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Conscience and the Contemporary Professional Life Challenges

The issue of conscience is one of the essential theological and moral issues. Contemporarily it is gaining even a greater importance due to the necessity of taking into account the research results of other sciences, including the non-theological ones, as well as due to the current cultural and social conditions which provide a range of challenges for each individual's conscience. Work and professional life are the platforms which reveal a range of moral dilemmas. The article indicates the most important challenges which are being faced nowadays, it highlights the role of conscience in the professional life and the basic rules of conduct in case of a conflict between conscience and the law.

Key words: conscience, work, professional life, morality, the law.

Introduction

The issue of conscience has been of a great importance for the theological and moral reflection. In some periods of time it was ahead and surpassed the capacity of other fundamental treaties. It resulted from the fact that since the beginning of its existence as an independent scientific discipline¹, moral theology has aimed at solving the problems of conscience (cases) and at the formation of the confident conscience, which is free from any doubts. Although the time of casuistry in the

¹ The conventional date of the appearance of moral theology among other theological disciplines is 1600 – the year when the first volume of the work of the Spanish Jesuit Juan Azor called: *Institutionum moralium in quibus universae quaestiones ad conscientiam recte aut prave factorum pertinentes breviter tractantur* was written. This work marked the beginning of the period called: *Institutiones morales*, recognized as the first coursebooks of moral theology.

previous form as well as of the disputes on the so called moral systems² (the essence of which was to seek the way out in case of a conflict and the doubts of conscience which appeared on the basis of the tension between freedom and the law)³, have long gone, however, the issue of conscience and of its role in the moral life focuses the attention of those who consider “morality”, which is expressed as the good and evil of human deeds and of the person who does it,⁴ to be the subject of their research.

The issue of conscience has become more and more important nowadays, not only due to the research results conducted by non-theological

² In the history of moral theology there have been six classic moral systems: probabilism, laxism, extreme tuciorims (rigorism), moderate tuciorism, probabiliorism, equiprobabilism.

³ It mainly concerned the answer to the question: when does man have to comply with the law, and when is he allowed to use his freedom not complying with the law. This particular case of the doubt of conscience caused extreme polarisation of opinions at the very beginning of moral theology. Probabilists (Bartolomé de Medina OP and his followers, mainly Jesuits) answered this question in the following way: you can use your freedom not complying with the law if the premise in favour of it is really probable (*probabilis*), that is: based on the justified positive proofs and supported by good arguments or by the authority of serious authors. Such an opinion however led to laxism, that is to a free and broad interpretation of duty. Therefore it resulted in a reaction of extreme rigorism which was preached by Jansenists and later in the more moderate probabilism created and proclaimed mainly by Dominicans. In the context of these disputes, St Alphons Maria de Liguori suggested his own system. The system was called equiprobabilism and it was accepted by the Church. It is based on three principles: 1) in case when the opinion in favour of the law seems to be more certain in an obvious way, the law must be obeyed and freedom should not be advocated; 2) if the opinion in favour of freedom is only probable or equally probable to the opinion in favour of the law, freedom must not be advocated but a certain judgement should be formed; 3) in case when the conscience is not able to form certain judgement and the opinions in favour of the law and in favour of freedom are equally probable, we can use freedom because there is a doubt which regards the very existence of the law and this means that the law was not properly promulgated while without such promulgating the law has no binding force. See T. Rey-Mermet, *Teolog sumienia*, transl. W. Kawecki, H. Pagiewski, Kraków 1996, pp. 127-128.

⁴ See John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 29, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

sciences⁵, which – with the use of proper tools⁶ – should be taken into account in the theological reflection over man and his deeds, but also due to the contemporary cultural and social situation which causes numerous moral dilemmas the amount of which surpasses the number of such dilemmas in the time of the disputes on the moral systems. Contemporary culture is marked with many disturbing phenomena of eclipse of conscience, depravity and even of the evolving new forms of “breaking the conscience”, particularly on a professional level. The man who lives in the complicated system of mutual social, cultural and legal conditioning has more and more difficulties in taking proper decisions. The dominating ideologies and the cultural mainstream trends result in the fact that the intransigence of some attitudes faces the incomprehension and condemnation of others⁷.

