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European Integration in the teachings of John Paul II: Selected aspects

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I. At present, European integration is going through a crisis that has been observed for several years. The financial crisis, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and anti-democratic tendencies in many countries (unfortunately also including the EU member states) are leading to a new rise of the ideology of nation states. The European Union responded to the global pandemic rather late, and although it did eventually launch multiple recovery funds to rebuild the economy destroyed by successive lockdowns and restrictions, the impression arises that the EU has changed as an organisation and is no longer as efficient as it used to be. Moreover, populists who have held electoral victories in many EU countries are also promoting anti-EU slogans, highlighting the concept of national sovereignty and the need to protect it. Following this type of rhetoric and political narrative, the United Kingdom left the European Union in 2020. Also, certain members of the clergy, some of them from Poland, more or less openly express their unflattering opinions about the idea of close European integration. This situation encourages reflection on how this process was perceived by John Paul II, who is still regarded by many Poles as an unquestionable authority figure, and his teachings remain an important signpost for the future for many Poles. This paper is an attempt to explore

the issue of European integration in the teachings of the Polish Pope. John Paul II was very active in showing his commitment and expectations in this respect. Examples include his visit to Brussels on 20 May 1985, at the headquarters of the then European Economic Community, or his speech in the European Parliament in 1988, when he called for the Community to expand to the East,¹ long before it became a realistic prospect. Another fact worth mentioning is that in 1980 he included Saints Cyril and Methodius among the patron saints of Europe, clearly indicating the importance of Eastern Europe for the integration processes of the Old Continent as a whole.²

II. While the number of doctrinal texts touching upon the issue of Europe is not impressive in the overall Catholic social teaching, or, frankly, is rather small,³ the collection of texts, allocutions and general statements made by John Paul II about Europe and its unity must be viewed as impressive.

Some authors even note the Pope's fascination with European themes.⁴ Looking at the 21 years of his pontificate, between 1978 and 1999 alone, the so-called papal *Profezia per l'Europa*⁵ contain over a thousand pages filled with as many as 669 papal statements.⁶ One can appreciate these figures, meticulously counted in literature, if one recognises that the predecessors of John Paul II spoke on the same topic merely 136 times (Pius XII: 36 times,

¹ Cf. M. Przeciszewski, *Akt europejski Jana Pawła II* [John Paul II's European Act], <https://www.ekai.pl/akt-europejski-jana-pawla-ii/> (access: 12.07.2021).

² Cf. *ibidem*.

³ Cf. M. Delong, *Stanowisko Papieża Jana Pawła II wobec integracji europejskiej* [Pope John Paul II's position on European integration], "Polityka i Społeczeństwo" 2011, Vol. 8, p. 38.

⁴ Cf. S. Sowiński, R. Zenderowski, *Europa drogą Kościoła. Jan Paweł II o Europie i europejskości* [Europe as the path of the Church: John Paul II on Europe and Europeaness], Wrocław 2003, p. 15.

⁵ *Profezia per l'Europa*, Rome 1999.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 39 and cf. J. Uściadek, *Myśl polityczna papieża Jana Pawła II o integracji europejskiej* [John Paul II's political thinking on European integration], in: *Polska. Unia Europejska. Świat. Wybrane problemy* [Poland, European Union. World. Selected problems], ed. J.M. Fiszer, Warszawa 2007, p. 32.

John XXIII: 7 times, and Paul VI: 93 times).⁷ This means that John Paul II's voice was not only frequent, but it was also loud, clear and consistent. Also, it is worth noting and appreciating that this vision of a united Europe emerged in John Paul II's reflections in a situation where Europe was divided by the so-called Iron Curtain.

