

Democratisation Processes in the Postcommunist Countries and the Roman Catholic Social Doctrine

In 1989 the Berlin Wall came down. Thirteen years have passed since the crash of the Soviet block – a dead end of Marxist-Leninist visions of the millenarian empire – of a paradise on Earth for the working class – proletarians. These changes affected the socio-ideological framework of the countries of the former Communist block. Ideological changes were decisively influenced by Christian opposition to ruling ideologies. Dialectical materialism was also pushed out by liberal visions in economics, as well as in the whole socio-cultural context. Also Roman Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is attracting increasing attention, Christian oriented political parties, professional unions and associations are being formed, but on the practical level CST still has relatively limited influence. Yet, former Marxist ideologists, who now often present themselves under a liberal or even national label, confront Christian ideas in the struggle for influence on public opinion. Are modern Christians familiar enough with CST and are they able to distinguish the “signs of the times” and be adequately equipped for the “battle of the soul”, which is a constant one?

Roman Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

The Christian ideal of *person* and *society* is different from the Marxist-Leninist one. Regarding the historical development, the communist attitude was based on the primordial accentuation of class-divided society, on the theory of the class struggle, on the elementary factor of divergences between production forces and relations, and on the dialectical laws of progress.

The Roman Catholic attitude does not divinize the notion of development – progress. It is rather a coherent holistic doctrine, based on the Bible and on the tradition of the Fathers and Mothers of the Church. As a formulated doctrine, it began with Pope Leo XIII, who

in 1891 published the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. The Roman Catholic Church had, however, attempted to react to the activities of the liberals, socialists and communists earlier as well. CST has been evolving as time went by in order to respond to the changes in societies and in the world. Concisely it can be characterised by ten “pillars“, on which it rests: Human Dignity; Respect for Human Life; Association; Participation; Preference of Poor and Marginalized; Solidarity; Stewardship; Subsidiarity; Human Equality and the Common Good.

CST sees its fundamentals in the dignity of every human being as a person created in the image of God. CST emphasises the dignity of every human as a person created in the image of God, saved by Jesus Christ, which gives her/him an immense value and right to honour as a member of the human family. Its fundament is the idea of *person* from the conception on. A human being is born into a society, which she or he is to organise in such a way that it creates space for the fulfilment of everybody’s gifts. The society is ruled by rights and duties, which are to act in balance. Society must protect its weak and vulnerable members. Society must guide its members towards sharing – eg. the more affluent members with the poorer ones. CST emphasizes in its vision, that humans are only stewards of the goods bestowed upon them and they are obliged to act responsibly in relation to future generations. Society must guarantee for every human the possibility to reach her/his fulfilment and satisfaction in such a way that proper human dignity is respected.¹

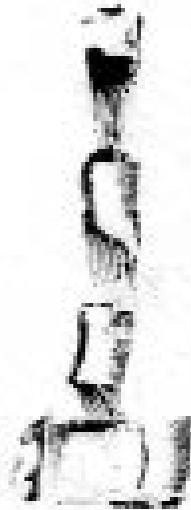
CST reflects the conclusions of the Second Vatican Council, which has evaluated in a complex way the actual state of affairs and has produced recommendations on the solutions of urgent problems. In the document *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), the Roman Catholic Church emphasizes the need to be attentive to the “signs of the times” and to react properly. Practically CST teaches that the dignity of humans must be seen in a free search for the good and in choosing and enacting what is considered meaningful. The other aspect of dignity is (in the vision of) dialogue with those who have different world-views and

¹ BYRON William J., *Ten Building Blocks Of Catholic Social Teaching*. www.americapress.org/articles/Byron.htm

² SHANNON Thomas A., *Roman Catholic Social Thought: Historical, Methodological, and Analytic Perspectives*. Collegeville, 2000.

in a definition of human life that takes into account the self-realisation and fulfilment of human beings. The notion of “the common good” includes welfare, social justice and morality.²

CST has insofar been completed by the last social encyclical of John Paul II *Centesimus Annus* (CA), which focuses on the position of a human being and her/his creative and entrepreneurial capacities. John Paul II underlines that an increasingly important role is played by well-organised and creative human work, as well as by the capacity to motivate and to give impetus to entrepreneurial activity. He maintains that the greatest wealth of the society is the human being her-/himself (CA 32). He spurs people to participate in voluntary activities actively. The Church supports the cooperation of all, in order to strengthen participation in the development of society. The Pope claims that human activities have their place in a culture that creates space for creativity, intellectuality and knowledge of the world and humanity (CA 49 and 50). The encyclical emphasises the fact that the peace building must take into account development, which is to be steered towards the common good. Therefore there exists



not just a common responsibility to prevent wars, but also a collective responsibility to support development (CA 52).

