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MAN CREATES CULTURE, CULTURE CREATES MAN:
THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN HUMANITY AND CULTURE
IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II

“*Culture* is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity. Man creates culture and through culture creates himself. He creates himself with the inward effort of the spirit, of thought, will and heart. At the same time he creates culture in communion with others. Culture is an expression of communication, of shared thought and collaboration by human beings. It is born of service of the common good and becomes an essential good of human communities.”¹

These seminal words addressed to the young people of Poland encapsulate Saint John Paul II’s recognition of the reciprocal relationship between humanity and culture. Man creates culture, and culture creates man. From within (spirit, thought, will, heart), the human person creates self and communicates self. In communion with others, human beings collaborate to create the shared expression of culture. Authentic human culture transcends the merely individual good and gives birth to the truly common good. The culture that we create forms the persons whom we become, and the persons who compose our communities characterize the civilization within which we live.²

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¹ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno (Gniezno, June 3, 1979) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), sec. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790603_polonia-gniezno-giovani.html.

² Compare Imelda CHŁODNA-BŁACH, *From Paideia to High Culture: A Philosophical-Anthropological Approach* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), 168: “As Wojtyła indicates, every man lives and

To further reflect upon this reciprocal relationship between humanity and culture, it is instructive to consider John Paul II as historian and custodian of faith and culture, to describe how Polish faith and culture helped to form Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, to describe how Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II contributed to Polish faith and culture, and to consider John Paul II as prophet and pastor of faith and culture.

JOHN PAUL II AS HISTORIAN AND CUSTODIAN OF FAITH AND CULTURE

Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II is a veritable historian of faith and culture in his own reflections on the contributions of Catholic faith and Polish patrimony to his own life and to that of his countrymen. Throughout his life as pupil, poet, playwright, performer, professor, pastor, and pope, he demonstrated exceptional historical sensitivity to the major events and anniversaries of Polish faith and culture. He may also be regarded as a proper custodian and curator of faith and culture in his careful preservation, thoughtful selection, and articulate presentation of seminal and enduring cultural artifacts. Along the way, he offers a philosophical ethics of culture and a framework for consideration of the reciprocal relationship between humanity and culture.

MAN CREATES CULTURE

Man creates culture, and culture creates man. “*Culture* is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity. Man creates culture and through culture creates himself. He creates himself with the inward effort of the spirit, of thought, will and heart.”³ The person creates art; art expresses and creates the person.

John Paul II recognized that the human person is created in the image and likeness of God. The human being is a profound unity of body and soul.⁴ The

breathes culture, is involved in a culture, depends on it, and is under the influence of the culture of his time. On the other hand, man also creates culture, needs culture, and shapes himself with culture. Man expresses himself for himself and for others, in the best possible way, by means of culture.”

³ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 2.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), para. 365.

most significant characteristics of the inner life of the human soul are “the sense of truth and the sense of freedom.”⁵ In human beings, there is a “fundamental dependence of freedom upon truth.”⁶ Human freedom does not exist for its own sake: “*Freedom exists for the sake of love.*”⁷ The image of God in us is inherently interpersonal; Christian revelation implies “a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity.”⁸ Inscribed within us is a “law of the gift”⁹ that involves both self-possession and self-donation: “This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”¹⁰

Culture is created through the action of each human person as a free and self-determining subject: “Culture develops principally within this dimension, the dimension of self-determining subjects. Culture is basically oriented not so much toward the creation of human *products* as toward the creation of the human *self*, which then radiates out into the world of products.”¹¹ Human creativity in the exterior world reflexively redounds to creation of the interior self: “Whatever we make in our action, whatever effects or products we bring about in it, we always simultaneously ‘make ourselves’ in it as well (if I may be permitted to put it thus). We express ourselves, we in some way shape ourselves, we in a certain sense ‘create’ ourselves. In acting, we actualize ourselves, we fulfill ourselves.”¹² For Wojtyła, each human life is like a stage play in which human consciousness participates in a “particular ‘drama’ of human interiority, which is the ‘drama of good and evil’ that occurs in

⁵ Karol WOJTYŁA, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (1960; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981; repr., San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 114-15.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter on the Splendor of Truth *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), sec. 34, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

⁷ WOJTYŁA, *Love and Responsibility*, 135.

⁸ VATICAN COUNCIL II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes* (December 7, 1965) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), sec. 24, para. 3, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁹ Karol WOJTYŁA, “On the Meaning of Spousal Love,” in *Love and Responsibility*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik, 273-294 (1974; Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 281.

¹⁰ VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes*, sec. 24, para. 3.

¹¹ Karol WOJTYŁA, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture Through Human Praxis,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok, OSM (1977; New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 265.

¹² WOJTYŁA, 266.

acts and, through the acts, in the person.”¹³ Human life is also like the creation of a fine work of art, within which the general human vocation is a call to perfection and actualization of one’s potential: “Not all are called to be artists in the specific sense of the term. Yet, as Genesis has it, all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece.”¹⁴ The specific vocation of the artist involves the connection between artistic expression and moral formation:

In producing a work, artists express themselves to the point where their work becomes a unique disclosure of their own being, of what they are and of how they are what they are.... In shaping a masterpiece, the artist not only summons his work into being, but also in some way reveals his own personality by means of it. For him art offers both a new dimension and an exceptional mode of expression for his spiritual growth.¹⁵

CULTURE CREATES MAN

Man creates culture, and culture creates man. “At the same time he creates culture in communion with others. Culture is an expression of communication, of shared thought and collaboration by human beings. It is born of service of the common good and becomes an essential good of human communities.”¹⁶

John Paul II was acutely aware that culture is crucial. Not just any culture will do. Culture may create, and culture may destroy. Culture may provide a healthy environment conducive to human flourishing, or culture may present a toxic environment suitable for human devastation. Cultural commentators have distinguished between a classical, high, universal, philosophical, spiritual culture of human integration and virtue, on the one hand, and a modern, low, philistine, scientific, materialistic culture of human disintegration and vice, on the other hand.¹⁷

¹³ Karol WOJTYŁA, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik (1969; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 149.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Artists (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), sec. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_23041999_artists.html.

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 2.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 2.

¹⁷ CHŁODNA-BŁACH, *From Paideia to High Culture*, 127-34. Consider, for example, this description of high culture from Chłodna-Błach, 130: “We cannot forget that—in philosophy—high

Pope John Paul II distinguished between “two civilizations” or cultures: the “civilization of love” versus a “civilization of use.”¹⁸ This is the distinction between a civilization of persons and a civilization of things: “*Utilitarianism* is a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of ‘things’ and not of ‘persons,’ a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used.”¹⁹ This sociocultural distinction is also necessarily and intensely anthropological: “Everything *contrary to the civilization of love* is contrary to the whole truth about man and becomes a threat to him.”²⁰ The civilization of love offers a constructive culture of personalism and altruism, while the anti-civilization of use presents a destructive culture of individualism and egocentrism. “The dangers faced by love are also dangers for the civilization of love, because they promote everything capable of effectively opposing it. Here one thinks first of all of *selfishness*, not only the selfishness of individuals, but ... even more broadly, of social selfishness.... Selfishness in all its forms is directly and radically opposed to the civilization of love.”²¹ Personalism recognizes that human freedom is dependent upon truth for the sake of love. Antithetically, “the programme of utilitarianism, based on an individualistic understanding of freedom—a *freedom without responsibilities*—is the opposite of love, even as an expression of human civilization considered as a whole.”²²

Wojtyła recognized that human community must resolve the fundamental social moral question regarding “how to create a system of relations between the individual and society that results in the fullest possible correlation between the person’s true good and the common good that society naturally seeks.”²³ Certain cultures are more hospitable and habitable for human persons than other cultures. Some societies promote “participation” wherein human beings are enabled to experience the humanity of other human beings, while other societies produce “alienation” as the “negation of participa-

culture was perceived at its source as the inner culture of man as a person. Culture understood in this way is perfection to which every person should strive in terms of cognition, action, production, and faith.”

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Families “*Gratissimam sane*” (February 2, 1994) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), sec. 13, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html.

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 13.

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 13.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 14.

²² JOHN PAUL II, sec. 14.

²³ KAROL WOJTYŁA, “Thomistic Personalism,” in *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandok (1961; New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 174.

tion.”²⁴ Within the “error of individualism,” characteristic of liberalism and capitalism, “persons may easily place their own individual good above the common good of the collectivity.”²⁵ Within the “error of totalitarianism,” characteristic of communism and socialism, society may seek to subordinate the “true good of persons” to the “alleged good of the whole ... collectivity.”²⁶ Wojtyła proposes the contrasting perspective of “Thomistic personalism,” which “maintains that the person should be subordinate to society in all that is indispensable for the realization of the common good, but that the true common good never threatens the good of the person, even though it may demand considerable sacrifice of a person.”²⁷ He was well aware that “the common good is often a difficult good” as he pondered the history of his Polish homeland.²⁸ He observed: “The absence of love leads to destruction and failure. It may be helpful to link the truth of love and of its absence (in other words, its opposite) with the history of our country.”²⁹

Authentic culture is created by human activity for the sake of greater humanization. “Culture (in the authentic and full sense of the word, and not as a set of substitutes and pretexts) is constituted through human praxis to the extent that through it people become more human, and not merely acquire more means.”³⁰ “There can be no doubt that culture is constituted through human praxis, through human activity that expresses and in some sense reveals humanity.”³¹ Truly human culture must protect and prioritize the human being and human action in the face of various social systems that would reduce human work from true creativity to mere productivity. “If culture is to be constituted through human praxis, we cannot agree to such an epiphenomenal, economic, or productionistic view of the human being and

²⁴ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Participation or Alienation?,” in WOJTYŁA, *Person and Community*, 206.

²⁵ WOJTYŁA, “Thomistic Personalism,” 174.

²⁶ WOJTYŁA, 174. Compare CHŁODNA-BŁACH, *From Paideia to High Culture*, 141: “There is no place for high culture within the framework of the indicated [socialist] systems, because there is no room for anything that is spiritual.... Reductionism lies at the heart of this view.... Therefore, the principles of social life are in this case pragmatism and utilitarianism, efficiency in the attainment of goods and their interim usefulness, which pushes man to egoism. Socialism—as reductionism—not only appropriates but also restricts the scope of culture and destroys high culture.”

²⁷ WOJTYŁA, “Thomistic Personalism,” 174.

²⁸ Karol WOJTYŁA, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in WOJTYŁA, *Person and Community*, 250.

²⁹ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Love,” in *The Way to Christ: Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Leslie Wearne, 96-106 (1972; New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 96.

³⁰ WOJTYŁA, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture,” 268.

