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THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Marek JAGODZIŃSKI (ed.), *Kwestie dyskutowane w teologii dzisiaj* [Issues discussed in theology today], Radom: Wydawnictwo Diecezji Radomskiej, 2017, 424 pp. Series: Theologia Radomiensis, vol. XIV. ISBN 978-83-61147-66-4.

The rapid changes that contemporary culture and contemporary societies are undergoing multiply the number of questions about their condition. This is reflected in theology, which has to face new challenges in the areas of morality and the theory of cognition. After all, the continual interpretation of the evangelical truth, so as to make it comprehensible in the current historical context, is an aspect of the missionary imperative of the Church, which is clearly stated in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44: “With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish and interpret the many voices of our age, and to judge them in the light of the divine word, so that revealed truth can always be more deeply penetrated, better understood and set forth to greater advantage.” For this reason, theologians’ efforts contributing to the elucidation of issues that have been subjects of controversies or disputes in the ecclesial or extra-ecclesial public sphere should be welcomed. A contribution of this kind to the Polish theological library is the collective monograph by theologians from the community of Radom, Poland, edited by the Rev. Prof. Marek Jagodziński. The title of the book, *Kwestie dyskutowane w teologii dzisiaj* [Issues discussed in theology today], accurately conveys its authors’ intention, which is to help the reader accept and understand the theological theory concerning the current disputes and controversies.

The advantage of topicality is the most important but not the only link between the chapters of the monograph. The book is a collection of nine articles penetrating different areas of theology. A look at their titles is enough to suggest a very important observation: they all have very strong pastoral reference; they discuss issues that a priest and a theologian encounter in their daily work, explaining the relevant teaching of the

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Church in response to the questions asked. The editors of the monograph thus took on an explicative and, consequently, mystagogical role.

The first problem addressed in the book is phrased as a question, which is also the title of the first article authored by Edward Sienkiewicz, namely: “Czy Bóg Starego Testamentu jest miłosiernym Ojcem?” (“Is the Old Testament God a merciful Father?”). The study contains a theological analysis of biblical passages concerning the picture of God in the Old Testament, which is so often raised in debates and sometimes accompanied by doubts. A consequence of the main aim is the biblical interpretation of the semantic scopes of the concepts of love and mercy, providing answers to another theological problem that evokes considerable interest.

In the next article, titled “Sytuacja osób rozwiedzionych, żyjących w związkach cywilnych, wobec sakramentów. Przegląd komentarzy na temat ósmego rozdziału *Amoris laetitia*” (“The situation of divorced people, living in civil marriages, with regard to the sacraments: A review of commentaries on Chapter Eight of *Amoris Laetitia*”), Jarosław Wojtkun addresses the stormy debate following the publication of Pope Francis’ encyclical *Amoris Laetitia*. The article very clearly presents the reception of the encyclical’s contents; it shows how these contents were related to the pastoral problem particularly important these days: the problem of enabling divorced people living in new relationships to participate in the sacraments. It also clearly highlights the main two interpretative positions that developed in the Church after the publication of the encyclical.

The issue of transgenerational healing and forgiveness is the subject of further two articles: Marek Jagodziński’s “Czy istnieje kwestia przebaczenia międzypokoleniowego” [“Is there an issue of transgenerational forgiveness?”] and Sławomir Płusa’s “Między grzechem a zranieniem. Wokół uzdrowienia międzypokoleniowego” [“Between sin and injury: Concerning transgenerational healing”]. The juxtaposition of these studies side by side is probably not accidental, since their somewhat different appraisals of the category of transgenerational healing reflect the ongoing theological debate on this issue. In developing their appraisals, both authors ascribe special significance to the pastoral consequences of practices involving prayer for transgenerational healing and transgenerational forgiveness.

The next study opens the part of the book that comprises three revised versions of master’s theses written under the guidance of the book’s editor, Marek Jagodziński. To some extent, this explains the large size of these chapters.

The first of them is an extensive article by Maciej Szymański, titled “Nauczanie Magisterium Kościoła od Pawła VI do Jana Pawła II w kwestii kapłaństwa urzędowego kobiet” (“The teaching of the Magisterium of the Church from Paul VI to John Paul II on the ministerial priesthood of women”). The author reliably systematizes the teaching of the Catholic Church on the ordination of women. He analyzes the argumentation given in the main documents addressing this issue, among which he mentions, above all, the declaration *Inter Insigniores* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on allowing the ministerial priesthood of women and John Paul II’s apostolic letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. The systematic character of the study manifests itself in its structure, with hierarchically ordered issues. The author begins by distinguishing hierarchical priesthood and common priesthood, pointing out that, despite the genetic

relationship between them, they differ in their essence. Thus, he presents the Catholic doctrine as distinct from the approaches of some post-Reformation churches, which have introduced the ordination of women invoking—among other things—the principle of common priesthood. In the next step of his reasoning, he discusses the internal theological “order” of the Church, in which all its members are grafted into Christ, making up a hierarchical structure of functions. This, however, does not mean—which the author clearly emphasizes—that the holy orders can be viewed functionally.

