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John Paul II's Theology of the Body

Introduction

THE PLACE OF THE body in the thought of John Paul II is situated within a prolific literary legacy for philosophy and theology.¹ Here, his original contribution to theological anthropology will be of interest, specifically his development of a theology of the body.² This chapter has three sections. The first is on the formative influences upon the younger Karol Wojtyła, the second outlines his theological framework which accentuated his thought as Bishop of Rome, and the third looks closely at *Man and Woman He Created Them*. The latter was written while Wojtyła was Archbishop of Krakow, but presented and published after his election as John Paul II. The place of the body according to John Paul II relates profoundly to his phenomenological interest in the human person. Furthermore, his account of *communio* and the body leads him to take up the nuptial mystery as his principle paradigm of alterity.

1. John Paul II's papacy lasted over twenty-six years (October 1978–April 2005) and produced more than 70,000 pages of teaching in encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, apostolic letters, homilies, addresses, letters, and other published texts. See O'Collins, "John Paul II and the Development of Doctrine," in Hayes and O'Collins (eds.), *The Legacy of John Paul II*, 1.

2. As an original contribution, John Paul II's theology is remarkable for reshaping papal teaching by more constant attention to Scripture, both as a point of departure and as an active role in developing his own thought. See Jones, "John Paul II and Moral Theology," in Hayes and O'Collins (eds.), *The Legacy of John Paul II*, 103.

Formative influences and theological departures: the human person in the drama of history

Man and Woman He Created Them has been described as a “theological time bomb,” waiting to go off in the life of the church at some point in the twenty-first century.³ It is true that many, probably most, Catholics have not heard of it, and it is an underutilized lens through which Christian theologians might view the mystery of the human person. Informed readers of *Man and Woman He Created Them* are rare. There tends to be two camps: those who have taken to it with evangelical enthusiasm, and those who have a vague idea that a pope said something about the body.⁴ Comprehensive negation of John Paul II's position is uncommon, although argumentation appears in the context of other broader works.⁵ It is possible that Wojtyła's election as pope permanently clouds the judgment of those who might engage with his thought on its own terms, stripped of prejudice concerning his official teaching and that of the Catholic Church (whether glowing or condemnatory). As David Albert Jones comments, “[i]n order to appreciate John Paul II as a theologian (without either excessive deference or excessive defensiveness) it seems better to try to forget that he was also pope.”⁶ Here, Wojtyła will be read as soberly and as fairly as possible, attempting to put aside unhelpful enthusiasm and lazy indifference. In any case, both before and after his papal election, Wojtyła's published works concerned the human person as an embodied creature within a theological framework. The prominence Wojtyła gave to the body in his writing is a response to various anthropological tendencies he encountered. The biographer George Weigel contextualizes it thus:

By insisting that the human subject is always an embodied subject whose embodiedness is critical to his or her self-understanding and relationship to the world, John Paul took modernity's “anthropological turn” with utmost seriousness.⁷

That is, Wojtyła's *Theology of the Body* was an attempt at answering the turn to the person evident in modernity, with a robustly Christian response.

3. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 342–43.

4. A well-known popularizer of John Paul II's theology of the body is Christopher West, an evangelist and writer. See his interpretation of John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*; West, *Theology of the Body Explained*.

5. For example, see Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*.

6. Jones, “John Paul II and Moral Theology,” in Hayes and O'Collins (eds.), *The Legacy of John Paul II*, 103.

7. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 343.

The critical relationship between embodiment and the dual comprehensions of one's selfhood and one's relationship to the world is central. Embodiment is a state of being for material creatures that both limits and enables them to act within a wider experience of the world. The body is a particular form of materiality that distinguishes one person from another; limited to what a human person can achieve as a body and enabling it to live and die like others. There is a long-standing tradition in Christian theology of explaining the human person as a unity of the body, soul, and spirit, with particular emphasis on the body-soul relationship. Much debate has ensued on the nature of this relationship, although Wojtyła placed himself in line with a reasonable emphasis on the unity of the body and the soul. For example, the Catechism, authorized by John Paul II, refers to the soul as the "spiritual principle" within the human person that is not only the most authentic inner truth of the person, but also acts as the "form of the body."⁸ The soul remains incorporeal and invisible, yet that aspect which, in turn, shapes the body in its spiritual and moral capacities. In turn, the body experiences in itself the imprint of sensory experience and the mental awareness and nonawareness of itself and others. Furthermore, it is organized according to genetic patterns and the opportunities to learn cultural, religious, and social habits by communication with others. The human body also experiences itself in terms of gender—male and female—which is a dimension of human experience Wojtyła attends to with both theological and philosophical interest. As will be looked at in detail, Wojtyła's approach to the body takes gender and sexual differentiation seriously, not as social constructs but as signifiers of the bodily and sexual aspects of being male and female. He does this primarily not to invoke a categorical account of attributes belonging to one sex or the other, but to evoke the analogy of the nuptial mystery as primarily a theological reality concerning Christ and the church that is grounded within the embodiment of relationships between male and female. As such, this evocation is an appeal to an embodied reality in social discourse for reflection on God.

