THE CULTURE OF LIFE: FOUNDATIONS AND DIMENSIONS

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SEVENTH ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL ACADEMY FOR LIFE

Città del Vaticano, 1-4 Marzo 2001

Edited by:

JUAN DE DJOS VIAL CORREA
ELIO SGRECCIA

LIBRERIA EDITRICE VATICANA
2002

INTRODUCTION

Presentation (Prof. JUAN DE DIOS VIAL CORREA E ELIO SGRECCIA)

Discourse of the Holy Father JOHN PAUL II

Final Communiqué

CONTRIBUTION OF THE TASK-FORCE

H.E. Msgr. JAVIER LOZANO BARRAGÁN, Man "image of God". Human life and health in the light of theology.

Rev. Msgr. BRUNO MAGGIONI, God speaks about life.


Dr. LUKE GORMALLY,

Rev. Prof. MAURIZIO FAGGIONI, Life and forms of life. The relationship between biology and anthropology.

Rev. Msgr. FIORENZO FACCHINI, Evolution, emergence and trascendence of man.

H.E. Msgr. ELIO SGRECCIA - Prof. MARIA LUISA DI PIETRO, The life of the spirit in corporeity: person and personality.

H.E. Msgr. ANDREAS LAUN, Natural Law.
Dr. VINCENZA MELE, *For a personalistic ecology between anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.*

Rev. Msgr. MAURO COZZOLI, *Natural law in the defense of life. The reasons for and limits of defending physical life.*

Prof. FRANCESCO D'AGOSTINO, *Respect for life and law.*

Prof. GONZALO HERRANZ, *The culture of life: an affirmative endeavour.*

Rev. Prof. TADEUSZ STYCZEN, *To live means to thank: gratias ago, ergo sum.*

H.E. Msgr. FRANCISCO GIL HELLÍN, *The mission of the family in the culture of life.*

Dr. CARLO CASINI, *Unborn life: contexts and new forms of support.*

Prof. GIAMPIERO GAMALERI, *The media and the culture of life.*

Prof. ADRIANO PESSINA, *The culture of life and the technological mentality.*

Prof. JUAN DE DIOS VIAL CORREA, *John Paul II, Pontiff of life.*
The annual study sessions of the Pontifical Academy for Life, during these first seven years of activity, have developed a detailed reflection on specific points of the ethical-legal debate about the defence of human life: The Identity and the Status of the Human Embryo, The Human Genome, and The Dignity of the Dying Person. Scientific and Doctrinal Comment on the Encyclical 'Evangelium Vitae and the study of the relationship between the encyclical Evangelium Vitae and the Law, which is a retrospective examination of the legal situation in the various continents and countries of the world with respect to the legal protection of human life. Five years after the Publication of the Encyclical 'Evangelium Vitae', have constituted a premise to these crucial subjects of the contemporary bioethical debate.

These volumes (six in number) bear witness to this wide and detailed reflection and constitute a patrimony which has been appreciated by scholars, not least because of the large number of translations which have been made of most of these volumes. Indeed, the examples of evidence of the culture of death are before everybody's eyes and they have in themselves a massive level of visibility, but the premises for a culture of life, with regard to its philosophical and theological foundations, did not seem to us to have been subjected to a detailed and explicit examination. The question was, and is, relevant, if one wants to go on to an operational stage, involving, that is to say, the construction of a culture of life, as something which goes beyond the stage of the mere condemnation of spreading evil, which nonetheless exists and is threatening: Vine in bonum malum is the warning of Holy Scripture (Rom 12:21). In this historical and cultural approach is to be located the choice of the subject of the Seventh General Assembly: 'The Culture of Life: Foundations and Dimensions'.

Employing the tried and tested method of the 'task force', which involved a high number of specialists (nineteen in number) in personal study and mutual and broad-ranging interaction carried out during the preparatory stage prior to the General Assembly itself, we achieved a survey which, or so we believe, dealt with the essential core points of the subject chosen for study. The various lesser related subjects such as the concept of 'the dignity of man', the theoretical and theological foundation of 'creation', the concept of corporeity, the definition of life and forms of life, natural law...were investigated by specialists and then discussed during the General Assembly. This volume also includes the contributions of theology and the approach of faith and includes papers which deal with subjects which have a critical interaction with contemporary culture such as ecology and the concept of the evolution of the various forms of life. The intention was to direct the reflection towards the ramifications of the culture of life within the contexts of the family and the mass media, as well as towards controversial subjects regarding the defence of unborn life and consequent sets of laws.

The result of this examination is in the volume that we present here, a volume written by a number of authors, each one of whom is a specialist on the subject, but also a volume which is unified around a fundamental theme - the culture of life. This volume will be immediately published in two languages - English and Italian - with the idea that it can be a significant support for those who, in teaching, cultural debate, and pastoral action, will want to draw from it inspiration and material.
It is always a great pleasure for me to meet you, distinguished members of the Pontifical Academy for Life. The reason today for this opportunity is your annual general assembly, which has brought you to Rome from various countries. I extend my cordial greetings to each of you, worthy friends who make up the family of this Academy which is so dear to me. I extend a particular and respectful greeting to your President, Prof. Juan de Dios Vial Correa, whom I thank for his kind words expressing your sentiments. I also greet the Vice-President, Bishop Elio Sgreccia, the members of the Executive Council, the staff and benefactors.

You have chosen a topic of great interest as the theme for your assembly's reflection: "The Culture of Life: Foundations and Dimensions". Its very formulation already expresses your intention to focus on the positive and constructive aspect of the defence of human life. During these days you have been asking yourselves about the necessary foundations for promoting or revitalizing a culture of life, and with what elements to propose it to a society marked - as I recalled in my Encyclical Evangelium vitae - by an increasingly widespread and alarming culture of death (cf. nn. 7, 17).

The best way to overcome and defeat the dangerous culture of death is to give firm foundations and clear content to a culture of life that will vigorously oppose it. Although right and necessary, it is not enough merely to expose and denounce the lethal effects of the culture of death. Rather, the inner tissue of contemporary culture must be continually regenerated, culture being understood as a conscious mentality, as convictions and actions, as the social structures that support it.

This reflection seems all the more valuable, if we consider that culture influences not only the behaviour of individuals but also legislative and political decisions, which in turn facilitate cultural trends which, unfortunately, often impede the authentic renewal of society.

Culture, moreover, orients the strategies of scientific research, which today more than ever is able to offer powerful means that unfortunately are not always used for man's true good. On the contrary, at times research in many fields even seems to turn against man.

Therefore, it is appropriate that you wished to clarify the foundations and dimensions of the culture of life. With this in mind, you stressed the great themes of creation, showing clearly how human life must be seen as God's gift. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, is called to be his free co-worker and, at the same time, to be responsible for the "stewardship" of creation.

You have also wished to reaffirm the inalienable value of the personal dignity of every individual from conception to natural death; you revisited the theme of bodiliness and its personalistic meaning; you focused your attention on the family as a community of love and life. You dwelt on the importance of the communications media for a far-reaching dissemination of the culture of life, and the need to be involved in a personal witness to it. You have also recalled how, in this area, everything that encourages dialogue should be pursued, in the conviction that the full truth about man supports life.

The believer is sustained in this by an enthusiasm rooted in the faith. Life will triumph: this is a sure hope for us. Yes, life will triumph because truth, goodness, joy and true progress are on the side of life. God, who loves life and gives it generously, is on the side of life.

As always happens in the relationship between philosophical reflection and theological meditation, in this case too the word and example of Jesus, who gave his life to conquer death and to give man a share in his resurrection, are also an indispensable help. Christ is the "resurrection and the life" (Jn 11: 25). Reasoning from this perspective, I wrote in the Encyclical Evangelium vitae: "The Gospel of life is not simply a reflection, however new and profound, on human life. Nor is it merely a commandment aimed at raising awareness and bringing about significant changes in society. Still less is it an illusory promise of a better future. The Gospel of life is something concrete and personal, for it consists in the proclamation of the very person of Jesus. Jesus made himself known to the Apostle Thomas, and in him to every person, with the words: 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life' (Jn 14: 6)" (n. 29).
This is a fundamental truth that the community of believers is called, today more than ever, to defend and promote. The Christian message about life, "written in the heart of every man and woman, has echoed in every conscience 'from the beginning', from the time of creation itself, in such a way that, despite the negative consequences of sin, it can also be known in its essential traits by human reason" (Evangelium vitae, n. 29).

The concept of creation is not only a splendid message of revelation, but also a sort of profound intuition of the human spirit. Likewise, the dignity of the person is not only an idea deducible from the biblical statement that man was created "in the image and likeness" of the Creator, but a concept rooted in his spiritual being, by which he shows that he is a being who transcends the world around him. The body's claim to dignity as a "subject", and not simply a material "object", is the logical consequence of the biblical concept of the person. This is a unified concept of the human being, which has been taught by many currents of thought from medieval philosophy to our times.

The commitment to the dialogue between faith and reason can only strengthen the culture of life, combining the dignity and sacredness, freedom and responsibility of every person as indispensable components of his very existence. Along with the defence of personal life, the environment must also be protected: both have been created and ordered by God, as the natural structure of the visible world itself confirms.

The great issues concerning the right to life of every human being from conception to death, the efforts to promote the family according to God's original plan, and the urgent need, now felt by all, to protect the environment in which we live represent an area of common interest for ethics and law. Particularly in this field, which involves the fundamental rights of human society, what I wrote in the Encyclical Fides et ratio applies: "The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason mutually support each other; each influences the other, as they offer to each other a purifying critique and a stimulus to pursue the search for deeper understanding" (n. 100).

The radical nature of the challenges posed to humanity today by the progress of science and technology, on the one hand, and by the progressive secularization of society, on the other, demands an impassioned effort to reflect more deeply on man and on his existence in the world and in history. It is necessary to show a great capacity for dialogue, for listening and for proposing, so that consciences may be formed. Only in this way will it be possible to create, in a just and united way, a culture based on hope and open to the integral progress of every individual in the various countries. Without a culture that safeguards the right to life and promotes the fundamental values of every person, it is impossible to have a healthy society, nor can peace and justice be guaranteed.

I pray that God will enlighten consciences and guide everyone involved at various levels in building the society of the future. May they always make the protection and defence of life their primary goal.

I express my heartfelt and grateful appreciation to you, distinguished members of the Pontifical Academy for Life, who spend your energies in serving such a noble and demanding goal. May the Lord support you in your work and help you to fulfil the mission entrusted to you. May the Blessed Virgin strengthen you with her motherly protection.

The Church is grateful to you for your lofty service to life. For my part, I would like to accompany you with my constant encouragement, confirmed by a special Blessing.

(From, L'Osservatore Romano, March 2001)
COMUNICATO FINALE

Si è svolta, dall'1 al 4 Marzo, presso l'Aula vecchia del Sinodo in Vaticano, la VII Assemblea Generale della Pontificia Accademia per la Vita, sul tema «La cultura della vita: fondamenti e dimensioni». Anche quest'anno, il convenire della quasi totalità dei Membri dell'Accademia, ha permesso lo sviluppo di una riflessione approfondita e compiuta intorno alla tematica proposta, secondo il metodo della interdisciplinarità.

Durante le sessioni di lavoro, ogni impegno è stato messo dai partecipanti nel cercare di individuare gli elementi fondanti ed imprescindibili per un'autentica cultura della vita, che possa essere promossa nel contesto culturale odierno, spesso contrassegnato da crescenti ed inquietanti scenari di una «cultura di morte» che sembra avanzare sempre più.

Un impegno, dunque, quello dell'Accademia per la Vita in questa sua Assemblea annuale, tutto volto al positivo, con il deliberato scopo di non fermarsi tanto a focalizzare gli eventuali limiti etici di specifiche problematiche di pertinenza della bioetica, quanto piuttosto a ripresentare i punti cardine da assumere come riferimento nella ricostruzione di una nuova «civiltà della vita».

Ampio è stato l'orizzonte d'indagine. Nell'ambito biblico-teologico, si è trattato dei fondamenti biblici del senso e del valore della vita umana, di ogni vita umana, qualunque sia la sua condizione contingente; ugualmente, anche la riflessione sulla fede nella «risurrezione della carne» ha rappresentato un importante presupposto per ogni ulteriore sviluppo antropologico. Ecco perché, entrando in questo campo, si è scelto di porre a fondamento proprio un'attenta considerazione della dignità umana, così come questa si è andata manifestando nello sviluppo del pensiero cristiano e secolare; allo scopo di approfondire ulteriormente la questione antropologica, un'intera sessione dei lavori è stata dedicata alla considerazione della singolarità dell'uomo rispetto all'universo dei viventi, singolarità espressa massimamente dall'unitarietà del suo essere «corpore et anima unus» (Gaudium et Spes 14), che vede la vita dello spirito vivificare ed «informare» la sua corporeità.

Il riconoscimento della vita come dono creato da Dio, poi, orienta l'uomo stesso a vivere la sua esistenza come un bene da donare a sua volta con gratitudine, al suo Creatore, eterna sorgente del suo essere, e ai fratelli, in un impegno di solidarietà e condivisione. Soltanto così l'uomo può realizzare in pienezza se stesso.

La ripresentazione di un tale quadro antropologico ha consentito anche di affrontare fondatamente la «questione ecologica», rifuggendo dalla semplicistica alternativa tra tutela indifferenziata di ogni forma di vita e protezione esclusiva della vita umana, mediante l'adozione del concetto di «custodia»: la natura è un dono di Dio che l'uomo non deve soltanto utilizzare ma anche custodire, cioè proteggere ed, insieme, far fruttificare.

Il cammino di riflessione di questa Assemblea ha poi trovato un importante momento di arricchimento e di incoraggiamento dalla presentazione di alcune testimonianze di dedizione piena al servizio della vita in difficoltà.
Anche quest'anno, il Santo Padre ha voluto ricevere in udienza speciale i partecipanti all'Assemblea Generale, rivolgendo loro la sua preziosa parola a sostegno delle attività dell'Accademia ed indicando la direzione per continuare il cammino già intrapreso.
«Vi è l'urgenza - ha detto il Papa - di rigenerare di continuo il tessuto interiore della cultura contemporanea», così come vi è pure la necessità di «dare prova di una grande capacità di dialogo, di ascolto e di proposta, in vista della formazione delle coscienze», nella costruzione di un'autentica cultura della vita, poiché «senza una cultura che mantenga saldo il diritto alla vita e promuova i valori fondamentali di ogni persona, non si può avere una società sana né la garanzia della pace e della giustizia».
L'Assemblea Generale della Pontificia Accademia per la Vita si è conclusa facendo proprio il grido che il Papa ha pronunciato con entusiasmo: «La vita vincerà: è questa per noi una sicura speranza. Sì, vincerà la vita, perché dalla parte della vita stanno la verità, il bene, la gioia, il vero progresso. Dalla parte della vita è Dio, che ama la vita e la dona con larghezza».

(pubblicato su "L'Osservatore Romano" di Domenica 18 Marzo 2001, p. 7)
JAVIER LOZANO BARRAGÁN

L'UOMO IMMAGINE DI DIO.
VITA UMANA E SALUTE ALLA LUCE DELLA TEOLOGIA

Il Pontificio Consiglio per la Pastorale della Salute ringrazia vivamente l'Accademia per la Vita per il suo interesse ad approfondire il tema della vita stessa, visto che salute e vita si intrecciano, e quando si svolge uno studio con la profondità con cui lo fa l'Accademia per la Vita, si offre al Pontificio Consiglio un aiuto meraviglioso in linea con le sue grandi preoccupazioni ed interessi.

Il tema che mi è stato assegnato probabilmente può essere preso come una piccola introduzione a quello che sarà esposto in modo autorevole nel corso del Congresso. Tenterò di unire alcune poche idee sulla vita concludendo con il suo rapporto con la pastorale della salute attraverso i concetti di opposizione, di contraddizione e di opposizione come contrarietà relativa. La riflessione in questo modo sarà centrata sul concetto di vita e di vita umana alla luce della Teologia.

LA VITA

A prima vista sembrerebbe che la vita è una verità di per sé stessa così evidente che non abbia bisogno di nessuna ulteriore riflessione e che di per sé stessa appaia come una specie di primo principio che risulti a tutti chiaro e venga percepita senza alcuna confusione, comunque, se ci chiediamo più profondamente, che cosa è la vita, in cosa consiste veramente il vivere, e concretamente, il vivere umano, le cose si complicano un poco.

Antica definizione della vita

Ricordo una vecchia definizione della vita: la vita è muovere se stesso. Questo è la vita, ci dicevano gli antichi, è l'essere o agire della sostanza che secondo la sua natura si mette in relazione con il movimento o con qualche altra operazione. Si tratta di un essere costituito nelle sue parti essenziali che ora si avvia alla vita, questo è un movimento interno. Ma, cosa è questo movimento?, ci viene risposto: è quello che è in capacità e potenza in quanto tale. Perciò la vita sarebbe la capacità primordiale di essere e di agire.

Relazioni e organicità

Essere agendo e agendo si è. Ma in qualunque movimento ci sono due termini, uno dal quale si procede e un altro verso il quale si tende che quello verso il quale si tende è la sua finalità, quello che specifica e definisce tutto il movimento. La finalità per essere tale deve essere l'esempio, e pertanto, inizio ed efficacia. Quindi, in quale direzione tende la vita? Penso che la risposta sia che la vita tende verso l'unità. L'unità è quello che specifica la vita, c'è un'unità che organizza l'essere vivente dall'interno e c'è un'altra unità che l'organizza dall'esterno, cioè in rapporto con gli altri esseri.

Sono due le classi di unità: l'unità interna dà il rapporto interno delle parti e così costituisce l'esclusione di altri esseri dentro di sé e dà l'individualità, l'individualità costituisce, per dirlo in un certo modo, la prima meta della vita che diventa così concreta e la realizza costituendo l'individuo. L'unità esterna sorge dalla comparazione di questo individuo con gli altri individui. Prendendo l'individuo come punto di partenza, grazie alla sua comparazione scaturiscono rapporti speciali tra questo individuo già costituito e gli altri.
**I rapporti**

I rapporti sorgono nel costatare la meravigliosa unità dell'Universo e del suo ordine imperante; senza rapporti non ci sarebbe ordine, tutto quello che è diverso per la sua partecipazione creata si unifica attraverso i rapporti. I rapporti costituiscono il condursi l'uno all'altro, l'avversi di un ente rispetto l'altro. In qualunque rapporto abbiamo un soggetto, un termine ed il fondamento del rapporto. Ci sono rapporti mutui e rapporti unilaterali, rapporti che coinvolgono due elementi o diversi elementi, sono diversi per la loro profondità e durata, alcuni scaturiscono dall'indigenza di uno dei soggetti che si relaziona e altri dalla sua ricchezza. La distinzione più importante dei rapporti è tra quelli trascendentali e quelli predicamentali, quelli trascendentali superano i limiti della categoria e si riferiscono alla costituzione essenziale del soggetto, come i principi dell'essere e i rapporti della creatura con il suo Creatore, quelli predicamentali sono accidentali e trasmettono una determinazione ulteriore al soggetto già costituito. Di solito si parla anche di rapporti reali e logici a seconda che il loro fondamento si trovi nell'ordine oggettivo o soggettivo. L'insieme di effetti realizzati per i rapporti trascendentali e predicamentali esprime l'organicità.

**La organicità**

Per costituire l'organicità, è necessaria la distinzione delle parti, l'interna e l'esterna; altrimenti, non ci può essere unità. L'unità interna, l'organicità dell'essere vivente genera la propria vita. Comunque, questa organicità non si esaurisce nell'interno, ma mira all'organicità esterna, mira verso l'unità con gli altri essere viventi. L'unità interna conferisce l'individualità, comunque quest'unità interna non è vitale se non è intimamente trasformata dall'unità esterna, cioè, se non si mette in rapporto con gli altri esseri viventi. L'organicità esterna influenza in tale maniera sull'individualità in modo che l'individuo non può chiudersi in sé stesso per diventare vita individuale ma ottiene la sua ricchezza quando si apre agli altri e si realizza l'unità, l'armonia, la convergenza tra i diversi. Si potrebbe quindi dire che la vita in genere è la convergenza tra i diversi. Così l'organicità esterna diventa in un certo modo un rapporto trascendentale, influenza sull'organicità interna senza danneggiare la distinzione degli esseri viventi; cioè, senza scendere in un monismo panteista di segno organologico.

**Esseri diversi**

Di fatto, ogni individuo è essenzialmente diverso dagli altri, in effetti, chiunque si può considerare diverso in quanto ha quello che l'altro non possiede e non possiede quello che l'altro ha. C'è un aspetto della vita nel quale è compresa una negazione, e su questa negazione si genera la vita, perché in questa è inclusa un'affermazione che esige l'organicità, la convergenza stessa verso l'unità degli esseri diversi, la vita. Questa convergenza tra i diversi, che in un ultimo termine costituisce la vita nella sua totalità, è stata pensata o negata in diversi modi attraverso la storia del pensiero. Una corrente che ha seguito questa linea è stata il Panteismo in tutte le sue forme, del quale abbiamo già fatto menzione; un'altra corrente è stata rappresentata dalla Partecipazione. Infine c'è stata un'altra linea di pensiero che strutturava molte correnti contemporanee che è stata la negazione basica dell'organicità esterna dell'uomo nella cosiddetta cultura o anticultura della morte.

**Negazione della distinzione: panteismo**

Nel Panteismo veramente non esiste organicità distinta in quanto le barriere vengono soppresse, nel profondo non c'è pluralità perché l'uno è il tutto e il tutto è l'uno. Quindi il Panteismo non spiega la vita, perché in esso non c'è una vera coincidenza tra i diversi ma è un tutto amorfo e pertanto senza vita.
Veramente nel Panteismo non esiste un'autentica opposizione tra rinuncia e proprietà o un vero rapporto che riconosca l'organicità, perché è tutto confuso.

**VITA COME OPPOSIZIONE**

Nelle concezioni lontane dal Panteismo, invece, esiste l'obiezione; ma mettiamo in chiaro quale tipo di obiezione si intende: la vita è opposizione, l'opposizione può essere come contrarietà o come contraddizione. Se è come contrarietà, ci troviamo nell'ambito della vita. Se è come contraddizione, ci porta alla morte. L'opposizione come contrarietà unisce i contrari con un disgiungimento, "questo e quest'altro"; l'opposizione come contraddizione elimina uno degli opposti per affermare l'altro. Nell'eliminare uno degli opposti non c'è più organicità e quindi non si può più parlare di vita. Aggiungendo qualcosa a quanto già detto possiamo dire che c'è opposizione tra due contenuti quando la posizione di uno elimina in qualche modo quella dell'altro. A seconda di quale sia lo spirito di questa eliminazione si hanno le diverse classi di opposizione. L'opposizione come contraddizione è irriducibile, si svolge tra l'essere e il non essere, non tollera un termine medio. L'opposizione come contrarietà o opposizione contraria fa sì che i due contenuti si respingano in un aspetto limitato e per tanto accetta i termini medi. L'opposizione contraria può essere privativa oppure relativa a seconda che siano in opposizione i due contenuti per rinuncia - proprietà, oppure per semplice relazione.

**Opposizione di contraddizione nel concetto della vita**

C'è una mentalità nel mondo moderno che si basa fortemente sull'opposizione come contraddizione. Questa è la mentalità evoluzionistica applicata all'uomo in modo diretto e interamente. In effetti, nella mentalità evoluzionistica la sopravvivenza delle specie si ha nella lotta fino alla morte che è un'opposizione come contraddizione, che porta alla sopravvivenza del più forte. Probabilmente molti passi dell'evoluzione degli esseri inferiori all'uomo si possono spiegare in questa lotta per la vita, la famosa "struggle for life". Ma non risulta possibile applicarla nella sua totalità perché, sebbene è vero che esiste una gradualità nell'esistenza attuale delle specie nel mondo vivente subumano, cioè esiste una gradualità attuale delle stesse, non sono scomparse le specie inferiori. Queste nel suo insieme formano la sfera subumana organica. Il problema sorge più fortemente quando questa spiegazione della vita attraverso l'opposizione contraddittoria si applica alla sfera umana della vita stessa. Quindi si arriva al punto che la prevalenza e la sopravvivenza del più forte diventano una norma e da li si originano tutte le opinioni maltusiane e di razze superiori nelle quali alcuni si affermano tentando di uccidere gli altri, in modo più selvaggio negli stadi primitivi, in modi più sofisticati nel mondo attuale. Questa è la cultura della contraddizione, o per dire lo stesso, la cultura della morte che viene chiamata l'anticultura propriamente detta. In questa posizione non c'è praticamente organicità, la vita come organicità scompare perché non c'è termine contro il quale opporsi, poiché è stato distrutto. Il problema è che siccome questo termine è assolutamente indispensabile per la vita, dal momento che non esiste più, la vita marcisce e quindi si arriva alla cultura della morte. Non c'è il termine contro il quale affermarsi dal momento che questo appartiene internamente alla propria organicità del soggetto che vuole affermarsi, la stessa vita individuale muore. Nuovamente, con la stessa logica, affrontiamo l'assurdo della cultura della morte.

**Opposizione di contrarietà nel concetto della vita**

L'autentica opposizione che può garantire la vita è l'opposizione di contrarietà. Questa, come dicevamo prima, si esprime mediante un disgiungimento: "questo e quest'altro". In parole povere, la vita è complementarità organica, si è vivi in quanto si è in opposizione ad un altro essere vivente perché non...
si ha quello che l'altro possiede ma si vuole partecipare della sua ricchezza. A sua volta, l'altro essere vivente è vivo in quanto partecipa della ricchezza del primo. L'ideale è che questa mutua partecipazione sia senza menomazione, cioè, senza sottrarre alla partecipazione comune niente di quello che gli esseri viventi possiedono di per sé. In questo caso ci troviamo con l'opposizione per mero rapporto.

**LA VITA NELLA SANTISSIMA TRINITÀ' E NELL'INCARNAZIONE**

È precisamente questo l'ideale che si realizza nella fonte della vita di tutta la creazione che è la Santissima Trinità. La Santissima Trinità, secondo la rivelazione dello stesso Dio, si costituisce in una opposizione relativa e una coincidenza assoluta. È per questo che Dio è uno in tre persone diverse (cfr. Jo 16,15). In Dio l'opposizione tra le persone divine è l'opposizione di rapporto di completezza, non di indigenza; dove, è vero, si trova la rinuncia e la proprietà nelle diverse persone, ma senza che questa rinuncia significhi una menomazione di una delle persone divine, e senza che la proprietà di una delle persone possa produrre qualche sottrazione a un'altra. L'opposizione tra le persone divine è un rapporto di completezza che consiste in una mera opposizione di contrarietà relativa.

In definitiva, quello che una persona non possiede si mette in rapporto con quello che un'altra ha in modo che la rinuncia resta in una possessione non relativa ma assoluta e infinita. Quest'apparente contraddizione viene chiarita osservando le tre persone concretamente: il Padre non ha la filiazione, ma è padre per la filiazione. Il Figlio non ha la paternità ma è Figlio per la paternità. Lo Spirito non ha l'ispirazione, ma è Spirito per l'ispirazione del Padre e del Figlio. Infine tutti e tre sono infiniti nella perfezione di una sola natura divina perché il Padre, il Figlio e lo Spirito Santo sono un solo Dio. La vita infinita delle tre persone divine si realizza per una donazione assoluta del Padre al Figlio, del Figlio al Padre, del Padre e del Figlio allo Spirito e dello Spirito al Padre e al Figlio. La distinzione si ha per rapporto di completezza, cioè, per opposizione di mera contrarietà relativa e, a sua volta, per opporsi in una totale donazione. Così la vita diventa rapporto di completezza feconda in una donazione amorosa.

Da questo modello divino possiamo intuire che la vita nella sua fonte, e quindi nella sua massima espressione, è muovere se stesso in un insieme di rapporti verso la piena donazione. Viene donato quello che si possiede e si riceve quello che non si ha in un processo incessante che arricchisce e che è, precisamente, il processo vitale. (Cfr. Jo 17, 22-23.26). I punti fondamentali sono i rapporti che fondano l'opposizione contraria, non per rinchiudersi nella propria proprietà o nella propria rinuncia, ma per aprirsi in una totale donazione. Così la vita diventa rapporto di completezza feconda in una donazione amorosa.

Questa è la vita in sé, e quando Dio la partecipa nella sua creazione, in particolare quando partecipa l'uomo, la dona, analogamente, in questo modo. Dio iscrive questa donazione all'interno della libertà umana. E precisamente quando l'uomo non vuole più accettare questa donazione, allora si rinchiude in sé stesso, si oppone agli altri in contraddizione. Questo è il peccato, vale a dire, la morte.

**La storia della salvezza**

All'interno di queste coordinate si scrive la Storia della Salvezza, come una storia della libertà (Gn 2, 16-17). E siccome l'uomo aveva scelto l'opposizione di contraddizione (Gn 3,6), il peccato e la morte e nonostante Dio non gli aveva sottratto il fatto che nel suo interno sia ancora fatto a sua immagine, la storia dell'umanità è una storia che si svolge all'interno di due capi vincolati nel più profondo dell'uomo: contraddizione-contrarietà, morte-vita, odio-amore, egoismo-donazione.

In questo ambito, l'Incarnazione Pasquale viene a compiere la frattura della contraddizione in una costruzione amorosa di contrarietà di rapporto. Ciò, la morte viene vinta dalla resurrezione. Cristo prende su di sé la contraddizione dell'uomo che significa il suo peccato e la sua morte, e porta questa
contraddizione fino a patirla su sé stesso nella sofferenza della morte (Cfr. Ro 5-6, passim). Ma questa morte, per l'amore dello Spirito Santo diventa fonte di vita, una donazione amorosa di vita, una risurrezione per Cristo medesimo e per tutta l'umanità (Cfr. Ro 8; Ef 1). La contraddizione in quest'unico caso diventa feconda, viene distrutta la sua negazione della vita e si trasforma in opposizione di contrarietà amorosa, fondata nel rapporto di amore che è lo Spirito Santo: la morte diviene la maggiore prova di amore, la maggiore prova di donazione. E così Cristo, divenuto colpevole, prendendo su di sé la contraddizione assoluta dell'uomo che è la morte, crea nuovamente un uomo nuovo nel rapporto di giustizia e santità che è la risurrezione.

La contraddizione compresa nella contrarietà

Per arricchire quello già detto possiamo aggiungere che Cristo prende su di sé la contraddizione e la fa diventare contrarietà in rapporto di massimo amore e quindi di massima vita, contrarietà nella quale si oppone relativamente all'uomo come soggetto al quale gli dona quello che gli manca totalmente: la vita. La vita trinitaria di opposizione contraria di pura donazione ora passa attraverso la contraddizione della morte per vincere la stessa morte e trasformarla in una pura donazione nello Spirito. La fa diventare donazione di puro amore. Si supera la contraddizione della morte nell'opposizione relativa di contrarietà che è un rapporto di amore. Avevamo descritto come l'opposizione di contraddizione genera la cultura della morte; in Cristo, questa opposizione lo condusse alla massima morte, così chiamata perché la sua morte prende su di sé tutte le morti del mondo, tutte e ciascuna delle contraddizioni; la Redenzione quindi si fondò nel trasformare questa massima morte nella massima vita, riformare la contraddizione attraverso lo spirito in un puro rapporto di amore, come donazione totale. Se, come dicevamo, la vita è capacità di essere e di agire, possiamo quindi concludere che la vita è capacità di essere e di agire attraverso un'opposizione contraddittoria, come è la morte, una opposizione contraria come rapporto di donazione amorosa assoluta nella quale si riceve la partecipazione alla vita della Santissima Trinità (Jo. 17,23.26). In questo consiste l'obbedienza di Cristo che, sentendo la voce del Padre e condotto dallo Spirito Santo, rinuncia a sé stesso, come dice San Paolo: "Pur essendo di natura divina, non ha insistito nell'essere uguale a Dio, ma abbandonando quello che gli era proprio e prendendo la natura di un servo è nato come uomo e presentandosi come uomo si sottopose all'umiliazione e per obbedienza, è andato incontro alla morte, vergognosa morte, sulla croce. Per questo Dio gli ha offerto il più alto onore e il più eccellente di tutti i nomi, così sentendo il nome di Gesù pieghino le ginocchia tutti quelli che sono nei celii e nella terra, e sotto la terra, e tutti possano riconoscere che Gesù Cristo è il Signore, per lode a Dio Padre" (Fil 2, 6-11).

Opposizione, tensione e salute

All'interno di questa riflessione sul contesto salvifico di Cristo è ora necessario considerare molto brevemente cosa è la salute. Lo faccio soltanto a modo di conclusione. Trattare in modo esaustivo la salute comporterebbe un discorso molto lungo per il quale non abbiamo tempo in questa occasione. Qui possiamo enunciare il concetto di salute che Papa Giovanni Paolo II ci ha offerto nel Messaggio Giubilare della Giornata Mondiale del Malato dell'anno 2000. Diceva il Papa: "La salute non si identifica soltanto con l'assenza di malattia, ma si pone come un'inclinazione verso la più piena armonia e sano equilibrio a livello fisico, psichico spirituale e sociale. In questa stessa prospettiva la persona è chiamata a mobilitare tutte le sue energie disponibili per realizzare la propria vocazione e il bene degli altri" (Giovanni Paolo II, Messaggio per la VII Giornata Mondiale del Malato, 6.VIII.1999) Ora tenteremo di commentare brevemente questo concetto di salute utilizzando i termini della riflessione che abbiamo svolto finora:

Abbiamo parlato di un rapporto di opposizione. Anche la salute è un'opposizione perche è una tendenza verso l'armonia totale dell'uomo, verso l'armonia fisica, psichica, sociale e spirituale dell'uomo.
Quest'armonia è, in ultimo termine, la partecipazione della vita divina della Santissima Trinità nell'uomo ed è quindi un'opposizione di contrarietà relativa di completezza, come abbiamo già detto, e la tendenza partecipa di questa stessa natura della vita armonica trinitaria. Infine, la salute è la tendenza generata dalla chiamata di Dio in Cristo a partecipare a questa armonia, è la risposta che l'uomo offre a Dio lungo le diverse tappe della sua vita. A volte comporterà l'assenza di malattia, a volte No. L'essenziale non è l'assenza di malattia ma la tendenza all'armonia. Questa tendenza è un'opposizione di rapporto di completezza. È muoversi in completezza. Così la salute si avvia verso la vera vita, che può trovarsi anche nella malattia e nella stessa morte, quando questa ha una natura come quella di Cristo. Una cosa è, quindi, la carenza di malattia e un'altra è l'autentica salute. In questo senso, la vera salute si identifica con la vera vita in quanto la vita si trova, in un certo senso, nel cammino verso la salute.

Si fa notare, inoltre, il vincolo essenziale che c'è tra salute e Chiesa, dal momento che la Chiesa è la chiamata concreta a quest'armonia. La vita e la salute sono, quindi, un dono dello Spirito Santo, sono i doni sperati dall'armonia nel contesto delle contraddizioni più grandi che siano mai esistite.

Dicevamo che la vita consiste nel muovere se stesso, possiamo quindi dire che la vita e la salute sono i doni che fanno sì che l'uomo metta in moto sé stesso nella forza dello Spirito Santo e grazie allo stesso (Cfr. 1 Cor 2, 6-16; 12-13; 2 Cor 5, 1-5). Così, salute e vita si identificano con il regalo della vita divina affidata, partecipata all'uomo. La vita e la salute sono il rimedio alle tensioni quotidiane che ricevono un cammino di risoluzione nella Parola di Dio che è Cristo e che ora ci arriva nella forma sacramentale, in particolare, nell'Eucaristia. Per questo motivo l'Eucaristia si chiama il pane della vita ed è la medicina dell'immortalità (Cfr. Jo 6, 25-29).

CONCLUSIONE: L'UOMO COME IMMAGINE DI DIO

Tutto questo che è stato detto è stato un balbettare alcune idee partendo dall'analogia per descrivere la vita e la salute e, in questo modo, l'uomo come immagine di Dio. Quindi, in sintesi, potremmo concludere la nostra riflessione dicendo che l'uomo come immagine di Dio (Gn 1, 27; Cfr. Ro 5, 12-19) è l'uomo che tende verso l'armonia, una tendenza che consiste nella contraddizione morte-vita (Ro 6, 1-11), che si risolve nel rapporto amoroso e di completa donazione con lo Spirito stesso (Ro 8, 1-17) e che permette all'uomo di vivere in quanto si apra a Dio e agli altri in un'essenziale integrazione umana (Cfr. Ef 4, 17-32). Così la vita è convergenza dei diversi, diversi che sono opposti ma non per un'opposizione di contraddizione ma per una mera opposizione di contrarietà che consiste in un rapporto di completezza dove quello che si possiede si dona agli altri, e invece di scomparire si diventa più forte per lo stesso atto di donazione. Questa è la meraviglia della vita e la salute come immagine di Dio.

Come immagine di Dio, l'uomo si costituisce nella vita grazie alla donazione amorosa verso Dio e verso gli altri. Come immagine di Dio, la tendenza che lo spinge a donarsi sempre a Dio ed agli altri costituisce la salute. È una tendenza che punta verso la completa armonia della resurrezione, ma è una tendenza molto dolorosa, perché passa attraverso la contraddizione che è la morte di Cristo. La vita è donazione amorosa sempre crescente che si spinge verso orizzonti infiniti. La salute è la tendenza che orienta la vita verso quest'armonia sempre perfezionabile. E questa vita e questa salute cristiane fanno sì che l'uomo sia, nel suo rapporto con Dio e con gli altri, una vera immagine di Dio.
I am persuaded that God speaks about life in many ways. In my speech, however, I will dwell just on the written word of God: the Old and New Testaments. A question, in particular, interests me: which is the root that, in the biblical narration, is the ultimate foundation giving sense and dignity to every man's life? Sense and dignity not only to the successful and promising life, but also to a "wounded" life? As you know, the biblical path may seem fragmentary, long, even tortuous. Its truth does not lie in the sum of all emerging details, but in the logic directing the whole course, which remains steady even when situations change, which little by little becomes clear and finds its accomplishment in the event of Jesus Christ. The perspective I chose—undoubtedly limited, but all the same essential—lets me free from such concerns as the examination of the individual texts, the historical situations they are placed in, their origins. I will not deal with this: I am not doing exegesis, but biblical theology. I am interested in synthesis.

The coordinates

I find it useful to start my conversation stating some coordinates that form the grid within which the biblical narration developed, though not always with the same clarity. They are well known, so I will just make a list of them.

From the very beginning, the Bible is persuaded that life is much more than mere existence. Paradoxically the Gospel says that in order to have your life you also need to know how to lose your existence (Mk 8,34)! The Bible is also struck by those outpourings of life which may be described as movement and liveliness. Life is something which grows and develops, it means completeness and intensity. That's why the Hebraic word is in the plural, precisely to emphasize the completeness and intensity of it. The Bible is persuaded that life is to be widened, not just lengthened (on this subject see Pr 3,16-18).

The Biblical idea of life is built up within a unitary idea of man. No dualism, either between spirit and body or between individual man and society. For the Bible no dualism is possible, because it always sees man in his inseparable unity.

The most typical and rich feature in the Bible is surely the bond between God and life. God is the Living, and life is the most precious gift pouring out of His free and faithful love. The Bible, in more than a way, stresses the idea the life is a gift and, as such, it is to be lived gratefully and joyfully. The word life is always connected with verbs showing God's saving action: to give, to redeem, to preserve, to provide, and to do. The narration in Genesis 2 tells that "God fashioned man of dust from the soil and then breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and thus man became a living being". The priestly version (Genesis 1) tells that on the sixth day God said: "Let's make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves". (Gn 1,26), and to ensure continuity and growth to the rising life, God gave man His blessing.

Not only is the creation of mankind as a whole, but also the appearance of every single person, every single life, traced back by the Bible to the creative and industrious action of God. For the Bible, man cannot thoroughly understand himself if he is not aware of this: he originates from a decision in which he has had no part. The gratuitousness of God's love, this free deed of love is at the origin of each man. On the subject you can read beautiful passages, like Psalm 139 and Job 10,8-12). In this original gratuitousness is the true reason which gives sense and dignity to every living man. And this gratuitousness encloses the promise of God's fidelity to man, to each single man, a fidelity that can by no means fail him.

Some remarkable statements are included in the idea of man as image of God. The first one is that life comes from God and is his gift, his image, his mark. God is the only owner of life; therefore this is an
unthinkable reality, which is removed from the power of any man. While blessing Noah at the end of the Flood, God said: "I will demand an account of every man's life from his fellow-men...for in the image of God man was made." (Gn 9,6-6) A second statement is that man is placed at the top of creation. Man is something unique. He is undoubtedly related to the creation and in agreement with all creatures, but there is something more in him: precisely his being the image of God. This is valid for any man, beyond any possible difference (see Psalm 8). The image of God is not something which is added to his being a creature; instead it expresses the deep meaning of his being a creature. The image of God belongs to each man, simply because he is a creature of God. And it refers to man as a whole, not to a part of him or to one of his qualities. A third statement is that life must be lived in obedience. Image means relationship, reflected reality, precisely obedience. Being a gift of God life develops when in communion with its source and is mortified when it moves away from it. More plainly, many passages of the Bible bind the promise of life to the observance of the commandments: for example Dt 31,15-16. In terms not so immediately religious, we could say that the development of life is bound to a correct planning of life itself. With a great sharpness of mind, prophets have always tried to deter Israel from making independent plans and to dissuade it from too human, firm, however religious, convictions. Man must, instead, abandon himself, with absolute confidence, to the hands of God. "Seek me and you shall live", says Amos the prophet.(5,4 folg). To lead a full life, man must find the courage of relying himself on the promise of God, so the courage of abandoning himself forward, to life coming towards him. And this not only in view of a future life (a concept which is rather vague in the Old Testament), but also in the course of his earthly life.

But where does the biblical man actually perceive his greatness and consistency? This crucial question is very clearly answered in Ps 8, which presents itself as the ripe fruit of a log-lasting reflection on creation and on the relationship between God and man. The Psalmist finds the greatness and consistency of man in the fact that God remembers him. Not in man's beauty, strength or intelligence. It is God's love which gives dignity to man. The deepest experience of the biblical man is his astonishment at being remembered by God.

The last coordinate I want to mention, so important as to be somehow the backbone of the speech (which therefore has been mentioned again and again) is the relation of confidence between man and God: a confidence in His promise so firm as to be purified, but not shaken down, by so many disavowals. In the passages of the Bible, even the most anguished, even those which seem to express God's desertion, there is always (maybe underground) this confidence in his fidelity. This confidence is present even in the narration of Abraham, who is ready to go to any length to comply with God, even to agree to the sacrifice of his son. Of course, throughout the Bible, many behaviours can be found, which diverge from what so far has been said: violence against enemies, extermination of foreign cities, killings, also some episodes of suicide. Such behaviours, however, do not compromise what is essential in the discourse. They show, instead, how difficult it was to work it out and how hard to overcome so many cultural hindrances. Anyway, it is not in the light of these behaviours that the main idea is to be understood, but vice versa.

Typologies

After dealing with the coordinates (which perhaps I have treated a bit too extensively) it is useful to examine the Old Testament itinerary, through the different situations the biblical man has faced. Here is a short list of them:

the man leading a successful life which comes to its natural end
a broken life ending up in an untimely, sometimes violent, death
a hurt life: the suffering of the blameless (Job)
a dissatisfying, though successful from the human point of view, life, devoid of sense in itself, rather a deceived promise (Qohelet)
Martyrdom

Certainly these different situations give rise to different ways of trusting in life. But what is interesting-and essential for us-is that the biblical man, in all situations, has always sought solace in God's fidelity.

The event of Jesus Christ and life

The New Testament does not place man in the centre of its revelation, but how God considers man: his love for man, his convenant with man, his sharing man's existence. Obviously, this revelation concerning above all God-cast a new, unthought-of light on man. Here are some aspects, which can interest us directly:

"The Son of the Father was made flesh" (Jh 1,14), you can read in the prologue of John. Flesh is surely neither the condition of sin, nor simply human nature: it is human nature in its transience, in its historicity, in its corporality and in its worldliness. The Son of God has taken on man's life in its full reality. Thus the foundation of the dignity of man's life, taken as a whole, is laid again. After the incarnation of the Son of God, any escape from the world is barred to Christians. Not even sin can be used as an alibi for the denigration of man's life in the world. For the New Testament, there are neither two parallel existences (spiritual and material), so much the less a spiritual existence confined in a body, and hindered by it; nor two existences merely thought as a "before" and a "after", but a unitary existence, the one which is being lived now, but which is bound to flow into eternity and into the full communion with God. St John, by his repeated expression of eternal life-to be explained as a sharing of divine life as from now, of such a quality as to defeat death-shows that the reason (or sense) of life is not only to be sought outside it, in its future destiny, but it is already inside it: a sense, undoubtedly received, but already present.

Moreover, if we examine the exact historical patterns of the existence lived by the Son of God, then we will also understand that he has taken on the face of the derided man, of the suffering man, of the persecuted man, of the enemy, even of the man considered sinner and wrongdoer. All this shows that no man, whoever he is and whatever he has done, can be deprived of his dignity of a being loved by God. Man's dignity is inalienable and unreserved, precisely because it is rooted in God's free love. Besides, Jesus clearly demands the utmost respect for man and considers both love and offence as directed to himself (Mt 25,21 folg). A God thought as remote can bear man to be manipulated, but a God who becomes man cannot bear it.

The New Testament opens man's life to boundless horizons, trespassing into God's mystery itself, the Trinity mystery. Thus life is thoroughly marked by gratuity. A free gift from its very beginning and a free gift in its elevation. Somehow also in the Old Testament they thought life-in its deepest core- as a communion with God. But now they speak of sharing divine life itself. All this is very important to understand life. If the outlook is limited to the present time only, or even if it is confined within man's natural consistency, it is objectively more difficult to find a sense in life. You have to rise your eyes towards God, whose life man shares.

And as God's life is a dialogue of communion and love (Trinity), what follows is that also man's life-which is inserted in the Trinity dialogue-reveals itself and develops in love and communion. St John is right when he writes in his letter (3,14): "We have passed out of death and into life, and of this we can be sure because we love our brothers". Life is the novelty of the love of God, who in Christ seizes man to its full extent, renewing him, opening him towards an unthought-of dignity.

The Cross/resurrection of Jesus

But to understand life, we must understand the Cross, and, obviously, resurrection. Without the Cross we would not have the key to understand the contradiction of our life, too many things of man would be senseless. The Cross does not abolish the negative realities of life, but suggests a different reading of
them. On accepting the way of the Cross, Jesus shared, of man's life, the weight and temptation, the failure and the suffering, the discomfiture provoked by a broken life, the desertion. Thus the Cross of Jesus is the place where the mystery of life is reflected, in a way it swells up, and then finds its solution. By dying on the Cross, Jesus actually placed Himself in the centre of the mystery of man and God, a place where life seems to be denied and God seems to contradict his promise. But the Cross/resurrection turns all contradictions into revelation. The three big alienations of man, those which seem to defeat life, depriving it of sense and dignity (sin, suffering, death) find a different understanding: sin is forgiven, suffering turns into solidarity and redemption, death is defeated by resurrection. Thus the Gospel is persuaded that, to find a positive sense in life, not only notwithstanding its alienations, but even within its alienations, man must face the Cross of Jesus.
GIUSEPPE LORIZIO
"I BELIEVE IN THE RESURRECTION OF THE FLESH"

Introduction: the christological foundation of the faith in the resurrection of the flesh

The present reflection of a fundamental-theological character on the theme assigned to me will take as its starting point a very simple but not obvious or universally acknowledged observation. I refer to the fact that the formula "resurrection of the flesh" is not of biblical but proto-Christian origin. One of the most ancient and significant texts on the matter is a passage in the homily improperly called "Second Letter of St. Clement to the Corinthians" (c.140 AD):

| Kai\ m³/₄ legʔtw tij Ómîn, Óti aÔth i s˘rx oÔ kr…netai oÔd? ãn…statai. |
| Let none of you say that this flesh of ours shall not be judged or rise again. |
| Gnîte: ?n t…ni ?sèqhte, ?n t…ni ãnebl?yate, e? m³/₄ ?n tî sarkî\ taÚth Øntej; |
| Consider this: In what state were you saved? In what state did you regain your sight, if it was not while you were in this flesh? |
| De? oân ‘m©j æj naÔn qeoà ful£ssein t¾n s˘rka. |
| Therefore we should guard the flesh in God's temple. |
| ?On trÔpon g’r ?n tî sarkî\ ?kl»qhte, ka… ?n tî sarkî\ ?l­ºsesqe. |
| For just as you were called in the flesh, you shall attain [God or salvation] in the flesh. |
| E? CristÕj Ð KÚrioj Ð sèsaj ’m©j, in m?n tÔ prîton pneàma, ?g?neto s˘rx ka\ oÚtwj ’m©j ?k£lesen, oÚtwj ka? ’me’j ?n taÚtV tÎ sark… épolhyØmeqa tÔn misqÖn |
| If Christ the Lord, our Saviour, was made flesh though he was at first spirit, and called us in this way, in the same way we too in this very flesh shall receive our eternal reward |

Other than on the text itself and on the recurrence in it of the term s˘rx [sarx = flesh], I would like to focus my attention on two contextual elements, in my view particularly significant, also with a view to underlining the contemporary relevance of the theme and reproposing it in the current cultural and religious areopagus:

a. The context of martur…a-witness in which faith in the "resurrection of the flesh" is expressed, as attested here: the flesh destined to be raised from the dead is thus above all the flesh of the martyrs who have borne witness by the supreme gift of their own life/flesh to the faith of the community (it would suffice to recall the strong language - excessively sanguinary in some passages - of Ignatius of Antioch).

b. The context of anti-agnostic polemic that forms the background to these affirmations regarding the "sarxic" character of Christian salvation. In this regard I will only recall that, in the framework of the gnostic system, a conception inspired by the most radical ontological, cosmic and anthropological dualism emerges with particular clarity; and in relation to soteriology, this conception is designated by the formula "restitution of the body": "The deposition of the body does not represent for gnosis merely a liberation of the Soul, but also a judgement on the powers that have created the body. It is a victory of the kingdom of Light that precedes the final destruction of the powers of Darkness"[3].
A second preliminary observation concerns the fact that the earliest expression of the formula "resurrection of the flesh" that we know of occurs in the Liturgical papyrus Dèr Balyzeh, discovered in upper Egypt and reproducing a liturgy dating to the mid-4th century AD:

PisteÚw e,j QeÕn pate'ra pantokrêtora
ka=e,j tÔn monogenÁ aÚtoà u/jÔn tÔn kÚrion òmín 'Iesoàn CristÔn
ka\i e,j tÖ pneàma tÔ ëgión
ka\i e,j sarkÔj ënëstasí[n
èn tî] ëg…v kaqolikí e'kklhs…v [4].

Three brief remarks may be made on this text:

a. The first concerns the formula sarkÔj ënëstasíj immediately after that concerning the Holy Spirit, which clearly involves an attention to the pneumatological dimension of the faith in the resurrection of the flesh: it is in fact the Spirit that has the power to restore life to the bare bones and putrefied flesh.

b. The second comment concerns the opening to the last formula which concerns the ëg…v kaqolikí e'kklhs…v. We are thus led to reflect on the ecclesial dimension of our eschatological faith, so that the flesh should not be understood merely in the individual but also in the community sense.

c. The third comment concerns the term ënëstasíj. It should be noted that the original connotation of this term is "to pick up, to raise up, to enable someone to get up or stand up (i.e. someone who is recumbent or sleeping)". From a careful analysis of the chosen term in relation to ë'ge…rw, it should be noted that the root of the latter term designates, especially in the passive, the paschal event, that is, the resurrection of the Crucified Lord, whereas the terms with the root anhist- are used not only in the context of the founder event, but also with reference to the resurrections of the dead performed during Jesus' life and the eschatological resurrection of all the dead. A particularly significant biblical text in this regard is 1Cor 15:13: e, dè ënëstasíj nekrîn oŰk oúkin, oŪde CristÔj ë'g»gertai ["If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ cannot have been raised either"].

It would be interesting at this point to introduce and articulate more fully the theme, which we can do no more than mention here, of our formula of faith (the "resurrection of the flesh") in relation to 1Cor 15:50: Toàto dè' fhmi, ðedelfo…, Óti s/rx ka\í aŒma basile…an qeoà klhronomÁsai oŰ dÚnatai, o_UDe t fqr| t¼n ëfars…an klhronome〈 ["What I am saying, brothers, is that mere human nature cannot inherit the kingdom of God: what is perishable cannot inherit what is imperishable"], where the terms "flesh" and "blood" denote "man in his creatural impotence in the face of the supernatural"[5].

In this way we are referred to the christological foundation of the faith in the "resurrection of the flesh" and in its theological implications. A fundamental-theological reflection on corporeity cannot ignore, on the one hand, the founder event and its constitutive traces, in relation to the corporeity of the Risen Christ: - the empty tomb and its historical veracity; the body of Christ in the accounts of his apparitions[6] - and, on the other, the realism of the incarnation and the paradoxical logic (cf. Letter to Diognetus[7]) of the lÒgoj s/rx, as it is recalled and formulated by Irenaeus, in an antignostic direction[8].

The anthropological value of faith in the resurrection of the flesh

The heart of the problem raised by faith in the "resurrection of the flesh" is of anthropological type. Although the sintagma sarkÔj ënëstasíj is not directly to be found in the Scriptures, we need in my view to interpret it in the light of the biblical datum on man, without forgetting the configuration of Christian anthropology and its possible developments in relation to contemporary thought. I therefore propose a reflection in three stages: the first will focus on the anthropological conception suggested by Scripture; the second on the great masters of medieval thought, pointing out in particular the theme of
the unity of man in the thought of Thomas Aquinas; the third on contemporary phenomenology, the results of which in terms of "subjective body" will be described.

The carnal dimension of man in the Scriptures

We will attempt here an approach to biblical anthropology by an analysis of the most significant terms through which the human being is designated, limiting our attention to the term "flesh". In the Hebrew text of the Old Testament the term basar (flesh) recurs no less than 266 times with various shades of meaning. These meanings can be regrouped as follows: basar denotes the muscular part of the human body, which man has in common with the animals; or, by synecdoche, it denotes the entire human body; or the whole of the concrete man; or the sum of living beings; or kinship of blood and the communion created by marriage, etc. For our purposes it seems to me that the following three meanings of the term in the OT are of particular interest:

- **basar** = the human cadaver and the dead body of animals, as in the text of Genesis, where God prohibits Noah from eating the flesh of the cadaver (basar) of animals with its life, that is, with its blood (Gen 9:4);

- **basar** = man in his earthly, fragile, weak and mortal condition, far from God or distinct from Him, who, by contrast, is the embodiment of strength and power (cf. Gen 6:3; Jer 17:5; Ps 56:5; Is 40:6; Job 34:14-15; Deut 5:26, etc.).

- **basar** = man in a certain opposition to God (cf. Job 10:4; Is 31:3; Ger 17:5).

Generally the term implies the situation of man on earth, that makes him mortal, i.e. radically far removed from the Creator (extraneousness to God). We may note that the term implies the whole of the earth-bound man; the perspective therefore excludes any form of dualism. This meaning helps to elucidate the Pauline text cited above (1Cor 15:50).

Although the biblical authors consider man primarily as a unity of flesh and spirit, they nonetheless identify three fundamental aspects (structural dimensions) of the human being, expressed by the Hebrew words: basar, nefesh e ruah. These three words are translated by the Septuagint and the Greek New Testament as: σάρξ, ψυχή, pneàma and the Vulgate as: caro, anima e spiritus. The articulation of the connotations of σάρξ in the NT in relation to Hellenistic Judaism is extremely variegated, with considerable fluctuations in meaning, for example in the above-cited Pauline texts and in the verse of the Prologue of the Gospel according to St. John. Particularly significant is the passage in 1Cor 15:36-45, with Paul's reply to the question with what body do the dead rise?:

| 15:39 | Not all flesh is the same flesh: there is human flesh; animals have another kind of flesh, birds another, and fish yet another. |
| 15:40 | Then there are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies; the heavenly have a splendour of their own, and the earthly a different splendour. |
| 15:41 | The sun has its own splendour, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another splendour; and the stars differ among themselves in splendour. |
| 15:42 | It is the same too with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown is perishable, but what is |
| 15:39 | Οὐ πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνίατον σὰρξ; Ἰδοὺ ἡ νεκρή ἡ σὰρξ ἡ ῥηχτὸς, ἡ ψυχὴ ἡ ἢστρα ἡ σὰρξ ἡ σπειρομένη, ἡ σφαίρα ἡ ἡ σάρξ ἡ δοξα. |
| 15:40 | καὶ τὰ σώματα ἐνεργείας, καὶ τὰ σώματα ἐν ἐνέργειας. |
| 15:41 | ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐνσάρκωσεν ἔστιν ὁ ἐν σάρκε. |
| 15:42 | ὁ θεὸς ὁ ἐνσάρκωσεν ἔστιν ὁ ἐν σάρκε. |
raised is imperishable;
15:43 what is sown is contemptible but what is raised is glorious; what is sown is weak, but what is raised is powerful;
15:44 what is sown is a natural body, but what is raised is a spiritual body.
15:45 If there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body too. So the first man, Adam, as scripture says, became a living soul; and the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit.

The semantic shift s\textit{\textgreek{\textsigma}}\textit{\textsigma} is consistent with what would be categorically affirmed in v. 50, though here scope for the bodily resurrection is introduced by the symptomatic expression: \textit{\textgreek{\textsigma}m\textgreek{\texttau}rion} \textit{\textgreek{\textomicron}}\textit{\textnu} \textit{\textomicron} \textit{\textlambdaside} = "Now I am going to tell you a mystery". The Pauline affirmation "not all flesh is the same flesh" will guide us in subsequent stages in our argument, in particular in our third stage, when we will introduce the concept of "subjective body" into our argument[9].

The theoretical elaboration of Christian anthropology in the Middle Ages

A privileged reference point for Christian thought in the patristic period was undoubtedly the Platonic philosophy. It will be enough here to recall the famous formula with which St. Augustine defined the soul: substantia rati
\textit{\textgreek{\textomicron}side}\textit{\textomicron} particeps regendo corpori accomodata[10]. An anthropology of this type was followed in the Middle Ages until Aristotle's De anima became known. Aristotle's thought had followed an evolution: it had led from support for anthropological dualism to the theory of hylomorphis (the doctrine identifying matter with the first cause of the universe). The fundamental characteristic of mature Aristotelianism (which for Thomas Aquinas was Aristotelianism tout court) is the revelation and clear affirmation of the unity of the living human being, body and soul.

Aristotle started out from what might be called a "phenomenological" analysis of experience, by investigating the concrete behaviour of the living being and the co-implication of its operative manifestations. The living being is one: its activities are phenomenologically varied operations, but unified against a background that remains unified, as the primary fons et origo of them all. The hylomorphic conception, extended and applied to the living being, is the hermeneutic key of phenomenological data. The first book of the De anima, after posing the problem of the soul and the method of resolving it, identifies the former in every animated living being and the latter in the investigation of its conduct, before concluding with the clear affirmation of the unity of the soul[11]. A little further one we enter into the central argument of the book, where the "soul" is defined as "the first entelechy of a natural body which has life in power"[12]. The logical conclusion of this argument: the inseparability of the soul from the body and doubt in the analogy of the helmsman[13].

Aristotle's procedure followed a line of remarkable consistency when it was a case of applying hylomorphism to inferior living beings. But as soon as he proceeded to consider man, considerable difficulties arose. These derived in particular from the presence of the intellect, irreducible to the forms of life present in other living beings. The recognition of this presence seemed in some way to arrest and block the process of unification of the living human being, with the result that Aristotle found himself faced by a tangle of doubts and difficulties which he does not seem to have succeeded in overcoming. The process of unification remained unresolved. Yet we find here the premises for the soul to be defined as the "only substantial form of the human compound". The conclusion that the Aristotelian theory seems to suggest is, however, incompatible with the immortality of the soul, which a dualistic perspective succeeds more easily in substantiating. In spite of this incompatibility, the Christian Middle
Ages did not condemn or reject out of hand the Aristotelian anthropology, probably also because it also left room for differentiated interpretations.

Historically, moreover, it should be pointed out that, before becoming familiar with the Latin translation of Aristotle's De anima, the medieval West[14] had got to know that of Avicenna's De anima, which took the form of a paraphrase of Aristotle's treatise and related his anthropology to that of Augustine, not because the Arab philosopher Avicenna (980-1037) was directly familiar with him, but because Augustine too drew on neo-Platonic elements. Similarly Bonaventura[15] (and others with him), although adopting the Aristotelian terminology, remained steadfast in his endorsement of the Augustinian position: he affirmed that the soul is not a form like the others, in other words, it is not merely the product of matter, but a being in itself, a substance with its own independent activity, composed in turn of matter and form.

In the Middle Ages another commentary on Aristotle's De anima was widely known. And it too was written by another Arab philosopher: Averroës (1126-88), who aimed to present the Aristotelian anthropology with greater fidelity than Avicenna. In doing so, however, he provided a different interpretation, developing the obscure parts concerning the separate intellect, to try to reconcile the unity of man with the fact that certain forms of knowledge present themselves as transcending the corporeal world. The Arab philosopher believed he had resolved the problem, although aware of the immense difficulty of doing so, by admitting that only the intellective activity of the human individual participated in the life of the spirit. He conceived the intellect as rigorously spiritual, but thought that it was separate and unique for the whole of humanity. The intellective activity, he argued, was a participation of the human individual in the activity of the only possible intellect, while the sensitive soul he regarded as the principle of the vital functions and, as such, as the form of the body. The consequences at the eschatological level of the Averroist-Aristotelian conception would later be treated by Pietro Pomponazzi (1464-1525), who would teach in Padua that the spirit, by virtue of its capacity to comprehend the universal, is not an individual single nature; it could not therefore endure beyond death. Here are the grounds for correctly interpreting the affirmations of the V Lateran Council which would condemn Pomponazzi, by affirming the immortality of the soul[16]. The problem of the unity of the soul is also the fundamental motive that inspired the whole commentary of Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle's De anima. In that commentary Thomas did not hesitate to dissent from his favourite philosopher in his determination to prevent any kind of attack on the unity of the human soul[17]. The parts of the soul are understood and conceived here as powers (faculties) rooted in a founding unity which represents their common source. To justify his thesis Thomas appealed to, and especially underlined, the theses favourable to unity.

With the seventh lesson of his commentary on the third book Thomas entered into the thorny question of the Aristotelian intellect, which Averroës had separated and super individualized, and affirms that a similar conception does not arise from Aristotle's texts, which suggest the lapidary expression of the hic homo intelligit, crux of the Thomist argument in the anti-Averroist polemic. In the second book of the Summa contra Gentiles, inter alia, Thomas observes that Averroism is concerned with saving the spirituality of man and, in particular, the intellective knowledge, but by detaching the intellect from the concrete individual (who is the only real man) it ends up by making him an animal just like all the rest: it only draws a difference of degree between the individual man and the brute animal. Thomas, in contrast to Averroës, continues the process of unification undertaken by Aristotle and tried to overcome its difficulties. He had at his disposal a maturation developed over many centuries of investigations into the human soul, but above all he was able, historically and psychologically, to draw on the Christian tradition, which offered him all the potential of its data on the creation, spirituality and immortality of the human soul. In bringing to its fulfilment the Aristotelian process, Thomas arrived at revolutionary formulations, if compared literally with those of the Stagirite. The human soul is characterized by the intellectual activity: something that Aristotle has seen and recognized, but then hesitated to specify the relations between the intellect and the form of the body. The Thomist revolution is the source of the
clear and conscious discovery that man is radically one and indivisible. And this is expressed in the
formulation of the intellective soul as form of the body. If the intellective soul is conceived in this way,
all those pseudo-problems of how it can be united with the body (we may think of the expedients of
Cartesian rationalism) dissolve, because it is by its nature the expression of the body. The real problem
will rather be that of how the soul can be separated from the body in intermediate eschatology, which is
considered by Thomas as the state of separated souls. And to reply to this question, Aquinas, before
defining the soul as the form of the body, recognizes its characteristics of subsistence and
incorruptibility, and this enables him to consider survival after death as moment of exile of the soul
from its body, in tension towards their reunion.
Thomas, in contrast to Bonaventura and other theologians of the Franciscan school, takes the
Aristotelian terminology seriously and does not merely assume its external clothing, to substantially
repropose a dualistic anthropology. Hence, in contrast to Bonaventura, he denies that the soul is a
compound of matter and form. He also opposed the Jewish philosopher Avicebron, who in his work
Fons vitae had advanced the hypothesis of the existence of a prime matter, which he called universal
matter and which he appropriated both to spiritual and to material substances, receiving only in part the
form of corporeity in them. To this hypothesis Thomas opposed all the realism of the Aristotelian
philosophy which, taken to its extreme consequences, led him to the yet more revolutionary affirmation
according to which the substantial form of man is one and only. In the Summa theologicae Thomas
would adduce the reasons that led him to affirm the oneness of the substantial form of man. This thesis,
in fact, expresses for Thomas the one way of understanding and saving the unity of the human being,
based on the ontological unity given by the form. The multiplicity of the forms, on the other hand,
multiples the being and splits the structures of the living. To sum up, in conclusion, we may say that,
while for the Augustinians and for the Franciscan school, the soul is substantia sui generis, for Thomas
Aquinas, concerned above all to save the unity of man, the soul is the forma sui generis, where the sui
generis implies for both systems the difficulty of imprisoning in a formula the mystery of man as it is
revealed and hidden in the event of death and suffering that involves the fidelity to the revealed
doctrine. The former thesis, adopting a certain anthropological dualism, purifies it, admitting that the
soul is destined to the union with the body. Thomas, by contrast, although he drew on the Aristotelian
philosophy, felt obliged nonetheless to mitigate this perspective, to ensure that its thought did not
conflict with the dogma of intermediate eschatology. The unity of man - according to Thomas - is in no
way in conflict with the Christian faith, indeed it seems required by the dogma of the resurrection,
which marks for man his reconstitution in unity, in other words his realization in full in his two aspects:
the spiritual aspect and the bodily aspect. If the subsequent eschatology was developed especially by
submitting to a dualistic scheme, it ought to be quite clear at this point that this happened in an
autonomous manner, in dissociation from (indeed in opposition to) the more authentic Thomist
thought.

The concept of "subjective body" in contemporary phenomenology

An elucidation of the modern and contemporary concept of "subjective body" may, it seems to me,
provide us with a possible interpretative and theoretical key to the Christian faith in the resurrection of
the flesh.

The originality of the Christian proposal in relation to the findings of Greek philosophy was clarified
by the phenomenological philosopher of Montpellier, Michel Henry[18]. He especially elucidated the
problem in his analysis of corporeity in relation to subjectivity, in his study of the ontology of Maine de
Biran[19]. To the concept of "soul" the same author has dedicated, apart from a paragraph in the same
book, a separate work, reproducing the text of two lectures given in Brussels in November 1965 and
published in the Revue philosophique de Louvain the following year[20]. The aim of this reflection on
the soul is soon explained: its purpose is to reflect on the old metaphysical concept of "soul" as a way
of responding to the question about its meaning for us philosophers today, where "to have a meaning" means "to have a reference to a reality" that corresponds to that concept[21]. The question is wholly legitimate, since between the traditional metaphysics, which teaches that we have a soul distinct from the body, a soul that is spiritual, simple, imperishable, that retains its identity through time, etc., between this metaphysic that Henry calls "reassuring" and we who conduct philosophy today is situated the Kantian critique, considered radical and definitive in turn[22].

Even though it may seem a presumptuous and disproportionate enterprise, if we still wish to continue to speak of the "soul" today, we need to conduct a rigorous critique of the Kantian critique of the paralogism of rational psychology, an operation that Michel Henry called "ontological destruction", in the sense of "revealing the structures of being" implicated in the paralogism itself and in the Kantian critique. Henry, after a detailed exposition of Kant's thought regarding the soul, proposes his own "destructive" argument: "The argument of this critique will be the following: the structure of being, in the way Kant understands it, is incompatible with the structure of our subjective being (our 'I'). We may call this structure of our subjective being the essence of ipseity (or individual identity). If our reasoning holds good, it should then be possible to demonstrate two things: on the one hand, that the inner experience described by Kant is in effect incapable of endowing us with our 'I'; on the other hand, that whenever Kant speaks of the 'I', or of a subjective being in general, he does no more than merely presuppose it, just as he does no more than presuppose the essence of ipseity, which he never takes into due account and never elevates to a problematic status"[23]. Henry's cogent analysis of the Kantian critique shows the poverty of the representation of the cogito, the je pense in relation to the problem of the soul, since it is no more than a representation and thus remains situated in the sphere of exteriority, but - adds Henry - "the subjective being can neither arise, nor reveal itself, in the heart of exteriority"[24]. To be able to grasp the essence of ipseity one would have to have recourse to the dimension of radical interiority, in which the manifestation of that essence is alone possible. In spite of the prohibition Husserl wanted to impose on interiority and in spite of the philosophical prejudices present in the contemporary areopagus, Henry never tires of referring to this fundamental dimension, which indeed constitutes the originality and the specificity of his philosophy. Thus he combines a critique of the Kantian critique with a discussion of the fundamental theses of the phenomenology of the body postulated by Merleau-Ponty.

