

JOHN PAUL II'S "MEDITATION ON GIVENNESS"

PASCAL IDE

"The 'thou' only acquires his full ontological stature
and his full ethical dignity if I see in him the 'dative'
hand of the divine 'Thou.'"



1. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEXT

On February 8, 1994, John Paul II wrote what he called "A Meditation on Givenness."¹ This meditation deserves to be better known—indeed, to be contemplated and studied—for at least three reasons.

The first and most decisive is the sheer importance of the work. Anyone familiar with the thought of the late pope will find, in reading the meditation, that it gathers together in a singularly dense way a number of themes that are dear to John Paul

1. See John Paul II, "Medytacja na temat 'bezinteresownego daru,'" *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* XCVIII (2006), vol. II, 628–38. In the in-text citations from the meditation that follow, Roman numerals refer to the section number and Arabic numerals to the paragraph. I have produced a French translation of the meditation in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 134 (2012): 188–200. (An English translation has since been made as well: see *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41 [Winter 2014]: 871–83.—Trans.)

II: an anthropology of gift, the nature of human love, shame, the communion of persons, sexual difference, God as the mediator of human relationships, the theology of the body, etc. The reader will find many of the pope's key references as well: Genesis 1–2 and the text from *Gaudium et spes* 24, for example (which, together with *Gaudium et spes* 22, was the conciliar text most cited by John Paul II).² These themes and texts, moreover, are not simply gathered in one place, but are bound together in an original intuition of singular power, which we will analyze below. The meditation is more than a summary, then, more than a reprise of one of the central themes of the first cycle of the pope's theology of the body,³ for example (the man of original innocence discovering beatitude and the knowledge of God through a spousal relationship with the woman given to him). Rather, the meditation presents a new and profoundly original synthesis in which the three central concepts of gift, the communion of persons, and the man-woman relationship converge and are reclaimed. Furthermore—an indicator of the text's importance—the meditation was deemed worthy of being included in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis (AAS)*, which was not the case with everything that the Polish pope produced (as the difference in volume between the *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* and the *AAS* attests).⁴ The importance of this meditation also allows us to glimpse the decisive influence on Karol Wojtyła of the Polish poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid, an artist who is renowned in his own country but still relatively unknown elsewhere. Wojtyła, who cites Norwid no fewer than five times in this text, began reading his poetry in high school and learned several of his works by heart. He once

2. See my “Une théologie du don. Les occurrences de *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24, §3 chez Jean-Paul II,” *Anthropotes* 17, no. 1 (2001): 151–80 and 17, no. 2 (2001): 129–63.

3. The first cycle comprises the first twenty-three Wednesday audiences dedicated to the theology of the body, from September 5, 1979 to April 2, 1980. The whole of the pope's catecheses on human love, which were presented over the course of 129 audiences, has been published in one volume in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

4. The *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* is the official gazette of the Holy See, containing all the principal decrees, letters, and addresses of the pope, as well as decisions of the Roman Curia. The *Insegnamenti* is more exhaustive, publishing all of the pope's teachings, both written and oral.—Trans.

recited Norwid's great mystical and philosophical poem *Promethidion* onstage, in a recitation contest in 1936, when he was only 16 years old. As pope, John Paul II referred to Norwid on several occasions,⁵ and many of the central themes that he developed were deeply indebted to the Polish poet,⁶ as he himself acknowledged with gratitude.⁷

The second reason the meditation deserves to be better known is more extrinsic: it remains almost unknown, not only to the general public,⁸ but also to John Paul II's own countrymen, and even to some experts in his thought, both in Rome and in Poland. This is due, first, to the fact that it was never given in public: the future saint did not visit his native country in 1994. Second, the text was published many years after it was written, in 2006, in the official gazette of the Holy See, the *AAS*.⁹ Finally, it

5. John Paul II quoted Norwid on two separate occasions during his first trip to Poland: "Address to the Ecclesial Community of Warsaw Gathered in the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist" (June 2, 1979) and "Homily for the Mass for the Workers of Jasna Góra" (June 6, 1979). In both instances, the pope did not refer to any specific work of the poet (as opposed to his "Homily for the Liturgy of the Word for the World of Culture and Art in Warsaw" [June 13, 1987], for example), which points to the fact that he was quoting from memory, out of the abundance of his heart. For other references to Norwid in the writings of John Paul II, see the index of the *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*.

