

RECEPTION AND APPLICATION OF JOHN PAUL II'S ANTHROPOLOGY IN SLOVAKIA DURING HIS PONTIFICATE

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This paper presents and attempts to evaluate the understanding of John Paul II's anthropological concept of the human being by Slovak theologians and philosophers during his pontificate. It explores the broader context of the existence of human beings as a part of his theology and philosophy with practical application to Slovak society in the communist and post-communist eras. I will focus on describing the understanding of his two most important works for Slovak scholars and theologians at that time – Person and Act and Evangelium Vitae. The first one is explained and applied during the time of the socialist era in Czechoslovakia, and the second work was evaluated and applied shortly after the fall of communism, but still with the socialist agenda in the minds of people of that time.

INTRODUCTION

In speaking about John Paul II and Slovak understanding and evaluation of his person and his works, mainly theological-philosophical work on the topic of anthropology, we need to go back to the era of socialism and be reminded of a few important facts connected with his person and his work. During most of his pontificate, there was socialism in Czechoslovakia. So the questions before us are: Can we really consider John Paul II as the originator of the fall of socialism in Europe? What was the understanding of his personality and, most of all, his work among the leaders of the communist parties and Churches in Czechoslovakia at that time? Why would the communist leaders be so afraid of accepting his principles of anthropology and of letting people study his works freely?

At the time Cardinal Wojtyła was elected pope, the troublesome years of communism in Czechoslovakia were over. Horror-filled-fifties, hope-filled-crushed-by-the-army of allies-sixties were definitely over. Communist rule was firmly established, ruling with a strong hand, stirring up constant fear among the people, offering benefits to the faithful and obedient followers of the regime, while harassment even persecution to the rebels or faithful and active believers. People were slowly getting used to this difficult situation. They were, we can say, slowly cooked in a pot like a frog to comply with a strict regime. And then – suddenly, this Slavic pope is

elected, emerging, so to speak, out of nowhere, an unpleasant surprise to the communist leaders. Coming from Poland, so close to Czechoslovakia, John Paul II suddenly raised both - helpless anger on the side of communist leaders and slight hope on the side of faithful persecuted Christians.

From the first day of his election, John Paul II's pontificate raised concern in Central Committee headquarters. Why? Because the basic pastoral concern of John Paul II's pontificate was his concern for human beings as precious individuals, as well as communal beings. And the Church must never give up on humans, and the Church must never leave human beings – because of what Christ did for us – through his incarnation, life and death, and resurrection. The Canadian reporter, Eric Margolis, described it this way: “I was the first Western journalist inside the KGB headquarters in 1990. The generals told me that the Vatican and the Pope above all were regarded as their number one, most dangerous enemy in the world.” (Barnes, Whitney, 2014). No wonder – he represented everything, the communist leaders were trying really hard to suppress, to wipe-out from people's minds and hearts and from the human society at all costs – the active living faith, the dignified human being who, created in the image of God, and completely transformed by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, was able to create a true community with true joy and hope. John Paul II was perceived (and rightly so) as a real threat to an ideology that was built on anger and constantly raging wars of revolutionaries, and blood and costly lives of thousands of innocent victims.

John Paul II's anthropology focused primarily on human beings, and their dignity was the main topic of polemic with Marxism, as represented by socialism in Czechoslovakia. Marxist philosophy of nature and natural selection was confronted with the innovative approach, which allowed for Logos to be found in the world, the creative force (Word) of God, including the creation order. Atheistic and theistic understanding of the world, human beings, and the order of existence came to clash here. Human being created in the image of God (*imago Dei*) and saved by Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, and his/her dignity with the consequences for the moral behavior was at stake. This clash of atheistic and theistic views could be expected because it manifested itself earlier, before the rise of the Communists in Poland or after the Bolsheviks came to power in Russia and during the persecution of Christians in the USSR, when many Russian religious philosophers in exile critically analyzed dialectical materialism and presented a different vision of creation and the view of man in Christianity (Sládek 2020, 107-123) According to John Paul II, human dignity is directly and fully a matter of creation, originating in and done by God himself. It is not anything human beings are able to gain by themselves or create in themselves – people only describe what was given to them by their Creator (Cf. Csontos 1996).