Although it may seem paradoxical to legitimize the concept of radical interiority and, through this, the concept of soul, Henry unhesitatingly takes the road of the "subjective body" and rigorously abides by it: "This paradox is diminished once the idea of a subjective body is developed. When the body is no longer interpreted, in effect, in an ingenuous and unilateral way as an object, but also as a subject, and perhaps as the authentic subject, as the source of our sense-derived knowledge, and when this sense-derived knowledge, in turn, instead of being treated as an inferior mode of knowledge, is understood as the basis and foundation of all possible knowledge, then the analysis of the body understood in this way in its original subjectivity seems to be able to lead us to the interiority we seek"[25]. But the road remains blocked, if we argue, with Merleau-Ponty, that subjectivity be understood in terms of being-in-the-world and hence of transcendence. The well-known descriptions of bodily existence in Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Perception[26] in terms of transcendence are, in M. Henry's view, self-evident and substantially faithful to what they describe, but at the same time fail to shed light on the essential problem: How does this body, which opens up the world to us (it is "the vehicle of our presence in the world") and forms the basis of our knowledge of the world, know itself? How is the body present to itself? No satisfactory answers to these fundamental questions can be given if interiority be denied, as it is in modern philosophy, globally considered. Hence Henry's interest in Maine de Biran, who (in reaction against the sensism of Condillac), while not in the least repudiating the transcendent dimension of bodily experience as the capacity of the body to place us in relation to the world and to others, posed the problem prior to this relation, namely the problem of the knowledge that the body has of itself. If we start out from the consideration of the original knowledge that we have
of the hand that touches something and reflect on the capacity itself to touch, we have to conclude that such knowledge does not consist in an ecstasy, since it does not take place in response to a form of being comprehended and external to the self. So an original knowledge of this kind is not and cannot in any way be intentional, due to the fact that every intentionality is based on transcendence; it develops a horizon as place of alterity. If the power of touching with our hand were to be given to us through the mediation of intentionality, it would then be a power external to us. But if it is true that each true power is given a primordial, absolute and immanent power, then the power to touch, in as much as it is an exterior dimension, is based on the authentic and interior power that is my body: "Does there exist [...] an absolute power, an efficient causality (this authentic causality which traditional metaphysics has denied or reserved for God alone), does there exist an authentic power, an 'I can' in the effectiveness of its exercise? Yes: it is my body. For my body is this absolute and irrefutable power, for which I dilate or contract my lungs, for which I close or open my fingers, for which I get up and walk. My body is the movement that is experienced by walking, in other words, the movement that attests to itself inside us. It is my action in exactly the way I live it in an immediate experience that defies any comment and, with all the more reason, any challenge; it is the essence on which idle gossip has no hold, the freedom that derides the paralogisms, the representations, the knowledge and its theses that makes a fool of science"[27]. Drawing the extreme consequences of this radical exclusion of the transcendence of subjectivity and corporeity, Henry reaches the conclusion that the subjective relation of the 'I' to its own body is nothing but the fundamental relation of the body to itself, the self-affection (to resume the theme of affectivity) of movement and sense for themselves, and this immanent and interior self-affection is ipseity. The primary internal coherence of this "dwelling-place that we are, in which we are and in which we are living beings" receives at this point the name of "soul". At the end of his study and before indicating the sense of the concept of soul in the "monadic" structure of being as "interiority", Henry quotes a passage from an author to whom he often refers, also in his principle works: Kafka, who in his novel America tells of the experiences of his hero Karl who, in his search for a job, is struck by a placard with the announcement "Here there's a place for everyone". The phrase expresses for Henry the metaphysical condition of being. "The contemporary ontology apparently has no trouble in coming to terms with the first terms of this proposition: 'here', 'there's', 'a place'. But what is meant by the emergence at the end of the sentence of that 'everyone'?" Is ipseity a contingent addition to the tireless, anonymous, impersonal event of the being in exteriority, an accidental limitation, a baseless particularization of its universality? Or does it not rather designate the condition of being, its original condition in a light that is no longer that of the world, the primary donation that is rightly ipseity itself?[28]. In this perspective therefore the soul will be nothing else than the ego. The ego, however, has a being that is precisely the soul, but not the soul understood in terms of transcendence, which in this sense is nothing but a shadow, a wandering ghost in the Hades of classical metaphysics. The reality of the "subjective body" enables the soul to emerge from this vague and shadowy existence and be understood as authentically real.

The Christian doctrine of the body, considered not only as a determined and contingent mode of our historical experience, but as an ontological reality by which human nature is constituted, involves a series of surprising affirmations that, according to Henry, only have sense if they are understood in the light of the concept of "subjective body": "Only if our body is, in its original essence, something subjective, the brief allusions of dogmatics to its metaphysical destiny may be something more than extravagant conceptions. For affirmations such as the one maintaining the resurrection of the body must inevitably have seemed extravagant in the eyes of the Greeks. That explains why the Corinthians sneered when Paul claimed that the privilege of this resurrection was not reserved for the soul. It is clear, on the contrary, that if the original being of our body is something subjective, it falls, in the same way as the notion of "soul", into the category of what is susceptible to being resurrected and judged. It is manifestly in conformity with the content of Christian theology that Rimbaud coined the statement:
les corps seront jugés"[29], a quotation that echoes the text of the proto-Christian homily we quoted at the beginning of our paper.

I should also like to recall here that the distinction between "objective body" and "subjective body" plays an important role in the elaboration of an anthropology inspired by Trinitarian ontology in the magnum opus of Edith Stein. The revival of Trinitarian anthropology of patristic stamp, that considers the finite human being as the image of the eternal Trinitarian Being, if on the one hand it can be placed in the more authentic tradition of Origen and Augustine, as well as that of Bonaventura, on the other hand includes fruitful references to the question, for instance, of the subjective body. Edith Stein calls the latter "vital body", distinguishing between Körper and Leib and thus introducing a typical category of phenomenological ontology, which she is certainly indebted to, but which in many respects recalls the Christian sense of corporeity and its personal and spiritual value. The gnoseological picture is given here by the conception of the truth, it too trinitarianly structured, according to its logical, ontological and transcendental dimensions. Edith Stein's doctrine of the soul makes reference to the mysticism of the interior castle and indeed derives its inspiration from it in a rather too explicit way: 'the soul is the 'space' at the centre of this totality composed of body, psyche and spirit; the soul as an organ of sense (Sinnenseele) inhabits the body, in all its mentalities and parts. It is fecundated by it. It acts by giving a form to it and by preserving it. The soul as a spiritual organ (Geistseele) rises above itself; it looks at the world placed outside its own self - a world of things, persons, events -, enters intelligently into contact with it, and is fecundated by it. As anima, in the proper sense of the term, however, it inhabits itself, and in it the 'I' as a person is at home. Here is gathered everything that enters from the world of the senses and from the spiritual world, and here the internal disputation takes place, on the basis of which the person takes a position, deriving from it what will become more properly personal, the essential component of his/her own self, what (speaking metaphorically) is 'transformed into flesh and blood'. The soul as 'interior castle', as it was called by our mother, St. Teresa, is not punctiform, as is the pure I, but is a space, a castle with many habitations, where the 'I' may freely move, at times going towards the exterior, at times retreating increasingly into the interior"[30]. At a time when the figure of the angel is returning and drawing the interest of theologians, while it is almost totally forgotten by philosophers, reading the pages of Edith Stein's book, in which a true theological and philosophical angelology is formulated, may even be found of disconcerting actuality in our time.

Conclusions

An important speculative development of the Pauline affirmation according to which οὐ παραδείσων αὐτὸς σώζει may, in our view, be attained precisely on the basis of the concept of "subjective body" as described above, though without forgetting the fundamental acquisitions of Thomist philosophy, which remain an indispensable reference point for Christian thought. The contemporary cultural context or areopagus in fact presents interesting analogies with the period of the first evangelization. Now as then the gnostic temptation seems to threaten the faith and to denote the variegated forms of the so-called return of the sacred. Now as then the appeal to the martur…a - witness seems to us particularly valuable and decidedly significant in a context in which those who, with energy and evangelical parrhesia, do not waver from their task of "guarding the flesh as God's temple" are increasingly exposed to incomprehension and isolation.
NOTES
(1) F, 1, 194 - PG 1, 341.
(4) DS 2.
(7) "Christians cannot be distinguished from the rest of the human race by country or language or customs. They do not live in cities of their own; they do not use a peculiar form of speech; they do not follow an accentric manner of life. This doctrine of theirs has not been discovered by the ingenuity or deep thought of inquisitive men, nor do they put forward a merely human teaching, as some people do. Yet, although they live in Greek and barbarian cities alike, as each man's lot has been cast, and follow the customs of the country in clothing and food and other matters of daily living, at the same time they give proof of the remarkable, or rather - as everyone admits - paradoxical constitution of their own commonwealth" (The So-called Letter to Diognetus, in C. Richardson (ed.), Early Christian Fathers (The Library of Christian Classics, vol. I), cit., pp. 205-224; Discorso a Diogneto, in I Padri apostolici, cit., pp. 364-365).
(8) It would be by emphasizing the realism of the incarnation ("The Son of God truly became man to save man" (Adversus haereses III, 18,7)) and by adopting a salvific-historical perspective (o,konom…a) that the great Irenaeus of Lyons, especially in AH, would respond to the gnostic temptation and its various expressions, furnishing us at the same time with a valuable source for the knowledge of this phenomenon and these doctrines.
(10) Aurelius Augustinus, De quantitate animae XIII, in PL XXXII, 1048.
(12) Ibid., 128.
(13) Cf ibid., 130.
(16) Cf. DS 1440-1445.
(17) For the whole of this problematic in a Thomist perspective see S. Vanni Rovighi, L'antropologia filosofica di S. Tommaso d'Aquino, Vita e pensiero, Milano 1972.
(18) Given the scarce familiarity with the work of this philosopher, we will give a fairly comprehensive basic bibliography below, in such a way as to provide materials for further development of the argument presented in the following pages: Philosophical works of M. Henry: L'essence de la manifestation, PUF, Paris 1963, 2 vols.; Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps. Essai sur l'ontologie biranienne, PUF, Paris 1965; Marx. I: Une philosophie de la réalité. II: Une philosophie de l'économie, Gallimard, Paris 1976; Généalogie de la psychanalyse. Le commencement perdu, PUF, Paris 1985; La
Le être de l'ego ne peut constamment affirmé à travers les méandres de la Dialectique transcendantale, c'est, d'une part, que

2(21) The Kantian thesis is well known and was summed up by Henry as follows: "Ce qui est constamment affirmé à travers les méandres de la Dialectique transcendantale, c'est, d'une part, que l'être de l'ego ne peut être posé à partir de la pensée pure ni par elle, et, d'autre part, qu'il ne peut pas
davantage être saisi tel qu'il est en soi. Et c'est parce que l'âme dont parle la métaphysique traditionelle désigne en fin de compte cet être réel et véritable du moi, que Kant écarte son concept" (ibid., 6).
(23) Ibid., 11.
(24) Ibid., 18.
(25) Ibid., 21.
(26) Cf M. Merleau-Ponty, Fenomenologia della percezione (ed. A. Bonomi), il Saggiatore, Milano 19803. The texts of this author on philosophical questions relating to the body are collected in M. Merleau-Ponty, Il corpo vissuto (ed. F. Fergnani), IL Saggiatore, Milano 1979.
(27) M. Henry, art. cit., 27.
(28) Ibid., 32-33
(29) M. Henry, Philosophie et phénoménologie du corps, cit., 289.
LUKE GORMALLY

HUMAN DIGNITY:
THE CHRISTIAN VIEW AND THE SECULARIST VIEW

Human Dignity: the Christian view and the secularist view (1)

Introduction

The contrast to be discussed in this paper between a classically Christian understanding of human dignity and a characteristically secularist understanding can be stated briefly as follows. Both assert that a certain worth belongs to human beings. In the classical Christian understanding, this worth or dignity may be distinguished as follows: (1) the worth or dignity human beings possess in virtue of their created nature, a dignity which is inherent in that nature, and which as such belongs to all human beings; (2) the dignity which belongs to those human beings who live well in accordance with the end or purpose that God has for human beings; finally (3) the dignity which belongs to the perfection of human life in heaven. These might be named (1) ontological or innate dignity, (2) existential or acquired dignity, and (3) definitive dignity. A characteristically contemporary secularist understanding of human dignity denies that there is an innate dignity which belongs to human beings as such, denies that only certain dispositions and choices (those which respect the truth about the human good) are consistent with achieving existential dignity, but asserts that existential dignity attaches to the exercise of the capacity to determine both what is to count as valuable and how to live one's life.

This paper outlines the development of the classical Christian understanding of human dignity, analyses in particular what St Thomas Aquinas has to say about the concept of dignity, identifies what crucial elements in Thomas's understanding of human life (his anthropology) were subsequently lost in the European intellectual tradition, and suggests how those losses help to explain the emergence of the modern understanding of human dignity. The modern understanding in some of its extreme contemporary versions assumes that there is no such thing as the truth about important elements of the human good. The paper closes with a very brief analysis of the present Holy Father's response to contemporary secularist understandings of human dignity.

In offering a genealogy for the emergence of the modern secularist understanding of human dignity I am conscious both of the roughness of the sketch offered and the lacunae that would need to be filled in a more detailed account. The major omission is a detailed analysis of the changing character of the doctrine of the will between Aquinas and Kant. My account focuses on the basic constitution of human beings, and in particular on the contrast between, on the one hand, a unitary and teleological understanding of human beings and, on the other, a dualist anthropology in which the body is understood mechanistically; that contrast is surely fundamental to understanding the characteristically secularist failure to recognise the inherent dignity of human beings. Limitations of time and space have dictated the selective character of what follows.

Classical Pagan Background (2)

There was no religious or philosophical basis in the classical world for the idea of equality in dignity of all human beings. (3) One can identify two positions about the value of individual human lives in the non-Christian thought of antiquity. The predominant one "simply asserts or argues that for whatever reason (e.g. lack of nous) men are born unequally valuable in some ultimate sense of 'valuable'." (4) The other, minority, position (to be found in Epictetus and Plotinus) is that human beings are born with a capacity to achieve equal value through the acquisition of virtue and so enjoy equality of entitlements.
(or 'rights'), but "that such rights are alienable, sometimes in toto, and that thus it could turn out that some people get themselves into a position of having no rights at all."(5)

The development of Christian teaching about human dignity

"Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: all therefore enjoy an equal dignity."(6)

"The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it .."(7)

In these sentences the Catechism of the Catholic Church makes it clear that there are two concepts which have been of central importance to the development of Christian teaching about human dignity: the concept of 'the image of God' and the concept of 'the person'.

The image of God and human dignity: biblical, patristic and medieval development of the theme(8)

Genesis 1: 26-27 and 5:1 teach that human beings were created in the image (tselem) and after the likeness (demuth) of God. The image is associated with dominion over the brute creation. It is clear that the image endures after original sin because man being in God's image is the reason for the prohibition of murder (Genesis 9: 6).

In the New Testament it is Christ who is spoken of as "the image of the unseen God" (Colossians 1: 15). Interpretation of this text produced two distinct understandings of it among the Fathers:

(i) there were those who understood Christ's human nature to be the visible image of divine reality (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Marius Victorinus).
(ii) There were those who considered that it could only be the divinity of Christ which is "the invisible image of the invisible God" (Origen): God, being incorporeal, cannot have a corporeal image.

This dispute about Christ is linked to the dispute about the sense in which man is imago Dei:

(i) On the one hand are those for whom the image is in the whole man, body and soul.
(ii) On the other are those for whom the image resides only in the soul.

For many Fathers only Christ, the Son, is properly called 'image' while man is only 'in the image' (kat' eikona). This being 'in the image' constitutes the essence of man's nature. Since many of the Fathers understand Christ to be the image of God in his divinity, not his humanity, it is only the soul, or rather nous of man, which is 'in the image' of God. The body shares derivatively in the dignity which properly belongs to the soul/nous.

There emerges in the Fathers a distinction between 'in the image', understood as constituted by what man is in the order of nature, and 'in the likeness', understood as constituted by what man receives in the order of grace. Thus Augustine distinguishes man as 'capax Dei' in virtue of reason, immortality and the natural knowledge of God, and man as 'particeps Dei' through the supernatural gifts.

Because of the strong influence of Platonic and neo-Platonic philosophy on Patristic thought, particularly in respect of the soul, it is not clear that there is an inherent dignity to bodily life. In the medieval period(9) prior to Aquinas, because of the continuing dominance of Platonic philosophical influences, no satisfactory explanation emerged of how it could be the case that the human body participated in the dignity of the human person.

Aquinas on human dignity, the 'image of God' and the human person(10)

" 'Dignity' signifies something's goodness on account of itself (propter seipsum)."(11)
The two concepts of 'image of God' and 'person', which we noted in the Catechism as key concepts in understanding human dignity, appear clearly in this role in St Thomas. Here we can take his treatment of them in turn, as they relate to the understanding of human dignity.

**The image of God**

His principal treatment of this concept in relation to man is in Summa theologiae I q.93. An image, St Thomas says, is an expressive likeness. There is in man a likeness to God, but not a perfect likeness (which is why Scripture says man is made to the likeness of God: hoc significat Scriptura, cum dicit 'hominem factum ad imaginem Dei'. Praeposito enim 'ad' accessum quemdam significat, qui competit rei distanti. Art.1) A likeness is an expressive likeness only if it includes what is distinctive of what it represents. Among creatures only those who know and understand most closely approach to God in likeness. And so it is only intellectual creatures which are, properly speaking, 'to the image of God'.

The image of God in man is imperfect but may be brought to perfection. This is possible because

1. the image consists in the first instance in our intellectual nature, in virtue of which we are endowed with the dynamic capacity to develop the abilities necessary to knowledge and love of God;
2. grace makes possible in man an actual or habitual knowledge and love of God, admittedly imperfect;
3. we may be brought to know and love God perfectly in heaven 'from the likeness of glory'.

Corresponding to degrees of likeness in the image are degrees of dignity:

1. the natural dignity of man - the dignity that belongs to his nature and natural powers. This is never lost.(12)
2. The dignity of those who live uprightly, the 'justi'.
3. The dignity of the blessed in heaven, the 'beati'.

These three correspond to what we have called 'innate' (or ontological), 'acquired' (or existential) and 'definitive' dignity. From our point of view in this paper, the human dignity which most interests us is the first, the natural, innate dignity of man, the dignity that belongs to his nature and natural powers. Exploration of the basis of this dignity is perhaps best approached by turning to the second key concept, that of 'person'.

**Person**

The concept of person entails 'dignity', and that is why the concept of person applies only to individuals of an intellectual nature, which is precisely what gives them their dignity.(13) A person is 'an individual substance of a rational nature'. Human beings are constituted as individual substances of rational nature in virtue of having rational souls. The rational soul is the 'form and life-long actuality'(14) which gives dynamic unity to the complex material organisms we are and to the expression of our various powers (vegetative, animal and intellectual) in multifarious activities. St Thomas says in II Sent., d.26, q.1 a.4c, "From the essence of the soul flow powers which are essentially different ... but which are all united in the soul's essence as in a root." The powers of the soul, as wholly undeveloped, radical capacities, are given to each individual at the beginning of his or her existence. This is the basis of the natural dignity which belongs to every human being.
One important part of St Thomas's teaching here is his teaching on the unicity of the substantial form. (15) One implication of this teaching is that the human body shares in the dignity of our rational nature in the sense that, as long as we are living human bodies, our bodiliness is intrinsic to what gives us natural dignity.

But this teaching on the unicity of the substantial form is also of fundamental importance for understanding what St Thomas has in mind in speaking of our capacity for mastery (dominium) over our own actions which is a central feature of our rational nature and essential to our existential or acquired dignity. (16) For the unicity of the human form means, inter alia, that sensuous impulse and need are not something alien to our essential nature but (a) are capable of revealing goods of the human person which are recognisably integral to human fulfilment, and (b) insofar as sensuous desire is contrary to human good, such desire is transformable, fundamentally in virtue of our rationality, through acquisition of the moral virtues. The rational 'dominium' to which we are called in the conduct of our life is not meant to be a form of tyranny over essentially alien feelings and emotions, but is meant to lead to that integration of feeling and emotion, through transformation, which is conducive to our living well with a view to that fulfilment for which God made us. Human life is goal-directed, and can be brought into a certain moral unity in striving after that goal (this, of course, is not to be achieved without grace). The radical capacities which belong to the essence of the human soul have a dynamic teleological orientation to our fulfilment.

I would now like to go on to suggest that the loss of a unified, teleological understanding of human life is an important part of the explanation for the modern, secularist understanding of human dignity. I shall do this by trying to indicate the ways in which a dualistic understanding of human life, including a mechanistic understanding of the human body, influenced the emergence of a Kantian ethic, and how modern, secularist understandings of human dignity have emerged from Kant.

The emergence of the modern, secularist understanding of human dignity

Cartesian mechanism vs. teleology in the understanding of the human body.

According to Descartes, something, the essential characteristic of which is 'consciousness'(17), is mysteriously conjoined (through the pineal gland, he speculated) with the human body. The human body is to be understood in mechanical terms. What is meant by saying this? To say that something can be understood as a machine is to say that we can explain the kind of thing it is exclusively by reference to the natural laws which govern the parts of the thing, considered not as parts but as entities with independent natures of their own. If you want to understand something as simple as a bicycle pump - how it works - what you need to understand is how its parts are so fitted together that they take advantage of the natural laws which govern its parts. But it is the natural laws governing the parts which ultimately explain how it works. And what holds of a bicycle pump also holds true of a car or an aeroplane or a nuclear reactor or any other kind of machine. A mechanical understanding of any entity is in principle a reductionistic understanding of that thing. (18)

It is worth considering briefly what Descartes has to say about the human body in his Sixth Meditation where he compares it to a clock. He writes: "Now a clock built out of wheels and weights obeys all the laws of nature no less exactly when it is ill-made and does not show the right time than when it satisfies its maker's wishes in every respect ... Of course, if I consider my preconceived idea of the use of a clock I may say that when it does not show the right time it is departing from its 'nature'. Similarly, if I consider the machine of the human body I may think that it goes astray from its 'nature' if its throat is dry at a time when drink does not help to sustain it, but I see very well that this sense of 'nature' is very different from the other. In this sense 'nature' is a term depending on my own way of thinking ('a cogitatione mea'), on my comparison of a
sick man or an ill-made watch to a conception of a healthy man or a well-made clock. It (i.e. nature) is something extrinsic to the object it is ascribed to."

A clock, Descartes observes, does not function well in virtue of a nature intrinsic to it. The parts of a clock, whether it is functioning well or badly, are true to their nature. Our idea of a 'good clock' is something extrinsic to the nature of the matter which we have combined in a particular way to do the job we want done.

According to Descartes, we can say something exactly parallel about our idea of a 'good (or healthy) body'. To say a body is unhealthy is not to say that it is failing to be or to function in a way in which its intrinsic nature would tend to make it function. Our ideas of healthy functioning and unhealthy functioning derive not from any understanding of how the body in its very nature is meant to function, for precisely as a body it has no nature which characterises it as a unified body. It is a mechanical assemblage of parts, which at the micro-level may be said to have a nature characterised in terms of fundamental laws of nature.

What Descartes rejects in this influential teaching is both the teaching about the rational soul as the unique substantial form of human bodily life and the teleological understanding of this life. Descartes would not, of course, have denied that machines and artefacts have got purposes - scissors to cut, pumps to inflate tyres, cars to transport us, and so on. But artefacts and machines serve these purposes in virtue of the fact that we have so arranged matter to secure these ends; there is nothing intrinsic to the matter of which the artefacts are composed that makes achievement of these ends intrinsic to the matter.

The teleological understanding of the human body which Descartes rejected affirms that the human body is the locus of a unified life such that the whole of that life is shaped and informed by a developmental dynamic directed to human fulfilment. This developmental dynamic encompasses the totality of a human life because all parts are informed by a unifying principle of life - the rational soul. The developmental dynamic is directed to a human fulfilment which encompasses all dimensions of the human being: one's well-functioning as a bodily organism, a right relationship to others in justice and friendship, the good of the transmission of human life (in marriage), the progressive grasp of truth and the overcoming of error and muddle in one's thinking, a right relationship to God, the integration of one's emotions so that one gradually becomes more spontaneously responsive to the authentic goods of human living - all these are possibilities to be realised in virtue of the developmental dynamic which is intrinsic to our nature and which makes our bodies not mechanical assemblages but a unity which may be informed by the teleological orientation of our practical rationality.

Cartesian dualism and mechanism set the anthropological framework for much subsequent development in modern philosophy. It will be immediately clear that bodily life conceived in mechanical terms has little claim to share in the natural dignity which classical Christian teaching attributes to human bodily life. In what follows, I would like to suggest how the Cartesian anthropological framework influenced the Kantian understanding of human dignity as 'autonomy', and how this understanding of autonomy degenerated into contemporary secularist understandings of dignity and autonomy.

Kant and dignity as autonomy

The significance of the Kantian 'turn' in ethics is not to be understood without taking account of another consequence of the abandonment of a teleological understanding of human life. The force, and therefore to some extent the authority of traditional morality, is in part explained by Aquinas by his making clear that rejection of the norms of morality is not the rejection of an arbitrary divine will but rather the rejection of norms the point of which is the fulfilment for which we are meant in virtue of the nature we have been given. Norms are intrinsically intelligible by reference to the goal (telos) for
which we were created (and redeemed). To act contrary to the norms is inherently self-frustrating activity; to act in accord with them is inherently rational, as making for our own fulfilment. With the loss of a unified teleological understanding of human life moderns also lost their grasp of the intelligibility of moral norms as existing precisely for the sake of fulfilment.(19) This understanding of moral norms was in the first instance replaced by an understanding of them as having their force purely in virtue of the will of God, a will which was no longer thought of as intelligible by reference to God's creative intentions as manifested in our nature. With the erosion of belief in a provident God, and the emergence of Deism, other accounts had to be found to make intelligible the force and authority of traditional morality. This is a central part of the task which Kant set himself. The move he made was to say that morality is constituted by the requirement that we act out of respect for a moral law that we ourselves make. This is the idea of autonomy which requires that, in determining what is the moral law, the will should be unconstrained by anything extrinsic to reason itself. It is relevant to note here one key consequence of Cartesian mechanism in the understanding of the body for the formulation of the content of the moral law. Since Kant thought of the human body as governed by mechanistic and deterministic laws he did not consider that bodily experience and sensuous desire could be sources of insight into goods and values which should govern our rational choices. Bodily experience and desire fell within the realm of the heteronomous. Our distinctively human constitution as bodily beings does not enter into defining the rationality we should exercise in the conduct of our lives. If the moral law is to have authority it must take the form of categorical (not hypothetical) imperatives. But if categorical imperatives are to be possible, there must be some governing principle which shows us how reason discovers them. The ends of action are not to be found in anything extrinsic to practical reason itself. "Rational agency must therefore provide its own ends. The autonomous being is both the agent and the repository of all value, and exists, as Kant puts it, 'as an end in himself. If we are to have values at all, we must value (respect) the existence and endeavours of rational beings. In this way autonomy prescribes its own limits. The constraint on our freedom is that we must respect the freedom of all: how else can our freedom issue in universal laws? It follows that we must never use another without regard to his autonomy; we must never treat him as a means."(20)
In concluding these brief observations on the Kantian 'turn' in ethics, there are three points to be retained:
1. that it's anthropological presuppositions do not allow consideration of our constitution as unified bodily beings to be determinative of the goods and values we need to respect and honour;
2. it makes purely formal considerations determinative of what is binding on us; in one version they amount to saying that the test of the reasonableness of a proposed 'maxim' of action is that it should respect the freedom of all other rational agents;
3. morality requires that each person legislates for himself.
On the Kantian account, therefore, dignity belongs to the autonomous moral agent who determines the moral law for himself in the way Kant proposes. One clear implication of this account is that those who lack the developed abilities of understanding and choice required for moral agency cannot possess dignity.

The vulgarisation of 'autonomy'

One consequence of the mechanistic view of the human body, a view compounded since the nineteenth century by the widespread belief that human beings are chance products of an evolutionary process, is that those values which Christian tradition particularly associates with bodily life (such as life itself, and the transmission of life as the value governing sexual activity) are increasingly thought of as lacking an objective basis and so are assigned to the sphere of private autonomous choice. The 'subjectivisation' of certain areas of value is one factor in the scope given by a significant number of modern authors to the
idea of 'autonomy': the autonomous person determines not simply what is to count as the moral law but what he or she is to count as valuable. The background to much contemporary reflection on what makes a human life valuable is widespread agnosticism or scepticism about whether there is a range of diverse, basic values which are integral components, so to speak, of human well being. Given such agnosticism and scepticism, one influential answer to the question about the value of human lives runs as follows: your life has value in so far as you are in a position to value things and you regard things as valuable. This means that if you do not possess the mental abilities which make it possible for things to seem valuable to you then there is no account one can give of the value of your life. On this account only a limited range of human beings can be represented as having human dignity or worth - and the basic human rights which go with recognition of human dignity. They are those human beings who possess presently exercisable abilities of the kind characteristic of developed human beings: abilities to understand, choose and engage in rational communication. In Anglo-American circles, philosophers who advance this position have taken to reserving the term 'person' for those human beings with these developed and exercisable abilities. The claim that only such human beings are 'persons' should be seen for what it is: a stipulation designed to convey a particular view of which human beings have dignity and possess rights. It is clear that on this secularist view of human dignity it has not been difficult to rationalise abortion, embryo experimentation, infanticide, voluntary and non-voluntary euthanasia and other practices. It is properly called a secularist view because it recognises no order of creation in which the Creator's intentions are discernible in the goods proper to the fulfilment of our created human nature. The response of Pope John Paul II to the secularist understanding of human dignity.

Pope John Paul II emphasises in Evangelium Vitae that "... when the sense of God is lost, the sense of man is threatened and poisoned, as the Second Vatican Council concisely states: '... when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible.' The consequent loss of understanding is manifested in a failure to recognise ontological dignity and in an inauthentic understanding of existential dignity. The Holy Father identifies as principal roots of the widespread violation of human rights - and therefore of human dignity - exhibited in abortion, euthanasia, and population control programmes, "the mentality which ... recognises as a subject of rights only the person who enjoys full or at least incipient autonomy ... and the mentality which tends to equate personal dignity with the capacity for verbal and explicit, or at least perceptible, communication." Here we have a loss of the sense of ontological dignity. Along with that loss goes a false understanding of existential dignity: " ... freedom negates and destroys itself, and becomes a factor leading to the destruction of others, when it no longer recognises and respects its essential link with the truth; ... then the person ends up by no longer taking as the sole and indisputable point of reference for his own choices the truth about good and evil, but only his subjective and changeable opinion or, indeed, his selfish interest and whim." Two years before Evangelium Vitae, John Paul II had criticised, in his encyclical Veritatis Splendor, the view that what is distinctive of persons (and constitutive of the dignity proper to persons) is freedom understood as "self-defining and a phenomenon creative of itself and its values". It is not open to man "freely to determine the meaning of his behaviour". "A freedom which claims to be absolute ends up by treating the human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design." The basis for the rejection of this conception of freedom is the truth which the Church teaches about "the unity of the human person, whose rational soul is per se et essentialiter the form of his body. The spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole - corpore et anima unus - as a person." Because of this unity "reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties". The body shares in the fundamental dignity proper to the person.
Moreover, basic bodily tendencies are for goods which are constitutive elements in the fulfilment of human persons. Our nature as bodily persons imposes limits on what chosen courses of action can count as making for our fulfilment as human persons. Hence our nature as bodily persons imposes limits on what can count as choices which respect human dignity. Existential dignity depends on respecting these limits; depends, one might say, on respecting the reality of ontological dignity. Here we have the rejection of Cartesian mechanism and Kantian autonomy, the seminal ideas which lie at the heart of modernity and at the intellectual root of our contemporary secularist misunderstandings of human dignity.

It is clear that the Holy Father sees the retrieval of an adequate understanding of human dignity as depending, at least in part, on a retrieval of an understanding of the rational soul as the unique substantial form of the human body and an understanding of the teleological dynamic which in consequence informs our bodily existence. The retrieval of such understanding in the face of the common assumptions of much biological science, and, more broadly, of the prevalent culture, is a large and demanding task.

NOTES
(1) I have substituted the word 'secularist' for 'secular'. A secular view may be one characteristic of a secularised society, by which is meant one in which political authority is exercised independently of religious authority since the two are acknowledged to involve distinct kinds of competence. A secularist view is one characterised by a mind-set in which either it is believed that God does not exist, or that, if He does, He has no concern with human affairs, or that God's concern is vaguely benevolent, and involves no specific requirements rejection of which would entail radical and potentially final alienation from Him. On this see, briefly, GORMALLY L, Catholic Bioethics in a secularised society, Priests and People 1997, 11: 413-417, and, more fully, FINNIS J, On the practical meaning of secularism. Notre Dame Law Review 1998, 73: 491-516.
(3) FERNGREN, The Imago Dei ..., p.34.
(4) RIST, Human Value ..., p.153.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Catechism of the Catholic Church, para.1934.
(7) Catechism..., para.1935.
(9) What is said here about the medieval period is confined to a single observation about the status of human bodily life; it is no more than a bridging passage to the treatment of Aquinas. The theme of human dignity receives a rich and extensive treatment in the monastic theologians and the early scholastics. For a survey see JAVELET R, La dignité de l'homme dans la pense du XII siècle, in HOLDEREGGER A, IMBACH R, SUAREZ de MIGUEL R, (eds) De Dignitate Hominis. Melanges offerts a Carlos-Josaphat Pinto de Oliveira. Fribourg/Freiburg 1987: 39-87; see also DALES R C, A Medieval View of Human Dignity, Journal of the History of Ideas 1977, 47: 557-72. I make no


(11) III Sent. d.35 q.1 a.4 sol.lc
(12) It is not destroyed or diminished by sin: "bonum naturae nec tollitur nec diminuitur per peccatum". Summa theologiae I II 85, 1c.

(13) I Sent. d.23, 1, 1: "Hoc nomen 'persona' significat substantiam particularem, prout subjicitur proprietati quae sonet dignitatem, et similiter 'prosopon' apud Graecos; et ideo 'persona' non est nisi in natura intellectuali." St Thomas explains the connection of the idea of 'dignity' with that of 'person' as arising from the fact that in the ancient theatre actors wore masks to represent people holding high office or distinguished positions in their society, 'dignitaries' as we might say in English. See Summa theologiae I q.29, a.3, ad 2.

(14) FINNIS, Aquinas, p.178
(15) "Aquinas's view that there is only one substantial form in each substance, including human beings, was also much contested during his lifetime and after his death. One of his major reasons for defending this view is this: if substantial form communicates substantial existence to matter and the matter-form composite, a plurality of substantial forms would result in a plurality of substantial existences and would, therefore, undermine the composite's substantial unity. If the first substantial form gave substantial existence, all other forms could contribute only accidental esse. As Aquinas reasons in ST Ia. 76, if a human being derived the fact that it lives from one form, the fact that it is an animal from another, and the fact that it is human from still another, it would not be one in the unqualified sense." WIPPEL J F, Metaphysics, in KRETZMANN N, STUMP E, (eds) The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993:.85-126, at pp.112-3.

(16) '... habent dominium sui actus; et non solum aguntur, sicut alia, sed per se agunt.' Summa theologiae I q.29, a.1c.

(17) 'Cogitatio', as Descartes uses the term, includes feelings and emotions, as well as intellectual dispositions and acts.

(18) Reductionism has, of course, been extremely fruitful as a methodological principle in the development of modern science. Scientists have sought to identify the fundamental building blocks of matter and to discover the basic laws governing those building blocks. This is the programme of micro-reductionism. More or less complex combinations of fundamental building-blocks - such as molecules, macromolecules, cells, tissues, organs - are understood as successful combinations of elementary particles, put together, so to speak, by taking advantage of the ways in which fundamental laws governing parts allow for such combinations. This has been the dominant paradigm in the development of modern science, including the medical sciences. It has been a fruitful paradigm. It has led us to understand a great deal about the workings of the human body: organ systems, individual organs, tissues, cells, chromosomes, genes. Genes are currently the object of intensive research programmes designed to unlock understanding of the way in which much in human development is pre-programmed by what we now suppose to be the basic units of inheritance transmitted in the gametes (sperm and ovum). But the history of genetics is itself serving to show the inadequacy of reductionism. It is impossible to understand gene function without understanding the complex dynamics of the cell, which in turn cannot be understood without understanding of inter-cellular dynamics, which in turn cannot be understood without understanding the role groups of cells play in an organ (say), which in turn

(19) This is highlighted as an important factor in the genealogy of the contemporary moral situation by Alasdair MacIntyre in his After Virtue 2nd edn. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1984.


(21) See some documentary evidence for the presence of this view in the highly influential writings of Mary Warnock and Ronald Dworkin in the reference in the following footnote. Similar views may be found, for example, in Grant Gillett, Jonathan Glover, John Harris, Peter Singer and others.

(22) I have argued in a number of publications that the view that only a sub-group of human beings possess the dignity which is required for possession of basic human rights is incompatible with our most basic intuitions about justice and, as such, does not allow one to provide any defensible account of justice in human relationships. See, most recently, GORMALLY L, (ed) Euthanasia, Clinical Practice and the Law London: The Linacre Centre 1994, esp.pp.118-126.

(23) This section cannot hope to do justice to the rich treatment of the theme of human dignity in the writings of the Pope John Paul II. I merely bring together, in brief compass, what the Holy Father has to say in Evangelium Vitae about false conceptions of human freedom (in which human dignity is held to consist) which lie at the root of widespread contemporary violations of basic human rights, especially the right to life, and then offer a brief analysis of the understanding of human dignity which he invokes in Veritatis Splendor, in confronting the understanding of human dignity assumed by those moral theologians who, under the influence of Kant, advance an 'autonomous morality'. I omit here the development in Pope John Paul's thinking of the idea of the specific dignities of 'being a man' and 'being a woman', which he links to the theme of the nuptial significance of the body. See especially the encyclical Mulieris Dignitatem.

(24) Evangelium Vitae 22, with internal quotation from the Pastoral Constitution on The Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes 36.

(25) Ibid. 19.

(26) Ibid.

(27) Veritatis Splendor 48.

(28) Ibid.
MAURIZIO FAGGIONI
LIFE AND FORMS OF LIFE.
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, after examining the idea of reductionism, we will consider the consequences of the reductionist approach as applied to the study of the phenomenon of life in its forms and expressions, and above all the phenomenon of human life. On the basis of Christian anthropology we will then try to overcome the aporias of reductionism and correctly understand the meaning of the biological dimension and the normative value of the biological dynamisms in the light of the overall mystery of the person.

The Ionic Spell

In the view of current opinions, the universe that we know began about fifteen milliard years ago beginning with a state of matter characterised by sub-nuclear dimensions and practically infinite density and temperature which in a hypothetical primordial instant underwent a violent expansive movement comparable to a great explosion ('the big bang') which triggered the coming into being of things with their inexhaustible multiformity. Since then an enormous number of worlds, galaxies, stars and planets have arisen, have carried out the curve of their existence, and have disappeared. Thus it was that about four milliard years ago, around a star which we call the sun, in a system at the borders of our galaxy, special environmental situations which had come into being in the atmosphere and in the immense linked-together primitive oceans, led to the appearance first of organic compounds and then biopolymers and finally, after innumerable attempts and experiments on the part of nature - as though it was detaching itself with a jolt from the level of inanimate matter - there began a form of existence which was completely unprecedented: living matter.(1)

We do not know if in other parts of the universe and at other times fortunate circumstances for the offspring of life have existed, but without doubt terrestrial life represents a rare event which is of great interest. The individual living entities have, indeed, amazing qualities - above all else self-regulation and self-organisation. The different terrestrial eco-systems, the coming and going of the geological eras, the struggle without mercy for survival, and reproduction all act as inexorable judges of the ability of a certain organism to occupy a space on the planet. Under the impulse of natural selection and moved by the wish concealed in every cell 'to become two cells' - as F. Jacob puts it - life bloomed on the earth in forms which have been always changing, increasingly complex, and increasingly fascinating.(2) Read from an evolutionist point of view, life appears to us, therefore, as a fundamentally homogeneous phenomenon which, beginning with the first living entities, enormously diversified and became complex. And our subspecies as well, homo sapiens sapiens, although presenting certain traits and characteristics of absolute originality, can after a certain fashion be placed in this endless vital flux.(3)

From a purely scientific perspective, the study of the phenomenon of life in general and of human life in particular is without doubt exciting and rich in thrilling discoveries which - one hopes - will lead us to increasingly certain knowledge about the origins of life, the evolution of living beings, and their way of functioning and organising themselves. In examining, however, the approach which guides contemporary science in the study of human and non-human life, one perceives a recurrent feature which is its basic error and which predetermines its developments and its results. This is the reductionist methodological option which is accompanied in fact, even though not necessarily, by an ontological option which is similarly reductionist. In his volume on life and the unity of knowledge E.O. Wilson perceives in reductionism one of the constants of Western thought and applies to this
hyper-simplifying tendency the Einsteinian concept of Ionic spell. The Ionic philosophers, or at least the presentation of them as made by Aristotle and in Greco-Roman doxography, placed the question of the arché of the real at the centre of their philosophical research, and there are those who see in the attempt to trace back the manifold ad unum the moving force of philosophical research and the secret dream of the whole of philosophical and scientific Western thought.

Heterogeneous positions such as those of Ockham's razor, Condillac's analysis, the nosography of the scientific language of Wittgenstein, and the behaviourism of Watson are all examples of reductionist programmes, that is to say of strategies which aim at the simplification of knowledge. In general, reductionism is a special form of the relationship of identity, the 'nothing else but' relationship or 'nothing buttery'. The As, in fact, can be reduced to Bs only if the As are nothing else but Bs.

From a logical point of view, reduction can be defined as the assimilation of one class of objects by another, or rather the transformation of a certain enunciation into another enunciation which is equivalent to the first, but which is more simple or more precise and thus of a character to bring out the falsehood or the truthfulness of the starting enunciation. In both conceptual and propositional definitional reduction the enunciations which refer to a certain type of entity can be translated without residues into other words or enunciations which refer to entities of another type. In this way enunciations relative to numbers can be translated, or if one wants, reduced, to enunciations relative to sets of numbers, and similarly, enunciations relative to the average Italian housewives can be reduced to specific enunciations regarding those women who acted as housewives in Italy. In propositional reduction, in particular, the truth value of the propositions themselves remains unchanged whereas their semantic contents are modified. In theoretical reduction a theory is reduced to a particular case of another, thereby demonstrating that the laws of the first can be deduced through precise rules of correspondence and by utilising opportune bridge enunciations from the laws of the second.

A classic example is to be found in the reduction of the laws of gases to the more general laws of thermodynamics or in the more complex example of the reduction of formal genetics to molecular genetics.

From an epistemological point of view, reductionism is a strategy for the condensation of information and the diminution of complexity. In its typical form - ontological reduction - reductionism affirms that 'objects of a determined type are nothing else but objects of other types, for example that chairs are nothing else but collections of molecules'. The reductionist approach would like to avoid the useless proliferation of entities which are postulated in virtue of pure logical or methodological constructions but often tends to programmatically reject all concepts which refer to non-observable entities.

Every real system is thus considered as the simple aggregative result of a set of sub-systems which compose it, and the properties and the causal powers of an entity are explained by reducing them to the properties and causal powers of simpler entities - for example the warmth of an incandescent iron bar does not presuppose the existence of a vis calorifica but is an outcome of the average kinetic energy of the molecules which make up the bar itself, whilst the causal consequences typical of a solid, such as resistance to pressure or impenetrability, do not postulate the soliditas as an entity but are to be traced back to the causal powers of the network into which the iron molecules in the bar are organised. Reductionism and modern science seem to make up a single distinct whole. For positive science of the nineteenth century and even more systematically for the neo-positivists of the twentieth century, reductionism is a cardinal epistemological thesis which postulates a hierarchical order of the various scientific disciplines beginning with physics, which is considered to be of primary importance and fundamental. To physics are subordinated, in a decreasing order of importance, chemistry, biology, psychology and sociology. All the terms and the concepts of any of these disciplines are translatable into the terms and concepts of another more fundamental discipline, although the contrary is not possible. In the neo-positivistic approach espoused by Carnap, reductionism seeks to effect a discrimination between scientific and metaphysical theories by constructing an empirical language made up of protocol enunciations or observations to which any scientific enunciation can be traced.
back. This reductionist programme assumes that beyond the methodological autonomy of the various disciplines there is an authentic homogeneity to knowledge, and postulates, as an extreme outcome, the unification of sciences within physics (physicalism). Psychology can be reduced to neurophysiology, biology to organic chemistry, organic chemistry to inorganic chemistry, and inorganic chemistry in its turn to physics, to the point of arriving at the highest level of unification and simplification. Leaving to one side the anti-metaphysical and anti-spiritualist pre-understanding implied in different expressions of reductionism, modern science has employed the utility of economic rules, imposed by logical reductionism, in the formalisation and axiomatisation of scientific theories, as well taking advantage of the enormous heuristic power of epistemological reductionism. But it is legitimate to ask oneself whether the formal and conceptual elegance of reduction does not expose us to the risk of coming to an artificial hyper-simplification of the facts which in reality omits or conceals the irreducible specificities of certain phenomena. Indeed, although it is often useful to consider certain orders of phenomena as subject to the better established or more precise laws of another order of phenomena, we can ask ourselves whether such a reduction is always possible and whether it always respects the complexity of the real and its levels of emergence, or whether it does not, instead, represent in some cases an objective impoverishment of knowledge and is an obstacle to authentic comprehension.

Life and Forms of Life

The tension between reductionism and anti-reductionism which characterises the centuries-old debate about life, with reference above all to the homogeneity between the organic world and the inorganic world; to the relationship between the laws which govern living things and the laws which govern inanimate objects; and to the possibility of, and the ways of, moving, both in a static vision and in an evolutionary vision, from inert matter to living matter, has been classically expressed in the two positions which have received the appellations mechanicalism and vitalism. (11) Mechanicalism, which has been variously expressed down the ages, argues in favour of the full reducibility of all the manifestations of life to chemical-physical forces and laws. After the mechanicalism of the ancient Democritean and Epicurean atomists, the founder of modern mechanicalism is seen as Descartes (1596-1650) who wanted draw up a mechanicalist explanation of living systems within the framework of his mechanicalist vision of nature, and for this reason sought to trace back the physiology of living things, which he equated with automatons, to mechanics: 'all the functions that I have attributed to this machine...all follow the natural way...from the sole arrangement of its organs, are no less and no more than the movements of a watch or another automaton brought about by its counterweights or wheels'.(12) The concept of machine-animal was taken up in a materialist context by Hobbes, by the French Sensists of the eighteenth century, and by many nineteenth-century positivists. The extreme positions of contemporary reductionism are well expressed by a statement of the Nobel-prize winner, F. Crick, according to whom 'the ultimate aim of modern biology is to explain the whole of biology within the framework of physics and chemistry'.(13) But today reductionism has in general a rather more sophisticated form given that many authorities admit that although living bodies are made up of the same elements as those to be found in the inorganic world, biological science is nonetheless not completely and immediately reducible to the terms of the physical sciences in the narrow sense. (14) Biological reductionism, lastly, is characterised by a radical critique of every form of finalism or belief that there is an immanent teleology in living natural objects, as exemplified by the famous essay by J. Monod 'Le Hazard et la Nécessité', according to which all organisms, including man, are systems produced by chance mutations which can be explained by general physical principles. (15) The finalism of the living is taken up to a certain extent in the cybernetic theories of life which liken living things to
an automaton capable of self-regulation, but in this case, too, one does not, in fact, move beyond an automatic vision of the living thing as the sum of its parts. (16)

The vitalists of every age have argued that the phenomenon of life is in itself irreducible to inanimate life and for this reason they admit the existence of laws specific to living things which cannot be fully traced back to chemical-physical laws and thus vitalism has often been accompanied by the denial of the possibility of spontaneous generation, that is to say the move from inert matter to life. Although the hylemorphic doctrine is often seen as an example of vitalism, to be rigorous in one's analysis the adjective vitalist should only be applied to those interpretations of the phenomenon of life which locate the newness of the living as opposed to the non-living in a force or vital principle added to matter, as a result of which the living thing is not explainable in terms of the laws which are valid for matter itself. For various reasons, and at times opposing reasons, the following great scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were vitalists: G.L. Buffon (1707-1788), J.B. De Lamarck (1744-1829), L. Pasteur (1822-1895), and above all, at the turn of the century, H. Driesch (1876-1941). Driesch defined vitalism as 'the doctrine of the autonomy of life' and from the autonomy of the phenomenon of life in relation to physics and chemistry he deduced the autonomy of biology as a science of life. (17) During the second part of the twentieth century, W.M. Elsasser spoke about special 'biotonic laws' which explained biological phenomena with reference to the physical laws but which he argued were not reducible to them, and in the same way M. Polanyi maintained that for living things there were higher principles which were additional to the laws of physics and chemistry. (18)

The criticisms which can be levelled at vitalism are two in number: from the point of view of scientific method vitalism begins from the pre-established acceptance of an ignorance which cannot be overcome given the elusive character of the vital principle; and from the metaphysical point of view it places an unbridgeable dualism between two heterogeneous principles - matter and the vital principle, encountering thereby all the difficulties typical of dualisms and not explaining the most fascinating property of living things which is their deep and harmonious organismic unity.

Perhaps E. Cassirer is right in thinking that in fact the antagonism between mechanicalism and vitalism expresses, more than two irreducible positions, 'a special state of oscillation of methods'. (19) But whatever the case it would be illusory to search for a solution to the age-old debate within a merely scientific framework. The term 'life' is a metaphysical notion because it expresses the act of being typical of living things, just as 'race' is the abstract term for concrete racing, and for this reason it is necessary as a preliminary step to strive to determine what is actually meant, in its real sense and in a right way, that is to say in a metaphysical context, when one speaks about 'life'. The two levels, the scientific and the metaphysical, if the distinctions of the different levels of knowledge are maintained, are not necessarily rivals and in opposition, given that there is no contradiction between the biological knowledge of life, which studies and defines the specific natures of living things and their behaviour, and the metaphysical knowledge of life, which sees life as a transcendental perfection of being of a special class of entities. L. Melina observes in this regard: 'This is certainly not a matter of moving from the rigid mechanism of positivist rationalism to an irrationalist vitalism which does not respect the legitimate distinction and methodological autonomy of experimental biology. Rather, one is dealing with demonstrating how, on the basis of complete respect for the results of experimental science, a philosophy of the living being can arise which interprets such results in its own light and in this way offers biology its own rational justification. In this way the chemical-physical dimension will not be opposed to the vital dimension of the biological phenomenon but will be ordered to it.' (20)

This intimate arrangement of the various levels of knowledge means, at the same time, that the difficulty which is encountered in providing a scientifically shared characterisation of the phenomenon of life - leaving aside the problem of whether life is reducible or not in material terms of a chemical-physical kind - is reflected in the difficulties encountered in providing a metaphysically watertight definition of life.
From the scientific point of view, the living thing can be distinguished from the non-living thing because of its capacity for self-regulation and self-organisation (autopoiesis).(21) Self-regulation allows the living thing to exist in a very special situation from a thermodynamic point of view which is characterised by a condition of stability distant from balance.(22) Self-organisation is actualised through the complex interactions of organs which are organised in a hierarchy to form the living organism which, as a single whole, regulates the functions of the organs themselves.

To arrive at a metaphysical definition of life which takes into account in the right way this scientific characterisation, it is useful to follow the steps of the Aristotelian definition of life as 'non-communicated and immanent movement'.(23) The type of action specific to the living thing is immanent in the entity itself and expresses itself as the capacity for the partial self-determination (in the non-human living thing) or the total self-determination (in man) of its own behaviour.(24) Whereas transitory actions have another element as their end, immanent operations begin and end in the same subject. The immanent action is a form of overall and self-finalised organisation of the individual transitive actions or chemical-physical modifications of the material parts of living organisms. 'The scientific idea of self-regulation', G. Basti writes on this point, 'at its different levels can supply a good way by which to render intelligible to the modern the metaphysical idea of immanent action as typical of organic operations...at their various levels of complexity (perfection').(25)

From an Aristotelian-Thomist perspective, the form which gives unity to all the parts and all the operations of the individual organic entity and which directs the organism towards its self-fulfilment is the substantial form, the vital principle or soul of that living thing.(26) Only the hylemorphic interpretation of life manages to avoid the aporias of mechanicalism and vitalism. Against mechanicalism it manages firstly to bring out the fact that living thing has a capacity to generate information and not merely to handle what a human planner puts into the machine from outside, and secondly it traces back the evident unity of the operations of the living being to the set rather than the sum of its parts. Against vitalism it overcomes the dualism between the vital principle, however it is understood, and the vital functions, making clear that the vital principle strictly depends upon such functions.

Classically, three types of immanent actions are recognised in living things: vegetative operations, senso-motorial operations, and intellectual operations.(27) The vegetative operations (metabolism, growth, reproduction) are common to all living things and take place in a non-intentional way in line with an innate and constant form. The senso-motorial operations, common to all animals, are non-intentional and can be modified in their execution and form. The intellectual operations, typical of man, ensure that a voluntarily pursued end can modify both the form and the execution of the intentional action.

In hylemorphism the move from inert matter to living matter and from a vital level to another involves an ontological leap and thus the action of a causality capable of achieving such a move. How de facto this ontological leap took place during the course of time, that is to say whether through a direct action of the Creator or through a divine process operating through secondary causes, cannot be established in an apodictic way.(28) What should be emphasised is the non-reducibility of the vegetable to the animal and above all of the human to the animal because the nature of the (cognitive and deliberative) intellectual operations requires the possibility of the reflexio or reditio completa of the human soul and thus involves its spirituality.

Unfortunately, in characterising human life as compared to mere animal life, philosophy and modern science - as we will see in the next section - fall into the most damaging reductionism and the consequences of this non-understanding of the ontological and axiological dignity of man are, as one can well imagine, devastating.
The challenge of reductionism takes on dramatic tones and consequences when there is a planned attempt to read and understand a complex and multilayered reality such as that represented by the human phenomenon by tracing it back, or rather by reducing it, to simpler and ontologically inferior realities. In the approach of the contemporary secularist mentality, and of invasive scientific reductionism, man is reduced to his biological element and culture also tends to be understood in terms of nature, just as even ethics, religion, art, and spiritual values are interpreted in a purely biological way. This is a vision closed to transcendence, even in the form of self-transcendence, which fails to grasp the creative meaning of human life and its sacredness, that is to say the ontological exceeding of the human subject compared to natural objects. In the end, anthropological reductionism, employed as a premise of research and a horizon of what it is conceivable to think, conditions the attitudes and the choices taken in relation to people.

The roots of this anthropological model can be traced back to the three great modern revolutions which have so greatly wounded the narcissism of mankind - the revolution of N. Copernicus (1473-1543), that of C.R. Darwin (1809-1882), and lastly that of S. Freud (1856-1939). The cosmological revolution of Copernicus displaced man from the centre of the universe and made the earth one of many planets around the sun, thereby undermining the ancient human idea of having a privileged and dominant position in the cosmos. The illusion of nonetheless maintaining an ontological primacy over the subhuman world was first broken by Charles Darwin who showed that the human organism not only functions like those of the animals but also has close connections of phylogenetic kinship with subhuman creatures. 'Man', wrote S. Freud, 'began to place an abyss between them and his own being. He denied them reason and attributed to himself an immortal soul, referring to another, divine origin, which allowed him to break his links with the animal world. We know that the research of Charles Darwin and those who worked with him put an end, a little more than a half-century ago, to this presumption on the part of man. Man is no more and no less than an animal'.(39)

Even more drastically, Sigmund Freud and his followers finally placed the aspirations of rationalism in a state of crisis by uncovering the obscure background of the human soul and by striving to show that man, even in relation to what appears to most specifically human - his psychism - is not radically different from the other creatures of the animal world, over which he proclaims himself - quite wrongly - the lord and sovereign.

In this horizon, the overall human project finds that it has to undergo the challenges of strongly reductive anthropological visions which seek to trace back the human creature in his highest expressions to mere biological reality.

The Challenge of the Neurosciences

One of the most long-lasting and serious challenges to suitable understanding of the human project has come from the study of the brain.

All the premises were already present in nineteenth-century Positivism, and in particular in the method and physiological theories elaborated by C. Barnard (1813-1878).(30) With Positivism there reached maturity a physicist conception of man which went back not only to the empiricism of J. Locke (1632-1704) and D. Hume (1711-1776) but to the French Sensists and to the whole of the mechanist biology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represented by the homme-machine of J. Offroy de La Mettrie (1709-1751), which ultimately went back to Descartes. Tenaciously opposed to the idea of an extra-physical consistency to mental contents, the positivist scientists professed a dogmatic materialism which was acritical and at the same time tragic. The zoologist Karl Vogt (1817-1895) formulated in this sense one of the crudest of the axioms which expressed the climate of the time: 'thought is the secretion of the brain just as bile is the secretion of the liver'.
Against a mechanicalist background, which was somewhat less ingenuous and methodologically more refined, there also moved the physiological psychology of J. Wundt (1832-1920), in whose view the higher mental processes cannot become the object of rigorous scientific research: consciousness, examined through elementistic introspection, should, instead, be the principal object of study. The dualism after a certain fashion presented by Wundt was completely superseded by one of the most rigorously reductionist, in a materialist sense, answers to the question of the relationship between the neurological mechanisms and the mind - that of the behaviourists. The hypothesis proposed by J. Watson (1878-1958) during the nineteen twenties was that human behaviour does not have mental causes because the observable behaviour of an organism, including the human organism, depends upon observable responses to given stimuli - the causes of behaviour, he argued, are to be found in stimuli and not in a purported world of the mind. Connecting himself at the level of ideas to these positions, B.F. Skinner later developed a psychology whose role was to catalogue the laws which determine the causal relationships between stimuli and responses. The psychological assertions of the 'I'm thirsty' kind mean, that is to say represent, behaviour and dispositions to forms of behaviour. 'I'm thirsty' therefore means 'If I had water to drink I would drink it'.

During our period, in coming into contact with the incredible development of the neurosciences, the eternal soul-body problem has taken on the form of the brain-mind dilemma. It appears that there is evidence that mental contents exist, that creativity and imagination exist, and that the capacity to elaborate ideas and produce symbols exist, but it is not clear what kind of relationship exists between the psychic and the neurological. This is a rather widespread approach amongst the experts of the neurosciences, of whom J.P. Changeux, through his work L'Homme Neuronal, made himself an influential interpreter. But this way of thinking tends not only to reduce the spiritual to the mental or the psychic but also to further reduce the mental to the neurological. According to the materialist approach to psychic life, the mental is not distinct from the physical and all other mental states, properties, processes, and operations, are identical, in principle, to physical states, properties, processes, and operations. The theory of identity has two declinations: the identity of type, according to which a well determined cerebral event corresponds to every mental event, and the identity of occurrence, according to which every mental event is identical to a cerebral event, even though it is not possible to reduce the taxonomy of psychology to that of neurology. An even more extreme approach denies that mental realities and events exist and argues that therefore the language which refers to them is semantically empty, or, at the most, is a useful instrument by which to interpret ourselves and other people, even though such language does not designate any subsistent reality.(32)

The study of the memory, of the centres of speech, of sight, and of emotional states through magnetic resonance, the tomographic emission of positrons, and other systems of brain imaging which allow one directly to follow the functioning of certain cerebral areas in relation to specific mental operations, seem to confirm the precise cerebral location of psychic events such as the memory, volition, intellection, the emotions, and the elaboration of sensations. The correspondence between precise mental states and the functional modifications of certain neuronal groups or entire cerebral areas confirms the reductionist pre-understanding that the mental is nothing else that a way of describing the effects of the neurophysiological functions.

In opposition to those authorities such as the philosopher D. Chalmers(34) who speak about the mind-brain relationship as a hard problem and postulate the irreducibility of the mind to something else, in the same way that the categories of time and space are irreducible, D. Dennet argues that once the soft problems, the structural and functional aspects of the brain, have been solved, we will also have solved the problem of consciousness.(35)

The discoveries regarding the neuromediators and the neuromodulators of the central nervous system, the effects on behaviour and on states of mood of various psychotropic substances, the same successes of psycho-neuroparmacology in relation to mental pathologies which were previously resistant to all forms of psychotherapeutic treatment, all converge to confirm the validity of an organicist
interpretation of psychic life. Psychosomatic medicine itself seems to have rediscovered the multilayered unity of the human composite but, seen in its right light, this is nothing else but a variant of general reductionism because it reduces the person to the union of soma and psyche, meaning by psyche the sum of the conscious and unconscious mental contents and certainly not the immaterial principle of human existence.

One could advance the objection that neurobiological modifications happen simply when there are, and as a result of, mental processes, but with a rigorous application of the reductionist razor A. Damasio answers that 'the biological processes which seem simply to correspond to mental processes in reality are the mental processes - I am not denying the existence of the mind or affirming that when we have learnt all there is to know about biology the mind will cease to exist. I merely think that the mind, although precious and unique, is in fact a biological entity which has to be described in biological terms'. (36)

An answer to the anti-mentalism which characterises many psychological and behavioural theories with a neurophysiological background is provided by perennially re-emerging dualist theories. According to the dualist approach, the mind is not reducible to the brain but is a non-physical substance, something which is traditionally called the 'spirit' or the 'soul'. There are different versions of dualism: emergentist dualism, as propounded, for example, by K.R. Popper, and neo-Cartesian interactionist dualism, as advanced, for example, by J.C. Eccles. (37) These are very variegated and complex positions which certainly cannot be examined in detail in this paper, but against which there are raised two principal difficulties. If the mind is something which is non-physical, it follows from this that it does not occupy a position in physical space and thus it is difficult to understand how a non-physical cause can have a behavioural effect whose system of expression is a physical alteration. Secondly, one asks oneself why the non-physical can give rise to a physical effect without at the same time violating the laws of the conservation of mass, energy, and quantity of movement, without, that is to say, a production of energy ex nihilo taking place.

The reply of the neurobiologist J.C. Eccles and the physicist R. Penrose is that within the microtubules of the neurons the molecular movements involved in neuronal activity must be seen as being subject to quantum physics rather than classical physics. (38) In other words, neuronal activity does not respond to the determinism of classical physics but to the indeterminism of quantum physics. Although it does not seem plausible to try to explain the obscurum per obscurius, it is however fascinating to think that the freedom and the creativity of the person could be traced back to the principle of indetermination.

The Challenge of the Cognitive Sciences

Anti-mentalism dominated the anthropological scene almost without opposition until the end of the nineteen sixties and its echoes can be found in many of the most influential thinkers and philosophical movements, from logical empiricism, to Quine and Ryle, and on to the second Wittgenstein. The development of the cognitive sciences in the nineteen seventies marked a major change in the comprehension of the relationship between the mind and the brain and represented a clear overcoming of the positions of the behaviourists, and this to such a point that the cognitivists, although not dualists, provocatively defined themselves as mentalists. The cognitive sciences begin with the internal architecture of the cognitive processes and in doing this they refer to computational models taking as their supposition the fact that the human mind functions as an active elaborator of the information which reaches it through the sensorial organs, in way similar to the action of the servant mechanisms of the cybernetic kind.

According to the classical version of computational functionalism, introduced by Hilary Putnam, the mental states or processes are identical to the computational states or processes of the brain-mind, or, to employ a metaphor the mind is the software which works within our cerebral hardware. (39) Nowadays the study of the neural networks is producing in this field notable advances and developments, with a
constant back referencing from natural intelligence to artificial intelligence and vice versa. From the interpretation of the brain as a system of hierarchised interconnections which are distributed in parallel has sprung the planning of computers which imitate the neural networks and are thus equipped with flexibility when they encounter new situations and an ability to learn, even though hitherto they have been more primitive that the most elementary animal nervous system.(40)

If the thinking mind can be adequately understood in computational terms, then one can theorise that a computer will be able, sooner or later, to simulate the performance of human intelligence. It is obvious, in fact, that if the thinking subject functions like a machine one can hypothesis that a planned machine can manage to develop thought similar to human thought. But in fact the question is more complex than our dreams about artificial intelligence want to accept - first of all we do not exactly know what it means to be intelligent and to think, but it is certainly the case that human thought cannot be reduced to the performance of tasks however difficult they may be. The subject that thinks - unless we embrace the idea of the homunculus, or rather that of the ghost in the machine, which is embraced by ingenuous forms of dualism(41) - does not achieve self-consciousness, a perception of his own subjectivity, without there also being involved his body, his sensations, and his emotions.

According to the reductionist hypothesis defended by A.R. Damasio and G.M. Edelman, the biological foundation of the sense of oneself can be located in the cerebral mechanisms which represent, from moment to moment, the continuity of the organism itself. Damasio, in particular, believes that the brain is capable not only of representing to itself the outside world and of making maps of it but also of self-representing the organism to which it belongs and which interacts with the outside world. The brain is able to produce elaborations of the first and second orders, to elaborate, for example, both visual sensation and the organism which receives and elaborates this same sensation: self-consciousness is thus said to be a self-representation of the organism which interacts with the world.(42) Only accidentally can this self-representation utilise verbal and non-verbal expressions which allow, among other things, human subjectivity to emerge fully. In this way the computational or representationist hypothesis argues that it eliminates for ever recourse to immaterial entities which, in whatever form they make take, are different from the brain.

The use of metaphors taken from the world of technology to describe and understand the functioning of the central nervous system is long-standing and can turn out to be fruitful.(43) The great neurophysiologists have often drawn inspiration from their environment to illustrate their philosophical-anatomical theories with suitable analogies. Galen in the second century AD, when thinking about the admirable water system of the Romans, compared the central nervous system to a complicated system of aqueducts. In the sixteenth century Descartes explained the nervous reactions of animals in mechanicalist terms whilst the mania of automatons spread throughout Europe. The medical doctors of the nineteenth century, fascinated by the discoveries in the field of electric energy and its exploitation, compared the central nervous system to a large electrical generating system. We today, living as we do immersed in a world of computers, love to give a cybernetic explanation of the working of the brain. Obviously, if one is dealing with metaphors and analogies, this process is correct and can help to illuminate this or that aspect of the working of the central nervous system, but if they correspond to nothing buterry logic they become reductive and partial approaches. To say that an analogy exists between the working of the human brain and the working of a computer is thoroughly legitimate, but to affirm that 'the human brain is nothing else but a calculator' is reductive. The cognitive sciences certainly run the risk of falling into a very sophisticated form of mechanicalism but the situation changes if we move from a banal and physicistic consideration of the computational brain to a consideration of the informational meaning of the neural networks. It is in this direction that G. Basti moves. He is a thinker of strict Thomist beliefs and an expert on cybernetics who has engaged in an interesting attempt to link the subject of the forma corporis with the subject of neurals, retrieving the idea of dispositio and above all retrieving the scholastic theme of intentionality as opposed to the modern theme of representation. It is not a matter, therefore, argues this thinker, of creating energy, as
is the case with interactionist dualism, but of producing information, and the mind could be described as a form which organises matter.(44)

The Challenge of Evolutionism

The theory of evolution as proposed by Charles Darwin in 1859, although born as a mere biological hypothesis, slowly became an interpretative approach of the whole of reality and replaced a rigid and static vision of the world with a dynamic and unfolding vision, extending itself to embrace in a sole evolutionary movement the cosmos itself. The theory of evolution, with all its consequences in the social, political and economic fields, inspired above all by the logic of the survival of the fittest and with its subversive effect in relation to ancient institutions and beliefs, is more than a scientific theory - it is a real and authentic meta-narration typical of modernity, and as such it lends itself to being exploited and bent to serve extra-scientific ideological uses.

One of the greatest challenges of evolutionism in relation to the human project and a constant reason for scandal lies in the affirmation that there is a continuity between man and the animals. Located in an empiricist horizon, this affirmation easily moves out from biological continuity, which can be verified or falsified, to ontological continuity, which, being a metaphysical assertion, is neither verifiable nor falsifiable through tests and experiments. This purported continuity goes against a conviction which is deeply rooted in the human spirit. Our ancestors, indeed, during the course of the evolution of our species, developed a growing awareness of their being, a self-consciousness that enabled them to see themselves as subjects in relation to natural objects. The man-animal relationship has been marked since the dawn of mankind by counterposition, a counterposition in the struggle for survival which has been translated into the belief in a much deeper and insuperable ontological counterposition at the level of being. One can say that the idea of man in Western thought was constructed in counterposition to the idea of the animal - humanity and animality have been terms which belong to an irreducible polarity. The possession of logos and the use, therefore, of speech and reason, defines man and marks his unbridgeable distance from animals, which are àlogos - without speech and thus without rationality.(45)

This idea really passes down the whole of the cultural history of the West, from ancient Greece, down through Christianity, and on to modernity. Where for Aristotle man is separate and differentiated from his animal basis because he is endowed with rationality (man is zòòn logikòn or animal rationale), Judeo-Christian faith perceives - albeit with shared creatural and terrestrial origins - the incomparable superiority of man over the animals, given that man is endowed with a vital spirit which likens him, as a divine imago, to the Lord and justifies his dominating task in relation to the other creatures.(46). In the scientific conception of the world which is specific to modernity there can be no doubt that animals exist to serve man (and for his well-being) and the mechanicalism, which characterised the birth of modern biology, provided a 'scientific' basis for the exploitation of animals.(47)

Prepared for at the level of ideas by precursors of the seventh and eighteenth centuries and supported by the contributions made by discoveries in the field of evolution, ethology, and sociobiology, one of the most significant philosophical innovations of the last decades has been the emergence of the so-called animalist question. Animalist philosophy subjects the categories of humanity and animality to critical analysis to verify their coherence and theoretical adequacy in relation to contemporary scientific parameters, beginning with the opposite assumption that this antinomy cannot be sustained and asking itself about the meaning of human or rational behaviour as something which is in opposition to animal nature.(48)

A subject placed in their sights by animalist philosophers to demonstrate its untenable character from a scientific point of view is mental complexity, the principal argument traditionally used by the supporters of a praxis of the absolute exclusion of animals from the moral world. In the approach of reductionist anthropology the esse is levelled to the bios and the existence of spiritual realities in man is
denied a priori. For this reason an attempt is made to trace back the higher faculties of man (rationality, self-consciousness, freedom) to simple psychic dynamisms. Once the spiritual dimension of man has been excluded, the demarcation between humanity and non-humanity or animality becomes evanescent. Not only, indeed, is our mental life considered as nothing other than an effect of the activity of the central nervous system, but one can also scientifically demonstrate that it takes place in relation to a structure which is widely shared by other species - the most recent data provided by comparative neurophysiology demonstrate that a real likeness and continuity exists between the fundamental neurophysiological functions in all pluricellular animals, man included, and that the likenesses grow - as can be instinctively grasped - with the increased location of a certain species in the zoological scale. The continuity at the level of the neurological structures and the homogeneity of performance lead one to think that there must also exist a real continuity between the mental functions that these structures and functions sublend, and in particular one can legitimately think that there is a continuity between sensitivity, intelligence, human self-consciousness and sensitivity, intelligence, and animal self-consciousness.(49) There does not, therefore, exist an impassable barrier between humans and non-humans and it becomes possible to compare the psychic experiences of different species on the basis of the demonstrated likeness of the fundamental properties of neurons, the synapse, and the neuroendocrinal mechanisms.

