

# BODY AND MEANING

An interdisciplinary approach  
to the semantics  
of the Human Body



Edited by the research group of the  
Institute of Higher Studies on Women

English edition edited by Anita Cadavid

**FrancoAngeli** 



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Special Thanks to Susanna Arru, Daniela Marinetti and P. Alejandro Páez, LC

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## Note to the English Edition

What does it mean to have a body? What does it mean to have a sexed body? Is this type of data able to give us information about our identity? These are deep existential questions that need to be faced in all their meaning. “Body and Meaning” was published in 2017. It is the result of a three-year research carried out by the research group “Essere Uomo - Essere Donna” of the Institute for Higher Studies on Women at the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome.

This research group focuses its work on the topics that have to do with the Anthropology of Sexual Difference. The relationship between Women and Men taken as an alliance and not as a dialectic opposition, is one of the most important mission statements of this publication. In 2021 we have the opportunity for presenting this investigation in the English language. This is an important chance to carry our voice to many other scholars and individuals in the English speaking world.

On behalf of the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, I would like to thank all of the people who have made this publication possible, especially Rosario & Donna Criscuolo from the United States and a Hong Kong citizen that wants to remain anonymous who have fully sponsored this important project.

*Anita Cadavid*

Director

Institute for Higher Studies on Women  
Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum





# Introduction

Marta Rodriguez

As a research group, we have focused our attention on the subject of the body for almost two years. Having allowed ourselves to be questioned by the paradoxes of our culture concerning the sexed human body, we have perceived the need to deepen our understanding of its meaning, especially as regards its relationship with and influence on the formation of a person's sexual identity.

This search for meaning had to be carried out at the deepest levels, where the presuppositions and orientations operating on other levels, are formed and decided. Therefore, we have given plenty of space to the ontological level, where we examine the relationship between body and soul to discover the intrinsic causes of sexuality. In the same way, we have reflected at the level of contemporary philosophical anthropology and asked ourselves what the relationship between body and person may be. Based on those foundations and others, we have entered the specific realm of meaning: What is the purpose of having a body? How should we interpret the bodily datum? And further still, is it possible to speak of a grammar of the sexed body? From a psychological perspective, which is the source of our understanding of sexed corporeity, we ask ourselves: How do body and identity relate to each other? What are the consequences of manipulating or defying the limitations of the body? These levels ultimately emphasize the ethical scope that is present: the dignity of the sexed body.

The structure of the present book follows closely the undertaken research. The first chapter, "The Body - From modernity to the post-human dream", draws a picture of the tendencies towards which the movement of post-humanism and trans-humanism leans. The steps taken in the past and even more so the future horizons headed towards on this path are of great interest. From the search for starting points, however, to judge

these technological approaches, there emerges the urgency for an understanding of the body that takes account of its identity as a personal body.

The second chapter, “What is the difference between man and woman - What philosophy tells us”, asks the question about the difference between man and woman within the framework of the person who fulfills himself/herself in the encounter and in self-donation. It affirms that the sexual difference is person-based by default, it touches its essence, and manifests itself at the relational plane. The analysis conducted at the metaphysical level is crucial if we want to reach an ontological foundation. To better grasp and interpret the existential meaning of the sexed body, however, phenomenology and approaches such as the interpersonal and the existential one become vital.

Chapter four, “Body and meaning”, develops this relational plane by tentatively interpreting the body symbolically. Here the reasoning takes its inspiration from the philosophical presuppositions of such an interpretation. It places us on the personal plane and gives us the tools to understand in which sense we speak of its meaning, to the end of offering a grammar and a symbolic interpretation of the sexed body.

Chapters three and five add the perspective of faith to these primarily philosophical reflections. The third chapter, “Body and person in the biblical tradition”, turns to *Holy Scripture* to express the biblical truth of the body as a manifestation, limitation, and condition of encounter and salvation, and compares this wisdom with contemporary reflection. The fifth chapter, “The mystery of the Word Incarnate and the Corporeity”, examines the issue of the body by starting from the two fundamental mysteries of the Christian faith: The Most Holy Trinity, a communion of Persons, and the incarnation of the Word.

The reader who wishes to advance along these paths of reflection on the meaning of the sexed body will come across some inherent research traits, with which we wanted to mark our journey as a research group. First, we have intentionally devoted merely a small space to the critique of other models. We know there are proposals, which start from differing presuppositions and lead to opposing conclusions. In the present publication, we deal with them only to a limited extent, mostly by either referring to them in passing or through accurate analyses. We intentionally decided not to include a *pars destruens* as a structural element of the book but rather – for better or worse – chose to focus our commitment on constructive work. This same decision has characterized the writing of each article. Though the reader will notice we continuously try to converse with each other, we have not given much space to address conflicting arguments.

One clear intention has been guiding our work: to explore new avenues, which will help us understand the beauty and dignity of the human body, drawing specific attention to the foundational part of such an intent. Our selection is indeed a quality of the present publication. If it may have resulted in any constraints or limited the attention some dimensions have received or the possibility for other reflection, we take responsibility for that outcome.

Our desire to take a deep look at the sexed body has led us to embrace a methodological approach that intends both to distinguish the individual epistemological and methodological levels assumed by the different research positions, while maintaining their underlying harmony because of the unique theme that unites them. From this derives the necessary analogical use of terms such as “body”, “meaning”, and “nature”, which appear along the way. Paraphrasing Aristotle, we can affirm that “body and meaning are said in many ways”, but none of these ways, considered separately, exhausts the content of the realities addressed.

Because of the intention that drives this project and due to the profound vision, from which we wanted to address the sexed body, we did not wish to disregard the dialogue that can be established between the knowledge derived from reason and the knowledge derived from faith. This leads to mutual enrichment. We have used the scientific methods proper to each cognitive order, convinced of the unwavering unity of the truth they look for.

As a last remark on the methodology used in this work, we would like to note that some chapters (3 out of 5) have been coauthored.

Though the process was more demanding, the result has been rewarding. The methodology, with regards to the elaboration of each chapter, has generally forced us to reflect on the core principles and continuously compare ideas. This has been a great help to grow as a team. One result of the present research, which we are pleased to communicate to the reader, was the subject of the specialization course promoted by the Institute for Advanced Studies on Women: “Body and Person”, held from January to May in 2017<sup>1</sup>. The discussions with our students, to whom we extend our gratitude, have been a valuable contribution. For our readers we desire they may find in the following pages a qualitative stimulus to continue along the path of reflection on one dimension of our being.

1. We will offer the course again in February of 2019 under the title “Body and Meaning”. This course is offered every year by our Institute.



# The Body – From Modernity to the Post-Human Dream

Chiara D’Urbano, Alberto Carrara

*I still wonder: What type of society would that be, in which – apart from not seeing any people with white hair around anymore, once synonymous with wisdom – we do not see any wrinkles or aged faces? A society in which aging is taboo. A society that consists of actual young people, and seniors pretending to be young. «At least as long as we do not find a way to also replace our brains».*  
(G. Meazzini, *Bellezza senza fine*)

**Abstract:** *Adopting Francis’ logic and methodology, we attempt here to offer a picture that does not increase the consternation which already riddles our time far too much. The general anthropological view that serves as an opening to our journey as a team is above all a picture of the current changes in progress, which however should neither create despair nor encourage the usual claims such as «Back then everything was better...!» The best is always and in any case the present, provided that it is a present lived consciously, and not just endured passively. After all, reflection serves precisely this purpose: It helps us not to remain mere bystanders in the face of what is happening in our time, but instead to be real protagonists capable of a word that ipso facto does not go with the flow. We need to think, understand, and raise meaningful questions through which we can discern what leads into the direction of life, to hope, and to real improvement of the quality of human life. Indeed, the contemporary world could be interpreted in the light of the extraordinary development of scientific knowledge; knowledge that has contributed to the transition from craft to technology, the latter being scattered all over the planet. We witness increasing incorporation of technology in the human being’s everyday life; to the point that it merges, almost integrates with his biological and psychological corporeity. Cinematography is a powerful cultural synthesis of the conception of man, his origins, and his destiny.*

*There fully re-emerges an anthropological dualism that today takes on semblances, expressions, features, and subtleties, which are only new in appearance. The two-dimensionality of man – once body-and-soul, then condensed to mind-and-body, and today in the golden era of neuroscience reduced to that of*

*body-and-brain – remain extremes; polarities, through which the human being either encounters himself in their unity or disappears in their irresolvable opposition. Thus, while on the one hand filmography itself – to safeguard its success – is “sewing up” the dissociation of mind and body to a unity, the presented visions of man conversely often contrast “disincarnate” and “digitizable minds” with “organic body” recipients, “hybrid bodies” (biological-and-robotic), and even real androids. The result is that the question of personal identity is represented through the ambiguity of the body. The chapter explains the situation of the body in the contemporary world through the magnifying glass of the transhumanist “dream”. From the body, the place of paradoxes, to the body, reduced to a mechanism, to fade away to leave room for an increasingly virtual “reality”, this contribution analyses the salient stages of transhumanism and underlines some of its assumptions.*

## **Introduction**

Adopting Francis’ logic and methodology, we attempt here to offer a picture that does not increase the consternation which already riddles our time far too much. The general anthropological view that serves as an opening to our journey as a team is above all a picture of the current changes in progress, which however should neither create despair nor encourage the usual claims such as «*Back then everything was better...!*» The best is always and in any case the present, provided that it is a present lived consciously, and not just endured passively. After all, reflection serves precisely this purpose: It helps us not to remain mere bystanders in the face of what is happening in our time, but instead to be real protagonists capable of a word that *ipso facto* does not go with the flow. We need to think, understand, and raise meaningful questions through which we can discern what leads into the direction of life, to hope, and to real improvement of the quality of human life.

Just the previous statement opens up a complex and multifaceted scenery: what is meant by “improving the quality” of life, and vice versa, what would be its deterioration instead does not meet any consensus of opinions. Thus, how far technology can advance to help man is an equally controversial question open to dispute.

Indeed, the contemporary world could be interpreted in the light of the extraordinary development of scientific knowledge; knowledge that has contributed to the transition from craft to technology, the latter being scattered all over the planet. We witness increasing incorporation of technology in the human being’s everyday life; to the point that it merges,

almost integrates with his biological and psychological corporeity<sup>1</sup>. Cinematography is a powerful cultural synthesis of the conception of man, his origins, and his destiny. To see first hand the fragmentation of the human being, it is enough to think about the succession of movies (just to mention the most iconic), going from Matrix (1999) to Bourne Identity (2002) and Minority Report (2002), from Avatar (2009) to Transcendence (2014), from Lucy (2015) to Selfless (2015), and, finally, from Criminal (2016) to the latest media franchise consisting in manga, anime, video game and novels of the iconic title Ghost in the Shell (2017), or the latest evolution of the video game Deus Ex: Mankind Divided, the Mechanical Apartheid (2016).

There fully re-emerges an anthropological dualism that today takes on semblances, expressions, features, and subtleties, which are only new in appearance. The two-dimensionality of man – once body-and-soul, then condensed to mind-and-body, and today in the golden era of neuroscience reduced to that of body-and-brain – remain extremes; polarities, through which the human being either encounters himself in their unity or disappears in their irresolvable opposition.

In the movies, there is a mind at work, which – though unseen – lurks in reality, proposes it, examines it, reflects on it and shows it to us. There is a body at work, which – behind and inside the camera – trembles with emotions, flees the horror, pursues the attractive objective, drags itself along with difficulty, fights a destiny, and is bound to a prospective framework. These limitations impose on it sequence, displacement, cutting and editing, the seeming construction of movement. The body and the mind of the spectators, and even before that the body and the mind of the director, have gained in reality, for with this extraordinary visual technique they become one thing, thereby impressing on it a continuous evolution...<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, while on the one hand cinematography itself – to safeguard its success – is “sewing up” the dissociation of mind and body to a unity, the presented visions of man conversely often contrast “disincarnate” and “digitizable minds” with “organic body” recipients, “hybrid bodies” (biological-and-robotic), and even real androids. The result is that through the ambiguity of the body the question about personal identity is resubmitted.

1. Cfr. J.G. de Freitas Drumond, *Ética, bioética y los desafíos del siglo XXI*, Derecho PUCP 69, 2012, p. 65.

2. P. Cattorini, *La libertà, del cervello. Neuroscienze, etica e cinema*, EDB, Bologna 2013, pp. 186-187.

## **The body: A place expressing paradoxes**

The body as a subject is particularly fascinating. In fact, it represents well the various paradoxes of our time. On the one hand, the physical dimension denotes the sense of omnipotence and loss of reality, both of which are strongly affecting, in the current slice of history, various areas of life. Omnipotence implies that we are seduced by the idea of being absolute masters of time, space and nature, while – being the first evident paradox – we are simultaneously rediscovering environment and nature in all their beauty and their inherent rules, which have not been created by man.

What subsequently seems odd is yet another aspect: the taking to heart of nature and its cadences appears to only apply to animals and plants, whereas the realm of man remains excluded. Today, great attention is given (in particular) to pets, whose biological stage has made us very susceptible. Thus, having an animal inside the house and taking care of it is no longer left to the spontaneous affection of its “owner”, but entails knowledge and understanding of how to comply with what is in accordance with the nature of a dog or a cat.

Though oddly enough, this attitude, as logical as it is, does not seem to be applied as much to human beings.

The opposite, it appears, holds true for us: we rebel when someone speaks of “natural” things because respect for the natural foundation is understood as the limitation of a presumed unconditional freedom that conceives the human being to be little more than undefined magma, which while rising up molds itself from chaos as it pleases.

The body is simply here. Its original characteristics, shape, and genital dimension appear to be purely accidental. And thus, they are subject to any experiment or transformation that until recently seemed unimaginable. As if to express the person’s absolute power over his own corporeity, not given biologically but entrusted to the entire human creativity. The struggle to erase the marks left by time – wrinkles and normal physical decay – arises from the grand delusion of being masters of natural boundaries. Rather than understanding them in a positive way as a framework, as an acceptable gift, they are resisted with arrogance and sheer will.

This explains the present triumph of cosmetic surgery, to the point, that those women in the world of entertainment, who neither have implants nor their faces and bodies reconstructed in any way, make the news and constitute a strong message of freedom with regards to the expectations of an environment, which at times is exceedingly superficial<sup>3</sup>.

3. Just recently, in a monologue during a show in prime time, Heather Parisi, a well-known dancer and showgirl in Italy, takes a stand against cosmetic surgery, but above all



Moreover, as a nuclear engineer writes, the velocity of the progress is such that the *Massachusetts Institute of Technology* has introduced something even more avant-garde than the usual aesthetic manipulation:

a second skin, an elastic and invisible biofilm, made of polymeric fibers, which is applied to the skin and adheres to it.

The benefits are numerous: partial correction of defects due to degraded skin, protection from external factors, gradual withdrawal of medication and curative creams, and hydration. In practice, the biofilm, in addition to reducing wrinkles and bags under the eyes with apparent aesthetic effects, would facilitate the recovery processes of damaged skin<sup>\*1\*\*4</sup>.

We were not able here to go into the highly interesting world of piercing and tattoos, which, being only the tip of the iceberg of all *body art*, is an entirely new artistic language of self, one's emotional experiences, and one's relationships. However, if we move away from the universe of aesthetic surgery we discover that alterations start also being considered possible in cases of painful events that have affected the physical and mental state.

Studies on forgiveness and memory, for example, are concerned with very delicate issues that pertain to the question whether it is appropriate to erase from the mind – and therefore from the body – painful memories with the so-called “pill of oblivion”, a drug that would allow us not to suffer anymore from anxiety and the fatigue of having to carry the burden of a heavy past, too difficult to handle.

At what price though? What does it mean to erase part of one's history? Here also, there would be plenty of material that could be

against the judgment to which women are subjected every day with regard to their physical appearance. It is the opinion of the people who push women, according to the showgirl, to go under the knife to be accepted by the world. «At first, I despised the women who rebuild their bodies so as to stop time, and because of other people's judgment», says Heather Parisi. «Now I think differently. It's not women who are to blame, but a world that never wants you as you are. Think about it. If you exhibit a beautiful breast at a job interview today, you have a better chance of getting hired, and if you have a beautiful backside at a TV audition today, you have a better chance of being chosen. Every morning I find the courage to look in the mirror and like myself like that because I am lucky enough to have a man by my side who looks at me for who I am, because I don't want to give up my imperfections and because I don't want to miss any day of my life, no matter how many wrinkles it has cost me» (Translation), [www.lastampa.it/2016/12/03/multimedia/parisi-e-la-chirurgia-estetica-un-monologo-sulle-donne-e-la-societ-SOMh5tlkhDri3i2VQlDjdN/pagina.html](http://www.lastampa.it/2016/12/03/multimedia/parisi-e-la-chirurgia-estetica-un-monologo-sulle-donne-e-la-societ-SOMh5tlkhDri3i2VQlDjdN/pagina.html).

4. G. Meazzini, *Bellezza senza fine* (Translation), [www.cittanuova.it/bellezza-senza-fine](http://www.cittanuova.it/bellezza-senza-fine).

discussed and studied in depth. Unfortunately, we have to point the interested reader to another place<sup>5</sup>.

Instead, we return to the paradox the body represents, which – when examined carefully – does not prove to be much of a paradox. The other pole then with respect to the hyperextension of the body's efficiency and a hyper-exaltation of its importance is the fear of the corporeity and the incapability of bearing the burden of being and relation.

Along those lines, being able to do without the body, which almost represents an impediment, the technological dimension offers alternatives to the next generations, though not only to them. Here, we think of *cybersex*<sup>6</sup>, which is almost an oxymoron, a juxtaposition of opposites. New words for novel cultural and anthropological dimensions; present-day relational modes, in fact, may not even have the need anymore for physical contact and actually encountering the other, but may rather find satisfaction behind a screen, be that a mobile phone or a pc.

Heading still in the same direction, the recent debates that have taken place about the beginning and end of life, as well as those about medical and technological procedures, have also reached the two extreme moments of human existence. One being as divisive as delicate and controversial is the issue of birth without any contact, let alone love, between two bodies, as is the case with surrogate motherhood, and that of dying. Both of them touch upon the endurance of suffering and the limitation of guardianship over a body in decay or “unserviceable”, which consequently creates embarrassment for whoever lives through it.

We said that all things considered we are not dealing with a real paradox because both poles constitute a crusade against the limitations of the human foundation, which is located in space and time, biologically speaking precarious, and subject to deterioration.

Because we had to choose from many aspects, all of which we could have studied in depth, in the next paragraphs, we are going to concentrate on the technological revolution called *human enhancement*. In addition to the classical areas already cited, such as aesthetic surgery, to which we would like to add doping in sports, other emerging areas of this approach are of the latest generation as well: from genetic modification to cogni-

5. For further information, we suggest: A. Lavazza, S. Inglese, *Manipolare la memoria. Scienza ed etica della rimozione dei ricordi*, Mondadori, Milan 2013.

6. Cfr. C. D'Urbano, *La pietra della follia. Nuove frontiere della psicologia contemporanea. Dialogando con T. Cantelmi*, Città Nuova, Rome 2016, eh. II: “Schiavitù del terzo millennio: dalla dipendenza sessuale al cybersex addiction”, pp. 37-59.

tive enhancement to the autopoietic dream of biological enhancement reaching immanent immortality<sup>7</sup>.

## A picture of the paradox

It has been announced several times at an international level that at the end of 2017, the history of science, and for some, that of humanity would witness a new breakthrough: the first head transplant on the human being would be carried out. Though it would be better to call it transplant of the larger part of the body. That is what Italian neurosurgeon Sergio Canavero argues. Resuming the results achieved by the Russian Vladimir Demikhov on the dog from 1954, and, above all, those by American surgeon Robert White on the monkey from 1970, Canavero, from 2013 to date, has reiterated to the scientific community the rationale behind the technique used in China at the end of 2017, which would render possible the first attempt to replace a Russian quadriplegic volunteer's sick body with the healthy body of a compatible donor<sup>8</sup>.

This datum has been directly incorporated by one of the most active and pre-eminent contemporary transhumanist movements: the 2045 *Avatar Project or Immortality Project*, founded and led by Russian millionaire Dmitri Itskov<sup>9</sup>.

In its different phases, project 2045 essentially reinterprets man's corporeity in terms of limitations, which have to be overcome, remolded at will until its partial and complete substitution, and, eventually, its definitive loss or annihilation. The final scenario is a radical emphasis on and reduction of one of the human being's components, his mind, and in particular, his self-consciousness, which then would define the human person in his essence and be decipherable based on substrates or neurophysiological correlations. Once extracted from the brain and digitalized, self-conscious-

7. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 130.

8. Cfr. S. Cañavero, "HEAVEN: The head anastomosis venture Project outline for the first human head transplantation with spinal linkage (GEMINI)", *Surg Neurol Int*, 4 (Suppl. 1), 2013, pp. 335-342. S. Cañavero, "The 'Gemini' spinal cord fusion protocol: Reloaded", *Surg Neurol Int*, 6: 18, 2015. S. Cañavero et al., "Neurologic foundations of spinal cord fusion (GEMINI)", *Surgery*, 160 (1), 2016, pp. 11-19; "HEAVEN: The Frankenstein effect", *Surg Neurol Int*, 7 (Suppl. 24), 2016, pp. 623-625; "Houston, GEMINI has landed: Spinal cord fusion achieved", *Surg Neurol Int*, 7 (Suppl. 24), 2016, pp. 626-628. For a revisited history of head transplants: Cfr. N. Lamba et al., "The history of head transplantation: a review", *Acta Neurochir* (Vienna), 2016, Oct 14.

9. Cfr. [www.2045.com](http://www.2045.com).

ness would not be in need of any corporeity any more. It would be rooted in potency without barriers or limitations. In other words, it would be immortal – which is precisely what happens in the movie *Transcendence*. According to different proponents of post-humanism, that which is interesting to this “new man”, called *homo cyber*, is the “mind”. The rest, which is the body cluttering everything up, is useless<sup>10</sup>.

First of all, it is useful to clarify some terms that have already been introduced and consider the anthropological presuppositions, which guide certain evolutionary and apocalyptic situations<sup>11</sup>.

First, they talk about “cyborgs”. How do we define cyborgs? In the thought of Donna Haraway, cyborgs are a blend of technology and culture inasmuch as they possess both, a human and a technological element<sup>12</sup>. For Yehya, cyborgs are

a mixture of organic, mythological, and technological elements. The cyborg is a being that encompasses us, and whom we carry within us. That means that robots, androids, and human beings can be cyborgs, and at the same time be contained within the cyborg... Cyborgs and androids are limited beings, essentially metaphorical creatures that help us to define ourselves. They help us to establish boundaries between that, which we consider natural or artificial, between that, which we make and what we are. They also help us understand where we are going<sup>13</sup>.

From the cyborg, there arises “post-humanism”, understood as the true cultural and philosophical movement, in which we think and try to realize the cyborg<sup>14</sup>. It «does not establish itself autonomously at a specific moment but is rather the result of a set of converging ideas, which unite

10. Cfr. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità nell'epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015. A. Pinzón León, “De la cultura a la cibercultura el aparato escolar en el proceso de la evolución de lo cultural a lo cibercultural”, *Cuadernos de Filosofía Latinoamericana*, 27 (94), 2006, pp. 213-216.

11. The second half of this article can serve as a synthesis: Conti, “II postumano: domande per Pantropologia”, *ScC*, 142, 2014, pp. 572-579.

12. Cfr. J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, in D.M. Kaplan (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham (MD) 2004, pp. 161-178.

13. N. Yehya, *Homo cyborg. Il corpo postumano tra realtà e fantascienza* (Translation), Eleuthera, Milan 2005, p. 37.

14. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità nell'epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, p. 81.

a group of authors»<sup>15</sup>. In other words, some would say it has «many lives and countless faces»<sup>16</sup>. Here then are some converging ideas, that is to say, the anthropological presuppositions that inspire the posthuman movement. Following Paolo Benanti, we can identify and condense, into four anthropological presuppositions, the vision of posthumanism, whose final result leads to an immortality view.

The premise of these four anthropological axioms is constituted by “malleability”: no longer would there exist an immutable concept of human or humanity – a concept rendered malleable by the technological evolution of the last century. There is a watershed marked by a sort of shift from a “human” to a “post-human” condition – the duty to assume responsibility for this intrinsic malleability:

*The post-human condition then is the duty to assume responsibility for this malleability, which posthumanists recognize as constitutive of the human being, and which represents the end of the human condition as it has been understood and known so far. The posthumanist era, to use Robert Pepperell’s terminology, began when man discovered that he was changing himself through the convergence of biology and technology, in a way that made it impossible to distinguish between the two*<sup>17</sup>.

Pepperell’s work, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain*<sup>18</sup>, is significant because already in the title he attaches two fundamental realities to the entire posthumanist discourse: consciousness and the brain. This malleability converges with “fluidity”, which today is being reduced in an even more radical way to an “evaporating” reality, and which is the result of waiving any explanation that resembles stability and finality with respect to what is real. This philosophical choice expresses itself, first and foremost, in the abandonment of the concept of nature as a reality, and subsequently, in the ethical and moral framework, in a radical relativism that renders man incapable of forming and expressing a critical judgment. For this post-modern man, everything appears to be equivalent

15. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità, nell’epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, p. 130.

16. E. Conti, “Il postumano: domande per Pantropologia”, *ScC*, 142, 2014, p. 563.

17. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità nell’epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, p. 91.

18. Cfr. R. Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain Intellect*, Bristol, Portland (OR) 2003.

and, thus, possible and feasible<sup>19</sup>. The dream of “absolute” freedom seems to come true precisely by escaping every limitation. The philosophical notion of “nature” is strongly criticized, questioned and, finally, eliminated<sup>20</sup>.

The “converging ideas” that structure posthumanism’s philosophical roots boil down to four<sup>21</sup>:

- The *preeminence or superiority of information over the materiality of matter* that brings down any barrier or limitation between what is natural and what is artificial, inspiring the very “hope” that, if human beings were to become pure information then the desired immortality could be achieved.
- The *constitution of man* according to which consciousness would be an epiphenomenon, ruling out any trace of an immaterial soul.
- The *conception of the human body as a mere prosthesis*: the body belongs to us but does not constitute what we really are.
- The *capacity of man to be seamlessly united with intelligent machines*, given that there would be no essential difference between corporeal existence and computational simulation, or between cybernetic mechanisms and biological organisms.

This results in imagining and desiring a sort of technological immortality, which could allow the human being to escape all those limitations as well as the fragility, by which we find ourselves to be constituted. In a true “religious” impulse then, technology is summoned to facilitate our transition from a mortal human condition to a posthuman condition of technological “non-mortality”<sup>22</sup>.

Reductionism and mechanism are the two supporting pillars of this synthesis, which is not only concerned with the body but also the mind. In fact, one of the first elements in line with reductionism is to conceive both, body and mind as mere objects. The mind acquires a preeminence and a sort of relevance for “containing” the personal information characterizing the individual personality. Hence follows a marginal consideration of the body being “interpreted” increasingly as that negative limitation, which

19. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 129.

20. Cfr. E. Conti, “Il postumano: domande per l’antropologia”, *ScC*, 142, 2014, p. 576.

21. These four converging ideas are borrowed from the work: P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità nell’epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, pp. 92, 99-103, and 428-429.

22. Cfr. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità, nell’epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, pp. 110-112.

must be overcome, depreciating it to the point of true disappearance. It is not difficult to identify in mechanism that other philosophical element, which breaks down the body into systems, apparatuses, and organs structured as reducible, interchangeable, and replaceable parts. Technology and the mechanization at the service of medicine increasingly blur the distinction between structures and functions of biological nature as compared to those mediated through devices and new materials, which increasingly merge with human biology.

If the body undergoes this mechanization aimed at its complete replacement – at a total and presumed “abandonment of the body we possess” – then also the mind, distinct and separated from its bodily support, undergoes a progressive reduction, which ranges from modifications of its neural substrates to the “dream” of turning its contents into digitalized information.

Throughout this process, the concept of “control” embodied by technology and the neuroscientific revolution plays a powerful role. The achieved dominion would affect both, the body and the mind. The final consequence is thus the loss of the uniqueness and singularity of each human being who, like a drop of water, would dissolve in the collective ocean of a digitalized virtual mind<sup>23</sup>. All boundaries would be torn down, thereby realizing the motto of transhumanism: «*I am everywhere*» – the recurrent and central phrase from both movies, *Transcendence*, and *Lucy*.

Since 2014, in addition to brain-to-machine interfaces, also brain-to-brain interfaces have been developed – called by some mind-to-mind interfaces<sup>24</sup>. And since 2015, the evolution of *brain-to-text* technology, which decodes the brain representations induced during silent reading of text into sentences pronounced by a computer, has opened the way to something called by many – not least Facebook founder himself, Mark Zuckerberg – the obvious proof of “telepathy”<sup>25</sup>.

Different philosophical-cultural currents converge in this synthesis: from the overcoming of the human in the super-human postulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, from the post-modern, post-structuralist, and deconstructionist thought, from the utilitarian pragmatism to the exaltation of technology as a new evolutionary force capable of blurring any demarca-

23. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, pp. 127-128.

24. Cfr. C. Grau et al., “Conscious Brain-to-Brain Communication in Humans Using Non-Invasive Technologies”, *PLoS One*, 9 (8), 2014, e105225. R.P.N. Rao et al., “A Direct Brain-to-Brain Interface in Humans”, *PLoS One*, 9 (11), 2014, e111332, pp. 1-12.

25. Cfr. C. Herff et al., “Brain-to-text: decoding spoken phrases from phone representations in the brain”, *Front Neurosci*, 9, 2015, p. 217.

tion and difference between man and machine, between what is biological and what cybernetic<sup>26</sup>.

Therefore, in continuation with posthumanism, one speaks today of *transhumanism* and *transhuman*. To be precise, if we consider the English neologism transhumanism from a diachronic perspective, the latter takes precedence over posthumanism<sup>27</sup>. Transhumanism would be nothing more than the dominant and synthetic current of posthuman thought, the most radical and practical one of which: a movement characterized by the fluidity with which it incorporates new ideas and perspectives. Aside from the works of futurist writer Fereidoun M. Esfandiary, known by the pseudonym FM-2030, one of the most prominent voices of the transhuman, today, is Nick Bostrom. He is among the hundred most influential thinkers on the planet, and ideologue of the transhumanism, which shares at least the doubt that we are moving towards an increasingly accentuated materialism, underlying the Plastic Man project: without goodness, without pain, without any mystery<sup>28</sup>. In the end, however, Bostrom concludes that, in the face of human suffering, it is difficult to make judgments about the limits to be imposed on “progress”. In fact, he associates Leon Kass, the American president of the Bioethics Council at the beginning of the century, with bioconservatism; probably because he is against cloning experiments and uncontrolled use of genetic engineering.

The peculiarity of the transhumanist vision lies in placing everything within evolutionism, now in the hands of technology. The present human species, directing technology towards a radical change of its very nature, would be able to bring about a convergence between computer science, robotics, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, and cognitive sciences, so as to facilitate in a first step the hybridization between man and machine and, ultimately, the extraction and digitization of the mind from the body until its insertion and expansion within the virtual network. In this way, the immanent immortality, so much desired by theorists of the transhuman, such as Nick Bostrom, would be achieved<sup>29</sup>.

26. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, pp. 128-129.

27. Cfr. E. Conti, “Il postumano: domande per l’antropologia”, *ScC*, 142, 2014, pp. 564-565.

28. Cfr. D. Lorenzetti, “Oltre uomo”, *Il Sole24-ore*, [www.ilssole24ore.com/ericulilire/2010-06-16/Il-re-uomo-15:1500.siliTill'O'elresll\\_cel\\_coTllinuc](http://www.ilssole24ore.com/ericulilire/2010-06-16/Il-re-uomo-15:1500.siliTill'O'elresll_cel_coTllinuc).

29. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, pp. 130-131.



Hence, what does it mean to be transhuman? In a nutshell:

*Being transhuman then means to launch a fusion process with machines, to start a progressive process that will lead us to be cyborgs. The way in which this process must take place is now planned and identified in a series of successive steps that permit, on the one hand, the solicitation of technological development, and, on the other hand, the progressive abandonment of a state defined as merely biological<sup>30</sup>.*

Two converging trends, one initially negative followed by a positive one, would animate this process:

The first trend of this process is characterized as negative: it tries to eliminate a series of characteristics that are seen as constitutive of the limitation of the human condition.

This phase will be followed by a second positive trend: an era will begin, in which new, not previously possessed functions and abilities will be common to transhumans. Thus, a transhuman subject will form himself as an evolution of man, a being on the way to a posthuman existence<sup>31</sup>.

### **Some stages of the transhuman “dream”**

Viewed in order, we can see a progressive project that starts with today’s human being, passes through the so-called “augmented” or “enhanced” realities, achieved either pharmacologically or cybernetically, and ends in overcoming the totality of limitations of corporeity, even reaching a “life” entirely computerized and handed over to virtual reality.

The *first phase* presents a dual perspective: On the one hand, the technological transformation of man through the hybridization between biology and machine, and the generation of the cyborg; on the other hand, the simultaneous realization of “thinking” androids<sup>32</sup>.

The *second phase* is also twofold: artificializing of the body is associated with the simultaneous digitization of the mind, which would open up the possibility for so-called “digital immortality”<sup>33</sup>.

30. Cfr. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità nell’epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale* (Translation), Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, pp. 136-137.

31. Ivi, pp. 136-137.

32. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 127.

33. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 125.

This mechanization of the body is then extended to the entire material reality until all of reality – as we know it and experience it – is reduced to information.

The “enemy”, who is fought here, is death.

Biological enhancement, to some extent, is close to the concept of therapeutic action, understood as postponing death and prolonging life, even with experimental procedures ‘at any cost’. In this case, however, we do not discuss the proportionality or disproportionality of therapies but the indefinite prolongation of existence with the precise intention not only to eliminate illness but to eliminate also and above all old age, which is perceived as an illness. Biological enhancement, at the extremes, arrives at the point of denying death, searching for ‘*ageless bodies*’, as Kass defined them, eternal and immortal: It is the so-called “genetic and biological shortcut to immortality”<sup>34</sup>.

Once this point is reached, we will have arrived at our destination as envisioned by Project 2045:

... all the way to ‘mind uploading’, which – following a brain scan – would allow transferring nerve structures (neurons and their connections) – atom by atom – on silicon support or other material<sup>35</sup>.

In the last stage of this “progress”, the “most perfect enhancement” i.e., the immanent immortality mediated by technology, will be a reality.

In summary, the following can be said:

‘Transhumanism’ fits into this theoretical context, integrating and grounding it philosophically. Starting from

- a hedonistic conception of being,
  - the ontological negation of nature, and
  - a lack of acknowledgment for the peculiarity of that, which is biological,
- the idea is to ethically promote the transition to the transhuman, thereby progressively abandoning what is human, and the human species itself. The abandonment of what is biological and the transition towards what is virtual, artificial, and digital is aimed at expanding human capacities, in order to have better lives and better minds. The motivation behind transhumanism is the super-human and hyper-human desirability of improvement, which is expressed in a moderate way in the quest to increase beauty, physical endurance, and life expectancy; in a radical way with the cancellation of the human condition itself, perceived and experienced as a limitation<sup>36</sup>.

34. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto* (Translation), Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 92.

35. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto* (Translation), Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 125.

36. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto*, Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 131.

## The body emerging from this vision

From *cyborgs* and *avatars* to *social robots*, from *intimate technologies* to *ageless* and *selfless bodies*, from *mind uploading* to *digital immortality* – just to name a few of the concepts most dear to transhumanism. This position proposes the gradual removal of the limitations of human nature<sup>37</sup>, of which the body constitutes the fundamental cornerstone. Then we will have to

empty human bodies ‘in flesh and blood’, reducing them to mere inconsistent receptacles of biotechnological, mechanical, and electronic components, of mutant flows of information capable of assistance until the vital processes of the organism are replaced, thereby promising unlimited perfection<sup>38</sup>.

There emerges the echo of a strong Platonic dualism, which is the result of an extreme interpretation of that “strange” duality that we are<sup>39</sup>. Such an interpretation considers the principle of organization in living beings or the form – in the specific case of human beings – to be separable from its material structure<sup>40</sup>. Here rests the *crux* of the matter, the *magna quaestio*. There is a high price at stake: the human and personal identity of the individual, its uniqueness, and its non-repeatability. The mere aiding and supporting *enhancement* would become a real substitute for typical human functions, even replacing them and producing new ones. The result would be real dehumanization<sup>41</sup>.

Not only does the dynamism that is inherent to identity, convert into a fluid motion but also takes on the features of a constitutive indetermination at the mercy of arbitrary desires, impulses, and constantly changing dreams:

in this sense, each individual can/should freely construct and deconstruct, thereby creating and undoing his own identity, to become performance’ that coincides with agency at the very moment in which he expresses himself and acts. In this sense the boundaries between natural and artificial are canceled out, identity becomes a fluid identification process, never static, uniform or rigid. Identity/

37. Cfr. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità, nell'epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale*, Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, p. 137.

38. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto* (Translation), Giaopichelli, Turin 2015, p. 132.

