

*The Philosopher Pope:
Pope John Paul II & the Human Person*

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In the period immediately after the death of Pope John Paul II many called for his immediate canonisation: *Santo Subito* ('Saint Straight Away') read the banners in St Peter's Square. Others, in praise of his teaching, opined that the recently deceased Pontiff should be declared a Doctor of the Church, joining other Popes with that title, such as Leo the Great (c. 390-461) or Gregory the Great (540-604). Indeed many stated that John Paul II should himself be referred to as 'John Paul the Great'. Time will tell. Among those who attempted to describe the legacy of Pope John Paul II were a number who stated that one really got to meet this iconic figure through his word: through the touching things he said to people on an individual basis, through his preaching and public addresses and through his writings. One thing is clear: Pope John Paul II spoke and wrote with conviction and with feeling and always as one who thought deeply about things.

John Paul II was a profoundly philosophical pope. His encyclicals, his letters and his books are all highly philosophically flavoured. Many find the term 'philosophy' or 'philosopher' at best mysterious and at worst off-putting. But this need not be so. In a broad sense philosophers are those who in a systematic way think about the deeper questions of life, ask the why and wherefore of things, are intellectually curious, are lovers of wisdom (the term 'philosophy' comes from combining the Greek words *philos* meaning love and *sophia* meaning wisdom), are searchers after the truth, are those who seek to see things as they are. The best of them are neither sceptical nor cynical but believe in the nobility of human nature and in the capacity for human reason to think for the good. Pope John Paul II was always one of those incurable philosophical 'types'. What he did and said was informed by his philosophical outlook. And in turn his philosophical outlook was very much informed by his life experience. As a philosopher his firm conviction was the essential dignity of human nature. He furthermore believed that the great totalitarian evils of the modern age, the ideologies of Nazism and Communism, had their roots in a distorted and disordered kind of philosophising. For Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II, history is driven by culture and by the ideas that form cultures. For him ideas have consequences.

The following article aims to give just a flavour of the teaching of Pope John Paul II concerning the dignity of the human person, sketching in summary form the key philosophical influences on his thinking. A reader looking for a systematic critique his philosophy will be sorely disappointed. Such an enterprise would require the meticulous attention of experts and is beyond the scope of this volume. The aim here is simply to identify the high points in this philosopher pope's highly personal philosophical journey, avoiding as much as possible the use of intimidating technical language. The choice of texts to be cited will be somewhat arbitrary but will at the same time be guided by a concern to present the 'last thoughts' of the Pope as expressed within weeks of his death. Pope John Paul criticised what he termed the, at times, 'false modesty' of philosophers, urging them to be confident in their search for knowledge of truth, goodness and beauty. It is to be hoped that the reader of following this article will be infected with something of this philosopher pope's own sense of wonder and intellectual curiosity in the face of the deeper questions of life.

The Formation of a Philosopher

Karol Wojtyła's first significant engagement with philosophy came with the commencement of his studies for the priesthood as a clandestine seminarian in Nazi occupied Poland. At this time he was forced to work at the Borek Fałęcki chemical factory, spending most of his shift hauling buckets of lime hanging from a wooden yoke over his shoulders. When he could find time he read the philosophical text book which had been assigned to him for purposes of preparing for examinations. This work awakened something inside the young seminarian: 'after two months of hacking my way through this vegetation I came to a clearing, to the discovery of the deep reasons for what until then I had only lived and felt... What intuition and sensibility had until then taught me about the world found solid confirmation.'^[1] This was Karol Wojtyła's first meaningful encounter with the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition of philosophy with its central conviction that the world is intelligible. The war had indeed given the young seminarian a harsh sense of reality. But this philosophy book helped him realise that there was more to reality, that it was intelligible, that it had meaning, that scepticism and moral relativism were not necessary responses to a seemingly hopeless situation. The discovery of philosophical realism helped Wojtyła realise that the brutal reality of Nazi occupied Poland was in a sense an unreality, based as it was on lies, specious ideology and distortion of the truth. It is a central tenet of Aristotelian-Thomistic realism that what is evil is not real but a distortion of the real, an absence of the good. What is evil is unreal because it denies the truth, the truth of the dignity of the human person and the goodness of creation.