The vision of the biological and ultimately ontological relations between man and the animals generated by extreme evolutionism of the Darwinian matrix, has received confirmation not only from palaeontology, comparative anatomy and genetics but also - as we will see below - from ethology, which, in studying the meaning of the behaviour, the motivations, and the communication of animals has sought to draw from them significant elements of continuity with human behaviour and has lead to a strengthening as a consequence of the idea of affinity and continuity of man with the animal species. There follows from this an anthropology which does not fear to humiliate human dignity in considering homo sapiens sapiens as a species amongst others, and also a set of ethics which, having denied the sacredness of human life, does not manage to perceive the axiological difference which exists between human life and animal life.(50)

The position of Catholic theology and of the Magisterium on evolutionism as applied to man has been very circumspect and this is not the place to dwell upon this in detailed fashion.(51) Today, now that through a cautious epistemological purification the materialist and immanentistic prejudices present in the current versions of evolutionism have been overcome, and that through sophisticated hermeneutics the most difficult anti-evolutionistic obstacles to be found in the sources of Revelation have been removed, there remains the truly fundamental question of understanding how the human person in his unity of soul and body can emerge from ontologically inferior realities. According to the interpretation offered by Karl Rahner - who remains today one of the most penetrating authors on this subject - one must think of a self-overcoming of the creature that is made possible through the participation of God, who does not operate at the side of the creatural action but is the cause of this same action.(52) This vision of man and human evolution respects the multidimensional nature of man and the ontological distance between human and non-human reality but nonetheless makes us feel an integral part of our material universe, and this responds to a deep need of the human heart which is always in tension between this world and transcendence. Intelligent beings are not the fruit of mere causality - as biological reductionism would have it - but the goal of the future of the cosmos. Although in the thought of Teilhard de Chardin the evolution of the cosmos and living things corresponds to a direction of movement which aims at the goal of the Noosphere to the point of the Omega,(53) in line with the factors of the so-called anthropic principle, in its strong version the cosmos has been structured since its beginning in such a way as to allow the appearance within it, at some stage, of beings capable of understanding its inner intelligibility.(54) 'The cosmos', observes Saturnino Muratore, 'is understood as a large very complicated laboratory which is following a programme, the production of life, indeed, intelligent life...This unexpected recovery of the Anthropos within a scientific reading of the cosmos is
an authentic major change in relation to the Copernican revolution which gave rise to Western modernity'.(55)

The Challenge of Genetics

The amazing discoveries of genetics, the discovery of the probable genetic base not only of physical characteristics but also of the likelihood of contracting illnesses, of temperamental traits, of certain normal and deviant inclinations, the possibility of reading the genetic programme of man, and practically of each one of us, and the prospect of being able to intervene and to manipulate this very programme through genetic engineering, are bringing about profound repercussions in our way of seeing man, his choices, and his behaviour.

Biology is clarifying the cascade of events which can explain the relations between genetic predisposition and forms of behaviour. The genes codify proteins with different functions - if there are genetic alterations, for example, in the proteins which constitute the receptors involved in the nervous response or which are involved in the metabolism of the neuromediators, psychic and behavioural disturbances can take place which are linked to the altered balance of the neuromediators.

In the case of drug-addiction, for example, it has been proved that in causing such a condition diverse factors of a socio-cultural, psychological and biological kind are at work which interact with each other according to ways which are still not yet fully clarified. There exist scientifically proved clues, although of a still unclear significance, which lead one to hypothesise the existence - at least in some individuals - of a sort of biological predisposition to drug-taking, similar to what is supposed to take place with alcohol-taking in the case of alcoholics. However, the simple and incontestable observation that even an individual who has become a drug-addict can permanently interrupt - if he is suitably helped and motivated - his compulsory taking of drugs, leads us to believe that this predisposition does not act in a deterministic way and at least that it is not sufficient to explain on its own the emergence of behaviour involving abuse.(56) 'The phenomenon of drug-addiction', writes the psychiatrist V. Andreoli, 'is the set of three factors - the substance, the consumer, and the social environment in which the encounter between the substance and the consumer takes place. Any assessment of the situation which ignores one of these elements leads to a reductionistic error. There can be pharmacological reductionism, psychological reductionism, or sociological reductionism. Each of these approaches tends to minimise or neutralise the other components'.(57)

It is certainly the case that even in reducing the importance of genetic determinism in relation to anomalous or deviant forms of behaviour there remains the perception that our freedom is probably more conditioned than we usually suspect. We know that human freedom is a reality which is still being defined and is something which emerges concretely as the fruit of a dialectic between determination and non-determination, but the deterministic inclinations - after the discovery of the genetic basis of so many propensities and forms of behaviour - work at an instrumental level which is so intimate and deeply-rooted that we are led to ask ourselves if suitable spaces really are opened up for the exercise of freedom. Genetic engineering is a very powerful instrument by which to enlarge our knowledge in the field of the sciences of life, from embryology to physiology and on to pathology. The use of molecular probes which allow us to recognise the sequence and the position of genes in relation to chromosomes has opened up the possibility of analysing entire genomes (mapping). The most ambitious objective to be encountered is the mapping of the entire normal human genome and the identification of the principal genetic alterations which are at the root of human pathologies - to this amazing project, called the genome project, tens of research institutes all over the world, co-ordinated at an international level, are now dedicating themselves.(58)

An extreme form of reductionism closely connected with the progress of genetics is supplied by a new discipline - sociobiology.(59) According to the definition given by its founder, E.O. Wilson, sociobiology is 'the systematic study of the biological bases of every form of social behaviour'.(60) It
seeks to explain every form of behaviour, and especially social behaviour, both in animals and in man with the sole resources of biology and from a evolutionist perspective which unites the data of genetics and the data of ethology. Biology, this approach argues, teaches us that every species is characterised by a certain genetic patrimony which is transmitted in an unchanging way to offspring, but at the same time within the same species and thus within the context of substantially homogeneous information genotypes can exist which have slight diversifications. The selective process which is at the basis of evolution substantially involves the survival and the differential reproduction of diverse genotypes: in a certain environment a certain genotype can reveal a great biological suitability and thus a greater capacity for survival and reproduction. Natural selection, therefore, refers primarily to the survival of the genes and not to the survival of the individual. Leaving to one side the criticism of a scientific nature which is levelled against Watson and his followers, from a philosophical point of view the basic limitation of sociobiology is to be found in its exasperated and programmatic reductionism - it gives exclusive importance to the genetic aspects of social evolution and undervalues the extra-genetic aspects, which, in the human species, instead determine that second nature - culture.

The proposal advanced by Dawkins, which from other points of view is fascinating, does not escape reductionism either. Correcting Wilson's idea that the most important thing about evolution is the good of the species as opposed to the good of the individual member and thus its own genes, Dawkins argues that 'a predominant quality to be expected of a gene which is successful is a pitiless selfishness. This selfishness of the gene provokes, in general, selfishness in the behaviour of the individual...However, there exist special circumstances in which a gene can achieve its selfish goals by favouring a limited form of altruism at the level of the individual animals'.(61) He is fully aware that 'a human society based only upon the law of the gene, a law of pitiless selfishness, would be a very bad society in which to live'.(62) Fortunately, however, even if biological nature does not always help us, our species can try to oppose the plans of selfish genes. Indeed, side by side with natural replicators - the genes - there appeared with man cultural replicators - described by Dawkins as memes or imitation entities acquired through learning (for example, words, theories, norms, melodies etc.) whose evolution and diffusion can be effected because in a certain fashion they are useful to man. Perhaps Aristotle has only two or three of his genes travelling around the world but his memes are still very widespread amongst mankind and continue to influence our choices, judgements, and forms of behaviour. Understood correctly, however, human beings in this way become mere supports of memes, in the same way as they had previously been seen as supports of selfish genes.(63)

One of the great challenges to genetics and the disciplines which are based upon genetics is to be found in this reduction of the whole of human action to the laws of selective advantage, whether in terms of the population or the individual, and thus in the difficulty which is encountered in explaining how freedom, which is so appreciated by our contemporaries, can emerge and go beyond the determinism of the tyrant gene.

Anthropology and Biology

Faced with the challenges of anthropological reductionism, Christian philosophy affirms the difference of the human being in relation to every other being and thus stresses his axiological excellence, as is evident in a famous passage from Gaudium et Spes which aims to describe the constituents of man: 'Corpore et anima unus, homo per ipsam suam corporalem condicionem elementa mundi materialis in se colligit...Homo vero non fallitum, cum se rebus corporalibus superiorem agnosci...Interiorite enim sua universitatem rerum excedit'.(64) 'Man is one in body and soul'; he is one and dual at the same time because as unitas multiplex, unified totality, he is reducible neither to his animal biologicality nor to his rationality.
Christian thought from the very first attempts to think about the faith on the part of the Fathers, has believed it impossible to abandon the idea of the exceeding of man in relation to his biological or material basis, dimension or component, and has found it useful to express this exceeding with reference to the theologoumenon of the anima. The word 'anima', to be understood in relation to the biblical categorisation of imago Dei, before corresponding to a definite ontological category, is the linguistic instrument employed to indicate the diversity of man and his constituent going beyond in relation to the animal layer. To profess the existence of the human soul is thus an affirmation of the singularity of man and constitutes a creditum which only in the second instance is rationally themetised in a scitum. This ontological excess allows the Tradition of the Church to establish in a secure way the axiological excellence of man (the sacredness of his life, because the life of a person, soul as principium agendi e ratio essendi, the dignity of the person).

In the encyclical Veritatis Splendor, John Paul II, placing himself within the horizon of Aristotelian-Thomist philosophy, teaches us that 'the spiritual and immortal soul is the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole - corpore et anima unus - as a person. These definitions not only point out that the body, which has been promised the resurrection, will also share in glory. They also remind us that reason and free will are linked with all the bodily and sense faculties'.(65)

One cannot say that man possesses a body or a spirit or that man is a spirit which uses a body: man is corporeal, man is an incarnated spirit. For this reason his body is not simply an object body (Körper) but the body of a person, the lived body (Leib) as the condition itself of personal existing and the epiphany of the person himself.(66) The relationship of the human subject with his body is complex and cannot be described in an instrumental or possessive way, in line with an object reading of the formula anima utens corpore, yet the anthropological conception for example of G. Marcel according to whom 'man is his body' also cannot be accepted without attenuations. 'Man is also more than his body; living it he transcends it. This transcendence does not involve, at least in the classic Thomist vision of man, any dualism of soul and body: the being man is characterised by a specific 'unitotality'. Although experiencing a certain tension between these two dimension of his existence, he is always and insuperably the unity of his spirit and his body, in each of his decisions and in the activities by which he realises himself, acts in the world, and communicates with others'.(67)

According to the Thomist interpretation, which at this point diverges from the authentically Aristotelian approach,(68) the human composite, like every other substance, derives its actus essendi from its form, which for man is a spiritual substance - the soul - which in its turn provides an act of being. The soul receives the esse through the creative work of God and its being participates in the body, or better, receives its body in the communion of its very act of being. The soul, as a substantial form, does not come to form a body which is identified for it because, being a form in the strict sense, it is destined to form not a determined body but primary matter. 'In this way one affirms', explains Karl Rahner, 'that what we call the body is nothing else than the actuality of the soul itself in the other of primary matter, the self-worked otherness of the soul itself, as its expression and symbol'.(69) In this way both the ontological originality of the human composite in relation to every modality of created existence, and the unity of the human composite, which is actuated by a unique act of being, and lastly the immortality of the soul, that is to say the ontological exceeding of the person in relation to the corruptibility bound up with being in this world and in time, are all upheld and safeguarded.

Some of the most penetrating pages on the relationship between the spirit and matter, a relationship which underlies anthropological discussion of the philosophical tradition on the soul and the body, although this fact has not been completely identified, have been written by K. Rahner, who addressed himself to thus question on a number of occasions.(70) This thinker begins with an ontological analysis of the nature of symbols which enables him to define the body as a symbol, an expression, a self-actualisation of the soul, as a result of which we call the body is nothing else than the actuality of the soul itself in primary matter, primary matter which he identifies with empty space-temporality. 'The body is already spirit, taken at that moment of self-actualisation when personal spirituality loses itself
in order to encounter in a direct and tangible way what is different from itself.’(71) In dialectic terms, therefore, the non-identical character of the soul and the body (that which could be called duality) depends in the final analysis on the unity of the spirit and matter within man, for which reason matter is already spirit and matter is the intrinsic constituent moment of the spirit.

In the perspective of the operating unity of spirit and matter it is possible to understand the meaning of corporeal life for the person in his entirety. The fundamental biological structure of the human person is of an organismic character, like, indeed, that of every other living thing. The medium between integrally understood personal life and biological life in a realist anthropology such as Christian anthropology is given by the idea of autopoietic organism which was introduced in this paper when life in general was being discussed.(72) From the beginning of the organismic life of each individual biological unity until the irreversible disgregation as an organised unity, the life of the person takes place.(73)

In a complex organism such as the human organism the task of maintaining suitable organisational unity falls during the embryo stages to the genome and the systems of intercellular communication, followed progressively by the encephalon (the brain, the brainstem and the cerebellum) and - together with the encephalon and subordinated to it in a hierarchical way - the immunity system and the endocrinal system. There exists, therefore, a full symmetry between the beginning of life at conception, with the appearance of the autopoietic qualities of the zygote, independently of the anatomical-physiological structures assigned to the maintenance of that specific organisational level.(74) The Thomist doctrine allows us to understand and to rationally justify the biological idea of life and death as the maintenance and irreversible loss, respectively, of the functional unity of the natural object, and to explain in a satisfactory and non-dualist way the relationship which exists between the maintenance of organismic functionality and personal presence.(75). In the view of St. Thomas, the set of corporeal spirits is the dispositive cause by which an animal organism becomes a whole. As a single totality, they are the principle which organises the individual members into a unity in relation to the living whole (the active dispositive cause) - in virtue of this unifying capacity the parts become organs of a body in potenza to life.(76) In relation to the union of the soul to the body they are, instead, the passive dispositive cause, given that the biologically human organism offers the materia apte disposita to be formed by the spiritual soul, or rather the disposiitio passiva to animation.(77) The soul, indeed, is destined to the body and is propelled to unite, as sole forma corporis, to primary matter (unibilitas). This union, however, is possible only if an adequate biological substratum is realised, capable that is to say to act as a whole, and the same union is diminished and the death of the person follows if the passive dispositive cause diminishes, that is to say the organic unity achieved by the corporeal spirits, when, indeed, such a union becomes impossible. The idea of dispositive cause very well explains the relationship between the beginning of the life of the person and the infusio of spiritual soul and the end of the life of the person and the secessio of the spiritual soul from the body.(78)

In defining the person, Christian philosophy avoids both naturalistic or actualistic approaches which link the recognition of a personal presence to the verification of characteristics which are merely animal (such as the perception of pain) or which are held to be defining of the human being (such as self-consciousness or relationality), and anti-naturalist approaches which do not hold biological data to be relevant in the definition of the ontological status of the human being and reject the idea that one can anchor the ethical status of the person in any empirical datum at all.

Ontological personalism does not undervalue the relevance of the biological datum but seeks a substantial and not actualistic determination of the human person. In this approach, the signa personae are not ignored but it is believed that being a human, or also, if one wants, becoming a human, cannot be argued for on the basis of empirical facts but only within an idea of being and its degrees of perfection.

Here we follow the classic line which is not satisfied with a nominal or conventional definition what the person is, nor with a description of his operations, but which seeks to grasp his constituent element,
to reach his ultimate truth and essential root. The person possesses his actus essendi which makes him ontologically incommunicable and at the same time possesses an intentional communicability in the order of operating, that is to say a transcendental openness to knowing, to loving, to engaging in dialogue, to Everything. Boetius, in this approach, defined the person as rationalis naturae individua substantia, a view which was matched by Richard of St. Victor's rationalis naturae individua existentia and above all by Thomas Aquinas's individuum subsistens in rationali natura.

We can extract from such definitions two essential elements which constitute the person - subsistent individuality and rational or spiritual nature.

Thomas Aquinas explains that 'individuum autem est quod est in se indistinctum, ab aliis vero distinctum', and concludes from this that the person is what in a certain nature is distinct. For this reason, in speaking about human nature, he writes: 'persona...significat carnes, et haec ossa, at hanc animam, quae sunt principia individuantia hominem'.(79) Ontological personalism, in fact, does not ignore the somatic level, but indeed presupposes it, because the human individual substance is also corporeal - the biological individuality, beginning with the moment at which it is established, enters to constitute the personal individuality of the individuum subsistens. At the same time, however, ontological realism manages to perceive the largest and most intimate aspects of the simple biological human being because it sees the depth of the person as being root in biological individuality. This is the proposal of an overall anthropology which understands and at the same time transcends the mere biological level, rising above the sand bars of reductionism and opening itself to an adequate understanding of the person.

In this way of conceiving the person, the human being (understood in a biological sense) cannot be dissociated from being a person (the human being in a metaphysical sense) in relation to the distinctions between the various levels or strata of concrete existing. One can speak, together with P. Prini, of a biological personalism, or better of an ontobiological personalism, in which the biological horizon is integrated by a relational ontology such that 'that which constitutes the essence of man as a person...is co-extensive, in its earthly experience, with the whole history of his vital organism'.(80)

The Ethical Value of the Biological Dynamisms

A very important consequence of the unitality of the person is that the integrity and the biological dynamisms of the human body are not of no account from an ethical point of view. On the basis of Christian anthropology 'natural inclinations take on moral relevance only insofar as they refer to the human person and to his authentic fulfilment, a fulfilment which for that matter can take place always and only in human nature'.(81) The natural law to which Catholic theology refers is not deemed natural with reference to the biological nature which likens man to other living things but with reference to the nature of the human person 'who is the person himself in the unity of his soul and body, in the unity of his spiritual and biological inclinations, and all the other specific characteristics necessary for the pursuit of this end'.(82) The moral norm is based ultimately on the person because the good which should be followed or maintained is a bonum humanum, the good received by the person and in the person as an openness to full self-realisation. As appears evident in the question of the artificial regulation of births and artificial fertilisation, the criteria of legitimacy of these and other actions in relation to life is provided by the upholding and defence of the safeguarding of essential human values, amongst which are also to be placed corporeal values because 'in man it is not possible to divide the biological from the human'.(83)

With this principle established, we nonetheless ask ourselves, when confronted with certain innovative forms of technology, where legitimate and at times incumbent help to nature (adiuvatio naturae) ends and where an unacceptable substitution of nature (substitutio naturae) begins.
Plato in Protagoras stressed that man, being the creature which is most defenceless and without natural resources, needs to develop his téchne, which thus should be seen as a consequence of the poverty of man but also as an expression of his ontological superiority in relation to every other earthly creature. Following this line of thought, but with the awareness specific to modern man, José Ortega y Gasset, in his Meditación de la Técnica, argued that technology was the means by which to liberate man from natural bonds and forms of servitude and to open up his infinite possibilities. By means of technology man can dedicate himself to himself and devote himself to a series of non-biological forms of fulfilment which are not imposed by nature and which he invents for himself. Linking up with the analysis advanced by J. Ortega y Gasset and P. Alsberg, A. Ghelen maintains that technology is necessary to man because of his own biological failings - man is a lacking creature (Mängelwesen), without a form given once and for all, without, compared to the animals, specialisations, and without an environment (Umwelt) which corresponds to him in natural and instinctive terms. Man is naturally a technological animal, because by his biological nature he is led to modify the world (Welt) which he finds before him, according to his planning nature and his needs and wishes. This human plasticity in relation to the world, this capacity to redirect himself and rethink things, allows man to overcome his innate incompleteness and in taking possession of the world to take possession of himself. The concept of plasticity, introduced by Gehlen in open polemic with the anthropology of an ethological inspiration of K. Lorenz, does not escape a question of capital importance for our subject. 

J.M. Buchanan follows the empiricist tradition and argues that man is the being who is most capable of becoming different. Whereas animals are natural, man is both natural and artifactual, or rather an artifactual animal bound by animal conditionings. 'We', he writes, 'are, and will be, at least in part, that which we make ourselves to be. We construct our own beings, again within limits. We are artifactual'. The limits within which we self-build ourselves are biological and cultural, individual and social, and these limits or data are the equivalent of what for animals is constituted by nature, so that 'for the extent that individuals are rigidly bound to culturally evolved rules of conduct or modes of behaviour which are developed culturally, these elements would make up part of natural man, or better stated of nonartifactual man.'

We cannot enter the vexata quaestio of the relationship between nature and culture in the structuring of man, but it is clear that the various anthropological prior understandings are dramatically reflected in the judgement to be given on certain biomedical applications in the field of life and human health, such as genetic engineering, in vitro fertilisation, and the selection of embryos. We ask ourselves, in practice, whether the planning nature and mouldability of man also includes his structures and corporeal dynamisms, and in the case of an answer in the affirmative, we ask ourselves to what extent this is so. Here two opposing anthropological approaches clash with each other: on the one hand, there is the tendency to see the human body as a rough biological object, a natural datum, still removed from the sphere of humanity but able to become humanly significant if invested with a project and a meaning; and on the other hand, there is the tendency to attribute to the body its consistency, its purpose, as something which is independent of, and prior to, being inserted into a project, before that is to say any appropriation of it by the subject. In the first case the body will be in itself available, finding the limits to this availability in factors outside the body, such as for example the right to the autonomy
of the subject. In the second case the body can be judged available but only to the extent to which the safeguarding of the biological natural (taken as a normative) allows this - within this position are also to be placed the various forms of biologism.

Whereas some people, indeed, uphold the total autonomy of freedom from the somatic dimensions of the person and the right to engage in manipulation according to their needs and their life projects, to the point of being able to programme the beginning and the end of life, other people, within the conception of the ethics of sociobiological ancestries, profess an authentic biologism because they argue that the ethical rule is the naturam sequi, understanding nature in a strictly scientific and descriptive way, for which reason everything that happens in nature can be taken as a guide and a justification for human action.(90)

The biological and evolutionistic perspective, which tries to establish moral life in terms of selection and Darwinian competition, converts the empirical given into an ethical norm, and in this meta-ethical short-circuit falls into a real naturalistic fallacy. The objectivistic being studied by science, because of the underlying gnosiological options, is a poor being, understood in its empirical factuality, a being drained of ontological density. Of relevance here is the famous aporia of D. Hume (1711-1776) which indicated the impossibility of passing from this expropriated to be to a corresponding ought to be, that is to say from judgements of facts to consequent judgements of value.(91)

Catholic ethics, despite their various forms of expression, recognise the ethical value of the natural structures but carefully take their distance from naturalism and biologism, given that the nature they speak about is a nature which is understood and interpreted through anthropological mediation: it is the nature of the person. The natural moral law, which is the law of the reasonable creature, transcends the empirical given and thus the biological given, but at the same time it implies it and does not elude it because one cannot think of separating the person from nature or of opposing these two elements in an antithetical way. Man is in fact a multidimensional and multilayered reality, a complex reality in which nature and the person correlate in a mutual pericoresis, the shared endowment of given structures and dynamisms and the never to be repeated singularity of the subject.(92) From such pericoresis between nature and the person descends the great relevance of the results of the sciences of nature for the orientation and delineation of the interpreting process, and as a result of this, for normativity. The ethical criterion for any action on man should not be sought in nature as a mere datum but in the person understood in his complex ontological structure.

The person exists in his biological nature, the singularity of the person subsists in the repetitiveness of nature and the body represents the point of convergence and encounter of these different dimensions of human existing. The same perception of self as a subject, that sense of personal identity which constitutes the guiding axis of our interior world, that original self-understanding of self as distinct from others and thus as something which is free, is developed through awareness of one's own body. The body, which biologically is datum, is lived, understood and interpreted, and leads to the self-transcendence of the person as incommunicable singularity which opens to otherness and as freedom which actualises in historicity. From this perspective, the biological integrity becomes ethically relevant as a condition of personal identity - equality, connected with biological nature, finds itself performing the task of ensuring personal singularity, for which reason, concludes K. Demmer, 'an inequality created artificially on the contrary runs the risk of diminishing both the internal and the external natural presuppositions of freedom, introducing bonds that act as an impediment to the full creation of person singularity'.(93) We can therefore say that every act which involves the natural processes can become an invasion of the intangible space of the person in his equality and in his singularity and can become translated into domination not of nature but of man.

If the body is the body understood and interpreted, if nature reveals its normativity only through understanding and interpretation, one certainly has to admit that there is an immanent mouldability of the body, an intrinsic disposition of the human body to correspond to the interpreting singularity. Such mouldability must, however, compose itself with the safeguarding of integrity and in the final analysis
of personal identity: the corporeal facts are flexible but not indefinitely so, and it would be contradictory if a man in order to actualise his subjectivity denied himself in his own essential identity through a vulnus of his corporeal integrity or even its subsistence. Every action on man will thus be meaningful interpretation if it respects the overall truth of the person, his equality and his singularity, the datum and the unicum; if it recognises, to express the point fully, his exceeding and respects his excelling.

Notes
(1) From the immense literature on the origins of life see for example P. Davies, The Fifth Miracle (London - New York, 2000).
(2) On evolutionism from a scientific point of view see: D.J. Futuyma, Evolutionary Biology (Sunderland, 1998); M. Ridley, Evolution (Cambridge, 1966); G.C. Williams, Adaptation and Natural Selection (Princetown, 1966).
(5) We will not enter the question here of whether the arché of the Ionians is to be understood in a reductionist sense and whether one is thus dealing with going back to a structural principle which constitutes the fundamental texture of the real, or, differently, whether one is, instead, dealing with the search for a metaphysical principle which can account for the real itself.
(7) There is a debate about the rules of conversions but the two conditions of E. Nagel are usually accepted: the first is that every term of the reduced theory must be defined by terms of the reducing theory, and the second is that every proposition of the reduced theory must be able to be derived from a set of propositions of the reducing theory. Cf. E. Nagel, 'The Meaning of Reduction in the Natural Sciences', in R.T. Staufer (ed.), Science and Civilisation (1949), pp. 99-138; and by the same author, The Structure of Science (New York, 1961), pp. 345-349.
(10) This explains the reductionist option of philosophies which are innately anti-metaphysical such as empiricism, sensationism, positivism, and neo-postivism.

Leaving aside the intrinsic value of the two positions, from the theological point of view both mechanicism and vitalism are compatible with faith in the Creation and with an openness to transcendence, even if the mechanist interpretation of life is often to be found in a materialist and anti-spiritualist vision.


(14) Cf. G.S. Simpson, This View of Life (New York, 1963). In the same trajectory of 'materialist emergentism' are to be placed A.I. Oparin, J.B.S Haldane, and M. Prênant.


(16) I. Prigogine, Dall'Essere al Divenire (Turin, 1986).

(17) Cf. H. Driesch, Der Vitalismus als Geschichte und als Lehre (Leipzig, 1905), p. 109: 'Life is not...a special connection of inorganic events: for this reason biology is not an application of chemistry and physics. Life is something different, and biology is an independent science'.


(21) For the concept of autopoiesis see M. Maturana and F. Varela, De Maquinas y Seres Vivos. Una Teoria sobre la Organización Biológica (1972). See also by the same authors: The Tree of Knowledge. The Biological Roots of Human Understanding (Boston, 1988).


(23) Aristotle, De Anima, II, 1, 403 b 16.

(24) Cf Thomas Aquinas, De Potentia, q. 10, a. 1: 'Est autem duplex operatio. Quaedem quidem transiens ab operante in aliquid extrinsecum...Alia vero operatio non transiens in aliquid extrinsecum, sed manens in ipso operante...Primum autem operationum genus commune est viventibus et non viventibus; sed Secundum operationum genus est proprium viventis'.

(25) G. Basti, Filosofia dell'Uomo, p. 113. For one of the most fascinating attempts to give 'an ontological explanation of biological phenomena' see H. Jonas, The Phenomenon of Life. Towards a Philosophical Biology (New York, 1966), quotation p. 3.

(26) The substantial form of every living thing was called the anima by the ancients but the moderns apply this name to the human soul. With the exception of the human soul, the substantial forms of corporeal entities become corrupted with the corruption of the material parts that they organise.

(27) Cf. T. Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, q. 18, art. 3 in corpore.

(28) In the view of Aquinas it is possible to pass from inert matter to the simplest living matter through spontaneous generation because general causality, coming from God through secondary causes (the skies of medieval cosmology) can produce the ontological leap in matter if this is already predisposed to accept the supervening formality. Cf. Summa Theologiae I, q. 91, art. 2, ad 2: 'Sufficit autem cirtus caelestium corporum ad generandum quaedam animalia imperfectiora ex materia disposita' (cf. Summa Theologiae I, q. 45, art. 8, ad 3; U, q. 71, art. un., ad 1).


(41) The problem of self is traditionally resolved by postulating the existence of a thinking homunculus which is said to be the ultimate subject of self-consciousness, but this moves the problem from the brain to the homunculus and does not in the least take into account the role of corporeality and the emotions in intellectual elaboration. Cf. A.R. Damasio, Descartes' Error. Emotion, Reason, and Human Brain (New York 1994).

Beginning with the assumption that self-consciousness is self-representation, what is a metaphysical problem becomes reduced to a gnosiological problem. Self-consciousness is, instead, the fruit of the complete reditio of the spirit, which is made possible precisely because the spirit is, by definition, immaterial and unextended. For this argument see G. Basti, Il Rapporto Mente-Corpo nella Filosofia a nella Scienza (Bologna, 1991, pp. 23-61).
(43) On the use of metaphors see T.S. Kuhn, La Metafora nella Scienza (Milan, 1983).


(50) This position has been advanced and elaborated in two much discussed studies: J. Rachels, Created from Animals. The Moral Implications of Darwinism (Oxford-New York, 1990); P. Singer, Rethinking Life and Death (1995).


(53) See here, in addition, obviously enough, to the texts by the French Jesuit, some overall works: R. Gibellini, Teilhard de Chardin: L'Opera e le Interpretazioni (Brescia, 1985); P. Smulders, La Visione de Teilhard de Chardin (Turin, 1967).


(56) G. Gerra, Drogati si Nasce? Percorsi nell'Infanzia-adolescenza prima della Tossicodipendenza (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, 1994), p. 18: 'If something of a biological kind should really influence the individual in his impulse towards substances', concludes G. Gerra, 'this would be a mere co-factor, that is to say a partial component which determines behaviour, not an absolute cause. It is easy to imagine how many environmental and cultural influences act to modify within man the impulses received from nature and which work together with his biological structure'.


(62) Ibid., p. 5.
(63) The current thesis is that the transmission of cultural data (including moral norms) takes place in a Lamarckian way, that is to say through instruction, and through selective mechanisms of a Darwinian type, but biological models of the transmission of culture are also advancing: J.-P. Changeux, Ragione e Piacere (Milan, 1995); J.-P Changeux and P. Ricoeur, La Nature e la Regola. Alle Radici del Pensiero (Milan, 1999); D. Sperber, Il Contagio delle Idee (Milan, 1999).
(64) The Ecumenical Council Vatican Council II, Gaudium et Spes, n. 14.
(66) The distinction between Körper and Leib, which was already to be found in A. Schopenhauer (1788-1860), is at the core of the philosophy of E. Husserl (1859-1938) and has been taken up in various ways in the phenomenological school and in existentialism. See E. Bühli, 'Corporeità e Conoscenza. Nota sulla Posizione della Filosofia Fenomenologica del Novecento', in AAVV, Il Corpo in Scena (Milan, 1983), pp. 69-85; G. Fergnani, Il Corpo Vissuto (Milan, 1979).
(74) For this reason the accusations levelled against Catholic bioethics on the basis of the purported inconsistency between the paradigms of interpretation employed to illustrate the beginning and the end of life are groundless. See M. Mori, 'Aborto e Trapianto: un'Analisi Filosofica degli Argomenti Addotti nell'Etica Medica Cattolica Recente sull'Inizio a sulla Fine della Vita', in M. Mori (ed.), Questioni di Bioetica (Milan, 1988), pp. 103-148.
(75) On the beginning and the end of life see: Pontificia Academia Pro Vita, Identità e Statuto dell'Embrione Umano (Vatican City, 1998); R.J. White et al. (eds.), The Determination of Brain Death and its Relationship to Human Death (Vatican City, 1992).
(76) Thomas Aquinas, Quaestio Disputata De Anima, 9, resp. ad. 6.
(78) Cf. Giovanni Paolo II, 'Ai Partecipanti di Convegno della Pontificia Accademia delle Scienze sulla 'Determinazione del Momento della Morte'' , 14 Dec. 1989, Insegnamenti vol. 12/2, 1527: '[Death] takes place when the spiritual principle which presides over the unity of the individual can no longer exercise its functions in relation to the organism and in the organism whose elements, left to themselves, dissociate. Certainly, this destruction does not afflict the whole of the human being. The
Christian faith - and not only the Christian faith - affirms the persistence, beyond death, of the spiritual principle of man'.

(79) Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologicae I, q. 29, ad 4, concl.


(84) Plato, Protagoras, 321 C.


(86) P. Alsberg, Das Menschheitsrätsel (Dresden, 1922).


(89) Ibid., p. 95.

(90) One example is the global bioethics professed by the anthropologist B. Chiarelli for whom bioethics is 'a biological and naturalistic science with ecological relevance' in which the decisive ethical criterion is the maintenance of the empirically explorable ecological configuration - B. Chiarelli, Bioetica Globale (Florence, 1993).

(91) Hume's aporia or law was emphasised by the Scottish empiricist in A Treatise of Human Nature (book 3, part 1, sect. 1) and was re-proposed with rigour by the analytical philosopher G.M. Moore, Principia Ethica (Cambridge, 1903). Cf. G. Carcaterra, Il Problema della Fallacia Naturalistica. La Derivazione del Dover Essere dall'Essere (Milan, 1969); U. Scarpelli, Etica senza Verità (Bologna, 1982).


The study of man, his origins and development, is based on documentation provided by various scientific sectors, particularly paleontology, prehistory and evolutionary biology. The current anthropological view, developed within the framework of the natural sciences, leads us to recognize, on the phenomenological plane, that man has peculiarities that are not seen in other species and do not fall within the scope of empirical science; thus, it is not possible to explain them with the reference parameters used in science. In particular, since human behavior involves schemes and models not seen in the biological world, its interpretation must be sought in other orders of knowledge, like philosophy. In addition to evolution, one can speak legitimately about the emergence of man, in a broader sense than for any other species, and also of a transcendence of man, as shown by behaviors that are beyond the strict sphere of biological evolution, considered on both the physical and social plane.

Man's identity, from the biological and cultural point of view, has aspects that appear closely linked in the past and the present and represent the background for any consideration of man.

HUMAN EVOLUTION

Like other species, man evolved from previous forms that prepared his appearance on earth. This evolution, as a phenomenon characteristic of living beings, is suggested by various observations related both to the past and the present. The study of fossils, comparative anatomy and molecular genetics reveals biological characteristics of extinct species and living species that can be explained by hypothesizing relations between them, that is an evolution.

As Pope John Paul II stated in a message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in October 1996, one can no longer speak of hypotheses, but of evolutionary theory "progressively attracting the attention of researchers following discoveries made in the different disciplines of knowledge." Their consistency with the supposed evolutionary process justifies the acceptance of the evolution in the scientific field. However, this does not mean that we know all the mechanisms, modalities and stages of biological evolution.

The Darwinian theory, according to the modern synthesis in terms of mutation and natural selection, of chance and necessity, must have played an important, if not decisive role. It is supported by many scholars (Simpson, Monod, Jacob, Dobzhansky, Mayr, Ayala, etc.) on the basis of what is observed at the microevolutionary level as only explanation of the evolutionary process. Ayala attributed to selection the role of "creation" of the different species. "Natural selection is a creative process that can account for the appearance of genuine novelty". Nevertheless such explanation is not believed sufficient by other scholars to explain the formation of large evolutionary trends in relatively short times. Grassé (1979) stated: "We must look beyond mutation for the source of evolutionary flow ...; invoking a mechanism different from mutation is imperative for all systems that claim to explain evolution." (2)

In any case one must distinguish between biological evolution and darwinism. The evolution is a theory which supports the evolutionary process, Darwinism is an explanation which could be considered not sufficient even by scholars favourable to the evolution.

One of the major points of discussion is that of a general design of evolution, a problem that appears more philosophical than scientific. In any case, even in a view based on random events, it cannot be excluded that a design could be realized. (3)

Notwithstanding its inevitable incompleteness, the evolutionary paradigm is commonly used in modern biology and constitutes an interpretative key of past and present phenomena. According to Ayala "Darwin completed the Copernican revolution by extending it to the living world" (4).
Also for man, it can be stated that evolution is the most reasonable explanation of the fossil record, as well as of the morphological and biomolecular similarities and differences with respect to other living beings, particularly the Primates in whose evolutionary tree the first human form arose. This can be accepted even though the phyletic developments and mechanisms leading to the earliest humans have yet to be fully clarified. The interaction between genetic mutations and the environment has marked the evolutionary path toward man and after his appearance. However, since the transformations occurred in a relatively short time, it is not easy to explain them with the simple model of the synthetic theory of evolution. It is sufficient to consider that the process of cerebralization has led to the trebling of brain size in little more than 2 million years. Therefore, the appearance of the human form was preceded by a long evolutionary process within the primate lineage. When one studies the human threshold at any morphological level, one observes a series of transformations that can be interpreted as a predisposition for the appearance of man. It is within the Hominoids of the Tertiary in Africa, around 4.5 million years ago, that we find forms (today extinct) with a type of locomotion related not to the forest habitat but to an open environment; there is a tendency to straightening of the vertebral column and bipedal locomotion. It has been observed that evolution began with the feet (Leroi-Gourhan); however, it perhaps should be said that it began with the vertebral column, as stated by Coppens. (6)

Adaptations in this direction are present in the Australopithecines of 4.5-3 million years ago, discovered in Ethiopia and Kenya (Australopithecus ramidus, Australopithecus anamensis, Australopithecus afarensis); indeed, bipedal locomotion (albeit not perfect) has been attributed to them. Numerous australopithecine species have been described (A. ramidus, A. anamensis, A. afarensis, A. bahr-el-gazalensis, A. africanus, A. robustus, A. boisei, A. aethiopicus), from Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Chad and South Africa, which can be grouped into archaic, gracile and robust forms. (7)

The phyletic relations of the Australopithecines with the most ancient forms of the genus Homo are viewed differently by researchers. The oldest human form, Homo habilis, is probably related to an archaic Australopithecus (or afarensis) or to A. africanus or to a somewhat earlier form (A. anamensis from around 3.9 million years ago) which from the morphology of the limbs seems more clearly oriented toward bipedalism. (8)

The life of the Australopithecines took place essentially in an open environment, but for the earlier ones, like the archaic forms, there must have been great familiarity with the arboreal environment, as inferred from the conformation of the upper limbs. Flaked stones have been found in layers with australopithecine fossils, but stone tool making was not practiced in a systematic and progressive manner, as later occurred with the humans. Homo habilis is a Hominid that lived 2-2.5 million years ago, in which some morphological and functional traits (better defined bipedalism, increased cranial capacity, presence of cerebral areas specialized for articulate language) and some behaviors (systematic making of stone tools, organization of the territory) induce many Authors to consider it the most ancient expression of humanity. (9)

The morphological level of Homo habilis presents a certain variability. There are less cerebralized forms (from 670 to 720 cc), like those of Olduvai from around 1.8 million years ago, and others more cerebralized (around 800 cc), like Homo habilis of Lake Turkana from 2 million years ago, for which the name "Homo rudolfensis" has been proposed. Homo habilis, or more generically early Homo, is documented from 2.0 to 2.5 million ago in other regions of Africa, in addition to Tanzania and Kenya (Ethiopia, South Africa, Malawi), although not all the specimens attributed to this level are accompanied by signs of culture.

In East Africa, Homo habilis evolved into a form with greater cerebralization and more complex stone tool industries and territorial organization. This is the level defined as Homo erectus (the oldest African forms are now called Homo ergaster), which appeared around 1.6 million years ago in East Africa. It spread and evolved during hundreds of thousands of years in Europe and Asia, where it seems to have lived more than 1 million years ago. In Europe, the oldest layers with these fossil specimens are at
Dmanisi in Georgia (1.8-1.6 million years ago), Atapuerca in Spain (800,000 years ago) and Ceprano in Latium (Italy) (800,000 years ago). The ancient forms of European H. erectus from Atapuerca, called Homo antecessor, are related to Homo ergaster from Africa (unless Homo habilis arrived earlier) and they are considered the ancestors of European Neandertals, through Heidelberg Man, if not also of modern humans. The ancient remains of Asia are represented by Pithecanthropes and Synanthrope. The evolutionary continuity between Homo habilis and Homo erectus renders their distinction at the species level increasingly less justifiable. Indeed, the same can be said for the last forms of erectus from 200,000-100,000 years ago, when there was an evolution toward modern man, Homo sapiens, in Africa. The distinction of fossil species into habilis, erectus and sapiens has always had more classificatory value than biological meaning, because one tends to see morphological stages in them (Jelinek, Coppens, etc.). (10)

Anatomically modern man (Homo sapiens sapiens) spread from Africa throughout the Old World, probably with some limited admixture with representatives of erectus, especially in southeastern Asia and Eastern Europe.

The peopling of Australia by Homo sapiens occurred around 50,000 years ago and that of America at various times during the last glaciation (between 35,000 and 10,000 years ago), especially through the Bering Strait.

As mentioned above, it is accepted that there was a single lineage leading to the first human forms, attributed to non-human primates in Africa. However, for modern man (Homo sapiens sapiens), two theories have been proposed: 1) modern man is related to forms of erectus that evolved in parallel in the different continents (continuity hypothesis) or 2) modern man derived from forms coming from Africa 100-200,000 years ago (replacement hypothesis). The latter hypothesis is currently favoured, although various Authors accept some interbreeding with previous forms, as indicated by some paleontological finds (in eastern Europe, East Asia). (11)

Studies of ancient DNA from Neandertal specimens would suggest that they did not contribute to the modern human genome. (12)

EMERGENCE OF MAN

Human evolution is characterized by the emergence of the human form. Easily recognizable in the more recent phases (Homo sapiens), its identification in the earliest phases is the subject of debate. Indeed, the beginnings are shrouded in obscurity. As Teilhard de Chardin noted "Man enters the scene of the earth on tiptoes, when we see him he is already a crowd."

The real problem is the continuity and discontinuity. Both must be acknowledged. However, one can pay more attention to one or the other. This explains why there is no consensus of views on the identification of the human threshold, even though most paleoanthropologists (Tobias, Piveteau, Jelinek, Coppens, etc.) are inclined to recognize Homo habilis as the earliest human form. (13)

Beyond the debate about the time of appearance of man, we could ask what characterizes the human form biologically and phenomenologically, i.e. on the basis of the documentation furnished by fossils. Biologically, i.e. with reference to morphological-functional development, in addition to bipedalism, there must be a certain cerebral organization that allows for language and psychic activities at the human intellectual level. Brain size is important (some Authors set the cerebral Rubicon for man at 700-750 cc). The existence of a link between psychism and cerebral organization is difficult to contest, at least at the species level. As Bergson observed: "Consciousness (we would say psychism) does not spring from the brain, but brain and consciousness correspond because they are measured, the one because of the complexity of its structure and the other because of the intensity of its awakening, the quantity of choices available to the living being." (14)
Cerebralization has been proposed by Teilhard de Chardin and others as a parameter by which to monitor evolution: "Nervous differentiation is an important transformation. It gives meaning and thus contemporaneously proves that there is meaning in evolution." (15). Nevertheless, the identification of what might be considered a minimum cerebral threshold for man remains very problematic. According to Piveteau (1994): "in a similar study, the anatomical criterion can only be a factor of indecision: the psychical criterion is certainly the preponderant one." (16). In this regard, the differentiation of the cerebral areas related to language (Broca's area and Wemicke's area) is of obvious interest. Indeed, these areas have been identified on the endocranium of Homo habilis (Falk, Tobias). (17)

Behaviorally, it is necessary to look at manifestations that can be interpreted as culture. Where there is culture there is man. But what characterizes cultural behavior? At any evolutionary level, cultural behavior must have two essential characteristics, which appear closely linked to each other and reveal an abstract intelligence: planning and symbolization. Planning means the ability to act intentionally by means of the predisposition of certain actions to achieve a goal. Planning means originality and innovative ability, whether expressed in stone tool making or in territorial organization or in manipulation of food. It is what occurs in technology. Intentionality reveals the notion of time: the subject elaborates images of the past and projects them into a future that he is able to prefigure. In the animal world, one also finds techniques (at times very complex ones), but they are regulated biologically and do not exhibit innovation and progress. There are no evident signs of abstract ability to project into the future. In his manifestations of intentionality, man also shows the capacity for choice and thus self-determination and liberty, an aspect that places him on a plane of values and thus ethics. Symbolization is the other characteristic of human cultural behavior. It consists in attributing to a sign (a sound or an object) a value or meaning that goes beyond the sign. By means of symbolization, realizations of techniques are enriched with meaning and value. The symbolic content is evident in artistic representations, religious expressions (spiritual symbolism), human language and the various forms of social communication (social symbolism). However, one can recognize symbolic value also in the products of techniques. What is obtained from the technique, in addition to the response to a plan, assumes the value of a sign or a reference to some use. The tool reflects the function to which it is destined and assumes a meaning in the imagination of man. Therefore, the products of the technique assume a symbolic value. One can speak of functional symbolism. Homo symbolicus is such because he is human, creator of tools and of art, able to communicate his internal world in various ways. (18)

There are good arguments that the first cultural manifestations were by Homo habilis. The cultural expressions observed in the phase of Homo habilis seem to characterize, albeit in an elementary and simple form, its behavior and living environment. There are records of stones flaked or used by the australopithecines, but their meaning in the context of living is very different from that of the forms of Homo of 2-1.5 million years ago, just as it is different from those of the current primates. For the latter, tool making is not essential for survival and for their relationship with the environment (Kitahara Frisch, 1984) (19). The human artifactual level is defined by the plan it expresses and the meaning it assumes in the context of life and survival. Although believing Australopithecus capable of manufacturing tools, Coppens (1991) recognized that such tool making "had an anecdotal nature. With man, tools became permanent, numerous, diversified." (20). It is exactly because of this cultural development that man has progressed in evolution while the australopithecines became extinct.

Some scholars believe that the birth of symbolic thought occurred only with anatomically modern man (or Homo sapiens sapiens) around 40,000-30,000 years ago, when the first manifestations of portable and cave art were recorded (21). Others consider burial practices, appearing in the middle Paleolithic
(from around 90,000 years ago) as the sign of human psychism (22). Leroi-Gourhan proposed the distinction between technical thought, also recognized in the australopithecines, and symbolic thought, a trait unique to Homo sapiens. (23)

In the interpretation proposed by us, the symbolic ability of man can be considered co-natural with the human form, although the available documentation regarding the earliest forms essentially concerns the expressions of functional symbolism. To be attributed to the sphere of symbolization are intentional behaviors of a technological nature, documented by tools, by the mode of their making (choice of materials, techniques employed) and by the meaning of the tools in the context of living, also in the organization of the dwelling space or places of frequentation (e.g. for hunting, for protection), and by the domestication of fire at least half a million years ago.

The tool kit and the organization of the territory, oriented toward subsistence and the life of the family group, constitute a symbolic system of relationships that developed during the evolutionary history of man. These activities, long practiced by Homo erectus and in an elementary form by Homo habilis, represented true adaptive strategies in the relationship with the environment (24).

By means of symbolic systems of communication and organization, man expresses, lives and transmits his imagination. We are faced with functional and social symbolism: Homo oeconomicus, Homo technologicus, Homo faber, since Homo symbolicus.

Some manifestations of spiritual symbolism (burials, artistic representations) appear to be more recent. However, it should be noted that signs of spiritual symbolism have also been recorded in eras much older than the late Paleolithic, when anatomically modern man appears. Recent documents of symbolic activity lead even further back in time, e.g. a manufactured article from the Mousterian (between 100,000 and 50,000 years ago) found at Tata in Hungary; some Acheulean bifaces from Norfolk with the imprint of mollusk shells in their center; a bovid rib from the Riss with intentional incisions; a fragment of an elephant tibia found at Bilzingsleben and dated to 400,000 years ago with intentional, but not easily interpreted signs; and others still. (25)

TRANSCENDENCE OF MAN

The emergence of man, revealed behaviorally by the capacity for planning and symbolization, i.e. by culture, appears as a discontinuity with respect to the physical and biological world. The cultural achievements of man are markers of humanity, of what is specific and peculiar to man since he is human and not animal.

On the philosophical plane, we can speak of an ontological discontinuity, because it involves the spiritual nature of man. However, also at an experimental level, as stated by Pope John Paul II in his message to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in October 1996, one can appreciate "many signs of the specificity of the human being." These are phenomenological observations based on manifestations that reveal humanity, i.e. the psychism of man, in other words expressions of culture.

Culture, although part of or related to the biological sphere, is characterized as extra-biological or meta-biological, in the sense that it achieves a transcendence with respect to purely biological laws or modalities of behavior. In fact, even when it has some relationship with biological needs, it occurs outside of any biological or behavioral determinism and, as mentioned above, it is a sign of liberty or self-determination. This is particularly evident in the manifestations of spiritual and social symbolism. According to Dobzhansky (1969), in the evolutionary history of life, there have been two great moments of "crisis". In consequence, although the organizational laws and modalities of the preceding phase were conserved, there was an advancement beyond the preceding organization to a new level. The Author proposes to call these new moments "evolutionary transcendences". A first transcendence was the passage from non-life to life. The laws of chemistry were not broken, but an organizational modality and a relationship with the environment were established: "cosmic evolution transcended itself, giving birth to life." A second moment of transcendence was the appearance of man: "biological
evolution transcended itself, giving rise to man". The laws regulating living beings were not cancelled, but the organizational modalities of human society are set on another plane. "Organic evolution is superimposed on organic evolution ...; cultural evolution is superimposed on biological and inorganic evolution." (26)

In this way of viewing evolution, which in various aspects resembles the conception of Teilhard whom Dobzhansky admired, the Author does not wish to attribute a philosophical or mystical meaning to the term transcendence. "Transcend means to exceed the limits, or go beyond the normal, usual possibilities already experienced by a system." However, this is not even necessary, if we remain on the phenomenological or empirical plane, although an explanation must be sought on the ontological plane. In my view (and remaining on scientific terrain), the term transcendence can be used correctly for man, for two reasons.

1. The activity that man performs by means of culture (including instrumental culture) is external to fixed and constant biological schemes, is performed freely with innovative modalities based on individual experience, and is able to counteract natural selection. However, unlike what occurs for any other species which faces new environmental conditions by means of its genetic variations, it counteracts the selective forces of the environment with other (non-biological) means, both defending itself from such forces and modifying the environment. This is an absolute novelty in the history of life. In this regard, the development of the human species represents "a paradox" on the evolutionary plane: natural selection has produced a being able to oppose it by a modality that no longer falls within the natural game of competition of living beings with the environment. In this way, natural selection is slowed down or even cancelled. This is a unique case in the world of living beings, one can say "an anomaly", explainable by the intervention of culture, a factor not found in other species (27).

2. The other expression of transcendence is the wealth of values and meaning, unrelated to biological needs, in the responses man is capable of eliciting for biological needs; the same applies to human behaviors not directly related to the biological sphere, e.g. manifestations of spiritual symbolism. Man is able to internalize the responses to biological needs by attributing to them other values related to the internal world of the person or to the social sphere. Thus his habitation has not only a protective function, but is a symbol and a means of family cohesion; clothing is not only to protect the body, but can have an aesthetic or social meaning or reflect modesty; the meal not only satisfies the demand for food, but is a moment of communication, etc. If one looks at manifestations of spiritual symbolism (art, religion, gratuitousness), the transcendent nature is even more evident.

Transcending leads to a condition of transcendence, understood both in the behavioral and philosophical sense. This applies to prehistoric man as well as to modern man.

In any case, remaining on the phenomenological plane, one must speak of modalities of behavior that are not regulated by biological laws and fall within the sphere of the self-determination of man on the basis of value choices.

Man's identity is not comparable to that of any other species, because it has a peculiarity that goes beyond the biological context.

Concerning the explanation of the nature of this transcendence and its causes, it is necessary to move beyond the phenomenological aspects onto a purely philosophical plane.

CONCLUSIONS

Man is made of the same "cloth" as the universe and other living beings: atoms, molecules, cells. These elements acquire consciousness in the ego of the human being. This is an absolute novelty in the world of living beings. Was the appearance of man a random event or finalistic? In the Darwinian view, the appearance of each species is an accidental event, completely random; the different evolutionary lines, including that of man, would have been formed through random events. The problem of finalism and randomness in the evolutionary process has generated a broad debate, also because the problem is not
only scientific but also philosophical, especially with regard to a general design in evolution. It cannot be excluded that a higher design could be achieved by means of accidental events, in the play between large numbers and randomness, as noted by Teilhard de Chardin, or by an interweaving of random genetic events, especially macromutations, and selection, working on biological programs which are gradually formed. (28)

Certainly man appears as a culminating event in the evolutionary process, the highest point of biological complexity, marked by the presence of new elements: consciousness, reflected psychism. Piveteau observed: "the birth of reflected thought cannot be considered an accidental fact; on the contrary, it constitutes the fundamental feature of the history of life." The same Author continues: "Man once believed that he was the center of the world; then he seemed not to have any measure with nature, finding himself lost in a corner of the universe. Paleontology gives back to him, in a new form, a pre-eminence in which he no longer believed." (29). This agrees with the anthropic principle suggested by astrophysics, which seems to reintroduce the idea of finalism into the scientific interpretation of the universe. (30)

Human thought, expressed in behavior, constitutes an emergent moment in evolution with respect to the forms that do not have this ability and it seems to assume consciousness also for the infrahuman world.

The evolutionary emergence and transcendence of man are closely related to each other. Apart from the causes and modalities, what emerges is that which transcends a certain level; thus the transcendent nature of human behavior becomes a criterion to recognize the emergence of man in that which characterizes him in a unique way.

Morphologically, one observes a certain evolutionary continuity between non-human and human forms, despite the innovations (above all cerebralization). Behaviorally, however, one can recognize aspects of discontinuity, even though in the beginning the manifestations may appear elementary. Concerning the comparison between man and the current anthropomorphic apes, there are those who maintain that the differences are only quantitative; nevertheless, it is difficult to deny the transcendence that generally distinguishes human behavior.

The identification of the human species at its origin may be more arduous. In this regard, it seems important to distinguish between aptitude for culture, expressed in planning and symbolization, and its manifestations. While the aptitude can be considered a constant of man since his beginning, the manifestations exhibit a progression in time, both concerning the development of technologies (instrumental, habitational, alimentary) in the relation to the environment and the greater complexity of symbolic systems in organization and social life. (31)

Emergence and transcendence distinguish man in each place and time. From this derives his common identity and basic equality, rooted in biology and variably expressed in the cultures of peoples through their common cultural capacity.
Notes
(3) The evolution theory is compatible with christian faith. Evolution is not in disagreement with creation. The evolution needs creation, as has said John Paul II (cf. International Symposium on "Christian faith and evolutionary theory", Osservatore Romano, 27.4.1985). Nevertheless one must outline two points: 1) all the reality is created by God and corresponds to his design in any way it has been achieved; 2) the soul is not evolved within an animal, but is created directly by God. About the general design in the evolution and some theological aspects cf. ARNOULD J, La teologia dopo Darwin, Brescia, Queriniana, 2000; AYALA F.J., 1998, cit.; GALLENI L., Scienza e Teologia, Brescia, Queriniana, 1992; FACCHINI F., Le origini dell'uomo: vedute scientifiche e attuali e istanze teologiche, Rivista di Teologia dell'evangelizzazione, 2000, gennaio-giugno 2000: 127-145. According to Ayala one must speak of design without designer in the evolution. I rather think there is a designer, but he hid himself behind the chemistry, physics, biological and great numbers laws.
(5) The African origin of the human branch is supported not only by fossil records, but also by researches on living Primates. Biomolecular studies of living non-human primates and man suggest that the differentiation of the Asian anthropomorphic apes (orangutan) from the African stem occurred 10-12 million years ago; the separation of the human lineage from the one leading to the African anthropomorphic apes was more recent, around 5-6 million years ago; but some recent discoveries of hominoid fossils in Kenya, dated 6 million years ago, raise new debate on the age of this divergence (see Note 8). There is a certain agreement between the biomolecular data and the paleontological record on the sequence of phyletic development, but less agreement on the times of separation of the different lineages.
(7) Cf. COPPENS Y., Le genou de Lucie, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1999; FACCHINI F., Evoluzione umana e cultura, Brescia, La Scuola Editrice, 1999. Recently a new form of Australopithecus lived 3.3 million years ago (Kenyanthropus) has been recovered.
(8) FACCINI, 1999, cit.; SENUT B., GOMMERY D., Le bipiedie degli Ominidi, Nuova Secondaria, Brescia, 15 maggio 1999: 26-30. Recently some fossils (fragments of humerus, femur and mandible) found in Tugen Hill, near the Lake Baringo (Kenya), have been announced as "millennium Ancestor" and named Orrorin tugenensis. It lived about 6 million years ago and had some adaptations to bipedism long before australopithecines showed an orientation to the human lineage. (cf. Science, 23 Feb. 2001, p. 1460-1461)


(14) BERSON H., L'evoluzione creatrice, La Scuola, Brescia, 1983. (L'évolution créatrice, 1971)


(20) COPPENS, 1991, cit.


(28) About finalism see note 3.

(29) PIVETEAU J. 1994, cit.

(30) The physical constants that regulate the universe are such to ensure that there are observers, and thus the universe is organized in view of the appearance of thinking beings who can recognize it. This
is the strong version of the anthropic principle, which seems difficult to demonstrate. If instead we state merely that the constants regulating the relations between the stars are such to permit life on earth, the principle is expressed in its weak form; however, in this case it appears to be a simple observation. (See: DALLA PORTA N., SACCO, Il principio antropico in fisica e cosmologia, Il futuro dell'uomo, 18, 2, 1991: 61-110).

(31) The development of culture can be represented in a Cartesian system by straight lines segments which follow one another, shifted in time, but maintaining the same slope. In this representation, the slope expresses the same aware and creative basic attitude, while the variations in distance from the abscissa, show the innovations or discontinuities during cultural evolution. Near the origin of the straight line (which corresponds to its derivative) has a slight slope (the elementary cultural manifestations), and departs only slightly from the abscissa, but with time the distance from the abscissa increases more and more in relation to the development of cultural expressions (see: FACCHINI F., 1999, Planning capacity, etc. cit.). Some have proposed an exponential curve to represent the development of culture; however, this perhaps does not allow us to observe the discontinuities that have undoubtedly occurred and the capacity for culture considered as a constant of man.
"The eclipse of the sense of God and of man inevitably leads to a practical materialism which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism. (...) Within this same cultural climate, the body is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency". (1)

No. 23 of the Encyclical Letter "Evangelium Vitae" introduces us to these brief reflections on the human person and on the nature and value of the human body, starting out from an irrefutable fact: the enclosure of human reality in an intramundane view and the pursuit of mere material well-being have led, among other things, to the distortion of our interpretation of the relation between the person and his body with some inevitable consequences. On the one hand, it has led to the depreciation of the body to the point of legitimizing its reduction to a "thing" (the non-therapeutic experimentation on human embryos or on already born subjects; the market in human organs; prostitution), or its violation (physical, psychological or moral violence), or its suppression (abortion; euthanasia; homicide; genocide). On the other hand, it has led to the glorification of the body in its exterior dimension, in such a way as to penalize the person's interior dimension and to give the impression of a "beauty" consisting merely of appearances. It is enough to think of the body used as a means of seduction or indulged in an obsessive way (from health fads to body building), perhaps in the attempt to resolve in this way, by "appearance", a profound sense of frustration.

But a far graver consequence, because it lies at the origin of the above distortions, is the alienation of the human body from moral acting or, more properly expressed, the "destitution" of the human body in questions of the natural law.

"A freedom which claims to be absolute - we read in no. 48 of the Encyclical Letter "Veritatis splendor" - ends up treating the human body as a raw datum, devoid of any meaning and moral values until freedom has shaped it in accordance with its design. Consequently, human nature and the body appear as presuppositions or preambles, materially necessary for freedom to make its choice, yet extrinsic to the person, the subject and the human act. Their functions would not be able to constitute reference points for moral decisions, because the finalities of these inclinations would be merely "physical" goods, called by some "pre-moral. To refer to them, in order to find in them rational indications with regard to the order of morality, would be to expose oneself to the accusation of physicalism or biologism. In this way of thinking, the tension between freedom and a nature conceived of in a reductive way is resolved by a division within man himself". (2)

A "distortion" in our interpretation of the relation between the person and his body: the idea is no novelty in the history of anthropological reflection, but it is a novelty that is presented in all in its dramatic consequences in our time, because "when the human body, considered apart from spirit and thought, comes to be used as raw material in the same way that the bodies of animals are used (...) we will inevitably arrive at a terrible ethical defeat". (3)
Interpretational keys

The reasons for a distorted interpretation of the relation between the person and his body may comprise, on the one hand, the diversification and fragmentation of the interpretational keys and, on the other, a diversified use of the same interpretational key.

Diversification and fragmentation of the interpretational keys. To conclude this first part of our reflections, we will say that it is not possible to "think of man" solely from one point of view, from one perspective: everything that the experimental and non-experimental sciences place at our disposal is useful and necessary for understanding this reality that is as mysterious as it is complex. We believe it is first necessary, however, to separate the various interpretational keys in such a way as to show that a fragmented approach is not in itself sufficient.(4)

The first interpretational key is that based on the experimental method, which avails itself of a precise linear procedure: the observation of the phenomena, the interpretative hypothesis, the experimental verification, and the evaluation of the findings of the experimentation. This methodological procedure, which has its own intrinsic validity, permits the accumulation of knowledge, so that the next experimenter can avail himself of the results, whether positive or negative, obtained by the previous experimenter and make, in turn, new contributions by adopting the same method. Nonetheless, the experimental method has an intrinsic limitation which consists in the fact that it must perforce rest on empirical data, susceptible of being observed, computed, compared, without being able to look "beyond". The consequence is that the experimental method is per se reductionist of reality.

In the perspective of the experimental method, scientists attempt to understand the body through the study of its structure (anatomy), functions (physiology), cellular structure (biology and biochemistry), its regulatory and activatory mechanisms (neurology and immunology), the structure of its organs and their functions, and a variety of diseases and disabilities.(5)

But does this type of knowledge of the human body suffice? - a type of knowledge that does not take account of the subjectivity of the person, and that reduces man to a sum of extrinsic manifestations? Or that goes so far as to repudiate human existence if the empirically ascertained data do not correspond to arbitrarily defined biological criteria?(6) And can a human body, deprived of its humanity and individuality, still be considered a human body?

A clear answer to this question is provided by no. 3 of the Introduction to the Instruction on Bioethics "Donum Vitae", where we read: "...the human body cannot be considered as a mere complex of tissues, organs and functions, nor can it be evaluated in the same way as the body of animals; rather it is a constitutive part of the person who manifests and expresses himself through it". (7)

So, if experimental knowledge necessarily leads to the consideration of only the physical and biological aspects of the human body, and the disregarding of the subjectivity that inhabits it, other ways need to be sought of recovering this subjectivity that is largely excluded but that is manifested in an "overwhelming" way in and through the body.

The second interpretational key is that characteristic of technology, which helps to modify and often to improve the conditions of human life: a technology that has by now pervaded and "impregnated" our whole way of life.

"Given that we inhabit a world technologically organized in all its parts, technology is no longer the object of our choice, but is our environment, where ends and means, objectives and ideations, forms of behaviour, actions and passions, even dreams and desires, are technologically articulated and have a need for technology to be expressed. That is why we irredeemably inhabit technology; we have no choice but to do so. That is our destiny as advanced Westerners; and those who, though inhabiting it, still think of retracing an essence of man that transcends technological conditioning are merely those who are unconscious of what is happening and cling to the mythology of man who is free to choose for himself; but such free choice does not exist unless in the deliria of omnipotence of those who continue to see man beyond the real and concrete conditions of his existence".(8)
These remarks show how far technology has gained the upper hand over man: over his mind and over his body. The body had been fragmented into its single components. It has disintegrated into its individual functions to the point that man has lost an overall view of them. The mind has been stripped of its subjectivity.

"Technology becomes part of the body, not physical but mental: prosthesis of subjectivity. And in becoming part of the body, technology enables it to play new roles: roles hitherto impossible. What do the confines of corporeity become, and how is corporeity to be represented, when technology is mixed with it in a co-substantial way, to the point of becoming the expression of subjectivity itself?".(9) Before evaluating the consequences of technology, we need to ask ourselves - first of all - what is the "attitude" of technology, or the knowledge that accompanies it, towards the human body. It is undoubtedly an attitude of domination, of utility and efficiency: with positive but also negative results, especially when the body is reduced to a mere instrument and object of manipulation. At the basis of everything is the profound crisis that pure science, and not only in its technological aspect, is undergoing. The source of that crisis is the having identified the purpose of "science" as such with the technological enterprise itself. In this horizon, science is understood essentially as research into those processes that lead to a success of technological type and that, conversely, distance man from the search for the truth: indeed truth becomes superfluous and is sometimes explicitly rejected. Technological achievement itself becomes the "truth", and human progress is measured merely on the basis of the progress of science and technology, without any attention, as we have said, to the human value. The world at the scientific level has thus been reduced to a mere complex of phenomena subject to manipulation. The aim of science is merely a functional connection that is analysed in relation to its functionality alone.(10)

The third interpretational key is the anthropologic-philosophical one, which considers the human body in its global dimension with a view to investigating its reality, its value, its dignity. In this case, the point of view penetrates the body in depth, overcoming its physicality in order to discover what is the ontological reality of the human individual.

The fourth, and last, interpretational key is that of theology, which is integrated - without confounding itself - with the anthropologic-philosophical one: "There exists - declares John Paul II - a twofold order of knowledge, distinct not only as regards their source, but also as regards their object. With regard to the source, because we know in one by natural reason, in the other by divine faith. With regard to the object, because besides those things which natural reason can attain, there are proposed for our belief mysteries hidden in God which, unless they are divinely revealed, cannot be known'. Based upon God's testimony and enjoying the supernatural assistance of grace, faith is of an order other than philosophical knowledge which depends upon sense perception and experience and which advances by the light of the intellect alone. Philosophy and the sciences function within the order of natural reason; while faith, enlightened and guided by the Spirit, recognizes in the message of salvation the 'fullness of grace and truth' (cf. Jn 1:14) which God has willed to reveal in history and definitively through his Son, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Jn 5:9; Jn 5:31-32)".(11)

Theological reflection, therefore, although it takes into critical account the conclusions of philosophical reflection, studies the body in the light of the Revelation that God made of himself in Christ, as transmitted by Holy Scripture and taught by the Church.

The four interpretational keys described above permit us, therefore, to investigate a single reality, the human individual, from four different viewpoints. If used separately, they can give only a partial and not an exhaustive interpretation of the human reality. They cannot reply to the fundamental question: "How ought we to behave to the human person?"

These four interpretational keys need to be integrated and placed in a hierarchical scale round a central value of reference, the person. Though the findings of other disciplines should not be ignored, only the anthropologico-philosophical and theological keys can "unlock" a full understanding of the person. Only thus shall it be possible to achieve the "passage, as necessary as it is urgent, from the
phenomenon to the foundation": only anthropologic-philosophic and theological research, therefore, are capable of transcending the phenomenon, though the phenomenon itself must also be studied if the true significance of the human person is to be grasped.

Different conclusions with the same interpretational key. That the same interpretational key may lead to different conclusions emerges from the analysis at the anthropologic-philosophical level. It is well know, in fact, that the question about the relation between the person and his body has received in the course of time at least two different answers: dualistic and dual.(12)

The dualistic answer is rooted, first in the Platonic dualism, and later in the Cartesian dualism. In Platonic dualism, the recognition of the substantiality of the soul is coupled with the devaluation of the body, which is held to be a transitory and accidental aspect of human existence. The soul is antecedent to the body, is imprisoned in it due to a fall, and possesses an absolute independence from the body; the soul alone is the immutable and divine element, called to the contemplation of ideas, through voluntary asceticism by which man is weaned from his attachment to the material world. In Cartesian dualism, the body (res extensa) is concretely and physically united with the soul (res cogitans) through epiphysis; but the two realities differ by essence and by value. The distinction between res cogitans and res extensa poses the substantial heterogeneity in man between thought and body, which is reduced to an extension and local motor.

