

THE OTHER AND THE BEYOND

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THE SELF AND THE OTHER

In speaking about 'the other' it may be useful to begin by recognising that I could not speak at all if I did not first recognise the other as other. How could a human being ever develop the ability to speak if there was nobody with whom he or she wished to communicate? Why should someone develop such a skill if there was no possible use for it? Even more fundamentally, how could individuals ever learn to speak without encountering somebody willing to communicate with them? We all learned to speak by hearing people speaking to us.

Furthermore, without some interaction with others it seems impossible that I could have any clear idea of my own identity. A little boy can only begin to identify himself as a little boy when he knows that there are people in the world who are not children and there are children who are not boys.

The idea that I am Irish only acquires meaning if I know that there are people who are not Irish and when I begin to have some idea of what is distinctive about other nations and their people in terms of their location, culture, language, history, social and political structures, climate and so on. The flaw in racial hatred is that my own sense of identity is dependent on my recognition of other identities. If that recognition is distorted, so is my recognition of myself. If on the other hand, my recognition of the other can appreciate the new perspectives and experiences and energies which the encounter offers, my own self-understanding is enriched.

To go even further, we build up our sense of ourselves precisely by seeing that we are distinct from others and by presenting ourselves in a way that stresses that distinctiveness. Gabriel Marcel, the French mid 20th century philosopher, was very interested in this topic of self-knowledge and I have always found his insights very enlightening. He begins a reflection on the growth of self-awareness in his book, *Homo Viator*, with a picture of a small boy bringing a bunch of wild flowers to his mother. "Look", he says, "I picked these for you". The child is very unsubtly drawing of attention to himself as admirable and is looking for the appropriate praise and approval: "Thus the child draws attention to himself, he offers himself to the other in order to receive a special tribute"¹. In this, the self, the ego, of the child is in the forefront; it would be a real disaster for the little fellow if someone else got the credit for the beautiful bunch of flowers that he had gathered and that he is now presenting with such pride and satisfaction. And so the child must make it clear that it was *he* who had the idea in the first place, and it was *he* who went to trouble of picking the flowers and it is *he* who is now making this wonderful gift.

¹ MARCEL, G., *Homo Viator*, tr. Craufurd, E., New York 1982, p. 13.

As we get older, this rather blatant seeking of praise and recognition becomes disguised by what Marcel calls “the complexities of the game of social hypocrisy”. But it by no means disappears! An amateur musician plays a piece he or she has composed and is delighted when someone asks ‘is that a piece by Fauré?’ This enables the composer to respond with the greatest apparent modesty, “No, as a matter of fact, it is my own”². Of course he could scarcely have dared to hope that the conversation would go so well!

Marcel sums up this point:

“Very early in the development of a human being this consciousness of existing... is linked up with the urge to make ourselves *recognised* by some other person, some witness, helper, rival or adversary who, whatever may be said, is needed to integrate the self...”³

There is, however, an obvious paradox here. We know that the more we are preoccupied with making a good impression on others, the less authentic we are. If the other is simply a foil, he or she is not really being recognised as other. To call another person, ‘you’, is to acknowledge another ‘I’⁴. In other words, it is to acknowledge a being who is not merely there to provide affirmation to me.

Furthermore, the effort to seek our value and status by comparing ourselves favourably to others is doomed for a number of reasons. In the first place, what is really valuable in us is not our own achievement. All I do is done on the basis of gifts which I may have played some part in developing so that they may bear fruit but which I have not given them to myself.

Secondly, such an approach destroys the basis on which I am looking for approval because it demeans the people from whom I seek it:

“... I must puncture the illusion, infinitely persistent it is true, that I am possessed of unquestionable privileges which make me the centre of my universe, while other people are mere obstructions to be removed or circumvented, or else those echoing amplifiers whose purpose is to foster my self-complacency. I propose to call this illusion moral ego-centricity, thus marking clearly how deeply it has become rooted in our very nature”⁵.

