



Via Ethica in Justifying the Credibility of Christianity and the Church According to Marian Rusecki

JACENTY MASTEJ 

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, jacenty.mastej@kul.pl

Abstract: The article presents *via ethica* in justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church according to Marian Rusecki (1942–2012). The professor from Lublin, although he was the creator of both the so-called models and an impressive set of credibility arguments, he did not comprehensively develop *via ethica*. The purpose of the article is to present the basic assumptions of that type of argumentation found in his work. A thorough analysis of his scientific achievements allowed for a critical synthesis and a comprehensive exposition of the methodological conditions of *via ethica* in Rusecki's approach. In demonstrating the credibility of Christianity and the Church, within *via ethica*, the fundamental issue is to define the relationship between religion and ethics. There are many different relations between them and they need each other, therefore, it is a mistake to separate them or to reduce religion only to ethical principles. The foundation of *via ethica* is the individual existence and dignity of man; these constitute the priority values of religion and ethics. The promotion of the revealed dignity of the human person and the apologia for the human rights that stem from it constitute the credibility of the Christian ethos. The absolutely unique feature of Christianity is the ethos of following Jesus Christ. According to Rusecki, the essence of *via ethica* is based on the outright uniqueness of Christian ethics. Ethical indications constitute the originality of Christianity in relation to other religions.

Keywords: *via ethica*, Jesus Christ, credibility of Christianity, ethics, religion, human dignity

The aim of fundamental theology is to study and demonstrate the credibility of Christianity and the Church. Therefore, within the framework of fundamental ecclesiology, which is integrally related to fundamental Christology, paths (*viae*) have been developed to demonstrate the credibility of the Ecclesia: *via notarum*, *via paradoxae*, *via historica*, *via communionis*, *via testimonii*, *via empirica*, *via significationis*, *via essentiae*, *via finalitatis*, *via prophetarum*, *via dialogica*, *via ethica* (Seweryniak 1997, 27–48; 2010, 14–23; Artemiuk 2019, 56; Kaucha 2005, 92). The essence is to demonstrate the absolute uniqueness and credibility of Christianity and the Church. Since the Ecclesia is a personal reality and thus living and dynamic, demonstrating its originality and credibility requires a holistic, ever new and in-depth reflection.

In Poland, after the Second Vatican Council, research on justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church was conducted by Rev. Prof. Marian Rusecki (1942–2012) (Rychlicki 2013, 241–42; Kaucha 2013, 5–12; Kaucha and Mastej 2019, 952–68). The most important assumptions of the credibility assessment project are

included by the theologian from Lublin in, e.g., the paper *Modele uzasadnień wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa* [Models for Justifying the Credibility of Christianity], which he delivered during the Second International Congress of Fundamental Theology in Lublin (September 18–21, 2001) (Rusecki 2001d, 355–402).¹ Moreover, the issue of the credibility of the Church is covered in many of his publications (Rusecki 2014, 42–44, 281–96; 1994a, 143–56; 1993b, 377–90; Kaucha 2007, 133–45; 2018, 91–99). The purpose of this article is to show the basic assumptions of *via ethica* according to the professor from Lublin. Although he did not comprehensively develop *via ethica* as a way of justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church, one can find premises in his work that allow identifying the essential assumptions and elements of that type of argumentation.

1. Religion vs. Ethics

In demonstrating the credibility of Christianity and the Church, within *via ethica*, the fundamental issue is to define the relationship between religion and ethics. The theologian from Lublin addresses the above issue when discussing the genesis of religion (Rusecki 2007b, 174–79; 1997c, 135–39).

Thus, he emphasizes the significance of ethics in the process of demonstrating the uniqueness of religion. The professor's presentation of the relationship between religion and ethics begins by describing two extreme views, i.e., the identification of religion with ethics and the radical separation of the two.² In his opinion, the identification of religion with ethics and morality is evident in everyday life, an example of which is the belief of many that "religion comes down to morally good behavior: religion is nothing more than a field of study dealing with human moral norms and behavior. Sometimes it is even said that it does not matter what a person believes in and what convictions one has, as long as one acts honestly." (Rusecki 2007b, 174–75) The theologian from Lublin associates the first attempt at the so-called scientific reduction of religion to ethics with Immanuel Kant, who, although denied the possibility and value of a rational justification of the existence of God and religion, recognized its need in social life for practical reasons—he considered ethics to be the only basis of religion (Rusecki 1997c, 135; Kowalczyk 1986, 322). According to the German philosopher, "ethics is the field of science dealing with the moral law inherent in man and relating free human acts to it. Every man is aware of a sense of moral duty and respect for moral norms. In essence, this is what religion also comes

¹ German-language version of the paper: Rusecki 2001a, 355–402.

² "Whereas formerly it was more common to equate those two fields, reducing religion to ethics or morality, today, some circles want to radically oppose the two realities." (Rusecki 2007b, 175)

down to.” (Rusecki 2007b, 175) Ultimately, Kant not only seeks the basis of religion in ethics but also reduces the role and significance of religion to tasks typical of ethics (Kowalczyk 1986, 322). Rusecki, referring to the attempts to replace religion with ethics, considers such a postulate to be groundless and unjustified.

