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THE TIMELINESS OF THE MESSAGE
OF THE ENCYCLICAL *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*:
AN ANALYSIS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE
OF THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF ITS PUBLICATION

Abstract. The article points to the topicality of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, the third social encyclical of John Paul II, from the perspective of the 30th anniversary of its publication. The author brought to the fore the prophetic character of the encyclical as an important message for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe during the transformation period after the fall of communism, emphasizing its timelessness and topicality. *Centesimus Annus* became the voice of the Church, which, through the very nature of its social teaching and its prophetic and critical specificity, has the right to make judgments in social matters.

Keywords: Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*; John Paul II; the social teaching of the Church.

John Paul II, when publishing his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* 30 years ago, devoted its first chapter to Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.¹ This was done on the special occasion of the *anniversarium centesimum* of the first social encyclical. Thanking God for Pope Leo XIII's encyclical, John Paul II not only referred to it as "great" and explicitly called its message as "prophetic" (CA 16), but from the very beginning of his analyses undertaken on the occasion of its anniversary, noticed that:

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¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, no. 4–11 (further: CA).

The commemoration of *Rerum Novarum* would be incomplete unless reference were also made to the situation of the world today. The document lends itself to such a reference, because the historical picture and the prognosis which it suggests have proved to be surprisingly accurate in the light of what has happened since then. (CA 12)

This circumstance is worth recalling here, because it allows us to recognize in Pope Wojtyła's seminal work a mark of certain prophetism which may define the methodology of its reading from the perspective of three decades. Admittedly, the first manifestation of the encyclical's prophetism is connected with the very jubilee of publishing *Rerum Novarum*. After a hundred years, the Polish Pope not only recalls that anniversary, but he rereads the encyclical precisely in a prophetic key, demonstrating how visionary were the words of Leo XIII both as regards the very question of the working class as an emerging issue for the contemporary world and for the Church, and, above all in relation to the collectivist system, which even if it did not yet at the time take the form a strong totalitarian state power, and only appeared as a social philosophy or as a more or less organized political movement, it already began to spread more and more widely slowly winning the minds of people as well as social circles. According to John Paul II, Leo XIII predicted all the negative consequences, i.e., political, social, and economic, of the system proposed by socialism as well as all the negative aspects of the attempt to solve the so-called social question in the spirit of socialism and communism. The Pope recurrently warned that the solutions proposed by socialism would not only fail to resolve the difficult situation of the working class at that time, but that they would bring even greater harm (cf. CA 12).

Although there was still a long way to go before the development of the prophetic and critical self-awareness and function of the Church's social teaching, the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* undoubtedly delineated for the Church a fixed pattern of conduct in social matters². From the perspective of a century, John Paul II characterized it as follows:

The Church, in fact, has something to say about specific human situations, both individual and communal, national and international. She formulates a genuine doctrine for these situations, a *corpus* which enables her to analyse social realities, to make judgments about them and to indicate directions to be taken for the just resolution of the problems involved. (CA 5)

Considering the above, it seems only natural that in the subsequent parts of the *Centesimus Annus*, John Paul II adopts Leo XIII's methodology as his

² Cf. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (June 24, 2004), no. 267–269.

own, and after demonstrating the foresight of Pope Pecci, he undertakes, as if in the same vein of prophetic insight, the task of reading and interpreting the *rerum novarum* related to the collapse of the totalitarian system as well as to the challenges faced by states and nations which at the time shed the half-century burden of totalitarianism and set on the process of transformation in numerous areas of social life: politics, economy, law, culture, etc.

It should be noted here that, ultimately, the Church will adopt this type of methodology in the conducted social discourse as well as in her own mission in the field of various areas of social life, especially in its socio-economic and socio-political spheres in the period of conciliar reception. The Church's critical function towards the world allows her to keep the necessary distance from it, which in turn leads her to becoming a sign of opposition, especially to all forms of reductionism and alienation.³

In this perspective, the basic research problem for further analyses boils down to the question of whether—this time from the perspective of three decades – it is possible to perceive the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* analogically to the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, and if so, what is its prophetic and at the same time topical character? Anyway, it seems, as has already been indicated, that in view of the circumstances of the document's publication, this prophetic character was somehow organically ascribed to the encyclical. First, it is worth recalling once again that John Paul II's encyclical was published on the centenary of Leo XIII's encyclical devoted to the *social question*. *Rerum Novarum* was the first social encyclical in history marking the beginning of Catholic social teaching. Only this fact sufficed to provide a natural incentive to a look back on the passing century, but also towards the future. Secondly, the encyclical was published shortly after the defeat of the communist ideology and the collapse of the economic system based on the principle of collectivism and central control, which left the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, with the dilemma regarding the type of socio-political model on which they should rest their further development. Hence, the encyclical naturally became a specific point of reference for the conducted changes. It was the voice of the Church, which, in line with the nature of her social doctrine and its prophetic-critical specificity, has the right to pass judgment in social matters in line with the demands of the fundamental human rights.

