

**“I am needed”: The Fundamental Point of the Logic of Love
According to Karol Wojtyła. Preliminary Remarks**

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Abstract

This article tries to demonstrate the thesis postulated by Karol Wojtyła, according to which a person needs love to truly be a person. The starting point of consideration is Wojtyła’s little-known letters to Teresa Życzkowska. He argued that the foundation of “the inner logic of love” is the objective awareness that “I am needed.” Man needs to love and be loved to realize himself as a person. Such love cannot be the “use” of the other person, but the gratuitousness of a gift that is both offered and received. Love does not appear as a finished “product,” and it requires molding (culture). The specificity of the human act makes it possible not only to perceive and affirm the values of the other person, but also to help their manifestation. And what is more, if the human act not only expresses itself externally, but also remains within the subject, love is always a self-giving and self-growth.

Keywords

Karol Wojtyła, love, person, culture, ethic, anthropology

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Introduction

Unambiguously defining the concept of “love” and its corresponding reality is not an easy subject. An important analysis in this regard is provided by reading the work of Rev. Karol Wojtyła entitled *Love and Responsibility*, first published in 1960.² In it, the author takes up in turn the issues of (1) “the person as affected by the sexual urge,” (2) “the love which grows up on this basis between man and woman,” (3) “the virtue of purity as an essential factor in that love,” and (4) “the question of marriage and vocation” (*LR*, 16). All this is aimed at discovering ever more deeply the nature and “the inner logic of love” (*LR*, 230). However, this is not about applied logic *sensu stricto* (the application of general logic to a specific, extralogical field), but a simple indication of the unique nature of the “inside” of love.

In this article, we attempt to analyze this “inner logic of love” based on the study *Love and Responsibility* and other texts by Wojtyła related to it, especially the two letters he wrote to Teresa Życzkowska, née Heydel. In particular, we wish to draw attention to the starting point of human love, which is, as Wojtyła noted, the awareness that “I am needed” by the other person.

Notes on the bibliography

The conclusions found in the study *Love and Responsibility* have a prehistory. The approach to the subject was born, as the author himself emphasized, from (1) pastoral experience, especially among academic youth (in Krakow starting in 1949), and (2) the Gospel and the Teaching of the Church. These two sources provided Wojtyła with an ascent to philosophical reflection (see: *LR*, 15-17), which found expression first in shorter – though still significant – articles,

² Subsequent editions of the book:

(0) K. Wojtyła, “Miłość i odpowiedzialność” [excerpts from the book], *Znak*, No. 5 (1960), 561-614.

(1) K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność. Studium etyczne*, (Lublin, TN KUL, 1960).

(2) K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność. Studium etyczne*, (2nd ed., Kraków, Wydawnictwo Znak, 1962); English transl.: K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, transl. by H.T. Willetts, (London, Collins, 1981) – in further references: *LR*.

(3) K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność. Studium etyczne*, (3rd ed., Londyn, Katolicki Ośrodek Wydawniczy “Veritas,” 1962).

(4) K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, (3rd ed., Lublin, TN KUL, 1982).

(5) K. Wojtyła, *Miłość i odpowiedzialność*, (4th ed., Lublin, TN KUL, 1986).

especially in: “Instinct, Love, Marriage”³ (1952), “The Religious Experience of Purity”⁴ (1953), “Thoughts on Marriage”⁵ (1957), “Propaedeutics of the Sacrament of Marriage”⁶ (1958), and “The Formation of Love”⁷ (1960). In addition, in the academic year 1958-59, this philosophical reflection featured in monographic lectures at the Catholic University of Lublin (see: *LR*, 9), and it finally took the form of the study *Love and Responsibility*.

It is worth noting, as recent archival research has shown, that the study *Love and Responsibility* had two different manuscript versions⁸ and corresponding typescripts,⁹ as well as an extensive manuscript outline, which was an intermediate version.¹⁰ This was not a book written on the spur of the moment, but a “meditation” on love and marriage born of experience, which ultimately took the form of a philosophical study. Moreover, in the year of the first edition of the work in question, Wojtyła also published a literary work under the pseudonym Andrzej Jawień, entitled: “The Jeweler’s Shop. A Meditation on the Sacrament of Matrimony, Passing on Occasion into a Drama,”¹¹ in which he expressed the same content in poetic language.