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector confronts precisely this illusion. The Pharisee was vain enough to seek admiration even from God who created him out of nothing! He sought to confirm this favourable judgement on himself by contrasting his life and qualities with the tax collector whom he saw as his inferior, socially and morally, and whom he looked on with contempt. That was probably an evaluation shared by the first hearers of the parable. But it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee, who returned home in good standing with God (Lk 18:14).

² *Homo Viator*, p. 14.

³ *Homo Viator*, 15.

⁴ RICOEUR, P., *Philosophie de la Volonté I*, Aubier Paris 1949, p. 14: “Le toi est un autre moi.”

⁵ *Homo Viator*, p. 19.

But thirdly and most fundamentally, judging others is something I can never fully do. However well I can empathise with another individual, even with someone I know and love, I can never have their actual experience or understand exactly how things appear to them. While it is possible to say that a particular action was wrong – for instance that it violated the rights of somebody else or it did not take account of the realities of the situation – that does not mean that I can precisely measure the degree of freedom or understanding or guilt that was present in the person who performed the act.

It is particularly dangerous to attempt to define national or racial identity by establishing our identity by reference to our imagined superiority, or our hostility, to other people of other nations any more than we should define our own family by reference to its supposed superiority to our neighbours. When someone contacts a radio programme to play a request 'for the best mother in the world' the whole country does not rise up in protest saying, 'but my mother is the best!' In the same way we ought not to be like the old colonel described by C.S. Lewis. He was waxing eloquent about the glories of England when someone objected that every country thought its women were the most beautiful and its men were the most courageous in the whole world. "Yes", the colonel replied, "but in England it's true!"⁶ People can be rightly proud of their own nation. But real patriots expect other people to be equally proud of theirs. They are motivated by love of their own country and traditions, not by hatred of others. If they adopt the latter course they become as ridiculous as the colonel, but a good deal more dangerous.

KNOWING THE OTHER

That leads us to another thought. What exactly do we mean when we talk about knowing another person?

Even the word 'knowledge' is a problem, especially in our time. We are in danger of narrowing the idea of knowledge in a way that actually diminishes us. There is a kind of knowledge of the other which is valid and important, the knowledge that comes from the biological or medical sciences for instance. At perhaps the extreme end of this limited perspective there is the perfectly valid and accurate knowledge that comes from chemical analysis – the human being is made up mostly of water, with some carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, phosphorus, calcium etc. In that perspective, the human being is a collection of items worth approximately ten euro! Star Trek fans may recall the episode in which strange crystalline creatures described human beings as "ugly bags of mostly water".

A complete answer to the *chemical* question, 'what is a human being?' can easily be provided. It is obvious, however, that it falls far short of answering other more important dimensions of the question! There is a real danger that we can begin to look on scientific truth as the only objective, 'real, truth' and that all else is opinion – not far superior to the statement that little boys are made of slugs and

⁶ LEWIS, C. S., *The Four Loves*, Fontana, London, 1963, p. 29.

snails and puppy dogs' tails. That temptation to restrict our notion of truth, even if not expressed or not consciously adopted, can narrow our perspective on the world and on ourselves.

That was one of the central points of Pope Benedict's address at Regensburg:

It is man himself who ends up being reduced, for the specifically human questions about our origin and destiny, the questions raised by religion and ethics, then have no place within the purview of collective reason as defined by "science" and must thus be relegated to the realm of the subjective"⁷.

There are levels of knowing the other which are not measured in knowledge of scientific measurable facts but rather in what might be called the degree of personal presence that exists between two people. Sometimes people are present physically, standing right beside one another, but there is no personal interaction. Marcel points out:

"There is a presence which is still a mode of being absent. I can behave in the presence of another person as if he were absent"⁸.

In this seat of learning, for instance, we may recall the classic definition of a lecture as the process whereby the material that is in the professor's notes transfers itself to the students' notes, without passing through the mind of either!

There are, however, ways of being present to another person which are more suitably expressed in a different sort of language, in the language of poetry, literature, music, in the giving of gifts, or in loving words of undying devotion. To try to express this in the language of objectively verifiable facts would empty it of its human meaning and produce something akin to the chemical analysis of a human being. This latter understanding is an 'impoverishment' of the primordial idea of what one philosopher calls 'the body-for-us' which can never be fully analysed by objective thought⁹. If there were a simple scientific diagnostic method of determining the presence of love, a lot of tragedies could be avoided. "If only one could tell true love from false love as one can tell a mushroom from a toadstool"¹⁰.

