

## The Meaning of Theological Anthropology in the Teaching of John Paul II

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Contrary to critics who blame John Paul II for wasting the heritage of the Second Vatican Council, I hold that he can be named “the man of the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>1</sup> This expression has at least four meanings. Firstly, Karol Wojtyła as a bishop, actively participated in the council – we have now multiple accounts of this participation.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the council considerably and permanently inspired bishop Karol Wojtyła in his philosophical and theological works. Italian philosopher, Rocco Buttiglione claims that the most important philosophical work of Wojtyła *The Acting Person* expresses anthropology, which underlines the Council teaching.<sup>3</sup> The only theological book of Wojtyła, published before the beginning of his Pontificate has a meaningful title *The Sources of Renewal. The implementation of the Second Vatican Council*<sup>4</sup>. Thirdly, John Paul II devoted his pontificate to the implementation of the council’s resolutions – fortunately, we have now a superb account of that in George Weigel’s book *Witness to Hope. Biography of the Pope*.<sup>5</sup> Lastly, and this thesis is essential for this presentation, the Pope is faithful to the council’s inspiration as far as the style and method of his Christian anthropology is concerned.

The Second Vatican Council for its own formulated the method of Christian anthropology, or to use another expression to which I will return, theological anthropology, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*. There it says that “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis is precisely justified by Jaroslaw Gowin in his article “Pontyfikat wielkich pytań,” *Życie*, 7-8 June 1997. Cf. also George Weigel, “Prepared to lead,” *Crisis*, 10/1998, 12-17.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rocco Buttiglione, *Mysł Karola Wojtyła*, Lublin 1996, 255-326.

<sup>3</sup> Rocco Buttiglione, „ Kilka uwag o sposobie czytania Osoby i czynu”, in Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*, Lublin 1994, 32-33.

<sup>4</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *U podstaw odnowy. Studium o realizacji Vaticanum II* (Krakow, 1972). During the Council, Wojtyła published many articles, letters and correspondence concerning the Council’s problems (Cf. Wiktor Gramatowski, Zofia Wilińska, *Karol Wojtyła w świetle publikacji. Bibliografia*, Rome, 1980, 65-81).

on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear.” (GS 22).

These words point out first of all to the nature of the council itself, the aim of which was not formulating new doctrines like it was the case with previous Councils but *aggiornamento*, the renewal of language and style in which the church conveys evangelical truth to contemporary man. Those cited words also describe anthropological structure and method of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which aimed at creating “dialog with mankind concerning various problems of the contemporary world“ (cf. GS 3). In the introduction to this essential document we can find this meaningful statement: “Hence the focal point of our total presentation will be man himself, whole and entire, body and soul, heart and conscience, mind and will.” (GS 3). *Gaudium et Spes* can be looked at as a presentation of Christian anthropology.

“The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.” Probably, these words of the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* are the most frequently quoted by John Paul II. They also constitute a methodological base, on which the first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (1979) is based.

John Paul II admitted that he began working on *Redemptor hominis* immediately after he had been elected the Pope. At the very beginning of his pontificate he wanted to announce and explain his mission in a document which would have a doctrinal authority; mission – which is to create Christian humanism. The Pope admitted that it was the subject which he had brought with him from Cracow to Rome.<sup>6</sup>

In the paragraph ten of the encyclical, which is entitled “The human dimension of the mystery of the Redemption”, John Paul II makes a fascinating and exact interpretation of the

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<sup>5</sup> George Weigel, *Świadek nadziei. Biografia Papieża Jana Pawła II* (Krakow: Znak, 2000).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 288.

text quoted above from the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 22. The Pope begins with the statement which forms the real foundation of any Christian pedagogy and teaching: “Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.” Consequently, Christ the Redeemer, who reveals the greatness of God’s love for man, also reveals “man to himself”, reveals to man – using a biblical term - his proper name and his identity.

The Pope emphasizes that only in the meeting with Christ each man can recognize the dignity and value of his humanity. Thus, in order to achieve so valued in our age self-knowledge and self-consciousness man should come close to Christ: “He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must "appropriate" and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself. If this profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself.” (RH 10). Here the Pope provides an anthropological justification of the Church’s evangelical mission – its aim is that every man could know and understand himself. This anthropological mission is Church’s answer to our age’s “Triumph of the therapeutic” as Phillip Rief brilliantly described it. The Pope also creates an anthropological definition of Christianity, writing in the next paragraph: “In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity.” (RH 10).