The next of the articles based on revised master’s theses bears the title of “Antytrinitaryzm w doktrynie Świadków Jehowy” [“Anti-Trinitarianism in the doctrine of Jehovah’s Witnesses”]. Its author is Szczepan Kowalik. The title very clearly indicates the thematic area addressed in the text, but it must be said that the author takes the opportunity to present other elements of Jehovah’s Witnesses’ teaching as well. Moreover, the reader is informed about the basic studies devoted to the doctrine of this denomination in the Polish theological literature. It should be stressed that this issue remains extremely important, even if we consider the basic statistical fact: Jehovah’s Witnesses are the third largest denomination in Poland, which—given their intense missionary activity—means that an average Catholic may encounter a theological system different than his own precisely during a meeting with a Jehovah’s witness. The Millerist and millenarian etiology characteristic of this system, as well as its characteristic ethical theory rejecting many socio-political solutions (notably the UN, seen as the beast), invariably induce other people’s interest. It should be noted that many of these ideas are shared by conservative communities of evangelical Christians, especially in the United States, but also in Poland.

The third article, being a revised version of a master’s thesis, is Damian Żabicki’s “Aspekty teologiczne ewolucjonizmu chrześcijańskiego w ujęciu arcybiskupa Józefa Życińskiego (1948–2011)” (“Theological aspects of Christian evolutionism according to Józef Życiński [1948–2011]). In an erudite way, the study introduces the reader to the teaching of the late Ordinary of Lublin, who died a few years ago. It presents Józef Życiński’s perspective on the difficult issues of Christian interpretation of evolutionism. It also presents the Lublin philosopher’s research work in the context of his dialogical attitude; as a thinker and a priest committed to pastoral ministry, Życiński pointed out the danger inherent in all kinds of fundamentalisms.

The chapter by Damian Żabicki is placed between two shorter articles. One of them is a study by the already mentioned Sławomir Plusa. In his second paper, titled “Pentekostalizm czy odnowa charyzmatyczna Kościoła?” (“Pentecostalism or charismatic renewal of the Church?”), the author addresses what is undoubtedly one of the main religious phenomena of the last decade: the rapid development of charismatic communities in the Catholic Church. The article contains a historical outline of Pentecostalism, originating in Protestantism, and presents the historical origins of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. It then briefly discusses the significance of baptism in the Holy Spirit. Finally, it comments on the very intense debate taking place in recent years in conference halls and in churches. The debate is centred around the question of whether or not the full bloom of Catholic Charismatic Renewal amounts the Pentecostalization or Protestantization of the Church.

The final chapter of the book is an article by its editor, Marek Jagodziński. It is titled “Teologiczna ocena ‘bioenergoterapii’” (“A theological appraisal of ‘bioenergoterapy’.”) The author’s aim is to assess the use of bioenergoterapeutic phenomena, particularly in the context of immense interest in this subject in the whole society on the one hand, and in the context of the intense theological dispute over this issue within the Church on the other. The author moves from presenting the etymology of the concept of bioenergoterapy, through outlining the state of knowledge about this phenomenon as well as its theological and other interpretations, through introducing the reader to the phenomenon of bioelectronics and the controversies associated with organ transplantation, to reporting Stoeger’s realistic theory of the laws of nature, which highlights their “epistemological” status: the fact that they are a description rather than the source of nature’s regularities. The very interesting process of inference prepares the hermeneutic foundation for conclusions, which are at the same time recommendations, asserting that psychotronic, bioenergoterapeutic, and other phenomena eluding the known methods of study must not be blindly rejected with the scientific outlook or theology as an excuse. The lack of a thorough and unbiased debate on these issues may result in a number of attitudes far from the Christian ideal, such as the growth of the materialistic outlook or the unnecessary attribution of natural phenomena to demonic phenomena.

Thanks to both the selection of topics and the quality of the studies, the book is undoubtedly a highly interesting and valuable contribution to the Polish contemporary theological literature. It provides theologians and priests involved in pastoral ministry with an important instrument that helps them formulate answers to the questions that they are asked in the increasingly complicated everyday reality. It is not without certain limitations, however. What draws attention in some of the articles included in the monograph is the striking instances of editorial carelessness, particularly a large number of typos. It would be advisable, moreover, to editorially “internationalize” each study by adding at least a table of contents in English. What also leaves the reader unsatisfied is the introduction to the book, which could be a little more elaborate. These shortcomings, however, do not significantly affect the value of the monograph. It is, as noted before, a highly valuable tool for every theologian and an interesting reading for everyone looking for answers to specific theological questions arising in everyday situations.

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