³¹ WOJTYŁA, 269.

human action. We must ensure in this thought the priority of the human being both in the metaphysical and in the praxiological sense.”³² Authentic culture must rise above reductionism toward the transcendental realities inscribed within reality and within the human heart. “It is necessary, therefore, to go beyond all the confines of the various kinds of utilitarianism and discover within the full richness of human praxis its deep relation to truth, goodness, and beauty, a relation that has a disinterested—pure and nonutilitarian—character.”³³ Once again, we see the reciprocal relationship between humanity and culture. “For not only is culture constituted through praxis, but human praxis in its authentically human character is also constituted through culture.”³⁴ This is manifest within all human activity, but it is particularly evident within the work of artists. “Through his works, the artist speaks to others and communicates with them. The history of art, therefore, is not only a story of works produced but also a story of men and women. Works of art speak of their authors; they enable us to know their inner life, and they reveal the original contribution which artists offer to the history of culture.”³⁵ Artistic talent is thus a personal gift that must be shared with the community of persons: “The idea is for the person gifted with talent to create works of art, to incarnate Beauty, and in creating these works, to incarnate Beauty so that it serves others.”³⁶

KAROL WOJTYŁA’S FORMATION BY POLISH FAITH AND CULTURE

Polish faith and culture are the cradle and crucible that formed Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II. As a child, the young Karol was nourished on the food of Polish faith and culture, including the savory sustenance of Polish saints and bards, as well as the sweet desserts of Polish legends and novels: “I liked books since childhood. My father got me into the habit of reading. He sat next to me and read to me works by Sienkiewicz and other Polish authors. When my mother died, we were left alone. And he did not stop

³² WOJTYŁA, 267.

³³ WOJTYŁA, 270.

³⁴ WOJTYŁA, 271.

³⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Letter to Artists, sec. 2.

³⁶ Karol WOJTYŁA, *God is Beauty: A Retreat on the Gospel and Art*, trans. Zofia Szozda (1962; Quarryville, PA: Theology of the Body Institute Press, 2021), 33.

encouraging me to read the most valuable literature.”³⁷ As he absorbed the drama of his nation, the script of his own life reads rather like an adventure story. Later in life, he described himself as “a man who owes his own spiritual formation from the beginning to Polish culture, to its literature, its music, its plastic arts, its theatre—to Polish history, to the Polish Christian traditions, to the Polish schools, the Polish universities.”³⁸ It is thus instructive to survey the events and themes of Polish history, faith, culture, and education to consider their impact on the developing Wojtyła.

PRIMEVAL POLAND

As a child, Wojtyła would have learned that *Polanie* are the “people of the plain” with their own unique language and culture. He would come to appreciate that the primordial Polish language, this particular language of the Slavs, was rooted in *słowo* (the word). Those peoples who knew “the word” could communicate with one another, while this rich language remained unintelligible to many neighboring nations.³⁹

BAPTISM OF POLAND

As part of his upbringing, the young Wojtyła would come to understand that Polish culture is inextricably interrelated with Catholic faith. The baptism of Mieszko of the Piast dynasty not only marked the Baptism of Poland (966), but it was also the inception of Polish culture:

From its beginnings Polish culture bears very clear *Christian signs*. The baptism received throughout the thousand years by the generations of our fellow-countrymen not only initiated them into the mystery of the death and Resurrection of Christ, not only made them become children of God through grace, but also had a great echo in the history of thought and in artistic creativity, poetry, music, drama, the plastic arts, painting and sculpture.⁴⁰

³⁷ Placard atop original étagère bookcase within the Museum of the Holy Father John Paul II Family Home in Wadowice.

³⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 3.

³⁹ Jerzy LUKOWSKI and Hubert ZAWADZKI, *A Concise History of Poland*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

⁴⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 3.

SANCTIFICATION OF POLAND

Wojtyła would learn of the missionary martyrdom of St. Wojciech (St. Adalbert, 997) and of the bronze doors in Gniezno commemorating his life. He would reverently sing the *Bogurodzica* (Mother of God) hymn, which he later described as “the most ancient monument of Polish literature,” a “cultural document” that “has given Polish culture its fundamental original framework,” and “a creed of Polish belief.”⁴¹ He would visit the site of the martyrdom of St. Stanisław (1079) at Skałka, where this faithful bishop of Kraków had been slain by the king for fulfilling his role as *defensor populi* (Defender of the People) and *defensor civitatis* (Defender of the City).⁴² He later analogously interpreted this event, in so many words, as the Confirmation of Poland.⁴³

As he grew up, Wojtyła would hear the hagiographies and experience personal devotion to Polish saints throughout the ages. Wojtyła would intone the great hymn of Wincenty of Kielcza,⁴⁴ which he later extolled: “*Gaude, mater Polonia!* I repeat today this exhortation to joy which for centuries Poles have sung in memory of Saint Stanislaw.”⁴⁵ Following the lead of St. Wojciech (Adalbert) and St. Stanisław came many others, including St. Kinga (Cunegunda), who founded the Poor Clare Monastery at Stary Sącz.⁴⁶ Perhaps Wojtyła was already formulating the insight that just as man forms culture and culture forms man, so do saints form other saints: “*Saints do not fade away. Saints draw life from other Saints and thirst for holiness.*”⁴⁷ Culture is contagious; sanctity is communicable. In Poland, the saints still come marching in.

⁴¹ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 1.

⁴² George WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 189.

⁴³ JOHN PAUL II, Homily during the Holy Mass in Honor of Saint Stanislaus (Błonia, Kraków, June 10, 1979) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), sec. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790610_polonia-cracovia-blonia-k.html.

⁴⁴ Jerzy KŁOCZOWSKI, *A History of Polish Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44.

⁴⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig (Błonia, Kraków, June 8, 1997) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), sec. 1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/travels/1997/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_08061997.html.

⁴⁶ KŁOCZOWSKI, *A History of Polish Christianity*, 43.

⁴⁷ John Paul II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Kinga (Stary Sącz, June 16, 1999) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), sec.1, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19990616_stary-sacz.html.

POLISH FOUNDATIONS

During the history lessons of his youth, beyond the fragmentation of Poland and toward its expansion, Wojtyła would learn that Kazimierz III Wielki (Casimir III the Great) literally contributed to the foundations of Polish civilization as he “inherited Poland made of wood and left it made of stone.”⁴⁸ Notably for Polish faith and culture, this included completion of the rebuilding of Wawel Cathedral in the Gothic style as well as the initial founding of Kraków Academy (1364)⁴⁹. Wojtyła must have also marveled at the beauty of the Mariacki Church (1347) along with its later addition of the Weitz Stoss altarpiece (1489) carved of linden wood.

The young Wojtyła would hear of the generous love of Jadwiga (Hedwig) in her marriage to Jagiełło, creating the Polish-Lithuanian Union (1385) and establishing the Jagiellonian dynasty. The perceptive Wojtyła may have begun to grasp the significance of their refounding of the University of Kraków (1400), which he later recognized most clearly: “Hedwig was also well aware that faith seeks rational understanding, that faith needs culture and forms cultures, that faith lives in the world of culture. And she spared nothing to enrich Poland with the whole spiritual heritage both of ancient times and of the middle ages.”⁵⁰ As a boy, Wojtyła liked to play with tin soldiers⁵¹ and was likely fascinated by the Battle of Grunwald (1410) between Jagiełło and Witold versus the Teutonic Knights, even though it may have only been much later that he fully appreciated the significant role of this conflict in ensuring genuine religious liberty. Later, as a philosophy professor in Lublin, Wojtyła would have occasion to marvel at the Byzantine frescos within the Gothic Chapel of the Holy Trinity commissioned by Jagiełło, and to ponder the significance of Poland as a meeting place for the cultures of both east and west.

As a university student in Kraków, Wojtyła would discover the contributions of rector Paweł Włodkowic, whose treatise on papal and civil authority

⁴⁸ Placard at the sarcophagus of King Casimir III the Great within Wawel Cathedral. See Norman DAVIES, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*, rev. ed., vol. 1, *The Origins to 1795* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 78. See also John RADZIŁOWSKI, *A Traveller's History of Poland*, 2nd ed. (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2013), 58.

⁴⁹ This university changed its name multiple times throughout its history, including “University of Kraków” and “Jagiellonian University” [Editor's note].

⁵⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig, sec. 4.

⁵¹ Ewa K. CZACZKOWSKA, *Museum Guidebook: The Holy Father John Paul II Family Home in Wadowice*, trans. Hanna Szulczewska (Wadowice: Muzeum Dom Rodzinny Ojca Świętego Jana Pawła II w Wadowicach, 2015), 55.

regarding non-Christian pagans (1414) “laid the foundations of the modern theory of human rights.”⁵² He would become familiar with the scholarship and holiness of priest and professor St. Jan Kanty, who lived during a “century of saints”⁵³ within a city that became a “cradle of saints.”⁵⁴ Wojtyła would be acquainted with the work of Poland’s first historian, Jan Długosz, and would also have occasion to walk by the Długosz house on Kanonicza Street and ponder the inscription above the door: “*Nil est in homine bona mente melius*” (There is nothing better in man than a good mind.).⁵⁵ During his lifetime, Wojtyła would often observe traditional folk carvings of the Pensive Christ, the suffering Messiah, within churches and roadside shrines throughout the Polish countryside.

POLISH RENAISSANCE

Wojtyła’s time at Jagiellonian University would increase his familiarity with the Polish Renaissance figure of Mikołaj Kopernik (Nicholas Copernicus), “whose discoveries gave rise to a new vision of the created world.”⁵⁶ As a young man, he also frequented Wawel Cathedral, the epicenter of Polish faith and culture. He would hear the sonorous tolling of the Sigismund Bell from its Wawel tower during moments of religious and national significance. He later rang out in his own sonorous voice the significance of the “Mother Church of Kraków” for Polish faith and culture: “By staying in the current of the universal Church and simultaneously preserving its own unique character, this community gave shape to the history and culture of the city of Kraków, of the region and, it is possible to say, of the whole of Poland.”⁵⁷ Wojtyła the student would also understand the foolish wisdom of Stańczyk, the dejected jester who mourned the Muscovite capture of Smo-

⁵² JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig, sec. 4.

⁵³ See JOHN PAUL II, Address During the Meeting with the Rectors of the Polish Universities (Collegiate Church of Saint Ann, Kraków, June 8, 1997). (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), sec. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19970608_ato-academico.html.

⁵⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig, sec. 5.

⁵⁵ See JOHN PAUL II, Address during the Meeting with the Rectors, sec. 1.

⁵⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig, sec. 5.

