

**THE UNIVERSALISTIC CONCEPTION
OF THE CIVILIZATION IN THE SOCIAL AND
PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT OF POPE JOHN PAUL II**

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Karol Wojtyła (1920–2005), later to become Pope John Paul II (since 1978), was one of the greatest contemporary thinkers. He was a Christian philosopher and Catholic theologian. His thought exerted an influence on diverse generations and representatives of many cultures, religions and nations. He was an authority not only for Catholics but also for many infidels and even atheists. He often made controversies because of His firm opinions. He was an aim of liberal as well as conservative critique. The liberals criticized Him due to His uncompromising and conservative attitude to female priesthood, homosexuality, contraception and abortion. The conservatives accused Him of apologizing and conciliatory tone of His voice in relationships with other religions, especially with Jews and Muslims. Because these parts of His thought became most controversial, they were and usually are commented on and analysed by world mass media. But few people found Him a leading contemporary theoretician of civilization despite the fact that He constructed a coherent theory of civilization that is unfortunately distracted in His numerous papers. And my article is dedicated to this theory. I would like to present the core of His civilization's conception.

Generally, civilization's thought is divided into two groups: universalistic and pluralistic views of world order¹. Universalism assumes existence of global civiliza-

¹ K. Krzysztofek, *Uniwersalistyczne i pluralistyczne wizje pokojowego świata*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 1990; Idem, *Cywilizacja: dwie optyki*, Instytut Kultury, Warszawa 1991.

tion. But in this standpoint we can distinguish two subtypes: extreme universalism, which supposes only one, usually global, civilization as well as moderate universalism that affirms existence of world civilization but does not negate particular civilizations, e.g. Western, Muslim and Far-East Civilization. Very often Western Civilization is treated as the global one. Process of globalisation of European values, which is an effect of industrialization, created worldwide system of political, economic and cultural interactions and interdependences. It is a base of world civilization². Civilization's pluralism rejected any form of universal civilization, believing only in an existence of various particular civilizations. In the 90th American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington became very popular thanks to his article and book *The Clash of Civilization*, where he propagated a thesis on a global fight of particular civilizations. He stated that universal civilization is simply a utopian idea of Western missionaries of progress. He tried to prove that westernisation is not the same as modernization. Non-western cultures can modernize their economies, technologies and political systems but they do not have to accept European or American lifestyles, its individualism, liberalism and relativism, which are the essence of the West³.

Among these different ways of interpretation of civilization's order we can find specific and originally depiction of Karol Wojtyła. His conception of civilization was more an ethical postulate than cognition of actual reality. However, Wojtyła did not avoid diagnosis of actual world condition, He prescriptively expressed what the world should be rather than describe what it really was. This is a specification of social ethics that is concentrated in ideal conditions. But these ideal ones are usually compared with social reality. And the comparison is also attended in Wojtyła's philosophical and social reflection.

The Polish Pope would use the term 'civilization' in different meanings. He often spoke on a 'civilization' as a synonym of a 'culture'. In *Letter to Families* He noticed that 'civilization' in certain sense "means the same thing as »culture«"⁴. But in global context of His philosophical reflection we should treat the term 'culture' wider than 'civilization'. Because Wojtyła and later Pope John Paul II understood 'culture' philosophically as an effect of a spiritual life of human being. This 'culture' includes everything that was generated by human intellect, e.g. thoughts, love, art, technique, science, etc., simply every kind of human activity. It is a consequence of His philosophical standpoint. He was a personalist, who concentrated on personal symptoms

² A. Piskozub, *Cywilizacje w czasie i przestrzeni*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, Gdańsk 2003, pp. 108–115.

³ S. P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1996.

⁴ John Paul II, *Letter to families*, no. 13, [[:]] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html, 2006-04-01, Vatican.

of individual existence. And these ones mean cognitional and voluntary activity, whose culture is a result⁵. ‘Civilization’ is rather limited to social values and institutions, e.g. law, political, economic, medial and international system as well as to confessional relations, organization of science and education. In conception of Karol Wojtyła as well as other Christian and not only Christian philosophers individual – person can create a culture, its subjects but civilization can be created merely by societies that we can understand as a community of persons (*communio personarum*). In this meaning ‘civilization’ is a type of widely understood culture that is a culture of society⁶.

