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## RELIGION AND FAITH IN 21ST CENTURY SOCIETY – CHRISTIAN TRADITION AS THE FOUNDATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Abstract:** This paper examines the enduring role of religion and faith in 21st-century society, emphasizing the Christian tradition as the foundation of social and economic development. It distinguishes three key pillars of Christian civilization: Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christian ethics. Greek philosophy, particularly the thought of Aristotle and Plato, shapes critical thinking, moral reflection, and the pursuit of virtue, providing tools for personal and civic development. Roman law creates a framework for justice, social order, and respect for individual and community rights, ensuring stability and predictability in public life. Christian ethics, based on the teachings of Jesus Christ, emphasizes love, responsibility, and solidarity, shaping moral attitudes and social cohesion. An integral element of this tradition is the figure of St. Peter, who serves as a model of a “servant leader”, whose leadership, based on service, humility, and responsibility to the community, offers a timeless example for contemporary leadership. His life demonstrates that a leader’s true strength comes not from power or authority, but from spiritual maturity, trust in God, and a willingness to serve others. The integration of Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christian ethics, enriched by the example of St. Peter, provides a comprehensive model for contemporary societies, combining economic development with moral values, promoting responsible leadership and the common good. This approach emphasizes the importance of Christian cultural heritage in addressing contemporary social, economic, and ethical challenges.

**Keywords:** Christian civilization, Christian tradition, Greek philosophy, Roman law, Christian ethics, St. Peter, religion, faith, 21st-century society.

Modern 21st-century societies face numerous challenges such as globalization, rapid technological progress, migration, accelerating climate change, and growing secularization. In this context, the question of the role of religion and faith in individual life and in shaping social values becomes particularly significant.

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Despite the decline of traditional Christian values in Western Europe, religion can still serve as a guarantor of social, cultural, moral, and even economic development. Christianity – through its promotion of work ethics, honesty, solidarity, and responsibility – has made a significant contribution to the economic growth of Western societies<sup>1</sup>.

The idea of *vocation* – understood as the duty of diligently fulfilling one's work to the glory of God and for the good of the community – contributed to the formation of a modern economic culture in which labor, thrift, and social trust constitute the foundation of stable development<sup>2</sup>.

The Christian concept of the *bonum commune* (common good) fosters the creation of an economy based on ethical values and social responsibility, which today is reflected in the idea of sustainable development and the social economy. As St. Thomas Aquinas emphasizes *bonum commune sit melius quam bonum proprium unius* – the common good is better than the good of the individual<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, concern for the *bonum commune* constitutes not only the foundation of social order but also a moral obligation that gives meaning to the actions of both individuals and institutions<sup>4</sup>. Thus, Christianity not only shapes the spiritual sphere of the human person but also supports engagement in social and economic life, making faith a real force for development and community integration.

## 1. CHRISTIANITY AS THE FOUNDATION OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

For centuries, Christian tradition has shaped institutions, law, and social customs in Europe. Combined with the legacy of Greek philosophy and Roman law, it has created a coherent system of values in which the pursuit of truth, goodness, and justice becomes the overarching goal<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> S.O. Becker, J. Rubin, L. Woessmann, *Religion in economic history: A survey. The handbook of historical economics*, 2021, s. 585-639; L. Guiso, P. Sapienza, L. Zingales, *People's opium? Religion and economic attitudes*, "Journal of monetary economics" 2003, n. 50 (1), s. 225-282.

<sup>2</sup> L. Guiso, P. Sapienza, L. Zingales, *People's opium?*

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, Book I, Lecture 4.

<sup>4</sup> A.L. Sherman, *The Soul of Development. Biblical Christianity and Economic, Transformation in Guatemala*, Oxford University Press 1997.

<sup>5</sup> E. Artemi, *Embracing Greek Philosophical Thinking in the Fathers of the 2nd 5th Centuries*, "Vox Patrum" 2016, n. 65, s. 31-47, <<https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.3492>>; J. Giltaij, *Greek Philosophy and Classical Roman Law: A Brief Overview* [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Law and Society*, eds. P.J. du Plessis, C. Ando, K. Tuori, Oxford University Press 2016, s. 188-199, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198728689.013.15>>.

