

Article

The Main Philosophical Inspirations in the Teaching of John Paul II during His Pilgrimages to Poland

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Abstract: The article focuses on the philosophical aspects of John Paul II's teachings during his pilgrimages to Poland. The pope, as an academic and philosopher, often discussed, in his teaching, topics that had also previously been part of his scholarly philosophical studies. Therefore, the philosophical legacy of Karol Wojtyła serves a significant context that enriches the papal teachings. This way, a complementing light is shed on his teachings, the terms he was using gain a deeper meaning and one can observe a deeper sense in his message. Under the influence of the statements of John Paul II during his pilgrimages to Poland, an unmistakable impression arises that they form a logical and comprehensive moral teaching firmly rooted in his pre-pontifical theological and philosophical thought, developing ideas (especially in the theological dimension) and giving them practical expression. The philosophical work of Karol Wojtyła is an important pillar and source of inspiration for the theology of John Paul II, especially in his teaching about the human person, laying the foundations for Christian anthropology. At the end of the paper, a specific aspect of the papal teaching in the Polish context is stressed.

Keywords: Karol Wojtyła; John Paul II; pilgrimages; dignity of the person; truth; freedom; conscience; Poland



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1. Introduction

Many works are devoted to the pilgrimages of John Paul II to Poland (Jackowski et al. 2009). Researchers have analysed various aspects of the papal pilgrimage, such as the historical (Polak et al. 2019), political (Klima 2014; Wnuk-Lipiński 2017), psychological (Biela 1980), sociological (Mach 2009; Ruszkowski et al. 2006), cultural (Skrzypczak 2019), aesthetic (Mrowiński and Przestek 2020), linguistic (Bartmiński 2000; Puzynina 2002), geographic (Jackowski et al. 2009), mediatic (Baczyński 2011; Pieniak 1997; Mydlarska 2019), evangelization-related (Adamiak 2020) or theological (Baczyński 2007) aspects. Less frequently, attention is paid to the philosophical message of the pope's teaching. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that John Paul II—although he was a philosopher—tried to formulate his statements as simply as possible during his meetings with the faithful. At the same time, there is no doubt that, when he took over the papal ministry, he brought, to his teaching, a rich philosophical message and deepened the ethical analysis of the phenomena he spoke about. At the end of the paper, a specific aspect of the papal teaching in the Polish context is stressed.

2. Resources and Method

This study focuses on selected academic and pastoral statements by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. In the article, I make reference to the pope's homilies and speeches made during his nine visits to Poland between 1979 and 2002 (Jan Paweł II 2012), as well as to some of his academic works from when he was active in Lublin and Krakow from 1949 until 1978. Both groups of texts form a coherent whole, albeit of a decidedly different character. Knowledge of Wojtyła's philosophical opus deepens our understanding of his pastoral message as pope. The statements of John Paul II during his visits to Poland include

many texts and focus on numerous themes of his teaching. They are also a testimony to exceptional philosophical sensitivity, shaped by the environment, especially the Lublin Philosophical School (Lekka-Kowalik and Gondek 2019; Duma 2016, Seifert 1981). The main philosophical texts by Karol Wojtyła are also analysed. The article focuses on the thought background of the papal message, thus deepening his message. Whoever wants to competently learn the content of the papal teaching (not only during pilgrimages to Poland) must go deeper, transcend the superficial meaning of words, reach their meaning in the pope's language and, at the same time, accept an invitation to meditate with Wojtyła in the name of seeking the truth about man and the world (Grabowski 2005, 2011). Of necessity, the article focuses only on the most important philosophical themes of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. He undertook only a few of them, but those to which he devoted his attention absorbed him for many years, which resulted in new, more mature and complete depictions. At the core of this thought, there are concepts such as the dignity of a person, truth, freedom and conscience. These issues appeared in various ways in his philosophical works and fell within the scope of papal teaching.

The pope did not visit any other country so often (apart from Italy, of course) and, in no other country, did he leave such rich teaching. His visits to Poland covered a period of 23 years marked by many important changes. The first pilgrimage (perhaps the most important, from today's perspective) took place in 1979 (Balon 2019; Gawin 2005–2006; Bösch 2020). The next ones were held in four-year intervals (1983, 1987, 1991 and 1995) and the last three in 1997, 1999 and 2002. (Podbilska 2008, pp. 145–50; Skibiński 2005, pp. 166–224). The pope visited almost all Polish dioceses (except for the Świdnica diocese) (Nabywaniec 2008, pp. 82–87) and met with representatives of many social groups. Foreign observers treated John Paul II's pilgrimages to Poland mainly as political and media events. However, they overlooked the message contained in the papal homilies and speeches—incidentally, always addressed to an exceptionally large assembly of the faithful. Yet, this message deserves attention for at least two reasons. First, the papal teaching in Poland is extremely broad; it spans a long era marked by significant events in Poland and central and eastern Europe. Secondly, when studying papal statements in Poland today, one might form the impression that they were composed in such a way as to cover as many issues as possible, arranged as a well-thought-out whole. In this way, the pope left Poles (and not only) with a comprehensive moral and religious message. Few of these statements are commonly known. They are rarely mentioned nowadays in Poland (and if they are, this is mainly via Radio Maryja and TV Trwam) and are almost unknown abroad. A non-Polish readership can access them mainly in Italian (and Polish) on the Holy See's website.