Weigel, along with George Williams, is right to relate this to Wojtyła's more general appreciation of the points of anthropological interest that have arisen in recent philosophy.⁹ Weigel refers to an interview with Angelo Scola, who suggests that every thesis in theology could be seen in a new light if theologians were to explore in depth the personalism of Wojtyła's

8. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 363, 65.

9. George H. Williams contrasts Wojtyła's development of Christian anthropology in highlighting the "historical man" against the "abstract" man of Marxism or the abstract "humanity" of the French Revolution and its twentieth-century sequels. See Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, 267.

theology of the body, which is presented as a catechesis on human and married love.¹⁰ For Scola, it is the nuptial mystery that unfolds an authentic theological anthropology.¹¹ He argues that the nuptial mystery acts as a systematic perspective for the *intellectus fidei*. Following Balthasar, both Scola and Wojtyla develop the nuptial mystery with the Trinity as a basis for human relationships. Scola explicitly states that this moves beyond traditional restrictions in prohibiting the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit from acting as the iconic model for marital or familial relationships.¹² Those restrictions, in Scola's reading, have now been overcome. A key voice that expresses a more wary, and therefore restrictive perspective on this use of the Trinitarian model is that of St. Augustine. Scola wishes to take Augustine seriously, but move beyond his perspective on the body. Augustine's contribution to the development of Western Trinitarian theology is profound and some comment on how Wojtyla departs from him is important.

For Augustine, the *imago Dei* in man has a Trinitarian structure: either the tripartite structure of the human soul (spirit, self-consciousness, and love) or the threefold aspects of the psyche (memory, intelligence, and will). In the *Confessions*, Augustine says that we are formed for God and that our hearts are restless until they find rest in the Lord, and in *the Trinity*, he states that the divine image orients the human person in invocation, knowledge, and love.¹³ That is to say, the human capacity to respond to God's prior act of love is shaped by the Trinity's personal structure of one-in-three and three-in-one. Yet, Augustine warned against overreliance on this mutuality of structures to build a description of human behavior. In *On the Trinity*, he disparages those who "try to transfer what they have observed about bodily things to incorporeal and spiritual things . . ."¹⁴ Augustine distinguishes God from creation so that the absolute difference of the divine life can be appreciated more perfectly from a human perspective. Again, in Book 8, he speaks against images of the body or interbodily relations as a basis for understanding God: "Indeed any and every bodily conception is to be so rejected."¹⁵ Thus, the Augustinian position is, strictly speaking, one that Wojtyla departs from. It can certainly be seen that Augustine maintains a

10. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 343.

11. For Scola, it constitutes one of the "essential aspects of reality, considered both in itself and against the horizon of Christian revelation," yet its depth and multilayered imagery reminds us that it must not be circumvented. It remains a "mystery." See Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 82–83.

12. Scola, "The Nuptial Mystery," 209.

13. Augustine, *The Confessions*, I.1.1; *The Trinity*, IX.3–5.

14. Augustine, *The Trinity*, I.1.1.

15. *Ibid.*, VIII.2.3.

firm difference between God and created things. Nevertheless, despite Augustine's warning about the body as a basis for understanding God, he recognizes that limited human experiences of love are motivated and oriented by God's first act of love. In responding to the higher love of the Triune God, human beings are aware that their first contemplation is upon those acts of love with which the body is accustomed. Augustine states:

Now love means someone loving and something loved with love. There you are with three, the lover, what is being loved, and love. And what is love but a kind of life coupling or trying to couple together two things, namely lover and what is being loved? This is true even of the most external and fleshly kinds of love. But in order to quaff something purer and more limpid, let us trample on the flesh and rise to the spirit.¹⁶

Augustine wishes to raise human minds from the lowliness of flesh and bodily love to the heights of the Spirit of God. For him, bodily witnesses to love are merely a lowly step to take on the way to a higher love. Wojtyła does not depart from Augustine in insisting on either the absolute difference between God and creation or the emphasis on God's love as the one perfect love to which all human loves are imperfectly oriented. However, Wojtyła does depart from Augustine by speaking of fleshly love as something to hold in veneration, rather than something to trample upon on the way to God. For Wojtyła, embodied forms of human love—and in particular those relating to sexuality within the nuptial relationship—have the capacity to orient human persons towards God's love without being discarded in the process. This is because embodied forms of love hold no capacity to love without the prior gift of God's Spirit. This is of primary importance, because all experiences of love known by the body find their originary event in the divine Trinity. The directionality of the Spirit is crucial; God reveals himself in Christ and shares the Holy Spirit as a gift to the created order, thus manifesting God's life within the world. The nuptial mystery in this sense is also an affirmation of God's prior self-gift. John Paul II states:

This gift sustains and develops in the spouses a singular *sensibility for all* that in their vocation and shared life carries *the sign of the mystery of creation and redemption*: for all that is a created reflection of God's wisdom and love.¹⁷

It is the Spirit of God that offers and maintains the possibility of experiences of the body oriented to love. There is no doubt that Wojtyła defends

16. *Ibid.*, VIII.5.14.

17. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 131:4.

a strong account of the reflection of the Trinity within some human relationships. Yet it is also true that his innovative work does not fundamentally disregard the tradition before him. Augustine is an important point of clarification in understanding Wojtyła's relation to the tradition, for it can be seen how the absolute difference between God's higher love and imperfect human loves is shared by Wojtyła and Augustine. The innovative work of Wojtyła is a delicate tension between the reflection of God's love within an embodied human love and the prior, perfect, and eternal love that, strictly speaking, belongs to God.

Two innovations in Wojtyła are identified by Scola. The first is the communal quality of our being made in the image of God (humans reflect the Trinity in their relation with others) and the second is his sexually differentiated anthropology of human embodiment (the body is the sacrament of the whole person).¹⁸ Based on these two developments, Scola argues that the nuptial mystery serves as a new opening for systematic theology.¹⁹ As an avenue for understanding *communio* with other persons and with the Triune God, the nuptial mystery casts light on the problem of the other and the dimension of alterity. However, it has its dangers. Two extreme poles come to mind. The first is the maximalist approach, which places an excessive burden of the images of nuptial and sexual relations upon the Trinity itself; in effect to "sex" the Trinity.²⁰ This is an overextension of the nuptial mystery, misunderstanding its nature as an analogical image within the theological tradition.²¹ An opposing pole exists, in which the nuptial mystery is rejected altogether as a perspective for systematic theology.²² This is often based upon a limited reading of nuptial imagery in the Bible as synonymous in value to the parables, such as the Shepherd and lost sheep.²³ It is viewed as limited in scope, lacking the systematic integration with other areas of thought and doctrine that would give it its inherent theological value.²⁴ There is no doubt that some danger lurks in the systematic presenta-

18. Scola, "The Nuptial Mystery," 212–14.

19. *Ibid.*, 233.

20. *Ibid.*, 221–22.

21. Examples include D'Costa, *Sexing the Trinity*; Loughlin, *Alien Sex*.

22. For example, Tracey Rowland notes a resistance to nuptial mysticism amongst neo-Thomists in contrast with Balthasarian thinkers, for whom life is theodramatic and therefore ecstatically open to the notions of being as (nuptial or spousal) "gift." See Rowland, "Natural Law."

23. Scola, "The Nuptial Mystery," 222.

24. For example, Fergus Kerr guards against possible excesses of utilizing the nuptial mystery systematically. See Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*, especially the chapters: "Hans Urs von Balthasar," "Karol Wojtyła," "Joseph Ratzinger," and "After

tion of the nuptial mystery, but with some care, and with due consideration of Wojtyła's perspective, it will be shown that its use is indeed valuable.

For Wojtyła, the Trinity is the original source for the enactment of *communio* in history. Michael Waldstein has demonstrated how vividly the centrality of triune love appears in the corpus of Wojtyła's writings.²⁵ In his papal pronouncements, the mystical fruit of the human person "finding himself" in the love of the Trinity is shown forth in the concrete realities of a lived life.²⁶ Salvation, through the Trinity, centers in each human (bodily) person a redeemed order of love, which in obedience to the source of all good things seeks to offer his or her humanity to Christ in all things (including sexuality). This reordering can only be understood in Trinitarian terms. The kernel of this thinking can be seen in earlier works, such as *Redemptor Hominis*, but the maturity of what could be called a Trinitarian praxis is evident from the earliest years of the John Paul II papacy. The notion of Wojtyła's development of the tradition can be observed in the broader context of moral theology after the Second Vatican Council. David Albert Jones identifies two areas in which Wojtyła makes an original contribution to that development.²⁷ The first is in his personalist approach to moral questions. That is to say, Wojtyła's phenomenological focus on the content of human experience in explaining the dignity of the person developed moral theology at its experiential and existential foundations. It is because of this contribution that Wojtyła could consider sexuality, not simply in terms of physiology or biology, but in terms of its *meaning* for human persons.

The second area is that of Wojtyła's use of Scripture in moral theology. For Jones, this will be the more enduring legacy, because it takes up the Second Vatican Council's call for a return to Scripture as the "supreme rule of faith."²⁸ Wojtyła's biblical hermeneutic is to allow the texts to act as a source of argument and disputation in their own right, yet central and primary within Christian moral discourse. Within scriptural texts, Wojtyła in turn views Christ as the hermeneutical key to understanding various threads of differing emphasis, and the Christian *ecclesia* as the proper social context in which those texts are to be manifested in the moral life. The use of Scripture by Wojtyła is an important contribution to developing the tradition. Oliver

Vatican II."

