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HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY AND CHRISTIAN FAITH IN THE THOUGHT OF KAROL WOJTYŁA

In Karol Wojtyła's view, the heart of the Gospel implies a metaphysical affirmation concerning man: that his essential core is spiritual, that is, inward. This affirmation does not immediately translate into a claim to spiritual faculties: these are essential, but affirming them presupposes that there is a subject capable of exercising them. Observing, and even describing them is not enough: it is necessary to step back to the inwardness that expresses them and that is characterized first and foremost as a place, an open space.

THE DOWNFALL OF INTERIORITY

The relationship between the Christian thought and the idea of subjectivity is neither uncomplicated nor deprived of tension. Even if in retrospect the theme of subjectivity can be projected onto the entire history of philosophy, its typical rendition is that characteristic of the modern thought, precisely the era in which the solidity of the alliance of philosophy with the Christian faith seems to be breaking down. The fact is that, on the one hand, in the philosophy of the subject from Descartes onwards, the status of the whole of metaphysical thought, i.e., its understanding as the background and a possible if not ideal presupposition of the Gospel (as it had been conceived beginning with the Epistle to the Romans) was made problematic. On the other hand, the very possibility of revelation has become a debated issue due to the fact that human sensibility and reason not infrequently act as filters put on our cognitive capabilities, or as screens impenetrable to any message that is not entirely human. However, both claims need to be nuanced and contextualized: the history of modern thought is much more Christian than its portrayals have often suggested. For this reason the claims in question can serve as rough premises for an attempt at an interpretation of subjectivity that significantly differs from that conveyed by modernity. In fact, one can say that the Christian faith has

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from its origins been allied to a *certain* view of human subjectivity, namely to the understanding of subjectivity as interiority. Those who wish to emphasize the rootedness of Descartes in the Christian tradition, for instance, would find it easy to detect a direct thread that connects Plato with Augustine, and then with Descartes. If, however, one moves backwards in time, what one encounters (or stumbles upon) is precisely the concept of interiority. Can interiority still pertain to a Christian way of thinking about subjectivity today? Or does it perhaps manifest an even more essential link with the Christian faith? It is around these questions that I would like to develop some reflections, being helped in the second part by some lesser-known texts by Karol Wojtyła.

Firstly, I shall address an obstacle that appears even greater than the difficulties presented by the concept of subjectivity: both the term and the concept of *interiority* were subjected, in the course of the twentieth century, to a considerable downsizing in the Christian discourse, at times being even declared as straightforwardly abandoned. An interesting symptom of this phenomenon is the change in the translation of a verse from the Gospel of Luke (see Lk 17:21). The Greek text reads: “*he basileia tou theou entos hymon estin*”: “the kingdom of God is *entos* you.” But what exactly does the preposition *entos* mean? A quick glance at the ancient translations shows that the expression was consistently understood in the sense of inwardness.¹ For instance, the Vulgate translation reads: “Regnum Dei intra vos est.” The Syriac translations, which, owing to their ancient character and apparent closeness to the conceptual universe of Jesus, render the text in the same way.² Even its versions proposed in modern times, in various languages, make use of precisely such a choice of terms. The German text of the 1545 Martin Luther’s version reads: “Das Reich Gottes ist inwendig in euch,”³ the French one, originally of 1551, by Jean Calvin and Théodore de Bèze: “Le royaume de Dieu est dedans vous,”⁴ and the King James English version of 1611: “The kingdom of God is within you.”⁵ Such an interpretation was later supported by commentaries and allusions

¹ Here and below, we shall use the terms “interiority” and “inwardness” as synonymous. The slight semantic difference between them well represents the unavoidable tension between a simple topological indication of something that lies *within* human beings, invisible to others, and a psychological or spiritual assessment of a life that develops in that almost secret place.

² See Ilaria Ramelli, “Luke 17:21: ‘The Kingdom of God is *inside* You.’ The Ancient Syriac Versions in Support of the Correct Translation,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 12, no. 2 (2009): 259–86.

³ *Luther Bibel 1545*, BibleGateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lukas%2017&version=LUTH1545>.

⁴ *La Bible*, trans. Jean Calvin and Théodore de Bèze (Geneva: n.d., 1588), *Le Nouveau Testament*, 39.

