

John Paul II's pilgrimages to Poland - native context and universal message

Comments from a participant and researcher

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Abstract: The article concerns a relatively small but important fragment of John Paul II's pastoral activity, namely his pilgrimages to Poland: the nature of these pilgrimages, their historical background and teaching - especially to the extent that went beyond the immediate and Polish context. The text is the result not only of reading papal statements, but also of personal observation of the political and social atmosphere. The first two parts contain a concise description of the Pope's eight pilgrimages to Poland (before and after the political transformation). The third highlights out the main universal themes raised by the Pope: the dignity of the person, truth and freedom. During consecutive pilgrimages to Poland, he deepened and expanded the themes of his teaching. This collection of his sermons and speeches to Poles constitutes a comprehensive (devoid of redundant repetitions and omissions) treatment of important social, philosophical and theological issues. John Paul II, when speaking to Poles and about Poles, did not lose his universal perspective; he appealed both to Christians and to all people of good will. Papal pilgrimages to Poland are a significant part of modern Polish history, and their message is a valuable intellectual and spiritual gift.

Keywords: John Paul II, Pope's pilgrimages to Poland, the dignity of the person, truth, freedom

Introduction

John Paul II was a pope who made pilgrimages to various corners of the world on an unprecedented scale. His pilgrimages to Poland, however, were of a special kind. John Paul II completed eight of them. No country has so often hosted him, and it is in Poland that he left an exceptionally extensive and significant message. From the very beginning, I had the opportunity to participate closely in meetings with the Pope. I observed the social reactions that these visits provoked, and then returned to the papal texts as a special intellectual and spiritual guide. The following comments, therefore, are composed of personal impressions and research considerations. The Pope continued visiting his homeland starting in 1979. The first visits were held at four-year intervals (1979, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1995), and the last three were held in 1997, 1999 and 2002¹. (Podbilska, 2008, pp. 145-150; Skibiński, 2005, pp. 166-224). John Paul II visited all of Poland's dioceses, including those he had established himself (Nabywaniec, 2008, pp. 82-87). He also met with representatives of many social groups, carried out 154 beatifications and 4 canonisations. It is hard not to notice that the period of 23 years spanning the papal pilgrimages was marked by numerous changes in the history of Poland and Europe. Undoubtedly, the Pope was their avid observer and accompanied them actively. The transformations which were underway at that time would probably not have had such a distinctive force without the Pope's influence. The article consists of three parts. The first demonstrates the specificity and underlying message of John Paul II's first three

pilgrimages to his homeland. They were special not only because of the exceptional nature of the meetings with the Polish people, but also because they took place in a very challenging political situation under Communist rule - taking into account the suppression of Solidarity as a trade union and the deteriorating economic situation in the country. The second part of the article examines the pilgrimage to Poland after the political shifts of 1991. The nature of these visits was already quite different. The Pope was coming to a country in which a democratically elected government was in power and difficult economic reforms had commenced. At the same time, however, the Church lost the position it had previously held in Poland, and its teachings began to be officially questioned on more than one occasion. The Pope therefore had to face up to the situation and address problems differing from the ones before. The third part of the text is devoted only to selected, and in my opinion the most important, universal themes of the Pope's teaching: the dignity of the person, truth and freedom. In papal teachings they are closely interrelated. They address pressing social issues and justify the evangelical message on a fundamental level. They also reveal the Pope's mindset as a philosopher, an expert in the field of ethics.

1. On the route towards freedom

Exceptionally memorable and significant was the pilgrimage in June 1979. It was then, that the Pope made his first visit to the land on the banks of the Vistula River in over a thousand-year history of Poland. Moreover, St. Peter's successor had never visited a country ruled by communists before. Finally, it was the Pope's second - certainly one of the most carefully planned - foreign trips, in which he wanted to delineate new directions for the development of Church and the papacy. At least these three factors contributed to making it an unprecedented event which took on great religious and political significance. The significance of the papal visit was strongly reinforced by the fact that only 13 years earlier, in 1966, on the occasion of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, Pope Paul VI was not allowed to visit Poland by the communist authorities. According to a number of historians, the pilgrimage heralded the fall of communism in Poland and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. It was therefore an event of international importance, not only in the political sense, but also on a social, religious and cultural level. The Pope was aware of taking the risk in the view of the whole world, providing an alibi for the Communist authorities (Jan Paweł II, 2019, p. 40). The outcome of these "nine June days that changed the world", both direct and indirect, allows one to posit a thesis that the importance of this visit has grown with time. The first ever Polish Pope to arrive in his native country was greeted with extraordinary euphoria. Thousands of people gathered along the passage route of the Vatican Guest, and over a million believers often attended the celebrations officiated by him. These events were as much liturgical as patriotic, uniting Poles under the banner of truth, freedom and solidarity. The main theme of the pilgrimage was the 900th anniversary of the Martyrdom of St. Stanisław of Szczepanów, the bishop of Kraków, whom the pope often referred to as the patron of the moral order in Poland. The Polish Episcopate realized how important this event was for the whole of Poland and all other countries of the Eastern Bloc. It does not seem, however, that the weakening of the communist authority was calculated as the key point. The focus was rather placed on stimulating religiosity, strengthening social activity and reviving Catholicism in the countries of the Eastern Bloc. The Pope's homily delivered during the Eucharist on June 2 at Plac Zwycięstwa (Victory Square) in Warsaw (now Józef Piłsudski Square) on the eve of Pentecost celebration turned out to be extremely moving and prophetic (Gawin, 2005-2006). It ended with the oft repeated words: "Let your

