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TO SHAPE THE PERSON AND THE COMMUNITY
On the Concept of the University,
as seen in the Light of the Thought of John Paul II

The passion that connects researchers, professors, as well as students, the passion for the pursuit for truth for the sake of truth only, for discovering the previously unknown truths and acquiring ever greater knowledge of the world and of man, makes it possible to forge particularly deep bonds between individuals, to create a community grounded in the rational nature of man. Such a concerted search for truth, increasing our knowledge of the world, allows us to control it wisely and opens up new possibilities.

How did John Paul II understand the process of shaping the person and the community, and in particular the process of their reaching maturity? This question ought to be at least briefly addressed in order to show the specific role the university plays, according to John Paul II, in this process. Therefore, the first part of my paper will focus on the understanding of the person and of the community. Only in this perspective can the Pope's addresses to academic communities and his reflections on the mission of the university, seen in a broader cultural and Christian context, be properly understood and appreciated.

SELF-DETERMINATION IN TRUTH AND COMMUNIO PERSONARUM

Cardinal Karol Wojtyła dedicated his anthropological study *The Acting Person* to the question of the human being and to that of the mechanisms and ways by means of which the human being can reach full maturity as a person. Two parts of Wojtyła's work seem particularly important with regard to the subject-matter of this paper: "The Transcendence of the Person in the Action" (Part Two) and "Participation" (Part Four). The former addresses the topic of freedom, the latter is devoted to the process of a person's growing to maturity in the community of persons. The originality of Karol Wojtyła's concept of freedom lies in that he conceives it not as a person's capacity to make his or her own choices undetermined by external factors, but as an ability to exercise self-determination, rooted in the subject's relationship to himself or herself. Furthermore, the relationship in question strongly invokes the moral dimension of human freedom. This is indicated, among others, by the title of the fourth chapter of *The Acting Person*, namely, "Self-determination and Fulfillment".

According to Wojtyła, self-determination “presupposes a special complexity in the structure of the person. Only the one who has possession of himself and is simultaneously his own sole and exclusive possession can be a person.”¹ This means that the first aspect of self-determination is that of self-possession, “for only the things that are man’s actual possessions can be determined by him.”² The second aspect of self-determination is self-governance, understood by Wojtyła as a fundamental dimension of the structure of the person rather than a moral sense of self-control. The structure in question is revealed and actualized in any act of the person, even in a morally bad one. “Thus self-governance is man’s power to govern himself and not only to control himself.”³ It is important to note that the notion of self-determination has an anthropological, and not merely ethical meaning. Self-determination, in Wojtyła’s view, is not a mere function of free will conceived as a spiritual power of man. “In self-determination the will is present first of all as the essential of the person and only then as a power.”⁴ From the understanding of freedom as self-determination, it follows that whenever I freely choose anything, I simultaneously actualize myself as a person. “When I will anything, then I am also determined by myself.”⁵

I am determined by myself—and I fulfill myself as a person. “The fact that every performance of an action means fulfillment makes ‘to fulfill’ almost synonymous with ‘to perform.’ ... For being the performer of an action man also fulfills himself in it. To fulfill oneself means to actualize, and in a way to bring to the proper fullness, that structure in man which is characteristic for him because of his personality and also because of his being somebody and not merely something.”⁶ Wojtyła intends to keep his analyses on the ontological rather than on the ethical level, but he emphasizes the fact that “as an existential reality morality is always strictly connected with man as a person.... for the significance of moral values for the person is such that the true fulfillment of the person is accomplished by the positive moral virtuality of the action and not by the mere performance of the action itself. Morally evil virtualities of action, on the other hand, lead to nonfulfillment even though the person is acting.”⁷ At this point, it is necessary to refer to the concept of conscience, because “it is ... the conscience that reveals the dependence on a specific mode of

¹ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki (Dordrecht, Boston, and London: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 105.

² *Ibidem*, 106.

³ *Ibidem*, 107.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, 109.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 149–51.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 152–3.

