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Solutions to the Anthropological Mistake

Introduction

The anthropological mistake, its sources, and its consequences are one of the great themes found throughout Karol Wojtyła's anthropology. Throughout the entirety of Wojtyła's written works, one can find references to incorrect and dangerous views regarding the nature of man, and critiques of these erroneous ideologies. This is the central theme of two articles I have previously published in this journal. After having done so, the question arises as to how one would go about providing a solution to the anthropological mistake. This article serves to do just that. Karol Wojtyła was not strictly a critic, he was not a man who, falling into Thrasymachus' complaint,¹ would only provide his detrimental opinion while not also providing a solution. The solution to the anthropological mistake is a proper anthropology, an anthropology identified by Wojtyła as the integral anthropology of man. This recognition of the

¹ Towards the end of the first book of Plato's *Republic*, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of being a contrarian who doesn't provide a positive argument of what "the just" is. 336b–d.

source of the answer to the anthropological mistake begins to hint at the proper construction of ethics, economy, and politics that would present a proper analogy of the human person. According to the thought of Wojtyła, this correct anthropological system rests on a proper conception of the human person, a person who first and foremost is both an end of ethics and politics as well as an acting being. This steers the correct anthropology of man away from any a priori conception of metaphysical anthropology, and as such thoroughly rejects monism, dualism, materialism, spiritualism, and any other conception of man that would see man's nature as pre-determined and/or outside of the person. Proposing this, Wojtyła steeped his personalism in the thought of both Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, insuring that his conception of man had a significant investment with regards to the experience, action, and reflection of the human person. As such, when determining the correct anthropology of man, one must delve into man as a person, the features of the personal being, and human transcendence over nature and society. This correct anthropology being itself the solution to the anthropological mistake.

Man as a Person

The most important aspect of the anthropology of Karol Wojtyła is the establishment of man as a person. This alone places Wojtyła's anthropology in direct conflict with any concept identified as being an anthropological mistake, but simultaneously must be delved into with greater detail. What exactly constitutes this "person" and what exactly does Wojtyła mean in the use of this concept? In order to truly understand Wojtyła's anthropology, one must understand man as a person and investigate the general aspects of the person, his development, and his ends. This thus places Wojtyła's anthropology in conflict with many alternative anthropological systems. Through a focus on man as a person, Wojtyła makes man inde-

pendent and active. Man's nature does not rest on an external ideology, and the recognition of that nature does not require an ideological system to be identified. Man as a person, in a way, is a synthesis of the great tradition of Catholic Thomistic metaphysics and phenomenological conceptions of experience.

The history of the concept of the person no doubt had an influence on the thought of Wojtyła. Himself being part of the Catholic University of Lublin ensured that Wojtyła would have a dose of classical Aristotelian/Thomistic metaphysics in his anthropology. With this one can see the development of the concept of the person and its effect on the person of Wojtyła's thought. Beginning with Aristotle, there is the development of the person as simply the living being, the animal product of nature. With this man is constituted with a body and soul, but the soul is seen as the potentiality that is found in all living matter. As such, the intellectual element did not come from within the person but from an external concept common to all living matter. Consequently, the soul is seen as being closely connected to this same living matter and suffered destruction with the death of the individual.² Thus, what man is, is connected very closely to volition and the subsequent actions that emerge from this volition, but is not independent from "living matter," with man's nature being supremely dependent on his physicality as well. This Aristotelian influence also insured that Wojtyła's thought would present man as a living being and that life and the body would be central to the content of the person. The thought of Thomas Aquinas is an additional influence on the thought of Wojtyła, with Aquinas' conception of the person surrounding Wojtyła during his studies and academic upbringing. With this, Aquinas presented the person as having both a soul and a body, with the soul being the organizing principle of existence behind the totality of a person, entailing that every person, "was unrepeatable and separate, and the acceptance of a

² In the Aristotelian conception the soul is destroyed with the death and decay of the body.

certain mystery hidden in the world and in individual things.”³ With this mystery being how the soul is, “the first and autonomous act of man’s existence.”⁴ As such, while Aquinas does focus on the substance of the spiritual being of man, without action to actualize man, man’s soul is an incomplete substance, with the existence of man’s being resting on the action of the person and this action’s relationship with the soul.