6. See Kazimierz Braun, "La part de Norwid dans la 'totalité' de Jean-Paul II," *Liberté Politique* 30 (2005), 151–62. This article demonstrates the decisive influence Norwid had, both as a poet and as a man, on his fellow countryman who would one day become pope: on the latter's understanding of work, art, suffering, heroism, Poland, and the role of the Church in the world.

7. See especially John Paul II, "Address to Members of the Institute for the Polish National Patrimony on the 180th Anniversary of the Birth of the Poet Cyprian Norwid" (July 1, 2001): "I honestly wanted to offer my personal debt of gratitude to the poet, to whom I have been bound by a deep spiritual kinship since my high school days."

8. The only reference to the text that I have been able to find is in François-Marie Léthel, *La lumière du Christ dans le cœur de l'Église: Jean-Paul II et la théologie des saints* (Les Plans-sur-Bex: Parole et Silence, 2011), 46, 51–52.

9. The date of each volume of the *AAS* is contemporaneous with the documents that are being published therein. There is thus always a delay in publication, which varies somewhere between eighteen months and two years. As a result, the 2006 volume would only contain texts from Benedict XVI. Who would look in the 2006 volume of the *AAS* for something written by John Paul II, who died in April 2005—*a fortiori* for a text that dates back to February 8, 1994? The meditation is also difficult to find in the *AAS* because it is placed (together, it is true, with several apostolic letters of John Paul II, the earliest of

was written and published in Polish, and, unless I am mistaken, has been translated into only one other modern language,¹⁰ in a book that gives no indication, apart from a second subtitle, that it deals with the theme of gift in the thought of John Paul II.¹¹

The last reason is more accidental, if not anecdotal, but it is nonetheless suggestive. The meditation raises many interesting questions, all stemming from one rather disconcerting fact: the twelve-year delay between the final date of composition (1994) and the date of publication (2006)—the latter of which occurred, moreover, after the pope's death. This long hiatus naturally gives rise to certain questions that, in the absence of any history of the text, can at present only spark interpretative hypotheses. Why did John Paul II, who was not shy to act on his own initiative, not publish the meditation in his lifetime? Could the publication of the text have provoked controversy?¹² Did certain individuals who were close to the pope resist its publication? But if so, why did the meditation appear after he had died, when he was no longer in a position to ask that it be published? Who decided to publish it in the *AAS*? What kind of weight or status should be given to the text? Is it the beginnings of a book that never saw the light of day, or is it a complete text in itself?¹³ To what literary genre does a text like this belong, which calls itself a meditation, but contains quasi-dramatic, or better, quasi-rhapsodic elements, questioning, exhorting, sometimes even arguing with the reader?

which dates from 2001) at the end of his successor's interventions, just before the "Acts of Various Dicasteries."

10. As noted above, the meditation has since been translated into English: see *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 871–83—Trans.

11. Italian translation by Mauro Leonardi, *Come Gesù: L'amicizia e il dono del celibato apostolico. Con una meditazione di Giovanni Paolo II* (Milan: Ares, 2011), 293–309. The author includes a brief commentary on the meditation (285–91) which does not, however, contain a history of the text. I am grateful to Rev. Laurent Touze for referring me both to this work and to the references in Rev. Léthel's *La lumière du Christ*.

12. Certain bold statements in the final section—regarding the place of feminine (and not only Marian) mediation in the life of (masculine) man, regardless of his state of life—might lend support to this hypothesis.

13. The internal evidence of the text allows us to rule out one hypothesis, at any rate: it is clear that we are not dealing with a series of scattered and incomplete notes collected after the pope's death.

2. THE CENTRAL THEME

In a stroke of genius, John Paul II succeeded in concentrating in a single phrase the central intuition that animates—in the most rigorous sense of the term: that vivifies and unifies—the whole of his meditation. This single phrase is also a simple one, and this is another striking aspect of this intuition. It serves to open the entire meditation: “God has given you to me.” Strictly speaking, this line is found only five times in the text (twice in the first section, twice in the second, once in the fourth), but its presence is ubiquitous. More than the original title, which only partially captures the content of the text, this intuition expresses the very heart of the meditation, and informs it at each step. At once the starting point and focal point, it illuminates the whole, while also being illuminated thereby.