After his ordination to the priesthood in 1946 the early intellectual formation of Karol Wojtyła reached its highest points in the writing of two doctoral theses. The first was written for Rome's Angelicum in 1948 and concerned St John of the Cross. Wojtyła had first been introduced to the Carmelite mystic by Jan Tyranowski, a Catholic lay activist and founder of the 'Living Rosary' youth ministry group in Nazi occupied Poland. What is interesting about this work is the young Wojtyła's already highly developed sense of the inalienable dignity of the human person. With the help of the mystical doctrine of the Carmelite saint, he brings out the essentially *personal* nature of the human encounter with God. The divine-human relationship is one of mutual self-giving and must imply a strong sense of personal freedom; after all self-giving can only be entered into freely.

Karol Wojtyła's second doctoral dissertation, submitted in 1953 to the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland, concerned the thought of Max Scheler (1874-1928) a leading exponent of the philosophical school known as phenomenology. Phenomenology, together with the more conventional Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, proved to be the two great influences on the philosophical development of Karol Wojtyła. From the latter he learned to be a philosophical realist. From the former he learned to develop of rich sense of the moral life of the human person. It is worth considering these two influences in a little detail.

Philosophical Realism

Most people are familiar with the term 'realist' in a broad sense. To describe someone as a realist is to say he or she does not run away from the truth of things. Among philosophers, and particularly contemporary thinkers, it has a more specific sense, having to do with the following question: how much is the truth of things in our minds and how much is the truth

of things 'out there' outside of our minds? Most modern philosophy, no matter how complex, centres on this problem.

Karol Wojtyła, in common with all seminarians of his day was formed firmly within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition. This tradition, following on from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) and from St Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), emphasises that the human being is to be understood in a *cosmological* way, that the universe, the world and the human being are all to be understood according to a grand scheme of things as being sustained in being by God the creator, the origin and the end. For St Thomas human beings are given the gift of reason by God and it is a very good thing. However, for him human intellectual capacities are ultimately dedicated to finding the truth of things insofar as the truly are, or in other words, insofar as they are sustained in being by God. According to this view the human being, along with human intelligence and human freedom, is very much to be understood within a cosmological scheme. Knowledge is about 'conforming' the human mind to things in a way in which the mind in some sense becomes what it contemplates.

Already in the later Middle Ages there was a tendency to exalt the role of human reasoning, wresting it from the grand cosmological scheme, and making it almost an end in itself. Allied to this there were more and more debates about human freedom. Some asked: if we do choose to see the human being as fitting within a grand cosmological scheme how can they be really free if God already knows everything? Later medieval thinkers spent more and more time debating this issue of human freedom and divine foreknowledge.

During the Renaissance and early modern period the human being was increasingly seen to be the ultimate measure of things. Furthermore, the human person became much more of an *individual*, and in the absence of a grand scheme, thinking became more fractured and less sure of itself. The great French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes (1596-1650) provides one example of this tendency. Without the benefit a comfortable cosmological scheme could the human person be sure even of his or her own existence? It seemed everything was in doubt. Descartes's solution was to philosophise in a way that doubted everything until he reached the point that the one thing he could not doubt was human thinking itself. *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think therefore I am'), he declared. Now the human being, or human intellect, had pride of place in philosophical thinking. 'I think therefore I am': thinking now came before being in order of priority.

The arrival of modern science further threatened the medieval cosmological explanation of things. With the discovery of a number of fundamental scientific laws the universe seemed very impersonal. Where did God fit into the universe as understood by the English mathematician and scientist Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727) and others? While previously every occurrence was explained in terms of creation's ongoing reliance on God, now everything and everyone seemed subject to impersonal laws of gravity and causality. The question of how the human being is noble and free within this rather frightening scheme of things became the quintessential modern philosophical problem, and a central preoccupation of the period which came to be known as the Age of Enlightenment. Spurred on by the ethical scepticism of Scottish thinker David Hume (1711-1776), Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was one of those who sought to defend the notion of human

freedom and responsibility within a seemingly mechanistic universe. Kant tended to see human reason as the guarantee of human freedom. However, those who came after him were worried by an over emphasis on human reason as the guarantee of human freedom. Does not this tendency tend to negate the importance of the human being's rooted and conscious experience of the 'real' world? 'Is human intelligence to be the measure of human worth?' is a question often asked of Kant to this day.

