



A BACKGROUND SURVEY OF KAROL WOJTYLA'S ORTHODOXY IN THE LIGHT OF HIS PRE-PAPAL ETHICAL TEACHINGS

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Abstract

Karol Wojtyla, who later became Pope John Paul II, made significant contributions to ethical teachings and theories, emphasizing the inseparability of orthodoxy from scholarship. His ethical reasonings are rooted in personalism and Thomistic philosophy thereby validating the dignity of human person, freedom, and responsibility. A survey of Wojtyla's background to underscore a pre-papal orthodoxy in his ethical teachings; to demonstrate how he integrated faith and reason based on truth and freedom into his ethics of the human person; to show the harmony between his beliefs and empirical applications leading to moral truth; and, to affirm that his cohesive vision and praxis aligned to sustain human dignity and common good are some of the objectives of the study. Phenomenology and analytic methods were adopted in this research. To achieve these objectives, the researcher approached the discourse from the following outlines: Karol Wojtyla's biography, education, specific historical events, early publications, and his ethical teachings. The research in its findings indicated that a good number of scholars agreed that Karol Wojtyla's ethical teachings proceeded from the background of his orthodoxy; an affirmation of the positive impacts of his work on society; and his immense contributions to knowledge, especially ethical themes on responsible freedom, human rights, moral truths, and human solidarity. At the end, the study concludes that the background of orthodoxy was instrumental to the ethical teachings of Karol Wojtyla.

Keywords: Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II), Background Survey, Orthodoxy, Ethical Teachings, Catholic Church, Poland.

Introduction

Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, was a great philosopher, theologian, and ethicist whose teachings resonated with millions around the globe, especially in shaping contemporary moral compass. His ethical framework was versed in orthodoxy emphasizing its connectedness with faith and moral truth. The motive for the consideration of Karol Wojtyla, ethicist, theologian, philosopher, and future pope, is to highlight his ethical thoughts on issues such as quality of human conduct and its interface orthodoxy. Wojtyla's ethical vision was largely influenced by the works of Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheller. For Wojtyla, moral truth is not a mere abstract concept, rather, a compulsory imperative for human beings in society. His seminal works such as *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*, lay emphasis on the personalistic approach to ethics and praxis, where humans are perceived as free, rational beings called to act in accordance with objective moral truth. Another backdrop to his orthodoxy is the family where his parents inculcated core Catholic ethics and values to his upbringing from infancy to adolescence. One cannot forget his educational formation where he enjoyed the



Catholic tradition of training both the mind and soul towards the complete mankind. Other aspects of his background include but not limited to such historical events in Poland; the evil of Nazism; Communism; and, the causes and consequences of the World War II.

The above laid the framework for his future role as a Pope in 1978 when he began his papacy. Wojtyla strongly defended the dignity of human life, the sacredness of human life, the sanctity of marriage, and the significant place of conscience in moral judgment. Given all these, this work posits that Wojtyla challenged relativism, advocating instead for an ethics that is rooted in truth, love, and personal responsibility. In all of these, the aforementioned indices of background were at the forefront as pivotal factors of successes in his career as priest, bishop and pope.

This research explores how Karol Wojtyla's background to orthodoxy influenced his ethical teachings, manifesting that authentic Christian faith and morals require both correct belief and right action. By investigating his scholarly contributions, one understands his vision of moral duty and the lived expression of faith in today's world.

1. Explanation of Key Concepts

Concepts are important aspects of research that define the usage of terms that form the substantial parts of the body of a work. They (concepts) lay the foundational structure both in contents, contexts and flavours to the phenomenon/phenomena under discourse. Here, ethical teachings and orthodoxy are some of the recurrent terms in this study.

1.1 Ethical Teaching

Ethical teachings refer to the principles, guidelines, or ethos that aim to define what is right or wrong, good or evil, what ought and what ought not, in human behaviour and decision-making for a personal or collective interests. They offer a framework on how individuals or group of individuals should act in various situations aimed at virtuous means or end.

1.2 Orthodoxy

Orthodoxy means correct belief or right pedagogy. It is used in a few different contexts to underscore upholding truthful position of a phenomenon or maintenance of tradition devoid of secularisation or adulteration in scientific or religious spheres.