Let us begin by commenting briefly on the content of this phrase—a phrase that, as we will see, can also be called a law—in order to show that it contains *in nuce* not only the whole of the meditation, not only the core of the pope’s thoughts on relation (1–3) and on gift (4–8), but also a whole anthropology, which is itself inseparable from an ethics and even a cosmology (9–13). In order to show that the following points are not simply juxtaposed but structurally interrelated, I will present each subsequent point with a question, in the form of an objection.

1. The core of the formula is *the interpersonal relation*. The formula thus concerns the very heart of human life, man’s relationship to his fellow man.

But can we say that this experience, as universal as it is quotidian, is captured in language that is equally familiar?

2. John Paul II articulates this interpersonal relation *in a concrete way*, using the personalist language of “I” and “thou.”¹⁴ Far from the abstract and distant rhetoric of “alterity,” or even the use of a different, more inviting substantive, such as “one’s

14. It suffices to recall here Martin Buber’s programmatic work, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). The Jewish philosopher, like John Paul II, recognized that the presence of God is necessary and integral to the interpersonal “I-thou” relation (and indeed also to the “I-it” relation), without confusing the two: “The absolute relationship includes all relative relationships and is, unlike them, no longer a part but the whole in which all of them are consummated and become one” (129).

fellow man,”¹⁵ the pope chooses to adopt the warm and welcoming familiarity of those pronouns we call “personal.” A rich conceptual content of profound philosophical and theological scope is thus incarnated within a single sentence. In this way, the pope not only recalls his own decisive experience of receiving these words from the lips of his spiritual director—words which then became central to his own pastoral ministry—but he integrates, or symbolizes,¹⁶ two dimensions that are usually kept apart: the ideal concept and concrete language. In doing so, John Paul II enables himself to be heard by any and every reader.

But how is the bond that joins the “I” and the “thou” established? Does the mutual presence of each to the other suffice to do full justice to the reality of interpersonality?

3. There are not two poles to this relation, as we almost inevitably tend to think—you and me—but *three poles*: in the order given in the text: God, you, me. It is only in relation to God, in other words, that my relation to the other can be adequately thought—and fully lived.¹⁷ This initial tripolarity, which is constitutive of every human relationship, does not introduce a third, anonymous “it” into the heart of the “I–thou,” but an eminently personal subject, the Subject par excellence, which warrants the name “God.”

The introduction of this third pole, though—is it not a bit artificial? In what way is God intrinsic and necessary to the interpersonal relationship between human beings? Points 4–8 below undoubtedly contain the core of John Paul II’s thought, his most original and fruitful contribution. This core contribution is even, in some ways, wholly concentrated in the following point, which serves to set in motion the whole dynamics of the gift.

15. There is one instance in which the pope translates the formula into more abstract terms: “God gives man his fellow man” (IV.3).

16. That is, in the root sense of the word: *sym-ballo*, to draw together, to join or unify.—Trans.

17. We could say that God is the necessary *mediation* that joins the “I” and the “thou” (even if the term “mediation” does not appear in the text), and is thus the substantial bond (*vinculum substantiale*) between persons, provided that we preserve the absolute primacy of God as origin and end, in no way reducing him to an intermediary. God is the Alpha and the Omega: he can only assume the position of unifying “median” because he is first the utmost terminus.

4. The relationship between the three poles is understood *on the basis of the gift* ("God has *given* you to me"). The other person is given to me, you are given me, you are a gift for me. The other only comes to light in the truth of who and what he is if I see in him a gift—a gift which, as we will see below, is easily forgotten or falsified. But (and this is the response to the objection raised above) the recognition of the other as gift is only possible if God gives the other to me. For a gift is a relationship that unites three poles: the receiver, the giver, and the gift itself. In the bi-polar encounter between two human subjects, the "I" takes the place of the receiver and the "thou" that of the gift. There thus remains the question of the giver—who, in the case of a human person, can only be God, the origin of every human being. The other is only "given to me," then, if he is himself a gift—which means, if he is a gift which points beyond himself to an actual Giver. In this way, the gift relationship opens up from within in two directions: toward the immanent gift of the other person, and toward the transcendent gift of God. The "thou" only acquires his full ontological stature and his full ethical dignity if I see in him the "dative" hand of the divine "Thou." An interpersonal relation is only fully realized on the horizontal plane, in other words, if it intersects the vertical donation descending from God above.

But if we refer the gift of the other back to his absolute origin, does this not risk disincarnating the relationship? Do we love other persons only because they are gifts from God?