⁵ *King James Version*, Bible Gateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lukas%2017&version=KJV>.

throughout the entire history of Christianity. Let us consider just two examples. Augustine interprets these words of Jesus as addressed to the superstitious⁶: evidently, interiority is an antidote to the search for external *things* to support one's faith; Thomas Aquinas quotes the verse in the context of the discussion of the "new law," considering it a proof that the kingdom of God consists essentially in interior acts; Aquinas believed that his interpretation is confirmed also by Paul, who states that "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:17)."⁷

It is therefore surprising to note how contemporary translations and commentaries almost universally agree on a different interpretation, i.e., one in which *entos* would not mean "within," but "among." In short, Jesus would not speak of inwardness. Yet the exact alternative meaning given to the expression used by Jesus can vary: one can, for instance, understand it as referring to the present moment (the kingdom of God is already present) or to the future (the kingdom of God will be present), or see it as an allusion to the unpredictability, or the suddenness, of the coming of the kingdom. All these versions, however, agree as to what is excluded: the expression does not refer to anything interior.⁸ At most, it is sometimes admitted that the Evangelist Luke interpreted Jesus' words in this way, yet this could not have been the meaning Jesus himself intended.⁹ While the transformation is radical, it is not easy to ascertain its exact genealogy. The first to follow this new interpretation was probably Louis Segond's French translation of 1880 ("Car voici, le royaume de Dieu est au milieu de vous"¹⁰). In modern translations, more or less from the second half of the twentieth century onwards, this choice appears almost universal. The typical contemporary position is well represented by the *Theology of the New Testament* by Joachim Jeremias, who comments on the verse: "The meaning 'indwelling in' can certainly be excluded. Neither in Judaism nor elsewhere in the New Testament do we find the idea that the reign of God is something indwelling in men, to be found, say, in the heart; such a spiritualistic under-

⁶ See Augustinus Aurelius, "De vera religione," 3, 4, in *Patrologiae Latinae cursus completus*, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 34, 1861, col. 125.

⁷ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 108, 1, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso, <https://www.freddoso.com/summa-translation/TOC-part1-2.htm>.

⁸ See, e.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Garden City: New York, 1985) vol. 2, 1161. After presenting the possible translation "within you" the author adds: "In the present Lucan context it is inappropriate. ... The real problem ... is that elsewhere in Lucan writing the kingdom is never presented as an inward reality or an inner condition of human existence." (Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke*, vol. 2, 1161.

⁹ See, e.g., Waldemar Rakocy, "Entos hymon (Łk 17,21): królestwo Boże "w was" czy "pośród was"?", in *Collectanea Theologica*, vol. 71, no.1 (2001): 31–40.

¹⁰ Louis Segond, BibleGateway, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lukas%2017&version=LSG>.

standing is ruled out both for Jesus and for the early Christian tradition.”¹¹ Such a clear-cut exclusion of the Christian tradition is somewhat surprising: the already quoted verse from St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans testifies to at least one possibility of interpreting the Kingdom in the sense of interiority, and its formulation echoes Jesus’ teaching on what comes out of man and defiles him (cf. Mk 7:17,23) or on man’s treasure, which is his heart (cf. Mt 12:34–35). However, we do not wish to discuss here the respective merits of the two possible translations: we only wish to note that the change of the verse’s interpretation in the history of Western Christianity was quite radical, while precipitous, and that its origin (usually hardly ever discussed) can be traced back to the rejection of the language of interiority.

If this is the case, one must first try to understand the change in Christian sensibilities that made such an interpretation appear theologically obvious regardless of its philological merits. One certainly important factor was the success of the eschatological interpretation of Jesus’ preaching. While we cannot extensively discuss this central theme of Christian theology as it developed from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, it is sufficient to note that both extreme versions of this reinterpretation of the word Jesus used (denoting, respectively, consequential eschatology and realized eschatology) focus on something that is external to man: either a surprising and unforeseen event that is approaching or an event that takes place before the eyes of Jesus’ contemporaries. In some interpretations we have mentioned above, these alternative meanings seem to be forcibly projected onto Jesus’ words, in which, for instance, there is genuinely nothing to suggest a “sudden” event coming. It is also necessary to note that one of the leading proponents of the eschatological perspective, Albert Schweitzer, brings a very strong “inward” element into his interpretation of the thought and activity of St. Paul: in Schweitzer’s opinion, Paul was an essentially mystical thinker.¹² But Paul’s mysticism is, according to Schweitzer, a secondary way of maintaining the eschatological momentum of Jesus’ preaching when time is running out. Such an interpretation, however, although it had many merits, only concerned Paul’s theology and had very limited success in his time. Not even its revival by Ed Parish Sanders in the last decades of the twentieth century substantially changed the landscape, despite the fact that Sanders’ other claims had great resonance.¹³ In short: ever since the Kingdom was understood, more or less exclusively, as a transformation of

