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THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF SERVICE IN THE FIRE BRIGADE

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Abstract. The article explores the theological aspects of firefighting service, highlighting its interdisciplinary nature. While the work of a firefighter is dominated by technical and emergency response factors, it also involves numerous moral, ethical, and spiritual challenges. The theological foundations of this profession are discussed, along with practical theological aspects related to coping with trauma and stress and to community building. The article also addresses contemporary challenges, such as ethical dilemmas and the role of chaplains. The conclusions emphasize the need for further reflection and research on the theological challenges involved in the work of firefighters to better support them in this responsible mission.

Keywords: firefighter, fire department, firefighting service, theology, chaplain, spirituality, mission, morality.

Streszczenie. *Teologiczne aspekty służby w straży pożarnej.* Artykuł eksploruje teologiczne aspekty służby strażackiej, podkreślając jej interdyscyplinarny charakter. Służba strażaka, choć zdominowana przez czynniki techniczne i ratownicze, niesie ze sobą liczne wyzwania moralne, etyczne i duchowe. Omówiono teologiczne fundamenty tej profesji, praktyczne aspekty teologiczne związane z radzeniem sobie z traumą, stresem oraz budowaniem wspólnoty, a także współczesne wyzwania, takie jak dylematy etyczne i rola kapłanów. Wnioski zwracają uwagę na konieczność dalszej refleksji i badań nad teologicznymi wyzwaniami w pracy strażaków, aby lepiej wspierać ich w tej odpowiedzialnej misji.

Słowa kluczowe: strażak, straż pożarna, służba, teologia, kapelan, duchowość, misja, moralność.

*[...] To the glory of God, for the benefit of people;
To honor God – to bring help to one's neighbor.*

Author unknown¹

*When duty calls me
To go wherever there is fire,
Give me strength, O Lord, I pray,
To save a human life today [...].*

Firefighter's Prayer, Author unknown²

The above motto is deeply rooted in the tradition of the Polish fire service,³ both professional and volunteer. It expresses the fundamental values that guide firefighters: devotion to serving God and helping people in need. The first part of the motto, "To the glory of God," refers to the theological dimension of the firefighters' work. It is an expression of dedication and tribute to God for the opportunity to serve, as well as for protection and strength in performing their duties. Traditionally, many firefighters are deeply religious and see their work as a calling. The second

¹ This phrase underscores the altruistic and self-sacrificing approach of firefighters to their work, which is the foundation of their public service. Most available sources describe this motto as widely used among firefighters in Poland. Some sources suggest that the phrase may have a long history, dating back to the formation of firefighting organizations in Poland, which dates to the first half of the 19th century. However, there is a lack of specific information regarding the author of these words and the exact origins of its usage. For more on this topic, see Marian Zalewski, *Strength in Unity. For the Glory of God, for the Benefit of People. On the 100th Anniversary of Poland's Independence* (Warsaw: Main Board of the Volunteer Fire Brigades Association of the Republic of Poland, 2018); Janusz Gmitruk, "The History of the Florian Association," *Independence and Memory* 25/3(63) (2018): 123–138.

² Richard Picciotto, Daniel Paisner, *Last Man Down: A Firefighter's Story of Survival and Escape from the World Trade Center* (Warsaw: Publishing Group Bertelsmann Media, 2002).

³ The term "fire service" will be used interchangeably to refer to both the State Fire Service and the Volunteer Fire Brigades of the Republic of Poland.

part of the motto, "For the benefit of people," emphasizes the humanitarian aspect of the fire service. "Knights of St. Florian" – as firefighters are often called – are always ready to assist people in danger. This mission is carried out not only during firefighting but also in times of natural disasters, accidents, and other emergency situations.

This motto contains theological implications of ontological dualism, as it assumes the existence of two independent vectors: the spiritual (service to God) and the material (service to humankind). Such an approach defines the theme of this study and prompts reflection on the theological dimension of the mission of firefighters in Poland. The subject at hand should be considered of interest to practical theology and general anthropology, but it may also have significant relevance for many disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, and even in fire science (technical fields).