‘truth’ ... inherent in the freedom of man.”⁸ And the “surrender to the good in truth forms in a way a new moral reality within the person. This new reality has also the normative factor and manifests itself in the formulation of norms and in their role in human actions.”⁹ Human persons, in contrast to other beings, which are determined by external causes, fulfill themselves by respecting the truth recognized in their conscience; respect for truth does not diminish human freedom; rather it brings out its essential subordination to truth—to any truth, but most importantly to the truth about the subject himself or herself, i.e., the human person, who can reach fulfillment by respecting truth. “Man strives for truth and in his mind the ability to grasp it as a value—by distinguishing it from non truth—is combined with the urge to search and inquire.”¹⁰ In this sense, “the normative power of truth within the functioning of the person, is intimately related to the conscience and evidences the freedom the person has in acting. Far from abolishing freedom, truth liberates it.”¹¹

Personal fulfillment based, on the one hand, on recognizing truth, in particular the truth about oneself, and on respect for it, on the other, is accomplished in being and acting together with other personal subjects. What Wojtyła claims is that not only does each and every one of us need help from others to live and reach his or her goals, but that man by nature acts in community with others. Only in the communal context can the person shape his or her values, set his or her goals in life, and fulfill himself or herself in the dimension of *communio personarum*. The latter is crowned by the category of ‘neighbor’ and has its fulfillment in the person’s participation in the life of his neighbors. Man, created in the image of God who is Love, cannot reach fulfillment, if not through love which connects him to other men and to God. In this sense, the process of maturation must take man away from himself, open him up, and finally help him find the meaning of life in his living for other people: in making a disinterested gift of self to others.¹² The key concept in this part of the reflection on the essence of the human person is ‘participation’ conceived as a personal subject’s active and creative joining other subjects in their realization of the common good. “Participation thus represents a feature of the person itself, that innermost and homogeneous feature which determines that

⁸ Ibidem, 154.

⁹ Ibidem, 156.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 159.

¹¹ Ibidem, 166.

¹² Karol Wojtyła expanded upon this idea in a number of papers (see, e.g., Karol Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in: Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (New York, San Francisco, Bern, Baltimore, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Wien, and Paris: Peter Lang, 2008), 219–61), and, as John Paul II, in the cycle of catecheses on human love and marriage (see John Paul II, “Man and woman he created them”: *A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

the person existing and acting together with others does so as a person.”¹³ The person acts together with others whenever there is a goal common to all the members of a given community: a goal so important to all of them that its achievement releases their multidimensional potential and creativity. The fundamental, authentic attitude expressive of this kind of participation is solidarity, which allows the subject not only to contribute to the accomplishment of the external common good, but also to become fulfilled as a person. It is through this kind of participation that community is formed. Therefore, „the *goal* of common acting, when understood in a purely objective and ‘material’ way, though it includes some elements of the common good and has reference to it, can never fully and completely constitute it. ... It also, or even primarily, consists in that which conditions and somehow initiates in the persons acting together their participation, and thereby develops and shapes in them a subjective community of acting.”¹⁴

THE ESSENCE OF THE UNIVERSITY A CONCERTED SEARCH FOR TRUTH

Beginning his address, of June 9, 1987, to the men and women of culture gathered in the Aula Magna of the Catholic University of Lublin (it was the first so important a meeting of the Pope with the scholarly community in Poland), John Paul confessed: “The memory of what the university is—Alma Mater—I still carry alive with me. Not only the memory, but also a sense of debt that must be paid with one’s life.”¹⁵ Indeed, Karol Wojtyła’s studies at the Jagiellonian University and at the Cracow seminary, his teaching at the Faculty of Theology at the Jagiellonian University, then the period of post-graduate research at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas *Angelicum*, and, finally, almost a quarter of a century’s work at the Catholic University of Lublin made it possible for him to acquire a deep knowledge of the academic world and to form a strong commitment to the scholarly community. It can be said that although the words he addressed to this community during his apostolic visit of 1987 flowed from the bottom of his heart, they were also grounded in his vast academic experience. The Pope raised a great number of issues related to the role of the university and to its mission. Here, I shall

¹³ Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 269.

