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Axionormative Determinants of Social Entrepreneurship in View of the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching*

Abstract

The role of Catholic social teaching has been attributed to the promotion of moral values and principles that should be considered when establishing or evaluating a given social, economic, or political system. This also applies to smaller structures, specific institutions, concepts, and practical social solutions, which may include social entrepreneurship. The article aims to confirm the hypothesis that, taking into account the principles of Catholic social teaching in the process of discovering the axionormative determinants of social entrepreneurship allows its deeper understanding and more effective implementation of its praxeological goals. At the beginning of the paper, the author emphasises the common source of all general and specific axionormative criteria of the two analysed disciplines – the dignity of a human person. Further deliberations revolve around other values and principles, such as the value of human work and entrepreneurship, the common good, the universal destination of goods, the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, and participation.

Keywords

Axiology, Catholic social teaching, personalism, principles, social entrepreneurship.

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The concept of social entrepreneurship is defined by four traits: (1) the social purpose of the activity resulting in the creation of social values for the benefit of people in need of support (at risk of social exclusion), society (particularly the local community) or the environment; (2) a clearly profit-making form of activity utilising business strategies, methods and financial profit as a means of fulfilling an established mission or social purpose; (3) the innovative nature of the venture; (4) the implementation of a specific venture through an organisation such as a social enterprise.¹

The values, motivations, goals, and methods of their implementation characteristic of social entrepreneurship are aptly expressed in the publication entitled *Polski model ekonomii społecznej* [*The Polish Social Economy Model*]: “Social economy is (...) primarily a specific approach of individuals and institutions to social reality. This includes both the attitude to one’s own problems (i.e. activity rather than entitlement), the manner in which they are solved (collective rather than individual), as well as the goals one sets (common good – the good of others rather than the interests of a narrow group). Such actions are thus heavily based on solidarity and cooperation, not particularism and competition.”² Furthermore, solidarity, subsidiarity, entrepreneurship, commitment, prudence, responsibility, self-reliance, empowerment,³ as well as freedom, multidimensionality and a long-term time horizon are clearly indicated in the dimension of the axionormative rooting of social entrepreneurship.⁴

¹ Cf. N. Choi, S. Majumdar, *Social Entrepreneurship as an Essentially Contested Concept: Opening a New Avenue for Systematic Future Research*, “Journal of Business Venturing” 29 (2014) 3, pp. 363–376.

² P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej. Rekomendacje dla rozwoju. Zaproszenie do dyskusji*, Warsaw 2008, Wydawnictwo Fundacja Inicjatyw Społeczno-Ekonomicznych, p. 15.

At this point, it should be noted that the term “social economy”, or as is being referred to recently, “social and solidarity economy”, has been adopted in Poland (see e.g., www.ekonomiaspoleczna.gov.pl). The author believes that the term “social entrepreneurship” is more adequate to describe both the idea itself and the academic discipline. Cf. e.g., J. Klich, *Przedsiębiorczość i społeczna przedsiębiorczość jako przedmiot badań*, “Ekonomia Społeczna” 6 (2013) 1, pp. 20–33; P.K. Hota, B. Subramanian, G. Narayanamurthy, *Mapping the Intellectual Structure of Social Entrepreneurship Research: A Citation/Co-citation Analysis*, “Journal of Business Ethics” 166 (2020), pp. 89–114.

³ Cf. www.wsparcie.es/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/manifest_ekonomii_spolecznej.pdf (9.08.2022).

⁴ Cf. M. Chomątowska, *Nauka społeczna Kościoła a gospodarka społeczna*, „Ekonomia Społeczna” 8 (2013) 3, pp. 71–74.