In both cases the interpretation is dualistic, but with some differences: in Plato's view, the body is non-being, whereas Descartes underlined the need for a foundation in the science of bodies; in contrast to Platonic dualism, moreover, the Cartesian dualism does not necessarily lead to a flight from the world and to the despising of temporal realities.(13)

Platonic dualism and, more especially, Cartesian dualism have given rise to two different interpretations: on the one hand, modern dualism, which has then had to tackle the question of the relation between body and soul (relation of mere accident, as in the case of the occasionalism of Geulinex and Malebranche); and, on the other, monism both in its materialist version (the one substance is the body, the spirit is but the sum of its functions) and in its spiritualist version (the one substance is the spirit, the body is but the result of an empirical consciousness). But, above all, the dualistic approach has given rise to an organicist and functional conception of the human body, a body considered as a complex of tissues, organs and functions. Such a conception cannot be excluded if the interpretational key is that of the experimental method, but does not exhaust, as we have already said, the totality of the human body. And if the body is defined as extended matter, definable by its spatial and temporal co-ordinates (the body occupies a determined space and has a determined continuity in time), it becomes a reality that man can possess and manipulate and dispose of as he thinks fit.

"The philosopher who formulated the principle of 'Cogito, ergo sum', 'I think, therefore I am', also gave the modern concept of man its distinctive dualistic character. It is typical of rationalism to make a radical contrast in man between spirit and body, between body and spirit. (...) The separation of spirit and body in man has led to a growing tendency to consider the human body, not in accordance with the categories of its specific likeness to God, but rather on the basis of its similarity to all the other bodies present in the world of nature, bodies which man uses as raw material in his efforts to produce goods for consumption".(14)

The interpretation of the relation between person and body propounded by the Fathers of the Church was also widely influenced by the Platonic dualism. Although they affirmed the unity of man and the call to salvation of his whole being, the Fathers ran the risk of reducing man to his soul. Even St. Augustine himself ran this risk: according to St. Augustine - Gilson writes - "man is neither a separate soul, nor a separate body; but a soul that makes use of a body".(15) St. Augustine's aim was to defend both the immortality of the soul and the unity of man, continues Gilson, but in fact he failed to justify the unity.

A first attempt to overcome the Platonic dualism was that of Aristotelian hylomorphism. But this theory presents a difficulty: its inability to justify the immortality of the soul.
"Aristotelian hylomorphism surrendered the soul as the form of the body. Hence the substantial principles of the unity of man were two: material (body) and formal (soul). In this way the unity of man is well preserved, since that unity is substantial and not accidental. But at the same time the immortality of the soul is jeopardized, since the soul is the act or the form. The act or the form, however, is not a substantial reality, but belongs to the principles of being. Consequently the act or the form ceases to exist with the death of man. In other words: the form of the human body lasts until the union between soul and body ceases". (16)

In the interpretation of St. Thomas Aquinas, by contrast, the human soul is indeed the form of the body (matter), but a special form that possesses and gives substantiality.

"Omne compositum ex materia et forma est corpus"(17); "anima rationalis est forma in homine, qua corpus est corpus"(18); "una enim et eadem forma est per essentiam, per quam homo est ens actu, et per quam est corpus, et per quam est homo"(19): so St. Thomas expressed the essential unity of man. A unity of body and soul that is substantial, intimate and indivisible: the biological, animal and spiritual dimensions of personal life are not juxtaposed, in an accidental combination that leaves them extraneous the one to the other; on the contrary, the rational soul invests and transfigures the whole of human corporeity, and transfers it to a new horizon. It is not therefore a merely material corporeity, but a personal corporeity: "it is the body permeated above all (if one can express it like this) by the whole reality of the person and his dignity".(20)

Man constitutes, therefore, a unity thanks to his form that substantializes and spiritualizes his body: "Man is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body can never be reduced to mere matter: it is a spiritualised body, just as man's spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as an embodied spirit".(21)

The spiritual-I of man is, therefore, a spiritual-I in a body: his bodily being coincides with his spiritual being. It follows that in the human person two realities - spiritual and bodily - do not co-exist, and that the body is not a part or sector of man: the body is the expression - sign - of the whole man, who can only be and exist through it. So the body, in turn, may rightly be called human, precisely because it derives its significance from its connection with the person and because it is animated by a spiritual soul, that same soul by which we have knowledge and are free.

**Body or corporeity?**

The same interpretational key may therefore lead to two different solutions: why should we incline to one solution rather than the other?

Being a body means "occupying" a space and a time, experiencing heat and cold, feeling thirst and hunger. But this same "body", if a human body, may also be able to think, to reason, to exercise free will. It is experience that leads us to a dual solution.

"Experience attests to us the profound unity of man: I, who feel cold and suffer from headache, have the concept of justice and demonstrate the existence of God. This unity is only explicable if we admit that the principle of our activities, the same principle by which we know intellectively, is the substantial form of the body. St. Thomas uses two different arguments to demonstrate this thesis: one positive and one negative. The positive one goes like this: man, hic homo, the man who eats, drinks, wears clothes, this man that I am, is a body: I am a body. Now, that for which the body exercises its activity is its substantial form. In fact, to act, it is necessary to be; and to act in a particular way, it is necessary to be in a particular way, it is necessary to have a particular nature; and the principle by which the body has a particular nature - and hence also a particular activity - is the substantial form. Now, among the various activities of man (and hence among my various activities), there is intellective knowledge. So the principle of intellective activity is the substantial form of man: it is the substantial form of the body. (...) The negative argument adduced by St. Thomas is this: find me another way of
union between the intellective principle and the body that may explain the profound unity of human life in its various manifestations". (22)

Everything said so far may be reassumed in Marcel's well-known maxim: "Je suis mon corps". (23) But as Riva has emphasized, this affirmation of Marcel must not of course lead to the conclusion that "I am only my body": "Returning, lastly, to the predicate mon corps, it has been pointed out that the possessive case is the driving force of intimacy, solidarity and the mutual recognition of subjectivity and corporeity. It should not be forgotten that what is at issue here is not an identification but a reciprocal rapprochement between the body and the 'I'. Their distinction is thus maintained in the mon, other than in the unity of the terms in question. It is therefore by virtue of the mon previously attributed, at the phenomenal level, by the subject to the body that the predication je-suis-mon-corps is made possible. The possessive, in fact, prolongs the sphere of subjectivity, bringing close what had been distant". (24)

This reflection leads us to analyze the two expressions usually used to indicate the relation between the person and his body: "I have a body"; "I am my body".

In a dualistic view, a person-body relation based on the category of having is undoubtedly excluded: if the body forms an inseparable whole with the soul, it is impossible to think of two elements, one that acts as subject and possesses, and the other that acts as object and is possessed. But is it satisfactory to base the body-person relation on the category of being a body? Does that not risk exhausting all personal existence in being a body?

For man to have inside him a consciousness of the body's presence and perceive its unity, he must necessarily transcend his body and, consequently, cannot identify himself in toto with it. If man were to identify himself in toto with his own body, why, for example, should he seek in another person, beyond the exterior appearance of that person's body, "something" of which it is the manifestation?

For if I look at the human body, I seek what is not visible and what is not empirically demonstrable: the thoughts and the volition of the person who manifests himself to me through that particular body. "... this sum observable from outside - writes Karol Wojtyla in Persona e Atto - does not wholly exhaust the reality of the human body, like that of the body of animals and plants. The body also possesses its own interiority...". (25) And again (on p. 235): "The belonging of the body to the subjective 'I' does not consist in an identification with it: Man is not his own body, but 'possesses' his own body. The possession of his own body conditions his objectivation in acts, and at the same time is expressed through such objectivation. Man is in a particular way conscious of possessing his own body, when, in action, he makes use of it as an obedient means to express his own self-determination".

With the premise that the category of "possession" used by Wojtyla to express the person-body-act relation does not correspond to the category of having in the person-body relation, (26) let us dwell for a moment on the statement "the belonging of the body to the subjective 'I' does not consist in an identification with it": in other words, the person is more than his body.

And so the expression that best expresses this peculiar constitution of man is: "I am a corporeity". The phenomenological philosophy already emphasized the difference between the terms "body" and "corporeity": in essence, the distinction introduced first by Husserl between Körper and Leib, where Körper denotes the body as mere object and Leib the body in its subjective experience or the consciousness of one's own body, (27) and then by Scheler between Geist (the world of the spirit), Ich (the psychic world), Körper (the physical world) and Leib (the unitary form of all the organic sensations), already anticipated this clarification.

"My body may (...) appear to me also as one body among all the other bodies: it may in some way be objectified, but never totally (...) I can touch my right hand with my left hand and make it the object of my perception and in that moment a part of me, my left hand, is subtracted from objectivization: it is touching, it is already subjectivity". (28)

And so, while "body recalls the classic dichotomy between body and soul of Greek and Indic origin and denotes, at least in common parlance, a part of the person: the bodily component in as much as it is
distinct from the spiritual component... Corporeity denotes the whole human subjectivity in terms of man's bodily condition as constitutive of his personal identity. Historically in fact there is no human person who is not at the same time a spiritual-I and a bodily-I; corporeity is in this sense, the expression, the visible reflex and the realization of the human being, one and indivisible. Corporeity is a wider concept than body; as such corporeity is essential to the person and influences that person's interiority and the way he relates himself to others in the world". (29) This corporeity fully manifests man's humanity: man is different from the animal - affirms Knapp - by virtue of his corporeity.

"Man - writes Hengstenberg - is not only an animal organism with the addition of consciousness that raises him to a higher level. He is the only being that has a body, while in the animal we can only speak of organism (...) The being aimed at objectivity (or sense) has co-operated in the morphology of the human members and organs, and the same goes for the body". (30) But Scheler had already challenged the definition of man as "rational animal", maintaining that the differences that separate man from the animal also concern his body. (31)

So far our analysis of the person-body relation has focused on the "person". But if we shift our focus to the interpersonal relation, we can also show that the individual is at the same time an inseparable unity of body and soul. Let us think of the experience of meeting another person, which always takes place through the body but which does not stop at the bodily dimension.

"For example, if we consider self-consciousness typical of the person, we have no direct experience of it but deduce it from the conduct of others, and that conduct is always mediated by the body. In fact the 'I' who has self-consciousness is the same 'I' who moves, who feels hot, who feels cold. Without reference to the body there is no possibility of a relation with others. The other person is for me in the first place his body, even if he is not only a body (our memory is always the memory of a face)". (32) The person is expressed through the body: the body manifests the person in his visibility; the body - as John Paul II has written - is "sacrament" of the person, i.e. the visible manifestation of an invisible reality; (33) the invisible and interior reality of the person is expressed and realized through the visible and exterior reality of the body. Through his corporeity the human person may express himself, communicate with others, enter into relation with them, give himself to and accept the other person. This social mediation of the body is one of the aspects emphasized by the thought of G. Marcel: if human existence is such by virtue of the fact that it is a "being with" others, a being open to others, this is only possible through corporeity and its language. (34) The body is a "presence" that presents itself to others; it is a synthesis of the past, present and future: hence the need for reciprocal recognition as person and as communion.

The body as "expression", and hence as culture, civilization, ability to transform the world and matter; the body as mediation for the person's realization; but also the body as mediation to confer ever new meanings on the world, constantly transcending its own experiences and previous meanings: "Our own body is in the world just as our heart is in the organism: it constantly keeps alive the visible spectacle, it animates and nourishes it entirely, it forms a system with it (...) the body is our general means of having a world". (35)

If the body manifests the person to me, and expresses that person, it follows that the body has a "language" that enables me to recognize it.

"This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23), exclaims the first man on seeing the first woman. Flesh of my flesh: it is the body that reveals man in so manifest a fashion as to be immediately recognized.

"The somatic homogeneity and the dynamism revealed in it, in spite of the diversity in constitution connected with sexual difference, are so evident that the human being (male) expresses it immediately by recognizing another human being (female) similar to him". (36) The body thus assumes a symbolic value: through the language of the emotions and of the affections it communicates meanings that the consciousness is then called to recognize and to interpret. It is a
language that exists independently of any manipulation of man: "The spontaneous crying of a new-born child expresses a cry for help, even before that child has gained consciousness. The gesture of a handshake or a kiss is thus placed at the confines between nature and culture: where conventions have given varied form to elements profoundly rooted in nature and hence recurrent in the various cultures. In short: language is indeed the work of man, but it is not arbitrary; it is based on a natural datum, which implies spontaneous meanings, as universal rules of communication rooted in corporeity".(37) John Paul has dwelt on the "primordiality" of the language of the body in his Catechesis on human love: "The human body is not only the field of reactions of sexual character, but is, at the same time, the means of expression of the integral man, of the person, who reveals himself through the language of the body. This language has an important interpersonal significance, especially in the case of reciprocal relations between man and woman".(38) 

In the interpersonal relation the language of the body can communicate in two ways: either by expressing the truth of the person ("primordial" or "objective" language); or by communicating what the person means through his own body ("subjective" language). Through objective language it is the body that speaks: "We here have in mind in the first place language in the objective sense: the Prophets compare the Covenant to marriage, they refer to that primordial sacrament of which Genesis 2:24 speaks, in which the man and the woman become, of their own free choice, one flesh".(39) Subjective language is subsequent to the interpretation of objective language by the subject. It is therefore subsequent to the assumption in truth or in falsehood of the specificity of this language: "Nonetheless what is characteristic of the way in which the Prophets express themselves is the fact that, by assuming the language of the body in the objective sense, they pass, at the same time, to its subjective significance...".(40) Hence John Paul II's appeal for a subjective interpretation and expression of the language of the body, but in all its objective truth: "Man and woman conduct in the language of the body a dialogue that - according to Genesis 2:24-25 - had its beginning on the day of the Creation. It is just at the level of this language of the body - which is something more than mere sexual reaction and, as authentic language of persons, is subject to the needs of truth, i.e. to objective moral norms - that man and woman reciprocally express themselves in the fullest and deepest way, since it is permitted to them by the somatic dimension of masculinity and femininity itself: man and woman express themselves in the measure of the whole truth of their person".(41)

The life of the spirit in corporeity

"A unity of body and soul, man sums up in himself, by his very bodily condition, the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the creator".(42) Man is therefore the "place" in which a synthesis is achieved between biological nature and transcendence. Man differs from the rest of the material world by his newness, both ontological and of value. And although he can be analyzed by the same criteria used for other living species, this man is the only one endowed - by power of the spirit - with intentionality. The human body is thus able to invent movements and gestures. It is always open to new possibilities. It can grasp the meaning of things through the senses and to communicate them. The human body is open to learning. It is involved in a cognitive and affective process. "When we say that man is a person, we wish to say that he is not only a piece of matter, an individual component of nature, in the same way that an atom, an ear of wheat, a fly or an elephant are individual components of nature. Man is indeed an animal and an individual, but not like the others. Man is an individual who guides himself through his own intelligence and will; he does not only physically exist: there is within him a richer and higher form of existence, a spiritual super existence in knowledge and
in love. Man is therefore in some sense a totality, and not only a part of something else; he is a universe in himself, a microcosm in which the great universe may, in all its entirety, be contained by means of knowledge. Through love man can give himself freely to other similar beings; this is a relation of which no equivalent can be found in the whole physical universe. In philosophical terms, this means that in human flesh and bones there is a soul that is a spirit and that is worth more than the whole universe. The human person, however dependent he may be on the smallest accidents of matter, exists for the existence itself of his soul that vanquishes time and death. It is the spirit that is the root of the person".(43)

Such an intentionality would be impossible if it were not sustained by a nature of being: man could not open himself and strive to what it is that transcends the materiality of the world, if within him there were no spiritual metaphysical nucleus that is not subject to the various forms of determinism of finite realities.(44)

The dignity of the person and his irreducibility to the order of mere biological nature are ascertainable - as we have seen - in various ways, all of which manifest, however, what is their real foundation: a spiritual, ontologically conscious and free subject, irrespective of how consciousness and freedom may then be expressed.

On the other hand, man himself perceives this "irreducibility" and "distance" from the material world: "The material substance, and also our body considered in its purely physical properties, is extended in space and is composed and hence divisible in its elementary particles (at least from a mathematical point of view). The human brain is composed of, and really divisible into, millions and millions of parts. The material substance may also be perceived through the senses - even if only indirectly through its accidents -; to it belong weight, colour, etc. All these determinations are clearly devoid of sense in relation to the immediate life of the conscious subject in our experiences and acts. This subject cannot be extended in space; it cannot have in space parts that are external to other parts; it cannot be composed and be divisible billions of times". (45) But at the same time man experiences in his life the limitations and ambiguities of being an "embodied spirit".

Man experiences this limitation in pain and in illness: the 'I' that lives, feels, understands, suffers, hopes, is at once spiritual and bodily: the sick body - writes Foucault - "recounts" man and makes clear his finiteness.(46) As also does man's normal dependence on biological, physiological and psychological constraints.

Such limitation makes even more manifest his spiritual and bodily being, because it emphasizes even more strongly the gap between human aspirations and real possibilities.

The ambiguities of his being are experienced, according to Scheler, above all in the experience of shame (pudor).(47) The gaze and attitude of the other person might, in fact, violate the sacrality of the body; it might make the individual feel at unease, "reduced" to a mere physical object, stripped of the character of a person. Shame is a reaction, a protest of the body against this form of reduction to an object; it is an attempt to safeguard the dignity and intimacy of the person and draw the attention of the other to the true level of interpersonal communication, the eyes.(48)

**The theology of corporeity**

The interpretational key so far used is the anthropologic-philosophical one. That key poses the question of corporeity not at the biological but at the ontological level: this will then permit us to distinguish between what it is that respects, and what it is that violates, the dignity of the person not only on the basis of biological criteria, but on the basis of meanings inherent in human corporeity. There is, however, as we have already said, another interpretational key, that of theology, that enables us to grasp the truth about man on the basis of human experience illuminated by the encounter with Christ, Son of God who became man.
"Outside such a context one cannot speak of theology of the body. And since the whole Revelation finds its fullness in Jesus of Nazareth, the central paradigm of the theology of the body is Jesus Christ, who not only reveals God to man, but reveals man to man and enables him to see his divine vocation".(49)

An interpretation of human corporeity in the light of God's Revelation permits us, moreover, to show how great is the bodily reality: the body is gift of God's creative gesture; the body is the "place" of the Incarnation; the body is the "means" of Redemption. These are the fundamental stages of the history of Salvation, and it is to these three stages that the theological study of the body is usually linked. That study, "while on the one hand it concerns a particular branch of theological knowledge, on the other enables us to proclaim the unity of the divine plan, from its origins to its centre and to its final end: from the body created by God to the Body assumed by the incarnate Word and introduced into the glory of the Trinity by its Resurrection; and then to the body of the Church, to the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, to the body of the baptized become temple of the spirit, to the body of Mary assumed into heaven, and ultimately to the resurrection of our bodies (...) "The entire economy of salvation is traversed, from beginning to end, by a real and concrete bodily substance".(50)

Man is created by God in body and soul: "At the origin of each human person there is the creative act of God: no human being comes into existence by chance; he is always the outcome of the creative love of God".(51) And the fact that he is made in the image and likeness of God does not concern only his spirit but also his body: indeed, it is just through the body that the mystery of God is manifested, by enacting that incredible synthesis between immanence and transcendence. The being a body is so important to God that he himself became a body to come among men: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14).

"And that is why Christ said, on coming into the world, 'You wanted no sacrifice or cereal offering, but you gave me a body..."' (Heb 10:5vv): the greatness of God was thus poured into the fragility of a human body, elevating it to a new dignity and redeeming it from sin. God never disparages the human body, but enhances it to the point of assuming human nature to manifest himself to the world, and to live and recount His Story.

The Redemption of Jesus Christ, too, is expressed and realized in the body, through the body: the gift of Jesus Christ who became man is realized through the gift of His body and His blood - just as is the Resurrection. So corporeity is not "just a provisional and ephemeral condition of man, because the eschatological hope in salvation knows the perfecting of man as such, in his unified totality, and hence also in his body. Of course we don't know - and for our salvation it is not at all necessary for us to know - what 'a spiritual body' (1 Cor 15:44) will be like; the glorious body. We know, however, that the fact that it is glorious is not to the detriment of the reality of the body: in the escathon the human body becomes the sign and place of the total revelation and full realization of salvation, and hence of the human personality itself".(52)

But another essential component is still missing in our analysis of the theology of corporeity, and one that enables us to point out another fundamental dimension of corporeity: the being a gift.

"If each created being, precisely because it has been created, is impressed with the seal of the love of God ('each created being bears in himself the sign of the original and fundamental gift'), man is impressed with this seal in a way that all his own, in an original and special way, in such a way, that is, as to differentiate him from infrahuman beings: he, he alone knows he is a gift; he is the only created being that is able to understand the sense itself of the gift in the call from nothingness into existence. And he is capable of responding to the Creator with the language of this understanding".(53)

Jesus Christ expressed this dimension of the gift of corporeity in his life on earth, up to the greatest of its manifestations: the gift of the Body and Blood in the Eucharist, the gift of Himself for the salvation of his fellowmen.
The spousal dimension of the body

The place where the human person experiences this dimension of the gift is above all sexual corporeity, i.e. the experience of being man or being women: an experience intrinsic to human life. Human corporeity is distinguished, and has been ever since its origin, by the sexual difference between man and woman. Based on the biological components of the human body, this sexual difference is rooted in the ontological structure of the person: "Right down to its last cell the male body is male and the female; and analogically the same goes for the whole experience and empirical self-consciousness of the two sexes. The sexual difference between man and woman exists within an identical human nature in both. But this identical human nature at no point emerges as neutral, transcending the difference between the sexes, as if in a neutral ground of possible comprehension". (54)

The person, therefore, expresses his ontological constitution by always and exclusively living either as a man or as a woman, but without this sinking an unbridgeable abyss between them, given that the foundation of them both is one alone: the existing as a human person: "The Yahwist text of the second chapter (of Genesis) - writes John Paul II - authorizes us to think first exclusively of man in as much as, through his body, he belongs to the visible world, but on going beyond it, it makes us think of the same man, but through the duality of sex (...) Masculinity and femininity are (...) two different incarnations, i.e. two different ways of being a body of the same human being, created in the image of God". (55)

In sexual corporeity is manifested all those dimensions we have already mentioned: corporeity as manifestation of the person, as relation, as intentionality, as limitation. And just as corporeity does not exhaust the whole of personal existence, sexual corporeity too does not express the whole of the person, nor is the person obliged to express the totality of his or her own sexual capacities. Being a woman is not therefore necessarily equivalent to being a wife or a mother, just as being a man does not necessarily mean being a husband or a father. If that were not the case, one would not be able to explain the choice of virginity: the having chosen to live one's own sexuality without genital activity, to strengthen one's capacity for self-giving, for Love, for dedication to man and to God, undoubtedly does not make a person any less a man or any less a women.

The sexual being, as an expression of the person, is intimately aimed at Love and self-giving: and it is on this dimension that we now wish to focus, with particular attention to the man-woman relation in conjugality.

Man and woman, while experiencing in sexual corporeity the limitation of not being in themselves the whole of humanity, have at the same time the consciousness of being and existing with and for someone.

"Man and woman become what they are only in the reciprocity of a bodily face to face that pledges them the one to the other; equally they experience what they are only in this reciprocity. Man and woman are themselves only inasmuch as they are for each other: that is what is fundamentally meant by sexuality". (56)

Man and woman are themselves only inasmuch as they are for each other: that is the key to understanding the dimension of gift - or spousal dimension according to the definition of John Paul II - of corporeity: through the body "man as person becomes gift and - through this gift - actuates the very sense of his being and his existence". (57) In the spousal dimension the capacity of self-giving overcomes the limitation of the man-woman relationship in the opening to the total gift of self to a new existence.

Indeed, in making a gift of themselves and exchanging it between them, man and woman re-enact and reconstruct the mystery itself of Creation: "Man and woman, by uniting themselves so closely together as to become one flesh only, each time and in a special way rediscover, so to say, the mystery of Creation, so returning to that union in humanity that permits them reciprocally to recognize each other as if for the first time, to call each other by their name (...) The fact that they become one flesh only is a

84
powerful link established by the Creator, through which they discover their own humanity, both in its original unity and in the duality of a mysterious reciprocal attraction".(58)
If, therefore, sexual corporeity is understood in the light of God's plan for man and woman and their original relationship, we can more fully grasp the significance of the spousal dimension of the body for which the person is called to become ever more, in love and self-giving, what he has been "since the origin": gift.(59)
"It is not good that man should be alone" (Gen 2:18): that is why God created woman and led her to man. He "recognized" her: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gentile 2:23), thus discovering another person, a "you" who is equal and complementary to him, a "you" he has always awaited, because man cannot exist by himself: he can only exist "in relation with" someone, someone who is his equal and of equal dignity to him.
"The creation of woman - writes John Paul II in his Letter to Women - is thus marked from the outset by the principle of help: a help which is not one-sided but mutual. Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: man and woman are complementary (...), not only from the physical and psychological points of view, but also from the ontological. It is only through the duality of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' that the 'human' finds full realization".(60)
And several years previously, John Paul II, examining this mystery of unity/duality, wrote as follows: "Following the narrative of the book of Genesis, we have noted that the definitive creation of man consists in the creation of the unity of two beings. Their unity especially denotes the identity of human nature; their duality manifests, by contrast, what, on the basis of that identity, constitutes the masculinity and the femininity of the created man".(61)
From recognition to the gift of self and its acceptance: "...and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). The sexuality, imprinted in the body, is an appeal to reciprocity in communion, made possible by the fact of possessing an equal human identity but at the same time of also being different.

**Person and personality**

Man is therefore an indivisible unity of body and soul. But is any kind of human body, even if diseased or deformed, or in the stage of just a few cells, or totally unconscious, the body of a human being? Are those embryos fertilized and frozen in test tubes anything more than a cluster of cells? Is the man who is incapable of communicating still a man? In other words, are those human beings, in whom a complete human morphology is not yet evident, and in whom some capacities or functions have not been developed, human persons?
The notion of "person", as we know, was formulated by the Christian Church to resolve questions of a christological and Trinitarian nature, with a view to characterizing and emphasizing, in particular, the spiritual characteristics of human nature; it has given rise to a mode of interpreting man in the image of the Creator: "...it is not enough to define man as an individual of the species homo (not even of homo sapiens). The term 'person' was chosen to emphasize that man cannot be enclosed in the notion 'individual of the human species', that there is something more in him, a particular fullness and perfection of being that cannot be rendered other than by the word person".(62)
The Greek etymology of the term person itself (prosopon; in Latin: persona) helps us to understand this. In its original connotation it denoted the mask used by ancient actors in theatrical performances; it served both to hide the face and resonate the voice (per-sono = to sound in all directions). It signifies not only what is represented on the stage, but what at the same time transcends appearances. The person, therefore, is the human being as "mask" or "word" of Being, since he is able to perceive an absolute moral appeal and think of the infinite, and since he is endowed with the gift of discernment which is free and capable of recognition.(63)
It is just in this sense that the term later lost its ancient connotation as "mask" and came to be identified - in theological disputation - with the Greek term ipostasis (in Latin: substantia: substratum, foundation), i.e. the very opposite of appearances.

But - a disconcerting fact - attempts were then made to transform a notion formulated to deepen and epitomize the highest characteristics of human nature (intellect, self-consciousness, will, freedom, creativity, symbolic activity, ability to communicate), irrespective of whether they were all, and at all times, present in every human being, into a criterion of discrimination between human beings, susceptible of denying to many even their basic right to life. In other words, though the etymological interpretation of the term person is unambiguous, the questions: "What is the person?" and, consequently, "Who is the person?" have received at least two different replies: that of the functionalist-actualist and that of the substantialist approach.

The functionalist-actualist approach subordinates the existence of the human person, and hence of a subject born with innate rights, to the recognition of the presence of some characteristics and/or to the realization of some functions, thus reducing the whole of man to empirically demonstratable data. By contrast, the substantialist approach argues that being a person does not depend on the degree of the presence of particular characteristics or on the realization of particular functions, but on a position of being, i.e. on the ontological nature (essence) of individual determinants, which remains constant in them. It follows from these premises that each human person is of equal value, based on the identical essence they all share, irrespective of the actual possession of certain properties or functions.

Essence was defined by Boethius as rationalis naturae individua substantia: and it is just the genitive rationalis naturae that indicates the whole novelty that makes the person. The difference that permits an individual to be denominated a person is, therefore, rationality, though without this implying as a result that "the being a person or the becoming a person is only ascertainable functionally or empirically" but rather that is "rationally deducible within a conception of being and its degrees of perfection".(64)

In other words, the person does not lose his own structure of essence as a result, say, of an inability to exercise self-consciousness or self-determination. This is because the ontological nature of the person may also manifest itself in, but is not reducible to, a series of capacities, activities and functions characterized by rationality. So a human individual possesses a rational nature (by virtue of which he is a person) without manifesting all the aforesaid characteristics, at all times and to a maximum degree. And so the becoming a person (unity of body and soul), as possession of man's own original ontological status, "is not a process, but an instantaneous event or act as a result of which that status has been established in the person once and for all (insemination). Personality, by contrast, is something that is acquired by a process through the commission of secondary personal acts".(65)

To say, on the contrary, that only an individual who is endowed with consciousness, rationality, or who possesses particular physical characteristics, is a person, does not permit us to give a real definition of this reality, since the emphasis is then placed only on an ontological accident, a secondary quality, and not on the essential character. And whereas the accidental qualities are always subject to alterations, the essential characteristics are immutable: either they do or do not exist. The human being is a person because he is, in his essence, of spiritual nature - an "embodied" spirit; a "spiritualized" body - and not because he has a greater or lesser capacity of consciousness, self-control, ability to relate to others, etc. "In the last analysis (...) the argument, poor but decisive, to establish who is man and who is not is that of considering his origin: the human being is someone who is born from other human beings (...) The experience of privation, in the sign of the not yet and the no longer, is the sign of human finiteness and of the evolutive/involutive character of every living being: taking this empirical datum seriously means understanding that the disarming simplicity of the argument by which we affirm that man is invariably someone who is born from other human beings is the condition for proceeding to any further and more detailed definition of man".(66)

Only if he begins to exist, and the right suitable physiological and environmental conditions are present, will that man be able to develop the biological, psychological and relational characteristics that
are not 'fondamenta' of his being a person (for he is a person from the very moment of his conception and remains so to his death), but 'building blocks' that serve to build up his personality.

If, in order to be a person, it is enough to possess a human nature, when does that nature start to exist? When does this corporeity so essential to that person's nature begin? And when does it cease to exist? The contributions of biology and genetics show that the first indispensable and biologically demonstrable act for the formation of a human being is - as for thousands of other living beings - the fusion of highly specialized and teleologically programmed cells, the egg cell or the spermatozoon.(67)

From the very moment that the spermatozoon enters into contact with the egg cell and roots itself in its cytoplasm (syngamy) a new chain of activity begins. And that chain clearly shows that the two gametes no longer operate as if they were two independent systems. They show that a new system has been established and one that acts as a unified organism. It is the unity called zygote or unicellular embryo which is already distinct from other living organisms. It operates as an individual unit and is intrinsically oriented at a well-defined and precise evolution. These characteristics - individualization and orientation - are determined by the genome or the genetic patrimony of which the zygote is endowed.

Thanks to the genome, the zygote undergoes a development that is individual, co-ordinated, continuous and gradual. This embryonal development takes place - unless in the case of intrinsic or extrinsic impediments - without interruptions, and in every successive phase needs the presence of the previous one in an inextricable concatenation of events. It is not plausible, therefore, to place the beginning of human life in a moment other than, or subsequent to, than of insemination.

This indivisibility of biological life from personal life continues throughout the whole existence of the human individual, because the life of the organism is always the life of the person. From the moment human life comes into existence, and for as long as it lasts - in the unitary and unifying sense - that life is the life of a single individual, of a human person. Insemination marks the beginning of a converging activity that, guided and co-ordinated by the genome, bears in itself a project that remains to be realized. Death marks the cessation of the life of the organism in its unity and co-ordination.

In fact, to know when a man is dead it is not enough to identify the loss of his capacity to think, to express his will, and to relate to the world. It is necessary, instead, to seek those signs that may indicate that the organism has ceased to be a unified totality of functions.(68)

Of course, it could be objected: "our human mortality does not permit us to draw on information at a level that goes beyond mere physicality". But this does not diminish corporeity: indeed, it further enhances its significance and value.

The centrality of the body

The current debate on what constitutes the person concerns both the initial and the terminal phase of life. The dichotomy between person and body is used to justify actions that are per se morally illicit, but that are transferred to a moral no man's land in which the only criteria are utilitarian. By separating the spirit from the body, attempts are being made to transform into a right what is in fact a crime (abortion, euthanasia, etc.). But, more fundamentally, the consciousness is being lost that a murder is committed not only when we kill a perfectly formed human body (according to some, the only kind of body that can be considered a "person"), but also when we kill a human being who does not yet manifest, or no longer manifests, the "characteristics" of a person.

The dignity that derives from being a personal body is dependent, however, not on its degree of bodily development, but on its "being" or "non being": "Our duty and responsibility to a person are dependent not on the functionality of its bodily parts or on the happiness of its interpersonal and social reactions... but on the reality itself of that person's presence in the world".(69)
Any kind of outrage committed against that person's life, any kind of attack on the person, must necessarily pass through his body, because his existence is necessarily that of the body: "I can withdraw from my existence into myself and render it external. Expel from me the particular sensation and be free from my fetters (...) for others. I am in my body (...) Violence done to my body by others is violence done to me". (70)

**What are the consequences at the ethical level?**

The first consequence is that we cannot dispose of our own body, or that of others: "man - writes Kant - has possession over himself and cannot do what he likes with his body. In as much as it is part of his own self, it is with his body that man constitutes a person. He cannot transform his own person into a thing", (71) nor dispose of his own person as a thing: "it is not permitted to him to sell a tooth or another part of himself". (72)

The only justification for an intervention on human corporeity is the benefit that might derive from it in terms of life and health for that same individual; just as the only way of disposing of one's own corporeity is that of a gratuitous, voluntary gift, that is not to the detriment of the acting subject and that is made with a view to an advantage for the life of the beneficiary. (73)

So the human body must not be subjected to interventions that "despise the human body", nor to interventions that "glorify it": "Rather, man is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honour". (74)

It should not be forgotten, of course, that for the believer the life of the body, though it is a fundamental value, i.e. a value on which the other values are based, is not an absolute value, "especially as he may be asked to give up his life for a greater good. As Jesus says: 'Whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it' (Mk 8:35)". (75) Life is "a sacred reality entrusted to us, to be preserved with a sense of responsibility" (76) and "no one can arbitrarily choose whether to live or die". (77)

In the second place, it should be borne in mind that every relation is essentially a relation that is mediated by corporeity, but that brings with it the richness of the person's totality. Account needs to be taken of this by, for example, the physician, whose intervention on the human body cannot fail to take due account of this richness and this bond: it is the act of one person on another person with the mediation of the body. (78) Another example: spouses - in the genital act - cannot fail reciprocally to recognize the value of the person present in the other. The sexual act is not just the union of two bodies, but the union of two persons through their bodies.

Indeed, in a theological interpretation, it is through the mutual recognition of the person in their spouse that man and wife feel themselves partners of the Creator himself, participants of His fruitful and unifying love. Spouses recognize in themselves and in their partner the gift of a transcendent love and of a procreant responsibility. They recognize that the life of their future child, the fruit of their act, is the gift of the Creator, even before it is the fruit of their conjugal love. They thus feel that the conjugal act is not any kind of gesture; that procreation is not merely reproduction; and that it can neither be counterfeited nor contradicted in its structure.

Third, and lastly, the centrality and continuity of human corporeity could be a basis for the recognition and the defence of human rights, beyond all the debate on the human person. Even "Donum vitae", in asking for respect for the "right to life and the physical integrity of every human being from the moment of conception to death", bases such right not on the recognition of the presence or not of a spiritual soul in the embryo but on its being a biological reality. "Certainly - we read in no. I.1 of the document (Respect for Human Embryos) - no experimental datum can be in itself sufficient to bring us to the recognition of a spiritual soul; nevertheless, the conclusions of science regarding the human embryo provide a valuable indication for discerning by the use of reason a personal presence at the
moment of the first appearance of a human life: how could a human individual not be a human person?".

NOTES
(4) In this regard F. D'Agostino writes as follows: "Scientific thought on the other hand has reached an impasse. None of its typical cultural positions really comes to terms with man's corporeity: neither in physico-scientific thought which has dissolved the body and matter in the impalpable dimension of energy, nor in psychologico-psychoanalytical thought, which indeed recognizes corporeity, but through the mediation of a frankly metaphysical datum such as that of the subconscious (...), nor in anthropologic-cultural thought" (F. D'Agostino, I diritti di indole biofisica, in G. Concetti (ed.), I diritti umani. Dottrina e prassi, AVE, Roma 1982, p. 760.
(8) U. Galimberti, Psiche e techne. L'uomo nell'età della tecnica, Feltrinelli, Milano 1999, p. 34.
(10) A. Strumia, L'uomo e la scienza nel Magistero di Giovanni Paolo II, Piemme, Casale Monferrato 1987.


(14) John Paul II, Letter to Families..., no. 19.

(15) E. Gilson, Lo spirito della filosofia medievale, Morcelliana, Brescia 1969, p. 225.

(16) I. Fucek, Prospettive teologiche ed etiche in tema di corporeità umana, Medicina e Morale 5 (1990), pp. 933-948.

(17) Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, ESD, Bologna 1984, q3, a2, sed c.

(18) Idem, Questiones disputatae: De spiritualibus creaturis, Gregorianum, Roma 1964, a3,5; sed c.

(19) Idem, Summa Theologiae..., q 76, a 6,1.


(21) John Paul II, Letter to Families..., no. 19.


(24) F. Riva, Corpo e metafora in Gabriel Marcel, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1985, pp. 120-121.


(26) On the same p. 235 of Persona e atto we thus read in note 63: "Drawing on the opinions reported here, the author wishes to observe that when in this study he affirms that man is not his own body, but possesses his own body, he bases himself on the conviction that man is himself (i.e. person) in so far as he possesses himself; and, in this sense, also in so far as he possesses his own body".

(27) Even before Husserl, Rosmini wrote as follows: "We may perceive our body with an 'extra subjective' perception, that is, with that type of perception that also perceives other bodies, i.e. all the bodies that represent for man something objective, or with a 'subjective' perception, i.e. with a fundamental feeling 'of one's own self'. So when "we perceive our body in the second way, i.e. by that fundamental feeling by which we recognize ourselves as living beings, we perceive our body as forming one thing with ourselves; it too becomes in this way, by virtue of its individual union with our spirit, a sentient subject; and it can truthfully be said that it is felt as sentient by us. When, in meeting others, we perceive our body in the first way, i.e. in the same way that we perceive the other external bodies by our five sense, our body like all the others is then outside the subject, it is something different from our powers of feeling: we no longer feel it since it too is sentient, but purely in its exterior data, in as much as it is apt to be felt, to excite feelings in us, but not to receive them" (A. Rosmini, Nuovo saggio sulle origini delle idee, vol. II, sez. V, p. V. CIII, art IX, Milano 1972, cited by: V. Melchiorre, Il corpo, La Scuola, Brescia 1984, pp. 7-8.

(28) Melchiorre, Corpo e persona..., p. 41.


(30) H.E. Hengstenberg, Philosophische Antropologie, Pustet, München-Salzburg 1984, pp. 81-82.


(33) John Paul II, Catechesi sull'amore umano..., XIX, pp. 90-92.
(35) M. Merleau-Ponty, La struttura del comportamento, Bompiani, Milano 1963.
(38) John Paul II, Catechesi sull'amore umano..., CXXIII, p. 467.
(39) Ibid., CIV, p. 401.
(40) Ibid.
(41) Ibid., CXXIII, p. 468.
(43) J. Maritain, I diritti dell'uomo e la legge naturale, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1977, pp. 4-5.
(47) M. Scheler, Pudore e sentimento del pudore, (Italian tr. A. Lanbertino), Guida, Napoli 1978.
(50) Rocchetta, Per una teologia della corporeità..., p. 98.
(52) Tettamanzi, Bioetica..., pp. 113ff.
(55) John Paul II, Catechesi sull'amore umano..., VIII, p. 54.
(58) Idem, Catechesi sull'amore umano..., X, p. 63.
(61) John Paul II, Catechesi sull'amore umano... (?), p. 58.
(64) V. Possenti, La bioetica alla ricerca dei principi: la persona, Medicina e Morale 6 (1992), p. 1081.
(65) Ibid., p. 1088.


John Paul II, Encyclical Letter "Evangelium Vitae"..., no. 47.

Ibid., no. 2.

Ibid., no. 47.

ANDREAS LAUN

NATURAL LAW

In 1947 H. Rommen spoke of an "eternal recurrence" of natural law, and it is indeed a subject which continually "recurs", regardless of how it is denoted. And even though talk of the natural law is frequently scornfully dismissed, the question nevertheless turns up as though of its own accord, especially when people have to suffer evil which has been ideologically and legally legitimized (for example under Hitler or communism).

What is the nature of this question about natural law? In what does it consist and what are people trying to get at when they ask it? Why does it keep recurring and what is its meaning?

First I would like to clarify the concept and then make a remark about the position of natural law within Catholic moral theology. Thereafter I would like to discuss some specific problems, and finally draw the conclusion.

The threefold meaning of natural law

One can use the expression "natural law" to mean three different "things", which it is helpful to distinguish for any discussion:

Natural law as the "law of reason"

If as a Christian one thinks of revelation and the possibility of recognizing what is moral and right by means of it, then natural law is every lex in a moral and legal sense, which a person can recognize on the basis of his natural power of reasoning. Natural law is then another expression for the law of reason as opposed to a commandment or law which has been revealed by God. The term naturalis indicates the instrument by which the lex is recognized - namely reason.

The term "natural law" in this sense contrasts with "revealed morality" or "revealed law" regardless of the question as to whether or in what sense a morality imparted through or based on revelation exists.

Natural law as "higher law"

In the second meaning we speak of natural law which contrasts with human law in its narrower sense. This kind of natural law is "law" in a more restricted sense and does not include the more comprehensive moral lex. It is so to speak only "half" of the concept described above.

So the same thing applies here: no revelation is required to recognize it. The laws of human legislation should comply to natural law in this sense. Natural law is the higher law, upon which merely human laws are founded and by which they are restricted. If the natural law in this sense is disregarded for some reason in favor of purely human laws, sometimes the consequences are disastrous.

Another expression for "natural law" in this sense - and one which is objective and more easily understandable in view of the development in society - is "human rights". One could just as well or even more exactly speak of "Divine law", but it is always a Divine law which can be recognized by reason.

"Natural law" as a specific form of natural ethics

The third meaning of natural law is when we speak of it in the traditional scholastic manner. This includes not just the other "half" of the first concept (= the moral lex which is recognized by reason), but at the same time a particular form of philosophical ethics, the basic axiom of which is: bonum est secundum naturam agere. Or also: bonum est secundum rationem agere. Or put in yet another way: good is what is conveniens naturae or conveniens rationi.
In other words: Lex naturalis means not only naturally recognizable morality but also the manner in which it is proved.

"Natural law" today?

The first two meanings of "natural law" are normally recognized today, although with a reservation which makes this "recognition" appear extremely questionable:

Natural law as human rights today?

As far as the "legal half" of the first meaning of "natural law" is concerned: people do talk a lot about "human rights" and make claims to them, but the basis of these "human rights" is lost more and more as a result of the loss of (faith in) God. For in the wake of falling away from God, Man too is lost in the sense that one no longer recognizes in him the image of God, but sees in him only "one organism amongst others". From that it follows that he possesses at the most "animal rights", but no longer the sacred right to life and the protection of his integrity. True human rights can only be based on the recognition of Man as a person and, in religious terms, as the "image of God".

The place in Evangelium Vitae, which explains this connection - that loss of God leads to the loss of Man - is perhaps the most important and most stirring of the whole encyclical. The consequences of this "loss of Man through the loss of God" are known to all present here. The true situation concerning the recognition of human rights becomes clear in a flash through the perversion of this concept by the proclamation of a human right to abortion or to homosexual "marriages".

Natural law as natural ethics today?

The situation of natural law in the sense of ethics is not much better: For the label "natural ethics" is used very many times to refer to those widely prevalent relativistic theories which do not deserve the honour of being called "ethics". They are far better described as an ideologically embellished destruction of ethics, as John Paul II has stated fairly clearly in Veritatis Splendor. One need only make clear to oneself how often today people talk in an extremely nebulous way about personal ideas of value or a change in values.

Scholastic natural law in the sense of specific ethics

It is not very long ago since the "natural law foundation of ethics" - that is, natural law in the third meaning of the expression - was the typical Catholic way of thinking of all moral theologians, but today a completely different situation has arisen. In German-speaking countries at least there is hardly any moral theologian who can be described as a representative of "natural law" in the scholastic sense.

Natural law in the light of tradition and the Magisterium of the Church

Pre-Christian thinkers such as Cicero have already clearly discerned the existence of a lex naturalis in the first and second meanings of the expression. W. Waldstein, a member of this Academy, has proved this conclusively in many of his works.

Even more important than this philosophical-historical proof it is essential to remember: Natural law is an essential part of the explicit teaching of Holy Scripture and is therefore a part of Catholic belief.

o In Romans 2, 14f. we read: "When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness ..." [Revised Standard Version]
Similarly the Council: "Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells him inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. His dignity lies in observing this law, and by it he will be judged." [Gaudium et spes, §16, Flannery]

However essential natural law in the first two senses of the expression is to the Catholic view of the world, it should certainly not be said that the Church wants to restrict Catholic philosophers and theologians in their argumentation to "scholastic natural law". Criticism is possible and, at least with respect to certain representatives of this direction of thought, also necessary.

The development of Catholic moral theology with respect to the scholastic understanding of natural law

In 1968 Humanae Vitae struck like a bomb and set off a serious wave of protests amongst theologians, who were followed by many lay people and also by declarations of churches in which their episcopal authors made what was in the end effect a vain attempt to combine faithfulness to the pope with appeasement of the protesters. But of course the wave of protests against Humanae Vitae ebbed away - it was the most serious of all offences on the side of the Catholic Church against the spirit of the age. Non-Catholics saw in it the confirmation of their prejudices against the Church and turned away, shrugging their shoulders. But a process of schism amongst many Catholics began at that time. How widespread and deep this split would become can be seen for example in the demands of the unfortunate "Kirchenvolksbegehren" (= "We are the church" - movement), in all the heretical ideas which are promoted at the Catholic theological faculties, and it can be seen in all those events which make an actual schism increasingly more imaginable and possible.

At the same time something else happened: in the solitude of scholarly work a process began in moral theology, which one can compare with the tearing down and rebuilding of an old house. All the structural elements of traditional moral theology were subjected one by one to what was initially a legitimate critical examination. They did not, however, according to the authors, pass the examination! They were therefore torn down, exchanged for new ones and rebuilt. Specifically: on the side of the subject was developed a modified idea of "conscience", on the side of the object one took over the idea of the so-called "weighing up of goods" from Anglo-Saxon ethics, which was substituted for the above cited principle of natural law (secundum naturam agere). In addition the attempt was made (in the discussion about the so-called proprium christianum) to show that revelation actually made no contribution to the working out of specific behavioural norms. That a "by-product" of this was a change in the meaning of the Magisterium of the Church is not surprising. An authority requiring obedience was changed into a "guide" [oder "source of guidelines"], which one promised "to take seriously". But one could no longer speak of "obedience" in the proper sense of the word. This was defamed as "immaturity". In its place was substituted "one's own" judgement, seeking to make its dignity impregnable on the basis of one's "conscience". Even with respect to grave sins such as abortion one spoke only of a "judgement of conscience", which was to be treated with respect - like a shield against the claims of the Magisterium.

And so the restructuring of the lex naturalis was completed, a restructuring so radical that one could scarcely imagine anything more radical. With this new type of "ethics" (if it really is "ethics"!) intellectual "accidents" - which was how Humanae Vitae was regarded - could not happen again in the future.

When one asks these moral theologians about "natural law" they accept it verbally in the first-mentioned sense of the expression. It is naturally extremely questionable whether, what they describe as lex naturalis, describes the same reality as is meant both in tradition and by the Magisterium of the Church. They say: teleological ethics are founded completely on reason. It is reason which, within the
possibilities of human nature, create meaning and norms. In this sense this new type of ethics is lex naturalis. But even though they assent to "natural law" as a synonym for ethics based on reason (in their sense of the expression), they deny just as fervently that it is a type of ethics which can objectively gain its norms from the structures of being. For, according to them, the possibility of such a secundum naturam agere was conclusively refuted in the discussions of the late 1960s and early 1970s. To state the matter cautiously: the type of moral theology just sketched can be shown to exist, although not very easily in its "pure" form. The main features of this way of thinking are common to all who belong to the group who could be described as "modern" moral theologians.

The criticism of natural law in the third sense of the expression (secundum naturam agere)

This is not the place to sketch all the objections which were at that time brought against the scholastic understanding of natural law and - like a chain saw - brought about its fall. But I would like to mention what seem to me to be the two most important arguments, since they do validly criticise a certain understanding of natural law by the scholastic.

From being to obligation?

Basing one's arguments on D. Hume and C. G. Moore it is said: one cannot derive an obligation from [mere] being; the duty towards a certain agere never follows from "being". This objection is particularly clearly visible in the so-called accusation of biologism, which is brought time and again against Humanae Vitae: why should biological structures be inviolable and why is it forbidden to intervene simply because "they are what they are"? Biological structures are something essentially different from moral norms!

And even when one adds that God is the creator of these biological laws, it does not follow that they have a normative significance. For that would lead to ridiculous and absurd consequences, as the following example from the history of human thought proves:

God created men with the faculty of growing a beard.
He therefore wanted men to grow beards.
It follows therefore that whoever shaves it off acts against the will of God.
But to act against the will of God is sin.
It is not enough to laugh at this example. One must also be able to show why the conclusion, which sounds so logical, is false.

"Self-realization" as the original ethical norm?

First I must explain a little more the principle cited above - agere sequitur esse:
Which esse does one have to follow (sequere) in order to act well? Human nature, is the answer; that too is the meaning of lex naturalis: naturalis tells us where moral norms come from, namely from human nature, from the being of Man as he is.

Thomas Aquinas replies to the question which follows from this: "How do we recognize human nature?" with the concept of inclinationes naturales: That which conforms to "nature" we recognize on the basis of the inclinationes naturales: That to which they are ordered shows us what is good and conforms to the will of God. Thomas names as basical inclinationes as follows: the inclinatio to preserve one's being, the inclinatio to preserve the species, the inclinatio towards recognition and towards community. That seems reasonable: it would after all be incompatible with the goodness of the Creator to have given Man inclinationes which were not ordered towards good.

When Man follows his inclinationes naturales he acts well and he realizes his being, which thereby comes to perfection; that is what "self-realization" means for him.
There are two queries against this explanation of agere sequitur esse or against the actus moralis hominis sequitur inclinationes naturae humanae:
The first objection: Human nature as we know it has been distorted by sin, it is a natura vulnerata. Its inclinationes do not by any means derive solely from God. Some of them derive from sin and lead to sin. One only has to think about all the sinful inclinations which affect all people (pride, indolence ...) on the one hand and specific inclinations to sin such as homosexuality or kleptomania on the other. The second objection: Even if our nature were as God created it, love would be the fulfilment of all morality, decisive for every moral act. But love is concerned with the other person. Thomas describes the love of God as deum amare propter se ipsum.
It follows from this that even if the moral good is the perfection of human nature, the nature of good cannot consist in striving after self-realization.

"Nature as neutral facts" and "being which has value as part of God's plan"

There is a way out of the dilemma which neo-scholastic natural law has got itself into:
There is a prejudice in the statement "One cannot derive an obligation from mere being", namely the prejudice that "there can be no such thing as being with normative content" , and that all "being" is nothing more than bare "fact", devoid of any worth, neutral material for the use of human freedom. The contrary assertion is: Being is by no means worthless; value is a property of being itself, bound inextricably with it.

I incline towards the opinion that the proposition of "being without value" is a consequence of atheism:
how can the world contain values which bind us morally when it is only a product of blind chance?
In this case the formula Agere sequitur esse gains a decisive clarification: Agere sequitur bonum in being.
Therefore it is not a moral duty to wear a beard: because it is only a fact, but without moral value (as opposed to its aesthetic value ...)! Therefore no duties follow from biological laws as such (= biologism), but they do follow from the human body, because the person is present through it and in it.
When in Catholic moral theology we speak of "God's plan" which lays a duty upon us, what we mean is precisely this: we ought to recognize that being which is "good" (in the sense of morally meaningful).

The morally good: self-realization of the individual or the transcendence of love?

We have heard: According to Thomas there is a duty to follow one's inclinationes naturales in order to know what is morally good. But it does not follow from this that the gratification of these inclinationes as such is already good. The thought can also be expressed as follows: the inclinationes naturales are a heuristic principle, which shows us how to look in the appropriate direction in which those morally significant goods are which make our action of moral value.

Natural law understood in this way conforms to the broad current of personalist ethics , which are represented on the one hand by D. von Hildebrand and Josef Seifert and on the other by K. Wojtyla and the entire Lublin school.
The moral act is a response to the good of another person, one which goes beyond the sphere of one's own interests, one which "transcends" self-interest. In the language of Hildebrand: the moral act is a "value response".
Applying this to love: if God is to be loved propter se ipsum, then it follows for his image: persona est affirmanda propter se ipsam. Because this perception is so important, John Paul II repeatedly quotes the teaching of the Council: "Man is the only creature on earth that God has wanted for its own sake;" he "can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself." [Gaudium et spes, §24, Flannery. Zu dieser Stelle in GS ist eine Fußnote mit Hinweis auf Lk. 17, 33: Whoever seeks to gain his life will
lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it. Also hat unser Herr Jesus das Prinzip von Hildebrand (unten) im Grunde bereits formuliert!]
That means: not self-realization or transcendence, not self-realization through transcendence (as if it were the means to the "end" of self-realization!), but self-realization as (Hildebrand would say: superabundante) the consequence of selfless transcendence in the giving of oneself in love.
This transcendence of love as a giving of oneself to the other person for his own sake befits every moral act. In Veritatis Splendor it says: "The origin and the foundation of the duty of absolute respect for human life are to be found in the dignity proper to the person ... Human life, even though it is a fundamental good of man, thus acquires a moral significance in reference to the good of the person, who must always be affirmed for his own sake."

Conclusion - a renewal of natural law

It cannot be denied: Some of the neo-scholastic authors have promoted a double misunderstanding of the lex naturalis:
o the misunderstanding that being as such - which they have without noticing it conceived of as value-
free - could be the foundation of moral norms (a variation of this mistake is biologism), and
o the misunderstanding that an ethical act is in its nature incurvatus in se, which means that it is in the final analysis always directed towards one's own happiness and one's own self-realization.
The neo-scholastic conception of natural law has gone through the fire of criticism and it emerges from it refined and strengthened. For two aspects of it have now become clear:
o A unique dignity belongs to Man. The moral act of love responds to just this dignity - propter se ipsum.
o The fundamental act of morality is love. It transcends the self-interest of the individual in the fulfilling of his inclinationes. Or in the words of Hildebrand: Man realizes himself when he does not seek to realize himself but loves the other person propter se ipsum.

The fidelity of natural law to reality

The crisis of natural law resulted from the crisis following the publication of Humanae Vitae. And this is why I would like to show in the final section how legitimate and true to "natural law" the method of argumentation of Humanae Vitae is.
Why is every possible form of contraception forbidden? It can only be understood with respect to the "exceptional meaning" of the marriage act (John Paul II) or to its intima ratio. When one understands this one also understands the moral commandment which refers to it.
What is this "exceptional meaning" according to the teaching of the Church? The answer is:
- The sexual union is complete self-giving in the language of the body (= essere) - therefore it requires the marriage vow (= agere).
- The sexual union is not fertility and love but the union of fertile love - fertility belongs to this love (= essere). This connection must therefore be respected (= agere). It follows that contraception is not only an act against fertility but also against love.
- The sexual union is ordered towards the possible conception of a child and therefore towards a mysterious cooperation with God, who creates the immortal soul (= essere). It is therefore to be respected (= agere).
Anyone who understands the "exceptional meaning" of the marital embrace also perceives that it is not automatically what it ought to be according to God's plan. It is not part of marital holiness "to abstain as far as possible from the sexual union", but to make it what it ought to be according to the will of God. To this purpose spouses need those powers which "flow from the Holy Spirit, who purifies, enlivens, strengthens and perfects the powers of the human spirit." For it is only the Spirit, "who makes
alive, the flesh is of no avail." In this Spirit - I quote John Paul II - the sexual union is characterized by a high "dignity and holiness".

Is this completely new? Yes, because it has never been seen so clearly in the history of the Church as by the present pope. No, because there are astonishing examples of it in history. In particular I would like to recall a passage in Thomas Aquinas which has moved me deeply: in answer to the question why marriage is a sacrament, although it does not lead to the suffering of Christ, but brings joy, Thomas answers: Marriage is a sacrament. It is true that it does not lead a Christian to the suffering of Christ, but it does unite him with the love with which Christ has suffered for his Church.

If you ask me what natural law is, I give a general and a specific answer: in the "general" answer I quote Saint Thomas: Because of his reason Man partly understands the Divine plan - and Thomas names this "participation" (participatio) of a creature of reason in the Divine law lex naturalis. The specific answer is: In that Man reflects on the "exceptional meaning" not only of the marital union, but of his own nature as a whole, he takes "part" in the Divine law - not blindly, however, like an animal, but with understanding.

The psalms also tell us what natural law is: First of all I pray (with the words of the "psalm of the moral theologians"! ):"Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" [Psalm 119, 18, RSV]

Then I consider and perceive: "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvellous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skilfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed." [Psalm 139, 14-16a, New King James Version]

I say: "I will meditate on thy precepts, and fix my eyes on thy ways." [Psalm 119, 15, RSV]
Because my own efforts do not suffice: "Lord, teach me thy statutes." [Psalm 119, 64, RSV]
I make the experience: "Blessed are those ... who walk in the law of the Lord! ... I find my delight in thy commandments." [Psalm 119, 1b. 47a, RSV]
Therefore: "I will observe they statutes." [Psalm 119, 8a, RSV]
Because of my weaknesses I pray: "Let me not wander from thy commandments!" [Psalm 119, 10b, RSV]
To recognize what is wonderful in God's creation and to perceive the echo of this wonder in one's conscience - that is natural law.
With the term "personalistic ecology", I am referring to the ecological philosophical thought, which is generated by ontologically founded personalism, shirking from the extremisms of strong anthropocentrism and ecocentrism.

In order to outline the physiognomy of a personalistic ecophilosophy, the discussion that follows will propose three stages of reflection: the first stage will aims to conceptually collocate moderate anthropocentrism within environmental ethics; the second will analyze the ecophilosophical approaches generated by ecology; the final stage will outline the features of an ecophilosophy inspired by personalism.

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Environmental ethical literature offers a very widespread outline of reflection. From a so complex and variegated subject, it derives the difficulty of classifying the various philosophical positions in an attempt of clarifying them without being, at the same time, too simplifying.

That is why I will propose a double classification, considering the matter from a double perspective. The first perspective concerns the patterns of philosophical argumentation of environmental ethics, i.e. its metaethics premises; the second is placed at an extremely practical level and concerns the assiologic qualities of nature.

I think that the first classification presents the advantage to schematize a so complex subject; the second, on the contrary, allows us to differentiate the details of the various positions, by widely specifying the different facets of the terms anthropocentrism, biocentrism and ecocentrism that are very common in environmental ethics(1).

Following the analysis proposed by Bartolommei, the different theoretical positions in environmental ethics are classified, as to anthropocentrism/biocentrism/ecocentrism, in four main positions: strong anthropocentrism, weak anthropocentrism, weak biocentrism and strong biocentrism-ecocentrism(2).

With reference to patterns of philosophical argumentation(3), the different definitions of environmental ethics could be classified into the following models: rationalistic objectivism, nature's ontology, feminism or gynomorphism, anthropomorphism and creationism.

In the model of rationalistic objectivism, value is conferred to nature through an attributive act of man, based on the evaluation of negative consequences on generations to come, because of destructive or irresponsible man's actions against nature. Ethical judgement is thus based on human reason that estimates long-term risks and benefits. Some utilitaristic and discourse ethics'positions can be included in this model.

The model of the ontology of nature considers nature as having a value in itself. Neo-Aristotelianism, the sanctity of life paradigm and the holism can be placed in this foundational model.

The anthropomorphic model attributes a value to nature by analogy with human being's value. Ethical judgement is based on the extension of moral value from man to other living beings (moral extensionism) as they are capable of feeling pleasure and pain. The anthropomorphic position can be found within some utilitaristic positions and ethics of rights' position.

The feminist model, with its innumerable facets, assumes as the starting point of its argumentation the analogy between sexism and the destruction of nature.

The argumentations of different types of feminism vary according to their anthropological interpretation of female identity(4)
According to theistic model, value is attributed to nature by God's creative act and it is recognized by human reason that is open to truth. Ethical judgement is thus based on metaphysics. Creationism is the basis for ontologically founded personalism.

As regards the type of value owned by or attributed to nature, it is possible to adopt the following definitions: nature as resource, nature as the wholeness of living and not living beings, mutually interacting between them, nature as a biotic community, nature as the place where the being discloses itself, nature as manifestation of God's glory.

The axiologic concept of nature as resource that, because of its ethical value, could be defined as ethical resourcism, derives from the philosophical matrix of utilitarianism, i.e. from a strong anthropocentric ethics, according to the assessment commonly used in environmental ethics. The environmental ethics by John Passmore is an example of an anthropocentric pattern, that I would define as strong.

According to the author, the only values of natural world are those deriving from man and its needs; that is why nature has no value in itself. Men's responsibility towards nature derives from their being the cause of biosphere's changes that arise moral problems because they venture the future of humankind.

Environment is so considered a value-resource for man, in a natural as well in an aesthetical sense. The axiologic concept of nature as a wholeness of living and not-living beings, mutually interacting derives from the philosophical matrix of holism, i.e. from an ecocentric ethics.

Ecocentric ethics is that environmental ethics attributing an inner value to nature, considered in its entirety; namely the value of the whole is considered higher than nature's single parts.

According to the theory elaborated by the Norwegian philosopher Arn Naess, ecocentric ethics is rooted in ecological science, i.e. the deep ecology movement. Naess distinguishes between shallow ecology movement and deep ecology movement. The first movements are represented by the traditional philosophical models, applied to environmental ethics and inspired by anthropocentric models, i.e. connected to the point of view of human utility; deep ecology movements, on the contrary, wants to insert in philosophy the point of view of nature and it is generated by scientific ecology, as we will examine later.

Ecocentric ethics has its philosophical roots also in feminism.

According to the theory proposed by Ynestra King, ecofeminism is a movement that consists of theoretical positions and practical actions, promoted by women who judge to have the duty to accomplish a special task in the present dangerous times: after having seen the signs of ecological disaster and atomic destruction, they realized the link existing among the patriarchal violence against women, the general violence against people and violence against nature.

Women have a deep and specific perception of this fact thanks to their own nature as well as to their experience as women.

Ecofeminist aim is thus anti-patriarchal, anti-militarist and ecologist.

In the works of the American philosopher Mary Daly, we may find the elaboration of a variant of ecofeminist thought, that I take the liberty of calling ecologist pseudo-spiritualism. According to the author, women's nature is completely different from men's: it renders them capable of living a true life, full of strength and nourished by a dynamic communion with animals, earth and stars. Men lack this capacity because they are parasites by nature, exploiting those who create and bear life and building a dreadful pantomimes of true life and true comprehension. Female nature, according to Daly, is a good nature, capable of generating profound bonds of friendship. Awakening that nature, women could create a unitary conscience for the restoring of creation. On the contrary, spurious and parasitic manliness is the source of evil, the cause for an illusory and false world, upsetting all true principles and spreading a deadly net on life's tissue. All the world's and mankind's problems would thus be caused by man's arrogant behaviour and by value supporting the patriarchal system that was and remains the most powerful force in the world.
Women's liberations, as Daly continues, will arrive from women themselves if they are capable of breaking the bonds of false conscience that at present tie them, with the aim of restoring gynocentric life that nowadays is overwhelmed by the lying and patriarchal system. Women's revival would arrive at the end of a course in a mere intuitional place, free from male language, culture, presence or expectations, accomplished thanks to a fanciful and innovative use of language, the meditation upon experiences that allows women to develop a real, new organ of mind, and the attention to gynocentric and multimedial symbolism of "O", in which feminists who love life can find the basic ecofeminist principle, i.e. every thing is connected with all others.

Paradoxically, ecofeminist variants affirming this link define themselves as spiritualistic. In fact, spiritual dimension is reduced to sexual energy, a sort of vitalism, among other things dangerously connected with magic: it would unite women among them and with other living beings as an interconnecting principle and it allows them to celebrate and love life. The celebration of life's sanctity, in this theoretical context, has no reason to exist in the transcendent world but in female immanence, i.e. in everyday women's life.

Restoring life's sanctity agrees with the consequent ecologism, because celebrating life's sanctity means respecting all the beings living on the earth and the earth itself in its entirety, as it is animated by the interconnecting female principle.

These positions have the evident limit of reducing spirit to matter: in other words, when we eliminate the differences between spirit and matter, matter will not ascend to the spiritual level while spirit lowers to the level of simple matter.

Woman too pays the consequence of such a reduction, because she practically disappears from the horizon of transcendence(12).

The assiologic concept of nature as a biotic community that generates biocentric ethics, i.e. that environmental ethics considering every living being as the centre of values, derives from various philosophical matrixes: for example, the utilitarism of Peter Singer and the paradigm of life's sanctity of Albert Schweitzer, recently reviewed by Kennet Goodpaster.

Nonetheless, biocentrism's philosophical value in these two cases is substantially different: the first is a hedonist biocentrism that aims at avoiding suffering to any living being; the second, on the contrary, is a biocentrism, affirming that any form of life has to be respected because of its sanctity.

Peter Singer(13) is the supporter of utilitarianism of preference or of interests. His ethics is based upon the principle of the equal and fair consideration of present and future interests. Interests concern the desire of avoiding suffering, satisfying primary needs, developing its own capacities, enjoying friendships, being free to carry out its own projects. The minimum condition for having interests or preferences is to be neurophysiologically able to feel pleasure and suffering. It derives the following moral norm: it is necessary to take into account the interests of all subjects capable of feeling them and to fight against every discrimination (racialism, sexism, slavery, specism) biocentrically extending the principle of equality.

Goodpaster(14) on the contrary, affirms that the capacity of feeling pleasure and suffering is not an aim in itself, but a strategy for survival, through which it is possible to avoid any risk of life. Any attempt to attach moral relevance to one or another attribute is arbitrary. In Goodpaster's words, the only objectively recognizable ethical principle is the respect for life. Thus, in nature, it is possible to contradict this principle only for assuring survival.

The assiologic concept of nature as the place where Being discloses itself, born in a philosophical conception called neo-Aristotelianism, is the expression of an ontocentric ethics.

The definition of ontocentric ethics was attributed to the ethics of Hans Jonas(15). Opposed to the Darwinian conception, the teleologism of Jonas finds in natural evolution a finalism culminating in the human being. In nature he singles out a principle of continuity going from the organism to the mind and refuses any dualistic reductionism (matter/interiority-freedom; nature/man; mind/body). Nature's telos that, according to Jonas, is a value, previously requires that nature exists, i.e. that life exists.
Jonas thus roots the imperative of maintaining nature's life on the ontology of biology (16).

In environmental literature, the concept of nature as the manifestation of God's glory, deriving from the ontologically and theologically founded personalism, is defined as a weak or moderate anthropocentric ethics in order to distinguish it from strong anthropocentrism.

An outline of weak or moderate anthropocentrism can be found in the works of Elio Sgreccia and Beatrice Fisso: "Man represents the height of universe; just because of his prominence, the same moral relevance must not be attributed to him and to other living beings. It is not possible to restore the balance between man and nature by comparing him with other living beings: first it is necessary to change his way of thinking and acting towards other not-human entities. It also exists a graduation of the importance of various natural entities that reverberates on moral values we have to attribute to them. This difference is inherent in Nature that presents in itself a hierarchical structure having man at its height" (17)

As M. Faggioni rightly affirms, ethics depending on the Jewish-Christian vision is precisely a theological ethics and it could be called an ethics of administration. In fact, it bases and justifies the responsibility towards nature on the concept according to which world is God's gift, entrusted to humankind who has to vouch to God himself for his way to administrate it. Christian environmental ethics, as Faggioni continues, dissociates from the arrogance of strong anthropocentrism and outlines the fact that human supremacy on creation is not absolute: it is a theocentrism more than an anthropocentrism affirming the duty for man of a wise use of natural goods" (18).

The various nature's assiologic qualities justifies the difference of barycentre for the different models:

- man, for strong and moderate anthropocentrism;
- human being, for biocentrism;
- earth in its entirety, for ecocentrism;
- graduation of being, for ontocentrism.

FROM ECOLOGY TO ECOPHILOSOPHY

As rightly indicated by the Norwegian philosopher A. Naess, the science of ecology has to be distinguished from ecology as philosophical system (19).

With the term ecology strictu sensu, I think we may mean that type of knowledge that uses scientific-mathematical methods for explaining the world as a biophysical reality, while, more precisely, with the term ecophilosophy we may mean that type of knowledge originated by scientific ecology and offering a model of interpretation that has an epistemologic, anthropologic and prescriptive valence.

