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## Dialogue in Karol Wojtyła's thought - Polish perspective

### Dialog w myśli Karola Wojtyły - polska perspektywa

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**Abstrakt:** Karol Wojtyła, bardziej znany jako św. Jan Paweł II, był często nazywany papieżem dialogu. W licznych wystąpieniach podejmował tematy dialogu ekumenicznego, międzyreligijnego i międzykulturowego. Nigdzie jednak nie znalaziono miejsca, w którym opisałby metodologię dialogu i nie ma jednego spójnego dokumentu, w którym nakreśliłby, jak osiągnąć pokój poprzez dialog. Niemniej jednak wiele tekstów Wojtyły, popartych doświadczeniem jego życia, pozwala na przedstawienie hipotezy, która sugeruje możliwość znalezienia spójnej, choć pozornie nieoczywistej koncepcji tego zagadnienia w zbiorze jego rozważań i idei. Praca ta, będąca syntezą nauczania o dialogu, ma również swój praktyczny cel. Interesuje mnie, czy obecna w rozważaniach Karola Wojtyły koncepcja dialogu może być wykorzystana jako propozycja realizacji, która może zmienić relacje społeczne, a tym samym stać się jednym z kluczowych elementów innowacyjności, choć jeszcze nierozwiniętym. Badam możliwość uzasadnienia faktu, że nauki teologiczne, które są podstawą metody dialogu Karola Wojtyły, wnoszą własną wartość do rozwijających się kierunków innowacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** postawa, dialog, metoda, proces, Wojtyła

**Abstract:** Karol Wojtyła, better known as St John Paul II, has been often called the Pope of Dialogue. In numerous speeches, he addressed the topics of ecumenical, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue. However, nowhere has he described the methodology of dialogue, and there is not one coherent document where he outlines how to achieve peace through dialogue. Nevertheless, a great many of Wojtyła's texts, supported by the experience of his life, allow for a presentation of a hypothesis that suggests the possibility of finding a coherent, yet seemingly unobvious concept of this issue in the collection of his reflections and ideas. This work, which is a synthesis of the teaching of dialogue, also has its practical purpose. My interest lies in whether the concept of dialogue, which is present in Karol Wojtyła's thoughts, can be used as a proposal of implementation that can change social relationships, and therefore become one of the key components of innovation, although still undeveloped. I examine the possibility of being able to justify the fact that the theological teachings, which form the basis of Karol Wojtyła's method of dialogue, bring their own value to the developing directions of innovation.

**Keywords:** attitude, dialogue, method, process, Wojtyła

The concept of dialogue, which is so unambiguous in its source definition, has taken on many related meanings in everyday language. Dialogue is quite often identified as a means of communication, as mediation in conflict situations, or simply as an exchange of opinions in a discussion. For this reason, a serious reflection on the idea of dialogue in Karol Wojtyła's case requires a purification of those concepts. Consequently, I have begun by identifying dialogue from its basic form. It is worth defining the conceptual scope through the prism of the approach proposed by Professor Janusz Tarnowski (1990), who distinguishes three possible forms of dialogue depending on the attitude towards change

and self-development. These are method, process, and attitude (ibid, p. 67). The method means that we deal with an intellectual idea that systemises the concept of dialogue, describing its components, and explains the sources and reasons for a specific understanding of dialogue. Karol Wojtyła made numerous statements concerning this subject in his philosophical and theological texts and speeches as Pope. They include both the contents of authentic listening, expressing one's own identity, humility, and the readiness to work on oneself constantly by listening to others' problems.