¹¹ Joachim J e r e m i a s, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971): 101.

¹² See Albert S c h w e i t z e r, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1931).

¹³ See Ed P a r i s h S a n d e r s, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977).

the world announced by Jesus, locating the Kingdom *inside* the human being has appeared simply absurd.

But the concept of *interiority* has also come under more direct attack. Here the most natural point of reference is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. It is particularly in his letters from prison that he formulates his diagnosis of the end of the age of religion, and the consequent need to rethink Christianity in a non-religious manner. But what is “religion” in his eyes? “How do we speak of God—without religion, i.e., without the temporally conditioned presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on? How do we speak (or perhaps we cannot now even ‘speak’ as we used to) in a ‘secular’ way about ‘God’? In what way are we ‘religionless-secular’ Christians, in what way are we the *ek-klesia*, those who are called forth, not regarding ourselves from a religious point of view as specially favoured, but rather as belonging wholly to the world? In that case Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, really the Lord of the world.”¹⁴ While undoubtedly an unelaborated expression of his thought, Bonhoeffer’s remarks must be taken seriously. He does not simply mean that, in the changed cultural conditions, Christian faith must be presented in different forms and in updated words. The problem he poses is not one of language. Rather, he means to say that the changed cultural conditions force one to realize that some traditional assumptions of the Christian discourse are by no means the actual content of Christianity.

Let us leave metaphysics aside and deal with interiority only. In a later letter Bonhoeffer elaborates on the meaning of inwardness, clearly stating that it is completely foreign to the Bible (and to the Gospels in particular!):

The Bible does not recognize our distinction between the outward and the inward. Why should it? It is always concerned with *anthrōpos teleios*, the whole man, even where, as in the Sermon on the Mount, the Decalogue is pressed home to refer to “inward disposition.” That a good “disposition” can take the place of total goodness is quite unbiblical. The discovery of the so-called inner life dates from the Renaissance, probably from Petrarch. The “heart” in the biblical sense is not the inner life, but the whole man in relation to God. But as a man lives just as much from “outwards” to “inwards” as from “inwards” to “outwards.” the view that his essential nature can be understood only from his intimate spiritual background is wholly erroneous.¹⁵

As he says elsewhere, it is in the sense of such a totality that the kingdom of God must also be understood. The problem that arises today is thus analogous

¹⁴ Dietrich B o n h o e f f e r, Dietrich Bonhoeffer to Eberhard Bethge, April 30, 1944, in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison: The Enlarged Edition*, trans. Reginald Fuller (New York: Collier Books, 1971), 280–81.

¹⁵ Dietrich B o n h o e f f e r, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Eberhard Bethge, July 8, 1944, in Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, 346.

to that which the early Christian community faced when it decided to admit pagans, and which Paul resolved when he established that faith in Jesus Christ did not require a ritual introduction into the first covenant as a prerequisite. Similarly, today it must be said that being Christian does not imply entering the universe of religious thought made up of metaphysics and interiority. On the contrary, they are even considered as obstacles.

