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# LABOUR MIGRANTS IN THE LIGHT OF PERSONALISTIC PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF KAROL WOJTYŁA - JOHN PAUL II

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## Abstract

Migrations are amongst the most important social processes impacting the functioning of many individuals, communities and societies. In recent years, particular intensification of migration processes has become noticeable. Its beginning coincides to great extent with the pontificate of John Paul II. This pope, the head of the Catholic Church, was not only a prominent theologian and philosopher, but also an insightful social thinker, whose teaching was always referring to important social issues. Therefore, the ideas of John Paul II abound in variety of threads concerning directly the phenomenon of migration and the conditions of migrants, including labour ones. The text stresses that the key to understanding papal social ideas lies in personalism, which can be also applied to the analysis of papal beliefs concerning the issue of labour migration. In accordance with this optics, John Paul II perceived the worker, including the labour migrant, as first and foremost, subject of the work. Simultaneously, in his teaching, he pointed out to the true nature of the labour immigrant associated with their dignity as a human being. In his considerations on migration, Pope John Paul II used, above all, his moral sense which made him pay attention to the issue of human rights (including the rights of a migrating worker) stemming not from the provisions of law, but directly from the innate dignity of the human being.

*Keywords:* philosophy, labour, Catholic social, doctrine, personalism

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## 1. Introduction

Without a doubt, Karol Wojtyła (1920-2005), better known under his papal name John Paul II, occupies prominent place amongst leading social thinkers of today. And though we are now witnessing a stormy discussion concerning him, and abuses and scandals in the Catholic Church in the times of his pontificate, we cannot cross out his intellectual output and his contribution to the global social and political discourse. Not only was he the Church hierarch, poet, theologian and philosopher, but also a social thinker; he paid

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special attention to social issues during his pontifical period. He was definitely the best-known worldwide Polish, or even Central European, intellectual, who was listened to and discussed due to his function. Nevertheless, it isn't the range of his message that is the most important here, though it is definitely significant, but maturity, cohesion and originality of the opinions expressed by this pope.

Philosophical and theological formation was definitely his great asset. His opinions concerning social issues have their source and authority in philosophical ideas. Personalism is the key to understanding John Paul II as social thinker. Issues connected with labour migration, which are present also in John Paul II's papal teaching, are also expressed there in the categories of personalism. Our paper is devoted to this issue. We are perfectly aware of the fact that we are not able to exhaust the subject here and we can only indicate the issue connected with labour migration present in papal teaching.

Karol Wojtyła's philosophical works, as well as papal statements and documents including the references to the issue of labour migration, were our source material.

## **2. International labour migration**

Labour migration is one of the major driving forces of modern global migration. According to estimations of the International Labour Organization (ILO), in 2017 there were 164 million migrant workers worldwide accounting for 60% of all global migrants (258 million). More than 2/3 of that group resided in countries with high levels of incomes [1].

**Table 1.** Numbers of international migrants according to regions 1960-2005 (in millions).

Region	Years					
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005
World	76	81	99	155	177	191
Africa	9	10	14	16	17	17
Asia	29	28	32	50	50	53
Europe	14	19	22	49	58	64
Latin America and the Caribbean	6	6	6	7	6	7
North America	13	13	18	28	40	45
Developed regions	32	38	48	82	105	115
Developing regions	43	43	52	73	72	75

Source: own elaboration based on [2]

Particular intensification of migration processes, including labour migration, coincides with the pontificate of John Paul II. It is illustrated by data presented in Table 1. As a result of both, the scale of migration processes, their social and economic significance, as well as those aspects of this phenomenon that are reflected in e.g. global configuration in the existence of deep dichotomous division of the world into two areas: wealthy, highly-developed

(North) and poor, undeveloped (South), the labour workers-related issues were broadly reflected in the teaching of John Paul II.

The UN Migration Agency (IOM) defines an international migrant as “any person who is outside a State of which he or she is a citizen or national” [3]. However, the method of defining international migrants used for statistical purposes by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) does not cover temporary travel abroad for purposes of recreation, holiday, business, medical treatment or religious pilgrimage [4]. Meanwhile, international labour migration is defined as “movement of persons from one State to another [...] for the purpose of employment”. Hence, a migrant worker is a “person who is to be engaged, is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national” [3, p. 121, 134].