Quite meaningfully, this projection of the new Europe, even in the vision developed by its forefathers, who were leaders or at least supporters of Christian democratic parties in their respective countries (K. Adenauer in Germany, A. De Gasperi in Italy, and R. Schumann in France), had to be limited in many ways (also geographically) upon its very birth. After all, this vision was born in pain, within the overall trauma of two cruel world wars, in a situation of immense economic and political hardships, especially after 1945, and in the face of Europe divided into two hostile ideological camps, with the Iron Curtain running across it.

Even if the founders of the post-war idea of a united Europe proposed "constant international cooperation, going further than ever before"⁸ as a remedy for the divided Old Continent, and even if this projection fell within the Christian tradition, it nevertheless had to be addressed only to Western European countries at the time.⁹ Even if the great predecessors of John Paul II, i.e. the aforementioned Pius XII, John XXIII and Paul VI, were careful not to identify only the Western countries as the whole of Europe during their pontificates, they were only able to support integration processes in Western Europe at the time.¹⁰

Against this background, since the very beginning of his pontificate (and even before his papacy), Pope John Paul II formulated his vision of a new Europe in a completely different way than his predecessors had done, and did so further under the political,

⁷ Cf. J. Uściadek, op.cit., p. 39.

⁸ K. Mądel SJ, *Jan Paweł II dla nowej Europy* [John Paul II for a new Europe], p. 1, <http://mateusz.pl/czytelnia/km-jpiidne.htm> (access: 11.10.2020).

⁹ Cf. S. Sowiński, R. Zenderowski, op.cit., p. 16.

¹⁰ Cf. M. Delong, op.cit., p. 39.

economic and social conditions which changed dramatically in the late 1980s.¹¹

It must be clearly emphasised that Pope Wojtyła “never attempted to define the details of integration solutions,”¹² nor did he see the unification of the Old Continent primarily in the structural sphere. However, he incorporated a number of important elements of European material and spiritual culture into his vision of Europe.

It was Wojtyła who demanded that sustainable European unity should be built on the solid foundation of Christian values, which represent the essential building blocks of Europe’s historical heritage,¹³ while also pointing out that the primacy of Christian values as building blocks does not imply that the distinct nature and diversity of other trends shaping the European heritage should be disrespected.¹⁴

Again, it was Wojtyła who first addressed all Europeans about European issues, thus enriching the European debate with ethical and religious elements.¹⁵

When defining the new Europe, the Pope spoke explicitly of its “two great lungs,” referring to the two great spiritual traditions that co-created it, evolving over time into the Western Christianity (with its centre in Rome) and Eastern Christianity (with its centre in Constantinople).¹⁶ These two worlds encountered and penetrated each other, yet without severe aggression or mutual expansion. Authors correctly state today that “without this fundamental diversity, one cannot imagine the religious and humanistic maturity of Europeans today, alongside their technical and social maturity.

¹¹ Cf. K. Małdel SJ, op.cit., p. 1.

¹² M. Delong, op.cit., p. 42.

¹³ Cf. M. Delong, op.cit., p. 41, and cf. *The speech during the presentation of letters of credence by the Polish Ambassador at the Holy See Hanna Suchocka in Vatican on 3 December 2001*, p. 2, <http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/X/XU/naszaue/jp2-europa.html> (access: 12.07.2020).

¹⁴ Cf. M. Delong, op.cit., p. 41.

¹⁵ Cf. K. Małdel SJ, op.cit., p. 1 et seq.

¹⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 2, and cf. *Redemptoris Mater* (Encyclical), 34, and cf. S. Sowiński, R. Zenderowski, op.cit., pp. 26–30.

Paradoxically, the profound divide between East and West has ensured Europe's fertility and unique unity".¹⁷ Pope Wojtyła rightly emphasised that Europe has Christian roots and a Christian identity, but he refused the right to ideologise this truth.