5. "Every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17). But the perfection of the gift demands that it be received, not only *from* the creative Origin, not only *by* the recipient (the "I"), but also *in* the created gift itself (the "thou"). The integrity of the gift requires, in other words, all three poles of the donation. The "thou," however, is love-worthy on account of his or her *beauty*, that is, on account of the immanent beauty that dwells in man. This beauty, far from being reduced to its physical dimension, is for the Polish artist the living synthesis of all the qualities of the beloved—or, better, it is this living synthesis made manifest. "Beauty is the form of love," as Norwid says in his *Promethidion*, quoted by the pope (IV.1). In the beauty of the beloved—in the beauty of the woman in particular—the divine Origin remains present. This is why John

Paul II emphasizes at such length and in so many different ways the beauty of the gift that is the other (III, V).

6. The gift God makes of you to me is not a point of arrival but a point of departure. “God has given you to me”—in order that I might give myself to you. A gift, in fact, calls of its own inner logic for a response. But this response can entail nothing less than a giving in return, with a gift as free and gratuitous as the reception itself had been. Here we can recall the original title of the text, which points to the central concept of the meditation, the *disinterested gift*.¹⁸ The inner dynamics of the gift thus begin to appear: the moment of the gift of self (*donum suiipsius*) presupposes, for the creature, a prior moment of givenness (*datum*). The reception of the other precedes our giving to the other.¹⁹

But do we not risk being caught in a downward cascade of gifts? Does the absolute priority of the divine transcendent gift (God has given you to me) doom man to live an asymmetrical relation (I give myself to you) that would lack all joy—not only the joy of the other’s response in turn (you give yourself to me), but also the joy of the unifying and unified reciprocity of gifts?

7. Gift exists for the sake of *communio*. Just as reception precedes the gift of self, so the latter opens to that communion which is the exchange of gifts. The meditation as a whole unfolds the contours of this relationship, which begins in the side-by-side of the persons’ “being-with” and culminates in the face-to-face [*cœur à cœur*] of the *communio personarum*—which is the central concept of John Paul II’s anthropology. This communion first takes the form of an “entrustment” or “keeping” of the other (II), which leads in time to a reciprocity of love (IV–V). In the end, in a properly theological anthropology, everything that is

18. (The original Polish title was “A Meditation on the Theme of the Disinterested Gift”—Trans.) It is surprising that the term “spousal,” which is so dear to John Paul II (and already to Karol Wojtyła: see his *Love and Responsibility*, trans. Grzegorz Ignatik [Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013], 78–83), does not appear in the meditation. But there are other themes that are important for the pope that are also absent from this text. In truth, even if the word “spousal” is not found here, the reality itself—namely, the “disinterested gift”—is present, indeed omnipresent.

19. There also appears here, implicitly, a sense of the order that defines the two movements of love: the attraction or draw of the good of the other, on the one hand, which is made visible in his or her beauty; and the response to this call, on the other hand, which takes the form of gift.

given man to be his own is received from, and so far participates in, God. But the "God who is the Creator of man . . . is the God of communion" (II.4). Thus, in a way analogous to the inner trinitarian life, interpersonal gift culminates in a created circumincession.

We have seen the way in which the formula "God has given you to me" implies a whole dynamics of the gift. In the text from *Gaudium et spes* 24, this dynamic unfolds in three steps,²⁰ underscored by a threefold "*seipsus*": reception, appropriation (of the gift received), donation.²¹ What about the intermediary moment of interiorization, which seems so far to be missing? Falling between the moments of reception and donation, is human subjectivity not at risk of being reduced to a kind of channel or conveyor belt, to being instrumentalized, that is, in service of the gift?

8. The solution to this danger appears in a small but important point that could easily be missed: the divine gift is conjugated in the past tense ("God *has* given you to me"). This reference to the past demands an act of memory. But memory—in the anthropology of John of the Cross,²² for example—is the most profound power the human person possesses, that by which we are configured to the Father. This is a memory, moreover, not of a beginning in time, but of an origin that endures. The temporal gap between the "pastness" of the gift and its present recognition points to the ontological difference between the giving Origin and the human *appropriation* of the gift—and thus to the second moment of the ternary rhythmic of the gift.²³ The primary link

20. See my "Une théologie du don." For an application of this ternary dynamics to the body, see my "Don et théologie du corps dans les catecheses de Jean-Paul II sur l'amour dans le plan divin," in *Jean-Paul II face à la question de l'homme*, ed. Yves Semen (Zurich: Guilé Foundation Press, 2004), 159–209.