Wojtyła’s conception of the person reflects the historical conception of the person that was handed to this philosopher, but Wojtyła took the concept of the person and created new areas of analysis that allowed him to add additional ideas to the classical conceptions that were given to him. The Thomistic influence is the most profound, particularly with regards to Wojtyła’s focus on the actualization of the person made manifest in an individual person’s actions and the subsequent identity of man that emerges in such a situation. This situation leading to the actualization of man generally in the mind of Wojtyła and allowing, “consciousness (especially self-consciousness) and freedom”⁵ in the individual person. Additionally, Wojtyła established this acting and the actualization thereof as ultimately being the essence of what constitutes the person. This is the case when he claimed,

action gives us the best insight into the inherent essence of the person and allows us to understand the person most fully. We experience man as a person, and we are convinced of it because he performs actions.⁶

³ Andrzej Maryniarczyk, *The Realistic Interpretation of Reality*. Translated by Hugh McDonald. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2015. p. 110.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 117.

⁵ Karol Wojtyła, *Considerations on the Essence of Man*. Translated by John Grondelski. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2016. p. 157.

⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979. p. 11.

This act actualized person is also conceived by Wojtyła as being inherently valuable, valuable in that,

a person is an individual of a rational nature – or an individual of whose nature reason is a property – makes the person the only subject of its kind in the whole world of entities.⁷

Thus man, through his actualization in action, becomes a uniquely valuable entity in the world.

The aspects and sources of the unique value of man are not restricted to the moment of act and actualization. Coupled with this is a secondary conception in the anthropology of Karol Wojtyła that sees man as an autonomous subject whose source of autonomy comes from free and rational action. Thus, it is not strictly action as action that provides the basis for man's actualization and by extension his value, but rather free and rational action, something which is unique to the experience of man. This conception reflects the conception of man provided by Boethius, particularly Boethius' definition of a person as a *rationalis naturae individua substantia* with substance being understood as a subject which exists in itself and is the source of rational and free action. This is where one finds the source of the aforementioned claim by Wojtyła that action is, in man, before it is even the agent of actualization, both free and rational. This free and rational action specially allows man to be both realized and actualized, thus providing a basis for his value. With this, free and reasonable action becomes the, "ontic property of person and his freedom."⁸

From this, one can understand Wojtyła's idea that man's subjectivity and essence are somewhat hidden. It is made apparent that through action, but particularly through the,

⁷ Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by H.T. Willetts. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993. p. 22.

⁸ Andrew Woznicki, *The Dignity of Man as a Person*. San Francisco: Society of Christ, 1987. p. 146.

“*action of the person*,”⁹ the so-called *actus humanus* is found. But this *actus humanus* must be both free and rational. Without this, the aforementioned value is lost with man’s hidden nature thus becoming unidentifiable as well. This is because free and rational action is unique to man, with any other kind of action being common to other entities in the world. To truly find the value and subjectivity of man, one must identify and experience the uniquely free and rational acts which man undertakes, with these acts exposing a significant part of his subjectivity, essence, and self-actualization. Now these actions work with reference to both the individual life and the social life of the human person. This is obvious, as subjectivity, essence, and self-actualization can be made both in reference to the self, as well as to the community of men that surrounds the self. Simply put, man can act freely and rationally towards himself as well as freely and rationally towards others.

It then becomes apparent what Wojtyła means when he claims that man is a person. Wojtyła establishes man as a person, but this personhood rests on several specific aspects. It should be noted that these aspects are found within man, and by extension have a relationship with man. This therefore protects Wojtyła’s metaphysical anthropology from any kind of monism, while simultaneously protecting it from any errors found in claiming that there are a-priori aspects of man that are found outside of the person. This reflects Wojtyła’s general idea that man is a rationally acting creature. It is not strictly the identification of certain aspects that provide a total and correct view of man, but rather is both the identification of aspects and the identification of the relationships of these aspects with the person and one another that create a total and correct anthropological view.

⁹ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979. p. 197.