⁵⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Homily on the Occasion of the Millenium of Archdiocese of Kraków (Wawel Cathedral, Kraków, June 15, 1999) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), sec. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19990615_krakow.html.

lensk (1514) while complacent national leaders imperviously danced and frolicked at an aristocratic ball.

DELUGE AND BULWARK

Wojtyła seemed to be particularly aware of the landscape of Polish history following the Union of Lublin (1569) and establishment of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Seeing the Polish nobility clad in Sarmatian attire, living comfortably upon their large estates, the priest-prophet of the day, Piotr Skarga, addressed the reigning monarch and patriarch of the Vasa dynasty, Zygmunt III Waza (Sigismund III Vasa). Skarga's famous *Sejm Sermons* (*Kazania sejmowe*, 1597) advocated love for the homeland and denounced the maladies of the Polish nation, including hostility toward the homeland, domestic discord, weakening of royal dignity and power, as well as open and unpunished sins.⁵⁸ It is noteworthy that each of these figures is memorialized atop a monumental column – Zygmunt in Warsaw and Skarga in Kraków—almost as if the consequential debate between them regarding the individual good versus the common good has continued to the present day.

Related to the absence of love within Polish history, Wojtyła noted that “the great Skarga criticized his contemporaries for their pursuit of their own personal interests” and observed that this negative trajectory carried into the future: “But in these next two centuries exclusive interest in one’s own prosperity and well-being, and the loss of any social conscience and love, increased to such an extent that by the late eighteenth century those who were directly responsible for running the country had lost all sense of their own duties and responsibilities.”⁵⁹ He recognized the severe consequences of failure to heed the warnings of Skarga, manifested in the numerous invasions of Poland from all directions during the seventeenth century. Whether through history classes or Sienkiewicz’s novels, he unavoidably absorbed the Polish consciousness regarding the Swedish Deluge, the intercession of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, and the holy heroism of Fr. Augustyn Kordecki amidst the Siege of Jasna Góra (1655). As Wojtyła later reflected: “One must listen in this holy place in order to hear the beating of the heart of the nation in the heart of the Mother. For her heart beats, we know, together with all the appointments of history, with all the happenings in our national life: how

⁵⁸ Piotr SKARGA, *Kazania Sejmowe* [Parliamentary Sermons] (1597; Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Siedmioróg, 2017), 128.

⁵⁹ WOJTYŁA, “Love,” 97.

many times, in fact, has it vibrated with the laments of the historical sufferings of Poland, but also with the shouts of joy and victory!”⁶⁰ He was ever moved by the Lwów Oath of Jan II Kazimierz Waza entrusting the nation to Mary as Queen of Poland (1656), later incorporating such consecration within his own episcopal motto, *Totus tuus* (Totally yours).

Wojtyła was also cognizant of Polish contributions to European history and culture, perhaps none more significant than the victory of Jan III Sobieski at the Battle of Vienna (1683). It is notable that Wojtyła celebrated his first Mass in St. Leonard’s Crypt under Wawel Cathedral, in close proximity to the tomb of Sobieski. Wojtyła thus chanted in harmony with the *Psalmodia Polska* (Polish Psalmody, 1695) by Wespazjan Kochowski which recognized Poland as the “bulwark of Christendom.”

TIME ON THE CROSS

Wojtyła was keenly aware of significance of the long nineteenth century as Poland’s “Time on the Cross,”⁶¹ when the Polish nation was partitioned and ingested by its neighbors. He traced the root of the partitions to the same lack of love observed during the time of Skarga: “This year marks the second centenary of the first partition of Poland, and this event, which was the first of a series (although maybe not the first in the whole history of our nation), is closely linked with love –or, rather, with its absence.”⁶²

Wojtyła often recognized that even when Poland did not exist as a country on the map of Europe, faith and culture kept the Polish nation alive in the hearts and minds of the Polish people.

I am the son of a Nation which has lived the greatest experience of history, which its neighbours have condemned to death several times, but which has survived and remained itself. It has kept its identity, and it has kept, in spite of partitions and foreign occupations, its national sovereignty, not by relying on the resources of physical power, but solely *by relying on its culture*. This

⁶⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Homily and Act of Consecration to the Mother of God (Jasna Góra, Częstochowa, June 4, 1979) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), sec. 3, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790604_polonia-jasna-gora.html.

⁶¹ WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 22.

⁶² WOJTYŁA, “Love,” 96-97.

culture turned out in the circumstances to be more powerful than all other forces.⁶³

The young Wojtyła would absorb the significance of the first partition (1772), Poland’s unrealized attempt to regain sovereignty in the Constitution of 3 May (1791), the second partition (1793), the failed efforts of its national hero in the Kościuszko Uprising (1794), and the third partition (1795). Yet, he would heartily sing “Dąbrowski’s Mazurka” (late eighteenth century), which became Poland’s national anthem: “Poland is not yet lost!”

Wojtyła incorporated much from the Polish faith and culture of the long nineteenth century, the period of Polish history preceding his birth and that most prevalent within the consciousness of the culture of his upbringing. Despite the excruciating duress of the partition of Poland by its neighbors, there was during this time a veritable explosion of Polish faith and culture.

POLISH ROMANTICISM

Wojtyła would understand that what was not accomplished by the troop movements of the November Uprising (1830)—with its banner proclaiming “For our freedom and yours”⁶⁴—began to be accomplished by the artistic movement of Polish Romanticism. With his literary interests, he was certainly well acquainted with the Polish bards: Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Zygmunt Krasiński, as well as Cyprian Kamil Norwid. He would frequently walk by the Mickiewicz monument in Kraków’s Rynek Główny, with its central statue and additional allegorical figures. Among these, the muse of science (man teaching a boy) and the muse of poetry (woman teaching a girl), in particular, seem to suggest the importance of passing on the works of culture to one’s children, reminiscent of the biblical exhortation regarding the words of faith, to “teach them to your children” (Deut. 11:19, RSVCE).

Within the context of the Christian humanism of Polish culture, certain passages from the Polish bards seemed to provide particular inspiration to John Paul II, starting with Mickiewicz. Wojtyła would certainly grasp the significance within *Dziady* (*Forefathers’ Eve*, 1832) of “a messianic proph-

⁶³ JOHN PAUL II’S speech to the UNESCO in Paris, June 2, 1980, sec. 14; English translation in *L’Osservatore Romano* (English Weekly Edition), June 23, 1980, 9-12, accessed October 9, 2024, <https://inters.org/John-Paul-II-UNESCO-Culture>. Compare JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 2.

⁶⁴ Norman DAVIES, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland*, rev. ed., vol. 2, 1795 to the Present (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 237, compare WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 294.

ecy that holds out the hope of a great man who will lead Poland and humanity toward bright destinies.”⁶⁵ He would understand the passages within the *Księgi Narodu i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego* (*Books of the Polish Nation and of the Polish Pilgrims*, 1832) suggesting Poland’s role as a messiah among the nations: “Poland was to redeem the nations through her suffering, and the mission of the Polish pilgrims was to announce to the materialistic Western nations a new world spiritually transformed.”⁶⁶ John Paul II noted the connection between Christian humanism and Polish culture:

Christian inspiration continues to be the chief source of the creativity of Polish artists. Polish culture still flows with a broad stream of inspirations that have their source in the Gospel. This contributes also to *the deeply humanistic character of this culture*. It makes it so deeply and authentically human, since, as Adam Mickiewicz wrote in his *Księgi Narodu i Pielgrzymstwa Polskiego*, “a civilization truly worthy of man must be a Christian civilization.”⁶⁷

John Paul II later recalled Mickiewicz at Częstochowa: “‘Holy Virgin guarding bright Częstochowa...’ To my mind come back these words of the poet Mickiewicz, who in an invocation to the Virgin at the beginning of his ‘Pan Tadeusz’ expressed what then beat and still beats in the hearts of all Poles, by making use of *the language of faith* and that of our *national tradition*.”⁶⁸

During a retreat on the Gospel and art, Wojtyła cited the words of Zygmunt Krasiński’s *Undivine Comedy*—“A stream of Beauty flows through you, but you yourself *are not Beauty*”⁶⁹—to remind us that we do not create ourselves by ourselves: “The human being cannot deify himself or herself. Each of us is an image and likeness of God. But only as an image-likeness of God. None of us can deify our own self.”⁷⁰

Most intriguingly, Wojtyła would certainly study Juliusz Słowacki’s prophetic poem *Papież Słowiański* (*The Slavic Pope*, 1848) which spoke of the coming of a “Slavic pope” who in the midst of tension would be a brother of the people, who would courageously give away love rather than weapons, who would in captivating fashion display sacramental power to the world, and

⁶⁵ Czesław MIŁOZ, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 223.

⁶⁶ MIŁOZ, 226.

⁶⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 3.

⁶⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Homily and Act of Consecration to the Mother of God, sec. 1.

⁶⁹ Zygmunt KRASIŃSKI, *Nie-Boska Komedia* [The Un-Godly Comedy], first published in 1835, quoted in WOJTYŁA, *God is Beauty*, 31.

⁷⁰ WOJTYŁA, *God is Beauty*, 30.

who would brightly show God in the creation of the world.⁷¹ This appears to represent remarkable foreshadowing of the Polish pope who, as a congenial and charismatic communicator within a most anxious world, fearlessly proclaimed God's kingdom of truth and love, inspirationally celebrated Mass before millions around the globe, and deeply reflected upon creation and redemption within his pastoral and poetic writings.

Wojtyła seemed to be particularly moved by the works of Norwid, “whom many regard as the most deeply reflective and authentically Catholic of Polish poets.”⁷² John Paul II spoke of his “personal debt of gratitude to the poet, with whose work I have been bound by a deep spiritual kinship since my secondary school years.”⁷³ He repeatedly reflected upon a passage from Norwid that speaks to the reciprocal relationship between humanity and culture: “For beauty exists that we might be enticed to work, // And work, that we might be resurrected.”⁷⁴ This relationship between human work and the paschal mystery illuminates both the mystery of persons and the meaning of culture: “Only this connection seems to bring out the full meaning of culture, in which the *humanum* encounters the *mysterium*. And this is just as it should be, since the human being in so many ways is a *mysterium*—a mystery.”⁷⁵ Wojtyła clearly pondered the poetic dialogue within Norwid's “The Cross and the Child,” where the father encourages his son not to be afraid in the face of apparent danger, recognizing that “the *cross* ... became our *gate*.”⁷⁶ Wojtyła so valued Norwid's contributions that he facilitated the belated placement of an urn containing earth from the common grave of this fourth bard within the crypt of the national poets under Wawel Cathedral.⁷⁷

⁷¹ WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 35; SŁOWACKI, Juliusz, “Pośród Niesnasek Pan Bóg Uderza” [In the Midst of Disagreements God Strikes], 1848, in *Dzieła Juliusza Słowackiego*, vol. 1 (Lwów: Księgarnia W. Gubrynowicza, 1909).