Since Bonhoeffer's letters from prison were published in the early 1950s, it is difficult to find voices addressing similar issues in Protestant or Catholic theology they have not profoundly influenced. Bonhoeffer's impact is easy to understand: not only did his diagnosis of the end of the religious world appear extremely realistic, but it was also connected with the diagnosis of the "death of Christianity" that a few years later, thanks to Emmanuel Mounier, had become central to the debate in the Catholic world.¹⁶ In short, the entire world, with its ideas and sensibilities, appeared to be waning and efforts to keep it alive seemed pathetic and counterproductive. Moreover, Bonhoeffer's diagnosis appeared to be a privileged way not only to rethink Christianity, but also to bring it into dialogue with other cultures, such as that of Marxism, whose advancement appeared unstoppable to many. It is a fact that Harvey Cox's *Secular City*,¹⁷ to which the latter theme was also central, became the best-selling theology book of the twentieth century and certainly played its part in the reception of the then recently concluded Second Vatican Council. It is also difficult to deny that, albeit in a more nuanced manner, the theme in question is still part of the Christian discourse today. Certainly, it is easy to recognize numerous merits in the emphases that have been made (who could deny that a reference to the wholeness of man is appropriate?). But, on the other hand, it is honest to recognize that the emphases were made at a high price: the total renunciation not only of vocabulary, but also of the idea of interiority. To deal with it would simply be unchristian.

We will stop the historical reconstructions at this point. If we wanted to make the picture complete, there would certainly be other elements to add: e.g.,

¹⁶ See Emmanuel M o u n i e r, *Feu la chrétienté*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris 1950. With 'Christianity' (*chrétienté*) Mounier does not mean the union of believers in Christ, but the alliance between Christian faith and society, which manifests itself in culture and politics. His thesis is that every influence of the Christian faith on the human world, however valuable, has always happened as a side effect, not as a direct expression of this faith. The end of a Christian-inspired society could therefore be seen more as purification than as a loss.

¹⁷ See Harvey C o x, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (New York: MacMillan, 1965). The retrospective and largely self-critical introduction added half a century later is important. See Harvey C o x, "Introduction to the New Edition," in Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), xi-xxxix.

the success of the *neue politische Theologie*¹⁸ and its subsequent transformation into liberation theology,¹⁹ in which one of the fundamental motives is precisely the opposition to an inner understanding of faith perceived as individualistic; perhaps also the interest in the theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and its orientation towards historical optimism²⁰; also the theology of the laity, at the origin of which lies Yves Congar's conception that the laity are those for whom the world exists²¹; or, on the part of the secular culture, the skepticism towards interiority aroused by a certain understanding of psychoanalysis (Freud considered as a "master of suspicion")²² or analytic philosophy²³; or again, the spread of an interpretation of religious phenomena in social terms, which Émile Durkheim proposed at the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁴ In such a context of a generalized aversion to inwardness, it is no wonder that even theological statements on the communitarian character of salvation, in themselves almost self-evident, may have been interpreted as distancing themselves from (real or presumed) overestimations of inwardness in past times: thus, for instance, the famous statement that "God willed to sanctify and save men not individually and without any bond between them, but willed to constitute of them a people" was included in the constitution *Lumen Gentium*.²⁵

INTERIORITY AND THE GOSPEL

Is there any possibility of questioning this abandonment of interiority? Have not the undoubtedly solid and well-founded reasons for its retrenchment forgotten or obscured something even more important? These questions can be addressed in many different ways, but we want to discuss them here with

¹⁸ See, e.g., Johann Baptist Metz, *Theology of the World*, trans. William Glen-Doepel (New York: Seabury, 1969).

¹⁹ See, e.g., Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973).

²⁰ See, e.g., Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

²¹ See, e.g., Yves M. J. Congar, *Lay People and the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity*, trans. Donald Attwater (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1957).

²² See, e.g., Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin et al. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

²³ See, e.g., Jacques Bouveresse, *Le mythe de l'intériorité: Experience, signification et langage privé chez Wittgenstein* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1976).

²⁴ See, e.g., Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1916).

²⁵ The Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, November 21, 1964, Section 9, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