Spirit descend! Let your Spirit descend! And renew the face of the earth. This earth!" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 25). It was the most expressive speech of John Paul II on political issues - a declaration of his views and a clear announcement of support, at least spiritually, for any actions that could overthrow the system. The first pilgrimage had numerous patriotic accents. The Pope visited places closely related to Polish history (Gniezno, Warsaw, Kraków, Częstochowa), recalled the history of his homeland and its close relationship with the Church (Kucharczyk 2018, p. 249-262.) Houses and balconies were decorated all over Poland (not only in places visited by the Pope). Careful attention was paid to the words of a man who spoke the truth to people who had lived for years in the hypocrisy prevailing in the media, at work and intruding into their families. The Holy Father spoke about the history of the nation, about human rights, about the right of Poles to freedom. The visit was sparsely covered in the pro-government media (except for broadcasts of meetings with the authorities, the celebrations at Victory Square in Warsaw and on the premises of the former concentration camp in Oświęcim), although conservative estimates indicated that the meetings with the Pope, despite numerous administrative and transport restrictions, were attended by over 10 million people in total (not only believers). At that time, hardly anyone thought that this extraordinary pilgrimage would become a source of great political transformations in Poland and Europe. They started in the summer of 1980. Then, almost all of Poland was engulfed by a wave of strikes. At the gate of the Gdańsk Shipyard, which soon became the cradle of the independent trade union "Solidarity", a large portrait of John Paul II was placed, and the movement, with which initially numbered 10 million members, took on a clearly Catholic character.

The next two papal pilgrimages in 1983 and 1987 were also visits to Poland ruled by communists. The first one was made on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of bringing the image of the Virgin Mary to the monastery at Jasna Góra. Over the centuries, this place has remained famous for miracles and has become a national sanctuary. The pilgrimage of 1983 upheld the spirits after the experiences of martial law introduced in Poland on December 13, 1981. The Pope wanted to strengthen the hope of Poles and the authority of the outlawed "Solidarity", and from the point of view of the communist authorities, the visit was intended to break its isolation in the international arena. The Pope often used allusions and metaphors, which, however, were immediately and correctly decoded by the faithful and greeted with enthusiasm. The pilgrims often applauded the words "solidarity" and "August". The Security Service tried to prevent the people from bringing "Solidarity" banners to the meetings with the Pope, but there were a lot of them everywhere. John Paul II noticed them with approval and raised such delicate issues as the problem of national sovereignty, freedom and trade unions. He argued that it was not about a military victory, but a moral one, and that evil should be overcome with good. In all the meetings, approximately 7 million people participated. Among them there were approximately 9,000 members of the Security Service, who observed the mood and behaviour of the gathered people. It was also then that the Pope had an informal meeting with Lech Wałęsa in the Tatra Mountains, near the Chochołowska Valley. It was an expression of the Holy Father's support for "Solidarity". However, the Pope did not only mean a political breakthrough (it seemed unreal at the time) but a mental renewal of the young generation. At that time, the words spoken to young people in Częstochowa spread around Poland: "You must demand of yourself, even if others do not demand of you. Historical experience tells us how much periodic demoralization cost the entire nation. Today, when we struggle for the future shape of our social life, remember that this shape depends on what a person will be like" (John Paul II 2005, p. 264). The calm

progress of the papal visit brought about the formal cancellation of martial law a month after the departure of John Paul II, on July 22, 1983. Over five hundred political prisoners were released, and the pending proceedings against 800 other ones were discontinued. Perhaps, however, it was more important that the youth, to whom the Holy Father was addressing his words at the time, already perceived the world in other categories.