In spite of the pitfalls and possible misunderstandings and deceptions, the way in which I come to know others in any deep sense is inextricably bound up with how I look on them and how I treat them. One might actually say that my ability to understand another person depends on the quality of our relationship. Marcel puts it strongly:

⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Papal Address at the University of Regensburg ,12 September 2006.

⁸ MARCEL, G., *Essai de Philosophie Concrète*, Gallimard, Paris, 1967, p. 55: "Mais il y a une présence qui est encore un mode de l'absence. Je peux me comporter en face de quelqu'un comme si il était absent..."

⁹ Cf. MERLAEU-PONTY, M., *Phénoménologie de la Perception*,Gallimard, Paris 1945, pp. 403f: "Il est question seulement de reconnaître que le corps, comme edifice chimique... est formé par appauvrissement à partir d'un phénomène primordiale du corps-pour-nous..."

¹⁰ MANSFIELD, K., *Journal of Katherine Mansfield*, 1927

“That means – and there is nothing more important to keep in view – that the knowledge of an individual being cannot be separated from the act of love or charity by which this being is accepted in all that makes of him [her] a unique creature or, if you like, an image of God”¹¹.

PUNCTURING THE ILLUSION

A statement of the Second Vatican Council which occurred perhaps more frequently than any other in the talks and writings of Pope John Paul was that human beings “can fully discover their true selves only in sincere self-giving”¹².

Recognising others not just in theory but by acknowledging them to be people like myself is a fundamental opening of myself to see beyond my own limited perspective. This goes a step further even than some experiences of participation with others in a common cause. In such a case it may be that they are united only by a factor which lies outside both of them: “In this kind of union the person of the other is not so much of interest, but rather the common purpose. The individual persons may be seen as dispensable”¹³.

But relating to the other as *another ‘I’* shows me that the things around me are not just mine; they exist in a world that is not defined simply by my perspective; I see other people who have a different but equally valid perspective. In other words I come to accept what Paul Ricoeur called “the existence-value of the other” which limits our egocentrism¹⁴. Our desire, our ambition, our pretension are no longer self-evident or self-justifying; they have to be evaluated in the light of the perspective of other people. We see ourselves not only from our own point of view, but begin to see ourselves as others see us. We begin to suspect that what others think of us may be nearer to the truth than we would like to admit. In that sometimes painful process of encounter with others, especially with different cultures, we ourselves grow in self-knowledge and in knowledge of what it means to be a member of the human family.

Here is the first way in which the other points to the beyond. The recognition of the other person requires us to transcend our own self-centredness and complacency. We can only recognise the distinctiveness of our cultural heritage and value it when we recognise the cultural heritages of others. Similarly we only recognise our own distinctiveness and value when we see ourselves in relation to others. The process of becoming aware of myself is a process of coming to see myself ‘as a being in

¹¹ *Homo Viator*, pp. 23-24.

¹² VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

¹³ VENDEMIATI, A., “L’amore cristiano...” in *La Scala della Carità*, ed Ilunga Muya, J., Urbaniana Rome 2007, p. 46: “In questo tipo di unione non interessa tanto la persona dell’altro, quanto lo scopo comune: le singole persone sono persino sostituibile.”

¹⁴ Cf. RICOEUR, P., “Négativité et Affirmation Originariaire” in *Histoire et Vérité*, Paris 1955, p. 355.

the world with others'. The human being, finite and existing in the physical world "is bound to this world and to his fellow men by all the fibres of his being"¹⁵

When I truly recognise *another 'I'*, it means that I recognise that other people are entitled to make claims on me, just as I may make claims on them. An important aspect of this is that I develop a sense of responsibility. I recognise that I am answerable for using my freedom in a way that impacts on others.

