

Who Is Man? Polo and Personhood

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ABSTRACT: In this work three dimensions are distinguished three dimensions on man. Firstly, the organic one or the body. Secondly, the immaterial one, or *having* realm, which is made up by the two immaterial potencies –intelligence and will– and by what modern philosophy names “I”. Thirdly, the spiritual one, or *being* realm, the person or spirit, that conforms the human intimacy. It is also treated the proper knowledge method to address man, and human intimacy is described as free, knowing and loving co-existence.

KEYWORDS: what, who, personhood, I, man, soul, body, human nature, human essence, human act of being, free co-existence, personal knowledge, love.

WHO IS MAN?

INTRODUCTION

One thing is certain: it simply will not do to ask ourselves the question “*what* is man?” because Man is not a *what*, not a *something*, but a *someone*, a *who*. Nevertheless, to ask, “*who* is Man?” is not quite the same as asking, “who is the human person?” The first question is wider in scope than the second because the term “Man” is more extensive than the term “person”. Indeed, it is important to understand that these terms are not synonyms. The first question, “who is man?” can be answered by describing an interwoven series of bodily, psychological, and personal characteristics. The second question, “who is the human person?” is more concrete, it points to the interiority of Man: his spiritual center.¹ However, to the extent that both of these questions represent an inquiry into the “who” and not the “what” of Man, it is possible to take them, in a certain sense, as asking the same question, for the “who” designates the human *person*, that is to say, that which is radically distinct in every Man.

Before resolving the question of the “who”, we should first take notice of the fact that in answering this question we are bound to run into certain terminological difficulties. The first of such difficulties is that we commonly understand the terms “person” and “Man” as if they mean same thing, but they are not. For many religions, there are both divine and angelic persons who are most definitely not *human*. But if the two notions – “person” and “Man” – are not synonymous but rather irreducible to one another, and both are predicated of some individual human being, this indicates that there are several distinct hierarchical dimensions intrinsic to the operations vital to the life of Man. We may, for the sake of simplicity, speak of these dimensions as different kinds of life or existence, the highest of which, I suppose, is the *personal* life of Man. In what follows, I will briefly sketch, as I see it, the three central

¹ One shouldn’t confuse the spiritual center of which I speak here with the language of “the soul” for the soul is something which man *possesses* and therefore he stands at a certain distance from it. The spiritual center of which I speak is something that stands in such a close relation to us that it is impossible to say that we stand *above* it, but rather that we dwell *within* it.

dimensions of human life: the life of the body, the life of the soul, and the life of the person.

a) *The Body*

The body is that aspect of man we tend to most clearly identify with human nature.² The body consists of the various powers and functions that accompany bodily life *per se*. Of these functions, we can identify a few. Bodily human life involves certain vegetative functions (nutrition, cellular reproduction, and growth), movement and the external senses (touch, smell, sight, hearing, taste), internal senses (perception, imagination, memory), and *sensible appetites* (like pleasure for example). All of these functions or powers of the human body are hierarchically distinct, with the internal senses, the presence of which is made possible by the brain, occupying the highest plane in human *bodily* existence. Human nature –the body- is common to Man, notwithstanding the fact that many nuances exist among human bodies, and not ignoring the fact that, for the most part, the body is disclosed to us as either male or female. The body is something we receive from our biological parents and in this sense we can talk about every human being as having a kind of *received* life, a life given to them by their parents. But it is clear that the human *person* is not exactly her body alone, especially if there are persons (like angels and God) that do not have bodies.

² In the philosophical conception of the medieval thinkers, human nature was understood as a substantial composite of soul and body, the former understood as the “form” and the latter as the “matter”. I don’t disagree with this conception of things, but, in order to better distinguish between soul and body, I prefer to designate the human body as “nature” and nothing more. Moreover, only the body is strictly speaking natural because, as we shall see, while the soul is certainly natural, that which distinguishes the character of the soul is not natural but acquired.