Although civilization’s creator is society, for Karol Wojtyła, every person has own share in forming civilization’s values. Because “Actions, which man performs in all his different social involvements and as a member of different social groups or communities, are essentially the actions of the person. Their social or communal nature is rooted in the nature of the person and not vice versa”⁷. A person as a social being cooperates with others. Society that is an essential living space for human existence does not act *per se* due to its alimental character. Substantial individuals (persons) determine an activity of society that they are members of. That’s why Wojtyła could state: “whole civilization is a creation of society, that is individuals organized in society”⁸.

This personalist prism of Wojtyła’s philosophy is a main reason of His universalism. Personalism does not lead to any form of either individualism or particularism. Knowledge of universal essence of human life is its realization due to principle of *communio personum* (community of persons) that in the highest level means realizing world society (mankind). Wojtyła stated human “ego” appearing in different dimensions (e.g. family, social group, nation) is ready not only to think about itself as “we” but also to do something what is important for “us” – that is for social community, and furthermore this “ego” is ready to realize a subjection in universal sense, which means a subjection of all⁹. Acknowledgment that creation of civilization and culture takes place in social community as well as the affirmation that existence of hierarchy of human communities belongs to mankind, leads Wojtyła to confirmation

⁵ K. Wojtyła, *Problem konstytuowania się kultury poprzez ludzką praxis*, “Ethos” 1989, no. 8, pp. 38–49.

⁶ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Parerga*, PWN, Warszawa 1978, p. 76.

⁷ K. Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht–Boston–London 1979, p. 263.

⁸ Idem, *Katolicka etyka społeczna*, Typescript, Kraków 1958, p. 36.

⁹ Idem, *Osoba: podmiot i wspólnota*, [in:] Idem, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1994, p. 407.

of universal civilization and culture¹⁰. A philosopher and expert on John Paul's thought: Adam Rodziński notices: "Karol Wojtyła's communionism appears to possess all attributes, which are characteristic for universalism. However, the universalism is not cosmopolitan, as well as, it is not a universalism of cultural or political hegemony. It is not also an indifferent tolerance of any expressions, any individual or collective tastes. Common assent to diversity of personal orientations and their equivalents in everyday culture does not matter here. A Christ-central affirmation of persons is the most important issue. It means attitude released from the deepest alienation, hiding in strangeness of people toward others that leads automatically to hostility there, where serious interests' contradictions appear"¹¹.

An essence of Wojtyła's universalism is in organic relationship between individual, society and whole mankind. An existence of universal human community implies universal culture and civilization. They manifest in relations between persons and societies form various cultural traditions that are based on mutual respect of persons¹². Universalism perceived in such a way is not any form of unification. It accepts pluralistic order of the World and cultural diversities. Global civilization is not a denial of particular civilizations, which have become different, generally in values' system. During one speech Pope John Paul II noticed that an existence of numerous civilizations caused many conflicts and battles but also it "brought fruitful results", it contributed to huge and unique development of science and art¹³.

Karol Wojtyła searched roots of particularism in a human need of identification. Every person needs to define itself. "Who am I?" – it is a main question of everyone. Global identification is not sufficient. Primarily every man or woman experiences natural communities, i.e. family, neighbourhood, ethnic and linguistic group¹⁴. After that he or she could become a conscious member of world community. And this attitude requires a respect for diversities and a sense of elementary solidarity. In Wojtyła's philosophy human existence oscillates between both extremities, i.e. universality and particularity: "This tension between the particular and the universal can be considered immanent in human beings. By virtue of sharing in the same human nature, people automatically feel that they are members of one great family, as is in fact the case. But as a result of the concrete historical conditioning of this same nature, they are necessarily bound in a more intense way to particular human

¹⁰ A. Modrzejewski, *Uniwersalizm w myśli filozoficzno-społecznej Jana Pawła II*, "Kra-kowskie Studia Małopolskie" 2002, vol. 6, p. 440.

¹¹ A. Rodziński, *Osoba-moralność-kultura*, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1989, pp. 375–376.

¹² K. Wojtyła, *Osoba: podmiot i wspólnota...*, p. 408.

¹³ Jan Paweł II, *Wiara i kultura*, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Rzym-Lublin 1988, p. 205.

¹⁴ Idem, *Pamięć i tożsamość*, Kraków 2005.

groups, beginning with the family and going on to the various groups to which they belong and up to the whole of their ethnic and cultural group, which is called, not by accident, a »nation«, from the Latin word »nasci«: »to be born«. This term, enriched with another one, »patria« (fatherland/motherland), evokes the reality of the family. The human condition thus finds itself between these two poles — universality and particularity — with a vital tension between them; an inevitable tension, but singularly fruitful if they are lived in a calm and balanced way”¹⁵.