### 1.1. GREEK PHILOSOPHY

Greek philosophy, especially the thought of Aristotle and Plato, teaches critical thinking, reflection on the meaning of life, and the pursuit of virtue. Greek philosophy, particularly the ideas of Aristotle and Plato, forms the foundation of European reflection on human nature, virtue, and the purpose of life. It teaches critical thinking, rational analysis, and the understanding of the common good. Aristotle emphasized the importance of reason and virtue in achieving the “good life” – a concept known as εὐδαιμονία (eudaimonia). He wrote,

Virtue is the mean between two extremes, and a life in accordance with reason leads to true happiness<sup>6</sup>.

In Aristotle’s philosophy, however, happiness is not understood as an emotion or fleeting pleasure but as a full, fulfilled life in accordance with reason and virtue. Εὐδαιμονία represents for humans their τέλος (telos) – the ultimate goal of human existence, achieved through moral and intellectual perfection. Aristotle indicates that human beings, as rational creatures, realize their nature by practicing virtues and acting according to reason. As he wrote,

The life according to reason is the best and happiest, because reason is the most perfect element in man<sup>7</sup>.

In Aristotle’s view, εὐδαιμονία is not a passive state but an active one – action in accordance with ἀρετή (aretē), or virtue. It implies harmony between reason, emotions, and deeds, in which a person realizes their nature through moral and social perfection. Importantly, Aristotle held that happiness is inseparably linked to life in the community<sup>8</sup>, where the individual achieves the fullness of humanity through participation in social life and care for the common good.

Plato, in turn, in the dialogue *Republic*, indicated that justice and harmony in the state reflect the inner order of the individual. He maintained that justice consists in each member of the state performing their function to the best of their ability, according to their natural capacities<sup>9</sup>. Education – understood as the formation of character and reason – aims to lead to the knowledge of the good and the truth, making a person capable of living in accordance with themselves and the community.

In Plato’s thought, the key conviction is that social order should mirror the moral order of the individual. Society is just when its members are guided by reason and strive for the common good, not merely for individual advantage. This

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1177a, Warszawa 1982.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a, Warszawa 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Republic*, IV, 433a-b, Warszawa 2025.

idea, developed in the concept of the polis as a community based on virtues, finds contemporary expression in the ideas of civil society, ethical leadership, and social responsibility.

The Platonic vision of a harmonious state, based on the three essential parts of the soul – rational, spirited, and appetitive – can today be understood as a metaphor for the balance between reason, emotions, and desires in social life. In the context of contemporary challenges such as the crisis of trust in institutions, political polarization, or social inequalities, the Platonic idea of harmony acquires renewed significance, reminding us that lasting social order requires the internal regulation of the individual and moral education of citizens.

Christianity, developing European culture, significantly influenced the development of education through the establishment of universities from the 11th century onward (the University of Bologna founded in 1088). These institutions became centers of integration for Greek and Roman thought with Christian ethics, creating a coherent system of scholarly and moral reflection. Greek philosophy, especially Platonic and Aristotelian, found support in Christianity, which allowed ideas of rational knowledge of the good, internal harmony of the individual, and duty toward the community to survive. Consequently, medieval universities became not only centers of theoretical knowledge but also shaped ethical attitudes and civic responsibility, serving as places where reason and faith were united.

Today, the ideas of Aristotle and Plato are applied in civic education, professional ethics, and leadership development. Training leaders, students, and professionals based on principles of rational reasoning, ethical reflection, and pursuit of the common good continues the Greek tradition. Teaching ethics in management, medicine, or law promotes responsible and conscious action in public and private life, drawing on universal values that Greek philosophers considered fundamental to the good life.