The radical separation of ethics from religion is found in views that reject the need for religion, i.e., primarily in atheistic, materialistic or secular directions (Rusecki 2007b, 175). The extreme separation of ethics from religion, however, raises the problem of determining the source of the moral norms a person should follow and, consequently, the way of justifying sanctions resulting from non-compliance. Although the simplest solution to that seems to be a reference to natural law, according to Rusecki, the issue of the origin of natural law and the legitimacy of the universal validity of the ethical principles derived from it needs to be dealt with (Rusecki 2007b, 175; Wojtyła 1959, 99–124; Krąpiec 1983, 220–236; 1968, 11–37; Rosik 1964, 39–57). For if one assumes that binding norms have their source in the interpersonal arrangement, there is a justified concern as to their permanence, since “the changing human will under the influence of certain ideologies, especially totalitarian ones, would decide about the right to life, significance, fate, vocation, destiny of man, family, nations.” (Rusecki 2007b, 176) In the opinion of the theologian from Lublin, a tradition to exclude religious ethics from the applicable moral norms would also be accompanied by the temptation to disregard and break the binding rules, e.g., to “become a ‘precursor’ of future good in the future, ‘better’ times.” (Rusecki 2007b, 176) Secular ethics has other drawbacks, including “the lack of sufficiently strong motives for moral conduct and moral sanctions.” (Rusecki 1997c, 137) The above-presented reasons, although not sufficient to completely negate the possibility of the existence of secular ethics, nevertheless reveal doubts as to its origin and the validity of the justification for its application in individual and social life.

After critically presenting the two extreme views on the relationship between religion and ethics, Rusecki moves on to discuss their distinctiveness and the mutual need that exists between them. In his opinion, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that

the whole person is involved in religious cognition and experience, while in the case of ethics, the dominant role is played by will. [...] In ethics and morality, man strives for good, which one realizes through actions. In a sense, it can be said that the ultimate pursued goal is the absolute good, the ideal, which man wants to achieve and realize to some extent. In religion, which is based on a living connection between man and God, the goal is never a creation of man but is given. It existed before and independently of man. (Rusecki 2007b, 178; cf. Krąpiec 1991, 242–44; Zdybicka 1993, 375–76)

The above statement emphasizes the professor’s position on the issue of the genesis of religion, i.e., that there is always divine revelation at its origin (Borto 2018, 50–51;

Ledwoń 2018, 122–23). The adopted theological-religious perspective cannot constitute a basis for stating that the absolute good pursued by a non-religious person is only their creation. The theologian from Lublin only claims that a believer finds in religion a reference to God, who embodies the absolute good.

The professor believes that the relationship between religion and ethics is vital and consists in the fact that ethics is a necessary element of religion:

ethics always falls within the scope of religion. There is no religion without ethics, without principles of moral conduct. Alongside the set of truths of faith, worship and organization, ethics is one of the essential structural elements of religion, which is fully understandable since every religion through, e.g., moral and right conduct is the way to achieve salvation. (Rusecki 2007b, 178)

The concept of the revelatory genesis of religion promoted by Rusecki also emphasizes the objective character of ethical principles conveyed by non-Christian religions, as they refer to revelation.

According to the theologian from Lublin, just as religion needs ethics, ethics needs religion. Justifying that thesis, he states that

religion, if it is revealed, provides man with fully true rules of conduct (independent of the changeable human will, conditioned by many factors), which are inalterable [...]. Moreover, religion provides the deepest motives for morally good conduct, which boil down to the salvific will of God wishing to save man [...]. Religious moral principles teach consistency between inner beliefs and external conduct, hence it is possible to avoid internal division in man. Religion also points to the sanctions of immoral behavior. (Rusecki 2007b, 178–79)

Bearing in mind the essential connection between ethics and religion, the professor also notes and emphasizes their social and culture-forming role. Both religion and ethics contribute to the preservation of a certain social order (Rusecki 2006b, 219–21). Thus, religion and ethics are an indispensable part of human life, as they set norms and rules of conduct, both on an individual and social level.³ Religion and

³ At this point, it is worth mentioning the professor's appeal to scientists to maintain the ethical character of research and scientific discoveries. Those conducting scientific work should be guided by principles characterized by respect for the dignity and rights of the human person, as only then can they serve the common good: "[...] science often serves evil aspirations, contributing to, for example, the degradation of the environment, violation of human life, human dignity, human rights (abortion, *in vitro*, experiments on human embryos), contributing to the development of increasingly modern weapons. What is the reason for that? In short, research and scientific discoveries must take ethical principles into account. Their application without an ethical dimension breeds chaos, disintegration in social life, strikes at the dignity of the human person and becomes a threat to man and even to humanity as a whole. The issue of ethics in science must be considered a particularly important area. John Paul II repeatedly taught about the primacy of ethics over technology and, above all, the priority of a person over a thing. Scientific

ethics are an inspiration for broadly understood culture, contributing to the creative involvement of man in the culture formed by a human being. On the other hand, however, religion and ethics, with the good of man and the human community in mind, set boundaries for the creators of culture.