Wojtyła's academic works are also obscure. Many of them (articles in particular) have not been translated into English, let alone other languages. Meanwhile, as a theologian and, especially, a philosopher, Wojtyła left a large academic output, especially in the field of philosophical anthropology and ethics. These publications are often written in difficult prose, referring to various philosophical trends, and reading them requires specialist academic preparation. Nevertheless, one ought to remember that the range of issues covered by them also encroached upon papal teaching, although in a popularised form. Often, it acquires depth only when the meaning of the terms used by the pope is expanded to include statements from before October 1978 included in the books *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (Love and Responsibility) and *Osoba i czyn* (Acting Person or Person and Act). Many problems that John Paul II dealt with as an academic and lecturer found expression and development in his papal teaching (e.g., theology of the body, human dignity and the relationship between faith and reason).

It is worth noting that, thus far, there has been no study on how Wojtyła's academic work inspired his papal teaching. In Poland, this is probably due to the fact that researchers were particularly interested in the philosophy of the author of *Acting Person* and his papal documents, treating the statements made during pastoral visits as less important, occasional, or even politically motivated. Nor did foreign researchers undertake such analyses, if only because of the language barrier.

The aim of the article is to show the relationship between the teaching of John Paul II during his trips to Poland and his previous academic thought, especially in his main books and selected articles. Over the years, Karol Wojtyła worked over the foundations of his philosophical anthropology and personalistic ethics. The juxtaposition of Wojtyła's philosophical reflections from the pre-papal period and his teaching during the pilgrimages to Poland allows a deeper reading of his papal message to be obtained, which can be perceived superficially or even completely misunderstood, especially by readers from outside Poland. This approach is allowed by Wojtyła himself, who was very sensitive to the precision of concepts, the mystery of the person and the revealing of deeper layers of reality (Piluś 1980). The concepts selected for analysis most often occur in John Paul II's texts delivered during the pope's pilgrimages to Poland and are also present in his earlier academic studies, in order to maintain a sense of coherence. The objective throughout is to rationally gather and explore the concepts used in various contexts by Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. Whereas his academic work is known to have broached a limited number of topics, he worked on them for a very long time, which resulted in an original and mature approach. The article ends with an attempt to explain—on the basis of historical and political circumstances—what specific aspect of Wojtyła's philosophy found expression in his papal teaching to Poles, what was particularly important in this message and why.

3. Excerpts from the Academic Biography of Wojtyła

In 1946, Wojtyła was sent to Rome, where he studied for two years at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum). He ended this period by writing the dissertation on *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross* in Latin (*Doctrina de fide apud S. Ioan-nem a Cruce*) and, in 1948, he obtained a doctoral degree in Cracow (Kiwka 1999, pp. 65–74). The aforementioned work, although of a theological nature, was of significant importance for the formation of his philosophical anthropology; indeed, it gave it a unique shape and encouraged to deepen his search towards building the so-called integral anthropology (Kupczak 2011). Dealing with the legacy of St. John of the Cross became the starting point for Wojtyła for the fullness of human experience (Galarowicz 1986; Półtawski 2013, p. 7). After returning to Poland, the young priest combined pastoral, didactic and philosophical activities. The result of these activities can be found, for example, in little-known earlier dissertations *Rozważania o istocie człowieka* [*Considerations on the essence of man*, 1999] and *Katolicka etyka społeczna* [*Catholic social ethics*, 2018]. The first work, a series of lectures for the academic youth of Cracow, dates 1949, while the second one includes lectures for students of the Jagiellonian University in 1953/1954 and then for the seminarians of theological seminaries in Cracow (Zajączkowski 2020, pp. 120–24). Both studies prove that, already then, the philosophical issues important to the author came to the fore. In 1953, Wojtyła received his habilitation at the Jagiellonian University based on the dissertation *Ocena możliwości zbudowania etyki chrześcijańskiej przy założeniach systemu Maksa Schelera* [*Evaluation of the Possibilities of Building Christian Ethics on the Principles of Max Scheler's System*]. Soon he began lectures at the Catholic University of Lublin (Wojtyła 1986). In 1960, his dissertation *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* [*Love and Responsibility*] devoted to sexual ethics was published and, in 1969, the continuation of this book and the most important work in his philosophical achievement, *The Acting Person*. An important origin of Wojtyła's thought is the spirituality of St. John of the Cross, but the foundation of his philosophising is also undoubtedly the traditional trend of the philosophy of being—Aristotelianism and Thomism—which the author extends to the achievements of the modern philosophy of consciousness, providing new and effective instruments of cognition (Acosta 2016; Havranek 1993; Jaroszyński 2021; Podgórski 2016). In his view, this leads to changes in and enrichment of both the philosophy of being and the philosophy of consciousness, which puts Wojtyła “in the position of a translator, trying to translate the concepts of Thomism into concepts of phenomenology and vice versa” (Wojtyła 1973, p. 306). Certainly, the knowledge of contemporary philosophy made it easier for Wojtyła to communicate efficiently with today's world, while placement in the Thomistic philosophy was a guarantee of defending traditional values in

the changing reality (Gałkowski 2017, p. 75). Rocco Buttiglione, an excellent researcher of the thought of John Paul II, emphasized that it is impossible to understand the teaching of the Polish pope without drawing on and constantly using the philosophical achievements of Karol Wojtyła. The great themes of his encyclicals matured in the pages of philosophical works before his pontificate (Buttiglione 1982, p. 98). Andrzej Półtawski shared a similar view, noting that “Karol Wojtyła’s philosophical views are also an important key to fully understand the teachings of John Paul II” (Półtawski 2013, p. 14).

