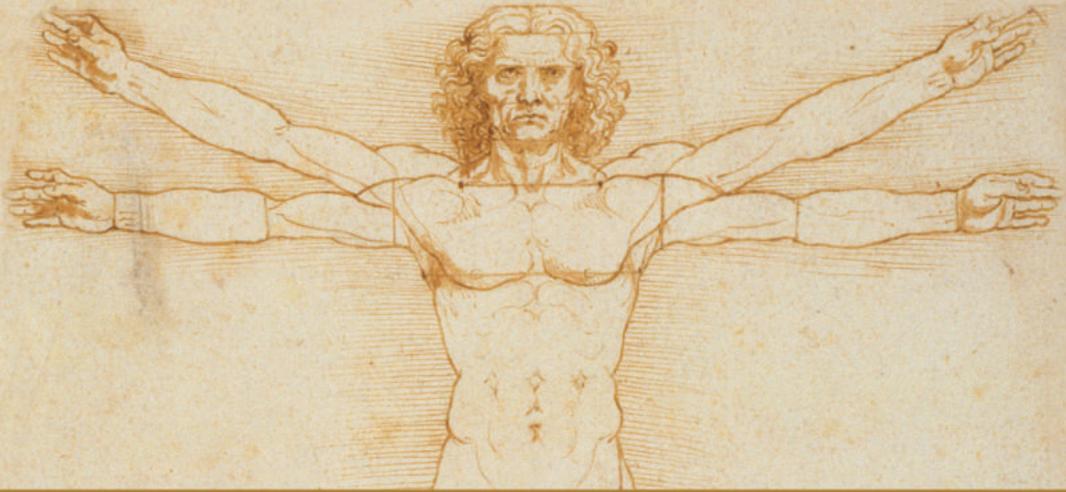


J. Brian Bransfield



— THE —
HUMAN
PERSON

ACCORDING TO JOHN PAUL II

“Bransfield illuminates John Paul II’s vision of
the human person brilliantly...” — Carl A. Anderson

THE
HUMAN PERSON
ACCORDING TO JOHN PAUL II

J. Brian Bransfield


Pauline
BOOKS & MEDIA
Boston

CHAPTER ONE



The Experiences of Wojtyla / The Experiences of the Twentieth Century

A. Formative Experiences

A person gains firsthand experiences in the first third of human life, lives from experience in the second third, and in the final third loves the experiences that have been lived. Experience forms humans, and they are continuously invited to weigh and evaluate their formation. History, in one sense, is a collection of experience. Anticipation is the hope for a fuller experience. Adventure is the high point of experience. Nostalgia is the hunger for the high point.

Candidates seeking employment or a political office need to show what they have achieved. Experience shapes a person's identity. Education, training, redirections, and mishaps as well as successes testify to a nominee's character and suitability. Karol Wojtyla brought to the papacy a personal identity that was formed from a diverse background even before his well-documented professional and pastoral abilities.¹ His resume may be broadly divided into three sets of experiences: his per-

1. For a detailed biography of Pope John Paul II see Tad Szulc, *Pope John Paul II: The Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995) and George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999).

sonal experiences, his intellectual experiences, and his pastoral experiences. These experiences cross-pollinated and coalesced in a unique way to forge a singular depth within the man who would become Pope John Paul II.

1. Personal Experiences

From the widest perspective, Wojtyła's personal experience consisted in being a son of Poland. This nation has a rich national identity built from a history often marked by invasion and tragedy. Situated between Europe and Russia, Poland was often trampled by foreign armies.² Repeated enemy incursions and occupation of their homeland have led the Polish people to develop a culture of resistance to foreign forces that transcends mere rebellion on a military level.³ Resilience sprouts from the very soil of Poland. Each of its sons and daughters bears an irrepressible resourcefulness. The Polish people have been formed to be recalcitrant, strong, and robust in dealing with hardship. The Polish identity, so durable and lasting, should never be underestimated.

Wojtyła's personal history mirrors the history of his country. Karol was born in the town of Wadowice on May 18, 1920, to Karol and Emilia (née Kaczorowska) Wojtyła. His father, a deeply religious man, fought in the Polish army and earned a commendation in World War I. He retired from military service soon after Poland regained independence on November 11, 1918. Karol had an older brother, Edmund, born August 28, 1906. A sister named Olga, born in 1914, died only a few weeks after her birth.