2. Background to Karol Wojtyla's Orthodoxy: A Survey

The background to the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of Karol Wojtyla with respect to his ethical teachings consists of a number of events and influences that shaped his thoughts culminating in his works as an academic and cleric. These include his biography, education, specific historical events, and early publications (*Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*).

2.1 Karol Wojtyla: A Short Biography

For Tad Szulc, one of the biographers for Karol Wojtyla, "a biography must be more than dates, facts, and



quotations”. It should convey, “...the person’s heart, soul, thoughts”¹ In order to meet up with these biographical expectations, Tad Szulc submits thus:

I took the pope’s advice to study in depth Polish history and literature – his own intellectual and emotional mainstay –and looked up old friends and acquaintances he suggested I should see in Poland and elsewhere. Then I took it up upon myself to work through, with much enjoyment, his immense literary output...²

The biographical setting is Poland for Wojtyla was a Polish citizen and his country was dear to him as a European. Luigi Accattoli has brought this to the reading public, when he pictured his love for Poland:

Dear fellow-countrymen: It is not easy to renounce the return to my country, “to those fields rich in varied flowers, silvered with wheat and gilded with rye”, as Mickiewicz writes; to these mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers; to the people loved so much; to our royal city (Oct. 23, 1978).³

The factuality of the birth of every human person is historical. This affirms the influences of space and time on shaping one’s outlook to life. It is therefore striking to note that only human are historical beings in the strict sense. The human nature is endowed with both intellectual and spiritual capacities to function as a rational, religious and social animal. Here lies the major concern about all those factors that moulded and shaped Wojtyla’s ethical thoughts, vision and mission. In his reflection he sees human history as a link between rational and memory in the management of finest moments of mankind:

Broadly speaking, it could be said that the whole created universe is subject to time and therefore has a history. Living beings have a particular kind of history. Yet no one of them, no other animal species possesses a historical dimension of the kind that we attribute to man, or to nations, or to the entire human family. Man’s historicity is expressed in his specific capacity to objectify history. He is not simply subject to the course of events ⁴

Karol Wojtyla was born on May 18, 1920 in the small southern Polish town of Wadowice to Karol Wojtyla and Emilia (Kaczorowska) Wojtyla. He received two names, Karol and Józef⁵ from his parents at baptism on June 20, 1920. But his mother gave him another name, “Lolek”. His birth coincided with what is generally known as ‘Polish Miracle’. Like what Tad Szulc calls the “literary output”⁶ of Wojtyla, many historians and

¹ Tad Szulc, *John Paul II: The Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 9.

² *Ibid.*

³ Luigi Accattoli, *John Paul II: Man of the Millennium* (Mumbai: Daughters of St. Paul’s, 2000), 17.

⁴ John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 83.

⁵ He received the name as a way of preserving the good memories of Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, a Polish national hero noted for waging war against Soviet Russia, at that time.

⁶ Tad Szulc, *John Paul II: The Biography*, 9.



biographers have equally flashed their literary torchlight on the relationship between his birth and that of the civic reception accorded to Piłsudski by the Poles. In making a connection between the two events, Weigel observes:

By August 12, as one historian has put it, “it was clear to most observers in Warsaw that the last desperate week of the resurrected Poland had arrived.” The entire diplomatic corps fled, with one exception: Archbishop Achille Ratti, the Pope’s representative. A Polish delegation left for Minsk, where they hoped to start negotiations for an armistice or surrender with the Soviets. ...But Marshal Józef Piłsudski, who dominated the life of the Second Polish Republic from its inception in 1918 until his death in 1935, was not prepared to concede defeat. Piłsudski’s intelligence operatives had detected a gap between the two corps of Trotsky’s army.⁷

The conquest secured by Piłsudski for Poland is seen as one of the greatest achievements by her citizen. It was celebrated as a national event following his triumphant reception in Warsaw, the capital of the newly independent Poland, as the conquering army had their major victory in over two centuries.⁸ Wadowice is a town in the Southern part of the present Poland. It has been situated within the contexts of some global events such as World War I and the Holocaust:

