impossible. Where the organization of society limits or even cuts the sphere of freedom that citizens are entitled to, social life gradually disintegrates and dies (Tischner 2016).

The right to private property is a natural one. The Church has consistently defended this right, fundamental to the autonomy and development of the person, to this day. The Church also teaches that the possession of goods is not an absolute right, but as a human right it is by its nature limited.

However, there is another form of ownership which, especially in our times, takes on an importance no less important than the ownership of land: the ownership of knowledge, technology and skills. The wealth of industri-

alized countries depends much more on this type of ownership than on natural resources.

If someone produces an object, he does so generally not only for his own use, but also so that others may use it after paying a fair price, set up by common consent through free contract. It is precisely the ability to recognize in time the needs of others and the arrangements of factors of production most suitable for satisfying them that is another important source of wealth in modern society. Moreover, there are many goods which cannot be adequately produced by the work of a single person, and which require the cooperation of many people towards a common goal. Organizing such an effort, planning it in time, ensuring that it really corresponds to what it is supposed to serve, and taking the necessary risks is also a source of wealth for society today. In this way, the role of disciplined and creative human work and – as an essential part of this work – the role of the ability to initiative and entrepreneurship are becoming increasingly obvious and decisive (John Paul II 1991: 26). Entrepreneurship and human initiative are key features and attitudes that allow for the realization of a specific way of human behavior, mainly decision-making in an uncertain environment. An entrepreneurial person tries to make the right and best decisions in all their actions on the market. The more these decisions are based on free choice, the greater the probability of their effectiveness. Free enterprise allows for the pursuit of goals set by a person, through the proper organization of resources and time.

An entrepreneur has specific features and skills that allow them to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them, create a sense of self-worth and faith in their own capabilities. What defines an entrepreneurial person is also responsibility for the decisions they make, but also awareness of the opportunities and threats that result from the methods they choose to implement. Additionally, entrepreneurship allows a person to be a creator and a creator.

Free market, economic system and the state

It seems that both within economies and in international relations, the free market is the most effective tool for using resources and satisfying people's needs. However, this applies only to those needs that can be paid for, that is, those that have purchasing power, and those resources that are "sellable", that is, can obtain an appropriate price. However, there are many human needs that have no access to the market. In the name of jus-

tice and truth, we must not allow basic human needs to remain unmet and human lives to be destroyed because of this. It is also necessary to help people in need to acquire knowledge, to become involved in the system of mutual connections, to develop appropriate habits that will allow them to make better use of their own abilities and resources. More important than the logic of exchange of equivalents and than the various forms of justice that this involves is what is due to a person because he is a person, because of his sublime dignity. What is due to man must guarantee the possibility of survival and of making an active contribution to the common good of humanity (John Paul II 1991: 28).

Gaining access to markets around the world allows each country to fully exploit its unique human and natural assets. Natural advantages are a barrier that allows countries in specific geographical regions to produce specific products or goods at a lower price or of higher quality. However, natural advantages would mean little without the possibility of global trade and global development of production and, above all, the creativity and entrepreneurship of people.

The economic integration that is taking place in the new global economy has contributed to the interdependence of nations and increased links between production and trade. At the heart of this transformation, the global entrepreneur was born, with a mentality based on a new global vision, new competences and new skills necessary to use the tools of the modern market. Among these new skills are the ability to cope with the wave of frequent and repeated changes, more efficient production methods, improving product quality, reacting faster to changing market conditions, selling at lower prices and being more aggressive towards competitors. In order to develop a global strategy, the modern entrepreneur must broaden his or her approach to multidimensional and complex social, cultural and political relations. Only a free person is able to cope with these challenges.

Successful entrepreneurship in the new economy also depends on the ability to break the boundaries of innovation in a sustained and deliberate manner. Innovation has become a permanent goal of economic efficiency and the development of an effective business strategy. The modern entrepreneur must assume the role of a catalyst for introducing innovative continuous changes. Therefore, entrepreneurs must seek opportunities to achieve economies of scale and scope. In this way, they expand the potential of the domestic market and the scope of innovation initiatives through research and development, new products, quality improvements and cost reductions, ultimately leading to higher profits.