That is to say, ecophilosophy is the philosophical product of the science of ecology.

In scientific literature, the word ecology is used for the first time by German biologist Ernst Haeckel (1866) to indicate the study of interdependence and interaction between living beings (animals and plants) and their environment (inanimate matter) (20).

As historians rightly underline, the idea of ecology is born long before its name. In fact, its modern history began in XVIII century, when it was a larger method for observing life's structure on the earth: this point of view tried to describe all living beings as an interacting unity, often named, as in Linneo's words (21), the economy of nature.

The merit of Haeckel was not only that of attributing a new name to the so-called economy of nature, but also that of applying the predictive method of physical sciences to this new science that was based on the concept of relation and context.

Thus, from its beginning, scientific ecology had two souls that were expressions of a double nature: holistic and reductionist (22).

So, with Haeckel, it was born the first phase of ecologic scientific thought: we may define it the pre-modern phase or phase of environmental ethics.

In 1893, John Burdon Sanderson raised ecology to the rank of one of the three parts of biology, together with physiology and morphology, calling it the philosophy of nature.
During the first 40 years of its life, little by little ecology went away for the hegemony of botanic and reached the concepts of animal ecology (Charles Elton), ecosystem (Arthur Tansley)(23) and biosphere (Vladimir Vernadskij)(24).

In this first phase, ecology appears to be a science that aims at translating the complexity of living world and of its relationships with environment into mathematical models and physical equations, embodying a reductionist rather than holistic soul.

In 1979, with the Gaian hypothesis of James Lovelock(25), we may affirm that the second phase of ecologic science began: the phase of modern ecology, i.e. the global ecology.

The idea of Gaia was proposed by James Lovelock, a chemist and physician. He supposed the existence of a mechanism of self-regulation of the earth and the life it contains. Together they form a system capable of maintaining on earth's surface the right conditions for the prosecution of the existence of living beings.

In Lovelock's words, Gaia is a complex unity, including earth's biosphere, oceans and earth; it constitutes a retroactive cybernetic system looking for the optimum physical and chemical environment for the life on our planet. The maintenance of relatively constant conditions by an active control could be called, in a satisfactorily way, "homeostasis".

When ecology widens its boundaries and proposes models for interpreting the reality, it became ecophi

At first, ecophi was a product of scientific ecology whose physiognomy represented the emergency of ecologic paradigm in contexts that were different for the scientific one.

In this perspective it is possible to explain the two ecophilosophical models born from scientific ecology, i.e. scientific ecophi and holistic ecophi.

Scientist model is the expression of the reductionist soul of ecologic science; on the contrary, holistic model is the expression of the holistic one.

Scientist Ecophi

Scientist model derives from scientific theory of environmental ecology(26).

The term environment in this case is used to point out the model of scientificity typical of physical sciences.

In fact, according to the scientific approach of environmental ecology, ecology appears as a science that uses mathematical models and is capable of offering instruments and methods of analysis, simulations, coefficients, indexes and indicators for the evaluation of risk.

Environmental ecology adopts a mechanicistic approach to nature-environment.

Reified nature, reduced to a simple res extensa, humbled to its mere quantitative dimension, loses the bounds of origin and meaning with subjectivity.

That is why scientific theory of environmental ecology can not create an adequate theoretical and foundational support for a philosophical model.

Nonetheless, the scientific theory of environmental ecology wants to assume a philosophical valence when it pretends to convert ecological laws in moral norms.

The prescriptive moment was outlined in the famous laws of ecology of Barry Commoner: every thing is in relationship with all others; every thing goes towards some direction; in nature free consumptions do not exist; nature knows best, and the highest degree of knowledge is reached by nature and expressed by ecologic science(27).

This ecophilosophical model remains bridled in the net of naturalistic fallacy, because it is not able to overcome the impasse between to be and ought to be.

Holistic Ecophi

Holistic ecophi model derives from the scientific theory of the Gaian hypothesis.
The term holism was coined in 1926 by the South African politician Jan C. Smuts to indicate the general tendency of nature to systematically collect, in every sector and phase of reality, structural parts into entities presenting properties that are qualitatively different from their component parts(28). The term thus did not originate in the context of ecologic science.

In ecologic field, holism represents a new prospect from an object ontology to a field ontology in which wholes are prior to parts and relationships more real than entities: "a specimen is, in effect, a summation of its species historical adaptative relationship to the environment"(29). In field ontology, individual organisms are considered temporary formations of energy rather than enduring material objects: "each living thing is a dissipative structure, for that reason it does not endure in and of itself but only as a result of the continual flow in the system"(30).

The concepts of entities-objects are convenient for human purposes, but entities, in reality, are momentary unities in energy, matter and information fields. Humans too are "knots in the web of life".

Ecophilosophical holism finds its most complete expression in deep ecology whose most famous exponent is Arne Naess(31).

Naess founded his philosophy on the following conceptual postulates:
- the refusal of image of man in environment in favour of the widely relational image. Organisms are knots of biospheric net or of the field of inner relationships;
- biospheric equality, in principle. For the ecologic researcher, the equal right to live and completely realize itself is a value axiom whose evidence is intuitively obvious:
- the principles of diversity and symbiosis. Diversity increases the possibilities for survival, the chances for new forms of life, the richness of forms. "Live and let live" is an ecologically more powerful principle than "you" or "me". The last aims to reducing the variety of life's forms and also to causing destruction inside communities of the same kind:
- anti-class position. The principles of ecology equality and of symbiosis sustain the same anti-class position;
- the fight against pollution and resource exhaustion. According to Naess, this principle must be respected only together with the other presuppositions.
- the distinction between complexity and complication. The theory of ecosystems makes a distinction between what is complicated, i.e. lacking any Gestalt or unifying principle, and what is complex. In the biosphere, organisms, ways of life and interactions generally shows an upsetting complexity: it renders unavoidable the fact of thinking in terms of great systems and contributes to a deep and acute perception of the profound human ignorance about biospheric relationships and the effect of interferences;
- local anthropology and decentralization. This postulate has a political meaning: in order to manage ecological problems, it is necessary to strengthen local self-government and material and mental autonomy(32).

The ecophilosophy of Naess does not remain bridled in the net of naturalistic fallacy because the trait d'union between facts and values has a substantially psycho-anthropological nature: human being, experiencing the world, perceives himself as being in continuity with the whole external reality. Naess suggests the necessity for a widening of self-perception of the "ego" in an ecosystemic direction: subjectivity itself is considered as the place of the summary of natural evolution.

In Naess' words, we are something more than our simple ego, we are not only tiny and powerless fragments. By identifying ourselves with vaster entities, we participate in their creation and preservation, thus we share their greatness.

The various egos develop until they become ever-greater self and proportioned to the amplitude and depth of our processes of identification.

The ontology of Gestalt is the theoretical background of the prescriptive moment.
RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY AS METAETHICAL STRUCTURE FOR A DEFINITION OF ECOPHILOSOPHY

I think that in the literature of environmental ethics there is evidence of a leap from theology of nature to moderate anthropocentrism.

In other words, I think that the ontological personalism, substantiating weak anthropocentrism, takes for granted the moment of ecophilosophical reflection.

Obviously, in the theoretic context of personalism, nature is neither a mere resource in an economic sense nor a totality of living and not living beings mutually interacting, because in the indistinct totality of beings the specificity of humanum would be lost, nor a biotic community, because this fact would be the sign of an anthropological degeneration.

Then, in the assiologic order, what is nature? How nature as God's glory could be traduced in philosophical words?

I think it is necessary to elaborate an ecosophy that is a trait d'union among theology, personalism and ethics.

I think that this ecosophy could find its roots in relational ontology.

The Bible clearly affirms the existence of an anthropology of relation that does not allow us to imagine man without God and nature without man(33).

The Bible - as Antonio Bonora affirms - never considers universe as a separated entity, independent from man, or man as separated from universe; they are events occurring under an inevitable divine action, not simple data or assembled pieces of a cosmic mechanism(34).

In Bellino's words, relationality has its foundation in ontology: life itself is opening, communication, relationship(35): "the pulsating of life, seeded in our nature, drains every fold of our existence. And it is an inexorable pulsation of relation, of co-essence: to become hand in glove with the objective essence (placed before) of world, with earth's beauty, sea's infinitude, fruits' taste, flowers' scent. An unique body with the other. The other constitutes the only possibility for our relations with world to have reciprocity. It is the logos (word and reason) of every objective essence, logos calling and inviting me to the universal co-essence. It promises me world or life's kosmos and the wonderful ornament or kosmena of totality. Only in the relation(36).

At the metaecological level, we may affirm that the thought of interconnection is rooted in relational ontology that reveals itself in personalistic and communional anthropology: "to be in reality is to inter-be, we can not exist only in virtue of ourselves but we must inter-be with all other things"(37).

Modern man - as Mounier affirms - is a man who lost the sense of "being", who moves only among utilizable things, devoid of their mystery. But man, life, the beings are not res, objects that can be defined all at once from the point of view of essence. They are events(38).

A similar denunciation about modern world is also hurled by Martin Heidegger. Umberto Galimberti, in his commentary to the Letter on humanism, offers a deep analysis of the Philosopher's thought about this subject: "If man, as being, is an opening to existence, he can not decide about his being, as modern science and techniques claim, but his existence is decided by the being itself. To affirm that the being is man's ethos means to affirm that man exists and stays in the being. The existence and stay are essential elements for the definition of man who can not choose another stay because, as opening to the being, if he wants to be a man, he must stay near it".(39)

I think that modern man, in order to re-establish his harmony with nature, first of all must awaken the relational dimension of his conscience, to rediscover a way for having relation with world aiming not to appropriate it but to stay together with it. To stay together with world means to accept it as such and to recognize it as being created. This relation is the result of a "tender" glance that is at once a contemplative glance and at once careful.
The contemplative glance is the attentive glance of Simone Weil: "a glance that is first of all attentive, in which soul empties itself to receive the being that it sees in its real aspect. Only those who are capable of attention are capable of this glance"(40)

Attention is an act that gathers truth. It is an act that leaves the being speaking. As act gathering truth, it is an act of thought. "Attention consists in suspending one's own thought, in leaving it at disposal, empty and permeable to the object, in maintaining the various knowledges that we acquire and are compelled to use near our own thoughts but at a lower level, without any contact with it. Thought, in comparison with all other peculiar pre-existent thoughts, must be as a man on a mountain who, staring far away, discerns at the same time under him many forests and plains, even if he is not looking at them. And above all, thought must be empty, waiting: it must not look for anything but it must be ready to receive the object penetrating it in its real truth"(41).

The contemplative glance is also defined by Deane Curtin as the "caring about" glance and occurs when the carer is not directly related to the object of the care. Curtin speaks also about another kind of caring, the "caring for", that occurs in a context of direct relation to the others. On some occasion, she says, one's relationship to the object, or simply its particularity, is the source of care.(42)

To have a caring for relation with creature means to recognize the deep sintonia between creature being and human being.

Attention and caring for are important interpretative keys of an ecophilosophy or global philosophy of man-nature relationship, generated by relational ontology.

Attention reveals an essential dimension of creation: it is a mystery and a gift. The attentive glance is the place where it occurs a relation that emphasizes the irreducibility of the being of the other to my being, the difference between me and the other.

"Caring for" reveals another essential dimension of creation: it is an event. "The event - as Mounier continues - marks the meeting between universe and my universe... The event is precisely what I do not create, the catastrophe, the invitation to come out of my being. Here the revelation of universe ends again with a gift(43).

The event emphasizes the dynamism of the being, the pursuit of self-accomplishment through the relation with the other, relation that accomplishes at the same time me and the other according to the respective and irreducible differences. We may interpret from this point of view the concept of unity expressed in the Chart of the Earth: "We are the earth, the people, the plants, the animals, the rain and the oceans, forest's breathing and sea's stream. Let us honour the earth, home of all living things. In all our diversities, we are one"(44).

The first and most immediate expression of the "caring for" relation is the relation with the environment-home, called by Sally Gadow "inherence"(45).

According to Gadow, inherence means that while human existence always organizes world around itself, it is never exempt from its world.

An ecosystem, she affirms, is an abstract network of spaces while inherence particularizes it into places. The space particularized into the place is called "home".

Thus ecology becomes the logic of the home, an ideal of human inseparably entwined with particular times and places.

Ecology as the logic of the home, as Gadow continues, entails a particular ethical model: an ethic of inherence that is to say care and responsiveness toward the place where one lives. Place means situation, a landscape of unmapped meanings, memories, expectations, known only to those who lived and lives in the home(46).

In our western culture, we may consider the lost of the meaning of environment-home as one of the fundamental hints of ecological crisis. Many authors, as for example Vittorio Hosle(47), explain this crisis with the Cartesian anthropologic dualism that through il depreciation of man's physical nature as
res extensa drastically opposed to res cogitans, depreciates at the same time all nature's world of res extensae.

In this perspective, ecology as philosophy of the home seems to be rooted in a not-dualistic anthropology that exploits corporality and thus environment as being in continuity with body. Continuity between body and environment-home is outlined in some works of the philosopher Vittorio Melchiorre: "man succeeded in winning anguish of natural element thanks to the refuge of home, field, garden; a refuge of the earth and air, of fire and light; a refuge winning the apparent hostility of the element, leaving its relation and affinity with his own body emerge, leading him to conspire this centrality that we are and that constitutes the world. All things enriching home and that in the home are, in many ways, arranged, are just ordained in this conspirations of environment and of the body and, in this way, they already constitute a world: it is not by chance that one of the meanings of mundus was about a tidy set and ornaments gathered for warrior's and woman's body“(48).

Until now, I tried to outline the possible features of an ecophilosophy rooted in a relational ontology, using, as key of interpretation, the concepts of attention and caring for. Nonetheless I think we may find evidence of a double defaillance. The first concerns the physiognomy of ecophilosophy

As keys of interpretation of an ecophilosophy rooted in a relational ontology, the concepts of attention and caring for outline a philosophy of the man-environment relation that is limited in space and time. This model presents a large void as regards a philosophy of man-environment relation extended in space and time: this void generates a short-sighted ethics which is responsible only for ecologic niches and present human generations.

The second defaillance concerns the keys of interpretation. As Sgreccia and Fisso outlines, moderate anthropocentrism of philosophically and theologically founded personalism involves the specificity of the "ought to be" of man, who is requested to preserve nature. "Because of his supremacy, man is compelled to respect Nature as its indispensable guardian. This task involves the possibility of conferring a different value to various natural entities, never reducing them to mere things to exploit”(49).

I think that the concept of custody that Sgreccia and Fisso propose constitutes another key of interpretation of an ecophilosophy founded on relational ontology: it outlines not only the theological dimension of man-nature relation - nature is a gift of God and man must not dominate but preserve it- but also justifies at the fundative and philosophical level the relation between man and the being, between anthropology and cosmology.

The concept of man-guardian recalls some elements of the philosophy of Heidegger: "Along the path to poverty opened by freedom that allows the unconditioned existence of the being to exist, man finds his own role as guard of nothing and shepherd of the being. In fact, only where man discloses himself as opening free from any predetermination so as nothing can hide the manifestation of the being, the being avoids its occultation and discloses itself as aleteia, as not hiding, as truth. Man is the guardian of this truth as the shepherd is the guardian of the flock...”(50).

"The dignity of the shepherd is thus to be called by the being itself to be the guard of its truth”(51).

Nature must not be destroyed, instrumentalized or dissipated, it is a patrimony that has to be preserved. To preserve it means the necessity for protecting and, at the same time, fructifying creation.

In Simone Weil's words: "May the whole universe, from this stone under my foot until the remoted stars, exists for me in every moment, as Agnes for Arnolphe and the coffer for Scrooge. If I will, world can belong to me as the treasure belongs to the miser, but it is a treasure that does not increase”(52).

To protect and fructify nature is thus the ethical aim: this difficult balance is first of all achieved by maintaining, as fundamental purpose, earth in good conditions for the habitat of human life.

One of the greatest challenges that today ecology shouts at the ethics of industrialized societies precisely concerns the responsibility toward future generations.
As Jonas outlines, the new power of science and techniques involves a new responsibility toward the future of mankind. "Man is no more a simple extreme executor but also a potential destroyer of teleological effort of nature, his will must be charged with the assertion and his power with the negation of the "not being". The future of mankind is the first duty of the human general behaviour in this age of civilization of techniques that has became, modo negativo, omnipotent"(53).

As we know, Jonas entails man's responsibility toward future generations on the ontology of biology. On the contrary, what is - if it exists - a theoretical basis of responsibility toward future generations based on relational ontology?

Relation is the search for meaning but at the same time it is prospect of immortality and aspiration to infinity. The chronological time of human mortality may be sublimed in nature's cosmological temporality: as in the alternation of seasons, life on the earth continues, so mankind survives to man thanks to the survival of world.

Thus, in a diachronic perspective, relation takes place thanks to the possibility for a future human life and life on the earth is the necessary condition for this possibility to take place.

This is, for example, the point of view of the ecological philosophy of Hanna Arendt: chronologic time of human mortality is sublimed in "infinite" temporality of the world that goes on, indissolubly linked to the life of the earth.

The most profound and richest aim of human hope - as the philosopher affirms - is eternity, the overcome of death and the way for acquiring immortality is generation.

Love for world - as the philosopher continues - includes love for life and love for earth. If we want that the world of people survive, we must preserve the earth; earth is thus the quintessence of human condition. Without earth, life can not exist and life is the link between world and earth. Life makes birth possible, birth is the beginning of world that goes on(54).

When Hannah Arendt was writing "Vita Activa" - as Alessandro Dal Lago affirms in his Preface to "Vita Activa" - ecology was only a specialized sector of natural sciences and the first manifestos of ecologic wave (that would increase from the 70's) were not be written yet. Moreover, Arendt's prognosis about the destruction of environment did not derive from specialized researches but from a reflection about the meaning of human actions. Any organicistic and vitalistic assumption preceding a definition of man-creation relation was quite alien to her thought. On the other hand, in this work as well in others, the concept of nature has not any instructive or idyllic role: first of all it refers to birth.

The nature-birth link allows us to consider the senselessness of a process that we may call the conscious or unconscious destruction of the places of birth, i.e. the houses that man built during cultural evolution as well as earth supporting them and the sky overhanging them. From this point of view, by destroying nature, human society destroys the basic condition for its own birth and so its freedom(55).

The ecophilosophy of Hannah Arendt is thus an exquisitely anthropocentric ecophilosophy that considers man the only subject who has a value in the ecosystem but that recognizes the deep existential relation between man's actions and nature's life.

As we have already outlined, the concept of custody entails to maintain, protect as well as fructify nature.

Fructifying nature requires some human actions in order to harmonize the thought in the perspective of having with the thought in the perspective of being, the instrumental logic with the contemplative glance.

To pursue this difficult balance it is necessary a wide place for the exercise of virtues especially the virtue of prudence (that must evaluate all circumstances according the peculiarity of the situation and with far-sightedness, taking also into account the future of human life), the virtue of temperance (that must protect man from the greed of the logic of having), and last but not least the virtue of justice that broadens our glance on whole mankind living on the earth, a justice founded on human solidarity.
The philosophical perspective of relational ontology especially and particularly underlines this dimension of solidarity as the actual and real "sign" of the relation among men. An ecophilosophy based on relational ontology that does not promote solidarity among people would be a contradiction in terms. The concept of custody, based on relational ontology, must adopt a large and long glance that includes all the environment-homes existing on earth.

I think that the words of John Paul II are enlightening in this sense: "The earth is essentially a common heritage whose fruits must be the benefit of all men. God destines the earth and every thing it contains to be used by all men and people as Second Vatican Council reaffirmed (Cost. Ap. Gaudium et Spes). It derives from this some direct consequences for our problem. It is not fair that the privileged few continue to accumulate superfluous goods dilapidating natural resources while crowds of people live in extreme poverty at the minimum level of sustenance. Now the dramatic situation of ecologic failure teaches us that individual and general cupidity and egoism are contrary to the order of creation in which mutual interdependence is inscribed" (56).

---

(2) For the distinction between anthropocentrism-biocentrism-ecocentrism, see BARTOLOMMEI S., Etica e ambiente, Milano, Guerini 1989.
(3) A useful classification of environmental ethics based on the different models of philosophical argumentation is exposed in DELLAVALE S. L'uman e il naturale in IDEM (a cura di), Per un agire ecologico, Milano: Baldini e Castoldi 1998:11-56.
(5) For a complete analysis of the ontologically founded personalism and bioethics, see: SGRECCIA E., Manuale di bioetica Volume I Fondamenti ed etica biomedica, Milano: Vita e Pensiero 1999.
(6) PASSMORE J., Eliminare le sciocchezze. Riflessioni sulla frenesia ecologica, DELLAVALE (a cura di), Per un agire ecologico...p.247-278.
(7) The choice of indicating John Passmore as an exponent of strong anthropocentrism, differently from what is often indicated in literature, is up to the fact that the so-called strong anthropocentrism or cowboy ethics, founded on the assertion that natural resources are endless and completely at the disposal of human consumptions, seems to only have a historical value and to be no more represented at the level of literature on environmental ethics. Thus I preferred to attribute to utilitarian anthropocentrism the definition of strong anthropocentrism (even if it is often called weak) in order to more differentiate it from weak or moderate personalistic anthropocentrism.
(11) For an outline of the thought of Mary Daly, see : DALY M., Beyond God the Father: toward a philosophy of women's liberation, Boston: Beacon Press, 1974.
(12) MELE , La bioetica al femminile...
(14) A commentary of the philosophy of Goodpaster is contained in TALLACHINI, Etiche della terra...p.37
(17) SGRECCIA, FISSO Etica dell'ambiente, Milano, Vita e Pensiero 1997, 41.
(21) DELEAGUE., Storia dell'ecologia...p.197-221.
(22) TALLACCHINI, Introduzione.Una scienza per la natura, una filosofia per la terra, in: TALLACCHINI ., (a cura di) Etiche della terra...p.15.
(24) DELEAGUE., Storia dell'ecologia...p.197-221.
(31) NAESS, Ecosofia ... .
(35) An interesting analysis of the perspective of the relational ontology can be found in BELLINO F., La storia della bioetica e la svolta pedagogica attuale, in Atti del Congresso Internazionale "I diritti della persona nella prospettiva bioetica e giuridica", Roma 7-8 settembre 2000, not yet in print.
(36) The text of The text of YANNARAS CH., are transcribed and expounded in BELLINO, La storia della bioetica ...
(37) The reference to NHAT HANH can be always found in BELLINO, La storia della bioetica...
(38) Ibidem
(40) The texts of Simone Weil with commentaries are transcribed in: MELE , La bioetica al femminile...p.85-89
(41) Ibidem.


(43) BELLINO, La storia della bioetica ...

(44) Ibidem.

(45) GADOW, Existential ecology...p.601.


(49) SGRECCIA E., FISSO M.B., Etica dell'ambiente, Medicina e Morale, 1997; Suppl.3: 41

(50) GALIMBERTI U., Invito al pensiero ...p.71.

(51) ABBAGNANO N., Storia della filosofia, TEA 1993, p.488.

(52) WEIL S., L'ombra e la grazia, Milano: Rusconi, 1985:128.


(54) For an analysis of the relationship among love for world, birth and world in Hannah Arendt, see: RICCI SINDONI P., Hannah Arendt. Come raccontare il mondo, Roma, Studium 1995; MELE V., La bioetica al femminile...p.75-76


MAURO COZZOLI
LA LEGGE NATURALE A DIFESA DELLA VITA
Le ragioni e i limiti della difesa della vita fisica

La vita ha sempre interpellato la morale in ordine alle possibilità e alle condizioni d'intervento su di essa, alla obbligatorietà e ai limiti della sua tutela. Queste interpellanze si sono fatte oggi più pressanti, complesse e urgenti, in ragione dei progressi biomedici e della loro traduzione biotecnologica, con l'enorme carico di questioni che le crescenti possibilità manipolatrici e invasive pongono e si trascinano. E' legittimo il loro impiego? E' anche doveroso? Lo è in ogni caso? Quali sono e da che cosa sono determinati i limiti d'intervento e di difesa della vita? Alla morale compete offrire risposte. Risposte non soltanto normative, intese cioè a tracciare i confini del lecito e dell'illecito e a configurare gli obblighi e la loro vigenza. Ma anche - ed oggi diciamo ancor più - motivate: intese cioè a dare ragione delle norme, in modo da essere trovate non solo vincolanti ma anche credibili. E questo non nell'ambito del proprio credo, delle proprie tradizioni o del proprio ethos, ma su scala mondiale, al cui livello si pongono oggi le questioni bioetiche suscite dal progresso biomedico e biotecnologico e acuete dalla ventata secolaristica e relativistica che ha investito e problematizzato il senso e il valore della vita. Siamo in presenza di una delle grandi sfide alla mondializzazione dell'etica.

E' una sfida per la Chiesa, chiamata a dischiudere la via della salvezza a tutti gli uomini sulla strada della vita morale[1]. E' in questa prospettiva che il magistero della Chiesa e la teologia ritrovano, ripensano e rilanciano la perenne attualità della natura umana e della legge naturale come fonte e criterio d'intelligenza etica, d'intelligenza in particolare della verità della vita e dei suoi obblighi morali.

Qui vogliamo delinearla e proporla in ordine alle ragioni e ai limiti della difesa della vita fisica. A un duplice livello di riflessione: fondativo, il primo, inteso ad accreditare la natura e la legge naturale come principio e fondamento di eticità; normativo, il secondo, inteso a configurare gli obblighi morali che ne conseguono. Al fine di illuminare la rilevanza e l'attualità per la Chiesa della via della natura e della legge naturale alla conoscenza del progetto di Dio sulla vita, ho scelto di corredare e suffragare questo studio con una documentazione attinta al magistero della Chiesa, al suo più alto livello d'insegnamento.

NATURA E LEGGE NATURALE

Nella temperie culturale che ha investito e travolto il concetto ed ogni riferimento alla natura e alla legge naturale, occorre ritrovarne il senso genuino e pregnante, riscattandole dalle distorsioni del passato e dai fraintendi del presente. Una più attenta e attualizzante considerazione è doverosa e possibile per l'intelligenza, provocata oggi dalle istanze ineludibili e dalle sfide radicali della complessità, della storicità e della prassi. La teologia e la Chiesa non rifuggono da esse, ma si pongono in ascolto vigile e dialogico.

Prestando attenzione alle critiche, molte delle quali legittime e stimolanti, e a partire da queste, dobbiamo prima di tutto mostrare la fondatezza logica ed epistemologica d'ogni richiamo etico e bioetico in specie alla natura e alla legge naturale.

NATURA E VITA

Natura e vita sono termini correlativi. La natura abbraccia la vita ed ha nella vita la sua manifestazione nobile e più insigne. La vita, a sua volta, è comprensibile nell'orizzonte di senso della natura[2]. Senza questo costitutivo richiamo alla natura, essa tende a perdere ogni elemento di significazione e differenziazione ed ogni valenza immutabile e perenne. Diventa un elemento della cultura, relativo al fluttuare delle opinioni, delle sensibilità e delle ideologie. Senza relazione all'ontologia, vale a dire
all'essenza cioè all'essere (essenza da esse) che la sostanzia e che la natura esprime, la vita diventa una variabile relativa a tutto e a tutti. Così perdiamo un senso unitario e condiviso di questo bene basilare e primario. Ciascuno se ne modella il proprio. Il che è sintomo di un regresso, perché discordare sulla vita allontana le coscienze, impedendo la condivisione, la comunicazione e la reciprocità. Per quanto il concetto di natura possa passare per il vaglio della critica, come è avvenuto nel nostro tempo, non possiamo prescindere da essa e relegarla all'archeologia semantica, quasi una nozione d'altri tempi. Perdere il riferimento alla natura è smarrire l'habitat ermeneutico della vita ed esporla a tutte le espropriazioni e ideazioni di senso.

Porsi nel contesto e nell'alveo veritativo della natura significa accostare e comprendere la vita attraverso una fenomenologia di penetrazione del dato ossia di lettura meta-fisica, in grado di doppiare l'evento sperimentale e descrittivo, attraverso un conoscere di senso e di valore. In tal modo la vita che sottostà a tutti gli esseri viventi assume rilievo. L'unica vita, che fa di un essere un vivente, si diversifica secondo lo statuto ontologico di ciascuno. La natura è la via all'essere e perciò alla verità originaria e specifica delle "specie" viventi. Non basta un approccio empirico e descrittivo. Questo coglie gli elementi sperimentali e superficiali: importanti e indispensabili in ordine a un sapere scientifico e tecnico, ma insufficienti e inadeguati a percepire la sostanza e il valore. Per questi occorre un'intelligenza meta-empirica, in grado di penetrare il dato (l'empiria) e cogliere la natura (la physis), l'essenza di ogni vivente, e affermarne la dignità secondo la specie.

Questo oggi va detto in modo esplicito e convinto. Perché la dittatura del sapere empirico e l'antimefisica del pensiero dominante sbarrano le porte ad ogni intelligenza in termini di natura, sbilanciando sulla cultura ogni discorso concernente il significato, la dignità e il valore. Con il risultato di un generale appiattimento delle forme di vita, delle cui sporgenze di senso e di valore decide autonomamente e arbitrariamente l'uomo: questi diventa il padrone e l'arbitro della vita. Non può essere diversamente quando la vita è svuotata d'ogni oggettività e relativizzata all'opinare dei soggetti. Si produce così lo scivolamento dalla natura alla cultura. Questa è "fatta" dall'uomo, è perciò relativa all'uomo: soggetta alle sue sensibilità e disponibilità. La natura invece è "fatta" prima, da una sapienza creatrice che chiama l'uomo all'ascolto contemplativo e conoscitivo[3].

Non si tratta di contrapporre natura a cultura, ma di arginare la deriva culturale cui è sottoposta oggi la "verità della vita" e di suffragarle le debite istanze culturali cui la vita non può essere sottratta. Senza dubbio nel passato la riflessione sulla vita ha conosciuto uno sbilanciamento sul versante della cultura, con scarsa attenzione ai risvolti culturali. La metodologia era pressoché deduttivistica, potendo disporre di assai pochi e spesso incompleti e inadeguati contributi scientifici e fenomenici. La riflessione risentiva dell'astrattezza di un discorso in termini di essenze, sostanze e accidenti. Ma il congedo dalla natura, a beneficio di un metodo esclusivamente induttivo della verità e della dignità della vita, la priva di referenti valoriali, abbandonandola alla congerie di aporie in cui s'impiglia oggi il discorso sulla vita o alla pochezza e indifferenza di senso coi cui è considerata. La vita trae significato e valore dalla natura, ma trova forma concreta e storica nella cultura, in cui di volta in volta e di contesto in contesto fa risplendere o adombra il suo valore. La cultura è un habitat di presupposti, opinioni e disposizioni che lo sviluppo scientifico, da una parte, e la comunicazione mass-mediale, dall'altra, vanno ispezionando e globalizzando. Dalla qualità della cultura dipende in buona parte la permeabilità della natura alle coscienze. La verità della natura senza la mediazione della cultura viene a mancare, oggi specialmente, del supporto immediato e pervasivo di comunicazione. Per questo il risvolto e il tramite culturale non solo non può essere trascurato ed eluso, ma dev'essere acquisito alla coscienza e alla responsabilità di ogni riflessione e amore per la vita.

LA VITA UMANA

Abbiamo fin qui parlato della vita tout court, in riferimento alla natura che la significa. Ma è proprio la natura a stagliarne e differenziarne le forme, a farne risaltare la forma eminente e singolare: quella
umana. E' nell'umano che la vita raggiunge ed esprime la dignità e il valore più elevato, ma di una elevazione trascendentente a motivo di una discontinuità o disomogeneità rispetto ad altre forme di vita La vita vegetale e quella animale appartengono al mondo degli elementi, ovvero degli esseri predeterminati, la cui vita è interamente segnata e preordinata dalla natura. Questa, attraverso un complesso di induzioni e reazioni vegetative (nelle piante) e psico-fisiche (negli animali), presiede all'attività e al ciclo vitale di ciascun organismo. Le stesse pulsioni, istinti, sensazioni e sentimenti negli animali rispondono a tale predeterminazione. A differenza della vita umana, la quale s'eleva con lo spirito sulle forme pre-umane di vita. Dire spirito è dire libertà, mediante cui il vivente umano è in grado di assumere la propria vita (e la realtà animata e inanimata che lo circonda), di indirizzarla e progettare. Egli la comprende con l'intelligenza e decide di essa con la volontà: le due facoltà spirituali che strutturano la libertà. Con lo spirito il vivente umano sporge su ogni altro vivente. La sua vita è al vertice della gerarchia dei viventi, perché non interamente predeterminata dalla natura ma dai diversi "posta nelle sue mani": egli è soggetto di determinazione. Che anzi dell'individuo umano solamente si può dire che vive davvero, perché soggetto della propria vita: egli vive, non è vissuto dalla vita. Il suo spirito è il principio attivo della propria vita. Gli animali senza lo spirito magis aguntur quam agunt, perché determinati e indotti dalla loro natura. Gli indvidui umani invece dalla natura sono costituiti soggetti attivi della propria vita[4].

E' la natura il principio贯通的 primo e perenne della vita umana e della sua verità, perché rivelativo dell'essenza, della qualità sostanziale e perciò caratterizzante e immutabile. Senza questo ancoraggio logico ed epistemologico alla natura, la vita umana è in balia delle ideologie di turno e delle opinioni dominanti. Non potendo far valere una verità assiale ossia sostanziale, cui articolare ogni concezione e risvolto culturale, la vita umana subisce gli sbilanciamenti delle tendenze e delle preferenze socio-culturali. Essa è compresa e definita a partire da queste, piuttosto che dall'ontologia qualificativa del vivere umano. Nella disaffezione e nella disabilitudine delle intelligenze al conoscere metafisico, in grado di raggiungere la verità trascendentale, si mantiene un profilo conoscitivo più modesto e debole, di tipo descrittivo, determinato da criteri di efficacia, convenienza e soddisfazione[5].

Allora si fa strada una concezione indifferenziata della vita, incapace di cogliere e salvaguardare il valore e la dignità singolari della vita umana, rispetto ad altri viventi. Al punto di equiparare la vita animale o di talune specie animali alla vita umana o da disconoscere la dignità umana della vita in determinati stadi del suo sviluppo o condizioni del suo essere al mondo.

**QUALE NATURA?**

Natura è termine che si è venuto caricando di una pluralità di significati, così da essere preso e adoperato con accezioni diverse e non previamente chiarite e condivise nell'ampio dibattito che si è acceso intorno ad essa in epoca contemporanea. Il che è fonte di non pochi equivoci e incomprensioni. La presa di distanza e l'abbandono della natura come fonte del conoscere è in buona parte da attribuire al malinteso concettuale. Cui si è abbondantemente prestato - come abbiamo rilevato - un uso astrattivo ed essenzialistico, vale a dire astorico e disincarnato del concetto di natura da parte dei suoi tradizionali fruitori: un concetto assai più speculativo che significativo, come tale alieno dalle frequentazioni conoscitive dell'uomo pratico e concreto di oggi.

Sostanzialmente la nozione di natura ha subito due radicali sbilanciamenti o riduzioni. Il primo di tipo spiritualistico, tendente a concepirla come un ordine di essenze astratte, incapace di cogliere appieno e dar conto della concretezza esistenziale, individuale, corporea, sociale, storica e cosmica del vivere umano (come anche del disegno storico-salvifico del Dio biblico e dell'evento cristologico).

Così da comprendere e accreditare l'uomo e la sua vita secondo una concezione sbilanciata sulle dimensioni e facoltà spirituali. La natura dell'uomo coinciderebbe essenzialmente con l'anima.
Il secondo sbilanciamento e riduzione è di tipo fisicistico, in senso sia cosmologico che biologico. Nel primo senso la natura coincide con ciò che chiamiamo il creato, il quale abbraccia tutto il mondo infraumano dell'universo inanimato, vegetale e animale. Verso questa accezione e forma della natura c'è oggi una sensibile e crescente attenzione, propagata e acuita dalla questione ecologica: dal bisogno di salvaguardare le risorse e gli equilibri ecosistemici dall'accresciuto e progressivo potere di sfruttamento dell'uomo. E' questo il senso e l'ambito che il termine natura evoca generalmente e immediatamente nell'immaginario collettivo: natura come mondo allo stato brado e spontaneo, non sfruttato e contaminato, e perciò come contesto di vita per l'uomo. Nel secondo senso la natura viene a coincidere con la vita fisica dell'uomo, vale a dire con le espressioni corporee del vivere umano, così che naturale è ciò che è conforme alla composizione anatomica o alla dinamica fisiologica dell'organismo umano. Esso si oppone ad artificiale: ciò che supplisce, integra o sostituisce un organo o una funzione biologica. Così, per esempio, è naturale il parto fisiologico, l'allattamento al seno, la dieta alimentare, l'estensione dai rapporti sessuali nei periodi genesiaci come metodo di regolazione della fertilità; è artificiale il parto cesareo, l'allattamento con latte confezionato, la dieta farmacologica, il ricorso ai mezzi contraccettivi[6].

Questa sono concezioni parziali e unilaterali e perciò inadeguate ad esprimere la ricchezza profonda e pregnante della natura in genere e della natura umana che ne è il fulcro e la cifra di significazione. La natura esprime il dato reale e veritativo originale e primario dell'esistenza. Così che alla sua luce noi comprendiamo l'essenza degli esistenti, conosciamo cioè la verità costitutiva di tutto ciò che è: la verità dell'essere (ontologica) e del valore (assiologica) e delle relazioni fra gli esseri. Conoscere la natura è portarsi alle radici, alle manifestazioni native della verità. Per la via dell'autocoscienza del conoscente, che s'interroga sull'essenza del proprio essere: chi sono io? E' da questa autocoscienza e dal conoscere, che essa instaura ed espande, che emerge il senso personale della natura: natura come persona. La natura affiora alla coscienza come percezione della centralità e interezza del soggetto conoscente, e delle relazioni che lo rapportano a tutti gli altri esseri. E' quanto esprime il concetto di persona, che comprende e integra tutto questo. Non si tratta di una natura astratta e disincarnata e neppure cosmologica e fisica in senso riduttivo, ma della natura della persona (personalistica): unitotalità individuale di spirito e corpo, in relazione creaturale e salvifica a Dio, in rapporto amicale e sociale con gli altri soggetti umani, in solidarietà con il mondo e con la storia. Espressione, questa, di una concezione globale della natura, integratrice di tutte le componenti e le relazioni dell'essere umano. Essa è compresa a partire dal soggetto umano e dalle sue relazioni, secondo cui prendono senso e valore gli esistenti e i legami tra essi[7].

La verità che ne emerge - la verità della natura - non è una verità derivata, un "prodotto" dell'uomo: il "risultato" di una elaborazione mentale o culturale. E' la verità costitutiva degli esseri e dei loro legami. Verità essenziale e decisiva e perciò ineludibile e inalterabile: da essa non si può prescindere e non è soggetta all'arbitrio dell'uomo. Nei suoi confronti l'uomo non ha un potere manipolatore. Si dispone piuttosto in atteggiamento di ascolto, riconoscimento e fedeltà. Perché la natura non è disegno del suo ingegno e della sua mano. La natura è presupposto e principio primo: "ciò a partire da cui" la mente umana argomenta ed elabora e le mani dell'uomo trasformano e plasmano. Prescindere dalla natura è attribuirsi un potere creatore della verità che l'uomo non ha. Tutte le volte che lo fa imbarca sempre una via umanamente perdente e deludente.

**DIO E LA NATURA**

La verità della natura appartiene al Creatore, che l'ha pensata e l'ha posta in essere, e ha dato all'uomo l'intelligenza per conoscerla e la volontà per farsene carico. La natura di soggetto dell'uomo è in questo suo essere non semplicemente parte della natura ma sporgente con il suo spirito su di essa, per comprenderla e assumeorla. In questo l'uomo riflette la dignità personale (è "ad immagine", dice la

NATURA E LEGGE NATURA

La verità della natura non è solo diretta all'intelligenza concettuale, è rivolta anche alla ragione pratica. Essa infatti è portatrice di significati non solo teoretici, ma anche etici: significati non meramente concettuali, espressioni delle essenze, ma anche pratici, espressioni delle esigenze. In genere dalla verità interna agli enti, ai loro dinamismi e ai loro nessi, la conoscenza deriva un sapere non solo scientifico ma anche operativo. Questa è legge (metodologia) del sapere. Ora l'operatività concerne non solo il fare empirico e produttivo ma anche l'agire morale e realizzativo delle persone. Il primo è sotto l'istanza del sapere poietico, proprio del conoscere fisico. Il secondo sotto l'istanza del sapere etico, proprio del conoscere meta-fisico. Il sapere poietico deriva leggi tecniche di funzionamento e produzione dai dati delle scienze empiriche o positive. Il sapere etico deriva norme morali di comportamento e azione dai significati delle scienze meta-empiriche o filosofiche. Tali significati hanno valenza non solo di verità (verum) ma anche di bene (bonum), nonché di bello (pulchrum). Una fenomenologia della persona - nella integralità del suo essere individuale (in sé), creaturale e trascendentemente (da e per Dio), relazionale e sociale (con gli altri), cosmiscamente e storicamente (nel mondo e nella storia) - mette in luce una pluralità di beni, in cui si rifrange e da cui è costellato il bene centrale della persona. In essi la persona si esprime e attraverso essi si compie[8]. Il che equivale a dire che convengono in modo originario e finalizzante alla persona: appartengono alla sua identità e alla sua realizzazione. In essi prende forma primaria la natura della persona[9]. Così abbiamo il bene, per esempio, della vita fisica, dell'integrità corporea, della sessualità, della libertà, del lavoro, del diritto, dell'amicizia, del matrimonio, della famiglia, della società, della politica, della preghiera, della fede, della cultura, dell'ambiente...

Tali beni sono anzitutto ontici, nel senso che rispecchiano l'essere della persona: ciò in cui esso prende forma sotto un aspetto particolare. La morale classica li chiama beni fisici: elementi, qualità, requisiti, inclinazioni attinenti alla persona. La loro carenza è un male ontico, un'anomalia fisica: la semplice mancanza di qualcosa che comunemente compete a qualcuno. Così, ad esempio, male ontico o fisico, patito da un individuo, può essere un handicap corporeo o mentale, la mancanza di libertà, una limitazione di libertà, la perdita di una persona cara, un insufficiente grado d'istruzione.

In quanto avanzano esigenze di rispetto, tali beni sono morali[10]. Come tali comportano obblighi, vincoli, doveri, responsabilità. Sono non soltanto indicativi ma anche imperativi. Essi sono valori da riconoscere, assumere, tutelare, onorare, promuovere. Così che disconoscerli, offenderli, danneggiarli, violarli è un male morale, e perciò eticamente illecito, inammissibile e colpevole: è un peccato. Il che rende cattivo o malvagio un individuo. Nessuno è riprovevole per il difetto di un bene fisico o il patimento di un male fisico: per esempio la malattia, la povertà materiale, l'analfabetismo, l'ignoranza del Vangelo. Lo si è invece per la negligenza di un bene morale e soprattutto per il compimento di un male morale: per esempio, la calunnia, l'ipocrisia, il tradimento, l'apostasia.

Questo vuol dire che la natura è principio non solo di un'ontologia ma anche di un'assiologia e quindi di un'etica. Il complesso di beni morali o valori espressi dalla natura della persona, in ragione degli obblighi che avanzano, è alla base dell'etica. Essi costituiscono come l'alфabeto dell'etica: gli elementi primissimi, che prendono forma imperativa immediata nelle proposizioni apodittiche. Queste esprimono, in forma imperante o proibente, la carica di esigenza prima, generale e immediata di
ciascun valore. L'esempio più significativo è costituito dal decalogo: i comandamenti della legge mosaica non sono che la traduzione imperativa primaria di ben precisi valori o beni morali[11]. Sorge e comincia a delinearsi così la *legge naturale*. Di questa, ben morali e proposizioni apodittiche costituiscono le espressioni originarie[12]. San Tommaso li chiama "principi primi" della legge naturale. Essi sono dati con la coscienza stessa della persona, della sua verità e dignità. Appartengono alla sinderesi, che è il nucleo originario della coscienza. La loro conoscenza non è di tipo argomentativo ma percettivo, se non proprio intuitivo. Nel senso che sono appresi con il senso stesso della persona e del suo valore. Non c'è senso della persona senza di essi ed in essi si esprime, prende forma il bene della persona[13].

Nei principi primi la norma d'azione espressa è piuttosto generica e astratta. Essi dicono molto in generale ma poco in particolare: nella concretizzazione, complessità e problematicità dell'agire concreto e tematico. Per cui c'è bisogno di una mediazione normativa, in risposta alle interpellanze etiche avanzate da determinate e ricorrenti questioni morali. Qui i principi primi diventano criteri e referenti di specifiche e concrete norme di comportamento, elaborate dall'autorità morale per via argomentativa.

Tali norme sono di legge naturale anch'esse, essendo implicazioni logiche, determinazioni applicative di principi primi. Come tali sono dette "principi derivati" o "secondi" della legge naturale. Il carattere *naturale* e perciò razionale di queste norme è principio e garanzia della loro universalità. E perciò della loro comunicabilità e condivisibilità tra gli uomini, nel tempo e nello spazio. La legge naturale è il *comune denominatore etico* nella molteplicità e diversità delle culture[14]. Ma anche e ancor più in un mondo in via di globalizzazione, alla ricerca preoccupata del codice etico: il codice normativo del "villaggio globale" e della "casa comune". Per quante critiche e resistenze la legge naturale possa oggi incontrare, da essa uomini e popoli non possono prescindere. Della legge naturale c'è un insopprimibile e impellente bisogno, quale garanzia dei beni e dei diritti fondamentali e universalì da assicurare ed esigere per tutti.

**LEGGE DELLA PERSONA**

Attinta alla verità della persona come identità e come fine, la legge naturale non ha carattere precettistico o legalistico: espressione di un voluntarismo eteronomico, fosse pure di provenienza teonomica. Essa cioè non è elaborata, compresa e fatta valere come un codice di atti e comportamenti comandati da qualcuno dal di fuori, fosse pure da Dio. Essa è proposta e percepita come un complesso di esigenze e compiti suscitati dalla verità della persona, che è lo stesso soggetto agente. Alla sua base c'è il *logos* (verità) della persona, il quale implica un *axios* (valore), per se stesso portatore di *deon* (dovere), che prende corpo nel *nomos* (la legge), in vista del *telos* (fine) realizzativo della persona. Al principio, al centro e alla fine della legge naturale c'è la persona[15]. C'è l'essere della persona, di cui la legge naturale enuncia il *dover-essere*, insieme ontologico-realizzativo ed etico-normativo: il secondo in ordine al primo, come via al primo; ed il primo come prospettiva di senso del secondo. Per questo la legge naturale non è il codice legale di un Dio legislatore e giudice, che detta all'uomo le condizioni salvifiche. Ma l'armonia e l'ordine della natura, secondo cui il Creatore ha forgiato e correlato le creature e che queste rispecchiano[16].

Per questo San Tommaso non la definisce come comando (imperium) della volontà di Dio, ma come ordinamento della ragione (ordinatio rationis). La legge naturale cioè esprime un ordine normativo e vincolante, conosciuto ed enunciato dall'intelligenza[17]. Il che mette in luce e in primo piano la valenza antropologica della legge naturale: legge dell'intelligenza, norma razionale[18]. Ma in filigrana si scorge lo sfondo teologico. Usando rettamente della ragione l'uomo entra in sintonia con la sapienza creatrice divina. In questo senso la legge naturale è il riflesso nella coscienza e nell'intelligenza dell'uomo della *legge eterna* (la stessa legge naturale come essa sta nella mente del Creatore)[19]. Essa è - come la dice S. Tommaso - "partecipazione della legge eterna nella creatura razionale"[20]. Dio dunque non comanda all'uomo la sua legge ma gli ha dato l'intelligenza per cercarla, conoscerla e farla
Il che accredita una comprensione personalista non precettistica, una fondazione autonoma non eteronoma della legge naturale. Il suo significato è profondamente umano ed insieme divino. Il Dio della legge naturale non è il legislatore e giudice delle eteronomie divine, ma il creatore e redentore dell'autonomia del soggetto etico.

La stessa rivelazione e la fede avvalorano questa valenza antropologica e impianto personalista della legge naturale. Esse non sono principio di un volontarismo biblico, che congeda la ragione etica, ma della novità etica cristiana: di nuovi richiami e contributi, propri della parola e della grazia, alla coscienza e intelligenza dell'uomo. Il che è messo in evidenza specialmente dal principio della creazione e dal principio cristologico. Il primo sta a richiamare l'appartenenza della natura alla storia della salvezza: questa incomincia già con la Genesi, vale a dire con la creazione, la quale è integrata a pieno titolo nell'alleanza di Dio con l'uomo. Il principio cristologico sta a significare la partecipazione della natura umana alla natura divina: con l'incarnazione il Figlio di Dio assume la natura dell'uomo, e con la risurrezione la eleva alla vita di Dio. Insieme i due princìpi stanno a mostrare come l'ordine soprannaturale della grazia non sia un ordine appositivo o disconoscitivo dell'ordine della natura, ma di riconoscimento, assunzione, redenzione ed elevazione di questo. La legge naturale è la legge che Cristo non è venuto ad abolire ma a portare a compimento nella sua pienezza di senso e di esigenza. La legge nuova (legge della grazia, legge di carità, legge dello Spirito Santo, legge di perfezione e di libertà) non è una legge altra e aliena alla legge naturale, ma il suo perfezionamento conoscitivo e operativo: è la legge naturale entro l'economia d'illuminazione e abilitazione della grazia. Gratia non tollit sed perficit naturam: la grazia non prescinde e non annulla ma compie e perfeziona la natura.

LEGGE NATURALE E DIFESA DELLA VITA

Sullo sfondo della natura si staglia e delinea la verità, il valore e la legge della vita. La natura costituisce il background di senso veritativo e normativo della vita umana. Su di esso noi comprendiamo i doveri che il bene della vita comporta in ordine alla sua tutela e promozione e nel contempo i limiti della sua difesa. Senza questo referente razionale e universale della vita, la vita umana è esposta a criteri valutativi volubili e arbitrarì. Essa non risponde più alla sua valenza oggettiva ma a precomprensioni soggettive e a sensibilità culturali cangianti, alla mercé di poteri forti, manipolatori dell'opinione pubblica e della legalità democratica. Nonostante tutto la vita umana è un bene oggettivo e avanza esigenze oggettive di rispetto. Questa oggettività è configurata e garantita dalla natura e dalla legge naturale.

LEGGE NATURALE E BIOETICA

In relazione alla vita il logos, l'axios e il deon espressi dalla natura hanno nel bios un basilare campo di inveramento. Non si può comprendere la vita umana e gli obblighi che essa crea a prescindere dalla corporeità biologica. Questa è portatrice di elementi veritativi decisivi per conoscere lo statuto ontologico ed etico della vita umana. Perché il corpo è manifestazione dello spirito e componente coessenziale del vivere umano. Nel bios corporeo prende forma visibile la vita della persona. Così che la natura corporea della persona ha valenza più che biologica: ha "significato morale". Ciò che il corpo rivela nella sua struttura organica come nelle sue dinamiche fisiologiche non è eticamente indifferentante ma significativo: è rilevante in ordine alle esigenze di rispetto, tutela e promozione della vita umana come anche alla cessazione di queste esigenze. Ciò sta a dire che la conoscenza e la determinazione della legge naturale nel campo della vita esige e s'avvale della razionalità biologica. E' questa, per esempio, a dirsi quando incomincia la vita individuale umana e quando invece essa finisce, al fine di precisare il momento iniziale e terminale dei nostri obblighi, delle cure cioè ad essa dovute. Gli apporti delle scienze biologiche e mediche, e i loro sviluppi sono importanti per una migliore e più precisa comprensione e determinazione della legge morale naturale nel campo della vita.
Il nomos che la legge naturale esprime in questo campo, il complesso cioè delle norme a tutela della vita fisica e che oggi va sotto il nome di bioetica, ha in sé e non può non avere una sua intrinseca ragione nevolenza. Insegnato dalla Chiesa, non ha nulla di dogmatico, perché essa lo attinge al conoscere biologico e meta-biologico, frutto dell'intelligenza verificatrice e interpretativa, empirica e valutativa, come tale comunicabile e condivisibile da ogni uomo, indipendentemente dal credo religioso. Ovviamente la Chiesa non prescinde dalla fede, dall'intellectus fidei del vangelo. Essa annuncia il "vangelo della vita", principio fontale e ispiratore del messaggio bioetico della Chiesa. Ma lo fa nell'esplicita e dichiarata persuasione del suo intrinseco e profondo significato antropologico, vale a dire umano e umanizzante e perciò razionalmente pervio ad ogni intelligenza[27]. La dignità e il destino soprannaturale della vita humana presuppone e porta a pienezza di senso e di valore tutto il significato naturale[28]. Per la Chiesa, la natura è fonte di verità come la rivelazione; e la ragione è via conoscitiva in sinergia con la fede. Non può essere né laica né confessionale: dev'essere semplicemente ragionevole. La dignità e il destino soprannaturale della vita humana presuppone e porta a pienezza di senso e di valore tutto il significato naturale[28]. Per la Chiesa, la natura è fonte di verità come la rivelazione; e la ragione è via conoscitiva in sinergia con la fede. Non può essere né laica né confessionale: dev'essere semplicemente ragionevole. Chiaro che, come esprime valori, diritti e norme di comportamento deve poter legittimare razionalmente. La Chiesa e la teologia lo fanno in nome della natura umana e della legge naturale. Questo è così evasione dell'intelligenza etica, che l'umanità ha percorso da sempre e che abbandonare oggi è un regresso e una grave perdita. E' così fugata l'idea che la verità esigente della vita, illuminata dal Vangelo, vincoli i soli cristiani ed è contraddetta dall'opinione secondo cui l'insegnamento bioetico della Chiesa e della teologia non può che essere confessionale e dogmatico, chiudendosi così pregiudizialmente alle loro ragioni argomentative. Atteggiamento, questo, dissimulato della preclusiva chiusura ad ogni intelligenza di natura e legge naturale, che non trova oggi favore e credito tra i padri della cosiddetta bioetica laica, posta prevalentemente sotto i principi dell'efficacia e del desiderio. Un'etica della vita non può essere né laica né confessionale: dev'essere semplicemente ragionevole. Chiunque esprime valori, diritti e norme di comportamento deve poter legittimare razionalmente. La Chiesa e la teologia lo fanno in nome della natura umana e della legge naturale. Queste sono via maestra dell'intelligenza etica, che l'umanità ha percorso da sempre e che abbandonare oggi è un regresso e una grave perdita.

**VALORI E PRINCIPI ASSIOLOGICI**

E' così riconosciuta e legittimata la legge naturale, assunta a criterio logico e metodologico di un'etica della vita: in ordine alla conscienza e conoscenza del bene della vita umana e ai compiti e obblighi che ne derivano. Dire vita umana è dire la vita di un essere con dignità di persona, di cui naturalmente condivide e riflette il valore. Ne vogliamo qui configurare i valori peculiari in cui prende forma e i principi assiologici che ne esprimono le esigenze.

**Valore di soggetto e principio di cura e terapeuticità**

Anzitutto la dignità e il valore di soggetto, perché la vita non è né un concetto astratto né una cosa, oggetto di possesso. La vita non è qualcosa, è sempre qualcuno: un individuo vivente. Come tale ne rispecchia la dignità di soggetto. Un individuo umano non ha valenza di oggetto, non è comparabile e confondibile con le cose: non è, in una parola, reificabile. Perché essere spirituale: mediante il conoscere e il volere (la libertà) egli s'eleva sugli esseri pre-umani, diventandone il signore. Di questa soggettività partecipa la vita d'ogni uomo e d'ogni donna, nella unitarità di spirito e corpo (spirito nel corpo)[32] che ciascuno costituisce. Così che anche la vita corporea condivide la dignità e il valore
dello spirito: corpo-soggetto, non corpo-oggetto: io sono il mio corpo, più di quanto non abbia un corpo. "In riferimento alla persona umana nella sua "totalità unificata", cioè "anima che si esprime nel corpo e corpo informato da uno spirito immortale", si può leggere il significato specificamente umano [non meramente fisico, materiale, biologico] del corpo"[33]. Questo è il motivo per cui il bios corporeo ha significato morale ed è fonte di moralità: ciò che il corpo rivela e in esso si compie non è eticamente ininfluente e trascurabile, ma essenziale e decisivo in ordine alla designazione del bene e ai compiti e obblighi che suscita. Prendiamo, ad esempio, il genoma biologico: questo è espressione e rivelazione di un genoma per così dire ontologico. Solo un individuo con patrimonio genetico umano può essere un soggetto umano. Non può che essere tale ed essere riconosciuto e rispettato come tale.

La dignità di soggetto del corpo è anche il motivo per cui ad esso sono dovute le attenzioni e le sollecitudini proprie della persona. Nasce di qui il principio di cura e terapeuticità, che enuncia il dovere morale del rispetto del corpo e della tutela della salute propria e altrui. Curare il corpo è curare la persona. La sollecitudine terapeutica (ma anche profilattica e riabilitativa) è via singolare e privilegiata di riconoscimento e reciprocità intersoggettiva. Ma è anche riconoscimento della propria soggettività, su cui nessuno ha il potere, l'arbitrio o l'indifferenza che può avere sugli oggetti. Il che vale non solo in ordine alla cura della malattia ma ancor prima al riguardo per il corpo, che non può essere trascurato né sottoposto ad alterazioni e ingiuramenti, a stimolatori ed eccitanti, a prove e carichi eccessivi, a condizioni di vita e di lavoro irrispettosi della persona e a lungo andare nocivi per la salute.

**Valore di fine e principio d'indisponibilità e inviolabilità**

Alla dignità di soggetto è strettamente e indivisibilmente correlato il valore di fine della vita umana. L'inoggettivabilità ne comporta ed esprime il valore non strumentale. Così da essere cercata "per se stessa", non "per altro" o "per altri". L'uomo - dice il Concilio Vaticano II - è "l'unico essere che Dio ha voluto per se stesso"[34]. La vita che egli è rispecchia questo "per sé" della persona. Per cui non è posponibile a interessi altrui, né è utilizzabile per scopi ad essa alieni. S'ilumina così il valore assoluto della vita umana, nel senso di non relativo a niente e a nessuno, fuorché al Creatore. Dio, il Vivente, è l'assoluto sussistente. Il vivente umano invece è l'assoluto partecipato. Valore di fine e valenza "in sé" e "per sé" si implicano e concorrono a illuminare questo assoluto.

Scaturisce di qui il principio d'indisponibilità e inviolabilità della vita umana. Questa non ha valore di uso, così da dispore di essa come di un mezzo o da violarne l'integrità e l'esistenza come di un meccanismo cibernetico o di un mero organismo nelle mani dell'uomo[35]. Il valore di fine esclude ogni strumentalizzazione e sfruttamento ed esige che ogni ricerca, sperimentazione e intervento sulla vita debbano essere a suo beneficio; e a beneficio altrui solo nella certezza morale di tutelarla e non recarle un grave danno. Parimenti il valore finale delegittima ogni manipolazione non terapeutica dell'integrità fisica (biologica e genetica) della vita ed ogni soppressione volontaria e diretta della vita innocente. Il valore di fine decide e misura la bontà della vita umana non dal suo "modo di essere" (sosein) ma dal suo "esserci" (dasein) semplicemente: dal suo essere al mondo come vita di un individuo con dignità di persona. Così che nessuno dal di fuori - nessun potere legislativo, nessuna rivendicazione parentale, nessun consenso sociale - ha il diritto di decidere di essa, ma solo il dovere di consentirne e favorirne il decorso vitale. Malgrado non attiri lo sguardo o non appaghi il sentimento, nonostante la piccolezza, le infermità o le menomazioni, una vita umana vale sempre perché vale in se stessa, non in funzione di qualcuno o di qualcosa. Per questo va denunciata ogni violenza sulla vita, in tutte le sue forme e condizioni. In particolare - come fa il Papa nell'enciclica *Evangelium vitae* - va denunciata la violenza soppresiva della vita nascente e terminale. Questo a motivo dello spessore e della diffusione socio-culturale che stanno assumendo l'aborto e l'eutanasia oggi: vere e proprie "strutture di peccato" contro la vita, che da
delitto vanno acquisendo valenza di diritto, nell'opinione pubblica e nell'immaginario delle coscienze [36].

Valore teologale e principio di venerazione

Il valore di soggetto e di fine fanno della vita umana un bene trascendentale e assoluto: sporgente col suo spirito su ogni bene oggettuale e non relativo a niente e a nessuno, se non a se stessa e a Dio. Il che delinea il valore teologale della vita umana, inteso come partecipazione e riflesso della dignità e della gloria di Dio. La Bibbia l'esprime con la categoria dell'"immagine" e della "somiglianza" divina (cfr Gen 1,26-27; Sir 17,3). Così che la sua bontà riveste il carattere di sacralità e santità della vita di Dio, e suscita la riverenza e il culto dovuti al santo. Il che dà un'impronta e valenza religiosa agli obblighi morali verso la vita, qualificando come venerazione ogni rispetto e tutela e dequalificando come profanazione ogni oltraggio e disimpegno [37].

Parliamo di una teologalità nell'ordine della natura, non cioè attinta dalla rivelazione, e perciò intelligibile da tutti [38]. In essa è la dignità e il valore più alto della vita umana e perciò il motivo e il fondamento dell'onore e del rispetto unico e massimo che esige. L'intelligenza che lo coglie è la forma più alta e sapiente del conoscere: in grado di penetrare il dato e cogliere il valore, di penetrare il bios e riconoscere un uomo. Senza questa intelligenza, inibiti dal sapere empirico alla superficie del bios, il valore non risplende. Ma non per deficit di presenza bensì di conoscenza. Non si può fare del significato e del valore religioso della vita una conoscenza di sola fede rivelata. Significa depotenziare e sfiduciare l'intelligenza, privandola della possibilità di cogliere l'assoluto che è nell'uomo e perciò di aprirsi a tutta la verità della vita.

Valore sociale e principio di solidarietà e sussidiarietà

Ogni vita è unica e irripetibile nella sua individualità. Ma questa autonomia non è principio di una concezione monadica e solipsistica, bensì il dato basilare e la condizione previa di ogni apertura e relazione. Ogni vita umana viene al mondo e vive nel mondo secondo una costitutiva e vitale relazione ad altri. Esse indigens et offerens, ogni vita umana è intessuta in una rete di relazioni di dipendenza (dagli altri) e di disponibilità (per gli altri). Il che è vero a partire dalla generazione e dalla nascita e si esplica lungo tutto il decorso vitale. Ciò designa il valore relazionale e sociale d'ogni vita umana, da cui prende avvio il principio di solidarietà e di sussidiarietà.

La solidarietà sta a dire che ciascuna vita, in ragione del suo esserci, è appello e attenzione ad altri, all'interno della comunità di appartenenza: dalla famiglia alle società intermedie, dalla collettività politica all'intera comunità umana. La sussidiarietà sta a precisare la modalità ausiliaria d'ogni premura e cura della vita altrui: queste, da una parte, devono essere misurate e modulate ai bisogni di ciascuno; dall'altra, non devono sostituirsi e mortificare le legittime decisioni e capacità dei soggetti. Così, ad esempio, di una vita che viene al mondo con gravi handicap si fa carico la comunità a tutti i livelli, integrando e sostenendo gli oneri particolari che la famiglia è chiamata ad affrontare. La sua soppressione con l'aborto o con l'eutanasia è indice di un individualismo egoista e opportunista, che esclude i più deboli dalla tavola del bene comune.

Solidarietà e sussidiarietà sono fondate sull'amore e sulla giustizia, che ricercano, tutelano e promuovono rispettivamente il bene e il diritto basilare e primario della vita. Esse sono ispirate e animate dall'amore ed istituite e strutturate dalla giustizia.

LA MEDIAZIONE NEL VISSUTO

L'assoluto che la vita significa, i valori singolari che riflette e i principi in cui questi prendono forma normativa primaria, non danno luogo a un'estetica della vita ma a un'etica della tutela concreta e
possibile. Perché l'etica non è una contemplazione distaccata di valori e un'enunciazione ideale di principi, ma la mediazione di questi nella concretezza, particolarità, complessità e conflittualità del vissuto. Dove la purezza del bene e l'universalità del principio si misura con i limiti del particolare, della condizione fisica, delle risorse insufficienti, delle conseguenze contrastanti, dei secondi effetti, delle circostanze particolari ed estreme, del logorio del tempo, nonché della libertà effettiva dei soggetti agenti. L'etica viene a trovarsi tra l'assoluto e il limite: l'assoluto che la vita umana è in se stessa (nel suo valore trascendente) e i limiti che ne contrassegnano la condizione fisica e terrena[39]. L'etica li comprende entrambi, rifuggendo e il semplicismo di un'assiologia incurante del vissuto e l'opportunismo di una prassi aliena dai principi. L'etica è la scienza della mediazione della coscienza trascendentale e ideale dei valori nella coscienza categoriale e situazionale dell'agire, dove il principio si fa norma d'azione e la coscienza si fa giudizio operativo.

Non si tratta di distillare il valore e il bene o di svigorire il principio, dando luogo alla doppia etica della teoria e della prassi o a un'etica dell'accomodamento della prima alla seconda, consentendo di fatto ciò che è illecito di principio. O anche scindendo un deontologismo della norma da un teleologismo dell'atto: il primo parametrato sul dovere espresso dal valore e dal principio, il secondo sulle intenzioni del soggetto agente e sul computo delle conseguenze del suo atto. Quest'etica del "doppio binario" è una morale dissociata e dissociativa che, in presenza del limite, è disposta a disconoscere in concretezza ciò che riconosce in astratto, così da consentire di fatto il male disapprovato in teoria ovvero da rinunciare in atto al bene asserito in principio. Ovviamente parliamo del bene e del male morale, che l'etica non consente di disconoscere (il primo) e di compiere (il secondo). Disconoscere il bene morale e compiere il male morale è sempre un peccato che la morale non permette mai: non si può peccare moralmente. Questo non significa che la morale si disinteressi di beni e mali fisici. Anche di questi essa si fa carico, cercando di tutelare, promuovere e massimizzare i primi e di prevenire, fugare e debellare i secondi. Che anzi per essa un male fisico e un bene fisico, in ordine agli obblighi che avanzano e suscitano, non hanno valenza meramente fisica ma assumono già valore morale: sono un male morale da evitare o un bene morale da compiere. In quanto però un male è soltanto fisico la morale può permetterlo o tollerarlo. Se essa è tenuta a evitare e proibire ogni male morale, non altrettanto può dirsi del male fisico. Sicché mentre è sempre illecito compiere il male morale, può essere lecito permettere il male fisico.

Riguardo alla vita, il valore morale compete alla persona, da cui il corpo lo deriva. Questo non lo è in se stesso, nella sua valenza biologica, ma in quanto lo riceve dalla persona. "Così - leggiamo nell'enciclica Veritatis splendor - la vita umana, pur essendo un bene fondamentale dell'uomo, acquista un significato morale in riferimento al bene della persona che deve essere rispettata per se stessa"[40]. A significare questo è la ragione: "Alla luce della dignità della persona umana - da affermarsi per se stessa - la ragione coglie il valore morale specifico di alcuni beni, cui la persona è naturalmente inclinata"[41]. Primo fra tutti quello della vita fisica. Così, "ad esempio, l'origine e il fondamento del dovere di rispettare assolutamente la vita umana sono da trovare nella dignità propria della persona e non semplicemente nell'inclinazione naturale a conservare la propria vita"[42]. Per questo la salvaguardia della vita fisica non è un dovere ineccepibile e la sua privazione o menomazione non è sempre una colpa. Ma solo in quanto riflette il valore della persona: "solo in riferimento alla persona umana... si può leggere il significato specificamente umano del corpo". Motivo per cui - è l'esempio fatto dall'enciclica - "mentre è sempre moralmente illecito uccidere un essere umano innocente, può essere lecito, lodevole o persino doveroso (cf Gv 15,13) dare la propria vita per amore del prossimo o per testimonianza verso la verità"[43]. La vita nella sua fisicità non basta da sola a identificare la persona e perciò a configurare il bene morale della vita. Questa concerne la persona, di cui la corporeità fisica è componente essenziale ma non esaustiva: "la vita del corpo nella sua condizione terrena non è un assoluto"[44], non totalizza cioè la vita della persona. La non-coincidenza della vita con la sua fisicità sta a significare la non-coincidenza
o, piuttosto, la coincidenza relativa e non assoluta del male fisico inferto alla vita col male morale. Come tale la difesa della vita fisica è condizionabile. Se la vita corporea e la sua integrità biologica costituissero comunque e sempre un bene morale non vi sarebbe limite alla loro difesa. E' il darsi della vita corporea come bene fisico (non ancora morale) e la sua manipolazione e la sua perdita come male fisico (non morale) a porre la condizione di limite della sua difesa: limite eticamente accettabile e sostenibile. Perché in tal caso non difendere la vita ad ogni modo o compiere una manipolazione o costituzione non costituisce un male morale. Semplicemente si tollera un male fisico inevitabile (o non si consegue un bene fisico).

Da questa basilare distinzione sono informati alcuni principi orientativi dell'agire determinato e concreto. Essi mirano a precisare le condizioni di difendibilità della vita umana, sottraendole all'arbitrio dei soggetti e consentendo di affrontare e risolvere la situazione e il caso particolare - in ciò che presentano di singolare, complesso, conflittuale, limitato - senza né l'angoscia del dubbio né deroghe agli obblighi espressi dal bene e dal comandamento.