³ Cf. Jerzy Gocko, *Nauka społeczna Kościoła w poszukiwaniu własnej tożsamości* (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Naukowe Franciszka Salezego, 2013), 290–307.

1. JOHN PAUL II—A PROPHET FOR NEW TIMES

In her scientific analysis of the prophetic aspects of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, Aniela Dylus, while analysing the figure of a true prophet, defines three main marks of his calling, namely, his being sent by God, being sent to people living here and now, and being sent with a specific mission, i.e., a specific task to fulfil. The kind of this mission is clear in Jeremiah's call to become a prophet: "Behold, I put my words in your mouth. Look, today I am giving you power over nations and over kingdoms, that you might break up and overthrow, that you might destroy and tear down, and build and plant" (Jer 4:9b–10). In this context, two important aspects of the prophetic mission can be distinguished. The prophet's task is first to uproot, overthrow, destroy, demolish, and then to build and plant, which means that his mission is first to perform a radically critical function and then make a positive contribution to the creation of a renewed reality.⁴

Both these aspects of the prophetic message can easily be found in *Centesimus Annus* as well. In the encyclical, at first there appears a categorical "no" to socialism and extreme liberalism, which, by the way, is nothing new in the social teaching of the Church. For, first of all, the essence of the Church's social doctrine is manifested in its ability to evaluate and, if necessary, to reject everything that violates human dignity, which is the fundamental principle of social life, and consequently leads to all forms of alienation. From this perspective, John Paul II, in reference to the teaching of his predecessors and his own teaching in *Laborem Exercens* and in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, makes a thorough assessment of the collectivist system. After a thorough analysis of the multi-faceted deficits of this model of economic and social life, the fundamental thesis of the papal judgment is:

... the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. Socialism likewise maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil. Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order. (CA 13)

⁴ Cf. Aniela Dylus, „Profetyczne aspekty encykliki *Centesimus annus*. Poza granice socjalizmu i liberalizmu.” *Studia Theologica Varsaviensia* 30, no. 2 (1992): 31–32.

It is on the basis of this false conception of man, and hence erroneous anthropological assumptions, that a system of social life was created in which human freedom and fundamental rights are not truly recognized. Hence, there is a distortion of the law, which not so much defines the scope of man's freedom, but rather leads to his incapacitation and subordination to the totalitarian apparatus of power. One of the tools of such subordination in the spirit of collectivism is the rejection of private property, since a person deprived of such property and the possibility of earning a living through his own entrepreneurship becomes dependent on the entire social machine and is subjected to such control. This makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for an individual to take personal responsibility for his own life, and thus becomes an obstacle to building an authentic human community (cf. CA 13).

John Paul II went beyond the assessment of collectivism pointing to some practical consequences of this basic error of socialism for the shaping of social life. Among others, he highlighted an extremely destructive role of perceiving the otherwise inevitable social conflicts in the spirit of the class struggle ideology for social life. For it is one thing to frame the class struggle in a kind of rivalry or competition, which is the driving force of social change and development, and another thing to promote the idea of a social conflict that is not limited by any ethical or legal considerations. Class struggle understood in this way leads, on the one hand, to the rejection of respect for the dignity of the human person in other people, and consequently also in oneself, and, on the other, to the exclusion of any compromise, and therefore also the possibility of building a real community. The basic good is no longer the common good of the entire community, but the benefits of only a specific social group. Bearing in mind that this class struggle is in practice carried out by all available means, giving priority to the principle of force over the principle of equity and law, and without excluding lies, terror and the destruction of the civilian population, it becomes clear that socialism is a system built on contempt for the human person (cf. CA 14). When asking today about the topicality of the thought presented in the *Centesimus Annus* in relation to the discussed issue, one should certainly beware of any systems resembling socialism in this respect, i.e., excessively broadening the scope of state intervention, "to the detriment of both economic and civil freedom" (CA 48), but also pertaining to the mechanism of class struggle in its manifold forms (e.g., gender, self—non-self/the other) in social relations.

