

SOCIAL TEACHING OF THE CHURCH IN CROATIA SOME INSIGHTS¹

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Introduction

I have divided my presentation into four points. Before I proceed with these, I will first give a brief overview of the Department of the Social Teaching of the Church and the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb. Then, I will share my insights on the strong points of the Catholic social teaching (CST) in Croatia and address the weak points and threats. Finally, I will conclude with a brief look at opportunities ahead of us.

Let me begin by stressing that I belong to the »Zagreb School«. What I mean by that is that I have studied in Zagreb and was also fortunate to obtain my PhD in Zagreb in the period of tenure of great professors who were sensitive to and greatly interested in CST. They are still here today, but times have changed. Since 2005, I have been a member of the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb and dedicated to studying and teaching Catholic social teaching and moral theology. During this period, I have gained a great deal of knowledge and many skills and I am grateful for this opportunity to present the work, contribution and research of the Department of the Social Teaching of the Church. It is the youngest department

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at the Faculty, but the Faculty, nonetheless, has a long and rich tradition of teaching CST.

Thanks to the Department, there is a possibility of specialisation in CST within specialisation in moral theology. That was the contribution of several professors who had played an important role in the development of CST. Let me share their names: the late Marijan Valković, Marijan Biškup and Špiro Marasović, and then Stjepan Baloban, Josip Grbac, Vladimir Dugalić, Tonči Matulić and Jerko Valković. Most of them had studied at the *Academia Alfonsiana* where they obtained fundamental knowledge in the field of moral theology. The role of the Catholic Church and Christians in the new circumstances after the fall of the Communist system presented them with a challenge and they began developing CST in relation to the new ecclesial and social situation.

It is also a fact that Zagreb has had a long tradition of teaching in CST, going back to 1898/99. The period of the 45-year strong Communist regime (1945–1990) had significantly slowed down the development of CST that was until then very rich at the theoretical but also at the practical level. Following democratic changes, a new air came to Croatian society and the Catholic Church had once again gained the right to public presence. Because of that from the end of the 80s, Croatian moral theologians started to develop Catholic social thought in order to contribute to the formation of the theological-social discourse in the Church in Croatia, of course, based on the common platform of the social teaching of the Catholic Church offered by Roman bishops. In this way, some of them have developed an identity of social ethicists.

Two names are most important. The first is the name of Prof. Marijan Valković (1927–2000), Croatian priest and theologian, whose research activity represents a primary contribution to the development of CST in Croatia. The second one is the name of Professor Stjepan Baloban. He is the current Head of the Department of Social Teaching of the Church and was the first Head of the Croatian Bishops Conference Centre for promotion of social teaching of the Church (1996–2004). We can notice that these two roles are different. While Prof. Valković's work was more theoretical, Prof. Baloban has developed a theoretical-practical view, especially in the dimension of its concrete application (such as at Faculty or at the level of the Croatian Bishops Conference). Professor Baloban has enthusiastically promoted social teaching of the Church, especially in the field of social formation of laity, their greater collaboration in Church life and their participation and engagement in society.

We are very proud to have the Department of the Social Teaching of the Church. As I mentioned, it is the youngest department at the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb and it has come about as a result of everything that has been happening in the field of ecclesial life and theological work in Croatia since the 1990s. The Department was founded on March 31, 2000. It was founded because of the increased interest of social and ecclesial public in the social teaching of the Church after democratic changes in Croatia. On the one hand, many lectures, round tables and panels, organised gatherings, and the founding of the Croatian Bishops Conference Centre for the promotion of the social teaching of the Church (it started to operate in November 1997) have awoken the awareness and demanded an organised theological reflection on social issues. On the other hand, following the Second Vatican Council, and especially with Pope John Paul II, the social teaching of the Church acquired a more prominent role in the practical and theoretical reflection on contemporary ecclesial and social situation. In that context, it is important to evoke the first document dedicated exclusively to the social teaching of the Church, *Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988), which recognises the social teaching of the Church as an autonomous theological discipline with the strong interdisciplinary character. The members of the Department are the following: Full Prof. Stjepan Baloban and Assist. Prof. Silvija Migles (Faculty of Theology Zagreb), Prof. Jerko Valković (who teaches at the Regional Study in Rijeka and is a member of the Croatian Catholic University), and Dubravka Petrović Štefanac, PhD (she is an external associate and works at the Croatian Bishops Conference). Let me just point out that a department of the social teaching of the Church has also been established at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Đakovo of the University of Osijek as well as at the Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

1. Strong Points: Department of the Catholic Social Teaching

Under the first item, I will outline the strong points of CST in Croatia.