Among those who came after Kant was the philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), regarded as the father of the philosophical tradition known as phenomenology. Members of the Carmelite family will be familiar with his name from the life of Edith Stein, St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (1891-1942). Edith Stein, who later became a Carmelite nun and was martyred in a Nazi concentration camp, was at one time Husserl's senior research assistant. Phenomenology is a notoriously difficult school of philosophy to come to terms with. Suffice it to say that Husserl was keen to avoid the excesses of a world view that was overly devoted to analysing reality in terms of impersonal scientific laws on the one hand and the excesses of a vision of the world which relies overmuch on the abstractions of human reason on the other. Husserl was keen to, in the words of Michael Novak, 'bring back into philosophy everyday things, concrete wholes, the basic experiences of life as they come to us.'^{12]}

Apart from his constant and obvious indebtedness to the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, the other great influence on Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II, was precisely this phenomenological tradition initiated by Edmund Husserl. Indeed this pope's official biographer, George Weigel, remarks: 'Despite the movement's complexities of analysis and terminology, understanding the basic program of the phenomenological movement is not difficult. Doing so is essential if one wants to get inside the mind and the thinking of Karol Wojtyła.'^{13]} Ironically, as his thought developed, Husserl tended to retreat more and more into the broadly Cartesian (i.e. following Descartes) tradition which emphasised the human mind at the expense of 'things themselves'. Indeed thinkers such as Scheler and future Carmelite, Edith Stein, came to feel he had abandoned his earlier commitment. The thought of Scheler was to become the main focus of the postdoctoral work of the future Pope John Paul II. While he was ultimately critical of Scheler's doctrine, Wojtyła was greatly influenced by what commentators call his 'ethical personalism' and for the rest of his life retained, under the influence of the phenomenological school, a rich sense of the human person as one who is profoundly and actively engaged in the surrounding world. The future pope was impressed by Scheler's attempt to overcome the dry rationalism of Immanuel Kant's approach to ethics. Scheler offered a phenomenological analysis of what it was like to be in the real world, in real situations, faced with having to make moral decisions. He also paid due attention to the role of the human emotions in the moral life and to the notions of empathy (the subject of Edith Stein's own doctoral thesis) and sympathy. If ultimately the Aristotelian-Thomistic realist in Karol Wojtyła was to find Scheler's philosophy too unrealistic, he was for the rest of his life impressed by the opportunity afforded by the phenomenological method for gaining insight into the way the human moral being works. For Wojtyła the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition needed to be enriched by this kind of 'psychology' of the human moral being. However, to the very end the future Pope John Paul II was a philosophical realist who saw moral acts as real, involving real choices between right and wrong. Scheler and the phenomenological movement in general tended to over idealise the moral act, to be sceptical about the ability of

the human being to get at the truth of things. Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II remained convinced of the reality of the moral world and of the formative influence right moral choices can have on the individual. For him right moral choices were character forming and were never merely about personal preferences. Right moral choices were always about objective right and wrong rather than mere sentiment.

Love and Responsibility

Karol Wojtyła was awarded his second doctorate by the Jagiellonian University in January 1954 for his thesis entitled *An Evaluation of the Possibility of Constructing a Christian Ethics on the Basis of the System of Max Scheler*. In October of the same year he was appointed to the philosophy faculty of the Catholic University of Lublin and taught advanced courses on the philosophical ethics of Scheler, Kant and St Thomas Aquinas. In December 1956 Wojtyła was appointed to the Chair of Ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin and in succeeding academic years began to lecture on sexual ethics. He was consecrated auxiliary bishop of Kraków in September 1958 but continued his career as a university professor and continued to teach sexual ethics. His book *Love and Responsibility* was published in 1960. In this work Wojtyła once again defended a rich sense of the individual worth of the human person and sought to articulate a true Christian humanism against what he considered to be the false humanisms of the age, particularly the brand of humanism that had been ushered in by the replacement of the Nazi occupying forces in Poland by those of the Communist Red Army in January 1945.