Between the two world wars, Poland bordered in the west on Germany, in the south on Czechoslovakia and Romania, in the east Latvia and Lithuania. The Poles are a western Slavic people who created a unified state in the tenth century and accepted Roman Catholicism. In the course of Poland’s thousand-year existence, its area has alternately expanded and contracted, covering 424,710 square miles (1,100,000 sq km) at its greatest size and only 38,610 square miles (100,000 sq km) at its smallest.⁹ This city has the pride of being the birth place of Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II. It was in this town that his parents lived and worked out their daily necessities of life. Wadowice is close to the River Skawa at the foot of Beschidi Mountains, some 40 kilometres of west of Krakow and 30 kilometres of from Auschwitz. And, it is on record that when Karol was born, Poland had only recently gained its independence after 120 years of domination by a foreign power, and it was struggling to regain territory on its eastern border.¹⁰

Motherhood is very essential to the formation of a young person. Karol Wojtyła still relishing the gift of motherhood was initiated into the world of being without that special institution, with the death of his mother on April 13, 1929. The psychology of the child-mother relationship makes a case for somewhat intrinsic attachment between a mother and her child. That loss remained with him until his last earthly moments. In his own words regarding the mother’s death¹¹ and the role of his father, he said:

⁷ George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 17.

⁸ Tad Szulc, *John Paul II*, 13.

⁹ Czesław Madajczyk, “Poland: General Review,” *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, 3 (1990): 1143-1151, 1143.

¹⁰ Luigi Accatoli, *John Paul II: Man of the Millenium* (Bandra, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2001), 17-18.

¹¹ See Karol Wojtyła, *Giobbi ed altri inediti* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982), 83.



Quite soon I became a motherless only child. My father was admirable and almost all the memories of my childhood and adolescence are connected with him. The violence of the blows that had struck him had opened up immense spiritual depths in him; his grief found its outlet in prayer.¹²

Another important factor in his life was the death of his elder brother, Edmund¹³ on December 5, 1932 at the age of twenty-six years. He was also moved emotionally by the death of her sister, Olga who died “only a few days after birth.”¹⁴ Not overwhelmed by these sad events, and with the support of his father, the young Karol marched on. Nonetheless, these events did not inhibit him from discovering his talents and opening him to realities that would mould him into his ideal person and ideology.

2.2 Education

Education is very central to human person's integral formation and development. In general, it is valued as a great asset both to the individual and the society, in general. So, for the young Karol Wojtyla, the journey to academic and spiritual life began in the autumn of 1926, when he started elementary education at the age of six. Following his good performance, he was admitted to the middle school, *Marcin Wadowita* in 1930. The essence of both formal and informal education is to study, analyze, understand and evaluate nature¹⁵ in such a way that human activities would be fine-tuned to the optimal degree of overcoming its impediments. It is from this context that the gamut of meaning will be drawn from the Holy Scriptures: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28).¹⁶ The primary and secondary schools had provided platforms for development of intellectual powers based on the overall classroom performance and coupled with exploration of extra-curricular activities. Karol Wojtyla distinguished himself in academic excellence and disciplined life which equipped him for higher education.

In 1938, the eighteen-year-old Karol moved with his father to Kraków and began his undergraduate studies at Jagiellonian University, where he enrolled in the department of Polish philology in the Faculty of Philosophy. Commenting on what this branch of study meant for him, he remarks:

I found myself attracted to the study of the language itself. We studied the descriptive grammar of modern Polish as well as the historical evolution of the language, with special emphasis on its ancient Slav roots. ...this opened up completely new horizons for me; it introduced me to the mystery of language itself.¹⁷

¹² A. Frossard, “*Be Not Afraid!*” (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Nature is here seen as the physical world including all natural phenomena and living things. Viewed from another perspective, it concerns the forces and processes collectively that control the phenomena of the physical world independently of human volition or intervention, sometimes identified with symbol of femininity.

¹⁶ All biblical citations are taken from *The Bible - Revised Standard Version*, under Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches in the United States of America (New York: Collins, 1971).

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 7.