Leaving aside other aspects of the anthropological error, it must first of all be emphasized that it is closely related to the materialistic conception

of man and social life, and therefore has its source in atheism. Man recognizes his transcendent dignity by fulfilling a vocation given to him from God. Rejection of God perceived as the guarantor of this dignity leads to the creation of a social order in which the true dignity and responsibility of the person are not recognized. This atheism is also closely linked with the rationalism postulated by the Enlightenment, which comprehends human and social reality in a mechanistic way and, at the same time, denies the need for salvation (cf. CA 13).

2. CAPITALISM REDEFINED

The question about the topicality of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* from a prophetic perspective must take into account the realism of the prophet, who is aware that it is not possible to take shortcuts on the way towards the economically ordered "Promised Land." After all, Moses led his nation there for 40 years. Therefore, it seems necessary to pay proper attention to the papal critique of the other extreme and unacceptable doctrinal and ideological solution, namely, of extreme liberalism as well as of the economic system built on its assumptions, although it could at first appear as a non-alternative direction of desired changes for the initiated system transformation.

In this perspective, the questions posed by John Paul II after the fall of real socialism take on particular significance:

... can it perhaps be said that, after the failure of Communism, capitalism is the victorious social system, and that capitalism should be the goal of the countries now making efforts to rebuild their economy and society? Is this the model which ought to be proposed to the countries of the Third World which are searching for the path to true economic and civil progress? (CA 42)

The Pope's reply is complex, but it will ultimately allow him to formulate a revised definition of capitalism. In a negative aspect, the encyclical decidedly rejects the economic system understood as "as a method of upholding the absolute predominance of capital, the possession of the means of production and of the land, in contrast to the free and personal nature of human work" (CA 35). The consequence of such domination will be a vision of work organized in such a way "so as to ensure maximum returns and profits" without taking heed to human self-realization (cf. CA 41), treating profit as the only indicator of the good functioning of the enterprise, even at the cost

of humiliating a person and offending his dignity (cf. CA 35), or, finally, the emergence of the consumer “Welfare State” with all its issuing negative phenomena (cf. CA 36).

The critical function does not exhaust a prophetic mission. After all, the prophet is also supposed to “build and plant,” which, especially in the socio-economic field, turns out to be a matter of extreme delicacy and not devoid of pitfalls. As Angela Dylus notes, prophetic wisdom needs to navigate carefully between the Scylla of vagueness and the Charybdis of incompetence, which is a threat to the “false prophet,” as well as to some people of the Church and moralists who have ready solutions to all problems.

The declaration that “The Church has no models” (CA 43) contained in *Centesimus Annus*, and expressly formulated for the first time in the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,⁵ has entered the ecclesiastical teaching for good. The Church had long since given up the ambition of charting a “third way.” Therefore, looking for an answer to the question about the optimal system model in the encyclical is a wrong track. It is impossible to come up with a single, ideal model, applicable anytime and anywhere.⁶

Indeed, the encyclical is far from proposing ready-made solutions as regards economic models, but it is aware that viable and truly effective systems can only be the outcome of manifold historical conditionings and arise thanks to the efforts of all those who responsibly deal with specific problems in all related social, economic, political and cultural spheres (cf. CA 43). It is significant here that the economic system, for which the word ‘capitalism’ is one of possible names, has been placed between two other systems; it is corrected, on the one hand, by the framework of the legal system, and on the other, by wider ethical and religious culture. An economic order must be seen against the backdrop of political as well as moral and cultural systems that modify it. In other words, the logic of the market must be complemented with other dimensions, including the logic of the state (political logic), or even, as Benedict XVI pointed out in the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, the logic of gift.⁷

Apart from other broader analyses, it is worth recalling here a few fundamental statements of the encyclical, the more so that the same methodology of discourse is also manifested in the presentation of other issues related

⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 41.

⁶ Dylus, “Profetyczne aspekty encykliki *Centesimus annus*,” 35.