Universal civilization that does not negate cultural differences but is a common space for everyone and every culture could be named “ecumenical civilization”¹⁶.

In ancient Greece term *oikumene* meant a land inhabited and cultivated by people. In biblical tradition it had two meanings: secular and sacral. In the first it expressed inhabited area. In the second it meant whole world created by God. Today we use term ‘ecumenism’ in religious aspect as views and attitudes articulating desire to unite Christian denominations in one Church but preserving theological, ritual and discipline’s pluralism¹⁷. This concept could also be used in secular context as an endeavour to unificate the World based on community of universal values and keeping cultural diversity.

Although we do not find the term “ecumenical civilization” in Wojtyła’s works, its analysis let us use this one. In *Apostolic Letter to The Youth of The World* He noticed: “The Church sees herself as a sacrament, or sign and means of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. And so she sees herself in relationship to the whole great human family, which is in constant growth. She sees herself in worldwide dimensions. She sees herself on the paths of ecumenism”¹⁸. This ecumenism means first of all an integration of Christians and their denominations. But it has also the second meaning. It concerns relations between nations, cultures and (particular) civilizations. Such comprehended “ecumenical civilization” is really a synonym of “a civilization of love and peace”, which appears in Pope’s teaching,

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Speech to the 15th General Assembly of United Nations Organization, New York, 5 X 1995*, no. 7, [in:] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/1995/october/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_05101995_address-to-uno_en.html, 2006-04-12, Vatican.

¹⁶ A. Modrzejewski, *Uniwersalizm w myśli filozoficzno-społecznej...*, p. 444.

¹⁷ *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. IV, R. Łukaszczyk, L. Bieńkowski, F. Gryglewicz (eds.), Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1983, p. 852.

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter »Dilecti Amici« to The Youth of The World on The Occasion of International Youth Year*, no. 15, [in:] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_31031985_dilecti-amici_en.html, 2006.04.20, Vatican. In Polish version of the letter that is probably original Pope John Paul II said on “universal dimensions” (Jan Paweł II, *List do młodych*, [in:] *Listy pasterskie Ojca świętego Jana Pawła II*, Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy “Znak”, Kraków 1997, p. 152).

especially in encyclical “*Evangelium vitae*”, where He used to use term “civilization of love” created by His predecessor Pope Paul VI. Furthermore Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II seldom used *explicite* a concept “universal”, “global” or “world civilization”, however He did not avoid them. He would rather have spoken about this reality in a proper context. But not words are important but their meanings. And they suggest connections of Wojtyła with universalism¹⁹.

Ecumenical civilization is an ethical duty. It is rather postulated than present in contemporary human relationships. But we must remember that Wojtyła was an ethic not a sociologist or political scientist. His conception of civilization is based on four fundamental and universal values, i.e.: (1) Truth; (2) Solidarity; (3) Justice and (4) Freedom. Peaceful world order is its aim²⁰.

The truth that is in principle a subject of epistemological analyses can be also ethical term. In Karol Wojtyła’s social thought it became a source of expected international order, whose a peaceful coexistence of individuals and societies is a main target. As a pope He stated: “the truth is a power of peace”. Contemporary man has doubts what the truth is. But Wojtyła being a scholar educated in a spirit of classical philosophy answered without hesitation that the truth *est adequatio intellectum et rei*. He rejected epistemological and in consequence ethical relativism due to “Every truth – if it really is truth – presents itself as universal, even if it is not the whole truth. If something is true, then it must be true for all people and at all times”²¹. That’s why Pope called to oppose a lie that is a cause of violence and injustice. In 1980 during The Day of Peace He noticed: “Restoring peace means in the first place calling by their proper names acts of violence in all their forms. Murder must be called by its proper name: murder is murder; political or ideological motives do not change its nature, but are on the contrary degraded by it. The massacre of men and women, whatever their race, age or position, must be called by its proper name. Torture must be called by its proper name; and, with the appropriate qualifications, so must all forms of oppression and exploitation of man by man, of man by the State, of one people by another people. (...) To promote truth as the power of peace means that we ourselves must make a constant effort not to use the weapons of falsehood, even for a good purpose. Falsehood can cunningly creep in anywhere. If sincerity - truth with ourselves - is to be securely maintained, we must make a patient and courageous effort to seek and find the higher and universal truth about man, in the light of which

¹⁹ A. Modrzejewski, *Uniwersalizm w myśli filozoficzno-społecznej...*, pp. 442–443.

