



# Janusz Nagórny's Interpretation of the Personalistic Category of Participation and Its Implementation in the Theological-Moral Reflection on Social Life

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**Abstract:** Moral theology, like any science, develops not only through the addition of new concepts but also through the explanation of phenomena with increasing accuracy and depth by applying adequate tools and methods, which can and should be improved. In describing the essence of social life and morally evaluating social attitudes, such a tool is provided by the personalistic category of participation. This category – extensively discussed by Karol Wojtyła in his book *The Acting Person* – was originally interpreted and applied to the theological-moral reflection on social life by Fr. Janusz Nagórny (1950–2006) – moral theologian from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. What was his contribution to this implementation? What rendered his understanding of participation so original? What were the methodological and substantive consequences of such a reception? To answer these questions, the author analyses Nagórny's publications, including those which so far – mainly due to their popular science and popularising character – have not been the subject of more in-depth study. The analysis presented here leads to the conclusion that Nagórny lent a theological character to a philosophical category by its biblification and, in such an interpretation, he applied it to detailed areas of social life. Furthermore, the use of elements of the historical method justifies the thesis that he was the initiator of this type of implementation and contributed to making it popular in Polish moral theology.

**Keywords:** Janusz Nagórny, Karol Wojtyła, participation, solidarity, opposition, personalism, covenant, community, social life, morality

The methodological reorientation of moral theology after the Second Vatican Council marked a departure from the methods of treating moral issues that had been developed since its autonomisation and a turn towards biblical morality, which gave it a number of new features. One of these was an appreciation of the communal aspects of moral life, while moving away from the individualistic treatment of moral issues characteristic of post-Tridentine theology (Gocko 2006, 183; 1998, 123–50).

The appreciation of social issues within the post-conciliar reorientation of moral theology was undoubtedly a result of biblification, but over time it was also expressed as a wider opening to the personalist category of participation, which was extensively addressed by Karol Wojtyła in the fourth part of his book *The Acting Person* (K. Wojtyła 1979, 261–300), and which is still the subject of many philosophically oriented studies today (Tarasiewicz 2016, 417–32; Mizdrak 2010, 115–30;

Pawlak 2006, 51–62; W. Wojtyła 2020, 103–18). Wojtyła's concept of the participating person, interpreted in conjunction with biblical sources, has found application in explaining the very nature and specificity of the Christian view of interpersonal community, especially the relationships within it and the obligations that arise from these relationships.

Although this category is also present in Catholic social teaching pursued autonomously, there is no doubt that Fr. Prof. Janusz Nagórny – rightly regarded as one of the protagonists of the post-conciliar opening of Catholic moral theology to social issues – significantly contributed to its introduction into moral theology (Gocko 2010, 175). He considered participation to be one of the most important keys to interpreting the Christian vision of community more fully, to properly understanding the problem of interpersonal relations within social life and to assessing specific moral attitudes and to interpreting the entire social teaching of Pope John Paul II (Nagórny 1997, 119; 2007, 228; Pokrywka 2008, 419).

In outlining a Christian vision of community, Nagórny consciously uses the personalistic category of participation specifically as a personalistic category. However, he makes his original contribution to it by its theologisation, biblification and applying it to specific areas of community life. The essence and significance of this contribution can be better understood in the context of the changes which, inspired by the Second Vatican Council, occurred in moral theology in the second half of the 20th century. Therefore, before proceeding to present participation itself as a key to understanding the full scope of social life and, at the same time, as a tool for evaluating detailed social issues, it is necessary to at least briefly outline the context in which Nagórny undertakes his scientific work as a moral theologian. This context determines a gradual departure from individualism in favour of highlighting the communal aspects of moral life and moral theology as a reflection on such life.

## **1. Janusz Nagórny as a Witness and Participant in the Social Reorientation of Moral Theology**

The studies and the beginning of the academic work of Nagórny coincided with the first phase of the post-conciliar renewal of moral theology. Admittedly, since the end of Vatican II and the famous call for the renewal of moral theology contained in the Decree on Priestly Training *Optatam Totius* ("Special care must be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific exposition, nourished more on the teaching of the Bible, should shed light on the loftiness of the calling of the faithful in Christ and the obligation that is theirs of bearing fruit in charity for the life of the world" [OT 16]), more than a dozen years had passed by then, this renewal was still in its infancy. The overly individualistic view of the moral life, which had been

characteristic of the prevailing currents before the Council: Alphonsianism and, to a lesser extent, Neo-Thomism, had to some extent survived in the lectures, especially of those who, not being associated with academic centres, had devoted themselves mainly to teaching in seminaries and who, themselves brought up on textbooks by Hieronymus Noldin and Dominikus Prümmer, faithfully followed in their footsteps (Zadykowicz 2006, 277).