The Features of a Personal Being

After having established Wojtyła's concept of man as a person, one must identify the features that Wojtyła attributed to this personal being. Wojtyła used some features of the person which are found in the anthropology of Thomas Aquinas and Mieczysław Krapiec, but with these ideas he added his own features which helped him further describe the specificity of the nature of the person. These features can be divided into two groups, one group presenting the person as a being, with the second group presenting the relation of the person to society. This ultimately shows how Wojtyła's anthropology is not restricted to the individual in isolation. Reflecting Wojtyła's general inclination towards actions and relations, here one sees that the aspects of the human personal being are based on actions and relations, never in an individualist vacuum. As such, how man and his features act with regards to his nature, his other features, and other men, help describe his very nature and features in themselves.

FEATURES OF THE PERSON AS A BEING

First one must discuss the features of the person as a being and how they present the specificity of a person. The first and most obvious is man's ability to rationally cognize himself and the world around him. This rational cognition is expressed by language, culture, science, ethics, politics, economy, art, literature, and religion. From this the person manifests himself as a rational subject and through the creation of these cognized systems, expresses their very rationality. For rationality is required in the creation of and participation in such cognized systems in that they require the cognition of ends outside those of a more base "nature." Without rationality, at most a being can create systems that reflect a particular, material purpose, and not the aforementioned rationally invested systems that both reflect their indebted reason and the subsequent rational nature of the

personal being.¹⁰ Thus, “The “human fact,” symbolized by the expression “rational animal” attains its characteristic expression by calling attention to those traits which most differentiate man from the whole ensemble of nature.”¹¹ Rationality, and rational cognition, can then be seen as both the basis of separating man from “nature” in a transcendent way and as an inseparable feature of the personal being of man.

Connected to this rational cognition of man’s transcendent nature is man’s ability to love. Essentially, the ability to love, particularly in the mind of Wojtyła, is not identified with desire, but rather with the possibility of making sacrifices for the benefit of another person. This ability to sacrificially love is connected to the cognition of the other person as an honest good. This subsequently means that this other person is an end for our action, not the means for achieving alien ends, with proper love between persons being, “a love which is directed to a genuine (not merely apparent) good in the true way, or in other words the way appropriate to the nature of that good.”¹² Thus, an inherent feature of man is his orientation towards this, “beautiful and pure love.”¹³

Moving from the ability to love, one must discuss man’s ability to be free. This ability to be free promotes the person as a being in that it is the source of man’s rational and free decision. This decisive act is connected with the ability to identify the nature of the good and an individual person’s ability to orient their action towards the good. While being similar to the afore-

¹⁰ This is the difference between a city and an ant hive. The city reflects the rational cognition of personal beings, thus being built in relation to cognized *transcendent* needs and functions while the ant hive is constructed strictly and instinctually to serve the physical needs of an ant colony.

¹¹ Mieczysław Krapiec, *I-Man: An Outline of Philosophical Anthropology*. Translated by Marie Lescoe, Andrew Woznicki, Theresa Sandok, et al. New Britain: Mariel Publications, 1983. p. 33.

¹² Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*. Translated by H.T. Willetts. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993. pp. 82–83. This good is of course the other person.

¹³ John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Translated by Jenny McPhee and Martha McPhee. New York: Borzoi, 1994. p.123.

mentioned love, this feature of man rather rests more in man's ability to decide, with this act of decision being the grounds from which orientation towards good can emerge. For without this freedom, man is not truly orienting himself towards certain goals through action, but rather following an a-priori determinism that at best is part of his lower nature or at worst makes man the plaything of external forces.

Man's free orientation towards the good naturally suggests man's ability to be religious. Now Wojtyła claims that this is a subsection of man's ability to be free, in that orientation towards the good necessitates orientation towards the highest good, that being God. This thus establishes man as being naturally religious (*homo religiosus*) and makes man's ability to be religious fundamental to the person as a being.

To these classical features of the personal being, which Wojtyła did present in his anthropology, Wojtyła adds three additional and important features, with these features extrapolating upon the dynamic nature of the person. Wojtyła listed these additional features of the personal being as being the ability to self-possess, self-control, and self-determine.