In the paragraph ten, thus analyzed, of the encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, John Paul II in reflecting on the words of the constitution *Gaudium et spes* formulates the method of theological anthropology. This method consists in thinking about man in the light of the Revelation. The reflections of Louis Ladaria, a professor of the Papal Gregorian University in Rome, harmonize with the Pope’s thought: “Man being the receiver of the saving Revelation

is also, to some extent, its object. From this point of view the term <theological anthropology> acquires its proper sense. It can also explain the Christian demand of presenting an authentic vision of man [the Pope calls it <adequate anthropology>], understood through faith and thus being the object of a theological study. This vision results from what faith says about God and His Son Jesus Christ, who for us has become man.”<sup>7</sup>

In 1994, after *Time* awarded John Paul II “Man of the Year”, the press spokesman of the Vatican, Joaquin Navarro-Valls explained that the Pope intended to create “a complete Christian alternative to humanistic philosophies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. Marxism, structuralism, atheistic ideas of post-modernism – a new anthropology, based on Christian assumptions.”<sup>8</sup> Therefore, from the programmatic encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, to the two encyclicals complementing the Trinitarian triptych, *Dives in misericordia* and *Dominum et Vivificantem*, then to the social encyclicals, *Laborem exercens*, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* and *Centessimus Annus*, and finally to a great catechesis about theology of the body *They Were Created Man and Woman* the Pope’s teaching can be considered as consequent, successive steps to the aim outlined by Navarro-Valls, i.e. the creation of Christian anthropology.

An integral presentation of the Pope’s theological anthropology, together with all the conclusions and premises it implies, is an essential and urgent task, still waiting to be undertaken. The task of this presentation is much more modest. I intend to present some dimensions of the Pope’s teaching in which theological anthropology finds its application and realization. The first two parts of this lecture, “The sacramental-spiritual dimension” and “The theological look at history”, present the importance of theological anthropology for the spiritual understanding of the self, which task includes also making sense of the history of one’s life as well as of the history of the communities one belongs to, especially the nation. The third part of the lecture, “An anthropological criterion in Catholic social teaching” argues

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<sup>7</sup> Luis F. Ladaria, *Wprowadzenie do antropologii teologicznej*, Krakow, 1997, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in John Elson, “Man of the Year”, *Time* 26/1994, 65.

that the image of man obtained due to theological anthropology is, according to John Paul II, the fundamental evaluation, criterion of the economic and political systems in the social teaching of the Church. The last part of the article, “Hermeneutics of culture”, focuses on the fact that the Christian vision of a human being was the foundation on which the Western civilization has been developing for ages. The description of this historic contribution of theological anthropology to Western culture seems to be the preliminary condition, *sine qua non*, to understand its current crisis and the essence of fundamental debates and disagreements that Western culture is presently engaged in.

### **1. The Sacramental-spiritual Dimension**

The statement of the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light” (GS 22) according to the interpretation made by John Paul II, which we have called the method of theological anthropology, has a very important spiritual meaning for Christians. Every Christian disciple who, as the Pope says “assimilates the whole reality of the Incarnation and Redemption”, knows himself, and by conversion, finds his identity, his real “self”. John Paul II points to this spiritual reality in many of his writings and homilies. During the first pilgrimage to Poland in the memorable homily on the Victory Square (Plac Zwycięstwa) in Warsaw, 2 June 1979 the Pope said, “The Church brought Christ to Poland, i.e. the key to understand this great and fundamental reality that is man. Man cannot be completely understood without Christ. Or rather: man cannot understand himself completely without Christ, cannot understand either who he is, or what is his proper dignity, or what is his vocation and ultimate destination. Man cannot understand all this without Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, *Musicie od siebie wymagać*, Poznań, 1984, 38-39.

In the first part of the encyclical *Veritatis splendor* (1993), the Pope comments on the evangelical scene when Jesus talks with the rich young man (cf. Mt 19:16-22). The question which the rich young man puts to Jesus of Nazareth, “Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?” (Mt 19:16) is for the Pope “an essential and unavoidable question for the life of every man” (VS 8). This question aims at knowing oneself and knowing God: the good that we should do and the eternal life that we want to possess. It is asked in the proper way and intended for the right person, because “the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself” (VS 2).