And so I transcend myself in another way. I am not a static, given reality. I have the ability, the responsibility, to direct myself, to make something of my life, to respond to other people as gifts or sometimes as challenges or threats. And I have to answer to them and to myself for how I exercise my freedom. This responsibility is inescapable. Thus my encounter with the other is an encounter of two freedoms, two responsibilities. Each of us in our freedom 'speaks' to the other, expressing our attitude of respect, or contempt, or indifference, or whatever. Even doing nothing may be an eloquent expression of my attitude! This encounter with the other, with the neighbour, is at the heart of morality:

"You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (*Mt* 19:19; cf. *Mk* 12:31). In this commandment we find a precise expression of *the singular dignity of the human person...* The different commandments of the Decalogue are really only so many reflections of the one commandment about the good of the person... in relationship with God, with his neighbour and with the material world"¹⁶.

Each of us also makes and shapes him or herself in the exercise of our freedom and responsibility:

"... freedom is not only the choice for one or another particular action; it is also, within that choice, a *decision about oneself* and a setting of one's own life for or against the Good, for or against the Truth, and ultimately for or against God"¹⁷.

The acceptance and recognition that others are 'I's, just like myself, is the fundamental puncturing of the illusion of moral egocentricity. I am no longer the centre of the universe. I can no longer be the source of the meaning of my own life, because that meaning cannot be constructed without reference to the world around me, to other people and indeed to my own 'situatedness'. Wherever I would like my life to go, I deceive myself if I try to start from an imaginary place. I cannot build my life on 'if onlys' and 'might have beens', only on reality.

THE OTHER POINTS TO THE BEYOND

¹⁵ SCHILLEBEECKX, E., *God and Man*, tr. Fitzgerald, E. and Tomlison, P., Sheed and Ward, London, 1969, p. 177.

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 13.

¹⁷ *Veritatis Splendor*, 65.

Knowing 'the other as other' points me beyond my own goals, beyond my own perspectives and beyond myself. As we mature, we see things in a less self-centred way. The ego around which everything revolved when we had not yet learned to appreciate the other, has been dethroned – at least in our better moments, though the moral egocentricity can reassert itself from time to time!

But what ultimately is the nature of the beyond that lies above or outside or deeper than my self? The first thing to be admitted is that if we could define the ultimate Beyond, that concept would not be ultimate enough! But we may approach the question from a number of angles.

Consent and Mystery

The first is about how we can reconcile the free self with the need to recognise and acknowledge a physical world which situates me in time and place, with the need to recognise my own limitations as an embodied being who cannot simply wish away the laws of physics, with the need to recognise that my freedom has to take account of the presence of *other* 'I's making claims that seem to restrict my freedom of choice.

Of course, from another point of view, these apparent limitations are in fact the means by which I can act at all – a physical world, my own body, the community of people in which I learn to know and to speak and to be myself. If I spend my energies resenting these apparent limitations and fail to see them as the arena in which I can be free, I will end by enslaving myself. The first step in any exercise of freedom is to accept the reality, the truth in which I operate.

Paul Ricoeur puts it well:

“To consent is not to capitulate if, in spite of appearances, the world is the possible theatre of liberty. I say: this is my place, I adopt it; I do not surrender, I acquiesce; it is well thus...”¹⁸

The consent to the physical world with its perspectives and its limitations is a recognition of the field in which my freedom is operating. I act in a world I did not create; I choose for motives that find their basis in the reality I perceive; I act with abilities and skills that are built on the possibilities with which I was born. But I can alter my physical surroundings, especially through science and technology; I can shape my motives by my moral growth or my refusal to grow; I can develop my skills by education and training.

To consent to the equal dignity and value of the other person is a step beyond the simple acceptance of physical reality. But this is not a surrender either. It is a recognition of the truth of who we are and of the arena in which we act – as beings in a world with others.

¹⁸ *Philosophie de la Volonté I*, p. 439. “Consentir n'est point capituler si malgré les apparences le monde est le theatre possible de la liberté. Je dis: voice mon lieu, je l'adopte; je ne cede pas, j'acquiesce; cela est bien ainsi”.