Karol and his father lived in a moderate apartment on Tyniecka Street in the Debniki quarter – which is historically separated by the Vistula River. Being in the university was a chance for him to undergo various transformative stages in life; these called for exploring his potentials, testing his skills and developing personal interests in professional and extra-curricular activities. He was already writing poetry and composing scripts for the theatre. Besides, he was also contemplating on what his life would be in terms of profession and career; he was faced with two options: married or celibate life. At his moment of decision, he chose a celibate life; the option as far as he was concerned, should be accepted as “a gift and a mystery.” On recalling this choice, he succinctly noted, “A Day came when I knew for certain that my life would not be fulfilled in the human love, the beauty of which I have always felt deeply.”¹⁸

2.3 Specific Historical Events

September 1, 1939 was a bad day for humanity including the young Karol Wojtyla and his father; on that day, the first bombs fell on Kraków and Karol was in the cathedral. It was the beginning of the World War II. This event has been analysed from different perspectives, especially that of Catholic view.¹⁹ His domestic and academic activities were put on hold. Two-thirds of Poland, including Kraków was in German hands while the remaining third was already being occupied by the Russians. By March 1940, Karol began to work in a stone quarry at Zakrzewek, Poland. The challenges and difficulties were enormous. However, the war offered him the opportunity to understand human nature with its untamed passions and ambitions. He wrote poem in tribute to one of his co-workers who died in the uprising at Pozan; part of which runs thus:

They took his body, and walked in a silent line. Toil still lingered about him, a sense of wrong. They wore grey blouses, boots ankle deep in mud. In this they showed the end.... White stone now within him, eating into his being, taking over enough of him to turn him into a stone.²⁰

From the above lines, it is not difficult to read Wojtyla’s mind; a mind that has been sharpened for seeing and interpreting human activities with philosophical and theological parameters. Poetry and the theatre are veritable vehicles for conveying messages.

Tragedy struck with the death of his father on February 18, 1941, and it was a launching-pad for his eventual ascension to fulfilling mystical realm of his life. He saw in his father all the prerequisites for a peaceful transformation into the great beyond. Not despaired, Karol found a “home” in the family of Mieczystaw Kotlarczk, a professor of Polish literature. Mieczystaw became host, friend, and teacher to Karol Wojtyla, and together they founded the ‘Theatre of the Living Word.’²¹ Having found solace in his new home, he had active

¹⁸ André Frossard, “*Be Not Afraid!*” (New York: St. Martin’s, 1984), 15.

¹⁹ Joseph Orlandis, trans. Michael Adams, *A Short History of the Catholic Church* (Lagos: Criterion, 1985), 185: “Peace did not bring sufferings of civil populations to an end—particularly in central Europe. The new political frontiers and the division of the old continent into zones of influence obliged huge numbers of families to leave their homelands and to emigrate, penniless, in search of a new country which would take them in. Migration within Europe or from Europe to America reached a scale never before known: one would have to go back to the barbarian invasions to find anything like it—but with difference: that the barbarians migrated of their own free will.”

²⁰ Karol Wojtyla, *Collected Poems* (New York: Random House, 1982), 87.

²¹ It was in the form of a peaceful and non-resistance movement in defense of Polish culture against the Nazism. The actors



participation in the theatre; he was actively involved in theatre productions both “as actor, scriptwriter, scene designer, or interlocutor. None of the regular members had any doubt that Karol’s future lay in the theatre. He possessed everything needed for an acting career: voice, gestures, emotion, (and) memory.”²²

In the autumn of 1942, Wojtyła took the final step towards the aspiration of his life, priesthood. He had told his friend, Kotlarczak not to expect him anymore in the theatre since his application to Stefan Sapieha, the Archbishop of Kraków, for vocation to the Catholic priesthood. For Karol, priesthood is a vocation from God and in a rather rhetorical and answer grandeur, he writes thus: “The story of my priestly vocation? It is known above all by God. At its deepest level, every vocation to the priesthood is *a great mystery*; it is a gift which infinitely transcends the individual.”²³ He was of the opinion that his vocation to the priesthood was not an abrupt venture; rather, that it took time to mature – though two major events contributed to his becoming a priest: the World War II and the death of his father. During the celebration of his fiftieth anniversary of his priestly ordination, Wojtyła commented on these factors more elaborately in his book, and here are some excerpts:

In the face of the spread of evil and the atrocities of the war, the meaning of the priesthood and its mission in the world became much clearer to me. The outbreak of the war took me away from my studies and from the university. In that period, I also lost my father, the last remaining member of my immediate family. All this brought with it, objectively, *a progressive detachment* from my earlier plans; in a way it was like being uprooted from the soil in which, up till that moment, my humanity had grown. But the process was not merely negative. At the same time a light was beginning to shine ever more brightly in the back of my mind: *the Lord wants me to become a priest*. One day I saw this with great clarity....²⁴

Many insights have been established from the above citation; the mind is a great reservoir of interests and desires. Its training through education and domestic orientation is very relevant to both its understanding and interpretation. For him to have chosen the priesthood instead of the theatre means far-sightedness and spirituality. He had already taken to such private devotions like joining the “The Living Rosary” group; reading St. Louis de Montfort’s book,²⁵ devotion to Brother Albert,²⁶ among others.

Karol Wojtyła had his classes from the Faculty of Theology at the university in Kraków as a seminarian of the archdiocese of Kraków. During the period under review, he was also concerned with ecclesial (such matters like serving at Mass in Archbishop Sapieha’s private chapel) social schedules. At the same time, Karol was working at the Solvay factory. In all these, he was surrounded by imminent dangers but he was undeterred. Two events would drive this point home. The first was the disappearance of his fellow seminarian by name, Jerzy

and actresses would meet secretly in private homes and basements, with at least twenty persons taking part in each gathering. The audience would be tutored on how to pose a challenge to the Gestapo who patrolled Kraków street-by-street every night. Karol Wojtyła’s and others’ scripts were the major source of the play.

²² Luigi Accatoli, *John Paul II: Man of the Millennium*, 27-28.

²³ John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 34-35.

²⁵ *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*.

²⁶ Also known as Adam Chmielowski, an artist and Polish hero from the 1800’s who had lived life of detachment from material gains in service to the indigent persons in the society.



Zachuta,²⁷ and the second, the accident he had with a German truck. These show the socio-political climates under which Wojtyla worked out his success. Luck was on his side as he would narrowly escape arrest during routine search by Nazi soldiers. The timely intervention by Sapieha who decided in August to move the clandestine seminarians into his own residence, saved the unforeseen problem. It added an impetus to his academic and priestly formation. Karol Wojtyla took the first practical step nearer to the altar by the reception of the tonsure on September 9, 1944. Remarkably, Karol completed his theological studies and seminary formation successfully.

This notwithstanding, human person adequately considered is a rational being with historical antecedents; such a being is the one with relationship to other human beings, and by so doing, creates events which have direct or indirect impact on humanity. Every human event, therefore, is begun in time and space. Paradoxically, the events exert influences on both their creators and non-creators, as well. Such holds for Wojtyla and other humankind. Poland, was under the Nazi occupation and also World War II, which unleashed on many Poles, including Karol untold hardships and traumatic experiences.

Given the currency of thought on the required relationship between the citizenry and the state on the one hand, and juxtaposing such expectation to the individual's personal choices and tradition on the other, what ensues is nothing but patriotism and citizen's rights and freedom. Many nuances have been used to explain this relationship. But it is not yet a problem, what poses a difficulty is the conflict of values and logic of systems. Wojtyla makes the following clarification about nationhood and citizenry: The Latin word *patria* is associated with the idea and the reality of 'father' (*pater*). The native land can in some ways be identified with patrimony, that is, the totality of goods bequeathed to us by our forefathers."²⁸ The total summary of candid admiration and adulations for a person's native land are found in the concept of 'patriotism'. Often, such expectations might have conflicting characters especially during oppressive rules or system. Poland was taken over by the Nazis during the World War II. The system was against the existence of Jews as a people and unjust laws imposed to malign them. Under such situation, the fundamental freedom of the citizenry was simply violated. It was also a case for determining the citizen's moral backbone to oppose the intolerable laws and regulations. Seen from another perspective, such an anomaly could exert its influence on the people's psyche, including the young generation of Poles. Corroborating this, Wojtyla avers as follows: "I have had experiences of ideologies of evil. It remains indelibly fixed in my memory. First there was Nazism. What we could see in those years was terrible enough. Yet many aspects of Nazism were still hidden at that stage."²⁹