Another visit of the Pope in 1987 is described as "a pilgrimage of many breakthroughs" (Grajewski, 2012). It was greatly facilitated by the domestic and international situation. An economic crisis was building up in Poland. In turn, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in the Soviet Union. The Pope came to a nation that was struggling to choose between apathy and the desire for change. The course of the pilgrimage was widely described and commented on in the underground press published by activists of the outlawed "Solidarity". John Paul II defended the dignity of Poles against the authorities, stressing that each person has their own personal dignity and therefore deserves to be treated as an independent entity, and citizens should have an impact on the fate of their country. During this visit, the Pope visited, among others, Gdańsk, Gdynia, Szczecin, Łódź, Lublin, Tarnów and met various social circles. The Pope's journey, especially in the coastal areas, was assisted by much more numerous and acting more brutally security forces. This time TV stations were instructed to employ a different strategy: broadcast everything, so that people would stay at home. Propaganda strived to discredit the Pope's words. Especially memorable was the meeting with young people at Westerplatte, the site where World War II broke out. The defence of this piece of land of the Polish territory against the Germans at the beginning of September of 1939 lasted for seven days and still remains a symbol of heroism in the Polish history. Referring to modern times the Pope gave a moral and spiritual value to this fight. He said then: "Each of you, young friends, encounters your own 'Westerplatte' in life too. A certain dimension of events that you need to engage in and fulfil. A just cause that you cannot help but fight for. Some obligation, or duty, which cannot be avoided. That you cannot 'desert from'. And finally, a system of truths and values, that need to be 'upheld' and 'defended', just like in Westerplatte, in yourselves, as well as around you. Yes, defend - for yourself and for others" (Jan Paweł II 2005, p. 481). The Pope would continuously speak about Poles and for them. Almost all of the homilies contained social content. None of them included a single kind word about the actions of General Jaruzelski's circle. Whereas all of them included considerations of painful and burning issues of the Polish realities. Poland, as seen by the pope during the first three pilgrimages, should be a country that unities its citizens, who are able to not just dwell on their past defeats and victories, but also to courageously look into the future (Gaszyńska-Magiera 2014, pp. 401-418).

2. After the Political Changes

In 1991 the papal pilgrimage to Poland gained a completely different value. John Paul II arrived in a country, which had entered the path of political and economic reforms. The fourth pilgrimage was divided into two stages (1-9 VI and 13-16 VIII 1991). The motto of the first visit in June was "Be thankful to God, do not quench the spirit". Its route was very extended and included several dioceses, especially the ones located in Eastern Poland, where the tradition of the Greek Catholic Church is still alive. The Pope delivered a record number of speeches and homilies, as well as attended meetings with various social groups. He also somewhat placed himself in the epicentre of the discussion regarding the shape of

future Poland - including the intense dispute concerning the place of Christianity in the rebuilt country. On the threshold of independence, the Holy Father tried to make his countrymen aware that the freedom itself is not all, and that real freedom needs to be based on truth and Christian values. The Pope avoided *strictly* political accents. His teachings concentrated on the Decalogue, which should be properly understood, accepted and pursued in individual and social life. The Pope spoke on many issues regarding the values and morality with great resolve, implying that certain matters are not subject to democratic vote or the opinion of the majority, but are universal laws, which are always valid in the heart of every human being. He also emphasized, that faithfulness to the Ten Commandments is a sign of freedom. The pope's words were acknowledged by certain circles of public opinion with reservation or even aversion, especially when he discussed protecting the lives of unborn children. He himself was also aware of it. In his bestseller *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, published a few years later, he shared his thoughts: "When during my last visit in Poland [1991 - R.Z] I chose the Decalogue and the Greatest Commandment as the topic of my homily, all Polish supporters of the Enlightenment program held it against me. The Pope who tries to convince the world about the existence of human sin becomes a *persona non grata* to this mentality" (Jan Paweł II, 1994, p.17). John Paul II also discussed such topics as the role of Poland as a country that has always been a part of Europe, the need to rethink the human labour ethos, presenting honest information in the media and avoiding consumerism: "Therefore, the economic reform that is taking place in our homeland should be accompanied by the increase in social sense, increasingly common concern for the common good, noticing the poorest and people who are in need, as well as kindness towards foreigners, who come here to earn a living [...]. But haven't we been dominated by what is - after all - less important? Wasn't it and isn't it still noticeable? What kind of effort do we need to discover the correct proportions in this regard?" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 597). John Paul II, quoting Rocco Buttiglione, drew attention to the need for a free-market alliance and solidarity². At a meeting with the diplomatic corps accredited in Warsaw he repeated the words he said in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 11 X 1988: "It is therefore my obligation to preach the truth regarding the fact, that if the religious and Christian foundations of the culture of this continent was deprived of its influence on the ethics and the shape of societies, it would be not only a contradiction of the entire heritage of the European past, but also a serious danger for the future of Europe's citizens. And all of them - believers and non-believers" (Jan Paweł, 2005, p. 731). The second part of the pilgrimage took place in mid-August 1991, when the Pope participated in the VI World Youth Day in Częstochowa. As a 30-year-old man I took part in this event, especially that it was organized in my hometown. Representatives of young people from all over the world came to Poland, including for the first time the youth from Eastern Europe, for whom the organisers provided free transport. The anthem of this event was the song "Abba Ojczy" (Abba Father) (lyrics by Jan Góra OP; music by Jacek Sykulski), which entered church songbooks as an indispensable item. Poland, and Częstochowa itself, had a few months for the preparations. It was a period of leaving the communist past behind. Available accommodation was insufficient, because Częstochowa was swarmed by over 1.5 million people (100 thousand of whom came from USSR, which was considered a major success in the contemporary circumstances). Visitors were literally sleeping everywhere: in private lodgings, schools, kindergartens, student dormitories, and camping sites. One of them was located close to my house. I remember the enthusiasm which characterised the youth. Young people just threw themselves in the arms of each other, sang and danced. It was a