the help of some of Karol Wojtyła's texts. At first glance, the task is difficult. Notwithstanding the philosophical depth and anthropological focus of Karol Wojtyła, it is somewhat surprising to note that the language of interiority is rare in his writings. A careful reading of his main philosophical work *Person and Act*, in which one might hope for the presence of this theme, is of little use: not even the terminology seems to appear.²⁶ Is there more to be hoped for by looking at his oeuvre of a rather theological orientation? There is at least one small promising text: it is a lecture he gave in Rome on 13 October 1974, entitled *L'evangelizzazione e l'uomo interiore*²⁷ (Evangelization and the inner man). At that time Karol Wojtyła was attending the Synod of Bishops in Rome dedicated to the issue of evangelization in the contemporary world; his address was delivered and published in Italian. Although its tone is rather conversational, its content is highly interesting. He begins by stating that he will be essentially making a commentary on the passage from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, which begins with the words: "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him, this God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God. Among men, who knows man's inner self except the spirit of the man that is within? Similarly, no one knows what pertains to God except the Spirit of God" (Cor 2:9). Karol Wojtyła interprets these lines as a foundational early Christian document of evangelization. In his view, the focus of the text is the interiority of the human spirit, which he also calls the "depth" (*profondità*²⁸) that characterizes the inner man. It should be noted that the translation of the Scripture Wojtyła uses slightly stretches the meaning of the original text, for what in Greek simply means "what pertains to a man" ("*ta tou anthropou*") is translated as "man's inner self": this slight strain upon the meaning of the phrase in question, however, does not depart from Paul's vocabulary, which

²⁶ See Karol Wojtyła, "Person and Act," in Karol Wojtyła *"Person and Act" and Related Essays*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 93–416. The work was originally published in 1969 as *Osoba i czyn* (see Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn*, Polskie Towarzystwo Teologiczne, Kraków 1969). It is noteworthy that this theme is also absent from the first discussion of Karol Wojtyła's philosophy (see Andrew N. Woznicki, *Karol Wojtyła's Existential Personalism* (New Britain: Mariel Publications, 1980).

²⁷ Karol Wojtyła, "L'evangelizzazione e l'uomo interiore," *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 335–52; the text was later republished under the same title in *CRIS Documenti*: Karol Wojtyła, "L'evangelizzazione e l'uomo interiore," *CRIS Documenti* 4, no. 19 (1977): 5–22. For the Polish version see Karol Wojtyła, "Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny," in Karol Wojtyła, *Człowiek drogą Kościoła* (n.p.: Fundacja Jana Pawła II, 1992), 117–33. Apparently, no English translation of this paper is available, therefore the rendition of the quoted excerpts in English is mine.

²⁸ Wojtyła, "L'evangelizzazione e l'uomo interiore," *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 341; see Wojtyła, "Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny," 123.

oftentimes resorts to the spatial language of inwardness, for instance in the famous passage from the Second Epistle to the Corinthians: “We are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day” (Cor 4:16).

But how does this attention to interiority relate to contemporary philosophical analysis of consciousness? In his article, Wojtyła seems interested primarily in the *limits* of contemporary philosophy: “The philosophy of consciousness, particularly in its phenomenological version, has certainly enriched our knowledge of the empirical ‘phenomena’ of human spirituality, but it has not resolved to take that *metaphysical* step from the symptoms to the fundamentals, that is, as St. Thomas would say, from the effects to the cause. Indeed, contemporary thought seems inclined to broaden the field of direct intuition rather than draw metaphysical conclusions *a posteriori*.”²⁹ The contemporary attitude has its advantages: indeed, it allows one to witness man’s spirituality even though a precise metaphysical awareness of his uniqueness might still be lacking; moreover, the empirical attitude of the contemporary man probably makes the investigation easier. But this must not detract us, Wojtyła argues, from the need to take the final step which he calls “metaphysical.”

The most interesting observations, however, are those Wojtyła makes about the relationship between interiority and the Gospel. He seems to believe that the fundamental point can be found in the fact that Paul’s words, while not obviously philosophical, concern the *reality* of the human spirit. The teaching on the new life presupposes the consistency of the human spirit, and not just its observable manifestations. The passage in which this decisive point is presented is worth quoting in full:

Contemporary psychology and philosophy thoroughly analyze the manifestations of the human spirit and its faculties, knowledge and will. *In contrast, the Gospel affirms that the human spirit is a dwelling place, a tabernacle, a place of encounter.* There is no way to reduce it to its manifestations alone, to acts of consciousness, of choice, of decision. The human spirit constitutes ‘a place,’ a quite specific ‘substance’ dissimilar from the body and matter which, being determined and having spatial dimensions, cannot be a dwelling place of a person within a person—of God in man, of which Christ speaks. Such a dwelling—indwelling—presupposes an existential dimension completely different from any embodiment: a radically distinct nature which is not subject to the laws of time and space that govern matter: Spiritual nature, in fact, possesses, as a property through its own cognitive energies, and, above all, through its capacity for love, an openness to interpenetration. The Gospel, with its revelation of the gift of the Holy Spirit, manifests in a special way the depth of the human spirit: ‘We have not received the Spirit of the world,’ St. Paul writes to the Corinthians,

²⁹ Wojtyła, “L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 338; see Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 119.

