

## Theology of the Body: An Overview

By Jim Seghers

My first introduction to Pope John Paul II's theology of the body occurred a few years ago when someone asked me to listen to a Christopher West audiotape on that subject. My initial reaction was one of surprise because I had come to similar conclusions from previous studies that came from different sources. My first major influence was the concept of the covenant, which is the major theme in the Bible. Sacred Scripture frequently describes this relationship in marital imagery. As I examined the covenants God made with a man in the person of Adam, with Noah's family, with the Hebrew people through Abraham, with a nation of many tribes through Moses, and a kingdom covenant through David, I recognized how all these advancements were incorporated and transformed into the new covenant of Christ's blood.

The second element in my preparation came through the study of the Book of Genesis, especially the first three chapters. The dignity of men and women, our glorious origin and destiny, and God's faithfulness jumped out at me. I was particularly struck by Genesis' portrayal of the great dignity of women. This resonated with me because I come from a family that has many extraordinary women. It was also evident that God sanctified marriage right from the beginning.

The final step was my exploration of the biblical presentation of marriage. I discovered that the indissolubility of marriage is biblically indisputable. Even before I carefully examined the New Testament texts about divorce and remarriage, God's declaration in Malachi made a deep impression on me: "For I hate divorce says the Lord the God of Israel" (Mal 2:16). St. Paul's instruction to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5:21-30 is profoundly insightful. This led me to reflect on my own marriage, and to study anew Pope Pius XI's *Casti Connubii* and Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*. John Kippley's *Sex and the Marriage Covenant* was also very helpful.

As a result the Pope John Paul II's masterful theology of the body was an easy read because it incorporated all the elements I had already accepted, but in a compelling way that advanced my understanding and added enriching new insights. The theology of the body is a powerful message that changes lives. Paul Quist, a former Protestant pastor from Canada, heard a presentation on the theology of the body by Christopher West. He was so moved that he gave up his pastorate, uprooted his family so he could earn a Masters Degree in theology from the John Paul II Institute in Australia. During the Easter vigil of 2004, he and his entire family entered the Catholic Church. His is an amazing journey.

In reading the numerous addresses that make up the theology of the body it is evident that John Paul II did not intend his reflections to be exclusively directed to Catholics. He believed that this reexamination of the human person would resonate with all men of good faith who will approach this topic with an open mind.

In 1968 Pope Paul VI issued his prophetic encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in which he reaffirmed the Church's traditional prohibition against artificial contraception. This was the universal position of all Christian churches until 1930. Tragically, the negative reception of *Humanae Vitae* created a division in the Church that exists to this day. Paul VI understood that acceptance of the Church's teaching depended on a healthy understanding of human nature. "It is impossible to understand the Church's teaching in this regard as it is with every issue with human life," wrote the Paul VI, "unless we have an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly, but also his supernatural and eternal vocation."<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI did not provide this total vision in *Humanae Vitae*.

In the divine plan the task of formulating a healthy and balanced anthropology was left to Pope John Paul II. This great accomplishment was the first major instruction of John Paul II's pontificate. In a series of 129 pithy Wednesday addresses given between September 1979 and November 1984, the Pope delivered a profound biblical reflection on the meaning of the embodied human person. Aware that human sexuality is the TNT of life he clarified the profound sacredness of this unique gift. John Paul II gave these presentations the collective title the *Theology of the Body*.

Definition: The <i>theology of the body</i> is John Paul II's biblical reflection on God's mystery discovered in the human body.
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A true Christian anthropology is vital because a defective understanding of what it means to be fully human deforms individuals, the family and, ultimately, society as a whole. George Weigel wrote that John Paul II's theology of the body is a "theological time bomb set to go off with dramatic consequences sometime in the third millennium of the Church...It has barely begun to shape the way the Church understands herself and thinks about herself barely begun to shape the Church's preaching and education, but when it does it will compel a dramatic development of thinking about virtually every major theme in the creed."<sup>2</sup>

The decided emphasis on sexual love in the theology of the body might seem startling to some. However, there is much more to sex than the physical acts and passion involved. "The way we understand and express our sexuality reveals our deepest-held convictions about who we are, who God is, the meaning of love, the ordering of society, and even the ordering of the universe."<sup>3</sup> Therefore the Pope creatively used the focus of human sexuality and married love as his springboard to enlarge our understanding of the meaning of human existence.