Therefore, moral theology re-faces the question on the very essence of conscience, on its role in the professional life and on its reference to the world of values. What is conscience? What are the most important challenges which conscience is facing nowadays? Is conscience necessary at all – as some are trying to convince – it disturbs man in self-realization and in career-making? In the face of these questions

⁵ Some philosophical trends devote a lot of space to the issue of conscience, mainly the trends which are inspired by phenomenology by E. Husserl, F. Brentano, M. Scheler, D. von Hildebrand, and by psychology, while certain psychological trends deprive conscience of any relations with God and even protest against the Christian concept of conscience perceiving it as a set of demands and habits learned from parents and from the society, which are contrary to the deepest human inclinations and to his genuine nature (S. Freud).

⁶ These tools were indicated by John Paul II in his encyclical *Veritatis splendor*: “Because the Church’s morality necessarily involves a *normative* dimension, moral theology cannot be reduced to a body of knowledge worked out purely in the context of the so-called *behavioural sciences*. The latter are concerned with the phenomenon of morality as a historical and social fact; moral theology, however, while being in need to make use of the behavioural and natural sciences, does not rely on the results of formal empirical observation or phenomenological understanding alone. Indeed, the relevance of the behavioural sciences for moral theology must always be measured against the primordial question: *What is good or evil? What must be done to have eternal life?*” (no. 111), as well as in the encyclical *Fides et ratio*: “Reference to the sciences is often helpful, allowing as it does a more thorough knowledge of the subject under study; but it should not mean the rejection of a typically philosophical and critical thinking which is concerned with the universal” (no. 69). Furthermore, the need for and the general principles to use sciences, economy and medical science in moral theology are indicated by the document of the International Theological Commission *Theology today*, no. 81.

⁷ See A. Derdziuk, *Sprzeciw sumienia w życiu Kościoła*, “Teologia i Moralność” 8(2013), no. 2, p. 78.

it seems that contemporary moral theology should become more practical again although in other sense than it used to be during the times of Juan Azor or of St. Alphonse⁸. It should become not only a theoretical reflection on the conscience but also a call for “the people of conscience”⁹ in the contemporary reality, also the Polish one.

The essence and the role of conscience

Every man is capable of judging his deeds. There are various sciences which interpret the sources of this ability in a different way¹⁰, however, there is a general agreement concerning the fact that conscience is a particular feature of man; of every man. Due to this feature man can recognize the world of values, take its side and head his life towards them. What is more, on his way of conscience man recognizes himself as a value: the given and set value. Conscience reveals itself as a natural moral awareness.

Conscience is often called “the heart”¹¹, it is the deepest human inside where he leads his inner dialogue. The Second Vatican Council adds that conscience is the “most secret and sanctuary of a man”, where he meets “God, Whose voice echoes in his depths”¹². Therefore

⁸ The practical nature of moral theology at that time mainly meant a relation with the sacrament of penance and, indirectly, also with the addressees of the coursebooks. The coursebooks were meant to provide aid to confessors and they were to serve in solving certain cases in the confessional.

⁹ See John Paul, Homily (Skoczów, May 22nd, 1995), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/homilies/1995/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19950522_skoczow.html.

¹⁰ Conscience is perceived differently by psychological, sociological, philosophical and theological sciences. Moreover, even within the same kind of science, the approach to the issue of conscience can differ e.g. Freudianism defines conscience in a different way than phenomenology and differently than personalism.

¹¹ The Hebrew word *leb* and its Greek substitute (*kardia*), which means “the heart” are the Old Testament expression of the reality of conscience. It means the ability to distinguish the good and evil (Sir 17,15). It has the role of the prosecutor after committing sin (Gen 3,7-10; 2Sm 24,10), it praises justice (Hi 27,6; Ps 17,3; 26,2). Psalm 50 speaks about the heartache caused by sin. Ultimately, it is God’s voice which is particularly audible in Cain’s remorse after Abel’s death (Gen 4,13-16). Furthermore, the New Testament, especially the Gospels, speak about “the heart” as the inside of man which has the decisive role in recognizing good and evil. It is also the witness of human deeds (Rom 2,15) and their source (Mt 15,19).