Considering the practical application of CST, let us mention the claim to freedom of conscience and the right to its public declaration. These were the main issues of many activists of the so-called “Secret Church”, such as Augustín NAVRÁTIL, Cardinal TOMÁŠEK, martyr reverend COUFAL in Czechoslovakia, Cardinal WYSZYŃSKI, martyr reverend Jerzy POPIELUSZKO and the Independent Solidarity Union in Poland with its president Lech WAŁĘSA, as well as many others.

The role of Christian thinking in its struggle with totalitarian ideology departs from its different vision of humanity and society. The greatest difference between the secular and Christian vision of human and society lies in the comprehension of authority and power, in the different evaluation of the dignity of every human being and above all in the understanding of the representatives of society as its servants and in prioritising common good. The Church officially does not give preference to any socio-economic formation (capitalism or socialism), as it does not pass judgement on different economic models. Social development is influenced by initiatives and activities of all citizens of society and all of them are guided by certain moral, cultural and other principles.

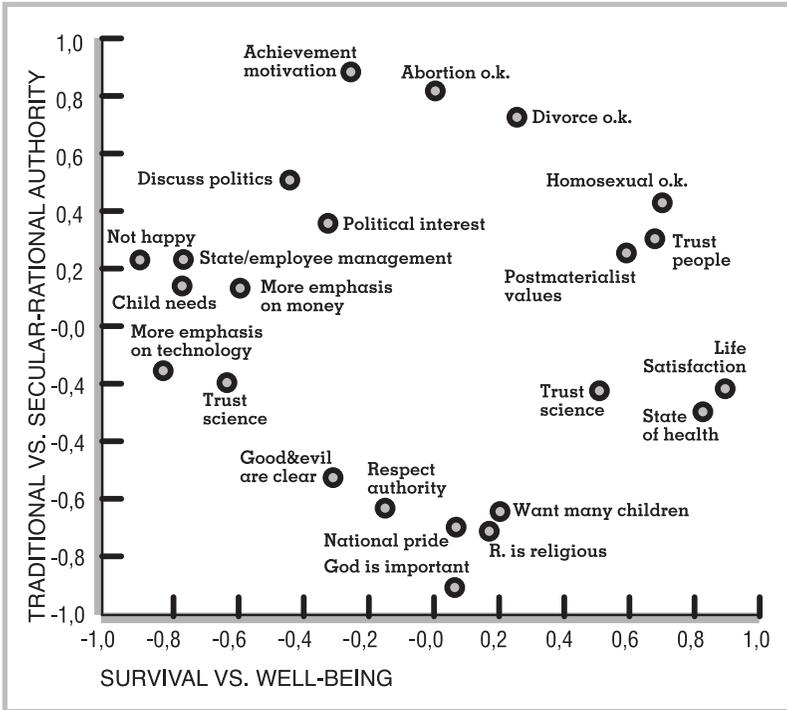
The subjective feeling of satisfaction or happiness varies in different countries, based on the particular historical and cultural milieu. It can be characterised by many factors, as e.g. economic prosperity, social security, political freedom or social equality.³ On the global scale, shifts of values can be seen in different regions: in the most prosperous regions there is an apparent shift of values from the material towards the so-called post-material, in some post-communist countries, an opposite shift can be noticed: towards *survival* values.⁴

The transition process in the postcommunist countries often incorporates societal changes of which the politicians and social scientists have no experience. The development is often not linear, which fills many citizens with the feeling of disappointment and pessimism.

