

## THE CHRISTIAN HUMANISM OF JOHN PAUL II

Battista Mondin, Ph.D. (Harv.)  
Professor of Philosophy — Pontificia Università  
Urbaniana — Rome.

In one of the central passages of his beautiful encyclical **Redemptor Hominis** John Paul II declares:

What is in question here is man in all his truth, in his full magnitude. We are not dealing with the "abstract" man, but the real, "concrete", "historical" man. We are dealing with "each" man, for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery (. . .) Man as "willed" by God, as "chosen" by him from eternity and called, destined for grace and glory — this is "each" man, "the most concrete" man, "the most real"; this is man in all the fullness of the mystery in which he has become a sharer in Jesus Christ, the mystery in which each one of the four thousand million human beings living on our planet has become a sharer from the moment he is conceived beneath the heart of his mother (. . .) Man in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being — in the sphere of his own family, in the sphere of society and very diverse contexts, in the sphere of his own nation or people (perhaps still only that of his clan or tribe), and in the sphere of the whole of mankind — this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: **he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church**, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption (nn. 13-14)

This famous text shows very clearly the anthropological interest of John Paul II: everything that he does or says is centred on man, on the Christian man, man both in his human and divine, natural and supernatural dimensions. **Redemptor Hominis** is a marvellous, actualized synthesis of Christian humanism. In this authoritative document John Paul II claims for the Church a humanistic import that modern culture has

never been willing to recognize to her. Laicism and atheism have always maintained to be the only defendants of man and the true supporters of humanism. On humanistic grounds they have constantly attacked the Church and religion, assuming that by submitting man to God, they deprive him of his freedom and autonomy, stifle his activity and hinder his progress.

John Paul does not pay attention to these big lies, and does not take care to defend the Church by condemning atheism, marxism, communism, nazism or other ideologies or anticlerical and irreligious systems that claim to enhance the liberation of man by depriving him of his religious dimension and of the Christian faith; but on the very subject of humanism the Pope launches a challenge to them and depicts with a firm hand and with a poetic language the image of the greatness and nobility of man, as has been planned and willed by God.

Of man the **Redemptor Hominis** presents two fundamental aspects: one based on human reason, the other on Christian faith. Treating the first he brings forth the qualities, the powers, the difficulties, the desires, the anxieties, the failures of man in this present age. Dealing with the second he gives a warm exposition of the Christian doctrine on man: man as surrounded by the love of God and transformed by the grace of Jesus Christ, and as object and way of the Church.

### 1. The problem of man

Who is man? This is the big question, the question of all the questions.

Our mind is assailed by numberless questions, and there are many of great interest; yet no other question comes before this in order of importance, urgency and gravity, for the question "Who is man?" does not regard facts, things, persons foreign or far away from us, but concerns directly our own being, our origin and our destiny. Before many other questions we may keep indifferent and let somebody else look for the adequate answer. We cannot take this stand of indifference before the question: "Who is man?", since from its solution depends the planning of our individual and social life, our behaviour, our relations with the other persons and with the world.

Hence the question "Who is man" is a basic question but a very difficult one, because of the complexity of our being, our great dynamism, our strong and high aspirations, our many capacities for good and evil, hate and love, progress and regress.

That the problem of man cannot be easily solved is clearly testified

from history: it has always been studied but never definitively solved. There is no great philosopher who has not coped with it. From Socrates to Plato, from Aristotle to Plotinus, from St. Augustine to St. Thomas, from Descartes to Spinoza, from Hume to Kant, from Hegel to Marx, from Nietzsche to Freud, from Heidegger to Maritain etc man has always been on the forefront of philosophical research. In the modern times scientists have faced the problem of man with no less passion, looking into his physical and psychical, external and internal, individual and social, conscious and unconscious, speculative and practical aspects. But notwithstanding so many efforts man continues to remain "a great mystery", as St. Augustin used to say.