¹² See The Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 16; https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

conscience is the meeting place and the space for dialogue; the dialogue not only with the law, with the norms, but rather with man – with God and with and with oneself, and, to some extent, also with other people. This dialogical function of conscience is revealed not only by the Biblical terminology but also by certain images and similes used in the Holy Bible. And so conscience is “God’s eye” (Sir 17,8), “God’s voice”, which speaks in man’s inside and proclaims His will (1Sm 3,1-10), “the worm”, which harasses and leads to the moral remorse (Iz 66,24; Mk 10,48). By comparison to the people who participate in a lawsuit, conscience is “the judge”, “the witness” and “the prosecutor” (Rom 2,14-16).

Conscience has the decisive role in recognizing good and evil, that is the moral value of proceeding role (Lk 12,54-57). It is a kind of self-awareness of what is morally good or wrong (see 2Cor 4,1-2). It is the first and sometimes the only witness and judge of human deeds (Rom 2,15). It is a permanent disposition of valuation of universal nature; a subjective norm of morality which is subjected to the objective norm, that is to God’s will expressed in the natural law and in the revealed law; the normative force when it tells you to do good and forbids to do evil. It is “sort of moral sense which leads us to discern what is good and what is evil...like an inner eye, a visual capacity of the spirit, able to guide our steps along the path of good”; “holy place where God reveals to him His true good”¹³.

Human heart, that is his inside – conscience is the source of good but also of evil. “For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, unchastity, theft, false witness, blasphemy” (Mt 15,19). Therefore, conscience itself can be good (1Tm 1,5,19; Acts 23,1), clear (Acts 24,16; 1Tm 3,9; 1P 3,16), righteous, gentle, sensitive but it can also be evil, perverse and wrong. Conscience is not the natural ability, although even on the natural plane this ability can be recognized¹⁴. It is enlightened through faith (1Tm 1,5; Rom 14,23). What is more, the Holy Spirit comes to aid to the conscience (Rom 8,27), and love provides it with “a spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph 1,17n). Thanks to opening to

¹³ John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia*, no. 26, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html.

¹⁴ It is evidenced by, among others, literary metaphors which used to define conscience. These include e.g. gods and Erinyes of the Hellenistic world who harassed those who committed evil, leading them to the deepest feeling of experiencing moral guilt, which was often on the verge of madness (Orestes), or the Calderon’s prompter (*Il gran teatro del mondo*).

the grace, conscience acquires the positive features mentioned above – kindness, chastity, righteousness and gentleness.

Therefore, conscience appears as the direct and practical moral norm. This means that it does not create norms or moral theories, and it does not evaluate the hypothetical state. In conscience man only makes the moral assessment of his certain deed, which he is doing here and now. It is therefore the direct moral norm, which remains in an essential relation to the objective norm¹⁵. Its function is strictly situational and practical in the sense that it evaluates various situational elements, inner and outer conditions, which, as a consequence, leads to a certain assessment, order or prohibition¹⁶. This assessment is conducted in a sensible manner in the light of the objective moral law, which becomes the inner regulation for the man, and the call to do good in a certain situation¹⁷.

God's will is the objective norm, the very law of God¹⁸. However, taking into account the universal nature of conscience, we should emphasise that the revealed law of God such as the Decalogue or the law of Christ cannot be the only reference point. There must be a universal law the basic norms of which are directly knowable, in a spontaneous

¹⁵ See John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 60.

¹⁶ The situational role of conscience should not be mistaken for situational ethics. The latter proclaims the absolute moral autonomy and inadmissibility of any intervention into this strictly personal sphere of thoughts and feelings. Situationism requires the total independence of conscience from any objective outer norm. It does not recognize any objective norms which are binding regardless of conditions. For situationism it is the independent conscience which finally determines good and evil in any particular situation. While the situational function of conscience comes to evaluation of performance in a particular situation.

¹⁷ The Second Vatican Council rejects the so called creative interpretation of conscience and emphasises that conscience is not an autonomous and only source of assessment of what is good and what is evil. However conscience has deeply inscribed the principle of obedience to the objective norm, which justifies and conditions the correctness of decisions with prohibitions and orders as the basis of human conduct: "In the depths of his conscience, man detects a law which he does not impose upon himself, but which holds him to obedience. Always summoning him to love good and avoid evil, the voice of conscience when necessary speaks to his heart: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law written by God; to obey it is the very dignity of man; according to it he will be judged." (Rom 2,14-16)". See Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 16; John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 54; Ibid, Encyclical *Dominum et Vivificantem*, no. 43.