We all operate in this field, situated in time and place, with our own personal history and character affecting one another by the way we use our freedom,

We know how much difficulty we have in evaluating our own responsibilities, our own motivation, and so on. So this is also a recognition that, since my knowledge of myself is so limited, my knowledge of the other can certainly never be total. I cannot see into another person's soul. I can only observe what they express physically. But even when the expression and what is expressed are apparently identical – as in an outburst of anger – it remains “always and indivisibly” an expression both of what he or she wishes to express and of who he or she is and has become¹⁹. The anger may be very basic and very real, but the way in which it emerges in this person may have much to do with his or her previous experiences, state of wellbeing, and perception of the events that triggered it – none of which I can know exactly as he or she does. Indeed he or she may know them only very partially.

The other person, even if he or she is greatly loved and has been a vital part of one's life for a long time, is never fully known. Thus I am already consenting to mystery – to the realisation that there are realities in the world which are not ultimately exhaustible and which can never be completely understood, predicted or managed in the way that objects or things, can be. When we take our relationship with the other seriously we have already broken through one of the misleading assumptions that the Pope pointed to in the Regensburg Address, namely that:

“... only the kind of certainty resulting from the interplay of mathematical and empirical elements can be considered scientific. Anything that would claim to be science must be measured against this criterion. Hence the human sciences, such as history, psychology, sociology and philosophy, attempt to conform themselves to this canon of scientificity”²⁰. (Wissenschaftlichkeit)

There are ways of knowing that are not simply objectively verifiable facts. This brings us back to Marcel who made a fundamental distinction between a problem and a mystery:

“A problem is something which I meet, which I find completely before me, but which I can therefore lay siege to and reduce. But a mystery is something in which I am myself involved, and it can therefore only be thought of as a sphere where the distinction between what is in me and what is before me loses its meaning and initial validity”²¹.

Human beings are fundamentally mystery not problem. The answer to the questions ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are you’ cannot in the last analysis be expressed as if we were merely objects, or things. The answer to such questions is not about ingredients or measurements or experimental data. The truth is that in recognising that we are mystery, we acknowledge that there is more to us that meets our eye, or any human eye. It is impossible to understand ourselves fully without seeing ourselves in the

¹⁹ Cf. MERLEAU-PONTY, M., *The Structure of Being*, tr. Fisher A.L., Methuen London 1965, p. 126.

²⁰ Regensburg Address.

²¹ MARCEL, G., *Being and Having*, Fontana, London 1965, p. 109.

ultimately unfathomable ocean of the meaning of life. We can go on to look briefly at some other pointers of where this line of reflection may lead us.

Love and Hope

I have already said that we come to the fullest knowledge of another person when we love them. William James puts it strikingly: “Every Jack sees in his own particular Jill charms and perfections to the enchantment of which we stolid onlookers are stone-cold”.²² He goes on to say that Jack is right and we stolid onlookers are wrong. Jack is the one who knows Jill best; Jack understands, in a way that we fail to do, that Jill’s existence is among the wonders of the universe.

Love not only gives a new perspective on the beloved; it points beyond the person we love. In a Pastoral Letter on *Christian Marriage* almost forty years ago, the Irish Bishops said:

“People in love cannot help speaking of their loved one as divine and adorable and of their love as undying, everlasting, eternal. They cannot help feeling that love comes from beyond themselves and carries them beyond themselves... The only possible explanation is that, whether we realise it or not, *all human love is finally a longing for God*. Only God can give that timeless happiness, that perfect satisfaction, that unchanging loveliness, that unflinching faithfulness which men and women are seeking in one another’s love, but cannot fully find there”²³.

Death remains always a mystery. But there is ‘a deep instinct’²⁴ within us which shrinks from and rejects the idea that I will merely cease to exist. There is also a deep refusal to believe that those we love have gone into nothingness. “To love a being”, says a character in one of Marcel’s plays “is to say you, you in particular, will never die”²⁵.

Of course the fact that we cannot accept something does not, in itself, mean that it cannot be true. But the arguments for saying that death is the end are often based on what I referred to earlier as the impoverishment which identifies the person simply with objective, material realities. It assumes that when the brain irreversibly ceases to function the person is no longer there.