Humankind had evolved some systems that oppose justice, peace, love and equity. One of such practices is racism; Jews in Poland at the time under review were maltreated. At this instance, a remarkable event in the life of Karol was his personal decision to choose Jerzy Kluger, a Jew, as his friend. This was his first step toward rejection of the societal *status quo* that negated justice, love and equality. In his own words, he recalled:

I remember, above all, the Wadowice elementary school, where at least a fourth of the pupils in my class were Jewish. I should mention my friendship...with one of them, Jerzy Kluger –a friendship that has

²⁷ John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, "One day [Zachuta] did not appear. After Mass I stopped by his house in Ludwinow (near Debniki) and learned that he had been taken away by the Gestapo during the night. Immediately afterward, his name appeared on the list of Poles who were to be shot." 42-43.

²⁸ John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.



lasted from my school days to the present.³⁰

Wojtyla deliberately made the choice of Jerzy as a personal friend to make a point that human beings should be brothers and sisters in society. He was against all forms of anti-life ideologies be it a social system, economic or political oppression or even biological segregations. Reflecting on this, he succinctly asserts:

First and foremost, the sons and daughters of the Jewish nation were condemned for no other reason than that they were Jews. Even if only indirectly, whoever lived in Poland at that time came in contact with this reality. Therefore, this was also a personal experience of mine, an experience I carry with me even today.³¹

This personal decision is an indication of the quality of one's behaviour. It is not an easy task to swim against societal culture of hatred and segregation, especially when it has become a national philosophy or mode of living amongst the people. But for Karol Wojtyla, he had an early inclination towards the moral norms that would bring about the best moral order and this mindset, in the thinking of James V. Schall, calls for reliance on moral truth in order to appreciate that inner force which motivated the decision of Wojtyla. Schall makes the following submission:

At the same time, we need not forget the principles of logic or philosophy itself that each of us can discover from our own given resources. These are the norms by which we ultimately test what is said or heard. These resources of intellect and nature we did not ourselves create but discover to be constitutive of the kind of rational substantial being we find ourselves to be.³²

These historical influences on Wojtyla shaped his outlook to life, particularly reminiscences of war, Communism, Nazism and other indices of evil that nearly distorted the order of goodness in the world. But in all, he would not forget in a hurry the evil of the World War II and its attendant effects on humanity, including his vocation to the Catholic priesthood. In his own words, he reflects thus:

*I was spared much of the immense and horrible drama of the Second World War. I could have been arrested any day –at home, in the stone quarry, in the plant and taken away to a concentration camp. Sometimes I would ask myself: so many young people of my own age are losing their lives. Why not me? Today I know that it was not mere chance.... What I have said about the concentration camps represents only a part, albeit dramatic, of this “apocalypse” of our own century.*³³

³⁰ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 96.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² James V. Schall, S.J., “Person and Society: John Paul II on Substance and Relation,” in *Prophecy and Diplomacy: the Moral Doctrine of John Paul II (A Jesuit Symposium)*, ed. John J. Conley and Joseph W. Koterski (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 3-21, 4.

³³ John Paul II, *Gift and Mystery*, 36, 38-39.



2.4 Karol Wojtyła's Early Publications

Karol Wojtyła had a number of personal writings but two of the publications that highlighted his ethical thoughts include *Love and Responsibility*³⁴ and *The Acting Person*³⁵, as part of the background to the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of his ethical teachings.

2.4.1 *Love and Responsibility (Miłość i odpowiedzialność)*

Love and Responsibility is a philosophical and theological book by Karol Wojtyła and published in 1960. This work explores the nature of human love, relationships, and sexuality from the Christian (Catholic) outlook, accenting the significance of personal responsibility in intimate and marital relationships.

The book has five chapters. In chapter one, the person and the sexual urge is explored; chapter two considers the person and love; chapter three x-rays the person and chastity; the work also discusses justice towards the other person in chapter four; and justice towards the creator is analysed in chapter five. It is worthy to note that each chapter builds on philosophical, theological and ethical perspective on love, sexuality, and human dignity.