¹⁸ See John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 60.

way by every man, regardless of his faith or the lack of faith¹⁹. The most basic norm of such law is expressed in the statement: “do good and avoid evil”. It is imposed on man as a golden rule, constantly present as the wisdom in the whole history of human ethical and religious thought, since Confucius and Buddha, until the Holy Scripture of the Old and the New Testament. In the wording of The Book of Tobit it states: “Do to no one what you yourself dislike!” (4,15), while Jesus puts it in a more positive way: “Do to others whatever you would have them do to you” (Mt 7,12; see also Lk 6,31). Other norms of the moral law, which is the reference point for conscience, are the logical conclusions resulting from these fundamental principles. Therefore conscience is a predisposition, the inborn ability which always demands good (*synderesis*), but which also requires the use of synderesis for a particular case, a conclusion (*syneidesis*).

Moral
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The so called moral dilemmas are born at the application level of these general principles in a certain situation; at the level of introducing conclusions from fundamental principles, while the very situations can be referred to as challenges. Every man is equipped with synderesis. What is more, it is always proper and indestructable. While proper conscience (Lat. *conscientia*), which is the act of practical reason judging the moral value of a certain deed²⁰, can err recognizing wrongly and demanding an objectively evil action or prohibiting objectively good deeds. Errors of conscience and its faulty acting are happening

¹⁹ For a non-believer conscience is a kind of awareness the subject of which is his own conduct (deeds) and the value or lack of value connected with it, evaluated in the light of the standards which a person recognizes as fundamental, wherein these standards do not have to be moral principles. See M. Klinowski, *Czysumienie zawodowe jest kwestią moralności?*, “Przegląd Prawa Medycznego” 2(2019), no. 2, p. 11.

²⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas defines conscience in the following way: *conscientia est iudicium intellectus practici ex principiis communibus dictans de bonitate vel malitia alicuius actus a nobis faciendi vel facti*. It is an intellectual approach which – in contrast to the voluntaristic approach of St. Bonaventure and the whole Franciscan school – perceives conscience with special emphasis on the a judgement of reason (Lat. *intellectus*). The contemporary teaching of the Church seems to be combining these two approaches: “The dignity of the human person implies and requires *uprightness of moral conscience*. Conscience includes the perception of the principles of morality (*synderesis*); their application in the given circumstances by practical discernment of reasons and goods; and finally judgement about concrete acts yet to be performed or already performed. The truth about the moral good, stated in the law of reason, is recognized practically and concretely by the *prudent judgement* of conscience. We call that man prudent who chooses in conformity with this judgement”. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1780.

nowadays due to conflicts and doubts which arouse in various spheres of life. One of such spheres undoubtedly involve work and professional life. This sphere has become the place of “a test of conscience” in the face of the attempts of breaking the conscience by employees and often without the consent of the employee.

Conscience in the professional life – contemporary challenges

There are many challenges for human conscience which appear in the professional life. It is impossible to present all of them in a short dissertation. Anyway, every kind of job and every profession involve specific challenges. What is more, with the ongoing technological development and due to the ongoing social transformations and changes of law, new challenges appear. However, it seems that these challenges can be grouped round various circles of reference.

The first group of challenges is connected with the need to answer the question: what values should work serve and what is its final meaning? This question arises in every place where professional work is placed above man as such; as more important than personal and family life; where the employee is deprived of the right to rest or when his religious practice is hindered²¹. It is therefore a question of the hierarchy of values. The objection of conscience should arise in any attempt of putting a product of human work over the man as its subject, as well as in case of raising any economic, political or moral reasons over man. The danger in treating human work as “a product” or as anonymous “force” necessary for production (“human labour”), which John Paul II wrote about in his encyclical *Laborem exercens*²², and which is a current problem. It is present in any place where the whole vision of the issue of economy is marked with premises of materialistic economism²³. However, it is necessary to emphasise that such

²¹ The labour code which is applicable in Poland (Act from June 26th, 1974 with further amendments, Journal of Laws 2023, fasc. 1465) obliges the employer to guarantee each employee a daily rest and a week rest (art. 132 § 1). Otherwise the employer can be sued by the employee to pay him indemnity or compensation. Failure to provide a daily rest or a week rest is considered to be the violation of regulations concerning the working time and the employer can be punished for that with a fine. However, in practice the law is violated or circumvented in numerous ways, sometimes even with the employee's consent.