We are looking here at a very different kind of argument. We are in the presence not just of a scientifically provable fact – that this body is no longer a living person – but of a choice as to how we understand the meaning of the world in which we live. If there is only the perspective of science then death is the end of everything. But if we reflect on our protest and our refusal of the idea that people to whom we have pledged undying love are no more, we are faced with a different question: Does this

²² JAMES, W., “What Makes Life Significant?” (1899) in *Essays on Faith and Morals*, Meridian, Cleveland 1962, p. 285.

²³ IRISH BISHOPS, *Christian Marriage*, Catholic Truth Society, 1969, section 1.

²⁴ VATICAN II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 18.

²⁵ *Homo Viator*, p. 147.

'you will never die' point us towards a larger reality, a deeper participation without which human existence must remain absurd and unsatisfied?²⁶

The question is whether our existence is one in which hope is possible, or whether life is absurd. There is nothing in between those two possibilities. That is the often hidden fear underlying our existence today. It makes us afraid of being silent for fear "of feeling the emptiness that asks about meaning"²⁷; or it takes refuge in the hope of some technological utopia or some drug-fuelled escape.

"All these, however, show themselves profoundly illusory and incapable of satisfying that yearning for happiness which the human heart continues to harbour. The disturbing signs of growing hopelessness thus continue and intensify, occasionally manifesting themselves also in forms of aggression and violence"²⁸.

Lesser hopes can urge us on, and even satisfy us for a while. But they cannot finally satisfy us. Pope Benedict in the encyclical *Spe Salvi* says that we need a hope that goes further: "It becomes clear that only something infinite will satisfy (the human being), something that will always be more than he can ever attain"²⁹.

Consent to our situatedness in the physical world already dethrones us as the centre of the universe, as our own god. The presence of the other raises the question in a new way. What becomes of me and of all the *other 'I's*, especially those I love? Does the mismatch between our limitless aspirations on the one hand and our limited abilities, situation and lifespan on the other mean that humanity is an absurd illusion? Only if there is something infinite which can satisfy the deepest human longings is life anything more than what Jean Paul Sartre called, "a useless passion"³⁰, or in other words an unsatisfiable longing.

This longing is expressed in poetry and music, in commitments to undying fidelity, and even in doomed searches for fulfilment through possessions or status or power or drugs. The Christian revelation addresses the unlimited longings of our hearts. The recognition of the other is a fundamental step in opening up my awareness of the longing to which that revelation speaks.

[A Kingdom of Justice](#)

One longing that strongly calls for something that comes from beyond, is the longing for justice. We recognise somewhere in our hearts that "I'm all right, Jack" will not do as a meaning for life. We live with facilities and technology that we have come to take for granted but it is said that 80% of the people on earth have never heard a telephone dial tone., Pope John Paul once said that we live

²⁶ Cf. *Homo Viator*, p. 152.

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Oriente Lumen*, 16.

²⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Europa*, 10.

²⁹ BENEDICT XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 30.

³⁰ SARTRE, J.-P., *L'être et le néant*, Part 4, ch 2. "L'homme est une passion inutile"

against a background of “gigantic remorse” because in a world where many enjoy affluence and excess there are also “babies dying of hunger under their mothers’ eyes”³¹ .

A world in which my life is reasonably comfortable can leave me fairly contented and, at least for most of the time, experiencing little or no anguish about the meaning of life. But if I believe that this is what makes my life meaningful I am deceiving myself. Human life would then be absurd for the many, indeed the majority, of human beings who live without any of these comforts and cushions – for the children who die of starvation or of easily curable conditions before they even learn to walk or talk, for those who spend all of their lives hungry, for those who live surrounded by war and cruelty. It would be nonsensical to imagine that I inhabit a bubble of sense which is surrounded by chaos and meaninglessness.

A genuine opening to others bursts the bubble. Take an African mother with a dying child and with other children who will receive no education, if I really saw her as *another ‘I’* would I feel happy assuring her that development aid will gradually increase and that things may be significantly better for her grandchildren – if she has any? If I were in her place would I be happy with that response?