These essentially pre-conciliar approaches were also present in Polish moral theology after the Council (Greniuk 1993, 172). They portrayed man as an individual who, not so much owing to, but in spite of, life in society, is to strive for the salvation of their own soul. The conception of social life was therefore negative. It was also focused on case studies, the individual cases that moral theology of the time sought to solve. There is no doubt, therefore, that the approach to social issues was one of the special areas in need of renewal, both from a substantive and methodological point of view. The idea was not only to broaden the scope of issues to include certain problems, but also to develop an overall, holistic concept of community.

In line with these demands, social issues, although always present to some extent in moral theology, began to receive even more attention after Vatican II, especially in the circles of theologians associated with the academic centres of the time (Kowalski 2006, 47). A number of problems in this area were taken up already in the first period of the renewal by such Polish authors as Stanisław Olejnik (1970), Franciszek Greniuk (Greniuk 1977), Tadeusz Sikorski (1976, 1977, 1978), and Jan Kowalski (1970). The aforementioned theologians, using the data of sciences such as philosophy, psychology and sociology in their argumentation, highlighted the communal aspects of morality. Moreover, they stressed that the specificity of Christian morality includes its social dimension. None of them, however, made explicit reference to the category of participation.

The 1980s and 1990s saw a particular intensification of theological-moral publications, which were an expression of the ongoing social reorientation of the discipline. They abounded in literature that addressed both the totality of social issues and their particular aspects. The best known in this respect is the seven-volume series *Dar. Wezwanie. Odpowiedź* (The Gift. The Call. The Response) by Stanisław Olejnik, the last volume of which was entitled *Moralność życia społecznego* (Morality of Social Life) (Olejnik 1993).<sup>1</sup> Henryk Skorowski's publications: *Być chrześcijaninem i obywatelem dziś: Refleksje o postawach moralno-społecznych* (To Be a Christian and a Citizen Today: Reflections on Moral and Social Attitudes) (1994) and *Moralność społeczna: Wybrane zagadnienia z etyki społecznej, gospodarczej i politycznej* (Social Morality: Selected Issues in Social, Economic and Political Ethics) (1996) can also serve as textbooks. A number of independent (i.e. not included in the entirety of

<sup>1</sup> A similar title (*Teologia moralna życia społecznego* [Moral Theology of Social Life]) in a three-volume edition is given to the last volume (Olejnik 2000).

teaching on moral theology) detailed studies have also been published presenting a holistic approach to social morality. Most of them discuss the subject of participation in connection with the common good, which is the space for participation and solidarity, which fosters the creation of the common good (Strzeszewski 1985, 516–18; Majka 1988, 420–21; Zwoliński 1992, 28–29; Piwowarski 1993, 183; Borutka, Mazur, and Zwoliński 1999, 58–59, 63–64). Some of them discuss the principle of participation separately, as part of detailed classifications made within the basic social principles (Mazur 1992, 179–80). Monographs devoted to individual social issues are also being written. Also, an increasing number of conferences and doctoral dissertations address social issues (Gocko 2006, 189–90). Within the faculties of theology at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw and the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Chairs of Social Moral Theology are established; the one in Lublin is not headed by Nagórny.

Therefore, Nagórny makes his contribution in a specific context. His vision of social morality is a reflection of everything that the Church of his time lives by. At this time, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is published, with one of the articles in its chapter “The Human Communion” entitled “Participation in Social Life.” (CCC 1897–1927) In disseminating the teaching contained in it, Nagórny is constantly searching for ways to better respond to the signs of the times (Gocko 2010, 175). For him, such a sign of the times was the need to show even more clearly the communal aspects of morality. For this reason, he first interpreted man’s vocation to community life by referring to biblical foundations. Later, he began to interpret this reference using also the original concept of personalism created by Wojtyła, and especially one of the elements of this concept – the category of participation. This use, however, was not a mere repetition, a loanword; it was rather an adaptation of the idea he interpreted. In this sense, Wojtyła’s book *The Acting Person* was for Nagórny a source of inspiration rather than a collection of *dicta probantia*. That is why he did not always quote it directly, although the reader will find a lot of such literal quotations and paraphrases, as well as references to studies that address it. However, it is not these that testify to the extent to which its content has been received. All the more so, he did not polemicise with the theses it contained, but rather developed them, supplemented them and made them the starting point for his theological-moral analyses.

## 2. Janusz Nagórny’s Theological-Moral Interpretation of the Category of Participation

Nagórny’s vision of the life of a person in a community was profoundly theological, i.e. not philosophical, still less sociological, which, however, did not mean that he founded it exclusively on biblical premises (Nagórny 1997, 102–3; 1994, 75;

Nagórny 2004c, 243). On the contrary, the communal character of the Old Covenant and the vision of community presented in the New Testament were supplemented by Nagórny with data that Christian personalism brought to the reflection on the social dimension of human life. It is not surprising, then, that in the book *Posłannictwo chrześcijan w świecie* (The Mission of Christians in the World), the fragments concerning participation were placed immediately after the presentation of the biblical vision of community life (Nagórny 1997, 112–32). He assumed that a person's participation in community life can be regarded from both a philosophical-ethical perspective, as Wojtyła did, and from a theological one. Moreover, he was convinced that referring to the natural order alone is not enough and that it is necessary to delve into the deepest foundations, i.e. Christian Revelation (Nagórny 2010b, 58–59). Thus, his conception of participation was inscribed in the theological character of the Church's social teaching, the character he always defended (Gocko 2008, 403).

