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## THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF KAROL WOJTYŁA

"We experience that man is a person  
and the reason why we are certain about this  
is that he performs acts."

Card. Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*

### 1. TRUTH IS BORN AND LIVES IN HISTORICAL REALITY

Truth is rooted in history in a double sense. "Being" – says Aristotle – "appears in its full splendour in many ways." The truth is revealed and embodied in a concrete, i.e. historical, cultural, national and individual situation. When it is unveiled, it has its addressee and recipient.

The truth about man, as it is presented in the third edition of *The Acting Person*<sup>1</sup>, has also revealed itself and taken shape in a concrete historical entity. To simplify this thought slightly, one could say that this fundamental anthropological work was parented by two events of the twentieth century, events characterized by radically opposite axiological marks: Communist totalitarianism and the Second Vatican Council.

The priest, and then the Bishop Karol Wojtyła, watched with concern the twentieth century crisis of Christianity in the West. He rejoiced when he received the announcement of the Council. He saw the latter as a crucial response to that crisis.

This is why he was so deeply involved in the work of the Council. Bishop Karol Wojtyła, after the Council's debates, felt it necessary to provide a philosophical elaboration and development of the concept of the human person as it was contained in the Council's documents. The *Acting Person* is, in a way and to a certain degree, a response to the obligation he experienced.

This crucial experience merged with the painful experience of the demise of humanity under the Communist regime. In this context, could he, a pastor and a Christian thinker, feel exempted from a confrontation with such a reduced and crippled vision of man? Bishop Wojtyła took up the challenge, opposing this vision of man with a reliable and firm conception of the human person. He presented this conception in *The Acting Person*.

The relation between the actual addressee of his great anthropological work, however, and its real influence, is much more complicated. The original recipient of *The Acting Person* was the thinking Christian after Vatican Council II, as well as the creators of the Polish culture in the 1970s and the succeeding years. When Card. Karol Wojtyła was elected pope, the range of the impact of *The Acting Person* widened considerably. Since that time, its contents have been present in John Paul II's encyclicals and in his teaching in general. Obviously, the life of this main anthropological work of Karol Wojtyła does not end. If today, nine

<sup>1</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne* (The Acting Person and Other Anthropological Studies), Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, Lublin 1994, 543 pp.

years after the previous edition, a new edition of *The Acting Person* is brought out, it is worth considering what problems and needs can benefit from what it contains, and what role it should play in the present situation. Rocco Buttiglione deals with this problem in an interesting and thorough way in "A Few Remarks on the Way of Reading *The Acting Person*" (pp. 9-42).

2. KAROL WOJTYŁA  
AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL  
THOUGHT OF CATHOLICISM IN POLAND

The new edition of *The Acting Person* presents a good opportunity to think about the role Karol Wojtyła played in the forming of the Catholic philosophical *milieu* in Poland, and about the chance his work provides for the development of Polish Catholicism.

Karol Wojtyła became prominent in the Catholic philosophical *milieu* due to his definite philosophical and methodological stance. It is impossible to characterize it exhaustively. One can only point to its essential elements. For Karol Wojtyła, philosophy is one of the principal ways of seeking truth. Philosophy, in his view, is closely related to the existential experience of man. He is aware that philosophy stems from life and serves life. Karol Wojtyła is a thinker, and he shows what it means to be a thinker. Karol Tarnowski is right when he says "what strikes one on reading Wojtyła's texts is the absolute uniqueness of his thought, a thought which is responsible and seeks its own path; it is a thought he does not strive to impose on others."<sup>2</sup> By

his phenomenological approach to research, Karol Wojtyła has regenerated Catholic philosophy in Poland. This thinker cherishes a belief that truth bears a manifold character which is being unveiled gradually. Accordingly, he is open to anything which constitutes a synthesis of various aspects. This explains why he values tradition so much, and why, for instance, he combines Thomism with phenomenology.