The issue of the theological aspects of firefighting service raises a whole range of contemporary challenges. These issues can be presented in three categories. The first is the understanding of firefighting service as a vocation in the theological dimension. The second category addresses the practical aspects of firefighting work from a theological perspective, while the third presents the contemporary theological challenges of this service.

The issue at hand is multifaceted and complex. Despite this, on the one hand, there is growing interest in service within the uniformed formation, which currently enjoys the highest level of public trust, while on the other hand, there is still a limited number of studies addressing the theological foundations and values of firefighting service. Undoubtedly, the aim of this study is to fill that gap and to outline several important issues that require deeper theological reflection. For methodological clarity, it should be noted that, due to the length requirements of the article, its content will be deliberately limited to selected aspects of the topic at hand.

It should also be noted that the issue at hand still requires the attention of both theorists and practitioners working in theology, anthropology, and fire science. The exploration and dissemination of this topic are indisputable and worthy of recognition in light of other related scientific disciplines.⁴ This study serves as a contribution and an invitation for fur-

⁴ Wojciech Cichosz, Jarosław Lisica, "Theology of Education in the Light of the Thought of Rev. Prof. Zbigniew Marek," in *Septuaginta Pedagogical-Catechetical. A Jubi-*

ther research in the field of theological and fire service studies. The general framework presented here undoubtedly fits within the interpretive paradigm of theological, social, humanistic, and fire sciences.⁵

1. FIREFIGHTING SERVICE AS A VOCATION IN A THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Service in the fire department is not just a profession; for many, it is a true calling that is deeply embedded in their spiritual and moral values. In a theological context, a firefighter is often seen as someone fulfilling their life's mission, responding to the call of serving their neighbor in accordance with the Gospel message of love and sacrifice. This perspective gives firefighting a transcendent dimension, viewed as fulfilling God's plan and consciously following Christ's example in being ready to help others, even at the risk of one's own life.

In undertaking an analysis of the theological foundations of firefighting service, it is essential to begin by attempting to define the term "service." This concept, in various forms, is present within the fire service, both in everyday language and in more or less official, even bureaucratic, contexts. A firefighter performs a specific service, and when at home, may say they are "going on duty." In both social and official contexts, firefighting service is often associated with a particular object and value. According to the *Polish Language Dictionary*, service is defined as work performed for the benefit of a community, carried out with dedication.⁶ This understanding of service should be further refined to include work undertaken for a specific individual, not just for the community as a whole. Key elements of a firefighter's service include work of a special nature, primarily voluntary, always carried out with dedication, and often involving the risk of one's own health and life for the benefit of others.

lee Book Dedicated to Rev. Professor Zbigniew Marek SJ on the Seventieth Anniversary of His Birth, edited by Anna Walulik, Janusz Mółka (Krakow: Ignatianum Academy in Kraków, 2017), 89.

⁵ Krzysztof Konecki, *Studies in Qualitative Research Methodology: Grounded Theory* (Warsaw: PWN, 2000).

⁶ Service, *Dictionary of the Polish Language*, at: sjp.pwn.pl (accessed: 19.08.2024).

Firefighting service, understood in this way, is characterized by self-sacrifice and renunciation.⁷

The above understanding of firefighting service finds its connotations in the life and sacrificial work of Jesus Christ. To describe Himself and His mission, Christ refers to the Old Testament tradition of the title “Servant of Yahweh” and defines His mission with the verb “to serve.” The attitude of the Son of God reveals the significance of service, as well as the deep anthropological and moral meaning of service, which involves achieving the fullness of humanity by offering it to others. Moreover, the entire life of Jesus Christ as the Servant is a gift for others, a form of pro-existence.⁸ Therefore, a firefighter who risks their own life to save others is following the example of Christ the Servant.

In this context, the concept of “service” should be expanded to include structural and theological elements, such as: 1) *Internal Disposition* – being a gift of oneself to others; 2) *Humanity in Action* – treating the injured person as a person, not merely a “case” requiring intervention; 3) *the Role of Empathy* – the critical importance of empathy in assessing the victim’s situation and making decisions about further rescue actions; 4) *Respect for Life and Health* – reflecting on the moral responsibility of the firefighter in the context of their impact on the life and health of those affected; 5) *Spiritual Support* – preventing the loss of empathy and assisting in maintaining sensitivity in difficult situations.