great festival of youth, and the participants only went to sleep in the small hours. At Jasna Góra, in his message to young people from all over the world, the Pope said, among other things, "Your mission is to secure in tomorrow's world the presence of such values as full religious freedom, respect for personal development, the protection of human rights to life from conception to natural death, concern for the development and strengthening of the family, the preservation of cultural distinctness for the mutual enrichment of all people, the protection of the environmental balance which is becoming more and more endangered" - Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 810).

The shortest, only 10-hour-long visit of the Pope in Poland took place in May 1995. John Paul II came to his country on the occasion of the visit he was paying to the Czech Republic, a day after the canonization of John Sarkander in Olomouc, a priest and the martyr who was born in the town of Skoczów and spent the first 13 years of his life there. The Pope visited, among others Skoczów, where he addressed the issue of moral order in the Poland undergoing transformations, and especially the need for the formation of consciences as a fundamental condition of life in a pluralistic society. It happened when Polish democracy, in the opinion of most observers, was going through a very serious crisis. "The time of trial for Polish consciences is taking place" said the Pope in Skoczów. "Can history run against the current of conscience? - he asked. - At what price can it do so? Exactly, at what price? This price is, unfortunately, deep wounds in the moral tissue of the nation, and above all in the souls of the Poles who have not yet been healed, ones that will have to be treated for a long time" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 844). The call for people of conscience echoed with immense reverberation at that time. Among other things, the pope said: "Above all, Poland is calling for people of conscience today! Being a person of conscience, that is, listening primarily to one's own conscience and refraining from muting its voice even if it is difficult and demanding; means to engage in good and multiply it in oneself and around oneself, and never consent for evil either, following the words of St. Paul: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). Since that moment, the last sentence has been repeated very often in Poland. In Skoczów, the Pope also warned against the wrong, overly broad interpretation of tolerance, which could indeed be intolerance towards believers.

The main motivation of the sixth Papal pilgrimage in 1997 was the International Eucharistic Congress in Wrocław held with the motto "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1) and the thousandth anniversary of the death of St. Adalbert - one of the patrons of Poland. The Pope - older, stricken with illness, more tired than during the previous visits, was nonetheless "strong in weakness". He had lost neither his strength nor sense of humour. His teaching focused on going back to the national roots and the mystery of the Eucharist, which he linked firmly to mature freedom. He said to the young people gathered in Poznań: "The human person, created in the image and likeness of God, cannot become a slave to things, economic systems, technical civilization, consumerism, easy success. A person cannot become a slave to their various inclinations and passions, sometimes deliberately incited. Defending against this danger is a necessity. We need to be able to use our freedom by choosing what is real good. [...] Do not let yourselves be enslaved, nor tempted with pseudo-values, half-truths, the charm of lofty prospects, from which you will later turn away with disappointment, wounded, and perhaps even with a broken life" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 921). The Holy Father often referred to the difficult economic situation of Poland and encouraged Christians to take responsibility for the shape

of social life. The pilgrimage abounded in many exceptional moments (such as two canonizations³ and two beatifications, a meeting with presidents of seven countries of Central Europe, a visit to Zakopane in the heart of the Polish Tatra Mountains, where Catholicism is particularly vibrant.) Thanks to the Eucharistic Congress, the pilgrimage was also characterised by an international atmosphere. On this account, the pope's speeches contained accents going beyond the local context. In Gniezno, in the first capital of Poland, the pope said: "There is still a long way to go before the continent of Europe is genuinely united. There will be no unity of Europe until it is a community of spirit. It was Christianity that gave Europe this deepest foundation of unity and strengthened it for centuries with its Gospel, with its understanding of the human being and its contribution to the development of history, peoples, and nations. [...] The cornerstone of European identity is erected upon Christianity. And the present lack of spiritual unity is mainly due to the crisis of this Christian self-awareness" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 911).

