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Collectanea Theologica 69/Fasciculus specialis, 99-109

1999

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EDWARD OZOROWSKI

THE GIFT OF LIFE IN THE ORDER OF CREATION AND REDEMPTION AS PRESENTED IN „EVANGELIUM VITAE”

All that John Paul II has written is related to life, as is the whole Bible and the teaching of the Church. And all that „Evangelium vitae” contains concerns life itself and not only its diverse peripheries. That Encyclical is a scientific treatise, a catechism, a homily, a hymn and a song of life dealing with its realities, which is beyond definition and in which every living being participates: which is the crowning of the work of creation, possessing its various degrees and reflecting the features of the Creator. In Man life is his existence (CG 1,98), in God – His essence (S. th.I.q.18, a.4, ad. 1).

The Pope writes about life in specific circumstances and for a concrete purpose. These are the mounting dangers to human life in the contemporary world, from its conception till natural death, originating in the materialistic vision of Man. The Pope stands in the defense of life and therefore, in the defense of mankind armed with the Christian vision of Man derived from the Gospel. But His teachings are no expression of occasionalism. It is also no struggle with those who support giving death. External conditions are only a framework, which holds a positive expository discourse, conducted, may it be remembered, by the Church’s Supreme Authority.

The characteristic of these teachings is, primarily, a wide screen on which life is projected. It comprises reality in its entirety: from the moment of creation to its eschatological fulfillment, from the supreme degree of life to that of its lowest expressions. No Pope has ever before presented life in such a wide omniencompassing vista.

Human life proceeds in two orders: the creative and the redemptive. To Christians this is the fundamental truth of faith. John Paul II accepted it as the starting point and, at the same time, the foundation for his expositions. The masterly manner in which these two orders

have been connected may be taken as the „primum principium” of the Encyclical. It would be impossible to present the functioning of this principle in all its many details. It is surely sufficient to perceive it in three areas: the dignity of life, the sense of life and the requirements of life. These are the three pillars on which the problems of human life, in general, rest.

The dignity of life

In „*Evangelium vitae*” John Paul II employs the term „human life” as a synonym of both man and the human person, while linking the concept of the dignity of life with the concept of value, sanctity and inviolability of that life. Each of these terms has semantic limits which differ somewhat though relating to the same reality. Their similarities and differences can be thus presented: human life is existence whose ontological property is dignity distinguished in that life’s relation to God and the world. It serves Man in a durable, inalienable and obligatory manner. Man is a person which signifies that, among all substantial existences, he boasts the highest perfection of existence. His dignity is a personal dignity and as such is the primary right among all others, requiring active affirmation from man himself and other people and constitutes the foundation, source and the moral motor of Man’s dynamism¹.

Personal dignity is a right and thereby a value. In the comprehension of the value of human life, the Pope is among representatives of objectivism, that is he recognizes that this value exists in reality and not only in the cognitive order durable and unreplaceable². In that manner personal dignity becomes a source, criterion and the end of all reference of and moral value³.

When he calls human life divine. John Paul II is something of a theologian and something of a philosopher. By reaching to the Bible for

¹ John Paul II gave expression to his views on the dignity of human life even before he took over the St. Peter’s throne inter alia in: *Love and responsibility*, Kraków 1962; *Person – an object and community*, Philosophical Year Books 24 (1976) no. 2 pp. 5-12; *Person and deed*, Kraków 1969; *Ethical primer*, Lublin 1983; Synopsis: E. Pedrez, *Man, existence, value*, Warsaw 1989 pp. 103-125.

² An attempt to define the concept of freedom and a review of opinions on the subject presented by: W. Tatarkiewicz, *Pararega*. Warsaw 1978 pp. 60-73.

³ E. Pedrez, op. cit, p. 111.

arguments He is a theologian, when introducing them in a rational manner He is a philosopher⁴. „Human life is divine – He writes – because it requires from the very beginning God’s creative activity and remains for ever in a special relationship with the Creator, the only of its purpose” (EV, 53). Divinity, in theology, is understood as that state which Man, stricken with the primeval sin, attains, as the result of grace earned through Jesus Christ. Divinity belongs to the order of redemption, while John Paul II sees the divinity of life already in the order of creation. His concept of divinity is close to that of which students of religion speak. Divinity appears here as a sacrum, an area reserved for God⁵. Life is divine – explains the Pope – since it comes from God, is his specific property and progresses to God as the final goal.