²² See no. 7.

²³ See W. Wieczorek, *Teologia pracy w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, “Roczniki Nauk o Rodzinie i Pracy Socjalnej” 4(2012), p. 327.

objectification of man and treating a person only as a work force and as an element of production, accompanies the employees who only aim at making a profit. Unfortunately, it is a feature which is also practised by employees who are tempted with higher earnings and therefore they agree to be subjected to such treatment.

Therefore, motivation is a challenge for any individual's conscience. In the context of such contemporary phenomena as undertaking job only because of financial reasons, or because of the job satisfaction, for gaining recognition or prestige, for one's own contentment, it is a challenge to awaken your inner personalistic, social or religious motivation. Aiming at one's success – according to John Paul II – must not drown out the voice of conscience²⁴. Through work man is to realize himself as a human being, in a way to become “more of a man”²⁵. He is supposed to express himself and his dignity through work. He is to improve his personality, multiply his virtues. He is to serve with his work and with its results and ultimately, through work he is to participate in the creative and salvific work of God. Unfortunately, in the period of secularism and consumerism, professional work is brought down to a choice of a post, a position. It is perceived only in two dimensions: the source of profit and the way to achieve proper social status. Therefore, where work is used against man and where it deprives man of his dignity, becoming work without any deeper meaning, conscience should protest out loud.

The other group comprises the challenges which appear at the level of interpersonal relations created at the workplace e.g. the problem of submission to people who do not have proper qualifications; the problem of professionals' secrecy; the problem of limits of obedience, loyalty etc. Every job has its social dimension – it is working “with others” and, to some extent working “for others”. If it becomes only working “for oneself”, if it is closed in egoistic approach, conscience should bring the motivation to work on the good side but also it should thus be turned into the good for others whom man meets in his workplace and for those who benefit from the fruits of this work. Unfortunately, in contemporary times work not always contributes to strengthening interpersonal bonds, both in the workplace and in families as well as the interpersonal relations on a larger scale. Although the workplace gives opportunity to create various bonds between employees and to develop solidarity of working people on a larger scale, unhealthy

²⁴ See Homily (Zamość, June 12, 1999), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/homilies/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19990612_zamosc.html.

²⁵ See John Paul II, Encyclical *Laborem exercens*, no. 9.

competition occurs more commonly, which is an anti-community factor. And so are the demands and requirements of the employer, which are against the system of values of an employee, and which often involve working overtime without any additional payment²⁶.

Sometimes the material relations can also become the source of challenge e.g. when the fruits of work are wasted or used for improper aims. This group would also involve the issue of working conditions, including payment for work and the question which is connected with this: whether e.g. too low income is an excuse for disregarding the job. The spirit of individualism results in the fact that contemporary man focuses on the fruits of his work for his own benefit and which do not contribute to multiplying the common good of certain communities and of the whole humanity. Although the produced goods become the object of social exchange, and thanks to the processes of globalization this exchange is facilitated, however the products of work are no longer treated as a link, as the platform which creates interpersonal bonds, but as the object of trade, of competition and of commercialisation. What is more, this object is sometimes created only to shock – e.g. as artistic works. Thus the question about the reaction of conscience in a situation when the employer (in this case the creator, organizer or the patron of the cultural life) requires from his employee to undertake a specific action which raises the moral objections²⁷.

Certain jobs which involve man as the object of work (education, upbringing, medicine, journalism, politics, legal professions), or the so called professions of public trust²⁸, constitute particular challenges for the conscience. Contemporarily these professions are put under the legal pressure, which more and more often is in conflict with God's law and with the natural law, and the employees are expected to strictly comply to the current norms set by the current government. Examples of such a situation include: introducing to schools and universities curricula which contain contents contrary to the values of the

²⁶ See K. Kietliński, *Sprzeciw sumienia wobec wyzwań współczesnego zarządzania*, "Teologia i Moralność" 8(2013), no. 2, p. 92.

²⁷ See K. Gryz, *Sprzeciw sumienia w kulturze*, "Teologia i Moralność" 8(2013), no. 2, pp. 108-110.