39. Cfr. S.L. Jaki, *The Brain-Mind Unity: The Strangest Difference*, Real View Books, USA 2004.

40. Cfr. P. Benanti, *The cyborg*, cit., p. 101.

41. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento*, cit., p. 137.

identification is not based on presumed intrinsic essences or external expectations of society but on the individual's desires, instincts, and internal impulses; it is the construction of the will that progressively frees itself from the biological body, which limits its expression. A path is delineated whereupon the "I" is broken down into complex, inhomogeneous, and dynamic identities<sup>42</sup>.

The theme of personal identity linked to the status of the body is one of the pillars in the debates of contemporary philosophy of the mind and, in particular, of today's neuroethics.

A sort of "antidote" to these scenarios reaches us from the fruitful dialogue between realist philosophy and those "neurosciences that love man". On the philosophical side, the irreducibility of the human body to a mere mechanism is increasingly taking root in contemporary reflection, underlining and illustrating the abysmal differences and peculiarities of the human biological corporeity. The anthropology of the limitations and deficiencies of the human biological makeup represents that necessary "openness", that space of possibilities, which allows the human being to partially escape from a tight determinism.

Furthermore, the "neurosciences that love man" realize that the brain is neither comparable nor analogous to a computer; that this mysterious organ cannot be reduced to the mere sum of its cells (neurons, glial cells, etc.). Rather is it a plastic and dynamic system, complex and modular in its different bidirectional relations with the other components of the same nervous system it is a part of, the different systems and apparatuses of the body, the internal and external environment, and, finally, the things it interacts with, above all, with other living organisms, human beings in particular. One could well say that the neurosciences, as well as the systematic and informed reflection on them, lead to the overcoming of the ontological dualism between mind and brain: *«the mind emerges from the brain, embodied in an organism, with which it maintains a continuous exchange of information throughout its existence»*<sup>43</sup>.

Parallel to the conception of the body, so also self-awareness – in the light of neuroscientific research over the past decades on its neuronal substrates or correlates, mediating the conditions that make an adequate manifestation possible – becomes more and more irreducible to mere electrochemical information. In the light of those complex relationships at multiple levels that render possible the constitution of subjectivity, and

42. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento umano. Tecnoscienza, etica e diritto* (Translation), Giappichelli, Turin 2015, p. 129.

43. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento*, cit., p. 134.

considering, in particular, the numerous dynamisms it is influenced by, any “dream” of disincarnating, digitizing, and making personal self-awareness virtual fades away.

On the contrary, based on cases reported within the so-called clinical neurosciences, many neuroethicists reflect on the unity of the twofold constitution of the human being, which can be defined simultaneously as *embodied-mind* (emphasizing the constitutive dimension of the body) and *embedded-mind* (a concept emphasizing the constituent relationship this dual and twofold unit has with the environment), thereby revealing the centrality of the body as such as well as that of the particular body of the individual (*hic homo singularis, hoc corpus*).

Citing Canadian philosopher and neuroethicist Walter Glannon is enough to understand the depth of the debate. Viewed from the psychiatric perspective, one realizes how and how much the body shapes our perception, and how much the environment, in turn, structures our subjective experience. Hence, it becomes clear that in the case of a hypothetical substitution of our body even the perception of the world and ourselves would change and be very different. In a hypothetical brain transplant (or body or head transplant for that matter), the person’s narrative identity would not be preserved. Glannon provides at least two lines of argumentation. First, an in-depth analysis of the modes in which the body shapes our perception is sufficient to make it clear that replacing the body or almost all of it would imply (if it were actually feasible) a different subjective perception of the world. Moreover, considering the ways in which the environment tunes and forms experience, we can see how a different environment would lead to different contents of the subjective experience. These two modifications would be sufficient to alter the personal identity of the individual, due to the fact that the body of another organism would give rise to a different functional conformation of the brain. This, in turn, would translate into different psychological properties emerging from the interaction of the brain with the new corporeity, which experiences and perceives the surrounding world in a different way<sup>44</sup>.

In the posthuman vision, by contrast, we perceive such fragmentation of subjectivity that – by breaking with any unity and integrity the human biological compound may possess – it also becomes the foundation for postulating a real “extraction” of the “I”, being separable from its physical support<sup>45</sup>. The biological body, thus, becomes something that can even be

44. Cfr. W. Glannon, *Brain, Body, and Mind. Neuroethics with a Human Face*, Oxford University Press, New York 2011, p. 23.

45. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento*, cit., p. 130.

“abandoned” – like a prosthesis, replaceable at will. And being such an extrinsic substrate to man, the body does not even enter his essential definition. Which is why it can be completely substituted, replaceable by both, either other human and non-human biological bodies or robotic structures, until complete independence and “liberation”, made possible by means of the so-called mind-uploading to the virtual network.

While, at the outset, technological enhancement sought to extend, amplify, perfect and integrate human functions, what counts, at the end of the posthuman evolution process, is the expansion of functions. The biological body, the robotic exoskeleton, and so forth, are simply accidental shells, which contain those functions and allow them to grow<sup>46</sup>.

However, the relationship between man and machine, as envisaged by posthumanism, turns out not to be as unimportant. The price to pay could be extremely high. Just considering the serious psychological and psychiatric burden of the so-called “new addictions” induced by technology and virtual realities, and which afflict many people today. Not to be dismissed are technological dependencies of a sentimental nature that could be induced by the familiar presence of a robot or a virtual companion to whom human qualities would be attributed, and towards whom feelings and emotional attachment could be developed, which would be but mono-directional, as it was the case in the movie *Her*.

At this point, the paradox that emerges is clear: departing with the desire to control and overcome the limitations of the body, one arrives at the prospect of “human life” without a body:

The objective is enhancement understood as the maximum control possible over the body, which ends up canceling the body itself in order to reach the perfection of the machine. A perfection that realizes the dream of ‘technological immortality’. In the convergence of technologies, it is man himself who becomes technology in a type of ‘pan-technologism’<sup>47</sup>.

From the anthropological point of view, the human person has been not only reduced but annulled. On the one hand, when focusing on things related to the mind, a series of successive reductions is at work, moving from the mind to consciousness, and from there – by means of the neurosciences – to the neurophysiological correlates of self-awareness, until it converts everything related into digitizable information. On the other hand, the body is interpreted from a purely mechanistic point of view as

46. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento*, cit., p. 132.

47. Cfr. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento*, cit., p. 132.

being a simple means or receptacle, i.e., a vehicle to information, which can be deciphered, extracted and expanded (“I must grow” is what the protagonist’s self-awareness told his wife in the movie *Transcendence* once extracted and loaded onto a computer)<sup>48</sup>.

This reduction of the human person to information is, in fact, a new form of dualism – between information and the medium that transmits it – that can only be tackled with an anthropologically correct understanding of the human body and corporeity<sup>49</sup>.

Finally, far from obliterating the philosophical discourse, these post-human viewpoints rather stimulate and drive anthropological reflection on the nature of man, on the status of his psychology, and on the value of his corporeity<sup>50</sup>. It is necessary to develop a philosophy of the human body that is capable of pointing out both, the body’s limitations as well as its significances with regards to technology.

*The objective is to facilitate interventions on the human body without distorting its identity, thereby avoiding irremediable transformations of the specific – present and future – human corporeity<sup>51</sup>.*

48. The author of this article presents the posthuman being as the “fruit” of an adverse philosophical derivation, which, as already described, would be better understood as twofold: Cfr. E. Conti, “Il postumano: domande per l’antropologia”, *ScC*, 142, 2014, p. 578.

49. Cfr. P. Benanti, *The cyborg: corpo e corporeità nell’epoca del post-umano. Prospettive antropologiche e riflessioni etiche per un discernimento morale* (Translation), Cittadella, Città di Castello (PG) 2012, p. 429.

50. Ivi, p. 582.

51. L. Palazzani, *Il potenziamento*, cit., pp. 133-134.

# What is the Difference between Man and Woman? What Philosophy Tells Us

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**Abstract:** *Taking a look at the main currents that reflect on the meaning of being male and female, and setting a paradigm for a reflection on the person, the present article investigates the ontological foundation of sexual difference. It argues that this foundation must be placed on the level of the very essence of the person. However, the reflection on the subject is not limited to the ontological level. Since concrete human nature is a “nature affected by culture”, it also addresses the existential actualization of the personal sexual difference. The reflection then focuses on the intersubjectivity, i.e., on the “reciprocal complementarity”, which the person lives in terms of the attainment of plenitude as a male or female person.*

Each era appears to have to clarify some particular issue. A question, by which it is both, lured in and tormented at the same time. If such an issue surfaces on the level of reflection, it is only because it has been put on the stage of life first. Hence, the most diverse voices and disciplines intervene, trying to make some contribution, and shed some light. For us, the question is: What does it mean to be a woman? What does it mean to be a man?

One thing must be clear from the start. It is necessary to understand well the specificity of the way in which philosophy, unlike other approaches (sociological, psycho-pedagogical, etc.), deals with the question of the sexual condition of the human being. The cultural and scientific debate on human sexuality has grown in complexity over the last twenty years, incorporating highly diversified aspects, perspectives and approaches. A prerequisite is to have the necessary sensitivity to discern at all times what approach it is, under which the respective reflection is developed, and what question it is that gave rise to the reflection. Philosophy cannot be asked to comment on every possible aspect of an issue, nor can it be expected to respond to every difficulty and objection. Nevertheless,



the service philosophy can offer is precious. It can organize the various voices that have expressed their opinion on the subject, trying to determine their reasonableness, and relating them; it can highlight the essential questions by separating them from other considerations. Above all, philosophy carries out critical research into the fundamentals, shifting its focus to the roots of the human being's complex structure.

This chapter would like to carry out this last task in a synthetic way, without forgetting any aspects of the other two. In fact, it seems appropriate to begin with a presentation of the main answers, which the question of the difference between man and woman receives today. Then we will move on to address the search for the foundations that serve to understand the issue.

### **First part: a look at the terrain**

In today's culture, there are two principal approaches that arise around the question of what it means to be a man or a woman<sup>1</sup>. We can understand them by starting with how they respond to this preliminary question: Are men and women really different?

Faced with this question, most *Gender* theories answer in the negative. This is the first approach, and very common today. According to these theories<sup>2</sup>, narrow sexual dualism, i.e., one allowing only for the two modes of man and woman, lacks any foundation. This dualism is rejected by the theories of gender because it would prevent the recognition of polymorphism, being the true sexual face of every human being. The constant production of sexual identities is ultimately grounded in the individual's freedom, understood as the capacity to give meaning to one's own way of living corporeity and relationships with others.

Contrary to the extreme *Gender* theories, the second approach responds by affirming the real difference between man and woman. Sexual dualism would be something well-founded and, thus, deserves to be reaffirmed even today, if anything, in a new way. Yet, within this general approach, different modes coexist of how to think about the foundation for this difference.

1. Cfr. S. Zanardo, "La questione della differenza sessuale", *Aggiornamenti sociali*, 12, 2015, pp. 833-844.

2. We acknowledge among the extreme theories of gender the diversity with regards with regard to their models and perspectives. Most of them agree on the fact that there does not exist any real or lasting difference between man and woman.

It seems useful to organize those modes by looking at the specific motivations which are active in their foundation. That way, at least four versions emerge. The first is the position that relies on the Judeo-Christian tradition as it finds expressions in the Bible. With great sensitivity and new hermeneutical tools, contemporary interpreters of the biblical text derive insights from the sacred writings that are rich in meaning. They affirm that creation would find in man and woman its apex because in them the image of God is manifested. However, if on the one hand, the image of the Creator is present in both considered individually, then the text also demonstrates that the divine image would be most fulfilled in them taken as a couple, in which their call to the interpersonal communion of spousal form is actualized.

The second position is based on studies conducted by different disciplines on the differences between men and women. Biology, as well as neuroscience and psychology, have found structural differences between the two sexes. These differences do not change, albeit the incidence of variations introduced by cultural and temporal conditioning is recognized. The data thus obtained is solid and allows us to affirm the validity of sexual dualism: men and women are different and would act in different ways.

The third position, which goes by the name of “difference thought” (*pensiero della differenza*), may perhaps enjoy less public notoriety compared to the two previous positions, but has a more articulated anthropological view in its favor. Historically, this position is based on the thought of the French philosopher Luce Irigaray, and, thus, is placed in the context of a type of feminism, matured in thought. “Difference thought” responds to the project of elaborating an autonomous, symbolically rich feminine subjectivity. Women are different from men, and, therefore, can find original ways to give voice and expression to their difference.

The fourth position is the one that continues the Western ontological tradition, understood as a philosophical project that strives to know the fundamental constitution of every reality. This tradition, being in contact with the various currents that have renewed philosophy in the twentieth century (phenomenology, personalism, transcendental Thomism, dialectical philosophy, existentialism, hermeneutics), has widened the variety of its methods and sharpened its sensitivity. Hence, it has received among its tasks the research on the sexual condition of each person as an important manifestation of human existence. For this position, the sexual difference between man and woman is enlightened from two complementary perspectives: on the one hand, being a man or woman belongs to the essence of the human person; on the other hand, this essence reaches its fullness on the intersubjective level, when both meet.

Where do we, as a research group that plunges into the substance of these debates, stand in this panorama?

Our position falls within the second of the two general approaches. Contrary to what the extreme *Gender* theories maintain, we affirm that the difference between man and woman is real and well-founded, because it belongs to the essential constitution of each person. However, we recognize that *Gender* theories have some valuable elements, which we would not like to lose. In fact, remembering that each person walks freely upon a unique path, one has to be careful to avoid generalizations, stereotypes and easy affirmations of universally valid truths. Moreover, *Gender* theories are sensitive to diversity, i.e., to everything that marks the non-repeatability of the individual. Therefore, *Gender* theories rightly point out that sexuality implies a problem that reaches the level of the purpose and meaning of personal existence. Consequently, we affirm that the question of a person's sexual identity does not find an exhaustive solution when the biological sciences present the data of which they have come into possession, as a result of their research. There remains to be addressed all of the personal, intersubjective and existential dimension, which affects the comprehension of one's own sexuality.

Faced with the four positions existing within the second general approach, our preference is towards the fourth position, as long as it is clear that the question of sexual difference finds its answer in the entanglement of the ontological and intersubjective level, and that we don't see it as an alternative to the foundation found by biblical and theological reflection, which philosophy can accept and argue with using its own conceptual tools.

Still, we do not perceive this choice in favor of the fourth position as a choice *against* the other three. In fact, we are aware that, should we speak of a foundation of the difference between man and woman, the univocal term "foundation" becomes analogical: there are foundations of various types or, to put it more precisely, the foundation manifests itself in different ways, depending on the levels on which the research is conducted, and depending on the epistemological perspective at stake.

With regard to the biblical position, we appreciate above all the fact that exegesis places the difference between man and woman within an even broader design, capable of enlightening it with data no longer coming from the humanities. The ontological approach we practice believes it can grasp a solid foundation but knows how to navigate within *the mystery* of the human person and of the transcendence, towards which the person reaches out.

With regard to the second position, we know that the biological sciences and other related sciences have achieved results whose scientific validity has been proven beyond any doubt. However, as we are positioned at a philosophical level, we understand that the human being does not only exist as a biological and psychological reality. His condition as a person means that all the data on his psychophysical structure can be seen within a broader framework. We understand that this amplitude unfolds in two directions: towards an ontological foundation, and towards research on the personal meaning of the data made available by the humanities.

“Difference thought” has in its favor the fact that it has conducted its reflection on sexual difference at the level of the search for purpose: the woman has the task of “symbolizing” her difference; she must be able to “say” it in such a way as to find it significant and to be able to accept it deeply. From this, she derives the integration of her own femininity into the totality of her being. Here we find an important hermeneutical and existential work of great value. However, we think that the results achieved by “difference thought” lack an ontological foundation that is part of *human nature*. As will be stated later, this does not render the cultural and interpretative work superfluous, which the woman carries out in order to understand the meaning of her sexual condition.

## **Second part: the search for the roots of the difference**

### *Some context: the reflection on the person*

What is a man? And what is a woman? Where does their difference fit in? And what kind of difference is it? Those are the questions we have to reflect on now.

While the *denotation* of terms such as man (*homo*), human individual, person, or subject is one, i.e., all indicate what each of us is, their *meaning* is different.

The concept of “person” gives us the speculative framework within which we propose our answer. Any reflection on sexuality presupposes an anthropological vision that more or less explicitly outlines the structure, possibilities, and limitations of the type of living being we all are. Whoever studies human sexuality within the framework of the person, as opposed to the framework of the individual, or that of the postmodern subject, knows well that this choice is not without consequences.

In the case of the term “person” that we use, its full meaning implies, among other things, the elements we are about to present.

They have been chosen because they have to do with the “plurality” that resonates within the *person*.

- The person is a *totality*, albeit not of the atomic or monolithic type, and thus recognizes within himself the presence of multiple dimensions, such as historicity, intersubjectivity, and corporeity. However, none of these dimensions, on its own, is the person.
- The person is a *unity*, his multiple dimensions are unified because they have been raised to the rank of personal dimensions by the personal, subsisting spirit that constitutes the ontological nucleus of the person. When we think, for example, of the body, as such the body is placed on the biological level. However, when considered as a living body because of the spirit that animates the body, it becomes a human body, i.e., a personal body integrated into the unity of the person. In other words, there exists within the unique person “that which personalizes”, i.e., the human spirit, and “that which is personalized”.
- The person is a stable reality but not in such a way as to prevent him from being open to a becoming. Persons are persons, but they also become such, in the sense that the personal condition, if never lost, tends to be implemented in ways and degrees that are increasingly perfect, being ever closer to what is ordinarily considered a full and happy existence.
- The person must also be understood in the light of the relationship of mutual implication existing between relation to oneself and relation to others, which can be seen as the relationship between immanence and transcendence. We want to affirm that an analysis of what is “immanent”, such as that carried out by anatomy or neuroscience, cannot fully illuminate all the richness that constitutes the totality of personal life. Many elements and dimensions only come to light when we relate to the other by ourselves, which is the light of transcendence.
- We affirm that the person in the proper sense, i.e., the essential constituent of the person, although already present in the metaphysical structure of each person, discovers the scope of his full actualization and manifestation during the *encounter with another person*. Simply put, only in the encounter is the person accessible as a “who” and no longer as a “what” (an individual of human nature). Moreover, here we are not talking about any meeting, but about the so-called dialogical or interpersonal one, well described in the pages of authors such as Martin Buber and Romano Guardini. In the encounter, his personal specificity emerges: in it, the person reveals himself as an “I” thanks to the “you” who meets him. In other words, the transcendence of the person opens up to an interpersonal horizon that, alone, allows the person to mani-

fest his status fully. Not only is the person this way, but *he also knows it*, and *exercises it* in a practical way.

With these tools in mind, we can now address the central questions: Is the person different in the two genders, male and female? In which way? Does sexual difference directly affect the core of the person? Alternatively, should we think of this difference as something that concerns us only indirectly, perhaps because of the historical events capable of conditioning us, or of the freedom that lies at the root of our symbolic capacity?

### *Research on the ontological foundation of difference*

Western culture, as well as philosophy, asserts that man and woman both enjoy an untouchable human dignity. Philosophy has made it clear that dignity is grounded in the fact that both belong to the same ontological rank, and share the same way of existence that has been called “human nature” for more than twenty centuries. Rationality and freedom are other essential attributes of human nature which, like dignity, are shared by every man and woman.

The question then arises whether the basis of the difference between one and the other lies precisely on this level of shared human nature, or on a different level, which would be difficult not to be considered as secondary.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas, while following Aristotle, argued that the difference between man and woman could not concern the core of human nature, which he saw – using Aristotelian philosophical vocabulary – in the human essence, represented by the “form, which constitutes the species”<sup>3</sup>. The context behind that argument is the subject of different individuals participating in a single species, and the diversification of the species in individuals. The species, we are told, derived from the essential form, while the gender derived from materiality. He was careful to maintain the unity of the species, which in his opinion was subject to diversification into two species if a difference implying a contrariety such as that between the sexes were to affect it. He thought that the contrariety between male and female should not be located on the level of shared human nature, but on the level of the distinct bodily constitution of male and female.

A careful re-reading of his text and the present assumptions shows that this conclusion does not appear to be entirely necessary. However, Thomas

3. T. Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, book 10, lesson 11 (2131).

Aquinas' reflection has the merit of reaffirming the identity of the species, metaphysically anchored in the ontological form, from which the human essence derives. This identity helps us not to run into the perils of some contemporary authors who – by absolutizing the difference between man and woman, and by not recognizing some shared ontological frame such as that of human nature or the human species – destroy the theoretical foundation that allows us to explain their communication. That ontological frame must, therefore, be maintained, although it is necessary to overcome certain limitations present in the Aristotelian reflection that prevented us from theoretically understanding why the difference between man and woman should belong to the human essence.

Our position does not think of a human essence common to man and woman to which characteristics are *added*. The addition to the single human species of differences implying a contrariety, such as that of male and female, would prompt metaphysical reflection to postulate a diversification of the species. Moreover, it does not seem necessary to think about the difference between man and woman in the way of making an *addition* to the essence. It seems reasonably plausible that the human essence has in itself the sexual difference as something intrinsic, as we will state shortly.

There is another line of thought similar to that of Aristotle and Thomas. Proceeding with a higher sensitivity to the global unity of the person, it states that body and soul are both essential to constitute the ontological nucleus of the human being – nor are they ever separated from one another, except on the formal plane of philosophical reflection. It then postulates that sexuality becomes part of that ontological nucleus *because of the body*. Joined to the soul to form a single substance, the body would also cause the soul to be gendered. With these or similar arguments, this line of thought wants to affirm that the whole person, in the unity of body and soul, is man or woman.

We accept the final conclusion that was reached, but we find it difficult to support the premise that the soul, not having in itself a proper and original way of being male or female, should obtain it only because of its substantial union with the body. To reason according to the scheme, wherein only the body would be marked by sexual difference – a difference that it should somehow transmit to the soul because it originally lacks it – is an unsuccessful attempt. In fact, according to the criteria prescribed for the metaphysical reflection, following the coupled principles of act and potency, it is the principle of potency (in the actual species, the body) that receives its determinations from the principle of the act (the soul), and not inversely. It is not intelligible why or how a determination of the body, such as sexuality, could be “transmitted” to the soul.

A more solid approach is that indicated by Joseph de Finance, according to whom sexual difference «runs through the entire human being, from bottom to top (or perhaps rather from top to bottom), flesh and spirit»<sup>4</sup>.

This metaphor of the two-way movement, ascending and descending, indicates, in our opinion, two important things. First, the contribution of any of the two principles is not so much aimed at being transmitted to the other principle respectively, but rather to the person, whose totality is the result of the substantial union of the two principles. Here, however, this union is being understood as a reality open to growth, which consists in fully integrating into itself – on the existential level – the very principles that constitute it on the ontological level. Secondly, de Finance’s text suggests that both “the high” (the human soul or spirit) and “the low” (the flesh, the body) are originally masculine or feminine, and, therefore, both of them have a contribution to make to the sexual condition of the person.

The sexual condition of the body is the subject of study in various biological disciplines, the results of which are widely known. Not as simple to understand is the way the sexual condition of the human soul can be thought of. We find a plausible answer that has been affirmed in the field of philosophical personalism. It reflects on the fact that the human soul – in the realization of the gift of self to the other so as to achieve communion in love – has its specific way of manifesting the ultimate dynamism, which it carries inscribed within itself. The gift of self made by a woman, always being a “gift of self to the other”, is different from that made by a man. Both, as persons, are called to make that gift of self; but it is *the manner in which they give themselves as a gift* to the other that reveals the male or female character of living that self-giving.

To conclude the first stage of philosophical research, dedicated to shedding light on the ontological foundation of sexual difference, we can say that it is not placed at the margins of the essence of the person, neither is it added to it only later nor simply by means of one of the constituent elements of that essence. Sexual difference originally belongs to the essence of the person. One can say that the difference is something *pre-contained in it*<sup>5</sup>.

This assumption is not arbitrary, nor is it a choice merely for the sake of it. It is, philosophically speaking, a well-grounded conclusion. In fact, if

4. J. De Finance, *A tu per tu con l'altro*, PUG, Rome 2004, p. 20.

5. Here, we refer to the human species as a universal, which in existing individuals can never achieve all the perfections conceptually possible. The single individual must be either a man or a woman, but being a man or a woman are the two possibilities of the one human species.



the unity of human nature did not pre-contain these differences, then the two ways we discussed in the previous paragraphs would be opened up: either to affirm that sexuality, being distinguished on the basis of a masculine and feminine manner, does not belong to human nature; or to assert that this difference, originally not belonging to that nature, would be integrated into it, thereby causing its division.

### *Research on the realization of the sexual difference*

We must now start a second stage within the discussion since the ontological search for the foundation does not exhaust the philosophical search for sexual difference. The human person does not simply identify with his nature. The person is *of* human nature, which means that the concept of person is broader than that of human nature. This asymmetrical relationship translates into the fact that the human person *relates* to his nature, in the sense that he experiences it and tries to understand it in order to integrate it into himself. Though human nature denotes something very precise, it also announces an opening, which, by way of an indeterminacy, moves towards a goal of plenitude achievable only in a free and historical way.

When reflection is no longer concerned with the level of the principles that constitute the essence or nature of the human person, but instead on the fact that the person, in relation to his own nature, acts in a free manner and in search of his own plenitude, the philosophical instruments must be modified. Thus, a philosophical perspective is more suited, which takes into account the most important approaches of anthropological development of the twentieth century, such as phenomenology, personalism, existential thought, and dialogical philosophy. These currents are going to dominate the style of philosophical reflection that we will use in this second stage. They will help us to contemplate the person from his *ontological plenitude* in the light of its final cause<sup>6</sup>, while the study of the *ontological foundation* of the person – object of the first stage of this research – has been conducted mainly in the light of its formal cause.

Here then is the bridge that begins from the consideration of nature (*persona ut natura*) and extends towards the concrete experience, in which both, freedom and the symbolic capacity to give purpose to all of reality

6. We do not understand this plenitude in a metaphysical sense of finality (union with God in the afterlife) but instead in a temporal and intersubjective sense. The content of this second perspective will become more evident in the following paragraphs.

as well as the events happening along the path of life, are of great importance. Human nature, considered in itself, is still a principle of potency, realizing its full dynamism only when it comes into contact with the cultural and social element. In short, the nature that exists concretely, the one we all experience, is always a “nature affected by culture”. i.e., a nature that, besides being part of the structure of our being, has also been *understood, interpreted and integrated into our experience*, within a historical and social context.

That one’s human nature must be subject to these highly personal processes, in which it is difficult to indicate universal structures, is not equal to saying that the second stage of philosophical research on sexuality is the realm of relativism where any solution is equally valid, indicating that it was our *free and personal interpretation* of the meaning of the sexual condition, in which we find ourselves by nature. There are some points of reference that can guide the person who wants to question himself in a philosophically responsible way. Two of these reference points are of immediate importance for our reflection. Both stem from a reflection concerning finality. The first indicates that the search for the purpose of our nature, starting from the asymmetrical relationship between person and nature, aims at the growing integration of nature into the self. The self, being the psychological nucleus of the free act of the person, is called upon to interpret corporeity in order to make it his own, to *personalize it*. The second point of reference wants to indicate the context that touches closest the objective of discovering the meaning of one’s *corporeity*. Let us now reflect on this subject.

Note that we no longer speak of the “body”, but instead of “corporeity”, which is an indication of the change in philosophical perspective. Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology has captured well the difference between the two ways in which a person experiences his own body<sup>7</sup>. When understood as a human body placed in space and time, with a certain weight and figure, which can be studied by biology and anatomy, we speak of the “objective body” (*Körper*). If, on the other hand, the body is grasped as the dimension of the person, inseparable from him as his manifestation, then we speak of the “subjective body” (*Leib*) as studied by phenomenological philosophy.

The corporeity involves in different ways all the levels of the person: the biological differences detectable by science, the distinct manner in

7. This reflection is primarily developed in the third chapter of the second volume of *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913), and in the fifth chapter of the *Cartesian Meditations* (1931).

which man and woman stand before the generation of the new life, the characterological and psychological traits that are proper to a man or a woman within a given culture, the existential variants, i.e., the ways in which one and the other exist and coexist.

The person, as we said earlier, can more easily discover the meaning of his sexual corporeity in a context, which is given in the event of an encounter with another person. This event, in addition to vigorously appealing to freedom, brings into play the intersubjective transcendence, i.e., the fact that the potency, with which the person is endowed (and not only as an individual or as an instance of the species *homo*), is actualized when the very meeting of another person rises to reach the interpersonal level of the “I” and “you”. There the intersubjective transcendence is established and finds in it different degrees of actualization and intensity. The “I” comes to understand essential aspects of its own Self, such as its own sexual corporeity, only in virtue of the “you” that serves as a mirror and confirmation.

We affirm, therefore, that this encounter constitutes *the path towards the plenitude* (not the foundation!) of being a man and being a woman. This is the context in which we can reach an understanding of our sexual condition; not only on the level of the person’s immanent structures (research on the ontological foundation) but also on the level of the transcendent structures of intersubjectivity.

There are, in fact, some essential characteristics of being a man and being a woman that are discovered, understood and lived in a mature way only in the encounter with the other; understood as the person of the opposite sex. Where a man does not enjoy the presence of women throughout the years of his formation (first of all his mother, his sisters and female friends, then passing on to the woman with whom he wants to share his life), he will hardly discover the meaning of his male condition in its fullness. Naturally, the same applies in the case of the woman, who must discover and mature the sense of her femininity through an existential relationship with men.

In order to shed light on the merits of this way of understanding the sexual condition of man and woman, we can recall the principle according to which the person is a unity, i.e., a unity endowed with a multiplicity, which, far from putting the fundamental unity at risk, serves to manifest its dynamism and richness.

If, in the first stage devoted to the research on the foundation, multiplicity implied that the alternative between being a man and being a woman was pre-contained in being a person, then, in this second stage devoted to research on the development of the person at the relational level,

multiplicity appears differently. The encounters, which arise in the inter-subjective context, and because of which a man finds himself existentially being in a relationship with a woman, have always been known. They are those type of encounters, which allow him to pass through the following stages: son, brother, groom, husband, and father. These are the stages that precisely concern the differentiation of the male person. At the same time, they are stages that speak of a “relationship to the other”, to that counterpart who is the woman (mother, sister, friend, bride, wife, parent). The same applies, of course, to the female person. She also has to go through a series of encounters – with her father, her brother, her male friends and so forth – during which she will discover and will be able to understand the existential and interpersonal meaning of her being a woman.

These are always stages whose immanence and transcendence must be considered in order to understand well the meaning and novelties hidden in them.

Other theories envisage different ways to differentiate sexual maturity. For example, Freud’s way of theorizing about the psychosexual development in six stages is well known: oral, anal, phallic, oedipal, “latent” and, eventually, genital. We are inclined to favor the differentiation of the person in terms of the development that sees the person successively become son or daughter, brother or sister, husband or wife, and, eventually, as father or mother. It seems to us that this is a more complete vision than the one proposed by Freud. Because, regardless of the true value of his theory, it only takes into consideration the immanent perspective, i.e., the relationship of the person with himself. Moreover, it is doubtful that the Freudian proposal involves a real personal gain: It is difficult to identify on each stage a distinct moment capable of differentiating the person directly; in the sense of bringing him to a new threshold of strictly personal perfection. In our opinion, this is present in the differentiation proposed by us. We will go quickly through the stages.

- It is clear that a male human being cannot be a “son” without a father and a mother. Here, however, the consideration is not necessarily on a personal level: the generational relationship is sufficiently explained by the term *homo*. In other words, at least a male and a female of the species *homo* are required to generate a child. (Evidently, the intimate encounter of the two can and must be experienced on a personal level so that this act may reveal its full meaning.)
- It is equally clear that a male human individual cannot be a brother without other siblings. However, there might be other male individuals involved: one can know brotherhood without a sister.

- Instead, it is impossible for that male human individual to become a boyfriend if his girlfriend is missing; that he becomes a husband if the wife is missing; or that he becomes a father if the mother is missing. For a male person, these stages speak of a qualified transcendence in his relationship with the female person. One that seems indispensable if the male person must reach those categories, which speak of ways of personal plenitude. (It is true that there is a difference between “generating a child” and “becoming a father”. However, it is evident that only in the second case are we faced with the full phenomenon, i.e., the fact that realities are lived and interpreted on a personal level.)

There, we find important traits and qualities of the male person, both, on the level of immanence (self-knowledge, identity and psychology), as well as on the level of transcendence (the manner of acting, posing in front of others and the way of realizing the gift of self, which is essential for the person). These cannot be acquired, except through an encounter with a female person. To this end, for a male person, other males would not suffice. There must be an encounter with the female person, or rather, with one of them in particular, to allow a particular male person to reach his plenitude as a male person. The same applies to the female person. There are certain things that only a woman can “teach” to a man (a mother to her son, a sister to her brother, a “girl” to her “boyfriend”, a wife to her husband, a mother to the father). Just as there are other things, only a man can “teach” to a woman (a father to a daughter, and so forth). These are, of course, lessons concerning one’s identity, the meaning of one’s sexual condition, and the differences with regard to people of the opposite sex. At each encounter, there arises the opportunity to understand and assimilate one’s own difference; to ask oneself how to realize it; to discover its meaning, and to make it one’s own deliberately.

Freedom and interpretation do not act in a vacuum, and, thus, do not risk navigating in the absence of real data, which is subject to interpretation. The interpersonal level, in which the person seeks his plenitude, is the level in which the Self appears as an “I-am-a-man-thanks-to-you-woman”, and vice versa. That is, in addition to the fact of *being* a male or female person (ontological level), *knowing oneself to be* a male or female person matters (interpersonal level of the encounter). It appears, therefore, that a male or female person exists as such, yet in another sense, they may also become such.

Man and woman do not only indicate the reality of nature, an ontological datum. They indicate much more: we are looking at individuals who have *understood the meaning* of their sexual being, and who have welcomed it in the right way. If understood in the most elevated manner,

*man* and *woman* are the successful synthesis of a natural element and a free, cultural process of research and assumption of meaning. If a process then is mainly entrusted to freedom and understanding, if this process takes place in very alternating cultural conditions, then there is also the risk of seeing situations of both, partial and profound failure.

To arrive at being “man” or “woman” completely is, as we have tried to show, like reaching a summit. Thus, *de jure* we say, all human beings can reach that peak. *De facto*, however, not everyone will. Below that summit, there are many intermediate points, ever closer to the base, where the clarity of being a man or woman becomes foggy and indistinct.

We want to present three concise formulas to capture the result of the previous reflections:

- The plenitude of being a man is conditioned directly by the encounter with the woman, and inversely.
- One fully becomes a man only thanks to women, and women fully become women because of men.
- To be a woman means to exist in reference to a man, and to be a man means to exist in reference to a woman.

We think that the strength of this explanation lies in the fact that it manages to grasp the root of the metaphysical difference (male or female human nature), and to integrate it with its plenitude on the interpersonal level, all in the light of the single concept of the “person”.

### *Concluding considerations*

Are we interpreting “differences in gender” as complementary, or just as differences, with this proposal? How are these concepts articulated? We would say that we have to admit that the concept of “complementarity” is imprecise. This polysemy certainly does not facilitate the correct understanding of the way in which gender differences are invited to become a gift for each other. There is an apparent complementarity between the male and the female individual on the corporeal level. However, this complementarity, which serves the purpose of procreation, belongs in itself only to the semantic held of the concept of *homo*: for procreation, we necessarily need, a male and a female of the species *homo*.

If, on the other hand, we are to think of complementarity on a strictly personal level, it is better to speak of “reciprocal complementarity”. We must understand that the human individual, even though he indicates something complete and perfect (plenitude of nature: human nature exists within the unity of this individual), he also reveals something open and

incomplete: openness to the interpersonal level. In this way, access is opened to a more elevated type of unity: indeed, to the interpersonal unity, in which both individuals participate, and from which they benefit. This interpersonal unity, which indicates the primary and most important sense of “complementarity”, possesses new specific characteristics that do not belong to the individuals who compose it, if considered individually. If we accept to look at man and woman from their reciprocal, interpersonal complementarity, we are looking at them in the light of a new kind of unity, a very specific unity, which they constitute when they accept to encounter each other precisely as the person they are, thereby underlining that the encounter involves giving and receiving. They give something that the other does not possess, and they receive from the other something that they lack in themselves.

One could ask whether not the way, in which we propose to think about the difference between man and woman, may run the risk of “fixating on” a model: some unique way of being a man and being a woman. One, which does not take into account all the significant differences that can be found out there as soon as one considers the variety of existing modes – depending on the times and cultures – of being a man and a woman. In this regard, we can answer in the following way: Whether we think of the Chinese man or the Western European man, the African man or the Nordic man, the medieval man or the present man, one understands that all these and other similar differences indicate ways that do not differentiate the core of what we have identified to be the key to understanding the difference between man and woman. In every culture, in every time, some modes of relationship between a man and a woman have been envisaged, allowing them to become such in plenitude: different from each other. Cultures don’t present a univocal paradigm but neither do they present an equivocal one.

A third question that could be asked is this: Does it not seem arbitrary to reduce the types, in which the concept of person is diversified, to only two? Why only a male person and a female person? Is there no room for other modalities? In this regard, we want to point out that any “other modalities” are, in fact, no true differentiation of the person in terms of gender differences. There are only two real differentiations: man and woman. This is understood by reflecting on the fact that man and woman are a relationship with specific properties that concern the person directly. It is enough to highlight one: The relationship between man and woman is the only dyadic or binary relationship, which, through itself, leads to a ternary relationship, i.e., a relationship of type “being-the-son’s-father-because-of-the-mother”, and “being-the-son’s-mother-because-of-the-

father”. Only the relationship, in which the two extremes are the male person and the female person, is open to such transformation.