¹⁴ Ibidem, 281.

¹⁵ John Paul II, “Jakie są perspektywy tego pokolenia?” Address to the men and women of culture in the *Aula Magna* of the Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, June 9, 1987, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Polish Edition, 8, no. 5 (90) (1987): 11. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are translated by Elżbieta Drozdowska.

focus only on his statements concerning the formation of the human person and of the community of people within the structures of the university. However, before I refer to the Pope's speeches on this topic, I would like to recall some truths, seemingly banal in their obviousness, which are nevertheless important for realizing the meaning of John Paul II's appeals.

The first of these banal yet important truths is that it is usually young people who leave their family homes and go to universities to study. Other people who have taken care of them so far, such as parents, teachers, educators, and not infrequently catechists, are no longer responsible for their lives, for the stages of their personal development to come, or for their further education. Young people begin to create their 'life projects' more independently, e.g., by choosing an area of studies, making new friends, and developing relationships which sometimes end up with marriage, or thinking about their future employment. In fact, they also choose, directly or indirectly, the system of values they will follow in their lives. Another important thing, however banal it might seem, is that to study means to engage in the process of learning truth: good students become naturally fascinated by the search for truth and they find joy in discovering it, while participation in this common pursuit shapes their minds and characters. At the same time, however, some students, as much as scholars, might be tempted to succumb to external pressures and abandon their selfless attitudes in research in favor of projects or study curricula improving their chances of financial prosperity in the future or media success. Higher education provides the human being with a great opportunity to reach his or her maturity as a rational being and to build deep and lasting bonds with others thus actualizing his or her participation in the community. Yet it is only an opportunity and whether a student will take full advantage of it depends on the atmosphere the university creates, as well as on his or her attitude. I believe this is the context in which we need to read John Paul II's numerous addresses to academic communities in which he emphasized the fundamental mission of the university. At the risk of inevitable simplifications, I shall now attempt to bring to the fore some of the appeals the Pope made in those speeches.

THE APPEAL FOR A SELFLESS SEARCH FOR TRUTH

In the already quoted address to the representatives of the world of culture delivered at the Catholic University of Lublin on June 9, 1987, the Pope said: "When I speak to you, I have before my soul's eyes all those communities in which the service of knowledge—that is, the service of Truth—becomes the basis for human formation.... By serving the truth out of love for it and by serving those to whom we communicate it, we build a community of people

who are free in truth, we create a community of people united by love for truth and by mutual love in truth, a community of people whose love of truth creates the bond that unites them.”¹⁶ The passion that connects researchers, professors as well as students, the passion for the pursuit for truth for the sake of truth only, for discovering the previously unknown truths and acquiring ever greater knowledge of the world and of man, makes it possible to forge particularly deep bonds between individuals, to create a community grounded in the fundamental dimension of humanity: the rational nature of man. Such a concerted search for truth, increasing our knowledge of the world, allows us to control it wisely and opens up new possibilities to make it better suited for human life and development. These immediate benefits, however important, must not overshadow the fact that through his search for truth and knowledge man shapes himself and, because the search for truth is a community endeavor, by participating in it together with others, man builds an authentic community of persons, a *communio personarum*.