Essi non fanno che comporre ed esprimere in sintesi applicativa presupposti, esigenze e condizioni di morale fondamentale. Questa insegna che alla moralità di un atto concorrono tre elementi (oggetto, circostanze e intenzione) e due condizioni (conoscenza e volontà). Gli elementi designano la moralità sotto il profilo della bontà o della malizia e perciò della liceità o illiceità. Le condizioni invece sotto il profilo della rilevanza etica o meno e perciò del carattere morale o pre-morale.

Relativamente agli elementi, il primo a decidere la bontà o la malizia è l'oggetto proprio (il finis operis) dell'atto[45]: se questo è un bene morale l'atto è buono, se è un male morale l'atto è cattivo. In forma subordinata e integrativa concorrono le circostanze in cui un atto è posto e le intenzioni (il finis operantis) del soggetto che lo pone. Queste incidono sulla bontà oggettiva aumentandola, diminuendola o cambiandola in male. Incidono invece sulla malizia oggettiva aumentandola o diminuendola ma non cambiandola in bene. Per questo in presenza di un atto il cui oggetto è comunque e sempre un male morale (intrinsece malum), circostanze favorevoli e intenzioni buone non valgono a legittimarlo moralmente: a cambiarlo da cattivo in buono[46]. Si danno però circostanze non accidentalì ma sostanziali, in quanto incidono sull'oggetto dell'atto in modo da mutarne la specie (circumstantiae mutantes speciem) ossia la qualità intrinsecà, l'essenza specifica. In tal caso la qualità morale dell'oggetto va considerata indivisibilmente dalla circostanza, nella determinazione della moralità dell'atto.

Relativamente poi alle condizioni di moralità, alla rilevanza etica di un atto concorrono insieme la conoscenza attenta del suo significato (fisico e morale) e la volontà libera da coazioni e condizionamenti. Così che eticamente rilevante può dirsi l'atto conosciuto e voluto, in una parola l'atto volontario. L'atto involontario invece, per deficit di conoscenza e/o di volontà, è da considerarsi eticamente irreilevante: è un atto pre-morale. Sotto il profilo degli effetti o conseguenze, è da considerarsi eticamente irreilevante e perciò pre-morale l'atto volontario indiretto: l'atto a doppio effetto, il cui effetto negativo è una conseguenza seconda, prevista sì ma non voluta, semplicemente tollerata come inevitabile, dell'effetto primo e buono che è il fine vero e proprio dell'atto.

**PRINCIPI MEDIATORI**

Sulla base di questi richiami di morale fondamentale, veniamo all'enunciazione e applicazione nel campo della vita di alcuni principi da essi ispirati e motivati.

*Principio di legittima difesa*

Il principio anzitutto della legittima difesa, il quale consente di fare violenza alla vita dell'aggressor fino a sopprimerla, a determinate condizioni[47]: che la violenza dell'aggressor sia in atto e non in
previsione, che si siano esperiti tutti i mezzi non violenti di dissuasione, che la violenza difensiva sia proporzionata a quella aggressiva. Il verificarsi insieme di queste condizioni determina una circostanza che muta la specie dell'atto. Non si tratta formalmente e perciò eticamente di un atto di violazione e uccisione, ma di difesa di una vita. Così da non cadere sotto il comandamento "non violare la vita", "non uccidere". Ovviamente si arreca un male all'aggressore. Ma è un male fisico, non morale. Fare violenza alla vita, fino a sopprimerla, non è comunque e sempre un male morale, un *intrinsece malum*, e perciò un peccato. La nonviolenza è eccepibile dalla legittima difesa. La violenza è un *intrinsece malum* e perciò un atto da non compiere mai nei confronti della vita del giusto e dell'innocente. La vita di questi è sempre un bene morale. Così che violarla e sopprimerla è un male morale. Per questo il comandamento "non uccidere" (Es 20,13) dalla stessa Parola di Dio è precisato: "Non far morire l'innocente e il giusto" (Es 23,7). E l'enciclica *Evangelium vitae* puntualizza: "Il comandamento "non uccidere" ha valore assoluto quando si riferisce alla persona innocente... In effetti l'inviolabilità assoluta della vita umana innocente è una verità morale"[48]. Non si vede come e quando il giusto e l'innocente possano trovarsi in stato di aggressione nei confronti di alcuno. Non si vede dunque come la soppressione della loro vita possa mai non essere considerata un male morale.

**Principio di spendibilità**

Il principio di spendibilità della vita sta a dire che, in vista di un bene superiore, come l'amore del prossimo o la testimonianza della verità, la vita fisica e terrena può essere sottoposta a rischi anche elevati di logoramento, di pericolo e di perdita, senza per questo contravvenire al dovere morale di tutelare e curare la propria vita. Con questo non si disconosce il bene assoluto della vita, appartenendo questo all'intera vita della persona[49], di cui la condizione fisica e terrena è parte integrante ma non il tutto. Come *parte*, la vita nel tempo ne partecipa la dignità e il valore, con le esigenze di rispetto da questi avanzate e che prendono forma primaria nei principi assiologici enunciati. Ma in quanto non è il *tutto* (non totalizza la vita della persona) essa è relativizzabile da un bene superiore[50]. Precisa Giovanni Paolo II nell'enciclica *Evangelium vitae*: "La vita nel corpo nella sua condizione terrena non è un assoluto..., tanto che può essere richiesto di abbandonarla per un bene superiore"[51] - come dice e fa Gesù nel Vangelo (cfr Mc 8,35; Gv 15,13). Il bene superiore, delineato dall'amore di Dio e del prossimo, consente e legittima il sacrificio della propria vita fisica e terrena. Questo è lecito perché, in relazione a un bene superiore, il sacrificio della propria vita è un male fisico (l'usura o la perdita di un bene fisico) non un male morale. Esso non è un atto d'incuria verso la vita, tanto meno di soppressione: un procurarsi la morte. La circostanza sostanziale del bene superiore e del suo amore ne fanno un atto di donazione, di consacrazione, di offerta: atto non solo moralmente lecito ma buono, nobile e ammiravole, la cui più alta testimonianza è il martirio[52]. Ovviamente il principio di spendibilità vale per la propria vita, non per la vita altrui.

**Principio di totalità**

Oltre i beni superiori, cui la vita fisica è relativizzabile e per il cui conseguimento è spendibile, c'è il bene della stessa vita corporea, inteso come un complesso organico, costituito dalle diverse parti che lo strutturano. Anche l'integrità fisica dell'organismo, in quanto bene della persona, assume un significato morale, che obbliga alla tutela e non alterazione di organi, tessuti e funzioni biologiche. Non però in assoluto ma relativamente al bene del tutto. Nasce di qui il principio di *totalità*, secondo cui la parte è per il tutto ed è legittimo manipolarla o sacrificarla per il bene del tutto. Il che trova applicazione nella terapia chirurgica. L'asportazione di un organo incurabile o la soppressione di una sua funzione, per le malattie che provoca, costituisce un male fisico eticamente lecito se non anche doveroso. Il bene del tutto dà all'atto manipolatore una finalità e un carattere terapeutico e perciò - come abbiamo visto - di tutela e promozione della persona nella sua salute.

125
Diversa è una manipolazione arbitraria, voluttuaria o finalizzata ad altri scopi: questa configura un male morale, eticamente inammissibile.
Il principio di totalità vale sul piano fisico, in ordine alla cura di una patologia su base biologica o organica. Non può essere esteso alla cura di malattie psicogeniche o di disagi psichici e spirituali. Non si può mutilare e invalidare il corpo per bisogni e scopi ad esso alieni. Pertanto non si può invocare questo principio a legittimazione della sterilizzazione antiprocreativa, della chirurgia transessuale o di certe pratiche eccessive e ossessive di chirurgia estetica[53].

Principio di beneficialità

Un bene peculiare e distinto è il beneficio terapeutico che può venire ad altri dalla messa a disposizione della propria vita fisica, o dal dono di un tessuto o di un organo del proprio corpo. Il che trova applicazione nella ricerca e sperimentazione in campo biomedico e nella terapia dei trapianti da vivente. C'è qui un limite alla difesa della vita fisica e della sua integrità? Il bene che altri possono ricavarne iscrive l'atto in una finalità d'amore. Questa però non vale a legittimare né la soppressione di una vita, né una grave menomazione della sua integrità (mutilazione), né un tasso di rischio elevato per la salute, al fine di salvare o curare altre vite Il principio di inviolabilità e indisponibilità non li consente. Evitato però il pericolo di violazione e di strumentalizzazione di una vita a un'altra, consentire a un gesto d'amore terapeutico con la propria vita o con parte di essa è atto buono e lecito. Il che è legittimato dal principio di beneficialità, secondo cui ciò è possibile alla duplice condizione del tasso di rischio accettabile e dall'assoluta gratuità del gesto. La prima esige di non provocare un grave danno per la salute. La seconda di improntare l'atto al dono, escludendo ogni forma di profitto e interesse. Così non soltanto la vita fisica non subisce offesa, ma diventa "luogo" singolare e "via" privilegiata dell'amore che dona se stesso per la vita del prossimo[54].

Principio di proporzionalità

La medicina dispone di mezzi terapeutici. Il progresso biomedico e biotecnologico oggi li moltiplica in modo esponenziale. Ci sono limiti nel loro utilizzo? Si è tenuti a ricorrere a tutti i mezzi disponibili? La rinuncia contravviene sempre al principio di terapeuticità, configurando comunque un male morale? Come aprirsi una strada tra l'eutanasia passiva (per omissione di cura) e l'accanimento terapeutico (per eccedenza di cura)? Come evitare un estremo senza cadere nell'altro? Prendersi cura della vita fisica è un obbligo morale enunciato e motivato dal principio di terapeuticità. Ma la relatività della vita fisica alla condizione e al decorso temporale, chiede di accettarne i limiti e il limite ultimo della morte. Questo vuol dire che è doverosa la cura della malattia, ma non ad ogni costo. Così che è possibile rinunciare a cure particolarmente onerose e dai risultati incerti o precari. Il criterio per arbitrare rettamente tra dovere e rinuncia e pervenire a un sereno giudizio in scienza e coscienza è qui enunciato dal principio di proporzionalità nell'uso dei mezzi terapeutici. Distinguendo tra mezzi proporzionati e mezzi sproporzionati, esso afferma che ai primi si è tenuti a ricorrere sempre, mentre ai secondi si può e, per non cadere nell'accanimento terapeutico, si deve rinunciare. Il rapporto di proporzione va calcolato mettendo a raffronto le condizioni del paziente e il mezzo terapeutico con i risultati sperabili. Dove c'è proporzione, nel senso che il mezzo dà sufficienti e apprezzabili risultati, il ricorso ad esso è doveroso. Dove invece i risultati sperabili sono scarsi, precari e inadeguati ai costi umani e sociali che il ricorso a una cura impone, ad essa si può e, per non cadere nell'accanimento terapeutico, si deve rinunciare. In tal caso non si compie un male morale per omissione, ma si accetta un limite fisico (da ultimo il limite della morte) che la vita porta con sé nella sua condizione biologica e temporale. La sollecitudine terapeutica considera e rispetta la vita nella concretezza dello stato e del decorso fisico di ciascun individuo, così da non sotoporla a forzature terapeutiche; senza però privarla mai delle cure ordinarie e proporzionate[55].
**Principio del volontario indiretto**

Altamente problematico è avvertito il limite della difesa della vita in situazioni di grave conflitto, in cui la vita di un individuo non la si vede tutelabile o curabile che al prezzo di un male come la morte dello stesso individuo o di qualcun altro. E’ il caso dell’eutanasia come terapia del dolore o dell'aborto per salvare la gestante. L'etica non permette mai di compiere un male morale per conseguire un bene (*non sunt facienda mala ut veniant bona*) (cf Rm 3,8)[56]. Tale è, ad esempio, la morte procurata a un individuo per la salvezza di un altro o per mettere fine a un malessere dello stesso individuo. Tale atto contravviene alla norma morale, che proibisce ogni soppressione volontaria e diretta della vita innocente[57]. Così precisata, sotto la proibizione della norma non cade la soppressione involontaria (per deficit di conoscenza e di consenso) e indiretta di una vita.

Questa seconda eventualità è recepita e precisata dal principio del *volontario indiretto* o del *doppio effetto*. Questo chiarisce che, nel caso in cui un atto buono comporta anche un effetto cattivo, previsto si ma non voluto né come fine né come mezzo per conseguire il fine, semplicemente tollerato come conseguenza seconda e inevitabile, tale atto si può compiere. Non essendo l'effetto cattivo né il fine oggettivo dell'atto (*finis operis*) né il fine soggettivo dell'agente (*finis operantis*), non entra nel costitutivo etico dell'atto. Come tale non costituisce un male morale ma fisico. L'atto - specificato dal suo fine diretto (oggetto proprio), che è quello inteso e voluto dall'agente - è moralmente buono e volontario. L'effetto cattivo è indiretto: come tale ininfluente sulla moralità dell'atto. Per questo la perdita di una vita embrionale o fetale, connessa ad un inevitabile intervento curativo della gestante, è considerato aborto indiretto; la morte anticipata in un malato dalla somministrazione di farmaci analgesici per la terapia del dolore è considerata eutanasia indiretta. Dal momento che la qualifica di indiretto toglie ogni valenza etica all'effetto mortale dell'atto, non si dovrebbe neppure parlare, in questi casi, di aborto e di eutanasia. Questi, infatti, hanno di per sé una connotazione morale negativa. Nei casi qui esaminati l'atto non è né abortivo né eutanasco ma strettamente terapeutico. La morte dell'embrione o del feto come dell'ammalato non costituisce il fine dell'atto, né lo strumento per conseguirlo, ma la conseguenza del fine terapeutico non altrimenti raggiungibile: l'effetto secondo, conosciuto ma non voluto (solo tollerato), di un atto oggettivamente buono.

**CONCLUSIONE**

La vita umana nella sua fase temporale e terrena - vita in un corpo biologico - è momento e condizione della vita della persona, che ha la sua pienezza nella condizione soprannaturale ed eterna. Essa partecipa e riflette il valore assoluto che ogni vita umana è in se stessa e nel contempo è connotata dalla relatività e penultimità della condizione terrena e biologica, soggetta al limite e destinata a terminare con la morte. In quanto esprime quel valore assoluto, la vita terrena è un bene morale che avanza obblighi intangibili e incondizionati di difesa e di rispetto. In quanto riflette la relatività della sua condizione fisica e temporale, quegli obblighi sono relativi a questa: la difesa del bene fisico della vita conosce dei limiti. Così da diventare lecito e a volte doveroso rinunciare alla difesa della vita fisica o anche solo della sua integrità.

Tali limiti sono fisici non morali. Perché il bene morale non conosce limiti: *bonum faciendum*. Il bene morale obbliga. Non fare il bene morale è un peccato e una colpa che l'etica non può mai legittimare. Questo vuol dire che l'etica non può porre alcun limite morale alle esigenze di difesa della vita nella sua condizione fisica e terrena: sarebbe un male morale eticamente inammissibile (*malum vitandum*).

Può invece riscontrare limiti fisici insuperabili, ammettere e accogliere i quali non implica un male morale, non è una colpa; anzi può essere moralmente doveroso.
Dov'è scritto questo? Chi lo legge? E' scritto nel grande libro della vita, impaginato dal Creatore nella natura. Ed è letto dall'intelligenza, di cui il Creatore ha dotato la creatura umana, per conoscere la verità e riconoscere la legge.

[4] Cfr *VS* n° 43; San Tommaso, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q.90, a.4, ad 1; *Quaestiones disputatae*, q. XX, a.4.

Per questa globalità di senso, a una migliore e più adeguata comprensione della natura contribuiscono gli apporti veritativi di tutte le scienze.

[10] "Alla luce della dignità della persona umana... la ragione coglie il valore morale specifico di alcuni beni, cui la persona è naturalmente inclinata... L'esigenza morale originaria di amare e rispettare la persona..., implica anche, intrinsecamente, il rispetto di alcuni beni fondamentali, senza del quale si cade nel relativismo e nell'arbitrio" (*VS* 48). Tali beni "acquistano rilevanza morale solo in quanto si riferiscono alla persona umana e alla sua realizzazione autentica, la quale può verificarsi sempre e solo nella natura umana" (*VS* 50).
[16] Cfr *VS* 12, 42-44.
[18] Legge "iscritta nella natura razionale della persona" (*VS* 51); "legge della ragione" (*VS* 61). Cfr *VS* 12. 40. 42-43. 72. 79.
[19] Cfr Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II, Dichiarazione sulla libertà religiosa *Dignitatis humanae*, 3; *VS* 40-44. 72.
[21] "La luce della ragione naturale con la quale distinguiamo il bene dal male - il che è competenza della legge naturale - non è altro che un'impronta in noi della luce divina" (S. Tommaso, *Summa theologiae*, I-II q. 91, a.2. Cfr, ivi q. 90, a. 4.
[22] Cfr *VS* 40-41
[23] Cfr *VS* 24. 45
[26] La natura corporea della persona "non può essere concepita come normatività semplicemente biologica, ma dev'essere definita come l'ordine razionale secondo il quale l'uomo è chiamato dal Creatore ... a usare e disporre del proprio corpo" (VS 50)
[27] "In Cristo è annunciato definitivamente ed è pienamente donato quel Vangelo della vita che, ...scritto in qualche modo nel cuore di ogni uomo e donna, risuona in ogni coscienza "dal principio", ossia dalla creazione stessa, così che...può essere conosciuto nei suoi tratti essenziali anche dalla ragione umana" (EV 29). Come tale "il Vangelo della vita non è esclusivamente per i credenti: è per tutti" (EV 101). Esso "ha un'eco profonda e persuasiva nel cuore di ogni persona, credente e anche non credente" (EV 2).
[28] "Il Vangelo della vita racchiude quanto la stessa esperienza e ragione umana dicono circa il valore della vita, lo accoglie, lo eleva e lo porta a compimento" (EV 30).
[29] I cristiani sono chiamati a "mettere in risalto le ragioni antropologiche che fondano e sostengono il rispetto di ogni vita umana. In tal modo, mentre faremo risplendere l'originale novità del Vangelo della vita, potremo aiutare tutti a scoprire, anche alla luce della ragione e dell'esperienza, come il messaggio cristiano illumini pienamente l'uomo" (VS 82).
[34] GS 24.
[37] Cfr EV 9-41. 53.
[38] Cfr EV 2.
[40] VS 50.
[41] VS 48.
[42] VS 50.
[49] "L'uomo è chiamato a una pienezza di vita che va ben oltre le dimensioni della sua esistenza terrena" (VS 2).
[51] EV 47
[52] Cfr EV 47
[54] Cfr COS 84-85. 90.
[55] Cfr Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede, Dichiarazione sull'eutanasia Iura et bona, 5 maggio 1980, in AAS 72 (1980) 549-551; COS 64. 65. 120; EV 65.
[57] Cfr EV 57.
FRANCESCO D'AGOSTINO
RESPECT FOR LIFE AND LAW

In approaching life in the same way as it would a mere concept, philosophy respects its own vocation. At the same time, however, in demonstrating that it is unable to approach such a concept in an adequate way it manifests - perhaps one might almost say in a humiliating way - all its own limitations. In his Logic (the Jena version), Hegel writes that 'faced with life, thought dissolves. For the mind the omnipresence of the simple within the multiplicity of the seeming is an absolute contradiction, an impenetrable mystery.'(1) Even though a term such as mystery is simply unbearable for science, it has to be recognised that this Hegelian statement has not been contradicted, not even by the triumph of biology which marked the second part of the twentieth century. Such biology has done everything to make us lose full awareness of the pregnancy of the above Hegelian observation but it has not dissolved its worth. If today life and biological life are used as synonyms, this comes about in defiance of the fact that - as Sarah Franklin rightly observes(2) - the concept of life is a concept characterised as much by ancient and consolidated beliefs as by recent and indeed growing uncertainties: not only is the determination of the beginning and the end of life becoming ever more problematic (even for biologists!) - with bioethical repercussions which are indeed evident to everybody - but the very cognitive identification of the idea itself of life seems by now to have become evanescent.

The only way by which to open any analysis of life which has meaning for the jurist must, it seems, follow the steps of an ancient observation: life is an analogous concept, if we want to employ the old scholastic term; or, to express it more moderately, it is a polysemic term. I do not know if jurists are fully aware of how embarrassing it has now become to continue using the term life in a univocal way, but it is certainly the case that, with their notable instinct, they have for some time perceived the difficulty. At the conference held in Rome in May 1982 promoted by the Accademia dei Lincei (among whose protagonists were scholars of the calibre of Santoro Passarelli, Falzea, Oppo, Pugliese, Mengoni, Rescigno, and Trabucchi), even though, unfortunately, the essential problem was not addressed - that of the relevance for jurists of a suitable epistemological reflection on life - there was, nonetheless, a perception of the need to place precise limits of competence to the juridical analysis, and this was expressed in the decision taken to reflect exclusively on material life. Despite its epistemological ingenuousness, the actio finium regundorum of Angelo Falzea was an example of this decision: 'the jurist is not concerned with life but with the life of man...situations of non-life, but also situations of no longer life, remain outside the framework of reference. Equally, human, immanent or transcendent lives, to which laws, by no means rarely, have referred or refer, (3) are also excluded.

An initial way of addressing the subject of life from an adequate epistemological perspective is in the meantime to approach it in terms of its lexical valences. (4) In this way we acquire knowledge and we become aware of the indisputable poverty of the language which is now available to us, and this is a sign in turn of a theoretical dearth, specific to a time of poverty, of a dürftige Zeit, to employ the phrase of Heidegger, such as that which we are now experiencing. We must, therefore, in reflecting on language, take it to its limits: we can seek help from a vocabulary distant from our own, and yet sufficiently near to us for it to speak to us and activate our thought. If we look in Greek for the equivalent of life we find ourselves faced with a fan of possibilities. Zoé, in a strict sense, is life. Bios is also life. In the same way, the word psyché deserves to be translated by life, even though this term has fascinating theological prior understandings, which should, however, be left out of this analysis. A large number of terms are connected to life, from phyle to soma. We are called upon to reflect on law and the salvation of life. But which life is law called upon to save?

Zoé means first of all life as a physical phenomenon; it alludes to the vitality which is expressed and is manifested in all organic beings, that vitality which pervades the dream of d'Alembert, (5) that vitality which we perceive in experience but whose cause, birth or end we cannot know through mere experience (to questions of this kind myths and religious revelations are more able to provide answers).
In a cognitive approach - which is what interests us here - zoé, using the Kantian term incorrectly, is to be placed on the same level as transcendental: through it we give an order to the world in which we live. In perceiving and employing the life/non-life distinction we formulate the idea of the place which we are called to occupy in the world. We build the category of the environment. In this meaning the term life - like zoé - does not have a plural; individuality is rejected by zoé. There can be more forms of life (ancient Greek termed them bioi) but there is only one zoé; there cannot be more lives. And this term does not even have antagonistic terms: from zoé one can well distinguish what is not vital but this distinction has a non-dialectical valency. The counter position of death to zoé has no sense because those that die are living individuals; it is not the principle of life that is dying. (6) To what has just been observed it can be objected that our generation, for the first time in history, has acquired the knowledge, and perceived the possibility, that zoé can be destroyed. This is an apocalyptic theme to which at various levels of lucidity the environmentalist movements give credit. Thus there appears the first way of thinking about the salvation of life in terms of law - law should take care of zoé. Independently of its operative configurations, the project cannot but seem to be noble. Whether it is epistemologically convincing is, however, another matter. From a cosmic perspective, life arises, it is not born. And just as life has arisen so it can evidently arise once again anew after being destroyed (in Darwinian terms this is only a question of time, but in the Darwinian cosmos time is certainly not a scarce resource). The point is that the very valid vitalistic worries of the environmentalists inevitably tend to onticise zoé, to lose the transcendental valancy of the concept. In fact, the environmentalist struggles are not in favour of zoé but of the bios, that is to say the individual specific forms of life which are endangered by the manipulation of the environment. But it is not through the bios that zoé will be saved. Differently from zoé, in fact, the bios is in constituent terms individual, plural, and mortal. If such is the state of things, the task which environmentalism should take on is much more imposing than appears at first sight and would require radical reformulations. The precept 'save zoé', is simple, intuitive, but unfortunately it is without a cognitive content. The precept 'save the bios' has, instead, a precise cognitive content, although it is badly formulated. 'Save the bioi' is an epistemologically impeccable precept because it is correctly formulated in the plural, but this means that the bioi to be saved should be specified individually and a suitable justification for this should be supplied. Whether it is right or not to destroy once and for all the smallpox virus, which at the present time survives under strict surveillance only in specialised laboratories, is a question which concerns the defence of the bios not the defence of zoé. Zoé means the life qua vivimus; bios the life quam vivimus. (7) Bios is the term which ancient Greek uses to express the living thing in its empirical individuality, inescapably bound to temporality and destined to structure itself through the body, the soma. (8) Birth and death are predicable in relation to the bios but not in relation to zoé. A phrase such as to live life is thus expressed in ancient Greek with bion zên. One can thus understand why in ancient Greek bios, by metaphor, was taken to mean profession, trade, means of support and wealth, even dwelling and residence - everything, in short, which defined life in its fragile singularity. It remains, however, the case that the bios does not contain within itself its own basis, neither with regard to the principle of its vitality (which remains zoé) nor with respect to the principle of its individuality. This is not given by the connection with the soma, which is necessary but extrinsic, but by its connection with the psyché. One can well understand why the Latins translated psyché with anima - this is because the anima animates bodies, individualising them (corpses, differently from living bodies, are all equal because they are equally inert). But the psyché is much more than a mere animating principle of a physical character. It is animation of individuality, which in the most excellent cases (such as the case of the human bios) opens that entity to the actualisation of itself, enables it to recognise itself and affirm itself as a self. It is what - in modern parlance - offers it and opens wide to it the dimension of meaning. Between bios and psyché the tie is ontological not biological because - despite what the forms of reductionistic materialism may say on the matter - only ontologically (with an approach from above) can one perceive the emergent
qualities, can one perceive in a living man a unity which is superior to the mere sum of the cells which make up his body. It is with reference to his psyché and not simply to his bios that man receives a name, which law is called upon to defend and uphold. As a mere empirical fact, the bios, however valuable it might appear, is anonymous and does not possess any relevance of an ontological or axiological kind - during his lament for Cordelia King Lear does not weep for the death of a living being, but for that death, the death of his daughter: 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life, and thou no breath at all?' It is only because it can receive (from the psyché) an identity and a meaning that the bios acquires value, just, indeed, as it can lose it. 'For a man', says Plato through Socrates, 'a life (bios) which is not thought about is not worthy of being lived (biotós)'. (9) The value of the bios is therefore an extrinsic value which the bios must conquer through the acquisition of interior rhythm (eurythmia) and harmony (euarmostia), which of itself it does not possess.(10) The very ancient instinctive perception to the effect that the bios of man needs a polis, because only in the polis is the nomos given (11), captures the whole of this approach and provides us with the fundamental line of argument we need to themetise the nexus which exists between life (as bios) and law.

The bios does not, therefore, have an intrinsic value; it is not ultimate but penultimate reality. This is why in well defined contexts, such as in the Gospels, in which the term life has to be connotated in a strong axiological and unequivocal way, reference is not made to the bios but to zóe and to the psyché.(12) But this does not mean that the bios is deprived of all value. This is because it is the only place in which life as psyché, that is to say that form of individuality which is the premise of every axiology, can manifest itself. And this is a fact which is brought out not only by philosophy but by cultural anthropology itself when this latter shows us that it is always and only through physical reality, through the bios and in particular through the body, and in the most contradictory and incredible forms - the fed and hungry, disguised and shown, embellished and humiliated, strengthened and weakened, respected and violated, sacralised and mutilated, body - that the self (the psyché) advances and manifests itself in the world as a dimension of value.

Law does not belong to the order of nature, yet only in the order of nature can it have the opportunity to operate. It is for this reason that it is called upon to defend not the bios but the psyché. But because the psyché is not directly derivable from the bios there springs the importance that the bios comes to acquire at every level of juridical experience (and for that matter of ethical experience as well). With a great deal of subtlety St. Augustine observes that the first form of expression of our freedom - the first affirmation of our self - does not manifest itself (as one might think in the abstract) either through a noble yes to absolute and transcendent values, for example a 'yes' to good or to God, or through an equally noble no to equally absolute anti-values (such as the no to Satan expressed in the declaration of the rite of baptism) but through the simple, daily no to those contingent forms of evil constituted by crimes - and the first crime that he cites is crime against the bios of man, namely murder.(13) The psyché says 'yes' to itself in saying 'no' to every attack which threatens the bios.

Hence the characteristic lack of satisfaction which assails us when we faced with any juridical analysis which seeks to have the bios as its sole subject. Nothing authorises us to sacralise it, as takes place in certain forms of naturism which deceive themselves that it is enough to formulate the precept 'defend life!' in order to provide law with a suitable principle of effectiveness. But at the same time nothing authorises us to reify it as though the precept 'be autonomous!' implied an indiscriminate availability of the subject at that dimension of itself which is the bios (and Kant was so aware of this fact as to state that not even the apparently most marginal part of our corporeal self, not even a tooth, is specifically to be made available by us. To reduce the bios to a mere instrument of the self (of the psyché) is as equally ingenuous as to reduce language to a mere instrument of thought. It is true that thought can deform the use of language (here we encounter the paradigmatic problem of lies) but it is also true that the malum mendacii is not to be located in the deformation of the use of language but in the fact that through lies thought inevitably deforms itself. Similarly, there is no doubt that the psyché has power over the bios, a power which can become literally immense (as is the case of suicide) but there is
equally no doubt that through the use of this power the psyché runs the risk of losing itself definitively. The bios and the psyché are united by indissoluble but subtle bonds: when these inspissate and lead the psyché to flatten out on the bios we fall into those forms of ingenuous materialism which see even in the most horrific aspects of nature a forms of impersonal sacredness. When instead these bonds become thinner, almost to the point of turning into vapour, we fall on the other extreme into equally ingenuous forms of solipsistic individualism, according to which the will wants what it wants and should always be seen as final as long as it is authentic. In both these cases law no longer finds space. Nor, and less than ever, can it have any function involving the salvation of that synthetic reality, the bios/psyché, to which we refer when we speak about human life.

Contrary to what many people think, for law the mere manipulation of the bios is not at all intrinsically condemnable (given that the bios does not have any intrinsic value). It is condemnable only when as a result of its manipulation there comes to be broken the bond of meaning which unites the bios to the psyché. At times this bond is easily expressed through intuitive teleological references. Law in cases such as these does not encounter any difficulty in focusing its own positions in the right way. An action of honest athletic training can even be materially more violent in relation to the bios than a careful administration of drugs which artificially and painfully increases the performance of the athlete, but whereas the latter is condemnable because it deforms the psyché of the athlete, inducing it to engage in dissimulation and deception, the former on the contrary can be extremely praiseworthy when through it the psyché (of the athlete) achieves full equilibrium with itself. More generally, every form of medical practice is juridically justified not because it is always and whatever the case beneficial to the bios but because it is directed whatever the case to that good of the person, to achieve the perception of which reference to the psyché is essential. But in other cases not even teleological thought is able to focus effectively on how the bios/psyché bond should be safeguarded and defended - in reality a courageous ontological affirmation is necessary to avoid law losing itself in the apparently insoluble antinomies of empirical experience. It is not because one does not have guarantees as to the truthfulness of the testimony (or better of transmission) which leads to it that torture is vile. It is not because it does not have dissuasive power that the death penalty is unacceptable. It is not because it does not manage to prolong objectively the life of the body that therapeutic overkill is condemnable. It is not because it cannot make the person who undergoes it acquire an extraordinary singing capacity that castration is repugnant. These practices can even produce effects which at their limits are in fact socially advantageous and which, whatever the case, exactly correspond to the intentions of those who carry them out: they should be rejected as being anti-juridical - in addition to being non-ethical - not because they are harmful but because they humiliate the psyché/bios nexus by dehumanising it. Or, if one prefers to express it in another way, because they deprive the bios of identity by wrongly levelling it to the soma.
Notes
(1) I take the quotation from the title of the volume by E. Chargaff, Unbefreifliches Geheimnis. Wissenschaft als Kampf für und gegen die Natur (Stuttgart, 1988).
(4) The lines of argument to be found in V. Melchiorre, 'Bios, Anthropos, Ethos', Studium, 85 (1989), pp. 19ss are very valuable.
(5) I refer here, of course, to Diderot, whose Rêve de d'Alembert can be read in an Italian version in the work edited by P. Rossi, Diderot. Opere Filosofiche (Milan, 1963), pp. 194-271.
(6) It is for this reason that in the language of spirituality zoé is taken to mean eternal life.
(7) See V. Melchiorre, loc. cit.
(8) The bios, however, is not to be identified with the soma: this latter can be modified (for example through mutilation) without its living reality being modified (the bios).
(9) Plato, Apologia, 38a.
(10) Cf. Plato, Protagoras, 326b.
(12) Let us take for example a very well known text, Jn 12:25: 'he who loves his life (psyché) will lose it; he who is an enemy to his own life (psyché) in this world will keep it, so as to live (zoé) eternally'.
(13) In Joa. Ev., 42.10.
GONZALO HERRANZ
THE CULTURE OF LIFE: AN AFFIRMATIVE ENDEAVOR

Introduction

When one analyzes what the Encyclical Evangelium vitae tells us about the culture of life, it becomes evident that the Holy Father has two different realities in mind.

On the one hand, the Culture of life is presented by the Pope as something having its raison d'être in being a confrontation with the culture of death. John Paul II sees to it that we become aware of this dimension of the culture of life, a dimension which unavoidable and relational, hostile and reactive. The Pope does not conceal from us that we are involved in "an enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the «culture of death» and the «culture of life»"(i). When the Pope refers to this conflictive dimension, he writes in a characteristic way the expressions between quotation marks: «culture of death» and «culture of life»"(ii).

On the other hand, culture of life appears in the Encyclical as an affirmative and dynamic reality, as something truthful and self-reliant, asserting and optimistic. The Holy Father uses to refer to it as the new culture of life, to draw our attention to the fact that it is something creative and original, part and parcel of a civilization of love and truth(iii).

Logically, to the first, belligerent dimension, to the «culture of life» with quotation marks, an intensive and prioritized effort has been devoted, certainly an effort so rich in fruits as poor in means. There is an immense literature of the «culture of life» against the «culture of death», scattered in bulletins and journals, brochures and books, as well as a massive array of information consigned to the net(iv). A substantial portion of that literature, despite its polemical character, abounds in brilliant ideas, so doctrine, and charitable understanding; it replies to the shadows with light, to harshness with mercy, to pessimism with openness to hope.

Regrettably, not always, from the side of the «culture of life», actions and thoughts have exhibited that positive outlook. The battle for life is strenuous, without respite, against a foe commanding powerful resources in comparison to the meager means at the disposal of those working for a culture of life and love(v). It is a war of the strong against the weak.

Given a so disproportionate asymmetry of power between both parties, it is not surprising that, with the passing of time, among a number of fighters for life a peculiar ethos has been created. In their words and deeds is perceived an accent of harshness and resentment, of bitterness and anger, that are the result of any prolonged battle with its accompaniment of exhaustion, inevitable wounds and apparent. There are then moments when the leading idea of being at the service of the culture of life fades out or is lost, and is substituted by the regrettable and shortsighted view that what really matters is to annihilate the enemy. An ideology is thus generated that is more negativistic than affirmative and many opportunities for friendship are lost. It is a fact: a not small number of people in the side of life change run the risk of losing appeal and become unsympathetic.

Paradoxically, at the personal as well as the collective level, what began as an activism "for" (life, the unborn, the terminally ill) changes insensibly into a generator of attitudes "anti": anti-abortion, anti-euthanasia, and also anti-individuals and anti-organizations active in the «culture of death». At the heat of struggle it is not easy to resist the temptation of making use of the same violent and damaging weapons the enemy wields. Even it is possible then to forget that the «culture of life» is intrinsically a benevolent and charitable task, a kind and joyful message, which tries hard and even heroically to show understanding with everyone. Although uncompromising with error, which strives to refute with rationality and endless patience, the genuine follower of the «culture of life» searches sincerely to gain all for the cause of life, bestowing to that generous amount of comprehension and forgiveness. Therefore, anyone fighting for the cause of human life must realize that the «culture of life» exists not to destroy or condemn the followers of the «culture of death», but to save them, to offer them a new
sign of hope. The «culture of life» labors for the growth of justice and caring, pursues the building of an authentic civilization of truth and love(vi). The «culture of life» is an essentially affirmative endeavor.

It is easy to understand that, given the immediacy and harshness of fighting, less attention has been paid to the elucidation of the affirmative contents of the new culture of life than to the apparently more urgent task of denouncing the fallacies and stratagems of the «culture of death». But, in my view, nothing is more pressing than to identify and characterize those elements that could be labeled as the positive features of the culture of life.

We must quest for things as the following:
- the psychological disposition best attuned to the positive and appealing demeanor with which the culture of life must endow its words and deeds;
- the ways to define and present the culture of life as an ever new and fresh novelty;
- to define the distinctive frame of mind and mood in which the messages of the culture of life must be coined and communicated, and adapted to the multitude of places, mentalities and situations;
- to see to it that the news and reports, the statements and replies from the side of the culture of life are impregnated of good and solid science, and imbued of understanding and forgiveness, of joy and hope;
- to explore new ways of expressing the human and Christian enthusiasm for human life, without indulging in rose-colored lyricism;
- to determine the limits of zeal in the furtherance and defense of human, to avoid the fall into bitterness and hounding;
- to see to it that, in the respect and acceptance of the free initiative and original ways of everyone, all militating on the side of the culture of life could unite in the attainment of some common and previously agreed on outcomes, to act. Occasionally, some co-ordination is needed in midst of the necessary and polyphonic diversity;
- to devise the ways to establish a rich flow of mutual communication, to enable all to know, adopt and adapt the manners of others to scatter the good seed of the gospel of life;
- to establish a confident and loyal relationship with the science of life and health, because true scientific advances are steps towards the culture of life. Never can be legitimate to deny, manipulate, overdo or torture the data of science; such as it is done frequently by those propounding scientism;
- to be wise enough to blend harmoniously in every occasion the talented rationality of objective moral judgment with the gentle and charitable dealings with those who do not understand the feelings and attitudes proper to the culture of life;
- to learn how to conjugate the affirmation of moral truth with the welcome acceptance and friendship of those who are astray.
- to develop, finally, with boldness and nerve the triple behest the Pope assigns to us in the Encyclical: to proclaim, celebrate, and serve the Gospel of life.

From this unfinished, but extensive and stimulating program, I will offer some brief suggestions on two points: One refers to the incorruptible engagement to truth from which all actions and words in favor of the culture of life must emerge. The other deals with the celebration of the Gospel of life. It is perhaps the more difficult and less discussed of the triple behest just mentioned.

Assuredly, my considerations are only tentative and partial. The matter is in need of much more reflection and talk. I bring it to you to provoke comments, criticisms and suggestions.

Engagement with truth

A systematic search of Evangelium vitae for the word "truth" and its related expressions reveals convincingly that John Paul II confers to truth an essential and leading role in the theory and practice of the culture of life. The Holy Father speaks of the central role of truth in the understanding and diffusion of the Gospel of life, since only on a deep and sincere adhesion to truth can the value of each human
being be revealed and the respect for his or her humanity is granted. The Pope affirms that "even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize (...) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end(vii). John Paul II insists, in relation with the spreading of the Gospel of life, that any authentic social relationship must necessarily be founded on truth(viii); that now, in our troubled days of moral confusion, we need more than ever to have the courage to look the truth in the eye and call things by their proper name, without yielding to convenient compromises or to the temptation of self-deception(ix). The Pope teaches us that the new culture of life we must help to build is a culture of truth and of love(x); that the purpose of the Gospel of life is to permeate all cultures and give them life from within, so that they may express the full truth about the human person and about human life(xi); that with clarity and determination we must identify the steps we are called to take in order to serve life in all its truth(xii). At last, the Pope invites those involved in the mass media to show a scrupulous concern for factual truth, combining freedom of information with respect for every person and a profound sense of humanity(xiii).

The Pope does not conceal that his history has known cases where crimes have been committed in the name of truth. That hard and disquieting fact makes more urgent for us to rediscover to our fellow citizens the very truth of the human being and the dignity of the person(xiv).

It is regrettable, in view of the Pope's advice, to find that the messages of some pro-lifers are infected by a variety of faults against truth, because they, for the sake of dialectics or efficiency, succumb easily to the temptation of deforming the truth. Certainly they do not use deliberately lies or deception. But they exaggerate the truth to reshape it into a stronger and more convincing weapon; or they torture truth to make it reveal more that it contains; or reveal truth only in part, to sidestep the unavoidable complexity the real presents.

Sometimes, forced by the pressing needs of the moment, some people put into circulation half-baked writings, result of improvisation, anger or pique, which can damage the cause of the culture of life, and offer to its enemies an opportunity for derision or delight. Many pieces produced under untoward emotional conditions, so frequent in the fight of the two cultures, not only are short of truth and Christian love, but are wanting also in prudence and circumspection. None of those working in the construction of the culture of life ought to abstain of asking advice and criticisms from a true and knowledgeable friend before issuing his or her articles or letters to the editor.

The written materials and the oral communications of the followers of the culture of life must comply, in due measure, with the set of rules to ensure the quality of form and content, that are operative in the areas of scientific or cultural editorship. The requirements for correct communication related, at the beginning, with matters of style and etiquette, but, with the pass of time, they include a growing number of ethical criteria(xv). Some of them are important in the sphere of the culture of life, since they urge habits of intellectual honesty and informational integrity, badly needed to prevent the risks of pretending that, in the service of life, all is permitted. Never the good end of defending human life can justify the use of the evil means of lying or deceiving.

The common ethics of publication(xvi) impose a number of duties, among which are of concern to us:
- to adopt a just and straightforward attitude facing authorship, which propel us to grant by a sense of justice the due credit to the originators of the ideas we borrow from them, and which forbids the appropriation of the work and merits of others through plagiarism or shifty imitation;
- to ascertain the credibility and accuracy of those data we use in our argumentation, through a diligent evaluation of their value and the reliability of the sources;
- to turn down any suggestion to fabricate data or of tricking information;
- to convey the conclusions of our argumentation with thoroughness and care, to avoid presenting as real what is only desirable, as true what is doubtful, as ascertained what is merely supposed;
- to assume personally the accountability for our words and deeds in the context of the culture of life, where there is no place for anonymous vilification;
- to get the advice of prudent persons on the quality and contents of manuscript to be sent for publication. As all we know, the application of the peer-reviewing process has brought about a considerable gain in the quality in scientific publication. The revision of manuscripts or of outlines for oral interventions by good and competent friends is the best assurance against inaccuracies and our idiosyncratic foibles. Asking for counsel and giving advice are worthy actions of human and Christian virtue that safeguard us from the danger of being lead by obsessions and phobias.

The danger of falling in error is not remote. Some of those misdeeds have been vigorously denounced by Roberge, on the basis of flawed data and sloppy arguments taken from culture of life's publications(xvii). Roberge's article makes a deserving reading, because it censures a number of scientific and ethical deficiencies found in the pro-life literature, and challenges some common habits that contribute to maintain the substandard quality of some pro-life productions.

The culture of life is a culture of truth and love. That means that the individuals and groups fighting for the culture of life must uplift their culture. They are to find their intellectual and ethical space in the generous giving of truth and love. That requires, on the side of truth, the use of intellectual honesty and competence in the search of verity, included the critical and diligent ascertaining of the present's state of the art in science. And, on the side of love, that demands an enduring effort of benevolence, understanding, and forgiveness towards those fallen in error; an effort not to condemn but to save them(xviii).

It devolves to the members of the Pontifical Academy for Life to help individuals and groups to upgrade the wisdom of their writings and the insight of their actions.

The celebration of the Gospel of life

The celebration of the Gospel of life is an issue worthy of consideration in our Assembly, because it has received until now, set aside the liturgical aspect, very little attention. It is in urgent need of study and development, because it could make an exclusive contribution to the culture of life. What means to celebrate life is decisive to determine the keynote of the whole of the culture of life. The human complexion of the pro-life endeavor, the character of the people of life, the diffusion of the Gospel of life, how to proclaim it and to serve it, all of that depends on the way we understand what is to celebrate life.

In a deep comprehension of points 83 to 86 of Evangelium vitae we can find the remedies for many ailments under which suffer many people in the field of the culture of life. Without joy, without this fruit of the Holy Spirit in our souls, it is neither possible to build the new culture of life, nor can take root on our consciences the humble and grateful conviction of being members of the people of life. To promote the profound cultural change the Pope invites us to accomplish, we need to present us before mankind with a joyful and humble mien, with a spirit of celebration.

What in his Encyclical the Holy Father tell us on the celebration of life?
The constant advice of the Pope, and his persistent example, is that we must begin, always it is possible, our ethical reflection and teaching with some reference to the Holy Scripture, so that we can rest on a biblical foundations(xix).

Faithful to his own recommendation, the Pope lay the foundation of the whole Encyclical on a chosen scene of the Gospel, an account full of joy and celebration. Evangelium vitae begins reminding us that, at the dawn of salvation, the Birth of a Child is proclaimed as a joyful news: "I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Lk 2, 10-11).
The Pope hastens to teach us that joy, and concretely the messianic joy, is the foundation and fulfillment of joy at every child born into the world. Joy is in the heart of the new culture of life.(xx). When, further on in the Encyclical, the Pope presents us the exulting scene of the meeting of the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, he characterizes it as a burst of joy for life, a celebration of fecundity, the happiness for the close approaching of a son, and especially the exaltation for the indisputable recognition of the value of life from its very beginning(xxi).

At the outset of the Encyclical's Chapter IV, John Paul II insists on telling us that the Gospel, and therefore the Gospel of life, has been received by the Church as a source of joy and salvation(xxii). He adds that three dimensions, of proclaiming, celebrating and serving the Gospel of life, are inseparable and closely linked to the prophetic, priestly and royal mission of the Lord Jesus. The various workers of the Gospel are called to action, each one according his or her individual charisma and ministry, bringing together unity and diversity, fidelity and spontaneity. The Pope reaches the conclusion that "together we all sense the duty (...) to celebrate (the Gospel of life) in the Liturgy and in our whole existence", that is, there is a celebration that has to do with the evocative power of gestures, symbols and rites of the Liturgy. But the celebration of the Gospel of life has another dimension to be displayed in the wide world, in the limitless stage of the whole existence(xxiii). In the following, some tentative and preliminary comments are devoted to this last dimension.

It is not an easy task to summarize what the Pope teaches us in sections 83 to 86 of the Encyclical, where he deals extensively with the celebration of the Gospel of life. But it is worth to a trial. This part of the Letter bears as a motto a verse from the Psalm 139/138: "I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made". This exclamation of gratitude and wonder lends an enjoyed accent to the following remarks.

With deep intuition for the psychological and the pastoral, the Pope reminds us that we are sent into the world as a people for life, and this is how we present ourselves to everyone. This attitude towards human life is, then, a mark of identity, and is characterized by humility, gratitude and joy(xxiv).

In an unexpected turn, the Pope declares us that to be able to celebrate the Gospel of life "we need first of all to foster, in ourselves and in others, a contemplative outlook"(xxv). The new culture of life demands from us a lively faith in the God of life, in the Creator who gives the wonder of existence to every individual. Only seeing life in its deeper meaning, revealed by this contemplative outlook, we can reach the vantage point from which grasp the utter gratuitousness, the beauty and the invitation to freedom and responsibility, which are its attributes. Such a piercing contemplative outlook reveals us the good news that in every person inhabits the living image of God. This is the source of the intangible dignity of every human being, so frequently concealed by illness and suffering, by the precariousness preceding death and the vulnerability predating birth.

Such a contemplative outlook discovers a sense for every human existence, since in the face of every person perceives not only a call to mutual respect, dialogue and solidarity, but also an invitation to share through Christ in the life of grace. A reflection in depth on the Gospel of life can fill our soul of an almost religious admiration for every human being, as an adopted Son of God in Christ. The Pope affirms that the new people of the redeemed cannot but respond with songs of joy, praise and thanksgiving for the priceless gift of life and in an existence of unending communion with God, our Creator and Father(xxvi).

The Pope offers a number of possibilities through which the celebration of the Gospel of life can be channeled. He advises us to bless and praise God in our daily prayer because He knitted us together in our mother's womb, and saw and loved us while we were still without form. Quoting from his predecessor Paul VI, the Pope displays before us the perplexing contrast of life and death as a unique source of joy: "despite its hardships, its hidden mysteries, its suffering and its inevitable frailty, this mortal life is a most beautiful thing, a marvel ever new and moving, an event worthy of being exalted in joy and glory"(xxvii).
The participation in the new culture of life, the Holy Father says insistently, demands from us to equip our conscience with a deep and clear certitude about the dignity of any human being, of all human beings. That dignity, so many times eclipsed by illness and ignorance, is categorical and unambiguous, and always must be the reason for celebration because it never fails to be a spark of God's grace and love. "In every child which is born and in every person who lives or dies we see the image of God's glory. We celebrate this glory in every human being, a sign of the living God, an icon of Jesus Christ."(xxviii).

The whole contents of sections 83 to 86 of Evangelium vitae must be read, and reread, frequently by those working in the construction of the new culture of life, to gain insight and to recover from tiredness and failure. It is a pity that those in the ranks of the culture of death, by ignoring or scorning willfully the teachings of the Pope, renounce to know the reasons for loving life beyond measure. To them must we go with hope and love: the Gospel of life is for the whole of human society and the people of life rejoices in being able to share its commitment with so many others(xxix).

If a significant number of people who believe in the value of life had acquired the contemplative outlook and the attitude of unconditioned admiration and joy for the almost divine dignity of every human being, then their work could possibly be more efficient, convincing and versatile, more open to all people of good will, and more sensitive to the possibilities beyond number for their peaceful and fecund work.

As an exemplification of those possibilities, I will offer some hints on the role the celebration of the Gospel of life can play in two areas: the teaching of medicine, and the social actions in favor of life.

Celebrating the Gospel of life and the teaching of medicine

Paradoxically, the contemplative outlook appears to be lost or badly dimmed among many teachers of medicine.

To begin with, how uninspiring and dull are many textbooks with which the minds of our students are fed! They are coldly neutral, merely descriptive, written in a boring and formalist style. They create in their readers a reductionistic frame of mind, devoid totally of enthusiasm for human life and human beings. Many medical books ought to be rewritten in a new temper that brings together a rigorous and critical presentation of facts and processes with the definitely human trait of wonder. It would be sufficient in many instances to include in lectures and books short breaks to offer time and place for amazement and contemplation, for wonderment and its countless reasons. We would be better teachers and mentors if we tried, in our lessons and books, to offer our students opportunities to smile in gratitude for the beauty and resilience of life, to fathom our ignorance, and to ponder the many problems that are ahead waiting for solution.

There is a lot of work and conversion to do. Mechanistic fallacy, so dominant in our academic institutions, tends to inculcate in students and young researchers the deep conviction that only is real what is mechanistically explainable. In such a mind-set, life becomes mere mechanics, things biologicare dead. As Holbrook concludes, biology becomes a sort of thanatology(xxx).

In the official mechanistic context, the teaching of biomedical science losses spirit and intellectual breath, and turns its back to what is typically human and to the ethical engagement of medicine. Then is too easy for teachers and students to fall in the sophisticated roughness of insensitivity for the human, the feelings and convictions, of others. For instance, the human embryo becomes a mere aggregate of cells where the only detectable activities are the expression of genes and the actions of modulating molecules, according to a development mechanics which does not differ from that governing the development of flies or mice. To refer to the human embryo as a human being worth of the respect due to other humans can appear today as a striking eccentricity. To accept that in the early embryo is present a whole human existence in the humble but glorious stage every man or woman must live when
he or she is only a few days old is rejected as treason to science. The whim of pre-embryo is, instead, politically correct.

The absence of the true living and human in the teaching of the basic sciences leave the students devoid of resources when they meet their first patients at the beginning of the clinical years. They are unacquainted with human realities of suffering and sickness. Frequently students experience feelings of estrangement and inadequacy in their first weeks of hospital work. To overcome such drawbacks could be a great help an in-depth and meditated reading of Evangelium vitae, not only because the Encyclical is a sovereign lesson of medical ethics, but also because it is also an intense lesson of medical humanity. We have a moral obligation to explain our trainees that the medical calling has as much or more to do with living people as with dead molecules or lifeless mechanisms, that they have an urgent need of learning to acknowledge the dignity and uniqueness of each one of their patients, and that such acknowledgement is the condition for true professionalism and human fulfillment.

As always, the best the medical school can give their students is the forging of character, the ethical outlook, the love and joy for serving life. That gives the contemplative outlook the Pope reveals to us a prominent place among the personal and institutional teaching goals. How good if we could get and transmit to our students that insight on the value and dignity of each human life, with the purpose of inducing them to know more to serve better!

As Sulmasy puts it beautifully, "To be joyful is to be attentive to the profound meaning of the privilege of serving the sick and to be grateful for that privilege. To be joyful is to be fascinated by people (...) and to be conscious of how wonderful it is that God made them and grateful that one has had the chance to meet so many on such intimate terms. (...) The secret joy of health care is people. If doctors and nurses (...) can just remember that every single patient is a gift from God, they will understand that they have been richly blessed. They will be very joyful people, for "good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap (Lk 6,38)."(xxxi)

It is necessary to infuse life, joy and love of life into the teaching of the theory and practice of medicine. Only then, we can protect ourselves and our trainees against the subtle dangers of moral lethargy, of affective impoverishment, of debilitating reductionism, of trivializing human worthiness.

I like to quote some articles by Lewis Thomas, a scientist whose life was not illuminated by the light of faith, but went by in the twilight of the search of God. Thomas was also a captivating writer and an enthusiast of life, a witness to the wonder of living things and the living man.

From an article entitled On Embryology(xxxii), I excerpt a fragment where Thomas tells us what happens along the first days of our own life, not in the cool terminology typical of embryology textbooks, but as an intense, personal and unforgettable experience, able to mark indelibly the mind of their readers:

"You start out as a single cell derived from the coupling of a sperm and an egg, this divides into two, then four, then eight, and so on, and at a certain stage there emerges a single cell which will have as all its progeny the human brain. The mere existence of that cell should be one of the great astonishments of the earth. (...) It is an unbelievable thing, and yet there it is, popping neatly into its place amid the jumbled cells of every one of the several billion human embryos around the planet, just as if it were the easiest thing in the world to do.

If you like being surprised, there's the source. One cell is switched on to become the whole trillion-cell, massive apparatus for thinking and imagining and, for that matter,
NOTES
(i) Evangelium vitae, n. 28
(ii) Evangelium vitae, n. 28
(iii) Evangelium vitae, nn. 6, 82, 92, 95 (three times), 97, 98 (four times), 100. In the second
acceptation, seven times the cultute of life is qualifyed as new; once is called authentic, and once more
is marked as truthful. In four occasions, it is referred simply as culture of life.
(iv) See, for instance, the web site of the Culture of Life, where a high number of links to organizations
working for the cause of life can be found.
(v) Evangelium vitae, n. 100.
(vi) Evangelium vitae, n. 6.
(vii) Evangelium vitae, n. 2.
(viii) Evangelium vitae, n. 57.
(ix) Evangelium vitae, n. 58
(x) Evangelium vitae, n. 77.
(xi) Evangelium vitae, n. 95.
(xii) Evangelium vitae, n. 95.
(xiii) Evangelium vitae, n. 98
(xiv) Evangelium vitae, n. 70.
(xv) International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. Uniform Requirements for Manuscripts
(xvi) American Medical Association, Manual of style. A guide for authors and editors, Baltimore:
Williams & Wilkins, 1998, Chapter 3, Ethical and legal considerations, pp 87-172.
(xvii) Roberge L.F., Scientific disinformation, abuse, and neglect within pro-life, Linacre Quarterly
(xix) Smith J.E., The Introduction to the Vatican Instruction, in The Pope John Center, Reproductive
technologies, Marriage and the Church, Braintree, Mass: The Pope John Center, 1988:17.
(xx) Evangelium vitae, 1.
(xxi) Evangelium vitae, 45.
(xxii) Evangelium vitae, 78.
(xxiii) Evangelium vitae, 79.
(xxiv) Evangelium vitae, 78.
(xxv) Evangelium vitae, 83.
(xxvi) Evangelium vitae, 83.
(xxvii) Evangelium vitae, 84.
(xxviii) Evangelium vitae, 84.
(xxx) Holbrook D., Medical ethics and the potentialities of the living being, British Medical Journal
(xxxi) Sulmasy DP. The healer's calling. A spirituality for physicians and other health professionals,
(xxxiv) Evangelium vitae, 88.


(xxxxvii) Veritatis splendor, 3.

(xxxxviii) Evangelium vitae, 78.

(xxxxix) Evangelium vitae, 80.

(xl) Evangelium vitae, 78.

(xli) Evangelium vitae, 99.
TADEUSZ STYCZEN
TO LIVE MEANS TO THANK: GRATIAS AGO, ERGO SUM

Gloria Dei vivens homo
Sant'Ireneo, Adversus haereses

STATUS QUAESTIONIS
Does to thank mean to give?

I say «thank you» to someone when I accept a gift from him. Gratitude is thus an attitude towards the gift and its giver. It is the attitude of accepting the gift. But what is meant by accepting a gift? Just as a gift is no gift, if in it and through it the giver does not in some way give himself to the receiver, so it can be said that gratitude is not really gratitude unless the gift is accepted in the same way that the giver himself is accepted. Giving means to affirm - in a special way - the person to whom one is giving something, for his own sake, through the gift of oneself. Likewise, thanking someone for a gift is also a special affirmation of the giver for his own sake. Thus one can speak of true gratitude only within the framework of mutual selfless love between the giving person and the receiving person. The gift is a specific sign and a special manner of realizing this love. Even very expensive things, when given without the intention of affirming the other in selfless love, do not deserve the name of gifts; and the acceptance of such gifts does not deserve the name of gratitude, even when bound with the corresponding verbal assurances and conventional gestures normally regarded as signs of gratitude. At least two conclusions may be drawn from these observations: first, that true gratitude is very rare; and, second, that a real gift - one which calls forth genuine gratitude - also occurs very seldom. To give oneself in a gift is a difficult matter, a bonum arduum.

Is it not true that what looks like a gift is all too often only an act of subtle manipulation of another person, a kind of purchase of sympathy or influence, a way of securing one's own interests with the help of another? In other words, it is an act of annexation, perhaps even of aggression, an aggression which can scarcely be withstood. Or perhaps from the beginning, both sides regard the gift, and the gratitude for it, only as a convention, a kind of social game which carries no moral consequences and which comes to an end, like every game, when the partners decide to break it off. I used to be of the opinion that human beings are actually unable to express gratitude in an appropriate way, even when they have been given a true gift. I could not believe people capable of thanking the one to whom they should first of all give thanks. For whatever a person receives from any other, he receives, in the final analysis, from God Himself. But in the sight of God, man is a needy creature indeed. Can he turn to God in any other way than to seek help because of his own needs, for any other reasons than selfish ones? Can he then thank God in a way which is appropriate and adequate to the gift and the Giver? In order to thank God appropriately and adequately one would have to be equal to Him, one would have to be God Himself, I thought. And because it is completely impossible to thank God in a way which is appropriate, it seemed impossible to thank anyone at all in an appropriate manner, especially to thank a person for the gift of himself. Sed contra...

A discovery in the hymn: Gloria in Excelsis deo

My conviction experienced a small revolution through an encounter with the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, which shook not so much my certainty as my doubts about a person's ability to express genuine gratitude. I will return shortly to the theme of gratitude from an unexpected direction: namely, from the discovery that man, who is God's creation and thus from his very being in need of God, is capable nevertheless of giving himself to God, thereby fulfilling the primary requirement of thanking God in an
adequate way, i.e. vere dignum et iustum est et aequum et salutare Deo gratias agere. I would like to show that this not only is possible but is also a moral imperative for man, as man.

I do not know exactly when I first came into contact with Bach. I had already heard about him and had listened to his music long before I succumbed to the magic of his small piano preludes. I played them for the first time when I took piano lessons during my theology study at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. But not every encounter is the same. My decisive encounter with Bach happened much later, when I heard his Mass in B-minor. I listened to the record ceaselessly as I was working on the text of my Habilitationsschrift in Lublin, and thus, with only partial attention. But every time I heard it, I had to interrupt my work when a particular passage approached. The music of this passage required my total attention, my complete concentration. My listening to the Mass became a waiting for this one passage, and from the music of this fragment I experienced the entire meaning of the Mass - the totality in the part, das Ganze im Fragment.

When the words suddenly forced themselves into my awareness, I experienced a total surprise. What I had somehow suspected I experienced in the most powerful way. Although I had heard the hymn Gloria in excelsis Deo countless times before, and, in it, the words gratias agimus Tibi propter magnam gloriam Tuam, not until that moment did I experience in the depths of my existence what it means to thank God not only for what I have received from Him, but rather for what He allows me to know of His innermost being, His magnificence. Thus I thank Him not primarily for what He allows me to experience as summum appetibile, that is, for my own sake, but rather for what He allows me to experience as summum affirmabile, for His sake, propter magnam gloriam Tuam.[1] Perhaps I would never have discovered the depth of these words without Bach and his musical wonder at their meaning. The anonymous author of this hymn expresses in it man's real possibility, his real need and obligation to thank God, and to thank him in a certain way. He is not trying to prove anything to anyone. Probably, he would have no interest in a scholarly meeting on gratitude. For him only one thing is important: the act of thanking. The hymn requires that he should thank God and that he should thank him in this way, propter magnam gloriam Tuam. With these words he bears witness to that which he experiences. What difference does it make that his humility requires him to conceal his name from us, since he expresses in his own words the fullness of his human possibilities and thereby, the possibilities of us all?

Does he not introduce himself to us, thus, in a strange and special way? In thanking God for the extent of His Glory, thus representing all men, he reveals that true gratitude towards God consists of gratias agimus Tibi propter magnam gloriam Tuam. We discover through Bach and the unknown author of the Gloria that it is possible to do what at first seems absolutely impossible. This needy creature who is human, fascinated and consumed by God, is able to thank Him in this way, to release from within himself aspiring possibilities, and to transcend himself. Of course, it can be asked whether one who thanks God in this way, who finds such a propter, such a «because of,» which brings him into agreement with this hymn of thanks, one who thanks God for His glory, is able to do so within his own human possibilities or whether he does not perhaps have other ad hoc possibilities which are given to him by God Himself. But is it really so important to ask how such glorification of God is possible in view of the fascinating fact that it is possible? (Because it is a fact!) Ab esse ad posse valet consequentia. After all, every one of man's possibilities is in some way a gift from God. I do not even know how the glorification of God could be separated from the gratitude towards God. Perhaps Bach does not know either; he certainly does not raise this question. He simply stands in awe of what he has discovered. He allows himself to be consumed by this discovery and attempts to lead others to the same sense of awe. Bach allows himself to be filled with the same gratitude shown by the unknown author of the words gratias agimus Tibi propter magnam gloriam Tuam, and begins to thank God with these words himself, as if they were his own, and lends to them the voice of his music.

It reminds me of the woman in the gospels, the Samaritan woman, who leaves her jug behind at the well. She forgets that she has come to fetch water and runs off to tell the inhabitants of the city of the
good news that she has received from the unknown man at Jacob's well, who has revealed to her the mystery of the giver within the gift. What has she received from this encounter? What motivates her cry: "come and see for yourselves!" (cf. J 4: 29)? Is it not the way in which the unknown man addressed her using the words: "If you knew the value of God's Gift and if you knew who asks you «Give me a drink of water.»"?[2]
To come back to Bach, I think that to him the words gratias agimus Tibi propter magnam gloriam Tuam must have been so moving, in the innermost way, that he would never be able to free himself from them and would never want such a liberation. How could he want a release from that which represents the pinnacle of freedom for the inner life of a man, the highest of all possibilities - what we desire above all things? Could Bach, while creating Kunst der Fuge, the most perfect work of his life, attribute the following words, with the feeling of absolute peace and trust, to God, his Creator: «BACH, it is you, Johann Sebastian Bach, it is you I am going to meet now»? Thus it seems no coincidence that Bach uses the music of the Gloria again at the end of the Mass. This genius of inexhaustible creative possibilities decided to repeat the theme for the conclusion of the Mass, in: Dona nobis pacem. So he makes that propter of the Gloria the finale of the Mass. One can ask «why»? I will venture an answer. He had to conclude the Mass in this way so that it would never end, so that it would go on forever, so that it would be transformed into a grateful song of praise without end, gratias agimus Tibi propter magnam gloriam Tuam. Eucharist means Thanksgiving.

TOWARDS AN ANSWER

Amatus sum ergo sum: I am loved, therefore I am

If a reflection on giving and thanking is not to become a mere fantasy, it must be based upon experience. This experience - as I assume - we have all shared, in occurrences such as «how good, how wonderful that you are here» or, «I wish that you would live forever.»[3] In this category belongs that deepest of all human longings - the one to give to the persons you love a grateful response to their love, which might be expressed in paradigmatic fashion with the words: «I want to belong to you totally and forever» (totus Tuus, tota Tua). I assume that these sentiments belong to the daily experience of us all. But in connection with these experiences, questions arise which point out difficult problems of human existence. Is it possible to give a proper response to the offer of a loved and loving person without first accepting the other self, in mutual self-giving? A further question arises: do I belong enough to myself, do you belong to yourself? Surely, the deepest foundation of ourselves, our mysterious existence, is in no way subject to our own control. Werner Bergengruen expresses this experience in the verses of his poem Zu Lehen:

I am not mine (Ich bin nicht mein)
You are not yours (Du bist nicht dein)
No one can be his own (Keiner kann sein eigen sein)
I am not yours (Ich bin nicht Dein)
You are not mine (Du bist nicht mein)
No one can belong to another (Keiner kann des anderen sein)

Isn't the poet right? It is precisely from the point of view of these questions that the problem of gratitude can be seen in its full scope. To solve it means to ask and answer the most profound question about the meaning of human identity (essentia) and existence (existentia), indeed about the meaning of human love: «From whom must we accept ourselves?» Or, «To whom must we give thanks for our own selves, i.e. for our experience that-we-are, and for our being what-we-are»?
Nothing reveals to me so profoundly and clearly the radically gift-like character of existence as the experience of its contingency. I was not, but now I am. I did not have to be, and yet I came to be. I am,
therefore, because I have been given to myself. Because I am a gift, I am. But, also, nothing reveals it to me so deeply and clearly as the admission, «How good it is that you exist.» In this proclamation, we see how very contingent the existence of the other person, the loved one, is, and how very much everything that person is, is a gift. But a gift from whom? To whom do we owe gratitude? No one can give himself, or be his own gift for himself. Even reference to the parents is no answer to the question at hand, for this question arises above all at the sight of parents who lament the death of their child. What a great power is necessary, and, at the same time, what a great love must work ceaselessly so that a man can come into being and live? And what a great power, indeed, works directly and continuously so that man can continue to live? Is not the encounter of love with omnipotence in the Infinite necessary to solve the riddle of the gift of personal existence? L'évidence de l'expérience, as Leibniz said, leads, in connection with the reductive, logical explanation of this experience, to the only answer to the above question, to the évidence de la raison.

At the deepest source of the awe which gives expression to every human exclamation, «How good that you exist!» stands the primary act of creative acknowledgement, the act of personal love combined with omnipotence. The «goodness of existence» is represented in the Book of Genesis as a consequence of the divine order: «let there be» (cf. Gn 1: 3-26), a command which is directed in a unique and unrepeatable way to each individual person, that, without this person, the world from then on, in the perspective of absolute and almighty love, simply could not be the same world. When we completely understand and can explain the truth of giving and thanking as the mutual gift of one's person to another person, then, as philosophers, we must, first of all, with Jacob the patriarch proclaim, "truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know!" (Gn 28: 16). God is here in our midst, and perhaps we, too, did not know it. For the only reason that I am at all, that I can be at all is that my Creator continually makes to me a present of myself. I exist only as a gift and you exist only as a gift. Augustine would probably say, «I am loved, therefore I am, I am loved creatively, therefore I am. Amatus sum, ergo sum.»

The Creator does not have to create anyone; He does not have to give anyone the gift of existing as a person. He remains completely free in His decision. However, when He decides to create me, to make me a present of myself, He cannot do it in any other way than by giving Himself to me as well, through His «Totus tuus» towards me. For He Himself must be in me and must work in me, giving within me, so that I can exist at all. He Himself must be radically present within us, intimior intimo nostro, in actu et in persona. Actiones sunt suppositorum, actus personarum.

The simple fact that we are here is enough to establish this truth definitively: inasmuch as God the Creator makes us a present of ourselves, He gives Himself to us completely as a gift. Therefore, it is true to say that we exist because God the Creator gives Himself to us ceaselessly, quia Deus bonus est nos sumus. I encounter not only myself within me when I genuinely want to encounter me within me. I encounter not only you within you when I genuinely want to encounter you within yourself. And what about when I make a gift of myself to another person, or when I accept another person in his giving of himself? What would then an appropriate gratitude consist of, and above all, to whom would it be owed?

Amo ergo sum: I love, therefore I am

God's giving of Himself obviously cannot be simply the communication of the gift, it cannot be mere information. It is a declaration of love par excellence and a waiting for the response, for the acceptance of the gift. It is a kind of invitation to communion to give ourselves to one another. Man becomes here a theophany par excellence. He becomes the one in whom God works: his creative encounter, and at the same time the one who encounters God, the one within whom God wants to be accepted by man as a gift. But what does all of this mean for my own genuine understanding of self and for my own
genuine identification with myself in free, honest self choice, given the fact that I am and that I am who I am, thanks only to a gift of God?