It is not possible for men and women to understand themselves apart from their relationship with God as revealed in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the hinge upon whom all history turns. Apart from Jesus humans are adrift in the storms of life without knowledge of their origin and without any heading toward our true destination. In

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<sup>1</sup> *Humanae Vitae*, #. 7.

<sup>2</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 1999, p. 336, 343, 853.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, 2004, pp. 1-2.

nautical terms without Jesus we are lost in the turbulent sea of life. This is a situation that is both painful and dangerous.

Jesus restored mankind's relationship with God in the new covenant of his blood. In that process mankind's destiny came into sharp focus, and men and women were given the means in him to achieve it. The Bible expresses the covenant God established in marital and family terms. In Jesus' marvelous fulfillment of God's covenantal promises the meaning of human life is discovered in love.

Indeed, love identifies authentic Christians. "A new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34, cf Jn 15:12). The Pope teaches that the vocation to love was imbedded in our bodies when God first created humans as male and female and called them to become "one flesh" (Gen 2:24) in the covenant of marriage. This call to love and to be loved began with the creation of Adam and Eve and reached a transcendent fulfillment in Christ's life-giving mission of self-sacrificing love.

Sin is the great distortion. It warps love in all its aspects. Therefore this evil deception always strikes at the union of the sexes, which is the starting point of human love. It is no accident that the theological rebellion, which broke loose in the last century, was obsessed with twisted notions of sex despite its high sounding platitudes about freedom, conscience and fulfillment. These falsehoods strike at the very heart of Christianity because the union of husbands and wives is inseparately linked with the mystery of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:31-33). The theology of the body properly refocuses the Christian vocation as husbands and wives, and as males and females, by developing an elevated understanding of human nature that is rooted in divine revelation.

Human history is replete with examples of the distortions of human nature. Heresies in the Christian era often flow from the failure to accept the paradigms of faith: one God - three Persons, Virgin Mother, God-man, faith and works, body and soul. Through the centuries the Catholic Church has battled against two errors that relate to human body. The one views the body as evil or, at least, as an unfortunate hindrance. It views man as a soul trapped in a lowly body. The body, especially anything to do with sex, is seen as "bad." The body in this distortion is contrasted with the spirit or soul, which is considered "good." Procreation is tolerated as a necessary evil to propagate the human race, but it shouldn't be enjoyed. The goal of life is to escape from the prison of the body.<sup>4</sup> This repressive view of the human body predominated at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is still alive today.

This counterfeit idea is often reflected in our uncomfortableness with our bodies in general and with our sexual parts specifically. For example, how many common slang expressions are there to describe the knee, the elbow, or the foot? The answer, of course, is none. Contrast this to the many slang, even vulgar and belittling expressions that are applied to our sexual parts. Authentic Christianity rejects these distortions because it is a

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<sup>4</sup> These defective ideas are often reflected in Eastern mysticism and religions as well as Christian heresies, for example, Manichaeism.

religion of God's union with humanity through Christ's body: "And the Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). God created the body. He declared that it is good and beautiful.

The second error, which is widely held today, is fixated on the superficial glorification of the human body. It disconnects the body from personhood and views it merely as an object of pleasure and adornment. This leads to a body-beautiful adulation and a preoccupation sexual gratification that is far removed from the Christian ideal of self-donating love. Below this veneer of sexual exaltation one discovers its true face - the ugliness of selfishness, exploitation, violence, and a culture of death. The tragedy of our sex-saturated culture is that it says too little about sex, not too much. What it does say is often twisted because it cheapens and undervalues the body and sex. In spite of the current body beautiful fixation that the media parades before us in various stages of undress, there remains a basic uncomfotableness and ambivalence with our sexuality. This belittling of God's gift is concealed behind the façade of immodesty, pornography, public nudity and promiscuousness.