²⁸ In the light of art. 17 act. 1 of the Polish Constitution the profession the execution of which is in everyone's interest (the so called public interest) is called the profession of public trust and the appointed professional self-government takes care of it. M. Klinowski broadens this definition with the professions which require trust to be performed the way the beneficiary bestows on the person performing the profession. See *Czy sumienie zawodowe jest kwestią moralności?*, op. cit., p. 20.

teachers²⁹, depriving the employees of medical professions of the right to conscientious objection and demanding from them to act against the particular dignity of human life and procreation³⁰: the doctors – abortion, euthanasia or treatment refusal³¹, geneticists – the decision to undertake prenatal diagnosis as the reason for killing a child before its birth in a legally justified procedure³²; nurses and midwives – participating in procedures, treatments and experiments which are against their professed norms³³, pharmacists – selling contraceptives, anti-implantation and aborticides or medications which cause euthanasia, assisted suicide or medications used in the procedures of assisted reproduction³⁴, laboratory diagnosticians – preparation to the *in vitro* procedure, selective abortion or euthanasia³⁵, paramedics – transport of a patient to an abortion clinic, administrative workers of hospitals – preparation and issuance of a certificate which is the basis for the procedure of terminating pregnancy. In non-medical professions we can also indicate ideological and financial blackmail of journalists, ostracism in the workplace of the legal community against those whose views are different, demand for absolute party loyalty. These are only a few examples of situations in which the individual conscience comes into conflict with the applicable law, however wicked and unjust it is.

A situation in which you have to choose between conscience and reason on the one hand, and legality on the other hand also concerns

²⁹ See Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, no. 279. See also: M. Szczodry, *Kwestia sumienia w posynodalnej adhortacji apostolskiej Amoris laetitia papieża Franciszka*, in: *Miłość jest nam dana i zadana. Komentarz do Posynodalnej Adhortacji apostolskiej Amoris laetitia papieża Franciszka*, ed. G. Chojnacki, Szczecin 2017, pp. 250-251.

³⁰ See Francis, Apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, no. 83. See also: J. Pawlikowski, *Spór o klauzulę sumienia z perspektywy celów medycyny i etyki lekarskiej*, in: *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce medycznej – aspekty etyczne i prawne*, ed. P. Stanisławski, J. Pawlikowski, M. Ordon, Lublin 2014, p. 149.

³¹ See K. Marczewski, *Klauzula sumienia w praktyce lekarza internisty*, in: *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce medycznej*, op. cit., p. 186.

³² See A. Midro, *Klauzula sumienia z perspektywy lekarza genetyka klinicznego*, in: *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce medycznej*, op. cit., p. 179.

³³ See B. Dobrowolska, *Sprzeciw sumienia w zawodzie pielęgniarstwa i położnictwa – założenia i praktyka*, in: *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce medycznej*, op. cit., pp. 201-202.

³⁴ See M. Prusak, *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce aptecznej*, in: *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce medycznej*, op. cit., p. 224; M. Prusak, *Konflikt sumienia katolickiego farmaceuty w praktyce aptecznej*, "Teologia i Moralność" 8(2013), no. 2, pp. 37-41.

³⁵ See W. Głusiec, E. Puacz, *Sprzeciw sumienia w zawodzie diagnosty laboratoryjnego*, in: *Sprzeciw sumienia w praktyce medycznej*, op. cit., p. 232.

the issue of the so called unreasonable regulations which are contradictory to the common sense and sometimes even contradictory to one another or absolutely immoral; the realization of them can bring harm to people or even to the whole community. Solving such dilemmas seems to be apparently simple: one should make use of his conscience and of common sense. However, in such cases, one must always expect the possible consequences. Contemporary societies, even though they declare religious freedom and the freedom of conscience³⁶ as a result of the first one, violate and limit this freedom in various ways. Currently the law becomes more important than conscience and thus it forces opportunism, otherwise one risking his professional career.

The role of conscience in the professional life and in the context of contemporary challenges

Conscience, as the ability to recognize what is good and what is bad, plays a fundamental role in everyone's life. In his conscience man recognizes his vocation. In the conscience he makes his independent moral decisions which confirm his vocation or deny it. Therefore, the judgement of conscience is obliging – we should always follow the voice of conscience (*conscientia semper sequenda*). This particular dignity and the binding power of conscience result from its closeness and from the ability to recognize the objective truth, that is God's will. Conscience recognizes and gives to man the objective judgement of the moral order.