In this context, it appears worthwhile to analyse the presented axionormative foundation of social entrepreneurship from the perspective of the principles advocated by Catholic social teaching.⁵ This is justified for several reasons. Firstly, both disciplines, being fundamentally focused on social issues, have the opportunity to meet in this way, not only on a subject matter level but also in terms of their deepest foundations – as axionormative assumptions – and thus enrich each other. Secondly, from the very beginning, the role of Catholic social teaching has been attributed to the promotion of moral values that should be taken into account when establishing or evaluating a given social, economic or political system.⁶ This also applies to smaller structures, specific institutions, concepts and practical social solutions, which may include social entrepreneurship. As such, the various principles of social life promoted by the Church are certainly worth analysing in terms of their presence, implementation, or necessity in social entrepreneurship. Therefore, the ultimate aim of the article is to confirm the hypothesis that taking into account the principles of Catholic social teaching in the process of discovering the axionormative determinants of social entrepreneurship allows its deeper understanding and more effective implementation of its praxeological goals.

The starting point of the discourse will consist in highlighting the common source of all general and specific axionormative criteria of the two analysed disciplines, which is the dignity of a human person. Further deliberations will revolve around other values and principles, such as the value of human work and entrepreneurship, the common good, the universal destination of goods, the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, and participation.⁷

⁵ The following article provides only a synthetic presentation of the most relevant research findings on the subject. This subject was previously covered by A. Zadroga, *Ekonomia społeczna i nauczanie społeczne Kościoła. Wzajemne implikacje aksjologiczne*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 56 (2009) 3, pp. 213–229; M. Chomątowska, *Nauka społeczna Kościoła...*; J.F. McVea, M.J. Naughton, *Enriching Social Entrepreneurship from the Perspective of Catholic Social Teaching*, „Religions” (2021) 12: 173.

⁶ Cf. J. Gocko, *Zasady nauki społecznej Kościoła i wartości podstawowe jako normy moralne życia społecznego. Refleksja na kanwie współczesnych dokumentów społecznych Kościoła*, „Roczniki Teologiczne” 53 (2006) 3, pp. 85–103.

⁷ Following the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, it is important to emphasise that “the principles of the Church’s social doctrine must be appreciated in their unity, interrelatedness and articulation. (...) Examining each of these principles individually must not lead to using them only in part or in an erroneous manner, which would be the case if they were to be invoked in a disjointed and unconnected way with respect to each of the others. A deep theoretical understanding and the actual application of even just one of these social principles clearly

1. The Dignity of the human person

Centuries of in-depth reflection on the essence of social life led to the conclusion that the metaphysical “root” of every social principle is the social nature of humans.⁸ From the moment of conception, every human being carries a certain personal potential only to reach the fullness of humanity through participation in social life. It is through various social principles that the injunction of practical reason to create common values as a means of achieving personal goals, finds expression. That is why humans have a central place in every area and manifestation of socialisation. It is around human beings that all social life should revolve. It is the human person who remains the main and most active participant in this life and its various forms.⁹ The man “(...) far from being an object and a passive element of social life is (...), should be and remains its subject, foundation and goal.”¹⁰

The effective implementation of this fundamental axionormative assumption takes place in the case of social entrepreneurship. It reveals a distinctly personalistic approach.¹¹ The core of this concept lies in a genuine concern for the integral development of a human person. Every individual involved in social entrepreneurship initiatives is treated as a subject. All undertakings, projects and specific activities are ultimately intended to activate, unleash and fulfil their personal potential, and in the end make them independent. This pursuit of empowerment and independence becomes more understandable considering that various innovative forms of social entrepreneurship are undertaken, among other things, to counteract the phenomenon of social exclusion of people at risk of marginalisation (the unemployed, homeless, disabled, migrants, etc.).¹² In practice, it provides these people with “an opportunity to abandon

shows the reciprocity, complementarities and interconnectedness that is part of their structure” (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 162).

⁸ More on the social nature of humans – cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 149–151.

⁹ Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 106.

¹⁰ Pius XII, radio speech (24 December 1944), 5, *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 37 (1945) 12.

¹¹ Cf. A. Zadroga, *Professional Ethics of Social Entrepreneurs: The Perspective of Christian Personalist Ethics*, “*Verbum Vitae*” 39 (2021) 2, pp. 495–513.