There is a relationship of mutual synergy between the basic principles of secular ethics and Christian morality. The Church, while respecting the autonomy of secular (natural) ethics, acknowledges the primacy of revealed ethics. At the same time, it claims that the fundamental ethical principles derived from natural law and the Old Testament law expressed in God's commandments were completed by Jesus Christ. Thus, Christian morality fulfills, enriches and organizes the principles of natural ethics in what concerns human conduct, the meaning and purpose of human life and the ultimate fulfillment of the human person. Rusecki emphasizes that Christian ethics, which promotes specific conduct and values, has for centuries inspired man to develop creatively, both on an individual as well as social level. Christianity motivates the believers to live by faith and mobilizes "to achieve the highest values and truth, goodness, beauty, love, holiness and ultimate fulfillment thanks to them and in them." (Rusecki 1997a, 517; cf. Rusecki 1989, 161–76; cf. also Zdybicka 1989, 137–48; Słomka 1989, 159–78)

2. Personal Existence and Dignity of the Human Person as the Foundation of *Via Ethica*

According to the theologian from Lublin, the foundation of *via ethica* is the individual existence and dignity of man (Mastej 2023b, 94–98). These have their basis in God's creation of man in God's image and likeness, as mentioned in the Bible (cf. Gen 1:26–27; 2:7) (Rusecki 2007a, 161; 1992, 451). As a result of God's creative act, man came into existence as a person.⁴ Man's personal existence is made evident, on the one hand, in the resemblance of a human being to the Creator and, on the other hand, in their distinctiveness from all other creation. Man has a unique personal structure, which is expressed above all by the possession of reason, free will, the capacity to love, the search for truth, the ability to ethically behave, the ability to create culture, and the desire for eternal life (Rusecki 2007b, 164, 237). Personal existence is expressed by means of rational, conscious and free action in the area of ethics and moral responsibility. Rusecki points out that "it is the very sphere of spiritual

research must be linked to ethics; only on that condition will it not be a threat to man but will serve the common good, the person and humanity." (Rusecki 2008, 95)

⁴ The primacy of the human person constitutes the uniqueness of Christianity, as Rusecki recognizes: "It must be said that the concept of man is absolutely characteristic of Christianity and is even its property." (2010, 364; cf. Rusecki 2006b, 227–28; 2007a, 162; 2006a, 139–44; 1995, 25)

life, causing the subjective existence of man, that makes man similar to God [...].” (2007a, 163; cf. Rusecki 2012, 204; 2014, 84) The dignity of the human person is the foundation of ethics, which safeguards human rights and defines the duties of man. The professor explains that

in Christian philosophy, scholastic and neo-scholastic theology, the image and likeness of God were considered to be the two highest powers of man, which distinguish a human being from the world of other creatures, i.e., rationality and free will. These powers are functions of the soul created by God—by His breath. (Rusecki 2014, 83; cf. Borto 2022, 775–88)

At this point, it should be noted that rationality and free will attest to the personal existence of man and God’s giving man the ability to act morally and, consequently, to take responsibility for own actions.

For *via ethica*, the fact that man in the act of creation was endowed by God with a conscience that enables man to meet God is also crucial (Rusecki 2010, 343–44). Through a conscience, God conducts a dialogue with man, the purpose of which is the spiritual development of the individual, the maintenance of personal dignity and helping to respect others. Rusecki reminds that

conscience, being a special moral sense of man, regulating their conduct and the ultimate norm for judging human actions, is a special sphere of God’s action in man. Conscience is often considered either a divine law inscribed in the human heart or the voice of God in man (cf. Sir 17:6–7; Lam 3:40–42; 2 Cor 1:12; Rom 2:14n). (Rusecki 2007a, 166; cf. Rusecki 2011, 45)

Created by God, man was also invited into the relationship—to participate in the dialogue of love and in God’s life. The obstacle to the realization of that communion became man’s sin. God’s response to man’s disobedience was redemption. The theologian from Lublin recalls the Christian truth: “man is therefore not only created but redeemed and invited into eternal dialogue with God. That dialogue elevates man above all beings, for a human being has become a partner of God, the Infinite Person.” (Rusecki 2007a, 165) The work of redemption, i.e., the reconciliation of man with God and the renewal of the human existence tainted by sin, was accomplished by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. In His person, there is not only a perfect union of the divine nature with human nature but also the reconciliation of humanity with God (Rusecki 2007a, 167).

Since personal existence and human dignity constitute priority religious and ethical values, Christianity guards them, guarantees respect and their defense: “[. . .] Christianity proclaims the primacy of the right to life and its value from the moment of conception to natural death. It defends that principle uncompromisingly, with no exception. It does not give permission to the experiments on human

embryos, a kind of eugenics of the purity of the ‘scientific race.’” (Rusecki 2011, 49; cf. Rusecki 2006b, 228–29) The fundamental right related to the dignity of a human person is that to life from the moment of conception to natural death (Rusecki 2011, 49). The promotion of the revealed dignity of the human person and the apologia for the human rights that stem from it constitute the credibility of the Christian ethos.

3. The Christian Ethos of Following Jesus Christ

A truly unique feature of Christianity is the ethos of following Jesus Christ (Seweryniak 2010, 22). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains it as follows:

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is “the perfect man,” who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privations and persecutions that may come our way. Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. (CCC 520–521)

With the above statement from the Catechism in mind, first, a reference is made to the earthly life of Jesus from the perspective of a personal role model, and then, the flagship elements of the Christian ethos are indicated.

The life of Jesus of Nazareth is a testimony to an unprecedented relationship with the Father, revealed to His disciples as His personal experience of God. In His earthly life, the Son constantly experiences closeness to the Father, knows Him and is one with Him (Rusecki 2000, 63; Szymik 2021, 80). The Evangelists testify that Jesus often spends time in prayer, which is a personal relationship between the Son and the Father. He knows that he has received a mission from the Father, the purpose of which is to reveal God’s love and to accomplish the work of man’s redemption (Rusecki and Popławski 2002, 785). The Son completes that mission through perfect obedience to the Father, which is the antidote to human, sinful disobedience.