Life’s inviolability stems from its divineness. In the „*Evangelium vitae*” Encyclical, these terms usually appear together. „Human life has a divine and inviolable character in which the inviolability of the Creator himself is reflected (EV, 53). „Human life is divine and inviolable at each moment of its existence, also in its initial phase prior to birth” (EV, 61).

Of the four enumerated concepts – dignity, value, divinity and inviolability – dignity is the fundamental and central concept, with the others supplementing or resulting from it. Hence, let us dwell for a moment on the dignity of human life. It is the primary definition of life as God’s gift. The creative and redemptive order of mankind and each person is focused separately as in a lens of reflected as in a mirror.

The Pope delivers the manner of his thinking in the sentence: „The dignity of life originates not only in its sources, that is from the fact that it is given by God, but also from its goal, designation to union with God by acquiring knowledge of and loving him” (EV, 38). In this statement

⁴ The Pope considers that knowledge revealed on human life is closely related to that which Man knows about this from experience and reason: „That Gospel of life was finally proclaimed and fully offered to Man in Christ which – already gifted in the Revelation of the Old Testament, even more – written in the heart of every man and woman – resounds in every conscience from the very beginning, that is from the moment of creation, in such manner that it may be recognised in its essential substance by human intellect as well, despite the negative influences of sin” (EV, 29); „Life’s Gospel holds all which human experience and intellect speak of the value of Man’s life, accepts than, raises to a higher level and supplements it” (EV, 30). M. Gogacz writes clearly and exhaustively on the subject the relationship of the philosophical and theological cognisans in: *On the problem of the person*. Warsaw 1974.

⁵ I wrote at greater length on this in a paper: *The Church in Poland thirty years after the II Vatican Council*, Theological Yearbooks, 43 (1996) no. 2 pp. 113-117.

John Paul II takes the double relationship of human life: to God the Creator and to God – Man’s ultimate goal. The third relation is taken into consideration – to God the Redeemer. Those three relationships constitute the pillars of papal teachings of human life. Let us dwell on each of them!

Human life, in its relation to God the Creator, appears as His gift and reflection and also as participation in His vivifying breath (EV, 39). Human life come about by creation and is extended by birth. In both cases God is the instigator and the master of human life. It comes from Him and belongs to Him. This is true of every life, including the most handicapped in their external expressions. The essential in Man’s dignity is that he is God’s specific property, while parental dignity is rooted in that their transferring of life makes them God’s associates in God’s work of creation. Conjugal and parental love is the mark and substantiation of God’s love.

This truth is stressed in a special manner by the Pope, often quoting the words of the Second Vatican Council that „Man is the only being which God wanted for himself alone (KDK, 24).

In the „Letter to the Family” He wrote: „God wanted Man from the beginning – and God wants him in every human conception and birth. That Man, every Man, is created by God for himself alone” (no. 9). It is a disinterested love which carries the prize of being loved.

The Pope writes that „Life, which God gives Man, is different and separate from the life of all other living creatures, since Man, though related to the dust of Earth, is a revelation of God in the world, a mark of His presence. a trace of His glory” (EV, 34). When considering the quality of the gift which life is, the Pope states that its supremacy over animal life and closeness to Godly life constitutes the dignity of human life. Man stands above the animal world by the dignity of his person. God has equipped him with „spiritual powers appropriate to him alone, like understanding, the distinguishing of good and evil, free will. Only Man among all visible creatures is capable to recognize and love his Creator (EV, 34). In relation to God, Man is his image and likeness (Rdz 1,26). To be an image means to possess the properties of the archetype in oneself. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, participates in God’s reality. In the opinion of John Paul II. this is the highest distinction „which is rooted in the internal bond linking him with the Creator: the reflection of the reality of God himself radiates within him” (EV, 34). Man participates „in the perfection of the divine exemplar” (EV, 52).

Such is Man, in his spiritual and corporeal reality, as a unit and as a subject of union of people. Giving birth is also such a reality which „finds its archetype in the Divine Parenthood which contains the „genealogy of a person” in the biological process (Letter to families, 9). In this light the human body appears as a „personal reality, a sign and place of relationship with another. with God and the world”, and sexuality appears as a sign, place and language of love (EV, 23).

The dignity of creation appears in a new radiance in the dignity of a calling. John Paul II writes „Man is called to fulfill life which substantially exceeds his earthly life” (EV,2) „This calling, however, opens not only to all temporality. It also opens to eternal life in God” (Letter to families, 9). It also displays „the greatness and enormous value of life in its worldly phase. For life in time is the fundamental condition, an initial stage and integral part of the entire and indivisible process of human existence” (EV, 2).