Nagórny thus succeeded in combining the natural and supernatural dimensions of participation and its anthropological and theological aspects. According to the Professor, participation has its foundations in human nature and Revelation. It is an anthropological category, but this anthropology has a theological character. For him, therefore, the category of participation was an important complement to the biblical vision of community. It allowed him to reach out to the natural-law order, to philosophical reflection of an anthropological-ethical nature. As a moral theologian, Nagórny was looking for a harmonious synthesis between what the Holy Scriptures teach about the communal character of human life and what results from the concept of human life interpreted in the spirit of Christian personalism (Nagórny 1997, 112). He argued that reflection on participation does not cease to be theological-moral when it turns to the natural-law order and to philosophical personalism. He was convinced that this double direction of search defends moral theology against both losing the Christian specificity of presence in the world and neglecting the temporal dimension of life and preventing Christians from adopting the attitude of dialogue and cooperation in a pluralistic society (Nagórny 2010b, 57). The Professor was aware that the concept of community is not unambiguous (Nagórny 1997, 102). On the contrary, it has numerous connotations depending on the adopted concept of man. Therefore, he thought of the philosophical category of participation as a tool for dialogue with those who are not necessarily open to the message of the Bible.

The category of participation, or better, the “category of participating person” described by Wojtyła, seemed to Nagórny to be particularly well suited to developing a theological vision of community. However, as a moral theologian, he repeatedly emphasised that the Christian view of social life is derived above all from a biblical vision of communal life, yet he immediately added that this does not in any way imply the omission of all that is contained in the philosophical concept of the human person and its dialogical dimension (Nagórny 1997, 103).

What was the reason for this “suitability” of the personalistic category of participation for developing a theological vision of community? According to Nagórny, it is its connection with the biblical idea of the Covenant, which points not only to the participation of man in the life of God, but also to the participation in the lives of others in the spirit of love (Nagórny 1997, 103; 2007, 248–49). In this way, Nagórny closely linked the category of participation with the biblical vision of covenant that was absolutely fundamental for him. The category of covenant, he argued, makes it possible to show the social character of participation and to overcome its individualistic interpretation and egoistic conception of life. Christians – he wrote – called to build an interpersonal community and to participate in this community are above all called to participate in the New Covenant in Christ, to participate in the community of the saved, and thus to co-create the Church as a true “communion of persons.” (Nagórny 1997, 101)

It seems, the Professor argued, that this Christian interpretation of participation finds its theological foundation in the vision of the New Covenant. Participation and solidarity are, as it were, the contemporary name of this Covenant which God has concluded with humanity in his Son, Jesus Christ. If God, out of love, not only creates a special bond with human beings but allows them to participate in His life, then a special duty of solidarity with other human beings arises from this Covenant-participation. Christians who follow their Master not only participate in God’s Covenant with people but themselves become, as it were, a “covenant” for others, and this is done through participation in the lives of other people and in the lives of individual communities (Nagórny 1997, 131–32; 2010b, 62).

Nagórny thus proves that the category of participation considered in terms of the concept of man as a relational being fits harmoniously into the biblical vision of community life based on the idea of Covenant in Christ. Both perspectives of interpreting the communal character of the human person converge in the truth that man, created by God and thus endowed with existence, has not only been given the world but, above all, has been endowed with a particular “image and likeness” of God, while man’s ability to enter into relationship with another “you” is a natural capacity, finding its fulfilment in God’s salvific self-communication to man. In either case, it has the character of a covenant gift. In this way, the personalistic vision of community leads one – as the Professor writes – directly to the theology of community (Nagórny 1997, 132).

The theology of community pursued by Nagórny reached the deepest, supernatural sources of participation. The Professor writes: “The attitude of participation experienced in the spirit of Christian faith is born out of the awareness of belonging to Christ and participating in His life and mission on earth. This reference of participation to Christ thus reveals its broader perspective: it acquires a supernatural dimension, for it is the realisation of the kingdom of God on earth.” (Nagórny 1997, 129) Nagórny was convinced that a proper understanding of the biblical doctrine of



the interrelation of community members with the community itself makes it possible to more deeply explain the roots of individuals' participation of individual people in the life of society. It seems, wrote the Professor, "that it is precisely this biblical perspective on the interconnectedness of individual members of a community with the community itself that can provide a starting point for a proper presentation of the problem of the social character of human action." (Nagórny 1997, 107)

Pointing to the supernatural sources of participation, Nagórny links this category with a Christian's participation in the threefold mission of Christ and with the theological virtues, especially love (Nagórny 1997, 129; 2010b, 57). It is in the theological virtues that the Professor perceived a great causal and motivational power of many concrete forms of participation (Nagórny 2010b, 66). Speaking of opposition as one of the principles of participation, he emphasised its connection with the capacity for sacrifice, growing out of Christian fortitude (Nagórny 1997, 126–27).