In the **Redemptor Hominis** John Paul II, according to his peculiar style of facing a problem gradually, raises the question concerning the being of man, his desires and his destiny again and again. He does not proceed according to the deductive method of classical philosophy, that attempted to explain man's nature in the light of the universal principles of being and knowing, but follows the phenomenological and existential method of looking attentively into the many aspects and dimensions of man's being. By exploiting the best and sure results of existential analysis and personalistic philosophy the Pope outlines a phenomenological image of man, whose main marks are the uniqueness, intersubjectivity, liberty, anxiety and manipulation of man.

First of all, man is a "person", that is "in his reality he has a history of his soul that is his own" (n. 14) Each human being is unique: "in all the unrepeatable reality of what he is and what he does, of his intellect and will, of his conscience and heart" (*ibid.*)

But this uniqueness does not imply that man is shut in himself, that he is a monad "without doors and windows" according to Leibnitz' saying and as it has been taught by a great deal of modern philosophy from Descartes to Rousseau, from Hegel to Heidegger. Man is essentially a social being who lives **together**, works **together**, **corresponds**, **dialogues**, **communicates** with others, Without a **Thou** there is no **I**. Human existence is always a social, intersubjective existence. "In keeping with the openness of his spirit within and also with the many diverse needs of his body and his existence in time, man writes his personal history through numerous bonds, contacts, situations, and social structures linking him with other men, beginning to do so from the first moment of his conception and birth" (*ibid.*)

Essentially united to the other fellow men, each human person discovers to be deeply **divided** within himself. This universal experience of interior division, described so well by saint Paul, saint Augustine, Luther and many others is vividly portrayed by the Pope when he quotes **Gaudium**

*et spes* (10): "In man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society".

Coming from nothing and moving toward death, man feels himself ceaselessly threatened in his own being. Whereas in the past he used to place the causes of the menace of annihilation in some external powers, superior to him (Fate, Gods, Nature), today he has become aware of the fact that the mortal dangers that threaten his life are the products of his own hands: technology, the H bomb, even the automobile with its enormous consumption of energy. "All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subjected to 'alienation', in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadcast and universal dimension" (R.H., 15).

To a threat of mortal dangers naturally follows **fear**, more precisely, since what is in question is our own being, it follows **anxiety**. We fear that at any moment one of the marvellous means that we have created escapes our control and turns against us. "Man therefore lives increasingly in fear. He is afraid that what he produces — not all of it, of course, or even most of it, but part of it and precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative — can radically turn against himself; he is afraid that it can become the means and instrument for an unimaginable self-destruction, compared with which all the cataclysms and catastrophes of history known to us seem to fade away" (*ibid.*). Since, however, he does not know either the time or the place or the way all this may happen and is unable to localize clearly the danger, his heart becomes full of anxiety.

Another sad feeling that contemporary man lives within his soul is that of being quite frequently object of **manipulation**. It is a sad sensation about which much has been written by philosophers and novelists in recent years (E. Fromm, M. Heidegger, J. Moltmann, A. Camus, H. Cox etc.) With regard to this experience of modern man the Pope writes: "There is a real perceptible danger that, while man's dominion over the world of things is making enormous advances, he should lose the essential threads of his dominion and in various ways let his humanity be subjected to

the world and become himself something subject to manipulation in many ways — even if the manipulation is often not perceptible directly — through the whole of the organization of community life, through the production system and through pressure from the means of social communication. Man cannot relinquish himself or the place in the world that belongs to him; he cannot become the slave of things, the slave of economic systems, the slave of production, the slave of his own products. A civilization purely materialistic in outline condemns man to such slavery, even if at times, no doubt, this occurs contrary to the intentions and the very premises of its pioneers" (n. 116).

But even through the feelings of anxiety and, especially, through the protest and rebellion against all that degrades human existence, the greatness of man comes to the fore. Such feelings reveal man's capacity to overcome any situation, that going ahead, that power of self-transcendence that clearly distinguishes man from animals. In these feelings like in every expression of love and thought, of culture and technique one can see "a continual aspiration to truth, the good, the beautiful, justice and love" (n.14).

## 2. Human answers to the man's problem

Man carries on his face the marks of an extraordinary nobility, beauty, sovereignty, greatness. In his works he leaves clear signs of power and talent and sometime of great dedication and love.