The negative, repressive approach to human sexuality led to an inadequate "don't do it" or "how far can I go" legalism that led many Christians to jettison the traditional Christian teaching on sex. The first great rupture occurred in 1930 when the Anglican Church broke with the unanimous Christian teaching of 1900 years that contraception was gravely immoral. This event prompted Pius XI to write his famous encyclical *Casti Conubii*. Most Protestant churches followed the lead of the Anglican Church in 1931. General acceptance of contraception among many Catholics awaited the public rebellion against *Humanae Vitae* in 1968.

The current movement in the United States to expunge Christianity from any expression in public life is the last desperate gasp to destroy the Christian sexual ethic. It is not surprising that those who promote pornography, homosexuality and same-sex marriages, abortion, euthanasia, experimentations on human life, revisionist's judges, nature worship, and secularism are drawn together with the same political agenda.

To address these issues John Paul II took a bold, innovative tactic. He recognized that the traditional approaches that focused on *being* and *existence* no longer resonated with modern men and women. The underlining truths they affirmed remained as solid as ever, but in a world in which even the educated were unfamiliar with metaphysics, epistemology and ontology, Christianity needed to present the truth in a language people could understand. That language is human experience. John Paul II believed that the objective truth would ring true if presented within the experiences of men and women.

Therefore the Pope persuasively laid out his case in the theology of the body, but never in apodictic terms. He makes no attempt of force assent. Instead he persuasively presents God's loving plan for humanity. It is a plan of staggering beauty that addresses the critical issues of both our origin and our destiny. Within this message of sexual healing and redemption, the Pope invites all men and women to freely embrace our true dignity. In that process sexual ethics sifts from the extremes of legalism and decadence to genuine freedom, the freedom of sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father.

One of the goals of the Second Vatican Council was to bring the experience of God from the realm of a cold, logical abstraction to a deep personal encounter with the Personal God in the Person of Jesus Christ, who loves and embraces us. Within Protestant circles this highly personal idea is often captured with the meaningful expression, accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. How is this personal encounter achieved? John Paul II teaches that God comes to us in the things we know best and can verify most easily. What is more verifiable every day than the experience of our own bodies?

When the eternal Word “became flesh” (Jn 1:14) mankind was given the definitive vehicle of encountering God on a profoundly personal level. John Paul declared: “The truth of Christian Revelation, found in Jesus of Nazareth, enables all men and women to embrace the “mystery” of their own life.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). Christianity is not a religion of a book, not even a divinely inspired book. Rather it is a religion focused on God’s union with humanity that centers on the Word made flesh. In “the body of Jesus ‘we see our God made visible and so are caught up in the love of God we cannot see.’”<sup>6</sup> The marvel is that Jesus meets us at our level, because as humans we can only encounter God through our bodies. In the Incarnation, God assumed a body and became a man. This breathtaking event permanently removed God from the detached status of a theological abstraction.

In assuming human nature Jesus hid His divinity to become one with us and to elevate humans to share in the divine life (2 Pet 1:4) and become God’s family (1 Jn 3:1). Intimate communion with God becomes possible in Jesus. The divine Word embraced all humanity when he assumed a human body. The staggering reality of the Incarnation is that the God-man made our divinization possible.<sup>7</sup> In assuming a body God made it possible for humans to become gods by elevating us to share in his nature (2 Pet 1:4)! This idea is captured in the beautiful prayer the priest prays at the offertory of the Mass as he adds a little water to the wine: “By the mystery of this water and wine *may we share in the divinity of Christ* who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” This stupendous reality is experienced through our bodies.

2 Peter 1:3-4 “His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and goodness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very real promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature.”

1 John 3:1 “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”

<sup>5</sup> *Ratio et Fides*, # 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, # 477 - henceforth abbreviated as CCC.

<sup>7</sup> It would, of course, be a heresy to conclude that our participation in the divine nature implies that we lose our created status and become equal to God.

When the Word became flesh, he came into our world as a male. This was no arbitrary decision. Jesus' sexuality, his maleness, was essential to his mission. He came as the heavenly bridegroom (Jn 3:20; Rev 21:9) to surrender his body for his bride (Eph 5:25), the Church. Jesus' birth, passion, death, and resurrection were all bodily experiences. His body was never an obstacle to his relationship with the Father. Rather it was in his body that he expressed his love for the Father and brought about our redemption (Heb 10:10). Jesus fully embraced the limitations of his body as he submitted to the will of the Father for us. "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:8-10). So, too, we must accept the limitations of our bodies. This understanding is totally at odds with the bankrupt idea that the spirit/soul is good, but the body/sex is bad.