⁷ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009), no. 37. Cf. also: Łukasz Niepsuj, *La figura dell'imprenditore nell'economia mainstream (marshalliano-keynesiana) e nell'economia civile. Valutazione etico-antropologica alla luce della Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa* (Roma: Edizioni Santa Croce 2020), 307-329.

to the free market economy, such as: understanding of the free market, profit, private property, the importance of the state in the area of the economy, etc. If capitalism, wrote John Paul II, determines the economic system that “recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity,” the answer to the above question will be certainly positive. The Pope proposes to describe such capitalism more accurately as: “business economy, market economy, or simply free economy.” If, however, capitalism is understood as a system “in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality, and which sees it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious” (CA 42), the answer must certainly be negative.

At this point, it is worth returning to the question about the positive function of a prophet. The above-presented idea of a prophet leading people towards the Promised Land may shed some light on it. It is significant that Moses himself did not enter the Promised Land and only led his people to the top of a mountain from hence they could see its still barely discernible outline. Thus, the Prophet may be seen as the one who develops a vision, shows strategic goals, but does not point the way *in concreto*, because the goal can also be reached in various ways. In this context, the encyclical recalls that to those who take responsibility for the shape of social life, it offers its “guiding principle” in the form of social teaching (cf. CA 43).

3. LOOK INTO THE FUTURE

What, then, are the prophetic *guiding principles* of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, which can be read as a point of support in the struggle for the proper shape of the new socio-economic order? Their brief analysis will also provide a detailed answer to the question about the encyclical’s topicality. They can be read on two levels: first in the theological key, and then on the systemic level.

The encyclical *Centesimus Annus* is very rich in content. First of all, it refers to the hundredth anniversary of *Rerum Novarum* (1891-1991), deals with the great events of 1989 and the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe. Then it attempts to decide whether this event signifies a victory for the Western system. Finally, it outlines the forms of the Church’s involvement in a democratic society.

One should also bear in mind important statements concerning the nature of the Church's social doctrine, such as, for example, the definition of the Church's social doctrine as proclamation of Christ in the earthly reality (cf. CA 55), its belonging to the Church's saving mission (cf. CA 5), being an instrument of the new evangelization (cf. CA 5), its orientation towards faith (cf. CA 54), its practical dimension (cf. CA 57) and interdisciplinary nature (cf. CA 59), as well as its importance as a doctrinal body (cf. CA 5).

The above illustrates that the encyclical touches upon numerous topics. The question is which of them should be considered as the primary one? Since the last (VI) chapter of the encyclical is entitled "Man is the primary and fundamental way of the Church" (an expression originating from the first encyclical of John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*),⁸ it must be assumed that the encyclical's main subject is man, and that *Centesimus Annus* is an expression, even if moderate, of the "anthropological turn." While it is true that in the encyclical, as in the entire Magisterium of John Paul II, personalism, also Christology-directed, is very strongly expressed, it seems that it is not the very heart of *Centesimus Annus*. That heart is the central place of God also in social matters. It is the call to "open the door to Christ!" from the Pope's first homily.⁹

The centrality of God can be deduced from the way in which *Centesimus Annus* approaches the social doctrine of the Church. As has already been said, it is seen as "proclaiming Christ in earthly realities," as an essential element of the "new evangelization," essential element of the "evangelizing mission" of the Church, "essential part of the Christian message" which "points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society." In all these expressions we notice the adjective "essential," probably used to point to something that cannot be missing. The encyclical seems to repeat with *Rerum Novarum* that "there can be no genuine solution of the 'social question' apart from the Gospel" (CA 5).

Certainly, *Centesimus Annus* speaks of man as "the way of the Church" and repeats that the goal of the Church is "the defense of man," but it further clarifies and confirms that she "receives 'the meaning of man' from Divine Revelation" that "Christian anthropology therefore is really a chapter of theology" (cf. CA 55), that "the theological dimension is needed both for interpreting and solving present-day problems in human society" (CA 55). There-

⁸ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, no. 14.

⁹ To see more, cf. Giampaolo Crepaldi, "La centralità di Dio, cuore dell'enciclica *Centesimus annus*," *Bollettino di Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa* 17, no. 2 (2021): 34-44.

fore, when the Church spoke of man, she always did so in relations to his “transcendent dignity” thus stressing that the foundation of human dignity lies not in himself, but in God: “by responding to the call of God contained in the being of things that man becomes aware of his transcendent dignity” (CA 13).

The question of the central place of God (and not of man) is also addressed in the encyclical in a negative context. The communist system collapsed not for economic or political reasons, but primarily because it claimed that it would “uproot the need for God from the human heart, but the results have shown that it is not possible to succeed in this without throwing the heart into turmoil” (CA 24).