Labour migrations apply to diversified group of people, ranging from unqualified workers performing simple works, to highly qualified specialists. Specific form of migration of the latter group consists in developed relatively recently intra-corporate transfers of employees for people characterised usually by high level of human capital and professional experience. In recent years, we have witnessed a clear change in the structure of demand for foreign employees expressed in increased demand for highly qualified people and weakening interest in unqualified workers. However, the latter group still accounts for the majority in international flow of labour [5]. They are simultaneously exposed to incomparably greater extent to various kinds of abuses and exploitations.

It is believed that international labour migrations of masses were initiated at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, when workers were recruited in China to work in the Chinese gold mines on Borneo. Soon, the migrations would apply to millions of people living in Europe, China and India. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this phenomenon was favoured by the opening of labour markets as well as demographic pressure in numerous countries. The scale of labour migrations grew even further in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly due to the fact that they covered new regions, including Africa and Asia in particular [6].

Today, globalisation is generally singled out as the main driving force behind the intensified migration processes (including labour migration) from developing to developed states. In this context, it is openly said that “international migration is an integral part of globalisation” [7]. According to Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, globalisation processes, which were intensified in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, enabled large-scale penetration of markets and economies of less developed countries by the great capital from the rich and wealthy states. As a result, the less developed states we exposed to great social and economic diversification, which was reflected in intensified social and political conflicts. It then led to greater mobility of both labour force as well as obligatory migrants [2]. Greater integration of markets is one of the symptoms of globalisation. However, while the states agreed relatively easily to free flow of capital, goods and services, the flow of people (including labour

force) is subject to much greater restrictions and serious limitations set by immigration policies [8].

Although the reasons of international migration of workers are complex, attention is most frequently drawn to the role of disproportion in incomes, work supply and the level of social well-being (it is characteristic particularly for the supporters of neoclassical theory of migration); for, economic migrants move, first and foremost, to improve their living conditions. And although majority of them benefit from migration and have a chance for a better life thanks to mobility, migrants (particularly unskilled ones) do not frequently have equal chances on labour markets in their destination/residence countries and are often subject to various kinds of discrimination.

As mentioned previously, migrations involve different categories of workers and employees, which can be defined according to education, skills, character of stay abroad or legal status. For obvious reasons, these elements impact the person's position on the labour market. Immigrants, particularly those poorly qualified, frequently become the victims of so-called dual labour market. It envisages the existence of the primary market, offering 'good' jobs which are usually taken by native employees, and secondary market providing only 'worse' jobs. These are usually intended for the foreigners. As a result, immigrants are frequently performing works referred to as 3Ds ('dirty, dangerous and demanding' or 'dirty, dangerous and difficult'). Usually, immigrants receive lower wages for their work, and are the first ones endangered with layoffs, while their rights aren't always fully guaranteed or respected. The conditions of illegal migrants are worst, as they are forced to perform shadow economy works. Piyasiri Wickramasekara stresses that "many host countries fail to recognise that migrant workers in irregular status also have fundamental rights as human beings as well as rights as workers, recognised in ILO and UN international instruments" [8, p. 1254]. Additionally, the welcoming societies frequently perceive immigrants as a threat to social cohesion, lifestyle or the level of well-being. They are frequently treated as 'scapegoats' and are accused of all kinds of fiascos of policies or governmental programmes as well as crisis situations. However, it should be stressed in this context that the functioning of social and economic systems of many states, particularly developed ones, would be impossible without the participation of workers from abroad. In many cases, their presence enables painless restructuring of entire sectors of the economy, execution of huge infrastructure investments or functioning of some branches of the economy. Their impact on social and economic situation is generally underestimated.

### **3. Personalistic foundations of the Karol Wojtyła - John Paul II's philosophy and theology of labour**

In Anthropology and Social philosophy as well as in the theological reflection of Karol Wojtyła, human work is founded deeply on the tradition of personalism. Personalism - also in the theological dimension [9] - is a key to

understanding the nature of labour, its essence as a phenomenon connected strictly with human being as a person, their rationality and individuality as constructive elements defining the person. Hence, in his works, he stresses first and foremost, its subjective dimension. This idea was built in opposition to both, Marxist as well as capitalist theory of labour, which Wojtyła called economism, which took into account mainly the objective dimension, i.e., in short, the results of the work performed by man, both those measured with productivity, easy to quantify as well as those with symbolic value, are subject to qualitative evaluation and interpretation. As a personalistic philosopher and theologian, Wojtyła always paid attention to the actor - man and his inner experience of work. In his perhaps greatest philosophical work, his *opus magnum* - dissertation *The Acting Person*, he wrote that man expresses his character through his actions. Therefore, the act is the expression of the human nature, the human 'I'. Wojtyła claimed that the act provides a special moment of revealing the person. Through acts we can penetrate the essence of a person and understand them. Thanks to the act, we experience that "man is a person and we are sure of it because they perform acts" [10].