A human individual can enter all kinds of – economic, cultural, sports-related, and friendly – relationships. It is clear that such relationships involve significant benefits and improvements for his proper being. It is equally clear that the person participates as a male person or as a female person. However, it should also be evident that the concept of person is only qualified and not differentiated in such cases! We do not use “sporting person” and “unsportsmanlike person” in the same way as we use “male person” and “female person”. In the former case, and similar ones for that matter, we deal with *accidental* qualities of the person.

Finally, it is not said that a friendship between two people of the same sex (or those who say they do not belong to either of the two essential modes) could not be of value or enriching. However, we are on the level of friendship, of collaboration, and not on that, which constitutes the male or female person. Moreover, for all the reasons presented, relationships, which are not between a man and a woman, do not generate the kind of perfection that only a relationship between a man and a woman can generate.

The reciprocal complementarity, which is created between man and woman, has different characteristics from those formed through the encounter of two homosexual people, even if it was not one of an erotic nature but instead for coexistence and mutual support. One may think of it this way: the encounter between man and woman causes, as we have already said, that the person makes a mature transition to seeing himself as the “boy of this girl”, or “promised spouse of this fiancée”, or “husband of this wife”, or, eventually, as the father of this child, who is also the son of this particular mother. This rite of passage, essential for the maturity of the male and female person, is beyond reach for the homosexual couple.



# Body and Person in the Biblical Tradition

Laura C. Paladino

**Abstract:** *This article lays out the question of the sexed body and the current issues pertaining to it. It frames its research in biblical terms which are the base of Judeo-Christian tradition and of European and western culture. The methodology is exegetical. It begins by analyzing the diverse ancient versions of the sacred texts that bear witness to it not only as a book of faith but also as a cultural document. This enables us to understand its message with regards to the great human questions in a fruitful dialogue with contemporary thought and with reference to the philosophical works that address those questions in a non-faith-based context (gender theories, difference theories). In addition to this, we make linguistic and philological observations about the biblical text and several in-depth studies about important and exemplary passages that touch upon our topics: the body as the place of limitations, the encounter of salvation, the symbolism of the sexed body, the meaning of vulnerability, the icon of motherhood, the body and its institutional and public dimension.*

## Introduction

The issue of the body, gender, and sexual difference is a hot topic in the times we live in. It is directly connected to the questions of life and the person, requiring particular attention in the contemporary world, in which different complex instances lead us to examine – even from a transcendent point of view – the signs of the times, so as to offer – each with his own specific competence – ideas for reaching the ultimate truth of the human being. This truth cannot be separated from the recognition and flourishing of our own corporeal and sexual dimension.

The reflection I am going to develop here is aimed at presenting the question of sexual corporeity, and the very topical issues related to it<sup>1</sup>. By framing them within the biblical sense, which is the foundation of the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as of European and Western culture, the reflection offers interesting interpretations with regard to the profound challenges that concern the human person and his life – private and public, social and economic<sup>2</sup>.

The person, as becomes evident from the biblical texts, has an intimately relational dimension. Biblical anthropology always aims to exalt this aspect, as well as the characteristics of “humanity” as a whole, with the profound corporeal and spiritual unity that sets it apart. The exaltation of the human being is so central in the biblical text, precisely because its likeness to God is declared since the first pages. The sexual difference, as described in the biblical texts, is understood specifically as the supreme expression of the image of God: In being a fertile creature capable of relationship, and in assuming the role of father and mother responsibly, man reveals and manifests to creation his vocation to be “in the image and likeness of God”<sup>3</sup>, a real sign of the His presence in the world. This has enormous ennobling value and justifies the highest respect, which the Jewish understanding attributes to human life in all its phases and under all conditions, declaring illegal any act that threatens the existence of a person or diminishes his dignity.

## Specification of the method

The approach that I will follow is that of the exegesis, which starts from the analysis of the different ancient versions of the sacred text, understood not only as a book of faith but also as a cultural document, so as to

1. I am referring specifically to the great themes of sexual difference, life, generativity, the issue of gender. Regarding this subject, I also refer to my recent contribution – along with the extensive bibliography contained therein: L.C. Paladino, «A immagine di Dio lo creò, maschio e femmina li creò. E disse: siate fecondi e moltiplicatevi» (*Gen 1:27-28*): sessualità, sponsalità, generatività nella sensibilità biblica, in *Temi scelti di Bioetica*, Naples 2015, pp. 63-82. In the course of the present study, I will refer back to various themes treated in that paper, without going into more detail here, as they have already been examined there.

2. The biblical text, which we will be able to explore in more depth, is not just a religious, but also a cultural code of the utmost value: It responds in an impressive modern manner to any question that has social, civil or philosophical relevance. With regards to the economic theme, for instance, as well as social justice, a theme, which is different from the problems that are subject to the present study, please refer to what I argued in L.C. Paladino, “Prendersi cura dell’uomo tutto intero: vita economica e mercato nella sensibilità biblica”, in L. Manca, L. Cucurachi (ed.), *Il mercato giusto. Per umanizzare l’economia*, Lecce, Italy 2016, pp. 147-183.

3. *Gen 1:26-27*.

understand the messages that it preserves with regard to the great themes of the human being. All that in the profound awareness that it actually has something to say to the man of today: the reason for the profound relevance of the “Book of books” lies not just in its sacredness – which can be acknowledged only in a context of faith – but also in the anthropology it conveys, which goes beyond the aspects of spiritual adherence, and always manifests the highest truth.

The textual and intertextual study of the biblical books makes it possible to clarify how they are documents deeply rooted in the cultural and social context of the West: The Greek translations, which date back to the third century b.C., have been widely spread and have contributed to the formation of a cultural sensitivity and a conceptual and perfect koine, which is the true fulcrum of the Western tradition. The biblical text has been conveyed to our world with the same language that has transmitted the great achievements of Greek philosophy and more generally of classicality, the foundation of the culture that characterizes us, and an expression of a very precocious wisdom and faith, identifying fundamental issues concerning the truth of man. In its twofold dimension – contingent and transcendent – the Bible provides essential tools and suggestions for these issues and offers to all – believers and non-believers – fundamental insights for reflection and exploration to locate, from time to time, elaborate answers to questions that pose themselves to people of today. I consider such an in-depth study to be fundamental for anyone who is motivated by the principles of good, beauty and truth<sup>4</sup>, and who wishes to make them a reality for all people; aware of the fact that «freedom is not and cannot be founded on the relativistic idea that all conceptions of what is good for man have the same truth and the same value, but rather on the reality that civil activities aim – from time to time – at the extremely concrete realization of the true human and social good in a well-defined historical, geographical, economic, technological and cultural context»<sup>5</sup>.

The novelty of applying this approach to philosophical questions is evident: In our world – which defines itself as being pluralist but confuses

4. In the biblical sense and language, these principles are deeply and closely linked, and contribute to providing a unified image of what is valid in the world. Good is beautiful, good is true, beautiful is true: the adjective *toiv*, good, which recurs from the first pages of the Bible (see the entire account of Creation, in *Gen 1* summarizes these concepts and provides the conceptual level.

5. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, II, 3.

pluralism with relativism<sup>6</sup> – there is definitely a lack of attention for biblical, anthropological interpretation, which restores in man his profound and highest dignity. There is no approach to the biblical text comparable to the traditional reading that would allow us to understand it as a fundamental cultural code, thereby restoring its objective value as an expression, first, of culture and anthropology, rather than of faith and religion. Such is the dimension pursued here. This objective will be achieved with a focus on a specific theme: body, gender, and sexual difference. The various philosophical interpretations of this theme, expressions of different, and sometimes opposing, cultural positions, come to different conclusions. However, some of them – specifically those relating to the articulation of sexual difference, which characterized much of the feminism of the second half of the twentieth century and continues to characterize significant fringes of female philosophy – significantly draw from the models and conceptual repertoire offered by the Bible, as well as the anthropology that emerges from the sacred texts of Judaism and Christianity, and Christian symbolism, to carry out some of their most innovative reflections. While examining the female figures central to the faith of Jesus – first among them, the figure of the Virgin and Mother Mary – they often arrived at interpretations not far from the revelations of faith<sup>7</sup>. Through these reflec-

6. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life, II, 2.

7. Here, I refer to the reflections on the mother-daughter relationship conducted by Luce Irigaray, which also recall images linked to Christian culture, such as those relating to the apocryphal tradition that deepens the figure of Anna, Mary's mother, and the relationship between the two women before the birth of Jesus: L. Irigaray, *Ethique de la différence sexuelle*, Minuit, Paris 1985 (Italian translation by Luisa Muraro and Antonella Leoni, *Etica della differenza sessuale*, Milan 1985). The references to the sources of Scripture can be traced back to the apocryphal books of the New Testament, and in particular to the Proto-Gospel of James and the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, who were attentive to the facts preceding the accounts handed down from the canonical Gospels and to the lives of Jesus' parents and grandparents. See M. Craveri, *I vangeli apocrifi*, Einaudi, Turin 1969. On the subject under examination, see also L. Irigaray, *Essere due*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin 1994, where the author insists on the value of what she defines as "chaste intention", understood as the possibility of preserving the feminine and "reserving oneself", as a woman, "to preserve in oneself a space available for the other, which allows respect and the generation, which pushes to be born and to be reborn" (*ibid.*, p. 240). This is an aspect of the feminine explicitly found in the biblical tradition, and the anthropology it conveys. The figure of Mary, and the dimension of her generative virginity, exalting her femininity and – according to the author's reflection – guiding the mother of Jesus to become a supreme model, is further explored in L. Irigaray, *Il mistero di Maria*, Paoline, Milan 2010. Here we underline the feminine specificity of making room for the other, for God, and the transcendent dimension of motherhood, whether incarnate or spiritual. This is a theme, which will still be addressed in feminist literature that is attentive to the articulation of sexual difference, with accents and conclusions not unlike those expressed in the

tions, the Bible reveals itself once again to be a source of useful recommendations for the lay world in our time, and in a world with which Christian thought is called to dialogue with renewed capacities to listen and welcome. The biblical text, considered rather as a major cultural code before its religious or spiritual aspect, can be suggested in philosophical terms as an epistemological instrument of use to complement an anthropological framework that seeks the true fullness of the human being.

### ***Bašar e geviâ: The body and the flesh – the manifestation of God***

There is a preliminary suggestion that the Bible transmits about the bodily dimension that characterizes us: the flesh of man really is, according to the sacred texts, the manifestation of something that transcends it. The Hebrew term for flesh, *bašar*, can be found for the first time with regards to man and woman in *Gen 2:24*. About them, it says that, once they have left their father and mother and joined together in matrimony, they are “*bašar ehad*”, one flesh. It is worth noting that the definition uses the numeral *ehad*, meaning only one, which in the Bible describes the uniqueness of God<sup>8</sup>, as well as the noun *bašar*, flesh, which derives from a very interesting root, since it also produces a verb whose precise meaning is “to manifest, to reveal”. The flesh of man, thus, according to the Bible is a manifestation of God. And specifically, the unity of man and woman, sanctified and consecrated by God himself in Eden before sin, is a manifestation of God, the one God of Israel. The two then are in the world “a unitary manifestation” of something that transcends them, an image of the triune uniqueness of God Himself, and therefore intimately relational. In this dimension, the body of a man – in its masculine and feminine declination – is a sacrament of relationship: Through the image of the relationship between male and female, man and woman, the body reveals both, the relationship between the divine Persons,

biblical sense, to which, later on, we will have the opportunity to refer with greater precision: see, in particular, the works of L. Muraro, *Le amiche di Dio. Margherita e le altre*, Orthotes Editrice, Naples 2014; *Il Dio delle donne*, II Margine, Trento 2012; L. Muraro, A. Sbrogio, *Il posto vuoto di Dio*, Marietti, Genoa-Milan 2006. There, we will observe the development, defined by the author herself as “theology in the mother tongue”. It is precisely the centrality of the generative dimension and the importance given to motherhood that prompts Muraro to strongly condemn the practice of the gestation on behalf of others, as attested in her recent essay: L. Muraro, *L'anima del corpo. Contro l'utero in affitto*, La Scuola, Brescia 2016. For more on all these aspects see below.

8. See, for instance, *Deut 6:4*: Hear, O Israel! the Lord is our God, the Lord is one (ehad).

and that between the body and the soul. This explains why, before original sin, the two are naked and have no shame at all (*Gen* 2:25): The body before the fall is an instrument of sharing and positive unity, and not the instrument of domination, exploitation, and sin that it will develop into after the fall, with all the subsequent consequences. The Greek translation of the Hebrew term *bašar* is ordinarily *sarx*, which properly defines the flesh: this term is significantly attested in *Jn* 1:14, where it refers to Christ, the visible manifestation of God: «And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth».

The theological meaning of this verse – even with respect to the meaning of the body and its epiphanic function, as well as a manifestation of a transcendent reality – is evidenced by the use of verbs related to sight and the theme of truth. Alternatively, in the Greek versions of the Bible, corresponding to *bašar* in Hebrew, we trace the word *soma*, which in Greek describes the body in its most material dimension, and which – with the root from which it descends – explicitly refers to the need to preserve it in order to save the very life of the person<sup>9</sup>. The noun is attested as much in the New Testament as it is in the Old Testament, and in the latter, when it occurs, is used to denote both the noun *bašar* and, in its very rare attestations, the Hebrew word *geviâ*<sup>10</sup>. Specifically in the Semitic equivalent, reference is made to the more material aspect of the bodily dimension, as the term also indicates the dead body, the corpse, and its root is directly connected with the Hebrew noun *goi*, which properly means people, nation, and which is found used in the Bible, usually in the plural, also to describe pagan populations<sup>11</sup>. Thus, in the etymological sense, the

9. The verb *sozo*, being one of the roots of the noun *soma*, means to save, to preserve.

10. The noun recurs a total of only eleven times throughout the Old Testament, and in almost all occurrences it is rendered with the Greek word *soma*; see, specifically, *Gen* 47:18; *ISam* 31:10-12, *Neh* 9:37, *Nah* 3:3, *Ezek* 1:11.23, and *Dan* 10:6. In the last two attestations, reference is made to the body of supernatural figures that appeared in visions.

11. See in this regard the different occurrences in the Old Testament, and in particular, e.g., *Gen* 15:14; *Lev* 18:24-28, 20-23; *Num* 24:8; *Deut* 4:27. It should be pointed out, however, that the term does not originally have a negative value, but is neutral, and describes in *Genesis*, the distinct descendants in peoples: so it is found the day after the flood, to describe the nations generated by Japheth, Cam and Sem, the sons of Noah (*Gen* 10:5-20, 31-32), or the nation promised by God as descendants to Abraham (*Gen* 12:2; *Gen* 17), Isaac (*Gen* 26:4) and Jacob (*Gen* 35:11). The noun *goi* is also found in *Exod* 19:6, *Deut* 4:6 to describe the holy nation of Israel. Note, however, that according to *Gen* 18:18 and 22:18, in Abraham, all the *goims* of the earth will be blessed. Thus, originally there is no value judgment in the term, and indeed Abraham's vocation and blessing are understood as universal, extended to all peoples of the world and all men, through the blessing, preservation, and transmission of life in the body.

body is both, the foundation of the descendants and constitution of entire populations<sup>12</sup>, but also – with its dimension more connected with hopeless mortality – subject to vulnerability, and even to that which comes from sin. As such it may find itself directly connected with the absence of salvation and paganism. To this vulnerable, exposed condition, which allows both the transmission and preservation of life, the Bible explicitly assigns the sense of being both, already and not yet. It recognizes a prophetic valence, to make it rise as a manifestation of the power of God: in this way *geviâ* is also *bašar*; the flesh, *sarx*, manifests transcendence, and in this sense – being *soma* – symbolizes salvation. Our carnal dimension, according to the Bible – even if exposed to sin – is originally and ontologically a manifestation of God: This allows us to understand the fulfillment of the revelation in Christ, which is realized in his taking on mortal flesh, and by manifesting to us – in his body and his person – the very image of the Father<sup>13</sup>.

### **The body in the biblical sense: The space of limitation, the condition of the encounter and of salvation**

Already from these first linguistic clarifications, it becomes clear how the biblical sense – together with the anthropology it conveys – gives us a threefold suggestion regarding the subject of the body, which, as I maintain, represents one of the most formidable conceptual problems to reflect upon: In the Bible, the body is understood as a condition, an encounter, and as salvation. The body is the space of limitation, space of the encounter, and the space of the sacred. This, in light of the biblical sense, is the ontological dimension of the body. It is what the body says by being as it is. Again, in the biblical sense, this is the truth about the body and, particularly, of the body of man. Put together, we have a description of the richness and complexity of the human person and his being in existence.

We exist in the body, we are in the body, and our body tells us what we lack and what we are not: the body – in being sexual, in being finite,

12. In the biblical sense, this aspect is guaranteed above all by the body of the mother. It explains the etymological parallel that exists in Hebrew between the generation and construction of houses and cities, in which the descendants live, and the importance of the feminine for the preservation of the chosen ethnic group. Regarding those questions, which I have had the opportunity to examine in greater depth, I refer to the contributions already mentioned above.

13. *John* 1:18: No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side, has revealed him.

and in being destined for death – is, in the biblical sense, the space of limitation. It is indeed a limitation to be assumed, and not to be exceeded. The meaning and the acceptance of limitation is part of what makes us human beings. Based on this realization, classical culture invited us to avoid the hubris – the claim to go beyond human limitations of becoming or the claim to be what we are not. In ancient tradition, when this occurs, it causes an imbalance and inevitable damage to man, who thereby attracts “the envy of the gods”. The myth of the androgynous, or of the spherical men, narrated by Plato in the *Symposium*<sup>14</sup>, which imagines man originally being created as an indistinct whole, and which sees in sexual separation (from the Latin *seco*: to cut) a punishment and a sentence of man, describes a horizon, on which this limitation that the body represents is neither interpreted in its sapiential dimension nor in its meaning of longing for the encounter or of a promise of salvation, but rather as a shame to be overcome. The myth of the androgynous is intriguing because it can offer us conceptual coordinates to understand how the rejection of the natural body and the primal dimension of sexual birth are handled today. Already in this mythological anecdote of Greek origin, the body is understood as natural conditioning that operates on the person. One must free oneself from it, to return to that indistinct unity, which the spherical creatures, once cut in half, frighteningly yearned for; but which, were it achieved again, inevitably led to their death. The text of the *Symposium* warns: «once the desire has been satisfied, having nothing more to desire, they die». Consequently, according to a Platonic interpretation, the longing for unity, which is a profoundly human longing – if separated from the acceptance of limitation that the body, in its natural condition, imposes – is destined to fail and to produce suffering instead of realization and plenitude.

What we see today in relation to this subject is, in particular, the desire to extend freedom to the natural aspect as well. One wishes to choose that, which, of course, one cannot choose; and in this desire, a sort of crisis of the very concept of freedom manifests itself<sup>15</sup>. One wishes to choose and decide freely about life; for example, about one’s own life, and that of another; because all the modern reflections on euthanasia and abortion relegate to the background the – albeit valid – reflection, according to

14. Plato, *Symposium*, 189e-191d.

15. The crisis of the family – within which the aspects we are examining here are usually cultivated and protected – is directly linked to the crisis of the concept of freedom. The very idea of making a decision “for one’s whole life” is rejected because it is rather understood as a limitation of freedom than a fulfillment and way to fullness of responsibility, donation, and love.



which each one is in the world not by his own choice, but by someone else's free choice of love<sup>16</sup>. And where natural conditioning of the biological sex is understood as a limitation of rights and freedom, one wishes to choose one's own sex, which one wishes to modify freely. Thus, in the contemporary world, there exists a real problem with embracing the dimension of nature as an expression of truth, and with recognizing in it a course that cannot be chosen in its own right, but only in the way in which it is accepted and made to flourish. In the biblical sense, the body is instead a beneficial limitation, which must not be overcome in solitude and self-sufficiency. On the contrary, this limitation remains unchallenged and becomes a necessary condition for the encounter and for salvation: the body is the space of encounter and salvation; the body is the condition, in which the encounter takes place; the body is the condition, in which salvation takes place. The body is the condition that allows man – male and female – to be in the image and likeness of God: a creature that is ontologically made to be in a relationship of love, in a condition of limitation and mutual complementarity to one another. This, in turn, summons and manifests – precisely in this condition of limitation and mutual complementarity – the possibility of completeness and totality. According to the Bible, in the end, man – male and female – realizes within himself and in his ability to relate to others – as described by the very limitations and conditions indicated by the body – the same relational dimension that characterizes the God of Israel, and which manifests itself in numerous biblical contexts: the prediction of the Trinitarian doctrine that was going to be institutionalized by Christianity.

### **The body as the space of encounter: The three fundamental relationships of the human being in the account of Genesis, and the bodily dimension of original sin**

Hence, far from being a sentence to rebel against or to reject, the body is a liberating dimension, which is to be accepted and made to flourish: In this way, unity is composed by the openness to an encounter that leads to

16. This otherness, in biblical tradition, is twofold. First, there is the otherness of the parents, who come before and render possible the existence of the child. Then, there is the otherness of God, the creator, which is realized through the collaboration of the parents, and which communicates to them – through persisting life – a true and explicit blessing. For these aspects I refer to L.C. Paladino, “Dal creato all'uomo, dall'uomo alla storia: la benedizione nei racconti biblici”, *Coscienza*, 4-5, 2014, pp. 37-46; see also L.C. Paladino, *Dire bene di Dio, dire bene dell'uomo: le preghiere di benedizione nel Pentateuco e nei libri storici dell'Antico Testamento. Un confronto tra le versioni antiche* (TM - LXX), Arte Tipografica, Naples 2012.

plenitude. This encounter takes place in the body and is of triadic nature in the biblical sense: the encounter with the world, with someone other than oneself (another woman, another man), and with God. It is the encounter that allows man to recognize and let flourish his creaturehood – a dimension of limitation, beneficial and redeeming in itself, because it is the expression and effect of God's love. The same linguistic and etymological declination of biblical Hebrew summons, through words, the dimension of the encounter, which the corporeity of man allows us to achieve: The encounter with the world takes place in the body of the *'adam*; with the *'adamâ*, of which the *'adam* is made. And in this way, the body establishes for the *'adam* the condition of the encounter with the world, which – without the body – could not be achieved at all. Similarly, in the body of the *'adam*, the encounter between man and woman takes place. From this encounter, the difference between *iš* and *išâ* is derived: man and woman, and no longer just *zacar-neqebâ* – male and female – as it was the case for all other living animal species. As such they are identical in nature – different, but of the same kind – and both derived from the identity of the *'adam*, which representationally describes the unity of human nature. The body of the *'adam* is the place from which *išâ* is derived; and without the body of the *'adam*, *išâ* would not be generated: Corporeity is therefore also the condition of the encounter between man and woman. Ultimately, in the body of the *'adam* – through the incarnation of Christ – the encounter with God takes place, who has taken a male body (rather than an indistinct body or a body comprising the totality of the differences), and who thus has accepted not only the limitation of the body (He who is God), but also the limitation of a sexed body.

Biblical tradition sees human beings as being created – from the beginning – with a body<sup>17</sup>, as well as being created – also from the beginning – with this benevolent limitation of a sexed body, including its salvific condition. The biblical sense does not interpret this limitation in a negative way, but rather assigns to the body as well as promises in the body the salvation of man: In the biblical account, original sin is, substantially, the overcoming of a limitation designated by God as salvific and leads to an immediate reorganization of the potentialities that the body in its condition of benevolent limitation offers to man. In fact, after sin, the triadic encounter that the body allows for is threatened instantly: man and woman hide in the garden, enslaving the world, which they were supposed

17. *Gen* 1:27, with explicit reference to the sexual dimension of the male and the female, clearly presupposes corporeity; reiterated in *Gen* 2:7, where the *'adam* is created from the dust of the earth.

to guard<sup>18</sup>, and thereby breaking their good relationship with it; man and woman cover each other because they are naked. They defend themselves, accusing each other. Thus, the body changes from being a place of encounter – in which the original nudity was understood, even in its ontological vulnerability, as openness and mutual availability<sup>19</sup> – into a place of distrust, confrontation, violence, murder for personal gain, selfishness and existential solitude, all because of a malice which in the biblical sense is instilled by sin and considered to be something not original to the human person. In this way, the body becomes the place where discrimination and pain are produced. Think of all situations of physical exploitation, prostitution, pornography, and physical mutilation; think of abortions, murders, and everything that offends the body because it no longer recognizes it as a space of encounter, but rather exclusively as a space of confrontation and mistrust. Even the gender discourse – while arriving at conclusions other than those of biblical anthropology – emphasizes the danger that the body with its ontological vulnerability lends itself to by being a place of violence<sup>20</sup>. This is an important aspect, which also has a theological flavor in the tradition of writing, and one we will have the opportunity to return to. For now, it is sufficient to emphasize how vulnerability in the original sense of biblical wisdom, the expression of creaturehood: that, which characterizes all of creation, has been entrusted to the care of the “*adam*” as constituted by God, his Lord and Guardian; and reciprocally, through the human person, it has been entrusted to the man and the woman, so that they may know how to guard and appreciate it, recognizing the transcendence hidden in what is human. From the outset, the Bible emphasizes the sacred dimension of the body, which makes it the place of God’s presence: Not only the body of man, as we have seen, is literally a manifestation of God. It is explicitly, even linguistically, connected with sacredness; and specifically with the sacred dwelling of the Most High, in so far as it directly refers to the temple of Jerusalem – as is attested by the term *šela*’, which in Hebrew defines that part of the body of the ‘*adam*, which, according to the account of *Gen 2:21*, is used by God for the formation of the *išâ*. It is a noun used with caution in the Old Testament, where it occurs only 50 times. With reference to the human body, it properly defines the side, the hip, the most important and significant part because it

18. See *Gen 2:15*.

19. *Gen 2:25*.

20. Judith Butler’s recent reflections on the vulnerability of the body and the duty to protect it – so that it does not open up to the dissolution of life (see *infra* sources) – are interesting in this regard, and point to a valid way of dialogue.

is particularly strong. It is a sacred part of the human body: In *Gen* 32:32, Jacob limped because of his hip, after having met God, in the likeness of a man, and having fought with him. In this condition, the presence of God is manifested to the patriarch, who, following that episode, changes his name and becomes eponym of the people of Israel. He has never been the same again after his encounter with God<sup>21</sup>. With regard to the sacredness of the body, it is of great interest that the term *šela'* is yet again used in chapters 25 and 26 of the book of Exodus, where it defines the sides of the ark of the covenant, the dwelling place of God, as well as in *1 Kings* 6, where it describes the walls of the temple, which support its architecture. In Jewish theology, therefore, it refers to the holy place par excellence – first, the ark of the covenant, then the temple – while Christian theology identifies a correlation between the rib of the *'adam* and the side of the body of Christ – the new temple and place of the second covenant<sup>22</sup> – the space of ultimate generation and construction of life and man: Just as from the rib of the *'adam*, the *išâ* is born, the bride to the *iš* and mother of the living, so from the side of Christ, the new *'adam*, is born the Church, the bride of Christ and mother of the faithful. Thus, the Bible emphasizes most clearly the sacredness of the human body, the temple of God<sup>23</sup>. It is the place where his presence can be contemplated, and which is made in his image and chosen by him to manifest his own image in the Son, through the mystery of the Incarnation, constituting the deepest encounter of divinity with humanity: this sacredness, this symbolic dimension that refers to transcendence; this prophecy of fulfillment, which is man's body destined for endless life, is the center of biblical anthropology, and remains the foundation even after sin, which caused the rupture of the third relationship, that with God. In *Gen* 3, in the aftermath of the fall, the man and the

21. The change of name also has theological meaning: In the Bible, it characterizes all those who meet God and are invested in a specific mission (See, e.g., the vocation of Abraham, *Gen* 17:5; that of Sarai, *Gen* 17:15; that of Simon, who becomes Peter, *Matt* 16:18). The encounter with God changes people, profoundly altering their identity, making them new people.

22. See the pericope of *John* 2:13-22, where Jesus – in the context of the expulsion of the vendors from the temple of Jerusalem – defines his body as *naòn* (temple), and predicts his own glorious resurrection. The episode is also noted elsewhere in the New Testament, when – according to Matthew's Gospel, *Matt* 26:61 – this moment is recalled during the course of Jesus' trial, where the verb used by the false witnesses is a more concrete verb linked to construction and edification. As for the generating function of Christ's sacrifice, from which the Church is born, see the reference contained in *John* 19:33-34: the outflow of blood and water from the side of Jesus, which follows the wounding by a soldier; when he is already dead but still on the cross.

23. The theme is reiterated in the Pauline exegesis. See, e.g., *1 Cor* 3:16-17; *2 Cor* 6:16, which revisits *Lev* 26:11-12; *Eph* 2:20-22.

woman, after shielding themselves from the world and each other, hide and protect themselves even from God. Before him, they are ashamed, cover the nakedness of their bodies, which he had made so that it be the way of the relationship, and they break off the encounter between the creature and the Creator. I maintain that in the contemporary world the rupture of these three relationships is evident, as is also pointed out to us by the recent encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

### **The human body, space of salvation and promise of fulfillment: attire, beauty, the acts of the body and faith in the resurrection**

Faced with this collapse, the body, being the place of original sin in the biblical account, is also – in the biblical sense – the place of salvation: sin occurs in the body; both, because it enters through the act of eating, which is a bodily act, and because the people, who ingest, exist in a body. Also, because of the symbolic representations that are assigned to this sin; in the same way, salvation is realized in the body. The first act of attention and mercy of God towards man is to procure a garment for him<sup>24</sup>: He takes care of his body, covers him and protects him, especially now that the body, upon the advent of guilt, manifests and exposes all the dangers of its vulnerability. One's attire is a vibrant symbol in biblical tradition. It describes the king-ship<sup>25</sup> that the Creator has bestowed on the human creature from the beginning of the world<sup>26</sup>. It characterizes Israel's sovereigns, is assigned to the children of kings and acknowledged to those who share in a rich inheritance. In the New Testament, the garment is a central symbol in the parable of the merciful father, who awards it together with sandals and a ring to the lost son, whom he had tenderly awaited, and who has finally returned<sup>27</sup>. Jesus recalls it in the parable of the grass in the held<sup>28</sup>, to describe God's concern for all his creatures, to whom he endows, already in the contingency of earthly life, authentic beauty, and elegance. He invites man to preserve the memory of the days of creation, in which the human creature was deemed to be the culmination of God's work, the primary object of the Creator's love. In that same context, Jesus invites us not to worry about the body, because God himself takes care of

24. *Gen* 3:21.

25. *Ps* 45(44):9.

26. *Gen* 1:26-28.

27. *Luke* 15:22.

28. *Matt* 6:25-34; *Luke* 12:22-31.

it, thereby emphasizing how central, in the biblical sense, the human body is. Elegant and beautiful clothes characterize throughout the Bible the brides on the day of marriage, which are an image both of Israel's election by God, a people clothed and loved as a bride, and of the Creator's love for the chosen nation<sup>29</sup>: The holy city, Jerusalem, is like a bride<sup>30</sup>; and like a bride in shining clothes, so also the Church of Christ, the new Jerusalem, according to the prophecies of the Apocalypse<sup>31</sup>, will manifest herself at the end of time, in her extraordinary beauty<sup>32</sup>. The prophecies prelude the new creation, and in it make shine, as in the first one, the beauty of marriage. To be clothed in the biblical sense means to be invested with a supernatural salvation, as unequivocally attested in *Isa* 61:10, which presents both terms together. For this reason, in Christian sacramental theology, the garment – symbol of sonship, of royalty, and thus of elective blessing – is, following the biblical model, one of the signs of baptism, the sacrament of the adoption as children. It should not be forgotten that in testamentary traditions the garment and the care of the body are specifically, though not exclusively, aspects of the feminine<sup>33</sup>, which shows to be once more, according to biblical sense, a manifestation of God and his concern for the human creature. In the Bible, the beauty of women is often expressed through the etymologies of their names. In the Bible, the beauty of women is often expressed through the etymologies of their

29. See, e.g., the passages of the prophets, especially, *Isa* 61; *Ezek* 16. See also *Matt* 22:12 about the duty of the wedding guests to wear an appropriate garment.

30. *Isa* 62.

31. *Rev* 19:7-8; *Rev* 21.

32. The beauty of the Church, in the presence and under the gaze of her spouse Christ, is under the control of Paul in unequivocal terms (*Eph* 5:26-27). These terms refer to the spousal dynamic and the relationship between man and woman, as described by the recurring symbolism in the accounts of creation. On these aspects, which have already been dealt with in detail, we refer to the contributions cited below.

33. To better understand this aspect and the salvific feminine dimension to which I will return below, I would like to refer to L.C. Paladino, "Il ta'am e il profetismo femminile: approfondimenti lessicali sulla sapienza delle donne e casi di donne sapienti nell'Israele Biblico", *SEL (Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici)*, 31, 2014, pp. 139-169. See merely, in the New Testament, the attention of women and their concern for anointing the body of Jesus after his death, which is attested in the Synoptics: *Mark* 16:1; *Luke* 23:55-24:1. In the accounts of the Passion, however, Joseph of Arimathea's attention to the body of Jesus is never hidden, always accompanied by the loving gaze of women, which demonstrates the reciprocity of this act, and the importance of the care for the body of all human creatures: On this point, see *Matt* 27:57-60; *Mark* 15:42-46; *Luke* 23:50-54; *John* 19:38-42, which also emphasizes Nicodemus' intervention and his concern for the anointing of the Savior's body. See also the Pauline exegesis of the accounts of creation, specifically in *Eph* 5:28-30, where the duty to care for one's own body, and that of others, is explicit, following the model of Christ, who, in the Church, recognizes the members of his own body.

names. It is all the more suggestive when these are given to secondary or, in some cases, unhappy female figures, given that they are placed alongside evil men. In their presence, and in the meaning of their names, which refer to adornments, perfume, elegance and grace, the salvific dimension characteristic of biblical women is shrouded, and the promise of redemption takes flesh. In the attention towards the body, in its care, which is entrusted to each human person, modeled on what God himself does in the aftermath of sin, the very mercy that characterizes the Creator is manifested. Clothing the naked thus becomes, in theological tradition, a way of being in the image and likeness of God – to act like Him – and a work of bodily mercy. This was explicitly pointed out by Jesus himself in the imposing fresco of the final judgment<sup>34</sup> as one of the criteria that would be adopted to distinguish those received into the Kingdom from those excluded from it. Among the symbolic representations of the garment, the aspect of beauty original to creation and always present in the biblical tradition is evidently manifested, even though sin wishes to threaten it. The beauty of creation and the creature in the testamentary sense especially that of man and of his body is a reflection of the greatness of the creator, a manifestation of him<sup>35</sup>. Thus, in the Bible, there is no anthropology that diminishes the body; and in this regard, it is not by chance that the beauty of biblical women is often emphasized in the Scriptures. The first woman, who comes forth from the *šela'* of the *'adam*, is beautiful. To this attest the words of amazement spoken by the first man at the sight of her<sup>36</sup>. All the matriarchs are beautiful<sup>37</sup>. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is beautiful. The archangel Gabriel himself affirms this at the moment of the Annunciation, where he addresses her with the participle *kekaritoméne*, which in Greek suggests grace, both, physical and supernatural, but also beauty as such. Likewise, the Messiah is beautiful, according to the psalms about him<sup>38</sup>. Every human creature is beautiful, from the first moment of his conception in the womb. *Salm* 139 (138) describes the astonishment of the faithful before the marvel of being called into existence. The psalmist praises the wisdom of God, who so beautifully formed him, differentiating him from any other creature. The terms used in the Hebrew version describe beauty

34. *Matt* 25:31-46, and, specifically, *Matt* 25:36,43.

35. *Ps* 8; *Ps* 139(138):14.

36. *Gen* 2:23.

37. The beauty of Sarai, Abraham's wife, is attested in *Gen* 12:15; similarly, reference is made to the beauty of Rebecca in *Gen* 26:7, and that of Rachel in *Gen* 29:17.

38. *Ps* 45(44):3. The text, which has a profound messianic flavor, also focuses on the beauty of the women who accompany the royal descendant, and especially on the beauty of his wife: *Ps* 45(44):10-16.

and uniqueness<sup>39</sup>, emphasizing the importance of the difference and particularity of every human person, male and female, made in the image and likeness of God, from the very beginning.

Israel's faith is a belief in the body. It is an incarnate faith, rather than an abstract one, passed on through real events and yearning for the realization of promises made to the body; because the salvation, Israel has been waiting for since the origins of the world, is physical salvation. This salvation is neither of a theoretical nature nor is it an abstract idea only existing in thought. The promise made to Abraham is a pledge to his body and the body of his wife. Thus, it is in this union of difference, which for him does not occur with any woman, but with the woman legitimately chosen before God, and wherein Abraham realizes the manifestation of God's love on earth<sup>40</sup>. The promise made to Isaac, Jacob, David, and the whole house of Israel, is a promise that is passed on to the body through lineage, generated by natural and real motherhood and fatherhood. It is not imagined in the abstract as a disembodied idea. The promise realized in Jesus is realized in his body and passed on through the symbolic act of eating, repeated at every Eucharist, and which is the same act that produced the fall and sin. In redemption, then, the act of eating also has a fundamental role, as does the body: Sin occurs in the body and the acts of the body, salvation occurs in the body and the acts of the body. Salvation comes to us from the body of Christ, both in a real and a mystical sense, through the Church. It comes to us from eating the body of Christ, which is the Eucharist, the experience of the encounter with salvation – true communion.