His essay – *Person and Act* sparked especially heated discussions among the Marxists. In the middle of this discussion stood the questions posed by the young generation after the IIWW concerning the meaning of life, of everyday existence, of solving the problems, of marriage and family – questions that were closely and naturally connected with their everyday life. Marxist philosophy offered a somewhat stern solution – the meaning of life is to be found in the faithfulness to the one and only party with its eternal leader, comrade Lenin, as represented by the local socialist government. By following them and their life-philosophy, living for greater goals of a better future will occupy the minds of young people who then will in absolute

obedience (and blindly) build a better future through the instructions of the party – even concerning their personal (almost non-existent) life. None knew at that time that in this process of absolute obedient blindness, the human dignity of an individual would be completely lost in the evil machinery of the masses. None knew at that time that the human dignity of the faithful Christians would be taken to a trial with the attempt to be taken from them by the all-knowing governmental officials through torture, imprisonment, and other, very effective means of persuasion.

The question of human dignity leads naturally to other important questions closely connected with the deeds or acts of a human being – the question of good and evil, or, in other words, the question of human morality (Kardis et al. 2018, 95-96). What is good and what is evil - who states that and who is the morally credible guarantor of justice in society? Clearly, there was no space for healthy competition in this respect in the socialist society of Czechoslovakia. Just as the Communist party clearly state who really was a dignified human being, in the same way, it was clearly proposed that they would have the final word concerning evil and good, rewarded appropriately, too. And thus, human being (a person) became an object of greater play, losing the value of individuality and completely losing the dignity, becoming just an insignificant poppy-seed, invaluable one of a million, as one of the critical voices in the Slovak society pointed out, the writer Jozef Cíger Hronský.

Speaking of human dignity, of a dignified individual who seeks to sacrifice and help the broader community, the question of freedom must appear, too. What about the human desire for complete freedom? Human beings find their freedom and meaning and fulfillment in free self-giving (the second aspect of humanity) – just as Christ has given Himself to the point of death. Freedom in the framework of self-sacrifice for others is the only possible freedom bringing even more meaning to human life. If it is realized in the framework of selfish desire to have more, to be more, to gain more, only then it becomes a real danger. Freedom for pure freedom leads to the glorification of disorder/anarchy, selfish – self-realization, and ends in slavery to one's own selfish desires.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF KAROL WOJTYLA

Before we focus on Wojtyla's anthropology itself, it is helpful and clarifying to speak about his philosophy/philosophical focus, as perceived by the Slovak theologians and scholars. His thinking was formed under the influence of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Max Scheler. Slovak philosophers thus speak about him as about personalist philosopher who is influenced by Thomism and phenomenology, coming from Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy (Cf. Šoltés 2014, 242; Gazda 2006).

The starting point of his philosophy is a person (persona). The essence of the person, the nature of a person, is fully revealed through acts of love and freedom. It is closely connected with the moral activity of a person, inner, deep experience, human freedom, and responsibility leading towards the metaphysical concept of a person (Šoltés 2014, 243). The most famous works speaking about this concept are *Love and Responsibility*, *Person and Act*, *Evangelium Vitae*, etc.

Wojtyla understands the human being (a person) in a wider concept. Not only

as a cosmological concept – a human being as a part of the created universe, an object among other objects of the world approached empirically, scientifically, biologically, etc. Wojtyła focuses primarily on a person as an anthropological concept – a human being who is conscious of himself/herself, who perceives and understands other human beings and the world around them. A human being – a person, is a subject, subjectivity with distinct origin and goal and must not be understood as a purely empirical object. The key point of being a human (a person) is “an act,” a human being who acts. Through the act/action, the truth about the human being is revealed and recognized. It is impossible to understand human beings fully without Christ. Human conscience, consciousness, all the relationships lead to a certain action, a deed that is fully done with respect to the inner nature of a human – on the basis which gives human life meaning. So the question of human freedom, the question of human society and the common good as the basis for ethical behavior, flows from the inside to the outside. Whatever/whoever stands in the center of human life is the source of the behavior.

At the basis of Wojtyła's philosophical anthropology seems to be a deep conviction of its theological character, that is, a human being created according to the image of God (*imago Dei*), as well as its Christological character, which bases human dignity on the continuous drama of creation and redemption. Humanism cut (separated) from God, mainly Christ, will never last. Christ is the ultimate truth about the nature of our personhood. In Him, we find the truth about ourselves. Štefko and Kalanin (2002, 50) speak about Wojtyła's adequate anthropology. The human being is created by and examined by his/her direct human experience as revealed by the inner and outer dimensions of a person. The relationship between two or more persons (you and me realm) is based on our dignity, which is the inevitable part of the creation of a meaningful community. The dignity of the human being is visible and put to practice in the community, where the needs of people around are expressed. If a person ignores the needs of others, he is enclosed in himself, and his dignity is not fully realized, isolating a person, stressing his emptiness.