b) The Soul

The immaterial aspect of human existence is shaped by the highest of human *possessions*. It pertains to the two superior human immaterial faculties that *can* exist without the body –the intellect and the will– and which are rooted in what we often designate as the “I”.³ To borrow some terms from classical and medieval philosophy, this intermediate aspect of human existence –the “I” we spoke of above– could be termed the “essence”, although it was predominantly understood as the “soul”.⁴ The essence and the soul denote a certain kind of perfection. It is certain that the intellect and the will, in their native state, are imperfect (the *tabula rasa*, as said by the philosopher Aristotle)⁵, which is to say that they do not manifest themselves in activity immediately, but must be actualized later in development. But these *potentialities* are always accompanied by a previous and superior *act* from which these *potentialities* are moved, in a progressive fashion, towards their full and proper exercise; the act as such is more perfect than the capacities or potentialities it activates. Lacking their exercise in a body, which limits the full actualization of these capacities, it is possible for them to reach infinite heights. The intellect grows through the acquisition of the habits of the intellect and the will and both of these are achieved through the virtues. The virtues are not given naturally, they are acquired; as a result, we call the life of virtue an “acquired life”. But the acquisition of these human perfections can take many different forms,

³ The “I” is equivalent to what the medieval philosophers termed “synderesis”, an innate habit (hence, a perfection) that enables one to know human nature and its perfections as well as how the intellect and the will move into progressive perfection from their native state.

⁴ In medieval philosophy, what was called the “soul” can be, for our present purposes, understood as equivalent to the “self”. The Medieval philosophers distinguished between the soul, as it was considered in its “act”, and the faculties –of the intellect and will– that are powers of the soul (and thus less active than the soul itself). So, the distinction made here between the “I” and the two “faculties” of the “I” follows the medieval conception.

⁵ Aristotle, *De anima*, l. III, ch. 5 (BK 430 a 10-25).

as they correspond to one's conception of human virtue, their community, profession, ideals etc.

The distinction between these three human elements (the "I", the intellect, and the will) is also hierarchical, with the "I" occupying a higher place than the other two. Again, it is important to stress that the "I" is not the person; instead, it is better to say that the "I" is the gateway to the person.⁶ This is a distinction that is stressed in classical philosophy as well. The "I" or soul is something the person *has* much like some person *has* a body, but the soul or the "I" is not the person as such, but something that the person possesses. In effect, we know the "I", but we know very little about the "who". Indeed, we all have an "I" insofar as we are a "who". The adjustment one makes to their "I" is what we may call their personality and this "I" fits into different psychological categories (type A, type B etc.). But it is extremely important to not confuse one's personality "type", which is common to many, to one's person, which is unique. In other words, it is important to not confuse *personality* with *personhood*.⁷

c) *The Person*

The person is constituted by the "private", by the innermost "who" that resides in every person. This dimension is spiritual or, if you like, it is the spirit, the unrepeatable uniqueness of every one *who is*. It is that which is most active and perfect in Man, it is the center of his dignity and the root of all other dimensions active in Man. To speak in accordance with the terminology that we used above, this reality can be spoken of as the "personal act of being". In spite of its being that

⁶ Together with classical philosophers, we can say that the human person is not a soul, but *has* a soul just as the human person *has* a body.

⁷ Our personhood is something interior, it is akin to the "heart", that is, our personhood is that which is most interior, conforming to the deepest and most interior reality of who we are. Personality, on the other hand, is the external *manifestation* of this reality. To speak metaphysically, our personhood exists on the same plane as our "act of being" whereas the personality lies on the same plane as our "essence".

WHO IS MAN?

which is most perfective and most active in Man, it is also –like everything else in Man- subject to growth, that is to say, the person can grow in their native perfection. This growth is what we refer to when we speak of the “personal life”. But, in contrast to the virtues, this life exists on the level of *being* not *having*. Whereas the life of virtues consists in the *acquisition* of intellectual habits and virtues, the life of the person consists in *being* or *existing* in a unique way. Although every person is constituted by a *kind* of simplicity –we are all, at root, only one person and nothing more than that- it is not utter simplicity (the simplicity of God). And this is because the personal life of Man (unlike God) consists of several hierarchical dimensions: personal *liberty*, personal *knowledge*, and (the highest) personal *love*. Now, personal knowledge does not consist in the knowing we associate with the intellect and neither does one’s liberty correspond to the desiring of the will.⁸ Whereas traditional philosophical anthropology has focused exclusively on the human body and its immaterial faculties, as well as their manifestation in different aspects of human culture (ethics, society, language, work, economy etc.), I hope to examine that which is more radically distinctive in Man –the person-.⁹