Since that time, one of the most important emerging messages, supported by John Paul II's endeavours, was the call "for a European community of the spirit." Wojtyła became a strong-minded advocate of making this idea of European unity a reality. However, he did acknowledge Europe's past and present weaknesses, saying: "Our continent is a reflection of the inherent paradoxes of human beings: their intellectual capabilities and their lust for power, devotion and sanctification, and, at the same time, human capacity for destruction, driven by greed and vainglory. Humans know their dignity and long for moral perfection, and yet they succumb to degrading degenerations." However, he immediately added that "if we look at the civilisation and culture that emerged at the dawn of our age, we can recognise their Christian roots. This is particularly evident in the way humans see themselves. They are convinced that the human person is the central value in the world, not comparable to anything else...".¹⁸ This emphasis on the role of spiritual roots as the foundation of human identity and dignity was perhaps the most distinctive element of John Paul II's European teaching.

The Pope was right in his diagnosis that a full and real unification of Europe could be possible, but only as a result of a real rather than merely verbal unification of "its two lungs." One can quite rightly admit this objective truth that it was Wojtyła who, "in the silence among Western politicians and intellectuals, called for full rights for all the nations of Europe, which was and still is a prerequisite for building international unity".¹⁹ The Pope also clearly said that "no country, not even the weakest one, can be

¹⁷ K. Mądel SJ, op.cit., p. 2.

¹⁸ *John Paul II's speech at the headquarters of the European Economic Community*, Brussels, 20 May 1985, <http://www.tolerancja.pl/?jan-pawel-ii-o-europie.242> (access: 11.10.2020).

¹⁹ A. Zwoliński, *Państwo a Europa* [The state and Europe], Warszawa 2001, p. 172 et seq., and cf. M. Delong, op.cit., p. 41.

left outside the communities which... are emerging,”²⁰ and he emphasised that this remark applied to the countries located in the eastern part of the continent, which had been abandoned by the West and left in the Soviet embrace behind the Iron Curtain.²¹ He said this as a Catholic Shepherd coming from that part of Europe, highly familiar with the realities and aspirations of the Slavic peoples. He explicitly added that it was his wish that “[...] Europe, choosing its free institutions in a sovereign way, could grow over time to reach the size conferred by its geography, and especially history”.²² This clearly implies that Wojtyła unequivocally supported the integration processes in Europe and even criticised those Eurosceptics who tried to use the authority of the Catholic Church in various ways in their anti-European rhetoric.

While stressing that the Church was not against the process of European integration, Wojtyła made a certain proviso, namely that integration processes cannot be based solely on market criteria or political and economic considerations, but must be firmly rooted in spiritual foundations and the evangelical community of the spirit, that is, in the heritage of faith.²³

John Paul II realised that the Old Continent had played a very significant role in many parts of the world for centuries. While saying this, he clearly acknowledged that Europe “in its contact with other civilisations, had not always shared its best achievements, but no one can deny that it successfully shared its long-nurtured values. It was Europe’s children who were highly instrumental in spreading the Christian message. Thus, if Europe wants to play a role today, it must preserve its unity and clearly rely on things

²⁰ Cf. M. Delong, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

²¹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 41.

²² John Paul II, *The united Europe of the future. Speech delivered in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 11 October 1988*, in: *Wizje Europy* [Visions of Europe], A. Rotfeld (ed.), Warszawa 1989, p. 45.

²³ Cf. M. Delong, *op.cit.*, p. 42, and cf. *The speech at the New Year’s meeting between John Paul II and the diplomatic corps in the Vatican, 16 January 1993*, <http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/X/XU/naszaue/jp2-europa.html>, p. 2 (access: 11.11.2020).

that are most human and most noble in its heritage”²⁴ because Europe still bears responsibility for a significant part of the world.