In this sense, the firefighter’s service is understood as a vocation.⁹ In a theological context, vocation is often understood as a special gift from God to undertake specific actions for the benefit of others and society. Firefighting service can be seen as the fulfillment of God’s call to protect and save one’s neighbors. In this sense, a firefighter acts not only out of a sense of duty (professional obligation) but also as an executor of God’s will, striving to fulfill the commandment of love for one’s neighbor. The theological approach to firefighting service encompasses the fulfillment

⁷ Adam Maj, „The Value of Service in the Spirituality of Early School Education Students,” *Pedagogical Annals* 15 (51), nr 2 (2023): 24–25.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 26.

⁹ Jarosław Lisica, “The Impact of Professional Service on the Quality of Family Life of State Fire Service Firefighters Based on Own Research,” *Studia Humanistica Gedanensia* 7 (2022): 152.

of the greatest commandment – the love of neighbor. The Gospel's call to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37–39) finds its concrete expression in the actions of firefighters who risk their own lives to save others.¹⁰

In a theological context, the vocation and service of a firefighter can also be considered an instrument of Divine Providence. God, who cares for His creation, acts through people who serve others in need. Firefighters, by saving lives, extinguishing fires, or protecting property, can be seen as the hands of God at work. Their work is then perceived not only as a profession but as cooperation with God's grace in providing help and protection. This truth is reminded by the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, where it speaks of the adaptation of God's actions to the needs of human nature.¹¹

The service of a firefighter as a vocation also has a profound spiritual dimension. The work of a firefighter requires not only physical courage and skill but also spiritual strength and an inner readiness to face danger and suffering. A firefighter should be aware of their responsibility toward God and their fellow human beings, which can lead to deep spiritual reflection and prayer. In challenging moments of service, such as saving lives in extreme situations, firefighters may feel the need for spiritual support and the presence of God, who provides strength and perseverance in carrying out such difficult tasks. Therefore, the relationship between the value of service and the spirituality of firefighters becomes a significant subject of consideration.

Spirituality in service involves elements such as love, empathetic morality, overcoming selfishness, the meaning of life, commitment to professional duties, and, in the case of religious inspiration, faith, love of God, and the imitation of Jesus Christ.¹² The second element of spirituality in firefighting service is the shift of focus from oneself to the person and life of another, especially those in need of any kind of support. The third element is treating the good of others as one's own or even more valuable. This involves selflessness and the absence of any expectation of

¹⁰ Ibidem, 153.

¹¹ Vatican II Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*," in *Documents of the Second Vatican Council* (Poznań: Pallottinum, 2002), 331–332.

¹² Wojciech Cichosz, "The Spirituality of Marriage and Family in the Publications of Father Professor Ireneusz Werbiński," *Włocławek Studies* 22 (2020): 91–106.

repayment. Moreover, the rescue and firefighting actions undertaken by a firefighter give spirituality a tangible dimension; in other words, all rescue actions are regarded as a particular good and hold a high moral value. In this understanding, the spirituality of the rescue formation acquires a specific character in relation to those values, for which there is a readiness for sacrifice.¹³

2. PRACTICAL ASPECTS IN THE THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FIREFIGHTER WORK

Practical aspects in the theological understanding of firefighting work may initially seem unusual or even paradoxical. The fire service, as an institution based on science, technology, and rigorous training, appears distant from the reflections of practical theology. However, upon deeper consideration, it becomes clear that theology can play a significant role in the work of firefighters, as outlined above. In the face of the dangers inherent in their daily work and the constant confrontation with extreme situations – death, suffering, loss – the practical aspects in the theological understanding of firefighting work become a crucial element in supporting their moral, emotional, and mental well-being. Firefighters often encounter questions that go beyond the technical aspects of their profession. How does one cope with the inevitable presence of death, suffering, and human tragedy? How does one maintain hope and strength in the face of uncertainty and danger? Theology, though it may seem distant from the daily duties of firefighters, offers tools to understand and deal with these difficult questions.