A great indicator of the importance of CST is extensive teaching and research in this field at the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb. CST is taught as a part of all study programmes: integrated philosophical-theological study programme; undergraduate and graduate study programme of religious pedagogy and catechetics; and undergraduate professional study programme in

theology, which is currently undergoing a transformation into a new lifelong learning programme.

At the Faculty we offer three compulsory courses: Social Teaching of the Church 1 (the role and meaning of the social teaching of the Church), Social Teaching of the Church 2 (social documents of the Church), and Theological Social Ethics (application of CST to specific circumstances). The main courses are thought by Prof. Baloban, myself and Prof. Tonči Matulić, who is the Head of the Department of Moral Theology but shares a great interest in CST. Interestingly, Prof. Matulić, who specialises in bioethics, deals also with CST and this is a further indicator of its importance.

The Department also offers the following elective courses: Human Rights and CST; Christian Caritas and Social Advocacy; Civil Society and Subsidiarity; CST in the Life of the Lay Faithful.

Seminars are representative of contemporary social issues and explore actualisation of Catholic social thought and promotion of the social teaching of the Church, as developed by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis. Some of them are: Challenges of Secularism and Laicism, The Role of Women in the Church and in the Society, Actuality of CST in Croatia, Educating for Solidary Humanism and Culture of Dialogue...

All elective courses and seminars are available to all students and held by Prof. Baloban, Dubravka Petrović Štefanac and myself.

Our teaching activity also includes postgraduate scientific licentiate, doctoral study programme and other teaching activities such as participation in teaching of Carmelites comprehensive spirituality studies. We are also dedicated to popularization and actualisation of CST: for example, since 2002, Prof. Baloban has been writing a column for Christian family magazine »Kana«, and since January 2017, I have been editing a radio show at Radio Marija called »Solidarity as a Way«. We are frequently invited to speak in the country and abroad and to give lectures on various issues of relations between the Church and society and Church and state from the CST viewpoint.

When it comes to students, their numbers and who they are, it is worth pointing out that since 1990s many generations of students have received information and instruction in CST. It would be interesting to see how much this great potential is realised within Church and social life through priests or lay faithful who work as Catholic religion teachers, in church offices, church or social media and so on. There are also those students who are raised in their worldly or ecclesiastical professions but are keen for additional theological study. They are especially moved toward Catholic social teaching. We feel the

decreasing trend in the number of students as well, but there is still significant interest among young people who want to complete some theological studies.

Catholic Faculty of Theology with its regional study (Theology in Rijeka) in integrated, undergraduate and graduate studies and professional studies in academic year 2017/2018 had 623 students (125 less than the previous year), 347 of which were men and 276 women. This number includes students of all years and all study programmes, as well as students who already have the status of completion of studies. In total 411 lay people (153 men and 258 women) and 212 priestly and religious candidates (101 diocesan seminarians, 93 male religious and 18 female religious) were enrolled.

At the postgraduate, licentiate and doctoral studies of theology, 27 students were enrolled (5 in the first year, 9 in the second year – licensed and 13 in the third – doctoral year).

Since 1990, around ten students have completed the licentiate and doctorates in the field of CST. Several of our students have specialised abroad. After finishing, some of them have gone into teaching. There is a further interest in the social teaching of the Church, but not to the extent that might be expected. Considering that we also ask ourselves where CST can be specialised abroad and it will be interesting to know and to identify the relevance of CST teaching at pontifical universities and academies in Rome!