On the level of being - that is, on the level of the original metaphysical creative constitution of myself - it means that God, my Creator, calls upon me personally from the innermost part of my being, to recognize and accept myself as a gift for the sake of the truth about my ontic structure. On the inner, subjective level of self-constitution - that is, the secondary cognitive and morally creative constitution of myself - it means that I do not disclose myself as a subject of self knowledge, and thus identify with myself, until I understand myself as a gift of my personal creator, through my own act of knowing and in my own act of knowing.[9] And only at this point am I standing at the threshold of what is the most important...

When I go beyond the dimension within which I speak the truth about myself only with myself (soliloquium), towards that dimension in which I speak about myself with that Person who is the Truth (colloquium), the truth about myself becomes for me a divine «Thou» and I recognize myself to be «His» responding and responsible hearer. It means further, however, that I am really only able to choose myself as the subject of freedom in the act of self-choice when I accept myself from God, the Creator, as a gift. Only then do I fulfill myself as myself; only then do I belong to myself and possess myself enough to choose to belong to Him; only then do I truly become myself - when I give myself totally and completely to God through acceptance of myself from Him as a gift, when I respond to His «Totus tuus» with my «totus Tuus.» Only when I conform my inner-attitude completely to totus Tuus can I thank Him for myself as a gift, which I may then return to Him with a total giving of self. However, if the acceptance of myself as a gift of God is inseparable from the acceptance of His self as the one who is the giver, then when I totally and completely accept myself from God as a present, I am totally and completely fulfilled, and the fullness which I experienced comes not only from myself but rather, above all, from God, the Giver.

I am approaching the conclusion here: Thus when I accept myself as a gift from God, I give to God through this acceptance not only my whole and complete self, but also - with myself - God Himself, totally and completely. Does that not mean precisely thanking God, the Creator, for my existence in an appropriate manner?[10] I believe that this is the answer to the question which was posed at the beginning: from whom must we accept ourselves to be able to thank adequately for ourselves? Still, can a man really do what is being maintained here, and give God to God? The inner-logic of giving and thanking is overpowering, but at the same time surprising, and even shocking, for on the one hand, what is easier to accept than the initiative of God, the Creator, who gives me to myself and at the same time gives Himself to me? What is easier than to say: «Yes, I accept myself completely and unconditionally from you, totally together with you, the Giver»? With this acceptance, I want to give myself completely to You (totus Tuus, tota Tua - all for You). Yet, on the other hand, how strange that sounds! What could be more shocking than what is here being claimed - to want to give God to God? Is this claim of appropriateness in gratitude to God not, in reality, an expression of the arrogance of man, a product of his vain imagination?

I could probably not have submitted to this logic of giving and gratitude, if I had not experienced the same logic in the marvelous words of Christ: "Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt: 12, 50; cf. Mk: 3: 58). Still, what does it mean to say that this person «is my mother»? Does it not mean that this person has given me to myself? Did Mary not do exactly that the moment she said to Gabriel, God's messenger: Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum?[11] Hence - to sum up - only if I accept myself from God, as His gift, and only if through this acceptance I give myself to God and with me God Himself to God, do I thank God in an appropriate fashion for my being. And second, only when I thank God in this way for myself do I belong to myself completely, fulfill myself completely, and genuinely become myself. Only then am I able to thank another responsibly and adequately for anything, and most especially for that gift of himself. Thus I am truly alive, when I express my thanks in this fashion. Gloria Dei - vivens homo!
IN SANCTUARIO GRATIARUM AGENDI...: IN SEARCH FOR THE TEMPLE OF THANKSGIVING...

When the seeking one has found....

Thus the fact that one seeking truth (or Truth) is actually in its embrace already at the start should by no means be surprising. Would one seeking truth be doing so, had one not already submitted oneself to the power of its magnetizing influence? Having once started to seek it, has one not already crossed the threshold of its house? "You wouldn't be seeking me, had you not found me," said B. Pascal. Indeed, this formulation is not surprising, in particular when you have found out that the truth about yourself you have been seeking is Personal Truth; when you have found out that this truth is indeed Personal Infinite Creative Love. This is why someone could say - and is still repeating - "I am Truth..." (J 14: 6). Yet it is only when one who has been seeking the Infinite suddenly discovers on one's way towards Him that the core of one's problem has become subject to a radical change, that the point is no longer to find the Infinite, not even to let Him find one, but rather to thank Him; it is only when one has realized that to thank means to give the Infinite to the Infinite; it is only when the seeking one recognizes that only by giving God to God does one give... oneself to Him, indeed it is only then that one can find one's total fulfillment and one's true identity, and still more - it is only then that one starts to really live. This is indeed incredible and astonishing. At the same time, this is the greatest possible surprise that can happen in one's life, and the greatest possible adventure in life. It constitutes an event on the way towards the Infinite, and simultaneously an event on the way to one's innermost being. Originally, such an occurrence happens as if unexpectedly, it simply takes place on man's way to his self-knowledge. Yet should it not become also - and above all indeed - his own accomplishment, and thus the event of events on the ways of his freedom? Should this occurrence not become the hour of his birth for a new life, the moment of his new fundamental decision and fundamental option?

To thank means to accept the giver of life in the gift of life

Indeed, the recognition of the Infinite in myself, the recognition of my «You» in me, calls for a radical re-evaluation of all the values. It demands that I look at my entire life from a new perspective: I am from His gift! I am His child! My «I» is forever written in Him! He is in me - intimo intimo meo - therefore I am! Therefore to live, to really live, means to thank! The time that is not thanksgiving is a wasted time! So? Should we not start with a radical «re-settlement in life» for the sake of its melior pars, seeking the most proper place where to give thanks? Should we not begin by finding our Bethany, for the sake of the unum necessarium, for the sake of what is only necessary and important in life? Should we not begin by climbing the «holy mountain of Transfiguration and Thanksgiving,» so that our entire life would be changed from now on into an unceasing act of giving God to God, into an unceasing totus Tuus, tota Tua, into an unceasing act of thanksgiving to the Father - "in spirit and truth" (J 4: 24)?

Indeed, we should! Nothing less and nothing more than that. This is exactly the point here, only that this temple of thanksgiving to Father, «in spirit and truth,» is not distant from life, it is not somewhere out-of-the-way. This temple is indeed in the very center of life! Thus it is not escape that is needed, but rather a return to life - a return to its Source! A return to the Giver of life in His gift par excellence, which is the gift of human life: humanae vitae donum. It is life itself, personal life of each and every man, with its exceptional, unrepeatable visage, that constitutes «God's gift.» Therefore each life is also «God's place,» the place where the Giver, Donator in dono, the One who gives Himself to each man, is most radically active and most radically present in personal! Can one find or choose a more proper place in order to thank God for the gift in which He gives Himself? Can one find or choose a place that is worthier than the one that God Himself has found and chosen? Thus can one find or choose a more
appropriate manner of thanking the Giver of life than to show respect for personal life which is His gift par excellence? Indeed, whenever a new human life is conceived, whenever it starts, is born and continues, the Father Himself is «fathering,» the Creator puts up a living temple for Himself so that we could give our thanks to Him by accepting Him in the gift of life, and thus by giving Him to Himself. Hence, wherever we deal with a human life, we deal with the Father; we deal with a holy place, with a temple of thanksgiving. Take off your shoes! It is a place where thanksgiving is due: by recognizing God in God, by recognizing in Him the Father of all His children in each of his children! Qui potest capere capiat! Let him comprehend who can comprehend!

To thank God means to accept the gift of sisters and brothers

Having once recognized the Infinite Giver and comprehended who He is, one who has sought Him finds oneself - in one's own act of discovering the truth about God and about oneself - in the trap of this truth, in the trap of the truth about the union which is a calling for personal communion with the Personal Giver. Yet this trap does not enslave; on the contrary, it has got the power to show man the only way leading to the apogee of his being. By accepting my being «doomed» to this communion, I have not chosen the subordination of a slave to the tyrant, but rather the life giving belonging of a child to the Father. This belonging expresses my acceptance of the bond between me and the life-giving Source, and hence it is the only way to the fullness of life, the only way for me to reach the apogee of my being, to exercise my freedom in a mutual exchange of the gift of self, the only way for me to reach freedom in love. By having accepted my being «destined» for this communion, I have simultaneously chosen - in the Father - the communion with all those to whom He Himself has ever wished to give a human face, one which is unique among all the others. Thus I have chosen the communion with each and every sister and brother of mine. One who has recognized that each and every human person without exception is a person that the Creator personally confronts, that each and every person is a place «where» the Creator meets them, will also see that from now on there can be no «yes» for God or for... oneself (!) expressed in any other way than by a «yes» for each «somewhere» in which His creative, forever irrevocable confession, unique towards each particular «I,» can be heard: Amo te - ergo es! «I love you - therefore you exist!» Every person is... unique here! Everyone is «God's sanctuary,» a house of worship due to the Infinite Creator. Everyone is from a gift and everyone is a place of thanksgiving for the gift of every other one, for the Infinite Love towards them.

One who has discovered the Infinite by having recognized Him in each living person without exception is thus called for a difficult gratitude. In thanking for the accepted gift one must be able to carry its entire weight. A «yes» for the Giver of life, a «yes» from a child who has recognized that he is who he is, because he is a child of such a Father, will find its transposition and interpretation, its proper expression and the infallible «truth test,» only in an absolute «yes» for every other one without exception. Only this one will be able to carry God who has managed to perceive Him in every other one, who has managed to carry the entire respect due to God, present both in every other one and in oneself. This is what to worship the Father «in spirit and in truth» means. This is what it means to address God as Abba, «Father,» with an action! Thus he will not worship the Father who continuously repeats «Father, Father,» but rather he who accepts the Father in His gift, who receives Him together with the gift, who accepts Him in one of those «least» children of His. St. Ambrose, great Patron of Milan and Father of the Church, might say: «You have called God your Father. Realize fully what you have done by it!»

When he who has discovered the Infinite starts to thank God in such a way, when he strives to carry the weight of the gift he has just recognized, he radically changes the course of the history of the humankind, even if he himself has not realized this fact yet. He contributes to the building of the genuinely human civilization, he starts to make a new history of people, a history in which none of the unborn will have to fear the born, a history in which even the weakest one will not need to be afraid of the stronger. In this history there is no room for Plus vis quam veritas. This history is ruled and directed only by the principle Plus veritas quam vis. It is marked by the very first truth (veritas) about man: that
he is from a gift! This is also the truth about free brotherhood of men, the truth about the solidarity of each with everyone, the truth about the freely chosen solidarity of all people which results from their choice of the Father - from the choice of «God's gift!» What could it have been but this truth that made Beethoven - completely deaf at the time - feel the imperative to sing his gratitude to God with the words of F. Schiller's hymn An die Freude: Seid umschlungen Millionen, diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt! Brüder! Überm Sternenzelt muß ein lieber Vater wohnen!? And yet He is deeply present in each of us, constantly giving ourselves to us. Intimior intimo nostro.

To thank means to discover sacrament in... profanum

Where should we commence? Should we not commence with a reiterated discovery of the place which marks the «transition of the Lord,» transitus Domini, the «transition of the Giver of life»? Should we not commence with a reiterated discovery of the place and time which the Creator Himself has chosen as the only ones worthy of the wonder of creation? As we know, it is the center of the personal union of man and woman in an act of marital love that the Creator has chosen as the place of His transition which results in the gift of life of a new human being. Strange though it may seem, many contemporary people no longer seem to recognize the depth of this act, although it was because of this depth that it was given a particularly apt name of the act of self-giving, which denotes that this is an act of mutual gift of self on the part of the spouses. What is even worse, our contemporaries have become unused to recognizing in this act the altar of the wonder of creation of man. Yet, in no respect does it change the gist of the matter: this is the altar of God the Creator, the altar of the God of Love and the God of Life. He who has discovered the Infinite is thus called to uncover to all his contemporaries a presacrament that is inherent in the marital bond. He is called to uncover to them the mystery of thanksgiving and worshipping «the Father in spirit and in truth,» in una-caro-communione, inherent in the act of marital love. Finally, he is called to uncover to them that the spouses are indeed ministers to God the Creator, and dispensers of His creative love. One who has grasped the Infinite is in a particular way called to break once and forever the tragic wall of misapprehension which the shallow technological civilization of modernity has built between the sacrum of the temple on the one hand, and the supposed profanum of the house and marital bed on the other. Is it not the case that the worship of the sacrum, this great mystery of the worship of the Father, and of thanksgiving Him «in spirit and in truth» for such a GIFT, must begin where two persons are most intimately united in His name?

Hence one who has recognized the Infinite must be particularly sensitive to the sacred nature of the moment when marriage - by becoming a family - faces the «truth test» of its own identity. He then who has recognized his Father in God must make the others, as well as himself, show particular sensitivity to this «sacred threshold» where there appears the temptation, particularly dangerous in the modern world, to reject the Giver by rejecting the gift which only He brings and in which He is most inherently present: the gift of life. This temptation is accompanied by another one which, however, is not less wicked, namely, by the temptation to manipulate the Giver by forcing on Him what can be accepted, and what one is allowed to accept, only as His gift. This latter temptation is particularly wicked, since it is a human person and not an object that is the gift of the Infinite Giver! This is why protection of the sacred character of the «place» in marriage which constitutes the threshold of life, the threshold that is composed of the free decisions made by two persons, has become today the «test» for and the guarantee of the survival of everything that differentiates the civilization of life and love from the civilization of death and hate. Thus it has become the «test» for and the guarantee of the survival of everything that differentiates genuine culture from its mere appearances, of everything that helps one recognize its genuine growth, as well as perceive the verge which demarcates its dusk. Thus we should start with a re-discovery of the act of self-giving! One who has made a mistake at this point will corrupt the solution of the problem at its core. We must start with respecting the ways and times of the «transition of the Lord» - the Giver of all gift. It is here that He must be recognized and
accepted «in spirit and in truth» as the Giver in His gift, as the Giver in «God's gift,» as Donatorem in humanae vitae dono... Only then can man recognize and receive also himself. And only then can he build in himself, as well as in others, both what «belongs to himself» and what «belongs to God.» Here lies the beginning and the criterion of anything that deserves the name of genuine morality and religiousness, of genuine culture. This culture reaches its pinnacle only in the worship of the Giver of life, in Gratias agimus Tibi..., in cultus Dei Creatoris et Caritatis, in the worship of the God of creative love, who continuously gives ourselves and Himself to us. This love urges us to respond to it with our love. Caritas Dei urget nos. Yet, is the challenge of such love not a challenge of difficult love? Indeed it is, and St. Augustine will admit: Amor meus, pondus meum (my love is my burden). Still he will add, with Christ, Eo ferox quocumque ferox (but I am being carried by what I carry). Thus this love proves to be not only a light burden, but indeed a sweet one. Only such a culture of life is a living culture.

NOTES
(1) In analyzing this experience it is worthwhile quoting here a significant sentence from St. Thomas Aquinas: Intellectus regit voluntatem non quasi inclinans eam in id quod tendit, sed sicut ostendens ei quod tendere debeat (The intellect directs the will not by making it follow what it tends to pursue, but rather by revealing to the will what it should pursue), De veritate, q. 22, a. 11 ad 5, which concerns his approach to the understanding of the human person and the essence of his freedom, as well as the essence of moral obligation. See also the analysis of the concept of finis ultimus debitus in St. Thomas made by Cornelio Fabro, Riflessioni sulla libertà, Rimini 1983, p. 62.

It is also worth quoting here what Jacques Maritain says on this subject: "L'obligation en conscience est une donnée absolument première et absolument irréductible de l'expérience morale. Et elle est quelque chose de si simple que la réflexion philosophique à son sujet ou bien la saisit d'un coup ou bien passe entièrement à côté d'elle." See: La philosophie morale. Examen historique e critique des grands systèmes, Paris 1960, Libraire Gallimard, p. 534. Note the significant sentence: "L'art moral n'est pas l'art de bien vivre en vue d'atteindre le bonheur, c'est l'art d'être heureux parce qu'on vit bien," op. cit., p. 29. See also: by this author, "Letter to Jerzy Kalinowski and Stefan Swieżawski on their La philosophie à l'heure du Concile," in: Nova et vetera 40(1965), pp. 242-249.

Peter experienced this the moment he stated that he did not know the Man he knew very well indeed, as soon as this Man looked at him. It was then that Peter realized the irreducible difference between the appetibile and the affirmabile: he realized what constitutes the essence of moral duty, as opposed to its reduction made by the so-called eudaimonism. See: T. Styczyn, "La libertà vive di verità. Intorno all' enciclica «Veritatis splendor,»" Anthropotes 2(1995) pp. 246-250.

(2) This is an English translation of an extract from R. Brandstæetter's Pisma Świętego Jana Ewangelisty (Works of St. John Evangelist), translated from the Greek language, Warszawa 1978. Compare The New Jerusalem Bible, London 1990: "If you only knew what God is offering and who it is that is saying to you, «Give me something to drink,» you would have been the one to ask, and he would have given you living water" (J 4: 10).


(6) "Już sam fakt, że człowiek chce istnieć, żyć, a nie zawsze będzie żył, jest z n a k i e m realnej niedentyficzno( ci istnienia i ludzkiej (czy w ogóle każdego bytu zmiennego) natury. Żaden zatem byt złożony i zmienny, posiadający utrakcyjne istnienie, nie jest sam w sobie zrozumiały w aspekcie egzystencjalnym. (...) Zrozumienie realizmu, faktycznego istnienia rzeczy, jest uwarunkowane Istnieniem Koniecznym, a więc takim bytem, w którym tym samym jest istota co istnienie, który jest istnieniem z konieczno( ci, bo istnieniem ze swej definicji. Byt taki nazywa się Bogiem. (...) To jest jedynie racjonalne wyj( cie w racjonalnym tłumaczeniu faktu istnienia ( wiata." (The fact that man wants to exist, to live, while he will not live forever, is itself a sign of actual non-identity between existence and the human nature (or the nature belonging to any other changeable being). Thus no composite or changeable being, whose existence can be forfeited, is in itself understandable in the existential aspect. (...) Understanding of realism, of the actual existence of beings, is conditioned by the Necessary Existence: the being in which essence coincides with existence, which is existence by necessity, and as such, existence by definition. Such a being is referred to as God. (...) Such is the only rational conclusion of the rational explanation of the existence of the world.) M.A. Krąpiec, "Tajemnica czy absurd?" (Mystery or absurdity?), in: by the same author, Odzyskać (wiata realny (To Regain the Real World), Lublin 1993, pp. 762f. Cf. also by the same author:"Tajemnica i absurd w ostatecznym tłumaczeniu ( wiata" (Mystery and absurdity in the ultimate explanation of the world), in: Tygodnik Powszechny 11(1957) No. 3, pp. 1, 7f.

(8) A strict connection between St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas can be observed at this point: St. Augustine stressing God's deep presence in man and St. Thomas adding that all actions have a person in actu as their subject; an actus is always an actus personae.
(10) "Let me know you, who know me, let me know you even as I am known. Do you, the power of my soul, enter into it and fit it for yourself, that you may have it and possess it without spot or wrinkle. This is my hope, this is my prayer, and in this hope do I rejoice when I rightly rejoice.(...) But now that my groaning is witness that I am displeasing to myself, you shine unto me and I delight in you and love you and yearn for you, so that I am ashamed of what I am and renounce myself and choose you and please neither you nor myself save in you." St. Augustine, Confessions, Bk 10, I, 1 - 2, 2; 5,7. Quoted after: The Divine Office, The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite, vol. 3, London-Glasgow 1974, p. 117.
(11) See St. Augustine, Sermon 25, in: The Divine Office, The Liturgy of the Hours According to the Roman Rite, vol. 3, London-Glasgow 1974: "I beg you to listen to what the Lord had to say when he stretched out his hand towards his disciples: «Here are my mother and my brethren»; and «whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and my sister and my mother». Are we to take it from this that the Virgin Mary did not do the will of the Father, she who by faith believed, by faith conceived; she who was chosen to bring forth salvation among man: by Christ created that Christ in her
might be created? Indeed and indeed she did the Father's will and it is a greater thing for her that she was Christ's disciple than that she was his mother. It is a happier thing to be his disciple than to be his mother. Blessed then is Mary who bore her Lord in her body before she gave him birth."

Cf. Isaac of Stella, Sermon 51; St. Ambrose, The commentary on St. Luke's Gospel, Bk 2, 22-27; St. Hippolytus, The Refutation of all Heresies, Ch 10, 33-34; St. Basil the Great, On the Holy Spirit, Ch 26, Nn 61.64.

See also R. M. Rilke's Verkündigung Die Worte des Engels, in: by this author, Ausgewählte Gedichte, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1973, p. 9:

Du bist ein großes, hohes Tor,
Und aufgehn wirst du bald.
Du, meines Liedes liebstes Ohr,
Jetzt fühle ich: mein Wort verlor
Sich in dir wie im Wald.
So kam ich und vollendete
dir tausendleinen Traum.
Gott sah mich an; er blendete...
Du aber bist der Baum.

The invitation which John Paul II makes in the fourth chapter of the encyclical Evangelium Vitae to generate a new culture of human life is matched by a deep need of contemporary times. Indeed, human life takes place in a context of interwoven spiritual realities which constitute the atmosphere in which the human person becomes fulfilled. This is a set of ideals and values which on the one hand express the inner reality of peoples, and on the other the spiritual and collective fruit of human communities. A culture is the moulded spirit of a people. This is not something that is certain but something with a certain likeness of living beings - there is development and growth but there is also exposure to illness which bring about decline.

History, as Marcus Tullius, the Arpinate, authoritatively observes, is Magistra vitae. From a broad reflection on the history of the cultures and the spiritual fruits generated by peoples down the centuries, only deep forms of teaching can be drawn. Errors, failures and even the seeds of death which arise slowly at their beginning but end up by destroying empires and civilizations that have lasted for thousands of years, can also provide us with major warnings. Aristotle said that a philosopher had to honour the memory of all those who before him had embarked on the difficult road of wisdom, including the memory of all those who had made major mistakes on their road. This was because for the person who sets out on this path news are of great utility, not only about the roads which lead to the goal which is aimed for but also with regard to the experience of those who err at their given moment, so as not to repeat their vain effort. These truths are equally valid in relation to the history of civilisations.

And it is precisely these 'seeds of death' that the Pope denounces courageously as existing in contemporary civilisation. Placing them all together in a bundle, John Paul II has called them the 'culture of death'. With this phrase are described all those factors present in contemporary culture which are the nursery from which are born a multitude of evils, which, like the Biblical plague of locusts, devour the field of the contemporary spirit. The result of this so-called 'epidemic' of ideas, of this real moral illness of culture, is a set of attacks which on all fronts seem to work against human life. Taking as their starting point various arguments and changing ideologies, there exist (and indeed with great virulence) a large series of attempts to justify what are nothing else but outrages in relation human dignity.

We are in the presence, and we are duty-bound to make this observation, of a real inversion of the hierarchy of values. There is an attempt to transform the right order of social and personal values so that not only is there an attempt to justify contempt for the dignity of every human person, from the very moment of his conception to his natural death, but even to raise to the category of 'right's what are nothing else but real crimes in the eyes of God, of man, and of history.

Only in this way can we interpret the frightening indifference which exists in relation to abortion, euthanasia, the manipulation of human life at its first moments, and which are at the root of many modern sets of legislation. To a major extent these initiatives have found a ready welcome not so much because of what has been done in their favour but because of a lack of a suitable rejection of them. This lack of resistance in the defence of the value of human life, especially in the ancient peoples of Western civilisation, should be the subject of mature and deep thought. The reason for this apathy goes beyond the individual sphere: we are face to face with a real illness of culture, which, corrupted by 'seeds of death', has turned against man and threatens to violate the most sacred sanctuary of human dignity, which is created in the image and likeness of God.

The invitation of the Holy Father to shake this apathy which seems to spread amongst so many of our contemporaries, and to generate a real counter-culture (a culture of life able to oppose the 'seeds of death' which are present today in our culture) is thus an inescapable requirement. We have to provide an answer to the seriousness of the present moment. The Church cannot be indifferent in the face of
this moral and mortal illness, this contemporary culture of death. She cannot do this because man is 'the way for the Church' as the Pope observed in his first encyclical, Redemptor Hominis. The evangelisation of today, of the concrete man of our times, takes place through the proclaiming of the Gospel of life. To this end, the Pope invites us to keep steady and grateful our awareness of the fact that we are the people of life and the people for life, presenting ourselves in this way before all men.(1)

The Family and the Culture of Death

Culture is not a kind of cloud which hovers over the earth, covering from on high the place where the lives of human beings unfold. Although it transcends the individual, it is present in each and every person. Culture lives in people. It is in people that culture is no longer an 'idea' but becomes 'life'. In a similar way, it is in people that the 'seeds of death' which are present in culture exercise their baleful influence. The place where we should find its origins, the terrain for the cultivation of the new culture of life, is thus the human heart. It is in the change in the mentality of people, in their conversion to life, that we will find the life-giving lymph of the new civilisation of love to whose construction the Church is committed through her work of evangelisation.

If the assaults on human life have acquired during our age a special gravity, this is due in precise terms to the fact that many people are morally ill. The factor working for the transmission of this very serious illness, as with apostolic courage John Paul II has proclaimed, is culture.

In this situation, the Church declares before the world that she is in favour of life. 'Within the "people of life and for life", one can read in Evangelium Vitae, 'the responsibility of the family is decisive: this is a responsibility which is born from its very nature - that of being a community of life and love, based upon marriage - and from its mission to 'guard, reveal and communicate love'. 'Following Christ who 'came' into the world 'to serve' (Mt 20:28), the Church sees service to the family as one of her essential tasks. In this sense, both man and the family are 'the way for the Church'.(2) The family is the cradle of life, its nursery. Human life germinates in a natural and spontaneous way in that basic cell of communion of life and conjugal love - marriage.

Indeed, we will help our contemporaries to rediscover the value of human life in a way to the extent that we will be able to retrieve the meaning of real love between a man and a woman, sealed in marriage and blessed by a crown of children.(3) The family and life form an intimate unity. Marriage is a community of life and love, life and love which are in reality a single good. This valuable good, conjugal love, moves towards openness rather than self-closure. It requires a culminating point which, to express the idea in a certain way, is an extension of itself within the family. Plato rightly said that 'good spreads itself'. For this reason, the good of marriage tends in itself to be consummated in the generation of a family. This is the real development of human life, as decreed by God the Creator in his eternal plan of compassion for all men.

One of the most baleful consequences of the culture of death is the separation of the intimate unity which exists between love and life. Many false prophets take as their starting point today an assumption that they hold to be incontestable. They argue that married life and children are completely different things. In this way, the unitary good which exists in the close union, decreed by God, between the family based upon marriage on the one hand, and human life on the other, comes to be broken.

From this point of view, anti-conception and artificial procreation present themselves as mere instruments by which to avoid or 'produce' (according to the case in hand) human life in line with needs, according to the tastes of the consumer. This conception of things is very far from the truth about the human person and the truth about conjugal love.
Education and the Culture of Life

The generation of a culture of life involves a correct understanding of the educational mission of the family because this mission has its roots in the primordial vocation of the marriage partners to share in the work of the creation of God. This task, the realisation of an essential and specific mission of the family, takes the form of the educating of the person in the giving of himself in love, and is for this reason an education which fosters 'the overall personal and social education of children'. (4) This is an education which should be well aware of the fact not only that every man fulfills himself through a sincere abandoning of himself, but also that he is called to live in truth and love. From all of this spring important consequences for a sexual education which educates in the virtues and which is an inquiry into the truth and the meaning of sexuality. The climate of those families in which the intimate unity between the family and life seen as a value is lived out, is the best defence against the culture of death. It is the best way of helping the adolescent to overcome the attraction represented by immature and premature sexual activity which is not very responsible and which is reduced to the mere search for individual pleasure. In this way the family becomes the pivot and the key element in the formation of the character of the person and in the generation, at a social level, of a genuine culture of life. (5) This is a really central point. The family is either a place of education of men and women who are masters of themselves, open to the gift of self to the truth and to the meaning of sexuality, to the family and life, or, instead, it is a lost opportunity for the achievement of these fundamental values. In the first case, the experience of the union between the family and life then becomes a concept, an intellectual expression which establishes a value which has already been lived out, and becomes transformed into a conscious value in the person, from which a cultural and social culture is generated. In the second case, the internalisation of the value depends upon a multiplicity of factors and becomes, in practice, overly dependent on an arduous path of personal enrichment which is subject to too many variables.

The family is the first place where one learns the real meaning of sexuality and the natural direction of human love towards the family and life. Each child prepares himself for the giving of himself as a path to be followed in a life of love. The family, for its part, does not completely fulfill itself as itself if it is not at the service of life. This service, of the family to life, which is the generation and education of children in the virtues, places itself for this reason at the service of the common good of society. The family contributes in this way and in a privileged way to the decisive and necessary transformation of a culture of death into a culture of life, supported by Pope John Paul II.

Human Life: the Flowing forth of Conjugual Love

Within the context of the 'people of life and the people for life', the family must occupy the position which is due to it, namely to guard, reveal and communicate love. (6) 'Here it is a matter of God's own love, of which parents are co-workers and as it were interpreters when they transmit life and raise it according to his fatherly plan'. (7) Thus love and the transmission of life cannot be separated. The separation of this tandem is contrary to the reality itself of conjugal love. The culture of death has sought to counterpose conjugal love and the transmission of life as though they were both in competition with each other, as though they were both incompatible, ignoring their deep rooting in each other. (8) The result has been that because these two values are irreplaceable in marriage, the denial of one has led to the alteration at a substantial level of the other. In this way, we find ourselves face to face with the fact that in the culture of death the affections are magnified and life is despised, and this with the result that both are obscured - both the value of marriage and the value of life. The prior step (which in fact is almost necessary) to the championing of the laws on abortion was, however paradoxical this may seem, the approval of the laws on divorce. History shows us the following constant element: the sequential process which exists between the acceptance of divorce (with the consequent deterioration in the value of marriage which flows from this) and seeing human
life as something which is completely subject to being manipulated. Both these expressions manifest a rejection of the 'other'. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger has recently written: 'in the fear of motherhood which has taken over a part of our contemporaries, there is also present a deeper factor: the other turns out to be a competitor who takes away a part of our lives, and is a threat to us and to our free development'.(9) The question of human life, for this reason, has been extracted, uprooted from its real place in the hearts of men (conjugal love, marriage) so as to be placed within the context of the private. The 'other' (both in the 'divorcist' mentality as in the mentality against life) is not an invitation to give of oneself and a stimulus to welcoming. First of all, conjugal love was deprived of its institutional dimension and reduced to a private affair (to be dealt with between two individuals who are opposed to each other). Successively, human life, too, became an individual, private affair, with a neglect thereby of the fundamental truth that human life is a gift and should be welcomed within marriage. Children are the flowing forth of human life within marriage, bringing about thereby a family. Marriage is the specific milieu where life springs forth and is transmitted. The family is the institution within which life finds its most important cultivation - welcoming, attention and care, development, and the education and formation of the 'other'. The culture of life (which is expressed primarily in great esteem for this gift) includes in particular those institutions which by their nature are intimately bound up with the gift of life, namely marriage and the family.

The Transmission of Life, the Gift and Responsibility of the Marriage Partners

Amongst the deepest roots of the struggle between the culture of life and the culture of death is to be found an erroneous concept of freedom which eclipses the meaning of God and consequently of the dignity of man.(10) This is a concept of freedom which involves radical self-fulfilment, something which is opposed to any giving and abandonment of oneself. This mentality therefore eliminates the ability to establish the authentic foundations of marriage and the family, and sees in the transmission of life and in children the lost pieces of its omnipresent freedom. Conjugal love specifically assumes the giving and abandonment of oneself so as to open up oneself to an intimate natural community of life and of love which becomes an institution before God and men. Freedom not only is not reduced in marriage but is actually realised in it. In contrary fashion, in the culture of death, the ideas of freedom and of giving seem contradictory. This is, therefore, a concept of freedom which is incapable of understanding that freedom attains its deep human meaning only when it blossoms into love. When freedom, which is made for the renouncing of oneself, becomes the slave of selfishness (that is to say, of a love for oneself which becomes closed to others, and thus becomes closed to that 'other', the child) and sees others as antagonists - the greater renouncing of oneself the less freedom one has - man loses the compass of his life and the meaning of his greatness, which lies in love for God and one's neighbour. Conjugal love becomes impossible, marriage is converted into a chimera, and the family becomes a reality of remote times, called upon to be substituted by other more up to date forms of life. The very existence of pro-life movements proves that the recognition of the dignity of the person, and respect for the human being, are today not guaranteed by public authorities and that they have not been fully embraced by all the members of the present-day generation. There exist forces which strive to obscure the universal application of this truth and that the inviolability of the right to life is specific to every human being. Those people who promote this culture of death struggle to eliminate certainties, digging deep in the weakness and the selfishness of men in order to work against the culture of life. This is a matter of uprooting the origins of human life from its natural context - the family based upon marriage.

Today, the enemies of the Church do not organise their arguments and approaches directly against God - they prefer to destroy or to deform his image within man. In disfiguring the fact of his being a creature and in devaluing the gift of life, how can its Author ever be respected? And if life is not appreciated, what will impede the banalisation of relationships with God and one's fellow men? Values
such as justice, respect, solidarity, faithfulness, truth, and so forth, as a result come to be vulgarised once they have become obscured amidst the worthlessness of life.(11) The conformation of the culture of life is achieved through a retrieval of the real meaning of conjugal love, through the discovery of the intimate opening up to life which is brought about by real love between a man and a woman, through esteem, through the abandonment of one's own life and through sacrifice, which are part of genuine marital love. The transmission of life is understood in this way as giving and as a communitarian and shared responsibility on the part of the marriage partners, who are united in life and love.

The Family, Life and the Civilisation of Love

The 'people of life and the people for life' a few months ago celebrated the Jubilee of Families within the framework of the celebrations of the Holy Year of the year 2000. This is an event which is to be placed within the series of world meetings of the Pope with families which began in Rome in 1994, was continued in Rio de Janiero in 1997, and was on this last occasion the third of these important meetings. On this occasion, the slogan was 'children: the spring of the family and society'. This is a very meaningful slogan for reflection upon, and thought about, the mission of the family within a new culture of life. One could say that the culture of death has placed in its sights the good of conjugal and fertile love (which is the fertile soil in the plan of God for the coming forth of human life, for the springing forth of the family, for the welcoming of the 'other'). In this way the 'seeds of death' which are present in culture corrupt human life at its very roots. The family, especially in the West, has entered a kind of winter, and we should be aware of its existence. The proposal of the Holy Father for the Jubilee Holy Year of 2000 was that families should continue with gratitude to 'know that we are the people of life for life'.(12) This is an invitation to engage in profound thought about the gift of children and is a stimulus in favour of a renewed spring for the family. The sign and fruit of this must be a new culture of life.

Each and every culture is the expression of a civilisation, of a specific way of conceiving of ourselves as a people, of a self-expression and self-projection towards the future. The Magisterium of the Church has not had any doubts about defining the meaning of this civilisation: one is dealing here with a civilisation of love. It was precisely during the celebrations of the other Jubilee, that of 1975, that Pope Paul VI coined the following phrases during the homily of the concluding Holy Mass of that holy year. Civilisation is a word which comes from the citizen. Families are the citizens of a renewed City of life, whose sign and fruit is the civilisation of love. The people of life and the people for life, that is to say families, must be summoned to generate a civilisation of humanistic meaning, whose culture is a new culture of life.

This is a responsibility which falls to everyone. As John Paul II observes: 'civilisation belongs to the history of man because it corresponds to his spiritual and moral needs: created in the image and likeness of God, he received the world from the hands of the Creator with the agreement to shape it in his own image and likeness. The carrying out of this mission is at the origin of society, which is nothing else in definitive terms than the "humanisation of the world"'.(13) 'Differently from every other class of vegetable and animal life which by the act of the creator has been placed at the service of man, he is the only earthly creature that is loved for himself'.(14) In the transmission of human life, God did not want a simple production or reproduction. He wanted a man and a woman united in marriage to be co-creators with Him. Co-creators, not creators. Nobody, as an individual, has the power to give life. Both the man and the woman, in a reciprocal abandoning of themselves, are co-creators with God, who creates the immortal soul of the child. This mission specific to marriage involves a specific responsibility given the meaningful sharing by man in God's lordship of God, the lord of life. 'It is', continues the Pope in the encyclical Evangelium Vitae, 'a responsibility which reaches its highest point in the giving of life through procreation by man and woman in marriage'.(15) The vocation of
marriage to co-operate with God in the transmission of life is certainly wonderful, especially when one considers that the end of men, the end of the City of life, is not only earthly but goes beyond the horizon of eternity.

'Man cannot live without love. He remains for himself an incomprehensible being, his life is deprived of meaning, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not attain love, if he does not experience it and does not make it his own, if he does not share it deeply'.(16) In this small nucleus of people intertwined by the love of the conjugal sacrifice, is expressed the past, the present and the future of mankind. The future of mankind necessarily passes by way of the family. Indeed, the future of society is conditioned by the pact of mutual sacrifice of the marriage partners which makes possible this propitious environment where the new shoots of the olive tree fill the domestic hearth with joy. There cannot be a real conjugal communion which is closed to service to life, nor can this be sought after separately from mutual sacrifice and the gift to the 'other' who arrives as a valuable gift from God. Consequently, when abortion establishes its dwelling place in a culture, included in that culture through the wish to be consolidated as a 'right', something happens which is singularly grave: the very springs themselves of life become poisoned. This is an ideology which also poisons the very idea of marriage and the family, the 'sanctuary of life'.(17) It does not happen often in homes which are of a Christian inspiration that abortion is taken into consideration as one of the first possibilities at the level of change, but a gradual establishment of contraception takes place more easily.(18) This in turn gradually leads to seeing abortion as a possibility which should not be discounted at a moment of need. However, the relationship between the use of contraceptive methods and divorce, which is growing like a plague in present-day society, is also very great. Unfortunately, there are many people who justify techniques to suppress ovulation on the grounds that it is a resource to save, as they say, their conjugal union. Well, everybody is aware sooner or later of the fact that what builds up union and faithfulness, and strengthens them against every threat (which are so frequent nowadays), is only authentic love and not its substitutes as presented by the 'seeds of death', to which, indeed, a new culture of life must address itself.

Conclusion

A culture is the way in which the spirit of a people is shaped. But a culture cannot be the product of a laboratory. The place of culture is in the hearts of people. Today in the hearts of our contemporaries there exist menacing, serious threats to the dignity of the human person, the image and likeness of God. Here we are dealing with a tendency towards selfishness, individualism, closing up, which radically spoils the good of marriage, dissociating love from life. It divides the 'unity of two' of conjugal love to begin with, and then breaks the unity between parents and children by showing them to be opposed, and goes on to the killing of the life of an innocent being when it is believed that this is opportune. Such, to a great extent, is the great illness of the culture of death.

In the face of this situation a new culture of life must be generated - whose engine will be the family - which is capable of welcoming the gift of the life of others, of children, of parents, of babies, and of elderly people. This is a matter of building up a civilisation of love in which conjugal love and the transmission of life can retrieve, in relation to culture, the unity that they have in natural reality, which subsists in the good of marriage, the institution of conjugal love.(19) In this historic endeavour, the family has an inescapable mission. This is a matter of acquiring a clear awareness of the family as a place of giving and welcoming, a sanctuary of life, and a dwelling place of love. To the extent to which the example of the family based upon marriage is a witness to faithful and fertile love, an image in which the ineffable love between Christ and the Church shines forth, it will be the real engine of the transformation of a society which is really directed towards the common good.
Notes
(1) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, n. 78.
(2) JOHN PAUL II, the letter, Gratissimam Sanae (Letter to Families), n. 2.
(6) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, n. 92.
(10) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, n. 21.
(12) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, n. 78.
(13) JOHN PAUL II, the letter, Gratissimam sane (Letter to Families), n. 13.
(15) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, n. 43.
(16) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Redemptor Hominis, n. 1.
(17) JOHN PAUL II, the encyclical letter, Evangelium Vitae, n. 11.
CARLO CASINI
UNBORN LIFE: CONTEXTS AND NEW FORMS OF SUPPORT

Unborn Life: a Window onto the Whole of Human Life

I am convinced that when at the present time people talk about the value of, and support for, unborn life, reference is being made to the whole of life at every age and in every condition. Indeed, the characteristic of man at the youngest age of his existence is to possess only life. He does not have wealth, intelligence, or consciousness, and he cannot be seen. He only has life. What is present is nothing more than a living human being, who at a potential level can become a scientist of the heights of Einstein or Leonardo da Vinci. To put it in minimum terms, at a potential level he is one of the thousands of millions of ordinary people who are marked by a certain possession of intelligence, wealth, and relationships. But at the beginning, as a reality which has already been realised, he is only a living human individual. Nothing more. And yet his value is extraordinarily great because it is by this standard that every other man should be defined. He expresses the common denominator of everybody and only that common denominator. To bring out his specific character one could say that the person who is not yet born is the only human being who possesses only life. In the course of his existence he will possess many other things. Perhaps there will be moments when, measured and assessed by the yardstick of having, he will return to being similar to the embryo he was at the outset, but he will inevitably continue to possess something in addition to life at the very least he will have visibility. However, at his beginnings man possesses only life. One could, indeed, say that he is life. To put it more succinctly: one could say that he is only man. This is because he is so incomparably small and poor that he possessed no other wealth than his humanity. What we say and think about him applies to each and every man.

Unprecedented Aspects of Medical Science and Law

My task is to describe the new features of commitment to service to unborn life at the beginning of the third millennium. What is new concerns the possible response to the new (John Paul II would say 'unprecedented', cf. Evangelium Vitae, section 95) situation in which we now find ourselves. In order not to invade the fields of other speakers, I will not dwell upon the question of culture in general. I will confine myself, rather, to discussing only two extraordinary new developments which impinge upon the spheres of law and medical science.

Law seems to have found an answer to the anxious questions asked about it which have been formulated since the very beginnings of human reflection on the nature and practice of law. Those questions are: 'what makes law different from the rule of the strongest? and 'in what ways is a state different from a well organised association?' The modern answer to these two questions is as follows: the distinctive element is human dignity and the consequent equality of humans in relation to all human rights, and above all else in relation to the right to life. But such an answer comes to be nullified by the disappearance of the subject. Who is the bearer of human rights? This disappearance is not the result of an intellectual effort which fails to reach the right kind of conclusion. It is, rather, the practical consequence of practical choices decided upon prior to the principles which should influence and condition such choices. In the background to all this, naturally enough, there is legal abortion, which in many countries has become a mass phenomenon which is conceived of, and implemented as, a social service. The encyclical Evangelium Vitae says that 'the most disturbing and subversive aspect' of the contemporary 'conspiracy against life' is to be found 'specifically at the social and political level' and that this is expressed in the 'transformation of a crime into a right'. This, therefore, involves law. In order to allow legal mass abortion, which is conceived as a social service, it is necessary to forget about the subject of human rights. I used the word 'to forget' and not 'to deny' because in the whole field of
abortion the prevalent approach of legal experts has not been one of head-on engagement but one of evasion - exclusion of the problem of subjectivity as a problem which is quintessentially civic and legal in character.

The appearance of the very young human being in a test-tube is changing the order of things. In order to be able to allow and finance the production of a superfluous number of embryos by means of fertilisation outside of the body, their freezing, their use for experimental purposes, and their destruction at an expiry date, it is not sufficient merely to close one's eyes. One has to positively declare, and sanction the idea, that the embryo is not a human being but a 'genetic blob.' Perhaps it is enough to say such a thing for as long as it is useful to utilise the embryo, that is to say for fourteen days from the moment of its fertilisation. The phrase is not only arbitrary it is also hypocritical because those who employ it are careful not to commit themselves to when the 'genetic blob' is no longer a 'genetic blob', thereby opening the path to a control approach to abortion which treats the embryo as a living individual belonging to the human species, that is to say as a person. The new reality of the field of law which we encounter is thus of the following character: exactly at the same time as a high concept of law which places the human subject at the foundations of the legal order is being affirmed, the human subject disappears or is denied.

In the medical-scientific field another similar contradiction takes place. Science now manages 'to see' the conceived human being, whose nature was previously only guessed at. I am referring here to the discovery of DNA, and to the discovery of the mechanisms of fertilisation and of the development and growth of the embryo, as well as the widespread use of ultrasound scanning which allows us to observe the presence of a new human being. And yet the medical profession places itself at the service of the killing of this new human being. It should be recognised, however, that in the case of abortion the resistance of medical doctors has been of a significant and marked character. The Hippocratic training of the less young medical doctors led the medical class as a whole to align itself in favour of life, at least from a cultural point of view. But today the spread of artificial fertilisation is changing the order of things. The availability of embryos in test-tubes is a strong temptation for the medical class, whose therapeutic intentions can lead to the removal of the human embryo from the category of those who are to receive medical service and bring about its transformation into an instrument of therapeutic action for the benefit of adults. The contemporary debate about the cloning of embryos and the distinction which is made between the reproductive cloning of embryos (which is thought to be unacceptable) and the therapeutic cloning of embryos (which is held to be right and welcome) is the expression of a rather dangerous tendency. What I am trying to say here is that whereas with regard to abortion medical culture has on the whole acted as a brake or check, in relation to the defence of the embryo which has been created artificially I am very afraid that the same culture at times performs a role of negative encouragement. As is the case in the field of law, so, too, in the medical sphere the practical ends tend to cancel out the scientific evidence which is before us.

The 'Heart' of the Answer

Actions in support of human life must take into account the new developments and the contradictions which have just been pointed out, above all else because it is necessary to take into account what is a fact of common experience: the decisive importance of recognising that a child is a child, and thus of recognising the humanity of the conceived human being, something which is a pre-condition of the effectiveness of actions and initiatives in favour of life. In order to know the causes of abortion and then to struggle against them it does not suffice to pose questions to those women who have engaged in this practice. It is also necessary to discuss the question with those mothers who refused to interrupt their pregnancies despite the very serious difficulties that they were up against. For what reason, given the same economic and social conditions, does one woman see abortion as an inescapable necessity, whereas the temptation to engage in this practice does not even enter the minds of other mothers? There are even women who prefer to risk their own lives rather than interrupt their pregnancy. Evidently, the environment and previous upbringing and education play a role of primary importance.
One thing is to feel oneself totally alone in the presence of a child who is a difficulty, with all the voices around one who directly or indirectly deny the value and the existence of new being, and another thing is to feel oneself comforted and supported in recognising what is growing within one as a human being and a child. Here we encounter the decisive element in the prevention of abortion: the recognition or non-recognition of the conceived human being as 'another' person, as a human being who has a dignity which is equal to the dignity of every other kind of living member of the human species. It is for this reason that I have drawn attention to two contradictions: that which is now to be found in law and that which is now to be found in medical culture. These are the two disciplines which should most sustain and support a not isolated recognition of the 'other' as a value. Law is not law if it does not recognise subjects as subjects, if it no longer distinguishes things from persons. Medicine is no longer medicine if it does not place itself at the service of the life of all people and of each and every person. The disappearance of the specific function of law and of medicine gives rise to a real and concrete risk for the life of a great number of human beings. For this reason, every action and initiative in support of life must seek to supply something. The first service to life involves maintaining the recognition within the social conscience that the conceived human being is a human being, notwithstanding the abdication of medicine and law. In definitive terms, the opposition throughout the whole world between the 'pro-choice' mentality and the 'pro-life' mentality well expresses the kind of new reality which must characterise actions and initiatives in favour of life. It is one thing to help a woman to continue with a pregnancy because she wants it and to do so within the parameters that she wishes, it is another to share the difficulties of that pregnancy with her because a human being with a right to life is present on the scene. Nobody denies the advisability and the value of actions and initiatives which help a woman to fulfil her own desire to have a child. But if this is the only reason for solidarity then the value of the child is denied. It is exactly this mentality which leads to new attacks on life present within a test-tube. A child at any cost is exactly the same thing as a rejection of a child at any cost. Important consequences follow from these observations and considerations. First of all that the sphere of actions and initiatives in favour of life enormously expand. There is not only the concrete action of the removal of the difficulties which can lead to the elimination of a life. I mean that there is not only the field of assistance which offers alternatives to abortion or to artificial fertilisation. There is also the field of education and politics. The sphere of words which proclaim and demonstrate the right to life, the sphere of solidarity in concrete cases, and the sphere where the rules and regulations which guide society are drawn up, are not different spheres. They are linked to, and bound up with, each other because all of them seek to achieve the concrete and real defence of human life by endowing it with that recognition of the equal dignity of every human being which is the preliminary condition for the salvation of human beings who find themselves in the earliest stage of their existence.

Educatings People in Respect for Life

All educators should for this reason feel that they are workers of life. 'Educators' as a category does not only include teachers and lecturers who work in schools and universities. Journalists, writers, film directors, and obviously enough, priests, too, are educators. There is a fundamental fact in the experience of service to unborn life - words, even on their own, can save. Indeed, they save in very practical terms. They have really saved the life of the child and the courage (I would say the 'youth') of the mother in a large number of cases. The message is not a complicated one. It is in essential terms of a simple character. It concerns biological facts and human dignity. It is for this reason that the widespread silence about life, even within the realm of ecclesial institutions themselves, is that much more painful. That much more admirable, on the other hand, is the choice which John Paul II has made, to be the 'Pope of life'. But it is in the ordinary catechesis, as in the daily explanation of the Church's teaching, that service to life should express itself. Seminars of bioethics for teachers, prizes for degree theses, competitions at the level of schools, the promotion of prizes in the literary, artistic, journalistic, and musical worlds, are all useful at the level of civic and lay action in stimulating and increasing
knowledge and service in the educational field. With respect to educational action, it is not possible to
ignore the close link which exists between people forgetting about the value of unborn life and the
banalisation of sexuality. I observed above that 'the message is not a complicated one', and this is true.
But it should be observed that the phrase 'human dignity', which is specific - as has already been
observed in this paper - to Christian anthropology and to secular modernity, is of an extraordinary
density. It refers to a mystery: a knowledge of biological facts is not sufficient if one does not perceive
the meaning of human life. Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the origins of the contradictions
which are present in the fields of law and of medicine. At the roots of this disappearance is not to be
found a difficulty which is encountered when it comes to putting together the known facts in an ordered
way. There is, rather, the pressing requirements of practical needs which arise from a banal idea and
practice of sexuality. In order to live out sexuality merely as an instrument of pleasure or escape, it is
necessary to remove from it any sense of responsibility, that is to say any link with broader and deeper
realities than mere pleasure and escape. The culture of splitting fractures the relationship between
sexuality and love, between love and the family, between the family and the meaning of human life.
For this reason, I prefer to speak more about a 'banal idea of sexuality' than a 'contraceptive mentality'.
But, despite everything, the child remains, as an extreme reason for responsibility and a principle of
reconstruction. Despite everything it cannot be denied that the sexual encounter is able to set off the
'big bang' of creation, the absolute newness of a child, which realises existence created in its fullness.
Man cannot exist without being a child and a man is the final and causal outcome of creation. For this
reason, the banal conception of sexuality must inevitably eliminate the child - and in the mind to begin
with, before taking place at the level of facts. The betrayal of medicine and of law in relation to unborn
life does not arise from realms of darkness which are specific to medicine and law. It arises, rather,
from the gathering of mists which come from outside, from the degradation of sexuality.
For this reason, education in respect for life must find new forms of language and new methods in the
field of sexual education as well. One should not respond to banalisation with prohibitions, the reasons
for which are taken for granted. One should respond, rather, by offering a high and compelling vision
of sexuality, something which is not possible without making reference to love, to the family, and to
the meaning of living as well. In this sense it is helpful to emphasise an aspect which perhaps is able to
make our evaluation and assessment of our times less pessimistic in character. There can be no doubt
whatsoever that today the attacks on unborn life have reached a level of unprecedented gravity both at
the level of quantity and in terms of quality. They exist side by side with the disintegration of marriage
and of the family, and with the loss of a sense of the value of unending loyalty and of the giving of
oneself. But if we turn our gaze to the past we can observe that a greater respect for conceived life and
a more widespread stability of the family were supported by the struts and girders of a socio-economic
order which had nothing to do with the deep beliefs of man. In a peasant society children were wealth
because they provided labour by which to work the land and constituted a staff of support in times of
old age. Loyalty to, and the continuity of, marriage were guaranteed above all else by the economic
dependence of women and by a substantial physical immobility. Today all the struts and girders have
fallen by the wayside. Values have to be seen in terms of their intrinsic strength and beauty. Our time,
therefore, could be one of authenticity, a time when exterior difficulties require a greater and more
authentic interior strength. For this reason, support for unborn life also requires an education in relation
to sexuality, love and the family which is the expression of a great luminous culture which is not faint-hearted, not anchored in the past, and not marginal. The teaching of natural methods cannot but be placed in this context. The opposition of the Catholic Church to contraception cannot be understood by modern man unless it is perceived as an attempt to understand and to adhere to the very deep mystery which is present in sexuality, and thus, in the final analysis, to the mystery of human life. Indeed, if it is expounded without such deep convictions and motivations the overlapping of the subject of contraception with that of abortion becomes an argument which is inverted by our opponents to deny the right to life. To slither the subject of abortion into the sphere of contraception means, in fact, to
deny the existence of a child, and to confuse the fifth with the sixth commandment. For this reason, I think that we need to begin with a reflective gaze on the splendour of human life in order to throw light on the meaning of the actions which generate that life and grasp what they require at the level of authenticity and truth.

Sharing the Difficulties of Life

Within the framework of concrete solidarity it would be a mistake to see the actions and initiatives of the various pro-life centres and services as things which are new in themselves. The Christian community has always defended unborn life and motherhood or maternity. I am referring here to an enormous wealth of works and initiatives, in comparison to which the various pro-life centres and services promoted by the various pro-life movements have a rather modest importance and significance. The entire network of Christian presence constitutes support not only at the level of existence as a whole but also with specific reference to unborn life. However, it seems to me interesting to reflect upon what is a new fact. In all countries as soon as discussion about the legalisation of abortion begins different kinds of associations arise which are characterised by a specific intention to offer help in practical terms to mothers so that they do not engage on abortion. These centres, although they do not share common origins, have certain spontaneous characteristics in common: they are based upon voluntary work, they offer material and moral forms of help, and in the majority of cases they are lay structures in the sense that not only believers or those who belong to Catholicism are called to take part in them but also every man or woman of good will. The slogan employed in Italian centres dedicated to helping life is probably valid for every such centre throughout the world - ‘the difficulties of life are not overcoming by cancelling life but by overcoming difficulties together’.

I have often asked myself about the deep meaning of the following fact: the 'social' protection of unborn life is not a new development but the rise of specific structures is something which is new, and the fact that they have similar characteristics notwithstanding the fact that nobody ever planned them according to an overall project is something which is worthy of consideration. There must be a shared impelling need. As long as abortion was not legalised or its legalisation was not called for, collective rationality in relation to human life expressed itself above all else through law - the fact that abortion was forbidden aligned the whole of the community in the side of life. Even though the motivations behind this stance varied in their clarity and precision, the testimony of the whole of the community of men and women in favour of life was more than evident. When the law abandons this kind of testimony the community tries to substitute it by engaging in direct testimony. This is why the centres which are dedicated to helping life, despite the frequent modesty of their capacities and resources, seek to be the expression of an entire community which welcomes life. These centres are characterised by a keenly-felt adherence to the specific nature of their task, and this with a view to ensuring that their action is not perceived exclusively as something which involves support for the free choice of women. They declare that they are lay bodies in order to demonstrate that support for unborn life does not amount to the defence of an opinion and even less of a religious idea, but rather is the expression of the ineluctable commitment of society as such. To summarise: these centres adhere to the idea that assistance is witness and that witness is in itself assistance, that is to say a concrete and practical form of help. But these centres also want to express another thought which in my opinion is rather profound. Of course it is easy to make the observation that the words which declare and uphold the value of life are not credible unless they are accompanied by work and initiatives. If in a city a natural catastrophe occurs it is not enough to proclaim the value of life. What is needed is action which saves the greatest number of people possible. Otherwise words of mere indignation can even become irritating. But in the witness which these centres would like to render there is something which is more profound in character. There is an instinctive perception of a link between human life and love which is as strong as it is mysterious. This is certainly so at a metaphysical level. Christian Revelation, which sees in 'Love'
the name of the Creator, which is being, that is to say life in its essence, expresses in a rigorous way this link. But this is also true at a sociological and psychological level. At a general level, women who feel that they are loved do not engage in abortion. To demonstrate what life is, to bear witness to life, and to persuade people as to the value of life, it is necessary to use language and a set of methods which are impregnated and rich with love. For this reason, these centres should employ a set of methods which are characterised by the sharing of difficulties. In essential terms, there is the idea, which was expressed by John Paul II, on 19 October 1986, when he visited the first centre to provide life in Italy. His Holiness said that these centres were 'witness in favour of the primary importance of life over all other material values; an appeal to all men and women to understand that a just society is not constructed with the elimination of the innocent'. The Pope concluded his speech by saying: 'I strongly wish Christians, believers, and men and women of good will to co-operate with sincere and constant commitment in such an evangelical action and initiative, fostering thereby its suitable growth and development'.

Naturally enough, one should not be surprised if this project is far from being a reality, above all with regard to the ability and capacity of these centres to be the expression of a whole community which engages in welcome. The ideal is that each and every Christian, indeed each and every citizen, feels that he or she is, and indeed really is, in a concrete and practical way, a member of such a centre of the city where he or she lives. Just as the law expresses the beliefs of everybody so in similar fashion such a centre should express the views held by everybody. Just as law once expressed the beliefs of everybody and contained within it threats of punishment for those who transgressed the right to life, and by such a threat sought to prevent attacks on that right from being effected, so the promise of sharing difficulties should express 'collective rationality' in a new way, and thereby prevent the practice of abortion by substituting fear with love. Within this logic, of the greatest importance is not only the breadth of participation and co-operation which people have with these centres of service to life, but also a close connection (which should first be of a mental kind and only subsequently of a practical character) with all the religious and civic structures dedicated to the provision of solidarity which are present at a local level. Life is not helped by protecting it only at the moments of its starting points. For the same matter, if the conceived creature is a human being then he or she is a child and a poor person. Indeed, he or she is to the highest degree a child amongst all children, the poorest of the poor. For this reason, all those people who are responsible for the poor and for children should also bear witness in favour of the as yet unborn person and all people should feel that they are linked together on that vast frontier where human life is defended. In this context I believe that the annual civic celebrations which commemorate the Declaration of Human Rights (promulgated on 10.12.1948) and the Convention of the United Nations on the Rights of the Child (promulgated on 20.11.1989) should become special and privileged occasions for the bearing of witness in favour of unborn life.

New Services: Some Examples

Naturally enough, promises have to be kept. This is particularly the case if a pregnancy encounters the difficulty of a home that is not there. In such a situation we should be able to offer the home of welcoming families or at the very least homes which can offer welcome. If there are economic difficulties, a response must be attempted, however partial it may turn out to be. As regards this area, I am very happy to point out the presence of a special service which has been brought into existence in Italy and which has been operational for some years. Its name is the 'Progetto Gemma' ('Gem Project'). It is based upon an experience which is rather widespread - that of adoption from afar. This practice has been engaged in above all else in the case of abandoned children or children in need who live in developing countries. If the unborn conceived human being is also a child, it follows from this that when there exists a danger that he or she will be killed he or she is the most abandoned and the most in need of all children. But this unborn child is not far away. He or she is near to hand. He or she is amongst us. Furthermore, this unborn child finds himself or herself is a very special situation. He or she is living within the body of his or her mother. If we employ the term 'adoption' to describe the regular
and lasting help which is offered by a family, a group or a parish to a child who is far away so that that child can live and grow, then we should speak about 'near to hand adoption' not only of a child but also of his or her mother when, through the network created by pro-life centres, the monthly help offered for a certain time is offered in order to share the burden of the economic difficulties which could lead to abortion being engaged in. This is the 'Progetto Gemma'. The other major impulse which lies behind the elimination of life is the phenomenon of loneliness. A fundamental requirement, therefore, is to make it known that within society there are people and structures that are ready to bring an end to this loneliness. In a society which censures unborn life it is not easy to 'make things known about' in this sense. And yet 'making things known about' is one component part of the 'new forms' of service to life, and can be effected through 'new forms of publicity (particularly in pharmacies), through medical studies, and through the instruments of social communication. The telephone and perhaps Internet as well are becoming powerful tools at the service of life. For some years in Italy a national telephone service has been operating which is free of charge for the caller and which is an around the clock service. It has already saved the courage of mothers, as well as the lives of their children. This service is called 'SOS Vita' ('SOS Life'). But it is necessary to ensure that people know about it. Another cause behind the killing of the unborn child is the phenomenon of fear. Here I mean fear of the malformations which the child possesses. Naturally enough, the child should be welcomed whatever his or her condition, but wherever this is possible - and experience demonstrates that the cases of this are very great in number - it is necessary to dissolve or reduce fear. This requires rigorous study, investigation and research at an international level, real answers but at the same time answers which are able to bring forth courage. It is to their great credit that a number of medical doctors of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the Catholic University of Rome have set in motion a service which is called 'Telefono Rosso' ('Red Telephone'). This is a new initiative which should be reproduced and developed. One of the most disturbing aspects of the 'culture of death' is to be found in the way in which the 'right to be born healthy' is proclaimed. Given that this position implies an evident act of discrimination in relation to man and in the final analysis constitutes a 'racist' approach, the legalisation of abortion in the case of malformations borne by the foetus has often been masked by an invocation of the risks which are said to exist with regard to the mental health of the mother. This is evident in the Italian law on the interruption of pregnancies. But this mask falls to the ground in the field of artificial 'in vitro' fertilisation, when, indeed, the killing of many embryos which have been studied in a test-tube before being implanted in the body of the mother so as to select and to attempt to make live only those embryos which do not seem to run the risk of genetic illnesses, is celebrated as being a triumph for medicine. The step from this practice to the approach of eugenics and the selection of children according to their characteristics is very short. The legal cases for damages which have been made against medical doctors and health care structures because of the birth of handicapped children have become increasingly frequent. These legal cases have been made not because the disability in question was the result of inexperience or negligence on the part of the medical doctor (in which case it would obviously be incumbent for those doctors and structures to pay damages) but because the health care staff did not become aware during the pregnancy of the malformation and/or did not advise or procure an abortion, and as a result allowed the child to live. A recent sentence in France (in November 2000) recognised the right to damages to be paid by the medical doctor not only to the parents of the child but also to the child himself or herself in the case of an abortion which was not carried out. The idea of 'damages caused by birth' is the exact antithesis of the idea that life is a gift and that a birth is a happy event. The final outcome of all this will be the right to compensation for coming into this world which should be paid not only by medical doctors but also by those heroic mothers who, although they knew about the malformations borne by their child, did not want to become murderers.
And because a malformation is nothing but a possible cause of 'the suffering caused by being alive' one can well understand how the 'culture of death' can envisage forays of a terrible nature which can be pursued through the breach of the 'right to be born healthy'. In this area the response of the 'culture of life' is, naturally enough, the caring welcoming of the disabled person and of the sick person, but it is also the bringing into play of the most sophisticated instruments of science and of love in order to combat the easy propensity to engage in abortion when there is only a suspicion, perhaps even of a remote character, of the presence of an anomaly or malformation (a propensity favoured and often induced by a category of medical doctors who are afraid that they will be called upon to pay damages). This response, whatever the situation may be, should always be to favour and foster the welcoming of the child with full respect for scientific truth. In order for these exhortations to amount to effective sharing as well, it is necessary to know and to propose remedies and forms of treatment both during and after the pregnancy.

Fortunately - and this is one of the many contradictions which are to be encountered - the embryo is seen as being a patient when approached within the context of a medical science which has reached the point of being able to treat and even to operate within the maternal womb. 'Telefono Rosso' is a service which consists of offering reassurance in the many cases where this fear is without foundation or something which can be managed and dealt with, and in every situation seeks to offer support to that medical doctor who is an authoritative friend of life in order to counterbalance that medical power which is often directed towards a policy of death.

Law at the Service of Life

Adoption, real adoption, legal adoption, has undergone a transformation during our times. It is no longer an instrument by which to give a child to those who do not have a child, but an instrument by which to give parents to those who do not have parents. This new vision should also provide an impetus to employing adoption as a means by which to prevent abortion. The premise - as is usually the case - is the recognition of the child as a child and the mother as being she who gives life and gives it (when this is indispensable) by separating herself from her child. This takes place at the birth of the child. This takes place during the whole trajectory of life when the child becomes fully independent with the arrival of adolescence and adulthood. For this reason, a mother who is certain that she will not be able to provide motherhood after the birth of her child, and who freely and as an extreme hypothesis accepts separation from her child, is a mother two times over.

The culture of adoption, therefore, is a new context for commitment to life. Our societies are societies which are often sick with schizophrenia and dissociated. Every year in Italy 140,000 children are killed because of the practice of legal abortion but the tribunals for minors can meet the demand for adoption only in the case of one copy in every twenty, and for this reason many families are discouraged from even making an application to adopt a child.

In the meantime the desire to have a child is expressed through the new form of artificial 'in vitro' fertilisation, a process which deliberately adds killed children to killed children. It is urgently necessary, therefore, to promote a coherent development and growth of the culture of adoption, at an international level as well, as an alternative to the request for Fivet. But Fivet has given rise to an endless and new battle. This is not the place to recall the risks to which the embryo in a test-tube is exposed. No woman conceives a child in order to then engage in abortion. 'To generate for death' is something which is outside the sexual act, even when it takes place in forms and circumstances which are most opposed to its real meaning. An unwanted pregnancy is a pregnancy which a person wishes had never begun, and not a pregnancy which is wanted so that an abortion can then be engaged in. 'Generation for death' seems to be, instead, a characteristic of Fivet. Not only in the evident case when embryos are 'produced' in order to subject them to experiments, but also when the policy of overcoming the sterility of a woman leads to techniques which ab inizio accept the destruction of a large number of embryos which have been subjected to a process of selection, or which have been frozen and consigned
to be thrown away as though they were things which were useless or even dangerous at a certain expiry date.

This difference can also be perceived in the possible remedies which Christian anthropology can invent for this unprecedented situation. In the face of culturally accepted mass abortion the response identified in this paper is that of education and solidarity. Naturally enough, it is urgently necessary to maintain or secure laws which respect the right to life, but even in the presence of unfair rules and regulations education and solidarity can obtain positive results. However, when faced with the situation of an embryo in a test-tube who runs the risk of death, although the instrument of education can still play a certain role, solidarity cannot be expressed, or rather, it can be expressed only through law. It should be observed that the parallel reality to the role of centres to help life in the field of abortion is inevitably and only law in the field of artificial fertilisation. No voluntary work structure can prevent an industry from employing the cloning of embryos. Only the force of law can prevent this practice. The same observation can be made with respect to frozen embryos which are subjected to experiments or processes of selection.

The specific function of law in relation to the defence of human life thus comes back into the picture as something which is of primary importance. The unprecedented character of the questions and issues connected with support for unborn life requires a serious and deep reconsideration of the specific function of what is legal, rights, and the law. After many years of involvement and commitment I am convinced that the heart of the defence of life is to be found in the introduction of the conceived human being into the field of law as a subject. Positive law, in adherence to what is the assumption of the modern theory of human rights, has to remove man, the whole of man and each and every man, from the world of things and place him at the mysterious level of a transcendence in relation to matter. This is the task of law, whose function is to separate objects from subjects. To recognise the conceived human being as a subject, to uphold his or her equality and dignity is the highest instrument by which to prevent abortion; it is an action of concrete solidarity in relation to those individuals whom Fivet condemns to death before their existence; the right answer to the idea of 'birth as damage'; and the solid basis and the final seal of the theory of human rights. One cannot deploy and effect what is complete support for unborn life without the 'novelty' of the recognition of a real and specific subjective right to life which belongs to man from conception, that is to say without a declaration of the legal subjectivity (capacity) of the embryo from fertilisation onwards. This also means an upholding of the nobility of law and what is legal as an instrument of justice, and not of might.

From Biolaw to Biopolitics

Given what has been said so far in this paper one cannot concretely defend life without turning to politics. It is the political world which makes laws and a law which does not protect human life is not a law in the modern sense. I have already directed the reader's attention to what is essential, and neglected details. What is of essential importance is legal recognition, that is to say a recognition which is said and written in laws, and taught in universities and made known, to the effect that each and every human being is a subject and that as a consequence the conceived human being from the moment of fertilisation is endowed with a legal capacity. This is the highest element of prevention. By now European thought in the realm of constitutional law, amidst so many uncertainties, seems to be influenced by this consideration.

But political action must also give great importance to the local administrative structures. Such structures, if they so wish, can sustain and finance projects which act to support life. They can proclaim the right to life in their respective statutes. Despite everything, it is rather difficult to affirm in written form in legal documents that the human embryo is a thing. For this reason, the local political sphere can in the long-term change mentalities even where national laws are unjust.

Lastly, it is of urgent importance to reflect upon the need for the right to life to have within politics the role that it should have, a role so central in character that it renders neutrality towards life on the part of governments, alliances, parties, and popular votes, no longer sustainable. This is a difficult and
complex argument which often involves a sort of stammering on the part of people. However, it is impossible not to address oneself to it if we reread section 5 of the encyclical Evangelium Vitae: 'Just as a century ago it was the working classes which were oppressed in their fundamental rights, and the Church very courageously came to their defence by proclaiming the sacrosanct rights of the worker as a person, so now, when another category of persons is being oppressed in the fundamental right to life, the Church feels in duty bound to speak out with the same courage on behalf of those who have no voice. Hers is always the evangelical cry in defence of the world's poor, those who are threatened and despised and whose human rights are violated.

