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John Paul II's Nonverbal Communication Rituals During His Pilgrimage to Bolivia in 1988

Komunikacyjne rytuały Jana Pawła II podczas pielgrzymki
do Boliwii w 1988 roku

Abstract

The article is dedicated to the communication rituals (secular, sacred, everyday, and occasional) of John Paul II during his pilgrimage to Bolivia in 1988. It focuses particularly on nonverbal communication. The main research question is whether nonverbal communication helped establish relationships with the faithful, and whether the Pope conveyed Christian values and reinforced the message of his pastoral visit through gestural and facial codes. The sources of analysis are media reports that accompanied the pastoral visit, especially press photographs and video materials posted on the YouTube channel documenting the pilgrimage. The method of content analysis and a contextual method were used, interpreting the Pope's nonverbal communication in the context of the social and political changes taking place in Bolivia in the 1980s. As has been demonstrated, John Paul II developed his own style of communication within nonverbal communication; in interactions with the faithful, he was characterized by an affiliative tendency based on close distance, touch, and eye contact. Through clear interpersonal communication, the Pope built community and developed the personal potential of both sides of the communicative exchange. Cultural differences did not pose a barrier to interpersonal communication for him.

Keywords

nonverbal communication, interpersonal communication, Bolivia, John Paul II

Abstrakt

Artykuł poświęcony jest rytuałom komunikacyjnym Jana Pawła II (świeckim, sakralnym, potocznym i okazjonalnym) podczas pielgrzymki do Boliwii w 1988 roku. Skupiono się zwłaszcza na komunikacji niewerbalnej. Głównym pytaniem badawczym jest to, czy komunikacja niewerbalna pomagała nawiązywać relacje z wiernymi, czy dzięki kodom gestywnym i mimicznym Papież przekazywał chrześcijańskie wartości i wzmacniał przesłanie wizyty duszpasterskiej. Źródłem analiz są przekazy medialne, które towarzyszyły wycieczce duszpasterskiej, zwłaszcza fotografie prasowe i zamieszczone na kanale Youtube materiały filmowe relacjonujące pielgrzymkę. Wykorzystano metodę analizy zawartości i metodę kontekstualną, interpretując komunikację niewerbalną Papieża w kontekście społecznych i politycznych przemian zachodzących w latach 80. w Boliwii. Jak wykazano, Jan Paweł II rozwijał własny styl komunikacji w ramach komunikacji niewerbalnej. W kontaktach z wiernymi cechowała go tendencja afiliatywna oparta na bliskiej odległości, dotyku i kontakcie wzrokiem. Poprzez jasną komunikację interpersonalną Papież budował wspólnotę i rozwijał osobisty potencjał obu stron wymiany komunikacyjnej. Różnice kulturowe nie stanowiły dla niego bariery w komunikacji interpersonalnej.

Słowa kluczowe

komunikacja niewerbalna, komunikacja interpersonalna, Boliwia, Jan Paweł II

John Paul II was universally recognised for his oratory skills and his mastery of words (Sokół, 2008, s. 162–180). His verbal skills and speech culture as well as the artistry of words can be traced back to his theatrical experience (he was an actor of Mieczysław Kotlarczyk's Rhapsodic Theatre in Krakow (see Flader, 2008) and can be credited to his many years of pastoral service. The Pope explored the power of words — the informative, persuasive and consolidating power of words — not only in art, but also in everyday communication and, above all, in his evangelization efforts. He easily established rapport with interlocutors and listeners based on direct and open interpersonal communication. These skills proved particularly useful during the pilgrimages, when John Paul II met people from all walks of life, representing different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As a polyglot, he preached using verbal communication skilfully combined with non-verbal and vocal communication techniques, building on his awareness of cultural contexts and socio-political situation of a given region and the understanding the human nature.