25. Waldstein, "John Paul II and St. Thomas on Love and the Trinity (First Part)," 116–17.

26. Wojtyła speaks of man's "living area" [*spatium hominis vitale*] raised up to the level of supernatural life. John Paul II, *Dominum Et Vivificantem: The Giver of Life*, 58.

27. Jones, "John Paul II and Moral Theology," in Hayes and O'Collins (eds.), *The Legacy of John Paul II*, 86–90.

28. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 21.

O'Donovan has referred to Wojtyła's scriptural methodology not so much as a proof for arguments developed in the latter's encyclicals, but "teased out as a way of framing a question in scriptural terms, in a preacher's way."²⁹ That is, Scripture acts as a fruitful resource of authoritative guidance in Wojtyła's work. Wojtyła's development of the tradition is defended, as will be seen, very much in line with these two contributions, the first in his phenomenological approach to human experience, and the second in his utilization of Scripture as a primary source for moral theology.

A note on two previously unpublished works

It will be many years (if ever) before the full catalogue of Wojtyła's writings become publicly available. Both papal and prepapal correspondence, his early journalistic efforts, at least one play, and some poetry, not to mention personal journals, will be studied in detail before they are each published and translated. A brief comment on two relevant unpublished works needs to be made:

1. In the final years before his papal election, Wojtyła had worked on a sequel text to *The Acting Person* with his former student Fr. Tadeusz Styczeń. This work, begun in 1972 and uncompleted in 1978 when Wojtyła was elected pope, was a step back from sexual ethics as such to consider the more general content of ethics and its relation to the human subject. It has only recently entered circulation in English as *Man in the Field of Responsibility*.³⁰

2. There is some controversy over the possible contents of an unfinished manuscript titled (provisionally), *Catholic Social Ethics (Katolicka Etyka Społeczna)*, which Wojtyła published in a short print run of only 300 copies in 1953–54. Poland's Catholic University of Lublin, which holds the two-volume work, has committed itself to publishing the contents, but has not provided a timetable. The work is controversial because some readers have indicated that Wojtyła expresses sympathy for Marxist philosophy in an analysis of political ideology.³¹ Weigel, in his biography, gives one footnote to this mysterious text and argues that the book is really the compilation of notes gained from other scholars, particularly the lecture notes of his

29. O'Donovan, "Pope John-Paul II."

30. Wojtyła's final prepapal book became available in 2011. See John Paul II, *Man in the Field of Responsibility*.

31. Controversy has been promoted by some journalists on this theme. See a public debate in Luxmoore and Ihnatowicz, "How an Unknown Text Could Throw New Light on John Paul II's Views on Economics," in *Houston Catholic Worker*.

colleague Jan Piwowarczyk.³² Perhaps the real problem for contemporary critics is not that Wojtyła expresses a scholarly appraisal of those currents in Marxist thought with which Christians might sympathize, but his criticism of free market capitalism. Given Wojtyła's integral involvement in the collapse of Communism and in the success of counter-Soviet movements in Poland (specifically that of *Solidarność*), it seems incredible that his philosophical consideration of Marxist thought might be interpreted as Communist sympathy.

Wojtyła's interest in anthropology and its historical context

From his earliest writing, including his theatrical productions, Wojtyła was concerned with the mystery of the human person. As he writes in a 1968 letter to the Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac:

I devote my very rare free moments to a work that is close to my heart and devoted to the metaphysical sense and mystery of the PERSON. It seems to me that the debate today is being played out on that level. The evil of our times consists in the first place in a kind of degradation, indeed in a pulverisation, of the fundamental uniqueness of each human person. This evil is even more of the metaphysical order than of the moral order. To this disintegration planned at times by atheistic ideologies we must oppose, rather than sterile polemics, a kind of "recapitulation" of the inviolable mystery of the person.³³

This commitment to the "metaphysical sense and mystery" of the human person is present in virtually every work produced by Wojtyła. It is clear that he did not understand it as an isolated intellectual problem, but as an ethical context in need of recapitulating the "mystery" of the person.³⁴ Furthermore, it cannot be understood apart from the formative influences upon the younger Wojtyła's thought and life.

Wojtyła's early experiences of the Second World War had a formative effect upon his thought. When he was later elected pope, he was able to speak as a church leader who had direct experience of war and its travesties.³⁵ Furthermore, Poland suffered through both the war and the Soviet liberation that followed. Poland's relationship with Russia had rarely been

32. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 130–31.

33. Lubac, *At the Service of the Church*, 171–72.

34. *Ibid.*, 172.

35. Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, 8.

comfortably at peace, with a series of wars and insurrections between 1772 and 1944, so its history is marked by transient freedoms and heroic moments of national significance.³⁶ Indeed, Poland lost the highest proportion of its citizens (both civilian and military) to the war, in addition to those who were shipped elsewhere, placed in camps, tortured, cremated, or killed by the regime of German National Socialism.³⁷ Bleakly, Wojtyła's previous archdiocese (Kraków) included a death camp, that of Auschwitz (Oświęcim).³⁸ Wojtyła's formative adult years covered the duration of time between German occupation, Soviet liberation, and, in turn, Soviet Communist oppression. It was over a decade into his papacy before Soviet Communism collapsed and Poland gained a significant level of independence and autonomy.³⁹

Wojtyła's theological framework: christocentric, Trinitarian, eucharistic, and Marian

Because Wojtyła published so widely in philosophy before his papal election, his theological contribution can be interpreted solely in terms of official pronouncements and writings such as encyclicals or apostolic letters. Yet his philosophical enquiries were pursued within a clear theological framework that he developed consistently throughout his life. Surprisingly few theologians have systematically engaged with Wojtyła's theology, but exceptions include John Saward, Aidan Nichols, Gerald O'Collins, Michael Hayes, and Antoine E. Nachez.⁴⁰ Wojtyła's personal reflections have highlighted the protection of theology as a scholarly discipline, in close dialogue with other areas of study.⁴¹ To understand his later contribution in the area of the body, his theological framework must first be outlined, which is at once Trinitarian, christocentric, eucharistic, and Marian.

36. *Ibid.*, 9.

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. For comprehensive accounts of the historical background to Wojtyła's life, see Prażmowska, *Poland*; Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism*; Davies, *God's Playground*.

40. See especially Saward, *Christ Is the Answer*; Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith*; Hayes and O'Collins, *The Legacy of John Paul II*; Gillis, *The Political Papacy*.

41. John Paul II, *Rise, Let Us Be on Our Way*, 87–88.

A christocentric theology

For John Saward, Wojtyła's theological framework is shaped by a geometric metaphor: it is thoroughly "christocentric."⁴² This is in evidence from the opening words of his first papal encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*: "The Redeemer of Man, Jesus Christ, is the centre of the universe and of history [*Jesus Christus est centrum universi et historiae*]."⁴³ These words act as a kind of Christian protest against the false ideologies of the twentieth century, and reject the claims of various other possible centers to the meaning of history, such as the state, the proletariat, the market, or the economy. A great number of themes are treated in *Redemptor Hominis*, but the common thread is the redemptive event of Christ, in whose person and work is revealed the mystery not just of God's love, but the vocation of the human person. As *Redemptor Hominis* states:

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer "fully reveals man to himself."⁴⁴

John Paul II expresses here the relationship between an encounter with revealed love and the encounter with the self. It is by virtue of the former that the latter is made possible, thus constituting anthropology on a christological basis. Love arrives in the person of Christ; it is this arrival that makes knowledge of one's own self possible. This was taught by the Second Vatican Council, especially "Gaudium et Spes." In that document, the Council explicitly linked anthropological understanding with the self-giving love of Christ. See especially the first paragraph of section 22:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.⁴⁵

42. See his definition of terms in Saward, *Christ Is the Answer*, 1–14.

43. John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis: The Redeemer of Man*, 1.

44. *Ibid.*, 10.

45. Catholic Church, "Gaudium Et Spes," 22.

Only by Christ can the mystery of the human person be interpreted. Christ fulfills what was anticipated in the first Adam, and completes in his flesh what is lacking in the common human experience of embodied life. In fact, the anthropological teaching of the Second Vatican Council is a constant reference point for Wojtyła's theology.⁴⁶ Of course, he had played an active part in the Council. There are various accounts of the exact number of interventions made by Wojtyła, but of them, six were in connection with "Gaudium et Spes."⁴⁷ He intervened in the discussion of method and outline (II/5, 298–300); wrote parts on human nature and culture (III/5, 680–83) and various amendments (III/7, 380–82); gave a speech on creation and redemption as well as the topic of atheism (IV/2, 660–63); and wrote further on marriage and family (IV/3, 242–43) and culture and work (IV/3, 349–50).⁴⁸ These contributions highlight Wojtyła's interest in "Gaudium et Spes," but also speak to his interest in what Christ reveals to the whole man; to the human person in its concrete experience of the world. The teaching of *Redemptor Hominis*, that at the center of both the universe and of history is revelation, the God-Man Jesus, provides the constant point around which Wojtyła's theology moves and finds its bearings. In Saward's words, Christ acts as the "*nexus mysteriorum*" in Wojtyła's theological constellation.⁴⁹

Crucially, Christocentrism is not a theology of an isolated Christ alone in a circle. The Incarnate one is never received *alone* in matters of faith, as if the center was all that mattered to the circle; it is not "Christomonism."⁵⁰ That is to say, Christocentrism cannot be interpreted as if faith consisted of Christ in a monadic form, severed from the bonds of incarnate relationship with the world he has redeemed, or even with his relationship to the other persons of the Trinity. Rather, Christ is both the second person of the Trinitarian *communio*, as well as a dynamic center who is accompanied by his redeemed creation/s, most especially the saints. The Christ to which Wojtyła refers is not constituted most properly within the terms of ontology,

46. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama*, 70.