In the life of Jesus, His pro-existential attitude is clear as He identifies with the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, the sick, the suffering and the abandoned (Rusecki 2007a, 433; Mastej 2023a, 356–57). He brings comfort, forgiveness, love and peace to people, which is especially noticeable in His attitude towards those on the peripheries of socio-religious life as well as women and children (Rusecki 1994b, 240; 1987, 123; Mastej 2001, 187; Seweryniak 2001, 236–41). Kindness towards those who need help is more important for Him than the Old Testament sacrifices made to God (cf. Matt 9:13; 12:7). The attitude of Jesus towards people expecting help from Him is revealed by the miracles He performs (Rusecki 2014, 34; 2002, 153; 1990, 75).

These reveal His concern for man; both in the temporal and supernatural dimensions (Rusecki 2007a, 273–74; 1990, 79–81; 1997b, 151–202; 1996, 408–26; 2001c; Mastej 2018, 60–63; 2023a, 357–59). Jesus reveals His love most fully through His passion and death on the cross and resurrection. In the Paschal Mystery, His pro-existential attitude is love to the end. Relating the pro-existential attitude of Jesus to the Christian life, Rusecki states:

a characteristic feature of Christian morality is also its pro-existential character. It directs the Christian towards others, forms in them the attitude of love towards their neighbors [...]. It is expressed in the lifelong commitment of the follower of Jesus Christ to other people. In that respect, morality in Christianity is closely linked to supernatural *agape*, constituting a further argument for the credibility of Christianity. Here, too, it is closely linked to love, which is the perfect fulfillment of the law. (Rusecki 2007b, 480; cf. Rusecki 1993a, 229–47; cf. also Kaucha 2002, 31–35; Sokołowski 2007, 41–59)

The model for living left by Jesus reveals the truth about man and man's call to a relationship with God and people (Rusecki 2006c, 241). Jesus is the fullness of anthropological revelation, because the deepest essence of man is shown in Him. Jesus Christ is both God and perfect Man and, therefore, “manifests the greatness of man in the eyes of God.” (Rusecki 2007a, 278) From Revelation comes the teaching that man's life cannot be limited only to the natural and immanent dimension, since man's personal existence definitely transcends it. Therefore, a transcendent eschatological dimension must complement the perspective of man's existence and meaning (Rusecki 2007a, 278). Jesus is “the ideal Man, the model and standard of human existence and the way to the fullness of humanity, which is attainable only in God, i.e., ultimately in eschatological reality.” (Rusecki 2007a, 167) Taking a biblical-theological perspective, the professor unequivocally states: “without Christ, man could not exist at all, and after the fall of the first people, he could not achieve salvation, become a child of God, fulfill his deepest desires, and achieve self-realization.” (Rusecki 1997c, 218) Continuing Rusecki's thought, one must add that

the unique feature of Christian morality is conversion (Greek *metanoia*). It is a complete change of life—of thinking and acting—prompted by acceptance of the word of God. Every Christian is called to a constant conversion of his or her heart. This shows that conversion is never a one-time act, but a long-term process, linked to an existential effort. (Rusecki 2007b, 479)

A specific feature of Christian morality is that it presents the rules of conduct from a positive perspective, unlike many other religions, which present moral norms from the negative perspective. Jesus' message revealed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29; Luke 6:17–49) is a signpost on the path of personal development of

man, which Rusecki emphasizes in his writing: “in this sense Christian morality has an eminently progressive and dynamic character at the same time, which does not have some end point, but is subject to constant improvement in love for the brethren in imitation of Jesus Christ.” (2007b, 479) The New Testament’s moral message covers all areas of human life (Rusecki 2011, 47).

Christianity offers man “a new horizon of existence and the possibility of becoming, developing, growing to resemble the supreme personal Being, participating in His life. [...] The inner bond with God encompasses and mysteriously permeates the entire human being, the entire existence of the human being, the entire human ‘I.’” (Rusecki 2001b, 124) In Rusecki’s view, in Christianity “man through faith and baptism is given a new existence, even a new ontology.” (2011, 128) Through this, the believer is given the opportunity for personal and moral perfection, in the image of Christ. The anthropogenic significance of Christianity lies in showing man a sure path leading to moral and personal perfection. Rusecki points out that the sacraments, the word of God, liturgy, prayer, and the daily life of faith have an important role in such an understanding of human personalization (Rusecki and Mastej 2009, 117; Rusecki 2014, 169). The all-round development of man “on the path of following Jesus becomes the true *via ethica* of ecclesial credibility.” (Seweryniak 2010, 22)

Rusecki (2001d, 371) points to modern man’s anthropological demand for the fullness of being and the need for the final personal fulfillment. At the same time, believers realize they cannot fulfill this deepest longing on their own, so they need supernatural help. The essence of the path Jesus reveals to man is filial obedience to the Father and boundless love for people. Rusecki identifies the Christian desire for moral perfection with the pursuit of holiness and emphasizes that “holiness is not a state that is acquired only after death, it originates from baptism and develops during earthly history.” (2010, 247) At the same time, the professor stresses that the Ecclesia equips believers with supernatural means to help them achieve moral perfection. However, he notes that “supernatural life, that is, divine values, can be embodied in the lives of believers in various ways, from an outstanding degree—as is the case in the lives of heroic Christians, or saints—to an average or even minimal degree [...]” (Rusecki 1997a, 519) The primary issue is man’s openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, willingness to cooperate with God’s grace, and consistent observance of the Gospel.