At the same time, contemporary education systems, inspired by Platonic thought and supported by the Christian university tradition, emphasize the importance of the integral development of the human person – not only intellectually, but also ethically and spiritually<sup>10</sup>. Fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and civic responsibility is a practical realization of the Platonic ideal of knowledge of the good (τὸ ἀγαθόν), which, combined with the Christian ethic of love for one's neighbor, responsibility, and service to the community, forms the foundation of contemporary civilization. Through the synergy of Platonic thought and Christian values, it is possible to build a society where learning, morality, and public life are closely interconnected, and the individual fulfills their τέλος (telos) through harmonious action for the common good. In this sense, Plato's philosophy

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<sup>10</sup> M. Nowak, *Education as Support for the Integral Development of the Pupil*, "Paedagogia Christiana" 2018, n. 2 (42), s. 11-32.

represents a lasting heritage of European culture – reminding us that true social justice and peace cannot be achieved solely through law or economics but through the formation of humans capable of self-knowledge, cooperation, and service to the community. The Greek philosophical tradition – through the concepts of λόγος (reason), ἀρετή (virtue), and εὐδαιμονία (fulfilled happiness) – created the foundations of rational ethics, which continues to inspire Western models of education, law, and leadership. This reflection on reason, morality, and community constitutes one of the most enduring legacies of European civilization<sup>11</sup>.

### 1.2. ROMAN LAW

Roman law provides the framework for stable social relations. Its essence lies in the balance between the rights of the individual and the good of the community, in the respect for contracts and procedures, and in the idea of justice as a universal value. Observance of the law ensures the predictability of social behavior, minimizes conflicts, and enables the harmonious coexistence of different groups within the state. As a result, public and private institutions can function efficiently, while citizens enjoy a sense of security and justice<sup>12</sup>.

Today, the principles of Roman law continue to inspire the creation of transparent legal systems, public policies, and international regulations, contributing to equality before the law, the protection of human rights, and the stable development of states. A state founded on law can develop effectively because adherence to legal norms establishes social order, strengthens citizens' trust in institutions, and enables the efficient resolution of disputes. In this way, the legacy of Roman law remains the foundation of modern democratic systems and the functioning of the rule of law<sup>13</sup>.

### 1.3. CHRISTIAN ETHICS

Christian ethics provides the moral foundation that shapes the attitudes of individuals and communities. In particular, the message of Jesus Christ concerning love of one's neighbor and even of one's enemies emphasizes that care for others is essential for social order. In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus teaches:

<sup>11</sup> J. Behr, *Patristic Humanism: The Beginning of Christian Paideia* [in:] *Reenvisioning Christian Humanism: Education and the Restoration of Humanity*, ed. J. Zimmermann, Oxford University Press 2016, s. 19-32.

<sup>12</sup> D.P. Kehoe, *Law and Social Formation in the Roman Empire* [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Social Relations in the Roman World*, red. M. Peachin, Oxford University Press 2011, s. 144-163.

<sup>13</sup> M. Könczöl, *The Relevance of Roman Law: A Look at its Roles and Ideologies*, "Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais" 2017, n. 112.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39) and “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Mt 5:44). Such an attitude not only forms the moral character of the individual but also promotes social harmony – through respect, empathy, and a willingness to help those in need, regardless of affiliation or conflict.

Within this context, the principles of Roman law serve as a natural complement. Its essence lies in balancing the rights of the individual with the good of the community, respecting contracts and procedures, and upholding justice as a universal value. Observance of the law, combined with the practice of Christian ethics – love of neighbor and social responsibility – fosters the creation of a stable and harmonious society. A state grounded in law, where citizens are guided both by legal norms and by ethical values, can develop effectively because it ensures security, justice, and mutual trust.

In modern practice, Christian ethics and morality are reflected in social initiatives such as social assistance, migrant integration, environmental and charitable projects – all of which draw upon the Christian moral and ethical tradition<sup>14</sup>. The integration of Roman law with the teachings of Jesus provides not only institutional stability but also builds a community founded on solidarity, justice, and moral order.

The combination of these three pillars – Greek philosophy as the instrument of reflection and reason, Roman law as the structure of social norms, and Christian ethics as the moral compass – makes it possible to build a society more resilient to ethical, social, and political crises. Contemporary examples demonstrate that these traditions are not relics of the past but serve as a practical foundation for shaping leaders, institutions, and policies that act in the spirit of justice, truth, and responsibility toward the community.

## 2. SAINT PETER AS A MODEL OF SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The figure of Saint Peter, the first pope and leader of the Christian community, represents a unique example of a leader whose authority is grounded not in power, but in service and humility. His life journey – marked by human weakness and profound spiritual transformation – reveals the process of maturing into true leadership founded on understanding, love, and responsibility. Peter, who was initially impulsive and self-assured, experienced deep humiliation when he denied Jesus (Mt 26:69-75). Yet it was the forgiveness he received from the Risen Christ by the Sea of Galilee (Jn 21:15-17) that became the turning point – transforming his proud confidence into the attitude of a humble servant and shepherd.