3.1. *A Man Is a Person—A Unique and Eternal Value*

Already in the 1940s, Wojtyła wrote, “a man is a person—a unique and eternal value” (Wojtyła 1999, p. 97). The phenomenology of the mystical experience of St. John of the Cross from the very beginning led the author to the irreducible centre of the person and pointed to the necessity of self-transcendence of the person towards the truth that is God Himself (Rembierz 2014). Later, his focus on man remained at the centre of his philosophical and pastoral activity. In the 1960s, reporting, in a letter to Henri de Lubac, on the philosophical issues that interested him, Wojtyła wrote, “I use very rare free time for work, close to my heart, devoted to the metaphysical meaning and mystery of the PERSON. It seems to me that today the debate is taking place on this level. Evil in our time consists primarily of some kind of degradation, even destruction, of the fundamental uniqueness of every human person. This evil is even more in a metaphysical order than a moral one. Instead of sterile polemics, we must oppose this disintegration, sometimes planned by atheistic ideologies, with a kind of »recapitulation« of the inviolable mystery of the person ...” (Weigel 2000, p. 223). Man’s way of existence is radically different from the way of existence of things. Man has reason, the ability to think conceptually, as well as a transcendence from within. All these inner qualities, objectively existing, make up the special, exceptionally valuable inner good of man, that is, his dignity—an inalienable quality. Dignity is the inner, innate and natural mark of man. It assigns him a central and unique place in nature and culture. Society and history do not give man dignity but, instead, have a duty to respect and protect it. Recognizing the dignity of a person is also an experience of the absolute obligation to affirm it; *persona est affirmanda propter se ipsum* (Crosby 1984). On the one hand, the dignity of a person significantly determines the basic vision of man in Wojtyła’s work and, on the other hand, it is a criterion of morality, in a sense, a determinant of the moral value of human action. On the basis of this good, Wojtyła formulated the so-called personalistic principle and norm, which is the basic norm of morality—“a person is such a good that only love constitutes a proper and wholesome reference to it” (Wojtyła 1982, p. 42). In an important essay, even the title of which is very eloquent, *Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man*, the author speaks of the need to “objectify the problem of human subjectivity” (Wojtyła 1978, p. 107), reminding, at the same time, that, in order to understand man, one should focus on that “which is irreducible” (franc. *irréductible*) and which makes it impossible to speak of him otherwise than as a person. Thus, “one has to stop in the process of reduction that leads us towards understanding man in the world (cosmological type of understanding) to understand the man in himself. The latter type of understanding could be called personalistic” (Wojtyła 1978, p. 112). The personalistic norm can also be formulated as a prohibition against disregarding the mystery of a person in oneself or in others, which implies a prohibition on treating a person as an object (Aguas 2009). In the book *Love and Responsibility*, the personalistic principle is created by reading the basic truth about man and his goodness in opposition to utilitarianism that treats reality in terms of utility, i.e., only as an object of use and as a means to an end (Wojtyła 1982, p. 42), although, at the same time, the utilitarian principle is not rejected, subordinated to the personalistic norm, because “everything fair and useful to a person is included in the commandment of love” (Wojtyła 1982, p. 43).

Wojtyła emphasizes more than once that man must not be reduced only to an object of use and performing a socially useful function by him. This leads to a further important conclusion; human dignity, although inseparable from him, is not an unchanging state with

regards to its subjective dimension (Duchliński 2008; Koterski 2006). It requires human effort, cooperation with God in the process of grasping and developing the truth. Wojtyła discovered the so-called integral anthropology, the basic thesis of which is that man, with his personal structure, is inscribed in the supernatural (Biesaga 2016; Crosby 2019; Ignatik 2021, pp. 85–92). An integral anthropology, which provides the full truth about man, is the result of cooperation between faith and reason, philosophy and theology (Drożdż 2011a; Grabowski 2004; Mruszczyk 2010, pp. 25–32, 76–94). It contradicts all naturalistic reductionisms that generate the so-called “anthropological error” (Drożdż 2007; Zwoliński 2012) which has devastating consequences for humans in the form of various kinds of reification, which leads to totalitarianism.

3.2. Truth–Freedom–Conscience

The reflection on human dignity has a strong metaphysical foundation in Wojtyła’s writings (Dec 2008, pp. 14–17). Already as the pope, he wrote, “It must not be forgotten that removing the problems of existence into the shadows inevitably leads to a loss of contact with the objective truth and, consequently, with the foundation on which the human dignity is based” (John Paul II 1998, No. 90). It is metaphysics that allows us to explain the concept of a person’s dignity, pointing to its spiritual nature. The constantly developed and deepened philosophical reflection of Wojtyła was primarily aimed at the truth and revealing its ever deeper layers, especially in terms of the mystery of man. Learning the truth in realist philosophy is a man’s reconciliation with an objectively existing reality. As part of the experience of the normative power of truth, the subject learns the truth about the bonum honestum and realizes it in the second stage of the ethical experience, i.e., in the experience of morality. While practicing assertion, thus experiencing the normative power of truth, a person discovers a categorical command to respect it. Thus, man, as a cognitive entity, discovers a moral responsibility. For Wojtyła, “responsibility is an experiential form of dependence on truth, which governs a person’s freedom” (Wojtyła 1969, p. 190). The power to accept the truth can only come from within the human being, from the freedom that is the property of the will and is realized through the truth. Freedom is itself to the extent that it is realized by truth for good (Tarasiewicz 2004). Freedom is an ethical category that finds its fullest realization in the commandment to love God and one’s neighbour. By choosing and realizing good in personal, family, social and global life, man realizes his freedom in truth, thus in a perfect way (Mizdrak 2011).