The creation of human life and the defining of its purpose constitute one act of God and together create a natural order. In the words of the Pope they together create „life’s Gospel, for God – when he created Man in his image and likeness – destined him for a full and perfect life (EV, 6)⁶. But this goal is of the attaining supernatural order. The first man and woman sinned and lost the possibility to attain eternal life. But original sin – teaches the Pope – did not deprive Man of being God’s image, only dimmed it within him. Sin thereby became a contrast against which the greatness of human life, redeemed by Jesus Christ, is displayed.

The soteriology in „*Evangelium vitae*” is anthropologically channelled. The Pope displays what Christ’s work is and means to human life. Sin and mercy, obedience and disobedience, the absence of love and omnipresent love, life and death today create the framework for Man’s image redeemed by Christ. The Pope states; „the value of human life is truly great since the Son of God accepted it and made it a place where the salvation of all mankind is performed” (EV, 33). After which, he leads the leader along the paths of Christ’s salvation, displaying to him his dignity at every step. „Those who consent to follow Christ – he re-

⁶ What I have in mind here is the concurrence of papal teaching with what H. de Lubac wrote, quoting H. Schiler: „The destination of Man’s essence and existence was obtained in that God gave Himself to Man at the very beginning as a goal presenting himself as salvation and that he let man from the outset on the road towards that goal”. H. de Lubac, *On nature and grace*, Krakow 1986 p. 16.

minds – will be offered a full life: God's image will be reinstated, renewed and made perfect within them" (EV,16).

All human life has been permeated with the power and radiance of the incarnation. Everything constituting human nature has been personally united, in Jesus Christ, with God's nature and reached its apogee on the cross, in the mystery of passing from death until life. „The Pope writes: „It is specifically by His death that Jesus Christ manifests life greatness and value" (EV, 33). This dignity is the result not only of the price which Jesus Christ paid for human life but also from the motives and effects of that act. Man regained life from the love of God (He loved them till the end) (J 13,1) and became a child of God, a participant of the nature of God.

Finally, the dignity of human life results from „its very purpose", that is „from its destination to commune with God" (EV, 38). The greatness of redeemed man, enjoying eternal happiness, reflects on Man in the whole process of his earthly life, from conception till natural death. „Eternal life is the life of God Himself and, at the same time, the life of the Sons of God" (EV, 38), „the fullness of participation in everlasting life" (EV, 37). The similarity to God which man bears within himself, from the moment of creation, is enhanced and raised to the supreme level by seeing God (EV, 38). „We know that when He appears we shall be similar to him for we shall see him as He is" (IJ 3,1-2).

The sense of life

Man received life from God as a task. This determines his greatness – as God's associate – but it often also becomes the beginning of his drama, particularly when he is unable to make use of the gift he has received. Man is the only being on earth which requires to see the sense of life in order to live. No unselfishness can face up to senselessness.

But what is sense? It is one of those undefined primary notions⁷. It is simultaneously so closely linked with Man „that Man would not find a place for himself on earth without it. He could neither calculate nor act without it for he can only do so in a place designated by that sense"⁸.

⁷ J. Tischner, *Science*. In *A to Z of Catholicism*, Poznan 1982 p. 342.

⁸ J. Ratzinger, *An Introduction to Christianity*, Krakow 1970 p. 34.

The term „sense of life” often appears in „*Evangelium vitae*”. It occurs there often with closer terms: „the most authentic sense” (no. 22), „all sense” (23), the most human sense” (27), „life’s full sense” (32), „true sense” (32). „life’s truest and deepest sense” (49), „the full and real sense of life” (49) etc. These terms surely do not extend or deepen the essence of conception, they are rather rhetoric figures which are intended more to move the reader than to instruct. Even so, the subject matter contained in these terms is important. The problem of life would not be full or, rather, not resolved without it. The notion, of the sense of life-comprises comprehending life. What is meant by this, is to comprehend life in its primary causes and not those given by the natural sciences. At this point one should speak mainly of causes on the ground of philosophy: causative, exemplary and intentional. Theology gives expression to the same, with simultaneous highlighting, by the truth of creation, redemption and everlasting life. The sense of human life stems from its origin in God, has its model in Christ and was created to attain fullness by participating in God’s life.