⁸ The distinction between the knowledge of the intellect and *personal* knowledge lies in the fact that the first concerns the knowledge which is inferior to Man himself, whereas the second relates to that which is *higher* than Man. This distinction, between inferior and superior *ratio*, was first made by Augustine and followed by Thomas Aquinas (cf. In II Sententiarum, d. 39, q. 3, a. 1, co; Q. D. De Veritate, q. 17, a. 1, co). The distinction between the object of the will and *personal* love lies in that the first tends to a good that it does not initially possess, as the will is first in potency and is brought into act progressively, whereas *personal* love is not lacking in any way, but overflowing; personal love does not want or need anything, it simply loves others. To put it more simply, the will as classically understood wishes or desires something it does not naturally possess, while personal love is all ready in possession of itself and so it only *gives* that which it possesses --love.

⁹ For a fuller presentation of my views on anthropology, see my *Antropología para inconformes*, Madrid, Rialp, 2^a ed., 2008.

To sum up what was said above, one can distinguish between three different aspects of Man: nature, essence, and person (or, as was outlined above, between the body, the soul and the spirit). The distinction between nature and person found its medieval articulation in the person of Thomas Aquinas.¹⁰ Indeed, Thomas also finds cause to distinguish between the “act of being” or *actus essendi* and the essence. Here I want to make clear my definitions. I see the person as the “act of being”. The human essence can be identified with the soul. In this way, it is easy to understand the body-soul distinction made in classical Greek and medieval accounts of man. Yet, we are not accustomed to distinguishing between *person* and *soul*, for though the medievals distinguished between the active (and more perfect) and passive (or less perfect) parts of the soul¹¹, they did not speak of the “person” as that which is more active and perfect, and neither did they speak of the soul as that which is less perfect and active in Man, even while they admitted that the intellect and the will were faculties of the soul (and hence less active). According to these differences, it can be said that every man *has* a soul (and a body), but he *is not* a soul (or body), but is a person.

While any treatise on Man ought to address these dimensions of human existence (body, soul, and person), it is often the case that anthropological investigation has failed to adequately attend to the highest of these dimensions –the person. And even when scholars have attempted to articulate a vision of the person, they have often proceeded as if the person is simply that which encompasses the “whole” man

¹⁰ “Person signifies what is most perfect in all nature” (ST I, q. 29, a. 3). So, *nature* does not *necessarily* denote perfection. The term “person”, on the other hand, does necessarily indicate perfection. Therefore, the human *person* is irreducible to human nature.

¹¹ “Since the human soul is a subsisting being, it is composed of potentiality and act. *For the substance itself of the soul is not its own act of existing, but is related to its act of existing as potentiality is to act.* However, it does not follow that the soul cannot be the form of the body, because, even in the case of other forms, *whatever is like form and act in relation to one thing is like potentiality in relation to something else*, just as transparency is formally present to the atmosphere, which is in potency in relation to light.” (*Quaestiones Disputate de Anima*, a. 1, ad. 6, emphasis added)

WHO IS MAN?

(e.g. body, soul, functionality, immaterial and material faculties, emotions etc.) A number of 20th century thinkers have taken such an approach (among them Edith Stein, Max Scheler, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, Paul Ricoeur, Xavier Zubiri etc.). Without impugning the great contributions to philosophical anthropology each of these authors made, contributions which are less relevant today than they ought be, the underlying anthropological approach runs aground when confronted with the reality of death. For if the person is simply the “whole” man, it follows that whatever existence, if any, follows upon death is not a *personal* existence and this certainly is some cause for concern. While some have defended such a vision on the grounds that the body is recovered after death (e.g. the religious conception of a resurrection of the body), this does not solve the problem that there seems to be a time at which we are without our body and yet, if we are to persist in our identity through death into the afterlife, it must be the case that such identity is sustained even when the “soul”, as many people often suppose, is temporarily separated from the body.