For Wojtyła, the distinguishing trait of freedom is “the transcendence of a person in act” (Sroczyński 2019, p. 89). This is also the title of a chapter from *The Acting Person* devoted to the issue of freedom. It highlights the foundation of freedom; man is free not only and not primarily because he can undertake various actions, but, above all, because he can guide and shape himself, for man “is not only the originator of his action but also its creator” (Wojtyła 1969, p. 119). If deeds have their source in man’s personal *esse*, then man is shaped by accomplishing them. Through them, he becomes morally good or bad. “To be morally good”—Wojtyła writes—“means to be a good person, to be good as a person. To be morally bad—it means to be a bad person, to be bad as a human being. Man becomes morally good or morally bad through his actions” (Wojtyła 1969, p. 125). The transcendence of a person in the act is not only self-dependence, or dependence on oneself. The fullness of freedom is not manifested in discretion, or in making one’s fate and action dependent only on one’s own will, but by subordinating to the truth (Šlužaite 2014). Only this subordination allows a person to rule over the world, himself and evil and to create good (Wilk 2007). If freedom ceases to be related to truth and makes truth dependent on itself, it creates morally harmful ideologies (Kupczak 2011, pp. 107–21; Tarasiewicz 2019).

The place where what is given is translated into what is ought to be is conscience. In the view whereby the fundamental and advancing changeability of the human situation and the face of ever faster emergence of new life problems in the moral dimension, special care is needed to strengthen the human conscience in its function of cognitive recognition of the moral value and its leading function, particularly in sensitive places of the human existence.

Without taking conscience into account, which flows from knowing and recognizing the truth, the description of the moral experience is incomplete and, ultimately, inadequate. Wojtyła writes, “Man is not unquestionably rooted in good, nor is he sure of his freedom. This is what the ethical aspect of a person’s contingency and at the same time the meaning of conscience are based on” (Wojtyła 1969, p. 161). Conscience reveals the dependence on truth inherent in human freedom and provides its normative force. However, above all, it presents to the subject the truth about himself and hints at what contributes to his development and—also through free choice—to his undoing. A choice that does not correspond to the truth he has learned contributes especially to the moral ruin of a man. Such a choice undermines what defines and distinguishes a man as a person, his rationality. For Wojtyła, a conscience is an act of knowing the truth, a judgment in a logical sense; the apparent exaltation of freedom by its “release” from the truth leads, in practice, to the enslavement of man by “subhuman” forces over which he has no power. Conscience understood holistically is, according to Wojtyła, an altogether peculiar effort of a person aimed at grasping the truth as a value. It is first seeking this truth and investigating it before it becomes a certainty and a judgment (Wojtyła 1969, p. 167). The decision is the final stage in the process of conscience. Wojtyła wrote, “this effort of conscience (...) is closely related to the specific structure of the will as self-determination, and at the same time to the structure of the person itself. There are two Integrated Aspects here: the cognitive aspect—referencing to truth, and the aspirational aspect—referencing to human purposefulness. Only together do they fully constitute the conscience. It is in conscience that the subordination of action to the truth takes place. It is possible only because man is internally complex, and at the same time, because he is internally superior, that is, transcendent to his powers, both cognitive and aspirational. A man is also superior to the objects of his pursuit, he is “greater” than them or remains at a certain distance from them.

Thus, conscience is nothing but a centre point of this holistic transcendence (Wojtyła 1976, p. 31). Therefore, conscience is also placed in the field of reflection; it is a personal “dominion”, “being above” the content of one’s cognition and awareness. It is also “being above” one’s extra-cognitive, extra-conscious dynamism, above the will and all the other extra-conscious and cognitive dynamisms. Naturally, conscience constitutes the central point of transcendence, but, as an expression of “I”, it is, at the same time, a certain integrating centre of all of these dynamisms. It is the crown of human transcendence. Conscience, through “dependence on the good in the truth, in a way creates a new reality within the person. It is a normative reality” (Wojtyła 1969, p. 163). Man, by referring to the moral norms mediated by conscience, which is showing the truth contained in these norms, can reach fulfilment not only in the ontological dimension but also in the moral dimension, i.e., the most profoundly humane dimension. He can fulfil his human vocation and achieve the state of happiness. However, the respect for conscience, its inviolability and the right to self-judgment require that it does not only reflect the interior of a person, but also that it remains righteous and genuine, that it continues to look for the truth in the form of reconciliation with reality and that it submits to it. Moreover, “a righteous conscience is [...] a vital condition for the fulfilment of not only a man but also of the entire community in which he lives” (Jędraszewski 2015, p. 21).

3.3. Philosophical Message of Papal Pilgrimages

The homilies and speeches of John Paul II delivered during his pilgrimages to Poland reflect the atmosphere of those times and the places visited. Therefore, they have a great historical value and are significant for the Polish people. However, it is easily noticeable that his speeches are also of universal character and are relevant for our times. The pope’s speeches carry a message relevant to the entire Church and the world. The pope was a philosopher by education, specializing in ethical issues. It is no surprise that these issues were particularly prevalent in his speeches.

3.3.1. Discovering the Dignity of a Person

Already during the first pilgrimage, John Paul II reminded his listeners of the deep dimension of the human being. He said then, “The human being [...] must be measured by the measure of conscience, by the measure of the spirit which is open to God. Therefore, man must be measured by the measure of the Holy Spirit” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 27). The human being is an entity endowed with dignity, that is, a value incomparable to anything else in the world outside the world of persons. During his pilgrimage to Poland, the pope repeatedly emphasized that the human being has always been and is a sovereign entity in relation to the rest of the world and holds a superior position over whatever surrounds them. “Human dignity has no price,” he recalled, reminding of the testimony of the first Polish martyrs of the 11th century (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 903).