²⁰ Idem, *Ład globalny w myśli społecznej Karola Wojtyły (1920–2005)*, “Gdańskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2005, vol. 4, no. 1–2, p. 44.

²¹ John Paul II, *Fides et ratio*, no. 27, [in:] http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0216/_P7.HTM, 2006.04.21, Vatican.

we shall be able to evaluate different situations, and in the light of which we will first judge ourselves and our own sincerity. It is impossible to take up an attitude of doubt, suspicion and sceptical relativism without very quickly slipping into insincerity and falsehood”²².

The truth shows essence of humanity, it overcomes prejudices and suspicions. Pope John Paul II was sure that a search of objective and universal truth about human being contributes to forming “people of peace”. Man of peace is a person, living and acting in accordance with the truth. And to be guided by truth means in Wojtyła’s social philosophy to do good thus peace, too.

A successful way to reach the truth is for Karol Wojtyła a dialogue that could overcome contradictions of interests and other barriers in building peaceful relations. Pope firmly affirmed: “There is no peace without readiness for sincere and continual dialogue. Truth too requires dialogue, and therefore reinforces this indispensable means for attaining peace. Truth has no fear, either, of honourable agreements, because truth brings with it the light that enables it to enter into such an agreement without sacrificing essential convictions and values. Truth causes minds to come together; it shows what already unites the parties that were previously opposed; it causes the mistrust of yesterday to decrease, and prepares the ground for fresh advances in justice and brotherhood and in the peaceful co-existence of all human beings”²³. Not only should the dialog lead to compromise or consensus, though. It needs to have more ambitious aim, i.e. objective truth that guarantees constant peace.

Pope supported His argumentation by reference to “the experience of history”. He noticed many cases, when conflicts seemed unavoidable but war was avoided or abandoned thanks to readiness to enter into dialogue. And in reverse conflicts appeared there, where dialogue had failed to show up²⁴.

Firstly, dialogue should be established on the state level in order to resolve social conflicts and to seek the common good. Showing fruitful results on this level it should be established also on the international level, even though its problems are more complicated. And it is very important that dialogue between states and nations ought to be based upon the strong consciousness that the good of the one nation or state

²² Idem, *Truth, The Power of Peace. Message for The Celebration of The Day of Peace, 1st January 1980*, no. 3–4, [at:] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19791208_xiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html, 2006.04.21, Vatican.

²³ Ibidem, no. 8.

²⁴ Idem, *Dialogue for Peace, a Challenge for Our Time. Message for The Celebration of The Day of Peace, 1st January 1983*, no. 3, [in:] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19821208_xvi-world-day-for-peace_en.html, 2006.04.21, Vatican.

can never be realized against the good of another nation or state. All people – said Pope – “have the same rights, the same claims to a worthy life for their citizens”. International dialogue should concern especially following issues: (1) human rights; (2) international justice; (3) world economy; (4) disarmament and finally (5) global common good. It “must be directed towards the recognition of individuals and human groups in their specific nature; in their original character, with the area of freedom which they need, and notably in the exercise of their basic rights. On this subject, one can hope for an international juridical system, which is more receptive to the appeals of those whose rights are violated and one can hope for jurisdictions which have effective means capable of making their authority respected”²⁵.

Principle of solidarity like the truth has a great meaning for establishment of peaceful global order. Pope John Paul II stated that world peace is not possible, when solidarity is absent. “The culture of solidarity – He noticed during the celebration of The World Day of Peace in 2001– is closely connected with *the value of peace*, the primary objective of every society and of national and international life”²⁶. Solidarity in Catholic social doctrine means “mutual bonds and obligations between persons”²⁷. The “obligations” indicates an ethical duty towards other persons. John Paul II like His predecessors understood the solidarity also as a bonds and obligations on the international level. States and societies as well as individuals, especially those, who are able to influence international system, are subjects of this solidarity. Wojtyła extended moral imperative to a whole world community²⁸. In 1986 Pope clearly pronounced that international solidarity indicates “ethical imperatives that appeal to the consciences of individuals and to the responsibilities of all nations”²⁹.

The unified and peaceful world could become reality, when numerous conditions are fulfilled, i.e.:

- (1) stronger states and nations give up ideology and politics of hegemony;
- (2) they are morally responsible for other nations;

²⁵ Ibidem, no. 8-10.