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<sup>14</sup> *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Law*, eds. J. Witte Jr., R. Domingo, Oxford University Press 2023.

## 2.1. SAINT PETER IN THE GOSPEL – THE PATH OF VOCATION AND PREPARATION TO BE A LEADER

The formation of St. Peter as a leader of the Christian community may be understood as a process consisting of several pivotal events that illustrate his gradual spiritual and moral development. The process of shaping St. Peter into the leader of the Christian community is one of the most striking examples of human spiritual maturation in the entire Gospel narrative. Peter – formerly known as Simon, a fisherman from Galilee – was called by Jesus not because of his perfection, but because of his openness of heart and readiness for transformation. The Gospels depict his journey as a dynamic process of formation: from a simple disciple, through one who doubts, to an apostle capable of service and leadership within the community of believers<sup>15</sup>.

### 2.1.1. The change of name as a symbol of new vocation

The first sign of Simon's special calling is the change of his name. When Jesus meets him for the first time, he says: "You are Simon son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)" (Jn 1:42). In biblical tradition, a change of name always symbolizes a new mission and identity given by God. "Cephas" (Heb. כִּפְּאָס, Gr. Πέτρος) means "rock" – the foundation upon which the future community of the Church is to be built (Mt 16:18). In Greek, Πέτρος (Petros) refers to a single stone or rock, while Πέτρα (Petra) denotes a massive, stable rock or foundation. By giving Simon the name Peter, Jesus symbolically calls him to be the enduring foundation of the Church – one capable of holding the entire community firm in faith.

This event is significant not only symbolically but spiritually. Peter is called to a stabilizing role, strengthening others in faith. From a simple, impulsive, and uncertain man, Jesus begins to make a "rock" – a leader capable of carrying responsibility for others. As Joseph Ratzinger notes,

the new name means an existential transformation – Peter becomes someone who no longer relies on himself but on God<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> P.F. Borowski, *St. Peter, Church and Religion as a Role Model for Modern Entrepreneurs*, "The Person and the Challenges" 2024, vol. 14, n. 1, s. 273-294, <<https://doi.org/10.15633/pch.14117>>.

<sup>16</sup> J. Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, translated by A.J. Walker, New York 2007.



### 2.1.2. Walking on the Water – a lesson in faith and doubt

A second stage in Peter's formation as a leader is the experience of faith and doubt while walking on the water. The Gospel of Matthew recounts how Peter steps out of the boat to approach Jesus walking on the waves, saying, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (Mt 14:28-31). As long as he trusts, he stays afloat; when fear takes over, he begins to sink.

This event is a metaphor for the journey of every spiritual leader – trust in God allows one to transcend human limitations, while doubt leads to failure. Jesus, reaching out to the sinking Peter, says, "Why did you doubt, O you of little faith?" – showing that faith and courage are the foundation of spiritual leadership. This experience teaches Peter that true strength does not come from himself but from trust in God<sup>17</sup>.

### 2.1.3. Promise of fidelity and betrayal – the fall as a moment of formation

Another key stage in Peter's formation is his dramatic fall – the denial of Jesus. Although he had earlier declared enthusiastically, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will" (Mt 26:33), in the moment of trial he denies the Master three times (Mt 26:69-75), revealing the limits of human confidence and pride. Yet Peter's betrayal does not end his journey – it becomes a turning point. His tears of repentance mark the beginning of conversion, in which he ceases to rely on himself and begins to trust in God's mercy.

In this context, the words of Jesus recorded by Luke take on special meaning:

Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers (Lk 22:31-32).

These words hold particular significance for every pope who exercises the *munus Petrinum*. They remind them of the original paradox that Christ placed within this ministry and assure them that a special grace operates in this service – one that sustains human weakness and enables them to "strengthen their brothers."

They form the spiritual foundation of leadership in the Church, showing that true governance of a community is rooted not in power or authority, but in humility, responsibility, and readiness to serve others. As St. John Paul II emphasized,

Peter, who wept over his denial of Christ, became capable of strengthening his brothers, for he himself had experienced what weakness and forgiveness are<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> P.F. Borowski, *St. Peter, Church and Religion as a Role Model for Modern Entrepreneurs*.