When John Paul II spoke of the “anthropological error” of communism, he understood it, above all, as a theological error: “the spiritual void brought about by atheism” (CA 24). Absence of God means the real alienation. Totalitarianism “arises from the denial of truth in an objective sense,” and therefore from the ultimate objective foundation of truth, i.e., God without whom freedom is freed from the truth and thus becomes totalitarian.

Centesimus Annus also abounds in statements relating to the theology of culture. Here, too, we can see the central importance of God, not man. Certainly “understanding man is more comprehensive when seen in the context of culture,” but “at the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God” (CA 24).

In this context, the most important topical message of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* on the 30th anniversary of its publication should be regarded the call to rediscover the central place of God, and, consequently, the social doctrine as the mission of the Church, and not as a simple social animation of consciences in a pluralist society. Man is the way of the Church, proclaims *Centesimus Annus*, however “man’s true identity is only fully revealed to him through faith, and the Church offers him help on the path of salvation” (CA 54).

When it comes to the prophetic and at the same time topical “guiding principles” of the encyclical on the political and systemic plane, it should be emphasized once again here that the positive indications of the encyclical as to the shape of the possible socio-economic order do not refer to any specific model solutions, because it is not the role of papal documents, rather, they should be seen as a project on the level of values.

The economic system, as already mentioned, should be corrected both by the framework of the legal system and the wider ethical and religious culture, which means that it must be seen in the context of both the political

system and the moral and cultural system that modify it. It is worth recalling the thought of Benedict XVI at this point, that the logic of the market must be complemented with other dimensions, including the logic of the state (politics), or even the logic of gift.¹⁰

The Pope is deeply convinced that it is impossible to build an efficiently functioning socio-economic model without a sound axiological and anthropological background. Just as the fundamental error of collectivism had an anthropological nature, a healthy economy and a democratic state must be based on a healthy work ethos, an ethos of entrepreneurship, freedom, participation, and the desired virtues (responsibility, commitment, diligence, prudence in taking risks, ability to take initiative).

From the perspective of three decades, not only since the publication of the encyclical, but also from the multifaceted systemic changes in our part of Europe initiated at the turn of the last decade of the last century, in the context of the prophetic dimension of the encyclical, it is worth asking a straightforward question in what way the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* retains its particular topicality as regards the second discussed plane here, i.e., in the systemic aspect?

The above question can be answered in several different dimensions. On the general level, the encyclical certainly teaches a holistic view, seeing the multiple relationships between various factors that make up social life, and thus between politics, economy and culture, while emphasizing the moral dimensions of human activity. In addition, it constantly reminds us of the danger of giving priority to a narrowly understood economy, that is, it warns us against the error of economism.

Secondly, it provides an insight into the contemporary world, guidance in the maze of contemporary problems. It sets the direction of action and presents a certain type of target culture and civilization, founded on, which is characteristic of the entire social teaching of the Church, recognition of human dignity and rights.¹¹ The encyclical complements freedom, which is worth remembering in the context of the pandemic and sanitary policy in many countries. The encyclical does not point to the economic collapse or ineffectiveness of bureaucracy as the main reason for the fall of communism. That reason, according to the encyclical was human rebellion. In the world of slavery, freedom was born, because it was free people who overthrew

¹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 37.

¹¹ Cf. Avery Dulles, "Centesimus Annus and the Renewal of Culture," *Journal of Markets & Morality* 2, no. 1 (1999): 1–7.

communism. In this context, the words of the encyclical take on a significant meaning: “Not only is it wrong from the ethical point of view to disregard human nature, which is made for freedom, but in practice it is impossible to do so” (CA 25).

Centesimus Annus also teaches a healthy realism in the approach to the economy, it allowed to overcome ingrained stereotypes in the form of the remembered Marxist critique of the free market, the critique of profit and private property. It recalled that the market is not a natural state of affairs, but a social institution. As such, it must be developed and protected. On the other hand, by carrying out a balanced moral legitimation of the basic principles of liberal economy and pointing to some deficits of the market itself and its mechanisms, the encyclical exposed unrealistic myths about the functioning of the market economy that exist in the public consciousness, concerning, for example, capitalist wealth without capitalist labour. This legitimation is not opposed by what John Paul II calls the alienation of work¹².