As a priest, he continued to take an active interest in theatre and the art of the living word. In *Tygodnik Powszechny*, a Polish Catholic weekly magazine, he reviewed the Rhapsodic Theatre premières under a pseudonym. He argued that the spoken word and movement are inseparable, and that vivid artistic speech must evolve into gestures. The rhythm of the body should be tuned to the rhythm of the words. "A turn of the head, at times a turn of the figure, sometimes a single step (...) they all follow the rhythm of words and thoughts. They reflect an internal tension" (Wojtyła, s. 1957, s. 4). Gesture and movement created the necessary setting for words. These are not just John Paul II's reflections on theatrical performances, but also practical guidelines that he followed during his public meetings, speeches, and while preaching. John Paul II saw priesthood as a service in *Theatrum Dei*, where he played the role of an actor-mediator, a medium for the word of the Gospel. John Paul II realized that non-verbal communication is inextricable linked with words and can strengthen and highlight verbal messages; it can also convey meaning without any words being spoken. Non-verbal speech accompanies all forms of communication, and can have a lasting impact on social or religious life. He believed it has a special role to play.

In his book *Jan Paweł II człowiek kultury* published after John Paul II's death, Lech Sokół argued:

We should reflect on the welcoming gesture of the Holy Father extended to all those who approached him, a gesture in which he offered to surrender all of us to God. We should learn to read his face and from his face. We should truly get to know his face looking at us, his face that closed and tightened when he wanted to focus and pray in the presence of cameras, inquisitive eyes and millions of people looking at him with love or unrelenting curiosity. Let us learn and deeply understand the language of his body, whether dancing and youthful, or ageing and full of suffering (Sokół, 2008, s. 180).

Encouraged by these words, I decided to explore the Pope's body language. This paper analyses the way John Paul II used elements of non-verbal communication during his pilgrimages. I consider here a number of different communication instances: ritual religious and non-religious, colloquial and occasional (see Jankosz, 2024). The main research question is whether non-verbal communication helped John Paul II establish a connection with the people of faith, or whether the Pope preached Christian values and reinforced the message of this pastoral visit through gestures and facial expression. I conducted detailed research on John Paul II's apostolic journey to Bolivia. This analysis is primarily based on media coverage, specifically press photographs and video materials reporting on this pastoral visit posted on the YouTube channel. Content analysis and contextual methods were used to interpret the Pope's non-verbal communication in the context of social and political changes taking place in Bolivia in the 1980s. I chose this particular country for two reasons. The body language of the population of Latin countries differs from the body language of the Europeans. The expressive non-verbal communication styles of Latino cultures are associated with a 'Latino temperament'. I travelled to Bolivia in 2024 where I carried out research, collected materials and conducted interviews. Crucially, during my visit, I personally experienced these differences in non-verbal communication.

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For the same of clarity and to understand the basic terms, the word "communication" comes from the Latin verb *communicare*, which means: "to share", "to make available", and from the noun *communio* meaning "communication", "community". Communication essentially means sharing something and creating a community. In the traditional Shannon-Weaver transmission model (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), the task of the sender is to encode information, and role of the recipient is to decode the message. The transmission model also consists of a code and a transmitter. The Shannon-Weaver model has been universally applied in cultural sciences, social sciences and education studies (Stewart, 2010; see also Chmielowska-Marmucka & Górska, 2015). However, communication can be perceived as a collaborative process in which "personal identities are negotiated and subject to change" (Stewart, 2010, loc. 214). Individuals are shaped by communication through verbal and non-verbal interactions. I believe the exact same processes were taking place during Pope's pilgrimages, where the identities of both the people of faith and that of the Pilgrim himself were shaped and evolved as a result of communication.

Theodore Grove, a researcher specializing in interpersonal communication, believes that non-verbal behaviours in interactions can be broken down into vocalics and kinesics (Grove, 2010, loc. 2777). Physical appearance (form of an individual), chronemics (the use of time) and artifacts are also important. Vocalics includes

intonation (tonal qualities of the voice: soft or sharp, warm or cool, dynamic or monotonous), timbre, speech rate, pitch and loudness, and non-linguistic vocalizations, such as meaningful pauses. Kinesics are body and facial movements. These include postural and gestural behaviour, facial expression, gaze (they can facilitate relationships, dialogue, denote the interlocutor's engagement), proxemics, and haptics.