The Pope was genuinely convinced and argued that Europe fulfils the role of “the shining torch of civilisation” and will continue to play this role for the whole world for a long time to come. However, the success of this role will depend on Europe’s ability to return to its own sources, i.e. to “classical humanism, elevated and enriched by Christian Revelation”.²⁵

Literature contains very apt comments on this statement, whereby “this is not, of course, about some kind of cultural colonialism, but about assuming obligations arising from interpersonal solidarity. Lack of solidarity breeds violence and, consequently, leads to wars and colonialism, whereas authentic solidarity is humble and supports everyone’s development. The ‘torch of civilisation’ or the ‘beacon of civilisation’ mentioned by the Pope is exactly a symbol of this evangelical virtue of fraternity and solidarity”.²⁶

Pope John Paul II also assigned a place to the Church in the process of integration, renewal and reconstruction of Europe in modern times. He expressed this idea best with his own words: “The Church is aware of the place it holds in the spiritual and human renewal of Europe. Without claiming the positions it used to occupy in the past and which the new times consider to be completely overcome, the Church, as Holy See and as a Catholic community, is ready to serve, ready to make its contribution towards achieving the authentic material, cultural and spiritual well-being of peoples”.²⁷

Therefore, what was John Paul II’s position in relation to European issues? What were the characteristics of his European narrative and reflection?

²⁴ *Address by John Paul II to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*, Strasbourg, 8 October 1988, <http://www.tolerancja.pl/?jan-pawel-ii-o-europie,242> (access: 11.11.2020).

²⁵ Quoted after K. Mađel SJ, op.cit., p. 3.

²⁶ K. Mađel SJ, op.cit., p. 3.

²⁷ *Europeistic Act*, Santiago de Compostela, 9 November 1982, <http://www.tolerancja.pl/?jan-pawel-ii-o-europie,242> (access 11.11.2020).

It seems appropriate to point out his role as a reviewer, attentive observer and active participant of integration in Europe.²⁸ He was a reviewer and an observer because he closely followed the evolution of the European Communities and then the European Union as well as its other organisations, he commented on that process in his teaching, making numerous remarks on its progress at various times. Naturally, he always did so prudently and from different positions than typical politicians. Moreover, he used fundamentally different instruments and cognitive tools in his analyses of European realities.²⁹ Thirdly and finally, John Paul II was an active participant in the integration process in Europe, although it must be clearly stated that he was interested in European integration insofar as it was linked to the religious and socio-cultural shape of the future of Europe as being designed at that time.³⁰

III. John Paul II's statements on European integration were always deeply balanced and dealt primarily with the spiritual and cultural aspects. However, he did not omit economic or even political issues whenever he deemed them rightful and meaningful. The Pontiff went beyond teaching and making suggestions about the desirable prospects for the development of European integration: he also gave hints, formulated warnings, pointed to possible pitfalls and stood up for the fate of the poorer and excluded nations. He saw European integration as a mechanism that ensured peace and economic development for many years in the part of Europe covered by this process, in a historically unprecedented way. Nevertheless, he was deeply concerned about certain tendencies in Western Europe, clearly noticeable already during his pontificate, such as the secularisation of societies and the enactment of laws that were in extreme contradiction to the message of the Gospel and the teachings of the Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, from the Polish perspective, and especially in the context of the current discussions on whether it is worthwhile remaining in the European Union or not, it seems too far-fetched

²⁸ Cf. S. Sowiński, R. Zenderowski, *op.cit.*, p. 76.

²⁹ Cf. *ibidem*.

³⁰ Cf. *ibidem*.

to argue that today's European Union is not the same Union that Poland joined in 2004, so perhaps John Paul II would not support Poland's membership now. In fact, up until the end of his life and his pontificate, John Paul II was an avid supporter of the idea of European integration, and this attitude shines through in his texts and speeches analysed for this study. Of course, in his perceptive mind, the Pope *did* notice the flaws and imperfections of European integration projects and warned clearly against reducing the European cooperation only to economic aspects, disregarding the spiritual, cultural or moral dimension. Above all, however, he noticed and appreciated the achievements of European cooperation mechanisms, which ensured peace and robust economic development in the second half of the 20th century for the countries which were actively involved in it.