⁷² WOJTYŁA, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture,” 269.

⁷³ JOHN PAUL II, Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Institute of Polish National Patrimony (Vatican City, July 1, 2001) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2001), sec. 2, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/july/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010701_norwid.html.

⁷⁴ Cyprian NORWID, *Promethidion*, Dialog I, quoted in WOJTYŁA, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture,” 269. See JOHN PAUL II, Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Institute of Polish National Patrimony, sec. 3.

⁷⁵ WOJTYŁA, The Problem of the Constitution of Culture, 269.

⁷⁶ Cyprian NORWID, *Poems*, trans. Danuta Borhardt (1866; Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2011), loc. 1158-1166 of 1341, Kindle. See JOHN PAUL II, Address of John Paul II to the Representatives of the Institute of Polish National Patrimony, sec. 4.

⁷⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Address to the Representatives of the Institute of Polish National Patrimony, sec. 1.

As a student of Polish history and culture, Wojtyła likely appreciated the melodious significance of Frédéric Chopin's "Revolutionary" Étude (Op. 10, No. 12) and "Military" Polonaise (Op. 40, No. 1). It appears that Wojtyła particularly resonated with the vibrant concertos and brilliant polonaises of Henryk Wieniawski.⁷⁸

POLISH REALISM

As the long nineteenth century persisted, the January Uprising (1863) ushered in the realization of failed military revolutions as well as the realistic art of Polish Positivism. Wojtyła would have occasion to visit the Gallery of Nineteenth-Century Polish Art in the Sukiennice within Kraków's main square. There or elsewhere, he would view various works of Polish national artist Jan Matejko, perhaps including *Polonia – Rok 1863* (1864) with its portrayal of a feminine personification of captive Poland.

Another inspiring figure for Wojtyła was Adam Chmielowski, a Polish patriot who lost his leg in the January Uprising, who became a Polish painter of some renown, and who ultimately became a Polish saint, known as Brother Albert, in service to the poor of Kraków. Chmielowski's personal transformation through the prolonged process of painting *Ecce Homo* (1879 – ca. 1888) would later serve as a model for Wojtyła in the pursuit of his own vocation.⁷⁹

We have already noted how Wojtyła's childhood love for literature was nourished by the historical fiction of Henryk Sienkiewicz. One can imagine the young Karol vicariously entering the adventure of *The Teutonic Knights* (1900/1993) with its tales of courage and romance, along with characters who keep time by "Paternosters" and "Aves."⁸⁰ He must have reveled in the famous trilogy (*With Fire and Sword*, 1884/1991; *The Deluge*, 1886/1991; and *Fire in the Steppe*, 1887/1992).⁸¹ It is notable that the epigram for the series and stated purpose for each volume was the Catholic liturgical exhor-

⁷⁸ "A Foreign Pope: A Polish Cardinal Shatters a 456-Year Tradition," *Time*, October 30, 1978, para. 31. <https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,912229-1,00.html>.

⁷⁹ Bolesław TABORSKI, "Introduction to Our God's Brother," in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 153, footnote 5.

⁸⁰ Henryk SIENKIEWICZ, *The Teutonic Knights*, trans. Alicia Tyszkiewicz, ed. and rev. Mirosław Lipiński (1900; New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993), 361, 587.

⁸¹ Henryk SIENKIEWICZ, *With Fire and Sword*, trans. W. S. Kuniczak (1884; New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991); Henryk SIENKIEWICZ, *The Deluge*, trans. W. S. Kuniczak, 2 vols. (1886; New York: Hippocrene Books, 1991); Henryk SIENKIEWICZ, *Fire in the Steppe*, trans. W. S. Kuniczak. (1887; New York: Hippocrene Books, 1992).

tation *Sursum corda* (Lift up Your Hearts).⁸² Surrounded by such patriotic imagery, the young Wojtyła may have wished to join the fight *On the Field of Glory* (1906/2000) with Sobieski and the winged hussars in the Battle of Vienna.⁸³ It was not lost on John Paul II or his fellow Poles that earlier episodes of foreign invasion due to selfish complacency and lack of love had been recapitulated during the time of the partitions: “Today, a further two centuries later, it is still difficult to read about those events in novels and historical works without being deeply moved.”⁸⁴ Just as Sienkiewicz’s novels would inspire him as a youth, so would an allusion to *Quo Vadis* (1896/2000) later inspire him in his decision to accept the papacy.⁸⁵

As a student of Polish culture, Wojtyła would become familiar with modernist trends of the Young Poland movement that emerged around the turn of the twentieth century, including the work of Stanisław Wyspiański, preeminent author and artist. Wyspiański’s classic drama *Wesele* (*The Wedding*, 1901/1998) presents numerous themes related to the drama of Polish faith and culture: “Dramatic! Lovely! Life is prone to be all drama for us Poles—playing grand, exalted roles.”⁸⁶ “Woman is a mystery.”⁸⁷ “Though today all things look fair, passion cools with time. Beware!”⁸⁸ “One needs to suffer, pain endure, to learn what love is all about.”⁸⁹ “More than ever, fools abound—enough to fill a parliament.”⁹⁰ “Isn’t it a pump... My heart – !? // Your heart is Poland. Right?”⁹¹ “You oaf! You had the Golden Horn!... All you’re left with is the strap!”⁹² John Paul II alluded to this play when exhorting his countrymen in the practice of truth and love: “Let us think about ‘Polish practice.’ Let us see whether it is carried out with prudence. Is it systematic and persevering? Is it courageous and magnanimous? Does it unite people or divide them? Does it treat anyone with hatred or contempt? Or is there too

⁸² Sienkiewicz, *With Fire and Sword*, v, 2; SIENKIEWICZ, *The Deluge*, vol. 1:xiv; SIENKIEWICZ, *The Deluge*, vol. 2:x; SIENKIEWICZ, *Fire in the Steppe*, 18..

⁸³ Henryk SIENKIEWICZ, *On the Field of Glory*, trans. Mirosław Lipinski (1906; New York: Hippocrene Books, 2000).

⁸⁴ WOJTYŁA, “Love,” 97.

⁸⁵ Henryk SIENKIEWICZ, *Quo Vadis*, trans. W. S. Kuniczak (1896; New York: Hippocrene Books, 2000), 554; WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 253-54, 888.

⁸⁶ Stanisław WYSPIAŃSKI, *The Wedding: A Drama in Three Acts*, trans. Noel Clark (1901; London: Oberon Books, 1998), act 1, scene 24.

⁸⁷ WYSPIAŃSKI, act 1, scene 10.

⁸⁸ WYSPIAŃSKI, act 1, scene 11.

⁸⁹ WYSPIAŃSKI, act 1, scene 16.

⁹⁰ WYSPIAŃSKI, act 2, scene 7.

⁹¹ WYSPIAŃSKI, act 3, scene 16.

⁹² WYSPIAŃSKI, act 3, scene 37.

little practice of love, of Christian love?”⁹³ The integration of biblical/classical themes and Polish historical themes within Wyspiański’s play *Acropolis* (1904/2017)—during a liturgical setting within Wawel Cathedral in which the statues and tapestries come to life—sets the stage for a similar approach within the subsequent early plays of Wojtyła.⁹⁴ Wyspiański envisioned the actual Wawel Hill as the “Polish Acropolis” and developed a collaborative proposal for its renovation and expansion, complete with architectural drawings and a model: “Just like the Athenian Acropolis, which contains within it the sum of the faith and glory of the Greeks, so does Wawel contain all of our splendour and our faith.”⁹⁵ Wyspiański’s beautiful painting *Motherhood* (1905) perhaps provided some inspiration for John Paul II’s later teaching on the sanctity of marriage and family life.

POLISH REBIRTH

Wojtyła was born within a window of liberty just following the rebirth of Poland and establishment of the Second Polish Republic (1918). Although tested by an attempted Russian invasion just months after his birth, Poland prevailed through the Miracle on the Vistula (1920), and Wojtyła was raised within a free Poland. The safety, piety, and patriotism of provincial Wadowice thus served for the young Karol as a sanctuary and school of Polish faith and culture. He was nurtured in the Catholic faith within the family as well as through the local parish and Carmelite monastery. He was immersed in Polish literature at home, at school, and within the community. He literally grew up performing the plays and reciting the poetry of Krasiński, Słowacki, Norwid, and Wyspiański.

Wojtyła’s rural roots likely also contributed to a fondness for the intricately carved woodwork of the late nineteenth century Zakopane style architecture of Stanisław Witkiewicz. He apparently appreciated the wooden folk sculpture of Jędrzej Wowro.⁹⁶ His love of the traditional folk music of Polish Highlander culture is also widely known.

⁹³ JOHN PAUL II, Homily for the Canonization of Blessed Queen Hedwig, sec. 6; cf. WYSPIAŃSKI, *The Wedding*.

⁹⁴ Stanisław WYSPIAŃSKI, *Acropolis: The Wawel Plays*, trans. Charles S. Kraszewski (London: Glagoslav Publications, 2017), Kindle.

⁹⁵ See Stanisław WYSPIAŃSKI’S and Władysław EKIELSKI’S “Acropolis: A Proposal for the Renovation and Expansion of Wawel,” presented in WYSPIAŃSKI, *Acropolis: The Wawel Plays*, loc. 14063, 14070 of 15018.

⁹⁶ Adam BONIECKI, *The Making of the Pope of the Millennium: Kalendarium of the Life of Karol Wojtyła*, 1st English ed. (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2000), 59.

PULVERIZATION OF PERSONS

Wojtyła's university studies of Polish language and literature at the revered Jagiellonian University were abruptly terminated by the onset of World War II and *Sonderaktion Krakau* (1939) of the brutal Nazi regime, whereby his university professors were rounded up and the university was shut down. Regarding such events in the twentieth century, Wojtyła later reflected that "the evil of our times consists in the first place in a kind of degradation, indeed in a pulverization, of the fundamental uniqueness of each human person."⁹⁷ During this particular time of the pulverization of persons and the crushing of culture, Wojtyła was compelled to manual labor in a stone quarry and chemical factory, yet he also began clandestine seminary studies.⁹⁸ We may not know whether Wojtyła saw the poignant paintings of Abraham Neumann (e.g., *Old Synagogue in Kazimierz*) or heard the haunting melodies of Mordechai Gebirtig (e.g., "Reyzele"), but he almost certainly knew what was happening concerning the liquidation of the adjacent Jewish Ghetto of Podgórze (1943). Wojtyła would also hear news of the Warsaw Uprising (1944) and the subsequent destruction of Warsaw. Perhaps he also got word that from the rubble of the Church of the Holy Cross there, the sculpture of Christ carrying his cross emerged essentially intact, forever giving an even deeper meaning to its inscription from the words of the liturgy: *Sursum corda*.⁹⁹ Within the environs of Kraków, Wojtyła himself narrowly escaped a Gestapo search of his Tyniec apartment.¹⁰⁰ His reflections on the destruction wrought by the absence of love within a country could now be applied to another historical era: "And we all know what heroic efforts were needed later on. That excessive private

⁹⁷ Karol WOJTYŁA, Letter to Henri de Lubac, February, 1968, in Henri DE LUBAC, *At the Service of the Church: Henri de Lubac Reflects on the Circumstances that Occasioned His Writings*, trans. Anne Elizabeth Englund (1989; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), 172.