Elements of non-verbal communication can also be classified into multiple parallel groups. Maria Mocarz-Kleindienst listed six categories of non-verbal communication (Mocarz-Kleindienst, 2017). These include kinesics (body movements, gestures); facial expressions alongside oculusics (facial expression shows whether the communicating individual reveals or controls emotions, is relatively easily decoded by the recipient). Other elements of non-verbal communication are as follows: proxemics, the study of interpersonal distance and space between interlocutors; haptics, which is based on the sense of touch and studies how the rules for acceptable touch, its duration, intensity and frequency are established (Jaroszewska, 2014, s. 38); chronemics, which studies the use of time as a signal in communication, for example the perception of time among members of different cultures¹; and paralanguage – auditory (paraverbal) components of communication, the most recognizable of which are voice qualities, pitch, the sound amplitude, and the tone of speech. A similar division (facial expressions, proxemics, haptics, chronemics, vocalics, kinesics) was proposed by Jankosz, who studied John Pauls II's communication behaviours during her first pilgrimage to Poland (Jankosz, 2024). As demonstrated in these examples, the area of research on non-verbal communication remains broadly the same despite the different classification systems of the elements of non-verbal communication.

Bolivia is one of the poorest countries in South America; it has a significant indigenous population made up of different tribes who speak their own languages. In Bolivia, non-verbal communication appears to play an important role in establishing relationships and preaching the Gospel. Latin American nations are known to use extensive facial expressions and gestures. Following Hall and Knapp, I consider gestures to be "movements of a body (the entire one or its parts) used in communication in order to communicate particular ideas, intonations and feelings. Many of such gestures amount only to movements of arms and hands but they can also

¹ Based on the different approaches to these categories, cultures have been broadly divided into monochromatic (e.g. Japan, Germanic European countries), which are concerned about time, punctuality or deadlines, and polychronic (Arab countries, Latin American countries and the Mediterranean), which demonstrate a much more flexible approach to time arrangements (See Hall & Hall, 1990).

be accompanied by movements of the head or parts of the face (Jankosz, 2024). All those elements were used for communication by John Paul II.

Before his pilgrimage, the Pope studied the complicated socio-political situation of Bolivia suffering under military dictatorships from 1964 to 1983, seeking to de-ethnicize the country, privatize businesses, liberalize the market, abolish social policies and state-funded education, and facing soaring unemployment figures (Śniadecka-Koterska, 2013). John Paul II arrived in Bolivia in 1980s.—at the end of the 'lost decade'. The Pope visited seven Bolivian cities between May 9th and May 14th. The social situation was particularly tense in five of these cities (Śniadecka-Koterska, 2013).

As can be seen in films and photographs, John Paul II's kinesics during the pilgrimage was expressive, and this description applies to both ritual non-sacred and sacred, as well as colloquial and occasional modes of communication (Jankosz, 2024). At the very beginning of the visit, John Paul II blessed and greeted the crowd from the steps of the plane that landed at the El Alto airport in La Paz (*UN Pueblo en Fiesta: Juan Pablo II en Bolivia — 1ra parte* [Video], YouTube, n.d.). John Paul II ascended the stairs at a medium pace and welcomed those gathered at the airport with a broad smile. After stepping onto the tarmac, before shaking hands with notables, including Bolivian President Victor Paz Estenssoro, the Pope knelt down and solemnly kissed the ground, as he used to do during his previous pilgrimages. Pictures of the Pope kneeling down and kissing the ground have been flashed around the world. The people standing next to the Pope seemed both curious and perplexed (see, inter alia, the photographs published in *Opinión* on May 10 and 11, 1988). It seems that this gesture had an even stronger and more symbolic meaning in Bolivia than in any other countries that the Pope visited. As explained by Tomasz Szyszka, an expert in Andean culture, many religious ceremonies in the Amazon and the Andes are being celebrated at the ground level (Szyszka, 2024). „There is no doubt that the culture of Quechua and Aymara people is based on their specific Andean view and perception of reality where — at an altitude of 4,000 meters above sea level — “nothing comes for free” and everything has to be earned with a great deal of toil and sacrifice (Szyszka, 2013). The Pope also knew the concept of Pachamama (essentially meaning „Mother Earth”) and was aware of the role it plays in the lives of the Andean people (see Szyszka, 2019). In Andean traditions, Pachamama is believed to give and sustain life. Her cult is associated with planting and harvesting; it embodies the fertility of the earth. An individual can become part of this sacred reality through work and celebration (see Szyszka, 2019, s. 197). John Paul II's gesture at the beginning of his pilgrimage was coherent with his interpretation of this indigenous cultural phenomenon in the spirit of Christian theology that the Pope presented on May 11 in Cochabamba.