With regards to self-possession, Wojtyła identifies the importance of the fact that the personal being is the object of itself. The individual self is not something that is possessed or directly controlled by another subject, but rather through the dynamism of the personal being, the individual self is both the subject and the object of itself, thus giving the personal being a sense of self-possession. Additionally, for Wojtyła, the human being is the author of his own personality, this personality thus emerging from the self, with the person being a subject which decides the face and facets of his own personality. As such, "acting is strictly connected with the responsibility for the subject himself, namely, for the value that in the course of acting is formed in the subject, in the concrete ego."¹⁴

¹⁴ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979. p. 171.

From this stance of self-possession, Wojtyła presents his second original feature as being the personal being's ability to control the self. As such man is able to reflect upon his action and judge the value of actions undertaken, actions being taken, and actions that will be taken. This is connected to a person's conscience, and the internal process of self-reflection. Any aspect which determines the amount or method of control or action necessitates an internal judgment as to how this will be undertaken. As such, the conscience of an individual becomes, in Wojtyła's mind, the basis for self-control. For Wojtyła, this conscience is the "sanctuary of the person" and shows that through a person's very reflection upon their actions, man's personal being has control of and determines the nature of itself, with it revealing "a picture of man as the sovereignly existing "personal I."¹⁵

Finally, Wojtyła lists self-determination as his third original feature of the person as being. This is closely connected to the reflecting feature previously mentioned, but rests more so on the moment of decision. Self-determination is understood by Wojtyła as closely related to the autonomy of the human being, with this self-determination meaning that the personal being is the author of himself. This rests on human freedom and man's personal action shows how man is neither a pre-determined being or an undetermined being, but rather an autodetermined being who determines the self. This is made apparent in the fact that self-determination establishes, "the transcendent backbone of the human person."¹⁶

The features of the personal being presented by Karol Wojtyła show the specific nature of the human person. Man is a being and acts, reflects, and rules upon the self. These features

¹⁵ Andrzej Maryniarczyk, *The Realistic Interpretation of Reality*. Translated by Hugh McDonald. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2015. p. 125.

¹⁶ Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*. Translated by Andrzej Potocki. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979. p. 194.

should properly be actualized by the personal being itself, the human person, and the society in which one lives in. It could be argued that when this is not the case, anthropological mistakes emerge and deny one or many of the features of a person's personal being. It should be noted that Wojtyła does not restrict the features of a person to only the features of his personal being. Man is not a solitary creature, and the society in which he lives provides an environment in which other features of the person emerge and can be made manifest. The following section presents these social features.

FEATURES OF THE PERSON
IN SOCIETY

The human being is primarily a social creature who is open to relations with other persons. As such, man requires society as an environment for not only his life, but also for the actualization of his personal potentiality. But it should be remembered that society is only the environment from which man actualizes himself, it is not the actualization itself and should never subordinate a man's personal being. Society plays an auxiliary role in that it helps the person in actualizing themselves but does not control or own the person. This situation begins to hint at the features of a person and their relationship with the society that surrounds them. These features being dignity, completeness, and the subjectivity of law.

Human dignity is the feature of paramount importance to the person and his relationship to other people and societies. It should be noted that there are theological, sociological, and philosophical understandings of the dignity of man. The theological understanding of the dignity of man means that man is a dignified being in that he is created by God as a child of God and made in the image of God. As such, man's dignity finds its origin in the way in which God created and sustains mankind. The sociological understanding of dignity presents the dignity of man as being found in how the personhood of man requires

work, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. His social dignity thus rests on rights and the relationship of the person to and in a society. This form of dignity is used within the wide concepts found in ideas regarding the rights of man and the social contract. The philosophical understanding of dignity presents the dignity of man as resting on how a person stands in the hierarchy of beings at the highest level. This means that the person should be the ends of the whole of community, society, and even the world of things, and never be the means. This is the basic understanding of human dignity on the philosophical level and plays a significant role in the anthropology of Karol Wojtyła, particularly the anthropology found in the early parts of *Love and Responsibility*.