If man acts against this judgement or, in a case where he lacks certainty about the rightness and goodness of a determined act, still performs that act, he stands condemned by his own conscience, *the proximate norm of personal morality*. The dignity of this rational forum and the authority of its voice and judgements derive from the *truth* about moral good and evil, which it is called to listen to and to express. This truth is indicated by the "divine law", *the universal and objective norm of morality*³⁷.

³⁶ See *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* from 1948 (art. 18); *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, accepted by the United Nations on December 16th, 1966 r. (art. 18); *The Helsinki Final Act (Akt końcowy Konferencji Bezpieczeństwa i Współpracy w Europie)*, signed on August 1st, 1975 r. (art. 7); *Resolution of the European Council (Rezolucja Rady Unii Europejskiej)* from November 16th, 2009. (*Council conclusions on freedom of religion or belief*); *Treaty of Lisbon (Traktat z Lizbony)* (art. 6); *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Karta Praw Podstawowych Unii Europejskiej)* (art. 10); *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (art. 48 i 53).

³⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 60.

It is necessary to aim at maintaining the voice of conscience, genuine and confident. However, sometimes the conscience can be misled – even without the fault of man: “Conscience frequently errs from invincible ignorance without losing its dignity”³⁸. However, if its voice is confident, man must follow it. Conscience is the ultimate authority for everyone, although it is not absolute. Therefore, it must be emphasised, man must not act against the reasonably monitored voice of conscience.

The right to freedom upholds the authority of conscience and it means that conscience is protected from any outer influence of any human authority and that man is bestowed with the freedom to the personal convictions with regard to what he must and must not do. Emphasising the meaning of the freedom of conscience from any pressure of any authority, the Second Vatican Council teaches that: “Wherefore every man has the duty, and therefore the right, to seek the truth in matters religious in order that he may with prudence form for himself right and true judgements of conscience, under use of all suitable means”³⁹.

Moral
Theology

Discussing the role of conscience in professional life, we should always remember that there is only one conscience and one morality – both on the level of faith and in the presence in the world. No one can demand from man to lead a life of double standards – one in relation to God, and the other, in work and professional life if it is so, the state which introduces such standards becomes totalitarian, even if the authorities call it democratic and forward-thinking.

In every field of life, particularly in the professional life, we should always follow the voice of conscience (*constientia semper sequenda*); we should emphasise: the voice of genuine conscience that is one which calls the good – good, and the evil – evil; and which does not create its own norms for its own sake but which recognizes the existence of the objective truth which man seeks and which he wants to follow. Therefore, if man recognizes the genuine criterion of good in a moral norm or a God’s direct order, he should remain submissive to this norm and he should act according to it.

Man owes obedience to the constituted human law (ecclesial or lay), as long as the law is just and as long as it is the guardian or the truth and the good. In such a case man can feel released in his conscience

³⁸ The Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, no. 16. See also: John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 62.

³⁹ Declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae*, no. 3.

from complying with the human law in case when it violates the limits of reasonability and the more if it is unjust or immoral (e.g. when the employer demands from his employee to do something evil or tries to impose certain views). There have been many cases in history of people who assumed persistent attitude which was contradictory to the constituted law, they were motivated by the voice of conscience and they had to face all the resulting consequences of their objection⁴⁰.

Man must never be reduced to the position of an object. We should never trust illusions of the slogans about the apparent freedom in cases when work and professional life would lead to indignity of man as a human being. The man of conscience can notice the world of people and their needs outside and over the world of material objects. Work as such constitutes a value but it is not the highest value. It is rather a tool which helps to satisfy other needs and to achieve other values. Therefore, we should protest in any case when work begins to become the value of its own sake and the more when it turns against other people.