In the following years, the theme of love and marriage returned many more times in Wojtyła’s works and teaching. It is necessary to point out such publications as: “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics. Reflections and Postulates”¹² (1965), and “On the Meaning of Spousal Love (On the Margin of Discussion)”¹³ (1974), which was written in reference to the discussion that took place on the margins of his study *Love and Responsibility* between Karol Meissner OSB and Andrzej Szostek MIC. Other noteworthy publications include: “The Family

³ K. Wojtyła, “Instynkt, miłość, małżeństwo,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 42 (1952), 1-2, 11; reprinted in: K. Wojtyła, „*Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał*”, ed. J. Hennełowa, (Kraków, Wydawnictwo Znak, 1979), 36-50.

⁴ K. Wojtyła, “Religijne przeżywanie czystości,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 6 (1953), 1-2; reprinted in: K. Wojtyła, „*Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał*”, 51-60.

⁵ K. Wojtyła, “Myśli o małżeństwie,” *Znak* 42 (1957), 595-604; reprinted in: K. Wojtyła, „*Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał*”, 414-424.

⁶ K. Wojtyła, “Propedeutyka sakramentu małżeństwa,” *Ateneum Kapłańskie* Vol. 56, No. 1 (1958), 20-33.

⁷ K. Wojtyła, “Wychowanie miłości,” *Tygodnik Powszechny* 21 (1960), 1; reprinted in: K. Wojtyła, „*Aby Chrystus się nami posługiwał*”, 88-92.

⁸ AKMKr, AKKW CII-10/113; AKMKr, AKKW CII-10/113b.

⁹ AKMKr, AKKW CII-10/114; AKMKr, AKKW CII-10/114a.

¹⁰ AKMKr, AKKW CII-10/114.

¹¹ A. Jawień [= K. Wojtyła], “Przed sklepem jubilera. Medytacja o sakramencie małżeństwa przechodząca chwilami w dramat,” *Znak* 12 (1960), 1564-1607; English transl.: K. Wojtyła, *The Jeweler’s Shop. A Meditation on the Sacrament of matrimony, Passing an Occasion into a Drama*, transl. by B. Taborski (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 1992).

¹² K. Wojtyła, “Zagadnienie katolickiej etyki seksualnej. Refleksje i postulaty,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* Vol. 13, No. 2 (1965), 5-25; English transl.: K. Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics. Reflections and Postulates,” in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Community. Selected Essays*, transl. by T. Sandok (New York [etc.], Peter Lang, 1994), 279-299.

¹³ K. Wojtyła, “O znaczeniu miłości oblubieńczej (Na marginesie dyskusji),” *Roczniki Filozoficzne*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (1974), 162-164.

as a ‘Communio Personarum’. An Attempt at Theological Interpretation”¹⁴ (1974) and “Parenthood a ‘Communio Personarum’”¹⁵ (1975). As for the period of the pontificate, during which this topic was by no means forgotten, we should mention above all the Wednesday catechesis entitled: *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*¹⁶ (1979-1984), *Letter to Families*¹⁷ (1994) and *A Meditation on Givenness*¹⁸ (1994/2006), which should be regarded as a development of the theme.

Letters to Teresa Życzkowska (née Heydel)

An example of Wojtyła’s actual use of pastoral experience as an inspiration and source for reflection on love and marriage are two letters he wrote to Teresa Życzkowska (née Heydel; 1931-2023), most probably in December 1956 and January 1957. These letters were a continuation and completion of the conversations she had with Wojtyła after 1952, when, as a twenty-one-year-old student, she listened to retreats preached by him and later became a participant in the so-called “Środowisko” [“Environment”] – a special academic pastoral care led by Wojtyła.¹⁹ It is also worth mentioning that, on December 10, 1956, Wojtyła led an Advent day of recollection for young people, while on December 16, 1956, he led a day of recollection for engaged couples, the topic of which was the religious side of marriage.²⁰ It is possible that it was the reflections of these days that gave the impetus to write the letters cited above.

A related correspondence was included by the addressee in her memoirs of her meeting with Wojtyła,²¹ written in 1994 and also made available to George Weigel, who, with her

¹⁴ K. Wojtyła, “Rodzina jako ‘communio personarum’. Próba interpretacji teologicznej,” *Ateneum Kapłańskie* Vol. 83, No. 3 (1974), 347-361; English transl.: K. Wojtyła, “The Family as a Community of Person,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 315-327.

¹⁵ K. Wojtyła, “Rodzicielstwo a ‘communio personarum’,” *Ateneum Kapłańskie* Vol. 84, No. 1 (1975), 17-31; English transl.: K. Wojtyła, “Parenthood as a Community of Person,” in Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 329-342.