21. "Man, who is the only creature on earth that God has willed for *itself* (*propter seipsam*), cannot fully find *himself* (*plene seipsum invenire*) except through the sincere gift of *himself* (*nisi per sincerum sui ipsius donum*)" (*Gaudium et spes*, 24 [emphasis added]).

22. St. John of the Cross is a constant (if often only implicit) presence in the writings of John Paul II, who was himself a third order Carmelite and who devoted his doctoral dissertation to the topic of faith according to John of the Cross. On the Mystical Doctor's influence on the thought of the late pope, see Waldstein's introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 23–34.

23. On this "law of delay," see the important sermon by John Henry Newman, "Christ Manifested in Remembrance" (May 7, 1837), in *Parochial & Plain*

uniting the “whence” and “whither” of the gift, then, is the interiorization or appropriation of the gift in memory.²⁴ “Fear only one thing: that you not appropriate this gift” (V.3).

But is it not the case that this great law of the gift, as formulated by John Paul II, is an abstraction from the world? At first blush, the formula does not appear to name any real “third” apart from man and God (insofar as the “I” and “thou” are in fact one in their common humanity). Does the gift bypass the world?

9. In response, it is not enough to point out that the meditation refers to *the world* repeatedly. First of all, in keeping with the narrative of Genesis 1, John Paul II highlights the continuity that exists between the gift of the cosmos and the gift of the person. “God . . . has given the whole richness of the created world to man” (I.3): here the pope uses a formula that is almost identical to the one we have been investigating—although without the use of personal pronouns and, more significantly, without any indication of reciprocity. Secondly, disinterested donation between persons always takes place in and through the concrete gift, which is often one of the goods of creation. Far from being excluded, then, the cosmos manifests and actualizes the interpersonal gift. This is why “these words [‘God has given you to me’] contain a profound truth about God, man, *and the world*” (I.1, emphasis added).

But does the phrase “God has given you to me” not suffer from a different lack, namely ahistoricity?

10. Again, it is not enough to point out that the formula is conjugated in the past tense. In fact, this phrase, “God has given you to me,” refers implicitly to the originary encounter of the first two human beings described in Genesis 2. Far from taking place between our first parents alone, this encounter occurred at God’s initiative, and through his mediation. But this prelapsarian scene, precisely *as* prehistorical, constitutes a “threshold” on which historical man “stumbles” (IV.1). In our

Sermons, vol. 4 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1909), 253–66. I am grateful to Rev. Martin Charcosset for this luminous reference.

24. “Only the man who truly possesses himself can become a disinterested gift for others” (II.2). The expression “to possess oneself” is a development of the Pastoral Constitution’s “to find oneself” (*Gaudium et spes*, 24). Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 86.

fallen condition, this "originary beauty" takes the form of a nostalgic "yearning" (III.7). Yet it is "given anew" by Christ to man, whom he has redeemed through his blood (IV.1). But fallen and redeemed man is the man *of history*—which the fourth part of the meditation develops.

Still, is it not the case that the threefold rhythmic of the gift ignores a last and decisive incarnation, separate and apart from those of nature (or the world) and history, namely *the difference of the sexes*?

11. Let us listen again to the echo of Genesis 2 that sounds in the phrase "God has given you to me." The Genesis narrative speaks of the originary and exemplary realization of the law of the gift. But the two who encounter one another here are a woman and a man, the first man and the first woman. The fifth part of the meditation thus applies the truth "God has given you to me," *suaviter et fortiter*, to the relationship between man and woman. If, after the Fall, the principal temptation is to misuse the gift by making of the other an "object of use" (IV.3), the opposite temptation also exists, namely to sterilize²⁵ the gift by failing to recognize the light that radiates forth²⁶ from the "unique, irrepeatable value" of the "thou"—in particular, for man, the irrepeatable value of the "genius of the woman" (V.2–3). In the same way that Karol Wojtyła transformed the traditional understanding of chastity by incorporating the negative aspect of abstinence within the positive movement of the integration of love,²⁷ so John Paul II transforms the man's (rightful) fear of "appropriating" and "enjoying" the gift of the woman in light of the opposite danger, namely, the failure to "recognize" and "rejoice in" the gift—provided this gift is truly given. "As long as she remains a gift from God to you, you can rightly rejoice in all that she is as gift. What is more, you should do everything you can to recognize the gift she is for you" (V.3).