A further major indicator of importance of CST is networking through projects: with different institutions (Caritas Croatia) and with non-theological faculties, with collaborators from the same Faculty and from other academic and scientific institutions (both theologians and social scientists). We do not have here enough space and time to elaborate everything important about scientific-empirical projects that have been carried out since 1998. What I wish to highlight here are two important points that would give some input on our activities and their meaning. The first point is a summary of our research:

a) The first empirical project was *Religion and Morality in Croatia* (1998–2001). It was the first empirical study of this kind covering the whole population of Croatia. The purpose of this research was to evaluate the religious beliefs and moral attitudes of the population in Croatia. The first head researcher was Prof. Marijan Valković, and after his death, Prof. Stjepan Baloban became the new head researcher. It is important to mention the unavoidable role of the Croatian Bishops Conference Centre for the promotion of the Catholic social teaching in the scientific research projects. The Centre has served as the 'work base' around which the collaborators of the project gathered and where the project was technically guided and dealt with. The project *Religion and Moral-*

ity in Croatia has given precious information and data on religion and morality in the contemporary Croatian society, which are also relevant today and represent a landmark for every serious reflection on religion and morality in Croatia.

b) Prof. Stjepan Baloban, who was the Head of the Centre, directed the project *Monitoring Poverty in Croatia* (2002–2005), carried out by the Croatian Caritas and the Centre for the Promotion of the Catholic Social Teaching. The main goal was to investigate social situation in Croatia, its reality and actuality with regard to the areas covered by basic and fundamental principles of CST. Particularly interesting themes were common good, solidarity, subsidiarity, preferential option for the poor, volunteering and participation.

c) The study *Theological Funding of Solidarity in Croatian Society* was the project of Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb (2002–2006) and its director was prof. Stjepan Baloban. The project had two main parts. The first, theoretical part and the second, more specific part, in which, on the basis of empirical research, especially of the project *Monitoring Poverty in Croatia*, some models of solidarity in Croatian society and in the Church were explored on two levels: individual and structural.

d) The study *Subsidiarity in Croatian Society*, was also the project of Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb (2007–2013), directed by prof. Stjepan Baloban. It is the first project on subsidiarity in Croatia and consisted of a theoretical analysis of the concept of subsidiarity and of an empirical study of existence and application of subsidiarity in Croatian society. The project was characterised as interdisciplinary and was integrated into the scientific programme *Croatian Values in a Comparative Context* at the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar in Zagreb. I also participated in the work of last two projects.

e) Lastly, we have the project EVS-2017. The holder of the Project is Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb and it is carried out in cooperation with professors from the same faculty (theologians and philosophers), as well as with colleagues and professors (sociologists, psychologists, political scientist, etc.) from other scientific social institutions. The establishment of the Croatian Catholic University and its infrastructure opens up a new space for an even greater cooperation between the Church and social institutions in scientific research. This connection is maintained today through this project. The project EVS-2017 is a part of the project *European Values Study* (EVS) that started in 1981 and has been carried out in Croatia since 1999. The research is directed by Prof. Josip Baloban, the Head of the Department of Pastoral Theology at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Za-

greb. Between the third and the fourth wave, Croatia had one other project entitled *Comparative European Values Study: Croatia and Europe* (0203006), carried out from 2002 until 2006 and directed by Josip Baloban. Croatia had its third project carried out through Catholic Faculty of Theology of the University of Zagreb in the fourth wave – EVS-2008, called *European Values Study – Croatia in Europe* (203–1941533–0734), 2007–2013, directed by Josip Baloban. Since the very beginnings of research in 1999, all three projects had the interdisciplinary, scientific-research character. These projects always had national and international character and they were funded by the Ministry of Science, Education, and Sport of the Republic of Croatia. By participating in the fifth wave, i.e. EVS-2017, Croatia is carrying on with already initiated scientific-research continuity. Unfortunately, Croatian Foundation for Science, the umbrella institution for the development and promotion of science, has failed to recognise the importance of this international and global project and rejected to finance it. Likewise, it has failed to fund the project *The Common Good in the Croatian State and Society*; another project for which the Department of the Social Teaching of the Church tried to obtain funding.

My second point is about conclusions in regard to the importance and contribution, opportunities, factors and problems surrounding these projects. All these projects contributed to Croatian society and to social-humanistic sciences, to church pastoral work, and especially to theological development. These projects are also an important factor in successful and strong collaboration among institutions, as well as among various scientist, whose cooperation has generated strong human resources open to further forms of interdisciplinary cooperation (on the individual level with champions of promotion and on the communal level with the critical group). Recently, interdisciplinary cooperation is also expected in the scientific field; especially when compared to Pope Francis' teaching in *Apostolic Constitution Veritatis Gaudium on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties* (08.12.2017).