Karol Wojtyła has influenced the philosophical thought of Catholicism in Poland as well the range of problems it addresses. First of all, he turned our attention to that which was underestimated in Thomism, e.g. to the importance of the subjective dimension of reality (the dimension of experience and consciousness). Secondly, we find an idea in Wojtyła which has already brought forth fruit in the work of Fr. J. Tischner, namely, that the crisis of civilisation has its source in the crisis of inter-personal relations. It is clear, however, that what is most important is that which was pinpointed in a certain discussion by Fr. Jan A. Kłoczowski, i.e., that it is in Karol Wojtyła that we find an epoch-making proposal of how to transform and renovate philosophical thinking on the basis of anthropology (I shall return to this later).<sup>3</sup>

Rarely, though, does one notice that Karol Wojtyła unveils his philosophy in a dual manner, i.e., "not only through his publications, but also through his actions, which were meant to serve this philosophy."<sup>4</sup> It is thanks to Card. Wojtyła that

<sup>2</sup> K. T a r n o w s k i, *Rola Karola Wojtyły*<sup>1</sup> – *Jana Pawła II w kształtowaniu się krakowskiego środowiska filozoficznego* (The

Role of Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II in the Forming of the Cracow Philosophical Milieu), "Logos i Ethos" 1993, No. 1, p. 295.

<sup>3</sup> See *ibid*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 289.

such institutions as the Philosophical Faculty of the Pontifical Academy of Theology in Cracow and the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna were established. Card. Wojtyła managed to create an atmosphere of freedom and confidence.

Today, the thinkers and Catholic *milieu* in Poland has yet to face another essential question: what is implied in fidelity to Karol Wojtyła, a thinker?

Some think that the most appropriate form of fidelity to the work of Wojtyła is to continue his work by way of commenting on it, deepening it and making it more precise. Such is the answer of the Lublin community of Fr. Prof. Tadeusz Styczeń and his fellow-workers. The John Paul II Institute at KUL (Catholic University of Lublin) has made a conscious decision that it is going to continue the thought of Karol Wojtyła.

On the other hand, the intellectual community of Cracow, gathered above all at PAT (Pontifical Academy of Theology), and in particular around Fr. Prof. Józef Tischner, holds that Card. Wojtyła desired not so much to have faithful disciples, but he had rather something more profound and more fundamental in mind, i.e., to set up conditions and create an atmosphere such that everyone could pursue his own discipline and pursue it in his own fashion.

As a result of these two different approaches to Karol Wojtyła's work, two philosophical centres have begun to function in Poland, i.e., the John Paul II Institute at KUL in Lublin and the Faculty of Philosophy at PAT in Cracow. The fruits of their activity vary considerably. Does this mean that one of these intellectual communities is faithful to the work of Karol Wojtyła and that the other betrays it? In this case, this variety of interpretation should not be seen as a drawback. Fidelity bears many a name. From what

I know, John Paul II is glad that there are two schools of thought which draw on his work in different ways.

### 3. THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF KAROL WOJTYŁA'S PHILOSOPHY

First and foremost, Karol Wojtyła was and is a pastor and a man of faith. He took up philosophy, seeking to understand the contents of his faith. Accordingly, his philosophy assumed a precisely defined form. Usually, the Christian thought which is rooted in the soul of an ardent Christianity concentrates on God and man. The philosophical thought of Karol Wojtyła is anthropological, and it is anthropological in a dual sense.

The philosophy of Wojtyła is anthropological because man is at the centre of his research and because the core of this thought is philosophical anthropology.

However, the anthropological dimension of Karol Wojtyła's philosophy cannot be reduced exclusively to that. It has already been noted that there appears in this thinker's work an epoch-making proposal to *reform philosophy on the basis of anthropology*.<sup>5</sup> Wojtyła intended to diagnose the situation of religious thinking, and such was his point of departure. Today, the debate about religion as a debate about God has been replaced by the debate about religious man. Karol Wojtyła asks the following question: How shall we re-introduce anthropological thinking into the context of religious thought? And such is the subject matter of his great works, and above all, of his *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*.

The latter work is the most mature fruit of Wojtyła's anthropological thought.

<sup>5</sup> See: *ibid*, pp. 293-294.

One may distinguish three stages in the philosophical writing of Karol Wojtyła. The first stage, preparing the formation of this conception of the human person which is contained in *The Acting Person*; then the culminating stage in his anthropological research, i.e. the writing of *The Acting Person*; and, finally, the stage of deepening and making his conception of man more precise. This conception has been presented most thoroughly in *The Acting Person*.

The first edition of *The Acting Person* was published in 1969 by the Polish Theological Society in Cracow (editor: Fr. Prof. Marian Jaworski). This publication found great response, the first instance of which was a debate about the book organized at KUL.<sup>6</sup> Then, after the author had been elected pope, *The Acting Person* was translated into foreign languages: English (1979), German (1981), Italian (1982), Spanish (1982) and French (1982). In 1985, the same publisher brought out the second Polish edition, revised and updated with Prof. Andrzej Póltawski as editor.