During his third pilgrimage in 1987, in his speech to the authorities, he spoke of human dignity as the measure and basis of political actions, because “communities, societies, nations, states live a truly human life, when the dignity of the human being, any human being, does not cease to set the direction on the basis of their existence and activity. Any violation and disregard for human rights is a threat to peace” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 383). Due to the dignity that characterizes the human being, they cannot be reduced to the role of an object in sexual relations, to a “tool of production” or an object for the “benefit of science”. In a 1997 speech at the Jagiellonian University, the pope gave a prophetic warning against the consequences of an anthropological error flowing from and adopting an incorrect concept of the human being. A flawed concept leads to the formulation of flawed rules of conduct and production. The anthropological error appears both on the grounds of the Orphic–Platonic and Aristotelian concept of the person, providing deformed theories of the human person towards its “deification” (Platonic sources) or “animalization” (Aristotelian sources). It must lead to a crisis of the culture founded in this way; “A deformed or incomplete vision of the human being causes science to transform easily from a blessing into a serious threat to humans. [...] Nowadays, the human being often becomes an object or even a “raw material” instead of a subject and a goal: it is enough to mention genetic engineering experiments, which raise great hopes, but also considerable fears for the future of mankind”—said the pope in Kraków in 1997 at Jagiellonian University (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 988).

According to the pope, the “human–subject” paradigm is a remedy for technocracy, consumerism and various forms of totalitarianism. In a similar vein, John Paul II also spoke in 1999 during his visit to the Polish parliament; “Today, in this place, we are particularly aware of the fundamental role that a fair legal order plays in a democratic state, the foundation of which should always and everywhere be the human being and the full truth about the human being, their inalienable rights and the rights of the entire community, which constitutes a nation” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1081). Therefore, human dignity should be the source of rights and the guiding principle in the creation of the common good. The whole order of truth and goodness is inscribed, for the human being, in God’s commandments. Any action which contradicts this order inevitably strikes the human being who, in turn, discovers their place in the world most fully through their relationship with Christ, because He showed mankind the deepest truth about God and man at the same time. The dignity of a person is ultimately rooted in the mystery of salvation and redemption (Schmitz 1993, p. 82).

3.3.2. In Defence of the Truth

Another very important and universal theme of papal statements concerned truth (Drożdż 2011b). During his second pilgrimage in 1983, the pope, in an address to the episcopate, reminded that “the truth is the first and fundamental condition of social renewal” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 289). A few days later, he argued that truth leads to trust and trust builds community—all the way from family to humanity. The subject of truth was most often reiterated during the pope’s meetings with people of science, i.e., those who are especially called to its research and dissemination, for example, during

a visit to Jagiellonian University in Kraków (1983), Catholic University of Lublin (1987), or Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (1999) (Przybiecki 2001, pp. 81–89). The pope rejected the accusation that it was impossible to learn objective truth. The defence of truth should oppose tendencies that promote a sense of meaninglessness, makeshift cognition, subjective opinion, changeability and relativity. It is dangerous, because “the fragmentariness of knowledge and the fragmentation of meaning destroys the inner unity of the human being” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1048).

In his speech to the rectors of Polish universities, the pope also repeated, after *Fides et ratio*, that “Faith and reason are like ‘two wings on which the human spirit rises to contemplate the truth’” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1048). Therefore, in science and philosophy, there is a need for a sapiential dimension consisting in the search for the overall meaning of human existence (Tarasiewicz 2016). For truth is not only an intellectual “adventure”, but it has an existential character and life without it would be meaningless. According to the pope, the defence of truth is a defence of human dignity and the normativity of ethics and it actually protects human freedom. The human being is called to seek the truth and make judgements according to it, so that their life would not be only a constant struggle to create a convenient space of maximum freedom. According to the pope, truth contains the source of the human being’s transcendence towards the universe. You reach the truth not only on your own, but also through dialogue with others (Modrzejewski 2016).

The pope often combined the philosophical, moral and religious dimensions of truth. Searching for it on every level and shaping one’s life according to it has ultimately a salvific value; “And from this truth that the human being implements, with which they try to shape their life and coexist with others, a path leads to the Truth, i.e., Christ. It leads to the freedom for which Christ has liberated us” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 607). Martyrs bear special witness to the truth. In his speech at the end of the Congress of Central and Eastern Europe Theologians in 1991, the pope emphasized that “The testimony (*martyrium*) constitutes exceptional *locus theologicus*, not only by virtue of the mystery of God, in which it expresses and presents itself, but also on account of the truth of the human being, which becomes exceptionally expressive through this testimony. [. . .] The status of the witness (one who bears witness to the truth) is the basic status of the human being. This is a statement of fundamental importance, not only in the dimension of Christianity as faith, but also Christianity as culture, as humanism” (Jan Paweł II 2012, pp. 824–25). The pope also emphasized the primary importance of the truth in ecumenical activities. During the ecumenical service in Drohiczyn in 1999, he quoted the following fragment of his encyclical *Ut unum sint*: “love of the truth is the deepest dimension of the authentic pursuit of full communion between Christians” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1076). The main threats to truth are scepticism, agnosticism, nihilism and ethical relativism. The latter, allied with democracy—as the pope noted in his speech to Polish parliamentarians—“deprives the life of the civil community of a permanent moral point of reference, depriving it, in a radical manner, of its ability to recognize the truth” (Jan Paweł II 2012, pp. 1084–85).