But all human achievements and man himself seem doomed to destruction. Death does not spare any human being and corruption assails every human work. This experience raises some poignant questions: What is man's absolute future? What will happen to his person after death?

To these most serious questions philosophers of all ages have attempted to find an answer by studying man's nature or some of his specific activities such as knowledge, freedom, language. Many modern philosophers instead of studying a peculiar activity try to reach a better understanding of man by considering that phenomenon so typical of him, called **self-transcendence**: the interior dynamism that drives man to go always ahead, to go beyond all that he has been able to think and achieve. Now what is the cause and the meaning of this impulsion that leaves man unsatisfied of all his achievements and even of his own being? What does it reveal of the true reality and destiny of man? What is the aim of all his efforts to go beyond the present situation?

The answers that human wisdom has found for this tremendous problem may be reduced to three, that I call egocentric, eterocentric and theocentric.

According to the egocentric solution self-transcendence aims at the self-realization of the being who transcends himself.

According to the eterocentric or philanthropic solution self-transcendence aims at a further improvement of mankind in the future.

Finally according to the theocentric solution self-transcendence is directed towards God: man by transcending himself moves towards God.

The clearest exposition of the egocentric solution was given by F. Nietzsche. In his *Zarathustra* he asserts that life in general and human life in particular is a constant effort of overcoming itself. "Life itself — declares Zarathustra — has revealed to me this secret: See, I am a continuous necessary overcoming of myself". And elsewhere: "Life seeks to ascend more and more, and by ascending to overcome itself". According to Nietzsche the goal of self-transcendence is always man, or rather, the super-man: "I teach you the superman. Man must be overcome". In order to fully realize himself man must break the chains that a culture based on logic, metaphysics and religion has laid on his hands and feet: it must do away with logic, metaphysics, morals and religion, but especially must get rid with the idea of God. The message that Zarathustra carries to mankind is this: "God is dead".

This interpretation of self-transcendence has the merit to show that the deep dynamism that drives man to overcome all the goals he has already reached is no alienation from oneself. The purpose of self-transcendence is to recover oneself by gaining a higher stage of reality, by realizing more fully and completely one's own possibilities.

The weak point of this interpretation of self-transcendence is that it does not show how the achievement of the process of full self-realization is possible as long as such enterprise is left to man himself. The experience proves that a great deal of our efforts are vain: we do not succeed in reaching either the knowledge, or the power, or the pleasure or the being we would like to get. But, if it is so, doesn't self-transcendence become a meaningless effort? Some contemporary supporters of the egocentric thesis are of this opinion. But the largest majority of the philosophers refuse this solution as absolutely unsatisfactory, since it does not provide any answer for a very serious problem, and they propound either the philanthropic or the theocentric solutions.

Marx, Engels, Comte and their disciples believe that self-transcendence aims at overcoming the confines of egoism and individualism and drives man towards the creation of a new type of society released from individual miseries and social injustices and capable of securing well-being, justice,

freedom and happiness for everybody. According to the neo-marxist, Roger Garaudy, self-transcendence is "the consciousness of the incompleteness of man, the dimension of the infinite (. . .) Man is not simply what he is: he is also that which he is not yet, everything that he is still lacking. In the language of Christianity one might say that he is that which transcends him, namely, potentially, all his future, since the future is the only transcendence recognized by humanism (. . .) It is a matter of excluding both the transcendence from below (that of things accomplished and known in a positive way) and the transcendence from above (that of an absolute Good, of a God of a revelation)" (R. Garaudy, "Matérialisme et transcendence", in *L'homme chrétien et l'homme marxiste*, Paris 1964, pp. 24-25).

Another neo-marxist, Ernst Bloch, in his *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* has accurately analyzed all the main sides of human self-transcendence. Man is always ahead of himself, projected towards the future, the realm of his possibilities, of the "noch-nicht". From the Noch-Nicht arises hope, that basic feeling that sustains self-transcendence in his continuous movement. According to Bloch, man's self-transcendence is merely historical, not metaphysical. For him "Transcendence does not exist at all". Human self-transcendence is without Transcendence".

