STUDIA NAUK TEOLOGICZNYCH
TOM 21 (2026)

DOI: 10.24425/snt.2026.850

Received: MAY 10, 2026
Accepted: JUN 4, 2026
Published: NOV 20, 2026

STEPHAN KAMPOWSKI
Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences in Rome, Italy
ORCID: 0000-0002-7927-6100

THE RELEVANCE OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS FOR ST. JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

INTRODUCTION

What role does the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas play in Saint John Paul II's Catecheses on human love in the divine plan, commonly known as the Theology of the Body? That Aquinas matters to Karol Wojtyła as a philosopher is uncontested; whether and how he matters to John Paul II as the author of the Wednesday Catecheses is a question on which the existing literature has been less than decisive, mostly arguing for a convergence and mutual enrichment between the Theology of the Body and Aquinas's thought. While the point can readily be granted, the thesis of the present essay is that more can be said: there is a genuine conceptual dependency on Saint Thomas at decisive points in John Paul II's argument, so that we will do well to interpret the Catecheses in the light of the Angelic Doctor. We will proceed first by way of a lexical survey of Thomas's appearances in the Catecheses, and then by a conceptual analysis of two notions – the "true good" and the relation between self-mastery and personhood – whose Thomistic pedigree Wojtyła himself had made explicit in his pre-papal writings. Let us begin, however, with a brief review of the secondary literature just alluded to.

Copyright (c) 2026 Stephan Kampowski. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 4.0 Poland (CC BY-ND 4.0 PL) License (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/deed.en), which permits copying and redistribution of the material in any medium or format for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original author and source are properly cited. If you remix, transform, or build upon the material, you may not distribute the modified material.

1. REVIEW OF SECONDARY LITERATURE

In his introduction to his English translation of John Paul II's Catecheses, Michael Waldstein proposes that there are three major influences on the Polish Pontiff's thought of which we need to be aware if we want to understand properly what has commonly come to be called the Theology of the Body: Saint John of the Cross, Immanuel Kant, and Max Scheler (Waldstein 2006a, 23–77). The former's ideas had been the object of Wojtyła's doctoral dissertation and the latter the object of his habilitation thesis. Inasmuch as one cannot study Scheler's ethics without also studying Kant's, the inclusion of these three authors is unsurprising. And yet there would seem to be a glaring omission. What happened to the influence of Saint Thomas Aquinas on Karol Wojtyła? In Jarosław Merecki's words, "What strikes the reader is the fact that in those one hundred plus pages of Waldstein's introduction, Saint Thomas is mentioned only in passing and not in connection with Wojtyła's own philosophy" (Merecki 2015, 29).[1] For Merecki, this omission was deliberate and meant that Waldstein wanted to communicate the "underlying thesis" that "one cannot speak of Karol Wojtyła's Thomism, since Saint Thomas is not among the principal sources that inspire Wojtyła's philosophical thought" (Merecki 2015, 29).[2]

The absence of Saint Thomas in Waldstein's introduction to the Theology of the Body is indeed a curious phenomenon, not least because on another occasion Waldstein actually called John Paul II a "Thomist," albeit one rooted in Saint John of the Cross (Waldstein 2005). On Waldstein's own account, his 2022 *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh* is "a more developed version of the introduction" to his translation of the Catecheses (Waldstein 2022, 1n1), and it abounds with Thomistic references, to the point that in his review of the book John Grabowski can unequivocally declare that Waldstein "locates Wojtyła/John Paul II squarely in the Aristotelian Thomist tradition" (Grabowski 2023, 489). It is thus unlikely that in his 2006 introduction Waldstein wanted to propose that we cannot speak of John Paul II's Thomism. It is more likely that he simply omitted to state what he considered obvious – something that to his mind did not even need mentioning.

The fact that Saint Thomas has been an important influence on Karol Wojtyła is beyond doubt. It will be obvious to anyone opening Wojtyła's *Lublin Lectures* (Wojtyła 2023a) or reading his early philosophical papers, such as those pub-

---

[1] "Ciò però che colpisce il lettore è proprio il fatto che, nelle cento e più pagine introduttive di Waldstein, san Tommaso è menzionato soltanto di sfuggita e non nel legame con la filosofia stessa di Wojtyła" (my own translation).

[2] "La tesi sottostante pare allora questa: non si può parlare del tomismo di Karol Wojtyła, perché san Tommaso non fa parte delle fonti principali a cui si ispira il pensiero filosofico di Wojtyła" (my own translation).

lished in English in the essay collections *Person and Communion* – pieces such as "On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm in the Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler," "Thomistic Personalism," and "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination" (Wojtyła 1993, 73–94, 165–75, 187–95). Wojtyła understood the latter as "a creative continuation of St. Thomas' thought," incidentally presenting it at the International Thomistic Congress in Rome and Naples in April 1974 (Wojtyła 1993, 187). While there may be disagreement among scholars on the extent of Thomas' influence on Wojtyła, the fact that the Angelic Doctor is crucial for his thought is uncontested. There is indeed ample literature that speaks of Karol Wojtyła's/John Paul II's "Thomistic Personalism" (see for instance, Popović 2018; Schaeffer 2012; Williams 2004; Reimers 1992).