Practical theological aspects in the work of a firefighter can manifest on many levels, influencing both their daily actions and long-term approach to service. It is important to highlight several key areas where theology can have an impact. These include: a sense of mission, comfort in the face of death, support in building community, reflection on suffering, and motivation for continuous growth. Each of these areas merits

¹³ Maj, “The Value of Service in Spirituality,” 28–30.

closer examination, starting with the sense of mission, which forms the foundation of a theological approach to the work of a firefighter.

A sense of mission can accompany firefighters in their service “for the glory of God and the benefit of people.” Religious faith¹⁴ strengthens the sense of mission and calling to serve others. Firefighters may see their work not merely as a profession but – as mentioned earlier – as a service to their fellow human beings, which gives a deeper meaning to their actions. From a Christian faith perspective, there is no way to distance oneself from “service.” On the contrary, the closer a firefighter draws to faith, the closer they draw to service. Religious faith¹⁵ can help in building and deepening Christian identity and in the development of Christian attitudes by highlighting the value and beauty of the firefighter’s service to others.¹⁶ This raises the question of whether, for today’s firefighter, the call to serve others is merely a symbolic and theological concept with little connection to the daily work in the fire service, or whether, on the contrary, in the context of the reality of faith, it begins to entail obligations, becoming practical and bringing awareness of the firefighter’s calling. It seems that in light of contemporary theological trends, the very sense of mission as a theological value requires, above all, a credible explanation and justification.¹⁷

The next key area in the work of a firefighter where theology plays a crucial role is the aspect of death and the fragility of life. The issue of death, from a firefighter’s perspective, evokes many negative and distressing feelings and emotions:¹⁸ fear of dying, fear of losing one’s own life

¹⁴ Daniel Brzeziński, “Faith and Its Celebration in Culture. Systematization of Concepts,” *Theology and Man* 27, no 3 (2014): 11–20.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Second Vatican Council, “Gravissimum Educationis,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1965): 564–565.

¹⁷ Marek Kluz, “Service in the Perspective of Christian Education in the Teachings of Popes John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis,” at: upjp2.edu.pl (accessed: 21.08.2024).

¹⁸ Wojciech Cichosz, Jarosław Lisica, “The Role of Emotions in Human Creativity,” in *Emotions. The Other Side of Knowledge. Epistemology. Education. Creativity*, edited by Diana del Mastro and Wiesław Dyk (Paris–Alberobello: L’Harmattan, 2019), vol. 2, 109–123; Wojciech Cichosz, Jarosław Lisica, “The Correlation of Emotions with Human Creativity,” *Gdańsk Studies* XLI (2017): 127–136.

as a result of rescue and firefighting operations, fear of the deceased – terror when viewing bodies (often burned, dismembered, deformed as a result of traffic accidents, etc.), helplessness, sadness, and despair.¹⁹ At such times, questions arise about the meaning of passing, the system of values, the existence of God, and life after death. Looking at the issue of death from a theological perspective, it is important to recall that death was initially portrayed in the Bible as a human tragedy, but in the Gospels, it is presented in the context of eternal life. Scripture does not offer any escape from death but rather helps to free one from fears associated with it.²⁰ Therefore, theological beliefs concerning life after death, redemption, or the presence of God's care can provide firefighters with a sense of peace and the courage needed in their service.

Such spiritual beliefs not only strengthen individual mental resilience but also create a shared foundation that unites firefighters around common goals and missions. Therefore, shared religious values play a crucial role in building strong bonds among firefighters. A team of firefighters that shares similar beliefs and spiritual practices often exhibits a higher level of trust and solidarity, which positively impacts their effectiveness and ability to overcome the challenges inherent in their service. Religious values can provide team members with motivation for collective action and serve as a source of support in the face of challenges.²¹ It is worth noting that studies on the impact of spirituality on team relationships have shown that groups engaged in shared religious practices, such as prayer or attending Mass, are more likely to achieve internal harmony and a higher level of commitment to achieving group goals.²² Shared spiritual experiences can also reduce tensions and conflicts, as they pro-

¹⁹ Sławomir Bukalski, "Death and Dying: Psychological and Pastoral Aspects," *Paradise Studies* 24 (2014): 105.