‘but the spirit that comes from God, that we may know the things which God has freely given us’ (1 Cor 2:12). It is precisely in this bestowal of God’s Spirit that the human spirit is revealed as the dwelling place which God, the Father and the Son, inhabits.³⁰

Although expressed briefly, the idea presented here is extraordinarily strong. In Karol Wojtyła’s view, the heart of the Gospel *implies* a metaphysical affirmation concerning man: that his essential core is spiritual, that is, inward. This affirmation, however, does not immediately translate into a claim to spiritual faculties: these are essential, but affirming them presupposes that there is a subject capable of exercising them. Observing, and even describing them, as we have seen, is not enough: it is necessary to step back to the inwardness that expresses them and that is characterized first and foremost as a place, an open space.

Folk wisdom (and also philosophical wisdom) has often imagined this space as one in which man takes refuge, seeking isolation and solitude: Karol Wojtyła, on the contrary, argues that interiority is the place of encounter. This observation can be interpreted as follows: purely material interactions can only give an illusion of contact between people. In twentieth-century philosophy, there were few who highlighted this; an example may be Jean-Paul Sartre, who showed that there is a tragedy implicit in the erotic intercourse, which expresses a desperate attempt to reach the freedom of the other that always remains elusive.³¹ From this perspective, however, Gabriel Marcel had his reasons when he observed that Sartre evidently did not know what love was, namely the capacity *par excellence* (though certainly not the only one) that allows human beings to encounter one another *truly*, albeit in a way that is always fragile, partial, fallible, sometimes tragically limited.³² Karol Wojtyła is saying exactly this, but on a level that is immediately theological: the ultimate encounter that interests him here is that between the human being and God. Without interiority, such an encounter could not take place. This is why, making a short-cut that may seem bold, Wojtyła may go on to argue that it is from

³⁰ Wojtyła, “L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 341; see Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 122–23.

³¹ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 471–556 (Part 3, Chapter 3, “The Concrete Relations with Others”).

³² “The author has nowhere succeeded, I do not say in giving an account of love, but in conceiving it, whilst under the head of sexuality and particularly the caress, he gives the most pertinent details. It might be said that his thought gains all the more force or body the more it itself dwells on the body.” Gabriel Marcel, “Being and Nothingness,” in *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1951), 177. The cited text is a review of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*.

the Gospel that we learn about “the non-reducibility [of the spirit] to matter and its laws”³³—the non-reducibility which the believer lives through “in faith, hope, and charity.”³⁴ It is in *this* sense that Karol Wojtyła also interprets the famous passage in *Gaudium et Spes* which states that Christ reveals man to man³⁵: he reveals man to man precisely because first of all he makes man understand his spiritual nature, and through this impels him to transform reality. Touching on the theme of “combat for the spiritual man,” Wojtyła continues: “The line of this combat passes through each of us, through human interiority, and filtering into multiple social and historical dimensions, it touches human institutions, economic and political systems, civilizations, and culture.”³⁶

In his view, the task is particularly urgent today (we are certainly speaking, first of all, of the “today” of the 1970s), since the great forces that oppose evangelization are those that also fight interiority, for instance promote the consumer society and hedonism, consider man as a means to an end or merely as a cog in the societal machine, encourage technological progress without simultaneously taking care of the inward one giving a spiritual face to the world. Are these problems only recent? Karol Wojtyła thinks they are not: the very issue of secularism, which he understands as the idea that “the whole human ego belongs to the world and is dependent on it,”³⁷ is, to him, identical with the problem St. Paul names when he contrasts the Spirit of God with the spirit of the world.³⁸ What is strictly contemporary, then, is merely the particular forms the combat against inwardness takes. Passing from the First Epistle to the Corinthians to the Epistle to the Ephesians, we might say that the essential point of evangelization is thus found in “corroborating the inner man” (Eph 3:17); in this way Christ can be allowed to “dwell” in the believer’s heart. One must

³³ Wojtyła, *L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore*,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 341; see Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 122.