The essence of the *via ethica* is founded on the absolute uniqueness of Christian ethics. Rusecki stresses that “the commandment of love is central to Jesus’ teaching. He makes it the absolute principle of the Christian life. We should love God above all things, each other, and even our enemies. We are to love God in our neighbors.” (2000, 63) The professor states:

What distinguishes Christian morality from other religions, however, is the Person of Jesus Christ. The Incarnate Son of God, the ultimate Lawgiver, proclaimed the new law

and fulfilled it perfectly. The Master of Nazareth made the moral value of an act solely dependent on one's inner disposition, thereby laying the foundations for a new morality and even, according to R. Schnackenburg, the foundations for morality in general. Jesus also draws attention to the necessity of replacing the spirit of the Law with the spirit of love. The commandment to love (even one's enemies), uniquely realized in His atoning death on the cross, has special significance against this background. At the same time, He instructed His disciples to abide by it. Notably, this commandment of love has no precedent in the history of religion and is not an element of morality in any religious doctrine. In this sense, the commandment speaks to the credibility of the claims of Jesus Christ. (Rusecki 2007b, 479)

Jesus reveals a new ethic that is not about the literal fulfillment of the law, but the love of God and neighbor, including enemies. Christianity is not just a matter of conviction, accomplished only on an intellectual level, but also a decision of the will, that is, an entirely personal commitment to Christ, accepting His person and trusting Him, following Him and living in union with Him. Therefore, as a revealed and salvific religion, Christianity is a value for man that unites and accomplishes the highest good, namely God and eternal life with Him. To achieve this good, it is necessary to live according to Jesus' instructions in the Gospels. The moral principles presented by Christianity are not the product of the human mind, but were revealed by the Incarnate Son of God (Rusecki 2011, 44–45). The divine origin provides guarantees of their truthfulness and salvific effectiveness. The ethical credibility of Christianity is confirmed by the saints and the blessed because in their lives, evangelical principles found fulfillment and proved effective.

Finally, it is worth adding that Rusecki (2010, 257–59), in discussing the following Jesus throughout the history of Christianity, also emphasizes the charitable ministry of the Church. Thus, he highlights the practical and humanistic character of the *via ethica*. The active love of Christ's followers is a clear sign for the world of Christianity and the Church's credibility. According to the professor, the way of demonstrating the credibility of the Church by referring to Christian ethics should also highlight its contribution to culture, especially education, literature, architecture, art, and Christian music (Rusecki 2001b, 131–97; 2011, 64–126). Indeed, the referenced cultural fields have multiple relationships with Christian ethics.

Conclusions and Topicality of *Via Ethica*

Summing up the subject matter covered, it must be said that while Rusecki dealt with the issue of the credibility of Christianity and the Church and is the creator of both the so-called models and an impressive collection of credibility arguments, he

did not clearly define the methodological conditions of *via ethica*, nor did he build a separate ethical argument. Significantly, however, we find elements of *via ethica* in much of his scientific legacy. Making them clear was the purpose of this paper.

This research highlights the most relevant methodological considerations of *via ethica* of Rev. Prof. Rusecki:

- 1) Ethics and religion remain in manifold relations with each other and need each other; therefore, it is a mistake to separate them or to reduce religion only to ethical principles.
- 2) Christianity is a revealed and salvific religion; therefore, its essence cannot be reduced to a set of ethical principles alone.
- 3) The foundation of *via ethica* is the individual existence and dignity of man; these constitute the priority values of religion and ethics.
- 4) The promotion of the revealed dignity of the human person and the apologia for the human rights that stem from it constitute the credibility of the Christian ethos.
- 5) Moral principles are an essential and necessary element of Christianity, but they do not exhaust and replace it.
- 6) The whole beauty and essence and meaning of Christian ethics can only be understood in the perspective of reason and faith, which allow us to recognize and discover the supernatural source of Christian morality, which is Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son of God.
- 7) In Jesus Christ, ethical principles find their justification and the certainty of eternal reward for obeying them or punishment for disregarding them.
- 8) Christian moral principles regarding respect for human life from conception to natural death have been revealed to man by God and therefore cannot be freely changed, even by democratic vote or referendum.
- 9) Christian morality is the complement and fulfillment of the law resulting from God's creative act, so the Church does not depreciate the value of ethics based on natural law, because the Church believes that it can assist man's development.
- 10) Christian moral principles correspond to man's nature and to man's eternal search for value and for a way to achieve personal perfection.
- 11) The human person needs God's help for personal fulfillment in the deepest dimensions of existence.
- 12) A unique feature of Christianity is the ethos of following Jesus Christ; morality is not merely a set of norms but a way of living by faith, which leads man to full union with the Triune God.
- 13) Christian ethics constitutes the originality and absolute uniqueness of Christianity compared to other religions.
- 14) *Via ethica* collaborates with other ways of justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church (e.g., from sanctity; martyrological, agapetological, bonative, veritative, culturalist, axiological, praxeological comparativist, personalist).

Rusecki's *via ethica* is personalistic in nature. The professor strongly dissociates himself from a noetic view of the principles of Christian morality. Instead, he links them with the person of Jesus Christ, from whom they originate, and with the person of man, who has been invited to accept and realize them in life. The personal character of the ecclesial community, which is both the Tradent of the revealed moral norms and their definitive interpreter, is also important.