What is much more difficult to establish is the relevance of Aquinas's thought for John Paul II's Theology of the Body. The question has been the object of previous studies. First and foremost, there is Thomas Petri's 2016 *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body: The Thomistic Foundations of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Petri 2016). Jarosław Merecki's 2015 *Corpo e trascendenza* (Merecki 2015) on the philosophical anthropology of John Paul II's Theology of the Body also needs to be mentioned, as does Michael Waldstein's 2022 *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh: Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body* (Waldstein 2022). Merecki's section on Karol Wojtyła's/John Paul II's Thomism does not seek to establish the extent to which Saint Thomas influences the Theology of the Body (Merecki 2015, 28–38). Saint Thomas pervades Waldstein's book; and yet here, just as in Waldstein's 2006 introduction to the Catecheses, there is again no specific section dedicated to discussing Thomas as an influence on the Theology of the Body. In addition, in 2025 Nathaniel Dreyer published an essay with a title that sounds very promising for our purposes: "Saint Thomas Aquinas in Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body" (Dreyer 2025). As Dreyer's text is very dependent on Petri's book, it will be sufficient for our purposes to take up the latter.

We are left, then, with Petri's *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body*, which starts with a historical discussion of how we passed from the moral theology of Thomas Aquinas to what has come to be known as the manualist tradition, drawing to a large extent from the work of Servais Pinckaers. It then presents the general terms of the debate surrounding marriage and contraception as occasioned by the rise of personalism. The next three chapters are dedicated to Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II: the general terms of his moral theology, his sexual ethics, and his proposal of the spousal meaning of the body, respectively. We find a discussion of Saint Thomas's influence on Wojtyła in the chapter on Wojtyła's moral theology, with particular attention to his use of Aquinas in the *Lublin Lectures*, in his philosophical essays, and in *Love and Responsibility* (Wojtyła 2013). Thomas's importance for Wojtyła becomes evident in these places.

Petri's conclusion is that for Thomas "the human person is a body-soul composite," and that therefore "the body is not simply the soul's biological or physical tool" (Petri 2016, 306). According to him it follows that "Aquinas's anthropology lends itself to the notion of a spousal meaning of the body" (Petri 2016, 306). In addition, Petri provides an original reading of Thomas's notion of the marital debt, which allows him to see it "through the same lens of the gift of self that Karol Wojtyła and others have written about" (Petri 2016, 308). We thus learn that there is convergence and agreement between what Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła say on the body, sexuality, and marriage, to the extent that "their thought is mutually enriching" (Petri, 2016, 10). At the same time, it remains somewhat more difficult to tell from Petri's presentation the precise role that Thomas plays in the Theology of the Body, if any, beyond congruence in terms of actual contribution.

For our topic we are left, then, without much help from secondary literature. At the same time, we are convinced that the question about the relevance of Saint Thomas Aquinas for Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body is good to ask and not impossible to answer. In our attempt to respond, we will first look at the occurrences of Thomas's name in the work. A second step will consist in a conceptual analysis. The fundamental idea is that even if we cannot relate a given concept that occurs in the Theology of the Body directly to Saint Thomas, we can look at its occurrences in Wojtyła's earlier works, where he himself explicitly links it to the Angelic Doctor, which can then count as evidence for Thomas's relevance for the Catecheses.

Here a methodological qualification is in order. Beyond the fact that a pope's catecheses are expressions of his papal magisterium and thus carry a different authority than the writings the same individual composed as a private scholar, there is a further consideration to be made. In the process of their composition, papal texts very often draw on the work of commissions, consultors, and collaborators, which is a circumstance that would ordinarily make reading a pope's documents through the lens of his pre-papal scholarship a hermeneutically precarious endeavor. The present case is different, however. Michael Waldstein relates that the archives of the Polish Pilgrim's Center in Rome (the "Dom Polski") "preserve the typescript of a book written in Polish by Cardinal Wojtyła before his election, entitled *Man and Woman He Created Them*" (Waldstein 2006a, 7), which is in fact the basis for John Paul II's Wednesday Catecheses. While they carry a different authority than Wojtyła's pre-papal writings – because they were publicly pronounced by a pope – in their origin the Catecheses still stem from the very same pen of Wojtyła the philosopher, so that our methodological move from the one to the other is legitimate.

2. LEXICAL ANALYSIS

Let us then begin with a lexical analysis. What can we learn from the individual occurrences of the name "Thomas Aquinas" in the Theology of the Body? Michael Waldstein counts eight mentions of Saint Thomas in six catecheses (Waldstein 2006b, 721). This may not seem much. But to provide context, Waldstein tallies three occurrences of the name of Max Scheler, two of St. John of the Cross, and none of Immanuel Kant (Waldstein 2006b, 716; 703).