In the Bible the discovery of one's real "self" in the meeting with God is included in the theology of names.<sup>10</sup> The reception of a new name, often after a transforming encounter with God, means a new identity and a new theological self-understanding. That is how Abram became Abraham (cf. Gn 17:5), Sarai became Sarah (cf. Gn 17:15), and in the New Testament one of the Twelve Apostles, Simon, after his profession of faith in Jesus, received a new name, which announced his and his successors' role in the Church: “So I now say to you: You are Peter [rock] and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it” (Mt 16:18). We may point out the old tradition of religious communities where upon entering a community and making his or her vows a new name was given to the new member. This new name was a sign of conversion and new identity.

The biblical theology of the name points to the sacramental dimension of Christian life. By the sacraments, especially by the sacrament of baptism, every Christian becomes united with Christ and consequently he can find himself, his vocation, and his identity only by “*sequela Christi*”, following Christ, or as John Paul II states by “coming into Christ” (RH 10). This ontological, deep and internal change of a Christian, which results especially from three

sacraments: baptism, confirmation and ordination and which means both a new kinship with Christ and a new social vocation, is defined in theology by the concept of “a sacramental character” (from Gk. *character* - a distinctive sign). Karl Rahner notes that the “irremovability of a sacramental character makes it independent from a human decision and personal history of salvation of an individual and points to an inner, invisible and graceful vocation of an individual by the saving voice of God to historical and public sphere of the Church and its cult”<sup>11</sup>. The mission of every Christian is inscribed by grace in our hearts.

The principle of knowing oneself in the meeting with God is a very important one in spiritual and in mystical theology. The saying inscribed on the Temple of Apollo in Delphi in ancient Greece, “Know Thyself”, does not cease to be current for Christ’s disciples. Knowing oneself is a condition of knowing God. On the other hand, the better and deeper man knows God, the better he knows himself and his place in the God’s saving plan. Father Maria Eugene, a leading theologian of spirituality and an expert in Carmelite tradition, describes this paradox: “Knowing oneself, which makes the truth triumph in our attitude and in our actions, is always necessary, both at the beginning, and throughout our inner life. (...) God is both the aim, and the principle of knowing oneself”<sup>12</sup>.

According to John Paul II, each conversion is a return to the truth about oneself. In the encyclical *Dives in misericordia* (1980) we find this profound statement that during conversion God’s love “brings back man to himself” (DM 14). Analogically, the apostolic document *Reconciliatio et poenitentia* (1984) situates sin “in its anthropological perspective, as the integral part of the truth about man”. Penance is presented in this document, which uses the words of St. Catherine of Siena, as the “knowledge of self” (RP 13). The process of conversion is described in a very similar way, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit, in the encyclical *Dominum et vivificantem* (1986). John Paul II, explaining the words of Christ that

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Leon-Dufour, Poznań, 1985, 322-26.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Rahner *Mały słownik teologiczny*, ed. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, Warszawa, 1987, 47.

the Holy Spirit “when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin” (Jn 16:8), says that these words mean the “gift of the truth of conscience” (DV 31), the truth about man itself. It is possible because the Holy Spirit “knows the mystery of man” (DV 45).

Dominican professor of moral theology at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland), Servais Pinckaers in his classic book *The Sources of Christian Morality* points to one of the main problems of today’s theology as the destruction of unity of theology. He states that modernity introduced divisions between: exegesis and dogmatic theology, moral and pastoral theology, spiritual theology and homiletics. According to Pinckaers, one of the main tasks of today’s theologians is to overcome those artificial divisions. Certainly, we see that the theological anthropology of John Paul II can serve as one of those attempts.

## **2. The Theological Look at History**

For each man to know himself also means to attempt to understand and make sense of the history of one’s life. A person believing in Christ makes a sort of a theological interpretation of his/her biography through faith. Well-known autobiographies of saints are excellent examples of such interpretations, i.e. famous St Augustine’s *Confessions*, St Catherine of Siena’s *Dialog*, Teresa of Avila’s *Life* and the *Book of Foundations*, Teresa of Lisieux’s *The History of Soul*, and finally Faustina Kowalska’s *Diary*. All these books present the faith’s look at one’s life. The question of how the Christian conceptions of the person and the spiritual life influenced the creation of the literary genre of autobiography will be left for historians of ideas. For our consideration, it is important to note that each of the above-mentioned books is an attempt to contemplate one’s own life in the light of faith; simply stated – to answer the question: does it make sense what I am doing here and now besides a short time gratification. Each of those books is also an effort to evaluate various experiences

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<sup>12</sup> Maria Eugeniusz od Dzieciątka Jezus OCD, *Chcę widzieć Boga*, Krakow, 1982, 34-35.

from one's biography, both successes and failures, in the light of the ultimate goal, the meeting with Christ.

