

Dissertation Abstract:

“The Truth about Man as the Criterion of Bioethics: Karol Wojtyla and Leon Kass on the Meaning of the Human”

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The question about the meaning of the human being is essential to bioethics. The modern mentality, shaped by the scientific and technological revolution, has lost the ability to grasp what is truly human (*humanum*) and, as a result, deprives both human bodiliness and human action of their inherent specificity. Effectively, Catholic bioethical reflection in order to avoid the reductive effects of this technocratic paradigm needs to affirm the full truth about man as a person. This conviction, accompanying the entire pontificate of John Paul II, finds its fullest expression in the *Theology of the Body*, *Veritatis Splendor*, and *Evangelium Vitae*. Although the Pope gives here an in-depth reflection on man, yet he does not provide a sufficient anthropological basis to apply his personalist and theological ethics to complex bioethical aporias. Such an anthropological basis can be found in Leon Kass, whose bioethical thought, focused around the notion of human form and, thus, defending both the humanness and humaneness of man’s life, provides the criteria to anchor the Pope’s philosophy and theology in the realm of bioethics. This dissertation seeks to show a systematic presentation of this mutually enriching combination of Kass and Wojtyla that would give a foundation for bioethical discourse, not as an application of casuistic formulae—toward which the past moral theology tended—but as a conformity to the full truth about man as an embodied person.

In Chapter One, we will answer the questions how and why the “technocratic paradigm” leads Wojtyla and Kass to face the question about man. In Chapters Two through Four, we will flesh out the full truth about man as they understand it and, thus, we will show how the priority of form over matter—the fundamental idea of Leon Kass’s bioethics—can mutually enrich Wojtyla’s theological, personalistic, and phenomenological thought. In the conclusion we will demonstrate how the “full truth about man,” as the criterion of bioethical discernment, gives rise to a particular manner of bioethical thinking, and we will show, how this manner of thinking might be extended beyond the field of concerns that typically predominate Catholic bioethical thinking.