

I. In care about hope

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JOHN PAUL II – A MAN OF HOPE

It is characteristic that one of the best biographies of John Paul II or even the best one written by Georg Weigl is entitled “The witness of hope”¹. It is not the matter of coincidence that the book, which in the bibliography had been attributed to the Pope, even though it sprung into existence from the dialog with Vittorio Messori, holds the title: ‘*Crossing the threshold of hope*’². I would like to come back to it, hence these works are not a coincidence. It accompanied the Pope during 27 years of experiencing the hope and it accompanied us all – the world, which perceived the Pope through the perspective of hope needed at that time not only among us, poles but also among a lot of people all over the world.

On October the 16th 1978 when cardinal Pericle Felici declared: *Habemus papam*, started the time of hope for ordinary people and for the Pope, who became the Peter of our times. Firstly he writes about himself – Karol Wojtyła was dead and John Paul II was born. A significant change came up but at the same time he underlines how many national features were left despite becoming the Pope. He complements the phrase: ‘Wojtyła was dead, the Pope was born’ by a thread of controversy during the whole pontificate, which is the main source of his hope.

One has to diverse between two factors, it means: the hope of pope (I would not like to dig in the theological discussion concerning hope as theological virtue) who by accepting the choice brought hope for the world. From the other hand it was the hope of world, Church and Poland – hope of us all. These are two different levels of discussing the subject *John Paul II as a man of hope*.

1. The pope’s hope

The book ‘*Crossing the threshold of hope*’ prompts the reflection on the Pope’s

¹ Weigl, Georg, *Witness of hope*. The biography of John Paul II was approved by the Pope and created with his partnership. The work contains the Holy Father’s talks with friends and coworkers, the speeches of personages from religious, political and artistic circles as well as some archive documents and the Pope’s private correspondence, which had been revealed by the Vatican for the first time. The polish version of the biography appeared in 2000. The developed version covers the events of the pontificate till October 2001.

² John Paul II – Karol Wojtyła, *Crossing the threshold of hoped*, The Editor’s office of Lublin Catholic University Publishing House, Lublin 1994.

speech on what happened on October 16th 1978, when 58 years old cardinal Karol Wojtyła was full of hope after being chosen for the Pope. Is there anybody, who at that time was not proud and deeply moved? *Habemus papam...*

We remember, when during the meeting with Poles in Rome on the 10th pontificate's anniversary the Pope recalled the importance of cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in his life, who encouraged him to accept the challenging selection. Also the first homily of John Paul II preached during the inauguration mass attest to the Pope's enormous amount of hope. The Pope says so in the book *'Crossing the threshold of hope'* : While on November the 22nd 1978 I expressed the phrase " Do not be afraid" I couldn't recognize how far will it get me and the whole Church. The message deriving from the phrase came (almost exclusively) from the Holy Spirit..."³

One year later, during the homily on the Victory Square the word of John Paul II were full of hope and strength: "Let the Holy Spirit descend and renew the image of the land, this land". And the spirit renewed it – in the remarkable year 1989, when the Berlin Wall fall and the communist system that subdued the nation for a long time started to erode. That Spirit still follows the mission.

The Pope was conscious that his invitations were not to be followed by all of the people according to the social impediments and obstacles. John Paul II is very patient, lenient and enduring to them. In the book *'Crossing the threshold of hope'* he appears as the master of dialogue and a very complicated dialogue. He condemns nobody but at the same time never conceals the truth about God and man, who accuses the Lord.

Hereby a personal digression is needed. How pathetic do the words in polish press sound contrasted to the Pope's words from his own book. I mean the opinions expressed in many sources and then discussed in different contexts, for example, that finally the pontificate of "being all over the word", the liberal word, a pontificate of cream-cakes has ended and the new one has begun. That is the way of interpreting the Pope's deep and meaningful opening to the word but at the same time a way of disparaging the time of John Paul II in the name of some pre-understandings and pre-assumptions stated by the authors of the texts who trivialize the problem and conclude it unserious.

When the Pope reveals his vision of the word's Church after several years of his pontificate then that both levels diverge and split up.

Finally the hope appeared to at the end of the difficult pontificate when he had to bear his cross. The deeper meaning of the Good Friday is as follows: the men that judges the God and justify in front of his tribunal. Thus isn't the judgment on God the judgment on the men himself? Isn't the judgment and the sentence – the cross, and then the Resurrection wouldn't be the only way of redemption and hope?

2. The world's hope, John Paul II as a hope for the Church

I will roughly pass to that hope, which is the hope of us, the hope of the world and of the Church. It means the hope that accompanied us at the beginning, during and at the end of his pontificate. It is the hope of the Slavic nations separated by the Iron Curtain, the nations of the divided Europe. That is the hope from the prophetic poem of Słowacki⁴, which came into being and that served as an example for John Paul II during

³ *Crossing...* p.160.

⁴ **OUR SLAVIC POPE**

God's bell the Conclave's petty strife has stilled :
Its mighty tone

Brings news of Slavic hope fulfilled –
The Papal Throne !
Pope who will not – Italian-like – take fright
At sabre-thrust
But, brave as God himself, stand and give fight :
His world – but dust !

Made radiant by the Word, the Pontiff's face –
A torch that guides
The faithful swarming towards that lighted place
Where God resides.
Obedient to his prayer and his command,
Not only men,
But, if he wills, the sun itself will stand :
Power beyond ken !

Now he approaches, he whose hand constrains
Globe – spanning forces –
He whose word turns back along our veins
The blood that courses.
Divine enlightenment, a mounting spate
Informs mankind ;
To think a thought therein is to create –
Power of the mind !

To bear our load – this world by God designed –
That power we need :
Our Slavic Pope, brother to all mankind,
Is there to lead !