The first two occurrences of St. Thomas's name in the Theology of the Body are tangential. The first is in a footnote in the second catechesis, where it appears in a citation from the French philosopher Etienne Gilson regarding medieval philosophical interpretation of Exodus 3:14 ("I am he who am"); the second, in catechesis 51, credits Aquinas with being one of the first systematic theologians (John Paul II 2006, catechesis 2:5n3; 51:6). The third mention of Aquinas is the first worth citing for our purposes. It occurs in catechesis 54. The topic is purity understood as a virtue:

> In his teaching on the virtues, Thomas Aquinas sees the object of purity even more directly in the power of sense-desire, which he calls *"appetitus concupiscibilis."* This power in particular must be "mastered," ordered, and enabled to act in a manner conforming to virtue, if "purity" is to be attributed to a human being. According to this view, purity consists above all in holding back the impulses of sense-desire, which has as its object what is bodily and sexual in man. Purity is a variant of the virtue of temperance (John Paul II 2006, 54:2).

In the following paragraphs, however, the Polish pope moves on to develop an idea of purity that goes beyond mastery of the passions. Basing himself on 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 he will link purity to a "reverence" that is "born in man for everything bodily and sexual, both in himself and in every other human being," ultimately connecting it also with holiness – all of which are ideas that we do not find in Thomas in this way (John Paul II 2006, 54:4). Yet while John Paul II has more to say about purity here, we can still affirm that St. Thomas's conceptualization of it serves him as a first step.

Thomas Aquinas is then mentioned twice in catechesis 66, which concerns the resurrection. Both occurrences are in the same context and bear on the relation between body and soul. According to John Paul II, it was the "truth of the resurrection" that motivated Thomas "to abandon Plato's philosophical conception […] and to draw near to Aristotle's view" (John Paul II 2016, 66:6). While for Plato the soul can be quite happy – and happier – without the body, on Aristotle's hylomorphic approach, human beings' perfection requires the integration and union of body and soul and is thus more in consonance with the Christian conception of eschatological happiness. As we have seen, this is an important point in Petri's attempt to relate Thomas to the Theology of the Body: he argues

that the notion of the spousal meaning of the body, in order to be intelligible, requires a hylomorphic understanding of the relation between body and soul (Petri 2016, 306).

The sixth time Thomas Aquinas's name occurs is as a marginal mention in a long, scholarly footnote (John Paul II 2006, 93:5n88) that provides information peripheral to the argument developed in the main text, namely the nature of the sacrament. It is as negligible for our purposes as is the seventh reference to Aquinas, in the same context in catechesis 98:7, where he is treated as an eminent *representative* of Scholasticism, but no reckoning is given of his contribution as *this* specific thinker.

The eighth and final mention introduces us to the context where Thomas' relevance is probably most noteworthy, though in itself it will not be enough. The setting is John Paul II's "analysis of the virtue of continence in the light of the teaching contained in *Humanae vitae*" (John Paul II 2006, 130:1). Here the pope reminds us how "the great classics of ethical (and anthropological) thought, both pre-Christian (Aristotle) and Christian (Thomas Aquinas), see in the virtue of continence not only the ability to 'contain' bodily and sensual reactions, but even more the ability to control and guide the whole sensual and emotive sphere of the human person" (John Paul II 2006, 130:1). Here John Paul II is moving the discussion a step further with respect to catechesis 54 and the discussion of purity, where all that was granted to the Angelic Doctor was a notion of virtue that held back the impulses of sensual desire. Now virtue not only "holds back" but controls and guides "the whole sensual and emotive sphere of the human person" (John Paul II 2006, 130:1) The point is that virtue does not necessarily dull desire but guides it. Even strong desire can be virtuous if well-directed. And what is at stake here is of course the notion of self-mastery, which will be of central importance for the conceptual analysis we will undertake now that we have concluded our lexical overview.

3. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

For our conceptual analysis we will limit ourselves to John Paul II's discussion of the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, since it can be understood as the point of arrival of the pope's entire project,[3] and the concepts that appear or reappear here

[3] In his final catechesis, numbered 133 in Waldstein's reckoning, the pope explains what had been his goals and hopes for his efforts spanning the previous years, stating that "in some sense, one can even say that all the reflections dealing with the 'Redemption of the Body and the Sacramentality of Marriage' [= the entire previous 132 catecheses] seem to constitute an extensive commentary on the doctrine contained precisely in *Humanae vitae*" (John Paul II 2006, 133:2).

will therefore be of particular relevance for the Theology of the Body. If we can show that at least some of these are drawn from Thomas Aquinas, we will have given evidence for a certain relevance of the Angelic Doctor for the Catecheses. To argue that John Paul II indeed took these concepts from Aquinas, even though he does not credit him in the given contexts, we will look at the origin of these ideas in his pre-papal works, where he in fact develops them explicitly on the basis of Saint Thomas's thought. We will limit ourselves to two conceptual frameworks that are crucial to John Paul II's explanation of *Humanae vitae* in the Theology of the Body and that are, we will argue, clearly rooted in Karol Wojtyła's analysis of Thomas's thought. The first regards the notion of the truth about the good, or the "true good" as the expression occurs in the Catecheses. The second regards self-mastery as related to personhood.