Therefore, while appreciating the importance of the university as the place where a concerted search for truth is conducted, the Pope nevertheless issues a warning against reducing the role of the university to that of a higher vocational school whose only aim is to prepare its graduates for competition in the labor market. On June 6, 1979, John Paul II addressed the professors and students of the Catholic University of Lublin present at the special meeting with him in Częstochowa: “The university is part of the struggle for the humanness of man. The mere fact that it is called ‘university’ ... is meaningless for the cause of man. Indeed, one can even manufacture ... well-trained, educated people; this is not the problem. The problem is whether the enormous spiritual potential of man through which man actualizes his humanness has been liberated.... The mere production of educated, highly trained, specialized individuals does not solve the problem ... of man.”¹⁷ The problem of man remains unsolved unless the university supports the development of man’s intellectual creativity, unless it helps man shape his own way of thinking. At the same meeting in Częstochowa (in which I was lucky to participate), the Pope also said: “Teaching is indeed one of the tasks of the university, yet the fundamental service the university offers those who enter it, having already developed their intellect and gained some life experience, is to help them learn to think on their own.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ J o h n P a u l I I, “Spotkanie z Katolickim Uniwersytetem Lubelskim,” Częstochowa, June 6, 1979, in *Jan Paweł II: Nauczanie papieskie*, vol. 2, part 1 (1979), ed. Eugeniusz Weron and Antoni Jaroch (Poznań: Pallottinum, 1990), 667.

¹⁸ Ibidem.

In addition, John Paul II warned that science should not succumb to the temptations of unhealthy competition. On August 30, 2001, at a meeting with rectors of Polish universities representing around a hundred academic institutions, the Pope said: “One of the threats connected with globalization is unhealthy competition. It can seem to scholars, indeed to the scientific mindset as such, that in order to survive the competition in the world market, reflection, research and experimentation cannot be conducted only by means of just methods; the latter must be adjusted to predetermined goals and to the interests of public demand, even if this were to involve a violation of the inalienable human rights. In such a perspective, the demands of truth give way to the so-called ‘law of the market-place.’”¹⁹ Needless to say, an attitude like this is contrary to the perspective described above in that it not only destroys the opportunity to create a community of people who selflessly seek the truth, but also undermines the very essence of the university.

THE UNIVERSITY IN THE SERVICE OF MAN

At the same meeting, the Pope emphasized that “*concern for the human person*, for his or her humanity, is at the root of the aspiration of the universities.... Regardless of the area of the research, scientific or creative work, anyone who devotes his own knowledge, ability and efforts to it, must ask himself to what extent his work makes him more human, whether it renders every aspect of human life more human or more deserving of the human person; and lastly, whether in the context of the progress he has achieved, man ‘is becoming truly better, that is to say, more mature spiritually...’ (*Redemptor Hominis*, Section 15).”²⁰

Science is, in fact, the motor of progress, and the academic milieu certainly provides great inspiration for progress. Yet the Pope draws attention to the ambiguities of progress, to the fact that, on the one hand, progress facilitates human life and strengthens man’s control over the world, but, on the other hand, man may be threatened by the consequences of progress, which may even get out of human control and become fatal. “Indeed, it happens all too often that what man succeeds in producing, thanks to the ever new possibilities offered by scientific theory and technology, becomes the subject of ‘alienation’.... Examples of this situation abound. It is enough to mention the innovations in

¹⁹ John Paul II, Address to the Rectors and Professors of the Polish Universities (Castel Gandolfo, August 30, 2001), Section 4, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/august/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010830_docenti-polonia.html.

²⁰ Ibidem, Section 3.

the fields of physics, especially nuclear physics, or information technology, the exploration of natural resources and, lastly, experimentation in the areas of genetics and biology.”²¹ To the list of the fields of science where progress may become dangerous to man, the Pope adds some fashionable philosophical ideas and developments in psychology. He also points out that literature and art are not free from such risks. According to John Paul II, the university should be an environment permeated with concern for man and respect for his dignity. At the same time, the Pope stresses the importance of long-term thinking rather than focusing exclusively on man’s current needs and threats; thus he encourages the members of the academic community to develop “the capacity to anticipate the effects of human acts and to be responsible for man’s situation, not only here and now, but also in the most remote corner of the world and in the indefinite future.”²² This postulate has a clear pedagogical dimension: scholars and students alike should remember that science is to serve all human beings, including those who will populate the earth in the future.