Examples include the first encyclical of his pontificate idea; *Redemptor Hominis* (John Paul II, 1979a), which gave direction to all his pontifical activities, was based on the slogan, *Do not be afraid, believe in your identity and open the door to Christ*. The encyclical, *Ut unum sint* (John Paul II, 1995) was dedicated to the call to unity. In the Apostolic Exhortation, *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (John Paul II, 1984), the themes were of forgiveness, reconciliation, and penance. There are many other speeches, including those for World Peace Days from his 104 pilgrimages, addresses to politicians, scientists, artists, and working people. The time of the pontificate is a period in which the of dialogue has already been defined, and shaped. The process of understanding this concept can be followed and appreciated by anyone who undertakes individual study and reads the publications: *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła, 1960), *The Acting Person* (Wojtyła, 1979b) , and the series of catechesis in *Male and Female He Created Them* (John Paul II, 1981). It is in these texts that Wojtyła guides the reader through the key concepts of his thought. He begins by questioning the needs and ethical conditions of the person who acts consciously and creatively. It is in an action that a person reveals his or her morality to the outside world (when he or she acts in a good or bad way). At the same time, the person creates his or her self when carrying out a good or bad action, and gets to know the world and experiences it. The action changes the experience (Wojtyła, 1979b, p. 174). Being a perpetrator of the action, the person fulfils him or herself in it (ibid, p. 159), which at the same time constitutes an entrance, a kind of intrusion into their own self. Hence, not only does the dialogue conducted with another person aim at peaceful coexistence, but also at becoming better by learning the truth together.

The culmination of these considerations is the introduction of the term, the personalistic norm, by which the internal command of a formed conscience, requires that the other person be treated with love. This command becomes in a self-shaping, self-conscious, and self-serving individual, the most natural of reflexes made towards the person. At the same time, treating the other person with love, just because s/he is - this act becomes constitutive and creative for the doer himself (Wojtyła, 1979b, p. 169-180). Therefore, the dialogue in Wojtyła's view, is a tool for building a space for the meeting of persons *for real*, and thus God's plan for the human person can be realised.

It is no surprise to attentive experts of Wojtyła's work, that regardless of the form of expression in his writing on different levels and aspects of dialogue, be it poetry, dramas,

pastoral letters, encyclicals or speeches, his texts show conceptual consistency. The dialogue consists of an attitude of merciful openness to the other person and the ability to forgive, and to understand oneself. For example, the ideas of God's mercy contained in the drama, *The Brother of our God* (Wojtyła, 1989), found their continuation in the encyclical, *Dives in Misericordia* (John Paul II, 1980). The theology of the body present in *The Jeweller's Shop* (Wojtyła, 1997), is continued in the scientific and ethical book, *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła, 1960), and later in the catechesis of *Male and Female He Created Them* (John Paul II, 1981). Similarly, elements of the concept of dialogue appeared in literary texts and it is very interesting to analyse how Wojtyła looked for words in poetic language to express dialogical attitudes. In a letter to his longstanding friend, Mieczysław Kotlarczyk, Wojtyła wrote that *in the poems he learned to speak, he could express himself*. Indeed, in many literary texts we can see fragments of meditation related to the development of being able to listen, to get to know oneself, to discern, to finally accept oneself and others (Popiel, 2019).

*The distant shores of silence begin at the door.  
You cannot fly there like a bird.  
You must stop, look deeper, still deeper,  
Until nothing deflects the soul from the deepest deep.*  
(Wojtyła, 1979b, 1)

In another text, he indicates listening, which gives the person an opportunity to be enriched and develop:

Didaskalia to the drama *Our God's Brother: Divergent thoughts break through in Adam from everywhere. The faces of the people he sees, illuminate him, exerting pressure on the words he has heard. Nonetheless, they are still processing Adam. At times, it simply seems that they have created him* (Wojtyła, 1989, II.1).

And then in part one of *Roman Triptych* (John Paul II, 2003), John Paul II describes the experience of knowing oneself – the one absolutely essential for dialogue:

*He was alone in his wonderment,  
among creatures incapable of wonder  
- For them it was enough to exist and go their way.  
Man went his way with them,  
yet carried along by wonder!  
In his wonderment, he always emerged  
From the tide that bore him on,  
As if to say everything around him:*

*"Stop – in me you find your haven",  
 " in me you find the place of your encounter  
 With the Eternal Word".  
 "stop, all this passing has sense"  
 "has sense.... has sense.... has sense!"  
 (ibid, I, 1)*

We can also find in him a reflection on how much we can change ourselves through meeting others:

*From this depth – I came only to draw water  
 in a jug – so long ago, this brightness  
 still clings to my eyes – the perception I found,  
 and so much empty space, my own,  
 reflected in the well.  
 (Wojtyła, 1979d)*

And in section 9 of the *Song of the Inexhaustible Sun*:

*....in one gaze so simple  
 I dwell in your Thought once more.*

*I am at one with myself  
 in the brightness that hides; I become your Thought, and am fed  
 by the love inside the white heat of Bread.  
 (Ibid.)*

It is obvious to Wojtyła that dialogue, regardless of the level of the problem or its form: ecumenism, interreligious, intercultural activities, daily, marital, or collegial relationships, they require the same attitude. In each of these situations it is necessary to listen to one another, to be open to the other's reasons, to humble oneself and one's own imperfections, and to be confident of who one is. More importantly, however, is the fact that dialogue is conducted not for the sake of the matter, but for the sake of the person. This is a method of introducing and implementing a personalistic norm. That is why Karol Wojtyła, referring to the experience of the Second Vatican Council, reminded us that dialogue is about a reliable search for truth, so we must be ready for it (Wojtyła, 1972). At the same time, it means that at different stages of growing up, to be human - through self development, we face a more or less deepened dialogue. When it is conducted with a sense of responsibility for the truth, it does not really matter whether it will result in an important international declaration or a common good that occurs between two people. What is most important for

dialogue is that it should take place within a person. It is therefore very important that institutional dialogue, such as inter-church or intercultural dialogue, always revolves around the good of the person - the personalistic norm, and not around a group or institutional benefit.

It is worth recalling that, in Wojtyła's concept, dialogue does not mean consent. Dialogue does not seek to unify behaviour, but instead it seeks to bring what is *true and right* out of a situation of opposition and diversity of views (Wojtyła, 1979b). *The principle of dialogue is therefore so apt that it does not avoid the tensions, conflicts, and fights that the lives of various human communities bear witness to, while at the same time taking up precisely what is true and right in them, which can be a source of good for people* (ibid. 326). A dialogue is intended to bring about an encounter between two people, and not the views or social roles that are fulfilled. Relationships between a father and child, employer and employee, doctor and patient (for social order) will always be characterised by hierarchy and subordination. In dialogue by Wojtyła, the entire process must take place between peers. Accepting roles does not really allow a person to build lasting relationships. Then, *subjective attitudes and dispositions appear, which can be a source of tension, conflict, and fights between people* (ibid. p. 326). No dialogue is therefore possible because the person's full identity has not been revealed.

Let us return for a moment to the division proposed by Professor Tarnowski and look at the levels of the methodology we are using to identify the intention, potential, and conscious willingness of the dialogue. It is only at the second level that we take real steps towards putting the method into practice. This process is characterised by a conscious willingness to communicate with each other, agree on positions, and cooperate in accordance with the adopted method. As Pope, Karol Wojtyła, implemented that phase of dialogue, for example, through the fact that he repeatedly became the initiator of personal and institutional contacts of various sorts and dimensions - personal, religious, cultural, philosophical, and generational, that were never before obvious and were never undertaken. This can be illustrated with a few examples of the processes initiated by his initiative.

On 10<sup>th</sup> November 1979, thirteen months after taking office, he initiated the investigation into the case of Galileo, who was condemned in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for proclaiming the theory of heliocentrism. Thanks to the efforts made at that time - on the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, the Catholic Church officially vindicated Galileo. In February 1980, Pope John Paul II met with the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, which was the first of many successive meetings of religious leaders united by a desire for peace. *'His own experience of communism in Poland helped him understand the Tibetan problem. For me personally, this gave a lot of support,'* recalled the Dalai Lama. On 16<sup>th</sup> August 1980, in Castel Gandolfo, the first meeting with intellectuals took place. Subsequent meetings were held every two years when he hosted the

most prominent thinkers from around the world at his summer residence. He listened to conversations devoted to the most important problems of the present day, thus expanding his knowledge, developing sensitivity to viewpoints other than his own, expressing respect, and appreciation for other perspectives. Among his guests, were Leszek Kołakowski, Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur, Robert Spaemann, and Charles Taylor (Michalski, Bonowicz, 2010). Shortly after the introduction of martial law in Poland, in the only way available to him at that time, in a letter to Wojciech Jaruzelski, dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 1981, he appealed for national dialogue and an end to violence (ibid, p. 586).