John Paul II provides us with an excellent example of such theological reading of one's life. In his biography of the Pope, George Weigel very strongly and rightly emphasizes that John Paul II reads his own life in the spiritual structure of the life of St Stanislaw (1030-1079), the 11th century predecessor of Wojtyla as the Bishop of Cracow. Saint Stanislaw was literally cut to pieces in front of the altar by knights of the King because he kept reproaching the King (Boleslaw the Generous) for harming his subjects and breaking moral rules [cf. Norman Davies *Europe* p.328][Davies, N. (1997) *Europe. A History*. London: Pimlico.]. This started a tradition in which the Bishop of Cracow is called *defensor civitatis* (defender of the city).<sup>13</sup> The succeeding Cracow bishops followed this tradition, and in the difficult years of fighting with “ungodly communism” it was Bishop Wojtyla who followed this tradition.

In September 1978, after the death of John Paul I, cardinal Wojtyla wrote his last, very personal poem *Stanislaw* while preparing to go to Rome for the conclave from which he was not to return soon to Cracow. The poem ponders on the sense of his predecessor's martyrdom, who lived nine centuries earlier, and on the fruits of his death for the Church and for Poland. There are words recurring in the poem which the martyr bishop is supposed to have said just before his death, “If the word did not convert, blood will convert.”<sup>14</sup> These words revived painfully in the memory of many people, when John Paul II himself was the victim of the assassination attempt on St Peter's Square.<sup>15</sup>

The understanding own life as a Christian martyrdom witness, in my opinion, is the paradigm in which John Paul II perceives his mission of teaching and leading the Church. It has many dimensions: from sustaining a undeserved criticism from inside and outside the Church, suffering a permanent disobedience in many parts of the Church (the Church in the

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<sup>13</sup> Weigel, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Wojtyla, *Poezje and dramaty*, Krakow, 1979, 105.

United States has its share in it) which breaks the unity and the bond of love, *communio* to carrying the Pope's difficult responsibilities while struggling with his physical weakness and declining health. It all seems to be the Pope's way of following Stanislaw.

A lot has been written about the role of John Paul II in the collapse of communism – there is no need to repeat arguments from, for example, excellent account of this story in George Weigel's book *Final Revolution*. For the purpose of this presentation I just would like to emphasize that the first Slavic Pope very early saw his mission in expanding the freedom of the Church in Eastern Europe. During the Pope's first pilgrimage to Poland in 1979, in the mass homily in Gniezno the Pope, as the following decade showed, prophetically emphasized the providential character of the appointment of a Slav for the Holy See and subsequent responsibilities of the first Slavic pope towards the nations and Church in Central and Eastern Europe. The Pope said “Does not Christ want, does not the Holy Spirit decide that the Polish Pope, Slavic Pope just now reveals the spiritual unity of Christian Europe, which consists of two great traditions: Western and Eastern (...)? Yes. Christ wants this. The Holy Spirit decides that these things are to be said now and here, in Gniezno, on the Piast land, in Poland, at the relics of St Adalbert and St Stanislaw, in the presence of the image of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady [Jasnogorska] and the Mother of Church. (...) Here comes Your compatriot, the Pope, in order to talk in front of the whole Church, Europe and world about these often forgotten Nations and Peoples. He comes to call with a great cry.”<sup>16</sup>

A theological, not political, reading of his own mission led the Pope to this bold annulment, in the above words, of the so far indisputable principles of the Yalta order in Europe. It also led him to question the rules which had so far created the Vatican's *Ostpolitik* according to the imperative *Salvare il salvabile* (save what can be saved). The Pope's

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<sup>15</sup> Weigel, 412.

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Musicie od siebie wymagać*, 52-53.

theological anthropology, especially his reflection on human freedom, human call to transcendence can certainly be seen at work here.

