

KAROL WOJTYŁA'S PRE-PAPAL THOUGHT CONCERNING HUMAN RIGHTS

Earlier in his life Karol Wojtyła endured experiences such as forced labor during the Nazi occupation of Poland and witnessing the slaughter of many of his friends and colleagues during World War II. Approximately 2 million of his compatriots were deported to the Siberian death camp Kolyma after the war.¹⁰⁶ Pope John Paul explicitly acknowledged his thinking and writing about the need to protect human dignity and human rights were shaped by these experiences, long before John XXIII's watershed encyclical.¹⁰⁷ Evidence of this can be found in one of Karol Wojtyła's earliest writings, *Katolicka etyka społeczna*¹⁰⁸, which is an unpublished transcript of some of his lectures as a professor at the Catholic University of Lublin.¹⁰⁹ It is interesting to examine

¹⁰⁶ See Robert C o n q u e s t, *Kolyma: The Arctic Death Camps* (London: Macmillan, 1978).

¹⁰⁷ J o h n P a u l I I, *Gift and Mystery: On the 50th Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 66-7. Fr. Józef Tischner, friend of John Paul II and the philosopher and chaplain of Solidarność wrote: "You cannot understand John Paul II's thought if you do not realize that it arose from the world of Auschwitz and Kolyma." Józef T i s c h n e r, *W krainie schorowanej wyobraźni*, (Cracow: Znak, 1997), 157.

¹⁰⁸ See Fr. Karol W o j t y ł a, PhD, *Katolicka etyka społeczna. Wykłady*, parts 1-2 [Kraków 1957]. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.)

¹⁰⁹ I am grateful for a copy of this manuscript from Professor Charles Clark of Saint John's University. This manuscript has caused some controversy in recent years. There is considerable disagreement about the origin and significance of this text. For example, some scholars believe that it does not contain Wojtyła's own original material; he simply elaborated on lectures prepared by the Catholic ethicist Fr. Jan Piwowarczyk, who was well-known in Poland. For this view, see W e i g e l, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, 130-1, 288. I have also corresponded with staff at the Centrum Myśli Jana Pawła II in Warsaw and the Instytut Jana Pawła II at the Catholic University of Lublin. Based on their opinions, I conclude that while Karol Wojtyła may have based many of the ideas found in the manuscript on Piwowarczyk's work, he adapted them and added his own intellectual imprint for a text that he used as his own, thus confirming his approval of the ideas. For debates about the status and meaning of this text, see John M. G r o n d e l s k i, *Social Ethics in the Young Karol Wojtyła: A Study-in-Progress*, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=3905>; Jonathan L u x m o r e, "Letter to the Editor and Response on 'How an Unknown Text Could Throw New Light on John Paul II's Views on Economics,'" *Catholic Worker*,

what the future Pope says in this manuscript because it is little known and adumbrates much of his later advocacy of human rights as pope. For example, in this manuscript Wojtyła begins his defense of human rights with the freedom of conscience, which according to him both natural law and revelation establish as the most fundamental of all human rights. He writes: „The principle of freedom of conscience defines most fundamentally the true good of the human person which must not be violated by the society. Implementation of this principle in particular socio-economic conditions of human existence requires a definition of an entire range of other human rights.”¹¹⁰ Wojtyła approvingly cites the list of human rights advanced by Émile Chénon in his 1922 book *Le rôle social de l'Église*,¹¹¹ which include the right to work (which “fosters the growth of the human person and ensures obtaining the basic material necessities of life”¹¹²), the right to private property, the right to association, the right to freedom of speech and writing “within the general boundaries of the demands of morality.”¹¹³ The realization of such rights can be temporarily postponed in exceptional circumstances, such as war or natural disasters, for the sake of the common good. However, the pursuit of these human rights must be quickly resumed after this “temporary situation” because they are “necessary for the true good of the human person.”¹¹⁴ Elsewhere in this work, the future Pope describes the rights given to the human person by the Creator. Among them he includes the right to own those things necessary for meeting one’s basic material needs¹¹⁵ and develops a lengthy, nuanced discussion of the right to private property.¹¹⁶ Wojtyła also includes an entire section on the rights of workers, arguing for the right to work *per se*, and that this right gives rise to a “host of

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¹¹⁰ W o j t y ł a, *Katolicka etyka społeczna*, part 1, 33. This claim later became a leitmotif of his papal teaching on human rights (see H e h i r, “The Modern Catholic Church and Human Rights,” 289).