Continuous research provides us with the know-how and experience needed for good collaboration. Experience with all these projects gave us also insight into contemporary problems of dealing with current situation and the global issue of applicability of results. On the one hand, there is a financial obstacle, which is a major limiting factor, and on the other hand, there is a question of whether we are capable to find ways how to apply our results. For all the reasons mentioned above, in this gathering in the CST-CEE 2020 project, we see a great chance for CST profiling through international collaboration and research cooperation and we are keen to support it.

2. Weak points

Let me now turn to the weak points that we face. It is a question and an internal issue of the Church. It seems that everything depends on individuals. The main question is how much is CST recognised and known and how strong is the structural support.

Here, I would like to mention two cases. Firstly, an active role of the frequently quoted Centre for the Promotion of the Catholic Social Teaching, especially in the field of active links with other institutions. The Centre, founded in 1996 at the Croatian Bishops Conference, had played a key role in the promotion of the social teaching of the Church. Its numerous activities such as social forums, public discussion, symposiums and conferences, seminars, encounters with young scientists, over 20 books and booklets, projects – testify to how much has been done. Unfortunately, in the last ten years all its activities have been weakened and devitalized.

Secondly, in 2004, a new postgraduate specialist study had been established under the name *Management of Non-Profit Organizations and Social Advocacy*. One generation of students had successfully completed the program, after which it was retired. Due to a great interest, Croatian Caritas has recently argued for its revitalization; the decision of the Faculty is pending.

Consequently, one critical issue arises: since the 90s much has been said, but CST is still insufficiently known. What is the matter? Where is the problem? Is it in methods, individuals, Church? Why has interest in CST weakened? Is it to do with CST as an issue of internal church policies, which does not allow us to make a step forward? Are the same forces pushing forward and slowing down at the same time? Croatia, in general, has this long but constantly interrupted tradition of strong duality. We think it is, firstly, a theological problem. There is much talk about CST related issues today (Pope Francis, for instance, raises these issues frequently). However, the question is how much is CST, that could answer these questions, prominent in general. Those of us who deal with CST are not satisfied and ask ourselves, are we going back to the time between Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II, when we wandered around CST, its name, method and meaning? In addition, how are things at the level of the whole Church? Do we not have similar problems in relation to the CST?

3. Threats

This brings us to my next item – some threats to CST. While social teaching of the Church was interesting in the 1990s as a way of resolving numerous issues

related to socio-ethical content in Croatian society, since 2005 and 2006 we have come across resistance of some sections of public that believe that Christians and the Church 'have no business in public life'.

There are also some uncertainties surrounding CST in Croatian theology. There are some Church people who appear in public with speeches that are more political than church-theological. They articulate socio-ethical questions politically. They do not consider what we call: the Church's social language. It seems that we know it, but we do not really know it. Based on the social teaching of the Church we have built Catholic social thought but we do not have Catholic social language. There is social teaching of the Church and Catholic social thought, but where is Catholic social language to communicate this? The biggest threat is also the biggest challenge: the place of CST within theology, its knowledge and understanding. We still have not shaped the social language of the Church, which would be appropriate for the current time.

4. Opportunities

It has always been important for Croatia to establish connections with countries in Central Europe and beyond. Therefore, a very significant role was that of Society for Catholic Social Ethics in Central Europe with the central office in Austria (*Vereinigung für katholische Sozialethik in Mitteleuropa*). Since the beginning of democratic changes in Europe, the Society has been gathering social ethicists from central European countries and organized quite interesting, useful and successful symposia. In 2000 and 2009, such conferences were organized in Zagreb, in collaboration with the Croatian Centre for the Promotion of the Catholic Social Teaching and European Society. Unfortunately, recent activities of the Society have likewise halted. Although there is a great need for it, it seems that it is not easy in today's time to organize such a gathering.

That is why this CST-CEE 2020 project is praiseworthy. It aims to promote CST, which really provides a unique contribution to the current challenges and bears an inclusive feature. On that level, this Project opens the sphere for the development of a network for practical commitment to the benefit of all participants but firstly to the benefit of CST profiling. The members of the Department of Social Teaching of the Church at Catholic Faculty of Theology of University in Zagreb – Prof. Stjepan Baloban and I – completely support this project and wish it much success.