



## On the road to humanity - Via Humanitatis - The main stages of the morphological and cultural evolution of Man. The emergence of the human being



### Via Humanitatis The Status and Future of Man

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This conference shows how the journey of humanity, *via humanitatis*, is a crucial pathway for understanding the human being in his entirety, from paleontological research to the study of the consequences of climate change, from food issues to the consequences of human migration, along with new genetic investigations, which aim to study a number of relatively recent mutations and which belong uniquely to the human race. Despite not being able to answer all the questions posed on the origin of man, the documentation presented by you, which has come to light in the course of the last one hundred and fifty years, seeks to identify those evolutionary lines that led to the early stages of the human being and, through successive stages, to man today. The working group has studied some of the founding practices of human activity (which have developed gradually with the advent of science and technology), such as environmental adaptation, bipedalism, the conception of tools, the domestication of fire, the growing awareness of a finite life span, the acquisition of articulated language, the development of a symbolic communications system, the transgenerational transmission of acquired knowledge by education, the creation of social beliefs and values systems, social cooperation, and the concretisation of mental representation systems in rituals, artistic endeavours and social institutions.

Such founding practices and gestures of the human being are the result of his activity, of his action. This means being able to trace the observable effects of actions back to the spiritual acts creators of meaning that generate observable results. Thus, human action that creates these founding practices and many others on the basis of these, is not simply meant to be *seen and observed*, like all the phenomena of nature of which it participates, but also to be *understood and interpreted* by these very founding gestures which are both effects and signs of the purposes and intentions that produce them. It follows that our knowledge of the human being is not limited to the level of natural observation and explanation, but develops in the interface of natural observation and reflective understanding of philosophy, theology and Revelation. Man is at the same time an observable being, like all the beings of nature of which he participates and a self-reflexive being who interprets himself in his dialogue with God.

This statement on these two objective levels of knowledge that combine in man, the one of the external world which is the object of science and the internal one of the self which belongs to the spirit present in his being and to his relationship with God, may provide an answer of reconciliation and pacification to the question raised by the status of the human being in the field of knowledge in the age of the predominance of science, as long

as the positivist ideology does not claim the right to abolish the border between the natural sciences and the human sciences and to annex the latter to the former.

In this spirit, the Church does not consider an unresolved conflict the one posed by science and linked to genetic mutations and the laws of heredity which, although originally discovered by Augustinian monk G. Mendel, were, after Darwin, frequently linked to the theories of evolution.

No external limit can be imposed on the hypothesis according to which “random variations” and “accidental changes” were established and reinforced in order to ensure the survival of a species and, therefore, of the human species as well. So far we have historical, paleontological and phylogenetic evidence, therefore something more than a mere hypothesis, to put it as the Blessed John Paul II told the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (Address of 22 October 1996). In turn, philosophy and theology – and with them the social sciences interested in learning about the natural sciences – must not engage in a losing battle to establish the facts of nature that constitute the very scope of science. Philosophy and theology should ask themselves how they can find a meeting point with and become enriched by the naturalist viewpoint of science, starting from the assumption that the human being is already a speaking, questioning being. A being, therefore, who has given himself answers that speak of his domain of freedom in relation to his given nature.

The scientist follows the descending order of the species and emphasizes the uncertain, contingent and unpredictable aspects of the apparent results of evolution in man, whereas the philosopher and the theologian begin their journey from the self-interpretation of man’s intellectual, moral and spiritual situation and ascend back through the course of evolution to the sources of life and being that man himself is. The starting point is still the original question: for the Judeo-Christian Revelation, the human being is made in the “image of God” (*Gen.* 1: 26-27). This was also the idea of certain religions and philosophers prior to Christianity, who considered man “akin to God”; we know this from the speech of St. Paul at the Areopagus in Athens (*Acts* 17: 22 ff.).

When the human being discovers and recognizes himself as God’s image, that is, as conscious and free, he can legitimately wonder how he arose from his animal nature in his body and in his brain. This approach is retrospective since it retraces the chain of genetic mutations and variations in brain and body. This retrospective approach of theology and philosophy intersects with the progressive approach that descends the river of the progeny of the human being, man and woman. These two approaches meet at a point: the birth of a symbolic and spiritual world where the search for truth, love for the good, desire for beauty, quest for justice and realization of freedom define the humanity of the human being.

The confusion to avoid lies in the two meanings of the term “origin”: the meaning of paleontological and phylogenetic derivation that we may call horizontal and the meaning of ontological or vertical foundation. The former refers to the origin and development of the species in the succession of space and time starting from an already originated datum, whereas the latter asks questions on the appearance of the participated being, beginning with the Being by essence. This is the first origin of the being which is the “transition” from nothing to being, which is not really a passage or mutation, but rather the primary origin of the being as being (*ens quo ens*) that emerges from nothing thanks to the act of participated being: “Deus est et tu: sed tuum esse est participatum, sum vero essenziale”, that is, “God is and you [are], but your being is participated, His is the essential being” (St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Psalm.* 34, 7). In this first transcendent origin of the human being we should in fact admit the direct participation of God. Besides, this also occurs in the generation of every human being, who is not produced in his entirety by his parents, but requires a creative act of God, because his incorruptible soul cannot derive from them. Thus each singular subsistent individual has his own vertical origin as a created person. Therefore, the human being is *capax Dei*, capable of God, as is rightly stated at the beginning of the Compendium of the Catechism promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI.

The course of human history experienced a clear acceleration especially after the coming of Jesus Christ, who introduced the new energy of his grace in the world. In the reference to Jesus Christ, the prototype of man, lies the fundamental reason of the dignity and destiny of the human being. St. Leo the Great, following St. Peter’s teachings, reminds us: «*Agnosce, o christiane, dignitatem tuam*», “Christian, remember your dignity, now you participate of the divine nature (cf. 2 *Petr.* 1, 4) by the grace of Christ (*Sermons I de Nat.*, PG 54, 192)”. Jesus Christ is both the measure of the individual human being and the measure and fate of all mankind, of the *via humanitatis*. And because in some sense Christ communicates the effects of grace to all human persons, this is why He is in some sense the source of all grace in all people, just as God is the source of all being. Indeed, since every perfection of the being is concentrated in God, so in Christ we find the fullness of grace and virtue. Because of it, He is not only capable of saving every single man but also to carry forward the history of salvation. For this reason He has the headship. The “mystery of the divine will” has a centre which is designed to coordinate the whole being of nature and grace, and all of history, leading them to the fullness willed by God: it is “a plan to sum up all things in Christ” (*Eph.* 1: 10).

In short, I am increasingly convinced that the scientific truth you study, which is also a participation in the divine Truth, can help philosophy and theology to understand ever more fully the status and future of the human person, according to the perfect model of Jesus Christ, alpha and omega of history.