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, transl. by M. Waldstein, (Boston, Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, Vatican transl. (Boston, St. Paul Books & Media, 1994).

¹⁸ John Paul II, “Medytacja na temat «bezinteresownego daru»,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* Vol. 98, No. 8 (2006), 628-638; English transl.: John Paul II, „A Meditation on Givenness,” *Communio* Vol. 41 (2014), 871-883, transl. by M. Mac-Kinnon. This meditation was originally signed on 8 February 1994 (six days after Pope John Paul II signed *Letter to Families*), but was not printed until 2006.

¹⁹ See: T. Życzkowska, “Od Beskidów i Bieszczad do Watykanu,” in: *Zapis drogi. Wspomnienia o nieznanym duszpasterstwie księdza Karola Wojtyły*, (ed. 2nd, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Św. Stanisława BM Archidiecezji Krakowskiej), 319-327.

The term “Environment” is used to describe the saucers gathered around Wojtyła, mainly students, who in 1952-1978 had him as their pastor and participated in various joint outings (trips to the mountains, canoeing). Wojtyła was “Wujek” [“Uncle”] to them and maintained lively contacts even during his pontificate.

²⁰ See: A. Boniecki, *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły*, (ed. 2nd, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Znak, 2000), 128.

²¹ Życzkowska, “Od Beskidów i Bieszczad do Watykanu,” 323.

permission, published it in his famous biography of Pope John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*, in 1999.²²

The subject of the letters that Życzkowska, then still Heydel, received was the nature of love. These were not superficial thoughts or hermetic academic deductions handed down to a student by a master, but an invitation to think together. In his second letter, Wojtyła wrote directly, “Dear Teresa! [...] I have to tell you a few things (think together with you).”²³ Wojtyła did not so much want to convey his specific “prescriptions” for love as to enter into a dialogue that would lead to bringing the problem closer, looking at it together. The spiritual director led and was at the same time an attentive listener to the students, sensitive to their life questions, plans, and choices.

In the letter, dated December 1956, Wojtyła began by pointing out the false impression of him held by the male and female students in his pastoral care who thought he was aiming only to lead them into marriage.²⁴ He then stressed that his aim was something else. He wrote:

Everyone [...] lives, above all, for love. The ability to love authentically, not great intellectual capacity, constitutes the deepest part of a personality. It is no accident that the greatest commandment is to love. Authentic love leads us outside ourselves to affirming others: devoting oneself to the cause of man, to people, and, above all, to God. Marriage makes sense [...] if it gives one the opportunity for such love, if it evokes the ability and necessity of such loving, if it draws one out of the shell of individualism (various kinds) and egocentrism. It is not enough simply to want to accept such love. One must know how to give it, and it's often not ready to be received. Many times it's necessary to help it to be formed.²⁵

It is this problem of “forming” love that Wojtyła’s letter is aiming at. This is because he noticed that it was precisely here that his students faced difficulty. In the following letter, he subjects this problem to closer scrutiny, pointing out several questions for consideration:

²² G. Weigel, *Witness to Hope. The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, (New York, Cliff Street Books – HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 101-102.

²³ *Ibid.*, 101.

²⁴ See: *Ibid.*, 101: “People like to think that Wujek would like to see everyone married. But I think this is a false picture.”

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

1) I don't want you ever to think this way: that life forces me to move away from the perspective of something that is better, riper, fuller, to something that is less good, less mature, less attractive. I am convinced that life is a constant development toward that which is better, more perfect—if there is no stagnation within us. 2) After many experiences and a lot of thinking, I am convinced that the (objective) starting point of love is the realization that I am needed by another. The person who objectively needs me most is also, for me, objectively, the person I most need. This is a fragment of life's deep logic, and also a fragment of trusting in the Creator and in Providence. 3) People's values are different and they come in different configurations. The great achievement is always to see values that others don't see and to affirm them. The even greater achievement is to bring out of people the values that would perish without us. In the same way, we bring our values out in ourselves. 4) This is what I wanted to write you. Don't ever think that I want to cut short your way. I want your way.²⁶

The thoughts evoked can be distilled to several theses that are worth examining in more detail. First: the ability to love constitutes personality. Next: the point of departure of love is the consciousness that "I am needed." And finally: love requires formation, education.