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Peter Strengthens His Brothers in Faith*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2014.



#### 2.1.4. Forgiveness and the call to service

The ultimate moment of Peter's preparation for leadership occurs in the scene by the Sea of Galilee after the Resurrection. Jesus asks him three times: "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" (Jn 21:15-17), which not only renews their relationship but symbolically reverses his threefold denial. In this dialogue, Jesus distinguishes between two types of love: ἀγάπη (agape) – unconditional, self-giving love open to the good of others – and φιλία (philia) – the affectionate, friendly bond of devotion.

Peter, aware of his weaknesses and earlier failure, responds humbly and sincerely, using the word φίλε (philos), expressing a devoted and friendly love shaped by his experience of weakness. In this way, Jesus entrusts him with the mission: "Feed my lambs," making him a guide who not only leads but, above all, serves others.

This act of forgiveness not only restores Peter's dignity but also enables him to serve others with deep understanding of human frailty. A leader shaped by the experience of sin and mercy becomes an authentic shepherd – one who does not dominate but guides, who does not judge but understands.

After the dramatic experience of denying Jesus, Peter undergoes a profound transformation that prepares him to fulfill his role as a leader in the spirit of the Gospel. As O'Collins (2012) notes,

Peter, after his fall, becomes more human, more humble, more truthful – and precisely for that reason, capable of being the rock for others<sup>19</sup>.

This experience of weakness and limitation teaches him that true leadership is not based on strength, power, or charisma, but on faith, humility, and the capacity for forgiveness. Peter becomes an example of a leader who, through conversion and trust in God, can guide the community – strengthening others in their faith and responsibility for the common good. His example shows that effective leadership requires authentic moral and spiritual life and the ability to learn from one's own mistakes, making him the foundation of a stable and just Christian community.

#### 2.1.6. A leader transformed by love

The process of Peter's spiritual formation shows that God does not choose perfect people, but those willing to be transformed. His story reflects the Gospel paradox: weakness becomes the place where grace acts. Peter – once uncertain, fearful, and

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<sup>19</sup> G.O'Collins, *Peter as Witness to Easter*, "Theological Studies" 2012, n. 73, s. 263-281.

impulsive – becomes the foundation of the Church, a community grounded in faith and love.

Through this journey, Peter becomes a model of servant leadership, combining inner strength, empathy, and responsibility. Modern leadership – both religious and social – can draw deeply from his example, learning that true authority always exists in the service of the common good.

## 2.2. SAINT PETER IN HIS LETTERS – LEADER AND SERVANT OF THE COMMUNITY

The Epistles of St. Peter (1 Peter and 2 Peter) constitute a valuable source of insight into mature apostolic leadership, shaped by personal experience of faith, weakness, and forgiveness. They reveal not only theological reflection on the role of the Church but also practical guidance on leading a community of believers. In Peter's writings, we find a model of leadership that unites spiritual wisdom, humility, and responsibility – values essential to any system of governance grounded in ethics and service.

### 2.2.1. Leadership rooted in service and humility

In the First Epistle of Peter appears a key teaching on leadership when the Apostle writes,

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock (1 Pet 5:2-3).

This passage is one of the earliest biblical articulations of what today is known as servant leadership. Peter emphasizes that a true leader does not rule over others but serves them through example and care. The community is to be "God's flock," not a private domain of power; and the leader, a shepherd – not a ruler who dominates, but a guardian who guides and protects. This teaching echoes the words of Jesus: "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mt 20:26). Peter, who himself journeyed from ambition to humility, shows that the source of authority lies not in position, but in the disposition of the heart.

### 2.2.2. Leading the community through witness and example

Peter teaches that effective leadership rests not on formal authority but on moral integrity and the example of life:

Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble (1 Pet 3:8).

These virtues, according to the Apostle, form the foundation of enduring community order.

In a contemporary reading, these words outline a model of leadership based on communication, empathy, and shared responsibility. Peter understands that a community thrives where there is trust, and where a leader inspires through ethical behavior rather than hierarchical power.

His letters also stress the leader's responsibility toward both the community and God:

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms (1 Pet 4:10).