²⁰ Robert Lewandowski, „A Philosophical-Theological View of Death as Seen Through the Eyes of Young People," *Theological Annals* 6, vol. LXIX (2022): 99.

²¹ Joan Marques, "Spirituality in the Workplace: Developing an Integral Model and a Comprehensive Definition," *Journal of American Academy of Business* 7, no 1 (2005): 80–92.

²² Louis W. Fry, Melanie P. Cohen, "Spiritual Leadership as a Paradigm for Organizational Transformation and Recovery from Extended Work Hours Cultures," *Journal of Business Ethics* 84, no 2 (2009): 265–278.

mote empathy and mutual understanding.²³ Spirituality and religion,²⁴ By fostering a sense of community, spirituality and religion can thus be significant factors in enhancing the cohesion of a firefighting team and its ability to work effectively together, especially during rescue and firefighting operations.

Moreover, spiritual and religious beliefs can not only strengthen bonds within the team but also provide firefighters with tools to cope with the emotionally challenging situations they encounter in the course of their duties. In the face of dramatic events, such as rescuing victims of accidents or fires, firefighters often confront human suffering and death. Without adequate support, these experiences can lead to deep feelings of helplessness and frustration. However, theological reflections on suffering can offer firefighters a framework for interpreting difficult situations in the context of higher purposes and values.²⁵ Understanding suffering from a religious perspective can help firefighters find meaning in experiences that seem incomprehensible or unjust. Theology can promote an attitude of acceptance and trust in God, which may bring a sense of peace and the strength to continue performing difficult tasks. In this way, reflection on suffering can not only mitigate the negative effects of stress but also support the inner growth and mental resilience of firefighters, which is crucial in their profession.²⁶

Such practical theological aspects not only help firefighters cope with difficult experiences but also inspire them to continual personal and professional development in alignment with the higher ideals promoted by religious traditions. Many religious traditions emphasize the necessity of self-improvement and striving for higher ideals, such as altruism,

²³ Gary R. Weaver, Bradley R. Agle, "Religiosity and Ethical Behavior in Organizations: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective," *Academy of Management Review* 27, no 1 (2002): 77–97.

²⁴ Wojciech Cichosz, "Anthropological Determinants of Religious Education," in: *Religious Pedagogy*, edited by Zbigniew Marek and Anna Walulik (Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 2020), 345–65.

²⁵ Kenneth I. Pargament, *The Psychology of Religion and Coping: Theory, Research, Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 1997), 165–185.

²⁶ Janice Bell Meisenhelder, Emily N. Chandler, "Faith, Prayer and Health Outcomes in Elderly African Americans and Whites," *Journal of the National Medical Association* 92, no 4 (2000): 201–209.

courage, and sacrifice. These ethical and spiritual commitments can be a significant source of motivation for firefighters, encouraging them to continually develop their skills and professional attitudes. The pursuit of excellence, grounded in a religious context, can lead to a greater readiness for self-improvement and perseverance in overcoming professional challenges.²⁷ Religious moral imperatives, such as helping others and protecting life, can guide the actions of firefighters, strengthening their sense of responsibility for others. This internal commitment can, in turn, encourage them to enhance their qualifications and improve rescue procedures to meet the highest ethical and professional standards. As a result, firefighters motivated by religious ideals become more engaged and effective in their work, which directly impacts the quality of assistance provided and the level of safety in the communities²⁸ they serve.²⁹

In conclusion, theology, although seemingly distant from the practical aspects of a firefighter's work, actually plays a significant role in shaping their professional and moral identity. A sense of mission, reflection on death and suffering, community building, and motivation for continuous improvement are just some of the areas where theology offers support. Through this, firefighters can better cope with the challenges of their demanding profession while maintaining their mental, emotional, and spiritual integrity. Consequently, theological reflections face new challenges posed by modern firefighting service.

3. CONTEMPORARY THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN FIREFIGHTING SERVICE

The profession of a firefighter has been classified as one with a very high level of risk. Its specificity and unique character stem from the social mission that firefighters fulfill.³⁰ Their service involves many hazards en-

²⁷ Michael King, Harold G. Koenig, "Conceptualising Spirituality for Medical Research and Health Service Provision," *BMC Health Services Research* 9, no 1 (2009): 116.