SUMMARY

European Integration in the teachings of John Paul II: Selected aspects

Nowadays, European integration is going through a crisis that has been observed for several years. The financial crisis, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and anti-democratic tendencies in many countries (unfortunately also including the EU member states) are leading to a new rise of the ideology of nation states. Moreover, many politicians are also promoting anti-EU slogans, highlighting the concept of national sovereignty and the need to protect it. Following this type of rhetoric and political narrative, the United Kingdom left the European Union in 2020. This situation encourages reflection on how this process was perceived by John Paul II, who is still regarded by many Poles as an unquestionable authority figure, and his teachings remain an important signpost for the future for many Poles. This paper is an attempt to explore the issue of European integration in the teachings of the Polish Pope. John Paul II's statements on European integration were always deeply balanced and dealt primarily with the spiritual and cultural aspects. However, he did not omit economic or even political issues whenever he deemed them rightful and meaningful. In fact, up until the end of his life and his pontificate, John Paul II was an avid supporter of the idea of European integration, and

this attitude shines through in his texts and speeches analysed for this study. Of course, in his perceptive mind, the Pope *did* notice the flaws and imperfections of European integration projects and warned clearly against reducing the European cooperation only to economic aspects, disregarding the spiritual, cultural or moral dimension. Above all, however, he noticed and appreciated the achievements of European cooperation mechanisms, which ensured peace and robust economic development in the second half of the 20th century for the countries which were actively involved in it.

Keywords: European integration; Pope; John Paul II; teaching; crisis; peace; economic development

STRESZCZENIE

Zagadnienie integracji europejskiej w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II – wybrane aspekty

Obecnie integracja europejska przeżywa pewien kryzys, który jest dość widoczny od kilku lat. Kryzys finansowy, Brexit, pandemia COVID-19, tendencje antydemokratyczne w wielu krajach, w tym również niestety w państwach członkowskich Unii Europejskiej, powodują, że następuje pewien nawrót do ideologii państw narodowych. Politycy często głoszą hasła antyunijne, eksponując pojęcie suwerenności państwowej i konieczności jej ochrony. Na fali tego typu retoryki i narracji politycznej w 2020 r. Unię Europejską opuściła Wielka Brytania. Ta sytuacja skłania do refleksji, jak widział proces integracji europejskiej Jan Paweł II, który w świadomości wielu Polaków nadal funkcjonuje jako niekwestionowany Autorytet, a Jego nauczanie pozostaje dla wielu z naszych rodaków ważnym drogowskazem na przyszłość. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą przyjrzenia się zagadnieniu integracji europejskiej w nauczaniu Papieża Polaka. Wypowiedzi Jana Pawła II dotyczące integracji europejskiej były zawsze głęboko wyważone i dotyczyły w pierwszej kolejności wymiaru duchowego i kulturowego, jednak nie pomijał On kwestii ekonomicznych czy nawet politycznych, jeśli uważał to za słuszne i celowe. Papież był do końca swojego życia, a zarazem pontyfikatu, zdeklarowanym zwolennikiem idei integracji europejskiej i ta postawa przebija z przeanalizowanych do celów niniejszego opracowania Jego tekstów i wystąpień. Jan Paweł II oczywiście w swojej przenikliwości dostrzegał wady i niedoskonałości europejskich projektów integracyjnych oraz surowo przestrzegał przed redukowaniem współpracy europejskiej jedynie do wymiaru ekonomicznego, z pominięciem wymiaru duchowego, kulturowego czy moralnego, ale nade wszystko dostrzegał i doceniał

dorobek mechanizmów współpracy europejskiej, które zapewniły krajom biorącym w niej czynny udział pokój i wysoki poziom rozwoju gospodarczego w drugiej połowie XX w.

Słowa kluczowe: integracja europejska; Papież; Jan Paweł II; nauczanie; kryzys; pokój; rozwój gospodarczy

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