Love and Responsibility sought to articulate an essentially positive view of human sexuality against the background of the Polish Communist regime's active promotion of abortion, contraception and sexual experimentation among the young. Naturally the communist authorities encouraged sexual permissiveness as one way of eroding the influence of the Church within society. For Karol Wojtyła sexual union was never meant to be a matter of using the other. Rather it was to be a supreme act of human freedom and an expression of human dignity. For Wojtyła the human sexual act was essentially a *communio personarum* (a communion of persons) within the context of which neither person should be reduced to the level of a mere object of another's desire. Once again the future pope was articulating his own radical brand of personalism.

Person and Act

On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII stunned the Church and the wider world by announcing that he was convening an ecumenical council. Highly significant is the fact that among all the weight of material submitted to the commission appointed to prepare for the council was an essay on the crisis of humanism written by a relatively unknown and very young Polish bishop, one Karol Wojtyła. Having survived the period of Nazi occupation of his homeland and currently beset by the problems of exercising his episcopal office within the context of yet another totalitarian regime, the young bishop and administrator of the archdiocese of Kraków came to the Second Vatican Council in October 1962 concerned that the greatest problem of the modern age was the erosion of the dignity of the human person by the depersonalising strategies of the two great ideologies of the period.

Bishop Wojtyla attended all sessions of the council and found much to exercise his philosophical mind in the debates over the Council's two great dogmatic constitutions on *The Church* and on *Divine Revelation*. He himself was to become involved in the drafting of the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. He and along with others contributed to the formulation of the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) with its emphasis on human dignity, on seeking after the truth and acting in accordance with it and on human freedom from coercion.

During the course of Vatican II Karol Wojtyla became convinced that the Council's understanding of the human person could be enriched if given a deeper philosophical foundation. It was in this context that he began to formulate what was to become his major philosophical work, *Person and Act*. Having read *Love and Responsibility* a Polish priest, Monsignor Stanislaw Czartoryski suggested to Bishop Wojtyla that he must now write a book on the person. The future Pope John Paul II himself saw *Person and Act* as an attempt to reconcile the two great philosophical influences of his life: the older Aristotelian-Thomistic realist philosophy of being with the phenomenological philosophy of consciousness typified by Max Scheler. Some commentators have also detected in Karol Wojtyla's philosophical *magnum opus* a desire to overcome the *Cogito ergo sum* ('I think therefore I am') of Descartes which smacks of solipsism with the dictum *Cognosco ergo sum* ('I understand therefore I am'), thereby re-establishing an connection between things thought and the process of thinking itself.^[4]

Central to *Person and Act* is the view that the human being is not just a bundle of emotions and sensory perceptions but is a real person and active agent. In other words, the human person is the *subject* of action and not a mere object of impersonal forces. Karol Wojtyla furthermore articulates a rich sense of human freedom as *self-mastery* rather than radical autonomy or self-assertion. Self-mastery involves not the repressing of what is natural to the human being, but the thoughtful channelling of natural instincts of mind and body into good actions that deepen human person since they are true and in conformity with the real. Human freedom is a noble freedom, a positive freedom, an expression of human dignity. The concluding part of *Person and Act* articulates a view of the human person as always living in community. Here Wojtyla sought to find a way beyond individualism and the kind of collectivism inherent to the Communist ethos. Ultimately he maintains that the individual and the common good have to be held in tension and goes on to analyse four 'forms' of participation, two of which can be considered to be authentic and two of which are inauthentic: conformism, non-involvement, opposition and solidarity. Conformism and non-involvement are both inauthentic since they are not true to a positive sense of the human being as active agent, as the subject of action. Opposition in the face of injustice can be an authentic form of participation while solidarity is the supreme kind of participation which involves the mutual enrichment of the individual and society. Needless to say, with the benefit of hindsight, Karol Wojtyla's employment of the term solidarity to describe the most authentic form of social participation on the part of the individual was prophetic. He could not have known that 'Solidarity' would become the rallying cry of the movement which saw to the end of Communism in Europe.