1. METHODOLOGICAL AND THEMATIC DIFFICULTIES OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Following our encounter with the terminological difficulties in treating Man, we are met with methodological and thematic difficulties. By “method”, I mean the mode of human knowledge pertinent for understanding what it means *to be* a human person. Regarding particular methodological pitfalls, one should first take notice of the title of this chapter “Who are we?” A better formulation of this question would take its future form – “Who will we become?” since we do not live just as some generic person, but rather as *the specific person we are called to be*. Indeed, it is better to speak of what man “shall be” rather than what he is.¹² To put it another way, it is better to speak of “becoming” rather than “being” when one discusses human persons.

¹² “In anthropology, one cannot say what Man *is*, but rather what man will be.” Polo,

A second difficulty arises because we attempt to gain access into the man's innermost reality by asking a question about that reality. But to ask a question is to presume there is an answer (even if unknowable) that is somehow inescapable. However, as was said above, it is clear that the response to the question – “Who is the person?” is not given *a priori*, but *will be given*, in the future, and even then one may miss the mark and never discover the person they were called to be. Note further that the question relies on *language*, which, contrary to the thesis championed by Gadamer, is dependent for its formation on the person not the other way around. To put it another way, our personhood is not conditioned by the language we use to describe it. Therefore, the question before us is how to make sense of a higher reality from a lower one. Concretely speaking, language always speaks in universals because it depends on human reason, which takes things as they are in the universal. However, while the term “person” is universal, the intimate personal reality of each “who” is *not* universal *or* common and thus the innermost reality of each individual person is different.¹³ Language alone cannot capture this reality. Since philosophical works require the use of language, I must try to offer something of an answer that corresponds to a universal property shared by every person.

A third difficulty concerns a kind of philosophical humility. For if every human person is unique, unrepeatable, and utterly beyond one's own sense of self, how can it be that I, an outsider (and even worse, a

Leonardo. *Antropología trascendental, I. La persona humana*, Pamplona, Eunsa, 1999, 137.

¹³ “Personal being is the distinct and unique “who” of the individual person. However, the nature of man is, as it has been said, common. All men “have” the same nature. Therefore, if the notion of the person is applied as a common term, it is not truly a predicate of the individual human being. If one takes the “person” as a common term, then all we are is this thing called “person”: I am a person, you are a person, he is a person; when we use the term “person” in this way, we lose the vision of the distinct “someone” or “who”, that is, the irreducible element of the human person (to either a universal or general scope). The irreducibility, the uniqueness of the person is what distinguishes them as a “someone” set off from all others. To speak of “person” as if it were a common term is always a reduction.” Polo, Leonardo. *Antropología trascendental, I. ed. cit.*, 89.

WHO IS MAN?

philosopher!), presume to explain to *you* –a person- what it means to be that which you assuredly are – a person? Is this not a foolish and arrogant presumption?

Now, as regards to *thematic* difficulties, the first thing to consider is that one cannot solve the problem initially formulated by asking it in a future tense, for by emphasizing the future we come to see that Man in his present state is limited in *seeing* just what he is *becoming*. And, furthermore, Man does not assure his *becoming person* just by knowing that he is in the process of *becoming*, since to *become* the *person* he is called to be, he must accept the *call* to his personhood. If, however, he ignores or rejects this call, not only will he not be the person he is called to be, but he will lose his personal being entirely; he will be nobody in particular, a horde, the legion of which the demon speaks in the Gospel (Mk. 5:16-13) .

The second thing to note is that this study can only hope to benefit those who have some sense of the person they are called to be and *moreover* who would love to fully be that person. The hope for such persons is that their knowledge and love will culminate in their very *becoming* of the person they always hoped to be. (perhaps vocation needs to enter in here as well as deification)

Thirdly, as a person can only *truly* know and explain *oneself* completely in isolation, and so if we want to know and explain personhood it is required that we appeal to many distinctive persons in order to explain how personhood applies to each of them. But then we have to ask “just who are these other persons?” Accordingly, we ought perhaps to revise again our initial question so that it reads, “who are *these* persons?” so as to refer to a distinctive set of presumable persons. One can try to avoid this difficulty by using the oft-cited truism “all persons are equal,” such that by explaining one person we have thereby explained all persons, but this does not conform to a *realist* anthropology since the notion of “all” or “everything” is not a real, but a mental concept. Moreover, the “what” of everything is not the blueprint for any *one* person. Even more than that, if we were to fix our gaze upon every single person, we would inevitably find that there exists no “copies.”