³⁴ Wojtyła, *L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore*,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 341; see Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 123.

³⁵ “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.” The Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 22, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

³⁶ Wojtyła, *L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore*,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 343; see Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 125.

³⁷ Wojtyła, *L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore*,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 348; see Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 129.

³⁸ See Wojtyła, *L’evangelizzazione e l’uomo interiore*,” *Scripta Theologica* 7, no. 1 (1975): 347; see also Wojtyła, “Ewangelizacja a człowiek wewnętrzny,” 128–29.

resist the temptation to take these statements as obvious. They are not today, and they were not then. It is enough to read the text of the apostolic exhortation promulgated after the synod in which Karol Wojtyła participated at that time to see how different the approach is: certainly compatible, but also distant.³⁹

THE STRANGE SPACE OF THOUGHT

As we noted earlier, Karol Wojtyła's text we are discussing appears a rather isolated piece within his philosophical work. Nevertheless, it bears the mark of his character and thought. If we wanted to give more substance to this observation, we should perhaps turn elsewhere: to Wojtyła's literary and poetic output. Here, obviously, one does not find theories: one does, however, find an extraordinary testimony to his profound awareness and analysis of human interiority. It is first and foremost this analysis that constitutes the text that might otherwise appear an expression of aesthetic and intimist revolutionary escapism. It is revolutionary because human interiority, even before it is "inhabited," is a place that *can* be inhabited, a horizon in which any attempt at a reduction of man to mechanism falters and shows its inhumanity. It is precisely such a reduction that lies at the core of the "alienation" that Marxism intends to fight, but in fact multiplies by misunderstanding the real nature of the human being. Just one but very interesting example will suffice. It is a poetic work of 1952, published under the pseudonym Andrzej Jawień and entitled "Thought—Strange Space." From a certain point of view, the theme of the poem has nothing religious to it: it is a reflection on the thought and its difficult relationship with words that are expected to express it. However, the reflection is conducted as an interpretation of the mysterious passage from *Genesis* in which Jacob is involved in a long struggle "with a man" (Gen 32:23–33) and then declares that he has seen God face to face. Here are the first lines of the poem:

Sometimes it happens in conversation: we stand
facing truth and lack the words,
have no gesture, no sign;
and yet—we feel—no word, no gesture

³⁹ See Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, The Holy See, https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html. In fact, also this important document speaks about interiority. For instance, Paul VI states that the kingdom and salvation can be only gained "through a total interior renewal which the Gospel calls *metanoia*" (Section 10), or that the purpose of evangelization is "interior change" (Section 18). However, the difference in emphasis and concern is evident: here interiority is an anthropological vantage point, not the place of Christ's presence.

or sign would convey the whole image
that we must enter alone and face, like Jacob.⁴⁰

Jacob's experience is the experience of coming into consciousness. But this can happen through any minimal reality that surrounds us:

Rest your eyes for a moment
on the drops of fresh rain:
the greenness of spring leaves in this bright focus,
weighing the drops down, not enough space for leaves—
and though your eyes are full of wonder
you can't, you cannot open your thought any farther.⁴¹

This is not always a pleasant encounter. In fact, its greatest intensity occurs at the moment of struggle and dismay:

But when reality's weight leans over and collapses
then it fills with thought and subsides
into man's deep pit
which I rarely tread—I wouldn't know how.
But this I know:
I can't fall apart any further.
Both the vision and the Object entire inhabit
the very same pit.⁴²

But in the intensity of this struggle occurs the revelation of what man really is. It is not the exteriority of acts that constitutes his essence, but rather the depth of his consciousness:

And yet, if ordinary things fill our days
and all the time some inseparable gesture
hides what is within the act,
we are still certain the gesture will drop
one day, and our deeds will retain
only that which most truly exists. Fact.⁴³

Certainly, no exaggerated importance should be attached to a youthful poetic composition that predates the lecture we considered earlier by more than twenty years. However, what lies at the center of the poem is the reflection on

⁴⁰ Karol Wojtyła, "Thought—Strange Space," trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz, in Wojtyła, *Collected Poems*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (New York: Random House, 1982), 53.