For sure, there is a positive element in this interpretation of self-transcendence: it is the recognition that the movement of overcoming oneself includes a social dimension: it is man as a social being and not merely as an individual being who transcends himself. Unsatisfactory on the contrary is the attempt to force self-transcendence within the boundary of human history, since human history cannot give an adequate support to the principle of hope for which they try to make room. In fact it is obvious that even in the case that one day the effort of self-transcendence will result in the construction of a class-less society, where everybody will be free and happy, this will not provide any solution for the aspiration of personal realization that is intrinsic in the very movement of self-transcendence.

The third solution of the problem of self-transcendence, already theorized by Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and later on by St Augustine and St Thomas, in our century has been carefully systematized by Blondel, Rahner, Teilhard de Chardin, De Finance, Lonergan, De Lubac, Moltmann, Pannenberg and others. According to these philosophers the goal of self-transcendence is God himself; the moving forward of man is not a wandering in the darkness, but a march towards the holy land, where God dwells, and where man will find his final abode and the full realization of his being. "Feciste nos Domine ad te, et inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in te", is the best formula for this understanding of self-

transcendence.

Such is also the way of John Paul II conceives self-transcendence both philosophically and theologically. However in the **Redemptor Hominis** quite naturally, he treats the subject from theological and pastoral stand-points. In his encyclical his main concern is to proclaim in the more convincing and intelligible way the Christian truth on man. His exposition however is corroborated with philosophical considerations of great interest.

As we have seen the encyclical contains an extensive and deep phenomenological analysis, where the Pope carefully studies the situations, the aspirations and the problems of mankind, today. It is not mere a **descriptive** but also an **inquisitive** analysis. In accordance with Husserl's teachings, Pope John Paul II explores the phenomena in order to find the essential meanings of reality (of the lived reality). He studies the human phenomena in order to discover the meaning that is hidden into it.

By reading attentively into the phenomenon of self-transcendence that is associated with every thought, desire and action of man, he always finds a theocentric orientation: "Though the routes may be different, there is but a single goal to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life" (R.H., n. 11).

These considerations on the theocentric meaning of self-transcendence are very important for anthropology: even if they do not fully unveil the mystery of man, they already suggest a positive solution of the problem, by inserting it in the larger mystery of God, the loving father of mankind. They are important considerations also for theology, since they provide it with that rational basis without which it cannot do its work. For it is in the very nature of theology to establish a dialogue between faith and reason; but in order that this may take place it is not sufficient that God be willing to talk to man; an analogous attitude is necessary in man: his mind must be open and receptive with regard to faith; it must be willing to hear the Word of God. Self-transcendence, understood theocentrically, is the sign of such an attitude, of such a direction of the spirit.

With this anthropological prolegomenon the Christian answer to the problem of man becomes meaningful, especially if it is presented with that calor and warm style of which John Paul II is a master, particularly in the **Redemptor Hominis**.

## 3. The Christian answer to the problem of man

Who is man?

We have seen the main answers that human wisdom has been able to work out for this huge question. The answer more satisfactory has seemed to be that sets the final solution of the problem of man in God himself. To this one arrives by examining the phenomenon of self-transcendence: by surpassing oneself, and everything that he is able to conceive and achieve, man points directly to God. Reason, however is unable to find out the real meaning of this answer.

The full meaning of the theocentric direction that is impressed in everything man thinks or achieves, wishes and creates, becomes clear only through Christ's revelation. The meaning is that man does not only tend towards God as his final goal, but he himself becomes, entitatively, God. He does not become God by means of his powers and initiative, but because of God's gracious will and gift. This however is a gift that moves along the same line, marked by self-transcendence and in conformity with the deepest aspirations of the human soul.

Therefore, Jesus Christ is the bright, definitive answer to the problem of man. That which he has been is also what man is called to become. Christ is the prototype of mankind. The substantial encounter between humanity and divinity has taken place in him, through the personal incarnation of the Son of God, is the model of the encounter that God intends to realize with every human being.