The future pope's first formations were in the context of marriage and the family. He was raised in an interim period of peace in Poland. The Wojtyłas were well versed in competition and excelled in the arts. Their younger son participated in activities ranging from family life, schooling, and sports to Saturday folk nights at a local park, singing and reciting

2. George Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II: A Richly Revealing Portrait* (New York: Dell, 1979), 7, 25. Gian Franco Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol: The Unknown Life of John Paul II* (Liguori, MO: Liguori, 2003), 4.

3. For a synthesis of Polish history in this regard see Raymond Gawronski, SJ, "The Distant Country of John Paul II" in *Creed and Culture: Jesuit Studies of Pope John Paul II*, eds. Joseph W. Koterski, SJ, and John J. Conley, SJ (Philadelphia: St. Joseph's University Press, 2004), 61–74.

poetry around a bonfire.⁴ Besides his affection for sports and the outdoors, Karol developed a devotion to the theater. But his personal life, like that of his nation, was to lose its peace in short order.

Aside from the influence of his family life, Karol was formed by suffering, both on a personal and national scale. Karol's mother died on April 13, 1929, at the age of forty-five, when Karol was only eight years old. His older brother, Edmund, a medical doctor, died at the age of twenty-six on December 5, 1932, from septic scarlet fever contracted from his patients.⁵ Karol was then twelve years old. He and his father moved to Krakow in 1938 as Karol took up university life⁶ and continued his theater activities. Within the year, the German blitzkrieg scarred Polish cities and towns with bombs beginning on September 1, 1939.

The Nazis closed the university and would allow only trade skills to be practiced and learned.⁷ Karol and Poland had fallen under the first of two totalitarian regimes. The young Wojtyła worked at a quarry and later at a chemical factory.⁸ His theater interests took on a new perspective. He wrote poetry, relying heavily on the themes of Polish history and the spiritual life. He participated in a secret underground theater known as the Rhapsodic Theater. This was a "theater of the spoken word" that kept alive and passed on the integrity of Polish history and tradition.⁹ The participants relied upon words and gestures rather than props, costumes, and scenery. Besides being cumbersome, such items, if found, would have made the players liable for deportation to the Nazi death camps.

Amid the pain of family loss and the darkness of war, a light arose in the form of a layman, Jan Tyranowski, a local tailor. He was a man of intense faith who introduced Karol to Carmelite spirituality through the writings of Saint John of the Cross.¹⁰ Tyranowski also introduced Karol to the writings of Saint Louis de Montfort. The influence of faithful lay persons became a third level of formation for Karol. The future pope

4. Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II*, 35.

5. Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol*, 10.

6. Peter Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2000), 1.

7. Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II*, 41.

8. Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 2.

9. Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II*, 46–47.

10. Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II*, 51; Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 2; Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol*, 49–50.

first learned of the laity's mission in the Church not through academic theory but through eyewitness encounter. His later apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* ("Christ's Faithful People") did not spring as much from theological research as it did from the lives and witness of dedicated women and men like Tyranowski.

As Poland's suffering continued, Karol's reached a final height when his father died of a heart attack on February 18, 1942. Karol Wojtyla, now twenty-one, had lost his entire immediate family and had seen the Nazis overrun his homeland.¹¹ When the war ended on May 7, 1945, the Nazi regime gave way to the tyranny of Soviet communism. The Soviets brought an era of Stalinist terror to Poland, with secret accusations, violence against human dignity, the obscuring of Polish history and identity, and oppression of the Church.¹²

These early losses had a deep impact on Karol, for that which is experienced earliest lasts longest. The deep sensitivity he would show as pontiff to suffering persons, even to the plight of entire nations and cultures, was forged in his own suffering. His eyes and expressions seemed to draw forth and convey extraordinary kindness for the sick and the abandoned. Kindness came naturally to Wojtyla. It was formed in his identity from his earliest personal experiences.