³ OUWENEEL Piet – VEENHOVEN Ruut, *Cross-National Differences in Happiness: Cultural Bias or Societal Quality?* In BLEICHRODT N. – DRENTH P. J. (eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Cross-cultural Psychology*. Amsterdam, 1991.

⁴ KIESLING Stephen, *The Changing Pursuit of Happiness*. Spirituality and Health Magazine, fall 1998.

The transition of human thinking from directive rule towards free participation and a responsible approach of every person requires time. People are to understand the importance of social capital, linked with active political engagement: the necessity of and trust in establishing informal associations.⁵



Basic Studied Values

The measurement and evaluation of the obtained data in a country gives us the possibility to evaluate the character of the country and to place it into a region of countries with similar values. So it is possible to classify countries and to obtain regions of typical characteristics, as well as to illustrate changes of accepted values during a certain time period. Such maps provide us with an image of sensitivity to values in a country based on inquiries rather than declarative acts. (Source: R. INGLEHART, 1997.)

⁵ LETKI Natalia – EVANS Geoffrey, *Social Trust and Responses to Political Economic Transformation in East-Central Europe*. London, September 2001.

Directions and Trends in the Development of Society

If we intend to illustrate the direction and trends of societal development, we have to find a way of expressing quantitatively different indexes and parameters that would characterise the state of the society today and in the past. The most common index used is gross domestic product (GDP), and the human development index (HDI) expressed in the figures of purchasing power parity (PPP).

Principal Indexes Evaluating the State of Central and Eastern European Societies

Country	GDP per citizen in \$ PPP (1994)	Index of freedom		Country's corruption rate		
		1997	1998	1998	2000	2001
Croatia	3970	8	116		51	51
Romania	4090	4	95	61	68	77
Bulgaria	4380	5	106	66	52	45
Estonia	4510	3	18	26	27	29
Russia	4610	7	106	76	82	71
Poland	5480	3	65	39	43	45
Hungary	6080	3	62	33	32	33
Slovenia	6230	3	81		28	27
Slovakia	7320	6	75	47	52	52
Czech R.	8900	3	12	37	42	52
Austria	19.560	2	18	17	15	15

Source: United Nations, Human Development Report 1998. World Bank, World Development Report 1996. Freedom House, Freedom in the World 1997/98. JOHNSON Bryan et al., Index of Economic Freedom 1999. Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 1998.

Today different statistical indexes and sociological studies are available, enabling us to compare the development in different countries – its directions and trends. To illustrate these directions and trends of societal developments it is proper to use the methods used by Professor R. INGLEHART in his *World Values Study* elaborated at the Michigan University.⁶

Countries of the world are classified according to the results of measurement of the sensitivity of their citizens to certain values. These are measured according to sociological methods, producing data, which are manifested on the value map (fig. no. 1). In this map the different values are placed in an orthogonal axes system. The axis “x” is the reference axis for values of survival versus well-being (self-expression); the axis “y” stands for values of traditional versus secular and rational authority. These two components give one coordinate for different values, e.g. importance of God, national pride, classical family values, respect of authority, differentiation of good and evil, the role of state, trust in people and trust in science.

Socio-cultural Changes and their Acceptance by Citizens

The post-communist countries are marked by a painful social transition. This process is characterised by the following components: loss of vision of meaningful development, of social security, of employment security, and of security provided by an omnipotent State.

In these societies several serious notions are to be tackled: phenomena linked with an insufficient or incorrect legal framework, insufficiencies in judicial administration or a lack of control mechanisms. As a consequence, these societies experience pessimism and scepticism. This is manifested in a relatively high suicide index, as well as in high numbers of citizens who consider their life as being dissatisfactory and unhappy. These phenomena are to be viewed also in connection with the fact that there are other countries, belonging to the same zone of the average GDP per capita, or even poorer, which manifest a higher ratio of citizens who declare themselves satisfied and happy with their life.