⁹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Speech During the Visit to the Jagiellonian University (Kraków, June 22, 1983) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), secs. 3-4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1983/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19830622_universita-jagellonica.html (in Italian).

⁹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Homily during the Holy Mass at Victory Square (Warsaw, June 2, 1979) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), sec. 3b. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790602_polonia-varsavia.html. "It is impossible to understand this city, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, that undertook in 1944 an unequal battle against the aggressor, a battle in which it was abandoned by the allied powers, a battle in which it was buried under its own ruins—if it is not remembered that under those same ruins there was also the statue of Christ the Saviour with his cross that is in front of the church at Krakowskie Przedmieście."

¹⁰⁰ WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 71-72.

and personal interest and that lack of love had to be redeemed with infinite love, in order to restore the country's independence."¹⁰¹

ROBOTNIK REALISM

Following the Yalta Conference (1945) which essentially ceded Poland to the Soviet sphere of influence, and thus demarcated World War II as the war that Poland “lost twice,”¹⁰² Wojtyła would become all too familiar with the brutal ugliness of socialist realism in art, with all of its functional propaganda extolling the presumptive virtues of work within the collective. Within this imposed culture, the very word for “worker” was *robotnik*, conveying a sense of impersonal labor whereby factory workers became indistinguishable from factory machinery. Wojtyła saw all too clearly the limitations of the atheistic utopia of the Nowa Huta steel factory district: “Culture cannot be connected in a simplistic way—and perhaps even in a utilitarianized way by various totalitarian programs—with the element itself of work.”¹⁰³ He must have experienced personal solidarity with the ideals and goals of the “Solidarność” trade union of Lech Wałęsa. Despite the on-again, off-again approach of communist censorship during its four plus decades of control, Wojtyła must have taken some encouragement from the eventual dissemination and recognition of such works of Polish identity as the poetry of Czesław Miłosz and the films of Andrzej Wajda.¹⁰⁴

KAROL WOJTYŁA'S CONTRIBUTION TO POLISH FAITH AND CULTURE

Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II bestowed a legacy of liberty to Polish faith and culture. He recognized the treasure that he had received: “Here there has always been a lively knowledge that our homeland is a patrimony which does not only include a certain reserve of material goods in a given territory but, above all, is a treasure, the only one of its kind, of values and spiritual content, that is, of all that constitutes the nation's culture.”¹⁰⁵ As previously

¹⁰¹ WOJTYŁA, “Love,” 97.

¹⁰² WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 46.

¹⁰³ WOJTYŁA, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture,” 270.

¹⁰⁴ DAVIES, *God's Playground*, vol. 2, 489.

¹⁰⁵ JOHN PAUL II, “Address of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Jagiellonian University Community” (Vatican City, September 11, 2000) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000),

noted, he acknowledged his indebtedness for the personal formation that he received from Polish culture (literature, music, art, theater), Polish history, Polish Christian traditions, and Polish schools and universities.¹⁰⁶ Out of this deep sense of gratitude, he reciprocated by offering his own characteristic contributions to Polish faith and culture. This is evident in his poetry and plays, in his writings on theater, and in his advocacy and actions on behalf of the Polish patrimony and heritage. Within these works, we see a veritable recapitulation of much of the story of Polish faith and culture, stamped with his distinctive personalist insights drawn from theology and philosophy. There we also discern such signature themes as person and community, freedom and truth, truth and love, self-possession and self-donation, individual good and common good.

As a university student, Wojtyła began in earnest to compose poetry, which he continued to some extent throughout his lifetime. By the age of 20, he had written early, youthful plays comparing biblical themes to events in Polish history. His later, mature plays considered themes of sanctity in artistic and religious vocations along with the universal call to holiness in marriage and family life. He was a perennial and steadfast patron and proponent of human faith and culture.

PRIMEVAL POLAND

As part of a poem-cycle commemorating the millennium of the Baptism of Poland, within his poem “Development of Language,”¹⁰⁷ Wojtyła ponders the first articulation of the Polish language within the lungs and throat of its primeval speaker:

I don't know those ancient words. When I turn to the written record
I am still far from the living words, which
a man in history filled with his breath and sound.¹⁰⁸

sec. 6. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2000/jul-sep/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20000911_univ-cracovia.html.

¹⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Development of Language” (1966, from poem cycle “Easter Vigil, 1966”), in *The Place Within: The Poetry of Pope John Paul II*, trans. Jerzy Peterkiewicz (1966; New York: Random House, 1982), 132-33.

¹⁰⁸ WOJTYŁA, 132.

He recognizes the origins of Polish thought within the hearts and minds of its progenitors:

Inspiration and meaning in unison.
When did they start throbbing in the same stream of sound
that flows in us today?¹⁰⁹

He further reflects upon the parallel development of Polish language and Christian faith amidst the Slavic word of man and the eternal Word of God:

How did the word *God* sound on this wave, what its first meaning,
Before it arrived at the meaning it has
in the eternal Word?¹¹⁰

He later reflected on the relationship between “the mystery of language” and “*the inscrutable mystery of God himself*.”¹¹¹

In another poem, “All Around They Speak With Tongues,”¹¹² Wojtyła contemplates the beauty and complexity of the Polish language: “All around they speak with tongues; one rings clear above the rest: our own. It goes deep into the thought of generations, flows around our land and becomes the roof of the house in which we are gathered together. It is seldom heard outside that house.”¹¹³ On the one hand, the complexity of the Polish language isolates Poland from its neighbors: “The tongues of nations did not take up the speech of my fathers, saying it was too difficult, superfluous.... Our tongue closes us in on ourselves.”¹¹⁴ On the other hand, the beauty of the Polish language encloses, enriches, and unites the Polish people: “A people living in the heart of its speech remains for generations, the mystery of thought unfathomed to the end.”¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ WOJTYŁA, 132.

¹¹⁰ WOJTYŁA, 132.

¹¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Gift and Mystery: On the Fiftieth Anniversary of My Priestly Ordination* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 7.

¹¹² Karol WOJTYŁA, “All Around They Speak With Tongues” (1974, from poem cycle “Thinking My Country”), in WOJTYŁA *The Place Within*, 143-44.

¹¹³ WOJTYŁA, 143.

¹¹⁴ WOJTYŁA, 143-44.

¹¹⁵ WOJTYŁA, 144.

BAPTISM OF POLAND

Wojtyła speaks of Mieszko I in at least two of his poems. In “A Tale of a Wounded Tree,”¹¹⁶ he portrays Mieszko, Poland’s first historical ruler and proto-Christian, walking in an orchard pondering his progeny (“my grandchildren and their children”) and the need for the “tree of history” (metaphor of Poland) to be wounded and to die with the perennial “Tree” (metaphor of Christ) in order to revive and bear fruit.¹¹⁷ “Don’t be afraid to die with me and revive.”¹¹⁸ This requires Mieszko to recognize both his beauty and ugliness, goodness and evil, and a shift from receiving (“so that what is not mine becomes mine”) to giving (“so that mine becomes not mine”).¹¹⁹

In “Seams,”¹²⁰ Wojtyła again appeals to Polish origins and again portrays Mieszko walking, this time on “seams,” understood perhaps as fissures in the earth or junctions between that which is above and below. The poem appears to address ways of understanding physical reality (visible/tangible) and spiritual reality (invisible/intangible), matter and motion, as well as body and soul (“feet” and “thoughts”). Mieszko “often felt afraid” in pursuit of impersonal pagan religion, “when he sought his gods in the seams of the world, in the unknowns of fate,” until it became clear that “God does not live in the seams of the world, ... but speaks in his own tongue, his speech of simple sincerity.”¹²¹ The “seam of souls” of personal Christian faith is the “mutual speech” of “baptism” whereby “God emerged from the seams of the world” and “spoke to Mieszko so that Mieszko could reply.”¹²² This “linking of persons” incorporates a mystical “drawing into” a threefold reality of “Parenthood,” “Word,” and “Love” which “must have its sign.”¹²³ Wojtyła concludes on behalf of the Polish people: “We have walked in this sign for centuries. This sign has replaced the seam of the world and the entanglements of human fate.”¹²⁴

¹¹⁶ Karol WOJTYŁA, “A Tale of a Wounded Tree” (1966, from poem cycle “Easter Vigil, 1966”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 126-28.

¹¹⁷ WOJTYŁA, 126-28.

¹¹⁸ WOJTYŁA, 128.

¹¹⁹ WOJTYŁA, 127.

¹²⁰ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Seams” (1966, from poem cycle “Easter Vigil, 1966”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 129-31.

¹²¹ WOJTYŁA, 129.

¹²² WOJTYŁA, 130.

¹²³ WOJTYŁA, 130-31.

¹²⁴ WOJTYŁA, 131.

SANCTIFICATION OF POLAND

In 1978, shortly after hearing the news of the death of John Paul I, Wojtyła composed his poem-cycle “Stanislas.”¹²⁵ This work was a tribute to St. Stanisław, Wojtyła’s predecessor as a bishop of Kraków, whose martyrdom “baptized the nation again with the baptism of blood” and fortified it “that it might later pass through the baptism of other trials.”¹²⁶ Perhaps in the church at Skalka or before the relics of this saint in Wawel Cathedral, Wojtyła reflected regarding Stanisław that “the bishop had perhaps no time to think: let this cup pass from me.”¹²⁷ He also reflected, perhaps with a sense of his forthcoming call to the Chair of Peter: “The first age is at a close, the second begins. We take in our hands the outline of the inevitable time.”¹²⁸ As he flew above his native land *en route* to Rome for the papal conclave, Wojtyła pondered Poland’s longstanding tension between person and community: “The land of hard-won unity, of people seeking their own roads.” “This land subjected to the freedom of each mindful of all.” “This land finally torn apart for six generations.... And through this tearing united in the hearts of the Poles as no other land.”¹²⁹ Perhaps he may also have heard an echo of *Quo Vadis* ringing in his ears.