Today there exists a great multitude of weak and defenceless human beings, unborn children in particular, whose fundamental right to life is being trampled upon. If, at the end of the last century, the Church could not be silent about the injustices of those times, still less can she be silent today, when the social injustices of the past, unfortunately not yet overcome, are being compounded in many regions of the world by still more grievous forms of injustice and oppression, even if these are being presented as elements of progress in view of a new world order'. These words of John Paul II should in my opinion be a fundamental stimulus for a new manifesto for the political presence of Catholics in the world. For this reason the forms of hesitancy, prudence, diplomacy, postponement, and evasiveness with which even those who want to support unborn life try to separate the right to life from politics are even more grave in character. I am well aware of the complexity, the difficulties, the dangers and the conditioning effects of politics. I accept the logic of the gradual approach (if it does not abandon the final aim), of mediation (if it is not compromise but knowledge of reality), and of concrete results (if they do not involve the rejection of witness). However, it seems to me that the political world, too, must feel the compelling exhortation directed towards it in section 95 of the encyclical Evangelium Vitae: 'what is urgently called for is a general mobilisation of consciences and a united ethical effort to activate a great campaign in support of life. All together we must build a new culture of life: new, because it will be able to confront and solve today’s unprecedented problems affecting human life; new, because it will be adopted with deeper and more dynamic conviction by all Christians; new, because it will be capable of bringing about a serious and courageous cultural dialogue among all parties'.
GIAMPIERO GAMALERI
THE MEDIA AND THE CULTURE OF LIFE

The 'river of change' of the galaxy of the media continues without stopping. Indeed, it no longer affects only the growth and development of digital supports in which the phenomenon of communication (which is now being constantly shifted onto the traditional 'information highways') is anchored, but also the qualitative and quantitative aspects of communication itself.

In practice, the form and the substance of traditional communication are being completely transformed. The new media reach everybody, as a result of which globalisation is today living out perhaps its moment of greatest vivacity. But side by side with the great and numerous opportunities which await us, and which are increasingly already present, there is also a series of risks - of an ethical and moral nature - for the ordinary user.

We should not and cannot depart from these considerations if the ultimate goal of the establishment of these new technologies in the universe of communication is to be seen as a fully positive event for the growth and development of the human person, both from a simply individual point of view and from the standpoint of social and collective life.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE GALAXY OF THE MASS MEDIA

The last five years, in addition to sealing the ending of the second millennium, have also revealed a mutation in Italian cultural customs and more in general in those of European citizens. The most recent Censis report - as usual a faithful mirror of the habits of our country - helps us with facts to hand to understand these changes and to face up to them.(1)

In general one can observe how the evolution of the consumption of contents distributed through instruments connected with the new technologies has attained very high percentage levels of development. In addition, it is easy to observe how, as a result of this, the quantity of multimedia cultural consumers has today reached similar percentage levels in all the European countries. This means that Italy and Spain as well (for example) have reached the levels of their continental partners in the spread and daily use of these new technologies and in their utilisation to benefit from their educational and information contents.

As can be observed, to a maintenance of levels by the traditional media (radio and television) is added a fall in information in paper form (newspapers and magazines), while CD-ROMs and digital television continue to gain an increasingly large measure of adherence from consumers. But the fact which stands out is certainly the dynamic and generalised spread of Internet. In this sense it is evident how the use of the Net does not subtract but add. That is to say the increasingly frequent use of Internet is also due to its ability to supply more contents. It is taking on, therefore, a supplementary and complementary role in relation to the other media, especially those of an audio-visual character.

The statistic which follows helps us to understand at a more detailed level this state of affairs, moving the analysis from the evolution of media goods towards a definition of the different kinds of consumer. These data clearly show - when we read the large numbers - that about half of the European population is by now directed towards cultural consumption of a multimedia character thanks to the notable and numerous forms of application which today even an averagely equipped personal computer is capable of achieving.

As further proof of what has just been said, one can also note how television continues to maintain - indeed is increasing - a numerically strong target amongst the public, while the population of readers is undergoing a season of relevant decline.

The observations made hitherto are essentially the outcome of a consideration of a single fact: the television is surviving the spread of new technologies above all because integration between the TV and computer, and between the TV and Internet, is still difficult. Where this problem does not present
itself, that is to say in cases where the flow of training and informational contents is sufficiently wide (for example on the Net), paper forms lose their users.

This overall analysis cannot but lead us to the convergence of the media, and to its growth and development being directly proportional to the use of supports created with the advance and progress of new technologies.

TELEVISION AND MULTIMEDIAL CONVERGENCE

Multimedial convergence, the subject of increasingly open and controversial debates and discussions (one may think here of analyses concerned with globalisation), has been in this period the social-economic phenomenon which has most commanded the attention of public opinion, and not only the interest of experts in the field and those directly employed in it.

One of the most striking cases in this area has undoubtedly been the AOL/Time Warner fusion, a deal worth 650 thousand milliard Italian lire and which created a commercial entity whose birth took place 'in a modest small block of offices, half-hidden on the motorway which goes from Washington to the airport, at the headquarters of an Internet company called America On Line which some ten years ago hardly existed and which today has swallowed Time Warner, a sacred monster of cinema, of TV, and of information, at the stratospheric and unprecedented price of 346 thousand milliard Italian lire'.(2)

A great many analyses have been built on this event. Antonio Pilati perceives in this fusion two fundamental aspects - one of a financial and one of an industrial character.(3) In the first case, 'the fusion brings out the extraordinary strategic power that the new criteria adopted by the market to assess and evaluate the companies specialised in Internet activities (working out the potential for future development without weighing the present-day results) confer on the most credible of them'. In the second, 'the fusion involves the victory of the idea of vertical integration which co-ordinates around a single axis the infrastructures of transmission, the instruments for the management of operations on Internet, and the wealth of contents generated outside the Net but which can be reorganised within the Net'. To summarise, this procedure allows the formation of 'a complex of capacities which is able to take advantage, on the Net, of a fan of opportunities which is almost complete, from electronic business to advertising to the consumption of media contents (TV, music, films, news)'.

In different fashion, there have been those who have dedicated attention to the difficulties which have been encountered in setting in motion a practice of convergence through TV-computer competition. Dom Serafini, for example,(4) has asserted that 'there is a great deal of talk about multimedial convergence, but the divergences are neglected. We find ourselves in a situation where the technicians of Internet do not understand the television broadcast and the broadcaster does not understand Internet. The PC industry has its plans and they are not in line with those who manufacture televisions. The sector of production and distribution are, in addition, threatened by Internet'. The realities of the matter, according to Serafini, are that a convergent mentality is absent, and therefore a real wish to reach convergent technologies, or rather the same technological standards, which should, however, be realisable.

Surveying the universe of telecommunications, which this paper will dwell upon, this multimedial integration has meant that our domestic PC is able to supply us with the ability to use contents which at one time were usually - indeed were exclusively - provided by radio and television.

For its part, it can be hypothesised that over the long term the computer will come to perform the function of the television, despite the present-day difficulties at the level of the integration of the two media. In addition, notwithstanding certain difficulties, Italy is marked by a net growth in the consumption of pay TV.

In this sense we can very much bear in mind the observations supplied to us by the British newsletter 'Screen Digest', according to which Italy will be 'the European market which will have the highest level
of growth rates in expenditure on pay TV over the next four years, exceeding the levels of Spain and Germany, which at the present time are in front of us’. (5)

Lastly, there is the final frontier of multimedial convergence - the cellular telephone. Already utilising WAP technology, it will achieve to the full the objective of multimedial integration with the arrival of UMTS mobile phones, those of the so-called third generation, in which Internet and the telephone will co-exist in a single operational support, a machine which works in audio and video to dialogue 'face to face', or to follow the stock exchange lists on line.

The UMTS system, which will be operational in Italy in 2002, will encounter a country which will be prepared on a large scale for the use of the cellular phone - more than 65% of Italians use a mobile phone, with a peak of about 84% amongst young people up to the age of 35, whereas more than 52% regularly use SMS messages and about one Italian in every five is able to navigate in Internet.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES, NEW RISKS

This unprecedented operational context brings us to possibilities which a few years ago were inconceivable, but in the ultimate analysis it should also hinder us from engaging in an early distancing from the 'lowest reality', that of the daily. To summarise: against the enormous advantages which the future offers us we must set the risks which could spring from following the 'flow of the future' in an overly hurried way.

Today, we are used to the possibility of being constantly in contact with everything and everybody; we are, that is to say, able to live in the 'core' of communication, to be at one and the same time - and at any moment - subjects and objects of communication.

But the observation does not stop there: at any moment of our lives we are potentially multimedial, in the sense that we can simultaneously use more instruments and different languages of communication. Furthermore, we can send messages by one or more channels, with the highest freedom of choice in the organisation of these 'communication movements'.

These factors, which are extraordinary innovations and which are becoming increasingly established, allow us as a result to broaden our capacity as receiver subjects, moving the band of attention from what we already know to be useful to what will be useful to us 'in an unforeseeable way'.

In practice, it can be asserted that the changes which are underway, produced by the circularity of communication, in which the recipient of information can also be a sender, are already remarkable. The user no longer turns only to the classic domestic container from which he must receive whatever is transmitted to him, adapting himself to the rhythm of the machine, for example to the palimpsests specific to each television broadcaster. The Internet consumer needs only to look for what he requires, and to tune into the ideal 'supplier'. The Net will thereby be explored and selected - navigated - by every receiver subject. To conclude: this process now allows us to take part in a horizontal widening of information, in a sort of globalisation and democratisation of knowledge, with ease and freedom of access to sources. So that this dynamic does not cease to offer us new opportunities, to be transformed into a dispersion of knowledge or even worse of a diffusion of erroneous and misleading news and ideas, it will, however, be advisable to equip ourselves to the best so as not to be placed in a condition of difficulty when we have to guide ourselves in the information surplus of the Net, above all else when it is a question of verifying information and original sources.

TELEVISION QUALITY

Television communication, in terms of quality, must be what in my opinion we could define as 'open television', and this so that it does not invent reality but is based upon it, reproduces it. Fiction, for example, plays an important and sensitive role, being a way of bringing out feelings and forms of
participation from a deep level. Fiction capable of basing itself on reality is, however, really very useful, because life itself is greater than any capacity of the imagination of man. This 'open television' cannot be such solely in its contents, that is to say in the programmes received by the general public which are nonetheless the most important element in terms of visibility. It should also be such in its entire technological and organisational architecture. To think the opposite would be like limiting the religious experience to the 'one-directional' sermons given on Sundays without considering the whole dimension of dialogue which pervades the Christian experience and the experience of other religions directed towards the other in both a horizontal (dialogue with brothers and sisters) and a vertical (invocation, prayer) dimensions.

Furthermore, quality television travels by means of its own evolution. In this sense we can also affirm the existence of an attempt at 'interaction' between the evangelical message and witness. In fact, in the message there is a didactic intention, whereas in witness we find the humility of putting oneself in, and of lending oneself to, interaction, of entering into dialogue. And when witness comes from a certain experience and seeks to embody it, even in an uncalled-for way, then the television, a clearly witnesses means, reproduces it and amplifies it.

With regard to the systems of communication, we are moving from consolidated means, still animated by a strong vitality, towards new means. The electronic means in which the religious experience has found an opportunity to have effective forms of presence has undoubtedly been the radio. It is no accident that the Holy See thought that it should 'compromise itself' from the beginning with this means, with the great achievement of Marconi and the birth of Radio Vatican. In addition to this institutional experience, we have had other examples in more recent times: Radio Maria, for example, in our country, and many other abroad. It is a fact, however, that the hinge between radio-telephony and the presence of, and the asking ourselves about, deep things, the religious dimension, and the presence of God amongst us, all this has without doubt had very significant experiences in radio.

Television, for its part, has that secularity - what Ettore Bernabei came to provocatively define as 'atheism' - from which we began by being realistic, which in effect can provoke a sense of being outside, of ghettoisation.

Another point of view should in my opinion be emphasised: Christian witness on television does not live solely by religious features. I would engage, indeed, in the formulation of an equation which is rather precise - the more global the means, the more the proposed experience must be totalising. But in television there is certainly a tradition and a resistance which should not be undervalued. The right road it seems to me can be found in the retrieval of the normality of certain figures of some forms of popular fiction, through which to propose values which link them to certain roots, to a certain tradition. And it is precisely going beyond these models that man - the inevitable way for that question - is retrieved.

Because for the contemporaries of Jesus as well, Jesus had to was incarnated. Nobody, in fact, could have grasped the radical nature of that message if there had not been an ultimate witness to incarnate it and represent it. And if this is true for the contemporaries of Jesus, it is even truer for us, for we must clearly see this witness through human histories which are bearers of that set of issues and questions. To return to the discussion about the radio, if we had to launch a slogan to express that it has sh
Instead, the humus of the Christian proposal, the aquarium in which it moves, is an open form of television which prevails over a dogmatic form of television. And here I would like to stress how Catholicism, understood as the historic life experience of a community, is an experience which revolves around human relations and not exclusively around written texts, closed expressions. This is because Catholicism is the least dogmatic experience that exists of interaction between man and God. If this is true, as I believe it is true, the less television is dogmatic the more it is open and the more it is able to host the Christian experience. Let us think of an example: in the field of scientific programmes there are two radical ways, as my colleague and friend Dario Antiseri teaches, of approaching the problem. There is one way with all its dignity and which I deeply respect, a procedure of a descriptive and almost textbook character, equipped with very beautiful images and excellent texts, in which things are described and taken for granted - things are like that because that is what the scientific community has said.

Then there is another way, which can be called here once again 'Popperian', in which the scientific aspect is placed in all its potential but where in addition an attempt is made to identify its limitations in relation to that beyond which makes not only everyman but also the scientist raise questions, making him say 'Eureka, Eureka' when there is a contradiction. Because we all know by now that it is in the face of contradiction that science makes a step forward, forcing the man of science to exclude a given hypothesis and embrace another, imagining and hypothesising a different scenario. This is another point on which television should providentially work, because it would do nothing else but open up to modernity a scientific approach which refers to higher and different questions, not involving magic or miracle-working but certainly directed towards enabling the television watcher to grasp to the full this sense of limitation.

Another consideration revolves around the definition of the role of the new technologies. Here, more than ever, should it be said that 'the medium is the message', in the sense that one is dealing with asking oneself if the development of the digitalisation of the systems is structurally more suitable to being able to channel that bearing witness reality to which we referred previously. The outcome of this analysis is the apparently paradoxical situation of a means such as Internet, which is different from television, in which there is a series of expert people, of able professionals, who create messages in order to spread them to other people. On the Net a summit does not exist, whether for good or for bad, which whatever the case hands things down to the base, and where there is the hope that this summit will be respectful, open, and pluralistic.

In Internet we have the 'making' of a dialogue, the coming in of actors. We have a paradox: the highest level of technological concentration, because this system is an integrated, worldwide, planetary system, on the one hand, and a highly intricate cobweb on the other, with the highest level of decentralisation of communications because each person can penetrate behind this system from any point, draw upon it and dialogue, but only if he wants to.

Thinking of the Jubilee and beyond, because I believe that the Jubilee is the great general test for the Church of the third millennium, I would like to add that the Church not only blesses these means, but takes them on, and by the Church we means not only the Church in an institutional sense but all the forms of experience of Christians, all the yeast of research, of Christian witness to be found in the world.

I believe in this sense that the Church is a bearer of a formidable peculiarity, speaking in sociological terms, but we know that it is not only a phenomenon which is obviously sociological, because it affects us at a deep level. The Church is perhaps the only experience spread throughout the whole of the planet, naturally in some zones it is more present and in some zones less present. Fundamentally, however, the Pope during his voyages is nothing else but a sort of physical 'Internetisation' which is a prelude to electronic 'Internetisation', because obviously enough after his presence one imagines that there remains, as indeed there does remain, the dialogue that is established.
If this is true, I see a providential conjunction between the characteristics of these means and the peculiarity of the religious experience, typical of Christianity and of Catholicism in particular. The new technologies can allow the realisation as well of that deep, radical, experience by which the Church can develop the life experience typical of a community - a community which meets, engages in dialogue, asks itself questions, compares and contrasts itself with others - through an electronic instrument. Something should also be said about the involvement of a broader sensorial reality, of virtual reality, but speaking about it beyond the fancy goods and 'artistic' production which from some points of view mark it out. Certainly, however, we can assert that communication is constantly going towards a wider involvement of the senses, perhaps also in simpler ways than such gimmicks.

Virtual reality, without making leaps forward, is also a phenomenon which can enable us to live this experience - the witness of the Christian community - by touching the hem of the cloak (I would say quoting Cardinal Martini), that is to say by perhaps also reaching forms of the tactile.

The journey of quality television is still long and involutions and even regressions will not be absent. But by now it appears to be inexorably set in motion. Naturally, it must be accompanied by valid instruments of legal and social regulation at the national and transnational levels. But it is equally certain that the ambivalent scenarios of the era of electronic communication must move in a single direction, reconciling the real antinomies - the direction of the fundamental rights of the person in virtual society.

PLANETERISATION, PERSONALISATION, PLATFORM

As a final element, it could be useful to identify a key approach of understanding and a capacity to govern the transformation. In the era of communication the slogans are presented as key approaches of understanding and simplification which help us to unravel the tangle of complexity which exists. We can, therefore, take on board with interest and curiosity the acronym of the '3Ps' which marks out our time - planeterisation, personalisation, and platform.

The term 'planetarisation' provides us with the dimension of the processes which are underway. In fact, every project is justified today by its goal of being at least in tendency directed towards involving the whole planet. However circumscribed one may be, the frame of measurement is everything. This is the effect of globalisation, by which an initiative either tends to grow or does not exist. This is true above all else in the political and business worlds, but it is also true of the world of professions which by now has to deal with a horizon without limits. Thus a journalist has as his competitors not only the great names of national information but also the leader writers of The New York Times or the anchormen of CNN. And this, by way of example, is particularly and immediately clear to journalists via Internet, in whose field of play the five continents are contained not in an abstract but in a practical way. If the information which is proposed does not satisfy the 'internaut', he immediately moves from one site to another, which can be anywhere. Here the competition is effectively global. Hence the fact that an on-line journalist works on an advanced frontier of planetary interaction on which soon, not to say immediately, will be put to the test off-line colleagues who still operate in areas protected by national information boundaries, still defended, but for a short time, by the 'language barrier'. The state of affairs thus turns upside down - the Internet journalists are not subordinated to 'traditional' journalists, but it is these latter who have to adapt themselves to the standards of those who live out planetarisation in the exercise of their profession, minute by minute, item by item.

The term 'personalisation' means that information will increasingly be gathered and managed by each individual in a direct way. Hitherto we have been involved in a very accelerated stage but which taken everything into account is still an initial stage - that, we could say, of 'vocal' decentralisation due to the boom in mobile phones. Some 'visual' signs are, however, being manifested through message sending (SMS) and graphic forms which are still poor, elements which are allowed by systems such as those of WAP subscribers to GSM.(6)
But two years hence the launching of UMTS is envisaged, the real and authentic setting in motion of personalised multimedial communication. One does not need the imagination of Jules Vernes to imagine that later steps will involve us in the space of few decades 'wearing', as a second skin and as an extension of all our sense organs (including those which are most tactile and involve smell, taste, the palate etc.) a 'capacity to experience', that is to say a transmission of experiences which are fully multimedial, multisensorial and multiperceptive and which will allow us 'to live the other and elsewhere', drawing this directly from an external supply and without bringing about a physical delocating of oneself. This will be the effect, among other things, of the intimate combination of electronic elements and neurological elements, the signs of which are present in certain trials now underway, the outcome of a mix of physics and biology.

It is easy to predict that the problems of bioethics will be of no importance compared to those of bioinformation, because this latter will have exterminated the capillary capacities of incidence in human relations and within each one of us. Of this process, whose mere beginnings we have seen so far, which nonetheless already seem to us amazing, the on-line journalists are the pioneers, the advance patrols, those who have so far handled the 'stem bits' while biology is still asking itself about the possible forms of architecture to be derived from 'stem cells'.

Whereas, in fact, in biology it is necessary to move from the differentiated to the indistinct, in informatics one begins from the elementary unit to construct the forms of architecture of the system. Naturally enough, this extraordinary combination of physicality and information, of biology and electronics, postulates the relaunching of what Paul Postman has called 'media ecology'(7), that is to say the subject of the legitimacy of individual acts and the sustainable development of the plant in this transformation.

The term 'platform' refers to the joint between planeterisation and personalisation. It is the interstitial organisational form which allows osmosis between the individual and everything else. It is the set of technologies, information, cultural, aesthetic, and ethical contents; economic factors; and human relations etc., which allow the birth of new systems.

In these each one of us is called upon to be a part of a net, or better, a set of nets, tending towards unity in differentiation. In this new real-virtual arrangement the words full of hope and prophetic vision of Marshall McLuhan have a comforting resonance: 'In the next decades I hope to see the planet transform itself into a form of art: the new man, integrated into cosmic harmony which transcends time and space will caress, shape and model every facet of the earthly artefact as though it were a work of art. And man himself will become an organic form of art. There is a lot of road still to go and the stars are nothing else but change stations along the way, but we have begun the journey. To be born in this age is a valuable gift and I regret the prospect of my death only because I will not be able to read so many pages of the destiny of man, if the Gutenberghian image is allowed me. But perhaps, as I have tried to show in my examination of post-literate culture, history begins when the book closes'.(8)
Notes
(1) Hereafter for such data see 3° Rapporto Censis (Franco Angeli, Rome, 2000).
(6) For a detailed analysis of the development of mobile communications see the next section 1.3, and at a deeper level chapter VII.
ADRIANO PESSINA
THE CULTURE OF LIFE AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL MENTALITY

Introduction

The intention behind these pages is to identify some of the theoretical components which have influenced the ways in which life has been understood and represented during the contemporary age. Whoever wants to promote and defend a 'culture of life' today must strive to understand the cultural models which make up the contemporary ethos. An attempt to interpret the present is required both because of the need to establish a dialogue with real interlocutors - that is to say with those people who live and think according to cultural structures which are now widespread - and, intrinsically, because of the need to rediscover those ultimate reasons which are able to formulate the meaning of our responsibility in the face of the specific features of our age. To think about history, to be within history, is also a historical task, which involves dealing with the categories by which we are called upon to think about, and express, the truth about man, his existence, and his place in the cosmos.

The preaching of the Gospel does not in itself need a philosophy, but it always needs believing reason because 'faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth.'(1) But the legitimacy of support from philosophy, carried out according to the methods, and even the limits, which are specific to it, for the understanding of life, is attributed to philosophy by faith itself. Indeed, amongst the many resources which 'men and women have at their disposal for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human...Amongst these is philosophy, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it.'(2).

The observations which I will make in this paper take place at the level of philosophical research and are intended to clarify the conditions which today allow a reformulation of this radical question about the meaning of life within a framework which, however extended it might be, is determined; more precisely, this context is the Western technological context. What we define as the 'technological mentality' tends, through the phenomena of economic globalisation, to extend its range and to interact with cultural traditions which are structurally pre-technological in character, such as those, for example, which characterise the eastern countries. But we should not forget that the technological question depends on the development of modern science, and from this point of view it is undoubtedly one of the most conspicuous supports of Western thought. The capacity which this 'technological mentality' possesses to penetrate different cultural contexts bears witness to the fact that technology is something which is more than a mere set of 'neutral' tools. In fact, it influences forms of behaviour and the very representation of reality, reinforcing all those cultural categories which are functional in relation to it. The question is without doubt complex in nature. The intertwining of different factors, therefore, does not allow an analysis which can go beyond the simple level of thought. In this sense, we can define the contribution of this paper as an attempt to achieve clarification and orientation within the complex contemporary situation.

Technological Culture

First of all it is advisable to clarify what we mean by the phrase 'technological culture'. This culture corresponds to the image which technology provides of itself. It can be identified with the process of legitimisation of the complex endeavour, made up of the intertwining of science, the technical, and the economy, by which Western man seeks to govern and rationalise the various aspects of his own existence. This process produces and diffuses certain beliefs which end up by constituting a large part of Western civilisation. To understand thus 'culture' adequately it is necessary to escape the temptation to construct ideal models which establish a mythical opposition between the present and the past.
One of the constant elements of the analysis of cultural processes is the confusion between the polarity of theoretical models and the polarity of historical contexts. Whereas it is meaningful to lay stress upon the opposition between different theoretical systems which at times have had greater diffusion in special historical periods, it is mistaken to counterpose the past and the present within an approach which involves their idealisation. Each and every historical period manifests its own characteristics, and the irreversibility of time means that the specific historical elements of one's own historical condition should be governed without the construction of 'myths' which are to a greater or lesser extent 'consolatory'. It should also be added that the opposition between theoretical models does not involve them being contradictory, that is to say that they exclude one another.(3) As long as the models remain contrary but not contradictory a synthesis is possible, and indeed is something to be welcomed, which acts to conserve the positive elements that they express. But a synthesis requires above all else a point of view which is able to draw up a hierarchy of both goods and theoretical structures. An aware and structured 'culture of life' could really contribute to this undertaking and give weight and meaning to Western anthropocentrism, which continues to be a non-abandonable point of reference for the construction of civilisation, but which today is experiencing various forms of 'crisis'. This is a crisis which is closely bound up both with the forms of secularisation specific to the West and with the loss of an awareness of the 'finite' condition of the human person.

In order to achieve a clarification of the problems to which we are today called to address ourselves, in order to respond to this 'crisis', or better still, in order to bring out the existence of this critical situation, it is necessary to understand what has introduced the 'technological mentality' into the structure of the contemporary ethos. One principle which can be of use to us from the point of view of guidance is that formulated by Hans Jonas(4) when he wrote that 'one understands what is at stake only when one knows that it is at stake'. We must, therefore, ask ourselves 'what is at stake' in the existential wager which is today promoted by technological culture. A culture of life formulated within the Western context must not abandon what is good in techno-scientific development, but at the same time it should not close its eyes when faced with unilateral approaches and forms of violence and injustice which this same development introduces. The reference to the past has, for this reason, a methodological value - it allows us to identify transformations and to understand how every age lives and perceives in its own ways the most radical questions of existence. And contrast and comparison allow us to escape an implicit and lived out historicism which could easily lead us to think that there is a correspondence between development and progress, between newness and goodness. If we manage to understand the deep transformations of the cultural categories and human experiences which are mediated by technology, we will manage, perhaps, to better identify the questions which today we should place at the service of a culture of life which is capable of joining together truth and historicity.

**Cultural Transformations**

As Francis Barone observed: 'to speak about a "technological" age implies the recognition of other "ages" which have not been technological'.(5) But this cannot make us forget that discontinuities exist in historical processes and that the identification of the beginning of the technological age depends in large measure upon how the phenomenon of the technical in relation to human action is interpreted. In this paper it is certainly not possible to elaborate upon this question. Even less can we take into consideration the vast literature which has addressed itself to the phenomenon of the technical during the contemporary age.(6) To simplify, we will confine ourselves to remembering that technology is closely bound up with the formation of modern science. Differently from the technical, understood as the simple art of making tools, technology takes part to the full in historical processes well, and from time to time constitutes their means and their outcome. Thus, for example, the electronic microscope is an instrument which provides knowledge and is also
the result of knowledge acquired in the realms of optics and electronics. After making these specific observations, we will try here to demonstrate some of the transformations which are connected with technological development. We will begin by identifying the ways in which man has related practice and truth to each other. In rather summarising terms, we can distinguish three approaches which in fact have affirmed themselves at a cultural level in different historical periods.

The first approach perceives an equivalence between truth and the being of reality ('verum est ens'). The second sees the source of truth in the work of man ('verum quia factum'). The third, which corresponds to the advent of technological culture, places truth and the meaning of reality in the doable ('verum quia faciendum').

These different approaches to reality, which in fact can legitimately co-exist when the respective epistemological confines which characterise them have been defined, can be read from a historical point of view as being the predominant models of medieval culture, modern culture, and contemporary culture. At a theoretical level, these approaches can be described in the following terms:

a) The first approach is that specific to the Western metaphysical tradition and belongs to Judeo-Christian culture. In this approach it is asserted that the intelligibility of the real finds its basis in creationism. Human practice, for this reason, is directed towards recognising the truth of things and believes that the meaning of reality cannot be established from the cognitive activity of man, from his projects or from his needs. Reality, certainly, is 'near to hand', it is available to the moulding work of man, but man knows that the task of humanising the environment-nature can identify non-arbitrary criteria to establish what it is good to do and what, instead, is bad.

b) In the second approach, which has its origins in modern science, intelligibility is placed in the work of man. Human practice, for this reason, in making history and building science through experiment, is able to render intelligible the environment-nature which is seen as being ugly, opaque and meaningless matter when located outside the project-making of man. This approach, which involves first methodologically and then in terms of contents an axiological 'neutralisation' of reality, found an echo and wide diffusion through some 'modern' philosophical approaches. As Kant was to say: 'reason sees only what it itself produces according to its own design'.

c) In the third approach, which is built upon the practical weakening of the environment-nature, that is to say upon the effective capacity to transform the constituent elements of the environment-nature - the fruit of the marriage between science and the technical - the truth is moved to the future, as a place for the verification of man's project. The conceptual transformation of development (that is to say of the simple increment of an activity) into progress (that is to say into an increment recognised as being 'good') here finds its rooting.

These three approaches, in themselves, can boast a theoretical legitimacy if they avoid mutual exclusion and withdraw from self-referentiality. These three theoretical models, in fact, meet three different cognitive needs. Although here we can only outline the theoretical question to be found in the relation between these different forms of knowing (and thus of the analogous meaning of the idea of truth), it becomes easy to understand the historical process which led to the theoretical marginalisation of the question of the truth about man and his 'location in the cosmos'. These approaches, in fact, determine in different ways the meaning and the task of human rationality.

The success of techno-scientific reason not only at the level of human knowledge in the sphere of certain empirical phenomena, but also at the level of the transformation of the quality of life, led to the unwarranted conclusion that the only context within which it is possible to establish the difference between truth and falsehood is that governed by the model of the experimental sciences.

From this point of view, the contemporary world has brought to fruition, so to speak, a process of the overturning of perspectives, relegating forms of knowledge such as philosophy and theology to the sphere of opinions (doxa), that is to say seeing them as approaches which no longer have something to do with truth or falsehood but only with the theorisations of individual choices, of existential opinions. Options, which as such, escape inclusion in the categories of reason.
Jonas perceives in this situation one of the aspects of the so-called crisis of modern man. In an essay entitled 'Problemi Attuali nell'Etica in una Prospettiva Ebraica' ('Contemporary Problems in Ethics from a Jewish Perspective'), Jonas writes: 'reason, triumphant thanks to science, destroyed faith in revelation without, however, substituting it with regard to its function as a point of reference for our fundamental choices. Reason made itself incapable of performing that function, in which at one time it was in competition with religion, precisely when it presented itself, in the form of science, as the only authority with regard to truth. Its abdication in the sphere of original action is the consequence of its triumph in other spheres: here its success is based upon the redefinition of the possible objects and methods of knowledge which excludes entire realms of other objects. This situation is reflected in the incapacity of contemporary philosophy to provide an ethical theory, that is to say to attribute a value to ethical norms as parts of our cognitive universe'.(9)

Expressed in other terms, contemporary man continues to have his question as to 'how he should live' but he does not believe that an answer can be provided to this question by philosophy or faith. He thinks that philosophy and faith no longer have anything to do with truth and reason, but at the most that they carry out a work of existential support for those people who have not reached full rational emancipation, something which only science can provide. Fundamental choices, therefore, should find their criterion in the promises of technology. This, however, means thinking that the problems which are indeed perceived must find their solution in technological development: knowledge about man and the construction of his existence expect an answer from techno-science.

This belief depends in large part upon the progressive familiarisation of contemporary culture with the cybernetic model - the great methodological invention of modernity. To think about man in terms of a living 'machine' means to try to understand his 'functioning' and thus to identify what is useful to his life. The 'machine' responds to the full to the need to rationalise reality. There is nothing which is 'mysterious' in it and its value depends directly on the ends which man himself has established.

To think about man and life through the cybernetic model means to expose life to a merely functionalistic and mechanistic understanding, which is increasingly near to the definition of 'how' phenomena come about, but also increasingly distant from the identification of the 'why' of life and reality. This functionalistic vision (which has its theoretical 'advantages' in the field of biomedicine) runs the risk, however, of producing a unilateral conception of existence and of eliminating the decisive question of the 'ends' of existence.

This cultural transformation induces people to think about all the 'limits' of existence as 'mere obstacles' to be overcome: the doable does not only become acceptable, it also becomes 'incumbent'. If, indeed, the 'truth' of existence is rooted only in the making of plans, it is only by bringing technological and experimental progress to fulfilment that it will be possible to respond to the yearning for truth which nonetheless lies beneath the techno-scientific endeavour. The anti-entropic character of contemporary techno-science and the difficulty which is encountered in bringing out the ethical questions and issues which are bound up with this new extension of human power are rooted in this approach.

It is not difficult to observe how the authoritativeness of faith, and at times of philosophy, seem to be accepted only at the level of subjectivity and in the face of the existential and emotional setbacks which are introduced by the experience of pain and death.

This 'consoling' function is, however, marginal in the face of a form of science which promises an increasingly unlimited extension of life, and proposes remedies to pain and holds up even the defeat of death. It does not matter whether these promises can be kept or not - the authoritativeness of techno-science is closely bound up - within a certain collective imagination - with its capacity to rationalise life, to withdraw it from the causality of events. In this line of thinking, one well understands how the idea of euthanasia, as the final act of 'rational' self-government in relation to one's own existence, becomes diffused. Concomitantly, we could also interpret the motivation of consent which accompanies the techniques of procreation outside of the body - they promise a new control over life and health, they represent a powerful insurance in relation to the constituent fear of pain and death.
The two 'limits' to existence, those which indicate its passivity, that is to say being born and dying, seem not to have their 'own meaning' in cases where they do not correspond to a human project. The 'value' of life, both human life and non-human life, are thus strictly bound up with the level of 'desires'.

In the first half of the last century Guardini had already understood what a process of rationalisation carried out in a way which excluded the aspects of life which are not within the grasp of human power meant: 'the set of events of which life is made up no longer appears as the Providence which Christ spoke about, but as a simple chain of causes and empirical effects which can be understood and directed...All the possible occurrences of life come to be 'foreseen', calculated according to their frequency and importance, and made inoffensive. The capital events of human life - conception, birth, illness, and death - lose their mysterious character. They become biological and social phenomena with which forms of science and medical technology which are increasingly confident of themselves concern themselves. And when they represent facts which cannot be dominated, they are 'anaesthetised' and their importance is eliminated. And here, at the margins of culture, there appears a technique which is complementary to that which seeks to triumph rationally over illness and death, that is to say the elimination of that life which no longer appears to be worthy of being lived to the living person himself, or which no longer appears to be in line with the goals set down by the state'.(10)

We can draw a first conclusion: in technological culture the human practice is not guided by any 'objective' truth. The concepts of 'limit', of 'renouncing', and of 'sacrifice' no longer have a 'meaning', that is to say they are not able to point out 'goods' to maintain, they are no longer thought of as the condition for the achievement of non-immediate and higher goods. They become only the 'provisional' signs of a human emancipation which has not yet been carried out.

From this point of view, as was observed above, the possible is not only presented as being acceptable but even as being incumbent. The structural ambiguity of the possible conceals the problem of what is 'compossible'. Indeed, the finite structure of the human condition requires that in the face of a rooted desire to obtain all goods, and all possible good, one has to choose - and every choice involves a renunciation. But this renunciation must be guided by a criterion. This criterion can be understood in a non-arbitrary way only if there is a commitment to establishing the 'truth' of human existence and to construct, therefore, a hierarchy of goods.

Thus, for example, if it is possible to solve the problem of illness, of suffering, and of death, then it is incumbent to attempt such an endeavour, as long as this undertaking does not work against other goods and does not end up by obfuscating the 'truth' about man, projecting into desire the basis of truth itself. An understanding of some decisive elements of existence escapes techno-scientific culture. This culture legitimates every instrument which is able to fulfil human desires (which in themselves are considered in abstract terms as being good) and runs the risk of giving rise to the fact that the moral question (of good and bad) of the employed 'instrument', which is assessed and evaluated solely in terms of greater or lesser effectiveness, is not perceived.

Technological culture presents itself as masked and latent metaphysics, as a sort of implicit Weltanschauung.

From a theoretical point of view, it is rather simple to condemn the fact that the primacy of instrumental reason promoted by the techno-sciences is not able to ensure this self-referentiality. Indeed, this is not able to establish 'which' ends, which 'desires', are legitimate or not, but can only point out the most suitable means. It is no accident, in fact, that technological culture continues to refer - in order to legitimate itself - to the good of man and to some 'goods' (health, the extension of freedom, emancipation from pain and trials), but is not able to say why these are goods which should be pursued and what is the sense (meaning and direction) of this existential propensity. This theoretical setback is, however, concealed to the eyes of many by two factors. On the one hand, the practical success of technological development; on the other hand, the elimination of any serious debate about the sense of life, a subject relegated to the realm of pure option and deprived of its original and constituent reference to the question of truth.
The Transformation of Experience: Technology as a Form of Liberation

We will never be able adequately to understand technological culture if we do not take seriously into consideration the deep transformations which it has introduced and is introducing into the human experience. Considered on its own, technology is one of the most potent elements in the emancipation of man from the physical bonds within which, over the centuries, he has found that he constructs his identity.

The invention of 'machines' has progressively freed man from many limits; it has transformed the way in which goods are produced; it has reduced physical trial; and it has enabled man to overcome many spatial-temporal barriers. It has also modified the perception of the environment-nature, which has been increasingly interpreted through means of biomedical formulas, mathematical relations and portrayals of an instrumental character. It is not possible here to go more deeply into this subject. We will confine ourselves to recalling that a one-way reading of living reality progressively obscures the very image of man, who shares with the environment-nature not only a vital space but also the same basic components. The axiological neutralisation of the whole of the biological through a purely techno-scientific interpretation has a heavy consequence for the very perception of man - one needs only to think about the contemporary discussions about zygotes, embryos, blastocysts, and human foetuses, all of which are scientific terms which conceal the fact that these are stages in the growth and development of a child. Linguistic transformations are also cultural transformations and have an immediate consequence at the level of the comprehension of critical and existential phenomena.

Those who are born in the age of technology encounter difficulty in understanding the practical and theoretical importance of the new systems of telecommunication: instruments which are used every day, such as the telephone, the television, or Internet, allow interpersonal relations which were previously absolutely unthinkable.

Without wanting to be irreverent, the following observation may be made: if before the advent of technology it was necessary to have a 'miracle' in order to be able to appear before a person who lived thousands of kilometres away, today Internet and a web-cam are enough and we can appear before our interlocutor on the other side of the ocean. It is now 'banal' to engage in acts which thanks to the mediation of technology at one time would have been seen as being extraordinary and 'miraculous'. It is equally 'banal' to move great distances in a few hours thanks to aeroplanes. The very perception of temporality has mutated - the man who experiences the results of technology can enjoy times free of trial and work which were previously unthinkable. It is no accident that our society has the problem of 'free time'.

Aesthetic perception is also worthy of mention. Experience of music and the theatre can now be undergone - it is banal to make the point - without having to go to listen to orchestras or to theatres to see actors. We need only listen to compact disks and videocassettes, and everybody, practically at any moment, thanks to portable instruments, can enjoy something which was created at one time and is now to hand.

It is certainly the case that one can say and write many things against mass culture, the levelling of taste, and the absence of originality. But one cannot deny that what was previously the possession of a few has now become a good to be enjoyed by many.

Before condemning or exalting this situation, it is necessary to understand it. Indeed, we cannot forget that this situation is the outcome of human inventiveness and is one of the signs of the real difference of man from the rest of the living world. Precisely because the technological phenomenon is a complex phenomenon, it interacts with the ways in which contemporary man portrays himself. Technology modifies our way of living and induces new forms of behaviour and dependencies. Precisely because of its complexity, technology is at one and the same time an instrument of emancipation and a factor of dependence. Technology, in fact, creates new and different forms of the existential 'exposure' of man.
Differently from mere tools, which create habits which are easily correctable and easily dominated, technology influences the construction of its own habits in a radical way. Furthermore, it introduces a net separation between those who enjoy technological products and those who know the theoretical and practical elements which make such products possible. Many people know how to use a computer but how many people know the physical principles which lie behind the fact that pressure exerted on a key of a keyboard becomes transformed into an image on a screen?

'Machines' not only make up a part of our familiar environment, to the point that the natural and the artificial interact and penetrate each other, they also become a constituent part of our portrayal of life and reality. In this way, the cybernetic model becomes the instrument by which the corporeal, the macroscopic, and the microscopic are described.

As Anders was already observing in 1956, the 'machine' has become our model of perfection. 'I believe that I am on the track of a new pudendum; a reason for shame which did not exist in the past. I call it, for the moment, for my own use, Promethean shame, and I mean by this the shame which one feels in the face of the humiliating stature of the quality of the objects which we ourselves have made'.

What can be gained from these observations when it comes to the subject of the 'culture of life'? First of all an observation should be made: technology broadens opportunity. And the possible demonstrates, and this is a positive fact, the authentic characteristics of moral experience, that is to say the dimension of responsibility. From a moral perspective, prohibition does not indicate a physical impossibility, an extrinsic limit, but an appeal to a choice, to an intrinsic bond. From this point of view, there are not actions which must not be engaged in because their performance is impossible - they must not be engaged in because it is wrong to perform them, that is to say they contradict the specific dynamic of possibility as vocation to the fullness of good. The relationship between being and having to be is fully manifested in the presence of the broadening of what is possible. In this sense, technology is a source of liberation but also an appeal to the moral meaning and not only the factual meaning of freedom.

In the face of many goods man is called upon to establish a hierarchy and to rediscover the good that is necessary to him to ensure that his power does not become the source of his existential and vital breakdown. If, therefore, technology has a radical merit, it is that of leading us to face the question of the sense of human power. On the one hand, indeed, technology seems to teach us that it is enough to want in order to be able; on the other hand, it poses questions to us about the task of this power which characterises us.

The power of man does not become violence only when its source and destination are found. And the power of man is understood only in rediscovering the vocation of man. Here, as has already been observed in this paper, there is a point of fracture with the aspiration of the technological mentality to be self-referential. Human power, in fact, should be understood in terms of the question of the sense of human existence and this question does not find an answer if one does not pose again, even within our own civilisation, the question of God. If, indeed, technology strengthens the power of man and thus exalts his freedom, it is incapable of defining the horizon within which this power should be exercised and this freedom should be actualised.

What, without too much effort, we could define as the discomfort of our epoch, in fact, springs from this absence of the ultimate sense of human power. What Weber defined as the 'disenchantment' of the world brings with it new forms of anxiety and existential tiredness. In the face of a form of progress which is mythologically thought of as being 'infinite', contemporary man runs the risk of being 'tired' of life and not 'sated'. Hence there arise new forms of fear about death, new forms of 'nausea' in relation to a life which seems deprived of a 'goal', and new forms of discrimination towards those who do not satisfy our desires, our needs, and our portrayals of the quality of living.

Human relations, which technology enables us to broaden and even to deepen, rapidly become transformed into an exaltation of the impersonal and the individual. Interpersonal bonds, which operate through the ideas of respect, justice, and dedication, run the continual risk of falling into the anonymity of a life which has lost the meaning of temporality and which no longer knows how to appreciate the
value of the finite. Community itself, which is built around a purpose, becomes dissolved into impersonal functions which guarantee only the useful. The 'crisis' of man whose only horizon of meaning is the power of technological civilisation is bound up with this new form of 'yearning' for the absolute which constantly leads him to shift the boundaries of his own work, to 'invest' his wager about existence in the future. Technology promotes impersonal forms in order to satisfy personal needs such as those of communication, health, and knowledge. But technological culture (which should be distinguished from technology) functions precisely because it makes subjectivity disappear and transforms truth into a project - here is born the contradiction between the humanising origins of the technological project and its outcome when the meaning and normativity of such origins are lost.

Some Concluding Observations

The culture of life is above all else 'knowing' about the truth about man and his ultimate end - only in rediscovering familiarity with God as the foundation of human freedom and fulfilment of the wish for the absolute does life take on meaning and is able to fully express the religious dynamic which can lead it to listen to the Gospel of Life. Today this communication has to deal with a progressive reduction of the human religious experience and with a portrayal of God as an alternative reality to man and his freedom. However illusory the undertaking of the construction of an existence which does not answer the question about its sense (its meaning and purpose) may be, technological culture attempts this step with an effectiveness which is much greater than that of forms of irreligiousness and of atheism which affirmed themselves in a historical sense during previous centuries. If, rightly, E. Gilson was able to speak about 'difficult atheism' in order to refer to the theoretical reefs of any endeavour which seeks to deny the existence of God(12), it should be observed that today the denial of God operates through 'indifference' towards the religious experience. But the roots of religious experience are not a matter of the satisfaction of certain needs but rather of the question about the 'truth' of life, that truth which is the basis of and directs freedom.

From this point of view, perhaps, the prosperity and well-being offered by techno-scientific progress could really allow a purification of the religious experience and an essentiality of the Christian message by restoring to the centre of the experience of faith the truth of a constitutive relationship between man and God, between history and God, and between the world and God. If, as Guardini wrote, the 'religious experience' refers to the instinctive perception which 'directly perceives a numinous element in all things, in all events', as a result of which reality has a meaning which transcends that which today we call empirical reality, then we can say that this 'instinctive perception is becoming increasingly weak'.(13)

For too long Western culture has linked the religious dimension to the concern with satisfying the worries and lack of satisfaction of man, making faith into an existential response which is unconnected with any concern about its truthfulness. It is not difficult to understand that when technology manages to satisfy (or at least promises to satisfy) the needs of man, it ends up by becoming rooted in that religion of the progress and emancipation of man which today is nourished by the recurrent myth of 'healthism'.

We cannot, in fact, ignore that today the technological promise consists of the promise of 'health' and everlasting 'youth': the myth of 'healthism' is today the most powerful surrogate for the request for salvation which has run through the complex history of man. It does not matter if this new Western myth is or is not able to realise this promise - what is clear is that the new forms of discrimination, of marginalisation, and of violation of human life, whether unborn or dying, arise within this myth of healthism and vitalism. The eugenic practices which run through technological civilisation, the pockets
of hopelessness and loneliness which are present within the walls of our civilisation, are the 'price' of this myth.

The declaration of Nietzsche regarding the 'death of God' has always been correlated with the promise of the birth of the 'super-man', of the individual who would be able to rediscover within himself the answer to the yearning for the infinite which can never be cancelled out. A culture of life, therefore, today has the task of making us understand the sense of human finiteness; of telling the truth about it once again. This is because it is within finiteness that the truth about life is manifested, that is to say that God is a participant in the history of man both because He constitutes it here and now in his freedom, and because in the Incarnation is announced the 'key to the interpretation of existence'.

Faced with the ambiguity of technological development, and the dangers of man and his very environment, it is necessary to remember that this crisis always requires a 'decision between negative and positive possibilities, and the question is to know where this decision falls. If in the face of this crisis the impression is born that the danger of what is negative, unjust, and destructive becomes carried to extremes, this is something which is new not in an existential way but only in terms of intensity. That danger is in man, in an absolute sense, and is not exclusively connected to the time which is at work; the right position can only be that of accepting the situation which is given to us and to dominate it from within, relying upon the purer strengths of the spirit and of Grace. If we fail this will not mean that our epoch, as such, is decadence and ruins, but it will become evident that in each and every age man is subject to decadence and ruin and needs Redemption: something which in certain circumstances can be less evident than in others.

Today, a contribution to the culture of life can also be made by a retrieval of metaphysical approaches and issues. Although there are many aspects of the thought of Jonas which give rise to dissatisfaction and perplexity, what he writes about the task of metaphysical is absolutely to be shared: 'We do not argue here that it is only with the disappearance of faith that metaphysics has had to take on a task which previously theology after its own fashion was able to perform, but that this task has always and exclusively been its task - in conditions of faith as of non-belief, the alternative to which does not in the least influence the nature of the task. From theology, metaphysics can acquire only a radical character - hitherto unknown - in raising questions, and to such an extent that a question such as one of a Leibnizian character (e.g., why does something exist rather than nothing) would have been impossible in ancient philosophy.'

This need for metaphysical thought and reflection is created by the fact that technological development raises questions and issues which do not only concern human action but also human being itself and the being of reality - ontological problems which the technological mentality is not able to solve. The contribution of philosophy is today strictly bound up with its capacity to overcome certain dogmas of modernity, such as those which forbid a reopening of the analysis of truth within the framework of metaphysical questions and issues, or those which impede a rediscovery of the constitutive links between human action and the ultimate end of existence, between being and having to be. Perhaps another sign of the influence of the technological mentality can be found in the halo of distrust which surrounds this endeavour, which is adjudged ineffective. For contemporary man, who is used to thinking that only what in statistical terms has some prospects of success deserves to be a project to be followed, it seems that the metaphysical approach, however true it may be, is 'useless'. To yield to this instrumental form of reason means to abandon a task which not only connotes philosophy as a specific discipline but also the very structure of human reason. To see things clearly, beyond the differences and oppositions which are involved, what all-human projects share is indeed always the search for truth - the breaking of a unilateral and univocal vision of this undertaking is, in essential terms, what is requested today.

It is not necessary to turn one's back on the search for the truth of science, for the truth of forms of technology, if one is able to read them in terms of that truth of being which is their basis, justifies them, and directs them. Only in this way can one understand why the inevitable renunciations which are
connected with human action, effected within a context of finiteness, will not be alternatives but conditions of possibility for the realisation of the original vocation of man to the infinite - a tendency which connotes his reason and his anthropological structure. And this infinite will no longer present itself as the 'bad infinite' which reveals itself in the indefinite prolonging of temporality, but as that Infinite which is the basis of the real, and which wanted to be received into the history of man with the face itself of man.

As Jonas pointed out, the task of philosophy finds in faith and believing reason a stimulus to going to the root of things and seriousness. Only if these 'two wings of the spirit', to employ the initial metaphor, do not cease to beat will it be possible to raise oneself even more towards the truth of being.

Technological culture is today's challenge to this endeavour - a similar challenge to those which in other ages have developed in other directions. What is at stake, once again, is our freedom - the freedom to make reason into a guide in relation to truth, and not only a tool to achieve survival.

The culture of life, indeed, differentiates itself from the widespread vitalism of our days precisely because of its rooting in truth, known through argument and recognised within the experience of faith. Thus is born a real and permanent interest of the believer for the world as well, because, as Guardini has written, through the Incarnation 'God is "existentially" interested in the being, the becoming, the development and the destiny of man, and through man, of the world'.(17) But this concern becomes possible 'only if the world is seen as a reality and a set of values wanted by God and which are dear to Him, as something which He has entrusted to man...Christianity is historical. The term must not be understood in the historicistic and relativistic sense of liberal theology, but in the sense of that history which God effects with His creation. Through this He offers to Christian existence, from time to time, the conditions in which it must be actualised'.(18) To interpret the signs of our times and to dedicate oneself to identifying their limits and their values constitutes a part of this concern.
NOTES
(2)Ibid. p. 1813.
(3) On this subject see A. Pessina, Bioetica. L'Uomo Sperimentale (Mondadori, Milan, 1999), and more specifically the chapter entitled 'L'Alternativa Impossible e il Disincantamento del Mondo' ('The Impossible Alternative and the Disenchantment of the World').
(6) For a general approach see M. Nacci, Pensare la Tecnica. Un Secolo di Incomprensioni (Laterza, Rome/Bari, 2000).
(11) Forms of biotechnology and their ability to intervene in relation to, to modify, and to rationalise certain phenomena of life, both human and otherwise, require a specific separate analysis. For this subject see A. Pessina, L'Uomo Sperimentale.
(14)Ibid., p. 42.
(15) R. Guardini, La Fine dell'Epoca Moderna, p. 158.
(16) H. Jonas, Il Principio Responsabilità, p. 60.
(17) R. Guardini, Sul Limite della Vita, p. 35.
(18) Ibid., pp. 31 and 32.
The fifth anniversary of the publication of Evangelium Vitae brings to the foreground the whole Magisterium of John Paul II on human life. This teaching has been of such importance in the life of the church and of the whole of humanity that it seems adequate to accompany the theological, philosophical and scientific studies prepared for the occasion by this brief appraisal of the role of John Paul II as defender of human life. This may give the occasion to glimpse into some of the roots of this vast magisterial effort and to value the effective and timely manner in which it has come to grips with some of the most urgent problems facing humankind at the beginning of this new millenium. This paper is therefore not aimed at any scientific analysis but attempts rather to give a broad view of the significance of the Pope's teaching on life.

In the number 34 of Evangelium Vitae, the Holy Father has written: "Life is always a good." In face of this statement, how does the history of mankind in the XX century appear? This has been a time illuminated by unparalleled scientific and material advances. However true this appraisal may be, one cannot look at many recent historical events without feelings of sadness and horror. Wars and revolutions have taken a toll of hundreds of millions of dead, many of whom were murdered with abominable cruelty. In contrast to the vast amounts of wealth that have been created and accumulated, many forms of oppression and exploitation afflict even to-day large segments of humanity. The social acceptance of crime is dangerously extended. Lawgivers do not shun the drawing up of legislations to justify the elimination of allegedly useless human lives. The poorer nations are remorselessly deprived of effective possibilities to ensure their necessary autonomy and to improve their miserable condition.

Science and Technology are ever widening the horizon of knowledge and increasing human power. It is paradoxical that in the very act of so doing they increase the dread before the future. A mistrust of times to come is an ingredient of everyday life, even in works of literary fiction. Yesterday it was the turn of nuclear power. Today, the fear of an environmental catastrophe is pushing many to a position, which amounts to contempt for humanity. Man is viewed as a predatory and harmful animal, whose destiny should be subordinated to that of the whole of Nature.

A very large portion of the homicides and cruel deeds that have darkened our history, have been due to the prevailing of inhuman doctrines that fostered class and racial hatreds as means to achieve social domination. But one can also perceive a pure exaltation of death, which was proclaimed by very influential thinkers, especially during the first half of the XX century and around the Great War of 1914-1918. This attitude contaminated even very remarkable Christian thinkers and artists, and it was linked to the rise of new paganisms and to the rising of social and political values severed from their religious roots.

In later times it appears that the colossal trauma of wars had ended by causing a real weariness at the physical destruction of human life. This is replaced by conceptions which debase man into a meaningless entity: man is impermanent and insignificant as a trace on the sand. The natural response, which is the rejection of homicide, has not led to value human life as such more highly. It happens rather that the ways and means to kill become more covert and subtle. Society would willingly ignore and render less traumatic the fifty million abortions which take place every year, and tortuous steps are being taken all the time toward allowing the killing of terminally and unconscious patients.

This apparent seduction by death has even boasted a sort of legitimization by science. Sigmund Freud wrote "that the principle of pleasure will serve a function destined to deprive the animic system of
excitations...such a function would take part in the more general aspiration of every animated being toward returning to the quiet of the inorganic world..." (1). This would mean that life even in the exalted mode of pleasure would be really moved by a yearning for death. It does not seem possible to attribute to the latter a more dilated empire.

The whole of this attitude is directly opposed to God's revelation. The Vatican Council teaches that (man), "...is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself..." (2). This fundamental truth has been vigorously put forward by the Pope when he reminds every man and every woman that their life is always a good. The Pope has stressed that the truth about man is a subject matter not only for the revealed doctrine, but also for human reason. The teaching of John Paul II emphasizes the importance of reason, and its fundamental power to attain truth. Man cannot face life as if he were not able to know the truth, as if he had not the freedom to act within the realm of truth, as if he had no dignity. Reason allows to perceive, and opens the way to desire, the undeniable good that comes from a proper use of moral conscience, or from the creative power of work, or from the life of the family or from the orderly expression of bodily functions. In short, we can perceive and desire the good of life. Revelation for its part enriches and widens this vision until it opens horizons which are not accessible to the sole reason, but which affirm and give ground to that which the latter attained. In this way is attained the union mentioned in the introduction to "Fides et Ratio": "Faith and Reason are like two wings in which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth" (3).

One revealed truth that gives the full measure of the good of human life, and which has been the core of much of the teaching of John Paul II is the word of the Book of Genesis that man was created at the image of God (4). The reaffirmation of this truth has been proclaimed in face of a number of currents and attitudes in the present day whereby the goodness of life is questioned and even denied. In their contrast therefore the prophetic nature of the Pope's teaching becomes especially apparent. In the present paper I do not intend to give an exhaustive treatment of this matter, but I have chosen five themes where the hand extended by the Church to the world is particularly timely and helpful. These are 1) moral conscience; 2) family; 3) work; 4) the human body, and 5) suffering.

Moral conscience

The Encyclical "Veritatis Splendor" begins with these words: "The splendour of truth shines forth in all the works of the Creator, and in a special sense in man, created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). Truth enlightens man's intelligence and shapes his freedom leading him to know and to love the Lord". (5) Conscience is not only a dialogue of man with himself. It "is also a dialogue of man with God, the author of the law, the primordial image and the final end of man. Saint Bonaventure teaches that conscience is like God's herald and messenger. Conscience is the witness of God Himself. In this and not in anything else, lies the entire mystery and the dignity of the moral conscience: in being the place, the sacred place where God speaks to man" (6).

The sole existence of this space where it is God Who speaks, gives the measure of the greatness and the beauty of human life, which becomes grossly impoverished when conscience is reduced to the power of establishing a purely human law which is more dependent on the will of man than on the truth of things. In face of this real mutilation, the Pope raises an inestimable defense of the dignity of human life, and in so doing he lays bare the paradox that man may often take conscience as a burden when it is really the seal of his dignity.

Family

On numerous occasions the Pope has insisted on the very special good of the family where the condition of man as the image of God is specially expressed. In "Familiaris Consortio" he writes "God
created man in His own image and likeness, calling him to existence through love, He called him at the
same time for love (7). In this way man has been placed within a community where God's own life is
manifested by mutual self-giving. "marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and
living the one mystery of the covenant of God with His people" (8).
The family, which stands at the origin of human life, is also the way and instrument toward its
fulfillment. Accordingly the family has been entrusted with a specific mission closely linked to the
work of salvation: "...to guard, reveal and communicate love" (9). The family is therefore called upon
to vitalize the whole of human society, bearing witness to the high good that it fosters and promotes:
human life.
The merciless blows dealt in our times to the family, are but too well known. The Pope has faced them
with faith and courage, and has been a stalwart defender of humanity in the custody of one of its
greatest goods.

Work

The meaning of human work becomes clear in the perspective of the dignity of the human person. The
idea of work is often reduced to that of a merchandise or a means for production. In this manner
human existence is darkened and the nature of human endeavor debased. The teaching of the Church is
highly invigorating in that it shows that work is intimately linked to the creative action of God., "work
is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth" (10). "...man's life is built up every day from
work, from work it derives its special dignity..." (11). "Even though (work) bears the mark of a bonum
arduurn in the terminology of Saint Thomas, this does not take away the fact that as such it is a good
thing for man. It is not only good in the sense that it is useful or something to enjoy, it is also good as
being something worthy, that is to say something that corresponds to man's dignity, that expresses this
dignity and increases it...work is a good thing for man, a good thing for his humanity - because through
work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfillment as a
human being" (12). This conception of work brings up its subjective value, far beyond its instrumental
value. For it to be true work should manifest the "lordly" condition of man.
The Encyclical Centesimus Annus, which was published after the fall of the real socialisms, draws the
lesson from that unique historical moment. "...the fundamental error of socialism is anthropological in
nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social
organization..." (13)
It was the atheist root that led to interpret the frequent and often necessary social conflicts as
expression of an inexorable class struggle, which amounted to read the human history in key of
conflict. But the defeat of a perverse doctrine need not be automatically followed by the recognition of
ture human values, in the ensuing historical events. This is of fundamental importance for the mission
of the Church. The announcement of truth to society does not identify itself with any political tendency
nor to philosophical or scientific theories. The Church evangelizes and that great evangelization
instrument which is social doctrine, in the light of God's mystery concerns itself with the whole of
social life and "reveals man to himself" (14)
Work as participation in the Creation is thus a privileged instance of the good and dignity of human
life. ".man is the image of God partly through the mandate received from his Creator to dominate the
earth..."(15)

The human body

The "image of God" exists in a corporeal structure, and not as a pure spirit. There is a mystery in this
that a being subject to biological becoming and to all the limitations of matter should be the image of
God. And the Pope is fond of recalling the words of the Council: "...only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light..." (16)
The human body has been the prey to the most paradoxical devaluation in a culture, which aimed at exalting it. The reduction of corporeality to physical-chemical phenomena, makes that the body, "the machine of the body" become external to man himself and comes to be considered either as the instrument of a freedom that defines itself as expressed in Veritatis Splendor: "...making freedom self-defining and a phenomenon creative of itself and its values..."(17); or to a being subject to blind determinism. In either case we face a denial of the true dignity of the body as affirmed by the Pope: "the person including the body, is completely entrusted to himself and it is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his own moral acts..." (18)
Because of the fundamental reason that the Word of God took human flesh is it that the body has a fundamental importance in God's plan of salvation, and consequently in the teaching of the Church. Visible creation in the person of man is placed on a plane of dignity, which transcends by far the arbitrary claims based upon a distorted freedom or upon a purely materialistic vision.
The person is expressed in the body. The corporeal condition manifests the uniqueness and the subjectiveness of personal being, just as the sexuated structure of humanity points toward the need for complementation and for communion. "The theology of the body, which is from the beginning linked to the creation of man in the image of God, becomes in a sense also a theology of sex, or rather theology of masculinity and femininity..." (19). The capacities to express love and the capacity and deep disponibility for the assertion of the person are fundamental traits of the human body which have been emphasized by the Pope. In the course of the General Audiences 1979-1980, John Paul II presented a teaching of basic importance for the moral themes developed elsewhere: "...a doctrine which dissociates the moral act from the bodily dimensions of its exercise is contrary to the teaching of the Scripture and Tradition" (20). This theological understanding of the body makes it clear that "...the natural moral law expresses and lays down the purposes, rights and duties which are based upon the bodily and spiritual nature of the human person. Therefore this law cannot be thought of simply as a set of norms on the biological level; rather it must be defined as the rational order whereby man is called by the Creator to direct and regulate his life and actions, and in particular to make use of his own body" (21)

Suffering

"Life in time, in fact, is the fundamental condition, the initial stage and an integral part of the entire unified process of human existence. It is a process, which unexpectedly and undeservedly, is enlightened by the promise and renewed by the gift of divine life, which will reach its full realization in eternity. At the same time it is precisely this supernatural calling which highlights the relative character of each individual's earthly life. After all life on earth is not an "ultimate" but a "penultimate" reality; even so it remains a "sacred" reality." (22).
In the perspective outlined by these words, suffering which is perceived even by the sole reason as "...a universal theme that accompanies man at every point on earth..."(23), acquires a special value, "...for in suffering is contained the greatness of a specific mystery..." (24). There is something that God wills to reveal through it about his own nearness and about the presence of evil in the world, and every human suffering can be associated to the immense joy of Redemption "...Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery...Love is also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ..." (25). This is why there is also a "Gospel of suffering". "...Christ suffers voluntarily and suffers innocently..." (26). "Christ gives the answer to the question about suffering and the meaning of suffering not only by his teaching, that is by the Good News, but most of all by his own suffering which is integrated with his teaching of the Good News in an organic and indissoluble way..."
This is why the Apostle Paul could write the word quoted by the Pope in Salvifici Doloris: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his Church...Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake..." (28)

The lesson drawn by the Pope is that "...at one and the same time Christ has taught man to do good by his suffering and to do good to those who suffer..." (29).

These words were written in 1984 at a time in which the Church and the world had become accustomed to the delicate preference shown by the Holy Father toward the ill and disabled, who were like guests of honor in his presence. Sixteen years later we see that the personal example set by the Pope before a society that values well being and health above life, has created a mysterious attraction toward his teaching. More than any other action, his acceptance of suffering and his consecration to a selfless service to the whole of humanity are a visible sign of the true meaning of human life which is "...the sincere gift of himself..." (30)

Gospel of Life and Culture of Life

The teaching of the Pope has set in motion a widespread effort where Catholics have been joined by women and men of good will of various persuasions for the proclamation and the defence of life. The call to meet this need is felt by people in all walks of life, by rich and poor alike, by young and elderly, by learned and unsophisticated. It is obvious that the Pope has struck a note that has deep resonance in the soul of humankind. Even the bitter reactions, which abound give witness to the unmistakable clearness and the warm attraction of the Pope's message. In the course of international travels, as well as in audiences in Rome, before large crowds and in restricted meetings, speaking to theologians and to children, he has presented the Gospel, far away and beyond the egotistical laissez faire, which is entrapping humanity.

The Church has been entrusted precisely with this, with the announcement of the Gospel. " The Church has received the Gospel as a proclamation and a source of joy and salvation: As Paul VI wrote: Evangelization is the grace and the vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize..." (31)

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has the Gospel of Life as one of its integral parts. The announcement of this Gospel of Life changes us into a "people of life" (32) with the triple mission of announcing the Gospel, of celebrating it and of serving it. "...The core of this Gospel is the proclamation of a living God who is close to us..." (33). To this announcement responds a service of charity "...which should be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible..." "...where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to show care for all life and for the life of everyone..." (34)

The Pope has drawn, especially in Evangelium Vitae, an impressive list of services: personal witness, various manners of volunteer work, social activity and political commitment, the showing of special favor to those who are poorer, lonely and in need. We need to "show care" for all life and for the life of everyone, thereby incorporating ourselves to an outstanding history of charity, and continuing the writing of this history through the implementation of appropriate and effective programmes of support for new life with special closeness to those mothers who even without the help from the father are not afraid to bring their child to the world and to raise it. Similar care should be shown for the life of the marginalized or the suffering, especially in their final phases.

Evangelium Vitae in number 88 asks for the development of means toward the implementation of long-term practical projects and initiatives inspired by the Gospel. These actions require "...people who are generous in their involvement and fully aware of the importance of the Gospel of Life..."
wholehearted involvement which is particularly demanding for health personnel who are called even "...to the exercise of conscientious objection..." (35).
The Pope calls for all kinds of volunteer work, and even beyond this he insists that charity demand forms of social and political engagement from those whom have responsibilities in public life. Legislation and court decisions have shown a tremendous power for evil in that they induce the people to accept as just everything that have attained legal sanction. In our society always menaced by anomia, the rule of law has a strong power for instilling negative values into the consciences of the citizens. It is understandable that before this overpowering attack, many should feel tempted to underrated the possibilities of success and to mistrust their own efficacy to attain a redressing of unjust situations. The Pope demands of these persons to feel certain that some fruit is to be derived from their labour because "...moral truth cannot fail to make its presence deeply felt in every conscience... (36) so that acceptable policies for the family and a truly human attention to the demographic question may some day be secured. Once again in his Pontificate he addresses the families to embrace the mission which has been entrusted to them to "...guard, reveal and communicate love..." (37)
The needs of the hour render this urgent convocation very wide indeed. It extends particularly to educators, and also to intellectuals (let us remember the special mention made of our Pontifical Academy For Life (38)), to social communicators, to women in general with a special and delicate mention full of charity for those who have had recourse to abortion.
There is an obvious disproportion of strength between such initiatives - varied and enthusiastic though they may be - and the coordinated and overwhelming power of the forces that oppose a culture of life. But the trust of those who promote the latter is placed not in the guiles of man but on the power of God, before whom a "...great prayer for life is urgently needed..." (39). Those who promote the cultural fidelity to the God of Life are in fact sowing for others to reap.
But the Gospel of Life demands more than announcement, and even more than the host of forms of charitable service. It demands the celebration by which we take conscience of the immense wealth of the gift, which we share, and we become moved to praise, and thank the Lord of Life. This celebration of the Gospel of Life is carried out first of all "...in daily living which should be filled with self-giving love to others ..." (40). "...Let us celebrate now the Eternal Life from which every other life proceeds. From this, in proportion to its capacities, every being which in any way participates in life receives life...." (41).
One might think that the organic union of proclamation, celebration and service of the God given Life is a distinguishing feature of the Magisterium of John Paul II, who placed before a scene loaded with darkness and threats, strikes a note of deep joy and optimism on the destiny of humanity not so much because of what human inventive might devise, as for the certitude of the salvation coming from God Who causes history to move.

NOTES
(2) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 24
(3) Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio, Introduction
(4) Gen. 1,26
(5) Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor Introduction
(6) Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor, 58
(7) Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 11
(8) Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 16
(9) Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 17
(10) Encyclical Laborem Exercens, 4
(11) Encyclical Laborem Exercens, 1
(12) Encyclical Laborem Exercens, 9
(13) Encyclical Centesimus Annus, 13
(14) Encyclical Centesimus Annus 54
(15) Encyclical Laborem Exercens 4
(16) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 22
(17) Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor, 46
(18) Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor., 48
(20) Encyclical Letter Veritatis Splendor, 49
(22) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 2
(23) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris, 2
(24) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris, 4
(25) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris, 13
(26) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris, 18
(27) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris18
(28) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris, 1
(29) Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris, 30
(30) Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World Gaudium et Spes, 24
(31) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 78
(32) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 79
(33) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 81
(34) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 87
(35) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 89
(36) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 90
(37) Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio, 17
(38) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 98
(39) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 100
(40) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 86
(41) Encyclical Letter Evangelium Vitae, 84; quoting Dionysus Areopagite, On Divine Names, 6 1-3; PG 3, 856-857)