The promise of the resurrection<sup>41</sup>, the key to faith in the God of life, is a promise that saves the body and leads it back to the endless life conceived for man since the origins of the world. The resurrection of the body is, in this sense, a central element of Israel's faith<sup>42</sup>. This is why

39. See the literal meaning of *Ps* 139(138):14, which will be referred to below.

40. In these stories, the symbolism of marriage, which is a symbolism nourished by corporeity, has been at work and salvific since the origins of the Old Testament. Similar accents will be found in all biblical texts. For more on these subjects, see L.C. Paladino, *Tutelare l'identità. Studi storico-filologici sulle versioni antiche della Bibbia*, Testo Ebraico Masoretico e Testo Greco dei Settanta, Pensa Multimedia, Lecce-Brescia 2012.

41. On this subject, see L.C. Paladino, "Dio non è dei morti, ma dei viventi" (*Matt* 22:32; *Mark* 12:27; *Luke* 20:38): *vita e morte, immortalità e resurrezione nelle Scritture Sacre*, in *Comprendere la vita. Pensare morte e immortalità oggi*, Atti delle conferenze di studio (Lugano 2014), ETS, Pisa 2016, pp. 53-62.

42. Also from this point of view, one understands the choice made by the people of Israel in relation to funerary rites, during which burials are preferred. The body must always be safeguarded – even when it lacks the vital spirit – because it is an evocation of the transcendent. This explains the absence of particular emotions in the description of the



numerous resurrection episodes appear in the Old and New Testaments. There are records of children, adults, and even of a corpse already buried. It is precisely this call to life without end in biblical faith that makes the body worthy, grand, to be respected and protected in its nature. The very God of life enlivens the bodies of his faithful, and the resurrection is the symbol and promise of this life. Often it is overshadowed by the acts of salvation, which the biblical women perform on the bodies of the men of their families. One such exemplary case is that of Zippora, described in the obscure passage of *Exod* 4:24-26<sup>43</sup>, which is accompanied by many other episodes in biblical accounts, embellished and full of profound symbolic representations. In a more general and original sense, it is not by chance that the image of the woman, with which the third chapter of *Genesis* – the chapter in which the fall caused by sin is described – closes, is a salvific image passed on through the body; and through the body of the woman, which in this context is exactly the body of the mother. In the corporeity of the woman there is the hope and promise of the son, the fruit of the womb; and in the corporeity of the son, there is the hope and promise of salvation. In this sense, the human body once again assumes an intrinsic sacredness and must be protected from those who believe that the dominant culture can change its natural and creaturely truth. This reference is even more significant if read in the light of the Gospel, which identifies the Truth

death of the fathers. Of them it is said that they reunite with their ancestors; and, as far as the patriarchs are concerned, this reunion also takes place in a single physical place, the cave of Machpelah, which was acquired by Abraham as sepulchral property to preserve there the body of his wife Sarai from Efron, the Hittite. On related matters, see, e.g., *Gen* 23; *Gen* 25:7-10; *Gen* 35:27-29; *Gen* 50:1-14. The attitude of Western culture, and specifically that of Greek-Latin culture towards death is completely different. Descriptions can be found in the Homeric poems; Greek literature, especially archaic literature, describes well the emotions and solemnity that accompany funeral rites in cultural contexts.

43. The pericope, which puts the journey of Moses and his family to Egypt, where God sent him as a liberator for the Israelites, into context, is very difficult to frame and clearly edited. It is said that, during the journey, during a rest at night, “the Lord came upon Moses and sought to put him to death. But Zipporah took a piece of flint and cut off her son’s foreskin and, touching his feet, she said, Surely, you are a spouse of blood to me. So God let Moses alone”. It is not clear from the text, to whom the male pronouns refer; whether to Moses, as it would seem initially, or to the first son he had from Zipporah – Gershom, of whom is spoken shortly after. Leaving aside all syntactical and lexical aspects – environmental and contextual – it is interesting how here the woman, Moses’ wife and Gershom’s mother – who, like many women in the Bible, is not Jewish, as is clearly attested by her genealogy – is attributed the central role of circumcising the child; thereby saving – in the body – the life of the male characters, husband and son, whom are tied to her by bond of blood. Moreover, the woman performs one of the most symbolic actions of the Israeli tradition, the circumcision of the male son, to which is added here also the consecration of the first-born.

in a person, a living person composed of a body, the person of Jesus, the Christ, whom Paul meaningfully defines, in *Eph* 5:23, as “the Savior of the Body”.

## **The symbolic representations of the sexed body and the centrality of human life: A comparison between the biblical sense and contemporary reflections**

*The five senses of the body and biblical tradition: Rebecca and the wisdom of the body*

The corporeity of man describes many horizons in the Bible. It opens the human being to the fundamental encounters of his existence; the encounter with the world, with the other, with God. It is a resource that gives meaning. It is vitalized by symbolic representations which take on a highly theological dimension in the texts of Scripture and which deserve to be explored in depth. Of particular importance among those are the symbolic representations concerning the five senses of the human body.

It should be noted as a matter of priority how the bond between man and the world, described through the etymological link of *'adam* and *'adamâ*, is passed on through an original blessing, which is expressed in the gaze of God: sight is par excellence a sense of God, the One who scrutinizes and knows<sup>44</sup> everything. As it is repeated throughout the first chapter of the book of Genesis, He exercises this sense with every creature, even barely called to life; looking at it and perceiving it as good. This visual blessing is substantiated by numerous promises in biblical history, also expressed verbally through the voice of God. These involve man and all of creation – the world and other living beings<sup>45</sup> and thus reaffirm the original bond between the human creature and the world, of whose very substance he is made. Within these contexts and through these symbolic representations, sight is a sense particularly ascribed to the Creator, while when attributed to creatures<sup>46</sup>, it is used ambivalently.

44. Regarding the links, including etymological links, between sight and knowledge that I have had the opportunity to study elsewhere, see the contributions already mentioned above.

45. See, e.g., the blessings that have been given after the flood, in *Gen* 9, and specifically in *Gen* 9:8-10: “God said to Noah and to his sons with him: See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you”.

46. See the negative value of sight in the account on the original sin of *Gen* 3, for which we again refer to the contributions already mentioned below: In particular, we

Hearing, on the other hand, is considered to be primarily a sense assigned to the creature, which is called to listen, to receive a Word that calls to life, and to give it space in its existence; so that it may be capable of generation; so that from this Word a new life may be generated in turn<sup>47</sup>. The dynamic is manifested in the accounts of creation. It is repeated in the stories of the Patriarchs<sup>48</sup> and the Prophets<sup>49</sup>, who are endowed with a docile and silent sense of hearing, called to listen to the Word of God and act according to its instructions. In the relationship between man and woman, as it is symbolically described in Gen 2, the dynamics of sight, speech and hearing are manifested again and emphasize the symbolism inherent in the relationship between the two. It sacramentally recalls the relationship between Creator and creature, which is a spousal relationship involving sight, speech, and hearing; and which in the Christian context – precisely because of these symbolic representations – becomes a sign of love, which unites Christ to His Church. Within the fundamental context of *Gen 2*, which relates to theological prehistory, sight and speech characterize *iš*, whereas hearing is typical of *išâ*: In this way *išâ* is identified as a symbolism that refers to creaturehood, and to the dimension of the creature called to listen to the Word in order to generate it in its life. Moreover, in the whole biblical tradition, Israel is considered as the bride of God, who

remind the reader of the strong link that exists in the biblical tradition between sight and concupiscence (see, e.g., the story of David and Bathsheba, *2 Sam* 11). The fault of Lot's wife, who turned around to look at Sodom, is another example, where the unhealthy desire of sight is associated with the inability to trust God – to look forward and not to turn back. Lot's wife is mentioned several times in the Old Testament, as well as in the Gospels by Jesus himself; as an example of disbelief, lack of faith, which is considered as the inability to trust God without seeing. On this subject, see also the story of Thomas, whom Jesus reproaches for having believed only after seeing. Attention should also be paid to the predominantly aniconic character of biblical faith, which is linked in part to the risks of idolatrous tendencies hidden behind the visibility of divine images. Finally, let us reflect on how this problem is overcome in the Christian faith, because Christ has made God visible through his own corporeity, restoring value and dignity to the sense of sight, when it is exercised by man.

47. On these subjects, which also call into question the crucial questions of prayer and evangelization, as well as the role of the Church as the repository of a Word, that of the Spouse, which makes her fruitful and generates the new children of God in Baptism, see L.C. Paladino, *II Vangelo della vita e della famiglia e la tradizione biblica*, Rome 2017, being printed.

48. See, e.g., the accounts of Noah or Abraham, to whom, in the biblical text, few words are attributed. Noah is always silent, Abraham talks little, and they both listen and do what God requires of them, generating life and salvation for themselves, their families, their descendants, for the whole people and for creation itself.

49. See the exemplary stories of Samuel, with an explicit reference to the dimension of docility to the word of God; and more generally, all the stories relating to prophets, writers, and non-writers.

is the Spouse. In Jewish understanding, this marriage of the Creator is manifested towards every human creature, and all human beings are called to arrive at the knowledge of and experience intimacy with the Spouse of Heaven. The feminine dimension, with all the symbols of representation, is a figure and an image of that call<sup>50</sup>.

The biblical text also strongly emphasizes the sense of smell, which, for the first time, is attributed to God in the account of the flood, in *Gen* 8:20-21. In this context, God smells the sweet fragrance of the sacrifice offered to him by Noah and immediately decides to revoke any intention of destroying the world. The sense of smell, the sense that most directly connects with the memory of man, is imprinted here in the memory of God, who promises to remember forever the decision he made because of Noah's sacrifice<sup>51</sup>. Following this premise contained in theological prehistory, the sense of smell becomes the dominant sense in the rituals of the ark and the temple<sup>52</sup>. The scent of the holocausts characterizes the sacredness of the place where God dwells, and its aromas summon the very presence of the Lord. Lastly, to emphasize this point, the sense of smell is the most active sense in the Song of Songs, the book of wisdom dedicated to human love. Here the aromas are depicted with embellishing richness. They describe the participation of nature in the love of the two spouses, and primarily characterize the Spouse, emphasizing the link that binds their love to the sacredness of the temple, thus evoking the possible theological dimension of the poem. While this dimension outlines the intoxicating beauty of carnal love, it also wants to evoke the symbolic and sacred dimension of this love, which is a figure of the intimate and matrimonial relationship of God, the Spouse, with His chosen bride, His people, and every human creature.

This overview concludes with the senses of taste and touch. They also are described with richness in the biblical text, and are traced back to theological dimensions: Taste, which etymologically recalls wisdom, becomes the real and corporeal expression of intimacy with God, the only source of true Wisdom. This supernatural intimacy endows man with a real capacity for understanding existence<sup>53</sup>. This more practical and less

50. On these aspects and female symbolism, see *infra*. See also the contributions cited in the context of this study.

51. *Gen* 9:15. On the subject of memory, I refer to L.C. Paladino, "Nelle radici la profezia: la memoria nella sensibilità biblica, tra mente, cuore e azione", *Consciousness*, 6, 2014, pp. 36-40.

52. See, e.g., *Exod* 29:18-25; *Lev* 1:9-13; *Num* 28:1.

53. Here, I refer to what I have already said about ta'am, and the etymological links, which also in Hebrew lead back the taste for wisdom, together with all the linguistic and textual references of the case: in L.C. Paladino, "Il ta'am e il profetismo femminile", *cit.*

logical sapiential dimension is generally ascribed to women, and denotes a direct and immediate communication with the Creator. See, for instance, the story of Rebecca, and her central role in helping Jacob to obtain the blessing reserved for the first-born in Esau's place; a role that, in the Bible, is justified by the specific intimacy the woman has with God. It should not be forgotten that at the beginning of the story, in *Gen 25:22-23*, Rebecca notices a dispute between the twins while they are still in her womb. She consults the Lord on this matter, and "the Lord answered her: Two nations are in your womb, two peoples are separating while still within you. But one will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger".

Rebecca's relationship with God is immediate and direct. It expresses that wisdom of heart, which leads women to the roots of existence, asking for and seeking knowledge directly at the source<sup>54</sup>. God responds to this thirst, which, of all places, is generated in Rebecca's womb. As such it is, therefore, an expression of wisdom strongly connected with the body. God's response to women manifests an exceptional intimacy that escapes even Isaac. From then on, far from deceiving her husband or youngest son, Rebecca does nothing other than the will of God. She is instructed directly by Him, using, if necessary, and as is typical of biblical women, immediate, practical means and stratagems. The text never passes value judgments on the work of Rebecca, who, in Jewish tradition, is an entirely good woman and central matriarch in the stories of the people. The only adverse judgment is directed against Esau. Unlike his mother, he neither possesses wisdom nor taste for the essential and disdains the birthright to the point of selling it in exchange for a plate of lentils (*Gen 25:29-34*). Because of this choice, which causes him to lose the blessing of his father, he later performs a series of wrong and unjust actions.

Touch is the most extended sense of the human body. In biblical accounts, touch is manifested as the original means of the encounter on the three levels that have been outlined so far and which open up the relationship with the contingent, the otherness and the transcendent: It should not be forgotten that, in creating man (in chapter 2 of *Genesis*), God uses the dust of the earth and shapes it, thereby touching it, and thus using the sense of touch Himself. It is precisely through touch that God enters into a direct relationship with man; that he puts '*adam* and '*adamâ*, *iš* and *išâ*, into a direct relationship. While for other creatures the call to life takes

54. These gestures echo the wisdom tradition, which insists on the duty to seek wisdom in God. For more on these aspects, refer to L.C. Paladino, *La Sapienza nel Vicino Oriente e nel Mediterraneo Antichi*, edited by A. Ercolani and P. Xella, Carocci, Rome 2013, pp. 197-249.

place exclusively through the Word, in the case of man God employs both the Word (*Gen* 1:26) and touch (*Gen* 2:7), which is expressed in the twofold gesture of shaping the dust and blowing the breath of life into the nostrils. Man is different from other creatures. This is already manifested in the character of the creating Word addressed to him: While for other creatures it is a taxing word, almost like an order that is dictated to inanimate matter (“Let there be light!”), in the case of man, the Word that calls to life is articulated in a thought: «Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion [...]». In addition, for man God gets to work, acts, shapes, and is involved in a concrete way, using touch, which also becomes a sense of God. In this choice of intimate and personal involvement, described at the dawn of creation, there is already a prophecy of the Incarnation, and the two pivotal moments of redemption are welded together by manifesting in the human body the greatest and noblest manifestation of the Creator. In these symbolic accounts, it becomes clear how important the body is for biblical anthropology.

*Body and vulnerability: the sacredness of life in all its phases and conditions, the prohibition of killing the body, Cain, the flood, the midwives of the Jews, Ezekiel, and Hosea*

The symbolism of the body – even of the sexed body – is used by many prophets to indicate the love of God. Take Ezekiel, for example, and the metaphor of the child, first abandoned then redeemed, only to be reduced to a prostitute later<sup>55</sup>; or the oracles of Hosea<sup>56</sup>. The bodies they refer to are at times wounded bodies, sick bodies or impure bodies. This is interesting because it directs us not to disregard any of the imperfections of the body. According to scriptural reasoning, even those are redeemed, and should, therefore, be included in a broader examination. This is an aspect, which is even addressed in the latest post-feminist reflection. Butler, for example, investigated in her writings after 2001, during the period of consternation for the fall of the twin towers, the fragility of the human condition. For Butler, the bodily dimension concretely speaks of our vulnerability and puts it into perspective. It requires that we intervene to defend the body; that we protect it, both, from what threatens it and what threatens the very person, who is this indissoluble unity with his

55. *Ezek* 16

56. See in particular *Hos* 1-3.

body. «The body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the [...] instrument of all these as well»<sup>57</sup>. This is a problematic position, which needs to be addressed. Butler investigates the dignity of bodies and concludes that there is not anybody who has more dignity than others; that they all – regardless of any power relations – share the same vulnerability and deserve protection. Her reflection leads her to look with lucidity at the extreme consequences of gender perspective. By focusing on the absolute freedom to act independently of the natural datum, and on physically intrusive measures to the point of excess to make it responsive to what the mind can desire, the gender perspective risks ultimately that those conditions of vulnerability, which cannot be controlled or modified by physical interventions, are either reduced to the background, ignored, condemned or destined for certain destruction. Butler also addresses the issue of the vulnerability of children. She recognizes the particular exposure to death and suffering and emphasizes the defenselessness and the number of defenseless beings. She contests war and violence wherever they occur because they offend the lives of those most deprived of protection. Therein arises a contradiction in post-feminist thinking. On the one hand, it imposes the supremacy of culture over nature and claims the right to modify the body as it pleases. On the other hand, it denies this right because of a vulnerability that needs to be defended. The hotspot of this reflection lies in the idea of freedom: one can do anything that can be deliberately thought of or decided. Hence, it is licit to interfere with your own life and body, but, based on the reflections on vulnerability, one cannot interfere with the bodies of others. This conclusion ignores that the reflections made so far on life and vulnerability are universal, and thus have value for everybody, starting with the person who affirms them: Biblical anthropology is aware of this truth and always respects the human person in his entirety. The commandment of love invites us to love our neighbor as ourselves<sup>58</sup>, emphasizing that love for ourselves and respect for the greatness of our lives are the model of civil relationships among people. Moreover, the above conclusion comes to a contradiction, especially, when it admits that the woman, with regards to her spousal and maternal capacity, may deny her own natural reality; that, in the final analysis, she herself – through her own body and absolute

57. J. Butler, *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence*, Verso, London, New York 2004, p. 46.

58. *Lev* 19:18; *Matt* 22:39; *Mark* 12:31; *Luke* 10:27. See the Pauline exegesis contained in *Rom* 13:8-10.

discretion over it – may use violence against others: against the man she meets or the child she carries in her womb. If there exists – as it does, and as Butler admits – such a thing as vulnerability of children, then it also exists in relation to their right to an education that respects their natural dimension, and to a culture that respects their lives from the very first moment, from conception; altogether aspects that are mostly denied or ignored in post-feminist contexts.

We will return to the specific subject of motherhood later. For now, regarding the more general issue that we are examining here, the biblical, anthropological datum can be included in the contemporary reflection. This reality aims at safeguarding corporeity, even in conditions of suffering and illness. Therein, human life is defended from its very beginning in all its phases. This is an expression and manifestation of the power of God, as attested by *Psalm* 139(138), which emphasizes the value and beauty of the human embryo<sup>59</sup>, on whom, from the first moment of conception, God's loving gaze rests: It is in this context that we read the ancient versions of *Ps* 139(138):16. There, it is stated that the eyes of God saw the unformed dimensions of the psalmist at the moment of conception. The terms are very clear in both Hebrew and Greek. They explicitly refer to the development of the fetus and describe an implicit blessing. Similar to the blessing imparted by the Creator in the first chapter of Genesis to creatures without hearing, this blessing is explicitly addressed to the human embryo. According to scriptural reasoning, human life is found from the moment of the blessed and vocation-oriented gestation. The prophet Isaiah himself emphasizes the same idea in a crucial passage<sup>60</sup>, which is not far from the notions found in other prophets; particularly that found in the prologue of the book of Jeremiah<sup>61</sup>. For the Bible, the life of man is always sacred. This fact is clearly emphasized in those great moments when God creates or renews the covenant with man. After sin, the lives and bodies of the first human couple are preserved and defended inasmuch as they remain – even in the presence of the error they have committed – images of God. Following the fratricide committed by Cain, in *Gen* 4, the guilty person remains alive; his body is not killed. On the contrary, it is even marked so that no man may put an end to his existence by destroying his body. Consequently, God himself respects human life as it is created by Him – an expression of his greatness. Even in *Gen* 6, when he takes the extreme decision to destroy creation, he decides to preserve a human

59. *Ps* 139(138):13-16.

60. *Isa* 49:1-6.

61. *Jer* 1:4.



couple from death, together with their sons and their sons' wives, to allow the continuation of life. The tale of the flood thus takes on an enormous exemplary value, because once again it emphasizes the centrality of sexual difference, which God preserved for all living beings on earth, who enter the ark – *zacar* and *neqebâ*, male and female. The phrase is repeated continuously, with different emphases in *Gen 7*, in the account of the preparations for the ark, and highlights almost prophetically the extent to which the body and sexual difference are necessary, as well as the ever-present risk that they could be denied or mystified. At the end of the flood, in the context of an abundant blessing that invests – as in a new creation – all living beings coming out of the ark, while renewing and expanding the promises already made at the dawn of the world, God comes close to man: «Only meat with its lifeblood still in it you shall not eat. Indeed for your own lifeblood I will demand an accounting: from every animal I will demand it, and from a human being, each one for the blood of another, I will demand an accounting for human life. Anyone who sheds the blood of a human being, by a human being shall that one's blood be shed; for in the image of God have human beings been made»<sup>62</sup>. The words used here are of primary interest because they all express a transcendence: the term *bašar* stands out to define flesh, and we have already had the opportunity to reflect on it. Blood, the element of the body par excellence, just like flesh, represents life, and, therefore, through its mention, the sacredness of the body is clearly reaffirmed here. Therein, the vital breath is kept, which is also defined in this context through the term *nepeš*. It was used before to describe living beings in *Gen 1*, in the first account of creation; and in *Gen 2:7*, to describe the breath – the life-giving breath infused into the 'adam by God. The reasons for the sacredness of human life are also reiterated: the 'adam was made by the creator in the image of God, and for this reason his body and his blood are sacred, in other words, his life. And God Himself promises, having a bow appear in the clouds, that He, in the name of a covenant that is between Him and every living being will no longer act to destroy life on earth. He himself, therefore, recognizes the bond of dignity imposed by human life, declaring it a limit not to be transgressed, sacred and untouchable. In this context, the God of Israel manifests himself as the God of life. The biblical text reaffirms an anthropology that centers in all its glory the sacredness of the body of man, which is the condition of difference and reciprocity.

These norms are remembered by the midwives Shifra and Pua in the passage of *Exod 1:15-21*, who disobey the order the pharaoh to kill every

62. *Gen 9:4-6*.

male of the Jews at the moment of birth, even before the child may have left the womb, without even verifying the sex. In other words, they were ordered to simulate that the child had been born dead, thus staging a sort of induced abortion. The two women break a law because they fear God. This is a decisive choice on their part, which calls upon the sacredness of life and the human body and involves the moral conscience, whose dictum is, for Shifra and Pua, even higher than the laws, if they are unjust. This decision manifests apparent respect for human life in every phase, even before birth, as well as for the dictates given by God immediately after the flood. For the two women, as for every man who fears God, the text preserves the certainty of a rich blessing and of a promise of abundant life, with long and fruitful descendants, as in the days of creation.

*Body and motherhood: The woman of Gen 3, the daughters of Lot, Agar, Sarai, Mary of Nazareth, and the theological, symbolic representations of marriage and gestation*

What has been said so far aids the integration of certain aspects into the reflection on the body that are of great concern for Western culture, such as the very current issue of surrogate motherhood. Postfeminism generally interprets it as a way of liberating the woman, who for millennia has been subjugated to male power, and in this sense has been forced to generate children for the society of males. Precisely because of this history of subordination, freeing sexuality from procreation was one of the objectives of feminism, with political battles that have characterized in particular the second half of the twentieth century and significantly influenced legislative choices. Maternity, together with pregnancy, is a fundamental subject of biblical anthropology. On the linguistic level, it first appears after sin, when God, addressing the woman, affirms that he would «intensify [*her*] toil in childbearing; in pain [*she*] shall bring forth children»<sup>63</sup>, and shortly afterward the man gives a name to the woman: Eve; which is not any different from what he did with the animals. According to scriptural reasoning, which recognizes the name and its imposition on the moment of birth as an enormous value from the point of view of the exercise of authority. In this way, Adam manifests his desire to impose on the woman a predominance, whose fruits are known throughout history. This predominance is not original to biblical anthro-

63. *Gen* 3:16.

pology and is explicitly condemned by the text. It is entirely the fruit of sin, and as such, it threatens man and woman throughout the entire course of their existence. Through motherhood, Eve tries to claim superiority over man as well, when she affirms in *Gen 4:1* that she had a child from the Lord, thus recognizing God's contribution but denying that of man. It is a prophecy of the drama of man's exclusion from motherhood, which becomes evident in the contemporary world as the fruit of feminist claims. In no way does it reveal the complexity of the human being and the richness of the anthropology that emerges from the biblical text. Here, the real name of the woman remains that of *išâ*, feminine and reciprocal of *iš*. A name that denotes equal dignity with respect to the difference. It is the name with which God defines the woman in the Proto-Gospel, where she rises to become the enemy of evil: «I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; they will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel»<sup>64</sup>. Here, the lineage – the descendants – is inherent in the feminine dimension, i.e., the motherhood is an indispensable and fundamental aspect of being *išâ*. Even though linguistically this aspect emerges in the text after sin, ontologically, it precedes the text. In this vision, sin does not give rise to motherhood at all, but solely offers the space for the power dynamics between males and females, as is emphasized by the mouth of God himself in the words addressed to the woman immediately after the Proto-Gospel; and please note, they are not words of punishment. In fact, the terms used are an expression of benevolence and blessing, which, in scriptural reasoning, are always expressed with the promise of life: 'I will multiply your pregnancies'<sup>65</sup> expresses God's will to continue to ensure the existence of men through generation. The verb used, *to multiply*, is the same found in *Gen 1* in the blessings for creation. These blessings are promises of fecundity expressed by the phrase "grow and multiply". The words God addresses to women after the Proto-Gospel, as well as those addressed to men, are, thus, exclusively an expression of the effect of sin<sup>66</sup>. And according to scriptural reasoning, this effect is neither responsible for the advent of motherhood nor for its prophetic character. On the contrary, they have been inherent in the feminine dimension from the beginning, and are an authentic expression of its richness as well as its reciprocal otherness with respect to the masculine. Pregnancy is here, properly, the biblical icon of salvation, and the pregnant woman, who

64. *Gen 3:15*.

65. *Gen 3:16*

66. *Gen 3:16*: «To the woman he said: ... your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you».

suffers from the labor of childbirth, is the symbol of a new era. That this indeed is the meaning of the text in *Gen 3:16* is manifested by the fact that this symbolism returns in the prophetic texts relating to the Messiah. In particular, in the prophecies of Isaiah, where the sign, reserved by God for his people, is the young woman who conceives and gives birth to a child, who shall be called *Emmanuel*, God with us<sup>67</sup>. Also in Revelations, where the extreme struggle between good and evil is illustrated, the image used is that of a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars, who suffers the pain and labor of childbirth, and is persecuted by a serpent, the symbol of evil<sup>68</sup>. In different contexts of the Old Testament, the labor of childbirth is also the sign of the arrival of a new era<sup>69</sup>: it must be endured because through it a new life is born, exactly as happens in the experience of motherhood. The corporeal symbolism of gestation and childbirth thereby becomes a prophecy of transcendent truth. It promises, as Jesus attests in the eschatological prophecies contained in the Gospel of Matthew<sup>70</sup>, the advent of new heavens and a new earth, preceded by pain and suffering, which are the expression of the eternal struggle between good and evil, between life and death. God Himself goes through labor pains before intervening in support for His people, as is attested by the messianic prophecies, and, specifically, in the capital passage of *Isa 42:11*, which is the precursor of the use of symbolism in the New Testament: Jesus illustrates his mission as savior in the Gospel of John, using the corporeal and human experience of gestation – which is entirely feminine in nature – to explain his work of salvation; which includes pain, the passion and his death, and which, through all of that, leads to the good news of the resurrection: «Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy. When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world. So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from

67. *Isa 7:14*. It should be noted that it is the woman in this passage who gives the name to the child; overturning the symbolic representations of male authority, the fruit of sin, which is described in Genesis. With respect to the salvific value of motherhood, we can also see *Isa 9:5-6*; *Is 11:1-9*.

68. *Rev 12*.

69. See, for example, *Isa 26:16-17*, as well as the numerous passages of the prophets alluding to the labor of childbirth as a symbolism of suffering permitted by the Creator, in view of a superior conversion that will be the source of a new life: *Hos 13:13*, which is considered the most archaic step; *Jer 6:24, 22:23*; *Isa 66:6-7*.

70. *Matt 24:7*.

you»<sup>71</sup>. The Christ-Messiah, thus, meaningfully uses an image taken from the feminine experience of gestation to describe his work as the Christ-Messiah. He thereby ennobles it as the very symbol of salvation, bringing to fruition the countless reflections contained in the Old Testament with respect to these symbolic representations, which are passed on through “all the law and all the prophets”. Paul himself, while describing his work of evangelization, recovers the symbolism of labor pains, emphasizing how evocative this image is, also in regard to the generation of salvation<sup>72</sup>. On this subject, see again the reference that the apostle makes to gestation in the letter to the Romans<sup>73</sup>; a prerequisite for the new times, now imminent. This citation concludes with an explicit reference to the salvation and redemption of our human body. At the same time, it clearly emerges in all these suggestions from the Testament that, according to scriptural reasoning, pain and death are understood as necessary evils, and not at all as something definitive. In biblical anthropology, only sin is absolute evil. And in fact, Christ experiences both, pain and death, and in them, he assumes all the way the dimension of vulnerability, so typical of the human being and his corporeality; but he never experiences sin.

Among the ancient languages, Hebrew is the only one that uses the same root to define man and woman. This is of incredible ethical and conceptual significance and remains a key aspect of scriptural reasoning. It should also be emphasized in the contemporary world, where, among the laity, the instances of an articulation of the feminine difference have already been able to reinterpret in an original way the fundamental dimension of the woman in the Jewish-Christian tradition, as well as the prophetic central role of her being different: her capacity of autonomously preserving her own word and her own breath<sup>74</sup>; her ability to encounter the word of the Other – God – and that of the other – man – to give life to a third word, that of the son<sup>75</sup>. The thought of Irigaray and Muraro empha-

71. *John* 16:20-22

72. *Gal* 4:19: «My children, for whom I am again in labor until Christ be formed in you!».

73. *Rm* 8:19-23: «For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies».

74. L. Irigaray, *Il mistero di Maria*.

75. In this regard, we can also read the enlightening reflections of Susy Zanardo with respect to gestation as an expression of triplicity, and unification of three desires: that of the mother, the father, and the son.

sizes the femininity of Mary and of the mystics: their otherness in relation to God, which in essence is the expression of otherness with respect to man, and the foundation of their ability to create. This otherness is therefore exalted in motherhood. In the articulation of the sexual difference, inasmuch as it is an expression of dominion, motherhood – far from being rejected – is considered the fulfillment and the summit of being a woman; whatever the contingent condition and the state of life that each real woman assumes in the world: bride or virgin, consecrated or lay. In the articulation of this difference, ideas relating to a non-corporeal motherhood, which manifests itself in the life of the mystics, and which nevertheless involves the body – at least in the experience of ecstasy – seem to find their own way. The concept is extraordinarily close to the goddess of spiritual motherhood, which has accompanied Christian thought from the very beginning. It allows Christianity to imagine and offer authentic mothers and symbolic women as a role model; even though they have not been involved in biological generation. This aspect also finds an exceptional precursor in scriptural reasoning, through the character of Deborah, a prophetess and judge in Israel<sup>76</sup>, whom the text of *Judg* 5:7 ordains as “a mother in Israel”. This is the same experience of spousal virginity for the kingdom, and of the virginal motherhood experienced in the contexts of consecration. If we examine in depth the supreme value, which from the dawn of creation is assigned to the woman, whom God generates from the *šela'* of the *'adam* to aid him to reveal himself<sup>77</sup>, we understand why Mary is always “the woman” in the Gospels. Jesus calls her that every time he addresses her, and this is perfectly in line with the biblical, anthropological dimension, which emerges from the texts of creation. Far from diminishing or denying her role as the mother of the Word, as she is repeatedly called in the texts of the New Testament, when Mary is addressed in the third person<sup>78</sup>, the name woman, *gunî*, which is a direct translation of the Hebrew *išâ*, even in the loss of etymological continuity with the noun

76. *Judg* 4-5.

77. This is, as I have explained elsewhere, the most faithful translation of the phrase *'ezer kenegdô*, attested in *Gen* 2:18.

78. See *Matt* 1:18, 2:11-21, 13:55; *Luke* 1:43, 2:34,48,51; *John* 2:1-5:12, 19:25-26; *Acts* 1:14. See also *Matt* 12:46-50; *Mark* 3:31-35; *Luke* 8:19-21, the crucial step in understanding the central role of the maternal dimension – as well as, in this sense, the generative dimension – of the disciple, who, like Mary, because of her intimacy with her Son, is capable of “generating the word” and giving it to the world; able to be “mother” and “brother” to Christ in the salvific and generative context of the Church, which is his body, as Paul himself repeated in the passage from *Gal* 4:19 already quoted. In this sense, Mary is properly called the first disciple.

man, and which is always used by the divine Son to address his Mother<sup>79</sup> emphasizes the original vocation that was thought of at the dawn of creation, and which now is finally realized, at the fullness of time: to be the fulfillment, the revelation of a relationship, the manifestation of an Alterity, the personification and the high prophecy of a bride who summons the Spouse and makes visible the promise of life that continues, through bodily generation and motherhood, which expresses in the *una caro* – one flesh – the original and fundamental unity of the two. In this sense, Mary is truly, as Irigaray says, the “first divine figure of the age of the Incarnation” because thanks to her and to her ability to accept and make her feminine dimension flourish in plenitude, the Savior was able to enter the world. From the dawn of creation, salvation is manifested to man when he meets the woman, as is made evident by the words and symbolic representations used in *Genesis* 2. Thus, at the fullness of time, salvation enters the world in form of a perfect female figure, who is incarnated in the original conception of the human being, into the traversal of existence in all its moments, respecting the institution of the family, where sexual difference radiates. For this reason, the Church venerates her as being conceived without sin. In this sense, with the advent of salvation, and with the intention “to recapitulate all things in Christ”<sup>80</sup>, the figure of the woman and her material dimension is once again enlightened and redeemed. The richness of difference, an expression of the image of God, is manifested in all its fulness. This way, the depth of the affirmation of the apostle Paul in *Gal* 4:4 is explained, where he defines Christ as “born of a woman”, recovering all the values that we have enunciated so far in the original dimensions of the feminine. Scriptural reasoning illuminates the articulation of sexual difference and manifests itself capable of interacting with contemporary philosophy for the construction of an anthropology that respects the truth about male and female.

In fact, the articulation of sexual difference provides insights that are of a profound theological nature: I think only of the notion, according to which the woman has always present within herself the experience of motherhood – even when she does not actually live it biologically – because this experience is the origin of her sensitivity; the powerful experience through which she puts the other into the world from within herself, in a relationship that does not deny the existence of the other but gives

79. See in particular *John* 2:4, in the context of the wedding at Cana, as well as *John* 19:26, in the context of entrusting Mary and the disciple John, both present under the cross, to each other.

80. *Eph* 1:10.

birth to the other. Applied to Mary, in this sense, this intuition speaks of transcendence: she is the one who makes God be. In theological terms, she is the one who accepts the Word and generates it so that it becomes life. It is a vocation that involves every human creature because in the relationship with God, as emerges from the matrimonial symbolic representations present in the whole Bible, the creature is always the bride of the creator, called to listen to him while he speaks. Mary, and in her the woman, is properly the bride, who manifests in her flesh the prophecies of God's marriage with the people described by the prophets<sup>81</sup>. For this reason, she is genuinely a daughter of Israel, a daughter of Zion, a daughter first and then a wife, loved as a daughter and as a bride; because she is the one who embodies the condition of being the recipient of God's love, which, in the scriptures, is typical of the chosen people, which is considered to be a son<sup>82</sup> and a bride, highlighting the femininity which already the name of Israel, being a female name, evokes in the scriptures. It is precisely this femininity which, in the prophetic traditions, increases in Israel the expectation for a divine son, a child given to the people by God, to manifest in the flesh and in the body the truth of his promises. In Israel, fecundated by the Word and by the love of God, salvation will be visibly manifested<sup>83</sup>. The woman, the image of the creature who allows herself to be fecundated by the creator, can accept the word and make it become flesh, the manifestation of God, *bašar*. The woman, in the words of Muraro, is able to "make herself be God" with the laugh of every child that comes into the world. It is not by chance that, in the Bible, children are the fulfillment of the promises of fecundity made by God to his people. From Genesis 3 to the accounts of Abraham and Sarai, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob, Samuel, these promises interfere with a destiny of sterility, which is a terrible symbol of ending existence.

They are properly, as manifested in the crucial story of the birth of Isaac, which is, in this sense, exemplary, God's laughter in the world and in history<sup>84</sup>.

81. *Isa* 54:4-7; 62:4-5; *Ezek* 16, *Hos* 2:21-25.

82. *2Sam* 7:14-15; *ICor* 17:13. 22:10; *Ps* 2:7.

83. *Isa* 9:5-6.