The ability to love constitutes personality

Commenting on the letters to Heydel, George Weigel has stated that, for Wojtyła, love was "the truth at the very center of the human condition, and love always meant self-giving, not self-assertion."²⁷ Indeed, Wojtyła noted that it is impossible to separate the person from love. And this is the fundamental thesis: love is personal, and therefore involves the world of people and God. The ability to love is in the very essence of being a person. A cat, a flower, or a stone by its nature is not capable of love. Only a person is, in his potentiality, capable of love – love that is always a gift of self (self-giving), not a selfish defense of one's rights (self-assertion)²⁸. Love,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 101; see: *LR*, 96-99.

²⁸ See: John Paul II, *A Meditation on Givenness*, 875: "Man is drawn up into the mystery of God by the fact that his freedom is subjected to the law of love, and love creates interpersonal communion. [...] God, man's Creator, is not only the omnipotent Lord of all that exists, but is also a God of communion. This communion is where that special likeness between man and God is played out. Through man, this likeness should radiate out to all of creation so that it becomes the "cosmos"—man's communion with all that is created and creation's communion with man. St. Francis of Assisi is one such figure in whom the truth about the communion of creatures found a special expression. The right and fitting place for communion, however, is first and foremost man—man and woman whom God has called from the beginning to be a sincere gift of self for one another."

therefore, must consist of some kind of stepping out of oneself, of transcending one's own selfishness, of revealing oneself to another person. It is risk-taking, because my love can be accepted, but it can also be rejected, betrayed, exploited. By stepping out of myself, I show the other person myself, reveal myself to him in my talents and weaknesses, and receive a positive or negative response, which only the other person can give. The aforementioned cat, flower, or stone – unlike a person – cannot respond to my love.

Significantly, Wojtyła stressed that love is a more important aspect of man's personality than even his intellect. Love is an action that goes outward, to another person and to God. The intellect allows this potential movement to be systematized, thoroughly considered, but the actual affirmation of the other person requires the fulfillment of an act, which is precisely personal love. Of course, what is meant here is "authentic love" – I.e. love as relating in act of will to the other in such a manner as to treat the other as end/good in him/her self – and not any false substitutes for it that are actually various forms of selfishness practiced under the banner of love. Only this authentic view of love precludes using the other, in negative terms. Love, as a choice for the good of the other is a rational act. It is a will that is a rational appetite/desire (see: *LR*, 80-82).²⁹ Accordingly, love is more important to man's personality than intellect in the sense that intellect is a necessary condition for love and that it is ordered toward a higher and more profound act in and through the person. Therefore, when speaking of love, there is no need to add "personal," since authentic love cannot be otherwise.

The beginning point of love is the consciousness that "I am needed"

Wojtyła, claiming that the starting point of love is the awareness of "I am needed," by no means points to a purely utilitarian aspect. On the contrary, he demands that love remain at the personal level and in no way be subject to objectification. There is a danger of objectification, since in an interpersonal relationship both the one "who acts" (the subject) and the one "to whom the action is addressed" (the object) is a human being – a person, a woman or a man. To reduce to an object and "use" by "x" some "y" (or vice versa) denies authentic love.

Wojtyła's insights into the nature of love through his attention to the phenomenon of "being needed" can be considered in at least two dimensions.

First, if person "x" asserts the love of "y" ("x" affirms "y") it means that "x" needs the love of "y" ("x" needs affirmation from "y"). At the same time, it is important for person "x"

²⁹ See: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a-II^{ae}, q. 6, a. 2, ad 2: "voluntas nominat rationalem appetitum."

not only to know (realize) that he is loved by “y,” but also that he is needed by “y” (i.e., that “x” needs the love of “y”; “x” needs to affirm “y”). Here we touch on the reciprocal nature of love (see: *LR*, 84-88). Love is always about the person, and not about his particular – aesthetic or pragmatic – qualitative emolument (e.g., a beautiful body or practical skills). To be sure, these emoluments can provide a point for getting to know each other. For example, “x” notices “y” because he sees this or that qualitative attribute in him. But in turning to love, one cannot stop at this value separate from the person. Authentic love is always about the whole person, not just some valuable quality of the person.

Second, and this is shown forcefully in Christian doctrine, the need for love goes back to the very mystery of one’s own existence. If love means the mutual “being needed” of person “x” and person “y,” then it can be thought that this is inscribed in the nature of the person, which logically points to God, who first loved man with this love. And man, by loving the other person, does “justice toward the Creator” (see: *LR*, 209-261).