The Poles waited only two years for the seventh pilgrimage of the pope, who arrived in his homeland in 1999 on the occasion of the end of the Second Plenary Synod of the Church in Poland, the millennium of the canonization of St. Adalbert and the canonical erection of the Gniezno diocese. The purpose of the visit was also to inspect the dioceses where he had not been yet. That is the reason why it was the longest pilgrimage: it lasted as long as 13 days. The size and the splendour of the altars built on this occasion was striking. The pope visited 22 cities, and the eight evangelical blessings became the theme of his teachings. Of unprecedented importance was the then meeting with members of parliament, the first such meeting in the history of the papacy. In his speech in the Sejm building, the pope emphasized that law must always be enacted with the intent of the common good serving the human being. He also added: "The Church warns against reducing the vision of a united Europe solely to its economic and political aspects and against an uncritical attitude to the consumerist model of life. If we want Europe's new unity to last, we should build on those spiritual values that once shaped it, taking into account the richness and diversity of cultures and traditions of individual nations, as it is to be the Great European Community of the Spirit". (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1087). This last sentence was later frequently repeated in many studies on the papal vision of the Old Continent, especially in the context of Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004. The pope's speech in the Polish parliament has remained valid and prophetic to this day (Wnuk-Lipński, 2005-2006, pp. 71-75). During this visit, the pope proclaimed 111 blessed. He also canonized the Hungarian princess Kinga, who ruled in Poland in the 13th century, and at the end of her life founded a convent of the Poor Clares in Stary Sącz, which she later joined. The canonization of Kinga in that city made the visit international in spirit and brought together believers from several countries. The figure of the saint became an opportunity for the pope to reflect upon the value of holiness: "It takes courage not to put the light of your faith under a bushel. Finally, it is needed that the hearts of believers host this desire for holiness, which shapes not only private life, but affects the shape of entire communities as well" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1171). A visit to his hometown of Wadowice, where Karol Wojtyła lived from his birth to his secondary school graduation in 1938, was especially cordial, reminiscent and farewell in nature. The speech he gave there was of a very personal character. The pope often referred to the times of his youth. Sharing various details, the pope recalled with a smile that after secondary school final exams he would go and indulge in cream pies (famous "kremówka") with his friends. The audience enjoyed this remark immensely and that moment the Wadowice cream pies became the most famous pies in Poland.

The last pilgrimage of John Paul II to Poland was made in 2002. It took place with the motto "God rich in mercy". Due to the subject of the worship of Divine Mercy, this pilgrimage was universal in spirit and aroused great interest worldwide. Its main goal was the consecration of the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Kraków-Łagiewniki. "I want to perform a solemn act of entrusting the world to God's Mercy" - the pope said. "I am doing so with the fervent desire that the message of God's merciful love that was proclaimed here through the mediation of St. Faustyna will reach all the inhabitants of the earth and fill their hearts with hope. Let this message spread from this place over our entire beloved Homeland and across the whole world" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1207). The consecration of the sanctuary also held a highly personal value for John Paul II related to his work during World War II. The pope mentioned it at the end of the celebration: "Many of my personal memories are tied to this place. I used to come here, especially during the occupation, when I was working in nearby Solvay. To this day, I remember the road that led from Borek Fałęcki to Dębniaki, which I took every day, going to various shifts at work, wearing wooden shoes. Such shoes were worn then. How could you possibly imagine that this man in wooden clogs would one day consecrate the Basilica of Divine Mercy in Kraków's Łagiewniki" (Jan Paweł 2005, p.1208). During his last pilgrimage, the pope also visited Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, where the famous Marian Sanctuary has been located for four centuries. Karol Wojtyła had been on pilgrimage to this place since childhood.

3. Universal message of papal pilgrimages

The homilies and speeches of John Paul II delivered during his pilgrimages to Poland reflect the atmosphere of those times and the places visited. Therefore, they have a great historical value and are significant for Polish people. However, it is easily noticeable that his speeches are also of universal character and are relevant for our times. Pope's speeches carry a message relevant to the entire Church and the world. The pope was a philosopher by education, specializing in ethical issues. It is no surprise that these issues were particularly prevalent in his speeches.

Dignity of the person

Already during the first pilgrimage, John Paul II reminded of the deep dimension of the human being. He said then: "The human being [...] must be measured by the measure of conscience, by the measure of the spirit which is open to God. Therefore, man must be measured by the measure of the Holy Spirit" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 27). The human being is an entity endowed with dignity, that is, a value incomparable to anything else in the world outside the world of persons. During his pilgrimage to Poland, the pope repeatedly emphasized that the human being has always been and is a sovereign entity in relation to the rest of the world and holds a superior position over whatever surrounds them. "Human dignity has no price," he recalled, reminding of the testimony of the first Polish martyrs of the 11th century (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 903). During his third pilgrimage in 1987, in his speech to the authorities he spoke of human dignity as the measure and basis of political actions, because: "communities, societies, nations, states live a truly human life, when the dignity of the human being, any human being, does not cease to set the direction on the basis of their existence and activity. Any violation and disregard for human rights is a threat to peace" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 383). Due to the dignity that characterizes the human being, they cannot be reduced to the role of an object in sexual relations, to a "tool of production" or an object for the "benefit of science". In a 1997 speech at the Jagiellonian University, the