Despite the passage of three decades, the encyclical is of particular importance for post-communist countries, as it was addressed to people who retained a vivid memory of communism. It helped to understand the essence of responsibility and emphasized the need for it. In this perspective, in the field of political life, the indications of John Paul II are still topical in regard to the model of the state, although they did not resolve all doubts, because they simply could not. The Pope defended the concept of the “rule of law state” (CA 44), “valued democracy” (CA 46), affirmed the “principle of subsidiarity” (CA 48) as the basis of state activity, and at the same time reminded the state of the moral obligation to intervene in economic life, especially in the case of the poor, as well as in cultural life. He did not share the view that “agnosticism and sceptical relativism” (CA 46) were to become the philosophy of a democratic state but held that it should rather be “a correct view of the human person” (CA 11). The state should respect human rights. Thus, John Paul II opposed the totalitarian state that collapsed with a state of “legal order” with a decidedly ethical overtone. In such a state there is a place for the Church, because its method of operation is based on “respect for freedom” (cf. CA 46).

Another question can be asked at this point: have the dilemmas faced by the states embarking on transformation been resolved with the publication of

¹² The concept of alienation, used and abused by Marxism, acquires a new meaning: it consists in inverting the relationship between means and ends. It is not man who is to serve the economy, but the economy is to serve man (cf. CA 41).

the encyclical? Certainly not, which can be seen, for example, in the fact that many problems faced by the builders of the state in the post-communist period are still the subject of political disputes. We can also mention here discussions on the subject of religious education in schools, legal protection of life, ideological neutrality of state officials, clauses of conscience, or even the issue of how to harmonize state legislation, which must be one and binding on all, with the principles and norms of ethics, which are numerous in every pluralist society, and which often oppose one another?

The encyclical was also seen as a mark of a significant progress in the dialogue of the Church with the modern world. Many prejudices stemming from the past and damaging the teaching and thinking style of the Magisterium have been removed. The encyclical *Centesimus Annus* also appeared as an attempt to find a relationship between today's social problems and the life of faith. For those Christians who feel powerless in the face of modern economic life, it may provide a first orientation for how to connect these experiences with their own faith.

CONCLUSION

The prophetism of the encyclical *Centesimus Annus* remains an open question, because, as was the case with the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the papal visions and the directions outlined there are constantly in the process of implementation, while still retaining their topicality and constantly calling for further study and analysis. All this research should be borne out by the optimistic, which is important for prophetic signs, remark of Richard D. Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, once included by the *Time Magazine* among the 25 most influential Evangelicals. In one of his essays devoted to the encyclical, he wrote that John Paul II did not simultaneously refer in it to good and bad things, which can be so frequently encountered today's world. *Centesimus Annus* offers only good, better and the best news. Although Land's constation concerns economics, we can extend its positive message to the entire message of the encyclical.

The good news is the clear and unprecedented recognition by the Pope of the efficiency and effectiveness of the free market economic system as the most effective tool allowing to use the resources and meet the needs. The better news is that the papal sanction given to the free-market capitalist system is conditional and limited by numerous remarks about its weaknesses and

shortcomings. The best news contained in the encyclical is that economics has certain inherent limitations and that, at best, it can only maintain and strengthen a political and cultural system based on moral and spiritual truth.¹³

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¹³ Richard D. Land, “Good News, Better News, Best News,” in *A New Worldly Order: John Paul II and Human Freedom*, ed. G. Weigel (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1992), 101–106.

AKTUALNOŚĆ PRZEŚLANIA ENCYKLIKI *CENTESIMUS ANNUS*.
ANALIZA Z PERSPEKTYWY TRZYDZIESTEJ ROCZNICY
JEJ OPUBLIKOWANIA

Streszczenie

Przedmiotem artykułu jest zagadnienie aktualności trzeciej encykliki społecznej Jana Pawła II *Centesimus annus* z perspektywy 30. rocznicy jej powstania. Autor skoncentrował się na ukazaniu profetyzmu encykliki jako istotnego przesłania na czas transformacji dla krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej po upadku komunizmu, podkreślając jego ponadczasowość i aktualność. *Centesimus annus* była głosem Kościoła, który zgodnie z naturą własnej nauki społecznej i jej profetyczno-krytyczną specyfiką ma prawo do wydawania osądu w sprawach społecznych.

Słowa kluczowe: encyklika *Centesimus annus*; Jan Paweł II; nauczanie społeczne Kościoła.