Theatre and Drama

Much has been made of Karol Wojtyła's love for literature and drama and of his active involvement in theatre groups in his native Poland, particularly during the period of Nazi occupation. It is interesting to note that this earlier love for the theatre, for the dramatic, always served to colour the future Pope John Paul II's philosophical language.

In his final book, *Memory and Identity*, published shortly before his death in 2005, the Pontiff begins his discussion of the *mysterium iniquitatis* (the 'mystery of sin') in the following way: 'The twentieth century was the "theatre" in which particular historical and ideological processes were played out, leading towards that great "eruption" of evil, but it also provided the setting for their defeat'.^[5] Earlier in *Person and Act* Karol Wojtyła described human life as inherently *dramatic*, meaning that we are not accidents of history. We are moral *actors* he insists. As Pope he had a keen sense of the 'human drama' even as he gazed on the crowds in St Peter's Square during the Jubilee year: 'I have often stopped to look at the long queues of pilgrims waiting patiently to go through the Holy Door. In each of them I tried to imagine the story of a life, made up of joys, worries, sufferings – the story of someone whom Christ had met and who, in dialogue with him, was setting out again on a journey of hope. As I observed the continuous flow of pilgrims, I saw them as a kind of concrete image of the pilgrim Church, the Church placed, as St. Augustine says, "amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God"'.^[6] It is hardly surprising that one of the leading analyses of the thought of Pope John Paul II is entitled *At the Center of the Human Drama*.^[7]

Ideologies of Evil: Nazism and Communism

In *Memory and Identity* Pope John Paul considers the two great ideologies of evil of the period: Nazism and Communism: 'I have had personal experience of ideologies of evil. It remains indelibly fixed in memory'.^[8] He furthermore expresses his firm opinion that these ideologies which had such horrific consequences for world history were rooted in the history of European thought, in a particularly bad kind of philosophising: 'Over the years I have become more and more convinced that the ideologies of evil are profoundly rooted in the history of European philosophical thought'.^[9] He goes on to locate the root of these evil ideologies in the kind of dislocation which takes place in European thought typified by Descartes's subordination of being to thinking. The following passage is worth quoting extensively. We find the Pope at the end of his life still influenced by philosophical realism and the phenomenology: 'Why does all this happen?', he asks, 'What is the root of these post-Enlightenment ideologies? The answer is simple: it happens because of the rejection of God *qua* [as] Creator, and consequently *qua* source determining what is good and what is evil. It happens because of the rejection of what ultimately constitutes us as human beings, that is, the notion of human nature as a "given reality"; its place has been taken by a "product of thought" freely formed and freely changeable according to circumstances. I believe that a more careful study of this question could lead us beyond the Cartesian watershed. If we wish to speak rationally about good and evil, we have to return to Saint Thomas Aquinas, that is, to the philosophy of being'.^[10] The Pope continues by turning to the phenomenological school: 'With the phenomenological method, for example, we can study experiences of morality, religion or simply what it is to be human, and draw from them a significant enrichment of our knowledge. Yet we must not forget that all these analyses implicitly presuppose the reality of the Absolute Being and also the reality of being human, that is,

being a creature. If we do not set out from such 'realist' presuppositions, we end up in a vacuum.^[11] Once again we find Karol Wojtyla, Pope John Paul II, tempering his enthusiasm for the phenomenological method with a good dose of Aristotelian-Thomistic realism. Nazism and Communism were evil ideologies precisely because they were built on lies and denial. Both denied the worth of the human being as one created in the image and likeness of God and thereby destroyed both individuals and the true functioning of the common good. Denial of the real, the true and the good made the wholesale destruction of human life across Europe and beyond eminently conscionable.

The Truth Will Set You Free

One of the most important intellectual events of the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II was the publication on October 5, 1993 of his long-awaited encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* ('The Splendour of the Truth') wherein he addresses the fundamental issues of the Church's moral teaching. Mindful of the quotation from the John 8:32, 'the truth will set you free', the Pope strives to articulate once again a true sense of human freedom.