This statement encapsulates the principle of stewardship – the management of one's talents not for personal gain, but for the common good. Peter sees in every person a potential that should be developed and used in the service of others.

### 2.2.3. Discipline and responsibility in leadership

In the second part of his teaching (especially 2 Pet 1:5-7), Peter highlights self-discipline and moral growth as the foundation of effective leadership:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love (2 Pet 1:5-7).

This passage serves as a kind of spiritual code for ethical leadership and personal formation. For Peter, a leader is not infallible, but someone continually working on himself – on his faith, understanding, emotions, and relationships. Remarkably, this approach anticipates modern leadership psychology, which views a leader as a “person in process” – inspiring others not through perfection, but through authenticity and consistency.

### 2.2.4. Humility as the summit of leadership

At the end of the First Epistle, Peter addresses the elders of the Church with words that encapsulate his teaching on leadership

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble (1 Pet 5:5).

For Peter, humility is not weakness but the awareness of one's limitations and dependence on God. Such a leader does not seek dominance but cooperation, building community in the spirit of service. In contemporary terms, this idea is reflected in concepts of ethical and participatory leadership, where the leader acts as a coordinator and inspirer rather than an autocrat.

The Epistles of St. Peter thus present the image of a leader who has undergone profound spiritual transformation – from an ambitious disciple to a shepherd guided by humility and responsibility. His teaching on leadership is timeless: it shows that effective governance of a community requires service, example, self-discipline, and love.

Modern societies searching for ethical models of authority can find in Peter's message a powerful inspiration for building structures founded on trust, solidarity, and mutual respect – values that remain the cornerstone of both spiritual and social development.

### 3. FAITH AND RELIGION IN SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Faith and religion serve educational, cultural, and normative functions, shaping a system of ethical values that supports social, economic, and political development. The Christian tradition, grounded in the ethics of love for one's neighbor, responsibility, and solidarity, enables the construction of stable social structures and promotes community integration. Contemporary educational initiatives, volunteer programs, and social projects often draw on these values, fostering cooperation, justice, and concern for the common good<sup>20</sup>.

In practice, this includes civic education, the development of professional ethics, and teaching responsible leadership. Non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, and civic movements rely on the Christian tradition to promote ethical behavior and conscious decision-making in public life.

Religion also plays a significant role in the economic sphere. Christian values such as honesty, integrity, solidarity, and social responsibility shape work culture and business ethics. In the Christian tradition, work is not merely a means of acquiring material goods but has a spiritual and ethical dimension. It is a way of fulfilling human vocation and participating in the work of creation and the redemption of the world. John Paul II repeatedly emphasized in his speeches and homilies that work performed in the spirit of responsibility and love for one's neighbor becomes a path to spiritual growth and participation in the Resurrection. Referring

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<sup>20</sup> A. Theodorus, *The Contribution of Christian Education in Shaping Work Ethics Among Christian Students*, "Ministries and Theology" 2025, n. 2 (2), s. 83-91.

to the words of Cyprian Kamil Norwid, the Pope observed: “Beauty exists to inspire work, work exists to rise again”<sup>21</sup>.

In this context, work takes on symbolic value: through engagement, diligence, and responsibility, a person fulfills their vocatio, contributes to the common good, and simultaneously participates in their own spiritual transformation. Work thus becomes not only a social duty but also a form of service to God and others, integrating the material and spiritual dimensions of human life.

Today, this perspective has practical applications in vocational education and work ethics. Education inspired by Christian principles teaches that responsibility, honesty, and solidarity in professional activity are the foundation not only for economic development but also for lasting social cohesion. Understood in this way, work links economic growth with moral values, making individuals fully responsible and creative participants in social life. The Christian idea of the common good (*bonum commune*) supports the creation of an economy based on ethical values and social responsibility, which today is reflected in concepts of sustainable development and social economy<sup>22</sup>.

Integrating the Christian tradition with education and the economy allows for the creation of a society where material and spiritual development go hand in hand. In such a society, individuals learn to make decisions responsibly, and institutions – both public and private – can function justly, predictably, and stably. Religion thus becomes a tangible factor in development, supporting both community-building and a lasting, ethical economy.

## CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the role of religion in the 21st century shows that faith and the Christian tradition, understood not merely dogmatically but as a system of values and moral inspiration, can provide a foundation for sustainable social, spiritual, and economic development. The example of St. Peter as a leader serving the community remains a relevant model for contemporary leaders. It demonstrates that true leadership is based on service, humility, and responsibility toward others, rather than on power or personal strength. Peter’s example teaches that a leader who has gone through a journey of personal weakness can strengthen the community, support others, and build trust – values essential in every sphere of social life.

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, *Celebrazione della parola con il mondo della cultura e dell’arte*, omelia di Giovanni Paolo II, Chiesa della Santa Croce (Varsavia, 13.06.1987).

<sup>22</sup> S.O. Becker, J. Rubin, L. Woessmann, *Religion in economic history: A survey* (CESifo Working Paper No. 8365). CESifo 2020; A.M. Gómez-Bezares, F. Gómez-Bezares, *Catholic social thought and sustainability. Ethical and economic alignment*, “Journal of Risk and Financial Management” 2020, n. 14 (1), s. 11.

Equally important is the Christian understanding of work. In the Christian tradition, work is not merely a source of income but a means of fulfilling one's vocation, participating in the work of creation, and achieving spiritual growth. As John Paul II emphasized during his homily at Jasna Góra: "One must demand of oneself, even if others do not demand it from us"<sup>23</sup>. Education and work performed in the spirit of responsibility, diligence, and love for one's neighbor promote both individual and communal development, integrating the material and spiritual dimensions of life.

The integration of Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christian ethics provides tools for building a society that is responsible, just, and open to truth, in which social, moral, and economic development are closely interconnected. Religion and the Christian tradition shape individuals and create conditions for lasting social, moral, and cultural development – particularly crucial in an age of globalization, rapid social change, and technological advancement.

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#### RELIGIA I WIARA W SPOŁECZEŃSTWIE XXI WIEKU – TRADYCJA CHRZEŚCIJAŃSKA JAKO FUNDAMENT ROZWOJU SPOŁECZNEGO I GOSPODARCZEGO

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł analizuje trwałą rolę religii i wiary we współczesnym społeczeństwie XXI w., podkreślając tradycję chrześcijańską jako fundament rozwoju społecznego i gospodarczego. Wyróżnia trzy kluczowe filary cywilizacji chrześcijańskiej: filozofię grecką, prawo rzymskie i etykę chrześcijańską. Filozofia grecka, szczególnie myśl Arystotelesa i Platona, kształtuje krytyczne myślenie, refleksję moralną oraz dążenie do cnoty, dostarczając narzędzi do rozwoju osobistego i obywatelskiego. Prawo rzymskie tworzy ramy dla sprawiedliwości, ładu społecznego oraz poszanowania praw jednostki i wspólnoty, zapewniając stabilność i przewidywalność życia publicznego. Etyka chrześcijańska, oparta na naukach Jezusa Chrystusa, akcentuje miłość, odpowiedzialność i solidarność, kształtując postawy moralne i spójność społeczną. Integralnym elementem tej tradycji jest postać św. Piotra, który stanowi wzór „przywódcy służebnego” – jego przywództwo, oparte na służbie, pokorze i odpowiedzialności wobec wspólnoty, stanowi ponadczasowy przykład dla współczesnego przywództwa. Jego życie pokazuje, że prawdziwa siła lidera nie wynika z władzy czy autorytetu, lecz z dojrzałości duchowej, zaufania Bogu i gotowości do służby innym. Integracja filozofii greckiej, prawa rzymskiego i etyki chrześcijańskiej, wzbogacona przykładem św. Piotra, dostarcza kompleksowego modelu dla współczesnych społeczeństw, łącząc rozwój gospodarczy z wartościami moralnymi, promując odpowiedzialne przywództwo i dobro wspólne. Takie podejście podkreśla znaczenie dziedzictwa kultury chrześcijańskiej w stawianiu czoła współczesnym wyzwaniom społecznym, gospodarczym i etycznym.

**Słowa kluczowe:** cywilizacja chrześcijańska, tradycja chrześcijańska, filozofia grecka, prawo rzymskie, etyka chrześcijańska, św. Piotr, religia, wiara, społeczeństwo XXI w.