At the moment of human creation God made every aspect of humanness "good" including our bodies. The Hebrew word translated as "good" also means "beautiful." The *Catechism* teaches that "the beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator."<sup>8</sup> The beauty and dignity of the human body took on a soaring meaning when the Word took flesh and sanctified, even defied the human body. Jesus is a divine Person *in the flesh* (Jn 1:14). He was so fully human that St. Paul affirmed Jesus can "sympathize with our weaknesses" because he was "tempted as we are, yet without sinning" (Heb 4:15).

Contemporary Christians are so focus on the divinity of Jesus that we often neglect to reflect on his humanness. Jesus did not have a phantom body, but a real body like ours. As a result the Catechism proclaims: "'The flesh is the hinge of salvation.' We believe in God who is creator of the flesh; we believe in the Word made flesh in order to redeem flesh; we believe in the resurrection of the flesh, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh."<sup>9</sup>

The very idea of a theology of the body rests on the mystery of the Incarnation - God made flesh. But isn't theology the study of God? How, then, can we speak about a theology that seems to focus on the human body? The theology of the body also centers on God, like all theology, but on God incarnate - in the flesh. Jesus is not only the hinge upon whom all history turns; he is the focal point of theology. However, because the eternal Son of the Father became a man, the body entered theology through the main door.

All human communication is conducted through our bodies. It is how we share our spiritual dimension. This reciprocal sharing through our bodies is called "communion" and "communication," that is, the establishment of a common union. Humans achieve this common union through their bodies. According to John Paul II: "The body, in fact, and it alone is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the mystery hidden since time

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<sup>8</sup> CCC, # 341.

<sup>9</sup> CCC, # 1015.

immemorial in God, and this to be a sign of it”<sup>10</sup> This reality is most uniquely achieved through the “Word made flesh” (Jn 1:14). However, although the invisible reality of God becomes completely visible to us in Jesus Christ, through his body, the mystery of God is also revealed in our own bodies.

The Pope taught that the human body was created to bring to the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from all eternity. The body is a sign of the invisible mystery of God. In this sense the body can be viewed as a kind of sacrament. Our bodies are not divine, but they are a *sign* of the divine mystery. As a sign or symbol the body points to a divine realities beyond itself.

What is the “invisible mystery of God?” It is the revelation of God’s inner nature, which is the eternal self-sacrificing gift of three Persons in the infinitude of love. In the words of the *Catechism*, “God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Each Person gives and receives totally and without limit. Love is synonymous with self-giving. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8), St. John informs us. God’s overflowing love is communicated to us through the body. Thus, we speak of a theology of the body, because the mystery of God is revealed through the body. God now has a human face, Jesus Christ. In a less perfect way God has also stamped his image on our bodies.

The bubbling over of the infinite love within the Blessed Trinity, God’s exchange of love, is the cause of our creation. God ardently desired to expand his overflowing love with a multitude of persons. Thus in the very act of creation God communicated his love and revealed that it is the human destiny to eternally share in that love. This two-part mystery of communion of love in self-donation is revealed in Genesis in the beauty of our sexual differences and in the committed union to become “one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

The truths God partially revealed in Genesis were illuminated in Christ. Jesus, the God-man, shows the depth of God’s love for us in his human body through our bodies to our hearts. Therefore it follows that we must understand God’s plan for our body in order to understand His plan for us as persons, which is to surrender to the eternal Being of Love and radiate that love to others. Distorted notions of the human body, like those described earlier, ultimately lead to a denigration of the human person and a rupture or, at least, a deformity in our relationship with God and each other.

Crippled Christians cannot adequately reflect God’s love to others. It is only in our bodies that we make visible in the world this eternal mystery of Trinitarian love. The martyr St. John Gabriel Perboyre captured this idea perfectly when he composed the Jesus Prayer.

O my divine Savior, transform me into yourself.  
May my hands be the hands of Jesus.  
May my tongue be the tongue of Jesus.  
Grant that every faculty of my body may serve you.