2. Intellectual Experiences

Amid his early losses, Karol turned to the laity, and these men and women pointed him toward the life of the intellect, his fourth layer of formative experience. Wojtyla's intellectual experiences flourished in a life that, despite early pain and hardship, was both vibrantly athletic and devoted to academic study. His academic records, which even show his excused absences from class, are included in *The Making of the Pope of the Millennium: Kalendarium of the Life of Karol Wojtyla*.¹³ As a young student, he spoke on behalf of his secondary school graduating class in 1938. His obligatory service in the military was postponed after his graduation. Later that year he entered the Jagiellonian University,

11. Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II*, 50; Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol*, 38.

12. Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol*, 129.

13. Adam Boniecki, MIC, *The Making of the Pope of the Millennium: Kalendarium of the Life of Karol Wojtyla* (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2000).

studying Polish philology in the humanities department. He remained at the university until World War II broke out in September 1939.

With his studies abruptly ended, Karol went to Krakow with his father and began his fifth formational experience, the hard work of a daily laborer. The young Wojtyła worked in a chemical factory and a quarry in the Solvay works near Krakow from 1940 to 1944. His service as a laborer exempted him from exportation to Germany for forced labor. During these years, the religious influence of his father, and later Tyranowski, was fundamental to Karol's life.¹⁴ In addition, the influence of priests and friends led Karol to study theology. During the Nazi occupation he began clandestine studies in the department of theology at the Jagiellonian while still working at Solvay.

Karol's formation followed an unpredictable path. His identity was molded early on by seven sources essential to his faith: marriage, the family setting, the experience of loss and solidarity in the face of national persecution, the strategic influence of dedicated laity, the importance of the intellectual life, the daily work of rigorous labor, and prayerful theology. He was naturally led from those seven formative experiences to theology. This is the early culture of Karol Wojtyła, which formed the man who became John Paul II.

The first targets of the Nazis were not the Polish political, military, or business leaders. Even the Nazis knew that to undermine a people's identity one must first undermine their culture. To do this they attacked Polish intellectuals. The first professionals the Nazis deported were university professors, those who could pass on the historical and cultural identity of the Polish people.

Karol Wojtyła responded to the Nazis by participating in the covert Rhapsodic Theater that sustained the identity of Poland by performing plays essential to its history.¹⁵ In trying to become an actor, he wrote several plays and performed in many more. It wasn't merely chance that drew him to the theater. His attraction for it emerged spontaneously from his experiences of marriage, family, loss, laity, intellectual life, hard labor, and prayerful theology. The stage became the eighth layer of his formational matrix. Meanwhile he began thinking about the priesthood.

14. Blazynski, *Pope John Paul II*, 51; Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 2.

15. Boniecki, *The Making of the Pope*, 81–82; Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol*, 45.

The influence of religious individuals such as his father and Tyranowski, along with priests he had known from a young age, drew him to it. In October 1942, a year after his father died, Karol entered the clandestine seminary of the Archdiocese of Krakow to study for the priesthood.¹⁶ By now the seeds of what would emerge as his personalist philosophy were sown deeply in his soul. While in the seminary he studied philosophy, which added a further dimension to the developing sense of culture and his appreciation for identity.

Karol Wojtyla was ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Krakow on November 1, 1946, by the Cardinal Archbishop Adam Stefan Sapieha.¹⁷ After ordination he was assigned to parish ministry and was later sent to Rome for graduate studies at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Wojtyla completed his doctoral studies in theology on June 14, 1948, and earned the first of two doctorates. His dissertation, *Doctrina di fide apud S. Ioannem a Cruce*, was published in English as *Faith According to Saint John of the Cross*.¹⁸ After returning to Poland he completed his habilitation thesis, which would give him the credentials to teach at the university level. It was titled *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler*, and with it, Wojtyla earned a second doctorate in 1954 from Jagiellonian University.¹⁹ He joined the faculty of the Catholic University of Lublin in October 1954, where he served as professor of ethics.

He taught at Lublin until 1957 and held the ethics chair even after he ascended to the See of Krakow. His lectures while teaching at Lublin include topics such as “Ethical Act and Ethical Experience,” “Good and Value,” and “The Problem of Norm and Happiness.”²⁰ He did not intend his Lublin lectures to be published. Nevertheless, a German edition was published in 1981,²¹ and a Polish text was released in 1986.²²

16. Svidercoschi, *Stories of Karol*, 59.

17. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 79.