3.1. THE TRUE GOOD

Let us begin with the notion of the "true good," which appears seven times in the Catecheses, all of them in the Polish pope's reflections on *Humanae vitae* (John Paul II 2006, 120:6; 122:5; 124:6; 125:2). Thus, in Catechesis 120 John Paul II points out that the Second Vatican Council and Paul VI's encyclical letter were moved by an authentic pastoral concern that "means seeking the true good of man, promoting the values impressed by God in the human person; that is, it signifies the 'rule of understanding,' which aims at the ever clearer discovery of God's plan for human love" (John Paul II 2006, 120:6). Moving on to Catechesis 122, we learn that the Gospel message reveals "what man's true good is for the sake of shaping […] his life on earth in the perspective of the hope of the future world" (John Paul II 2006, 122:5). And here *Humanae vitae* has something to say, inasmuch as it "answers the question about man's true good as a person, inasmuch as he is male and female, about what corresponds to the dignity of man and woman when one is dealing with the important problem of the transmission of life in conjugal life" (John Paul II 2006, 122:5).

Now, the issue of "truth" is central not only when it comes to John Paul II's speaking of the "true good." Truth language pervades the entire text of the Catecheses, and particularly in the pope's explanation of *Humanae vitae* we repeatedly encounter expressions such as "rereading the language of the body in truth," "the innermost truth of the conjugal act," or "the truth of the reciprocal gift of self" (John Paul II 2006, 119:2; 123:6; 123:7). To this we can add the Polish pontiff's discourse on the "truth about the human body" and "the truth of the person and thus the person's dignity" (John Paul II 2006, 123:2; 125:1).

Understanding the meaning of this "truth of/about…" is crucial for a proper interpretation of the Catecheses, and our hypothesis is that a promising way to start is to look at Karol Wojtyła's pre-papal writings, focusing in particular on the

"truth of/about the good." We will then at the same time see that this notion is deeply rooted in the thought of Saint Thomas. One of the first places he develops the idea of the "truth about the good" is in his *Lublin Lectures*, where he explicitly links it to Saint Thomas Aquinas. Thus, Wojtyła explains: "The good is the object of the will; however, the grasp of the good, its objectivization, is – according to St. Thomas – the object of reason" (Wojtyła 2023a, 178). It is reason, after all, that presents the will with its proper object, which is the good understood: reason has "the grasp of the good." In fact, "both these powers closely cooperate with each other" (Wojtyła 2023a, 178). The truth, as the proper object of reason, is also a good, the proper object of the will, and thus the will commands reason to know: "The will wants reason to cognize, and reason understands that the will wants and what it wants" (Wojtyła 2023a, 178). Because reason and will cooperate so closely, one can say that "the good and truth, in a sense, contain each other" (Wojtyła 2023a, 178). The result is that "the truth about the good can have a speculative sense" (Wojtyła 2023a, 178). This occurs when reason tries to arrive at the essence of the good and grasp its principles. But "the truth about the good" can also have a practical sense, namely when "reason cognizes the good in a practical way when the good is the object of action" (Wojtyła 2023a, 178). In a different passage in the *Lectures*, Wojtyła, still drawing on St. Thomas's account, speaks of reason that "attains the practical truth about the good" (Wojtyła 2023a, 126).

We find a further development of these ideas in Wojtyła's 1959 essay "On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm," published about four years after he had delivered his *Lublin Lectures* (Wojtyła 2023b). Here he expresses what he means by "truth about the good" in a less technical way, while continuing explicitly to credit Aquinas with the idea: "For St. Thomas, moral life consists in man seeking the truth in his entire action and conduct, the object of which is naturally always a good" (Wojtyła 2023b, 354). Action is something that admits of truth. But how so? Things become clearer as Wojtyła rephrases his sentence, writing that "the essence of moral life is the 'lived-experience of the truth about the good realized in the act and the realization of the good in the act, the good subject to the criterion of reason, thus posited in light of this truth'" (Wojtyła 2023b, 354). The act is "true" when it realizes the good as presented by reason, so that for St. Thomas, as Wojtyła reads him, "the moral good […] is the *bonum rationis*," which is why one can speak of the moral good as "the true good," which "is a perfection proper to man: a perfection of the will corresponding to its rational nature" (Wojtyła 2023a, 126).

Thomas Aquinas certainly speaks of the good as "true" in the sense that the good is intelligible – that is, knowable by reason (Aquinas 2012, I, 79, 11, ad 2) – and the mutual implication of will and reason in his thought is as uncontroversial as it is well documented by Wojtyła (Wojtyła 2023a, 178n44 and n45). But it

seems that with the expression "true good" or "truth about the good" the Polish philosopher wants to express more than simply the fact that the good is knowable. The opposite of a "true" good for him would seem to be not an "unintelligible" good but a "false" good. It is the "true good" that brings about the "perfection proper to man" (Wojtyła 2023a, 126); the opposite of the "true good" is something contrary to the human being's perfection, not just something not well understood.