In this work, Wojtyła, developed and argued for the following themes:

- a) The dignity of the human person consists of the intrinsic value of persons as subjects and not objects; and true love as the measure of the humanity devoid of manipulation.
- b) Utilitarianism is a negation of the inherent worth of human beings in view of choices and pleasures. Personalism is what should be practiced and it makes room for true love which manifests self-giving and the recognition of the worth of other persons in society.
- c) Love is a virtue and it yields to an objective choice as opposed to emotion. The same love is conjugally celebrated only within the institution of marriage as true sign of mutual donations amongst couples.
- d) Marriage is God's vocation to openness to co-creative acts through bearing of children as well as responsible parenthood that respects the procreative and unitive objectives of sex.

2.4.2 *The Acting Person (Osoba I czyn)*

The Acting Person, a philosophical work written by Karol Wojtyła, was published in 1969 as part of his research interest in human being as a rational and relational being in society. He explores human action, subjectivity and obedience to duty through the framework of Husserl's phenomenology and theological prism of Aquinas. The book sets forth to understand the human being as a moral agent of praxis, and with special attention on integration of freedom, conscience, openness to talents and skills.

This is a philosophical work focused on personalism and phenomenology. It consists of five chapters which consider a thematic discourse on the human person. In chapter one, the human being and the problem of action is discussed; efficacy and subjectivity is considered in chapter two; chapter three discusses integration of

³⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by H. T. Willets (London: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1981).

³⁵ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Netherlands: D. Reidel Pub. Co., 1979).



the person in action; in chapter four, the transcendence of the person in action is explored; and chapter five x-rays participation and alienation.

Wojtyla developed a number of themes in the book, but suffice here to mention the followings as key themes and insights:

- i) Human person is subject and moral agent whose nature indicates a conscious and active being who make a deliberate choice in pursuant to vision and mission of his place in society.
- ii) A person is a rational being endowed with consciousness and self-determination. This is a distinguishing feature that sets man and woman from other non-human beings in view of awareness and choice-making in matters pertaining to personal or communal needs. Of course, this conscious freedom should not be misconstrued for an absence of external inhibitions, but the human's capacity to choose good at all time in all circumstances.
- iii) Given the above, the human person as a conscious being is the one who participates actively, particularly in matters of solidarity. This underscores humans as social beings whose intentions or actions have direct or indirect influence on other persons whether in family, community or society. It is here that one understands the importance of the concept of participation, where citizens act not merely for personal gains but buoyed by the common good.
- iv) Wojtyla also advocated for the adoption of the ethical principle of Thomas Aquinas who argued that humans are unitive beings by virtue of the complementarity of body, soul and mind. There is nothing like having a human being as a thinking person. Added to this ethical thought is that one's personal experience is one of the indices of moral conscience and its application to lived situations.

3. Ethical Teachings of Karol Wojtyla

Karol Wojtyla's ethical teachings are deeply rooted in Christian personalism, a philosophy that emphasizes the dignity, freedom, and responsibility of the human person as a social, moral and religious being. His moral vision integrates faith and reason, ensuring that ethical decisions align with objective truth while respecting human subjectivity.³⁶ His teachings were shaped by his academic work, pastoral experience, and response to the socio-political challenges of his time, particularly under Nazi occupation and communist rule in Poland. This study approaches and categorizes his ethical teaching under the following themes, namely: a) personalism, freedom and moral duty, ethics of love and sexuality, conscience and the natural law, resistance to totalism and social ethics, among others.

Wojtyla's ethical thought centres around Thomism and Catholic social teaching where inherent worth of persons as creatures of God and solidarity³⁷ plays central roles to authentic existential living as well as application of justice³⁸, equity and holiness of life to lived experience. This is the core of his ethical pedagogy that promotes

³⁶ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 1-10.

³⁷ Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 261-300.

³⁸ Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, 213-260, 261-396.



personalistic ethics that emphasizes the intrinsic value and dignity of the human person.³⁹ Connected to this was the influence of Max Scheler and Thomas Aquinas whose respective works argue that human beings must always be seen and treated as persons other than objects or means to an end. This moral principle remains the fulcrum of the ethical teachings of Wojtyla.