¹² Cf. A. Zadroga, *Ekonomia społeczna...*, p. 217. At this point, it is necessary to point out that social entrepreneurship not only undertakes activities for the benefit of people in need of support (including, in essence, people at risk of social exclusion), but it also seeks to introduce

the position of a client, of being an object of philanthropy and social transfers, the position of a person dependent on the help of others – and on the help of non-governmental organisations; an opportunity to become an independent individual capable of taking care of his or her own fate and of their loved ones. This involves the possibility, but also the necessity, of earning an income from work and consequently means regaining the dignity that originates in making independent choices about one's own destiny."¹³

2. The Value of human work and entrepreneurship

The possibility of engaging in decent work and, even more so, participating in the management of a social enterprise, is a form of implementation which the Church postulates concerning human work and entrepreneurship. For humans, work is a fundamental right and good that appropriately expresses and multiplies their dignity. Therefore, it is not only objective but, above all, subjective. Its proper organisation benefits human development.¹⁴ Work is necessary to support the family,¹⁵ maintain the right to own property¹⁶ and contribute to the common good of the human family.¹⁷ Therefore, many initiatives within the social enterprise sector can be regarded as excellent examples of the practical implementation of the Church's social teaching on the value of human work.¹⁸

As was already noted by Pope John XXIII, numerous examples of social enterprises established, based either on an associative agreement or on cooperative law, confirm the possibility of building socio-economic solutions that genuinely benefit people by enhancing the value of work, fostering the development of individual and collective responsibility, as well as promoting other human values – entrepreneurship – which are useful for the growth of the

positive solutions for society as a whole (in particular the local community), as well as launches initiatives to protect the environment.

¹³ Cf. P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej...*, p. 16.

¹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 9, 18.

¹⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 10.

¹⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 31.

¹⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 16.

¹⁸ Cf. R. Praszquier, A. Nowak, *Social Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, London 2012, Cambridge University Press.

market and society as a whole.¹⁹ John Paul II also expressed his deep conviction that “the role of disciplined and creative human work and, as an essential part of that work, initiative and entrepreneurial ability becomes increasingly evident and decisive.”²⁰

Such a way of thinking and acting is consistent with the notion of social entrepreneurship, which stems from the desire to take responsibility for one’s own destiny. As experts creating the assumptions for the Polish social economy model stated: “Without an entrepreneurial spirit in people, in organisations and in communities, even the best external conditions will not lead to fundamental changes. Of course, first of all, this requires a change in people, who must be willing and able to take up the challenge.”²¹ This was one of the contexts in which John Paul II saw the need for there to be “an open process by which society organized itself.”²² Moreover, this links to the Pope’s conviction that “besides the earth, man’s principal resource is *man himself*. His intelligence enables him to discover the earth’s productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied.”²³ The entrepreneurial attitude to solving social problems confirms the papal intuition.

3. The Common good

The common good is defined in Catholic social teaching as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment.”²⁴ After translating this to social entrepreneurship, it is important to first and foremost draw attention to the importance of social capital. In fact, social enterprises not only rely on social capital but simultaneously foster its creation.²⁵ In a broader

¹⁹ Cf. John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra, Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 53 (1961) 422–423.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 32. For more on the entrepreneurial vocation, see: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader* (4th ed. 2014).

²¹ P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej...*, p. 15.

²² John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 16.

²³ John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 32.

²⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 26.

²⁵ Cf. A. Marek, A. Jabłoński, *Care of the Common Good as a Responsibility of Business Leaders. Catholic Social Teaching Perspective*, “Religions” 12 (2021): 125.

sense, it is necessary to state that the entire economic sector formed by social enterprises can only function efficiently “(...) in an environment where people engage in joint ventures, know how to work together and have trust in each other to take risks together. This implies that effective social enterprises need to operate in an environment where social initiatives, and citizens’ initiatives are something natural.”²⁶

It is worth emphasising that the common good should not be treated as a goal in itself. This principle assumes its deepest meaning only in relation to the fulfilment of the ultimate objectives of human beings and of the whole of creation. This indicates that the common good cannot be deprived of its transcendent dimension since God is the ultimate goal of His creations.²⁷ It is only through Him, by Him and because of Him that every reality, including human activity in the sphere of social entrepreneurship, can be brought to its highest good. Otherwise, a purely materialist vision would lead to the transformation of the common good into mere social welfare deprived of any transcendent purpose and thus of the deepest reason for its existence.²⁸ This is an important warning with regard to potential attempts to implement a model of social entrepreneurship that would, by definition, eliminate this deepest transcendent dimension from its axionormative assumptions.