Linking the category of participation with the biblical vision of the covenant led the Professor to link the vertical and horizontal elements of participation. That is to say, he did not see participation as a mere contribution to community life, but as a consequence of the truth of God's fatherhood towards all people and a consequence of the covenant that God has made with each person and with the nation as a whole. The biblical category of covenant allowed Nagórny to reconcile the necessity of an individual's personal involvement in religious life with participation in the nation's life. It also helped to demonstrate the possibility of and need for the universality of participation. Indeed, the central law of the covenant, which was the commandment to love one's neighbour, opened up an ethnic community to an increasingly open fraternity, which also included strangers and foreigners (Nagórny 2007, 107; 1997, 107).

By this specific "theologisation" of participation, Nagórny was able to show the ecclesial dimension of the Christian life and emphasise that it is not just individual Christians but the entire Church that is present in the world and the entire Church that participates in the life of individual societies (Nagórny 2010b, 63). It also made it possible to recognise the social dimension of sin (Nagórny 1997, 107). The concept of participation presented by Nagórny is very realistic precisely because it takes into account the reality of sin. This is because the Professor closely linked the category of participation with the theological category of sin as a source of community breakdown, but also as an obstacle to authentic participation. "Man called to community," he wrote, "is at the same time man in need of salvation." (Nagórny 1997, 110) It is also realistic in that it accounts for the objective difficulties of the obligation to participate. These include, for example, all forms of prejudice against Christians who want to participate in the building up of civil life, as this prejudice motivated the pagan community in the biblical world and motivates it today (Nagórny 1997, 111).

Through the category of the covenant, especially the New Covenant, Nagórny portrayed participation as a form of transforming the world from within so as to

orient the community towards an eternal perspective and at the same time towards temporal prosperity. Thus, Nagórny's category of participation is not only an anthropological category but also a theological one. Thanks to the theological approach to this category, the relative character of temporal values and a specifically Christian approach to the world, which is neither contempt, rejection nor uncritical affirmation, has been shown (Nagórny 1997, 111; 2010b, 68).

Nagórny also outlined a concrete image, a model of authentic participation in the person of Jesus and the early Church: "Christ [...] as God-Man is fully in solidarity with human beings, which is also expressed in the truth of the New Covenant, which is a Covenant in Christ and with Christ. This must also be read in the light of the words of Christ, who told his Apostles: 'I am with you always, until the end of the age' (Matt 28:20). In this declaration: 'I am with you,'" writes Nagórny, "every follower of Christ should also recognise the call for an individual to want to be together with others, too, for God's solidarity with people is a call for solidarity between people. Thus, the Christian refers to the model of Christ as the true Emmanuel, that is, 'God with us', as the One who in solidarity has become involved in all human affairs." (Nagórny 1997, 130) And a little further on, "the disciple of Christ should at the same time recognise in his Master the One who is 'a sign of opposition' and a sign that 'will be contradicted' (cf. Luke 2:34). Christ repeatedly made it clear by His conduct that he was that 'sign of opposition' to evil which he perceived in the lives of both individuals and society. Only the imitation of Christ in the totality of His mission and His attitude towards human society can enable individual Christians and the entire Church to fulfil their tasks in the world." (Nagórny 1997, 130)

Nagórny – as is evident from the above – linked the personalistic perspective of participation with the Christological foundation of the Christian life: "Any call to participation should ultimately be read by the Christian in the context of life with Christ." (Nagórny 1997, 131) He also linked the fruitfulness of participation to Christ and being grafted in Him: "For Christ says: 'Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5). Only the one who grows, matures and bears fruit in union with Christ can fully undertake the toil of responsibility for both oneself and others and thus can be a participant in community life." (Nagórny 1997, 131) Nagórny emphasises, however, that "Showing the Christian perspective on participation is not limited to pointing to the model of such participation in Christ, but also refers to the supernatural endowment of man. Man by his very nature is capable and called to participate in social life, but transformed and strengthened by grace, he can do it in a new and more perfect way." (Nagórny 1997, 131; 2007, 248) What is more – as the Professor convinces – a person can and should do it in many areas of their life.



### 3. Janusz Nagórny's Application of the Principles of Participation to Concrete Situations

Nagórny had a great ability to apply general ethical principles to specific situations. This also applied to how the duty to participate in social life was realised. Very often, on various occasions and, perhaps above all, in his publications and speeches of a popular-scientific and popularising character, he showed not only the foundation and essence of participation but also its numerous detailed, practical aspects. Moreover, he not only showed, but called for, solidarity and opposition, attitudes which, according to Wojtyła, express authentic participation (K. Wojtyła 1979, 284–87). His theological-moral reflection on participation thus had a practical orientation.