However, this act as well as all works of man, which result from that act, are in the ontological meaning secondary towards the person - the agential subject, their ontological value is secondary also towards the person and their innate dignity. In one of his anthropological texts, he established that "to recognise man's dignity means to regard man much higher than anything that is man-created and present in the visible world", all creations are only agents [11]. Therefore, man is put in the middle of the issue of labour. In his paper devoted to constituting the culture through human *praxis* delivered at Università Cattolica in Milan in 1977, he clearly set forth this specific rule of man's priority before work. The priority is mainly of ontological character. In the above-mentioned article, he claimed that "the priority of man as a subject of essentially human acting [...] belongs to the notion of *praxis* in the sense that it simply constitutes it. It would be absurd to understand it the other way round, i.e. assume some subjectively undetermined *praxis*, which would later define [...] its subject. We cannot also consider *praxis* in an a priori way, as if various forms of actions, which determine their actors were supposed to emerge from this *quasi-absolute* category through evolution. If we assume [...] that the act is the best way to reveal the man as a person, then this epistemological stance includes a belief and certainty about the priority of this man - subject of the action." [12] He continued this thread connected with ontological priority of man - subject of work before work, as Pope John Paul II. In the so-called first social encyclical entitled *Laborem exercens* devoted to human work he stressed that action is not reduced to existence, to act you have to firstly exist, which is expressed in the Latin maxim *operami sequitur esse*. Compared to existence, action is only an accident (*accidens*), which is associated with recognising the 'existence' of action as dependent on the existence of man - the subject of the action. Therefore, man does not exist through action, but action

‘exists’ thanks to the subject, the actor of the action, who exists in substantive form and acts as such [13].

Priority of man before the act is also of ‘praxeological’, as described by Wojtyła, character. In this sense, whatever the man does and whatever are the products of this act, he always ‘makes himself in it’. In short, through his act man expresses mainly himself, shaping himself in the act and somewhat ‘creating’ himself in the act. Wojtyła wrote that “by acting, he *brings up to date*, i.e. accomplishes himself; he makes that what, and simultaneously, whom he potentially (*in potentia*) is reach some, naturally, partial fullness. [...] The priority of man in *praxeological* meaning makes us reduce the essence of *praxis* itself to man: that what man realises himself corresponds in fact to its essence.” [12, p. 42] As a result, the non-human reality, which becomes the object of man’s actions, the creations that are their results, become to some extent more humane. Man leaves his trace in reality by humanising it. Hence, the issue of work in anthropological sense is strictly connected with the issue of creating culture. For, according to Wojtyła, work is of culture-formative character, if, as he personally stipulates, man does not become the action’s slave [12].

Philosophical idea of work is coherent with his theological idea of work. We may say that the theology of labour completes, and also sort of illustrates Wojtyła’s philosophy of labour by referring to biblical or evangelical examples. It appears in particular in papal teaching of John Paul II, in his speeches, documents and social encyclicals, including the first one, i.e. *Laborem exercens* encyclical devoted to human work. As we have already mentioned, John Paul II’s theology of labour, similarly to Wojtyła’s philosophy of labour, is based on premises of personalism, which makes his philosophical and theological idea devoted to work a coherent and complementary entirety, whose heart is always occupied by man understood as a person being the subject of work. He expressed it directly in *Laborem exercens* encyclical stating that work has, first and foremost, personal values, stressing that it is an eternal truth preached by the Church [13, no. 15]. A sort of personification, and simultaneously sacralization, of the subject of work is done in Jesus Christ, whom John Paul II calls ‘man of work’ [13, no. 26]. The pope believed that thanks to work, which always entails some pain and effort, man participates to some extent in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, but also opens himself to the hope of resurrection. “The Christian - Pope John Paul II wrote in *Laborem exercens* - finds in human work a small part of the Cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his Cross for us. In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil-and never without it. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand the Cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.” [13, no.

27] Assumption of personalistic perspective in the theology of labour leads to the exposure of the priority of the value of a person before a thing, and consequently to stressing the priority of moral values before economic ones. It also exposes the relational and communal character of human work connecting the secular life with eschatology [14].