pope gave a prophetic warning. He warned against the consequences of an anthropological error, which consists in adopting an incorrect concept of the human being, which entails the formulation of incorrect rules of conduct and production. The anthropological error appears both on the grounds of the Orphic-Platonic and Aristotelian concept of the person, providing deformed theories of the human person towards its "deification" (Platonic sources) or "animalization" (Aristotelian sources). It must lead to a crisis of the culture founded in this way: "A deformed or incomplete vision of the human being causes science to transform easily from a blessing into a serious threat to humans. [...] Nowadays, the human being often becomes an object or even a "raw material" instead of a subject and a goal: it is enough to mention genetic engineering experiments, which raise great hopes, but also considerable fears for the future of mankind"- said the Pope in Kraków in 1997 at the Jagiellonian University (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 988). According to the Pope, the "human-subject" paradigm is a remedy for technocracy, consumerism, and various forms of totalitarianism. In a similar vein, John Paul II also spoke in 1999 during his visit to the Polish parliament: "Today, in this place, we are particularly aware of the fundamental role that a fair legal order plays in a democratic state, the foundation of which should always and everywhere be the human being and the full truth about the human being, their inalienable rights and the rights of the entire community, which constitutes a nation" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1081). Human dignity should therefore be the source of rights and the guiding principle in the creation of the common good. The whole order of truth and goodness is inscribed for the human being in God's commandments. Any action which contradicts this order inevitably strikes the human being who, in turn, discovers their place in the world most fully through their relationship with Christ. The dignity of a person is ultimately rooted in the mystery of salvation and redemption. Hence, "The truth about God's love also sheds light on our search for truth, on work on the development of science, and on our entire culture. Our quests and our work need a leading idea, fundamental value that would impart meaning and combine into one stream the research of scientists, the reflections of historians, creators, artists and the discoveries of technicians, which are developed at a breakneck pace" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1047). This is what the Pope said in 1999 in Toruń to the assembled rectors of Polish universities. Recalling Copernicus, he emphasized the relationship between reason and faith.

Truth

Another universal theme of papal statements concerned truth. During his second pilgrimage in 1983, the Pope, in an address to the episcopate, reminded that "the truth is the first and fundamental condition of social renewal". (Jan Paweł II 2005, p. 289). A few days later, he noticed that truth leads to trust, and trust builds community - all the way from family to humanity. The subject of truth was most often reiterated during the Pope's meetings with people of science, i.e., those who are especially called to its research and dissemination, for example during a visit to the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (1983), the Catholic University of Lublin (1987) or the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń (1999) (Przybiecki, 2001, 81-89). The Pope rejected the accusation that it was impossible to learn objective truth, especially the truth about the human being and moral truth. He also referred to the science of natural law, inscribed in human nature and thus cognisable. The defence of truth should oppose tendencies that promote a sense of meaninglessness, makeshift cognition, subjective opinion, changeability, and relativity. It is dangerous, because "the fragmentariness of knowledge and the fragmentation of meaning destroys the inner unity of the human being" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1048). In his speech to the rectors of Polish

universities, the Pope also repeated after *Fides et ratio* that "Faith and reason are like 'two wings on which the human spirit rises to contemplate the truth'" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1048). In science and philosophy, therefore, there is a need for a sapiential dimension consisting in the search for the overall meaning of human existence. For truth is not only an intellectual "adventure", but it has an existential character, and life without it would be meaningless. According to the Pope, the defence of truth as an objective good is a defence of human dignity and the normativity of ethics, and it actually protects human freedom. The human being is called to seek the truth and make judgements according to it, so that their life would not be only a constant struggle to create a convenient space of maximum freedom. According to the Pope, truth contains the source of the human being's transcendence towards the universe. You reach the truth not only on your own, but also through dialogue with others⁴. A human being of truth does not create truth, but it reveals itself to them when they persistently search for it. As a result - as he said to the scientists of the Jagiellonian University - "Learning the truth generates a unique spiritual joy (*gaudium veritatis*)" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 987). The Pope often combined the scientific, moral and religious dimensions of truth. Searching for it on every level and shaping one's life according to it has ultimately a salvific value: "And from this truth that the human being implements, with which they try to shape their life and coexist with others, a path leads to the Truth, i.e., Christ. It leads to the freedom for which Christ has liberated us" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, 607). Martyrs bear special witness to the truth. In his speech at the end of the Congress of Central and Eastern Europe Theologians in 1991, the Pope emphasized: "The testimony (*martyrium*) constitutes exceptional *locus theologicus*, not only by virtue of the mystery of God, in which it expresses and presents itself, but also on account of the truth of the human being, which becomes exceptionally expressive through this testimony. [...] The status of the witness (one who bears witness to the truth) is the basic status of the human being. This is a statement of fundamental importance, not only in the dimension of Christianity as faith, but also Christianity as culture, as humanism" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, pp. 824-825). The Pope also emphasized the primary importance of the truth in ecumenical activities. During the ecumenical service in Drohiczyn in 1999, he quoted a fragment of his encyclical *Ut unum sint*: "love of the truth is the deepest dimension of the authentic pursuit of full communion between Christians" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1076). The main threats to truth are scepticism, agnosticism, nihilism, and ethical relativism. The latter, allied with democracy - as the Pope noted in his speech to Polish parliamentarians - "deprives the life of the civil community of a permanent moral point of reference, depriving it, in a radical manner, of its ability to recognize the truth" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, pp. 1084 - 1085).