Love needs to be formed

The above-mentioned image of love may seem idealized and thus even unrealistic or at least difficult to realize. Wojtyła was aware of this. He wrote that the culture of the person in married life requires not only formation, but even heroism, to be faithful to that “inner logic of love” of which he wrote in *Love and Responsibility* (*LR*, 230)³⁰ – or, generally speaking, a “life’s deep logic,” as he expressed himself in a letter to Życzkowska.

Wojtyła emphasizes that “x”—“y” love does not appear as a ready-made “product.” Infatuation is not immediately pure betrothed love. It requires work, which in almost every case proceeds somewhat differently. Even if “y” is ready to receive the love of “x,” this “x” must know how to offer this love (and vice versa). Love, Wojtyła wrote, “is often not ready to be received. Many times it’s necessary to help it to be formed.”³¹ This involves seeing values and affirming them, especially seeing values that others do not see. And, even more so, it involves bringing out values that, without the other person’s help, perhaps would never manifest themselves. Thus, we bring out the values in ourselves.

³⁰ It is worth noting that the very concept of “the inner logic of love” was added by Wojtyła only in the second revised and supplemented edition of his 1962 study *Love and Responsibility*.

³¹ G. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 101.

Wojtyła here refers to St. Thomas Aquinas and his concept of the human act, which is always realized in a double profile: *transiens* and *immanens*.³² The former objectifies itself in some external product, while the latter remains in the subject, constituting its intrinsic value, its own culture of the person. Thus, if “x” helps “y,” he also helps himself. What is key is that when the person loves the person, the act is good in the sense that it is good for the other, but it is also good in the sense that it is good for the agent as ordered toward fulfilling the need of the other and as forming the virtuous disposition of friendship, justice, and so on, in the agent.

However, it should be remembered that the specificity of human action (praxis) includes not only “factuality” (“x” does this or that), but also “duty” (“x” should act in a certain way). For Wojtyła – unlike for I. Kant – this duty was the personal element of the act and morality, and thus a call to fulfill oneself, to be a person to the measure of the person. It is therefore a norm of conduct, in contrast to Kant, for whom it was only a postulate of the norm, as reason (according to Kant) could not arrive at the essence of good and evil. Wojtyła therefore emphasized the distinction between being good or bad *in some respect* (lat. *secundum quid*) – e.g., a good engineer, doctor, painter – and the ethical qualification of being good or bad *as a person* (lat. *simpliciter*). Applying this distinction to love, it was obvious to Wojtyła that “x” cannot love “y” solely in some respect, e.g., because of “y’s” beautiful body and sexual attractiveness, in which case love becomes a de facto use of “y” (at least potentially). For love to be really personal, it must be a desire for the good of the whole of that person.

The man – let us repeat, citing Wojtyła’s philosophical magnum opus entitled *Person and Act* –

being the agent of the act, [...] at the same time fulfills himself in it. He fulfills, that is, he realizes or, in a sense, brings to proper fullness the structure that is characteristic of him on account of his personhood, on account of the fact that he is somebody and not merely something. It is the structure of self-governance and self-possession.³³

And this is resolved in morality: “Man as a person is somebody, and as somebody he is good or evil”³⁴, as “human acts remain in man thanks to moral values, which are the objective reality

³² See: St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I^a, q. 5; K. Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture Through Human Praxis,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community*, 266.

³³ K. Wojtyła, “Person and Act,” [in:] K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, transl. by G. Ignatik, (Washington, CUA Press, 2021), 253.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 254.

most closely coherent with the person.”³⁵ While it is theoretically possible to “exclude before the parenthesis” moral reality, as Wojtyła stressed, “morality [...] always remains closely connected with man as a person.”³⁶ This applies in a special way to love.

Conclusions

Karol Wojtyła approached love with great sensitivity. It seems that he was looking for the right language to express the mystery we call love. Emphasizing the importance of the objective awareness that “I am in need” of the other person, yet not as an “object of use,” but precisely as a “person,” allows us to see love as a value that allows a person to truly be a person. The analysis of the act and its profiles points to the reciprocity of the interpersonal relationship and the actual gratuitousness of love, which is formed and realized exactly in reciprocity. In a broader perspective, the problem of love in Karol Wojtyła’s thought must be analyzed more largely, taking into account the thought of St. Thomas and St. Augustine. This article is an introductory treatment of the topic and an invitation to further and deeper analysis and discussion on the subject of love.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

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