²⁸ Jarosław Lisica, "Honesty Towards the Homeland (Constructivism and Behaviorism in Education for Patriotism)," *Reflections* 1 (2018): 30–36.

²⁹ Harry R. Moody, *Religion, Spirituality and Aging: A Social Work Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 72–88.

³⁰ Lisica, "The Impact of Professional Service," 152.

countered during rescue and firefighting operations, which can adversely affect their physical and mental health, and often threaten their lives. Firefighters perform their duties in situations that require responsibility, composure, quick reactions, high physical and mental endurance, as well as proper handling of accident victims.³¹

Stress and the emergence of trauma are associated with the need to perform extremely difficult tasks, often at the edge of feasibility, usually in unfamiliar environments for the firefighter, with existing threats to their own health and life as well as that of others (fires, building, chemical, and environmental disasters, traffic accidents). A stress-inducing situation is also the mere anticipation of an alarm while at the station. In addition to the continuous stress caused by the daily demands of service, there is also traumatic stress as a reaction to a critical event that posed a direct threat to the firefighter's life.³²

The interdisciplinary nature of stress and its widespread occurrence in the professional life of firefighters creates contemporary theological challenges. As mentioned, serving in the fire service involves not only fighting fires and saving lives but also constantly grappling with moral dilemmas, stress, and trauma. In such moments, theology – understood not only as a set of dogmas but also as a reflection on the meaning of life, death, and suffering – can be a valuable source of support. In reality, it permeates many aspects of firefighting service and focuses on spiritual support, which plays a crucial role in coping with trauma and stress. In this regard, the role of fire chaplains seems significant, as they are trained to provide spiritual support in crisis situations.

The ministry of a firefighter chaplain is a mission filled with sacrifices, requiring constant readiness to act. The nature of this ministry is therefore different from traditional parish pastoral work. The duties of clergy serving among firefighters are very broad, with an important task being the possession of extensive knowledge in stress reduction, which in-

³¹ Justyna Oleksy, "Occupational Exposure of Firefighters – The Risk of Psychophysical Disorders," *Psychology* 54, no 4 (2015): 52–57.

³² Tomasz Sawicki, "The Safety of State Fire Service (PSP) Firefighters and Occupational Risk During Rescue Operations," *In Action. Technology – Tactics – Prevention*, no. 2 (2012): 46–57; Sylwester Woszczyk et al., "Stress and Coping Strategies Among Police Officers and Firefighters," *Occupational Safety* 10 (2016): 11.

cludes recognizing stress symptoms and providing immediate assistance. Additionally, it is essential to remember that a chaplain is obligated to care for all rescuers, regardless of their worldview or religious beliefs. The chaplain should also actively collaborate in solving moral issues, counteract manifestations of panic and aggression, and contribute to creating an atmosphere of mutual trust among firefighters.³³

In the face of these events, ethical dilemmas in firefighting service become another contemporary theological challenge. Firefighters, who make decisions daily that can determine life and death, must not only cope with pressure and stress but also confront difficult moral choices. In a theological context, these dilemmas require deep reflection on the spiritual and ethical values that should guide their actions.

The aim of the fire service is to ensure the safety of citizens, which is regarded as a value representing the experience of good. If ethics is understood as the study of doing good, it follows that the foundation of firefighting service is rooted in moral values and norms. These values and norms define the very idea and vocation of the profession.³⁴ Ethics holds particular significance for firefighters, primarily because the main task of this profession is to serve society by protecting people and their property. It is crucial that society expects the actions of the fire service to be not only lawful but also ethical.³⁵ Firefighters, as rescuers, often find themselves in situations where they must make quick decisions that have a direct impact on the lives and health of people. Such situations can give rise to serious ethical dilemmas, including:

- 1) *The Priority of Saving Lives vs. Protecting Property* – Firefighters often have to choose whether to first rescue people trapped in a burning building or to protect property threatened by the fire. Although human life is usually the priority, there may be

³³ Przemysław Tur, "The Role of a Chaplain in the Armed Forces of the Republic of Poland," *Scientific Journals of the Witelon State University of Applied Sciences in Legnica* 27, nr 2 (2018): 105–113.