3.3.3. Freedom—But Not Absolute

The issue of freedom was of great importance in the pope’s pilgrimages to Poland right from the start. In the 1970s and 1980s, the very presence of the Holy Father reminded us of the nation’s aspirations for freedom. The theme of freedom recurred during every pilgrimage (Karasiński 2007). The pope always proclaimed that freedom is a gift from God, but it can be misused, as “Freedom is given to the human being as a measure of their dignity. However, it is also entrusted to them. ‘Freedom is not a relief but a hardship of greatness’—as the poet expresses (Leopold Staff, *Oto twa pieśń* (*Here’s your song*)). For freedom can be used well or misused by people” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 272). This issue became particularly important with the introduction of martial law in Poland and then with the revival of society’s aspirations for political and economic transformations. The pope was constantly associated with the desire for freedom of Poles and supported the trade union “Solidarity”, which was dissolved upon introduction of martial law. During

the pilgrimages in 1983 and 1987, the participants of meetings with the pope often held banners reminding of the existence of “Solidarity”. The pope, in turn, repeatedly referred to the issue of freedom, thus showing support to those who struggled with the communist regime in various ways; “There cannot be a healthy society if the issue of freedom, personal freedom, community freedom, national freedom is not resolved fully, honestly, with a full sense of responsibility” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 449)—he said in 1987. The situation changed drastically during the fourth pilgrimage in 1991. Its slogan “Thank God, do not quench the Spirit” marked the joy of regained freedom, but also anxiety about how it would be nurtured and used to overcome the socio-economic and moral crises of the Polish society. It was during this pilgrimage that the pope most often spoke about freedom and did not limit himself to capturing it in political terms. Indeed, he pointed to the need of educating for mature freedom, which presupposes a moral order, an order in the sphere of values; “May we refrain from trying to take shortcuts in our efforts to shape a new economy and new economic systems, omitting moral signposts” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 646)—the pope exclaimed in 1991 in Białystok. His teachings covered all dimensions of freedom, including its false varieties. On the verge of Polish transformations in 1991, the pope even spoke of an “exam in freedom”. The truth is difficult, but also “Freedom is difficult, you must learn it, you must learn to be truly free, you must learn to be free so that our freedom does not become our own slavery, internal enslavement, or a cause of enslavement to others” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 699). During his fourth pilgrimage, in his speech to the laity, the pope touched upon, among others, issues of the freedom of speech in the work of social reconstruction, explaining that “Our word must be free, it must express our inner freedom. You cannot use any means of violence to impose any theses on a person [...]; in today’s world, even the media can become means of violence if there is some other violence behind them” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 670).

In a sense, John Paul II considered the struggle of Poles for freedom in the 1980s to be an example. In the land on the banks of the Vistula River, a special form of the theology of liberation took shape; “It should be said—the pope said in 1991 to theologians from Central and Eastern Europe—not only because of the fight for the most basic human rights (freedom of religion—freedom of conscience and others), which was waged here—using the radically ‘poor’ means in the clash with the violence of a totalitarian state. It should also be stated because of the evangelical authenticity of liberation itself, which was the underlying motivation of this fight” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 826). On each subsequent occasion, the pope added something on the subject of freedom. During the period of political changes, he always warned against its improper use, emphasizing that it was both a gift and a challenge. This is evidenced by, for example, the words addressed to Polish bishops in 1999, at the prospect of Poland’s accession to the European Union, which sounded prophetic; “Poland enters the twenty-first century as a free and sovereign country. This freedom, if it is not to be wasted, requires people who are conscious not only of their own affairs, but also of obligations: self-sacrificing, animated by the love of the Homeland and the spirit of service, who want to build the common good and develop all levels of freedom in the personal, family and social dimension” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1097). It was always characteristic of the pope that he clearly demonstrated the relationship between freedom and truth as well as with Christ which, in modern times, has often been negated (Kupczak 2011). “Beyond truth, freedom is not freedom. It is only apparent. It is even enslavement” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 670).

According to the pope, freedom can never only be possessed, but “it must be constantly acquired and created” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 718). Political freedom is important, but, first of all, the human being must be free and should not become a slave to instincts, passions, pseudo-values, easy success, consumerism, possessions, economic systems, etc. Over the years, these exhortations recurred in the pope’s teaching. The erroneous concept of freedom consists in its absolutization. Analysing the spheres of human life particularly exposed to the temptation of improper use of freedom, John Paul II pointed out that the value that can properly direct our “freedom” path is the love for God and one’s neighbour, and

“the greatest fulfilment of freedom is love, which is materialized in devotion and service” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1086). That is why the pope encouraged his countrymen not to forget about the heritage of solidarity—solidarity with another, often weaker person, and solidarity exceeding class barriers and ideological barriers (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1083). He reminded of the principle that was widely accepted in the 1980s whereby “there is no freedom without solidarity”; its fullest expression is the joint effort put into building the “civilization of love”. “The ultimate destiny of human freedom is holiness” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1010)—this is the message that the pope left after his pilgrimage in 1997, during which he officiated two beatifications and canonizations. The teaching about freedom which was given by John Paul II in Poland is an important voice on this subject, to which the pope often returned in his various documents (Dulles 1995, pp. 36–41).

3.3.4. Conscience Formed by the Objective Truth

The concept of conscience appeared for the first time during the third pilgrimage of the pope to Poland in 1987, during the reflections for the youth gathered at Jasna Góra. John Paul II commented on the content of the Jasna Góra Appeal—the traditional Polish evening prayer; “What does it mean that ‘I am vigilant’? It means that I am trying to be a man of conscience. That I neither obscure nor distort it. That I call the good and the evil by their real names, not blur them. I work out the good in myself and I try to remove badness by overcoming it in myself. It is a fundamental matter that can never be diminished or pushed to the background. No. No! It is everywhere and always remains in the foreground. In fact, it is all the more important since more and more circumstances seem to favour our tolerating evil and to easily ask for absolution. Especially, if this is how other people act as well. [. . .] You must demand of yourself, even if others do not have demands” (Jan Paweł II 2012, pp. 263–64). The pope considered freedom of conscience as one of the fundamental human rights that was defended by the martyrs.