There is a passage in St. Thomas that allows Wojtyła to argue that his idea of the "true good" or the "truth about the good" is indeed based on the Angelic Doctor, even if it does not exactly correspond to Thomas' terminology. Thus, in his essay "The Problem of Substantiating Norms," found in the Krakow archive and first published in the English critical edition of his works, Wojtyła asks, "What is the criterion of this practical truth?" And he answers that "according to Thomas and the Thomists, it is the conformity of reason with the correct orientation of the will to the end (*cum appetitu recto*)" (Wojtyła 2023c, 368). While here Wojtyła does not directly indicate a passage from St. Thomas, his reference is without doubt found in the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa Theologiae*, where in question 57, article 5 we read the passage Wojtyła had paraphrased: "The truth of the practical intellect depends on conformity with right appetite," or in Latin: "Verum autem intellectus practici accipitur per conformitatem ad appetitum rectum" (Aquinas 2012, I-II, 57, 5). While Thomas in this context does not speak of "truth about the good" or "practical truth," he does speak of the "truth of the practical intellect" ("verum autem intellectus practici"). Now, as intellect, the practical intellect's object is indeed truth, but as practical, it "directs what it apprehends to operation" ("hoc quod apprehendit, ordinat ad opus") (Aquinas 2012, I, 79, 11). It would thus seem that it is an entirely legitimate extension of Aquinas's thought to speak of "practical truth," or of "truth about the good," as Wojtyła does.

The fact that for Thomas the practical intellect ordains us to operation cannot be stressed enough. This allows us to render Aquinas's meaning in this way: The truth of the practical intellect consists in correspondence between action and right desire – a correspondence to which we can also give the name "practical truth." An action is "true" (practically speaking) if it corresponds to what we really want (right appetite). What we really want is a good of reason (operations in conformity with reason), which may on many occasions allow for variegated realizations. But there are also some acts that are always against reason, acts we could never *truly* want; and if we indeed realize them, we act against "the truth of the person," "the truth of the conjugal act," or "the truth of the reciprocal gift." All these are in a certain sense practical truths: truths about the good that correspond to us as persons (the truth of the person), that express something about what we truly desire in the conjugal act (the truth of the conjugal act), or that indicate

something about the practical conditions of making a sincere gift of oneself (the truth of the reciprocal gift). "Truth" for John Paul II is not only something speculative, as the correspondence of the mind with reality, but also something practical, as the correspondence of action with right desire. Only this second way of looking at truth allows us to grasp the full meaning of John Paul II's "truth" language, so important to the Theology of the Body. It presupposes the idea of "practical truth," which has a Thomistic pedigree on which Wojtyła himself drew in his years as a philosophy professor.

3.2. SELF-MASTERY AND PERSONHOOD

Even though we have clarified the meaning of John Paul II's discourse on the "true good" or "the truth about the good," and shown the pope's indebtedness to Aquinas on this point, an important issue still remains. How exactly does *Humanae vitae* answer "the question about man's true good as a person" (John Paul II 2006, 122:5)? How, in other words, does the practice of contraception, to his mind, go against our "true good"? This brings us to the central point of the argument in the pope's discussion of *Humanae vitae*, introduced with a question that leaves no doubt about the importance attached to the considerations that are about to follow: "What is the essence of the teaching of the Church about the transmission of life in the conjugal communion?" (John Paul II 2006, 123:1). For the Polish pope, the "essence" of this teaching has to do with the concept of self-mastery as related to the very constitution of the person. In what follows, we will show that this linking of self-mastery with personhood is already present in his pre-papal writings, where the idea is explicitly drawn from Thomas Aquinas.

Let us then move step by step. For John Paul II, the heart of the matter "lies in maintaining the adequate relationship between that which is defined as 'domination […] of the forces of nature' (*HV* 2) and 'self-mastery' (*HV* 21), which is indispensable for the human person" (John Paul II 2006, 123:1). A problem comes in when we transfer "the methods proper to the first sphere" – that is, the sphere of the forces of nature – "to those of the second" – that is, the sphere of persons properly governed by self-mastery (John Paul II 2006, 123:1). In fact, *Humanae vitae*, as cited by the pope, points out how "the domination and rational organization of the forces of nature" has extended to the human person's "own total being: to the body, to psychical life, to social life and even to the laws which regulate the transmission of life" (Paul VI 1968, n. 2; John Paul II 2006, 123:1). For John Paul II, the core of the problem lies precisely here: "This extension of the sphere of the means of 'the domination […] of the forces of nature' threatens the human person for whom the method of 'self-mastery' is and remains specific. It – that is, self-mastery – corresponds in fact to the fundamental constitution of the person: it is a perfectly 'natural' method" (John Paul II 2006, 123:1). The

choice *for* artificial means is then understood as a choice *against* self-mastery, a choice that as such "breaks the constitutive dimension of the person, deprives man of the subjectivity proper to him, and turns him into an object of manipulation" (John Paul II 2006, 123:1).