With *Veritatis Splendor* Pope John Paul seeks to attack common notions of human freedom as freedom without reference to binding moral truths. For him freedom separated from truth is mere licence. Without common understanding as to moral truths life is reduced to the level of each person's will to power. Furthermore, the idea that each human being creates his or her own meaning or truth – what is true 'for me' – is symptomatic of contemporary moral relativism. The Pope also shows he is familiar with the kind of postmodernist rhetoric which sees all moral systems as mere constructs and human freedom as illusion. He insists, on the contrary, that human freedom is the condition for any real concept of morality.

Addressing issues of pluralism John Paul II agrees that public conversation about moral issues is important but insists that such exchange of views must be grounded by a sense of a universal moral law intrinsic to the human condition which provides the 'grammar' for discussion among people from different cultural and experiential backgrounds.

Pope John Paul concludes his reflection in *Veritatis Splendor* by advocating the kind of moral heroism exhibited by martyrs who were willing to die for a principle. For him the dignity of the human person as expressed in concrete choices between good and evil will at times necessitate the heroic refusal to compromise or be compromised: 'Martyrdom, accepted as an affirmation of the inviolability of the moral order, bears splendid witness both to the holiness of God's law and to the inviolability of the personal dignity of man, created in God's image and likeness. This dignity may never be disparaged or called into question, even with good intentions, whatever the difficulties involved. Jesus warns us most sternly: "What does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mk 8:36)'.^[12]

Gospel of Life

On 25 March 1995 Pope John Paul II published his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* ('The Gospel of Life'). The whole document hinges on the contrast between the fundamentally life-affirming message of the Gospel of Christ and what the Pope calls the 'culture of death' of tyrant states which deny the inalienable right to life of the human being from conception

until death. The main evils identified are: direct and voluntary killing of the innocent, abortion and euthanasia. The Pope also points to the responsibility of legislators and to the possibility for conscientious objection in the face of unjust laws: 'Abortion and euthanasia are thus crimes which no human law can claim to legitimize. There is no obligation in conscience to obey such laws; instead there is a grave and clear obligation to oppose them by conscientious objection.'^(73.1)

Less than two months before his death Pope John Paul addressed a 'Letter to the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life on the Occasion of a Study Congress on "Quality of Life and Ethics of Health", February 19, 2005'. The reality of his own state of health at the time makes the message all the more poignant. He says: 'It is necessary first of all to recognize the essential quality that distinguishes every human creature as that of being made in the image and likeness of the Creator himself.'^[13] The Pope insists that dignity is constitutive of the human being: 'This level of dignity and quality belongs to the ontological order and is a constitutive part of the human being; it endures through every moment of life, from the very moment of conception until natural death, and is brought to complete fulfillment in the dimension of eternal life. Consequently, the human person should be recognized and respected in any condition of health, infirmity or disability.'^[14] The Pontiff concludes: 'All the forces of science and wisdom must be mobilized at the service of the true good of the person and of society in every part of the world, in the light of that basic criterion which is the dignity of the person, in whom is impressed the image of God himself.'^[15] To the very end of his own life the worth of the human being was to the forefront of John Paul II's message.

Philosophy's False Modesty

September 1998 was a busy time for Pope John Paul II. In the same month as he canonised Edith Stein, former research assistant to Edmund Husserl who went on to become a Carmelite nun, he published his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* ('Faith and Reason'). This document was the first important papal statement on the relationship between faith and reason in well over a century. Vatican I (1869-70) had taught that human beings could know the existence of God through reason. Leo XIII's encyclical of 1879, *Aeterni Patris*, proposed the thought of St Thomas Aquinas as a model synthesis of faith and reason.

In *Fides et Ratio* Pope John Paul upbraids philosophers for the kind of 'false modesty' which precludes them from asking the larger questions of life. Why is there something rather than nothing? What is good and what is evil? What is happiness and what is delusion? What awaits me in the next life? For the Pope philosophy needs to recover a classic sense of *wonder and awe* in the face of the larger questions, the kind of wonder and awe that directs the human being towards the transcendent. The result of giving into the kind of 'false modesty' which runs away from the bigger questions of life is the triumph of an instrumental view of the human being (where human beings become mere objects of use), a false faith in technology (as the measure of progress) and a triumph of the will to power (where each one seeks to have his or her own way). If the larger questions of the meaning of life remain unasked humanity loses its vigour and proper dignity.