In sum, the obstacles with which we open this study are neither insignificant nor unimportant. And if, as I should like to suggest, the person represents the pinnacle of all reality (both created and uncreated), how could it be otherwise? Nevertheless, I hope that the reader will gain some knowledge of the *human* person in the following pages. Inasmuch as this subject is always accompanied by a multitude of difficulties, some of which I listed above, I hope the reader will excuse me if I do not treat it as thoroughly as they might have hoped.

2. CO-EXISTENCE OF PERSONAL FREEDOM

The objections above indicate, in fact, that knowing “the who” of every Man does not appear to be within the reach of any individual human being. But note that the recognition of this cognitive (rational) limit is indicative of a deeper and more radical characteristic of the human being: if the individual human being –the person- cannot be understood in isolation, and remember above that it seems that my own personhood is experienced as a *call* by another, then it seems to follow that Man neither is nor can ever be an isolated entity. To not be isolated is to be in a state of *co-existence*, the significance of which is that the person is not just a *being* or an *existence*, but a *co-being* or *co-existence*. *Coexistence* indicates personal openness, that one is, from the first moment of their existence, “linked” to an “other.” *If* this “link” to other persons persists throughout the entirety of Man’s life, then we do not need to wait until this being matures, reaches the age of reason, chooses to live with others, becomes sociable or formed by intersubjectivity. What follows from this supposition runs counter to many influential “personalist” accounts of personhood insofar as this account presumes, against the personalists, that it is impossible for a person to exist as if they were the only person since *to be* a person is *to be open* to another. Just as Buber argued that there can be no “I” without a “Thou”, so too can we say that the “personhood” of one being requires that this being *be linked* to an “other”.

WHO IS MAN?

By *coexistence*, one should not understand me to be saying that all persons are constituted by the same *act of being*, which would run utterly contrary to the notion of a *personal* being. If this were true, there could not be a *plurality* of persons. Since personhood, as I argued above, includes in its definition the notion of plurality, such a position would be incoherent. Of course, the notion that all men are a single person is absurd. If each person shared the same personhood as another, there could be no *distinctiveness* of persons (indeed Mark Johnston has argued as such in his recent book on surviving death). Of course, not all things in existence are persons. Therefore, it is certainly possible that certain things could exist in isolation. For example, the universe, considered as a thing, has its own act of being –its own existence-, but it does not require another universe to exist. But again it is important to note that coexistence is not equivalent to *intersubjectivity*, that is, to *manifested* correspondence or *dialogue* between persons, for one can *co-exist* as person without doing or saying anything, they can just *be* and that simply means, in the case of persons, *being with an “other”*.

What was pointed to above is an issue of greater significance: that if no human person can understand herself or others entirely, this is because she is, from the moment of her existence, *called* to coexist with another person, a person from whom she can gain the complete sense of her personhood.¹⁴ Such a person, as should be obvious, cannot be human and cannot be created. For if we did not have an uncreated person, then we would always have to ask how the first person came to be and eventually this line of persons would terminate unless there was some persons who were uncreated. To be explicit, Man is incomprehensible without God.¹⁵ In other words, there could very well be only

¹⁴ See my, “Can the human person reach fulfilment through the self alone?” in the proceedings of *Metanexus Conference*, Madrid, 2008, posted online at their website

¹⁵ “For this reason we must say that the oft-repeated saying, “I know who I am” is incorrect, even ridiculous. Who I am is only known by God.” Polo, L., *La persona humana y su crecimiento*, Pamplona, Eunsa, 1996, 155.

one created person, but they would never be *alone*, they would always be co-existent with God.