All of this is God's work — God knows we need the food that the earth produces — this is the complex and meaningful reality that our ancestors called Pachamama, which offers its gifts to humans, as a reflection of divine providence. This is the profound meaning of God's presence, which must be reflected in your relationship with the earth, with its fields, waters, streams, mountains, hills, gorges, animals, plants and trees; for the whole created world is the earth which God has given us. As you look at the earth, at the crops rising, the plants growing, the animals being born, think about God high in heaven, God the Creator of the world, who revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ, our Brother and Saviour (Jan Paweł II, 2013a).

Although the Pope came to Bolivia after the assault of 13 May 1981, he often travelled through the streets of cities in an open car. He greeted the crowds that gathered on the airport tarmac, along the city streets, in city squares where holy masses were celebrated, showing that he trusted the Bolivians, that he was not afraid of any danger². He thus managed to build closer relationships with the people and continued to establish visual and haptic contact. The Pope often blessed the people and was making the sign of the cross. These are conventional gestures that facilitate communication between the Pope (the sender) and the people of faith (recipients) who are familiar with the religious code (Kowzan, 1976, s. 310–311). According to Ekman and Friesen divided gestures into five categories (Ekman & Friesen, 1969, s. 49–98): illustrators (to support or complement the meaning of expression), regulatory gestures (to manage the course of interaction), emblems (denote specific value regardless of the context), adaptors (to defuse tensions) and affect displays (non-verbal emotional transmission). Accordingly, most religious gestures can be considered emblems. They are culturally conditioned, “created within and corresponding to the needs of a given culture; they can only be correctly understood by those having the relevant cultural knowledge (Drabik, 2019, s. 121). A Christian understands the meaning of the gesture of the cross, the raised hand of a priest, the connected thumb and index finger of the right hand raised over the faithful ones during a holy mass. In his interpersonal communication, the Pope also used gestures to moderate interaction or affect expressions.

There were many cases of child deaths due to malnutrition or poor sanitation reported in Bolivia in 1980s. For this and many other reasons, meetings with children and gestures towards children — although already present in the Pope's interpersonal communication — gain new contexts in this Latin American country. John Paul II used to recognize the presence of children at every stage of his pilgrimage. He was captured hugging a disabled child in a wheelchair in La Paz in the midst

² Several hours before the mass celebrated at the airport in El Alto, representatives of the Shining Path planted and detonated a bomb in front of one of the parishes in this city.

of the crowd or bending over children in traditional Andean clothes who came to welcome him (*UN Pueblo en Fiesta, b.d., 1ra parte*). There is one emblematic photograph by Rafael Balderrama depicting John Paul II leaning over a child and stroking its face, while the child looks into the Pope's eyes and touches his hand, and the hand of another child rises in the crowd, trying to meet the Pope's hand.³ Non-verbal communication with children was very spontaneous. Already on the second day of the pilgrimage, on May 10th, at 7:00 a.m., a group of about three hundred children from orphanages dressed in traditional clothes and musicians playing Bolivian folklore arrived at the apostolic nunciature, where the Pope was staying. They sang and danced to greet John Paul II. The Pope spoke to them and went out into the street to bless them. Crowds of children and young people gathered in front of the Monastery of St. Francis in Cochabamba. The Pope greeted them from his window. These were unscheduled meetings with the Pope who expressed his particular friendliness towards young people.

Scheduled meetings with children and youth took place on May 11th in Cochabamba at the Felix Capriles Sports Stadium, where over thirty thousand people gathered (a non-sacred mode of communication), and in Tarija on May 13th (this event was attended by approximately sixty thousand people, a sacred mode of communication). Videos posted on the YouTube show that the crowd included children of all ages, from infants to teenagers (*UN Pueblo en Fiesta, b.d., 3ra parte*). The first meeting was very artistic and performative. Young people presented forty live paintings and performed folk dances wearing traditional clothes (Zielińska, 2013). Based on his facial expression, the Pope was deeply engaged in the performance; he repeatedly greeted the young people and blessed them. In Tarija, children in communion clothes presented gifts to the Pope, spoke to the Holy Father, and released white doves into the sky as a sign of innocence, a symbol of faith and the Holy Spirit. The Pope made an important gesture to an eleven-year-old boy, Fernando Valverde, who spoke at the ceremony. After the boy finished speaking, John Paul II stood up and opened his arms wide; the boy threw his arms around the Pope's neck. The Pope then hugged him tightly and stroked the boy's head. This scene in slow motion was included in *UN Pueblo en Fiesta Juan Pablo II en Bolivia 3*, a film directed by a Jesuit priest Hugo Ara, highlighting it as a truly special moment (*UN Pueblo en Fiesta, b.d., 3ra parte*).