The Pope is also keen in *Fides et Ratio* to warn against fideism, the idea that religion is a matter of feeling and experience and that reason has no role in the life of faith. On the contrary, Pope John Paul believes reason to be God-given. 'If faith does not think it is nothing', he says quoting from St Augustine.^[16] For him the dignity of the human person is ultimately grounded in the human capacity to know the truth, adhere to it and live according to it.

Remembering and Forgetting

As early as August 1983, John Paul II began an innovative biennial series of summer humanities seminars at Castel Gandolfo, bringing together scholars of various faiths and various Christian denominations for a serious exchange of ideas. Among the leading intellectuals who attended these seminars over the years were philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer, Charles Taylor, Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur and theologians such as Gerhard Ebeling (Lutheran) and Johannes Metz.

In his last work, *Memory and Identity*, Pope John Paul refers to the Castel Gandolfo seminar held in 1994 and which had as its theme the identity of European societies. The Pope was struck by the contribution of leading French phenomenologist, Paul Ricoeur, who spoke of remembering and forgetting as two important and mutually opposed forces that operate in human and social history. Following Ricoeur, memory is understood to shape the identity of human beings at personal and collective levels. The Pope claims that Christ was acquainted with this 'law of memory' when he instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper: 'Do this in memory of me'. He goes on to say: 'Memory evokes recollections. The Church is in a certain sense, the 'living memory' of Christ: of the mystery of Christ, of his Passion, death and resurrection, of his Body and Blood. This "memory" is accomplished through the Eucharist. It follows that Christians, as they celebrate the Eucharist in 'memory' of their Master, continually discover their own identity.'^[17] For Pope John Paul the Eucharist highlights the divinisation of the human being and the redemption of the world: 'This memory of the redemption and divinisation of man, so profound and so universal, also triggers many other dimensions of memory, both personal and collective.'^[18] The human being comes to understand himself or herself deeply by means of memory and begins to understand the different communities in which his history evolves: the family, the clan, the nation. 'Finally', the Pope says 'it allows him to understand the history of language and culture, the history of all that is true, good, and beautiful.'^[19]

In the following chapter of *Memory and Identity* Pope John Paul puts forward a maternal view of the Church on the model of Mary: 'The Church preserves within herself the memory of man's history from the beginning: the memory of his creation, his vocation, his elevation and his fall. Within this essential framework the whole of human history is written, the history of Redemption. The Church is a mother who, like Mary, treasures in her heart the story of her children, making all their problems her own.'^[20] The Pope goes on to remind the reader that *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern world (no. 22), declares that the mystery of the human being is only fully revealed in Christ. Referring to the Jubilee year 2000 the Pope asserts that it marked both the birth of Christ and the answer to the question of what it means to be human and memory is the key element in the human being's entering into this mystery: 'It could be said that the Great Jubilee of the

Year 2000 was the jubilee both of Christ's birth and the answer to the question about the meaning and sense of being human. And it is linked to the dimension of memory. Mary's memory and the Church's memory enable man to rediscover his true identity at the dawn of the new millennium.'

It is refreshing to find that the Pope is consistent in his highlighting of the dignity of the human person right to the very end of his life, while at the same time being open to new ideas, coming at the issue from a new perspective, the perspective of memory as understood by more recent exponents of the phenomenological tradition in philosophy.

Conclusion: Carmel in the World

It is to be hoped that by now the reader has some sense of the richness of the philosophical legacy of Pope John Paul II, a pope who saw the crisis of the modern age to be a crisis of humanism. A full appreciation of this pope's teaching concerning the human person would need to pay more attention to the social and political implications of his brand of personalism and Christian humanism. Furthermore, tracing the *development* of this thought over time more precisely would be desirable as would an assessment of John Paul's teaching concerning women – a sticking point from some of his more vociferous critics. The question of how good a theologian was this philosopher Pope we can happily leave to specialists in that discipline.