⁴¹ Wojtyła, "Thought—Strange Space," 57.

⁴² Wojtyła, "Thought—Strange Space," 59.

⁴³ Wojtyła, "Thought—Strange Space," 59.

that inner space in which the encounter with God can take place. In a sense, indeed, the very care of that space is the guarantee of an encounter. As Augustine wrote, *in interiore homine habitat veritas*,⁴⁴ it is in the interiority of man that truth dwells.

In hindsight, the twentieth century's suspiciousness of interiority appears unjustified. Karol Wojtyła's quick remarks about the risk human being face of being emptied of their true nature by the external forces of the "world" have by no means lost their relevance: perhaps they are even more significant in an age when the great recognizable dictatorships certainly have receded, but the dissimulated ones have advanced, the ones that, for example, manage to engage even a child in a flood of images, words, desires, and patterns that colonize and deform experience. Abandoning the "strange space" of thought means leaving it empty and letting something else occupy it. But, above all, it is the deep connection of interiority with the Christian faith that deserves to be thought about again. It is well possible to recognize that this nexus has sometimes, or often, been developed in deviant forms. But it is also impossible to deny that it has appeared since the first Christian generation as an essential way of the thinking of faith as wholly human, as something that, with all the immense limitations of every individual person, truly concerns him or her and (as Paul wrote) even transforms the meaning of the word "I." I believe this is an important contribution that Christian discourse can bring to our time, and perhaps the best card to play in the face of someone who, if we are to believe the words of Jesus, does not care about conquering the whole world if he risks losing his soul.

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⁴⁴ Augustinus Aurelius, "De vera religione," 39, 72.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Giovanni SALMERI, Human Subjectivity and Christian Faith in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła

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The idea of interiority was greatly downplayed in Christian theology during the twentieth century. This was due to several causes, among which there were a rediscovery of the eschatological character of the preaching of Jesus and the attribution of interiority to a religious dimension apparently diminishing in the modern world. The language of interiority thus appeared not only unsuitable,

but sometimes even misleading. A scarcely known text by Karol Wojtyła, written in 1974, helps reopen the question: the paper describes interiority as the place *par excellence* of the divine presence. In this sense, interiority becomes an essential touchstone of evangelization, especially in the face of the challenges of the contemporary world that attempts to erase inner life. While such ideas are not frequent in Karol Wojtyła's most famous philosophical and theological texts, they do appear clearly in his early poetic compositions. In an age in which threats to human identity are more subtle and widespread, clarifying the link between Christian faith and interiority becomes an even more important task.

Keywords: subjectivity, interiority, Christianity, evangelization, Karol Wojtyła

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Giovanni SALMERI – Podmiotowość człowieka i wiara chrześcijańska w myśli Karola Wojtyły

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Idea wewnętrzności w dużym stopniu straciła na znaczeniu w dwudziestowiecznej teologii chrześcijańskiej. Zostało to spowodowane wieloma przyczynami, między innymi ponownym odkryciem eschatologicznego charakteru nauczania Jezusa i coraz rzadszym we współczesnym świecie łączeniem wewnętrzności z religią. Język wewnętrzności zaczął się w tym kontekście wydawać nieestosowny, a niekiedy nawet mylący. Mało znany tekst Karola Wojtyły, napisany w roku 1974, wykorzystany został w ponownego postawienia kwestii wewnętrzności. W artykule Wojtyły wewnętrzność uznawana jest za szczególne miejsce Bożej obecności. W tym sensie stanowi ona podstawowy próbiez ewangelizacji, zwłaszcza wobec wyzwań świata współczesnego, w którym życie wewnętrzne człowieka bywa zagrożone. Chociaż podobne idee nie pojawiają się często w znanych dziełach filozoficznych i teologicznych Karola Wojtyły, obecne są w sposób wyrazisty w jego wczesnych utworach poetyckich. W czasach, w których zagrożenia dla tożsamości człowieka stają się subtelne i wszechobecne, zrozumienie związku między wiarą chrześcijańską a wewnętrznością nabiera coraz większej wagi.

Tłumaczenie *Patrycja Mikulska*

Słowa kluczowe: podmiotowość, wewnętrzność, chrześcijaństwo, ewangelizacja, Karol Wojtyła

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