4. The Universal destination of goods

One form of care for the common good is the principle of the universal destination of goods. Its key significance in Catholic social teaching was emphasised by John Paul II, who described it as “the first principle of the whole ethical and social order”²⁹ and “the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine.”³⁰ It originates from the revealed truth that the first and most important source of all good is God Himself. He is the Creator of humans and of the earth, and he gave the earth to humans to make it subject to themselves with their human

²⁶ P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej...*, p. 15.

²⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 41.

²⁸ Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 170.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem exercens*, 19.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 42.

efforts and creativity, and to enjoy the results of their work and entrepreneurship.³¹ What is relevant from the point of view of the analyses is that the Creator gave the earth to the whole human race to sustain all its members, without excluding or distinguishing anyone. This constitutes the fundamental premise of the universal destination of the earth's goods.³² Such an approach in social entrepreneurship is manifested in all initiatives aimed at taking care of the environment and promoting responsible consumer attitudes and behaviours.³³ Moreover, any project in line with the idea of social entrepreneurship should, by definition, lead to the establishment of a fairer and more solidarity-based world, in which not only natural resources but all accumulated goods are intended to act as a means fostering the well-being of all people, in particular those most vulnerable to exclusion and exploitation.³⁴

5. A Preferential option for the poor as an expression of social love

The motivation to counteract the phenomenon of social marginalisation plays a key role in social entrepreneurship and simultaneously, is consistent with the Church's postulate to follow a preferential option in favour of the poor, in social life. John Paul II explains this principle by stating 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."³⁵ In this context, it is worth highlighting the crucial benefits of social entrepreneurship as perceived from the point of view of specific groups of people at risk of social exclusion. They include the creation of permanent jobs (individuals who struggle to find work on the open labour market become employed), social inclusion of disabled people through work (in this case, it is work, rather than productivity,

³¹ Cf. Gen. 1:28–29.

³² Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 31.

³³ Cf. P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej...*, p. 16.

³⁴ Cf. A. Zadroga, *Ekonomia społeczna...*, p. 221.

³⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 42.

that is the most important value), social and professional reintegration, i.e., the broadly understood socialisation of excluded people, such as the homeless, by involving them in the process of productive work.³⁶

6. Solidarity

Solidarity can be defined as “a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual.”³⁷ This means that apart from compassion for those in need of support, there needs to be a specific, thoughtful, and goodwill-based commitment to making a positive difference in their lives. Furthermore, it is not enough to act together. According to the theory and practice of social entrepreneurship, it is necessary to learn how to act effectively, boldly striving to harmoniously combine interpersonal solidarity with business efficiency. At this point, it is worth recalling the opinion of John Paul II, included in his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, on the social reforms that had been undertaken over the previous hundred years, which at the same time exemplify the practical application of the principle of solidarity through the mechanisms of social entrepreneurship: “These same reforms were also partly the result of an open process by which society organised itself through the establishment of effective instruments of solidarity, which were capable of sustaining an economic growth more respectful of the values of the person. Here we should remember the numerous efforts to which Christians made a notable contribution in establishing producers’ consumers’ and credit cooperatives, in promoting general education and professional training, in experimenting with various forms of participation in the life of the work-place and in the life of society in general.”³⁸

The aforementioned historical experiences should serve as an inspiration for appropriate changes in legislation and market rules to foster the creation

³⁶ Cf. H. Sobocka-Szczapa, *Ekonomia społeczna w Polsce*, Łódź 2010, Społeczna Wyższa Szkoła Przedsiębiorczości i Zarządzania, pp. 27–28; B. Kowalczyk, *Ekonomia społeczna w pomocy społecznej w Polsce w walce z wykluczeniem społecznym*, in: K. Wódz, S. Pawlas-Czyż (eds.), *Praca socjalna wobec nowych obszarów wykluczenia społecznego. Modele teoretyczne, potrzeby praktyki*, Toruń 2008, AKAPIT, p. 35.