¹¹¹ É. C h é n o n, *Le rôle social de l'Église* (Paris–Barcelone–Dublin: Bloud & Gay, 1922).

¹¹² W o j t y ł a, *Katolicka etyka społeczna*, p. 1, 34.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ See *ibid.*, part 2, 12-14.

¹¹⁶ See *ibid.*, part 2, 15-34. Given the space constraints of this article, and the fact that a copy of this unpublished manuscript I am working with is illegible in certain places, I cannot treat this issue at length.

other socioeconomic rights.¹¹⁷ First among them is the right to a just wage.¹¹⁸ In addition, workers should ideally have a share in ownership and management of the company and “the freedom to choose their form of work, that is to take up the line of work they choose according to their capabilities and passions.”¹¹⁹ Because workers’ rights flow from the principle of social justice, the state should protect them, including the eight hour workday limit, the right to rest on holidays, the physical, mental, and moral well-being of workers, and myriad other rights aimed at promoting the well-being of workers.¹²⁰ Wojtyła also defends the right of workers to belong to unions that promote the principles of justice and fairness. Labor unions are necessary to protect the interests of workers against injustices of capital.¹²¹ He also affirms, with certain qualifications, the right to strike.¹²² Succinctly stated, this manuscript foreshadows John Paul II’s later defense of a panoply of workers rights’ in his encyclical 1981 *Laborem Exercens*, where he states, among other things, that the problem of just remuneration is the key to social ethics in the area of work.

Cardinal Wojtyła also boldly spoke of the rights of the human person in homilies while he was Archbishop of Kraków from 1964-78.¹²³ In his most important pre-papal treatise, *Osoba i czyn* [The Acting Person], he argues that each human person has the right to engage in acts that contribute to her becoming the person that she was created to be, i.e. in fulfilling her destiny.¹²⁴ In other words, Wojtyła insists on the right to participation in the common good as the right and duty of all, which only solidarity among human beings can ensure.¹²⁵ Much of his other pre-papal writing underscores the right to participation as the precondition to and justification for all other human rights.¹²⁶ Space precludes an examination of these writings here. Given my constraints in this article I will now turn to his papal thought.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, part 2, 57.

¹¹⁸ See *ibid.*, part 2, 57-60.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., part 2, 61. See also *ibid.*, part 2, 59-60.

¹²⁰ See *ibid.*, part 2, 61-3.

¹²¹ See *ibid.*, part 2, 63-6.

¹²² See *ibid.*, part 2, 64-6.

¹²³ See Adam Michnik, *Kościół, lewica, dialog* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 1998), 105-6.

¹²⁴ Karol Wojtyła, “*Osoba i czyn*” oraz *inne studia antropologiczne* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 2000), 315.

¹²⁵ See *ibid.*, 301-5.

¹²⁶ See Meghan J. Clark, “Integrating Human Rights: Participation in John Paul II, Catholic Social Thought and Amartya Sen,” *Political Theology* 8, no. 3 (2007): 299-317. On John Paul’s pre-papal writing on human rights, see also Dules, *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988-2007*, 310-2; Gregory R. Beabout and Mary Catherine Hodges, “John Paul II on the Relationship between Civil Law and the Moral Law: Understanding the *Evangelium Vitae* in Light of the Principle of Subsidiarity and the Moral Grammar of John Paul II,” *Notre Dame Journal of Law, Ethics & Public Policy* 21, no. 1 (2007): 93-7.

John Paul II advocated human rights in far too many writings and venues during his pontificate for a complete review here. He defended all the civil, political, social, economic, and cultural rights found in *Pacem in Terris* and elsewhere in modern papal social teaching. However, he also devoted sustained attention to particular rights in his writing. I will limit myself here to a few of the most important, original, or currently relevant themes in his human rights legacy.