The greatest cry for people of conscience was the homily delivered by John Paul II in 1995 in Skoczów on the occasion of the canonization of Jan Sarkander. The homily developed the theme of martyrdom as faithfulness to the voice of one’s conscience. “It is our inner guide and the judge of our actions at the same time. Therefore, it is very important that our consciences are righteous and that their judgments are based on truth; that they call the good and the evil by their true names” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 843). Then, the pope explained what it means to be a man of conscience today, i.e., not to silence the voice of conscience, but to “engage in good and multiply it inside and outside of yourself, to never take on the evil”, “to demand from oneself and to rise from one’s failures”, “to courageously take responsibility for public affairs; to care for the common good, and not close our eyes to the poverty and needs of our neighbours in the spirit of evangelical solidarity” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 844). Two years later, the pope asked a rhetorical question which also referred to the testimony of many martyrs whose attitude gave witness to the pre-eminence of the conscience, i.e., “Is the dignity of conscience not more important than any external benefits?” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 904). During his next pilgrimage, the pope added, “Let us do everything to sensitize our consciences and protect them from distortion or numbness” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1034). People of science, who do not disregard the criterion of truth and goodness from their studies, bear a great responsibility for conscience (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1049). The pope also associated the dignity of work with conscience, since “Whoever has lost the righteous judgment of conscience can turn the blessing of work into a curse” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 1150). He saw the great role of the Church in shaping human consciences in terms of sensitivity for the world of work.

3.4. The Papal Message and Polish Context

One might ask what specific aspect of Wojtyła’s philosophy found expression in his papal teaching to Poles, what was particularly important in this message and why. One ought to bear in mind that the future pope practiced philosophy in a post-war Poland that still vividly remembered the oppression of Nazism and, since 1945, had been enslaved

by the communist system. At the same time, he was the bishop of Krakow, had actively participated in the Second Vatican Council and then implemented its teaching in the Polish Church. Finally, from Rome, he observed the changes taking place in Poland and strongly supported the movement for freedom that took place, in particular, under the banner of “Solidarity”. It was this political and church context that significantly influenced the message he left for Poles.

In the autobiographical book *Dar i Tajemnica* [*Gift and Mystery*], John Paul II wrote, “[...] the two totalitarian systems which tragically marked our century—Nazism on the one hand, marked by the horrors of war and the concentration camps, and communism on the other, with its regime of oppression and terror—I came to know, so to speak, from within. And so it is easy to understand my deep concern for the dignity of every human person and the need to respect human rights, beginning with the *right to life*. It is also easy to understand my concern for the family and for young people. These concerns are all interwoven; they developed precisely as a result of those tragic experiences” (Jan Paweł II 1996, p. 20).

In his teaching addressed to Poles, on the one hand, John Paul II emphasised topics related to guarding human beings from death and enslavement (hence the protest against abortion and euthanasia, as well as various practices of marginalising the social life of people who demand respect for their subjective rights), which may arise as a consequence of various totalitarian practices. The pope was vehemently opposed to forms of social praxis that harmed human dignity. He stressed that the circumstances of alienation are created by both a totalitarian society that subordinates the individual to its collective aspirations and a liberal capitalist society that loses its hierarchy of objective values—hence the focus on freedom conditioned by truth. Freedom finds its fulfilment when it is used correctly—i.e., in the light of truth, which, however, should be understood more deeply than in the Greek-intellectual tradition. This is truth gleaned from an existential point of view—in particular, a religious and moral truth, ultimately, the truth whereby God sets man free. A personal relationship with God as the highest truth is the culmination of the mature freedom of man. Therefore, in his message to Poles (especially after 1991), the pope clearly exposed the myth of the twentieth century whereby man has been attributed the power to constitute his own essence and to define what is morally just or unjust.

On the other hand, the pope wanted to implement the conciliar teaching in the Polish Church. According to Vatican II, a human being is the place where the Church and the world intersect. Indeed, while the basic question which ideologies try to answer is “what to do?”, the Council seeks to answer “how to be?”. During his pilgrimages in Poland, John Paul II related the breakthrough initiated by conciliar decisions to Polish circumstances. Wojtyła’s philosophical thought, followed by his teaching as pope, is about the consequences of the Council, thought through and re-lived in the contemporary history of Poland. In the same book, the pope also included some thoughts about the Council. In his book *Gift and Mystery*, he even noted that “the Council has pointed to the possibility and need for an authentic renewal, in complete fidelity to the word of God and Tradition” (John Paul II; a specific introduction to the spirit of the Council is offered by Wojtyła’s book *U podstaw odnowy. Studium o realizacji Vaticanum II* [*Sources of Renewal. The Implementation of Vatican II*]). Reading this work, it is difficult to resist the impression that many of the references to conciliar texts contained therein are consistent with his own philosophical reflection. The hypothesis that this reflection was shaped under the influence of the Council and, at the same time, influenced the shape of those conciliar documents in which Wojtyła was involved, will surely be justified (Millies 2017).

It is also worth mentioning one strand amidst the teaching of John Paul II, most relevant from a Polish point of view. It had already been outlined in the book *Acting Person* and is about solidarity and participation. The independent and autonomous trade union “Solidarity” would never have become a turning point in the recent history of Europe and the world, if, from its inception in the workers’ strikes of July and August 1980, it had not drawn inspiration from the teaching of John Paul II, whose portraits were hung on the

gates of striking factories (for example, Gdańsk Shipyard). However, at the same time, another process was taking place. “Solidarity” was becoming one of the main ideas of the papal teaching. During his second and third pilgrimages to Poland, the pope profoundly identified with the issue of “Solidarity”, which had been banned after the introduction of martial law in Poland in December 1981. He even demanded protection for people who had suffered over and over again from political repression. That is why it was no coincidence that, during his second pilgrimage in June 1983, his thoughts clearly turned to the relationship between the idea of solidarity and mercy—the latter depicted as a practical, truly Christian manifestation of the former. The pope himself became, in a way, a spokesman for the righteous demands of “Solidarity”. In 1987, during a workers’ meeting in Gdańsk, he said directly, “I speak about you and I speak for you” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 405). Praising the non-violent methods of struggle chosen by “Solidarity”, John Paul II emphasised that “Solidarity must go before the struggle. Then humanity can survive. And any nation in a great human family can survive and thrive. [. . .] Let me add: solidarity also liberates struggle. But this is never a struggle against one another. [...] This is a struggle for man, for his rights, for his true progress: a struggle for a more mature form of human life” (Jan Paweł II 2012, p. 447).