Rusecki's *via ethica* can provide an important point of reference for contemporary debates on ethical and religious and social issues, especially when questions arise about the universal foundations of morality, the dignity of the human person, the place of religion in social life, the need to shape attitudes and educate for values (Wszolek 2021, 103–22; Pabich 2020, 383–400; Zubrzycka-Maciąg 2018, 149–62). The professor's emphasis that the dignity of the human person comes from God can be used as an important starting point in contemporary bioethical discourses and discussions on human rights, new technologies such as artificial intelligence, or the limits of biotechnology research such as human cloning and genetic experimentation (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2024; Chyrowicz 2009, 1–25; Sinkiewicz and Chudzińska 2018, 7–24).

Remembering the unchanging yet universal Christian moral principles present in Rusecki's work, as well as showing the elements and manner of justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church in the *via ethica*, is important in the context of the contemporary confrontation with the idea of the "dictatorship" of relativism, which Pope Benedict XVI has alerted believers to (Warzeszak 2011, 291–322). Therefore, Rusecki's *via ethica* is a significant alternative to relativism, as it proposes an ethic based on objective and unchanging norms rooted in God's revealed truth and guaranteed respect for the dignity of the human person. However, it should be recognized that such a conditioned Christian foundation of morality may be difficult to accept by those who do not acknowledge the supernatural origin of ethical principles, moreover, they are guided by the belief that the defense of universal and fixed moral principles is an expression of intolerance and limits their freedom.

Bearing in mind contemporary worldview debates, the *via ethica* should seek new platforms for dialogue with people with different worldviews, while preserving the fundamental ethical principles proclaimed by the Church. This task is difficult, since relativism, which assumes that truth and moral values are changeable and depend on subjective feelings and sociocultural situations rather than objective norms, is sometimes considered the most important principle of individual and social life. By demonstrating the disastrous consequences of relativism for man (e.g., rejection of objective moral principles causes confusion in interpersonal relations and instrumental treatment of the human person), Rusecki appeals for an unambiguous witness of Christian life, highlighting values such as truth, goodness, love, solidarity, sacrifice, justice, freedom. In his view, it is these values that modern man longs for.

His *via ethica* also reveals new possibilities for ethical reflection in the perspective of interreligious dialogue. His proposed concept of religion's revelatory genesis invites a comprehensive ethical argument referring to the transcendent origin and universal validity of ethical principles. Since religion originates in divine revelation and the principles of moral life belong to its essence, they thus have a supernatural genesis. The difficulty is that Rusecki himself does not conclusively assert the revealed origin of specific religions (with the exception of Judaism and Christianity), and thus does not affirm the supernatural origin of the moral principles present in them. However, this does not undermine the value of the professor's achievements but opens up the possibility for further research, development, and reinterpretation of the *via ethica* in justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church in the spirit of new challenges.

Bibliography

- Artemiuk, Przemysław. 2019. "Ubóstwo znakiem wiarygodności Kościoła." *Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne* 28 (2): 41–57.
- Borto, Paweł. 2018. "The Lublin School of Fundamental Theology's Understanding of Divine Revelation." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65 (9) (English Version): 43–56. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt.2018.65.9-4en>.
- Borto, Paweł. 2022. "Joseph Ratzinger's Apologia for the Concept of the Soul." *Verbum Vitae* 40 (3): 775–90. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.13885>.
- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 1993. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. (= CCC).
- Chyrowicz, Barbara. 2009. "Argumentacja we współczesnych debatach bioetycznych." *Diametros* 19:1–25.
- Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith and Dicastery for Culture and Education. 2024. *Antiqua et Nova: Note on the Relationship Between Artificial Intelligence and Human Intelligence*. Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Kaucha, Krzysztof. 2002. "Agapetologiczny argument." In *Leksykon teologii fundamentalnej*, edited by Marian Rusecki et al., 31–35. Lublin–Kraków: Wydawnictwo M.
- Kaucha, Krzysztof. 2005. "Współczesne metody uzasadniania wiarygodności Kościoła." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 52 (9): 77–96.
- Kaucha, Krzysztof. 2007. "Wiarygodność Kościoła i jej uzasadnienie w twórczości naukowej M. Ruseckiego." In *Scio cui credidi: Księga pamiątkowa ku czci Księdza Profesora Mariana Ruseckiego w 65. rocznicę urodzin*, edited by Ireneusz Sławomir Ledwoń et al., 133–45. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.
- Kaucha, Krzysztof. 2013. "Doctor creditatis: Śp. ks. prof. dr hab. dr hc Marian Jan Rusecki (22 III 1942 – 15 XII 2012)." *Roczniki Teologii Fundamentalnej i Religioologii* 5 (5): 5–12.
- Kaucha, Krzysztof. 2018. "The Achievements of the Lublin School of Fundamental Theology in the Field of Ecclesiology." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65 (9) (English Version): 83–98. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt.2018.65.9-6en>.