The Professor placed the call to participation in the context of the challenges arising from the concrete situation of the contemporary world (Nagórny 2007, 233–36; 2010b, 57). One could even say that his reflection in this regard grew out of his concern about the state of solidarity of Poles and their capacity for constructive opposition. In one of his columns, he said: "I watch with concern how easily interpersonal ties and social relations are broken in today's Poland. How easily divisions and quarrels arise also in those human groups and communities, which are specifically called to seek ways of love and unity." (Nagórny 2005, 39–40)

Therefore, it was in the light of the possibility or impossibility, the willingness or unwillingness to be with others, through others and for others that he evaluated social and political programmes, the electoral decisions of Poles and their moral attitudes, the already existing and created legal acts, and even the words and deeds of politicians and journalists sometimes mentioned by name. He interpreted many specific topics in terms of participation: human labour (Nagórny 2000, 60–61), patriotism (Nagórny 2000, 104; 2006, 129–30), upbringing in the family (Nagórny 2000, 60, 79), religious education (Nagórny 2000, 63–64), education for freedom (Nagórny 2004b, 27), the mission of the media and responsibility for the word (Nagórny 2000, 74), fraternal admonition (Nagórny 2004a, 194), and showing young people the meaning and value of life (Nagórny 2000, 211).

Nagórny emphasised that a Christian cannot give up participation, which on the practical level is realised through the ordinary testimony of life and expresses participation in the work of evangelisation of the world (Nagórny 2000, 202, 205; 2010b, 63). A Christian cannot give up witnessing even if the environment is hostile or even hostile towards the mission of believers (Nagórny 1997, 111). On the contrary, they must constantly remind themselves that they are called to put into practice the principle of solidarity, i.e. "all with all," and "all for all." (Nagórny 2007, 230) When necessary, they are also obliged to oppose constructively. Such an attitude is – according to Nagórny – an expression of responsibility for others (Nagórny 2007, 279), including care for their salvation (Nagórny 2000, 125–28). Thus, the Professor called for solidarity that is general, but also for the "neighbourhood," "local,"

and “grassroots” solidarity (Nagórny 2007, 278). He outlined detailed principles of solidarity of working people, and solidarity of families. He described specific forms of participation resulting from specific vocations, e.g. of parents, teachers, and catechists (Nagórny 2000, 126–27).

What then are these specific forms of participation? Nagórny’s social sensitivity had him exposing the delusion of those who proclaim the possibility of building social life solely on democratically legislated law. While not denying the need to care for good law, the Professor was at the same time pointing to its insufficiency. He postulated that this life be based on a certain system of virtues, which he somewhat jokingly called “urgently wanted.” (Nagórny 2007, 75) From 18 March to 24 June 2004, he delivered a series of talks on *Radio Maryja*, in which he presented these virtues as the foundation of social life; as something that every citizen should “contribute” to the community of the state and the nation, so that this community would truly deserve the name. Participation, therefore, also involves being concerned for the formation of oneself and others, for being guided by a righteous conscience, aimed at building the social order. For a person does not only bring “something” into the community, but first and foremost they bring themselves into it, and the shape of social life depends on what they are like and what their conscience is like.

Among these “urgently wanted” virtues, Nagórny included wisdom (Nagórny 2000, 159), prudence, a healthy sense of shame and decency, humility, responsibility, fortitude, justice (Nagórny 2000, 156), honesty, patience and perseverance, moderation, kindness, unselfishness, patriotism, mercy, readiness to help others (Nagórny 2000, 151), capacity for dialogue (Nagórny 2000, 129–31), and even simple kindness (Nagórny 2000, 108–10). Commenting on the invocations of *The Litany of Loreto*, the Professor created a full “litany” of virtues that need to be developed in oneself and “brought” into social life. In this he saw a way to solve many social problems, e.g. poverty, loneliness, discouragement, resignation (Nagórny 2007, 242; 2005, 41).

He saw the concern for one’s own development, for one’s own education, for one’s own family, for multiplying one’s own prosperity as an attitude of solidarity, because – as he argued – all this is important not only for a particular person and his or her loved ones, but is somehow a co-creation of the prosperity of the community of the nation to which one belongs (Nagórny 2007, 237, 252, 285). Participation is always oriented towards the future, towards the creation of a perfect community. A person who lives according to the indicated virtues becomes a sign of hope for a better tomorrow (Nagórny 2000, 170). Participation – according to Nagórny – is, however, not only a person’s “contribution” to social life, but also the ability to receive, to open up to other people, to their good advice (Nagórny 2000, 112–13).

The professor also showed the consequences of non-participation. He had the courage to say unpopular things when he blamed the lack of moral order in many areas on condoning evil, on scandalous behaviour of politicians and supporting and

electing them (Nagórny 2007, 78). Speaking of the need for responsibility, he warned that "if we do not feel more responsible not only for our personal lives, but also for everything that determines the life of the nation and the state, we will lose the regained freedom." (Nagórny 2007, 87) Thus, for the Professor, any form of indifference to social issues, including the evil existing in social life, was the negation of participation (Nagórny 2000, 77, 152).