With balm from all the world, our souls' torment
Is soothed by him ;
About his flower-decked throne a regiment
Of cherubim.
Love he dispenses as great powers today
Distribute arms ;
With sacramental power, his sole array,
The world he charms !

His word, like dove set free, takes instant flight,
The news proclaims :
That yet the Holy Spirit sheds its light,
Devotion claims !
The heavens above him open wide their gates,
While he, alone,
Sits on his throne and humbly re-creates
Both Earth and Throne !

Among the nations, with a brother's love,
He spreads the word :
Man must, to reach his final goal above,
Brave fire and sword.
The sacramental power of realms untold
His willing slave ;
Power that the soul of man may yet behold
Before the grave !

the meeting in Gniezno while making his first pilgrimage to Poland. The thirstiest anniversary of this events is upcoming. Twenty years later, in 1997, in the same place in Gniezno John Paul II returned to the words of hope from the year 1979, the hope that was realized ten years later. He recalled the topic also in the sense of critic assessment of the wall that is being constructed in our hearts through rejecting the wise opening to the neighbor.

Especially in the days of the crisis it is worth coming back to what John Paul II suggested us during his first and second pilgrimage to Poland. He warned then that the economic, political and military integration is not enough. It can be easily destroyed by the lack of fundamental virtues and roots from which we derive. It is not only the return in the written form in the constitution but a real searching for answering the question where do we come from. Today it is visible that when there is no solidarity fundament in the sense of helping weaker countries, in the days of crisis there begins the thinking only of your own country and one leaves the European "small" nations on their own in the name of non-Christian and unethical existence contrary to what was declared as common European way of thinking and acting.

The mentioned hopes of Slavic nations had been especially concentrated in Poland. We could experience the spirit of hope in 1979 during the Pope's meeting with the believers in Warsaw, Cracow, Czestochowa and Gniezno. This hope, which was centered not only in the Pope but also in the people in concrete countries following him emerged with great enthusiasm and vision of upcoming changes. It concerns the countries that were involved in the so called Falklands conflict, when the Pope's intervention was direct and effective. It concerns the hopes of the African, American and Cuban people - the hope of the leaders and ordinary people... It is the hope of people approaching the Pope during his pilgrimages and ceremonies held in Vatican, during the private and Wednesday's audiences. They came with the hope of consolation and renewing their own way of thinking or even with the hope for miracle of recovery, which they often experienced.

To conclude those two trains of hope: the people's and the Pope's one, it is crucial to remark that the hope connected with the Pope after his election bounds up directly with the Square of Victory in Warsaw. For me the pontificate of John Paul II seems to be a process completed here on earth. There is nothing new going to happen. We have to consider everything what happened by means of timelessness or only in one dimension like as the history of redemption is present in the Eucharist.

The connection of the hope of John Paul II and cardinal Wyszyński is precisely the square of Victory. Four years after the Pope passed away it is substantial for us to cherish those symbolic places for his pontificate, such places as Piłsudski's square, St. Paul's square in Rome and many other significant places. Let us look at that square through the prism of those four years: 1979 – cold outside, the crowd seems a little bit

From the world's wounds he laves corruption's blight,
The maggots teeming ;
Health he restores, fanning our love alight,
The world redeeming.
Sweeps out our churches, makes the portals gleam –
So that each one
May see his God within Creation's scheme,
Bright as the sun !
Written in 1848.
English translation by Noel Clark..

scared by the media. And then the enthusiasm and outbreak of hope a year later heading to the emergence of "Solidarity". That was the emergence of hope at the side of John Paul II, who with his preachments was able to encourage and strengthen the people. He didn't want them to be scared "Do not be afraid". That was the beginning of Polish hope – the hope that was widely described in the works of Pr. Józef Tischner⁵.

Mai 1981 was one of the historic moments to be now easily and safely recalled. One who lived in those times remembers that from one hand we were accompanied by great hope expressed in the Churches' and world's praying but from the other hand by sadness. Exactly in the same month the lives of two great Poles were in danger. Cardinal Wyszyński was dying in Warsaw and John Paul II was shot and suffered in Rome at the same time. On the Piłsudski's square there was a coffin of cardinal Wyszyński and in Rome – already full of hope for recovery – John Paul II was praying for the Church and for his Polish co-worker. That was the connection of hope and sadness. It could be said like this: if in 1979 there had been the hope *gaudium et spes* then in 1981 there had been sadness but still full of hope. Finally the year 1999 when the Pope stands another time on Piłsudski's square, ten years after regaining liberty, he thanks God for what happened in 1989. He speaks about it on the square and in the Parliament but at the same time there emerges the first warning – there are serious conditions imposed by John Paul II to the political world, to parliament and politicians. Those conditions were crucial to be fulfilled if we wanted our liberty and democracy to be based on virtues.

At last the year 2005 when at the same square in Warsaw thousands of people meet spontaneously accompanied by the others in Poznań and Kraków. There was a big Holy Mass at the day of the Pope's death and the day after. Firstly there was a plan to arrange the mass in the park that surrounds the church in Koło district in Warsaw but finally they decided to organize it on the square that was directly connected with the Pope, who was a man of hope. The reason was to pass on the message that derived from the Pope's pontificate to the upcoming generations.

The main dimension of the Pope's message to the people was to get the contemporary man out of sadness, agnosticism and doubts by means of hope passed on by God personalized by Jesus Christ. In 1979 there started the revolution of consciences that has led to the peaceful revolution in 1989. And not a politician, nor diplomat nor a military took part in it but the greatest priest, the pontiff.

⁵ Tischner Józef: *The Word of man's hope*. Znak, Cracow 1992.