On the other hand, attributing the word “shall” to the human person can contribute to a poor understanding of personhood, for if this word is understood in the sense that when one fully accepts their co-existence as person (with the Divine for example), they no longer constitute a person “becoming”, but just are a person “being”. While there is a certain religious sense in which the acceptance of the ultimate “other” marks a kind of “accomplishment” of human personal existence, one should be careful not to understand this state of “accomplishment” as one devoid of any further personal growth, improvement, or, as some religious traditions have it, progressive deification. For a God who is infinite, it is impossible that we could ever exhaust our calling to “partake of the divine nature” (2 Pt. 1:4). When we speak of human persons as most fundamentally a kind of “becoming,” we mean that the human person is never finished or complete, he never just “is” (as God just is). For this reason, every human person is always radically new; in fact, since he is made for God, the eternally New, the unique future of Man can never come to pass if only because it is always “becoming” with God.

But what if our consumation with the divine were the end of the story? That is, what if, when we passed into the afterlife, our lives were perfectly complete, with no future expectation? If we granted such a vision of the afterlife, then it seems that the meaning of human life would be limited exclusively to one’s fixing their gaze on the (now completed) past. It would seem odd that a person who spent their entire life looking towards the future would then suddenly turn their focus exclusively to the past. Could the afterlife be so different from our present life? We must reject such a supposition if only because it appears to assume to disjointed of a view between our “first” and “second” nature. It seems that there must be a kind of organic continuity between the two. And so it is better that we affirm that the human person is and always will be a *project*, a “becoming”, and thus she always fixes her gaze on the future, that which will come to be. One wonders if the problem of *parousia* is simply that we expected that the afterlife

WHO IS MAN?

would be constituted simply by a “being” and never, from our own human and created perspective, as a further enlightened *becoming*, but unfortunately this is a question more apt for theologians and so I leave it to one side.

To speak of the human person as “complete” or “finished” would suggest that in the eternal life of Man things would appear as always “present”, which is to say that “time”, as it exists in the afterlife, does not have the same character as it does in our present world, for the present is not a “time”, but, simply, the mental aspect of humans that articulates the past and possible future. (I’m not sure this is needed) But this is not so, because the future is always something *new* and to be a human person is to be made for the future. In other words, every human person is a radical novelty, in fact, because she is made for God, who is constantly “new”, the unique future of Man can never be exhausted.

On the other hand, if the human person can only be explained by his personal coexistence or “link” with God, then it is this fact *alone* that explains that which is most intimate (individual, radical) to every human person, a point which cannot be proven by one’s mere biology. So if the person cannot be explained solely from within herself, as certain existential theories have attempted, and if the person cannot be explained solely by their co-existence with other persons, then we must reject theories of personhood grounded in intersubjectivity.

3. PERSONAL LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

Now, when we reflect on our personhood “who we are” we try to know just how we are distinct from all other persons –“how am I unique to the exclusion of all others?”. To know one’s personal being is not –as was indicated- to know it as if it was already “complete,” but to see that one’s personal being is open to the future, that is, *open* to one’s future growth in the realization of one’s own personhood. For this reason it is wrong to speak of the “successful life” of a human person and we should remind ourselves that to speak of success in this regard is always premature.

The *call* of one's personhood is what is meant by the term "vocation". On this point, it is important to clarify that one's personal vocation is never wholly reducible to some particular form of life (e.g. a religious order, marriage etc.). Every person can open or close themselves to their particular vocation, that is, they can accept or reject it, love it or despise it. To despise one's particular vocation is not to despise the state one is currently in, it is something much worse, for it is to despise the person one is called to be. It thus compromises one's sense of their own personhood: the fulfilment of which lies always in the future. In other words, if I despise the person I am called to be, I cannot be open to the future and hence I am closed to the possibility of my *being called* to my own *individuality* as person.