The Church recognizes the positive role of profit as an indicator of the good functioning of an enterprise: when an enterprise generates profit, it means that the production factors have been properly applied and the human needs corresponding to them have been satisfied. However, profit is not the only indicator of the good functioning of an enterprise. It may happen that, despite correct economic calculation, people, who constitute the most valuable asset of the enterprise, are humiliated and their dignity is insulted. This is not only morally unacceptable, but eventually it must also negatively affect the economic effectiveness of the enterprise. The purpose of an enterprise is not simply to generate profit, but its very existence as a community of people who in numerous ways strive to satisfy their basic needs and constitute a special group serving the whole of society. Profit is not the only regulator of the life of an enterprise; in addition to it, human and moral factors must be taken into account, which from a longer perspective turn out to be at least equally important for the life of the enterprise (John Paul II 1991: 29, Wojciechowski 2015). Liberal economies tend to increase the role of the market in economic decision-making, and therefore will be more dependent on money and capital flows. The opposite will happen in statist economies, where the emphasis is on protecting the labor market at the expense of a higher level of efficiency.

Liberal systems focus primarily on protecting the market and the mechanisms that create it. Enterprises are focused on receiving market signals, while their activity is less influenced by institutional factors. When assessing the efficiency of a liberal system, attention should be paid to several basic elements: the capital market and the financial system, economic policy, inter-sectoral and inter-enterprise interactions (including the labor market), technological progress, and the volume of international exchange (including the subject structure and competitive ability). In earlier stages of development, man always lived in the face of necessity: his needs were few, imposed to some extent by the objective structures of his physical nature, and economic activity was focused on satisfying them. It is obvious, however, that today the problem is not only to provide people with the right amount of goods, but also to meet the demand for quality: the quality of goods produced and consumed, the quality of services used, the quality of the natural environment and life in general (John Paul II 1991: 30).

Capitalism is the sole system that allows this (Zitelmann 2024). It is a process of a certain evolution or economic change resulting from the fact that economic processes take place in a changing social and natural environment. This evolutionary character does not result from a quasi-automatic

increase in production factors but from new consumer goods, new markets, new forms of industrial organization created by the capitalist enterprise. These processes continuously destroy the old and create a new economic structure, causing constant drift and variability of the socio-economic order and its spontaneity (Mączyńska & Sadowski 2008).

Through decisions regarding production and consumption, a specific culture is revealed as a general concept of life. It is here that the phenomenon of consumerism arises. In defining new needs and new ways of satisfying them, it is necessary to be guided by an integral vision of man, which encompasses all dimensions of his existence, and which subordinates the material and instinctive dimensions to the internal and spiritual ones. On the other hand, appealing directly to his instincts and ignoring in various ways his free and conscious personal nature can lead to the creation of consumer habits and lifestyles that are objectively unworthy or harmful to physical and spiritual health. In the economic system itself there are no criteria that would allow for a correct distinction between new and more perfect forms of satisfying human needs and artificially created needs that hinder the formation of a mature personality. Therefore, great work in the field of education and culture is urgently needed here, including preparing consumers to use their right to choose responsibly, shaping a deep sense of responsibility in producers and, above all, in specialists in the field of social communication; intervention by public authorities is also necessary (John Paul II 1991: 30).

The explanation of this issue is closely connected with the assumption that all the data needed for “economic action” are not easily accessible. The market causes constant changes that must be taken into account in the intentions and actions of entities. The driving force of changes in the market are entrepreneurs who see the benefits resulting from improving economic activities. The market process is becoming increasingly dynamic, due to the competition of entrepreneurs for potential benefits, while the remaining participants are more or less passive. The information obtained by entrepreneurs allows for making profits, but sometimes also leads to losses. This in turn forces them to change the method or direction of their activities. In the case where market information is incomplete or imprecise, they make wrong decisions, changing the market in a way that does not result from the efficiency criterion. The essence of social cooperation is specialization in both the field of labor resources and knowledge. This has two fundamental implications. First, the results of social cooperation in the production of intermediate and final goods cannot be defined as efficient allocation, because there is no common denominator for individ-

ual activities. Second, the coexistence of decentralized decisions and social cooperation requires the coordination of individual plans resulting from incomplete knowledge and information. Both of these requirements are met by the market price system. It allows entities to perform calculations of their actions and to establish ways of coordination and communication among participants.