18. Published in English by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1981.

19. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 130.

20. Jaroslaw Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty: The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyla / John Paul II* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 25.

21. Lubliner Vorlesungen Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag.

22. *Wykłady lubelskie*.

The texts are Wojtyła's notes and synopses for the classes.²³ Even as Holy Father, John Paul still held the chair in the department of Christian philosophy at Lublin. He would even serve as reader for student papers and meet with professors for discussion.²⁴ He continued to hold the chair until his death on April 2, 2005.²⁵

Wojtyła's Lublin lectures constitute a major contribution to the field of ethics. The Lublin experience forms a central dimension to Wojtyła's identity. The encounters in the lecture hall allowed him to give considerable attention to what various philosophers thought about the nature of human action and identity. He thus had a professional formation that added to his previous personal experiences.

3. Pastoral Experiences

Simultaneous with his intellectual experiences, Wojtyła gained pastoral experience as a parish priest, university chaplain, auxiliary bishop, and archbishop of Krakow. He brought all of his early formation and culture to his service as a diocesan priest. His early formation in his family, his experiences of loss, the guidance of laity toward intellectual riches, his exacting work as a laborer, and his theological work had been honed in the seminary and offered at ordination. Now Wojtyła brought that rich experience to his pastoral service of the Church in Poland. In 1948 he was assigned as curate at the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady in the village of Niegowi.²⁶ He was transferred to Saint Florian's Parish in Krakow in 1949, where he also served as chaplain at Jagiellonian University.²⁷ On September 28, 1958, just a month shy of his twelfth anniversary of priestly ordination, he was ordained auxiliary bishop of Krakow.²⁸

His thoughts and teachings as pastor arose not only from his rigorous academic investigation but also from the lived experiences of ordinary people. Besides his regular interaction with his flock, he had a special ministry to some 200 married couples. Together they would go into the

23. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 26, no. 49.

24. *Ibid.*, 26, no. 50.

25. Simpson, *On Karol Wojtyła*, 3.

26. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 91.

27. *Ibid.*, 93–95.

28. *Ibid.*, 148.

mountains for prolonged weekends, and Wojtyła would form discussion groups to talk about the challenges of married life. This group of married couples came to be known as *Srodowisko*, a term first suggested by Wojtyła himself in the 1960s. Many continued their friendship with the young bishop in later years. George Weigel notes that this group was one of many “networks of young adults and young married couples with whom Father Wojtyła worked” that “evolve[d] into networks of intellectual conversation.”²⁹ Wojtyła, writing as John Paul II, made reference to this group in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*.³⁰ His book *Love and Responsibility* flowed directly from questions that arose in these discussions with young married couples.³¹ His pastoral ministry was well grounded in an avid awareness of and concern for his flock. His method was always to meet persons, ask them what they were experiencing, and then to proceed from that knowledge.

Bishop Wojtyła participated in the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965. He was appointed archbishop of Krakow on January 13, 1964, and created cardinal in 1967.³² In 1972 he published a 400-plus-page book on the implementation of the Council, later translated into English as *Sources of Renewal*.³³

Even a brief overview of Karol Wojtyła’s experiences and background reveals several avenues that enabled him to give prolonged thought to the nature of the human person and identity, and their importance in the formation of culture. As he was passing through these experiences, other events were in motion as well. An extensive storm was forming, one which this young man from Poland would be called upon to engage.

29. *Ibid.*, 98.

30. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 122. See also Stanislaw Dziwisz, *A Life with Karol: My Forty-Year Friendship with the Man Who Became Pope* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 12.

31. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willetts (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981). This work was originally published in Polish as *Miłość I Odpowiedzialno* (Krakow: Wydawnictwo, Znak, 1960). It was first published in English in 1981 by William Collins Sons & Co., London; and Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.

32. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 184, 187.

33. Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal: The Implementation of the Second Vatican Council*, trans. S. Falla (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980). In Italian: *Alla fonti rinnovamento: Studio sulla realizzazione del Concilio Vaticano II* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979).