And yet when I reflect on these things I experience a sense of helplessness. As individuals or groups, we know that what we can achieve will be hopelessly inadequate to the scale of the problem. The gigantic remorse remains.

There is, however, a possible escape from the absurdity – an escape which in no way lessens the imperative to respond as generously as we can, but which rather intensifies that imperative. That is the possibility that there is a Power great enough to provide vindication even for those human beings whose lives are no more than short experiences of illness, starvation and pain. It is the same Power that calls us to love our neighbour as ourselves:

“The vigilant and active expectation of the coming of the Kingdom is also the expectation of a finally perfect justice for the living and the dead, for people of all times and places, a justice which Jesus Christ, installed as supreme Judge, will establish. This promise, which surpasses all human possibilities, directly concerns our life in this world. For true justice must include everyone; it must bring the answer to the immense load of suffering borne by all the generations. In fact, without the resurrection of the dead and the Lord's judgment, there is no justice in the full sense of the term. The promise of the resurrection is freely made to meet the desire for true justice dwelling in the human heart”³².

[Image and Likeness](#)

The Christian Gospel offers an answer large enough to satisfy even the most profound sources of anguish and ‘gigantic remorse’. The human person lives in the inescapable tension between, on the

³¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 11.

³² CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 60

one hand, a life that is inescapably marked by pain, injustice, suffering and mortality and, on the other, a life which is already full of the glory of the risen Christ.

The human being is the only creature presented in the Bible as the image of God. But this is another way of saying that in knowing the other we come to know God. Pope John Paul pointed to the necessity of a contemplative outlook, which would see reality in its deeper meaning, would discover God's reflection in all things and would see the Creator's living image in every person³³.

What this means in practice is that meeting other people, and especially those who differ from us culturally, is an opportunity to recognise a part of the truth about God that is not so visible from the familiar perspectives of our own background.

In our own experience we see how a person's humanity can be expanded by immersion in another culture. Someone who is completely at home in two different cultures – fluent in two languages, feeling a sense of belonging in both, sharing in the two perspectives and approaches to life – is enriched enormously.

In less dramatic ways, we grow every time we really appreciate the wider perspective on truth that is offered to us by another person's insights, or sufferings, or qualities, or courage, or wisdom. When that happens, our knowledge of God, our relationship with God can also grow. We see the Creator's goodness reflected in the gifts of the other; we see the hope offered by God more clearly when we realise that it can fulfil the deepest and truest longings of someone whose experience and culture is quite different from ours.

God offers hope to all humanity and wishes all to be saved (cf. I Tim 2:4). The Good News of Jesus tells us that we already belong to this family of God. We belong not only with all the great variety of all the billions of people who are alive today, but with all the others who have lived on earth and all those who will live on earth – people who lived before the wheel was invented and people who will regard our most sophisticated technology as impossibly primitive.

My final destiny is not just the fulfilment of *my* hopes. It is at the same time the fulfilment of all those billions of hopes. If it were not, then human life would indeed be a useless longing. If there were no hope for some human beings, then the hope we feel would be empty. The most adequate formulation of hope as Marcel succinctly put it is: "***I hope in Thee for us***"³⁴. Not only that, but we will rejoice together in the flourishing of all human gifts and in the God whose gifts they are. St Thomas Aquinas describes eternal life:

"Eternal life consists in the joyful companionship of all the blessed, a companionship which is full of delight; since each one will possess all good things together with all the blessed, for they will

³³ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 83,

³⁴ *Homo Viator*, 60.

all love one another as themselves and, therefore, will rejoice in one another's happiness as if it were their own, and consequently the joy and gladness of one will be as great as the joy of all"³⁵

This is not a fulfilment that is alien to our present lives; it is the blossoming of the gifts and qualities and achievements which we will find again "cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured" when Christ presents the Kingdom to his Father³⁶. That is the end of the journey that begins in the opening up of the self to other people: it is an opening of ourselves to the whole human family and to the Lord who is "the goal of human history... and the fulfilment of all aspirations"³⁷.

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³⁵ AQUINAS, *Collationes super Credo in Deum*, 12.

³⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*,

³⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, 45.