Freedom

The issue of freedom was of great importance in the Pope's pilgrimages to Poland right from the very beginning. In the seventies and eighties, the very presence of the Holy Father reminded us of the nation's aspirations for freedom. The theme of freedom recurred during every pilgrimage. The Pope always proclaimed that freedom is a gift of God, but it can be misused: "Freedom is given to the human being as a measure of their dignity. However, it is also entrusted to them. 'Freedom is not a relief but a hardship of greatness' – as the poet expresses (Leopold Staff, *Oto twa pieśń (Here's your song)*). For freedom can be used well or misused by people" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 272). This issue became particularly important with the introduction of martial law in Poland, and then with the revival of society's aspirations for political and economic transformations. The Pope was constantly associated

with the freedom aspirations of Poles and supported the trade union "Solidarity", which was dissolved upon introduction of martial law. During the pilgrimages in 1983 and 1987, participants of meetings with the Pope often held banners reminding of the existence of "Solidarity". The Pope, in turn, repeatedly referred to the issue of freedom, thus showing support to those who struggled with the communist regime in various ways: "There cannot be a healthy society if the issue of freedom, personal freedom, community freedom, national freedom is not resolved fully, honestly, with a full sense of responsibility" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 449) - he said in 1987. The situation changed drastically during the fourth pilgrimage in 1991. Its slogan "Thank God, do not quench the Spirit" signalled the joy of regained freedom, but also anxiety about how it would be nurtured and used to overcome the socio-economic and moral crises of the Polish society. It was during this pilgrimage that the Pope most often spoke about freedom and did not limit himself to capturing it in political terms. Indeed, he pointed to the need of educating for mature freedom, which presupposes a moral order, an order in the sphere of values: "May we refrain from trying to take shortcuts in our efforts to shape a new economy and new economic systems, omitting moral signposts" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 646) - exclaimed the Pope in 1991 in Białystok. His teachings covered all dimensions of freedom, including its false varieties. The human being is free because they have the ability to recognize the truth, and free as long as they are guided by the truth about good. On the verge of Polish transformations in 1991, the Pope even spoke of an "exam in freedom". The truth is difficult, but also "Freedom is difficult, you must learn it, you must learn to be truly free, you must learn to be free so that our freedom does not become our own slavery, internal enslavement, or a cause of enslavement to others" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p.699). Freedom must be constantly won; it requires effort and evangelization. During his fourth pilgrimage, in his speech to the laity, the Pope touched upon, among others, issues of the freedom of speech in the work of social reconstruction: "Our word must be free, it must express our inner freedom. You cannot use any means of violence to impose any theses on a person [...]; in today's world, even the media can become means of violence if there is some other violence behind them" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 670). In a sense, John Paul II considered the struggle of Poles for freedom in the 1980s to be an example. In the land on the banks of the Vistula River, a special form of the theology of liberation took shape: "It should be said - the Pope said in 1991 to theologians from Central and Eastern Europe - not only because of the fight for the most basic human rights (freedom of religion - freedom of conscience and others), which was waged here - using the radically 'poor' means in the clash with the violence of a totalitarian state. It should also be stated because of the evangelical authenticity of liberation itself, which was the underlying motivation of this fight" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p.826). On each subsequent occasion, the Pope added something on the subject of freedom. During the period of political changes, he always warned against its improper use, emphasizing that it was both a gift and a challenge. The Pope's words addressed to Polish bishops in the perspective of Poland's accession to the European Union in 1999, sounded like a prophetic message: "Poland enters the twenty-first century as a free and sovereign country. This freedom, if it is not to be wasted, requires people who are conscious not only of their own affairs, but also of obligations: self-sacrificing, animated by the love of the Homeland and the spirit of service, who want to build the common good and develop all levels of freedom in the personal, family and social dimension" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p.1097). Freedom is given to the human being from God as a measure of their dignity, and at the same time it is imposed on them as a task. It was always characteristic of the Pope that he clearly demonstrated the relationship between freedom