84. According to Jewish etymology, the name Isaac means "he laughed". This is a reference to the story in *Gen* 18, to Abraham's encounter with the three men who announce to him Sarai's conception of the promised son, to which Sarai incredulously laughed to herself because she had been secretly listening to the whole conversation. Throughout the story, the metaphor of her laugh and Sarai herself remain present. At the moment of the birth of her only begotten son, whom Abraham names Isaac, she affirms that «God has given me cause to laugh», and which is why, so she continues, «all who hear of it will laugh with me» (*Gen* 21:6).



The subject of gestation has been carefully examined by the exponents of the articulation of sexual difference, who explicitly reject the practice of surrogate motherhood. In line with their reflections, they consider it offensive to the feminine dimension, damaging to the body, and offensive as well as to the entire symbolism associated with gestation; symbolism, which, in their opinion, has contributed over the centuries to what is known as “the symbolic order of the mother”. Feminist reflection has drawn on biblical tradition to reject the foundations of a culture that rejects the corporeal value of motherhood. Muraro interprets the story of Mary, the true mother of the Word, in absolute and explicit terms, thereby joining the reflections of biblical anthropology, as opposed to other interpretations, which come from gender theory and post-feminism, and which aim to reduce Mary to the “rented uterus” for God. This is how she speaks, reiterating that Mary is the true mother of Jesus, not at all a “surrogate” or a “uterus” lent to God: «In the sacred account the mother remains present; unlike the surrogate, which is replaced by another, the so-called “intentional mother”. Mary is and remains the only mother of Jesus». Therefore, no analogy exists that would consider Mary «an example of a woman who makes her fruitfulness available to God as an instrument for His coming into this world». [...] «Mary did not simply accept to become the mother of the savior promised to the Jewish people. Rather, when many saw in him their God made man, she was called Mother of God». [...] «Those great fathers of the Church [...] at the Council of Ephesus in 431 looked for words to describe the mystery of the incarnation of God in the man Jesus. What they wanted to say of him, true man and true God in one person, implied the absolute non-instrumentalization of feminine fecundity; and the fathers of the Church boldly found those words. Mother of God... What vigor they had, those men! They were certainly not feminists, but they knew how to reason...»

Biblical literature and the examples of the Old Testament support this perspective, and already in Genesis the account of Agar is clearly expressed in this context. It was an attempt to interpret a precursor to gestation for others; an interpretation, which neither is explicitly confirmed by the reality of the account itself nor according to the understanding of the biblical text. In the stories about Ishmael, Sarai’s female Egyptian slave, as noted, will always remain the true mother of her son. She prides herself on her motherhood in front of her mistress, and by no means does she consider Ishmael to be the son of the couple, Abraham and Sarai; even Sarai herself did not believe it. On the contrary, she even brings her husband to cast out the slave and her son, whom she perceives as an intruder in the sacredness of their relationship<sup>85</sup>. Ishmael, however, always

85. *Gen* 16:4-6.

remains a son of Abraham, and together with his mother Agar, he is the subject of specific blessings from God himself<sup>86</sup>: According to scriptural reasoning – an understanding that is genuinely sapiential and genuinely perceptive of the value of human existence as well as the human body – the Lord of Israel, «God of the living and not of the dead»<sup>87</sup>, «lover of life»<sup>88</sup>, always respects and protects human life, even if it is the fruit of a relationship that has been consumed in violation of the divine laws, which, in the stories of Abraham, already emphasizes the sacredness of marriage and its character of indissolubility<sup>89</sup>, highly precocious with respect to their historical and theological obsessions<sup>90</sup>. Here we find questions of great contemporary importance with regards to the lives born as a result of biomedical experiments, their value, the freedom of man, who is the great mystery and great truth of biblical anthropology. Exposed to sin and error, as the account of *Gen 3* illustrates in an exemplary way, man is always placed in the hands of a God, who is capable of forgiveness and mercy; who intervenes to straighten out human distortions to the extreme sacrifice of his own son. This is another great theological subject, which, as Catholic theology and the reflection on the body conducted in the Magisterium of the latest Popes' recalls<sup>91</sup>, involves the human corporeity

86. *Gen 16:10-12, 21:17-21.*

87. *Matt 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38.*

88. *Matt 22:32; Mark 12:27; Luke 20:38.*

89. I have had the opportunity elsewhere to emphasize this dimension: In the stories of Abraham in Egypt (*Gen 12:10-20*) and Gerar (*Gen 20*), later repeated by Isaac in *Gen 26:1-14*, God himself intervenes to protect the marriage of his chosen ones in social contexts that permitted polygamy. Already in the Torah, these stories emphasize the value of the conjugal covenant, which soon becomes, in biblical tradition, a symbol of monotheism, and as such is used by the prophets to define the fidelity of God.

90. Monogamy imposes itself at the historical and theological level, especially in the post-exilic period, initially only for priests, as attested by the book of Malachi. Christ underlines its original, theological value in the exegesis of *Gen 2*, which he presents in the synoptic gospels, specifically in *Matt 19:1-9; Mark 10:1-12.*

91. I refer in particular to the reflection conducted by John Paul II, both, before his election to the seat in Rome, during his studies on personalism (see in particular K. Wojtyła, *Amore e responsabilità*, Marietti, Genova 2000; K. Wojtyła, *Persona e atto*, tr. it. di G. Girgenti, P. Mikulska, Bompiani, Milan 2001), and as Pope with the many catecheses relating to the theology of the body during the public audiences on Wednesday from September 1979 to November 1984. There are 129 interventions, which since then have been collected in numerous editions (John Paul II, *Catecheses on marriage; Catecheses on love; Catecheses on sexuality*, Logos, Rome 1981; John Paul II, *Man and woman created it. Catechesis on human love*, Città Nuova, Rome 2011), and which have opened the way to a reflection still underway in the pontifical magisterium, as shows the attention given to the body and sexuality by Pope Francis, both, in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, published at the conclusion of the two sections on the family in 2014 and 2015, as well as in the public catecheses on Wednesdays, which for a long time had

and reveals its transcendence, through the mystery of the Incarnation and Resurrection. In the accounts of Genesis, fundamental questions are also raised with regards to the problems posed by desire and the role of human law, which are both central to contemporary reflection. Sarai's story is another example of this. Motivated by her desire to have a son, to achieve what the law of her time provided for, and to seek satisfaction from that desire, she relies on the support of the body of her slave. The account of Lot and the daughters serves as yet another example. They also consider their desire to have sons and descendants to be legitimate and sacrosanct. With no men present, but their father, to satisfy their desire, they resort to incest to obtain what they believe is theirs to have. In this context, it is loneliness that leads to sin; together with the conviction that one has the right to fulfill one's legitimate desire to have a son, and regardless of the real, objective conditions. After the destruction of Sodom, Lot and his daughters take refuge in the cave of Zoar, where they are isolated from the rest of human society. This is an echo of the words in Genesis. It is not good for man to be alone. In all these cases, it is human desire that leads to an action that is contrary to God's will and that has a real identifiable consequence in the lives of new people: these children are partially affected by the sin committed by their parents. They are forced, as in the case of Ishmael, to go into exile and suffering, or are condemned and cursed, as in the case of Moab and Ammon, the incestuous descendants of Lot's union with his nameless daughters. But in all these cases, in a more or less distant future, the hope of redemption arises; which for Ishmael is illustrated by his participation in the burial of Abraham, his father, and being recognized as a blessed son, unique among the many children, Abraham was to have from other concubines. For Moab and Ammon some regulations of the Torah, together with some emblematic stories<sup>92</sup>, allow for the rehabilitation of these two people born from incest; and in this rehabilitation, one recognizes the mercy of God, who acts despite the infidelities of man.

been focusing on the family, on the relationship as a couple, on the masculine and feminine dimension, and on the modalities with regards to their most genuine flourishing (see in particular the themes chosen for the General Audiences on Wednesdays in the year between the two synods, from 17 December 17, 2014 to November 18, 2015). See also the Audiences on September 3 and 10, as well as on October 15 and 22, 2014).

92. See particularly the enlightening story of Ruth, the Moabite woman who is even the ancestor of David, and thus central to the descendants of the Messiah-king.

## *The institutional and public dimension of the body: The Decalogue*

The subject of the institutional and public dimension of the human body is carefully addressed by post-feminist reflection. Judith Butler's thought is central in this case too. In *Precarious Life*, reflecting on the vulnerability of bodies, she points to some more universal views, which are also more directly connected to the historical context, in which she finds herself. She calls out America and the West on the use of war as an instrument of defense and protection from internal and external enemies, and as a way of muscular display of strength and superiority, a mode that ultimately reaffirms the mechanism of opposition and oppression, which post-feminism has interpreted in the duality of genders and believed to overcome by eliminating sex and gender in favor of a fluid identity. In these latest essays, the vulnerability of bodies, according to Butler, is, in essence, the aspect that unites all men, whether they belong to one or the other side of the lineup: «When the United States acts, it establishes a conception of what it means to act as an American [...] In the recent months [2004], a subject has been instated at the national level, a sovereign and extra-legal subject, a violent and self-centered subject; [...]» a subject that «seeks to reconstitute its imagined wholeness, but only at the prize of denying its own vulnerability, its dependency, its exposure, where it exploits those very features in others, thereby making those features “other to” itself. [...] Perhaps the lives of the Afghan children killed in a war, of which they knew nothing about, were not vulnerable to the violence of other bodies? And isn't the life of children in general vulnerable and in need of protection? And what mourning have we reserved for these lost lives? The elaboration of the mourning for the fallen of September 11 had its time and its gravestones. But those children?»<sup>93</sup>.

What human beings have in common is, as we have seen in Butler's reflection, the vulnerability of their bodies. When this is recognized, the paradigms of political action must change. According to the philosopher, feminism, which wanted to address and highlight the conflict between male and female, because of its specific history, can help to offer solutions to the conflict between cultural othernesses, to look at the women of the East and the Muslim world with different eyes, and to reflect on how to deal with their difference without offending their specificity, while at the same time trying to restore their genuine dignity. Once again, Butler falls into the hidden traps in the pursuit of the extreme consequences of post-

93. J. Butler, *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence* (English translation of the original quote in Italian), p. 62.

feminist thought, and gender theory, aimed at destroying the difference. She herself concludes that, contrary to the conceptual cornerstones of fluid identity, only profound respect for otherness can ensure the dignity of all people, knowing well that it is constitutive of existence, the human, and fundamental to life itself as we know it on earth, and as it is also demonstrated through scientific studies.

Gender studies on the other hand, in Butler's opinion, have made it clear that there exists no body that belongs solely to the subject since it is exposed to public space and collects external instances. Its dimension and the way one can interpret one's body also depend on the social and political networks, in which the subject is immersed. Ultimately, it depends on the anthropology of reference. It is certainly true that a genuine political action should cause reflection about more universal points of view because the condition of the human person and the body of man and woman are very different depending on the specific geographical area. International conferences, dealing with issues related to women, have stressed that often the presented views display an overly Western bias. In opposition to this accusation, different lines of feminism have been created that define themselves deliberately as "third world", and which provocatively accuse the West of imposing female images that are biased and acceptable only in developed countries, or worse, imagining the non-western woman as an indistinct prototype, unitary, which does not take into account the cultural differences that exist in different contexts. In this sense, biblical anthropology can be of great assistance because it expresses a truly unusual universality, which begins with respect for every difference<sup>94</sup>: What it expresses is valid for every man and woman on the planet, in every place and in every time; and because it is universal, and Catholic in this sense, it is the revelation which is contained therein. The challenge is to narrate this universality in words that welcome, respect and eventually redeem not only the natural but also the cultural condition of every woman and every man.

On this subject relating to the relationship with the public and institutional dimension, I want to recapture a suggestion: The Decalogue, the expression par excellence of Jewish law, and, thus, in direct relationship with the political institution, is a set of "words" that speak of the body in concrete terms because they address real people who want to walk with God<sup>95</sup>. I do not particularly appreciate the term "commandments". Above

94. See particularly the passages which call for respect for peaceful foreigners dwelling in the midst of Israel, reaffirming – according to deep-rooted convictions, which run throughout biblical history – the human dignity common to all people.

95. This is, we should not forget, another vivid image, typical of biblical tradition, which actively involves corporeity, with all its fatigue.

all because it is not a biblical term<sup>96</sup>; and also because it reduces to a rule what is God's word for the good of man, spoken with freedom and in view of the complete freedom of the human creature, a freedom that is not the absence of bonds, but instead consists in the acceptance of such bonds because in them the plenitude of a vocation is realized.

The ten words are understood in a faith incarnate, embodied, not abstract. The body again is their requirement and horizon. Those who enshrine both, the duties towards God and the prohibition of idolatry, warn against placing in God's place what is not God, be it an animal, a plant, a natural phenomenon, or even the body, made an idol itself; in the illusion of making it become omnipotent<sup>97</sup>. The fourth word recalls the sacredness, from which the body is derived, and reaffirms the importance of the relationship of love between parents, as expressed above: In the Bible, it is regarded as such an important duty that it is associated with the blessing of long-lasting life *in the body*. The fourth word, in fact, reads: «Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord, your God, has commanded you, that you may have a long life and that you may prosper in the land the Lord your God is giving you»<sup>98</sup>. The biblical accounts instead warn against the curse that hangs over those who do not respect their parents, and specifically their bodies<sup>99</sup>. The fifth word, on the prohibition of killing, is present, as we have seen, very early in scriptural, and together with the sixth word, it is evidently connected with corporeity. Both of them shed tremendous light on all the other words; because, if the body is suppressed or offended by impurity, then it becomes impossible, according to scriptural reasoning, to respect the other indications. The seventh word carries only meaning in the context of a life in the body and protects the material existence with the means that support it. The same can be said of the word relating to desire. Christian tradition knows two, but in reality, they are unitary in the biblical text, and teach the purity of the heart, thereby

96. In *Exodus* and *Deuteronomy*, the commandments of the Decalogue are properly called "words", with all the ample conceptual and concrete meaning that the original Hebrew term carries with it.

97. I am thinking, for instance, of cosmetic surgery, the difficulty of accepting oneself as one is, the unwillingness to welcome and respect the passing of time and aging, all of which so strongly characterize the contemporary world.

98. *Esth* 20:12; *Deut* 5:16. The subject is revisited in the book of Syracuse – belonging to the wisdom tradition in Greek – together with a long lesson on duty to respect one's parents. See *Sir* 3:1-16, which reiterates the subject and makes explicit the promises of blessing within the body contained in the fourth word.

99. «Think of the story of Noah's drunkenness, and the punishment, which falls to the son who looks at his father's nakedness, instead of covering it up; a punishment that results in the curse of his descendants»: *Gen* 9:18-27.

touching on very practical aspects: goods, in the first place, but also love, marriage, which is relationship and as such takes place in the body, and again involves everything that has been discussed so far. The word on the attestation of truth and falsehood returns to the subject of truth, which cannot be detached from corporeity, and which can be another way of reflecting upon how to present today, to everybody, the truth about the life and body of man and woman; thereby following the example of Paul, an apostle of his time, skilled with the truth, fearless in truth, and in the midst of different trends: *«For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength»* (1Cor 1:22-25).

So far, biblical anthropology has been examined in terms that have rarely had any recourse to theology, with the objective of making it comprehensible to the lay world, and opening up a constructive dialogue with it. From this perspective, biblical anthropology opens up to the true transcendence and recognizes the ultimate model of the human being: Christ, the wisdom of God, present at the moment of creation, the eternal word, with which the world has received existence; who is in communion with the Father, with whom he is *unum*, one entity only, without being *unus*, one person only. Therefore, he is the eternal model of eternal difference, which is the foundation of existence and, for the other, the condition of being. He is the word that takes flesh, becomes incarnate, and does so in a male body, in a vulnerable body, in a defenseless body, subject to the laws of growth, aging, and death. So was he born into a family, and thus into difference, subject to suffering and corruption, profoundly human. Christ incarnates in a differentiated body, not in an indistinct body, nor in a body that brings together all differences within itself; and all that through the gestation of a female body. With this supreme, transcendent, and yet immanent model, the human body receives, under the guidance of scriptural reasoning, its highest and most undeniable dignity.

# Body and Meaning: an interdisciplinary approach to the semantics of Human Body

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**Abstract:** *As a person has a subjective, rational and free interiority, the relationship he has with his own body and with everything that concerns him is subject to a process of discovery, elaboration, and appropriation, which revolves around the meaning of his own sexed corporeity. The three contexts, in which our reflection is situated, are, therefore, the search for the meaning of corporeity, the search for the meaning of self, and the direction of existence in view of human plenitude. At the center is the subject of meaning: We will try to offer the primary coordinates of the search for meaning itself, not as to clarify the fundamental or theoretical order, but to facilitate an interpretation of the “relational grammar” of the body.*

## The context of our reflection: The personal perspective

From a biological and metaphysical perspective, the unity of the person with the body is a fact. However, for the most part, it is a datum not subject to freedom. As long as the person lives, this unity does not dissolve. We are in the realm of “indisputable facts”. Nevertheless, there is also another perspective, another realm, in which the person/body relationship appears differently.

As a person has a subjective, rational and free interiority, the relationship he has with his own body, and with everything that concerns him, is subject to a process of discovery, elaboration, and appropriation that revolves around the *meaning* of his sexed corporeity.

Note that the search for the meaning of corporeity is not an end in itself. It is directly part of the elaboration of that project of oneself, in which the person is involved given the plenitude to be attained<sup>1</sup>. The inter-

1. «The embodied person cannot reach full realization in a naturalistic manner without the responsible contribution of free decision: the “objective” value of meaning



pretation of one's own personal history and the way one's own behavior is regulated, depend to a large extent on the network of meanings that constitutes the vital world in which that project itself is registered<sup>2</sup>.

The search for the meaning of corporeity, the search for the meaning of self, and the orientation of existence concerning human plenitude are the three contexts, in which the reflection that begins now is developed. At the center, there is the subject of meaning: Here, we want to indicate the primary coordinates of the search for meaning itself; not to clarify the fundamental or theoretical order, but to render possible an interpretation of the "relational grammar" of the body.

Let us focus now on the subject of meaning. From what has been said so far, it follows that the meaning does not fully coincide with the reality, on which it insists: The meaning of the sexed body is not the same as the sexed body seen from some perspective. However, it is true that "the relationship of man with his body is embodied in the imaginary and the symbolic"<sup>3</sup>, i.e., in his personal interiority. The meaning belongs to the world of the *symbolic*, which we must enter now.

As a starting point, we can look at the discoveries made by a famous biologist active at the beginning of the 20th century, Jakob von Uexküll. To explain the anatomy and life of some simple animals, he identified a structure he called a "functional circle". It consists in the fact that the sensory organs and effector organs of each animal (think of an insect) seem to correspond perfectly to the world and the environment, in which it lives. The sensory organs of the insect perceive signals that alert it to the presence of food, to which the insect then reacts with precise action, thus ensuring its subsistence. The capacities of the insect and the structure of its environmental world correspond to each other, forming a functional circle<sup>4</sup>.

The reflection that followed von Uexküll's discoveries has made it increasingly clear that the functional circle seems substantially modified in the case of the human person<sup>5</sup>. Not only is their world not configured

demands to be realized in freedom. [...] Human freedom brings with it the possibility of "integrating" the body into the person, or rather, of preserving the unity of the person» (C. Caffarra, *Persona, libertà umana e corporeità* (Translation), from [www.caffarra.it/pamplona\\_96.php#sthash.cgZF3620.dpuf](http://www.caffarra.it/pamplona_96.php#sthash.cgZF3620.dpuf)).

2. Cfr. John Paul II, *Encyclical Fides et Ratio* (1998), n. 30.

3. D. Le Breton, *Antropologia del corpo e modernità*, Giuffrè, Milan 2007, p. 256.

4. Cfr. J. von Uexküll, *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*, Berlin 1921.

5. For further information, the following classic is recommended: E. Cassirer, *Saggio sull'uomo. Una introduzione alla filosofia della cultura umana*, Armando, Rome 2009, second chapter; L. Prieto Lopez, *El hombre y el animal. Nuevas fronteras de la Antropología*, BAC, Madrid 2008; J. Pieper, *Verità delle cose. Un'indagine sull'antropologia del Medio Evo*, Massimo, Milan 1991, pp. 110-116.

as a simple *world-environment*, but further still, human interiority – being the basis of the sensory organs and the effectors – allows us to break the automatism of the functional circle. The person does not react to the stimuli of his world: He responds to them. In other words, in the case of man, one does not automatically pass from the perception of signals to subsequent action. Instead, the person manages to distance himself from the stimuli that come to him from the world: A space opens wherein the dynamics of the functional circle are suspended. It is the space of rationality that raises the question about the entity and the meaning of such stimuli. Only when these questions have been satisfactorily answered can one think of giving an answer to the stimuli.

### **The human being and the question of meaning**

The twentieth century has much reflected on this particular condition of the human being, which is a being open to the question of meaning. There are two approaches that can help us to deepen our subject.

The first approach, which can be presented briefly, regards the relationship between meaning and the reality it refers to. If at first, it seems that the meaning of a word or a proposition coincides with what it refers to (the meaning of “pencil” is the object next to my book), a deeper analysis will reveal that it is opportune to distinguish two particular aspects that are involved. We can follow Gottlob Frege’s proposal, which invites us to recognize the difference between *denotation* and *sense*<sup>6</sup>. The denotation of the term “pencil” is that object with which one can write, while the sense of the “pencil” (we will call it “meaning”) is something that belongs to the order of what the human mind can understand, and which it uses for actions such as giving the definition of pencil, talking about the properties of pencils as well as indicating similarities and differences between pencils and other objects. Following these reflections, our attention will focus on the sense (meaning) of the sexed human body.

The second approach, which is more demanding, completes what we have just mentioned. It is concerned with the complex phenomenon of observable differences, which occurs as soon as several people confront each other in a debate about the meaning of the human body. Is it possible to give a coherent explanation of this datum? Instead of following the path of relativism, which wants to trace back the mentioned discordance to a

6. G. Frege, “Senso e denotazione”, in A. Bonomi (ed.), *La struttura logica del linguaggio*, Milan 1995, p. 16.

hypothetical social or historical construction of meaning – if not perhaps to its arbitrary creation without any reference to reality – we want to point out that the most striking differences can be explained through the diversity of qualitative degrees, by which things are classified. There are some simple cases, classified by lower degrees, as in the case of a pencil or other material objects, where the mind seems to limit itself to deduce the meaning of real objects and indicate the instances, to which it applies: “This here is a pencil, whereas that other thing is not”. Then there are more complex cases, classified by degrees of the highest level, in which the realities on which the discourse converges are not material objects. Think of moral (virtues, behaviors, intentions) or cultural (fashions, social conventions, political ideas) realities, or – to get to the subject we are interested in – of the human person and its constitutive dimensions, such as sexed corporeity, historicity, and intersubjectivity – the subject of intense debates. If it were possible to envisage an adequate grammar for these more elusive meanings, what would be its points of reference? It is not enough to say that the meaning of these realities of a higher order must be naturally treated in a different way from those material realities.

Let us think directly about the case of the sexed body. How has the search for its meaning been commonly directed? It is not easy to answer this question because being a man or woman is a fact as much as it is a mystery. It seems that we have reached a *deadlock*: There are those who affirm the pure historicity of all meaning, so that masculine and feminine may assume as many concepts and representations as there are cultures or, even more so, individuals; so that no constant or specificity could be held firm. Then there are those who consider the sexual difference to be a purely physiological or functional fact, without the sigh of human freedom, and then risk deducing fixed characters from sexed matter. On the one hand, we find the historicity of all ideas, on the other hand, discouraging and abstract genericity (the realm of stereotypes). It is clear that the problem here is, first of all, to know how to think about the meaning of the sexed body.

In fact, if the body is reduced to mere organic matter with its laws or functions, then we slip into naturalistic reductionism. If, however, the corporeal substratum is denied and reduced to language or social interpretation, then we slip into sociological determinism. The further away one is from the respective positions of the *functioning body* and the *societal body* – directed by scripts or the product of social conditioning – the less one can think of the synergy between the two, or of the *lived-in body*, and we find ourselves oscillating between two dead tracks.

How does one escape this deadlock? The philosopher Edmund Husserl has found a valuable basis to aid this meaning. He has captured the important difference between two possible ways of understanding the human body<sup>7</sup>: First, there is the focus on the *objective body* (*Körper*), either the body as a reality composed of a multiplicity of organs, with a particular weight and volume, whose outer boundary is constituted by the skin, and which can be studied by anatomy and other similar disciplines. Then, there is the perspective that captures the *subjective body* (*Leib*) that each person experiences as his body, i.e., not as a body that appears “in front” of the subject and that can be measured, but as a body «sensed and subjectively possessed, even before any categorical classification and the distinction between subject and object»<sup>8</sup> occurs. From this second perspective, where the human body is inseparably attached to the person, of whom it is a constituent element and from whom it receives its status and essential qualities, the body is neither reducible to its material dimension, to the organic functions it performs, nor to the cultural interpretations and social constructions that inevitably distinguish it. That is why the human mind must seek the meaning of the body beyond the reductions of a material-functional or cultural-social nature.

The research method then has to deduce its general orientation precisely from the *personal statute* of the human body. It is this ontological “elevation” that makes it different from a pencil and any other object devoid of personal character and, therefore, requires a distinct approach. If the human body is not a simple object, whose characteristics are already fully revealed, and, thus, open to experimental research, but instead presents itself as capable of manifesting an interiority of a personal nature, then this means that the body conceals within itself a *surplus of sense*. Therefore, the corresponding research method (1) is not only theoretical/objective, as material or functional realities would require, but (2) includes a decision-making/participatory dimension, since a study on the meaning of the body would remain incomplete, would not be well established if it did not require the commitment of freedom called to embrace the manifestation of meaning, of which the body is capable, and finally (3) includes a symbolic/hermeneutical dimension, since meanings are not material entities that can be accessed directly but results that are reached at the end of a search for an understanding of reality. The Judeo-Christian culture, which forms part of the foundations of Western culture, has also linguistically

7. Cfr. E. Husserl, *Idee per una fenomenologia pura e per una filosofia fenomenologica*, II, Einaudi, Turin 2002, pp. 146-173.

8. P. Miccoli, *Corpo dicibile. L'uomo tra esperienza e parola*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome 2013, p. 110.

indicated this horizon: in fact, to describe the body, it adopts the Hebrew noun *bašar*, which also means manifestation.

Therefore, it can be said that the human body is not a *meaning*, but a *signifier*. The fact that the body is a signifier means that the surplus of sense, of which the human body is a bearer is not exhausted in a single meaning. On the contrary, that sense cannot be exhausted even in a very large but closed number of propositions. The fact that the body is a signifier means that it is a source of sense: When it is found in new circumstances and relationships, it is a fountain of new meanings. This is because the human body cannot be reduced to a mere animality or opaque matter, not even to a meaning assigned once and for all. However, we must also add that the *body as a signifier* can never be without meanings because it would be an empty form.

Then the meanings, which each time make the body explicit, are at the intersection of two vectors: On the one hand, a base consisting of a direction given by the body itself; on the other hand, the way in which the person receives and understands that direction. The vector, whose direction is given by the body, is further specified by the fact that being a man or a woman qualifies our way of existing and being in the world. However, this explanatory determination is not given to the vector by itself but is received from the interaction with the other vector, or from the effort the person makes to understand, sincerely and profoundly, the meaning of his own body, and that of others.

Historical and social conditions certainly play a central role in the field of the symbolic, where meanings are placed, but that role consists above all in demanding that the commitment to specify the meaning of the body be renewed. Therefore, it is not the ineliminable presence of subjective arbitrariness, the creator of meaning, which explains the fact that the meaning of the body may not be objectively established once and for all – this idea does not presuppose a body rich in meaning, but a *poor* body, a mute body, incapable of saying anything about itself and in need of the outside world to offer it the words it does not possess. It is rather the consideration of the *richness of sense* that characterizes the personal body that invites us to continually start listening again to and renew our acceptance of the meanings of the body.

In order to interpret the meaning of the human body, it is, therefore, necessary to intertwine the elaboration of the meaning of one's sexed body with the free and responsible acceptance of that meaning. The growth of one of these poles must correspond to the growth of the other, so that the understanding of the meaning and its valorization at the axiological level are mutually conditioned, allowing the maturation of both.

An example may elucidate what we have explored<sup>9</sup>. Suppose someone has a sheet of paper in front of him. It presents itself to him as an object totally at his disposal. He can do whatever he wants with it: fold it, burn it, write something on it. Suppose that person now realizes that there are signs on the sheet, more or less arranged: musical notes, for instance. In front of him, he has a musical score. At that moment, he realizes that the sheet of paper he wanted to burn conceals a wealth of meaning accessible to anyone who is able to read the music. So he understands that, even if he could treat the score as any other sheet of paper, it would be a mistake. He would have treated something as a simple object, which, instead, could facilitate the realization of higher values and possibilities. The score must be treated adequately. Imagine now that this person is capable of playing that score on the piano. He places the score in front of his eyes and, letting himself be guided by it, begins to play the melody. At this moment he notices that he has entered into a special relationship with the score: it fully reveals what it is (a basis for generating musical beauty). At the same time, the person can fully show his musical aptitude.

In this way, the plenitude of the score and the plenitude of the musical abilities mutually condition each other, from the moment, in which the musician has deliberately decided to accept the score as a score and not as a sheet of paper and let himself be guided by it.

Something similar happens with the sexed body, but on a much higher plane, because the sexed body is always the body of a person. Everything begins when freedom, perceiving something of the meaning of the sexed body, takes a step backward (i.e., welcomes and leaves space for the body): Instead of treating it as a simple object, it prepares itself to follow the path that the body seems to indicate in order to reach its fullness of meaning<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, this allows those, who have decided to adopt this attitude of respect and cooperation, to reach their full potential.

In this process of discovering and elaborating the meaning of the body, meanings always arise in a historical context and cannot be determined beforehand or established unilaterally. How then do we know if an emerging meaning is an authentic path of personal development and not an abusive meaning? Is it possible to establish some criteria for discerning

9. The example proposed here is inspired by the philosophical approach developed by Alfonso López Quintás (cfr. Id., *Descubrir la grandeza de la vida. Nuevo proyecto formativo*, Editorial Verbo Divino, Madrid 2004; Id., *El triángulo hermenéutico. Introducción a una filosofía de los ámbitos*, Publicaciones Universidad Francisco de Vitoria, Madrid 2015).

10. Cfr. R. Guardini, *Hondo e persona*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2007, pp. 162-166.

between meanings? It is clear that the criteria cannot be external to the relationship; more than anything else it consists in the invitation to modulate our relationship with others with the “correct” behaviors.

In our opinion, the first step in discovering the grammar of the body consists in a change of the way how freedom is conceived: from the freedom that uses things and instruments to freedom that starts to adopt an attitude of respect and listening, waiting to be able to interact with the body in a correct manner. Only then does the way of relating to the *objective body* cease, being superseded by a new way of establishing the relationship, which wants to signify and integrate the experiences of the body before acting with it or on it. Once this basis is guaranteed, it is possible to exercise patience – under the pressure of otherness – so as to test one’s own desires and even prejudices. Those who are able to understand the true scope of their desires will find it easier to discern the meaning of accepting or rejecting them.

### **The relational grammar of the body**

After completing the two initial approaches, we are equipped to begin our research into the sense codes of the body<sup>11</sup>. As mentioned above, it is based on the recognition (not always theoretically definable, but certainly accepted in practice) of his personal statute; a statute that places it above objects that can be used at will. This exploration of the meaning of the body is not always easy to carry out, for example, if we think of the violent power games the body is subjected to. It is trapped in the midst of strong contradictions: There is the invulnerable body (performer) and the raped body (wounded, exposed); the enhanced body (body of capacities, physical, sexual, cognitive) and the dis-individualized body (as if it were a garment); the asexual and the artificially fertilized body; the body of rights (political surface that activates processes of social change, as in the case of *queer* politics) and the de-symbolized body, which of itself would have nothing to say, having no ontological density to decipher. In order to liberate the body from the game of these contradictions, it is necessary to listen deeply into

11. Cfr. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia della percezione*, Il Saggiatore, Milan 1965. In this work, the French philosopher reflects on the personal dimension of the body, i.e., on the specificity of the living body. If for Husserl intentionality was always located in the context of the reflective work of consciousness, for Merleau-Ponty it also knows an earlier level: the intentionality of the body. In fact, for him, «consciousness is the connection with things through the body» (*ibid.*, p. 226).

ourselves, i.e., try to decipher the relational symbolic of the body, particularly dense and complex in the moments of birth and death, suffering and sexuality.

So what does the sexed body tell us? If it speaks – and we must remember that it can speak in different ways, depending on the circumstances – is it possible to indicate its central words, to recognize its grammar, to decipher, if you will, its relational symbolism?

We propose three places, to which the experience of the body takes us; three words on which the body orients us more: the body as a relationship, as a manifestation of otherness, as the ordained limitation of the encounter.

### *a) Body of relationship*

The body speaks of relationship because with words and gestures it gives voice to what is born and quivers in direct contact with the other: with the world and with other people. But more profoundly, the corporeity<sup>12</sup> speaks of relationship because it manifests that the person has the ability to join another person. In this sense, it is said that corporeity is open to the world of things and people. Corporeity, as a constituent element of the person, guarantees that it will always be possible to go towards the other by oneself in order to build a relationship.

The person is originally a relationship, and the human body is its place and the condition for the encounter: We can only enter into a relationship through the body, even if it were only a relationship with ourselves. Every experience proves it to us: When we rejoice or suffer; when the person rejoices or trembles in fear, the body speaks and what it means cannot be deciphered without profound contact with one's own body: we can only express ourselves through bodily gestures, through words of the body. At the same time, the bodily experience can only arise from the interiority of the person, so that the body speaks of that otherness, which quivers in the carnal depth of the human being. So it follows that body, I, expression, and meaning are never completely separated. Those who affirm one dimension cannot avoid assuming the others<sup>13</sup>.

12. When we speak of corporeity, we are referring to the human body understood as a subjective/living body that, in its deep integration with the person, constitutes a carrying dimension of the same.

13. This dimension of relationship – of encounter – is clearly expressed in scriptural reasoning, which also linguistically brings the human being back to the earth, of which he is made, and establishes a reciprocity between the masculine and the feminine of the human being, both described through the same etymological root. This point has already been discussed in chapter three.



b) *The body is a manifestation of otherness*

It is possible to distinguish a twofold otherness: the otherness, which we could call internal; which consists in the fact that the body assumes, in certain ways, the form of the interiority that inhabits it; and the otherness of another's body, which does not belong to us; which we do not experience; which is untouchable, and which obliges us to listen to its word, following its grammar, without ever being able to contain it in our rational comprehension.

Regarding the first sense, we can say that the body (one's own and that of others) is always inhabited by the *logos*, by personal sense. This means that one can never touch another's body without touching his soul, his intimacy. When one encounters the body of the other, one encounters an otherness that goes in a certain sense beyond the body: «For the soul is not contained by the body», the ancients said, «rather does it contain the body»<sup>14</sup>. They meant to indicate that the body is a witness and a revelation of something, which surpasses it: the person. By containing it, the person makes the body share in his richness, in his way of being. It is then understood that it is impossible to study the body as a “closed item”, because, like a bridge, it leads across a horizon that is the person who inhabits it – otherness, taken away from us and only partially accessible, in the measure, in which it is revealed in the body and wants to reveal himself more through its gestures.

This first sense of otherness is intertwined with its second connotation, that of the alterity of another's body – another with respect to myself, and my body. This connotation expresses an important part of the meaning of sexual difference: a woman, not having masculine experiences, does not know what a man feels; and conversely, a man does not know what a woman feels, in the absence of experiences given by a feminine corporeity. It is then that the alterity of the other reveals itself as an “inaccessible threshold”, because it is not possible to put oneself in the place of the other, to occupy one's interiority and to experience things in the singularity of another's experience. We are only allowed to stay outside of it, to listen to it, admire it, follow it, without ever being able to appropriate it: the person in its depth is always – ontologically speaking – *alteri incommunicabilis*. That the body of the other is truly another allows us to transcend ourselves (the other is neither assimilable nor a replica of our experiences),

14. «Non enim anima continetur a corpore, sed potius continet corpus» (T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 62, p. 3).

but he is still “another like us”: He is similar to us to the point of not being a stranger or immeasurable, but not as similar as to be a double.

Otherness is not simply the difference that rejects the other: if so, the two would not be able to meet, because one would be the totally other and distance would be the only grammar possible. If, on the other hand, otherness is not only outside of us but internal to us – like the absence of or the tension towards the other – then it offers us a precious indication: limitation makes it clear that we are not everything, that we cannot do everything, that in us, there is a potential for the other<sup>15</sup>.