³⁴ Lidia Młodzik, "The Personality and Moral Profile of Uniformed Service Officers," *Scientific and Methodological Review. Education for Security* 4 (132) (2018): 192.

³⁵ Andrzej Pieczywok, "Basic Ethical, Legal, and Organizational Categories in the Professional Work of Public Security Service Officers," *Legal and Economic Review* 43 (2018): 185.

situations where the decision is not clear-cut, such as when the firefighter is unsure if there are people in a particular location or when exceptionally valuable or dangerous property, like explosives, is at stake.

From a theological perspective, human life is considered a supreme value because every person is created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Therefore, saving lives always takes precedence over protecting property. However, in situations where a firefighter is uncertain whether there are people present or when particularly significant property is involved, Catholic theology encourages the application of the principle of “double effect”³⁶ (*principium duplex effectus*). This means that if an action has two effects – one good (protecting life) and one potentially bad (destruction of property) – the action can be morally justified as long as the intention is to achieve the good effect, and the bad effect is not directly intended.

- 2) *Rescuing a Fellow Firefighter vs. Rescuing Civilians* – During a rescue operation, it may happen that one of the members of the firefighting team is seriously injured or finds themselves in immediate danger. In such a moment, a firefighter may face a difficult choice: whether to interrupt the operation to help their colleague or to continue rescuing civilians whose lives are also at risk.

In Christian theology, there is the principle of love for one’s neighbor (Matthew 22:39), which commands caring for others, especially those in need. Rescuing civilians who are defenseless might seem like the prior-

³⁶ Catholic moral theology has formulated the principle of double effect to enable a correct assessment of complex situations in which making a morally good decision may lead to unintended bad consequences. In other words, if a given action has two effects: one good and one bad, it is permissible to perform that action only if the following four conditions are simultaneously met: 1) the action itself is not intrinsically evil, 2) the intention of the person performing the action is not to achieve the bad effect, although they are aware (foresee) that such an effect may occur, 3) the bad effect is not the means to achieving the good effect, 4) the good effect must be sufficiently morally worthy to balance out the bad effect. For more on this topic, see Barbara Chyrowicz-Dorobek, *Intention and Effects: A Philosophical Analysis of the Principle of Double Effect* (Lublin: Scientific Society of the Catholic University of Lublin, 1997), 11.

ity, but theology also recognizes the value of solidarity and brotherhood. By rescuing a fellow firefighter, who is a member of the community, the firefighter is practicing love for one's neighbor in a different but equally important way. In such situations, the decision should be based on the specific circumstances, and if possible, both sides should be rescued, adhering to the principle of love and respect for life.

- 3) *Evacuating People vs. Threat to the Firefighter* – In some situations, a firefighter must decide whether to enter a highly dangerous area to evacuate individuals who may not survive without immediate help. In such cases, the firefighter is putting their own life at risk, which raises the question: Is the risk justified?

The theological principle of “martyrdom” does not obligate one to risk their life if there is no certainty that it will lead to the salvation of others (John 15:13: “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends”). However, Christian ethics teaches the value of sacrificial love, which may lead a firefighter to take risks in order to save others. It is important that this decision is made with full awareness that the firefighter may be sacrificing their own life for the greater good of saving others.

- 4) *The Duty to Rescue Everyone vs. Personal Prejudices* – A firefighter may encounter a situation where they must rescue someone who was previously involved in unlawful or immoral activities (e.g., a criminal). In such cases, the rescuer must overcome any personal prejudices and act in accordance with the duty to save every human being, regardless of their past.

Considering this dilemma from a theological perspective, it is important to remember that Christianity strongly emphasizes love for all people,³⁷ regardless of their past or moral status (Luke 6:27–28: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”). Rescuing a criminal or someone who may have caused harm is an expression of unconditional love and mercy, which are fundamental values in theology. By

³⁷ Wojciech Cichosz, *Integral Education. Practical Reception of the Middle School in the St. John Paul II Catholic School Complex in Gdynia 1992–2019* (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2019), 57.

undertaking a rescue operation for such a person, the firefighter is acting in accordance with the teaching of God's mercy, who loves and forgives everyone.