and truth as well as with Christ, which in modern times has often been negated. "Beyond truth, freedom is not freedom. It is only apparent. It is even enslavement". (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 670). To detach freedom from truth leads to evil and even self-destruction. According to the Pope, freedom can never only be possessed, but "it must be constantly acquired and created" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p.718). Political freedom is important, but first of all the human being must be free and should not become a slave of instincts, passions, pseudo-values, easy success, consumerism, possessions, economic systems, etc. Over the years, these exhortations recurred in the Pope's teaching. The erroneous concept of freedom consists in its absolutization. Analysing the spheres of human life particularly exposed to the temptation of improper use of freedom, John Paul II pointed out that the value that can properly direct our "freedom" path is love for God and one's neighbour, and "the greatest fulfilment of freedom is love, which is materialized in devotion and service" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p.1086). That is why the Pope encouraged his countrymen not to forget about the heritage of solidarity: solidarity with another, often weaker person, solidarity exceeding class barriers and ideological barriers (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p.1083). He reminded of the principle that was widely accepted in the 1980s that "there is no freedom without solidarity", and its fullest expression is the joint effort put into building the "civilization of love". "The ultimate destiny of human freedom is holiness" (Jan Paweł II, 2005, p. 1010) - this is the message that the Pope left after his pilgrimage in 1997, during which he officiated two beatifications and canonizations. The teaching about freedom which was given by John Paul II in Poland is an important voice on this subject, to which the Pope often returned in his various documents (Dulles, 1995, pp. 36-41).

Conclusions

John Paul II's pilgrimages to Poland were extraordinary events not only in the lives of Poles at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. They accompanied the struggle for freedom and great political changes. The Pope highlighted the great historical, cultural and spiritual heritage in Poland. The places he visited still evoke memories today; they are associated with important moments in the history of Poland (Szyma, 2002), and papal teaching is an important point of reference in the evangelization and the moral life of the Polish people. Therefore, it is not a teaching that has only a historical value (although it contains a lot of references to the then situation and visited places). On the contrary: he returns in his sermons, in journalism, in scientific studies, etc. Anniversaries of pilgrimages are often recalled in the places visited by the Pope. However, the universal dimension of papal teaching in Poland should also be emphasized. John Paul II was aware that he was speaking not only to the Polish Church (after all, foreigners often appeared along his pilgrim routes in Poland). He also wanted to reach people unrelated to the Church, and maybe even hostile to it, in order to build an agreement based on truth in spite of unfavourable conditions, indicate directions and methods of action, reconcile disagreements and bring hope. The pope contrasted postmodern wilfulness with truth-based freedom. He defended the existence and the search for objective truth precisely because he saw in it the necessary condition of freedom. The human being must be ready to accept the truth and answer the call of good. The truth is an opportunity for the human being, not a threat. Properly understood freedom depends on truth, otherwise it is false and even enslaving. For the

pope, the problem was the liberation of freedom, that is, giving up illusory freedom and binding oneself to true freedom. Freedom cannot be reduced to spontaneity or omnipotence. Freedom is not only a choice, but also a state of liberation from evil, sin, illusion, etc., and thus the readiness to serve truth and good. The papal message has an important ethical value, which culminates in the religious message - in the Good News about God and the human being.

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Notes

¹A pilgrimage in 2005 was also planned. A pilgrimage that John Paul II very much wanted to make in order to consecrate the Temple of Divine Providence in Warsaw. However, the Pope's death stood in the way.

² It is worth noting that during the period of striving for economic changes in Poland, the encyclicals *Laborem exercens* (1981) *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) were also published. Their message, although universal, remained related to the situation in Poland.

³Among the canonized figures were Queen Jadwiga of Poland (1373-1399) and the Franciscan Jan of Dukla (1414-1484). On May 31, 1979, two days before the first pilgrimage to Poland, John Paul II beatified Jadwiga by approving her public worship in the Archdiocese of Kraków. The canonization of Jadwiga (the first one in Poland) was attended by approx. 2 million believers. For centuries, Jadwiga has been venerated, especially in the Diocese of Cracow. She contributed to the development of science, building temples, caring for the poor and on account of the union with Lithuania through her marriage to the Lithuanian prince Władysław Jagiełło, who had been baptized earlier. John Paul II was one of the great worshipers and promoters of the cult of Jadwiga.

⁴ In 1999, during a meeting with the rectors of Polish universities, the Pope quoted the words from his encyclical *Fides et ratio* : "The human being is perfected not only by acquiring abstract knowledge about truth,

but also through a living relationship with other people, which is expressed through the gift of themselves and through faithfulness. In this fidelity, which enables one to give themselves as a gift, the human being finds full certainty and security. At the same time, however, cognition based on faith, which is based on trust between persons, is not devoid of reference to the truth: by believing, a person entrusts to the truth shown to them by another person" (*Fides et ratio*, 32).