Shortly after the election of Card. Wojtyła, the John Paul II Institute in Lublin began bringing out a collected edition of the philosophical works of Karol Wojtyła. The whole series is properly called *Man and Morality*. Thus far, the following works have been published: vol. I, *Love and Responsibility*, vol. II, *Lublin Lectures*, vol. III, *The Question of the Subject of Morality*. This year, the

fifteenth anniversary of the pontificate of John Paul II, *The Acting Person* has been issued for the third time as the fourth volume of the above series.

#### 4. AN ALMOST COMPLETE EDITION OF KAROL WOJTYŁA'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL WORKS

The most recent edition of *The Acting Person* differs from the two previous editions in that, in addition to the main work, several other anthropological texts written by Wojtyła have been added, along with two commentaries – one by Rocco Buttiglione in the form of an introduction to *The Acting Person*, and the other by Fr. Tadeusz Styczeń, in the form of an epilogue to the anthropology of Karol Wojtyła. The book concludes – and this, too, is a novelty – with an analytic index and an index of names.

The texts added to *The Acting Person* come from various periods of Karol Wojtyła's writing (the majority of which were written after *The Acting Person*), and deal with many different questions. Each of these texts has a different significance. They are not arranged chronologically, but thematically. Some of Karol Wojtyła's other anthropological studies, presented in the publication under review, form, in my opinion, four groups differing from the classification by the editors.

The editors aptly introduced *Other Anthropological Studies* with "A closing word after the discussion on *The Acting Person*". This text written by Card. Karol Wojtyła touches upon almost all the most important problems of *The Acting Person*. This stands as a sort of epilogue to *The Acting Person*.

The second group of texts together constitute what may be called an introductory programme to the issues which

<sup>6</sup> This debate was published in "Analecta Cracoviensia" 5-6 (1973-1974) pp. 49-263. The final word of K. Wojtyła after the debate was reprinted in the volume reviewed here (K. W o j t y ł a, *Słowo końcowe po dyskusji nad "Osobą i czynem"* (A Closing Word after the Discussion on *The Acting Person*), *op. cit.*, pp. 347 – 369. [Editor's note])

enable a better and more profound understanding of Karol Wojtyła's anthropological standpoint. In this group I would place the following studies: "Man is Person" (the text in which the author explains the reason for his research in anthropology), "Subjectivity and the Irreducible in Man" (the work which shows in a formidable way Wojtyła's stance, i.e. his tendency to synthesize different aspects of reality – in this case, of human reality), and the address "Theory – Praxis: A Universally and Christian Topic."

These studies should be followed by two works which are closely linked to the central issue of *The Acting Person*, i.e. with self-determination. Here we have the paper entitled "The Personal Structure of Self-determination" (the text which, in fact, is the author's summary of the theory of self-determination) and the text "The Transcendence of the Person in Action and the Self-teleology of Man."

*Other Anthropological Studies* should be completed by two texts, constituting a development and supplement of the last part of *The Acting Person* entitled "Participation": namely, "The Person: Subject and Community" and "Participation or Alienation?"

Does the volume in question contain all the anthropological studies of Karol Wojtyła? Unfortunately, it does not. I do not know why two important texts are missing, i.e., "Human Perspectives – an Integral Development and Eschatology"<sup>7</sup> and "The Problem of Constituting Culture Through Human Praxis."<sup>8</sup>

## 5. TWO COMMENTS

Many studies<sup>9</sup> have been written on Karol Wojtyła's philosophical thought. Thanks to a new edition of *The Acting Person*, two important commentaries have been added. They were penned by Rocco Buttiglione and Fr. Tadeusz Styczeń, both prominent specialists and commentators on the thought of Karol Wojtyła and the teaching of John Paul II.

"A Few Remarks on the Way of Reading *The Acting Person*" written by Buttiglione is undoubtedly one of the best introductions to *The Acting Person*. This interesting text, however, is not without some controversial statements. Due to lack of space, polemic is replaced by a mere listing of reservations.

