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PASTORAL THEOLOGIAN – EXPERT IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Among Theologians, of those good in practice, there is a debate regarding the issue of hierarchical order of pastoral-theological studies. This debate can be rephrased into a question: whether in the first place is a theory or experience, which comes from practice? The answer to this question involves the choice of methods in which to conduct research in the field of pastoral theology. Starting from the theory in pastoral theology there has been developed a practical syllogism, which consists of three elements: the legislative (the condition is greater), empirical (less condition) and practical (applications and postulates). The second element of the syllogism puts in the first place an experience to be discerned, then evaluated and that basis one can determine the modes of action. Both theory and practice are valid in pastoral theology, but on the condition that they will take up the bipolar unity.

Polskie Stowarzyszenie Pastoralistów i Duszpasterzy im. Jana Pawła II (Polish Association of Pastoral Theologians and Ministers [dedicated to] John Paul II) was created from the need for dialogue between experts in the pastoral field, both those good in theory and those Ministers with practical experience. The aim of this association is “to acquire knowledge through methodical research in the field of pastoral theology, upgrading pastoral ministers education and the propagation of the principles and modern methods of pastoral mi-

nistry of the Church and to promote and support dialogue between Pastoral Theologians and Pastoral Ministers”(art. 11).

In their research Pastoral Theologians should take into consideration an assumption that the theory and practice must continually learn from each other and share. Theology is a discipline essentially coherent (theology is one), but it is methodically diverse. Each department of theology has its own objectives of research and apply appropriate methods of its specialization. The point of view of a Pastoral Theologian therefore may differ from the perception of other Theologians. All specializations of theology, however, merge into a common goal: scientific-theological reflection leads to practical applications. Such described goal is actually the main one for the pastoral theology and whose realization requires close cooperation between Pastoral Theologians and Pastoral Ministers (Priests).

One of the functions of the pastoral theology is to translate this revelation in the form of “Today’s” personal and social context and the present situation of faith community. Theology comes from faith and to faith is re-referenced¹. The whole of theology is a reflection on faith. This reflection goes in two directions. The first consists in the study of the Word of God, authentically interpreted by the Magisterium of the Church. The second direction focuses on a human being who talks to God: a human being with his/her vocation to “believe”, to “live” and to “share” with others Christian faith and ethos. This second direction includes the study of dogmatic theology, moral theology, spirituality, canon law and pastoral theology².

These two directions, mentioned above, converge in the pastoral ecclesiology, in which the Church can be represented as a “mystery of communion”. The source of this ecclesial communion is the life of the Trinity. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, the People of God,

¹ Cf. W. Kasper, *Funkcja teologii w Kościele*, in: *Podstawy wiary. Teologia*, Poznań 1991, p. 224 (Kolekcja „Communio”, vol. 6).

² Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 54.

which is bonded by one faith, one hope and by one love on a pilgrimage toward the heavenly homeland. All the baptized are the living members of this living organism of the Church, which is sustained by sacramental, hierarchical and charismatic aids. It is necessary nowadays that all Christians, enlightened and guided by faith, may learn the true identity of the Church in all her beauty and holiness, and thus be able to feel her and love her like their own mother. To this end, Pastoral Theologians and Ministers should awaken in the entire People of God the true *sensus Ecclesiae*, linked to the inner consciousness of the Church, which consists in the “mystery of communion”³. These thoughts constitute the core of the activities for the Association.

Pastoral theology looks for answers to the modern challenges of the Church and the world⁴. John Paul II clarified the material and formal objective of pastoral theology, which is to carry out a scientific reflection on the mission of the Church in the world⁵. According to John Paul II,

³ Cf. John Paul II, Message to Cardinal J. Francis Stafford on the occasion of the Congress of the Catholic Laity, 21 November 2000, 4.

⁴ John Paul II stressed that there is a deep, unbreakable bond between evangelization and theological reflection, as the second one - as a science with its own status and its own methodology - is living the faith of the Church and is serving her mission. In fulfilling the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, the Church gratefully applauds vocation of Theologians, recognizes them and supports their work. Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, 52.

⁵ Pastoral (practical) theology “is a scientific reflection on the Church as she is built up daily, by the power of the Spirit, in history; on the Church as the ‘universal sacrament of salvation’ (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 48), as a living sign and instrument of the salvation wrought by Christ through the word, the sacraments and the service of charity. Pastoral theology is not just an art. Nor is it a set of exhortations, experiences and methods. It is theological in its own right, because it receives from the faith the principles and criteria for the pastoral action of the Church in history, a Church that each day “begets” the Church herself, to quote the felicitous expression of the Venerable Bede: *Nam et Ecclesia quotidie gignit Ecclesiam* (*Explanatio Apocalypsis*, lib. II, 12: PL 93, 166). Among these principles and criteria, one that is specially important is that of the evangelical discernment of the socio - cultural and ecclesial situation in which the particular pastoral action has to be carried out. The study of pastoral theology should throw light upon its practical application through involvement in certain pastoral services which the candidates to the priesthood should carry out, with a necessary progression and always in harmony with their other educational commitments. It is a question of pastoral “experiences”, which

man is the “primary and fundamental way for the Church” to follow in carrying out her mission⁶. The foundation of seeing man as a “primary and fundamental way for the Church” has been laid out by Christ himself and realized in the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. “This man is the way for the Church – a way that, in a sense, is the basis of all the other ways that the Church must walk – because man – every man without any exception whatever – has been redeemed by Christ, and because with man – with each man without any exception whatever – Christ is in a way united, even when man is unaware of it”⁷.