Building from the features of human dignity is the concept of human completeness. In this man is seen as a total being, one who lacks nothing in his identity and as such should be treated as a holistic being. Society and other agents should not look to add or attempt to bring to the personal being something that will increase their “humanity,” in that this humanity already is complete and has nothing that can be added or modified to his nature. All the things that make man a person already exist within man, with extreme cases still having all aspects of the totality of the person existing in potentiality.¹⁷ Therefore, the human being needs these external social agents only in an auxiliary position, for when they are above a personal being, societies and other people will tend to erroneously attempt to change, modify, or add to the “humanity” of the person, with this being impossible in and of itself. This attempt to modify the nature of the personal being is a fool’s errand that only leads to anthropological mistakes.

The last feature of a person in society is also perhaps the most practical. This is the subjectivity of the law before the person. This means that the end of the law should be the goodness

¹⁷ These extremes being those people who have certain extreme illnesses, whether they be physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual.

and the promotion of the human person. The practical object of law is therefore also the good of the human person. This leads to a situation where that to be a subject of the law necessitates man being a rational being. If man is seen as not being a rational being, man cannot be both the subject and object of law. Therefore, all law which is constructed by society cannot be against man as man. With this, law can be made against man as a criminal, man as a thief, but never as man as man. As such any law which is against the existence of the human being is necessarily an anthropological mistake in and of itself.

The features of the person in society show, through their relational aspect, more of the totality of the personal being. Through this one can discover the value of man present in society or identify how the value of man is being denied. These features show how man should be the goal and ends of the family, community, church, state, and society generally. These environments only play an auxiliary role, and thus should never be identified with the ends of human life. These features show how the human person is sovereign in the social world. This means that the individual person can choose the ends of his life, and that any society that chooses the ends for him makes an apparent error. Any society that places itself as the end of human life creates a dangerous anthropological mistake that views man as nothing more than a material aspect of an erroneous whole. Society lives for the promotion of man; the inverse is incorrect and anthropologically erroneous.

Human Transcendence over Nature and Society

As is hinted in the listed features of personal being, man is not restricted to either nature or the society in which he resides. Simply put, man is doubly transcendent over nature and society. This discovery has very important consequences for understanding the nature of the human being and his place in society

and the world. The features connected with the person as a person, such as the ability to rationally cognize, the ability to love, the ability to be free, the ability to be religious,¹⁸ and the ability to self-possess, self-control, and self-determine, show that the human being is much more than an aspect of the material or biological world. This means that a human being is part of the material world but is not determined by the material world in his life and action. This means that the human being transcends this naturally material world and as such is not completely reliant on it for his identity or personhood. From society, the human person simply needs goods which help him to actualize himself though his abilities. Once again, the human person himself is transcendent over the society to which he belongs. This discovery of the transcendence of the human person is very important because when systems of education, politics, economy, society, and other such things are being created, they necessarily must consider the transcendence of the human person in their process of construction. If someone rejects the transcendent nature of man, it naturally leads to anthropological mistakes and at worst societies that are anti-human in their very nature and construction. Therefore, Wojtyła very often stressed the truth of man's transcendent nature and how individuals and societies must respect this transcendent nature in their actions and existence. Wojtyła also stressed that society and programs of education, politics, economy, and social upbringing should not just see the biological actualization of man, but also the spiritual actualization of man, with this spiritual element being the vehicle of the general transcendent nature of man. According to Wojtyła, these personal features are a base for the construction and formulation of humane and human social order. This is because, as previously stated, human law should always help actualize the transcendent potentiality of the human person.

¹⁸ Andrzej Maryniarczyk, *The Realistic Interpretation of Reality*. Translated by Hugh McDonald. Lublin: Polskie Towarzystwo Tomasza z Akwinu, 2015. pp. 125–126.