This marvellous and rationally unconceivable truth that crowns, beyond every expectation, philosophical anthropology and natural humanism, by transforming them into a supernatural anthropology and a 'divine' humanism, is the beautiful message that in the **Redemptor Hominis** announces once again to mankind at the turn of the century, in a moment of darkness and anxiety.

Right at the beginning of his solemn document the Pope declares: "Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that he intended man to have from his first beginning; he has granted that dimension definitively — in the way that is peculiar to him alone, in keeping with his eternal love and mercy, with the full freedom of God — and he granted it also with the bounty that enables us, in considering the original sin and the whole history of the sins of humanity, and in considering the errors of the human intellect, will and heart, to repeat with amazement the words of the Sacred Liturgy: 'O happy fault... which gained us so great a Redeemer!'" (n. 1).

Incarnation, then, is the crowning, the perfect and total realization

of that remarkable design that God has conceived from the beginning for mankind. It is necessary to keep always in mind this mystery if one wants to perceive the whole truth of man; since, only by knowing the perfect man, Jesus Christ, one understands the "common" man, who has been created after "his image and likeness".

With regard to this subject the Pope quotes very aptly the teaching of Vatican II: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come (Rom 5, 15), Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling. He who is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1, 15), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam the likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, in a certain way united himself with each man" (*Gaudium et Spes* 22)

Of his own the Pope adds some considerations that bring out the same truth very nicely: Christ the Redeemer fully reveals man to himself. "In the mystery of the Redemption man becomes newly 'expressed' and, in a way, is newly created. He is newly created! 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3, 28). The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly — and not just in accordance with immediate, partial, very often superficial, and even illusory standards and measures of his being — he must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must, so to speak, enter into him with all his own self, he must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself." (R.H., n. 10)

In this way, Jesus Christ becomes the "fundamental and essential response" to the question "Who is man?". That movement of self-transcendence that as we have seen sets to the human reason such problems that it can hardly solve, is finally clarified from Christ himself: "Our spirit is set in one direction, the only direction for our intellect, will and heart is towards Christ our Redeemer, towards Christ the Redeemer of man" (n. 7).

Therefore, in order to know who man truly is one must go to Christ (though he may previously pay a visit to Aristotle, Plato, Descartes, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Heidegger etc): "He, the Son of the living God, speaks to people also as Man; it is his life that speaks, his humanity, his fidelity

to the truth, his all embracing love" (n. 7). Hence, "the man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly (...) must draw near to Christ (...) He must 'appropriate' and assimilate the whole of the reality of the Incarnation and Redemption in order to find himself" (n. 10)

But what does Christ, this full, perfect, integral man, reveal to us common human beings?

John Paul II answers categorically that "in Christ and through Christ man has acquired full awareness of his dignity, of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence" (n. 11). In particular, "the Redemption that took place through the Cross has definitively restored his dignity to man and given back meaning to his life in the world, a meaning that was lost to a considerable extent because of sin" (n. 10). Through his Incarnation and Redemption Christ reveals to man that whereof he feels greater need, love: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own. This, as has already been said, is why Christ the Redeemer fully reveals man to himself" (n. 10). With his life, his teaching, his example Christ reveals to man the meaning and the value of freedom. Historians recognize that freedom is a discovery and a conquest of Christianity: before Christianity freedom was not a right of every human being but a privilege of few, based on power, riches or race. Christ is the one "who brings man freedom based on truth, frees man from what curtails, diminishes and, as it were, breaks off this freedom at its root, in man's soul, his heart and his conscience. What a stupendous confirmation of this has been given and is still given by those who, thanks to Christ and in Christ, have reached true freedom and have manifested it even in situations of external constraint!" (n. 12).

The Pope amazed by the splendor of man's dignity and value such as they appear through the mystery of Christ, declares: "Christ, the Redeemer of the world, is the one who penetrated in a unique unrepeatable way into the mystery of man and entered his heart" (n. 8).