Wojtyła considered individualism and totalism (K. Wojtyła 1979, 272–73) and conformism and avoidance (K. Wojtyła 1979, 289–91) to be the negation of participation. Nagórny was aware of these attitudes in his own time. He stigmatised specific manifestations of conformism and avoidance, escapes into privacy and exuberant individualism on the one hand and collectivism on the other (Nagórny 2007, 234, 256, 260, 263; 2005, 40, 42). He called for overcoming all manifestations of apathy and passivity. For, according to him, participation is also "going against the tide," opposing everything that destroys man and social life (Nagórny 2007, 89); it is even a fight for justice and for just rights (Nagórny 2007, 93; 2000, 208). The Professor was aware that there is still much to be done in the field of Christian participation in social life. How eloquent in this respect are his words about *Solidarity* as a trade union, but at the same time as a moral stance: "The first *Solidarity* contributed to overthrowing the totalitarian system and Soviet domination. And the second one? First, I beg God for it to be born at all." (Nagórny 2007, 108)

In his contemporary Polish society, Nagórny perceived a spirit of egoism, anti-solidarity, privacy, aversion to community life, and divisions that prevent people from cooperating. Faced with these phenomena, he called for participation also by looking for some synonyms for the term. He said, for example: "Nothing about us without us – that is the best incentive to participate in any election." (Nagórny 2007, 104) He also used certain images, for example when he said: "The ballot papers symbolise something that can be associated with the spirit of solidarity." (Nagórny 2007, 231) For him, participation was about defending the values of social life, such as, for example, defending the life of the unborn, and mobilising others to such defence. In his statements, one can find specific definitions of participation. For example, he said of solidarity that "it means the ability to be with another person," (Nagórny 2005, 41) "it is one of the names of love" (Nagórny 2007, 247); that it is the same as covenant (Nagórny 2007, 249); that "today it also means hope." (Nagórny 2007, 235–36) It is worth noting, in passing, the word "today," which is used fairly often in his statements. It is a form of sign that his reflection on participation is indeed rooted in current circumstances.

In his application of the principles of participation to concrete situations, Nagórny drew attention to the need to create the right conditions for such participation. What good is it, he asked, when a person wants to contribute to the life of the community when those who have already gained some office consider themselves infallible and no longer need any help, any advice but only flatterers (Nagórny 2007, 85–86)?

Nagórny was also particularly sensitive to the problem of the participation of the Church and individual Catholics in political life. He courageously defended this right; moreover, he pointed to the obligation of such participation in spite of the slogans about “the Church’s meddling in politics,” which were used both then and now (Nagórny 2007, 114). He also extended participation to the fields of economics, culture, education and the media. He devoted a special place in his articles and speeches to the need to care for the family. He ranked this type of participation – both of the spouses and parents themselves and of the entire community with regard to marriage and the family – among the most important (Nagórny 2007, 117). He considered the upbringing of the young generation in the spirit of solidarity, i.e. teaching young people to live with others, through others and for others as a special form of family participation in social life (Nagórny 2007, 286–87).

Nagórny portrayed participation as the “contribution” of a particular person to social life, but he also developed the communal, and especially ecclesial, elements of this involvement (Nagórny 2000, 229–31; 2004b, 84). He criticised the views that only individual believers can be involved in social life, while such involvement is denied to the institutionalised community. He proved that not only solidarity with the weakest, with people in need but also the Church’s call for morality in public life, work on human conscience, creating a culture of life and striving for its legal protection is also a participation in the spirit of solidarity (Nagórny 2004b, 38, 41, 55, 72; 2005, 94, 113).

The interpretation and application of the principle of opposition to current situations is also interesting. The vision of tolerance reduced to a total negation of the right to dissent, as well as “political correctness” are – according to the Professor – negations of this principle (Nagórny 2007, 255; 2000, 269). Nagórny linked constructive opposition with the capacity for sacrifice, with the Christian virtue of fortitude and courage, in the name of which the individual is able to oppose everything that destroys the community (Nagórny 2007, 256). Opposing the existing or created legal order, if it refers to an intrinsically unjust law, is sometimes a concrete expression of such opposition (Nagórny 2000, 25; 2003, 235). Besides, Nagórny himself stated that if one wanted to list all inappropriate attitudes and situations in our social life, towards which an attitude of opposition is necessary, one would have to speak for at least several hours (Nagórny 2005, 43). However, he particularly lamented the lack of opposition to manifestations of rudeness and savagery, to obvious and drastic forms of ridiculing Christian values, and religious symbols, but also to corruption, violence, lies, deceit (Nagórny 2005, 43–44).

It seems that Nagórny’s original contribution to the reflection on the duty to participate is even a call to leave, to withdraw from public life addressed to those who have proved too weak or even more to those who have proved immoral. The Professor said: “A normal person will have enough shame to consider that when they have lost public trust, they should withdraw from public life, resign their position.”