Regarding the conflict between Argentina and Great Britain over the Falkland Islands, the Pope was involved in a reconciliation process between the parties. He demanded that Argentinean troops withdraw from the islands. At the same time, he urged the leaders of both countries to stop the conflict by means of telegrams. To illustrate how multifaceted the dialogue conducted by Pope John Paul II was, I highlight the fact that the Pope was the first to step over the door of the Evangelical Temple on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther's birth. In his speech, he focused on the reference to the restoration of unity and the call to purify history - 11<sup>th</sup> December 1983 (ibid, p. 599).

Almost a year later, on 29<sup>th</sup> November 1984, thanks to the Pope's efforts and mediation over several years, the signing of the peace treaty between Argentina and Chile took place. The war for the three deserted islets of Lennox, Picton, and Nueva, located in the Beagle Canal in the very south of both countries, was to start at 3am on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1978. The following year was a turning point in contacts with the followers of Islam. More than 2 million young Muslims arrived at the Casablanca Stadium on a pilgrimage to Morocco to meet the Pope. This was the first time in history that the Pope had addressed Muslims. A year later, a breakthrough took place in dialogue with Judaism, when the Pope was the first to enter a Jewish temple. It was in the Major Synagogue in Rome. A storm of applause was caused by his statement that Jews are the older brothers in the faith (ibid, p. 636).

The culmination, also in terms of image for the Pope of dialogue was the organisation of the World Day of Prayer for Peace, on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1986. At the Pope's invitation, delegations representing 47 Christian Churches and 13 world religions came to Assisi. The meeting was a confirmation that humankind, when engaging in the cause of peace, should reach for its deepest and most life-giving sources (ibid, p. 645).

The process of ecumenical, inter-religious, and inter-cultural dialogue was therefore carried out, among other things, by inspiration, and thanks to the Polish Pope. He implemented the personalistic standard he had formulated, which in the communal format was also complemented by his theory of participation. Participation, or acting together with others, not only makes it possible to create something together, but above all, acting together allows a person to fulfil him or herself. Participation is more than just being a member of a community. A person and a community create each other and this awareness was shared

by John Paul II when he initiated and sought to meet people at different levels of social decision making. Acting together with others, not only do we act for the common good, but this good also returns to the active one, changes it, develops it, and helps to reach maturity in the right person. It is a personalistic model of thinking about the person. Simultaneously, it can be seen that acting together with others, in order not to be conflicting and problematic, everything must naturally be based on dialogue. The common good *must release an attitude of solidity, but it must not close itself off and cut itself off from opposition. Such a structure of human community and participation seems to meet the principle of dialogue perfectly well. Dialogue can also be used to shape and deepen human solidity through opposition* (Wojtyła, 1979b, p. 325).

The third level of dialogue concerns adopting an attitude characterised by a constant readiness to meet. It is about the person who reacts to interpersonal relationships in a dialogical way, when this attitude is a natural way for him/her to react to another person, being always available to listen, to accept otherness and difference, to be open to learning and to come to the truth together. The phenomenon of Karol Wojtyła's personality consisted precisely in his dialogical attitude (Wojtyła, 1961, p. 664-675). We are not analysing his personality here, so it is difficult to say how much of the behaviour that contributed to the dialogue was due to his natural predispositions, and how much he adopted because of his upbringing and as a result of learning from his own reactions, his environment, and the effects of his decisions and actions. However, an attitude is something much deeper than learning to listen, to suspend one's own judgements, to express one's own opinion firmly, or to be open to the opinions of others. It is about the internal structure of a person who, as his or her identity accepts the behaviour and reactions typical of dialogue. Since the attitude of dialogue requires dynamism, constant updating, and self improvement, it is not good practice to use in a common setting concepts such as: conversation, communication, and meeting, interchangeably with dialogue. Synonyms extremely diminish the depth of the concept of dialogue.