- 5) *Utilizing Limited Resources* – During major disasters, such as wildfires or large-scale building collapses, resources like equipment and time may be limited. Firefighters may be forced to make difficult choices about where to direct their efforts, which could mean that some victims may not receive immediate assistance.

In Catholic theology, there is the principle of “social justice”³⁸ and the “option for the poor,”³⁹ which call for the fair distribution of resources, especially to those most in need (Matthew 25:35-40). In crisis situations, firefighters should direct resources where they are most needed, with a deep respect for the dignity and value of every human life. Limited resources should be utilized in a way that brings the greatest good to the greatest number of people, considering the principles of social justice and solidarity.

³⁸ *Social justice* – the understanding of this principle is based on the assertion that there is universal justice, whose source is an order based on the common good. This means that no person can exempt themselves from the observance of justice. Pope Francis warns against avoiding justice within social life. In his Message for the World Day of Peace in 2014, he emphasized that there is no exemption from this principle, as its foundation is the good of all people living on earth. For more on this topic, see Janusz Szulist, “Sources of Solidarity as Exemplified by Pope Francis’ Message for the World Day of Peace 2014,” *Koszalin-Kołobrzeg Studies* 21 (2014): 293; Michał Stachurski, “Catholic Social Teaching on Socio-Political Issues,” *Perspectiva. Legnica Theological-Historical Studies* 1 (32) (2018): 157.

³⁹ *The option for the poor* – is a proposal for subjective, emancipatory, and renewed actions for the benefit of people affected by the lack of goods necessary for development. In practice, it involves a wise and realistic participation in the integral liberation of the poor. Although it belongs to initiatives of the *promotio humana* type, it is closely linked with the doctrine and evangelizing-missionary tasks of the Church. For more on this topic, see John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa and Its Evangelizing Mission on the Threshold of the Year 2000 *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 42–44; Andrzej Pietrzak, “The Option for the Poor,” *Theological Sciences Studies* 8 (2013): 49.

Each of the firefighter's dilemmas mentioned above carries profound moral⁴⁰ and ethical consequences. Undoubtedly, they present theological challenges not only for firefighters but also, and perhaps especially, for fire chaplains. Theology can provide a framework in which firefighters can make decisions in line with faith, ethics, and moral principles, striving to achieve the greatest good in situations where there are no clear answers. For obvious reasons, the role of fire chaplains, who offer spiritual support in crisis situations and help resolve ethical dilemmas, is particularly significant. Dilemmas such as prioritizing saving lives over protecting property, rescuing fellow firefighters, or allocating resources in crisis situations highlight the complexity of moral choices faced by firefighters. Theological frameworks help in making decisions consistent with the principles of faith, ethics, and the common good.

CONCLUSIONS

The outline of the issues presented in this study does not claim to be definitive or irrefutable but rather contributes to the ongoing exploration of philosophical, theological, and technical perspectives. The aim of this work was to attempt to present an understanding of selected theological aspects present in the fire service. At first glance, the topic might seem like paradoxical theorizing. However, nothing could be further from the truth, as the fire service, though deeply rooted in the technical and practical aspects of rescue work, is inherently connected with multidimensional moral, ethical, and spiritual challenges.

The analysis of the theological aspects of this profession reveals that firefighters, as those who risk their lives daily, face numerous dilemmas that require reflection beyond technical preparation. Theological frameworks provide not only support in coping with trauma and stress but also help in making decisions aligned with the spiritual and moral values fundamental to this noble service. In this way, theology, as a tool for reflecting on the meaning of life, suffering, and death, becomes an integral part of

⁴⁰ Wojciech Cichosz, "The Value of the Christian Family in the Age of Contemporary Cultural and Post-Industrial Transformations: From the Nuclear Family to the Global Family," *Włocławek Studies* 14 (2012): 261–263.

a firefighter's formation, supporting them in fulfilling their mission with responsibility, courage, and dedication. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the need for further research and reflection on the theological challenges in the work of firefighters, which can contribute to a better understanding and spiritual support in their service. Undoubtedly, this service today more than ever requires interdisciplinary debates and a view of human horizons of science and faith in the light of revealed truth.

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