In the face of many contemporary forms of violating consciences in the professional life, man should re-discover the role of the Church Who comes to rescue the conscience of an individual. Teaching moral norms, the Church “in no way undermines the freedom of conscience of Christians. This is so not only because freedom of conscience is never freedom “from” the truth but always and only freedom “in” the truth, but also because the Magisterium does not bring to the Christian conscience truths which are extraneous to it; rather it brings to light the truths which it ought already to possess”⁴¹. As the revealed truth was entrusted to the Church and She proclaims it and genuinely interprets, Christian should “the Christian faithful ought carefully to attend to the sacred and certain doctrine of the Church”⁴².

In the face of the current situation, there is a need for the ongoing formation of the conscience which has not been bestowed on man as completed. Therefore, everyone is obliged to form his conscience in such a way to make it more mature. Apart from that, an individual conscience – although it is the direct norm of personal morality – “is not exempt from the possibility of error. [...] in the judgements of our conscience the possibility of error is always present. Conscience is *not*

⁴⁰ See S. Gałęcki, *Sprzeciw sumienia i nieposłuszeństwo obywatelskie*, “Studia Kulturoznawcze”, 12(2017), no. 2, p. 156; K. Jaworski, *Zasada równego traktowania a sprzeciw sumienia*, “Logos i Ethos” 2019, no. 1, pp. 110-112.

⁴¹ John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 64.

⁴² Declaration on religious freedom *Dignitatis humanae*, no. 14.

an infallible judge; it can make mistakes”⁴³. Therefore, the formation of conscience should be understood as striving for getting to know the objective truth, in order to make proper judgement on the basis of it to make conscience righteous. In other words, formation of conscience is the process of “a continuous conversion to what is true and to what is good”⁴⁴.

Religious factors constitute an essential role in the process of conscience formation. Growing up in the atmosphere of closeness of God the Father Who gives them love, in the life of sacraments and being open to God’s word, opens and shapes human heart and conscience, creates a specific atmosphere of love and responsibility, carries out the internalization of laws and God’s commandments. What is more, the natural elements of the formation of conscience such as deepening the faith, being submissive to the genuine authorities, constitutes aid in the process of the formation of conscience which never ends.

A well-formed conscience makes proper decisions in work and in professional life. Man who is led by such conscience is able to protest in a situation in which at work and in his professional life he is to be limited to the role of a tool. Such a protest becomes prophetic that is: it reveals the basic moral truth – God’s primacy in the life of man as well as the beauty and the liberating value of the Truth revealed in Christ⁴⁵.

Conscience is the basic determinant of human dignity. On the path of conscience man finds and constantly confirms his identity. Through conscience he can find the whole truth about himself and he tries to live to the extent of this truth. It is not a tool for independent determination of what is good and what is bad, but rather, an act of rational getting to know the truth, it is a witness and the first judge. Properly formed conscience, that is the conscience capable of discovering the genuine hierarchy of values, is the best protection for human freedom. Some consciences are wrongly formed. However, even then nobody should be forced to act against his conscience.

There are numerous opinions that work and professional life should be free from any moral assessment – that they should be “deprived of

⁴³ John Paul II, Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, no. 62.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, no. 64.

⁴⁵ See Z. Wanat, *Profetyczny wymiar sprzeciwu sumienia*, “Teologia i Moralność” 8(2013), no. 2, p. 32.

any moral judgement”, ethically neutral. There are numerous attempts which are to stop man from seeking the truth and the good. There are many attempts aiming at giving conscience the rank of the supreme instance of moral judgement; categorical and infallible in deciding of what is good and what is bad, as well as attempts to replace conscience with the law or with an authority.

Being faithful to your conscience in the professional life can unfortunately mean suspension of career, job loss and other consequences. It seems that people without any moral principles today, with “no conscience” can be promoted more easily, to the detriment of honest people. Therefore, contemporary man no longer feels any dilemmas of the conscience. Being deeply engaged with his professional passion, man reduces himself to the role of an object; by accepting evil, he allows his conscience to be violated. The conscience cannot be violated otherwise than with the cooperation of the one whose conscience is violated.

In fact, the genuine engagement with the world, responsibility for public affairs requires sensitive conscience. And only then this engagement will be effective, beneficial for the good of man and of human community. “The world of work – as John Paul II stated – needs people with properly formed consciences”⁴⁶. We need witnesses of fidelity to conscience, people who are truly free, brave, not limited by conformism.

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⁴⁶ John Paul II, Homily (Sosnowiec, June 14, 1999), https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/homilies/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19990614_sosnowiec.html.

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