47. Dulles counts twenty-three contributions to the Council, against Scola's twenty-two and Grondelski's eighteen. Dulles includes written works under the title "inscribed to speak," which were never given in actual speech form; from the *Acta Synodalia*. See Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith*; Scola, "Gli Interventi Di Karol Wojtyła Al Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II," in *Karol Wojtyła*; Grondelski, "Sources for the Study of Karol Wojtyła's Thought, Appendix," in Schmitz, *At the Centre of the Human Drama*.

48. In addition to details taken from the Council's official record, Dulles notes the integral relational they have with his other published works. See Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith*, 1–17.

49. Saward, *Christ Is the Answer*, 1.

50. *Ibid.*, 3.

but the dynamic of relations in which he participates.⁵¹ These relations are Trinitarian and human. Avery Dulles points out that while for Wojtyła theology must be christocentric, Christ himself is not.⁵² The orientation of the Second Person of the Trinity was always in humble obedience towards the First, who is God the Father (John 4:34). This substantive work of the Son—to do the will of his Father—bears itself out in the three aspects of his mission: that of prophet, priest, and king. This *tria munera Christi* always, in Wojtyła’s reading, presents a revelation also of the human condition itself.

Wojtyła’s approach to the *tria munera Christi* is detailed explicitly in the work *Sign of Contradiction*, a text that includes his addresses to the papal household of Paul VI during its Lenten retreat in 1976. This work reflects further editorial changes made after the actual presentation of those addresses, and because of its ecclesial context offers a strictly theological work as opposed to Wojtyła’s philosophical publications. As such, it is an important account of John Paul II’s understanding of the *tria munera Christi*.

CHRIST THE PROPHET

In his prophetic mission, Christ “proclaims divine truth,” both enacting it and preaching it to the world.⁵³ In so doing, Christ prophetically reveals a *telos*, a calling to mind of human dignity as something both present and called to fulfill in the action of life. Human dignity, according to the prophetic witness of Christ, is bound up with truth, which is our “greatest treasure.”⁵⁴ It is that gravity of self-worth that finds its origins in the Father’s love, but that can only strengthen its own witness by its binding to the truth. And truth, by nature, belongs to God and is one with the divine Word.⁵⁵ The culmination of Christ’s prophetic witness is revealed for Wojtyła in the dialogue with Pilate, in which Christ gives his reason for coming into the world, “to bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37). In Christ, all human persons can locate the perfect synthesis between bearing witness to, and bearing within themselves, the truth.

Against the backdrop of an unruly world, Christ who is the truth stands out in stark relief, and so his prophetic nature is shown in form and outline, even before his spoken words are granted a hearing.

51. Dulles, *The Splendor of Faith*, 31.

52. *Ibid.*, 33.

53. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 120.

54. *Ibid.*

55. *Ibid.*

CHRIST THE PRIEST

The priestly ministry of Christ is not only a christological reflection for Wojtyła, but also an opportunity to reflect upon the “mystery of man.”⁵⁶ In addition to Scripture, he refers to “*Gaudium et Spes*” (10) and to “*Lumen Gentium*” (22).⁵⁷ Building on the Council’s teaching in these two documents, Wojtyła emphasizes that it is Christ’s own priestly ministry in which both the laity and the ordained ministers of the church participate. Christ’s priesthood is a self-sacrificial offering, one that is offered universally and so can be named the “common” priesthood of all the faithful.⁵⁸ Although Wojtyła’s methodology here is reflective, calling to mind the various scriptural references to Christ’s sacrificial priesthood (for example, Rom 12:1; Heb 10:5–7), he shapes this reflection anthropologically, by linking Jesus’ soteriological accomplishment in his sacrifice and in the Eucharist to the “existential interrogative” about the human person.⁵⁹ That is to say, the existential question about the meaning and purpose of the embodied human creature, who finds itself caught between conflicting limitations, aspirations, possibilities, and the ever-present demands of a choice to be made.⁶⁰ The link is one of call and response. The existential question of human existence is the call that demands a response. Wojtyła concretizes this in terms of the lived experience of priesthood (speaking generally of lay or ordained members of Christ’s priesthood). In a sense, the priest is making a subjective response both to a divine mandate as well as to the complex alterity of the self, what James Mensch calls “self-hiddenness.”⁶¹ In looking to others, we confirm our self-reliance on them, seeking in them a completion of what is lacking within ourselves. A “trace” is identified by the human subject referring to itself incompletely and to others to confirm this “inadequacy” of self-representation.⁶² However, this trace is not the whole truth, nor does it have the capacity to tell the whole truth. Rather, the person locates the truth in an ascetic moment of recognizing its subjective inadequacy, and so becomes a more perfect subject to what lies beyond itself.