A few years later, commenting on the pontificate of John Paul II in *Newsweek*, Kenneth Woodward wrote that “The real gem in the Pope’s international plans is putting an end to the division of Europe into Eastern and Western and an utopian vision of Europe stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains. Only the Polish Pope could have had such a dream.”<sup>17</sup> Maciej Zięba adds to Woodward’s statement an important thought when he says that theological reading of history allowed the Pope to “have a dream about utopian Europe”. To a surprise of politicians, various intelligence agents, and political scientists, this not a utopian dream, but rather theological project became reality ten years later. Zieba continues: “theology allows the Pope to break through a wall of *Realpolitik*. For John Paul II the presence of the Slavic Pope by the tomb of St Adalbert is far more important than information about the dislocation of all the SS-20 rocket launchers. St Stanislaw, symbolizing the primacy of moral truth to a political situation, is more important than millions of Red Army soldiers stationed in Eastern Europe. Theological data is for him more important than sociological, military, or political analyses.”<sup>18</sup>

### **3. The Anthropological Criterion in the Catholic Social Teaching**

Theological anthropology plays also an important role in Catholic social teaching. John Paul II considers precisely the nature and method of the Church’s social teaching in the encyclical *Centessimus annus*, which was published a hundred years after the document of Pope Leo XIII *Rerum novarum* (1891) which is assumed to be the beginning of the systematic presentation of the modern Catholic social teaching. John Paul II states that the Church

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<sup>17</sup> Cited in Maciej Zięba, *Niezwykły pontyfikat. Z ojcem Maciejem Ziębą rozmawia Adam Pawłowicz*, Krakow, 1997, 59.

expresses her views on the social question because of her responsibility for man, who is the only creature God willed for its own sake, and who has been entrusted to the Church by Christ (cf. CA 53). Also, by analysis of the current social, economic and political situation the Church gains a better understanding of man, the addressee of the Christian message. This in turn facilitates the Church's evangelizing mission (cf. CA 54).

The main idea of the encyclical *Centessimus annus* is the assertion that an appropriate vision of society results from the true notion of a human person. This principle points to the sources of the Church's competence to express its views on social issues. The Church considers herself an expert in the domain of the truth about man, because "man's true identity is only fully revealed to him through faith" (CA 54). Consequently, the Christian notion of a human person is in Catholic social teaching a research criterion for various social, political and economic systems. Maciej Zięba calls this criterion a "human-meter" saying that "An economic system may facilitate the development of a human person, but it can also degrade a person, and this cannot be indifferent to the Church. (...) and from an anthropological point of view, as John Paul II suggests, we can consider all economic systems. Having so to speak a 'pattern' of man, we can 'measure' various ways of the organization of economic life. Do economic systems respect human freedom? And on the other hand, is not economic freedom absolutized in them? Do they destroy interpersonal relations and make individuals autonomous, or do they perhaps reduce individuals to the role of instruments in a large producing-consuming organism? Do they facilitate the creation of large and permanent differences between people, or even between social groups? Or perhaps they prefer cooperation among people and enhance creativity inherent in man? What do they do with people who have not been successful in economic life, or generally with the weaker people who, on account of various reasons, are not able to earn their living on their own?"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>19</sup> Maciej Zięba OP, *Po szkodzie? Przed szkodą? O Polsce, kapitalizmie i kontemplacji*. Krakow, 1996, 182-83.

We can find a very interesting example of the application of the anthropological criterion in the encyclical *Centessimus annus*, in the chapter entitled *The Year 1989*. It presents John Paul II's answer to the question "Why has communism collapsed?" According to the Pope, there is an anthropological fault revealed in the origin of two widely accepted causes of the collapse of communism: the violation of the human rights concerning labor and the inefficiency of the economic system, i.e. the faulty understanding of a the human person. The encyclical offers us a very precise analysis of the deformation process of the understanding of a human being in Marxism: "Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. Socialism likewise maintains that the good of the individual can be realized without reference to his free choice, to the unique and exclusive responsibility which he exercises in the face of good or evil. Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order" (CA 13). The anthropological fault of Marxism is that it deprives man of freedom and, in consequence, responsibility for his own actions. The error in Marxist anthropology led to the "violation of the human rights to private initiative, to ownership of property and to freedom in the economic sector" (CA 24), and as a result to complete inefficiency of the economic system and the economic collapse of the Central-Eastern Europe countries in the 1980s.