### c) *The body as an experience of limitation*

As a signifier of otherness, sexual difference is the realm where one learns to desire the other: For it has to do with the positive awareness of limitation (“I am not everything” and “the other is not my double”) and with the safeguarding of mystery (“I do not have immediate access to the originality of your experience”). To each the other sex appears to be “similar” (to the point that it is possible to recognize a common “human”, without plunging into fusion and losing oneself, as Judeo-Christian culture recalls in sapiential terms, when it identifies the common matrix of man and woman in the “human” *'adam*, differentiated as masculine and feminine in *Gen* 1:26-27), and at the same time “different” (because one does not make the mistake of seeing in the other nothing but oneself). To understand this point we can use the relationship between immanence and transcendence. The growth of one of these dimensions always implies the growth of the other. In this way, when the person becomes aware of the sexual difference that the person in front of him is carrying (moment of transcendence), he immediately begins to discover or recognize his own limitation (moment of immanence). This recognition of one’s own limitation is not understood only in a negative sense, i.e., like the realization that one is not like the other and that one is not everything (moment of transcendence), or like the realization of one’s own situation of deficiencies (moment of immanence). There is also a positive sense, which consists in the discovery of the possibilities that are revealed if one chooses to open oneself to the difference of the other; when one wants to be with the other

15. This is the creatural dimension, underlying biblical anthropology, and is described through the sapiential texts on the origins (*Gen* 1-3). In this sense, the body assumes and manifests its dimension of limitation, beyond which it is not possible to go, as scriptural reasoning has clearly demonstrated through the anthropology by which it is characterized.

and for the other. In this case, the “limitation” is revealed as a possibility of contributing to the constitution of the “we”, in which man and woman enter, bringing with them their own difference, i.e., their own not-being-the-other. Therefore, the limit is the place of a tension that appears as a distance inhabited by a promise of proximity. These profound anthropological dynamics show that sexual difference is really the condition of identity, but at the same time, of relationship.

## **The relational symbolism of the sexed body**

The body, as we have said, is the reference point through which the world articulates itself: It is “the vehicle of being in the world”, “the linchpin of the world”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, being a man or a woman provides orientation for a person’s way of being in the world, leaving to freedom the task of deciding how to put it into practice. The time has come to take advantage of some of the features of this orientation. It must be reiterated that these aspects do not restore all of the complexity of the male and female human being, but offer them meaningful possibilities and a direction for reflection.

In this last section of the chapter, we will offer some clues on how to interpret some data of the relational symbolism of sexed corporeity. We will focus our attention on particular biological aspects, trying to interpret them based on symbolism. We acknowledge that some of these biological aspects are common to animals, but only for human beings do they have a meaning. As mentioned before, the biological dimension of the person is inseparable from the personal logos, so the biological aspect cannot be only biological: It is human and, as such, carries meaning. Consequently, the differences of the sexed bodies (at chromosomal, hormonal, genital or morphological level) do not only have a functional value: They form a body that “speaks of” and questions our freedom, so that it can give it a personal and relational interpretation<sup>17</sup>.

This is not a simple operation. The premises of such an interpretation, e.g., the analogical unit, which crosses the diversity of qualitative degrees present in the human body, rarely find acceptance, where the

16. M. Merleau-Ponty, *Fenomenologia della percezione*, p. 130.

17. This does not mean that there are exclusive characteristics to either sex, but that there are aspects, which tend to develop through the interaction with the other, different from oneself. Pedro Juan Viladrich speaks of a mutual ability to “generate oneself” (P.J. Viladrich, *La palabra de la mujer*, Rialp, Madrid 2000, pp. 13-55).

grounding anthropological vision does not reach the ontological level. Another assumption of the present interpretation is to accept the interpersonal presupposition, according to which, without the encounter with the other, neither man nor woman can achieve plenitude. We also believe that this disposition for the other can already be seen in the symbols of their bodies. Certainly not in such a way that meaning is univocally anchored in biological data, suffocating freedom and making the search for meaning superfluous. Hence, we will not use the word “complementarity” in this context, because it could cause us to believe that the encounter and enrichment between man and woman occurs in an automatic, mechanic or functional manner, “predictable” in some way. To be a man or a woman is rather a “supplement”, a surplus of sense so that each one can reach the full measure of human plenitude. Evidently, these assumptions are placed on another level with respect to feminist literature, which has criticized in various ways the reductionisms that identify man with *ratio* (and therefore with the part considered active and most noble) whereas the woman with the *body* (considered the passive element, moved more by feelings and instincts than reason and will). Other feminists, far from considering it a condemnation, have taken advantage of the opportunity given by the identification of the woman with the body, discovering therein a new type of rationality and a new type of logic, which lead to a redefinition of the concept of “thinking”. Women would then appeal to the discovery of the corporeal and driving roots of thinking<sup>18</sup>.

Below we offer some ideas to symbolically interpret the following data: the ovarian cycle in women and its absence in men, the difference in sexual dynamics, the general experience of the body and the generative difference. The following observations have prompted in us some reflections that we make in the form of questions, to illustrate the intertwining between the data and the personal processing of such.

#### a) *Cyclicity and the rhythms of existence*

The woman’s body is marked by the rhythms of her ovarian cycle. Her emotional world is naturally marked by this particular aspect of her body that involves a complex hormonal, cerebral, genital and morphological dynamic<sup>19</sup>. It is well known that ovulation is a time when a woman feels

18. Cfr. R. Braidotti, *Dissonanze. Le donne e la filosofia contemporanea. Verso una lettura filosofica delle idee femministe*, La Tartaruga, Milan 1994.

19. Merleau-Ponty defines the emotional world as «a mosaic of affective states, pleasure and pain enclosed in it, which escape the understanding and *can only be*

an increase in positive energy within herself; when she is more at ease with herself and with others. The premenstrual period, on the other hand, causes swelling and fatigue; it increases her irritability and sensitivity and she may suffer from various syndromes, such as migraine, nausea or insomnia.

Although a man experiences his own spermatogenesis cycle, he is far from the oscillations of the female hormonal cycle, and for this reason the woman's experience is strange to him. How does this differentiate his various ways of being in the world? Let us reflect on some aspects in particular:

- Rhythm and the relationship with time: Opening up to the world based on the body means looking at it from a perspective situated in space and time. Women experience a temporary sequence *within* their bodies: Since their adolescence, they have become accustomed to a cyclical rhythm. Are we to think that this experience impacts their relationship with time? How does this perception of time manifest itself in personal decisions, in their orientation towards the future, and in their awareness of the passing of time or its consequences?
- Pain and the relationship to suffering: The experience of menstruation, in some sense, teaches women the discomfort the body can cause. A purely biological interpretation would identify menstrual cramps as a disorder, which prepares women for childbirth; but if we are at a level of significance, the experience related to those cramps goes beyond their apparent function. Can we say that, based on their bodies, women are better prepared to resist physical and moral suffering? A woman's body tells her that life is given through pain. How is this reflected in the relationship with men, who seem to need the support of women in times of suffering? In this sense, one understands the theological value assigned to pain, and specifically to the pains of childbirth, which are present throughout the Bible: it is a fundamental, anthropological fact of Judeo-Christian culture.

How should we interpret these differences based on a relational grammar? We ask ourselves: can we discover in them an opportunity for mutual education? In the encounter with the other, and above all with the man, the woman is pushed not to focus her attention on her own physical-emotional state or to modulate it with "what is outside": the

*explained by our corporeal organization»* (cfr. Id., *Fenomenologia della Percezione*, p. 220, Translation. Italics are from the Italian version). However, recognizing the corporeal anchorage of certain emotional states does not mean renouncing the capacity of reason to govern this dimension.

objectivity of being herself, that of the other and of the world. When a man meets a woman, on the other hand, he is educated to understand and evaluate “what is within”: the relational and subjective aspects of reality. In the encounter with the other, who is different from themselves, men and women acquire a more complete concept of reality, because it is approached from different relational modes.

### b) *Sexual dynamics*

It is also known that men and women have different rhythms within their sexual dynamics. Man is more immediate: He is quick to initiate intercourse and experiences it as short-lived. Women need more time, and emotional elements greatly influence their ability to accept and experience intercourse. This seems to be an inconsistency of nature, but it also presents itself as an opportunity for a fully human encounter. In fact, the sexual encounter is not automatic as in the case of animals: Coupling is not enough for there to be an authentic encounter. Mutual adaptation of one another is necessary: availability and activity on the part of the woman; patience, expectation and tenderness on the part of the man. It seems that the true encounter takes place when each one does his own thing and adapts to the sexual dynamics of the other. The encounter, if it is such, can reaffirm both in their own identity. The language of the body enlightens us at this point:

- Man knows the woman outside of himself. The tension of his sexed body leads him towards her. We could say that the characteristic movement of masculinity is that of going out of oneself to find the woman, who becomes the house (the space) where he is welcomed. This dynamic is evident both at the level of the genital organs and at the microscopic level of generation: In fact, after fertilization, when the sperm has entered the ovum, the nuclei of the two cells are not yet united. The nucleus of the spermatozoon then begins to throw microtubules towards the nucleus of the egg and attracts this nucleus towards itself, fusing with it «During the so-called pro nuclear phase, in which the paternal and maternal chromosomal kits are segregated within the respective pronuclear membranes, from the male centrosome the radiating microtubules begin to organize and extend themselves to englobe the female pronucleus» (F. Fabo, *Elementi di Embriologia*, Faculty of Bioethics Regina Apostolorum, 14). Is it possible to think that these dynamics are not only chemical and somehow illuminate higher orders? The masculinity of the man seems to be fully affirmed when he is received by the woman.

- The woman meets the man inside herself. The tension of her body leads her to receive and welcome the other. She becomes space and time for the other: This happens both with respect to the man she encounters in the sexual dynamic, as well as the child she conceives and carries in her womb as a result of that dynamic. Sexual dynamics translate into receptivity. This disposition has been interpreted as an inferiority of the woman, because receptivity has been identified with a negative passivity<sup>20</sup>, while the reception of the other is considered a powerful form of action. The biological process confirms this: When the spermatozoa enter the woman's body, they are not yet ready to fertilize her. They must undergo the phenomenon of "capacitation", through which the woman's cervical mucus feeds them and prepares them for fertilization<sup>21</sup>. If we wanted to give an interpretation of this phenomenon within the symbolic relationship that we are illustrating, we could say that the woman feeds the body of the man and makes it fertile.

These different dimensions of the masculine and feminine nature are widely emphasized also by the Bible and its anthropology, both in the accounts of creation as well as in the writings and narrative contexts of the Pentateuch and the Historical Books, which describe the origins and provide wise indications about the human being. We can only see, by way of example, the outburst of Adam when he meets the woman, which is of a clear outgoing nature towards her, approaching an encounter that gives plenitude, as well as the dimension of listening, which characterizes the woman, who receives the gaze and words of the man. See also, in biblical symbolism, the importance of the notation that the encounter between man and woman, and their own differentiation, takes place in the body of the *'adam*.

c) *The experience of the body in relation to the person's self-understanding*

For a man, the body tends to be experienced as an instrument. It does not arouse any other interest except to do something, overcome an obstacle, avoid evil or get a pleasure. In the construction of the masculine

20. Cfr. B. Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, y G. Collins, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 2013<sup>2</sup>; J. Butler et al., *Feminist contentions: a philosophical exchange*, Routledge, New York 1995.

21. Capacitation is a phenomenon that lasts about seven hours. During this process, the coat of protein is removed from the membrane surrounding the acrosome region of the sperm: In this way, the membrane begins to be "permeable" (cfr. F. Fabo, *Elementi di Embriologia*, p. 9).

self-image, the things that the man can do with his body (his strength, speed, dexterity...) count for something. Affectivity and the body run the risk of being perceived as two distinct and separable realities: Therefore, the challenge presented to him is to unify, integrate and personalize his body, so as not to live it as something different from himself, as if it were a mere instrument, whose disposal would be without any existential implications.

Women seem to have a different tendency. For them, body, affectivity, and identity seem to be more intimately connected. It is not only the amount of things she can *do* with her body that matters, but also the quality of the gaze that rests on her body, and how it *is perceived* by herself and by the other. The self-image causes immediate repercussions for the experience of the body. When she feels uncomfortable or in conflict with herself, she easily develops a rejection of her body, which manifests itself in pathological forms, such as anorexia, bulimia, and self-harm. It is no coincidence that they are much more frequent among women, and especially among young women. It is difficult for a woman to separate her body from her affectivity, as well as her self-image and her relationship with others, but also her thoughts and habits, her knowledge and experience. In fact, her sense of being rooted in the body, allows corporeity to enter into feminine thought and language, which are often tactile, sensitive, refined, and charged with everyday life.

This interpretative orientation is not far from what biblical anthropology proposes and is evidenced by the linguistic fabric itself: Man is intrinsically an operator, he is the one who acts and speaks, from the dawn of creation. The woman generated by the body of the '*adam*' becomes the image of the creature that, at the moment of creation, is regarded as good by God, endowed with a specific capacity for listening and welcoming. This dimension is identified in the relationship between the first man – the lover who looks at the beloved – and the first woman – the beloved seen by the lover. The concept is repeated in the figure of Mary, mother of Jesus: She – the creature capable of listening to and accepting revelation and incarnation – personally emphasizes – in the context of the *Magnificat* – that God has looked upon her and that she has received grace through his gaze. Let us, however, return to the reflections on the semantics of the sexed body.

In the encounter with the other, man and woman bring their respective ways of living the body and the relationship, educating each other in what best suits the other: She guides the man towards the integration of affectivity on the body and brings him in contact with his own emotional world, to decipher and communicate it. He urges her to detach herself from



a corporeal and affective experience that is overly subjective, and to place it on a broader level instead. This dimension is also found in the Bible in the declination, which it provides, with respect to the human being, for the masculine and the feminine, for the paternal and the maternal; and which, in the same manner, is also outlined for God. When we speak of an encounter between man and woman, it is important to emphasize that this reference should not be reduced to an encounter of a couple, much less to an exclusively sexual encounter. It is about any personal encounter between men and women that exposes them to the difference of otherness.

d) *The sexed body and life*

The experience of giving life is lived differently as well: man generates life outside of himself, woman within herself.

The whole body of a woman is made to welcome life. In feminist thought, there is a course that speaks of the woman's body as a "concave" body, which is categorized as "absence", and therefore as the "expectation of the other". This absence and expectation are manifested not only through the sexual organs but through the entire morphology. A woman's ear, for example, is sharper, as if she were trained to pick up any sound from her child. The thighs are wide and predisposed to pregnancy and childbirth; the breasts are programmed in the most perfect way to produce nourishment for the child. Again, it is not enough to interpret these features in purely functional terms, and it is difficult to think that the ability to be a mother would not characterize a woman on other levels. What meaning can then be given to her ability to "make room", to preserve and nurture life? How does a woman's relational world present her freedom with a direction or possibility?

The weak side of this stretch, as Di Nicola and Danese point out, lies in the obsession with the other, to the point of risking losing oneself in it and nullifying one's own dignity<sup>22</sup>. In fact, the "presence of absence" that she perceives so clearly can lead her to an exaggerated quest to fill that void through relationships of control, dependence or possession.

Man, for his part, awaits the advent of the creature outside of himself. He supports the mother's work, but he must also pass through her body, without which her fertilizing power disappears and becomes an insur-

22. G.P. Di Nicola, A. Danese, "Donna e uomo: creati l'uno per l'altra", in *Donna e uomo. L'humanum nella sua interezza*, Vatican Publishing House, Vatican 2009, p. 109.

mountable loss. The father is not taught to become a father by his body. He must, therefore, follow the variations of her body outside of him. If he does not have enough security and inner strength, it is easier for him to escape, especially when things go awry: In fact, he lives generation in the other and needs the mediation she offers him. She teaches him to be a father. She is also the bridge that brings him closer to the son, and the son closer to the father.

Scriptural reasoning describes these differences in various contexts, and particularly in the paternal and maternal symbolism that characterizes God. It perceives him having a mother's solicitude, capable of the kind of mercy, which is linguistically identified with the bowels and the womb; and who, at the same time, possesses the vigorous love of a father. It is in this sense, that he is even capable of the necessary detachment to ingrain in the creature the impulse that leads it out there to realize its vocation to the fullest.

## Conclusion

With these paragraphs we wanted to offer some clues to talk about the meaning of the body. We have established that the meaning is something proper of the *humanum* because only the human being possesses the space of indetermination and interiority that allows him to pose to himself the question about meaning and give a responsible answer. "Meaning the body" is certainly a duty of freedom, but not of absolute and unrestricted freedom. The body itself is a necessary link, whose directive cannot be ignored by freedom. Its "codes of meaning" are like compasses that guide us in the adventure towards plenitude. We have come to the conclusion that the symbolism of the body is decipherable based on a relational grammar that directs man and woman towards the mutual gift of self and communion. We may conclude, in a concise and programmatic way, that:

The more we organize, the more we realize ourselves. The more we realize ourselves, the more we elevate ourselves. The more we elevate ourselves, the more we open up. The more we open up, the more we identify ourselves. The more we identify ourselves, the more we become consolidated. The more we become consolidated, the more we are willing to offer ourselves as a gift<sup>23</sup>.

23. S. Palumbieri, *Antropologia della sessualità. Presupposti per un'educazione permanente*, SEI, Turin 1996, p. 59.

# The Mystery of the Word Incarnate and the Corporeity

Carmelo Pandolfi

**Abstract:** *Corporeity is seen in the light of the mystery of the Incarnate Word. It is neither an esoteric spiritual doctrine nor an anthropological reflection based on God (understood as the beginning, and according to the idea of any monotheism). Instead, one is under the “pretense” (certainly in faith – a faith, that nevertheless is the light in the darkness...) that the following holds: Man, who is body and spirit, and every earthly corporeity exist because of the Incarnation of the Son. The creation of “material” beings (entia) is imagined (by the Father) because the Son, in his obedience, has always wanted to assume the flesh. There is a world because there is the “will of Jesus” in God, who is Father, Son, and Spirit. Consequently, all the stages of human life (birth, infancy, marriage, sickness... death) are not secondary contingencies at all, but moments exemplified in Christ. For example, we die because Jesus dies. In this, he (and we in him) is absolutely Son, because there is a total surrender of self into the arms of the Father. These considerations are revolutionary, both with respect to atheistic visions and generic theistic visions, but not with respect to Christian tradition. Christian thought has always taught this, albeit this wonderful nucleus has been diluted too often with extrinsic (cosmological and anthropological) presentations. Therefore, there is always an urgency to “argue” the flesh in and for the flesh...*

## Introduction

If we were to hypothesize the disappearance of man, we would have to admit, as it were, an inversion within the intimacy of the very Trinity because we would eliminate the humanity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ:

The humanity of Jesus or all humanity is in God. It is in the heart of God, and no one can ever uproot the humanity of God. Eternally “*unus de Trinitate*” is man [...] The Word is incarnated in eternity. Jesus has always existed by the side of God. Paul says that God’s plan works «before the

foundation of the world» (*Eph 1:4*). Does creation present any modification in God? After all, God has always been a creator [...] The history of God is Jesus Christ [...] But let us be clear: The Trinity generates history, but it does not become historical [...] Therefore, if we were to hypothesize the disappearance, not of the Word, but of Jesus crucified and glorified, everything would collapse, as with the rupture of the linchpin that sustains all things [...] Hence, the content of the eternal design is the exalted crucifix: not just the glorious Jesus or simply the patient Jesus, but the risen Jesus from the dead<sup>1</sup>.

### *Absolute Christian originality*

The following reflections are intended to determine ideas that are consubstantial with Christian faith. May they enlighten the sense of *corporeity*, not as an addition to a rigid, naturalistic view, already armored, but, instead, as the revelation through the flesh of Christ of the very truth about the flesh. We did say *flesh*. We could have said *human corporeity*. Without entering into semantic debates, it is necessary to emphasize the truth that there is no such thing as *matter* devoid of *form*. Wherever there is a being (*ens*), underneath there is a *lògos*, which is the form of some matter. In addition, there is the unique case of a form-in-matter, possessing consciousness and self-consciousness: *man*. A sound philosophy, which notices that an essence devoid of matter (such as a mathematical *lògos*) would be exempt from the problems of generation and corruption, must wonder: Why not an essence devoid of matter<sup>2</sup>, but rather a form-in-matter? Moreover, why a conscious and self-conscious form-in-matter? Why a body with a *human lògos*?<sup>3</sup> To this I want to

1. H. Biffi, *LO, nostra gloria: dire il Mistero*, Jaca Book, Milan 2008, pp. 72, 77, 78, 81.

2. In any case, the metaphysical importance of the spiritual creature must be emphasized: «The act of being (*esse*) of spiritual substances, which is specified by their simple and immutable subsistence, is formed by them to the immobile consistency of a perpetuity of eternal duration; as a result the [*spiritual creature*] is being created every time, like the primordial “*quantitas essendi*” of the physical world the first time» (C. Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità*, Opere Complete 19, EDIVI, Segni 2010, p. 395) To the intensity of a single spirit's being, there corresponds an intensity of participation, of God, equal to that of the whole hylomorphic and impersonal world. At this point, the question is even more emphatic: Why an incarnate spirit?

3. «A sentiment of superiority keeps us cool and practical; the mere facts would make our knees knock under as with religious fear. [...] the thing which is valuable and lovable in our eyes is man – the old beer-drinking, creed-making, fighting, failing, sensual, respectable man. And the things that have been founded on this creature immortally

respond in the light of the Christian belief in the mystery of the Incarnate Word.

That, which is *specifically Christian*, absolutely surpasses *common monotheism*. In fact, the former contradicts the latter. It is not true that Christianity – when faced with an identical idea of God in each monotheistic proclamation, and in the end one already taken for granted by reason – adds valuable elements to the redemption of a being (*ens*) from sin, such as man's, who is made of spirit and *of flesh*. Such an approach – though facile – drains the Christian event from within and clears out everything. In technical (and historical) terms: this approach makes it become gnosis, monophysitism, pre-Islamism, deism, Masonry. In fact, such an approach presupposes that *transcendental* reason (in one of its two forms, either *believing*, as they say, or *atheist*) already fully knows what things God, man, spirit, body, sin, pain... are. It does not want to learn from the entities, Jesus and his insertion into the entities, who *quod dicimus Deum* – the necessary point of reference for all types of *thinking* existences – is. On the contrary, it wants to assess, in the light of its own aprioristic conception of God, man, the spirit, the flesh, sin..., whether the Christian datum and mystery are convincing.

*What is being asked about corporeity?*

*Therefore, faithful to the genuine selfhood (proprium) of Christianity's response, we will try, on our part, to first articulate questions about corporeity.* It is not about questioning the physical, chemical and biochemical constitution of the body. Nor is it a question regarding the truth about the body, the human body. Of course, the empirical aspect, increasingly developed, must be implicit, assuming also its *beauty*. The logical-mathematical and functional structure of the *matter* of the being (*ens*) is increasingly revealed, as well as the total *thinkability* of what is material, which does not comprise the being (*ens*). Once again: The metaphysical nucleus is indeed inevitable because it is of necessity whenever we are dealing with something and encounter its *whatness*, i.e., when we are not dealing with nothing. Consequently, one has to agree with the Aristotelian correction of Platonism<sup>4</sup>: Here, on this earth, we do not find pure forms, but hylomor-

remain; [...] the whole nature and in most secret of the psychological adventure which is called man. It is his strength to disdain strength» (G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, Plimpton Press, Norwood (MA) 1919, pp. 20, 28).

4. «The essence of historical Platonism [...] must be considered exclusively within the systematic position of the transcendence of predicamental forms, and, therefore, in the

phic systems. This does not entail the reduction of surrounding entities to something material but emphasizes that their *Lògos*, which is not *material*, is exclusively given in the *material*. Probably, the most opportune way to predicate the hylomorphic system (= the fact, that the form of entities here on earth is a *materialized form*) constitutes the word *body*. *Body* is never something *what is it made of* but rather involves, on all levels (non-living, living, animal, human), form and matter of the being (*ens*) in its totality. For example, the marble, of which Michelangelo's *Pietà* is made, is neither a body nor the idea of the *Pietà*, by which it has not yet been realized. Instead, *body* should be denoted of the real occurrence of the *Pietà*. Neither the biochemical aspect of my dog nor the presence of its specific form within it denotes its body. Instead, its *body* is its existential being (there) and relating with. The scientific truth about my neighbor and myself do not denote body. Neither is it the conscious, thinking nucleus of *myself*. On the contrary, even if the *soul* transcends the body, I could still introduce myself in the strongest sense: *Here I am*. Here I am as a *person*, *here is my body*. Hence, the ontological presentation of the corporeal and hylomorphic realism is not avoidable. Nonetheless, eventually, we want to inquire about the implications of such an entitative connotation of the here and now for co-existence. By faith, we know that Christ, the Lamb slain since the foundation of the world<sup>5</sup>, shows not only the ultimate sense of corporeity but also the nature of original sin and all sin, which is antithetical to Christ and the Incarnation.

We are trying to understand then what important things the mystery of the Incarnate Word has to say about the fundamental coordinates of man – neither those of the angel nor the living infrahuman but only and exclusively those of man. Such coordinates (all in need of the *body*, all irreducible to it): birth, infancy, maturity, marriage, parenting and sonship, old age, illness, pain, and death. Many correct things, though not enough, could be said about each one of these most important coordinates of man,

denial of causality it declares mental, which is based directly on the substance of the real. [...] The fundamental instance, to which Aristotle opposes [...], recognizes the reality of "nature" (κόσμος) in itself [as] the truth about "one's own" being [...] In this sense, the true spiritualist is Aristotle, and not Plato, who separates the ideas from all things [...] From a synthetic point of view [...], the doctrine of act and potency [...] undoubtedly constitutes the highest vertex the human spirit has reached regarding this point [...] For this reason, for Aristotle, intelligences are also 'pure forms'; but not because they are pure intelligibility, but rather because they are pure acts to be understood in the order of their own substantial form [...] This personalistic conception of the spiritual realm is the antithesis of separatism» (C. Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità*, Opere Complete 19, EDIVI, Segni 2010, pp. 401 and 405).

5. Cfr. 1 P 1, pp. 19-20.

who is body and spirit. Birth (which today also happens by means of controversial techniques) is the result of the parents' cooperation with God: He gives *esse* (act of being) to the rational soul of the new man (in fact, one never thinks of *that* spirit if not for *that* man), in absolute coincidence with the procreative act of the parents, which in turn are causes at the predicamental level<sup>6</sup>, for they only have *esse* from God.

Childhood, according to all the typical – not only biological but also psychological, cultural and educational – modalities, means detachment from one's parents, being independent of them. Maturity – a remarkable extension of youth, with the former detachment completed by now – makes it possible, in turn, to become capable of human paternity, which, so as to be truly such, must be valid at different levels: biological, psychological, cultural, economic and social. To the extent of the new paternity, maturity coincides with the coordinates of marriage and paternity (therefore that of the relative new sonship). The mature human subject, precisely because he implies public recognition of his spousal and paternal reality, is included in a more or less broad social context. As he receives on behalf of his family, he is called to give, so that he further marks his being to be that of a mature man (as a man or woman at the service of the common good and the political common good). Such social orientation frequently gives the best of itself, at least spiritually (experience), at old age, which, although it marks detachment from active paternity and then, marked increasingly by the mechanisms of illness (and suffering), becomes old age, on which the role of those, who receive social services, is imposed. In addition to illness and suffering (which are present at all ages, being characteristic of the human being; sometimes dependent on known and desired imbalances, sometimes on the mystery of pain itself) there is death. This is to say that the spirit (which is not the whole man) manages, albeit with unimaginable difficulty, to continue to *exist*; and that corporeity, insofar as it is generated, it is also corruptible. In all this, one can detect a marvelous, underlying logic, which is evident also on the predicamental level (which, however, exists within the transcendental level of being).

And yet, on closer examination, it is precisely the wholeness thereof, which demands that *breviter* the question arises again: Why does the indi-

6. «The problem is to indicate the scope that connects both, the predicamental and the transcendental level, and which in the development of human thought have been predominantly separated, and consequently [...] rendering the problem of the truth about being [...] (For this purpose, in St. Thomas), platonic participation's methodical error is eviscerated by resorting to Aristotle [...] The Primary Cause is [...] Person [...], but in possession of the absolute metaphysical quality, which is the *esse per essentiam*: the first moment is Aristotelian, the second platonic, the synthesis is that of St. Thomas» (C. Fabro, *Partecipazione e causalità*, cit., pp. 358 and 317).

vidual being (*ens*) have to be corporeal as well? Why man and not just some pure individual form? Why not just the impersonal hylomorphic? The answer, which must exist, is to be found in the encounter with the mystery of the Incarnate Word, which in itself reveals the true God, the Trinity.

### *What is the encounter with the Incarnate Word?*

From the bottom up, (that is, from inside beings, in the human part of being - history -) the encounter with the person of Jesus Christ, the *Incarnate Word*, represents:

- The realization of the understanding of the truth about the participation of *ens* in *Esse*, i.e., the sense of creatureliness, which is only mentioned by the great classics of metaphysics.
- The unique realization for Israel.
- The realization of the natural desire to see God<sup>7</sup>.
- The only possible sense of the factuality of *evil*<sup>8</sup>.
- The true answer to the question *Why the many from the One?*

a) Let us begin to excavate, explore a little more the first point, in a more *philosophical* way. This will enable us to say something about the following:

What does it mean that Jesus Christ historically *acts upon* the understanding of the truth about creatureliness and participation *as the only correct discourse about God*? It is often taken for granted (for *believers* and perhaps also for *non-believers*) that enough is known – though perhaps not admitted – about God, the cause of the world. In reality, it is not true that the discourse about God can be conducted off a rigorous, metaphysical path. Just as it is true that this metaphysical journey can be presented, in principle, in its essential features. To reach out to God is to seek the

7. «The desire to love the beauty of the world in a human being is essentially the desire for the Incarnation» (S. Weil, “Forme dell’amore implicito di Dio”, in *Attesa di Dio*, cit., p. 130).

8. «For the one whose soul remains oriented toward God while being pierced by the nail finds himself nailed to the very center of the universe. It is the true center [...] It is outside space and time [...] the nail pierces a hole through creation, through the thickness of the veil that separates the soul and God. [...] This point of intersection is the crossing branches of the Cross [...] being able to be nailed to the cross of Christ [...] The only one capable of compassion, during his stay on earth, he did not receive it [...] he has been left alone in suffering [...] And every being, full of love, who passes through misfortune, without ceasing to love, participates in the Passion of Christ [...] Cross of Christ. That is all. That is enough» (S. Weil, “L’amore di Dio e la sventura. First version of the last sheet, etc.”, in *Attesa di Dio*, cit., pp. 235, 236, 247, 257, 251).



foundation of the entirety of unity, truth, and goodness (beauty), *never resting in itself*, which, like a *world*, welcomes the human being – without enclosing him. As a *man*, he assumes responsibility for the investigation of the foundation – without enclosing it. Every scientific research and technical progress is sequential, except for this *first research*. To deepen the regional sectors of being – the biological, anthropological *lògoi*, etc. – presupposes, *first* of all, the caveat that *here* all being of beings (*entia*) is exactly that, something merely *subsequent*.

Who could deny the proof of the fragile beauty of every feature in the world, and of the whole world? Who would like to impose on himself the great falsehood of blocking the single features and the whole in themselves without the Principle<sup>9</sup>? Who would not want to acknowledge the falsehood – not about God, but about being (*ens*)! – *not* whenever, for example, I stated that I existed and that I existed for this or that, *but* whenever I pretended that *this were the truth*? Who, in addition, would not want to *reasonably* assume that the foundation, which establishes the Truth, were still a being (*ens*); or evil, nothing or, even worse, the Superbeing, the Enigma? Who, instead, would not want to – delicately but powerfully – realize that *only* a simple and pure *Goodness itself* were the reason for the being of the many and of created goodness? Who then would not want to take a glimpse at *participation* as the primary ontological nucleus (then reflected in each subsequent phase of being and thought), the desirable norm of the great *greek* truth, which is the *Being*? That is why the skeleton of the true religious sense – which is the proclamation of and the inclination towards the Act of Being, the Beautiful – even constitutes *in unum* the fundamental feature of philosophy and, consequently, the *broad* presupposition of rationality with regard to all the other subsequent regional investigations. In addition, such *being in the Act of Being* is also the ultimate fascination of any love, of any new beauty being invented.

Now, if we look honestly at the history of ideas, we must recognize that such *resolutio* (convergence of science, metaphysics, religion, art, technique, ethics and politics) has been achieved definitely better by Francis of Assisi than by the great Plato, definitely better by Thomas Aquinas than by Aristotle, and definitely better by Bonaventure than by Plotinus... On the one hand, it is true – and always will be – that the apparent lesser certainty

9. «Take away the supernatural, and what remains is the unnatural. [...] It is not the dogma of the reality of the other world that troubles him, but the dogma of the reality of this world. [...] If [...] a man is sensible enough to think only about the universe; he will think about it in his own individual way. He will keep virgin the secret of God; he will see the grass as no other man can see it...» (G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, cit., p. 86, 114 and 116).

of the metaphysical discourse, in comparison with the scientific-technical definitions, is, in fact, only apparently so... On the other hand, it is also true, in fact, that what should be normal for thought (the affirmation of God) is achieved only in the *encounter with Christ*<sup>10</sup>.

The true debate about God (*our God*), even in the sovereign grandeur of its *dimensions* (being), is very similar to the swimmers' summer sympathy for the sea, to the natural concordance of colors with the white light, to the secret kinship of thought with logic, of the living with life. Which *secular* love would be willing, for the drama of the world, to renounce all that? What literary *character*, faced with the evidence of love for his own plot rather than for himself, would want to kill it and kill himself, thereby reducing it to nothing or to the banal, the impersonal or the evil master, instead of praising his plot as Lord and Father<sup>11</sup>?

The discourse about the foundation of a being's (*ens*) existence might not be easy, but, after all, and paradoxically so, it is easy, because it can only be the Existence itself (Act of being). And all this is a *good thing*. It is the acknowledgment of paternity, of the homeland; the sense of family. It is reason's friendship with the *Lògos*. No alienation, no mythology. Instead: the very foundation of *Western* philosophical civilization.

b) This is amazing: the speed of this *discursus* – it should be natural – happened only in Israel, i.e., *in the historical and logical environment of Christ*. (How sweet it is, within the tragic charm of life, at times, to hear us reveal from the Old and then the New Testament, that the Principle is *the Lord*...! In the New Testament, for all secular lovers of Life: He does

10. For example, «St. Augustine [...] did for Plotinus what St. Thomas Aquinas would later do for Aristotle: revise, in the light of faith, a great philosophical interpretation of the universe. Whenever such act has occurred, a Christian philosophy has appeared [...] (which) liberates the will of the flesh through grace and the thought of skepticism through revelation» (E. Gilson, *Introduzione allo studio di Sant'Agostino*, Italian translation. Marietti, Genova 2014, 2<sup>a</sup> ed. (Translation), pp. 272-273).

11. For the (philosophical, not scientific) ideology against God, «existence is to be natural, an interweaving of natural powers and substances. And at the same time, it must be ideal, an interweaving of laws, values, norms. Never is it to be personal. Only impersonal (abstract) reality, impersonal norms are granted existence. [...] Christianity contradicts: Ultimately all being must be personally determined. That is what it is waiting for. But someone else is also waiting – waiting to determine it personally for evil. He does not declare himself, but hides behind logic and objectivity, in the ambush of so-called disenchantment. He throws sand in the eyes of science that prides itself on its “pure rationality”, blinding it to the obvious. He makes much research a never ending contradiction [...] He who is caught in it sees only objects, fact [...] He does not see the enemy. Jesus brought Satan to a standstill. He alone was able to stare him down. [...] The clever will of course smile at this» (R. Guardini, *The Lord*, English translation. Henry Regnery Company, Chicago 1954, pp. 120-121).

not call himself “God”, but defines himself as Life... It is difficult to close oneself to Life, to not love it, to not accept it deliberately as the *essential* Foundation of the *participating* living beings, rather preferring nothingness and the impersonal...<sup>11</sup>

It seems even monstrous, then, to oppose Life, so different from the super-living being, and similar – we insist – to what Mathematics is for mathematicians, the sea for swimmers... It is criminal, then, to offend Life, whenever in its most intimate Nucleus it shows itself to be absolutely more expert than we are in the knowledge of all which is the human of love.

We continue. All we have tried to say are the *opening words* of every true discourse about God. Either it is delicately redirected to the Creator, the Good diffused by Himself (as naturally as it were to one’s own wife, one’s own children, one’s own *body*), or it is simply false. In technical terms: either the discourse about God is about understanding *ens and Esse* – like the exact opposite of any rupture of being – or behind “God” – if *different* from the Creator, from the real Universal of this real particular, from Him Who has joyfully woven this spirit of mine into the body – there hides deception.

Now, we have already said that the sense of the true God, the sweet and powerful Lord, is historically only that of Israel. Israel is the true exercise of participation, i.e., the sense that it exists since I am, as a beloved creature. There would be no Israel (not form, not matter, but *body!*) without I Am, and there would be no I am without – as He intended – the definitive, sabbatical, messianic, Christlike protruding of the I Am, Who finalizes all alliances and also every day of creation only in its complete Realization, in the insurmountable Proximity. This would be the new Moses, David’s lineage on the throne, the Lamb, the Priest, the Temple, the Son of Man to the Right, the Suffering Servant... Looking at it well, all this is contradictory if understood like a concurrence of non-composable figures; only in the unpredictable Flesh of Christ, Realization is given.

c) And what is this *insurmountable* (What is insurmountable?) Work of God? It is that He, who liberated Israel, makes himself visible, truly Jewish, in Israel... To explain that genuine liberation is not the magic of well-being, and is certainly not the perpetuation of the cancer of slavery, but (who would have thought it?) the very Passover of the I am, truly resurrected from the very blows of death. Now it is He who passes the sea of his blood... Let us be joyful forever that we had the grace to receive at least the possibility thereof (God is this man, crucified and resurrected – both at the same time), in its simultaneous nature and inconceivability, tantamount to a warning: This is only worthy of God or, which is the

same, this is absolute poetry<sup>12</sup>. To the extent that, *only after having found it to be something novel*, we must not ask ourselves: “Is it Him?” Rather – and that is very different – we should ask ourselves: “If it is not Him, what could be that genuine other Human Presence, that other Petiteness, that other true Resurrection of the true Passion, that other to be seen in a Divine Body?”