56. *Ibid.*, 127.

57. Catholic Church, “*Gaudium Et Spes*,” “*Lumen Gentium*.”

58. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 129.

59. *Ibid.*, 127–29.

60. *Ibid.*, 129–30.

61. Mensch, *Hiddenness and Alterity*, 89.

62. *Ibid.*, 28–30.

The priest is one who has embraced the truth, and so has become a free subject to the truth.⁶³ Priesthood, as a quality of vocation that is embodied in a single human subject, is the sacrificial commitment that reveals truths about God, the world, and the human condition. It is an expression of meaning, showing the thread of continuity between the sacrifice of Calvary and the life of each human person. Priesthood plumbs the depths of human experience, reaching “to the depths of the whole existential truth of the created world, and above all the truth of man.”⁶⁴ As a category of absolute sacrifice, priesthood is self-giving of a particularly high order, which provides an adequate response to the existential problem. Sacrificial priestly behavior “answers” the existential problem with the form of self-giving.⁶⁵ It is at this point that Wojtyla turns explicitly to the ordained sacerdotal ministers within the Roman Catholic tradition to explain transcendence in relation to the human condition. The priest is one whose ordination confers the “turning towards God” as an expression of lived transcendence.⁶⁶ This transcendence is a reaching towards that which surpasses the world, yet expresses itself precisely in living for others within the world.⁶⁷ It is not an expression of the self, but a participation in the priesthood of Christ.

Wojtyla does not summarize his thoughts on the intimate relationship between the priesthood of all believers, the ordained priesthood, and Christ’s priesthood by reference to ethics. Instead, he refers to priesthood as prayer, both of man and the world. In fact, he turns to prayer as the “supreme” pursuit of the human person.⁶⁸ Prayer is not only an act of hope, but is revelatory of the human condition. In an allusion to Heidegger, Wojtyla claims that “[h]uman existence is ‘being directed towards God.’”⁶⁹ Yet it is also contemplative, for “it is ‘being within the dimensions of God.’”⁷⁰ Christ’s sacrifice is therefore a participatory aspect of his ministry; one that invites each human person to enter a redemptive course of life that also reveals truths about human experience. It displays the contemporary existential

63. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 130.

64. *Ibid.*, 131.

65. *Ibid.*, 130–32.

66. *Ibid.*, 132.

67. This also has resonances with Martin Buber’s “Single One” in the body politic: “Otherness enshrouds him, the otherness to which he is betrothed,” in Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 64.

68. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 135.

69. Heidegger’s *Dasein*, lived authentically, is “being-toward-death.” See for example Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 247. Wojtyla’s Heideggerian reference is made in *Sign of Contradiction*, 135.

70. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 135.

problem of human existence, as well as insisting that “Man exists not merely ‘in the world,’ not merely ‘in himself’; he exists ‘in relationship,’ ‘in self-giving.’”⁷¹ In the contemporary setting, it is confirming the “between” of human existence, and does not look to this present world as the final context in which this “between” can be overcome.⁷² Within such a transient moment, the kingship and prophetic witness of Christ are profoundly related to the priestly dimension, by which the kingly character is enjoined to the priestly character within the Christian disciple’s act of faith.

CHRIST THE KING

Wojtyla reflects upon the third of the three major aspects of Christ’s vocation and ministry, that of his kingship. Once again, he quotes the words of “*Gaudium et Spes*,” “Christ, who is the new Adam, by revealing the mystery of the Father and his love, also reveals man to man himself. . . .”⁷³ The revelation of man’s own mysteries have been understood under the titles of prophet and priest, but it is in Christ’s kingship that Wojtyla’s interpretation is the most paradoxical. He defines a relationship between *Christus Rex* and the human conscience by which the divine kingship is enthroned in the conscious acts of human personality. This is an argument for an integral relationship between the postresurrection Christ as a living God, and the structure of personal moral conscience within the human person. In the latter, the former is enthroned as king, thus putting aside a complete deferral of kingship until the eschaton in favor of a contemporary morality that owes its form and guidance to a contemporary Christ. The paradox lies in the absolute kingship afforded to Christ, while maintaining its humble reliance on the unique moral choices of each individual believer.