- Kaucha, Krzysztof, and Mastej Jacenty. 2019. "Rusecki Marian Jan." In *Słownik polskich teologów katolickich (2004–2013)*, edited by Tomasz Błaszczuk, Waldemar Gliński, and Józef Mandziuk, 10:952–68. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UKSW.
- Kowalczyk, Stanisław. 1986. *Podstawy światopoglądu chrześcijańskiego*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej.
- Krąpiec, Mieczysław Albert. 1968. "O tomistyczną koncepcję prawa naturalnego." In *W nurcie zagadnień posoborowych*, edited by Bohdan Bejze, 2:11–37. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sióstr Loretanek-Benedyktynek.
- Krąpiec, Mieczysław Albert. 1983. *I–Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*. Translated by Marie Lescoe et al. New Britain, CT: Mariel Publications.
- Krąpiec, Mieczysław Albert. 1991. *U podstaw rozumienia kultury*. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.
- Ledwoń, Ireneusz S. 2018. "Theological and Religious Research Studies at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65 (9) (English Version): 117–32. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt.2018.65.9–8en>.
- Mastej, Jacenty. 2001. *Od objawienia do wiary: Personalistyczna koncepcja aktu wiary chrześcijańskiej*. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.
- Mastej, Jacenty. 2018. "The Achievements of the Lublin School of Fundamental Theology in the Field of Christology." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65 (9) (English Version): 57–81. <https://doi.org/10.18290/rt.2018.65.9–5en>.
- Mastej, Jacenty. 2023a. "The Credibility of the Church Based on Benevolence in the Light of the Works of Marian Rusecki." *Verbum Vitae* 41 (2): 353–71. <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.15935>.
- Mastej, Jacenty. 2023b. "Elementy antropologii teologicznej w twórczości naukowej ks. prof. Mariana Ruseckiego." *Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN* 18:93–111. <https://doi.org/10.24425/snt.2023.146523>.
- Pabich, Marek. 2020. "Rola religii w życiu współczesnych społeczeństw w ujęciu przedstawicieli Ośrodka Myśli Politycznej." *Studia Oecumenica* 20:383–400. <https://doi.org/10.25167/so.2065>.
- Rosik, Seweryn. 1964. "Formowanie sumienia praktycznego w etyce sytuacyjnej." *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 11 (3): 39–57.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1987. "Argumentacja prakseologiczna w teologii fundamentalnej." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 34 (2): 111–39.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1989. "Problem wyboru światopoglądu." *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 36 (6): 161–76.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1990. "Bonatywny wymiar cudu." In *Z zagadnień dobra i zła według Biblii: O. prof. Hugolinowi Langkammerowi*, edited by Jan Flis, 65–88. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1992. "Bóg objawiający się w dziełach." *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 84 (3): 448–59.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1993a. "Miłość jako motyw wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa." In *Miłość w postawie ludzkiej*, edited by Walerian Słomka, 229–47. Homo Meditans 8. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1993b. "Wiarygodność Kościoła w Polsce jako rzeczywistości personalistycznej i dynamicznej." *Studia Warmińskie* 30:377–90.

- Rusecki, Marian. 1994a. "Czy Kościół w Polsce jest wiarygodny?" In *Wiarygodność Kościoła wobec przemian w Polsce: Quo vadis Ecclesia Polonorum?*, edited by Marian Rusecki, 143–56. Pelplin–Lublin: Bernardinum.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1994b. *Z teorii teologii fundamentalnej*. Vol. 1 of *Wiarygodność chrześcijaństwa*. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1995. "Bóg objawiający się w dziejach." In *Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego: Wprowadzenie*, edited by Marian Rusecki and Edward Pudełko, 21–28. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1996. *Cud w chrześcijaństwie*. Prace Wydziału Teologicznego 115. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1997a. "Co to są wartości chrześcijańskie?" In *Problemy współczesnego Kościoła*, edited by Marian Rusecki, 511–20. Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1997b. *Funkcje cudu*. Sandomierz–Lublin: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne i Drukarnia w Sandomierzu.
- Rusecki, Marian. 1997c. *Istota i geneza religii*. Lublin–Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne i Drukarnia w Sandomierzu.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2000. "Uniwersalizm zbawienia w Jezusie Chrystusie w nauce Vaticanum II." In *Uniwersalizm chrześcijaństwa a pluralizm religii: Materiały z sympozjum Tarnów–Kraków, 14–15 kwietnia 1999 r.*, edited by Stanisław Budzik and Zdzisław Kijas, 52–71. Tarnów: Biblos.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2001a. "Begründungsmodelle der Glaubwürdigkeit des Christentums." In *Chrześcijaństwo jutra: Materiały II Międzynarodowego Kongresu Teologii Fundamentalnej, Lublin 18–21 września 2001*, edited by Marian Rusecki et al., 355–402. Źródła i Monografie 213. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2001b. *Fenomen chrześcijaństwa: Wkład w kulturę*. Lublin: Gaudium.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2001c. *Gottes Wirken in der Welt: Dimensionen und Funktionen des biblischen Wunderbegriffs*. Frankfurt am Main: Lang.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2001d. "Modele uzasadnień wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa." In *Chrześcijaństwo jutra: Materiały II Międzynarodowego Kongresu Teologii Fundamentalnej, Lublin 18–21 września 2001*, edited by Marian Rusecki et al., 355–402. Źródła i Monografie 213. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2002. "Bonatywny argument." In *Leksykon teologii fundamentalnej*, edited by Marian Rusecki et al., 152–55. Lublin–Kraków: Wydawnictwo M.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2006a. "Chryściana ikoniczność Kościoła w świetle nauczania Jana Pawła II." In *Jana Pawła II inspiracje chrystologiczne*, edited by Krzysztof Kaucha and Jacek Mastek, 133–51. Biblioteka Teologii Fundamentalnej 1. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2006b. "Chrześcijańskie wartości podstawą jedności Europy." In *Chrześcijaństwo a jedność Europy*, edited by Eugeniusz Cyran, Andrzej Czaja, and Piotr Gutowski, 213–40. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2006c. *Pan zmartwychwstał i żyje: Zarys teologii rezurekcyjnej*. Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Pax.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2007a. *Traktat o Objawieniu*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Księży Sercanów.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2007b. *Traktat o religii*. Warszawa: Verbinum.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2008. "Arcydzieło kultury: Uniwersytet w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II." *Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN* 3:95–100. <https://doi.org/10.24425/snt.2008.133791>.

