

# THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

## A Reflection on Original Man – The Way We Were

By Jim Seghers

### **Introduction**

The Totus Tuus Ministries essay *The Theology of the Body: Part I, an Introduction* was an introduction to John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. His purpose was to give to the world a true vision of man, answering important questions like: Who are we? Why did God create us as male and female? How are we to live? What is our destiny? He begins his consideration with the way we were, that is, a reflection on Original Man before the advent of sin. Because Jesus is always his starting point he begins in the nineteenth chapter of Matthew's Gospel.

In this passage, Jesus addresses the question of divorce and remarriage with the Pharisees. He instructs them that Moses allowed divorce because of "the hardness of your heart ... but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8). Using this text as his springboard, the Pope takes us back to "the beginning" in an effort to bridge the way we are, living with a hardness of heart, to the way we were before sin entered the world. Hardness of heart is the condition of the will that is closed to God. When humans close their hearts to God's life and love, they are incapable of sharing life and love with their spouses or their children, because they don't have it within themselves to give.

Jesus directs his discussion with the Pharisees "from the beginning" (Mt 19:8), because it is the starting point. Jesus understood that the state of Adam and Eve before sin is the model for all married couples, because it reflects God's original plan. By penetrating human experience beginning with Adam and Eve before sin, the Pope will contrast that reality with our experience after sin. Nevertheless, there is a vital connection between that world and ours. It is the echo in the human heart that resides deep within the soul of every man and woman.

In his penetration of the Genesis account, the Pope develops three experiences that are common and fundamental to the human heart. They are:

1. Original Solitude.
2. Original Unity.
3. Original Nakedness.

### **1. Original Solitude.**

God said, "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). But why is it not good for man to be alone? The answer is found in human nature. When God created the man, he formed his body from the "dust from the ground," but he added a unique spiritual component when he "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7). However, Adam was alone.

Adam tasted his aloneness when he named the animals. He discovered there was no "helpmate fit for him" (Gen 2:18), that is, none of the animals had a soul like his that was

created to love and to be loved. The animals were not called to love. They merely followed their instincts. Adam was alone in the most profound sense, because there was no other creature in whom he could pour out his love and receive love in return. Adam's innate longing for love left an echo that still resounds in every human heart.

Animals, in contrast, do not reflect on the big questions. Who am I? Where am I going? What is my ultimate destiny? What is the meaning of my life? Animals don't paint, nor do they compose music or write poetry. The fundamental difference between humans and animals is that humans seek love amid the experience of solitude. It's the longing of every human to share one's inner self - the desire to love and to be loved.

## **2. The Original Unity**

Man's experience of the original solitude - being alone - finds its fulfillment in the experience of the original unity. Solitude aches for a fulfillment in communion, that is, a common union, with someone "fit for him," otherwise the human person will never fulfill himself. Man's very being calls for union - communion - oneness with another person. The experience of this original unity is expressed in the book of Genesis by the words "therefore a man must leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and the two will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

The "rib" of Eve's formation (Gen 2:21) indicates that the "woman" (Gen 2:22) is also a human being, different from the animals and made in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26). Therefore, like Adam she, too, can only discover her fulfillment in love.

According to John Paul II both the experience of solitude and the experience of original unity are expression of being made in God's image and likeness. "Man became the image and likeness of God," he wrote, "not only through his own humanity, as an individual, but also through the communion of persons that man and woman form right from the beginning." This union reflects God's inner nature, which is an eternal communion of love and of life in a union of three distinct Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

In the original unity, Adam gives his whole being to Eve who is open to receive it. In receiving him, she in turn makes the gift of herself. It is this exchange of self-giving that brings about their common union - a communion of persons. In this original unity we discover a foreshadowing of mankind's ultimate destiny, which is the eternal communion achieved with the Bridegroom Messiah in the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Rev 19:7-9).

The blessing of fertility, which is linked to procreation, is built on this fundamental union. Thus, sexual union, properly understood, reflects the inner life of the Trinity. This explains the satanic attacks aimed against the body and the resulting culture of death. In order to know what is most sacred in the world, consider that which is most profaned: our bodies - the temple of the Holy Spirit, human life, and the denial of, irreverence toward, and sacrilege of the Eucharist. Satan attacks the greatest good in an

attempt to seize it as his own. “Bow down and worship me” (Mt 4:9) is his pathetic plea. The body, which is formed as a symbol of Trinitarian life and love is the battleground.