Lumen Gentium is recalled; especially section 36 on the topic of Christ’s kingdom.⁷⁴ In these words, Christ’s obedience unto death and his entering into glory reveal him to be king, to whom all subsequent obedience is owed.⁷⁵ As the document explains:

Christ, having made himself obedient unto death and exalted by the Father (cf Phil 2,8–9), entered into the glory of his kingdom. To him all things are made subject until he subjects himself and

71. *Ibid.*, 132.

72. See especially William Desmond’s treatment of desire in *Ethics and the Between*, 292.

73. Wojtyla quotes from Sect. 22 of GS; John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 137.

74. *Ibid.*, 138.

75. Catholic Church, “*Lumen Gentium*,” 36.

all created things to the Father in order that God may be all in all (1 Cor 15,27–28).⁷⁶

Wojtyła includes the more extensive quote, in which the power of kingship is communicated to the disciples, established in “royal freedom.”⁷⁷ The royalty in which Christ’s disciples share is not one of dominion over others, but a dominion of “self-abnegation and a holy life,” in which the reign of sin is overcome within themselves.⁷⁸ This interior kingdom also serves in an exterior, heraldic dimension, leading other brethren towards Christ the King, ushering in a time of humble servanthood under his reign.⁷⁹ For Wojtyła, this kingly character does not arrive solely by grace, but is already present or “embedded” within the structure of human personality as a kind of anticipative event.⁸⁰ In the various secular labors of the faithful, the kingly aspect of Christ shows itself. By acting faithfully within the world, the inner structure of kingship manifests itself outwardly. As such, theory and praxis are united christologically, confirming the Aristotelian notion that they remain complementary.⁸¹

Conscience is an important category for Wojtyła. For him, the union of *theoria* and *praxis* exists because of the presence of conscience, which he describes as “the most secret core and sanctuary of man, where he finds himself alone with God . . .”⁸² Conscience acts as the moral law, written within the human heart, to which human dignity is obedient. In subjecting human dignity to the moral conscience, Wojtyła is placing himself close to Thomas Aquinas’ account of conscience, for which the good of human nature is protected by obedience to a higher good, which is of moral virtue. For Thomas, conscience is the application of “knowledge to activity.”⁸³ It is the knowledge of good or evil as it is applied in particular circumstances that present themselves. The concrete practice of actions that follow a correctly formed conscience is what Thomas calls prudence, but it must be

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 138. According to Aristotle, there are three main forms of *energeiai*. They are *theoría*, *poiésis*, and *praxis*. While the first is the highest, it remains in complementary relationship with the last, neither of which can be understood without reference to the second. See Book VI, Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*.

79. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 138.

80. Ibid.

81. Wojtyła names Marxist philosophy as problematic in placing *praxis* before *theoria*. See John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 139.

82. Ibid., 140.

83. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, I.

remembered that a conscience must be formed well and correctly to serve the person in correct moral guidance.⁸⁴ Wojtyła takes up this Thomistic approach and develops it within a stronger christological dimension. The human person must live and act in accordance with a high moral call; one of kingly dominion over the self's temptation towards sin and towards the enacting of Christ's kingly dominion over the whole creation. Conscience therefore must be obedient to the divine law, by which "serving Christ in others" equates to "reigning."⁸⁵ Wojtyła writes:

Man's obedience to his conscience is the key to his moral grandeur and the basis of his "kingliness," his "dominion"; and this—ethically speaking—is also a dominion over himself. Obedience to conscience is a key element in the Christian's share "in munere regali Christ."⁸⁶

In this schema, ethics follows the order of self-abnegation, which is a participation in the kingship of Christ. Obedience to God equals a share in Christ's kingly reign. This requires that the human person be obedient to moral conscience. In line with the tradition preceding him, Wojtyła identifies a powerful relationship between conscience and repentance, through which the individual human subject turns from a course of sin and faces the Redeemer.⁸⁷ He even associates Christ's kingship with the sinful man who has accepted the truth of his own sinfulness and thereupon repents.⁸⁸ This moment of humility, given form in the concrete experience of going down on one's knees in the Sacrament of Penance has, for Wojtyła, "something of the nature of a meeting 'face to face' (1 Cor 13,12)."⁸⁹

The kingship of Christ therefore holds an anthropological promise. By it, the human person is granted its own moment of "kingliness" within the self, shone forth most clearly in the life of self-abnegation and the act of penance.⁹⁰ This is established in royal freedom only in so far as human dignity acts in abeyance to the law of love written in the moral conscience. The kingly person is one who has responded to the primary kingship of Christ, and in so doing, anticipates Christ's kingdom by living for others. It is therefore both a response and a participation in the life of grace.

84. *Ibid.*, Ia, q. 79, a. 13.

85. John Paul II, *Sign of Contradiction*, 141.

86. *Ibid.*

87. *Ibid.*, 141–43.

88. *Ibid.*, 143.

89. *Ibid.*, 142.

90. *Ibid.*, 143.