John Paul II’s thinking on this subject has philosophical roots. However he teaches as the supreme authority of the Church, as a man of faith who takes his knowledge from the Revelation and checks with the centuries-long traditions of the Church. His teaching of the sense of life is the result and extension of his teaching about the dignity of that life and moves along the same path, he attempts to perceive the truth of life, at the same time to see it is a value moving man’s will. He stands on the ground of realism in which truth as the reflection of that which is, which constitutes reality. He writes: „Life has inherent the indelible record of its truth. When Man accepts God’s gift he should work to uphold life in that truth which is part of the very essence of life.

To death oneself means to sentence oneself to an existence deprived of any sense and an unhappy one, in consequence to become a real danger to the existence of others” (EV, 48). Life’s reality appears to him as a value. „Life is always a value. Man has been created to understand the deep motivation of this intuitive conviction which is also a fact which can be experimentally studied” (EV, 34).

To John Paul II, the first source of the truth of life is life itself. It is also the Revelation which does not eliminate knowledge from comprehending to the contrary „it embodies all which human experience and understanding say of the life of man, accepts it all, raises and supplements it” (EV, 30). „God’s word points (simultaneously) to a concrete direction

in which life should proceed to respect its truth and uphold its dignity” (EV, 48). It teaches, among others, that „temporal life is not an absolute value” (EV, 47). Eternal life is more important. To find the truth of life Man requires a new heart and a new spirit (Ez 36,25-26; Jr 31,31-34) „That new heart allows an understanding and substantiation of the truest and deepest sense of life: It is a gift which becomes fulfilled in giving itself (EV, 49)... when he lives as though God did not exist, Man loses not only the secret of God but also the secret of the world and of his existence (EV, 22). The truth of life remains in a relationship with the truth of the entirety of existence – of God, the world and Man – and extends to two orders: the natural and supernatural.

When displaying the sense of life in relation to the Creator, John Paul II accentuates the love of God. This is no impersonal God, some undefined force in the Universe. God created Man from love and gave him the ability to love. He also desired that love among people be a mark and substantiation of his love. God the Creator and the Lord of life is also a Lover of life „The power wielded by God – teaches the Pope – is not some dangerous autocracy but a caring which is protective and filled with love, a caring with which he surrounds His creatures. It is true that Man’s life lies in God’s hands but it is also true that those are loving hands, like those of a mother which embrace, teed and nurse her child” (EV, 39).

The sense of life lies not only in its origin in and dependence in God but also from the moment of creation is directed toward God. That „final destination of Man does not oppose the statement that God desires Man for himself alone... for to the very genealogy of a person created in the image and likewise to God belongs that, when participating in the life of God, he exists for himself alone and fulfills himself”⁹.

The creative, exemplary and joyful bond of God’s love for Man transforms human existence into an existence for the others. „If Man instinctively loves life, because it is a given value, then such love finds a final justification and power, expands and finds greater depth in the divine dimensions of such a value” (EV, 38). Human life possesses the ability to reveal God, to meet and commune with Him (EV, 38). Human „, «I» find’s fulfillment in the Divine Thou’ „. The need to love is substantiated

⁹ *Letter to Families*, No. 9.

in the communion of love embracing God and a second person. It impresses a special character on betrothal, marital, family and partnership relations and makes them beautiful and truly human. A second person, man or woman, seen in such light is a reflection of „God himself, the ultimate goal and fulfillment of every person” (EV, 35).

The sense of human life stemming from the relation of Man with his Creator is displayed even more clearly by the relation with God the Saviour. Every person experiences the effects of the original sin within himself, regardless of whether he knows then origin or not and whether he is able to give them a name or not. These are mainly: suffering, illness, internal disruption, failure and death. People who attempt to find succour within themselves against the onslaught of senselessness, particularly in an atmosphere of hedonism, individualism and utilitarianism, comes up against an insurmountable wall and an impenetrable darkness.

John Paul II knows full well Man’s condition and the frailties of human existence. When he writes of the dignity of life he does not forget what makes human life tragic. When he speaks of God he reminds of that which is essential in Christianity, that is of God in history, being present in all Man’s situations, suffering together with every man, forgiving his sins, giving his life on the cross for Man’s eternal life. God the Saviour is revealed in Jesus Christ. He announces „to all whose existence is exposed to danger and subject to restrictions, that their life is also a value to which the love of the Lord gives sense and a magnitude... a gift jealously guarded in the Lord’s hands... His words and deed reveal what great value their life has and on what strong foundation their expectation of salvation stands” (EV, 32).