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<sup>10</sup> *Theology of the Body*, February 30, 1980 (henceforward, TB followed by the date).

<sup>11</sup> CCC, # 221.

Above all, transform my soul and all its powers  
that my memory and my will and my affections  
may be the memory, the will, and the affections of Jesus.  
Grant that I may live but in thee and for thee,  
And that I may truly say with St. Paul: "I live, now not I,  
But Christ lives in me."

Humans are called to be incarnational, that is, to live their humanness fully in their bodies because they are incorporated into Christ. We live the reality of our life in Christ in our bodies not in our souls apart from or in spite of our bodies. In assuming uniting a human body the Word joined himself to all humans. The goal of the Christian life is to live an authentic incarnational spirituality. The power of the theology of the body is that it removes theology from the realm of abstraction and makes our knowledge of God real and concrete in a way that ordinary men and women can relate.

What is the aspect of our bodies that allows us to be representations in the world of the mystery of the God's Trinitarian love? It is the revelation that God created humans in His image and likeness, as men and women: "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'" (Gen 1:27-28). Human sexuality, the complimentary differences of the sexes and the call to committed, life-giving donation and communion, justifies speaking of the body as a theology. In the human body the eternal mystery of the Trinity and the relationship of Jesus with the Church are revealed to the world.

God is at the same time Love and Father within the mystery of His inner dynamism. His very nature radiates love and fruitfulness. Analogies are frequently inadequate to fully express the meaning we are attempting to convey. In respect to God they always limp because the dissimilarities are greater than the similarities. There is, for example, a certain similarity between human fatherhood and the Fatherhood of God. However, the dissimilarities are infinitely greater than the common elements because God is Father in a manner that transcends all human paternity. Likewise human sexuality expressed in the commitment of marriage reflects the inner life of the Trinity, but this does not imply that God is sexual because His spiritual being transcends all sexuality.<sup>12</sup>

Biblical analogies like shepherd and sheep, the vine and the branches, the king and his subjects are of value, but they all have substantial limitations. The most widely used biblical analogy is the spousal or marriage analogy, which is intimately connected to the covenant. This is the least inadequate of all the biblical analogies. According to John Paul II the spousal analogy reveals a characteristic of God's inner life that is not contained in any other biblical analogy. In the spousal analogy we discover the mystery of God's gift of Himself to humanity, which expresses and reflects the total self-giving within the Persons of the Trinity. Therefore God's gift calls humans to be open to that

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<sup>12</sup> CCC, #'s 370, 42, 239.

gift in their surrender to God. The result of this submission is a life-giving union with God in Jesus Christ. Why?

The human body, according to John Paul II, innately contains a nuptial (marital, spousal) meaning. He teaches that the sexual differences between males and females express a complimentary call to union and communion in life-giving, self-donating love. In this relationship the hidden mystery of God's inner life is revealed, namely, the eternal loving self-giving of the Persons of the Trinity. This idea is already revealed in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament God describes his love for his people as the love of a husband for his wife. Infidelity is called adultery (Jer 3:8; 9:2; 23:10; Ezek 23:37; Hos 7:4). In the New Testament Jesus assumes human nature as a male because he is the heavenly bridegroom (Jn 3:24) fulfilling the spousal analogy of the Old Testament as he lays down his life for his bride (Eph 5:25).

Faithfully living the marriage analogy is vital to human destiny. Men are called to become a faithful bridegroom who makes the gift of his fidelity to his bride by his willingness to lay down his life for her. Women are called to accept this gift into herself and to reciprocate with the gift of herself in surrendering love. These complimentary roles are not a question of assertiveness on the one hand, and passivity on the other, but one of giving and receiving in reciprocal love. In the very giving of the gift to his wife a husband simultaneously receives her gift. In the receiving of the gift of the bridegroom, the bride returns the gift of herself.

God is the initiator of this self-giving because he is the creator. He freely gives us His life and love. In our relationship to God, both men and women assume the role of the bride as we receive His gift and are called to surrender ourselves to Him.