#### **4. Migrant workers in the papal teaching of John Paul II**

Pope John Paul II did not devote a separate papal document to labour migration as such; however, this issue is present in his papal teaching, including, in particular, his messages for the World Migration Days. Also in the above-mentioned encyclical *Laborem exercens*, he discusses the conditions of labour migrants in one of the paragraphs. This issue stems from his personalistic anthropology and ethics; this anthropological/ethical context is essential here to understand the attitude of the Pope from Poland towards labour migration. Naturally, also in this case he puts great stress on the supremacy of a person as a subject of work. Therefore, the work of a migrant is, first and foremost, of subjective dimension. Its author is a human being - person. Therefore, the work itself gains this subjective value compared to its tools, including capital. He stressed it emphatically in the context of migrant labour in his first social encyclical: "Once more the fundamental principle must be repeated: the hierarchy of values and the profound meaning of work itself require that capital should be at the service of labour and not labour at the service of capital" [13, no. 23]. This sentence can be treated as a conclusion of the above-mentioned paragraph, as all matters that are related to the work performed by migrants are based on the universal personalistic rule according to which man is the work's subject and work gains its (subjective) value because it is the creation of the subject, and thus becomes a superior value towards the capital, i.e. all that serves work. Therefore, labour migrant is treated in the papal teaching as a subject of work. Thus he is due universal rights that are typical for all workers, who are the subjects of work.

However, due to the specific character of the issue, i.e. the work of labour migrants, their complicated and sometimes even dramatic social, economic and legal condition, the Pope did not restrict himself merely to formulating general moral principle concerning the superiority of work over capital and the subjective character of the work of migrants, but he also recalled concrete rights that labour migrants are entitled to, that are, so to say, a consequence resulting from the assumption of the above-mentioned rule.

John Paul II believed that leaving your homeland to find better living conditions is a human right. Motivations might vary and may include economic factors too. When it comes to the issue of work, the Pope believed that the migrant worker should have the same rights as other workers. He cannot be handicapped in any way compared to other people working in a given society. Emigration due to economic reasons must not become the reason for any exploitation, be it financial or social. Universal norms of a given country apply

to migrant workers. And again, John Paul II used personalistic arguments to justify the equalisation of the rights of labour migrants with other workers. The value of work is determined by its subjective nature. Therefore, any forms of discrimination, whether based on nationality, race or religion, which in fact threaten personal human dignity, should be rejected as morally bad [13, no. 23; 15]. Therefore, in the messages for the World Migration Day he formulated a postulate according to which states welcoming migrants should adopt as soon as possible legal regulations and appropriate social programmes and procedures in order to treat them equally with other workers - citizens of the state. As a result, it will be possible to prevent marginalisation of migrants [16-18].

Nevertheless, in *Laborem exercens* encyclical he perceived emigration as 'necessary evil'. It entails the country of origin losing a person connected with it with unique cultural, social and economic bonds. Without a doubt, the Pope alluded here to the human capital flight, although he was referring not only to highly qualified employees, but also those without expert knowledge and skills, because he treated each labour migrant subjectively, regardless of the character of their work. He believed that man's homeland, the national community of his origin, is a natural place of development of a human being. Therefore, along with emigration, the community of origin loses "a subject of work, whose efforts of mind and body could contribute to the common good of his own country, but these efforts, this contribution, are instead offered to another society which in a sense has less right to them than the person's country of origin" [13, no. 23]. Nevertheless, in the very same fragment of quoted encyclical, he notices that if emigration is bad in any sense, then it is 'necessary evil'. However, it is important that leaving the country does not entail 'moral harm' and that it ultimately contributes to good in the personal, family and social life of the migrant, both in their homeland as well as in the country of their destination. For, Pope John Paul II's perspective is in fact universalistic, also in reference to the issues of migration. He expressed it clearly in apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Europa*, where he said, in the context of migration, that universal vision of common good requires us to take a look at the needs of the entire human family [19]. Hence, the postulate to create *mature culture of acceptance*, which means respect for the dignity of every human being and proper solidarity with the weakest, and thus demands recognising basic rights of each migrant.

According to the Pope, each migrant should also have the right to go back to his country of origin. Bearing that in mind, he postulated that the countries of origin should plan appropriate measures so that the comeback of the families of emigrants would result in productive reintegration, and parents and children did not feel discriminated and were not forced to emigrate again [20].