(Nagórny 2007, 81) And even more: "Today, responsibility for Poland means not allowing people who have been compromised many times to continue to influence our social life." (Nagórny 2007, 88) Elsewhere: "Whoever lies should never be elected again." (Nagórny 2007, 96) Therefore, according to Nagórny, there are situations when others must be prevented from "participating." This is because if people bring into social life different forms of aggression, violence, attack, destruction of one's neighbour, hostility, brutality, various forms of contempt, and disregard for the weaker and less educated, then this must be opposed (Nagórny 2007, 100, 128). In doing so, the Professor referred to the words of John Paul II uttered in Gdańsk in 1987 that "solidarity also generates struggle." (Giovanni Paolo II 1987) As he immediately added, this is not a fight against others, but a battle for man, for man's rights, for man's true progress: a battle for a more mature shape of social life (Nagórny 2007, 229).

This is why he called for a new awakening of the attitude of responsibility for social matters in those who, even with a completely justified sense of injustice, have relegated themselves to the margins of social life (Nagórny 2007, 88). This issue is all the more pressing because – as he said – "the peculiar drama of our times is that in Poland the people who are more 'in solidarity' with each other are the wicked people, the criminals of various kinds, all those who unite and cooperate for evil purposes." And immediately the Professor adds: "of course, this is not solidarity, because this unity is not based on love." (Nagórny 2007, 278) A true "contribution" to society will only be possible if one is capable of sacrifice, of renunciation, of rising above one's own self-interest (Nagórny 2000, 48–49).

#### **4. The Significance of Implementing the Category of Participation for Theological Reflection on the Morality of Social Life**

Although, almost immediately after the Second Vatican Council, many Polish moral theologians drew attention to the need to appreciate the communal aspects of moral life, there is no doubt that Nagórny was the first to discuss the category of participation so extensively and to use it so creatively. Above all, it served him as a methodological tool for grasping the very essence of social life and the duties of an individual towards the community. From a substantive point of view, however, it contributed to his moral theology, especially to that which was more practically and pastorally oriented, a number of specific issues which were not included in the older models of reflection on the good and evil of human acts and of the person who performs them within the framework of social life.

A detailed analysis of Nagórny's writings made it possible to reveal the originality of his approach to participation in relation to the thought of Karol Wojtyła. It should be emphasised, however, that an attempt to capture the originality of his contribution

to the interpretation of this category cannot lead to juxtaposing the two authors. As already mentioned, for Nagórny the category of participation was the key to reading the entire teaching of John Paul II. Thus, many of the intuitions found in his works were inspired by the message conveyed by Wojtyła already in his role as pope, later than the book *The Acting Person*.

Inspired by the reflection of Wojtyła – John Paul II – Nagórny demonstrated the existence of a harmonious relationship between the anthropological category of participation and the biblical vision of community. By introducing Wojtyła's more personalistic and philosophical category into the area of his biblical analyses, he created a form of synthesis in the interpretation of the Christian vision of community life. It is a theological vision, which grows out of the conviction that the rationale of the duty to become involved in various areas of social life cannot be limited only to natural arguments, but such arguments cannot be omitted either (Nagórny 2010b, 79). Nagórny was convinced that participation and the resulting principles of solidarity and opposition can and should be interpreted in two complementary dimensions: in the natural dimension that is universal for all people; and in the dimension of faith, i.e. in the deeply Christian dimension (Nagórny 2007, 107, 226). It seems that such a close link between these dimensions and the development of the supernatural dimension of participation is the Professor's original, creative contribution.

There is no doubt that the theological perspective of participation was more important and more fundamental for Nagórny. However, he builds a certain type of bridge between it and Wojtyła's thoughts of a more philosophical (anthropological) nature. Thus, it can be said that the Professor made an evangelical interpretation of participation and its principles and of their application to detailed areas of Christian life. This indication of various planes of solidary presence of an individual in the community, the variety of forms and means of involvement of individuals and whole communities, was undoubtedly an original contribution of Nagórny to the development of Wojtyła's category of participation.

In the context of the Covenant, and at the same time with the use of philosophical tools, the Professor showed that not only are the individual and the community not contradictory concepts but – on the contrary – they are complementary and only considered together they reveal the anthropology of the community. Both the data of Revelation and the very nature of man confirm that members of a particular community does not so much become lost, as find themselves in it and, as it were, confirm themselves by simultaneously participating in everything that constitutes the good of that community (Nagórny 1997, 107). In this way, Nagórny made the category of participation and the level of its implementation the test of a truly Christian attitude (Nagórny 1997, 112). He considered the principles of participation – solidarity and opposition, as another way of expressing the fundamental command to love as Christ does (Nagórny 1997, 123).



By linking the personalistic category of participation with the biblical vision of community life, the Professor inspired research not only on participation itself, but also on the theological character of Catholic social teaching (Pokrywka 2000; Gocko 2003). He provided theological instruments for evaluating the different forms of a person's participation in community life. By combining philosophical reflection with biblical premises, he pointed to the possibility of dialogue around social issues between Christians of different denominations and even between believers and non-believers. His intuitions about certain social problems were extremely pertinent and remain still valid today. Most importantly, however, these issues and new problems can be evaluated in the light of the same principles of participation.