Relationships are broken, the community is falling apart – the consequence is - everyone is hurt, the person himself/herself, but also the whole community – many times without even realizing it. According to Slovak theologians, the main point of Wojtyła's anthropology is speaking about the life of a community. The human being must not be understood in his/her individuality only. An individual person finds deeper meaning only in the broader community, where the fullness of one's humanity may be exercised. Responsibility before God comes hand in hand with the social life of a person. The human being was created as a social being, so the status of a person is based primarily on the fact of being created in the image of God, not the status gained in the worldly society. This is where the created material world comes together with the spiritual world of an individual and broader community (Cf. Paľa 2017, 39).

Wojtyła proposes five basic principles (pillars) for the life of the community:

1. The right (for every human being) for life (to live).
2. The right of every human being to decide freely and willingly, whether to get married or not.
3. The right to know the truth accordingly.
4. The right to own material wealth accordingly.

5. The right to express the worldview freely, together with the right to free expression of religious convictions.

THE COMMUNIST ENVIRONMENT AND ITS AFTERMATH

Person and Act – Its Reception in Slovakia

For Wojtyła, a human being in this work is an object of astonishment and awe. That is the reason enough to consider this concept ever-exciting and never boring. An image of a human person is realized through human action. A person, while acting, always chooses one of two things: value or duty. This action is inspired by the good itself and the consciousness of some moral duty. What is specific to this self-realization is that it is only possible through conscience, through which one learns the objective truth of good and decides freely to realize that what is good. Only through the conscience can a man know the real truth about his freedom, which is based on obedience to the truth. Man's openness to the truth allows him to open himself to the Supreme Truth, which is God. The concept of authentic freedom of a person is thus presented as the author of a person's actions. It is only in the space of this decision-making that a human person can exercise his or her autonomy and heteronomy. By heteronomy, we mean the belief that one should act according to the laws that go from the highest good. In the exercise of autonomy and heteronomy, man carries out the law he carries in his heart and is known as the dignity of the human person (cd. Štefko – Kalanin 2002, 50).

According to one of the present-day interpretations, freedom is a fundamental autonomy - man is himself, and his decision depends only on his will. However, Wojtyła disagrees with this statement. Wojtyła believes self-enforcement or self-control is not an indicator of true human freedom. I (a person) will not achieve self-control by suppressing what is natural in me, but in this case, I will deliberately and freely direct instincts of mind and body to actions that deepen humanity in me because they are in harmony with reality. According to empiricists, the essence of man is in his body and his functions. On the other hand, Kantian idealists seek the essence of man in his soul, in the structures of consciousness. Wojtyła solves this dispute simply. It does not agree with either of those arguments. According to him, the essence of every human person and their humanity is just a moral act. Moral action is the only way in which the mind, body, and spirit are united as a whole - in a person (Cf. Weigel 2000, 166).

However, actions are carried out in a certain moral realm/space - other people in which our humanity seems to be self-aware and transcendent. Here we can see a shift in philosophical anthropology somewhere to the limits of social ethics. The question arises, how can single persons live together? Wojtyła gave an interesting answer to this question. According to him, although humanity can only be achieved by interacting with others, a purely radical individualism of a free person is not appropriate. The person's job is to transcend - to fulfill in other persons and beings. Their role is also to develop, grow in depth. A person is a human being living in the world and transcending him at the same time (Cf. Novotná 2002, 753). On the other hand, collectivism deprives a person of freedom and thus of their personality. Wojtyła thus speaks about a certain kind of synthesis of radical individualism and collectivism.

According to him, this synthesis means both – the importance of an individual and the common good in society at the same time (Cf. Weigel 2002, 166).

In his work, Wojtyła also focuses on the importance of human experience. Although many things in our lives are just “happening” to us, on the other hand, we also personally experience experiences that make us know that it was I who makes a decision that is in line with what I am doing. Through this experience, we not only recognize ourselves, just as some persons who are a mixture of emotions and sensory impulses, but we recognize ourselves as persons, certain actors – as the roots causing our deeds. However, on the other hand, sometimes we might be both subjects and objects of action. We can induce some action because we can decide and then act freely. It is for this reason that we are someone, not just something (Cf. Weigel 2000, 165). The key point in Wojtyła’s reflections is man as such, as it appears in our immediate experience, in his free action. It is the experience that is associated with consciousness and moral action that is conscious action.