John Paul II claims that an important indication of false Marxist anthropology and ideological blindness of its inventors was an attempt to eliminate individual profit as a source of economic development. We can read in the encyclical: "In fact, where self-interest is violently suppressed, it is replaced by a burdensome system of bureaucratic control which dries up the wellsprings of initiative and creativity. When people think they possess the secret

of a perfect social organization which makes evil impossible, they also think that they can use any means, including violence and deceit, in order to bring that organization into being. Politics then becomes a 'secular religion' which operates under the illusion of creating paradise in this world" (CA 25). The Pope emphasizes that Christian anthropology, in contrast to Marxist ideology, realistically takes into account the fact that for man immediate benefit and individual profit are a very important motivation to work and care for the common good. Consequently, "the social order will be all the more stable, the more it takes this fact into account and does not place in opposition personal interest and the interests of society as a whole, but rather seeks ways to bring them into fruitful harmony" (CA 25). In its description of human nature Christian anthropology stands for realism, against angelical idealism.

In the encyclical *Centessimus Annus* John Paul II shows how the erroneous notion of the human person in Marxist theory became one of the origins of the collapse of communism. A distinguished Italian commentator on the Pope's thought, Rocco Buttiglione wrote in early 1990's that while the first part of the pontificate of John Paul II was devoted to fighting with the Yaltan order in Europe and with communism, "perhaps the main subject of its second part will be the reform of capitalist systems and fighting against Western alienation."<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the intuition of the Italian philosopher has proven true with the Pope's three great encyclicals of the 90's: *Centessimus annus*, *Veritatis splendor* and *Evangelium vitae*, which are concerned mostly with the criticism of Western democracy and liberal culture. Moreover, we can add that according to the methodology of Catholic social teaching, we do not want to replace communism and capitalism by a "catholic" ideal social order, or to find a Catholic "third way". Catholic social thought intends to analyze any of the already existing or emerging politico-economic systems with the help of an anthropological criterion ("human-meter") in order to check whether it complies with the integral vision of a human person

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<sup>20</sup> Rocco Buttiglione, "Kilka uwag o sposobie czytania *Osoby i czynu*" in Karol Wojtyła, *Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*, Lublin, 1994, 42.

presented by Christian anthropology. Theological anthropology employed as a criterion in Catholic social thought prevents the Church from ideological involvement in political and economic sphere.

#### **4. An Interpretation of Culture**

The statement which is fundamental for our considerations in this article: “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light,” (GS 22, RH 10) has yet another important meaning, which cannot be omitted in these reflections. It points to the present state of post-Christian Western culture and to the fact that without taking into account the influence of Christianity one cannot understand the situation of contemporary man - the way in which he defines and understands himself. John Paul II emphasizes this truth by his insistence that the West - and Europe in particular - has to recover its Christian roots. Following John Paul II we can point to several fundamental anthropological notions whose contemporary meaning we owe to the mystery of the Incarnation and Christianity. The notions include: the person, human dignity, marriage, freedom, conscience and truth. The list of these notions can be considerably expanded and in addition it should not be limited to anthropology. Each of these notions owes its contemporary meaning to centuries of theological reflection rooted in Christian Revelation - the Bible and Church Tradition. I would like just to sketch the Pope’s argument for two notions, the human person and human dignity.<sup>21</sup>

John Paul II gave attention to the theological source of the notion “the human person” during his Wednesday catechesis, when he commented on the Christian profession of faith. On March 16, 1988, commenting on the statement of the Council of Chalcedon that in Jesus

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<sup>21</sup> The presentation of such hermeneutics in case of each of the above-mentioned notions is beyond the capabilities and aim of this article. The author, basing on the thought of John Paul II, will try to undertake this task in another place. In order to analyze Christian roots of the notion of freedom and human free will cf. Jarosław Kupczak, *W stronę wolności. Szkice o antropologii Karola Wojtyła*, Krakow 1999, 67-72; J. Kupczak *Destined for Liberty. The Human Person in the Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II*, Washington DC, 2000, 91-94. An excellent example of this historical hermeneutics of culture, especially as far as the notion “virtue” is concerned, is Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo cnoty. Studium z teorii moralności*, Warszawa, 1996.

Christ two natures are united in one person, the Pope noticed that the Council took the notions “the person” and “nature” from colloquial language, in which they did not have a clearly specified and precise meaning. This decision by the Council Fathers resulted from the conviction that the Council could not identify with any specific philosophical system. John Paul II emphasized in his catechesis that after the Council of Chalcedon the notion of the human person (Lat. *persona*, Gr. *hypostasis*) gained a specific content and became a precise notion for the domain of philosophy and theology.<sup>22</sup> Another significant fact is that the same term *person* designates both God’s being - a being of Everlasting Word - as well as ours: human person. Even if we clearly emphasize analogies and discrepancies in the usage of the same notion to designate the Creator and the creature, these two meanings of the term *person* affect and influence each other. After the Council of Chalcedon the human person is understood as the image (Lat. *imago*) of God’s person, whereas we attribute life functions to God, which are characteristic of a human being, especially the desire for good and the knowledge of truth.

