Foreword

"Should something be remembered about John Paul II three hundred years from now, it will surely be his anthropology and theology of the body." These were Angelo Scola's words when he taught us in the early nineties at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in the Lateran University in Rome. The then-bishop of Grossetto, Tuscany (at present Cardinal Archbishop of Milan) spoke in his capacity as a thorough investigator of past and contemporary global culture, following in the steps of Don Luigi Giussani's eagerness to establish a solid dialogue between faith and culture. Both for the latter, founder of *Communione e Liberazione,* and for his disciple, it was clear that a Christian had to confront the manifold expression of human culture as though it was an echoing of the sometimes-unconscious struggle of the human soul with, and thirst for, the mystery of Christ. What was and still is at stake is the authentic self-development of each person within the human community. The risk being for each one or for each society to tread an estranged route leading to violence and even autodestruction, as it had done more than once in the past. The Christian's renewed mission is ever to open minds and hearts to the light that Christ brings, not only concerning humanity's salvation in the world to come, but already guiding us in our search for happiness, love, and peace in the present world.

Central to man's quest for fulfillment is to apprehend his own identity: who he is and how he deals with his relationship to God, to the world, to his fellow men. In the Western world, since the Renaissance, the general tendency has been to try and enhance man's capacities by strengthening his power over nature and enlarging the field of his freedom to the detriment of any kind of social authority and of God's effective presence. This indeed has led to an impressive development of technology and to some political achievements that are potentially beneficial in the long run to many individuals. Alas, it did not prevent—indeed, it rather fostered by its oblivion of

God's wisdom—the spread of different political tyrannies, the indifference to ecological equilibrium, and the excesses of economic systems centered on the success of a happy few.

Having endured the disasters of two tyrannies—that of Stalin and, after that, of Hitler—and because of his Polish origin, considering Poland's historical struggles many a time in history to preserve its culture and its very existence, Karol Wojtyla was well prepared through the sufferings entailed in this "novitiate" to guide his fellow men in the quest for a renewed humanism. In his second encyclical, Saint Jean Paul II revealed his frame of mind as a philosopher. He writes in the opening paragraph of *Dives in Misericordia*, his encyclical written in 1980 on the Almighty Father:

> While the various currents of human thought both in the past and at the present still tend to separate theocentrism and anthropocentrism, and even to set them in opposition to each other, the Church, following Christ, seeks to link them up in human history in a deep and organic way. And this is also one of the basic principles, perhaps the most important one, of the teaching of the last Council.[1]

To link theocentrism and anthropocentrism, then, because the relationship between God and man is a covenant of love and not a permanent negotiation between rivals. And here is where the reflection on the human body becomes fully pertinent. For human flesh concretely bears witness to creation as the first covenant. Otherwise it is purely matter, freely disposed of by man's intelligence and directed toward the benefit of his welfare projects.

The seventeenth-century philosophers invented a connection to the body that bore the imperative of a new relationship to God. The heirs to Bacon and Descartes end up by rooting reality in blind matter of which thought is only but an effect. The body is just an automaton inhabited by a pure mind. God does not exist and faith is the lie of the powerful to justify political oppression.[2] The philosophical response to these theories will come more than two centuries later when phenomenology rehabilitated the body as a crucial element of lived experience and therefore as a condition to any rational process. It is no surprise, then, to see Wojtyla, a reader of Max Scheler, reflecting on the meaning of the human body in order to approach a better perception of the mystery of the human person. He does so by "following Christ," which means that the philosophical effort to express the person's unity, body and soul, is enlightened by faith in the incarnation

1. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 3.
2. For a thorough investigation see Villemot, *Dieu et la chair au 17ème siècle*.

of the Word: a mystery that indeed seals the reconciliation between God and man.

But it is not only Wojtyla's faith that stimulates his rational research: his entry into phenomenology, welcomed not as a discredit, but rather as a complement to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, helped him to develop an original theological anthropology that, as Scola put it, will still forever reshape the church's theological and pastoral work and hopefully influence the way in which the person is thought of and treated. In so doing, Wojtyla-John Paul II revives a patristic trend. Thomas Aquinas, following Augustine, barely includes the body in the *imago Dei*, as the trace (*vestigium*) of God's image in the human soul.[3] But Tertullian—in some of his writings at least—and Irenaeus, on the contrary, were very affirmative about the body's participation in the *imago Dei* and in humanity's path to salvation.