25. The term is intentionally chosen. It is surprising that the theme of the family, like that of sponsality, does not explicitly appear in the final section of the meditation. The pope does refer to procreation and "the preservation of mankind" in the third section (III.3), however. We should also recognize that he is speaking here, in the fifth section, from his own experience, and with a desire to address consecrated persons as well.

26. "There came a time when I truly recognized [the genius of woman] and was even, as it were, dazzled by its light" (V.2).

27. See Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 96–100.

But is it not regrettable that all these references to God and the Scriptures end up restricting this meditation, so rich in basic human significance, to believers alone?

12. To be sure, the anthropology articulated in this great law of the gift is integrally theological: not only because it refers to a creative, and thus to a giving and loving, God, but because it is imbued with the life-world of Genesis 2, as expounded in a radically new way by John Paul II in the lengthy commentary of the first cycle of his catecheses on human love.²⁸ The meditation never misses an opportunity to demonstrate, in a rigorous and robust way, that all that man experiences and lives in his free interiority, in the gift of self, and in communion is participated from God: it is God's own inner life of gift and communion communicated to his creature.²⁹ Yet this idea is not simply unintelligible to the light of reason alone. A passage from the first section alludes to it already in terms of creation.³⁰ Is it not witnessed and confirmed all the more by the gift par excellence which is the other, which you are? In fact, by showing that love is a response not only to the gift of God, but to the beauty of the other, the pope does full justice to our common human experience. We thus approach the truth of this meditation on the two wings of *reason* and of *faith*.³¹

28. I have presented a condensed synthesis of the first cycle of the catecheses in my "La théologie du corps de Jean-Paul II. Un enjeu philosophico-théologique inaperçu," *Revue Théologique des Bernardins* 3 (2011): 89–103.

29. On interiority: "This holds true for God's being in the ineffable mystery of his interior life. Man has also been called, from the beginning, to a likeness to God's being" (II.2). On gift: "God, who is love, bestows this form of love on man—a loving predilection" (III.1); "Loving predilection (*amor complacentiae*) is, or at least can be, a participation in that eternal predilection which God has for the human being whom he has created" (V.3). On communion: "In this way, in creating man as man and woman, God imprints on humanity the mystery of that communion which is the essence of his own interior life" (II.3). In this last insight, John Paul II is once again following *Gaudium et spes* 24.

30. "Man knows more and more about the riches of the cosmos, but at the same time he sometimes fails to recognize that these riches come from the hand of the Creator. However, there are times when all men, even non-believers, glimpse the truth of the givenness of creation and begin to pray, to acknowledge that all is a gift from God" (I.3).

31. Cf. *Fides et ratio*, 1: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."—Trans.

13. I am conscious that the exegesis I have offered of John Paul II's core insight has only begun to scratch the surface of its *inexhaustible depth*. In conclusion, let me indicate some possible avenues for further inquiry by situating the phrase within its context and defining further the nature of the speech act. By putting the statement in the form of a question,³² John Paul II invites the reader into his own questioning. By then revealing the origin of the phrase—by humbly confessing that he, like the Apostle, is handing on to us what he himself received—the pope transforms the statement into a confession of gratitude, thus disclosing and enacting the thankfulness implicitly contained in the confession of the gift. By enriching the statement with his living witness, he encourages the reader to verify its truth for himself, to conjugate it, as it were, no longer in the third person, but in the first. Gratitude is the second tie that binds together the three moments of the gift; it is perhaps even more decisive than appropriation.

3. AN OUTLINE OF THE TEXT

We have seen that the whole of the meditation is contained *in nuce* in its initial thesis ("God has given you to me"). As noted especially in point 4 above, the "tripolarity of the gift" brings together, not the usual three terms (giver, receiver, gift), nor Marcel Mauss's three obligatory acts (to give, to receive, to reciprocate), nor what I have called the three "moments" of the dynamics of the gift (to receive, to appropriate, to give), but the three "subjects" implied by any adequate or integral³³ conception of the gift (God, you, me). The other only appears to me for what he is, that is, as gift, if I recognize that he is given by the (transcendent) Giver.