The desire to live better (Kotarbiński 1989) is not a bad thing, but a lifestyle that places the pursuit of having above being and wants to have more not in order to be more, but to experience as much pleasure in life as possible, is a mistake. Therefore, it is necessary to create lifestyles in which the search for truth, beauty and goodness, as well as a community of people striving for common development, would be the elements that determine the choice of the quality of consumption, savings and investments.

If the term “capitalism” is used to describe an economic system that recognizes the fundamental and positive role of enterprise, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, and free human initiative in the economic field, the question posed above should certainly be answered in the affirmative, although perhaps the expression “entrepreneurial economy”, “market economy” or simply “free economy” would be more appropriate here. But if by “capitalism” we understand as a system in which economic freedom is not included in the framework of a legal system, harnessing it in the service of integral human freedom and treating it as a special dimension of this freedom, which is primarily ethical and religious in nature, then the answer is decidedly negative (John Paul II 1991: 34).

The concept of “common good” is a category that does not have much significance, because the violation of individual rights eliminates all other rights, and the majority, which does not have the possibility of action, surrenders to the mercy of social groups calling themselves the “voice of society”, which governs using violence until another group also being the “voice of society” takes over power. The wealth generated in the economy is not anonymous and does not have a social character. It is always an individual product (Horodecka & Żuk 2024: 9–28).

Even if the government had sufficient knowledge to implement the principles of privileged distribution concepts, people would not always have the same opinion about economic principles. The effect of this is the complete unpredictability and arbitrariness of allocation decisions, which do not result from the value of economic indicators but only from political government decisions. Redistribution therefore requires a significant expansion of bureaucratic decisions and an increase in the number of regulations and

the method of verifying their compliance. Bureaucratic powers granted in this way cannot be reconciled with the institution of law, which in turn translates into restrictions on the functioning of a free society.

The state has the right to intervene when special situations caused by the existence of a monopoly cause inhibitions or create obstacles to development. However, in addition to the function of harmonizing development and directing it, the state, in exceptional situations, can also fulfill substitute functions, namely when too weak or only just emerging social sectors or business organizations are not adapted to their tasks. These substitute interventions, justified by urgent needs related to the common good, should, as far as possible, be limited in time, so as not to permanently deprive the aforementioned sectors and business organizations of their proper competences and not to excessively expand the scope of state intervention to the detriment of freedom, both economic and civic ((John Paul II 1991: 35).

The state is changing the nature of expenditure from personal to institutional, which has now been extended to practically all social groups. Financing health care, education or some social expenditure concerns both the poor and the rich. The essence of such changes is therefore not to improve the lives of the weakest social groups, but centralization. In addition, a number of expenditures that were private in nature have been centralized and transferred to the sphere of enterprises. Currently, large enterprises use state financing in their operations. One can accept the thesis that what enterprises should do at their own risk is in fact paid for by social groups, including the poor.

By intervening directly and depriving society of responsibility, the welfare state causes a waste of human energies and the exaggeration of public structures which – at enormous cost – are dominated by bureaucratic logic rather than by concern for serving the people who use them.

Conclusion

In theological and philosophical literature, economic issues are analyzed primarily from an ethical point of view (Przesmycki 2007). The economic rhetoric of John Paul II has also been widely rooted in the structures of both sciences. Religion and economics are recognized by the Pope as areas of human experience in the sphere of economic life.

John Paul II's reflections should be an inspiration for economic policy and economics (Hardt 2020). Social sciences, and especially economics, attract many people who are sensitive to social evil and want to learn how

to eliminate it (Boulding 1985: 95). Properly interpreted, John Paul II's thought can have an enormous potential for guidance for a better understanding of the functioning of the modern world and for building and implementing solutions that can improve human existence.

N O T E

¹ "The social doctrine of the Church is not some sort of 'third way' between liberal capitalism and socialism (...) it constitutes an independent category. Nor is it an ideology, but a precise formulation of the results of in-depth reflection on the complex reality of human existence in society and in the international context, carried out in the light of faith and church tradition. Its fundamental purpose is to explain this reality by examining its conformity or inconsistency with the teaching of the Gospel about man and his temporal and at the same time transcendent vocation; it therefore aims to direct Christian conduct" (John Paul II 1987).

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