In the center of the theological-pastoral reflection is man; this is why a contemporary pastoral theology tends to lead a dialogue with people on various problems they face, showing them light derived from the Gospel. This theology also incorporates the teaching and the rich experience (tradition) of the Church, which provides people the saving power of her Founder. The human person is destined to be saved and human society is to be restored⁸.

Pastoral theology serves the church by serving man, looking carefully at all the changes taking place in the world⁹. As a theological

can come together in a real program of “pastoral training”, which can last a considerable amount of time and the usefulness of which will itself need to be checked in an orderly manner”. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 57.

⁶ Cf. P. Góralczyk, Człowiek drogą Kościoła w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II, „Warszawskie Studia Pastoralne” 5(2007), p. 8-21.

⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 14.

⁸ Cf. GS, 3; 29. John Paul II emphasized that the pursuit of truth is deeply ingrained in human nature and therefore can not be pointless and meaningless. Even the ability to seek truth and to ask questions suggest first response. A man would not begin to search for something if he did not have a previous knowledge of it and what he thought had been totally beyond his faculty to reach. Only the chance of obtaining response could persuade him to take the first step. Indeed, this is what normally happens in scientific research. When scientists, following their intuition to find the logical and verifiable explanation of a phenomenon, from the outset are confident that they will find the answer and they do not get discouraged with setbacks. They do not judge their original intuition useless simply because they have not reached their goal; rightly enough, that he could not yet found a satisfactory solution. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, 29.

⁹ Cf. P.M. Zulehner, Teologia pastoralna wobec sytuacji Kościoła w Europie, in: *Sytuacja Kościoła w Zjednoczonej Europie*, E. Robek (ed.), Warszawa 2005, p. 77-90.

faculty it must include theoretical models of theology and to use the experience of the Church to build up these models. Such pastoral-theological reflections are the foundation of the Polish Association of Pastoral Theologians and Ministers. The Association has a commitment. First of all, we are here on the academic level because the place of theological studies among the humanities division is implicit. This also determines a new approach to pastoral theology¹⁰. It is not only a theology, a fully developed field of the humanities, but also is of practical nature, which occupies a group of social and praxeological sciences¹¹. On one hand, pastoral theology is a formal (deductive) science, but on the other hand, it is a branch of empirical knowledge (induction)¹². In pastoral theology is therefore a compiled element of theory and practice¹³.

Assuming, therefore, the theoretical and practical nature of pastoral studies we need to seek a new formula of the Association of which both Theologians and Pastors can benefit from the its achievements. According to the Statute (Art. 12), the Association pursues its objectives by:

- 1) conducting research in the field of pastoral theology;
- 2) promotion of knowledge in the field of pastoral theology among Priests, consecrated persons and Laity;
- 3) promotion of initiatives that use knowledge of pastoral theology in practical applications, namely in certain forms of pastoral ministry;
- 4) promotion of the specialized university studies in the field of pastoral theology;

¹⁰ Cf. C. Vagaggini, *Teologia. Pluralizm teologiczny*, Kraków 2005.

¹¹ Cf. R. Kamiński, *Działalność zbawcza Kościoła w teorii i praktyce pastoralnej*, Lublin 2007, p. 7-39.

¹² Cf. J. Mikołajec, *Metody teologii pastoralnej*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 144(2005), p. 252-269.

¹³ Cf. M. Mierzwiński, *Teologia pastoralna czy teologia praktyczna. Spór o nazwę czy koncepcję?*, „Ateneum Kapłańskie” 144(2005), p. 224-233.

- 5) organizing and conducting training activities, seminars, meetings;
- 6) publishing activities, issuing own specialized journals and independent publications;
- 7) leading actions to raise awareness of pastoral theology to the people involved in the Church;
- 8) using results from scientific studies of various fields to discern and interpret the socio-cultural and religious situation, in which the pastoral care of the Church is to be offered;
- 9) cooperate with the universities authorities and academic associations and organizations to lead dialogue and undertake common initiatives;
- 10) cooperation with the ecclesiastical institutions in order to help the Pastors to realize their pastoral initiatives according to rules and norms of Church.

The above mentioned objectives show that there is nothing wrong by including in the Association both Pastoral Theologians and Pastors. They also indicate previous experience and the nature of the activities of the Association. However, taking into consideration some critical observations regarding the Association, it should be clear that the positive future of this organization will depend on Pastors being open recipients of pastoral theory, and at the same time they must also be authentic creators of practical pastoral models. This can be fulfilled if the Pastors will be open to dialogue with Theologians and contribute their own experiences.