The five sections of the meditation, which are of unequal length (the third is almost twice as long as the fourth, for ex-

32. The meditation begins: "Can one man say to another, 'God has given you to me?'"—Trans.

33. "Integral" here recalls the "integral vision of man" developed by Paul VI in *Humanae vitae*, while "adequate" recalls the "adequate anthropology" of John Paul II, who used this phrase often in his Wednesday catecheses on the theology of the body. He first introduced and defined the phrase in the general audience of January 2, 1980 (see *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 178n.23).

ample), develop different dimensions of this law of the gift. The following linear outline is approximate and can be misleading, since John Paul II, like many Slavic authors, thinks in a circular, or better, spiral-like way, anticipating later developments and regularly returning to first intuitions, which are continually being deepened and enriched as the text unfolds. The topics of the different sections are thus constantly being reworked and folded back in as the meditation progresses.

The first section, after introducing the overarching theme, “God has given you to me,” applies it first to *creation*, which is “a great and continuous giving of all the goods of the cosmos to man” (I.3)—without failing to refer, at its summit, to the reciprocal giving of man and woman. Although the following sections make frequent reference to the world, they focus on the interpersonal relation between the “I” and the “thou.”

The second section shows that the gift that God makes of the “thou” to the “I,” that is, the gift of one human being to another, leads to a *communion* of persons—in a unique way, to a communion of man and woman. This communion is concretized in the “keeping” or “entrustment” of the other, which finds its “first form” in motherhood (II.3). The remainder of the meditation continues to deepen this idea of entrustment.

The third section elucidates the immanent cause of the gift: the *beauty* of the other, in particular the beauty of the woman. Nuptial love is the privileged place in which one person is given to another. But the man is drawn into love for the woman because he delights in her beauty. This beauty of the human person, which takes into itself and integrates “the beauty of all creation” (III.2), and which then becomes “the subject of human creativity and artistic creation” (III.4), achieves its “culmination” in “the absolute beauty” of the resurrected Christ, “foreshadowed on Mount Tabor” (III.5).

Until this point, the meditation has contemplated the “law of life” (“God has given you to me”) as God willed it in the beginning, and as man lived it in the state of original innocence. But this is no longer the state of our historical condition. The fourth section develops the transformation of this truth, first in the state of *fallen* nature—in which “use of the other” takes the place of the disinterested gift—and then in the state of nature *redeemed* by the crucified and resurrected Christ, who “created a

new order of interpersonal relationships" (IV.5): notably by recalling to man that he is "the guardian and keeper of the sacredness of his body" (IV.6), and that of the woman.

The fifth section, finally, considers the particular incarnation of the word "God has given you to me" in *the relationship between man and woman*. To every (male) man, no matter his state of life, God gives Mary, as well as woman in her spiritual beauty, in order that he might be his sister's "keeper" (V.4). Here John Paul II resumes once more the intimate, personal tone of the first section. His words are steeped in his own experience, and culminate in a final word of counsel and exhortation. If the preceding section denounced making the other an object of use, this last section deplores the opposite attitude in man, which would ignore or overlook the gift of the woman which God entrusts to man.

If we recall what the third section says about the resurrected and glorified Christ and about marriage, and what the fifth section says about the consecrated life, we find an almost one-to-one correspondence between the order of the meditation and that of the six or seven cycles of the pope's Wednesday audiences on the theology of the body.³⁴ This surprising confirmation witnesses to the importance of this meditation, which was written some ten years after what remains, according to some, John Paul II's "masterwork."³⁵



Let us conclude by returning once more to the phrase "God has given you to me." The strange fate of this text, its improbable publication, above all its synthetic and original character, its exceptional density together with its sapiential simplicity—all of this gives good grounds for seeing in this formula, and in the meditation that unfolds it, the intellectual and spiritual legacy of John Paul II. "God has given you to me": this phrase, rooted in a decisive experience that goes back to the beginning of Wojtyła's priesthood, matured and deepened throughout his life,

34. On the order and organization of the different cycles, see my "Don et théologie du corps," 207–09; Waldstein, introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 105–24.

35. Waldstein, introduction to *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 4.

reflected upon and enriched by a philosophical, theological, and poetic meditation, contains a wisdom that has all the illuminating simplicity of definitive truth and all the perlocutionary power of beatific exhortation. Is this not the hidden core animating the dynamics of the gift?—*Translated by Michael Camacho.** □

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* This text was first published as “La Méditation sur le thème du don désintéressé de Jean-Paul II. Une présentation,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 134 (2012): 201–14. Translated and printed with permission.