One of Wojtyła’s earliest poems, “Magnificat (Hymn),”¹³⁰ is quite different in form and style than most of his later poetry. Here, Wojtyła the poet refers to himself as a “Slav troubadour,” evoking images of a wandering medieval poet and musician traversing the Polish countryside:

A Slav troubadour, I walk Your roads and play
to maidens at the solstice, to shepherds with their flock,
but, wide as this vale, my song of prayer
I throw for You only, before your throne of oak.¹³¹

The verses portray a young man whittled “from the wood of a linden tree” who grows from his youth “cradled in yearning and pain.”¹³² This text is rich with

¹²⁵ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Stanislas” (1978, poem cycle), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 177-84; WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 235, 248-49.

¹²⁶ WOJTYŁA, “Stanislas,” 180.

¹²⁷ WOJTYŁA, 182.

¹²⁸ WOJTYŁA, 182.

¹²⁹ WOJTYŁA, 183.

¹³⁰ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Magnificat (Hymn)” (1939, poem), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 185-88.

¹³¹ WOJTYŁA, 187.

¹³² WOJTYŁA, 186.

imagery of Polish landscape and history (“Tatra rocks,” “solstice fires,” “sacred oak”), as well as Christian theological and liturgical references (“heavenly banquet,” “chalice with wine overflowing,” “servant in prayer”).¹³³ It is replete with allusions to medieval art, music, and literature: “Father of great Poetry,” “woodcarver of saints,” “primordial song,” “shower of music,” “Gothic yearning,” “statue on marble pedestal,” “song among songs.”¹³⁴ It sees God’s hand in human formation and Polish history: “Blessed be the Carver-of-saints and prophet and Slav.”¹³⁵ It hears God’s voice in human song and Polish destiny:

Slav Book of yearning, on the last day resound
like brass, choirs of the resurrection
in virginal holy song, in poetry that bows
with the hymn of humanity—God’s Magnificat.¹³⁶

POLISH FOUNDATIONS

In 1939, Wojtyła ostensibly wrote his first drama, entitled *David*, which was “partly biblical, partly rooted in Polish history,”¹³⁷ specifically with reference to the Polish Piast dynasty. He indicated that the Old Testament protagonist “wears biblical robes and a linen shirt from the time of Piast and a crimson cloak of a Polish nobleman.”¹³⁸ Wojtyła described this work as a “drama or, more precisely, a dramatic poem,” composed of “sonnets” and of varied form, “in prose and in verse, both bland and rhymed.”¹³⁹ It has been generally reported by scholars that this manuscript has been lost to history.¹⁴⁰ However, is this really the case? An English language source refers to a manuscript of an early poetry collection by Wojtyła entitled *The Renaissance Psalter: A Slav Book* (1939).¹⁴¹ A recent authoritative Polish source indicates that the common title for this collection is *Psalter of David (Slavic Book)*,¹⁴²

¹³³ WOJTYŁA, 185-86.

¹³⁴ WOJTYŁA, 185-88.

¹³⁵ WOJTYŁA, 188.

¹³⁶ WOJTYŁA, 188.

¹³⁷ Bolesław TABORSKI, Introduction to Karol WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, trans. Bolesław Taborski (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 3-4, footnote 1.

¹³⁸ BONIECKI, *Kalendarium*, 65.

¹³⁹ BONIECKI, 65.

¹⁴⁰ TABORSKI, Introduction, 3-4, footnote 1; WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 62.

¹⁴¹ WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 185.

¹⁴² Karol WOJTYŁA (Jan Paweł II), *Dziela Literackie i Teatralne*, vol. 1, *Juwenilia (1938-1946)*, ed. Jacek Popiel (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2019), 8, 540.

and a review of the contents indicates that it consists of seventeen sonnets as well as some other poems, with apparent allusions to early Polish Piast rulers as well as to Gothic and Renaissance architecture and culture. Perhaps the lost “drama” *David* is essentially the same work as the “dramatic poem” sonnets of the *Psalter of David*.¹⁴³

POLISH RENAISSANCE

Wojtyła’s poem “Seams,”¹⁴⁴ previously discussed, actually begins with consideration of Copernicus, the famed Polish Renaissance astronomer whose heliocentric theory revolutionized the way that we understand reality:

We walk on seams. Earth once appeared even, smooth.
For generations they thought her flat disc was surrounded
by water below and the sun above.
And Copernicus came: earth lost its hinges,
it now became hinged on motion.
We walk on the seams not as before
(Copernicus stopped the sun and gave the earth a push).¹⁴⁵

Here, Wojtyła appears to be considering the relationship between faith and science as ways of knowing: “I accept the seams I can see—I want to see them all; if I can’t see them, can’t touch them, I cannot accept them.”¹⁴⁶

DELUGE AND BULWARK

Wojtyła’s early play, *Jeremiah* (1940),¹⁴⁷ chronologically the second of his extant plays, skillfully integrates the prophetic biblical warning of Jeremiah to Jehoiakim with the prophetic historical warning of Skarga to Zygmunt (Sigismund) III Waza. The subtitle denotes “a national drama,” and the epigraph invokes Poland as the bulwark of Christianity: “*As a holy bulwark You placed us, O Lord.*”¹⁴⁸ It is rich in liturgical allusions, starting in a cathedral chapel where angelic statues come to life (reminiscent of Wyspiań-

¹⁴³ I am currently working on another paper to further explore this question.

¹⁴⁴ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Seams,” 129-31.

¹⁴⁵ Karol WOJTYŁA, 129.

¹⁴⁶ Karol WOJTYŁA, 129.

¹⁴⁷ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Jeremiah,” (1940) in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 93-145.

¹⁴⁸ WOJTYŁA, epigraph, 93.

ski's *Acropolis*) and incorporating lamentations of the Holy Week Tenebrae service. Its plot literally brings to life the political, patriotic, and religious characters portrayed within the Matejko painting, *Skarga's Sermon* (1864). The central message is to remember Poland as a mother and to transcend one's individual good for the sake of the common good:

Thievish hearts! Everyone for himself, but naught for her—your Mother Poland.... Fools!... When the ship is sinking, what is private? The dearest ship that carries us all, our common good, is scattered to the winds! Look to the common good, do not rock the boat, all take the oars with glad and willing hearts, loving hearts—let no one betray her!¹⁴⁹

Otherwise, the absence of love will result in the disaster of foreign invasion and the loss of liberty:

Discord will lead to your captivity, will cause your sons, your descendants to suffer. Discord will lead to your captivity, will make a mockery of your liberty! You must unite, overcome discord by love!¹⁵⁰

TIME ON THE CROSS

As Wyspiański had previously looked through the windows of Długosz house toward Wawel Hill and imagined a “Polish Acropolis,” so did the young Wojtyła look from the environs of his Dębnyki apartment up the Wisła River toward Wawel Hill and recognize an “Athenian Poland.” The depth of Wojtyła's reflections regarding Polish faith and culture is manifestly evident in a letter to his theater mentor, Mieczysław Kotlarczyk, sent just two months following the 1939 Nazi invasion:

No matter how this has come about and who is to blame for it, one thing becomes obvious: in Europe, Poland has been the greatest martyr, she whom He had raised as Christ's bulwark for so many centuries, and now.... But another thought comes to mind: Poland—a complex of strange disparities: next to outright mystic idealism, buffoonery and Judas's pieces of silver, for which the nation's soul has been sold.... Poland. I see her as you do, but up to now I have not seen her in all her truth.... Today in my meditations I feel, I realize with all awareness, with full clarity, that her idea has revived in us, as in the romantic

¹⁴⁹ WOJTYŁA, act 2, 113.

¹⁵⁰ WOJTYŁA, act 2, 114.

generation.... I think that our liberation ought to be a gate for Christ. I think of an Athenian Poland, but more perfect than Athens with all the magnitude of Christianity, such as our great poets imagined, those prophets of Babylonian captivity. The nation fell like Israel because it had not recognized the messianic ideal, its ideal, already raised like a torch—but unrealized.¹⁵¹

This letter is laden with allusions to Poland as bulwark of Christianity and messiah among nations, Stańczyk's tragic comedy, Skarga's warning, the deluge and partitions, Mickiewicz's prophetic poetry, Norwid's cross as gate, and Wyspiański's *Acropolis*. One might see in these words of the 19-year-old Wojtyła a striking and prescient advocacy for a romantic revival and practical realization of a renewed Christian messianic liberation.¹⁵² He ends this letter with a profound valediction regarding Polish faith and culture: "I send you greetings in the name of Beauty, which is the profile of God, the cause of Christ, and the cause of Poland."¹⁵³

Wojtyła's longest play, *Our God's Brother* (1950),¹⁵⁴ represents a transition from his early historical plays to his mature vocational plays. It depicts the drama of late nineteenth/early twentieth century Polish patriot, artist, and saint, Adam (Albert) Chmielowski. John Paul II indicated that he was indebted to Brother Albert as an inspirational figure toward his own religious vocation: "For me he was particularly important, because I found in him a real spiritual support and example in leaving behind the world of art, literature and the theater, and *in making the radical choice of a vocation to the priesthood*."¹⁵⁵ The play includes cameo appearances from some of the notable cultural figures of the time, including painter Maksymilian Gierymski, architect Stanisław Witkiewicz, and actress Helena Modrzejewska. Among

¹⁵¹ Karol WOJTYŁA, Wojtyła to Mieczysław Kotlarczyk (letter, November 2, 1939), quoted in Bolesław TABORSKI, "Introduction to Jeremiah," in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 75.

¹⁵² See Krzysztof DYBCIAK, "The Pope of the Civilisational Turning Point," in *The Space of the Word*, ed. Zofia Zarebianka and Rev. Jan Machniak, trans. Piotr Mizia (Kraków: John Paul II Institute of Intercultural Dialogue, 2011), 446. "Wojtyła *continued the tradition of great myths of Polish literature*, which are rarely undertaken and with no success in contemporary literature. He presented, especially in prose (sermons, speeches), that the concept of Poland as the bulwark of Christendom (*Antemurale christianitatis*) was still relevant today—Poland, which culturally defends the West, despite loss of independence, against the pressure of atheist soviet totalitarianism. Wojtyła also revived and modernised the messianic paradigm created by the great authors of the Polish Romanticism, propagating the value of nations endowed with special tasks, which fulfill solidarity missions, not selfish or aggressive ones."

¹⁵³ BONIECKI, *Kalendarium*, 64.

¹⁵⁴ Karol WOJTYŁA, "Our God's Brother," (1949) in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 159-266.