²⁶ Idem, *Dialogue between Cultures for A Civilization of Love and Peace. Message for The Celebration of The Day of Peace, 1st January 2001*, no. 18, [[:]] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_20001208_xxxiv-world-day-for-peace_en.html, 2006.04.21, Vatican.

²⁷ J. Höffner, *Gospodarka światowa w świetle katolickiej nauki społecznej*, [in:] *Ordo socialis. Kościół i ekonomia*, Wydawnictwo, Fundacja ATK, Warszawa 1996, p. 25.

²⁸ J. Kondziela, *Pokój w nauce Kościoła. Pius XII-Jan Paweł II*, Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL, Lublin 1992, p. 64–65.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Peace Is A Value With No Frontiers North-South, East-West: Only One Peace. Message for The Celebration of The Day of Peace, 1st January 1986*, no. 1, [[:]] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_08121995_xxix-world-day-for-peace_en.html, 2006.04.21, Vatican.

- (3) international system is based on universal equality of states and nations as well as respect for diversities;
- (4) individuals and whole nations are treated as subjects not objects;
- (5) exploitation and oppression are eliminated;
- (6) divisions of the World into opposing ideological, military and cultural parties are overcome³⁰.

Peace in Wojtyła's social and philosophical thought was in a way identified with justice that is its *conditio sine qua non*. Peace is not possible if elementary principles of justice are not respected. Pope did not limit justice to juridical category but linked it also to a sphere of social and economical relations on a national and international level. It is rather widely understood *social justice* than only *legal* one. It aims to establish common good (*bonum commune*)³¹. It is always negated, when exploitation and other form of oppressions are present in relations between persons, social groups and nations. Pope John Paul II noticed: "In any case a full realization of peace cannot coexist with injustice. Peace cannot be reduced to the mere absence of conflict; it is the tranquillity and completeness of order. It is lost by the social and economic exploitation by special interest groups, which operate internationally or function as elites within developing countries. It is lost by the social divisions that pit rich against poor between States or within States. It is lost when *the use of force* produces the bitter fruit of hatred and division. It is lost when economic exploitation and internal strains on the social fabric leave the people defenceless and disillusioned, a ready prey to the destructive forces of violence"³².

The justice is closely connected with a respect of human rights, which are a central aspect of Pope's social and ethical thought. A protection of human rights is firstly protection of freedom that is attribute of each individual and every nation. When someone or some nation tries to violate other's freedom, it could be a beginning of conflict or war. He said during one message: "Without a willingness to respect the freedom of every people, nation and culture, and without a worldwide consensus on this subject, it will be difficult to create the conditions for peace"³³. Among rights included in peculiar Wojtyła's catalogue of human rights we can find following: individual freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of assembly,

³⁰ J. Kondziela, op.cit., p. 65.

³¹ C. Strzeszewski, *Katolicka nauka społeczna*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2003, pp. 394–399.

³² John Paul II, *Peace Is A Value With No Frontiers North-South, East-West...*, no. 2.

³³ Idem, *To Serve Peace, Respect Freedom. Message for The Celebration of The Day of Peace, 1st January 1981*, no. 9, [in:] http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19801208_xiv-world-day-for-peace_en.html, 2006.04.21, Vatican.

freedom of travel, right to free choice of profession and marital status as well as right of citizens to free choice of political system, etc³⁴.

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Karol Wojtyła in His conception of civilization reconciled both realities, i.e. universal values, e.g. peace, solidarity, justice, human freedom and dignity with identity of a specific man that concerns a membership of a given family, community, nation, culture, state and religion. It is, or better it can be in its essence ecumenical civilization. Universal and peaceful community, realizing world common good, respecting human rights, especially freedom and dignity of each human person, accepts right to cultural, ethnical and religious distinctness. Diversity of cultures never again can be cause of conflicts and wars. That's why "Over prejudices and cultural divisions as well as over racial, linguistic and ideological splits, people should find each other as brothers and sisters and accept their diversity"³⁵. Probably this statement, so simple in its form, reflects best Wojtyła's universalism.

³⁴ Jan Paweł II, *Na forum pokoju i sprawiedliwości. Orędzie do Organizacji Narodów Zjednoczonych w Nowym Jorku*, [in:] Idem, *Nauczanie społeczne*, t. 2, Ośrodek Dokumentacji i Studiów Społecznych, Warszawa 1982, p. 316–317.

³⁵ Idem, *Wiara i kultura*, p. 188.