We see that for John Paul II the teaching of *Humanae vitae* has nothing to do with the violation of biological laws, as some critics mistakenly interpret it. For him the problem is much deeper and concerns the breaking of the fundamental constitution of the person *as* person. This is of course a strong claim, and it is, perhaps, not immediately obvious. How would this be the case? Saint John Paul II goes beyond simply making this bold claim and proceeds to make good on it. His explanation, we will argue, is based on the thought of Saint Thomas.

Bodily acts, for the pope, have meaning; there is a "language of the body" capable of expressing a "truth." We have discussed this "truth language" in the previous section. Now, when it comes to the act of conjugal union, this "language of the body," he writes, is "something more than mere sexual reactivity" (John Paul II 2006, 123:4). Here we may see an implicit reference to brute animals, which, too, copulate. But in that act, these do not "speak." They do not express mutual love but simply follow their natural instincts, reacting to external and internal stimuli. By contrast, in human beings the sexual act, whether they want it or not, is a "language of the persons" and as such "subject to the demand for truth" (John Paul II 2006, 123:4). What, then, is the demand for truth in this case? In paragraph 5 of catechesis 123 the argument becomes very concrete. Here John Paul II draws attention to the fact that "man is person precisely because he possesses himself and has dominion over himself" (John Paul II 2006, 123:5). It is because, as persons, we possess ourselves that we can give ourselves. Now "the freedom of the gift," he writes, is "decisive for the 'language of the body,'" a language that "must be judged according to the criterion of truth" (John Paul II 2006, 123:5). If the conjugal act wants to make a claim to being an expression of love – as opposed to an act of mere biological reactivity, as is the case in brute animals – then it must be an act of mutual "giving." Only those who possess themselves – persons as opposed to brute animals – can give themselves, since one can only give what one has. The "freedom of the gift" refers to persons' capacity to give themselves because they own themselves.

The use of "artificial means" in the conjugal act, so as deliberately to render oneself and one's act sterile, is seen by John Paul II as a way of renouncing the use of a capacity that is constitutive of persons and the condition of the act's being a "gift": self-mastery "corresponds […] to the fundamental constitution of the person" (John Paul II 2006, 123:1). Only if the spouses can also abstain when circumstances demand it can their coming together at other moments rightly make a claim to being an expression of love. The "freedom of the gift" – foundational to the conjugal act's being a loving act – requires that the spouses are

capable of self-mastery, that is, that they are able periodically to abstain from the act when they have good reasons to avoid another pregnancy. By contracepting, the spouses treat each other as if they were "forces of nature" that cannot change their behavior. We use technical means to protect ourselves and our goods from the potentially destructive consequences of tornadoes or wolves, to prevent the first from laying waste our towns and the second from killing our livestock. We use technical means because we cannot demand self-mastery of tornadoes or wolves. When instead it comes to persons, such technological mastery would seem to go against the "truth of their persons" (John Paul II 2006, 123:4) – the truth, that is, of having dominion over themselves. For them, self-mastery rather than technological control will be the "perfectly 'natural' method" (John Paul II 2006, 123:1).

Of course, one could object to the pope here that contraception involves technical mastery over the *natural* phenomenon of *fertility.* Contraception could then be read precisely as practicing self-mastery rather than renouncing it. But then again, no woman has ever become pregnant from the mere fact of being in her fertile days. An action is needed, and for persons actions – such is the pope's argument – fall into the realm of freedom, and thus morality and are rightly governed by virtue, not technology.

Now, one can show that the idea of the personal significance of self-mastery is an argument that Karol Wojtyła had already developed during his days as a philosopher, drawing on Thomas Aquinas in doing so. The attribution to Saint Thomas of the link between self-mastery and personhood is most explicit in Wojtyła's 1974 essay "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," delivered, significantly, at that year's International Thomistic Congress (Wojtyła 1993, 187–95). In this paper he sets out to analyze "the dynamism of the will," in order to "come closer to the complete view handed down by St. Thomas." And what sheds light on the will in this sense is what Wojtyła calls "the reality of self--determination" (Wojtyła 1993, 191). What is at stake here is a reflection on the way that action is linked to becoming. It is self-determination that "explains the reality that by my actions I become 'good' or 'bad,' and that then I am also 'good' or 'bad' as a human being – as St. Thomas so eminently perceived" (Wojtyła 1993, 191). Inasmuch as through my free action I determine myself as good or bad, I am not only the subject but also the object of my activity. I do not only bring about changes in the outside world; I also bring about changes in myself. In fact, "I myself am the first and most basic object that I determine" (Wojtyła 1993, 192). This self-determination reveals my subjectivity, testifying "to what is both human […] and personal" (Wojtyła 1993, 192). Wojtyła here clearly links the phenomenon of self-determination to the basic characteristics of the person and attributes this connection to St. Thomas. In fact, he continues: "By revealing that I am an object of my own subject, self-determination also brings to

light the particular composition that is proper to me as a person. St. Thomas, along with the whole subsequent tradition of Christian thought, emphasizes that *persona est sui iuris et alteri incommunicabilis*" (Wojtyła 1993, 192).