OPENNESS TO GOD

Many academic disciplines have no direct reference to God and John Paul II was well aware of this fact. At the same time, he also realized that in every area of science and the humanities, responsible scholars encounter problems that lie outside the scope of their discipline, provoking them to address questions related to other fields and eventually to cross the boundaries of their research field, opening it up to Mystery. “The man of science will really help humanity if he keeps ‘the sense of man’s transcendence over the world and of God’s over man,’” said the Pope in his speech at UNESCO in 1980.²³ And in Vilnius, after his critical remarks about Marxism and other atheistic ideologies, John Paul II reminded the scholars: “Therefore, ladies and gentlemen of culture and science, you, more than others, have the responsibility not to close the range of human thought to the horizons of mystery.”²⁴ In his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, as we know, John Paul II placed a special emphasis on the need for a dialogue between faith and reason (including science). He believed the dialogue in question is particularly important both for shaping the person (scholars and students) and for building a community of people seeking the truth.

²¹ Ibidem, Section 2.

²² Ibidem, Section 4.

²³ J o h n P a u l II. Address to UNESCO, Paris, June 2, 1980, Section 22, <http://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>.

²⁴ J o h n P a u l II. Meeting with World of Culture, Vilnius, September 5, 1993, <http://inters.org/meeting-world-culture-vilnius>.

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While the above reflections certainly do not exhaust the rich contents of the numerous addresses given by John Paul II to academic communities, I attempted to demonstrate their grounding in the philosophy of man proposed fifty years ago in Karol Wojtyła's study *The Acting Person*. I believe the paper will help the readers realize the significance Karol Wojtyła–John Paul II, former professor of the Catholic University of Lublin and saint of the Catholic Church, attached to the university as the environment in which students and scholars are formed as persons and grow to reach their maturity.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Andrzej SZOSTEK, To Shape the Person and the Community: On the Concept of the University, as seen in the Light of the Thought of John Paul II

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The first part of the article is focused on Karol Wojtyła's views, proposed in *The Acting Person*, on shaping the person and the community. The key concepts discussed in the paper include the category of freedom conceived as self-determination based on truth and the category of participation as the dimension of the human person that enables him or her to create, together with others, a community of persons (*communio personarum*) to develop and reach her maturity within it. The second part of the article discusses particular guidelines John Paul II, referring to his rich academic experience, offered to the world of the university. The author of the paper emphasizes three such guidelines as specifically related to the university: to selflessly search for truth, to serve the human being, and to be open to God. As these characteristics of the university help shape the person in the community and, at the same time, seem to be threatened, the Pope calls for particular respect for them.

Key words: freedom, truth, community of persons, university, scientific research, education

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Andrzej SZOSTEK, Uniwersytet jako miejsce kształtowania osoby i wspólnoty w ujęciu Jana Pawła II

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Pierwsza część artykułu zawiera przypomnienie Karola Wojtyły koncepcji kształtowania osoby i wspólnoty zawartej w studium *Osoba i czyn*. Kluczowe znaczenie dla tej koncepcji ma kategoria wolności jako samostanowienia poprzez odniesienie do prawdy oraz kategoria uczestnictwa jako tego wymiaru ludzkiej osoby, poprzez który współtworzy ona wraz z innymi wspólnotę osób (*communio personarum*) i w jej ramach dojrzewa do swej osobowej pełni. W drugiej części artykułu omówiono szczególne wskazania, jakie św. Jan Paweł II – w oparciu o swoje bogate doświadczenie uniwersyteckie – kierował do świata akademickiego. Specyficzne dla uniwersytetu są, zdaniem autora artykułu, trzy takie wskazania: bezinteresowne poszukiwanie prawdy, służba człowiekowi oraz otwarcie na Boga. Papież dopomina się o respekt dla tych znamion uniwersytetu, ponieważ wszystkie one dobrze służą kształtowaniu osoby we wspólnocie, a wszystkie zdają się być dziś zagrożone.

Słowa kluczowe: wolność, prawda, wspólnota osób, uniwersytet, nauka, wychowanie

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