The Pope's gestures did not seem new, they were rather characteristic of John Paul II, however, they were not typical of a sacred mode of communication. Haptic behaviour conveys a specific message to both individuals engaged in the interaction. Here, this message was definitely positive. First, haptic behaviours are meant

³ Press release, private archive.

to express support, respect and a sense of community (Grove, 2010). Gestures directed to children were to communicate understanding, empathy and, most importantly, they were expressions of affection: love and friendship. Gestures toward children were meant to demonstrate understanding and empathy (illustrative gestures), to moderate the course of interaction (regulatory gestures), and — first and foremost — to express affections: love and friendship (affect displays). The role of gestures directed towards people with disabilities and towards the elderly was essentially identical. After the Pope asked the President of Bolivia at the airport in El Alto to ensure a greater sense of justice for his countrymen, he approached the sick, blessed them, and made friendly gestures (touching heads, shaking hands). In the cathedral in Sucre the Pope also met with the sick and the elderly to demonstrate that they are as important a part of Bolivian society as healthy and young citizens. Another encounter with the elderly was staged at a social welfare home in Santa Cruz, where the Pope talked to the seniors, approached them, leaned over people in wheelchairs, and patted the heads of those gathered. The Pope's gestures expressed interest in the affairs of the nursing home's residents and his understanding for the elderly. Audio-visual materials from this pastoral visit feature multiple images of John Paul II bending over disabled people and photos of people lifting wooden orthopaedic crutches (Presencia, 1988, May 14) to manifest their presence.

To be able to decipher an individual code of gestures, it is important to identify the degree to which a gesture was tense or relaxed, its semantic content, the orientation and purposefulness of a sequence of gestures; the stylistic and aesthetic procedures; and whether a relationship exists between the gesture and words (Pavis, 2002, 168). From this perspective, the gestures of the Pope are clear, tense, directed to both individuals and the entire community, and they illustrate the Pope's emotional attitude toward the people of faith. Rather than being just isolated messages, they form a coherent system of non-verbal speech. John Paul II's gestures were closely intertwined with words, becoming narrative in nature, reinforcing verbal communication, and creating meanings⁴. The Pope's body movements and gestures were addressed to all social groups but were specifically directed to the most vulnerable and excluded members of the society, creating a coherent style and a clear message of the Pope's apostolic journey as a "weaver of justice and hope."

⁴ The concept of *narrative gestures* is discussed by David McNeill in his book *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal about Thought*, (1992). In Poland, this topic has been researched by Anna Załazińska, among others, in her book *Schematy myśli wyrażane w gestach* (*Thought schemata expressed by gestures*, Kraków, 2005), and by Jolanta Antas, who in her article *Co mówią ręce. Wprowadzenie do komunikacji niewerbalnej* (*What Do Hands Say? Introduction to Non-Verbal Communication*, 2001) divides narrative gestures into the following categories: baton-swings, illustrators, and gestic metaphors (2001, s. 437–459).

The Pope's facial expression — another very important element of non-verbal communication — was rich and easy to read. The Pope smiled, his face showed understanding, was friendly and kind in direct contact, for example when John Paul II listened to music played on folk instruments or watched folklore dance performances. The Pope's non-verbal communication expressed clear satisfaction when he was greeted at Viru Viru Airport in Santa Cruz. Here, young people dressed in traditional clothes staged living pictures and sang the papal anthem. John Paul II, visibly moved, stopped on the stairs of the plane, greeted and blessed those gathered, after a while he rested his right hand on his left shoulder and watched the performance with great satisfaction (*UN Pueblo en Fiesta, b.d., 3ra parte*).

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His body language revealed interest and joy, which was far from conventional behaviour typical for a head of state. The same happened when the Pope was leaving his papamobile in Santa Cruz before the mass at El Trompillo Airport. The Pope smiled and blessed the people who sang and cheered in his honour, then he put both hands together and moved them rhythmically with visible satisfaction. There is footage showing the Pope being visibly joyous in a Santa Cruz social welfare home whose residents sang *Happy Birthday* in Polish (*UN Pueblo en Fiesta, b.d., 4ra parte*).

