

**BOOK REVIEW: Francisco, Rolyn. *Karol Wojtyła's Acting Person: In Philippine Contexts*. Manila: Claretian Publication, 2025. 416 pp.**

**ISBN 9786214262359**

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Fr. Rolyn Francisco is known for his commitments to both academic scholarship and pastoral ministry. With a master's degree in philosophy from Ateneo de Manila University and a Doctorate in Public Administration and Governance from UP-NCPAG, he has taught philosophy for many years while actively ministering in marginalized communities in Manila. This present work thus appears as a sort of synthesis of these two dimensions of his vocation, bringing Wojtyła's personalism into conversation with concrete Philippine contexts.

Such an endeavour is laudable, at least in principle. Contextualizing Wojtyła's philosophical anthropology is a timely task, especially in areas of the world where personalism has yet to be deeply integrated into the theological or philosophical discourse. Despite this promising claim, however, the present work regrettably falls short of contemporary scholarly standards for studies on the thought of Karol Wojtyła for several substantive reasons.

The first and most obvious concern is that the book relies heavily on an outdated English translation of Wojtyła's works. This is evident in the book's title, which indicates that it is based on the 1979 English version of *Osoba i czyn*, translated by Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka. This work has received criticism from both scholars and Wojtyła himself for its numerous unauthorized editorial interventions and inconsistent translations, which weaken the metaphysical underpinnings of the entire work.<sup>2</sup> This is why, in 2021, the Catholic University of America Press published the *English Critical Edition of Person and Act*, edited by Carl A. Anderson, et al., and

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<sup>2</sup> G. Ignatik, preface to K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, vol. 1, *The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła / John Paul II*, trans. by G. Ignatik, eds. Carl A. Anderson, et al. (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), xxviii-xxx.

translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. This critical edition was the result of years of philological and philosophical labour intended to address the issues inherent in the earlier translation.

Thus, it is methodologically deficient that a new work should use the outdated and inaccurate translation without taking into consideration or even acknowledging the existence of the new translation, while continuing to perpetrate the same intellectual confusion that the critical edition attempted to eliminate. The same reasoning holds true for the continued use of the older 1981 edition of *Love and Responsibility*, translated by H.T. Willetts, not the updated 2013 translation, also by Grzegorz Ignatik.

The second problem concerns the originality and structure of this work. The content of the book is exactly the same as Fr. Francisco's previous two works: *Karol Wojtyła's (John Paul II) Theory of Participation Based on His Christian Personalism* (1995) and *Empowering the Poor with A Quadripartite Housing Approach: A Personal Odyssey* (2012). While re-addressing one's previous works is not wrong *per se*, a new work published over 30 years later is expected to include new scholarship, updated interpretation, and expanded engagement with recent studies. The complete replication of previous works without any development whatsoever sends a message of stagnation instead of progress in research.

In addition, the author's critical assessment of Wojtyła is misleading. In the "Critical Remarks" section, the author claims that Wojtyła fails to explain the origin of moral norms. This outrageous claim is untenable given how thoroughly Wojtyła treats the truth about the good as the normative basis for moral qualification in *Person and Act* and that states the ultimate source of the norms is God as seen in his other works.<sup>3</sup> Wojtyła consistently maintains that norms are not external or imposed on the person, but spring from the person's transcendence in truth and their intrinsic relationship with freedom and objective good. Thus, this assertion shows insufficient textual analysis, further exacerbated by the dependence on minimal sources, especially on the primary section.

Alongside these scholarly concerns, the "Application" section of the book contains no engagement with Wojtyła's texts at all. It contains pastoral reflections and experiences with parish ministry, but it lacks any meaningful connection to Wojtyła's framework or attempt to engage with it. Pastoral reflection is beneficial in and of itself, but it requires careful conceptual mediation for incorporation into a philosophical monograph. Without ongoing engagement with Wojtyła's

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<sup>3</sup> K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act*, 241-241.

works, this section is more of a personal testimony than a proper application of the philosopher's text to concrete situations. As such, the second half of the book is a description of personal ministry and is not demonstrative of Wojtyła's philosophy in any shape or form.

Finally, there are numerous editorial and production deficiencies in this book, such as spelling errors, uneven printing, and inconsistent use of formatting, thus negatively affecting the scholarly presentation of the book. Though many of these deficits reflect poor publishing decisions rather than poor authorship, they nonetheless impact the reception of the work, whose credibility depends partly on the degree of precision and care reflected in the presentation.

It must be acknowledged that there is a positive, commendable pastoral/cultural effort on the part of the author to try to situate the thought of Karol Wojtyła in the cultural context of the Philippines. It is certainly worth showing how personalism is relevant to the life of the local community. However, this cannot contribute meaningfully to the advancement of scholarship unless contextualization is based on textual fidelity and engagement with recent scholarly works.

In conclusion, *Karol Wojtyła's Acting Person: In Philippine Contexts* could serve readers looking for an introduction/pastoral approach to themes developed by Wojtyła. However, from a scholarly perspective, it fails to add any meaningful contribution to the discussion on personalism or Karol Wojtyła's philosophy. Its dependence on outdated translations, lack of engagement with the *English Critical Edition* of *Person and Act*, absence of recent secondary scholarship, and structural drift from sustained textual analysis cause this particular work to fail to meet current academic standards.

Scholars who wish to engage with the thought of Karol Wojtyła should pay close attention to developments in current scholarship, such as new translations of primary texts. One hopes that future works in this area will expand on the state of existing research or refer to it critically. Only then can the original author's work be responsibly appropriated in specific contexts and contribute meaningfully to the philosophical discourse.