³⁷ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38.

³⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 16.

of authentic “solidarity structures”³⁹, by which the entities of the social enterprise sector can be classified. The state naturally plays an essential role in this process, but this intervention by the public authority can by no means be carried out in disregard of the principle of subsidiarity.

7. Subsidiarity

In Catholic social teaching, the principle of subsidiarity, generally understood as the requirement to protect and foster the expressions of innate social nature of humans, was formulated in the encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* in the following words: “Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry, and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organisations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the social body, and never destroy and absorb them.”⁴⁰ In this respect – with regard to social entrepreneurial actors – it is the responsibility of entities like, the state or other “larger communities” to respect their nature as “bottom-up” organisations created as part of a civil society initiative. This must be expressed by the appreciation of their specificity, by implementing the concept of subsidiarity into practice. A concrete indication of this approach would be respect, promotion of dignity and unrestricted responsibility of the supported entity.⁴¹

In social entrepreneurship, the principle of subsidiarity is fulfilled when social managers strive to achieve the financial independence of the managed organisations in relation to external institutions. It is reflected in actions focused on raising funds primarily at one’s own risk, as well as through one’s own efforts and resources, that is, in the form of business activities. This allows shifting away from an “extended hand” attitude, which results in almost complete dependence on the preferences of public and/or private donors (as is the case with many NGOs). Guided by the principle of subsidiarity, well-managed social enterprises aim to become sovereign entities capable of taking action in line with their own

³⁹ Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 193.

⁴⁰ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo anno*, 79.

⁴¹ Cf. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 357.

mission and based on their own resources, including financial resources. In this way, the opportunity to avoid falling into the trap of becoming an 'extension' of public institutions or a hostage to philanthropic emotions, in favour of a real implementation of the notion of empowerment, becomes real.⁴²

8. The Principle of participation

Subsidiarity is closely linked to the principle of participation. It is expressed in the commitment by which a person – either alone or in cooperation with others – contributes to society at its various levels.⁴³ The Church stresses that “participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.”⁴⁴ In terms of social entrepreneurship, it is essential to note that it is impossible to effectively implement its fundamental idea without the direct and active involvement of individuals and communities for the benefit of which a particular project's activities are conducted.⁴⁵ This applies particularly to initiatives promoting local community development and ventures of an associative, cooperative or mutual nature. Activity and cooperation based on mutual trust are vital in the development of local communities. All these attitudes are simultaneously prerequisites for the effectiveness of activities in the field of social entrepreneurship. One must note that social entrepreneurship can only be truly social if it gains social support and, above all, is met with the right attitude on the part of its direct beneficiaries.⁴⁶

9. Conclusions

The above deliberations presented Catholic social teaching as complementary knowledge enriching the axionormative determinants of social entrepreneurship. The identification, description, and comparison of the fundamental assumptions of the two disciplines under study have made it possible to reinterpret more deeply

⁴² Cf. A. Zadroga, *Ekonomia społeczna...*, p. 15.

⁴³ Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 75.

⁴⁴ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of The Church*, 189.

⁴⁵ Cf. P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej...*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Cf. P. Frączak, J.J. Wygnański (eds.), *Polski model ekonomii społecznej...*, p. 7.

the concept of social entrepreneurship in relation to such values and principles as the dignity of a human person, the value of human work and entrepreneurship, the common good, the universal destination of goods, the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity and participation. Therefore, the hypothesis that engagement in social entrepreneurship cannot be devoid of a strong axiological rooting has been proven. Otherwise, such a practice, deprived of value factors, will not truly serve the benefit of humans and society.

Most importantly, moral and social doctrine – both the one preached by the Catholic Church and the one contained in the axiological assumptions of social entrepreneurship – is arranged and developed based on the principle affirming the inviolable dignity of a human person. This personalist standard is also the foundation on which all other principles and content of social teaching, especially that of the common good, subsidiarity and solidarity, must be based. At the same time, social entrepreneurship promotes the creation of innovative organisational solutions that effectively affirm the value of each human being and enable their full participation in society, leading to an integral development. That is why it is an excellent example of the practical implementation of the personalist norm into a socio-economic reality.

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