One more step is needed, however. After all, it was self-mastery and self--possession that represented the core of the argument in the Catecheses. How do these fit in here? The title of Wojtyła's essay is "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," and his thesis is precisely that self-possession and self--governance form an essential part of this structure. We read: "Self-determination in some sense points to self-possession and self-governance as the structure of the person" (Wojtyła 1993, 192). In the Catecheses he affirms that "man is person precisely because he possesses himself and has dominion over himself," and notes that self-mastery corresponds to the "fundamental constitution of the person" (John Paul II 2006, 123:5; 123:1) The idea that the person's "structure" or "constitution" has to do with self-possession and self-governance (which we can take as synonymous with "dominion over oneself") is present both in the Catecheses and in the article under discussion, where this notion is explicitly linked to Saint Thomas.

CONCLUSION

Speaking about the relevance of Saint Thomas Aquinas for Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body, we do not need to limit ourselves to noting that there is a convergence, agreement, or mutual enrichment. While modest in itself, our lexical analysis already pointed beyond mere congruence: at least some of the instances where Thomas is named in the Catecheses are of a certain importance, as when John Paul II speaks about the resurrection and the body-soul composite, or when he argues that continence not merely restrains desire but rather guides it. The conceptual analysis goes further. The notion of the "true good" along with the "truth" language that pervades John Paul II's reflection on *Humanae vitae* becomes much more intelligible when read in the light of the Thomistic conception of practical truth as the conformity of action with right appetite, a conception Wojtyła himself developed under explicit reference to Aquinas in the *Lublin Lectures* and subsequent essays. The personalist account of self-mastery, in turn, finds its most explicit Thomistic genealogy in Wojtyła's 1974 paper, delivered at the International Thomistic Congress as "a creative continuation of St. Thomas's thought" (Wojtyła 1993, 187). The Catecheses do not cite these pre-papal sources, but they presuppose their conclusions. To read the Theology of the Body adequately, we do well to make use of the important key that is provided by Saint Thomas.

ZNACZENIE ŚW. TOMASZA Z AKWINU DLA TEOLOGII CIAŁA ŚW. JANA PAWŁA II

Abstrakt

W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano rolę, jaką myśl św. Tomasza z Akwinu odgrywa w katechezach św. Jana Pawła II dotyczących miłości ludzkiej w planie Bożym, powszechnie znanych jako teologia ciała. Nie ulega wątpliwości, że Akwinata miał duże znaczenie dla Karola Wojtyły jako filozofa; jednak kwestia, czy i w jaki sposób miał on znaczenie dla Jana Pawła II jako autora środowych katechez, nie została jednoznacznie rozstrzygnięta w dotychczasowej literaturze. Niniejszy esej ma na celu ponowne podjęcie tej kwestii najpierw poprzez przegląd leksykalny wzmianek o Tomaszu w katechezach, a następnie poprzez analizę pojęciową dwóch terminów – „prawdziwego dobra" oraz relacji między samokontrolą a osobowością – których tomistyczne pochodzenie sam Wojtyła wyraźnie podkreślił w swoich pismach sprzed pontyfikatu. Chociaż katechezy nie cytują tych źródeł, to jednak zakładają ich wnioski. Tekst pokazuje, że aby właściwie odczytać „teologię ciała", warto posłużyć się ważnym kluczem, jaki dostarcza myśl św. Tomasza.

S ł o w a k l u c z o w e : teologia ciała, Jan Paweł II, personalizm tomistyczny, prawda praktyczna, samokontrola.

THE RELEVANCE OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS FOR ST. JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

Abstract

This article examines the role that the thought of Saint Thomas Aquinas plays in Saint John Paul II's Catecheses on human love in the divine plan, commonly known as the Theology of the Body. That Aquinas matters to Karol Wojtyła as a philosopher is uncontested; whether and how he matters to John Paul II as the author of the Wednesday Catecheses is a question on which the existing literature has been less than decisive. This essay proposes to take up the question afresh, first by way of a lexical survey of Thomas's appearances in the Catecheses, and then by a conceptual analysis of two notions – the "true good" and the relation between self-mastery and personhood – whose Thomistic pedigree Wojtyła himself had made explicit in his pre-papal writings. While the Catecheses do not cite these sources, they presuppose their conclusions. The text shows that to read the Theology of the Body adequately, we do well to make use of the important key that is provided by the thought of Saint Thomas.

K e y w o r d s : theology of the body, John Paul II, Thomistic personalism, practical truth, self-mastery.

DIE BEDEUTUNG DES HEILIGEN THOMAS VON AQUIN FÜR DIE THEOLOGIE DES LEIBES VON HEILIGEN JOHANNES PAUL II.