(left)

⁶ INGLEHART R., *World Values Study*. <http://www.isr.umich.edu>

Subjective Ratio of Satisfaction and Suicide Rate Index

Country	Ratio of happy and satisfied citizens (%)	Index of suicides (per hundred thousand citizens)
Moldavia	32	15,4
Ukraine	34	31,1
Belarus	35	35,6
Russian F.	40	37,1
Armenia	43	1,6
Bulgaria	45	16,1
Lithuania	49	45,9
Rumania	48	12,9
Georgia	50	3,0
Estonia	51	34,1
Latvia	55,5	34,3
Azerbaijan	56	0,8
Macedonia	59,5	7,4
Yugoslavia	62	15,4
Hungary	65	33,5
Croatia	66	21,6
Slovakia	66	13,8
Slovenia	69	30,4
Poland	74	15,3
Czech R.	75	16,4
Austria	81	19,9
USA	89	11,5

Source: WVS, GNP/cap PP WB, WDR, 1997.

The values of the *World Values Survey* show the data of gross national product expressed in unified purchasing parity. Economic development of a society is directly linked with the frame of free activity, manifested by the index of freedom. With this factor another subjective factor is linked: the feeling of satisfaction, or happiness. In the next table the data of subjective happiness or satisfaction with life as a whole can be found.

CST's Message for Today's Central Europe

Christian ideals have substantially motivated citizens to oppose the totalitarian Marxist-Leninist Empire. We have outlined the fundamentals of Roman Catholic Social Teaching and its basic principles. We have also mentioned the trends in sensitivity towards certain values, on the basis of the study of WVS. The study focuses also on traditional values, such as the importance of belief in a transcendent God, acceptance of traditional religion, cultivation of traditional family, as well as acceptance of values, which in practice are seen by many as contradictory to them – eg. atti-

tudes towards divorce, homosexual habits or abortion. It takes into account other important values as well – those of trust, self-realisation and achievement of success.

A number of values which are usually considered secular, or at least not necessarily religious, can prove to be of interest for CST. As CST tries to respond to the signs of the time, its role and task modify together with societal changes. The opposition against Communist dictatorship in Central and Eastern Europe is largely an issue of the past, so CST can now draw inspiration from other burning issues of the contemporary society.

On the other hand some traditional approaches, which constitute the very basis of CST, can enrich secular thinking with serious values fundamental for a healthy long-term development of society. CST was sometimes viewed as a prophetic voice in the times of Communist censorship, but in the post-communist society its task of bringing an up-to-date message to the citizens has by no means ceased to exist. It just needs to realise how its principles are applicable in the given societal setting.

It would be good to know how eg. *self-realisation* would be defined if it took into account the claims of Roman Catholic Social Teaching concerning the dignity of every human and the principle of dialogue in active participation of every person in the problem-solving in society. In the same way we could ask where to put other important principles of CST, such as solidarity, subsidiarity or the common good. On the other hand, it could be also useful to enrich CST by new considerations on important factors of societal development, such as *social capital*, based on the value of trust.

The current situation in many post-communist countries has prompted citizens towards an evident shift to the values of survival or secular-rational. There is still a strong trust placed in a social state, which should accordingly take care of the disabled, the weak, and those unable to obtain the minimum level of material security. The notion of social capital is seen ambiguously, even if social trust is the basis for obtaining a true image of the society and tailoring proper solutions to its problems. The ambiguity is seen in the countries of the former USSR, where the level of trust is highest, even if the indexes of suicide are also highest.

Suicide rates are extremely high in the European countries of the former USSR unlike in its Muslim and Caucasian republics. In the same manner, these indexes are high in other European ex-communist countries, particularly in Hungary and Slovenia.

Roman Catholic Social Teaching faces a great challenge of bringing its teaching closer to people, into the practical consciousness of citizens. In doing this, it is important to follow societal developments, trends, and to formulate proper reactions to new challenges and impetuses life brings along. It can be useful to remember an old scholastic principle that *differences push towards search, search brings inventions, inventions cause joy and joy leads to unity.*

Suggested Reading

BYRON William J., *Ten Building Blocks Of Catholic Social Teaching*. www.americapress.org/articles/Byron.htm

INGLEHART R., *World Values Study*. <http://www.isr.umich.edu>

KIESLING Stephen, *The Changing Pursuit of Happiness*. Spirituality and Health Magazine, fall 1998.

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SHANNON Thomas A., *Roman Catholic Social Thought: Historical, Methodological, and Analytic Perspectives*. Collegeville, 2000.

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