An important postulate included in the message for the World Migration Day in 1986 consists in the necessity to ensure normal functioning of the immigrants within family relationships. Hence, the Pope urged to launch proper programmes aimed at reuniting families. Execution of this postulate is the only way to save the migrants from negative consequences connected with alienation



and detachment from family life. Family, as John Paul II noticed, is frequently the first victim of migration. Traumatic experiences connected with it affect both people staying in the country of origin as well as those who had decided to leave. Moreover, the Pope paid attention to the fact that an immigrant family is vulnerable to crises connected with acculturation and disintegration, even if the family members live together in a foreign country. Frequently, the character of work undertaken by the migrants also has a negative impact on harmonious development of a family. When it comes to poorly qualified migrants, it is usually work rejected by local workers. It frequently entails irregular working hours and influences the health of people performing it. This in turn may lead to a sort of isolationist attitude, inclination to closing oneself in own communities, lack of integration with the society and culture of the country of residence. Therefore, Pope John Paul II formulated a range of practical guidelines, which migrant families should have ensured by the authorities, including education of the children of immigrants at a level which would provide them with equal chances to find work compared to local children, immigrants-friendly housing policy and, finally, ensuring social guarantees. As noticed in the previously mentioned message, these are only some of the challenges facing the states welcoming migrants and refugees. According to the Pope, commitment to reach true equality and will to counteract discrimination and racism lead to more fair and humane society [20].

The Pope noticed that the situation of illegal immigrants is, first and foremost, the most difficult. Therefore he believed that national authorities, social organisations and the Church should be particularly looking after this category of people. In 1992, he argued in the message for the World Migration Day that the aim should consist in as quick as possible integration of illegal immigrants with the society. The method proposed by the Pope consists in engaging them in economic development of the country of origin, which could make them feel a real bond with the society and the state they had come to. The authorities should initiate legalisation procedures as quickly as possible, bearing in mind human dignity, including the human dignity of the people who are staying illegally in the country. In no way does the lack of legalisation of the stay belittle personal dignity of man [16, no. 2].

## **5. Conclusions**

The issue of labour migration fits into Karol Wojtyła - John Paul II's philosophy of labour and theology; it is, first and foremost, anthropological and ethical attitude with visible (particularly during the pontificate) references to evangelical and biblical themes. Common element of both attitudes, i.e. philosophical and theological, consists in personalism, which makes us see a subject of work in a worker, including labour migrant or simply working migrant. This subjective character is contradicted neither by the type of work nor the place of origin, nationality, race, religion, or even legal status of the migrant. Karol Wojtyła - philosopher built anthropological foundations for John

Paul II, who was not only the Church hierarch, but also social thinker, or even more - participant of global debates devoted to key social, economic and political issues. Thanks to these foundations and basing on them, Pope John Paul II was able to remind the architects of political governance and global public opinion the true nature of labour migrant, which is connected with their dignity as a human being.

Pontificate of John Paul II coincided with the dynamic development of globalisation with its immanent feature in the form of migration movements at an unprecedented scale. The Pope did not express his opinions concerning these issues as migration, economic or social policy expert. In his considerations, he was guided by, above all, his moral sense, for the issue of migration, including labour migration, is in fact connected also with sensitive moral issues. It concerns, after all, human rights, including the rights of a worker - immigrant. And we cannot limit ourselves to legalistic interpretation only, as the rights discussed by John Paul II do not stem from legislation, but from the dignity of a human being. Therefore, specific nature of man understood as a person is the source of rights. Hence, papal considerations gain universal character as they are not limited to a given country or legal system. They affect most universal foundations of human existence, i.e. being a person. Personalism becomes the key to understanding the philosophy and theology of labour of Karol Wojtyła - John Paul II [21], also in reference to labour migrants or simply working migrants. Work as an expression of a person is a universal value [22].

Learning the opinions concerning this subject may be important also from a practical point of view. Social and ethical thought is strongly connected with practice. One may say that it rises from practice and it is there to change practice. Therefore, it is worthwhile to recall the ideas of such prominent thinker and philosopher as Karol Wojtyła to understand the true nature of human work, including the work performed by migrants. It is particularly important in the modern world, where the phenomenon of migration (including labour migration) occurs at an unprecedented scale and is thus connected with escalation of social conflicts, rise of prejudices and discriminations [23]. To some extent, it may protect migrants against instrumentalisation and objectification.

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