Jesus Christ restores eternal life to people. It belongs to the order of the goal which, in turn, is a constituent part of the reality of the sense of life. In effect one can only sense of life when one sees its final direction, when it contains eternal existence in attaining the fullness of development and happiness. All imperfection which cannot be removed would throw a shadow on Man. When writing of eternal life, John Paul II makes it an integral part of his teaching. In so doing, he understands it not only in the timeless dimension but rather as the fullness of participation in „Eternal” life (EV, 37). This is a life to which Man was called from the moment of his conception, which belongs to the economy of grace which becomes Man’s part in the Divine-human dialogue of love.

The requirements of love

Life, gifted to man by God, contains its requirements. The Pope writes of these with the same force as of the dignity and the sense of life. He applies the same method: adducing experience and understanding and the Revelations of the Old Testament, linking the order of natural and supernatural life, seeing life in the dialectics of a gift, task and reciprocated gift. In the Pope's opinion everything that Man does as regards his life he does to himself. To despise life is to despise himself, while caring for life is caring for Man himself. Upholding the truth which is carried within life is a requirement of the very essence of life affirmed by Divine Revelation. Departure from that truth leads to existence devoid of sense, unhappy and harmful to others (EV, 48).

Life's basic requirement, according to John Paul II, stems from the fact that it comes from God, belongs to Him and finds its ultimate goal within Him. That means that Man is not the absolute Lord of his life. He possesses life as a treasure for the upholding and multiplying of which he is responsible to God. That is why „no man willfully decide whether he is to live or die; the sole and absolute Lord entitled to take such a decision is the Creator” (EV, 47). On this foundation the Pope condemns as morally evil: abortion, eutanasia, suicide and all other acts directed against life. „No circumstance, no purpose, no law in the world may make an act acceptable which, in itself is unacceptable by reason itself and declared by the Church” (EV, 62).

Life sets negative and positive requirements, i.e. it prohibits and orders specific activities. John Paul II links these requirements with the commandment „Thou shall not kill” which is treated in the third chapter of the encyclical. As Cardinal Ratzinger assesses, it contains three groups of subjects: the sense of the Fifth Commandment in the context of the whole proclamation of faith, concrete imperatives stemming from that Commandment and its consequences in political ethics¹⁰.

In its negative layer this Commandment „sets the untraversable boundary below which a liberate man may not go” (EV, 75). As other negative orders, it hold an absolute value for human freedom: it is valid „for ever, in all circumstances, without any exceptions whatsoever” (EV, 75) while in the positive layer the Fifth Commandment „sets a certain minimum which (Man) must observe and from which the expressing of a co-

¹⁰ J. Ratzinger, *The inviolability of human life in the light of the Encyclical „Evangelium vitae”*, L'Osservatore Romano, 16(1995) No. 5 p. 48.

unless number of „Yes” (es) must take their beginning, able to embrace gradually the whole horizon of good” (EV, 75). It is „the beginning and the imperative initial stage to freedom” (EV, 75).

John Paul II elucidates that this Commandment should not be extracted from within other truths. „Only when (Man) becomes open to the fullness of truth of God, of man and history, the „Thou shall not kill” Commandment regains its full brilliance as a value for Man in all his dimensions and relationships” (EV, 48). What is required here in particular is sensitivity to the fundamental truths of existence. Man, „when he loses sensitivity to God also loses sensitivity to Man” (EV, 21). The weakening of sensitivity to God and Man leads inevitably to practical materialism” (EV, 23). „He who does not acknowledge God as God, is disloyal to the deep-seated concept of Man and violates the communion among people” (EV, 36).

Basing on the foundation so described, John Paul II defines the requirements of life depending on whom it has been consigned to. In His opinion every life is a gift granted each concrete person, his immediate environment and, in reality, all mankind. Life, by itself, appeals to he who possesses it, to his nearest – spouse and family – to the environment in which he moves and to those responsible for that environment. These requirements for the social and political ethics of each man, marital couple and family. No person is relieved from the responsibility for life, while a particular duty to care for life is held by all who directly deal with life.

It would be impossible to mention all the Pope’s instructions concerning requirements of life, together constituting „a Gospel of life”. Let it suffice to highlight that the Pope requires that this Gospel be preached, celebrated and served in the ministration of love (EV, 78). Each such requirement has a wide range of substantiation. The anticulture of death which is encroaching on all sides today should be rejected and the culture of life, strictly linked to the civilization of love be shaped, while the attitude of contemplating life be fostered inside oneself: observing its depth, beauty, unselfishness and the call to freedom and responsibility written within it (EV, 83).

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