Who is the one human who most perfectly received the gift of God and responded with complete surrender? It is Mary, the Mother, the new Eve, the "woman" of Genesis 3:15 who the angel Gabriel addressed as "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). The verb form of the Greek verb *charitoo*, *kecharitoméne*, is a perfect passive participle. In addressing Mary the angel Gabriel attests that she is endowed with grace of a permanent and singular kind, a perfection of grace or perfect holiness. He affirms that the *fullness of grace* is both intensive and extensive. This is the same verb form used to express the finished work of Christ: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). The whole work of redemption is complete both intensively and extensively. In Mary's total surrender to the gift of God she conceived the Incarnate Gift within herself. When we surrender to God, he is conceived in us. Jesus shows us God's love. Mary shows us how to respond to that love.

In "the woman" is discovered the awesome dignity of all women. Mary is the perfect human model of how women should respond to God. This response is most perfectly expressed in motherhood. In her capacity of wife and mother women show men and women what it means to be fully human. They demonstrate that to be fully human we must surrender to the gift of God's love by allowing it to be conceived within us. Then

we can bring forth this love to transform the world. The awesome dignity of women is not threat to authentic masculinity. It is simply a recognition that women often teach men what it means to be fully human.

The dignity of women explains the devil “enmity” toward “the woman” (Gen 3:15). He hates life and fruitfulness. His aim is to prevent her, and through her all humans, from conceiving God’s life within themselves. In this way he would block God’s life from being fruitful in the world. This is the fundamental aim of the current attack on motherhood, the denigration of women through a false feminism, and the assault on life.

The first Eve was called to embody God’s life and love. Both the first and the second Eve were approached by angels, the one by Lucifer and the other by Gabriel. Lucifer brought a message of deception, a kind of anti-annunciation that denied and distorted the gift of God’s life within her. Gabriel brought a message of life and submissiveness to Mary, which asked her to surrender to God’s life within her.

In Ephesians 5 St. Paul expanded the “one flesh” (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31) union God established at the dawn of human creation by showing its connection with the profound mystery of Christ and the Church. Jesus left his Father’s house in heaven, as well as his mother’s house on earth, so he could sacrifice his body for his bride with whom he becomes one flesh in the Eucharist! “This is my body given up for you” (Lk 22:19). Through his body Jesus achieved oneness with human nature and effected our redemption. In the reception of the Eucharist the relationship with the heavenly bridegroom with his bride is consummated and eternal life is conceived in us. “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink my blood, you have no life in you” (Jn 6:53). The bride must be one with the bridegroom in order to conceive life.

There is a profound sense that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the bridegroom and the bride. In the Eucharist Jesus teaches us the meaning of masculinity and femininity. In the reception of the Eucharist and intercourse between a husband and his wife we discover two holy communions because union between a husband and wife forms the great sign of Holy Communion. This reality lends profound insight into the meaning of theology of the body. From the beginning when God made them male and female. Adam and Eve reflected in their bodies both the self-donation of Trinitarian life and the union of Christ with the Church.

The theology of the body is emphatically a spousal theology. It begins in Genesis with marriage of Adam and Eve. It’s culmination is foreseen the Book of Revelation in the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb and his bride. In this context it becomes clear that the theology of the body transcends sex and marriage because it teaches *the authentic meaning of being a human being*.

Theology of the body answers the fundamental questions. Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be a woman? What am I supposed to do with my life? Why

did God call men and women to a nuptial relationship that is aimed toward fruitfulness in children? Why is there evil in the world? What is my destiny? How will get there?

The answers to these inherently sexual questions determine the course of ones life and the destiny of civilizations. Confusion about sexual morality hides a deeper confusion about the human person. In regard to man's sexual behavior it shifts the focus from "How far can I go?" or "What can't I do?" to "What does it mean to be human?"

As early as 1960 Karol Wojtyla, the future John Paul II, wrote that confusion about sexual morality "involves a danger perhaps greater than is generally realized: the danger of confusing the basic and fundamental human tendencies, the main paths of human existence. Such confusion must clearly effect the whole spiritual position of man."<sup>13</sup>

The contemporary tragedy is that many people tend to divorce their sexuality from the positive aspects of their spirituality. It is almost as if their sexual dimension is the unfortunate burden with which they were tragically inflicted. John Paul II says, "No!" We are called to integrate our sexuality with our spirituality as we direct our whole selves to God. Consider great saints like St. Therese, St. Catherine, St. Paul, and St. John of the Cross. Their sexuality was an integral part of who they were.