¹⁵⁵ JOHN PAUL II, *Gift and Mystery*, 33.

the intriguing themes of this work is the personal transformation of the artist through their works of art: “Have you ever considered ... that we can transform little—ridiculously little—apart from ourselves? As artists we merely try to understand, or rather heed ... and reflect in our work an unexpected insight into our self, which, slowly transformed, has suddenly realized its own transformation.”¹⁵⁶ This is particularly true regarding the transfiguration wrought within Adam through the painstaking process of painting *Ecce Homo*, which depicts the suffering Christ:

But with all this You have remained beautiful.
The most beautiful of the sons of men.
Such beauty was never repeated again.
Oh what a difficult beauty, how hard.
Such beauty is called Charity.¹⁵⁷

Another noteworthy theme emerges within the dialogue between then Brother Albert and the “Stranger,” who might be identified as Lenin, who lived in Kraków around that time.¹⁵⁸ Whereas the Stranger advocates social unrest and collective revolution through the “mighty, magnificent eruption of human anger,”¹⁵⁹ Brother Albert advocates a revolution of love: “But here anger fails; here Charity is essential.”¹⁶⁰

PULVERIZATION OF PERSONS

Wojtyła’s earliest extant play, *Job* (1940),¹⁶¹ is a clear comparison of the legendary sufferings of the biblical character, Job, and the severe sufferings of Poland under the Nazi occupation. The epigraph attends to past, present, and future events, including the following: “*The Action Takes Place in Our Days // In Job’s Time // For Poland and the World.*”¹⁶² The prologue of the play directly makes the connection between the trials of Job and the trials of prisoners in concentration camps: “Behold, my people. Behold, my people—and listen to the Word of the Lord, you who are downtrodden, you who are

¹⁵⁶ WOJTYŁA, “Our God’s Brother,” act 1, 161.

¹⁵⁷ WOJTYŁA, act 2, scene 7, 227.

¹⁵⁸ Bolesław TABORSKI, “Introduction to Jeremiah,” 152, footnote 4.

¹⁵⁹ WOJTYŁA, “Our God’s Brother,” act 1, 192.

¹⁶⁰ WOJTYŁA, act 2, scene 9, 243.

¹⁶¹ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Job,” (1940) in Wojtyła, *The Collected Plays*, 25-74.

¹⁶² WOJTYŁA, epigraph, 25.

flogged, sent to the camps, you—Jobs—Jobs.”¹⁶³ As Job receives news of tragedy from every direction (reminiscent of invasions of Poland through the centuries), a theme of messianic suffering emerges with parallels between the suffering Job, the suffering Christ, and “dismembered Poland.”¹⁶⁴ There are questions regarding the meaning of human nature, suffering, and happiness: “And what is man? ... And what is human might? ... And what is human happiness?”¹⁶⁵ Despite it all, Job exemplifies the total surrender of self to God: “You gave; You have taken away. It is Yours—it is Yours—”¹⁶⁶ (akin to Wojtyła’s motto *Totus tuus*). Job is granted a profound vision of the passion of Christ and then lives in the expectation of redemptive suffering: “He whom I called is coming. What is my suffering, O Lord, since my Redeemer lives.”¹⁶⁷

In addition to writing plays and poetry, during World War II, Wojtyła participated in a clandestine underground Rhapsodic Theater, described as a “theater of the word.” As a form of cultural resistance, this troupe put on at least seven performances in secret within private residences, including adaptations of the works of Słowacki, Wyspiański, Norwid, and Mickiewicz. Out of both philosophical conviction and practical necessity, a minimalist format was adopted: “These took the form, precisely, of a ‘theater of the word’. It was all quite simple. The scenery and decoration were kept to a minimum; our efforts were concentrated essentially on the delivery of the poetic text.”¹⁶⁸ Wojtyła later elaborated on the significance of this theater of the word:

The position of the word in a theater is not always the same. As in life, the word can appear as an integral part of action, movement, and gesture, inseparable from all human practical activity; or it can appear as “song”—separate, independent, intended only to contain and express thought, to embrace and transmit a vision of the mind. In the latter aspect, or position, the word becomes “rhapsodic,” and a theater based on such a concept of the word becomes a rhapsodic theater.¹⁶⁹

Wojtyła’s poem-cycle “The Quarry” (1956)¹⁷⁰ eloquently depicts his own experience of forced labor within a stone quarry. Amidst the physical strength

¹⁶³ WOJTYŁA, prologue, 29.

¹⁶⁴ Bolesław TABORSKI, “Introduction to Job,” in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 23.

¹⁶⁵ WOJTYŁA, “Job,” 44.

¹⁶⁶ WOJTYŁA, 44.

¹⁶⁷ WOJTYŁA, 70.

¹⁶⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Gift and Mystery*, 12.

¹⁶⁹ Karol WOJTYŁA, “On the Theater of the Word,” in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 372.

¹⁷⁰ Karol WOJTYŁA, “The Quarry” (1956, poem cycle), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 61-71.

of the worker through “the even knocking of hammers,” Wojtyła meditates on the interior aspect of human work: “And a thought grows in me day after day: the greatness of work is inside man.”¹⁷¹ Manual labor contributes to personal maturity and growth in love: “The stone yields you its strength, and man matures through work which inspires him to difficult good.” “Listen to love that ripens in hammers, in even sounds.”¹⁷² The human person is challenged to leverage the fulcrum of difficult work to transform anger into love: “And in man grows the equilibrium which love learns through anger.”¹⁷³ “Should his anger now flow into the anger of others? It was maturing in him through its own truth and love.”¹⁷⁴

Wojtyła’s poem, “The Armaments Factory Worker” (1957),¹⁷⁵ describes the interior struggle of conscience of a person working within a munitions factory during wartime. The worker agonizes: “Do I start wars? ... No, I don’t sin. ... I only turn screws, weld together parts of destruction, never grasping the whole, or the human lot.”¹⁷⁶ He concludes: “Though what I create is not good, the world’s evil is not of my making.” He still worries: “But is that enough?”¹⁷⁷

ROBOTNIK REALISM

Wojtyła’s poem, “The Car Factory Worker” (1957),¹⁷⁸ describes the tension between the person of an automobile factory worker and an impersonal machine that they help to produce. The poem raises the question regarding whether the human being is merely an object, merely “fingers” of a cog in the machinery of the factory, or whether he or she is truly a person with soul, will, thoughts, voice, and purpose: “I am not with them at the controls...”

¹⁷¹ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Material” (1956, from poem cycle “The Quarry”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 63.

¹⁷² Karol WOJTYŁA, “Inspiration” (1956, from poem cycle “The Quarry”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 66.

¹⁷³ WOJTYŁA, 67. For more on the two forces of love and anger, see Monika JABLONSKA, *Wind From Heaven: John Paul II, The Poet Who Became Pope* (Kettering, OH: Angelico Press, 2017), 102.

¹⁷⁴ Karol WOJTYŁA, “In Memory of a Fellow Worker” (1956, from poem cycle “The Quarry”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 71.

¹⁷⁵ Karol WOJTYŁA, “The Armaments Factory Worker” (1957, from poem-cycle “Profiles of a Cyrenean”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 86.

¹⁷⁶ WOJTYŁA, 86.

¹⁷⁷ WOJTYŁA, 86.

¹⁷⁸ Karol WOJTYŁA, “The Car Factory Worker” (1957, from poem cycle “Profiles of a Cyrenean”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 85.

“They stole my voice; it’s the cars that speak.” “My soul is open: I want to know with whom I am fighting, for whom I live.”¹⁷⁹

As a personalist antidote to the depersonalized and utilitarian culture of the Soviet communist regime, Wojtyła’s penultimate and mature play, *The Jeweler’s Shop* (1960),¹⁸⁰ tells the story of three married couples: a loving couple torn asunder by death during the war, an estranged couple working toward reconciliation, and their children who struggle to embrace the commitment of marriage. The play serves as a narrative counterpart to the ethical teaching on love and marriage described in Wojtyła’s *Love and Responsibility* (1960/1981), which also reflects pastoral conversation among the Środowisko community of young adults that formed around his work as university chaplain.¹⁸¹ Within the drama, the mysterious jeweler speaks of the relationship between freedom and love: “And in all this—love, which springs from freedom, as water springs from an oblique rift in the earth.”¹⁸² During the process of courtship, one of the young men comes to recognize the relationship between love and truth: “Beauty accessible to the senses can be a difficult gift or a dangerous one; I met people led by it to hurt others —and so gradually I learned to value beauty accessible to the mind, that is to say, truth.”¹⁸³ He recognizes that marital commitment contributes toward marital unity: “Here we are together. We are secretly growing into one because of these two rings.”¹⁸⁴

Wojtyła’s profound final play, *Radiation of Fatherhood* (1964),¹⁸⁵ offers a mystical meditation on the mystery of the Trinity and the mystery of the human family. The drama opens with Adam as the representative of humanity at the gates of the (perhaps Nowa Huta) steelworks: “The thought constantly returns that I ought to find myself in every man—searching not from without but from within.”¹⁸⁶ As he hikes in the hills of Poland with his adoptive daughter, he learns the lesson that human freedom exists for the purpose of love: “For love denies freedom of will to him who loves—love liberates him from the freedom that would be terrible to have for its own sake. So

¹⁷⁹ WOJTYŁA, 85.

¹⁸⁰ Karol WOJTYŁA, “The Jeweler’s Shop,” (1960) in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 277-322.

¹⁸¹ See also WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope*, 98-102.

¹⁸² WOJTYŁA, “The Jeweler’s Shop,” act 1, scene 4, 289.

¹⁸³ WOJTYŁA, act 1, scene 1, 280.

¹⁸⁴ WOJTYŁA, act 1, scene 2, 287.

¹⁸⁵ Karol WOJTYŁA, “Radiation of Fatherhood,” (1964) in WOJTYŁA, *The Collected Plays*, 333-64.

¹⁸⁶ WOJTYŁA, act 1, scene 1, 335.

when I become a father, I am conquered by love. And when you become a child, you too are conquered by love. At the same time I am liberated from freedom through love, and so are you.”¹⁸⁷ His formation continues under the tutelage of a mystical mother figure (perhaps the Madonna of Częstochowa) who once again delivers the message that self-fulfillment comes through self-transcendence: “People inhabit an earth that has two poles. They have no permanent place here. They are all on their way, which leads them from the pole of loneliness to the pole of love.”¹⁸⁸

It appears that during his time in Rome for the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Wojtyła penned a series of catechetical meditations on St. Paul’s sermon at the Aeropagus (Acts 17:16-34),¹⁸⁹ a location adjacent to the Athenian Acropolis. Perhaps with Wyspiański’s “Polish Acropolis” and his own “Athenian Poland” in mind, Wojtyła reflected on Paul’s visit:

Arriving in Athens, he finds himself right in the center of the culture, philosophy, art, and religion of the ancient world. This place remains a symbol today, not only of a great past linked to Greece and Athens, but also a symbol of what has endured for centuries and generations. The entire *culture of Europe*, of Western civilization, *comes from there*: from Greek culture, from the Areopagus—as from a spring.¹⁹⁰

Wojtyła further reflected on the relationship between person and community in the formation of human society and culture: “In effect, the history of the world, of human communities and societies, the history of all humanity, depends on that good and evil of which each person is the author.”¹⁹¹

In addition to his literary contributions during the communist era, and his philosophical lectures at the Catholic University of Lublin (KUL), Bishop Wojtyła embraced the role of his predecessors as “defender of the city” and “defender of the people.” His powerful words were matched with authoritative actions. Despite communist insistence on an atheistic Nowa Huta, Cardinal Wojtyła responded to this new “deluge” by constructing the safe harbor and sanctuary of the Ark of the Lord Church (1969-1977). In response to previous communist liquidation of the Jagiellonian University theology fac-

¹⁸⁷ WOJTYŁA, act 2, scene 3, 355.