In *Dives in Misericordia*, quoted above, Saint John Paul II recalls the role of the Second Vatican Council in the reconciliation between theocentrism and anthropocentrism. This council was certainly a landmark in Wojtyla's intellectual quest and spiritual experience. He himself played an important part in the elaboration of the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes* in which a theological anthropology is developed from the mystery of the incarnate Word. The key phrase of the constitution is undoubtedly that which is often quoted by John Paul II himself: "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" (*GS* no. 22). From this starting point, the constitution develops a reflection on man as an individual and as a member of society, where marriage and family are fundamental in helping each one to grow and fulfill themselves within a *communio personarum*. Working on *Gaudium et Spes* surely gave Bishop Wojtyla the opportunity to confirm a solid christological and Trinitarian grounding in which he could develop his theology of the body, implemented thanks to his personal reflections and experience in counseling young students of both sexes and married couples. Thus, the meditation he began with *Love and Responsibility* and *The Jeweler's Shop* continues and flourishes, notably in the great catechesis he developed from 1979 to 1984.

To enable both theologians and philosophers, and more largely anyone wishing to scrutinize the mystery of the human person's nature and destiny, to draw great benefit from Karol Wojtyla–John Paul II's invaluable contribution, Nigel Zimmermann has chosen to prolong the dialogue the Polish philosopher and pope established with Emmanuel Levinas. It is a judicious choice. Both thinkers have endured the disastrous consequences

3. Cf. Aquinas, *S.T.*, Ia, Q. 93.

of ideological madness, both are inscribed in the inheritance of Edmund Husserl, both have rooted their philosophical work within the context of a religious experience lasting throughout a lifetime, both had a deep knowledge of their respective work and shared a mutual esteem. Both, insists Zimmermann, have something to bring to so-called "postmodernity" in their insistence—although with real differences—on the humble respect one should always adopt while "facing the other." For the other is a mystery, the clue of which is hidden in God's heart, albeit this mystery is embedded in a body—or is it just a face?—through which he becomes manifest to us. In postmodernism, the body tends to become idol or object, never an icon, for God is forgotten. For Levinas, and more convincingly so for Wojtyla, the body is a sense-bearer, although in different ways.

Levinas stresses the absolute ethical value born by the presence of the face of the other. Yet, impressed with Heidegger's watchfulness against any conceptual trapping of "being" and situated in a religious tradition emphasizing God's transcendence, he brings this radical ethical call almost to wall up the other in his irreducible otherness. Wojtyla, still welcoming Aquinas' realism and worshipping an incarnate God, reads the body in its sexual difference as an appeal to live all relationships in view of building a *communio personarum* through a form of nuptial mystery. Each individual's existence is structurally oriented towards the other.

Both Wojtyla and Levinas view self-giving as the ethical dynamism that is the foundation of a truly human society, and this begins with the way man and woman live their sexual relationship, mirrored in the erotic dimension of any human relationship. Nevertheless Zimmermann is quite convincing in showing the greater coherence of Wojtyla's teaching. What he calls Levinas' constant "hesitation before incarnate presence" makes it difficult for the Jewish philosopher to fully express and reflect on human experience. Therefore, his ethical claim seems weakened. As Zimmermann writes: "Has anyone truly loved another to the point of sacrifice for the sake of that person's *otherness* alone?" But this again is both a religious and a philosophical question. Must one read the opening of John's gospel in order to fully understand the opening of Genesis? To what extent can the body be apprehended as the person's epiphany?

In this very well-documented publication Nigel Zimmermann has rooted the dialogue between Levinas and Wojtyla in the experience of both authors and in the philosophical and theological dynamics, ancient or modern, nourishing their own thinking. Closely following the main writings of each and advancing with great ease through the unfolding of their thoughts, he puts forward their respective logic with clarity and renders them available to an attentive reader. Thanks to an impressive layout of the secondary

literature, whether it be critical or laudatory of the authors analyzed, their intellectual stand is constantly challenged and appears all the more stimulating, although the limits thereof are clearly stated. Special attention is given to the sacramental economy and its repercussion on consideration of the human body. Further developments are suggested, especially through exploring Jean-Luc Marion's work on *eros*. There is no doubt that this work is an important contribution to philosophical and theological research, helping each reader to positively reconsider his way of relating to "the holiness of the other" in his embodied otherness.

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