John Paul II taught in the *Gospel of Life*: "It is an illusion to think we can build a true culture of human life if we do not help the young to accept and experience sexuality and love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and their close inter-connection. ... The trivialization of sexuality is among the principal factors which led to the contempt for new life."<sup>14</sup>

"Within the same cultural climate [of practical materialism, which breeds individualism, utilitarianism and hedonism], the *body* is no longer perceived as a properly personal reality, a sign and place of relations with others, with God and with the world. It is reduced to pure materiality: it is simply a complex of organs, functions and energies to be used according to the sole criteria of pleasure and efficiency. Consequently, *sexuality* too is depersonalized and exploited: from being the sign, place and language of life, that is, of the gift of self and acceptance of another, in all the other's richness as a person, it increasingly becomes the occasion and instrument for self-assertion and the selfish satisfaction of personal desires and instincts. Thus the original import of human sexuality is distorted and falsified, and the two meanings, unitive and procreative inherent in the very nature of the conjugal act, are artificially separated: in this way the marriage union is betrayed and its fruitfulness is subjected to the caprice of the couple. *Procreation* then becomes the 'enemy' to be avoided in sexual activity: if it is welcomed, this is only because it expresses a desire, or indeed the intention, to have a child 'at all costs,' and not because it signifies the complete acceptance of the other and therefore an openness to the richness of life which the child represents."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Love and Responsibility*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> *Evangelium Vitae* # 97.

<sup>15</sup> *Evangelium Vitae* # 23.

The key to understanding our humanity is found in discovering the meaning of our bodies, because the body alone can make visible to us the mystery of God. In discovering the truth of the body we also uncover the great conflict between good and evil, between life and death, and between love and hatred. In Ephesians 6 St. Paul issues a call to take up arms in the great battle of spiritual warfare. He begins with the command “gird your loins with the truth” (Eph 6:14). In this great battle of spiritual warfare the focal point is on the meaning of human sexuality, the body.

There is at the same time a counterfeit plan. The father of lies (Jn 8:44) promotes a deceptive understanding of the body in order to prevent us from achieving our destiny of wedded union with the Lamb. He strives to corrupt the purpose God built into the very fabric of our bodies as male and females. When God’s plan for marriage is rejected through his twisted notions of human sexuality, our sexual expressions become destructive instead of life giving.

God’s plan for the body is *spousal*, deeply rooted in marriage, which brings life into the world. His plan is good and beautiful. The devil, on the other hand, creates nothing. He can only disfigure and deform. When we accept his lies we rupture God’s plan with disastrous results in this life and an eternity of misery and torture in the next life. His program can only breed death, unhappiness and regrets. Why is this so?

The devil’s agenda attempts to destroy human life at its basic element, the family. Human sexuality according to God’s plan brings life, fulfillment, a sense of purpose and happiness. Twisted human sexuality according to Satan’s false plan fractures persons bringing death, estrangement, using and being used, unhappiness, self-indulgence, loneliness and emptiness. The misuse of God’s plan for human sexuality is the root cause of our culture of death and all its attendant evils.

The future of our civilization hinges on a proper relationship between men and women. Will we continue down the slippery slope of self-destruction by our continued selfish exploitation of one another? Or will we welcome the new evangelization, which calls males and females to seek their true dignity by embracing the spousal mystery in Christ. It is only in restoring families by orientating them toward love and life that our society will also be restored. There is no other way.

The destructive changes in our society in the past generation is amazing. Let’s consider one example. When I was in grammar school I didn’t know a single boy or girl who came from a divorced family. Today there is hardly any family that is not so impacted including my own.

Sex embraces the mystery of our masculinity and femininity of which intercourse is only one aspect. When we hear the word “sex” what comes to your mind? Is it the distortion of human sexuality that has produced our culture of death, or is it the committed complimentary union between a husband and wife in marriage that foreshadows the inner life of the Trinity and the relationship of Jesus, the heavenly bridegroom, with the

Church? We are called to reclaim that which the devil has distorted. This is the great battleground of the lay apostolate