To carry out their pastoral duties priests should have the following qualities: competence, professionalism, knowledge and practical skills, and all that requires constant education. Such Pastors should have leadership skills, natural qualities, enriched by a certain charismatic personality. Social status of a pastor is determined by his functions, but practically it is conditioned by a personal culture of a Pastor, his knowledge, “the expertise and professionalism”, com-

petence, and especially spirituality based on the human and Christian formation of the Priests. In the pastoral formation of Priests, therefore, special attention should be given to prepare them for modern ministry, and should therefore be focused on three areas: theological, social and practical.

The Association should be actively involved in the implementation of the programs for ongoing formation of Priests. The Bishop is responsible for the formation of his Priests, too. The Association should help in this area. In preparing the first draft of a program of the permanent formation, there should be indicated the ways for its realisation, which will supply a systematic presentation of particular contents, which is divided into stages and carried out with well-defined methods. The Bishop may indicate the time and place for permanent formation of the Priests, but the organization of such formations could be provided by branches of the Association acting in different dioceses. With the help of the Association some neighbouring dioceses or the whole ecclesiastical region may combine forces to ensure adequate programs for the permanent formation. These programs will include specialized courses in Scripture and theology, pastoral sessions, cycles of conferences, meetings for reflection and re-evaluation of the pastoral experience of the priests within ecclesial community. Following the recommendation of the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, a Bishop will perform his duty well by soliciting the assistance of the faculties and institutes of theology as well as pastoral seminars, organizations and associations that gather people – Priests, religious and lay people – involved in the work of priestly formation¹⁴.

Formation of Priests is “permanent” because it accompanies a priest forever, in every period and in all circumstances of his life, and the functions he plays in the Church. Such formation will of course depend on the possibilities and circumstances related to age, living conditions and the tasks entrusted to the Priest. Ongoing for-

¹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 79.

mation is primarily the responsibility of young Priests: there should be given the same seriousness and solidity in the frequency and regularity of meetings, which was characterized by the formation in the seminary, while gradually leading young people to understand and live the extraordinary richness of God's "gift" of the priesthood and to express their abilities and attitudes, and by becoming more authentic and responsible in the presbyterate, and therefore, in communion with all fellow Priests. While it is understandable for a young Priest, after his Ordination, to feel "excessiveness" just thinking of further formative studies and meetings, it must be rejected as totally false and a dangerous view that the formation of a Priest ends when he leaves the seminary¹⁵.

These indications of Pope John Paul II may be a signpost for the future operation of the Association. Pastoral theology in Poland is undergoing a period of a rapid growth based on many university departments and the appreciation of its role in this ministerial work of the Church. The Association faces important tasks: it should go deeper into the mystery of God and man living in the world, to help to understand the "signs of the times" and to assist in finding new ways to implement the mission of pastoral, apostolic and evangelization mission of the Church in Poland. These tasks are a challenge for the Association. *Non nova sed nove* (old stuff, but we in a new way) - The Association should pursue this policy, opening up to both the Pastors and the Laity (in the lieu of two exhortations: *Pastores Dabo Vobis* and *Christifideles Laici*). A common concern about the high level of education of Priests and more commitment of the Laity in theology are calling the whole Church in Poland for cooperation in this field. It is also a new challenge for the Polish Association of Pastoral Theologians and Ministers that can be successfully faced only under the condition that both those experts in theory and those good in practice will cooperate.

¹⁵ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, 76.

SUMMARY

Through the combined efforts of Pastoral Theologians and Pastors, with the agreement of neighbouring Dioceses as well as the whole region, initiatives conducive to the perpetual formation of specialized courses in biblical, theological and pastoral representation sessions, cycles of conferences, meetings, reflections and reviews of pastoral experience of Priests and ecclesial communities should be established. Following the recommendation of the apostolic exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* a Bishop will perform his duties well by soliciting the assistance of the faculties and institutes of theological and pastoral seminars, organizations and associations that collect people – Priests, Religious and Lay people – involved in the work of priestly formation.

BIOGRAPHY

Professor Edmund Robek, S.A.C. (Pallottine Fathers) is a Head of Department of the Pastoral Ministry of Pastoral Theology section at the Theological Faculty of the University of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Vice-Chairman of the Polish Association of Pastoral Theologians and Ministers, President of the editorial board of “Warszawskie Studia Pastoralne” (Warsaw Pastoral Studies - biennial edition of the Pastoral Theology section at UKSW). He promoted one doctor and few masters. The author has to his credit 14 books, dozens of articles, of both academic and popular level. Among them of special note: *Pielgrzymka do Ojczyzny Jezusa śladami Trójjedynego Boga*, Warszawa 2003; *Miłość zbawcza w Kościele i w świecie. Wizja teologiczno-pastoralna w świetle nauczania Jana Pawła II*, Warszawa 2006; *Pallotyńskie apostołstwo miłości*, Warszawa 2007; *Kościółowi w Polsce powiedz...Refleksja teologicznopastoralna*, Warszawa 2009. He was awarded with the Silver and Gold Cross of Merit for his special concern for the poor and homeless, the Badge of Merit for the Capital City of Warsaw and the Order of Polonia Restituta – Officer’s Cross.