

sacramental despite their “secularity.” Again, the Polish soul has its final say. This, fittingly enough, comes across with a sixth poem, “St. Sebastian.” It was written to honor a sixteen-year-old, a young person who experienced “scorched flesh.” Was this in a German Nazi camp or was it a gift from Stalin? It is not clear, but what is clear is that Jesus knows the journey:

While after death Lazarus
Led a quiet life.
At table he and Martha
Served the deathbound Lord.

And so we see it again, a Polish sense of the sacramental. A crucified Lord has made the whole way a holy journey. The pain, the hideousness have all been transformed, made new in its pain.

What would it take for America to deliver something like this, to feel the depths of Christ crucified? Perhaps we got some of that in Stevens after the Second World War when his family began dying off, but more than likely it will come sometime in the future, when our own peculiar brand of secular humanism ends in something more hopeful than a cloaked totalitarianism. Δ

Considerations on the Essence of Man/ Rozważania o istocie człowieka

By Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II). Dual text translated by John Grondelski. Lublin/Rome: Societa Internazionale Tommasco D’Aquino, 2016. 211 pages. ISBN 978-83-60144-92-3.

Jude P. Dougherty

This short work is the result of the discovery of a set of unpublished manuscripts that were under the ownership of Teresa Skawińska. Texts that she kept were preserved in the archives of the John Paul II Institute in Kraków. Ms. Skawińska was the leader of an academic study group to whom Father Wojtyła frequently lectured. At the request of student members of

that group, Fr. Wojtyła prepared written versions of his lectures for dissemination.

The lectures not only reveal much about Wojtyła’s own philosophical training and teaching, but are as relevant today as when they were written. His lectures were prepared from what may be called an Aristotelian/Thomistic position. He offered them as an alternative to the Marxist dialectical materialism promoted by the communist regime at the time, and as a rebuttal to Darwin’s evolutionary account of man’s origin that accompanied it.

Wojtyła’s lectures begin with a defense of the first principles of knowing and being from a realist point of view. Things are, and things are what they are (the principle of identity). With that recognition he goes on to say that they are intelligible to the extent that they exist. They have an essence or nature that the human intellect is powerful enough to discern. That essence or nature is not given in the sense report of their existence, but there is more in the sense report than the senses themselves are able to appreciate. It is not the senses but the intellect that grasps the nature of the thing.

The recognition of these basic principles leads Wojtyła to the affirmation that there is such a thing as “human nature.” Man’s fate is in great measure the consequence of that nature which determines both his potentialities and his limitations. Wojtyła goes on to give an account of the key Aristotelian doctrines of substance/accident; of change; and of the four causes, i.e., material, formal, efficient (making), and final.

Like any substance, man is composed of form and matter. Like any living thing, man has a soul, a unifying principle that makes the living thing be what it is. Thus we can speak of a vegetative soul, an animal soul, and the human soul. We sometimes speak of man as composed of body and soul, but that is imprecise. We should rather speak of man’s immaterial soul and the matter it informs, making him be what he is. “Each of us,” Wojtyła explains, “possesses a certain experiential knowledge of what it means to be a human being through an awareness of our own *I* as well as through comparative observation of other people. That

experience becomes ever greater the longer and more intensely a man lives and reflects.” Developing that theme, he notes that “man is a rich, complex, and multifaceted being. Many empirical sciences study man as their object but it is man who possesses an immediate apprehension of the totality of his nature, the totality of the *I*.” On the other hand, no properly human cognition is purely sensory. Even man’s spiritual or intellectual experiences are never purely immaterial but always have some connection to the sensory.

Wojtyła then makes a subtle point. We do not come to know our souls directly and immediately as a result of introspection. We experience the self in an indirect way by drawing conclusions from the way we apprehend things. Put another way, philosophy arrives at an apprehension and explanation of human nature not through direct experience but by reasoning and inference. But that is not all. In our quest to know what man is, our Catholic faith adds to the picture. Faith proclaims the immortality of the human soul, a truth intimated by philosophy but beyond philosophical demonstration.

In the course of his lectures Wojtyła spends some time explaining St. Thomas’ treatment of the passions of the soul, what he calls “the sphere of desire and aspiration.” Cognition, he explains, is directed to the thing itself, to the object, whereas aspiration is directed to its value. St. Thomas divides the rich material of human feeling into the eleven *passions animae* of which six belong to the desiring sphere of the soul: love-hatred, desire-dislike, joy-sorrow, and five to the sphere of urges: hope-despair, fear-bravery, and anger (for which there is no opposite). Obviously, one can find and distinguish in the orbit of each of those feelings a higher or lower form of emotional experience.

In a subsequent discussion of freedom Wojtyła displays knowledge of the empirical studies of Wilhelm Wundt, Herbert Spencer, and William James. He acknowledges their insights in pursuing his own study. One must add that this early study is reflected in his later published work, especially in *Love and Responsibility*.

Whether they realize it or not, students and others who heard these lectures were exposed to a valuable course in Thomistic psychology. While Fr. Wojtyła was ever faithful to the texts he was explicating, one can detect in these lectures his signature touch, or the personality that subsequently endeared him to a worldwide audience when he became John Paul II.

This reviewer would be remiss if he did not recognize the very readable English translation of John Grondelski. △

To Our Children

Memoirs of Displacement

A Jewish Journey of Hope and Survival in Twentieth Century Poland and Beyond

By Włodzimierz Szer. Boston: Academic Studies Press (www.academicstudiespress.com), 2016. xii + 219 pages. Index, illustrations. ISBN 978-1-61811-478-5. Hardcover.

James R. Thompson

The author and main hero of this first-person narrative was born and raised in pre-Second-World-War Poland. Like a large majority of Polish families at that time, his family was poor but not destitute; it aspired to higher education for its children. These were the times of the Great Depression that Poland experienced no less than the United States. Włodzimierz Szer’s family lived in Warsaw before Germans and Soviets attacked Poland in September 1939. When the war started Włodzimierz’s father raced off to the Soviet-occupied part of Poland, whereas he and his mother remained in Warsaw. When in the German-occupied part of Poland (including Warsaw) Germans ordered Jews to wear the Star of David on their sleeves, Włodzimierz was shipped off to the east to join his father.

It should be added that unless he/she were a renegade and member of the prewar communist party, hardly any Polish Catholic would dream of escaping to the Soviet zone: it would mean instant death or being shipped off to the Gulag. The Soviets considered Polish Catholics to be