Those who follow us, can understand that, by the very virtue of things, each feature imposes itself on the next: The revelation of God’s *normality*<sup>13</sup> in Jewish Jesus (every *lògos* but the *Greek* has seen it); the manifestation of the fullness of the Divine Work, promised to Israel, in Jesus<sup>14</sup> (if not Him, to whom will we go?); the realization of the desire to see God, then, coincides with the external (economic) realization, like showing us His infinite work as human creatures; the true explanation of evil with the existence of the crucified Son of God, which is therefore not only the Visibility of God,

12. In O. Pamuk, *My Name is Red*, 2001, tells the fascinating story – between crime and prose – of the struggle between two factions of miniaturists (the Western, seduced by the heretical idea of representing human forms; the other, rigidly orthodox) in Istanbul at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The author’s sympathy for the first is evident: When the headmaster of the first school is assassinated and presents himself before God, he is very concerned about his condemnation for heterodoxy, but hears himself say, even with citations from the Koran, that his (God) is the East and the West; God, in short, welcomes him, and in response to the emotional question of the deceased: “All right then, what is the meaning of it all, of this... of this world?” “Mystery”, I heard in my thoughts, or perhaps, “mercy”, but I wasn’t certain of either” (p. 224). In the beautiful novel, the classic anti-Christian controversy is mentioned a few times (“Christ the prophet [...] at the same time Allah” (p. 117), without ever being able to understand whether the accusation (which, on closer examination, states very badly the Christian dogma, presenting exactly the opposite of the Trinity) is shared... Beyond this, the subtle theological thread, of which the author is probably not fully aware, is beautiful and decisive, because it shows the rational background of the question (iconicity, anti-iconicity in the broadest ontological sense). That is to say, the choice is this: either God because, being God, he is unrelated, or God is God precisely because he is pure relationship. Sympathy for the yes towards the human form (and also sympathy for an eventual divine sympathy for human loves - see pp. 436 if.) is portrayed in the novel, but he certainly does not say yes to the Trinitarian-Christian option; though he cannot afford the first, deistic option: «What’s more, we’re struggling with something more forbidden and dangerous; that is, we’re struggling to make pictures in a Muslim city» (p. 176).

13. «[...] and never the Nowhere without the Not: the pure/unwatched-over, that one breathes and/endslessly knows [...] Lovers are close to it, in wonder, if/the other were not always there closing off the view» («... niemals Nirgends ohne Nicht: das Reine/Unüberwachte, das man atmet und/unendlich weiss [...] /Liebende, ware nicht der andre, der/die Sicht verstellt, sind nah daran uns staunen...») (R.M. Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, VIII, English Translation by A.S. Kline).

14. “There was something that He hid from all men when He went up a mountain to pray. [...] There was some one thing that was too great for God to show us [...]; and I have sometimes fancied that it was His mirth”, an unattainable conclusion of G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 244.

but also the visibility in that Visibility of the reason for that bodily system of evil, death and suffering.

d) In fact, the analysis of *ontological deprivation* alone is not sufficient. The mystery of iniquity, innocent pain, and *misfortune* imposes, apparently, to fall into atheism, or into a slippery, badly indifferent and deistic conception of God; or into a Gnostic, mythical-pantheistic vision (which, unlike the second, no longer distinguishes between the entitative Passion and the Lord's compassion). In fact, outside the Mystery of Christ, there is no answer. We will return to this subject. In the meantime, let us say it is not true that we are not divine because we are not indifferent, essentially; it is true that we are not, because we are not Passion, essentially.

e) The last considerations have finally led to the Triune God. Only in the Son, the Person, who is in Heaven, and on earth his body, does the Eucharist find meaning in human suffering; thus, on the same level of radicality, only through the emanation of the divine Persons (the Son and the Holy Spirit), in the unity of the essence, does the emanation of creatures in the diversity of the essence have meaning and *possibility*, i.e., does the question "*Why the many from the One?*" have an answer. Outside the Trinity, revealed by Christ, one is compelled to unsatisfactory explanations of the emanating process of Islamist-Ockhamist arbitrariness.

For the Fathers of the Church and the great Scholastics<sup>15</sup> it is but obvious that only the Trinitarian God is, and *can be*, the Creator.

### *To the heart of the Mystery*

Already now it is possible to show the fresh taste that the genuine juice of the Christian faith brings to the human question about corporeity. Let us highlight a few points:

a) In the first place, the full truth about creatureliness and participation (the heart of Christian philosophy, alluded to but not reached by

15. «Rightly then does the person of the Son say, "I, like a brook out of a river of mighty water", in which is noted both the order and mode of creation. Order, because as a brook is derived from a river, so the temporal procession of creatures derives from the eternal procession of persons. [...] the first procession is the cause and reason of every subsequent procession [...] I take these rivers to be an eternal procession whereby the Son proceeds from the Father and the Holy Spirit from both in an ineffable manner. These rivers were once hidden and in some way confused with the likenesses of creatures, even in the enigmas of Scripture [...] The Son of God came and poured forth rivers, making known the name of the Trinity» (Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Comment on the Sentences*, I, Prologue in *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Invito alla letteratura* of: A. Ghisalberti, Famiglia Cristiana, S. Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Milan) 1999, pp. 21-22 and 21).

Greek thought) strongly shows the goodness of every being, which is everything willed by God, not only in its logical-formal aspect, but also in its necessarily material possibility if it is a hylomorphic being. Matter, certainly never alone, is also created – not so for Plato or for Aristotle, who condemned the residue of prime matter to be the unusual basis of being.

b) Then the integral sense of Israel (so well illuminated by the two genealogies of Jesus by Matthew and Luke<sup>16</sup>) is that the only Day *made* by the Lord is and will be His Extreme messianic Proximity. Not a spiritualist closeness, but even more incarnated than what has already been incarnated during the preparation: the covenant, the patriarchs, prophets, the priesthood, and the temple. At the center of creation there is no pure form (angel, idea), neither the cosmos nor *man*, but that Sabbath<sup>17</sup>, the Father's resting, which, in reality, is the extreme work, i.e., the shadow of the Son of man, Jesus, so that we may begin to understand that man is created after the model of Jesus (and not vice versa!).

c) Jesus is, at the same time, the celestial-terrestrial insuperability of the absolute fecundity of the Father and, for us, his brothers, the possibility of *seeing God in the flesh*; the expectation any good piety would desire. Since (as the Trinitarian dogma says) God is not a subject, but "*his very own subsisting Act of being*" (*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*). To see God is to see his Act of being, i.e., the moment when he shows his "might with his arm"<sup>18</sup> to "do something new"<sup>19</sup>. This extreme of the "Act of being" is the Incarnation. Hence, *videre Deum* really is *opus Incarnationis videre*.

d) Since the Incarnate one, just like the one Crucified and Risen, is the genuine and only Meaning of evil (that is, the Salvation from evil) in all its dimensions, the *vision* – in a strong sense – of the one Risen is liberation from evil, *while* it is the vision of the "New Thing" and the messianic Work (the messianic objective!) of God, and of God precisely because of that.

e) And that, for God, is obviously the Son, the trace of the Father's substance, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the vision of the one Crucified and Risen is, in its entirety, five things: salvation from evil, messianic fulfillment, contact with the *non plus ultra* of divine "Agency", vision of God – of God necessarily as Trinity.

In short: Being (*ens*), good because of its form and its matter, denotes in man the created vertex of hylomorphic goodness (person, not pure

16. Cfr. *Matt* 1:1-17 and *Luke* 3:23-38.

17. Cfr. *Gen* 2:2-3.

18. Cfr. *Luke* 1:51.

19. Cfr. *Isa* 43:19.

form!), whose purpose is definitively explained in this unique way, *characteristic of Christianity*: Adam is sought in Christ, in the likeness of Jesus Christ, because humanity, in the Word, in the eternal decree of the Father, a decree that has always accepted the eternal Eucharist of the Son, is, as the Son himself, receiving himself from the Father, and wants to return to the Father. He, the Son, wants to return to the Father “on earth as in heaven”<sup>20</sup>, i.e., in his divinity and humanity – his soul, his body, and his blood. God, the Son of God, the Word is, like a true son, the Father’s embrace, pushed, in obedience, to the maximum – divine and human. In Jesus Christ, the same – yesterday, today, and always – is the eternal child, the tender return (*Reditus*), in which they find purpose and being on the so different – but beloved! – level of creation: man and the world, i.e., the personal and the impersonal hylomorphic – conscious and unconscious corporeity.

The two absolute (and absolutely relational) mysteries of the Christian faith are the Trinity and the Incarnation. *The mystery of the Incarnate Word*: either it refers to both or it does not mean anything...

Trinity: We believe that the Father is the Father – that he is almighty – absolutely only in his *being* the *Generation of the Word, His Son, Jesus our Lord*. Neither chronologically nor ontologically is there any substance of the Father that had existed before, without being but the subsisting Act of being, not a subject. And this Act of being consists of *generating his Son Jesus, our Lord*. The following could be an analogical and useful example: Let us think of an act we are most fond of, e.g., *teaching*. Now, imagine that we never existed outside of it. Hence, we ourselves would be *teaching*, the *act of teaching*, the *person “teaching”*. Thus, *teaching is consubstantial with your inner self, daughter, “lesson”*. We think, for example, of St. Pio of Pietrelcina who, without time or being on his own, “was” *to confess*, and *to celebrate mass*... Let us think of St. Teresa of Calcutta, who “was” *to caress the poor flesh of Christ*.

The Trinity reveals the *rupture of subjectivity*: in Principle, the Person is pure Relationship, and this is the truth about the *kat’exochē* of the “Person”. The “person” created contracts, by participation, to a subjectivity, for which he *also* results in a state of – more or less vast – isolation, deprivation, individual prerequisite (*sub-iectum*) for agency.

In short: We are not only our agency, and only when we grow in perfection do we come closer to coincide with our relational agency (imagine one who, singing, almost becomes his singing...). God is not like that: the Father is (=) *the Generation of the Word*.

20. Cfr. *Matt* 6:10.

This means: In the Generation of Jesus, his Son, God (in the entire New Testament “the Father”) “is” full of emptying Himself. St. Bonaventure teaches that one does not think of God in the “loftiest and most pious” way if one does not think of him – in the light of faith (but filling a need for reason) – as the *Producere Dilectum et Condilectum*<sup>21</sup>... This means: We are forbidden to think of God as a subject, arbitrarily expressing his dominion, so that he – confined to maximum subjectivity – then and extrinsically “does such and such, emanating such and such decree, being or pardon”. God – the Father – is totally consummated in being the Generation of the Son, God Himself, i.e., in being the expropriation of his own divinity, totally, to the gift of divinity – of All – without – because of it – absurd annihilation (moreover, for this he is always “the Father”). This means: If God, the Truth, the Father, is *only* the Generation of God, Jesus, full of emptying Himself, love as Relationship Himself (not its subject!), it is forbidden to think that what we – men and the world – are (or better: we participate in being) were a minor work of art, useless, of little meaning, a reduced term of self-giving, different, excluded, and (in comparison with the Son) redundant and shameful (or little decent), but in any case absurd in comparison with the fullness of Generation, which is the Only Begotten.

We – our limited spirits, our incarnated spirits: we! – could not be a less beloved, peripheral and strange termination.

This does not mean a Hegelian equation of the world with the Son (the Son who, on the other hand, does not exist in Hegel...), a presumed consubstantiality of finite infinity, a gnostic and impersonal procedure. If, on the other hand, we believe in the Trinity, in the Father who is only the Generation of the only perfect Son, this is to say:

The Father is the generation of the Son. He is the gift of divinity, full Actuality, and Beauty.

The Son, *therefore*, Generated Divinity *is also* a Gift, i.e., to give Himself, to return to the Father in a divine manner as a son (the Son is the Act of Obedience, the Act of Embrace, the total divine Act of Caressing the Father). He is the total (divine) Emptying, as Son though (not as Father). He is – ineffably – Jesus, who totally (divinely so) humbles himself for the Father (= Son).

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever*<sup>22</sup>.

*Jesus is the eternal Child, who is always at the Father's side*<sup>23</sup>.

21. Cfr. St. Bonaventure, *De mysterio Trinitatis*, q. I, art. II, concl.

22. Cfr. *Heb* 13:8.

23. Cfr. *John* 1:18.



*Jesus, who ineffably – beyond all will and duty – Is, precisely in his Generated Being, the Emptying in reditus like the One who said: A Body you prepared for me*<sup>24,25</sup>.

*Jesus, whose Incarnation is above all “ad maiorem Dei Patris gloriam”*<sup>25</sup>.

*Jesus, through whom there are men, brethren and branches of His being the true vine*<sup>26</sup>.

*Jesus, through whom there exists biological life, chemical as well as physical structure, i.e., the subhuman corporeity, which we call “the world”*<sup>27</sup>.

*Jesus, through whom – not only of whom – all things “consist”*<sup>28</sup>.

*Jesus, through whom also all “earthly” things have been created*<sup>29</sup>.

*Jesus, who is eternal wisdom, eternal child who loves playing before the Father, thereby edifying the games of the body and those of the world, the men, the brothers, the free multiplication of his being the Son*<sup>30</sup>.

*Jesus, who in this sense loves to be among men, though without their sin*<sup>31</sup>.

*Jesus, who finds in men, who are created in him, the mysterium iniquitatis, and, remaining among men as the one who is Crucified by them, he Is – after death – the Risen one; only to continue to exist as the one who suffers, thereby loving, showing the living signs of the Passion*<sup>32</sup>.

*For He, the Incarnate Word, is the Eternal Passion for the Father (we in Him; therefore He, looking at us in Him, with us is Passion for the Father). That’s why He, Jesus, is the Second Person (= the gifted Giving – total, but sonship).*

24. Cfr. *Heb* 10:5.

25. Cfr. *John* 12:28.

26. Cfr. *John* 15:1 ff.

27. Cfr. *John* 1:3; *ICor* 8:6; *Col* 1:15-17; *Rom* 8:29; *Eph* 1:3 ff.

28. *Ibidem*.

29. *Ibidem*.

30. Cfr. *Prov* 8:30.

31. Cfr. *Prov* 8:31.

32. Cfr. *Rev* 5:6. The most secular and human poetry can often overcome, through the intuition of true joy, the worn-out patterns of a certain, supernatural piety. One such unconsciously Christological example is E. Bronte, writing the following: «If I were in heaven, [...] I should be extremely miserable. [...] I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy. [...] Whatever our souls are made of, his (Heathcliff’s) and mine are the same» (E. Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, London 1847, pp. 74-75). In faith, we know that God is not in Paradise, but that Paradise is in God, i.e., the Humanity of Jesus is always united to the Word of the Father (a Who, such as he is, not a where, probably beautiful and pleasant).

*His mysteries are these:*

He who was born of the Father before all centuries, “in Whom” everything is created/the Descent from Heaven that He, Jesus, is for us men, for our salvation: the Flesh that He, loving the Father like a Child, wants to be hypostatically interwoven becomes interwoven with the Bottom, with the Embryo (the Incarnated through the work of the Holy Spirit, made man, the Son of *Man*), with the Washing of the feet, with the Eucharist, with the cross, i.e., with the greatest Love<sup>33</sup> (The Jesus Crucified for us under the *history*, i.e., under Pilate, under the culture of the insulted flesh.)/The descent into hell – an evident reality – of the nonmeaningful, of nothingness, hatred, ugliness, violence against the flesh, since There the Infinity of the Tension between Father and Son extends to its Maximum<sup>34</sup>, stronger than death.../The Risen one on the third day according to Scripture: Only by remaining the living sacrifice, there to *save*, because Scripture and philosophy could neither content themselves with a death that annihilates nor with a living who ascends without knowing how to die.../The Ascension to heaven, i.e., he who is in heaven is the one Who is, Jesus; he brings back with him forever the flesh, which has even known the kisses of Mary, the dust of Galilee and Judah, the tears of Magdalene, rust of the spear, pollen and aromas, the salt of the roasted fish./The one who sends the Spirit, Who makes everything beloved/The *Venturus* in the glory, while, beyond all times, he brings back all those times and the resurrected but wounded flesh of those times to the Father, by whom he is eternally generated...

It is not necessary to point out how much and how profound all of this (i.e., the true Christianity of Scripture given through the Spirit, to the Fathers of the Church, the Saints, the little ones, and the unknown) speaks of itself for the *ontology of the human body*.

33. «Everything is a provisional word, which anticipates and runs towards this unique self-enunciation of God in the death of his Son. The most significant burden is death. It is again the seal of authentication: that God is not intelligence, nor absolute knowledge, nor progress, nor future, but love» (H.U. von Balthasar, “Tradizione”, Italian translation in *Homo creatus est*, Saggi Teologici 5, Opere v. XXIV, Jaca Book (Translation), Milan 2010, p. 290).

34. “Formosus deformis apparuit in conspectu paternae gloriae” (Saint Bonaventure, *De triplici via* 3, par. 3; *Lignum vitae* 29). “The Word, so to speak, has left the mouth of the Father and feels the absolute distance, because now it experiences and incarnates all the separateness of the guilt of the world, from which God must distance himself for eternity” (H.U. von Balthasar, “II linguaggio di Dio”, in *Homo creatus est*, cit. (Translation), p. 262).

*The Mystery of the Incarnate Word and the seven coordinates of man, who is spirit and body*

In any case, we have the duty go into deep analysis, to confront the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word with the characteristics identified above, of what is human – neither angelic nor animal – in us and which connotes us precisely: birth, infancy, maturity, marriage, parenthood, old age, sickness, pain, death. The time has come to see clearly how all this finds its meaning in Christ, a meaning which is completely necessary, completely original.

1. *Christ and human birth*

We are children in the Son, projected and realized only in Christ, the humanized Word. It is necessary to understand, in faith, that the heart of Christian dogma teaches, with absolute originality, that men are created by the Father in the Son, Jesus Christ.

This implies a reversal of the Christological archetype, i.e., one does not think with a Christian character, when we content to say that Adam and Eve are at the genealogical beginning of the true human flesh of Jesus Christ (as if, going beyond this concept, one could also correctly say that Adam, whose archetype is the Word, is in turn, in the temporal line, the archetype of Jesus). No: It is Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is the model of Adam. Moreover, he is of the model of Jesus and Mary – the first cell of the Church – (hence the extraordinary importance of the virginal conception of Jesus) that the Father “thinks” (but this “thought” is in the being-the-Eucharist of the Logos, the Project-and-Person) Adam and Eve. It is not the vine that comes from the branches, but the branches that come from the vine. In Adam and Eve, all of us are created as *branches of the vine* – with no other foreseeable prior and more fundamental “plan” – and this vine is Jesus Christ, God the Son, who, for the absolute glory of and in infinite love to his Father, with infinite tenderness for him, wants his body, hypostatically united to himself, to be *a real embrace for the Father*.

Consequently, every man, derived by mere grace from only the taste of that first mystery of the Son, is born as a son in the Son. He is not born as an image of any primordial unity. He is not born only as an image of the Idea and Word. He is born by and in the *divine* being “of” the Word, who truly, from the Christian point of view, is not an idea but a Person, the Person who gives back his gift totally to the Father, the Person who is Jesus Christ the Son of God. We, the others, like branches of the vine, brothers and sisters of the firstborn – not arbitrarily, but so ordained by the

only begotten – we were born children with flesh and blood (that is, men) in the image and likeness of the Son Jesus, his flesh and his blood.

The origin of man does not drown in brutal spermatogenesis made from *nothingness* (inevitable “another” *metaphysics*), nor – on the other hand – in the false transcendence of an aseptically spiritualist architecture, projected without true passion. On the other hand, without losing anything good about the corporeity of atoms, molecules, cells, evolutions (composed of immanent logic and evident poetry), it lurks at the root of a *most human* event that is there from the beginning, and which is “God”. The humanity of the Son incarnate, like real love for his Father, from whom everything is derived, is at the origin of our human lives, and, therefore, also of our corporeity.

It is not a dream: There is the fragility – infantile, sick, old, wonderful – of the human body. That is the truth. And so it has to be divine by force. It is touching that *it is not true that man does not exist*, his spirit, his body! From the Christian view, man is not the “son of God” in an abstract way; man is the son of the Father in the Son, who is Jesus Christ, a real icon, multiplier of the shape of our mouths, arms, and legs, i.e., kisses, games, dances, work, and, unfortunately, also the temptation of fiction, the institution of arrogance and violence.

## 2. *Christ and infancy - Christ and maturity - Christ and old age*

We think that the joint treatment of these three phases of human age, in a constitutive relationship with Christ, contributes to a better synthesis.

*Childhood and Maturity.* Man – who knows why – does not immediately jump into existence as an adult but begins as a child. We know the pages of Saint-Exupery in *The Little Prince*, which is *ontology* and, therefore, exactly the opposite of romantic sweetness. From these pages, we can draw the idea that maturation, understood as the loss of the capacity for wonder and confidence, is anything but maturation, and also has nothing to do with science; while instead, it is certainly the cynical presumption of the industry of despair.

Jesus, as we know, said: “I praise you, O Father...”<sup>35</sup>. By this, he has not preceded for centuries proclamation of Montessorian predilection for biological infancy, so to speak, nor did he join the political party of childcare. Jesus speaks of the little ones, while in himself, *always* Son, he reveals what is necessarily mutually apparent to being a Father: the Son, indeed, “but” as God from God. It is not esotericism. Instead, it is

35. *Matt* 11:25.

the Truth at the bottom of all things, either not existing or existing in the one Who is Good, i.e., diffused neither by external need nor by will but by intimacy... Nothing excessive, but absolutely the norm at the level of being: “If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more...”<sup>36</sup>.

Jesus then clearly states: “Unless you turn and become like children”<sup>37</sup>.

Guardini comments: «What is it that the child has which the adult, in Jesus’ eyes, so sadly lacks? [...] Certainly, not childish charm; that would be a lyricism, something Jesus had nothing to do with [...] The spiritual childhood Jesus means emanates from God’s fatherhood. [...] The childlike mind is the one that sees the heavenly Father in everything that comes into his life. To this requires a great effort: wisdom must be sucked from the naked continuation of cause and effect; love from the accidental. [...] To become a child in Christ’s sense is to reach Christian maturity»<sup>38</sup>.

It is not at all, then, an exaltation of the ignorant nature of childhood (and sometimes, because of sin, even evil – let us just say it). Instead, it is a question of trying to isolate two indisputable positive features of childhood: the capacity to trust; the capacity for natural astonishment, not like a “fairytale”, but as a sense of beauty, and, therefore, of being.

Jesus wants to link these two features of the natural order, of which he is the creator, with the necessary rebirth, which in him – because he is the Son – must derive the Christian. In other words: In Christ, man is *normally* called to entrust himself to God the Father, always beginning over and over again to be amazed at the being He gives. It is the only way, a man is mature and wise – *man*. Why is that? The Christian answer: because we have been created in Christ, who is God and who, in any case, is the Eternal Son of the Father, or rather, of his Dad<sup>39</sup>.

36. *Luke* 11:13.

37. Cfr. *Matt* 18:3.

38. R. Guardini, *The Lord*, Henry Regnery Company, Chicago 1954, pp. 268-269.

39. «Logos and its logic are the fruit of unfathomable and gratuitous love that is beyond necessity and freedom. If we separate the Son from the Father, we fall into a rationalism that withers [...] The Son never separates from his origin [...] This sonlike obedience is the foundation of all logic. Now we can understand why Jesus of Nazareth died as a juvenile and why his Spirit, given to us, keeps us young until death, if we follow Him» (H.U. von Balthasar, “Giovane fino alla morte”, in *Homo creatus est*, cit. (Translation), p. 174). Once again, very beautiful: “His seriousness is part of God’s game, but at the beginning and at the end, the way of playing appears unveiled: the little Son of the Father, who proceeds eternally from him, also returns to him eternally and at all times. And we, the other children, are invited to participate precisely in this game” (H.U. von Balthasar, “Il fanciullo Gesù e i fanciulli”, in *Homo creatus...* (Translation), p. 168). And the great Father Florenskij, thus describing the Child in an icon: «He is the Child par excellence» (P. Florenskij, “Icône di preghiera di San Sergio”, Italian translation in *La mistica e l’anima russa*, San Paolo (Translation), Cinisello Balsamo (Milan) 2006, p. 176).

This is far from the dreamy exaltation (Rousseau's philosophy) of human novelty, because it does not eternally celebrate the child entrusted to fathers, earthly mothers, society, the State, the vague sense of what exists and a smoldering being of the being; on the other hand, praise is given to those who incline everything toward God the Father, as a child does with his father and mother. This does not in any way mean that man should not naturally abandon, or even oppose his father and mother; nor, on the contrary, that the mature Christian becomes an adult beyond and out of conformity with Christ, the Son. But they say:

- If the Father is the Father, he is the Father through and in the Son (without culmination, without degradation, in pure unity of being Relationship): This is God, the Good of goods.
- We are given the position of being created as children in the Son.
- Therefore, we are fully ourselves (= mature), as long as we behave like children, as children in the Son.

The Son, Jesus, is perfectly mature: he knows and, in fact, grounds all created science and knowledge; he subverts all bad acquiescence to the earthly bonds of authority; he also opposes “stopping” within the holiest and most beautiful bonds (they too must be transcended). However, in all this, he remains close to the Father with love, absolutely eternal, insurmountable and divine, absolutely sonlike (in the indivisibility of the mystery of God, where there is not one who realizes the other, but he is the one who is not one, but the only relationship of being).

At this point, what can we say? Let us start with this: Childhood of a natural order, in a being (man) that is a person in psychophysical growth because of his corporeity, does not exist as a point of arrival, but as an image of what spiritual (Christian) childhood should be, i.e., mature Christian truth.

Christianity must abandon ignorance and romanticism. It must know well all that reason can know. It must be an expert not only of games but also of love, mourning, the sweat of labor, of death. In all this he must not depend forever on earthly fathers and mothers; nor must he grow to the height of a pseudo-god without sons; instead, he must entrust himself to the Father, as a child entrusts himself to his father and his mother, but *after having necessarily understood that before being a father or mother we are first and foremost brothers in the common entitative nature grounded in Christ.*

If so, the childhood of a natural order exists so that man, created in Christ, may understand, by analogy, the truth about his relationship with God, the Father. In other words: He must experience (during natural infancy) what trust and astonishment mean. Then he must grow and

abandon this trust in and astonishment for the essential relationship with his earthly family, fatherhood or motherhood. Hence, he must regain this trust and astonishment, this time as an adult; not because he is an “adult” but because he is a child in Christ.

“If you do not turn and become like children” is not addressed to children, nor to adults to bring them back to astonishment and trust in the family of origin, nor to adults only symbolically, to invite them to a presumptuous cleansing of conscience (which, in the child, should be a blank slate!) – and, therefore, to make them march within a rigorous sanctity deprives them of tenderness. No. “If you do not turn and become like children” is addressed to the man thought and created in Christ, so that, when he becomes an adult, he may accept the truth about maturity in a relationship with the Father, a relationship conscious of death, responsible for his own sin, capable of leaving behind childish reasoning based on the concept of merit and reward, happiness like that of a joyful paradise; a relationship, but always capable of weeping, joy, cries of joy...”

I’m not in search of great things... I’m calm and serene like a baby in his mother’s arms<sup>40</sup>.

Carried out in this way, the Christological discourse on childhood entails that of maturity: Mature is not the child (entrusted “in any case”), mature is not the adult (often entrusted only to his own pride), mature is the one who becomes a child again (entrusted only to the Father, but – this is essential for the Trinity – in Christ, who is the eternal one, made flesh, entrusted to the Father as the divine Person of the Son).

### *Old age*

Cicero, with classic wisdom, has tried to list the merits of old age<sup>41</sup>, striving to re-dimension grief for the loss of the energies of youth<sup>42</sup>. The Greek lyrics were more sincere: Think of the sweet Alcmene<sup>43</sup>.

Fact is that extra-Christian thinking while theorizing correct values is somehow forced to divide the human datum: agency versus contemplation; manual work versus study; and youth, thus, put against old age. Where

40. Cfr. *Ps* 130:1-2.

41. Cfr. *Cato maior de senectute*, Italian translation Selvi (Translation), Milan 1971, p. 55.

42. Cfr. *ibidem*, p. 53.

43. «O girls of sweet voice who sing, the extremities can no longer hold me; oh, if I were the bird that flies over the flower of the walk with halons, with a fearless heart, bird of the purple spring».

there is plenitude of corporeal effervescence, complete prudence is not given; when there is old prudence, the human psychophysical structure is already conjugated to the past. There is no doubt that old age clearly says that man goes towards death. If it is true, and it is often true (not always), that more advanced age should bring with it greater energy of spirit, previously immature, we still have a question to answer: Why is wisdom not achieved come old age? Why does man, growing up, not reach *both at the same time*, maturity of the soul and the body? The bio-ontological answer is easy: The multiplication of births, spouses, parents, and deaths (which “serve” to give space to another living) depends, over time, on the multiplicity of men. Humanity is not just *one* man. God the Father has, in Christ the Son, always thought and realized the birth of man as a son in the Son. The phenomenal fact that there are many births over time (thus, old age, the dead; so many, not one family) is by virtue of the multiplicity of men. It is, so to speak, useful for the multiplication of individuals in uniqueness; of the human, communal species, created in and through Christ the Son, though. In other words: Man is called to be born (to be a son), and this would also be valid if there were no births over multiple periods; the multiplicity of births (therefore of deaths, of aging...) does not “make” man a son. Instead, it realizes a non-simultaneous plurality of children, a presence of children in a house made up of historically different environments.

We must ask ourselves: Is old age only a function of that “making room?” Is it, therefore, only aimed at the temporal multiplication of birth and infancy (which in the eyes of the Father, as it has been seen, in Christ the Son is forever)? Or does old age, in a Christian way, have an additional function? We think so, by virtue of this simple reasoning: If natural infancy is like the outline of true infancy, i.e., of true maturity, in which we become humble children; if old age can really (in the classical sense) constitute the time of an improved contemplative and experiential capacity, thus, didactic (the teacher, the priest); if so, it goes without saying that old age must possibly be the time men are given to teach other men how to be mature, i.e., to teach them to be children. We understand how much this is missing, every time we meet old fools, full of pride and cynism, greedy with counsel, and still full of desires.

### 3. *Christ is marriage, paternity, and motherhood*

It is evident – as we have seen already – that the family (father, mother, children) exists (like old age, like death, which send off the children of previous generations to make room for the new ones) because the Father, in Christ the Son, wanted not a single man, but a multitude of men extended over time.



Sexuality, which is realistically at the service of such multiplication through procreation, is thus not assumed as an archetype. Instead, it belongs to the creaturely order, which is very good. Let us avoid the confusion, which, in light of the revealed mystery (Father, Incarnate Son, Holy Spirit), pretends to subvert the analogate with the analogue, forcing the imagination, e.g., to consider the relationship between Father and Son molded (almost) to the measure of the relationship between man and woman, whose fruit would be the Spirit. Certainly, it is possible to recognize similarities; but the truth – which must be *observed* to fascinate in a self-sufficient way – is “merely” the following:

God is “the” Father, (of) our Lord Jesus Christ.

The glorious, sorrowful, joyful gaze of the eternal Father upon his eternal child Jesus, incarnate and crucified, a mutual touch, not of any love, but that of the Holy Spirit: This is God (not analogous to)...

If it is to repudiate the (hierogrammatic, anthropomorphic) mania of establishing earthly (even good) measures of archetypes (being derived images), we must also repudiate the opposite fashion. We refer to that which, before God has been revealed by Christ as Trinity, rejects as purely nominalistic all confessions of the Father and the Son, considering them as anthropomorphic terms. This heresy is dangerous because it reduces God to god, to the totally unknown and elusive, and coherently eliminates him. If it is anthropomorphic to speak of the Father, then it is also ontomorphic to speak of the Being Himself. Consequently, that which is divine about God would be very close to Nothing; it is the absolutely indescribable (contradictory), the absolute Absolute (even more contradictory it that it is so much appreciated by Satan). No. It is not like that. Instead, the sweet paradox of the Truth is such: God is astonishment and mystery himself, not because he is “mystery”, but because he himself is nothing more but the Good, that is to say, the Trinity. This means that this Fatherhood *fundamentally* resembles ours (the opposite is true). In any case, God does not free himself overhead and against the good. The perennial Greek-Socratic intuition (“It is not good because it pleases the gods, but it pleases the gods because it is Good”)<sup>44</sup> has made it once and for all understood that God is not subject to anything. Not because he is beyond the truth, the good, and the beautiful, but because He is Truth, Good, and Beautiful. As no man, though “*quadam generalitate*”, can be exempt from “reasoning” (loving) the Truth, the Goodness or the Beauty, such comprehension (God is Truth) makes the discourse of philosophical theology contemporaneously and

44. Cfr. Plato, *Euthyphron*.

impregnable, able to touch the *quid sit* of God with its *an sit*. That is to say: One does not ask: Is there X? Instead, understanding that the True is delicate and powerful, one rather asks (not beyond the Truth though): What is it in the end...?

If (as Christ tells us) the True is True, and Good is Good because he is Trinity, professing God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, then, is not anthropomorphism. Instead (as long as fatherhood and sonship are thought to be beyond our scope) it is the *reduction to absolute humility*. God is Father because the human mode of fatherhood does not exhaust its perfection. Those who, with a radical apophatism (which should be drowned in nothingness), prefer to emphasize the anthropomorphism of the exploration of fatherhood and sonship in God, instead, are – among other things – haughtily convinced that God cannot be a Father, because the totality of the perfection of fatherhood (of sonship, of love) has already been consummated by the ranks of humans...

These considerations were intended to tell us the following: The reality of a man and a woman who love each other and form a family does not in any way provoke a pagan rebirth of the pure human in the archetype of God. God, on the other hand, is “just” that, the Father’s look of love toward Jesus incarnate (we, all the families and sexuality, are in Him: how much is enough!). Now however, precisely because the Word has always wanted to be united to Humanity, “and” because Christ, the true flesh united to the Word, wanted to be the firstborn of many brothers (his articulated body and Church), behold, the fraternity (in Christ) of men (of human families) must be called their bodily extension. The Church, his body, is also his bride: not in the (our) sense of parity between *partners*, but in a unique, not a derived sense. It is created by Christ as his body from his torn side (of which – in the eyes of God – Adam’s side was symbol, hence Eve), the Church is nourished by Christ, made to grow all beautiful, and thus is united to him in the “spousal” and indissoluble nature and true communion of the flesh.

One could object: Such a relationship between Christ and the Church (his body, his branches, and only because it is his wife) will lose something of the natural relationship of the order of husband and wife. The objection contains the usual, fundamental error: that of thinking that Christ, the spouse of the Church, resembles (approaches) human marriage. Quite the contrary, it is human marriage that resembles (approaches) that of Christ.

Human marriage must not be idealized. It is very good, but it is not God. And it is not God, not because it is incapable of being imperturbable. It is not, because it is incapable of being passionate to the core. God alone

is Passion because he is the Father of the incarnate and crucified Son. Any other (created) love, any other created eros either is in Christ or is not. The family – the intensity of the bond between man and woman – is in Christ. Since it is in Christ, but not Christ himself, this bond, precisely because of the inescapable evidence of sexuality, is confined to... lose in love and (even) passion. It seems today that this can no longer be said, but it is the truth.

It is not true that Christ, by constituting the body of Church (the structure of his brothers, sons in the Son, born on the Cross from the Heart...), lacks something of the totality of the human, spousal mystery (sexuality, parity, etc.). Instead, it is true that families and spouses (transcendentally, before being spouses, they are children in the Son, born from the heart) lack something of the plenitude of the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church, precisely because in every love on the human level between man and woman must find, in a creaturely manner, space for a certain theatricality of the eros as the genital principle of procreation (which then, realistically, is a partial remedy of death).

Simpler and more definitive: Christ and the Church do not resemble Adam and Eve. Once again, the opposite is true.

Here, and this is fundamental, we need to find the time for a Mariological realization. The Church (body and wife, not the other way around), of which we have said that it was not an abstraction. Instead, it is formed by the saints, the Christians. It is especially real in the Blessed Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus. The *particularity* is ontological and is linked with the virginal motherhood of Mary, and is, in turn, (we believe convinced) inseparable from the correct concept of Christology.

What we want to say is the following: It is not true that a logos *asarkos* is the causal archetype of Adam and that, after the fall of Adam, the Incarnation intervenes secondarily, to the point that the humanity of Jesus is certainly similar to that of Adam.

No. The real man thought of by the Father is Jesus Christ. Adam resembles him, because Christ the Word, the only begotten, wanted to be the firstborn for the greater glory of the Father (as if he had poured out his whole being as a Son towards him with childlike and sweet arms, arms of the flesh of the vine and of the branches, of himself and of his brothers). Hence, the Word, the Lord Jesus, is the Creator of Adam. All predicamental and secondary causality (Adam begot... Abraham...<sup>45</sup>) is supported by the *fiat* that the Father pronounces in Christ. And so it could be said of any, necessarily evolutionary, corporeal *ratio*: If Christ did not exist, there

45. Cfr. *Matt* 1:1 ff.

would be neither a world, nor corporeity, nor humanity, nor Adam. Christ is the Cause of Adam. Christ is not caused by Adam, as if the humanity of the Word (without prejudice to his divinity) were, instead of being the effect, on the horizontal line of predicament. From Adam, Mary is born, but from the Virgin Mary, Christ is born into time<sup>46</sup>.