As Wojtyła rightly points out, we should concentrate on the experience of action. Why did Wojtyła choose to speak about this experience from all his experiences? One of the reasons why he did so is that he sees action as the highest right of the human being. According to Wojtyła, through action, man becomes directly and fully involved in their own existence. Any person can “speak” with and through action. Action is part of not only psychic moral, and somatic life, but also its spiritual life. So when we evaluate an act, we see the whole person who participates in it. It is as if one can express himself completely through action. He can experience it in two different ways: (1) from a phenomenological (rational and conscious) angle, and (2) from an objective angle.

To sum up, an act is not only a phenomenological fact because it is experienced, but also an objective fact because the act itself is accessible to other people, not just the creator of the act (Cf. Novotná 2002, 753). In addition to Wojtyła’s experience in his anthropology, he draws attention to other experiences as well. He describes the experience of human dignity, the experience of self-giving, the experience of love and responsibility. It is this image of the human that shows the important position of moral values in the world. When one decides freely for an action, that action takes place through some knowledge of these values, and thus one becomes good or bad. By looking at this, Wojtyła’s doctrine is predominantly anthropologically optimistic, especially for our time. In this teaching, the human being might be freely and inherently focused on the good of realizing the *imago Dei* in his life (Cf. Štefko – Kalanin 2002, 50).

Wojtyła concludes that if we want to understand a person, it cannot be achieved solely using philosophical anthropology. The mystery of the human being can be deciphered only by Revelation and faith, “genuine, liberating faith-oriented on Christ and inspired by the Spirit” (Valčo 2016, 181). A man cannot be understood without Christ, His incarnation, life, death, and resurrection (Cf. Novotná 2002, 755).

After the Velvet Revolution (November 1989)

In 1990, the desire of many Slovaks and the Pope himself was fulfilled for the first time when he could kiss personally on April 22, 1990, during his first visit to Czechoslovakia. He celebrated the Eucharist with all Slovak bishops. His affection for the Slovaks was also extraordinary during his second visit to Slovakia on June 30 -

July 3, 1995, during which he supervised three martyrs of Košice - Marek Križin, Štefan Pongrác, and Melichar Grodecký. In addition to this gift, the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, which the Holy Father gave to Slovak youth, is a gift of lasting value and it clearly stated the heart of the pope's anthropological insight: "Serve the life of every person and in such a way follow Christ who has come so that you may have all life and have it abundantly" (Labo 1995, 47).

The main questions of this era pose an intriguing insight into the life of free human beings. How to live a human life and how to value human life after Czech and Slovak Christians gained the desired freedom? Freedom brought with itself the tension – what is real freedom within certain limitations and what it becomes if the borderlines are non-existent – even to the point of anarchy? What should be the basis for our conception of the dignity and destiny of the human person? Such questions emerged with acute relevance already in the socialist era and continued to shape public debates after 1989, as the Czech Jesuit and personal friend of John Paul II reminds us (Sládek 2019).

Evangelium Vitae – The value and inviolability of human life

As I have mentioned in the previous part, one of the pillars on which Wojtyła's philosophical anthropology stands is the right of man to life – the right to live. Every man has been entrusted with life as a treasure that must not be wasted but should be used by him, and later, he will lay his number before the Lord (Lk 19: 12-27). Hence, human life is sacred because we have received it from God; it is the bearer of God's creative activity. John Paul II (1995a, 97) asserts that under no circumstances can anyone claim the right to destroy an innocent human being. Even in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we find the clearly posed statement - every person has the right to life.

In his encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II (1995a, 10-11) explains that people who are against life, all who offend human dignity, are perceived by him as a destroyer of civilization. However, they do more to defile themselves than to those they are hurting and afflicting. By their evil actions, however, they, in reality, offend their Creator and Savior. It also lists all the terrible deeds that these destroyers of civilization do. It includes acts such as murders of every kind (genocide, abortion, euthanasia, suicide...), physical and mental abuse, inhuman living conditions, slavery, trafficking in women, prostitution (Cf. Bąk et al. 2019, 68). All these acts undermine the integrity of the human person, degrading him to the object of momentary interest or benefit, or a useful tool to gain something else (John Paul II 1995a, 10-11).