As was indicated above, the personal "act of being" penetrates one's freedom. When freedom is exercised in such a way –by denying the relevance of one's personal vocation- one denies the very *personal* (or future-oriented) character of their being and thus one becomes less of a person. This is because, as was said above, *to be* a person is always, in reality, to be in a process of *becoming* the person that you are called to be. To be a person is not to be a static entity, it is *to be constantly in a state of activity* –a state of growth or movement towards their becoming of the person they are called to be. Of course, it also can be the case that one's own growth is stunted, which is the same as one's decision to cease growing into the person they are called to be. Another way of putting this is that when one refuses the *call* to personhood, they undergo a process of depersonalization. Such progressive depersonalization can result in the definitive loss of one's personal being, which happens –lamentably and freely– to those who refuse, even unto death, to accept the *call* to personhood.

To not want to be *anyone* –as Kierkegaard rightly noted– leads one to *despair*. Since Man is most fundamentally always a project in the making, a project for the future, to deny one's vocation –their call to be a specific *someone*--is to deny hope. This brings us a bit closer to understanding the radical reality of Man, namely, that it is not so much that Man has hope (although he does), but that hope in some way constitutes his very being. To see Man as "hope" is to see that he always

WHO IS MAN?

points beyond himself. As such, the freedom of Man is always directed upwards towards something more than he is currently capable. Indeed, personal freedom doesn't mean "autonomy" or "independence", for it depends entirely on one's acceptance of the scope and limits of reality in which one exercises their personal freedom. As such, *personal* freedom cannot be explained without *coexistence* since to accept oneself as a person is to accept themselves as linked with another. It is manifest, however, that no created reality can fully exhaust one's personal freedom. In this way, the freedom of the human person is said to be related to the divine being.

As Aristotle taught, Man desires to know, but in an important sense what Man seeks is not just what all Men might know, but what He *qua* individual can know to the exclusion to all others. This exclusive knowledge is the knowledge of one's *personal* vocation. One's vocation is not determined by his subjectivity, but is rather received from without. As such, a person can accept or reject this *call* from God, but they cannot determine its shape. The *personal* vocation we are called to by God is what constitutes our personhood. It is a "secret" truth spoken by God to every Man and our knowledge and acceptance of it is passive. This is to say that our intellect and will is in potency relative to our personhood. But since *to be* a person is to be *linked* to another *person* –in this case the divine person- it follows that we cannot possibly have knowledge of our personhood without it being made manifest to us by the word of God. While during our earthly lives it is possible to have some conception of the person we are called by God to be, it is nonetheless the case that it isn't fully made manifest until we pass over into the next life –standing face to face with God.

As was argued above, our life is made sense by reference to the future and so our present life cannot be fully understood without understanding something of our future, including our future after death. Without referring to life after death, we cannot make any sense of our present life. Although certain philosophical doctrines can speak to the conditions of life after death (e.g. immortality of the soul, existence of God etc.), they do not provide us with a complete story and, more importantly, they cannot speak to our *personhood* because philosophy is

a discipline, not a person, and only *persons* can reveal the true person each one of us is called to be. But since the *call* of our personhood is obviously not contingent, it must be that the only *person* who fully manifests our personhood to us would necessarily be Divine.

We conclude, then, with something of a puzzle. To know ourselves we must know the unknowable. While the picture painted of personhood here supposes that the unique characteristic of *being a person* is that one is always *becoming*, they are always *being sent* onwards towards *becoming* more like the person they are called to be, this puzzle should not frighten us since it is exactly what we would expect if we viewed the person as eternal and never-ending. To refer to the apocalyptic vision of the Beloved Disciple: we are, in some ways, always and forever a “beginning” and “ending”, an “alpha” and an “omega”. Still, how can we know, in some limited sense, *who* it is that calls us? Although this “who” is vastly different, it is still the case that a “who” is a person and so we come to know this “who” in the same way we come to know all other persons: through conversation and presence.

The preceding suggests that we have to find a way to converse with the divine. We might say, along with the world’s many religious traditions, that to know ourselves as persons is *to find* ourselves in prayer, in conversation with God. Yet, to enter into a conversation like prayer requires some foreknowledge of the person to whom one speaks. One possibility, of which I have no competency to speak, is that God speaks to us first just so we may have some sense of how to respond to the insurmountable mystery that God represents. To hear the voice of God, then, one will need to go beyond philosophy. Even more, one will need to hear the stories of God proclaimed by the great prophets of the past and present. It is only then that we might have sense of the God who calls.