The timelessness of the idea of solidarity would also return during subsequent papal pilgrimages. John Paul II pointed out that solidarity is not only a thing of the past, but also a task waiting to be fulfilled (Doran 1996). The pope recalled, “I heard you say then in Gdańsk: there is no freedom without solidarity. Today it must be said: there is no solidarity without love”. During his final pilgrimage in 2002, the pope consecrated the Shrine of Divine Mercy in Krakow-Łagiewniki and entrusted the whole world to God’s Mercy. In a homily delivered to nearly three million believers at a mass in Krakow, he called for the “creation of an imagination of mercy”. Solidarity is definitely not confined to overthrowing a totalitarian system. It is a universal lesson of humanity, a practical implementation of the principle of social participation and love.

4. Conclusions

The teaching of John Paul II is deeply rooted in his pre-pontificate philosophical reflections and it is them that reveal the deepest dimension of the papal message. The phenomenology of the mystical experience of St. John of the Cross from the very beginning led Wojtyła to the irreducible centre of the person and pointed to the necessity of self-transcendence towards the truth which is God Himself. Wojtyła discovered deep humanism and, at the same time, abundant experimental material in the writings of the Spanish mystic. This helped him turn to personalism and phenomenology. The author of *The Acting Person*, starting from theological reflection, at the same time, lays the foundations for original philosophical anthropology. In the homilies and speeches preached by John Paul II in Poland, his long articulated and precisely constructed anthropology comes to the fore, in the centre of which is the thesis about the irreducible dignity of the human being and the formation of humanity through action and conscience, which should be grounded in objective truth (Kupczak 2002, pp. 128–40). John Paul II considered the salvation of the person in a human being as the most important. He regarded this as the criterion for any progress and value of social and political activities. Hence, he arose his opposition to the anthropological error that takes various forms, thus to false, reductive humanisms. Wojtyła, not confining himself to criticise ideological anthropological constructions, showed the value of integral anthropology. This was also reflected in his papal statements. During the pilgrimages of John Paul II to Poland, the theme of the deformation of truth by totalism first appeared and, since 1991, the error of liberalism was mentioned more and more. In both cases, a misreading of the truth about the human being violates their dignity. Along with this, there is the pope’s emphasis on freedom of conscience. It is not only an affirmation of a person’s transcendence towards any socio-economic system but also an expression of solidarity with every human being who struggles for recognition of them being “someone” rather than “something”. John Paul II also postulated that the freedom of conscience

should not be understood merely as the freedom of worship and thought, but also as the freedom to act by the known truth—obviously within the limits of the right protection of the common good.

An important life, pastoral and intellectual experience of Wojtyła was the Second Vatican Council (whose teaching he was partially responsible for) (Scola 2010, pp. 121–22). His task was to give faith a dimension of life experience, to call for its adequate empowerment. The idea was to create a Christian mentality in which faith is not only intellectually accepted, but also existentially lived. The philosophy of *The Acting Person* helped to undertake this task and, at the same time, provided its theoretical justification. According to Vatican II, the human person is the point where the Church and the world meet. While the basic question that the ideologies of this world are trying to answer is “what to do?”, the Council is looking for an answer to the question “how to be?”. The teaching of John Paul II in Poland is also a translation into Polish conditions of the breakthrough initiated by the conciliar determinations. The philosophical thought of Wojtyła and, later, his teaching as pope are about the effects of the Council that are rethought and lived in the contemporary history of Poland and those countries that faced the violence of communist totalitarianism. On the other hand, in the face of corruption and lobbying in modern democracies, the relativistic conception of democracy reveals its ultimate failure. By recalling the constitutive relationship between freedom and truth and, in particular, between freedom and the truth about the human being, the papal teaching offers a criterion for assessing human action, which must always take into account the truth about the good. This truth is not a prison for action, but a guide. The good in question is the value of the human being. Just as acting together with others constitutes the foundation of the specificity of the social sphere and the basis of (relatively) autonomous political reflection, the reference of this activity to the objective value of the human person constitutes the foundation of the specificity of the moral sphere and the basis of autonomous ethical reflection, which integrates economic activity into the system of human action and its moral evaluation. Therefore, the teaching of John Paul II on political order does not contain clear political principles but is, above all, deeply marked by the defence of the person’s dignity, freedom and the truth that precedes it. The pope, while traveling to his homeland, taught in a country first ruled by communists, then by liberals.

Thus, John Paul II observed a country undergoing rapid cultural and economic changes. However, he did not provide any clear political rulings. He was aware that more than political reform, a reform of the national mentality was needed, fidelity to the truth of life and man against the claims of power. Under the influence of the statements of John Paul II during his pilgrimages to Poland, an unmistakable impression arises that they form a logical and comprehensive moral teaching firmly rooted in his theological and philosophical thought before his pontificate, developing this idea (especially in the theological dimension) and transferring it into the order of practice—especially in social solidarity.

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