Everyone who rightly understands the mysteries of Incarnation and Redemption may join the Pope in asserting that with Christ authentic humanism not only does not suffer any menomation, but on the contrary it reaches its culmination, beyond all that human reason can expect or foresee. Christ accomplishes authentic humanism in three directions: **gnoseological** in as much as it helps human reason to conquer the fullness of truth; **ethically** in so far as it strengthens human will and it makes it capable of acting in harmony with the dignity and nobility of the human person; finally, **ontically**, in as much as it changes the very

same being of man, by endowing it with a divine dimension.

Humanism with a divine dimension, revealed and accomplished by Christ, is also the task of the Church. The latter is because of her mission and vocation necessarily "humanist". The Church is never against man but for man. Her main concern is to help man to become aware of that divine dimension which God is planning for him.

Naturally, the secularists who have been repeating for centuries that the Church is dishuman, obscurantist, contrary to reason and freedom, will find these statements absurd. And yet they are profoundly true. Besides by the teaching of Christ they are corroborated also by the evidence of history. This testifies that no other human institution has contributed as much as the Church for the human promotion.

At the end of the second millennium, when the threat of a second middle ages becomes from day to day a very terrible possibility, the Church assumes again her "anthropological", humanist vocation. John Paul II wishes that this will be the main mark of his pontificate. Extremely human in his person, he gives a human touch to everything he does, says or writes. A humanist programme is clearly outlined in the *Redemptio hominis*. Here are some wonderful paragraphs of that programme:

"The Church's fundamental function in every age and particularly in ours is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of God, to help all men to be familiar with the profundity of the Redemption taking place in Christ Jesus" (n. 10). "The Church wishes to serve this single end: that each person may be able to find Christ, in order that Christ may walk with each person the path of life, with the power of the truth about man and the world that is contained in the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption and with the power of the love that is radiated by that truth (...) Out of regard for Christ and in view of the mystery that constitutes the Church's own life, the Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves man's true welfare, any more than she can remain indifferent to what threatens it" (n.13). "Inspired by eschatological faith, the Church considers an essential, unbreakable united element of her mission this solicitude for man, for his humanity, for the future of man on earth and therefore also for the course set for the whole of development and progress. She finds the principle of this solicitude in Jesus Christ himself, as the Gospels witness. This is why she wishes to make it grow continually through her relationship with Christ, reading man's situation in the modern world in accordance with the most important signs of our time" (15).

This task is so important and essential for the Church that John Paul II does not hesitate to qualify it as the way, as the "primary and

fundamental way, the way traced out by Christ himself", "the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission", "the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption" (n.14).

The "anthropological" humanistic vocation of the Church implies many different tasks, that the Pope explains, very accurately, in the second part of the encyclical. First of all the Church should get a better acquaintance with the present situation of mankind; she should get a deeper knowledge of man, "not of the abstract man, but of the real concrete, historical man" man in his present situation, with his concerns, fears, problems, anxieties. Secondly, she must take side, critically, with man, in defence of the rights and the values of man, against the systems, the ideologies, the structures which may hinder or destroy them; she must fight against all the manipulations of man so frequently caused by science, technology, culture, propaganda etc. Finally, following the example of Christ, takes for herself the responsibility of defending man's cause before all the tribunals of this world. "Seeking to see man as it were with 'the eyes of Christ himself', the Church becomes more and more aware that she is the guardian of a great treasure, which she may not waste but must continually increase (...) This treasure of humanity enriched by the inexpressible mystery of divine filiation and by the grace of 'adoption as sons in the Only Son of God, through whom we call God 'Abba, Father'" (n. 18)

Christ and the Church are the most valiant advocates of man and of true humanism, the humanism with a divine dimension. John Paul II as vicar of Christ on earth and as head of the universal Church, has officially assumed this duty as the first and most serious engagement of his pontificate.

It is customary for the popes, at the beginning of their service to the Church to let know their program with a brief formula or motto. I think that for John Paul II the appropriate motto is: **Defensor Hominis**. Actually, in these frightful times, no philosopher, no lawyer no chief of government has been a better and more persuasive advocate of man than John Paul II.

This lecture was delivered by Professor Mondin during an Academy held annually in honour of St. Thomas Aquinas.

Such an activity was held jointly by the Faculty of Theology, Malta and the Theological Students' Association, on February, 6, 1980.