In the thought of Karol Wojtyła, one is or should be, dialogical not for social or cultural reasons, but for deeply ontological and anthropological reasons. In other words, for the sake of the person. The meeting of people is not really supposed to be an exchange of opinions, but a meeting of two identities, which are connected by a common goal - to become the image and likeness of God and to make a subjugated land. It is in the earthly dimension that this is the direction of the dialogue. For this reason, every encounter with a person, including self-esteem, requires a certain degree of reference to God and recognition that the person demands to be treated with love. The commandment to love God and neighbour Wojtyła transposes for the purposes of relationship ethics and introduces the term of personalistic norm. It means that a person is such a being that deserves to be loved. This sentence that seems laconic, sets and prioritises all further decisions that a person makes. The fact that Wojtyła's love for his neighbour is set in the position of a norm means that he treats

this type of relationship as obligatory, as an obligation arising from creation, as well as a model for building relationships. Theological studies reflect on what it means in practice; that man is the image and likeness of God, whether the image and likeness are the same when they reveal themselves, and what their characteristics are. Wojtyła takes up these issues, but looks rather more towards the answer that seeing the other person is like meeting the holiness of God. Therefore, the meeting in Wojtyła's concept cannot be limited to conversation and exchange of information. Since the human person is a reflection of the holiness of God, it is the person who becomes a temple (according to such an understanding, theology will say that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit), and the encounter with another person is somewhat akin to contemplating God. The difficulty is that it should not only happen intentionally, but that it should transform into an attitude, a constant readiness to meet (Wojtyła, 1979b, p. 55-62).

Therefore, Karol Wojtyła's dialogue means a meeting at the deepest level of a relationship one can imagine. It is an encounter with a person, not the social role that that the person plays. Therefore, if I meet my mother, my teacher, my employer, or a sales assistant, the level of our relationship comes down to listening, conversation, and acceptance (Tischner, 1990). When there is a conflict because of the level of roles, what we need is to listen, to form consensus, and agreement. When we talk about the level of people, we are dealing with an attitude that could be raised to the level of salvation dialogue. In terms of evaluating Wojtyła's ideas, this is crucial, because his dialogue has theological roots and its sense is not so focussed on building the common good on earth (Wojtyła, 2007, p. 36-40). The prospect of salvation, peace, and understanding, built on earth for the sake of future reunification with God is the reason for dialogue. Together with another human being, I can look for the truth about my own creation, I can look for the truth about the meaning of existence, I can look for God and together with another person I am able to contemplate his holiness. Without dialogue, without peace, without understanding, without love of neighbour it is impossible. Thus, the essence of the concept of dialogue according to Wojtyła, is its core which is to know the other person without any intention or desire to treat that person in an instrumental way in any way, shape, or form. It is a cognition for the sake of cognition itself, a kind of foretaste of meeting God, face to face, which is a condition for any further action and cooperation. This feature is what makes Wojtyła's concept unique. Dialogue in this sense is not therefore, primarily understood as an agreement, compromise, or consensus, etc., but is, above all, a meeting of people and an opening to mutual knowledge (Wojtyła, 1979b, p. 329-333).

In this way, the concept of integrity, which is clearly present in his texts, also gains a new and deeper meaning. *It is essential that we meet in the name of a human being understood integrally, in all its fullness and in all its spiritual and material richness of existence* (John Paul II, 1979b), and thereafter: "All these human rights taken together are in keeping with the



substance of the dignity of the human being, understood in his entirety, not as reduced to one dimension only..... Material and spiritual realities may be viewed separately in order to understand better that in the concrete human being they are inseparable, and to see that any threat to human rights, whether in the field of material realities or in that of spiritual realities, is equally dangerous for peace, since in every instance it concerns man in his entirety" (ibid.)

Dialogue helps a person to become integral and holistic.

### Conclusion

Dialogue in the thought of Karol Wojtyła cannot be discussed only in the context of communication, as it is often raised today. A dialogical attitude becomes part of human personality. Its universality is attested to by the fact that it does not ask about a person's faith, beliefs, or views, but seeks an authentic meeting, during which all of the participants begin to learn the truth. The Latin notion of *revelacio* - revelation, is unveiling what has always existed, although it was covered. In this sense the dialogue of Wojtyła is over (beyond) the religious one, and yet deeply humanistic. It speaks about the experience of itself in dialogue with another person. This experience in turn, brings us closer to the truth, opening us up to transcendence. The basic condition however, is a personalistic norm, which, when applied, enables the transformation of social relationships. The idea of dialogue, understood in this way, implemented in every interpersonal relationship, serves to improve the quality of work and to achieve the desired goals. According to the theory of participation, people fulfil themselves in a community dimension. The greater the understanding within the community, the greater the possibilities of achieving the tasks undertaken, and the goals pursued.

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