¹⁸⁸ WOJTYŁA, act 3, scene 1, 360.

¹⁸⁹ JOHN PAUL II (Karol WOJTYŁA), *Teachings for an Unbelieving World: Newly Discovered Reflections on Paul’s Sermon at the Areopagus* (1965; Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2020).

¹⁹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, 3.

¹⁹¹ JOHN PAUL II, 30.

ulty, Cardinal Wojtyła facilitated formal establishment of a Pontifical Faculty of Theology (1974) which would later become the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Kraków. As Pope John Paul II, he would later commend the significant contribution of the Catholic university to human faith and culture: “By its very nature, a University develops culture through its research, helps to transmit the local culture to each succeeding generation through its teaching, and assists cultural activities through its educational services.”¹⁹²

JOHN PAUL II AS PROPHET AND PASTOR OF FAITH AND CULTURE

Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II might also be regarded as a true prophet and pastor of faith and culture in his homilies and exhortations to past, present, and future generations of citizens of Poland and the world. Just as Polish faith and culture formed Wojtyła, and Wojtyła bequeathed a legacy of liberty to Polish faith and culture, so did John Paul II speak to the future of the faith and culture of Poland and the world. The first words of his pontificate bespoke the necessity of Christian culture for human flourishing: “Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of States, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Do not be afraid. Christ knows ‘what is in man.’ He alone knows it.”¹⁹³ With prophetic vision, he foresaw the consequences of the “civilization of love” (personalism/altruism) versus a “civilization of use” (individualism/egocentrism). With pastoral heart, he recognized the inextricable relationship between authentic Christian faith and truly human culture.

Whether actually present or only witnessed on film, we might wish to close our eyes and open our ears to once again listen to the clarion call of his sonorous voice in Warsaw’s Victory Square on that Pentecost vigil of 1979:

¹⁹² JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities *Ex corde Ecclesiae* (August 15, 1990) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), sec. 43. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.

¹⁹³ JOHN PAUL II, “Homily of His Holiness John Paul II for the Inauguration of His Pontificate” (St. Peter’s Square, October 22, 1978) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1978), sec. 5, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19781022_inizio-pontificato.html.

To Poland the Church brought Christ, *the key to understanding that great and fundamental reality that is man. For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man is incapable of understanding himself fully without Christ...*

The history of the nation deserves to be adequately appraised in the light of its contribution *to the development of man and humanity*, to intellect, heart and conscience. This is the deepest stream of culture. It is culture's firmest support, its core, its strength....

It is therefore impossible without Christ to understand the history of the Polish nation—this great thousand-year-old community—that is so profoundly decisive for me and each one of us. If we reject this key to understanding our nation, we lay ourselves open to a substantial misunderstanding. We no longer understand ourselves....

Today, here in Victory Square, in the capital of Poland, I am asking with all of you, through the great Eucharistic prayer, *that Christ will not cease to be for us an open book of life for the future*, for our Polish future.¹⁹⁴

On the very next day of his first pastoral visit to Poland, Pope John Paul II reminded the young people of Gniezno of the significance of Polish faith and culture for national identity and spiritual independence:

Culture is above all *a common good of the nation*. Polish culture is a good on which the spiritual life of Poles rests. It distinguishes us as a nation. It is decisive for us throughout the course of history, more decisive even than material power. Indeed, it is more decisive than political boundaries. The Polish nation, *as is well known*, passed through the hard trial of the loss of its independence for over a hundred years. And in the midst of this trial it preserved its own identity. *It remained spiritually independent because it had its own culture*. Indeed, in the period of the partitions it still greatly enriched its culture and made it deeper, since it is only by creating culture that it can keep itself in being.¹⁹⁵

He thus exhorted the young to preserve and pass on this national, cultural, and spiritual heritage: *“Remain faithful to this heritage. Make it the foundation of your formation. Be nobly proud of it. Keep this heritage and multiply it; hand it on to future generations.”*¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Homily during the Holy Mass at Victory Square, secs. 3a-3b, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790602_polonia-varsa_via.html.

¹⁹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, Address of His Holiness John Paul II to the Young People of Gniezno, sec. 2.

¹⁹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 3.

Later that same week, he addressed a similar challenge to the university students of Kraków:

You are the future of the world, of the nation, of the Church...

You must carry into the future the whole of the experience of history that is called "Poland." It is a difficult experience, perhaps one of the most difficult in the world, in Europe, and in the Church. *Do not be afraid of the toil*; be afraid only of thoughtlessness and pusillanimity. From the *difficult* experience that we call "Poland" a better future can be drawn, but only on condition that you are honourable, temperate, believing, free in spirit and strong in your convictions.¹⁹⁷

Twenty years later, during his eighth pastoral visit to Poland, he presented the same challenge to Church and society:

Now, as we give thanks for the past splendour of this Church, in the same spirit we must look at today and tomorrow. We must ask ourselves: What has our generation done with this great heritage? Does the People of God of this Church continue to live from the tradition of the apostles, the mission of the prophets and the blood of the martyrs?¹⁹⁸

He recognized the necessity of preserving the heritage of Polish faith and culture for future generations:

We must give an answer to these questions. In accordance with this answer, we must plan for the future so that it will be seen that the treasure of faith, hope and charity, which our fathers kept in the midst of struggles and which they handed down to us, will not be lost by this generation lulled into sleep, no longer as in the work of Wyspianski, *The Wedding*, by the dream of freedom, but by freedom itself. We bear a great responsibility for the development of faith, for the salvation of contemporary man and for the fate of the Church in the new millennium.¹⁹⁹

Now, yet another twenty-five years later, we must still raise and respond to the same questions. In the words of the fresco adorning the side of Wojtyła's hometown parish in Wadowice: "Time flees, eternity waits." Re-

¹⁹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, Address to University Student, (Kraków, June 8, 1979) (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979), sec. 4, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1979/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790608_polonia-cracovia-universitari.html.

¹⁹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, Homily on the Occasion of the Millenium of Archdiocese of Kraków, sec. 5.

¹⁹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, sec. 5.

garding the John Paul II era, it is rather startling to realize that the youth in Poland of his day are now the elders of our day who have children and grandchildren of their own. We necessarily wonder: How might the first-generation Środowisko families of his day (and all of the families of our day) pass on the Gospel of Polish faith and culture to the second and third and future generations to come?

Man creates culture. Culture creates man. It is no secret that Poland and all the nations of the earth experience significant pressures from without and from within. Polish faith and culture literally kept Polish identity and civilization alive through previous periods of duress and danger. It remains an open question regarding the extent to which Polish faith and culture remain alive and well within the hearts and minds of the present Polish generation. One most notable son of Poland received this heritage and bestowed this heritage, for the sake of Poland and the world.

How will we respond? Will we take up this heritage and pass it on? Will we build a civilization of love or succumb to a civilization of use? Let us not lose the golden horn of faith and culture! Let us wholeheartedly proclaim: “*Gaude, mater Polonia!*” “Poland is not yet lost!” “For our freedom and yours!” “The cross is our gate!” “Lift up your hearts!” “Be not afraid!” “Open wide the doors to Christ!”

As we ponder and penetrate the drama of human faith and culture, so may we recognize and reverberate the reflections of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II – “I Reach the Heart of the Drama” (1974).²⁰⁰

Freedom has continually to be won, it cannot merely be possessed. It comes as a gift but can only be kept with a struggle....

You pay for freedom with all your being, therefore call this your freedom, that paying for it continually you possess yourself anew....

You who have bound your freedom with ours, forgive us.

And see how continually we rediscover freedom, ours and yours, as a gift given and a struggle still unfulfilled.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Karol WOJTYŁA, “I Reach the Heart of the Drama” (1957, from poem cycle “Thinking My Country”), in WOJTYŁA, *The Place Within*, 145-46.

²⁰¹ WOJTYŁA, 145-46.

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MAN CREATES CULTURE, CULTURE CREATES MAN:
THE RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMANITY AND CULTURE
IN THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II

Summary

The life and thought of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II embody and elaborate the reciprocal relationship between humanity and culture. As historian and custodian of faith and culture, John Paul II provided a conceptual understanding of the mutually formative influences of person and community. Polish faith and culture were the cradle and crucible that formed Wojtyła. In return, Wojtyła bestowed a legacy of liberty to Polish faith and culture. As prophet and pastor of faith and culture, John Paul II continues to challenge humanity to faithful personal formation and interpersonal transmission of this heritage for the sake of future generations.

Keywords: Karol Wojtyła; John Paul II; humanity and culture; Polish faith and culture; civilization of love

CZŁOWIEK TWORZY KULTURĘ, KULTURA TWORZY CZŁOWIEKA:
WZAJEMNA RELACJA MIĘDZY CZŁOWIEKIEM A KULTURĄ
W ŻYCIU I MYŚLI ŚWIĘTEGO JANA PAWŁA II

Streszczenie

Życie i myśl Karola Wojtyły/Jana Pawła II ucieleśniają i rozwijają wzajemną relację między człowiekiem a kulturą. Jako historyk oraz opiekun wiary i kultury Jan Paweł II przedstawił konceptualne zrozumienie wzajemnie kształtujących wpływów osoby i społeczności. Polska wiara i kultura były kolebką i tygłem, które ukształtowały Wojtyłę. W zamian Wojtyła przekazał polskiej wierze i kulturze dziedzictwo wolności. Jako prorok oraz pasterz wiary i kultury Jan Paweł II nadal wzywa ludzkość do formacji osobistej opartej na wierze i przekazywania tego dziedzictwa dla dobra przyszłych pokoleń.

Słowa kluczowe: Karol Wojtyła; Jan Paweł II; człowiek i kultura; polska wiara i kultura; cywilizacja miłości