In the eyes of God the Father, time is space, i.e., the “days” of time are regional zones, being simultaneously present to his creative gaze. The Father’s gaze is creative, for the Father is the generation of the Son, and the Son obeys the Father, by accepting the body he gives him. In conclusion, the different time periods are placed, created around Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate. Thus, the periods of time articulate, starting with What is in the womb of the Virgin Mary, both in Christian and pre-Christian times, with a theory about beings until Adam on the left, and, on the right, until the Parousia.

Jesus, the Eternal Word and first Adam, the primeval icon of the Father (who really must be the man in the eyes of the Father), is the one who enters human history, the one who, just because he is a son of the Virgin Mary, is a son of Adam.

Jesus, the Word, is the creator of his brothers, from Adam to the end of the world, to the last man. Among these, there is Mary. Holy Mary is the absolute concentration of the body, fraternity, the Church, and the branches. Mary is the living cell, already present in her entirety – body and soul – in the glory of the Son toward the Father. This is because Mary – for the cross of Christ – is preserved from original sin; she is preserved because in her the Word Jesus descended among us, *being born of her, his mother*. All of this happens in the *Virgin Mary, for Jesus Christ* is the open side, the cause of Adam and Eve, of all of us, and of our genealogies. Our genealogies take from him, not viceversa. In Mary, he takes what Adam takes from him.

Once again, the objection could be: Is not *such* humanity of Christ (a divine Person, incarnated through the Virgin Mary, and risen) spurious with respect to (our) humanity? The error, once again, lies in the affirmation that we allow ourselves the humanity and divinity of Christ, if and only if they coincide with our ideas of humanity and divinity. Instead, the opposite is true: We fully know, who man is and who God is, only “after” the encounter with Christ. The encounter with Christ and his humanity, as desired by the Father, humbles us to understand that we are not the truth about what is human. The truth about what is fully human lies in that most

46. Cfr. *Luke* 1:35.

tender body united to the Word, deep down in the sonship, to the point of being the firstborn, to the point of giving being to Adam, to the point of existing in the womb of the Virgin Mary as the one to whom – present in that womb – the next humanity of Adam owes everything. The truth about what is human is Jesus, who gives everything back to the Father, who gives everything to his brothers and sisters.

We know that man is such because he is a person. We also know (or intuit) that the *person cannot be the “faber ipsius fortunae”*, but rather that – if we come from the Father – the person is the one who, after all, chooses and expresses the richness of his self (a *self* which he has not chosen, and whom he loves more than his choices). In short: The person is a mission, he is a role. Better: He is participating in the mission of Christ, founded on his eternal generation. In fact, throughout, Jesus has made his “I” a mission because his “I” was the Mission, not the subject, but the coincidence of the “I” and the role (not a “Jesus”, not “a” son, but the Son, who is Jesus). Only Jesus really is Person. Who of us can actually say to be a radical concurrence of one’s agency (choices) and one’s own being (chosen by the Father, but nonetheless more loved by us than our choices: our role and our “I”)? Consequently, we should not say at all that the humanity of Christ (born into time by Mary) is less human because it is not totally like ours; instead, we should say that ours is not completely human because it is not completely like his. And it is not like his, not because he is *super* and we are infants, but, on the contrary, because only he is fully child, the Son, totally himself in the free interpretation of the being that he has from the Father. We, on the other hand, are often too grown-up, eager to make choices, which we do not love, outside of the “I” that we have not chosen, and which we really love (together with the Father).

In Mary, his mother, Jesus, the Eternal Word, is the man within “history and time”. Mary’s milk is the blood of Jesus. The blood of Mary, in the womb of Mary, is the blood of Jesus. The blood of Mary, in the birth of Mary, is united to the blood of Jesus. Without the participation of man, in a flash of lightning, behold then, the Word, which is the humanized Word, *and from here, all times and the fraternal branches depart*. Thus, within this true nourishment, this true gestation, this true birth, Jesus Christ, Eternal Word incarnate, gives humanity to Mary (creating her and preserving her from sin). At the same time, from Mary alone, in some way enriched by Mary’s personal tones, he assumes humanity (corporeity), which he, Christ, in whom all is created, extends by himself and which he gives to the Holy Mary and all the saints.

We can conclude then: human families (father, mother, children) exist so that, from below, man, created in Christ, may become aware of the mystery of Christ and the Church, as well as Christ and Mary. But not because the mystery of Christ (= the humanized Word, upon which history is created, the ecclesiastic history of brethren<sup>47</sup>) is similar to the relationship between man and woman. Instead, it is the relationship between man and woman that resembles (in a “defective” way) the original relationship between Christ and the Church, between Christ and Mary.

We can only see something of the relationship Christ and the Church in the union between man and woman. Thus, realizing, from human families, the mystery of the union of the Son with the flesh, the origin of history, we necessarily discover the mystery of the Son (since in the Son as Son happens all creation of the flesh of sons and brothers, beginning with Mary<sup>48</sup>). When we realize, then, the mystery of the Son, Jesus, man (every man) understands the essential: only the Son, Jesus, obedience in person, is truly man, the Person, gratitude, the only “religion” of the Father. His humanity must not resemble ours in order to be true. Instead, it is ours that is true and exists to the extent that it resembles his, the perfect measure of Christ – in which there is no violence of sin, in which nothing of the true human being or his *infancy* is missing.

Jesus is the Father’s child. Therefore, understanding that only Jesus is the true Adam and that Jesus is the child, every man can understand that he must be a child to really be a man, the offspring of Adam.

#### 4. *Christ and sickness and pain*

In the light of the mystery of Christ, it seems absolutely important to us to first make a strong distinction between pain and sickness, and, then, distinguish with even greater force, between sickness (evil) and sin (*the* evil).

47. The Church is the «family of the children of God assembled about Christ, the Firstborn» (R. Guardini, *The Lord*, English translation. Henry Regnery Company, Chicago 1954, p. 242).

48. The idea of A. von Speyr is very beautiful and profound: Mary, receiving herself ontologically from Jesus, her Son, is always an anticipation of the Church (the Son suffers for her in Gethsemane – which does not take anything away from her, but causes the immaculate nature of the mother – as well as for all those who are on the cross, where Mary is already, turned towards Christ). Anticipating the Church, Mary is also the one who, humbly, always takes a step back, coming to meet us and to take us to where she is already (cfr. A. von Speyr, *Maria nella redenzione*, Italian translation, Jaca Book, Milan 2001 (Translation), pp. 76-77). H.U. von Balthasar also teaches that in Mary’s “yes,” every Christian is – in the first place – the Church, thus called to become Mary... This, then, is within the eternal and temporal return of the Son to the Father (cfr. H.U. von Balthasar, “Maria e lo Spirito”, in *Homo creatus est*, quote (Translation), p. 141).

Many of today's perceptions do not realize such distinctions: Sin is said to not exist since any behavior intended to achieve good (immediate well-being) is proclaimed licit (why not?). If so, then the opposite of good well-being is necessarily bad illness. Therefore, a life worthy of being lived ("divine" life) is a healthy, rich and joyful life. Faced with the necessity for socio-political activity, it will be a question of working with distributive justice, at most, in an attempt to radically eliminate diseases (perhaps by avoiding – why not? – that the "sick" may enter this world). But the Christian sense of true charity, which opens the heart for the other, the brother who is ontologically weaker, does not find any recognition anymore. If it did, it would necessarily mean – besides not being against every religion – believing in God.

To believe in God, in fact, is not to platonize some serene Absolute in the face of the fragility here below (this, in any case, is atheism). Nor is it confusing heaven and earth in panic-ridden and insignificant suffering (which is another type of atheism: The former intends to save God's personality by keeping his conscience pure and taking away his love. The latter intends to preserve love, thereby abolishing the person, thinking that the person must necessarily be inconstant and subjective). But this is not the case: Being (*ens*) is not the evil; being (*ens*) is not self-subsisting; being (*ens*) is rooted in a living context, in which it is lifted up to exist in its peculiar essence (= it is created). This is not the context of the meaningless *fiat* of an unconscious supersubject unaware of love and suffering. Instead, it is characterized – mysteriously, but truthfully – by the presence of the creature – as a creature – in the being of the Eucharist of the consubstantial Son, in heaven and on earth.

There is no doubt that being (*ens*) is act and perfection. We do not turn to God because things here are disappointing, but because they are very good<sup>49</sup>. There is no doubt, at the same time, that being (*ens*) is *because of another* and does not subsist by itself. For example, the value of suffering and fragility cannot be celebrated with pride, thereby enclosing being (*ens*) in itself and moving it away from the true God. In fact, suffering by itself makes no sense. According to the words of the Gospel, it is true that it then brings more joy to joy, but beyond itself... It is better to be together than getting lost, but it is even better to get lost and find each other again than never getting lost. It is better to smile than to cry, but it is better to console those who cry than simply smiling. This is the core of the beatitudes. It is the kingdom of God. It is God... The fragility and the beauty

49. Cfr. *Gen* 1:31.

of being (*ens*) is born of God and only of him; of his tenderness, not the disturbing arbitrariness of a serene pseudo-god who creates the ear but does not know the sweetness of hearing; the eye without knowing the sweetness of seeing; human love without ever experiencing the abysmal nature of its abandonment – and its failures.

But this does *not* mean that being (*ens*) – founded only on God (precisely to guarantee the beauty of his “pain”) – constitutes an accomplishment for God. God is neither indifferent to the existence of nor to the (fragile) essence of his creature, but God is not realized by creation. God is Good because he is the diffusion of himself, even the fragile, most tender tones – divinely so – of such diffusion. But the world, thought of as being autonomous, is not the *internal* realization of that diffusion, which is God, the Father.

Only the Son is consubstantial with the Father. Now, this Son is, by the ineffable decree of the Father, the incarnate one, the crucified one, the risen one. Only at this point does the world – in a decisive and original Christian manner – find space and meaning, its substance, and even its true cross, which is not without meaning. The finite and entitative structure of being (*ens*) is absolutely respected: This is not to say that the creature is the Son; nor is it to say that the creature is an imperfect creation of the Father! The Father is perfect generation. His “*creation*” is only and entirely so the Son, Jesus: from his eternal birth to his return to the bosom with his glorified wounds.

What does this have to do with the subject we are talking about or with pain and illness (and, as we are going to see, with death)? The most beautiful answer is not found in theories, but in the accounts of so many little ones, the saints, who perfected their flesh... Let us think of the indescribable crosses – marvelously and inexplicably – carried in Christ; of Benedetta Bianchi Porro<sup>50</sup>, and Chiara Corbella Petrillo<sup>51</sup> What is it that infuses true life, true joy (which the world does not know) into these stories? What saves them from nothingness and absurdity? The non-Christian and indifferent god perhaps? The nothingness of the inevitably different (as in being an alternative to God) and unscientific metaphysics...? (Bad is what is evil and nihilistic, but what is unscientific is good. The only scientific measurement is always going to be transcended: For the believer as for the nonbeliever, the drama of a sick

50. Cfr. A.M. Sicari, *Il grande libro dei “Ritratti di Santi”*. Dall'antichità ai giorni nostri, Jaca Book, Milan 1997, pp. 869-882.

51. Cfr. S. Troisi, C. Paccini, *Siamo nati e non moriremo mai più. Storia di Chiara Corbella Petrillo*, Porziuncola, Assisi 2013.



child is not one of proteins and enzymes being out of control. Instead, it is either a suffering child, and thereby, being assimilated in Jesus, even more precious than the Father, or it is a malicious product of the root cause of evil – entirely theological structures!) In the face of evil, the alternative to believing in God so as to have meaning is not the empirical fact, but the belief in or even the profession of evil as being meaningful.

It would be enough to look at a man once, to kneel piously before the divine evidence of the existence of a conscious and personified beauty. It must be founded on what cannot be without it. In this sense, a complete look at man and the profession of God as his foundation are a single theoretical and practical act. Evil (and who denies it?) has the power to make people doubt this foundation, to doubt God. Then, however, without God and without there being anything else (nothingness, pure calculation, and being (*ens*) as mere being (*ens*) are not enough), being (*ens*) is left with the necessity for a beginning and, at the same time; left without any apparent and possible beginning; left without any beginning. Simpler still: Without the Good of whatever is good (*entia*), they which are good (*entia*) would remain without a cause, impossibly so; they would remain non-being. However, they are

- not created but being created. God cannot be their cause (because there is evil); the cause is yelled out, even necessary, but not found...

Unless, of course, God is the Father of Jesus Christ. This is, in fact, not an absurdity (who wants to intervene, though he *simpliciter* cannot

- this is not God, and, therefore, we remain without a beginning); nor is this, though worse than the former: He could intervene, but he does not want to. The Father, who did not intervene when his Son asked him to in Gethsemane, is the one who, “*audemus dicere*”, did not intervene because he would not and divinely so is not able to – and this divine weakness, indeed, is the best.

By virtue of this divine and, at the same time, natural paradox, it so happens that the best food is the one seasoned with fatigue; that the most beautiful joy is that of finding oneself after being lost; that, looking at daily life, a child is cute when it is in tears... A child cannot but be cute; and it would not be cute, if imagined that without crying it would fall and, therefore, runs into his father’s arms...

Traditionally, and for a good reason, it is said that God allows (but does not want) evil because from it he is able to obtain a greater good. This, after all, is very simple. Mercy is more than love because it happens to misery. Now, this truth, which is the law that is con- substantial with

Zeus, i.e., to know is to suffer<sup>52</sup>, is either a principle, which “god” must obey, or, *eminenter*, the same relational, sweet and powerful nature of the true God.

If the happy need for bread to be better appreciated only by effort – for children to be really tender only because they cry, fall and really suffer – is an outward realization, with respect to God, we would not have found God.

However, this is not the case: The Father does not need the Son. He-who-is-generating-the-Son is not a predicate, by which the former subject, the Father, realizes himself. The Father is He-who-is-generating-the-Son, and, in being this (= generating him), he is both, seeing-him-eternally and God, as well as Son and child. Before all of us, the Father is the one who, in himself, is eternally astonished, moved and afflicted (by suffering that is more than suffering) by the *sonlike* and tender divinity of the second Person, by the amusements of Wisdom before Him...

The Son, because of his return to the Father, is the Son till the very end; even to the point of Jesus’ extreme tenderness, his humanity, and, because of this humanity, to the point of being all of the corporeity. He is the full, messianic worship of the being of our bodies, the brothers.

“Therein”, the Word Jesus Jesus is the most delicate Creator and Savior of a perfect work in its weakness, as anyone with a bit of a poetic heart can guess.

But this does not constitute a Hegelian realization of his subjectivity. Instead, ineffably nested in his being, the personified gratitude, the Person of Gratitude (better: the Person who is tenderness himself “ad Patrem;” not an embrace of the Father who realizes his nonexistent subject of a son, but the Son-who-is-embrace).

God, the Father, divinely begets the Son. The Son is divine, “yet” Son does not logically imply an external future (only in the order of space and time does the son, in turn, become father etc.). Thus, his generated active being, as a gift, the tender embrace of a child, does not produce another “Person”. His generated active being is divine, perfect and sonlike because – without necessity – it is the push toward the Father *while united with the flesh* with all the work of creation and redemption. This is how the Word eternally thanks the Father, with perfect sonlike “agency”. Not with the absurd edification of a divine extra-trinitarian, but with the divine return to the Father with a childlike touch, kiss and embrace (which – and not the other way around – resemble the tumbling of children while playing

52. Cfr. Eschilo, *Agamemnon*, pp. 176-178.

in front of their parents, and without which they would not be as beautiful as children are). The weakest are *really* – a profound truth – the most touching parts of the entire Christ. This is unsustainable for both, pantheism and non-Trinitarian deism, because they both do not know the being of *relationship* and the abyss of the person. This does not at all, in some nirvanic manner, eliminate suffering nor does it, existentially, sing of it in an arrogant manner. It does not compel either of the two *easy* absurdities in the face of evil: atheism and idolatry. This is only Christian.

The world proclaims happiness in independence in aseptic justice, in the denial of a child's emotion and clumsiness, in short: in the suppression of the child.

The saints, on the other hand, behind Christ, profess their joy in their childlike tears, i.e., in their inevitable fragility, which, in Christ, only makes them pleasant to the touched eyes of the Father moved to tears. The Father is not touched by a non-child creature. And – again – this is not some accomplishment of any kind because this truth rests in the Trinity. It is not about any Father, but the one who is the Father; the one who is the Father because he is the generation of the eternal Jesus. In Jesus, the Father sees us – and, in Jesus, we see ourselves – as children shared in the Trinity, entering the pure relationality of his great being, in the tenderness toward the great tenderness of the Son.

Only this – the beauty of the Father's cry, in Christ, over us and our weakness – explains the existence of so many unimaginable sufferings. Only this. Neither nihilism nor deism nor atheism nor technical evasion nor empirical “amusement” nor “god”.

The outcome of all this is not an illness, till death as if it were a nullification. It is rather that condition in Christ that unifies Good Friday and Easter, as we shall see when referring to Christian death. We distinguish, from the beginning, between suffering, sickness, and sin. In fact, there is no disease without suffering, but, in a certain sense, there is (good) suffering without an incurable disease. Let us be clear: Whoever, lucidly, wanted to eliminate the suffering of insanity by slaughtering the mentally ill would be the actual mad and incurably ill. This diabolic, cynical, and incurable disease (the denial of tenderness toward the weak) can only be cured by accepting the existence of suffering, which sanctifies us by making us merciful. Paradoxically, we must desire healing, but not anti-Christian annihilation (= driven to the denial of the divinity of the child).

Once again, although sin, deep down, is not free from suffering, there is also the sin of utterly intoxicating enjoyment; good acts, on the other hand, are often accompanied by suffering in the strict sense.

We have now said something about sin, which we have not yet been able to classify between the coordinates of man, the spirit incarnate, because sin, which exists (!), is not a natural consequence of the being of being (*ens*). What about sin then, the mystery of iniquity? What is sin? How can it be possible in relation to the omnipotence and goodness of God? First of all, it must be clear that moral evil must be attributed, in its totality, to the ill will of the impoverished creature. The existence of this most particular predicamental causality constituted by created freedom marks a kind of interruption of divine omnipotence. God, in creating freedom, really portrayed himself. The work of freedom, possessed by God “alone” in being is all freedom. This must be said of that imperceptible breath in which one decides, in the intimacy of the person, not so much this or that other act, but about the fundamental orientation, the yes or no given to the Good and the True. Then in a certain sense, things are different. Who turns on the Good is increasingly forced to lose his freedom; on the other hand those who have sighed over their weakest yes to the will of the Father (which is always the will of Christ!) find that wonderful paradox (one of the many, of which the world is made): experiencing more and more that he will never be tempted to abandon his own fundamental love, it is precisely in this necessary growth (more and more like Christ, who was obedience, not arbitrariness) that one becomes increasingly free<sup>53</sup>.

But the infinitesimal point, at which, freedom (shared creativity) carries out its essential decision of orientation, is never attributable to God. Not only by granting that such action is that of the creature, but by having to admit – with the necessary concomitant denial, which could come back to disdain God – the fact that a creature, made good, becomes evil. The choice for evil in the creature is free. The choice is so absolutely of the creature that it does not compromise the honor of God at all. God, in this one case, has nothing to do with it. This is all the creature’s, not God’s: not only its sin but also its sinfulness. He who does not accept this has not understood what freedom is.

Indeed, it must be said that precisely this divine “not to enter” marks, so to speak, one of the softer aspects with respect to his genuine – total, not totalitarian – force.

But we cannot possibly think that the existence of the sinner contributes to “realizing” a God made perfect by his own tolerance. God shines in his being Love precisely because, while leaving room for man, at the same time, he does not want evil to be committed<sup>54</sup>.

53. In Latin, *fili* are the free.

54. Cfr. *Deut* 8:1.

The strength of the Lord does not lie in some mysterious deception, which ultimately authorizes evil, but in the creation of the creature, for it to fulfill what is good. Herein “then” lies the encounter with the drama of unwanted human wickedness<sup>55</sup>, which makes the Father suffer. It is in this divine suffering – and as soon as in a constitutional monarch’s vacillation – that the Perfection of the Father is realized.

At this point one could imagine, erroneously that it is the being of misery that moves God to be “realized”. That is not true either. And the reason, as we have seen many times, lies in its being Communion Trinity, not a subject, but a personality of subsisting relationship. The illness and the innocent fragility of the son created in the Son moved the Father. As we have seen, “even” He is tender, not realizing his subjectivity (God loves), but, instead (God is love<sup>56</sup>), because to say Father is to say generation, always moved by the Christ as the child, and, in Christ, by us, children by participation. Now, by analogy, the sin of the son does not realize a paternal subject preceding mercy, because, in Christ, the Father is mercy (*misericiordiar* as Pope Francis joyfully says). *From the moment that the creature sins, everything is attributable to the creature*, and the Father is revealed as identical not to the subject, but to the act, which is the moved generation of the innocent Christ as the child, and, in him, of us created children, who have become degenerates, and who are in need of mercy.

In the “Exultet”, the liturgy, we know, sings scandalously “O felix culpa”. The liturgy, wisely, however, does not say that the occasion of the forgiveness of sins makes the creation of God more perfect (fulfilled).

55. Romano Guardini clearly insists on the idea of the *second original sin*, i.e., the Word Incarnate wants to be the first-born of many brothers; these, in Adam, sin against him. He remains among us, now as pardon... But here we are, in the reality of space and time of the Word’s being among us, among the chosen people; behold, the astonishing announcement of Jesus, the Beatitudes. The answer is not a sequel but remains a no to the Word; this time to the point of crucifying him. In this way, the *conversatio Christi* among us takes a dramatic turn, when he, before the dramatic repudiation on our part, chooses to be with us on the path of the Passion. All this, in God’s eyes, is not subject to the times; but precisely to the simultaneity, God, through Christ (who is with us of his own desire; with us in Adam and in Israel, and who, being rejected, dies on the cross), far from diluting the suffering, emphasizes it. He emphasizes it till the cross, without which a) his Passion would be what we had brought about and would be made salvific (it is the Father who accepts homicidal sin first; it is Jesus who *remains*), b) his Passion would not be real or *marvelous*. Jesus is not realized in grief; he is the grief over the *first and second original sin* (cfr. R. Guardini, *Il Signore*, quote, pp. 302, 303, 305, 306). On p. 324, it is said, marvelously so, that the Transfiguration is precisely before Moses, and not before Abraham, “boundless breadth”, as it may have happened at the time of the sermon on the mount; for Israel did what should not have been done: They said no to the Word among us, *for the second time*, Adam’s no being the first time, and so Christ is led to the Cross...).

56. Cfr. *Uohn* 4:8.

Instead, it says (which is not the same) that the creation of God is perfect as it is, even the creation of man in Christ, and even, also in Christ, the forgiveness of man who has (should not!) become a sinner.

The absolute beauty of mercy is intuitive (*it is more...*). Above, with respect to evil, not sin, we have simply talked about the greater beauty of bread seasoned with fatigue, as compared to that, which is eaten without appetite because it has not been worked for. In God's eyes, this being "ever greater" in the core of his Act of being (it is not "god"; it is the generation-of-the-Word as "creation" of perfect diffusion) is not, however, a passage from potency to act. In God not only the before and the after do not exist, but there is not even any possibility preceding his being, therein present together with other possibilities, to which, with respect to the others, he would give actuality, and be an even better act... No. God is, in his trinitarian nature, the diffusion of the absolutely perfect Good, and, "thus", the generation of the Word, in which there is everything. "Within" the generation of the Word, the Eucharist in Person, being "*pros ton Patera*", therein lies – never obvious, but never the fruit of hypothetical alternatives either – all Tenderness. The Father is "directed toward the Son, and to the children in the Son", always in an excellent and tender, although not obviously. This, which constitutes a nonmechanical, but not contingent outpouring of childhood. Is already the "explanation" of the feeling of weakness, even sickness, and suffering.

The sin<sup>57</sup>, reluctantly grafts in, unwanted by God, and becomes (it, the sin, not God) a further way of receiving divine tenderness. It is certainly the forgiveness and the true redemption of the sinner are certainly greater than the (somewhat aseptic) justice of the fair "static". But this "greater" *quoad Deum*, does not fulfill God. He has always known that the creature – he wanted to create – would want to sin deliberately. God has always wanted to create it and forgive it in Christ crucified, without "looking" at any other possibility. And if another possibility is not considered by him, it does not exist<sup>58</sup>. God does not realize himself but remains the one Who

57. Notably Goethe: «... *ein Teil von jener Kraft, die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft*» (J.W. von Goethe, *Faust*, p. I, escena III, "Studio"). That is why "in spite of himself"...

58. «In the crucified, one can interpret the abyss of sin that is felt by Jesus as an offense against the heavenly Father, and whose reparation is carried out with a gesture and sign of sonlike love and not as a sacrificial satisfaction of a God, who claims blood [...] (not only the Word but) in our proposal the Word is incarnate, crucified and risen, except as a way [...] and more as a beginning and more as an end [...] There is no God who is not a creator [...] and [...] God [...] does not irrationally believe [...] (but) every man is born to be conformed to the Son of God, dead and risen; to receive the figure of the crucified Lord; to enter into his destiny [...] because the conception (...) in the Lord precedes

is (He is the being-touched generating the Son and, in him, by creating all that, which “constat” in the Son, and which, perhaps, wants to move away from the Son). The Father has eternal mercy for all of this.

We want to make a reflection inspired by the so-called conversion of Saint Teresa, when she went from a certain quietism in religion to her passionate Christian mysticism, fulminated by the wounds she saw in Jesus<sup>59</sup>. As long as one thinks that sin does “hurt” Jesus, one will not really come out of temptation.

The rationalist does not accept this. The “Christian” rationalist for example, accepts the prayer of praise, not that of reparation and eagerness. He does not believe that God can be “modified” and “helped”. He would need more humility to understand how, in a certain sense, the true God is helped and modified by our participation in his will of salvation.

First of all, there is the fact of grace, of being able to see that the Father, in Christ, already loves us. The sacraments are now flowing (blood and water<sup>60</sup>) from the side of Christ. Christ, dying and risen he, not us, is the one who baptizes and celebrates the Eucharist etc. Fascinated, in a breath – only – of freedom that looks, so it happens that, having discovered this love in action, we are *unable* to do anything but confess it, express it, experience it, *make it ‘res*. And, with this, one receives a) Paradoxically so true which is also a necessity<sup>61</sup>; b) the extension in us, “*ex opere operato*”, of the baptizing action of Christ *on the Cross*, evangelizing action in all its being. “The mouth speaks from the fullness of the heart”. Looking at Christ who, by dying, saves us, we cannot stop proclaiming it, and, in this, the sacramental baptism and the Eucharist of the Church occur.

On the same level, there is the will to help Jesus, to feel pity for his wounds. It is not born from the thought that, if I do not intervene, Christ will be lost (this arrogance, which pretends to control Christ, is diabolical); but neither is it born, following Protestant doctrine, by separating the need of Christ from the uselessness of his Church and its saints. Instead, it is

any human appearance [...] (The men) are born the way they are born [...] (reside) in the mind and memory of God, in the heart of the most Holy Trinity» (I. Biffi, *Gonformi all'immagine del Figlio* (Translation), Jaca Book, Milan 2002, pp. 68, 87, 89, 90, 93).

59. Cfr. Saint Teresa of Avila, “Libro della mia vita”, in *Opere complete*, OCD, Rome 1981, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 99, cit. in H.U. von Balthasar, *Homo creatus est*, cit., p. 217.

60. «... an element, through which, according to the vision of Catherine of Siena, the whole Church, which continually becomes dirty again, is always cleansed, over and over again» (H.U. von Balthasar, “Conversione”, in *Homo creatus est* (Translation), cit., p. 223).

61. For example, when a mother responds: «Sure, why would I do anything else?» to those who praise her for taking care of her sick son... «You seduced me, Lord, and I let myself be seduced» (*Jer* 20:7).

born this way: It comes from looking at the love of Christ for us; only this forces us to celebrate it (sacramentally) and, without further thought, to love it, “while” the autonomous self of each one – which does not really exist – finally understands that it does not exist, passing in its form. Also, we see that we are acting for Jesus, *while* we exist coming out of him, just as he “exists” coming out of the Father. We are moved (so that, necessarily we “help”, without thinking because and while we are created in him; in him who is the one in whom we return to the Father, “while” the Father is the one who generates him...

The saints, the Virgin Mary, the magisterial, ministerial and sacramental constitution of the Church, do not constitute an infinite series of steps that, starting from us, should reach Christ. No. Just as Christ is not a step from us to the Father, but the Father’s lean towards us, so our involuntary commitment, free and necessary to be saints of Christ for other brothers (= Church) – our being branches of the vine it is not an accomplishment of Christ, mediating, with our own steps, between the brothers and him; but a being within the total being of Christ.

It is complete in one’s own flesh...<sup>62</sup>. The integral truth of Christ is (as scandalous as the Trinity is: he being of the Father in the Son) that Christ is “also” in me, he is also me... Only Catholicism manages to make this *connection*, in light of the *act of being*, without ever becoming pantheist. On the other hand, both, the pure Reformation and, worse, deism, *must* become idolaters, while dissecting the creation of God, and thereby separating in the flesh, the head and the body, i.e., they must rethink “god” as a major part of the world.

Catholicism does not imply the fulfillment of a previous subjective requirement, but the participation in a condition of relational nature<sup>63</sup>. Christ does not realize himself in us. Christ realizes himself before down to us. Christ is the Act of being made flesh for redemption, which descends to us so that the one called “we” becomes his cell (not found but “created” by him). It is the branch that, “necessarily” seduced by the vine, constitutes, in turn, Christ (always branch!), in which other branches can see the vine. Deism has maintained that Christ displaces God, Protestantism holds that the Church, the saints, the simplest of prayers offered, all displace Christ. In reality, Christ does not displace God, because there is no “God” but the Father of the Son. The Church does not displace Christ because Christ (Son of the Father) is, in his active sonship, the Incarnate Son, in

62. «I complete what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ in my flesh», should be said, and not «I emph complete in my flesh what is lacking, etc.» (cfr. *Col* 1:24).

63. Read the full text of *John* 13-17.



whom the brothers are created, forgiven, Christianized and expropriated from themselves

In this section, the illnesses, the suffering, the sins, the desires and the realization of holiness, i.e., the love for Christ in the brothers, have been addressed; all realities incarnate. The entirety of this system (fragility, and also misery) is neither the other face of God (gnosis) nor is it what prevents us from believing in God (atheism) nor is it totally different from the supreme God (deism). Instead, from a Christian point of view, all this is an exchange of agency and relationship, “internal” to the totality of the Incarnate Christ, who never left the heaven “of the” Father, at whose bosom he is found: «When the Son of Man comes in his glory [...] he will say [...] Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry [...] you did it for me»<sup>64</sup>.

## 5. *Christ and death*

In summary, so far we have said the following: Not for secondary reasons, but, essentially, because of the mystery of the Incarnate Word – in which human reality subsists: a) the birth of every man is the fact that the Father calls us to be children in the Son Jesus; b) human childhood is path for maturity;) maturity is being children – like the Son; d) human old age is, in the necessary and tired continuation of time, to keep on being tired and in need of the time, a capacity to teach “spiritual” childhood; e) human marriage, where children are born, refers concretely to the relationship between Christ and the Church (but this is the archetype, not vice versa); f) illnesses, suffering, and even sins<sup>65</sup>... they constitute, *quoad Patrem* his inclination on us, in the Son Jesus. This is because “God” is the trinitarian relationship, not impersonal necessity nor supreme existing subject.

And what about death? We want to – without rhetoric – be laconic, referring to a wonderful essay by von Balthasar which is based on this theological polysyllogism: if the Word has to “finish” in the Father (the Person is divine, but different); if this “ending” is surpassing death, a very sweet abandonment, exactly the opposite of the expansion, of the “Absolute”; if, Incarnate, the same Son dies and rises to also prove on earth how the Son abandons himself to the Father (until death and Hades);

64. Cfr. *Matt* 25:31 ff.

65. “*Etiam peccata*” It is like mentioning the brief comment of St. Augustine on the Pauline text that says that everything cooperates for the good of those who love the Lord...

if this death (supra-death) as a surrender of oneself to the Father is the very being of the Son (through participation, of the children); if this is so, our death is the full expression of the sonship, i.e., the total surrender<sup>66</sup>. This is not absurdly by the nothingness. Instead, the resurrection in Christ is inextricably linked to it. The resurrection of Christ is not the earthly paradise after the (forgotten) Passion, but the always remain dynamic and victorious; the Lamb that fights, the slaughtered, meek Lamb that triumphs with generous blood. It is not a biological return to rest. It is perfect permanence to live loving. Our resurrection in him will not be the perpetuation of *bios*, but a complete grafting in the *zo'e* of the Son<sup>67</sup>. It will be the remaining *always* with Christ, in the glorious but tense struggle and it sounds different from *forever*. It will be the fixation on the dynamic of love: to find oneself in losing oneself. It will be a Christian death, i.e., it will be a return in commotion (joy and crying likewise) to the Father.

The natural desire of the good, in fact, rebels against nothingness; it also rebels against a pseudo-glorious biological perpetuation for everybody. Instead, from afar, it sees the truth of what Christ reveals: Only He the innocent Son, “deserves” eternal glory; like the Lamb, always in the work of salvation, always bloody. We, children (although sinners) will resurrect in him, only in him, as non-depersonalized pieces of his Oneness. That is to say: He will continue with us an eternal work of love and of healthy fatigue, our prize.

Maybe only *today*, one can really come to appreciate Christianity as an alternative to nihilism. In fact, only today, nihilism is becoming the new religion and the majority theology. So, only today when faced with *nothingness*, Christianity can shine like the truth of a *simple* being (not like a drug or the utopia of *super*). In fact, in the name of the Father, of the Incarnate Son, and of the Holy Spirit, everything is, is created, re-created, glorified, and given meaning. This is to say: the simple and Subsistent Relationship in which we are and move, exists only in the two mysteries of faith: in the evidently *surpassing poverty* of the Trinity and Incarnation. Both of them to explain also the existence of human body.

66. Cfr. H.U. von Balthasar, “Unità di vita, e di morte”, in *Homo creatus est*, quote (Translation), pp. 175-178.

67. «The fact that for Paul life literally “overthrows” (*katapinein*) death does not mean only an annihilation of death, but its inclusion in the life of Christ and God. Christ is resurrected [...] as he who lived on earth and died on earth [...] does not rise from the dead (as if leaving them behind [...]), (which is) his death was the act of his love more alive» (H.U. von Balthasar, “Lo, morte assorbita dalla vita”, in *Homo creatus est*, quote (Translation), p. 184).

The Christian, who has the burden of carrying out cultural tasks, is called, today, to say something about the body, in times of profanity of the body (neither corporeal nor carnal desecration, but entirely ideological). The Christian must understand that he is not called at all to theorize confused philosophical ideas about the generic god, the cause of everything (souls and bodies). Instead, he is called to venerate, among all the bodies, the human body as mysteriously and poetically nested within the universal Lògos, which is by eternal decree the Incarnate Logos, Jesus Christ, the unbroken Son of his, who is the Father, and whom we call God.



# Outlook

Marta Rodriguez

The conclusion we reached in our research is that we can interpret the body in terms of a “relational grammar”, in which man and woman are oriented towards each other through the reciprocal gift of self. This point of arrival thus becomes the premise of a new stage of research, in which we ask ourselves whether the symbolism of the human body tells us something about the relationships between men and women in different areas of life: family, society, and culture. We want to be able to affirm that the “reciprocal generation”, which we have captured in our interpretation of the body, is made possible preeminently but not exclusively in the relationship of the couple. We would like to argue that men and women can enrich each other in different areas of social and cultural life and that their interaction leads to their personal growth as well as to a project that, although arising from their separate perspectives, will be enriched more than any work undertaken separately by either party.

This affirmation of ours is merely a hypothesis. We are faced with a long history of cultural expressions, in which the relationship between men and women has been characterized by opposition, conflict, and submission. How can this trend be explained? Is it still possible in the face of all this to propose a relationship between men and women in terms of a constructive symbolic alliance? What would be its basis? How would this alliance manifest itself, and how would it translate into culture? These are the questions that are only now being enunciated. And these are the questions that will drive our new cycle of research.

What is the purpose of having a body? How should we interpret the bodily datum? And further still, is it possible to speak of a grammar of the sexed body?

From a psychological perspective, which is the source of our understanding of sexed corporeity, the authors has asked themselves: How do body and identity relate to each other? What are the consequences of manipulating or defying the limitations of the body? These levels ultimately emphasize the ethical scope that is present: the dignity of the sexed body.

One clear intention has been guiding this work: to explore new avenues, which will help us understand the beauty and dignity of the human body, drawing specific attention to the foundational part of such an intent.

**The Institute for Higher Studies in Women**, founded in 2003, intends to advance the role of women, alongside that of men, in any cultural domain, in order to create a line of thought capable of inspiring factual actions in social life.

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