In his first philosophical work *Miłość i odpowiedzialność* (Wojtyła 1960; *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła 1993)), first published in the Polish language in 1960, later re-edited and re-printed several times, Wojtyła pointed out that each person is unique, has his human dignity, and must never be used merely as a means of realizing any other person's goal. God created us as persons who have a certain nature and free will (Cf. John Paul II 2002, 24). John Paul II (1995a, 97-98), in the context of human life, focuses on the commandment, "You shall not kill!" According to him, this commandment is the basis of every social cohabitation and marks a limit that should never be crossed. It points to respect for life, which leads to the subsequent defense of life. The commandment You shall not kill was already in the very heart of the covenant

that was made between God and men (Ex 20:13). The Church tradition, inspired by this command, has unequivocally taught that any kind of murder of a human being, who is an image of God, becomes a particularly grave sin for the murderer who does this deed (John Paul II 1995a, 98). John Paul II. adds that the absolute inviolability of moral life is a moral truth that follows directly from the teachings of the Holy Scripture (John Paul II 1995a, 103).

Right after the fall of socialism up till the present times, our society struggles with precisely this question – what does it mean to have a right to live? (Cf. Ambrozj and Śagát 2019). What all it includes and whose life is to be protected at all costs? It is especially sensitive while speaking about abortion and euthanasia. These topics shifted to the private realm of one's life way beyond the borderlines of freedom in Christ, become a private issue suddenly, a matter of one's free will. People worshipping their ultimate private personal freedom refuse to see the image of God in the lives of others and fully ignore the *imago Dei* in their own life (Cf. Bernaciak 2018). Instead, they welcome and worship the culture of death, bringing momentary comfort and well-being. In the long run, they refuse to see the emptiness and hopelessness as the consequence of a previous momentary decision. Human life is reduced to an ephemeral feeling of happiness, an object of momentary desire, and even the object of economic benefit.

Abortion

Wojtyla, in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, speaks about abortion as a serious and condemnable act, just as the II. the Vatican Council considers it a repulsive crime (John Paul II 1995a, 105). On this subject, Wojtyla points out that the absolute inviolability of innocent human life is a moral truth that results directly from the teachings of the Holy Scripture. In this case, there is a serious violation of the Fifth Commandment. Yet every human life is sacred, and it must be realized that abortion is murder. In this procedure, a human being is murdered at the threshold of life (John Paul II 1995a, 106). The right to life is inviolable and making a conscious decision that one ends the life of an innocent person is an act of grave moral evil.

Wojtyla clearly explains that a new life has begun from the moment of the fusion of two living cells. This life is not the life of either mother or father, but it has the potential to develop into a new human being and is gradually evolving. This argument is also confirmed by modern genetics, according to which, from the moment of fusion (fertilization), the fetus becomes a living being, a person who has had certain specific characteristics and predispositions since birth and who are just waiting for their development and formation (Cf. John Paul II 1995a, 109).

So can abortion be justified? In our opinion, no. In our opinion, human life is sacred and is a gift from conception. The writer of the Latin region of Tertullian had a clear view of her ending of a pregnancy. According to him, not allowing someone to be born is an anticipated murder. Tertullian sees no difference between the murder of a person who is already born or who is still in the mother's womb (Cf. John Paul II 1995a, 111). Though it sounds very bad, mothers kill their unborn children in abortion and violate their right to life.

Euthanasia

Another important topic Wojtyla address in relation to the value of life is the

problem of euthanasia. In his encyclical, Wojtyła explains that euthanasia is like taking control of death by prematurely causing death and thus pleasantly ending our own or other person's life. However, if we take a closer look at this act, we conclude that euthanasia is an inhuman and absurd act. Wojtyła also defines euthanasia in its true sense as an act which, by its very nature, is aimed at the intention of a person to cause death to eliminate any form of suffering and pain. At present, in our society, there is a trend of a "culture of death" characterized by the fact that only people who are rich or beneficial in some way (mostly economically) are beneficial to society. On the other hand, poor, old, handicapped, or uneducated people are unable to benefit society and become a burden. These disadvantaged people seem to be thrown out of society and are considered inferior (Cf. John Paul II 1995a, 117). So the question is at stake – which life has a right to live? Whose life is of more worth and whose life is not really of any worth and should be ended quickly? And – the question of the most importance – who is to decide about this? (Jurko 2018)

Summarizing both euthanasia and abortion, Wojtyła considers them to be crimes that no human law can and should accept as permissible. We should all follow the command. You shall not kill! Because this command is the only way to true freedom, which leads us to the subsequent defense of every human life and the formation of certain attitudes (Petkovšek 2014). For a Christian, the greatest law should be to honor, love, and support the life of every brother and respect human life as the foundation of any society (Cf. John Paul II 1995a, 139-140).