For Wojtyla, human love involves responsibility in order to separate it from an irrational instinct with respect to non-human beings that are driven by sensual instincts. Humans must approach intimate relationship with the decorum of mutual donations⁴⁰ characterized by trust, consent, selflessness and self-giving as opposed to mere utility or pleasure. Human sexuality requires decency and modesty in a milieu of self-discipline and respect for human dignity in all its forms and shapes.⁴¹

Another significant theme in the ethics of Wojtyla is that of responsible freedom in human intention and action. True freedom is not the capacity to do whatever pleases one, rather, the ability to choose good intention over evil intention and also choose right action over wrong action. There is no room for moral relativism⁴² since reasonable freedom is exercised within the ambience of objective truth and moral responsibility. In all of these, Wojtyla's ethics of action implies that human actions shape a person's character and identity.

In view of the foregoing, one will not fail to appreciate his theological and social ethical teachings. Wojtyla was an active resource person in the Catholic Church, especially his social teachings that advocate the dignity of work, the right to trade unionism, the right of workers, and right to just wages and remunerations. He interrogated the Poland of his time when his country was under Communist regime and resolved to invoke the principle of natural law: that humans are free beings endowed with inalienable rights to pursue happiness, including enjoyment of human, religious and ethical rights in society.

Defence of objective moral truths is another aspect of the ethics of Wojtyla. He rejected ethical relativism and utilitarianism, thereby upholding the existence of absolute moral truths. He argued that morality is not an ephemeral subject matter in human affairs, rather, it is engrained in the order of objectivity – as part and parcel of human nature and existence. The objective moral truths yield to societal welfare where sanctity of life, human dignity, freedom of responsible choices, love, and solidarity are cherished and upheld as ethics and values.

Wojtyla presents love as a self-donation phenomenon that is responsible to act rather than expression of duty-oriented passion as opposed to addiction to irrational passion. In this aspect, he argues that love must be moderated by truth and respect for the dignity of the self and other in the traditionally recognised marital institutions, where conjugal love to openness to the fruits of the womb.⁴³ It is only a person whose intention and action show consciousness in matters pertaining to human action can take responsibility through moral choices that align with moral truth.

4. Conclusion

The study affirmed that Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, was a great philosopher, theologian, and ethicist whose teachings resonated with millions around the world, especially in shaping contemporary moral

³⁹ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 21-58, 59-110, 171-200.

⁴⁰ Karol Wojtyla, *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Karol Wojtyla, *Op. cit.*, 21-58, 111-170.

⁴² Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*.

⁴³ Karol Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, 171-200, 201-250.



compass. His ethical framework was versed in orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right action/deed), emphasizing their connectedness with faith and moral living. The research arrived at the objectives of the discourse, namely, that Wojtyla is known for his ethical teachings which still resonate with scholarship and practice, specifically his orthodoxy.

Again, the research averred that Wojtyla's ethical vision was largely influenced by the works of Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler. For Wojtyla, moral truth is not a mere abstract concept, rather, a compulsory imperative for human beings in society. He espoused this in his seminal works, *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*, where he laid emphasis on the personalistic approach to ethics and praxis.

Another backdrop to his orthodoxy, in the evaluation of the study, was his family setting where his parents raised him in the Christian tradition. Wojtyla's educational formation was rooted in the Catholic tradition of training both the mind, brain and soul towards the complete mankind. The study observed that certain historical events in his native country, Poland, were significant in shaping his ethical thought and actions. Some of those events include Nazism, Communism, the World War II.

The above laid the framework for Karol Wojtyla's role as a future pope. Gleaned from the above statements, it is an objective position that Karol Wojtyla's orthodoxy through his pre-papal writings influenced and shaped his papacy in a great way. The background to his orthodoxy also had significant influence in papal writings (encyclicals, pastoral letters, exhortations, constitutions, etc). His pre-papal books reinforced the importance of aligning doctrinal truth with extant moral choices.

Wojtyla strongly defended the dignity of human life, the sacredness of human life, the sanctity of marriage, and the significant place of conscience in moral judgment. Given all these, he also challenged relativism, advocating instead for an ethics that upholds truth, love, and responsibility. This research explored how Karol Wojtyla's ethical teachings integrated orthodoxy, manifesting that authentic Christian faith and morals require both correct belief and righteous action. The study by investigating Wojtyla's scholarly contributions to knowledge and praxis, achieved its objectives through the findings and evaluation that his vision for moral duty is still relevant to the world. Therefore, Karol Wojtyla's ethical teachings as Pope John Paul II owe its orthodoxy to his pre-papal background and writings.

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