What we hope to have achieved here is an appreciation of the doctrine of Karol Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II concerning the dignity of the human person, articulated against the background of the dehumanising ideologies of Nazism and Communism and shaped by his immersion in the Aristotelian-Thomistic realism and the phenomenological method.

We noted earlier Pope John Paul's interest in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and also his theatrical and dramatic sense. This constitution in its articulation of a vision for the Church in the world was sensitive to what it called 'the theatre of human history': 'The world which the council has in mind is the world of women and men, the entire human family seen in its total environment. It is the world as the theatre of human history, bearing the marks of its travail, its triumphs and its failures.'¹²¹ So much for the Church in the world. What might we say of Carmel in the world (the name of this very publication), particularly in the light of the philosophical teaching of Pope John Paul II?

A documentary assessment of the relationship of John Paul II with the Carmelite Order is the concern of another article in this volume. Nonetheless it is fitting to conclude this particular contribution with a suggestion for further reflection. Perhaps the Pope's later concern for the role of memory and forgetting in the flourishing of human life, on both individual and collective levels, could be brought to bear on reflection concerning the role of Carmel in the world. If members of the Carmelite family are to be true to their vocation as Carmelites, and faithful to their Ecclesial responsibility to bring the gift of Carmel to others, perhaps an awareness of memory and forgetting could bear much fruit. With Our Lady of Mount Carmel as mother Carmelites in every walk of life are well placed to appreciate John Paul II's image of the Church as maternal memory and, with a long-established tradition of

regarding Mary as patron and sister, are equally well placed to develop the idea further. Being Carmel in the world means being at the heart of the Church in the modern world, being convinced of the worth of Carmel's unique identity formed as it has been by the living memory of an ancient spiritual tradition. Being Carmel in the world means, furthermore, eschewing all 'false modesty' (as Pope John Paul might call it) with regard to charism. Carmelite culture is distinct. Carmelite tradition has something unique to offer the Church. Carmel in the world has its own memories and therefore its own identity at the heart of the Church. Carmel in the world has its own contribution to make to human flourishing for generations to come. In the words which inaugurated the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II in 1978: 'Be not afraid!'

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- [1] Quoted in George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II*, London: HarperCollins, 2001, p. 70
- [2] Michael Novak, 'John Paul II: Christian Philosopher', in *America* 177:12 (October 25, 1997), p. 12
- [3] George Weigel, op. cit., p. 127
- [4] Pope John Paul comes back to this point in his last work *Memory and Identity*. If somewhat technical it is worth reproducing his remarks on this point here: 'The *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) radically changed the way of doing philosophy. In the pre-Cartesian period, philosophy, that is to say the *cogito*, or rather the *cognosco*, was subordinate to *esse* [being] which was considered prior. To Descartes, however, the *esse* seemed secondary, and he judged the *cogito* to be prior. This not only changed the direction of philosophizing, but it marked the decisive abandonment of what philosophy had been hitherto, particularly the philosophy of Saint Thomas Aquinas, namely the philosophy of *esse*. Previously, everything was interpreted from the perspective of *esse* and an explanation for everything was sought from the same standpoint. God as fully self-sufficient Being (*Ens subsistens*) was believed to be the necessary ground of every *ens non subsistens*, *ens participatum* [non subsistent being, participated being], that is, of all created beings, including man. Now the *ens cogitans* enjoyed priority. After Descartes, philosophy became a science of pure thought: all *esse* – both the created world and the Creator – remained within the ambit of the *cogito* as the content of human consciousness. Philosophy now concerned itself with beings *qua* [as] content of consciousness and not *qua* existing independently of it.' See Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2005, pp. 8-9
- [5] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 3
- [6] Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, no. 8
- [7] Kenneth L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II*, Washington DC: CUA Press, 1993
- [8] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 15
- [9] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 8
- [10] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 13
- [11] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 13
- [12] *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 92
- [13] 'Letter', no. 3
- [14] 'Letter', no. 3
- [15] 'Letter', no. 8
- [16] *Fides et Ratio*, no. 79
- [17] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 162
- [18] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 163
- [19] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 163
- [20] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, p. 170
- [21] *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 2