CONCLUSION

The most important lesson we can learn from Wojtyła's anthropology is clearly expressed in a book published shortly after the Pope's second visit to Slovakia in 1995 and is called - *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. In that book John Paul II (1995b, 175-176) writes:

The Gospel is the fullest affirmation of all rights. Without it, we can very easily move away from the truth about man. The gospel really reaffirms the divine rule that maintains the moral order of the universe and, in a special way, affirms it through the Incarnation itself. Who is a man if the Son accepts human nature? Who is the man to be if the Son of God pays the highest price for his dignity? ... The Redeemer affirms man's rights simply by bring him to the full dignity received at the moment when God created him in His image and form.

However, the task before us is to learn to convey these (and many other) precious ideas to an indifferent or outright hostile environment of our western societies. Wojtyła's thought and personal example prompt us to "return to a meaningful engagement in and with the society" in which we live, as we hermeneutically recover the "religious sources for human flourishing." However, as Valčo (2018, 173) rightly argues, "These sources ... should not be taken for granted but rather argued for in a competent and open dialogue of narratives (or "meta-

narratives”) that would include both the religious and secular visions of reality.” If we fail to do this, we may not be able to defend ourselves from “the dangers of the naturalistic tendencies within the modern sciences” (Valčo et al. 2019a, 176) that attempt to reduce our humanity to a complex array of electro-chemical reactions. Or, even worse, against the modern, pseudo-religious ideologies that have so fatefully influenced the 20th century and that is still lurking under the surface (Kardis et al. 2019, 14). There seems to be this unyielding tendency on the part of humans to “surrender the shaping of the society to self-proclaimed, enlightened social engineers with the ability to mold human characters through their newly-engineered social structures, educational reforms, and state institutions” (Valčo et al. 2019b, 781). Yet, it is foolish to rely on the state power and ideology to accomplish this, as we have seen in Czechoslovakia between 1939-1989.

The intellectual legacy of John Paul II can help us in our deliberations and decision that we must make as we face these challenges. However, the richness of his intellectual legacy is matched by his life legacy. In 1979, when John Paul II's plane landed in Poland, church bells announced his visit throughout the whole country. He traveled throughout his beloved Poland, followed by vast adoring crowds. He managed to preach more than thirty sermons in short nine days. The Poles who took the courage came out of their houses, looked around, and saw they were not alone; in fact, there were millions of them coming together. Suddenly they were a powerful multitude. “The Pope spoke of human dignity, the right to religious freedom and a revolution of the spirit--not insurrection” (Barnes and Whitney 2014). And it brought to the lands of oppression and slavery a new spirit of true freedom in Christ and ultimate hope – God is still present and will never leave His children alone and suffering (Kardis et al. 2019, 114-115).

The late president of Czechoslovakia, Vaclav Havel, was very cautious about singling out anyone - Gorbachev, Reagan or John Paul II--as the prime mover in the fall of communism. However, Havel called the Pope's 1979 pilgrimage to Poland “a miracle” and credited John Paul II's contribution during the trip with being more important than anything the leaders of the US or USSR had done. However, Havel was also careful to place John Paul II in a historical narrative. In the end, the Pope was only one leading character in the story of a vast grassroots movement. “Clearly, John Paul II's 1979 trip was the fulcrum of revolution which led to the collapse of communism. ... Timothy Garton Ash put it this way, ‘Without the Pope, no Solidarity. Without Solidarity, no Gorbachev. Without Gorbachev, no fall of communism.’” (Barnes and Whitney 2014) Gorbachev himself was quite clear about the role that the Polish pope played in the dismantling of the communist Eastern Bloc: “Everything that happened in Eastern Europe in these last years,” said Gorbachev in 1992, “would have been impossible without the presence of this pope and without the important role — including the political role — that he played on the world stage” (Aikman 2003, 258). Besides, as Barnes and Whitney (2014) rightly point out, “It was not just the Pope's hagiographers, who told us that his first pilgrimage was the turning point. Skeptics who felt Wojtyla was never a part of the resistance said everything changed as John Paul II brought his message across the country to the Poles. And revolutionaries, jealous of their own, also look to the trip as the beginning of the end of Soviet rule.” Thus, through humbleness, perseverance, and courage, we carry the life legacy of John II in our lives as we try to rebuild Slovakia and help renew our world.

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