Buttiglione is right that the phenomenologies of Ingarden and Wojtyła are not identical. Does not this difference, however, consist in that Ingarden (as well as Hildebrand and Seifert) wants to prove in a phenomenological manner that man is a person, yet Wojtyła intends something else, he seeks to "show by way of phenomenology how man is a person"? (p. 15).

Buttiglione shares Gilson's view that he who starts as an idealist (i.e., begins in examining consciousness), must end as an idealist (see p. 26). But if this were so, one would have to ascribe idealism to such thinkers as Franz Brentano, Nicolai Hartmann, or the representatives of transcendental Thomism.

According to Buttiglione, Wojtyła claims that "person is not only substance

<sup>7</sup> "Colloquium Salutis" 7 (1975) pp. 133-145.

<sup>8</sup> "Roczniki Filozoficzne KUL" 27 (1979) fasc. 1, pp. 9-20.

<sup>9</sup> See J. G a l a r o w i c z, *Człowiek jest osobą. Podstawy antropologii filozoficznej Karola Wojtyły* (Man is Person. The Foundations of Karol Wojtyła's Philosophical Anthropology), Cracow 1994, pp. 252-274 and p. 312 ff.

(*subiectum*) but also a relation" (p. 21). I regard this introduction of Hegelianism into the interpretation of Wojtyła's anthropology as unjustified. Wojtyła has put much effort (see his texts on the philosophy of intersubjectivity) into showing that a person is a substantial being bearing a relational character, and enters into relations with other persons (but himself is not a relation!).

And finally two questions: does not Buttiglione identify the personal structure of self-governance with the psychological (acquired and gradual) skill of self-control (see p. 33)? Does he not reduce self-determination (and autoteleology) to the fact that man is his own first and most important object of care (see p. 18)?

Fr. Tadeusz Styczeń's epilogue "To be Oneself is to Transcend Oneself – On the Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła," elicits a number of comments. Allow me to present two.

In his commentaries on the thought of Karol Wojtyła-John Paul II – in addition to the things mentioned above – one can notice a certain formalism. According to my way of thinking, Fr. Styczeń has a tendency to read the rich and many-sided anthropological thought of Karol Wojtyła in terms of a certain schema. This schema is just one aspect of Wojtyła's anthropology, i.e. the thesis that freedom is realized through its connection to truth. This is a very important thesis, but not the only one. Fr. T. Styczeń's formalism has another side to it. This is what one may call a speculative approach to the issues. The phenomenologist proves that by referring to intuition, he describes that which he can "see." Fr. Styczeń refers also to the principle of insight or inspection. The reader understands what he means when he writes about the relationship between freedom

and truth; but cannot "see" it. I would put it this way. If the power of Fr. Tischner's texts lies in their phenomenological dimension, and their weakness in their analytical dimension, it is the opposite in Fr. Styczeń.

The following thesis appears in Fr. Styczeń's texts, namely, that man may learn the truth about himself, but may not recognize it. Two remarks come to mind here: a) it seems that in a "common" man it is as follows: he learns the truth and at the same time recognizes it; knowing the truth, he automatically recognizes it. b) According to me, the problem of contemporary man does not consist in – as Fr. Styczeń holds – that he does not want to recognize the truth which he has discovered about himself, but it consists in something more primary – in a difficulty to know this truth. To put it in a different way, contemporary man is not so much a creature with an evil will, but a creature immersed in illusions, a creature who has difficulty in freeing himself from them. That is why the thinker's task today is not to reproach the bad will of contemporary man, but to show him his illusions, their roots and the way of liberating himself. Does not this tacit argument between Fr. Styczeń and Fr. Tischner consist in this: that one of them begins by reproaching and the other by uncovering?

#### FINAL REMARK

Wojtyła's anthropological studies appear at a crucial moment of Polish history: at the moment when there is a great need for a reliable anthropology. Thanks to the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* there has been an increase of interest, following upon a period of certain indifference, in the thought of Karol Wojtyła.

In like manner, the publication of *The Acting Person and Other Anthropological Studies* may play a prominent role. The intellectuals of Poland face a great chance, let us hope that it will not be wasted. Will the new edition of *The Acting Person* contribute to a firmer grounding of ethical personalism in the philosophical culture of Poland? Will it gain an eminent and permanent place therein?

Questions such as these must arise. We observe with concern how easily the good is destroyed in our homeland through irrational strife between different intellectual communities, through backbiting, etc. This, unfortunately, refers to the Catholic communities as well.

Translated by *Jan Kłós*