The category of participation has entered permanently into the social teaching of the Church. The most recent *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* lists it among the fundamental principles and values of social life (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005, nos. 189–91). Of course, this is not attributable to Nagórny, but confirms his intuition that participation is more than just one of specific moral attitudes. Also, numerous publications on the morality of social life today refer to the terminology and category of participation. The term has entered the language of moral theology and autonomously practised Catholic social teaching. Even there are no direct indications of its origins in Wojtyła's writings, it functions universally as a theological-moral category and as a principle of social life closely linked to the common good and solidarity (Borutka 2004, 119–20, 124; 2005, 599–601; Drożdż 2005, 552–55; Bełch 2007, 170, 175; Mazurkiewicz et al. 2024, 111–12). The family's tasks in relation to society (Zarembski 2020, 319–36), human labour (Kupny 2003, 32), participation in culture and its creation (Krajewski 2020, 13), in elections (Nagórny 2010a, 415), presence in the media (Klichowski 2011, 199–208) and many other aspects are explored in the light of the principles of participation.

## Conclusions

The analysis of Janusz Nagórny's scholarly and popularisation works leads to the conclusion that his understanding of the category of participation is his original contribution to the theological research regarding social life, especially in terms of its foundations. This is because his view of participation was not a simple repetition of social philosophy. On the contrary, it had a deeply theological character. Consequently, his entire moral and social reflection is not a social ethics pursued from a philosophical perspective, but a moral theology of community life.

The originality of Nagórny's approach to participation lies in the close connection of this personalistic category with the biblical idea of covenant that is absolutely fundamental for him. Reference to this idea allowed the Professor to show the double

source of participation: the very nature of man and man's supernatural endowment by God. While Karol Wojtyła focused on the natural sources of participation, Nagórny devoted more attention to the supernatural sources of this attitude. Hence, themes such as the creation of man in God's image and likeness, participation in Christ's threefold mission, and especially the new covenant in Christ, are presented in his works in connection with participation.

Nagórny therefore looked at the sources of moral theology in an original way for his time. Despite his keen awareness of biblical sources, he did not reject philosophy and the human sciences. On the contrary, he fulfilled the postulate on the mediating role of philosophy in theological reflection that John Paul II formulated in his Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio* (no. 68). His understanding of the principle of participation expresses his conviction that it is possible and at the same time necessary to use philosophy in moral theology.

Nagórny does not practice moral theology in a historical and existential vacuum. On the contrary, he is familiar with and makes use of the achievements of his predecessors, but makes his own original contribution to these achievements. He is also familiar with current moral and social problems. His interpretation of the principle of participation is an example of inscribing a personalist category in a specific historical and theological context, but also in a specific situation, which is particularly evident in his practical application of the principles of participation to current problems. As part of this application, he significantly developed the category of the participating person by emphasising that an individual participates not only by contributing "something" to social life but, above all, by contributing themselves to it. Hence, in terms of participation, he described the care for the formation of oneself and the acquisition of appropriate virtues, which are to be one's first "contribution" to the good of the community.

The theologisation of participation allowed Nagórny to underline the ecclesial character of participation, and to show Christ as the source and perfect model of two attitudes expressing participation: solidarity and opposition. Through theologically elaborating on the category of participation, some specific issues, such as the theological virtues or sin, were also explored in more depth.

By introducing the category of participation into moral theology, Nagórny contributed to overcoming its negativism and casuistry. This is because he presented social life as an opportunity and as a unique entirety, and not merely as a threat and a collection of individual cases. Although he undoubtedly contributed to significantly broadening the range of issues within theological-moral reflection, the issue of participation cannot be regarded as just one of many in Nagórny's works. On the contrary, it plays the role of a methodological tool, an aid to understanding a holistic conception of social life. Nagórny turned Wojtyła's concept of participation as "acting together with others" or "co-operation" (K. Wojtyła 1979, 261–64) into a specific type of interpretative key.

This key is fairly widely used in moral theology nowadays. Today, it is no longer possible to practise a moral theology of social life without recourse to the category of participation. To abandon it would mean to return to the legalistic and individualistic models of the past, in which man and his actions were seen solely in terms of a narrow relationship between the individual and God, and all morality was reduced to achieving one's own perfection solely through obedience to the law, in which other people and the entire community could only be an obstacle. However, the constantly emerging simplifications in the understanding of participation itself (Karwat 2017, 54), as well as the spreading attitudes of avoidance and conformism that contradict it, challenge one to show its deepest foundations and its possible goals – the self-realisation of the person with the simultaneous “humane” shape of community life.

It is worth noting that Nagórny not only conducted theoretical research on participation but also sought allies in shaping pro-social attitudes and in opening ever-new spaces for human talents and initiatives. All the more so because, as he noted, it was rather common at the time to discourage participation (Nagórny 2007, 115). From today's point of view, therefore, it can be said that he not only analysed the attitude and principle of participation, not only taught about it, but also sought the social impact of those truths about which he himself was convinced. Therefore, his theology of participation also had a practical dimension and was directed to both the construction of a coherent theory and the promotion of moral and social attitudes corresponding to this theory.

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