The considerable influence of Christian theology on the notion of the human person in Western culture is rather a commonly accepted fact among historians of ideas.<sup>23</sup> Similar inquiry aimed at finding an historical source of a specific word meaning can be conducted for that notion so semantically close and complementing the notion of *person*, namely that of *human dignity*. John Paul II often emphasizes in his statements that human dignity finds its ultimate justification in the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption. According to the Pope, this ultimate justification may be expressed by the means of the phrase from the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of the Second Vatican Council: “For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man.” (GS 22, RH 13). The Pope says

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<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Wierzę w Chrystusa Odkupiciela*, Warszawa, 1991, 188.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Romano Guardini, *Świat i osoba*, in Romano Guardini, *Koniec czasów nowożytnych*, Krakow, 1969, 89-219; Kenneth L. Schmitz, *W sercu ludzkiego dramatu. Antropologia filozoficzna Karola Wojtyła – Papieża Jana*

“what is in question here is man in all his truth, in his full magnitude. We are not dealing with the <abstract> man, but the real, <concrete>, <historical> man. We are dealing with <each> man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery.” (RH 13). Jesus Christ by the Incarnation has united Himself with each man, and for that reason indispensable and unimaginable dignity is attributed to each man. John Paul II emphasizes that Christ’s care for each man points the way for the Church, which in her ministerial, charitable and missionary activities becomes “a sign and a safeguard of the transcendence of the human person” (GS 76, RH 13).

John Paul II also gave attention to the theological justification of human dignity during his Wednesday catecheses. On March 23, 1988 speaking about the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon concerning the Incarnation he said that “It should be noted that by the statement that God’s person of the Word-Son becoming man entered in the world of human persons, the Council emphasized in a special way their dignity and the relations existing among them. Additionally, it gave attention to human reality and dignity as an individual, which is an indisputable subject of being and life, thus of responsibilities and laws. Is this not a starting point for new histories of thought and life? Thus the Incarnation of God’s Son is the basis, source and prototype for both new supernatural order of existence for all people, who from this mystery derive sanctifying and saving grace, as well as for Christian anthropology, which also affects the natural sphere of thought and life, raising man as a person standing in the center of society and the whole of world.”<sup>24</sup>

John Paul II’s reasoning, merely pointed out here, for the notions *person* and *human dignity*, may and should be conducted also for other ideas which were mentioned at the beginning of this section and which are essential for understanding contemporary anthropology and culture. The aim of such reasoning is understanding the post-Christian

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*Pawła II*, Krakow, 1997, 52; Zięba, *Papieża i kapitalizm. Od Rerum novarum po Centesimus annus*, Krakow, 1998, 174.

culture today, especially in the context of the situation of man. The following words of the Second Vatican Council point to such an understanding, "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light" (GS 22, RH 10).

To understand each of the above-mentioned anthropological notions it is necessary to take into consideration two aspects of their respective meaning, each having its own history and deriving from a separate tradition. On the one hand, each of these notions owes its contemporary meaning to Christian thought, to centuries of theological reflection rooted in Christian Revelation. On the other hand, there is a fierce debate in contemporary secular culture concerning each of the above-mentioned words. The understanding and interpretation of each of them is a locus of confrontation between Christian Tradition and post-Christian (or often even anti-Christian), secularized modern culture. If we do not take into account these two aspects of the meanings of the above-mentioned notions, for which a serious historical investigation is necessary (its outline can be found in the teaching of John Paul II), it is impossible to understand contemporary, fierce moral debates concerning abortion, euthanasia, "rights" of homosexual couples, ecology, etc.<sup>25</sup>

## **5. Concluding Remarks.**

The theology of John Paul II is rooted in the philosophical considerations of Karol Wojtyła, which were created before 1978.<sup>26</sup> This can also be said of his theological anthropology.<sup>27</sup> The earliest publications of Wojtyła, both poetical and philosophical, concern a natural and supernatural knowledge of man - knowledge of oneself and others. In the poem *A Song About the Shimmer of Water* (1950), Wojtyła described the meeting of Christ and the

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<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Wierzę*, 189.