The Pope's facial expressions changed during speeches and homilies. His face expressed deep concentration, solemnity, and sometimes concern. During his meeting at the La Salle amphitheatre with politicians and intelligentsia, the Pope spoke standing up, with great concentration on his face, furrowed eyebrows, and sharp hand movements to strongly emphasize his verbal message (illustrative gestures). He spoke in a strong voice, intentionally lengthening the final syllables. Facial expressions, gestures and words were coherently combined as the Pope was calling for solidarity, justice, division of responsibilities and fair remuneration for work, and they also invoked the values of Bolivian culture.

This kind of solidarity is a virtue rather than a weakness of any political or cultural leader. The contemporary understanding of governance is based on active participation, excluding any signs of coercion or insult to humans. It involves being knowledgeable of the real needs and concerned about finding the most appropriate means of solving the underlying problems and establishing a hierarchy in planning activities, which should always serve a common good, without any concessions to personal or group privileges or selfish interests (John Paul II, 1988).

Likewise, with his firm gestures, a focused, serious facial expression and a well-balanced voice, the Pope preached about building a new society based on solidarity and respect for human dignity during a mass at the El Trompillo airport. These were the fundamental issues that the Pope focused on during his pilgrimage. John Paul II also invoked the Bolivian tradition, pointing to the richness of cultural, social and religious values of this part of South America. The Pope's facial expressions showed his emotions and commitment. He was not overly expressive, nor did he excessively control his emotions. His facial expression was rich rather than neutral during his pilgrimage. This can be seen clearly in a series of photographs published by the *Presencia* newspaper (see the *Presencia* issue of May 12, 1988).

John Paul II established eye contact and directed gestures of kindness and understanding toward people who approached him, for example presented him with gifts. With his attentive gaze, he was both a pastor and a friend. The Pope also demonstrated *non-verbal leaks*, or signs of feelings manifested non-verbally that cannot be intentionally controlled (Grove, 2010). They convey information about internal states, thoughts, and feelings. The Holy Father's facial expression showed joy or concern before he uttered a word or made a conscious gesture.

John Paul II was establishing all types of conventional spatial relations described by Edward Hall in his book *The Hidden Dimension* (Hall, 2001). While speaking in La Paz to thousands of the people, the Pope was forced to maintain a distance to those to gathered there; he also kept social distance from those sitting or standing closer to him when he made a speech at a seminary. However, it is evident from videos posted on Youtube that the Pope felt most comfortable when maintaining individual or even intimate distance to other people. According to Hall's findings, an individual distance is intended for acquaintances, friends and family, and an intimate distance is kept between people who are very close, like romantic partners and children. By shortening the distance, it is clear that Pope wanted to demonstrate his friendly attitude and create intimacy, he himself repeatedly entered into very close contacts with other people on many occasions, for example when, after meeting the President of Bolivia in the palace, he walked to the cathedral for the Liturgy of the Word, accompanied by nuns and monks. The Pope also allowed people to come closer, for example when he was presented with gifts or on the way to liturgy celebrations.

The people he met did not feel stressed, but felt welcomed and loved. Through these spatial relationships, the Pope made it clear that he was a father and a friend.

Haptics is closely linked to proxemics and gestures. The Pope communicated his attitude towards the people of faith through touch. When he blessed people, he would often touch their cheek, patted their backs as a sign of solidarity, and shook their hands. Richard Gesteland argued there are expressive cultures that openly and enthusiastically use gestures and touching, such as the cultures of Latin countries, and reserved cultures where hand and arm gestures as well as facial expressions are restrained (Gesteland, 2000, 68). South America is considered an area where touch is an important element of non-verbal communication. As R. Axtell argues (2010), touching cheeks and kissing on the lips are natural ways of showing friendliness). During his pilgrimage to Bolivia, the Pope knew that the local non-verbal communication is important and expressive. The use of touch (haptics) was evident in Oruro, where John Paul II met with farmers, miners, workers and *relocalizados* — the poorest members of the society that were affected most by the neoliberal transformations introduced by the government. The city of Oruro was once a very prosperous mining centre, but in the 1980s it became a symbol of poverty (Struzik, 2003, s. 65)⁵. James Hardison, who studied the importance of touch in interpersonal communication, argued that interpersonal relationships feature much more touching at a time of major crisis (Hardison, 2010). This theory can be transposed from the space of partnerships into the social space. In the late 1980s, Bolivians experienced a period of turmoil, upheaval and drastic changes affecting their social, cultural, and, above all, economic situation. That is why their relationship with John Paul II expressed through haptic behaviours was particularly intense.