The second aspect of the transcendence of the human being is connected to society. Transcendence of the human person over society presents such personal features as dignity, completeness, and the subjectivity of the law. All these features show one common and important aspect of personal life in society, that a person should be always treated as an end, never as a means. The improper use of persons thus denies man his transcendent nature over society. Dignity shows that the person should be the end of each community and society and that he transcends these communities and societies. As previously stated, this means that communities and societies play an auxiliary function in the potentiality of the action of the human person. These features help us to discover the basis of the sovereignty of the human person. This sovereignty of the human person is fundamentally also the basis of the sovereignty of the state. In practice, this means that a person is a sovereign in choosing his own ends of life within a society, and society is sovereign in choosing the tools of helping in the actualization of the sovereignty of the person.

Completeness as a feature of the person in relation to society shows how man is transcendent in his metaphysical completeness. This means that in the structure of the human being all human elements are present. Man is therefore transcendent over incomplete entities and the very fact that he is complete raises his nature to a transcendent level. Society can help man to realize this completeness but must never incorrectly attempt to add to his nature, as again human nature is already complete, and this attempt in itself would be making an anthropological mistake in that it would be denying man his transcendentally complete nature. This discovery should be very important in the practical creation of systems of education, politics, economics, society, etc, in that man should always be perceived as a total whole, and these created systems should not have their goal as being some sort of addition to the nature of man.

The subjectivity of law with regards to man in relation to society shows how man is both a subject and an object of law.

This means that law is only for human beings because only man can be conscious of law and the nature thereof and only man can recognize law, with this meaning that the object of the law is the human being as well, because the last end of each law is the promotion of the goodness of the human person. As such, as a consequence of the discovery of this feature, laws which are against man as man should be rejected on the grounds of being anthropologically erroneous in that they see man only as an object. This feature shows the transcendence of the person as an end of law generally. Therefore, the state, through the construction of law, should always pursue the end of the promotion of the goodness of human persons and avoid anthropologically erroneous undertakings that either deny man as being a man or see man strictly as an object and means for society and law.

Conclusion

Human transcendence in regard to both nature and society shows the specificity of the human person which Wojtyła stresses in his metaphysical anthropology as being both in society and nature, but not determined by society and nature. As such, holding man to be a transcendent being isn't just part of a correct system of metaphysical anthropology, but also provides a bulwark against societal systems and ideologies that create anthropological mistakes. Therefore, Wojtyła sees his realistic anthropology as a solution to the anthropological mistake generally because this proper conception of the human being is both holistic and integral. Wojtyła's conception presents the human being as a being which cannot be reduced to a material, spiritual, or functional being but rather should be treated as a unity of spirit and body that transcends individual, biological, and social determination. This proper anthropology, particularly with regards to society and culture, can be a solution to many of the practical problems which the world faces in contemporary times. A shift towards seeing man as a transcendent being

would allow societies and political systems to better organize themselves towards the promotion of the goodness and true happiness of people themselves. Ironically, this should be the goal of societies and political systems, but anthropological mistakes make achieving this goal more difficult than it should be. More philosophical investigation should be made in this direction, with the thought of Wojtyła providing a basis for the endeavours of subsequent philosophers. These undertakings should not be limited to the thought of Wojtyła, but through using his realistic anthropology can open upon new fields of investigation. Given the anthropological issues contemporary to the writing of this article, the need for such work is becoming increasingly pertinent as the culture of death that Wojtyła warned of is only continuing to expand. Christian, realistic philosophy has a duty to continue confronting the anthropological mistake wherever it is found. ■

Solutions to the Anthropological Mistake

SUMMARY

In the thought of Karol Wojtyła, significant time and focus is given to the concept of the “anthropological mistake.” This conception argues that certain ideological positions create an improper view of the human person, and as such are dangerous to man and his personhood. This article follows two articles previously published in this journal and presents Karol Wojtyła’s solution to the anthropological mistake, with this being a proper metaphysical anthropology that sees man as a personal being. This metaphysical anthropological position is deeply ingrained in the Lublin School of Metaphysics, with Wojtyła’s thought reflecting the positions thereof. As such this article uses both the works of Wojtyła, as well as closely related positions found within the Lublin School of Thomism, to present Wojtyła’s answer and solution to the anthropological mistake. This being a proper, realistic, and person based metaphysical anthropology.

Keywords: metaphysics, metaphysical anthropology, the anthropological mistake, Karol Wojtyła, John Paul II, Lublin Thomism

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