### 3. **Original Nakedness**

Pope John Paul II begins his final point on his reflection of Original Man with a quote from the second chapter of Genesis: “The man and his wife were both naked and felt no shame” (Gen 2:25). The Pope teaches that this *nakedness without shame* is a key for understanding the original biblical view of men and women. It indicates that the very desire of their hearts was to love as God loves because they had the unspoiled love of God radiating from within themselves. Adam and Eve’s desire for each other was not focused on the other as an object to be used, but on the person to love as God loves. Their longing was to express their love through the gift of self, which is called self-sacrificing love.

Indeed, according to John Paul II, it was precisely to express this reciprocal love that God made them male and female. So God commands them, “Be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). In other words, God commanded them to love as He loves, which is with an eternal generation of life and love. Each divine Person gives the totality of his being to the other Persons in an infinite act of total self-giving and receiving. When God said, “Be fruitful and multiply,” his decree meant - live in the image I created you.

Therefore, we discover there is no shame in loving the way God loves, because the focus is not on body parts, but the person of the one loved. So Adam and Eve were naked and there was no shame because the desire of their hearts were pure (Gen 2:25). Their desire was to be a gift in the image and likeness of God, because they wanted to love the way God loves. In their nakedness they discovered the theology of their bodies, the revelation of the mystery of God’s plan of self-donating love. They saw the beauty and the goodness of God’s plan of love and life. They desired nothing else. They saw and knew each other with all the peace of the interior gaze which creates the total intimacy of persons. In their innocence they saw with their hearts not just with their eyes. Thus, they could perceive the person revealed through the body. They could see the spiritual reality in and through the body. Thus, Adam did not merely see a body, but a person made in the image and likeness of God, a somebody.

There is an important lesson here that resonates with us. Sin has not conquered the goodness of our creation. Therefore, through the eyes of faith, we can see this beauty and goodness in spite of graying and falling hair, wrinkles, too much weight, stretch marks, and sagging and deteriorating body parts. Sadly, we often perceive with the false vision of the world, which focuses on what is superficial and passing. Through grace we can reclaim the divine perspective, which is God’s original vision of our bodies.

John Paul II wrote, “Nakedness without shame expresses the fact that holiness entered the visible world.” It shows that Adam and Eve were holy. “Holiness enables man to express himself deeply with his own body precisely by means of the sincere gift of himself.” Holiness, the Pope points out, is always expressed through the body. Therefore, we can’t reject or denigrate our bodies, because holiness expresses God’s love

through our bodies. Jesus teaches us this lesson when he pronounced the most masculine words ever spoken, “This is my body which is given up for you.” This is the gift of self through the body. In their original nakedness Adam and Eve discovered the “nuptial meaning of the body.”

The body has a nuptial meaning because it reveals specifically in the difference between men and women the call to holiness, that is, to be a gift in the image of God. According to John Paul II, “The human body includes right from the beginning the nuptial attributes, that is, the capacity of expressing love.” That love is achieved when a person becomes a gift, and by means of this gift fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.” Jesus’ commandment is to love as I have love you (Jn 13: 34). This call to love as Christ loved is stamped on our bodies. This is the essence of the theology of the body. Neither a man’s nor a woman’s body makes any sense by itself. Why am I a male? Why am I a female? Is our sexuality some freak of nature? However, in the complimentary and completing nature of the male and female bodies we discover the call to be a gift, the call to remain in the image the Blessed Trinity. The call to be like Jesus, the call to love like God loves, and to surrender our bodies like Christ. It’s the call to holiness. It is only as a gift that we fulfill the meaning of our existence.

If we don’t live according to the true meaning of our bodies, we ultimately destroy ourselves. This is the culture of death and self-focus in which we live. It is a culture of men and women who are estranged or cutoff from the nuptial meaning of their bodies. Our society has bought into a bogus version of the human person. As a result our culture inundates us with false messages that give a counterfeit meaning to life. The theology of the body dispels this falsehood and exposes the lie.

If one could choose between a real and a counterfeit \$100 bill, we would always choose the real money. However, what would happen if we were indoctrinated with messages that told us the counterfeit money was real? Wouldn’t we be deceived to choose what is false? This is the world in which we live.

Christians are called to dispel Satan’s lies with the whole truth of their faithful witness. This is accomplished by embracing the nuptial meaning of their bodies by living a life of self-sacrificing love.