During the mass in Oruro, a woman approached the Pope alongside other indigenous people, carrying a small child in a scarf on her back. She held a pot in her hands. "This pot is empty," she said, "but my heart is filled with hope for a better future" (Szyszka, 2013). The Pope stood up when he listened to her, and looked her straight in the eyes. As soon as she finished speaking, the Pope hugged and kissed the woman and the child. John Paul II was then approached by a miner, José Tarqui. The miner told the Pope that, although he was suffering from hunger, he came to meet the Pope to find hope that would keep him strong in his fight for justice. "They are closing our mines. Help us reopen the mines. We are hungry. We have no bread" (Szyszka, 2013). Tarqui then placed a red miner's helmet on John Paul II's head and with this

⁵ As Tomasz Szyszka (2013, s. 203) pointed out, Oruro is the capital of the Andean carnival. That is why folkloric dances were performed for John Paul II at the airport in this city, including a staging of the most popular *diablada*, showing a clash between angels and devils. This dance has its origins in theatrical performances from the colonial period.

telling gesture, the Pope symbolically became one of the hungry, unemployed miners. This gesture was also intended to make the head of the Catholic Church aware of the particularly vulnerable situation of local miners, and became a sign that Pope was considered to be their equal. By applauding this gesture and then repeating it (he put the helmet on his head once again), the Holy Father showed that he was truly concerned about the difficult situation of miners, and that he wanted to contribute to social change.

This meeting must have been very emotionally demanding for John Paul II, who had no direct influence on political decisions. The miner spoke with a desperate, breaking voice. He was listened to by other people of faith, whose faces showed emotion and tears. It is no wonder that the gestures of the Indian woman and the miner, as well as the non-verbal response of the Pope, were most often featured in press and mass media coverage of the pilgrimage.⁶ They became the symbols of the entire pastoral visit.

During meetings such as those in Oruro, it was evident that the Pope's interpersonal communication was aimed at establishing close connection with people, with „each individual involved in such communication speaking and listening in a way that added truly personal dimension” rather than to simply convey a message (Stewart, 2010). Touch reinforces the sense of trust and empathy. The haptics between John Paul II and the people of faith improved interactions and communication, strengthened social and personal ties, and helped convey the message of hope.

During pilgrimages, the head of the Catholic Church must closely adhere to the timeline of scheduled events and meetings, and must precisely observe the time of services and homilies, especially since pilgrimages last several days and one delay can cascade into a chain of disrupted schedules. The apostolic journey to Bolivia was only one in a series of pastoral visits to Latin America. The Pope flew to Bolivia from Uruguay and then departed to the capital of Peru. Europeans are often associated with a monochronic perception of time, which differs significantly from polychronic cultures dominating in Latin America. The Pope never rushed his conversations with the people he met during his pilgrimage, he did not get impatient when those bringing gifts entered into dialogue with him, he listened to requests, and accepted words of gratitude. Friendly facial expressions and kind gestures were combined with a flexible approach to the schedule. The Pope was known for spontaneously approaching the people, even during hours set aside for rest and regeneration. As Martyna Zielińska points out: “In Santa Cruz, the Pope departed from the visit protocol three times: during a meeting with union leaders, in the cathedral and at a social welfare home, when he went out to greet and talk to the gathered

⁶ See the photos published in the ‘Opinion’ on 12.05.1988.

crowd" (Zielińska, 2013). Because of John Paul II's respect for the people of faith and the desire to establish direct connection with them and communicate less officially, his meetings became much longer than originally planned.

Audio elements constitute another important aspect of the Pope's non-verbal communication during his pilgrimage to Bolivia. The tone and sound of voice determine the correct interpretation of information, especially when the speaker addresses a crowd. The Pope spoke Spanish, but repeatedly addressed the Indians in indigenous languages (Quechua, Aymara, Moyo). Each time he spoke with a strong and clear voice to get the message across to both those standing close by and those listening to him from afar. His voice was amplified by a microphone, but the tempo, pauses, and tone of his voice added meaning to the Pope's message to the people of faith. The Pope was 68 years old when he visited Bolivia. His voice was still strong and resonant. John Paul II skilfully modulated it, changing the intonation to adapt it to the current message. It was usually soft, warm and dynamic. He mastered the technique and understood the culture of the Living Word, and had a good sense of when to pause or create suspense, and when to use greater lengthening of final syllables.