Abstrakt

Dieser Artikel untersucht die Rolle, die das Denken des heiligen Thomas von Aquin in den Katechesen des heiligen Johannes Paul II. über die menschliche Liebe im göttlichen Plan spielt, die gemeinhin als Theologie des Leibes bekannt sind. Dass der Aquinate für Karol Wojtyła als Philosoph von Bedeutung ist, steht außer Frage; ob und inwiefern er für Johannes Paul II. als Verfasser der Mittwochskatechesen von Bedeutung ist, ist eine Frage, zu der die vorhandene Literatur bisher keine eindeutige Antwort gegeben hat. Dieser Aufsatz möchte diese Frage neu aufgreifen, zunächst anhand einer lexikalischen Bestandsaufnahme der Erwähnungen von Thomas in den Katechesen und anschließend durch eine begriffliche Analyse zweier Begriffe – des „wahren Guten" und des Zusammenhangs zwischen Selbstbeherrschung und Personsein – deren thomistische Herkunft Wojtyła selbst in seinen vorpäpstlichen Schriften deutlich gemacht hatte. Die Katechesen zitieren diese Quellen zwar nicht, setzen aber deren Schlussfolgerungen voraus. Der Text zeigt, dass wir gut daran tun, den wichtigen Schlüssel, den das Denken des heiligen Thomas bietet, zu nutzen, um die Theologie des Leibes angemessen zu lesen.

S c h l ü s s e l w ö r t e r : Theologie des Leibes, Johannes Paul II., thomistischer Personalismus, praktische Wahrheit, Selbstbeherrschung.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dreyer, Nathaniel. 2025. "Saint Thomas Aquinas in Saint John Paul II's Theology of the Body." *The Incarnate Word* 12:25–54.

Grabowski, John. 2023. Review of *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh*, by Michael Waldstein. *The Thomist* 87:489–93.

John Paul II. 2006. *Man and Woman He Created Them.* Translated by Michael Waldstein. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media.

Merecki, Jarosław. 2015. *Corpo e trascendenza. L'antropologia filosofica nella teologia del corpo di Giovanni Paolo II.* Siena: Cantagalli.

Paul VI. 1968. Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae.* (= *HV*).

Petri, Thomas. 2016. *Aquinas and the Theology of the Body. The Thomistic Foundations of John Paul II's Anthropology.* Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.

Popović, Petar. 2018. "Securing the Foundations: Karol Wojtyła's Thomistic Personalism in Dialogue with Natural Law Theory." *Nova et Vetera* (English Edition) 16:231–57.

Reimers, Adrian. 1992. "The Thomistic Personalism of Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II)." In *Atti del IX Congresso Tomistico Internazionale*, edited by A. Piolanti, 6:364–69. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

Schaeffer, Matthew. 2012. "Thomistic Personalism: A Vocation for the Twenty-First Century." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 86:181–202.

Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (Thomas Aquinas). 2012. English translation: *Summa theologiae*. Translated by Laurence Shapcote. Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine.

Waldstein, Michael. 2005. "John Paul II: A Thomist Rooted in St. John of the Cross." *Faith and Reason* 30:195–218.

Waldstein, Michael. 2006a. "Introduction by Michael Waldstein." In *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, by John Paul II, translated by Michael Waldstein, 1–128. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media.

Waldstein, Michael. 2006b. "Index of Words and Phrases." In *Man and Woman He Created Them. A Theology of the Body*, by John Paul II, translated by Michael Waldstein, 677–724. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media.

Waldstein, Michael. 2022. *Glory of the Logos in the Flesh. Saint John Paul's Theology of the Body.* Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press.

Williams, Thomas. 2004. "What is Thomistic Personalism?" *Alpha Omega* 7:163–97.

Wojtyła, Karol. 1993. *Person and Communion. Selected Essays.* Translated by Theresa Sandok. New York: Peter Lang.

Wojtyła, Karol. 2013. *Love and Responsibility.* Translated by Grzegorz Ignatik. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media.

Wojtyła, Karol. 2023a. "The Lublin Lectures." In *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Scheler*, by Karol Wojtyła, translated by Grzegorz Ignatik, 1–271. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.

Wojtyła, Karol. 2023b. "On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm (According to the Conceptions of St. Thomas Aquinas and Max Scheler)." In *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Scheler*, by Karol Wojtyła, translated by Grzegorz Ignatik, 339–56. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.

Wojtyła, Karol. 2023c. "The Problem of Substantiating Norms and Moral Assessments on the Basis of Thomistic Philosophy and Phenomenology." In *The Lublin Lectures and Works on Scheler*, by Karol Wojtyła, translated by Grzegorz Ignatik, 367–74. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press.

Stephan Kampowski – Professor of Philosophical Anthropology at the Pontifical John Paul II Theological Institute for Marriage and Family Sciences in Rome. He has been teaching there and at its predecessor institute in various capacities since 2005, the year in which he defended his doctoral dissertation on Hannah Arendt's action theory and moral thought at the same Institute. Since 2012 he has also been an invited professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas (Angelicum), Rome. He is the author of several books. His more recent publications include *Il caso serio della vita. La morale cristiana tra autonomia e libertà del dono* (2022) and *Embracing Our Finitude. Exercises in a Christian Anthropology between Dependence and Gratitude* (2018).

Address for correspondence: kampowski@istitutogp2.it.