- Rusecki, Marian. 2010. *Traktat o wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa: Dlaczego wierzyć Chrystusowi?* Źródła i Monografie 355. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2011. *Dziejowe znaczenie chrześcijaństwa*. Poznań: Pallottinum.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2012. "Sens chrześcijaństwa a pluralizm religii: Zarys problematyki." In *Między sensem a bezsensem ludzkiej egzystencji: Teologiczna odpowiedź na fundamentalne pytania współczesnego człowieka*, edited by Damian Bryl et al., 189–216. Poznań: Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza; Wydział Teologiczny.
- Rusecki, Marian. 2014. *Traktat o Kościele*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL.
- Rusecki, Marian, and Jacenty Mastej. 2009. "Ekezejotwórczy wymiar modlitwy." In *Ecclesia de oratione vivit: Kościół rodzi się na modlitwie*, edited by Jan Perszon, 103–23. Scripta Theologica Thoruniensia 6. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Rusecki, Marian, and Jarosław Popławski. 2002. "Mesjańska świadomość Jezusa." In *Leksykon teologii fundamentalnej*, edited by Marian Rusecki et al., 780–788. Lublin–Kraków: Wydawnictwo M.
- Rychlicki, Czesław. 2013. "Prof. Dr. Hab. Mons. Marian Rusecki (22 marzo 1942 – 15 dicembre 2012)." *PATH* 12:241–42.
- Seweryniak, Henryk. 1997. "Sposoby uzasadniania wiarygodności Kościoła w nowszej literaturze teologicznej." In *Wiarygodność Kościoła: Materiały z sympozjum w Kamieniu Śląskim w dniach 2–3.04.1997*, edited by Tadeusz Dola, 27–48. Sympozja: Uniwersytet Opolski. Wydział Teologiczny 20. Opole: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego; Wydawnictwo Św. Krzyża.
- Seweryniak, Henryk. 2001. *Świadectwo i sens: Teologia fundamentalna*. Płock: Płocki Instytut Wydawniczy.
- Seweryniak, Henryk. 2010. *Teologia fundamentalna*. Vol. 2. Biblioteka "Więzi" 258. Warszawa: Towarzystwo "Więź."
- Sinkiewicz, Władysław, and Małgorzata Chudzińska. 2018. "Zagrożenia bioetyczne osoby ludzkiej i rodziny w XXI w." In *Wyzwania i zagrożenia bioetyczne XXI wieku*, edited by Władysław Sinkiewicz and Rafał Grabowski, 7–24. Bydgoszcz: Komisja Bioetyczna; Bydgoska Izba Lekarska.
- Słomka, Walerian. 1989. "Wartości światopoglądu chrześcijańskiego." In *Z zagadnień światopoglądu chrześcijańskiego*, edited by Marian Rusecki, 159–78. Rozprawy Wydziału Teologiczno-Kanonicznego. Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski 8. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Sokołowski, Paweł. 2007. "*Deus caritas credibilis est*: Teologicznofundamentalne rozumienie *agape*." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 54 (9): 41–59.
- Szymik, Jerzy. 2021. "Syn jako rozdarta zasłona: Misteria Jezusa w ujęciu Josepha Ratzingera / Benedykta XVI." In *Misteria życia Jezusa: Historia i teologia*, edited by Przemysław Artemiuk, 79–95. Biblioteka Teologii Fundamentalnej 16. Płock: Płocki Instytut Wydawniczy; Lublin: Stowarzyszenie Teologów Fundamentalnych w Polsce.
- Warzeszak, Józef. 2011. "'Dyktatura' relatywizmu w ujęciu Benedykta XVI." *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* 24 (1): 291–322.
- Wojtyła, Karol. 1959. "O metafizycznej i fenomenologicznej podstawie normy moralnej (w oparciu o koncepcje św. Tomasza z Akwinu oraz Maksa Schelera)." *Roczniki Teologiczno-Kanoniczne* 6 (1–2): 99–124.
- Wszolek, Andrzej. 2021. "Chrystoformizacja jako fundament moralności." *Tarnowskie Studia Teologiczne* 40 (2): 103–22.

- Zdybicka, Zofia Józefa. 1989. "Światopoglądowe wartości religii." In *Z zagadnień światopoglądu chrześcijańskiego*, edited by Marian Rusecki, 137–48. Rozprawy Wydziału Teologiczno-Kanonicznego. Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski 8. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Zdybicka, Zofia Józefa. 1993. *Człowiek i religia: Zarys filozofii religii*. Rozprawy Wydziału Filozoficznego 61. Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL.
- Zubrzycka-Maciąg, Teresa. 2018. "Z teorii i praktyki wychowania moralnego w szkole." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 65 (11): 149–62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/rt.2018.65.11-9>.