<sup>25</sup> Such a historical approach to the contemporary ethical dilemmas is suggested by MacIntyre, *Dziedzictwo*, 21-29.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Buttiglione, *Kilka uwag*.

<sup>27</sup> The best illustration of this argument is the character of John Paul II's Wednesday catecheses concerning the theology of the body, which were written by cardinal Wojtyła in the 70s as a theological continuation of his

Samaritan woman by the well in Sychar.<sup>28</sup> The poem expresses the author's conviction that natural knowledge of oneself is very difficult, almost impossible: "I tell you that it is only your sight / it perceives people so vaguely, when they flow after the wave of a neon light. / In fact they are revealed by what is most hidden in them / and what no fire can burn."<sup>29</sup> Wojtyła, using a poetical metaphor, says that the best way to know oneself is to close one's eyes and yield to the supernatural light which comes from the Christ. The Samaritan woman by the well in Sychar was given such a supernatural knowledge of herself.

Wojtyła returned to the subject of natural and supernatural knowledge of oneself in the poem *Mother* (1950). This poem describes Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who reminisces about moments spent with her Son. She discovers their deeper, sacramental meaning and their transforming power: "I have been returning there for a long time, to memories, because from each of them / continuously life is expanding, swelling deep with enormous content."<sup>30</sup> Mary is transformed by every moment spent with her Son. Because of the supernatural light of faith she acquires in her autobiographical memories more thorough knowledge of herself: "I am seen to the depth, seen through with grace - / how I am growing from this sight and how I am quietly immersing in it, / yet, no one has known anything about it for a long time / because I do not say anything to people about Your sight."<sup>31</sup>

The subject, outlined in the earliest writings, of knowledge of man in the light of the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption was very consistently developed by Wojtyła as his philosophical and theological views matured.<sup>32</sup> The Wednesday catecheses of John Paul II

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anthropological reflection. After he was elected for the Holy See the text which was to be published as cardinal Wojtyła's book, became a ready material for catecheses at general audiences (Cf. Weigel, 335).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. J 4, 1-42. The author of this article claims that Wojtyła's poetical and philosophical writings, in spite of formal differences, constitute a whole. Wojtyła's poetical images often illustrate and make more intelligible his philosophical theses, and his philosophy provides interpretation rules for his poetry (cf. Kupczak, *W stronę*, 45-47; Novak, *Christian Philosophy of John Paul II* in Kupczak, *W stronę*, 14-15; Kupczak, *Destined*, 3-4).

<sup>29</sup> Wojtyła, *Poezje i dramaty*, Krakow, 1979, 31.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> The individual stages of the development of Wojtyła's anthropological method are presented in: *Destined*, 81-95.

concerning theology of the body as well as papal theological anthropology presented in his encyclicals, documents, homilies and other writings crown this way.

Many eminent contemporary thinkers believe that current moral dilemmas, created for example by the development of bio-technologies and genetic engineering, concern primarily anthropological problems and thus require an analysis concerning the ancient question: who a human being is.<sup>33</sup> Such an analysis seems to be practically impossible today in view of the problems of contemporary anthropology regarding the plurality of contradictory and mutually exclusive theories and approaches. In contemporary anthropology we have very often to deal with reductionist attempts to approach the phenomenon of man. We talk about attempts to deconstruct the notion of the human person replaced by ideas such as: consciousness, self, ego, subject, individual, etc.<sup>34</sup> In the situation where a consensus concerning fundamental truths concerning man is urgently needed as a basis of solving ethical problems, anthropology alone cannot answer its own questions. Thus, creating a Christian anthropology which derives the deepest intuitions concerning man from the Revelation seems to be the more pressing task than ever. Such an anthropology may be a reference for contemporary debates which are crucial for the future of mankind. The theological anthropology of John Paul II, as I tried to show in this presentation, can be of much help on this way.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Zbigniew Brzeziński, *Bezład. Polityka światowa na progu XXI wieku*, Warszawa, 2000, 63-72; Z. Brzeziński "Supermocarstwo w poszukiwaniu partnera", *Rzeczpospolita* 16 July 1999; Francis Fukuyama, "Koniec historii dziesięć lat później", *Gazeta Wyborcza* 19-20 June 1999.

<sup>34</sup> Schmitz, 52-53; Schmitz "Selves and persons", *Communio*, Vol. 18 (Summer 1991), 182-206.