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In his book *Successful Nonverbal Communication. Principles and Applications*, Dale G. Leathers identifies six functions of non-verbal communication (Leathers, 2007). These include providing information, regulating interaction, expressing emotions, allowing metacommunication, controlling social situations, and forming and managing impressions. During his pilgrimage to Bolivia, John Paul II's non-verbal communication fulfilled all of these functions. His gestures reinforced the message, often it itself conveyed information; proxemics, gesticulation, haptics and even chronemics regulated interactions with the people of faith and expressed the Pope's feelings

toward the people he met along his journey, who also used non-verbal means of communication to express their emotions. The Pope used non-verbal elements of communication to enter into dialogue and develop relationships as the head of the Catholic Church, to form and manage impressions. His non-verbal communication was intended to direct attention, reinforce the message and highlight emotions but was free from any manipulation. All non-verbal means of communication, in the ritual non-sacred, sacred, colloquial and occasional modes, in interpersonal relationships left the believers with the conviction and feeling that John Paul II came to Bolivia as a friend, a witness of hope, a compassionate father.

The effectiveness of the Pope's interpersonal communication can be demonstrated by analysing the reactions of people, for example by maintaining eye contact, which is clearly visible in closer interactions of people gathered at the altar, vocal signs (laughter, crying), applauding, smiling, hugging, shaking hands, shouting slogans. During five days of his visit to Bolivia, the Pope became a Bolivian among Bolivians, as is evidenced by banners held during holy masses or the slogans chanted by the crowds (Zielińska, 2003, s. 29). „You are a Bolivian”, „John Paul, you are a miner”, „The Holy Father, you are a Trinidadian”, „The Polish Pope, you are a chapaco”⁷. During a meeting at a seminary in San José, a blind seminarian told the Pope: „Holy Father, I cannot see your lips that preach love, but I feel the warmth of your presence” (Zielińska, 2013, s. 32).

In non-verbal communication, individual messages can each represent a different style. They convey a message in a specific manner and have an inherent system of signs.

A style of non-verbal communication should be understood as a socially and culturally established system of non-verbal signs arranged within the message itself (film, verbal statement, etc.) that supports or in itself constitutes the communication process between members of a linguistic and cultural community. (...) It is created by a given statement and is contained in it. The characteristic features of a given style of communication can be extracted from the rich repertoire of various means that the world of non-verbal signals is made of. (Mocarz-Kleindienst, 2017, s. 61).

John Paul II developed his own style of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. His style consists of rich facial expression, clear gestures – greeting the faithful, blessing them, haptic communication with people with disabilities, the elderly, children – reducing the distance from public to personal or intimate, establishing

⁷ Father Adam Wiński explains that *chapaco* is someone close with whom you share life, a friend, a comrade.

eye contact, moderate pace of speech, accentuating important words, exclamations, pauses, repetition of key phrases, firm but calm tone of voice, satirical elements. In Bolivia, a country where non-verbal communication constitutes an important means of interpersonal communication, John Paul II preached the message of the Gospel and his own feeling through extensive haptic behaviours. In his contacts with Indians of various nationalities, miners, children, old people, and intelligentsia, he expressed the affiliate tendency based on close distance, touch, eye contact, smiling, as opposed to the dominant tendency – upright posture, raised head, fast speech, one-sided verbal communication (Milewska-Matlak, 2024). In his relations with the authorities, especially in communist countries or those where social and economic changes affected the everyday life of the poorest, as in Bolivia, the Pope was firm and clearly expressed his support for and solidarity with the local people. However, he always showed respect to every human being. In line with Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue, the Pope emphasized that we are addressable – we speak to and with each other and share communication. "These special events begin with one individual addressing another being, conscious of their separate self, to propose shared communication with which a common world is built from the individual worlds of separate human beings" (Buber, 1992). Through clear interpersonal communication, John Paul II addressed every person, built a community and developed the personal potential of each individual involved in this shared communication. Cultural differences have never been a barrier in the Pope's interpersonal communication.

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