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“Theology and a Pub”

## John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*

### I. Introduction

Sources: John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*  
Hogan and Levoir, *Covenant of Love*  
Steven Kellmeyer, *Sex and the Sacred City*  
Walter Schu, *The Splendor of Love*  
Christopher West, *The Good News about Sex and Marriage*  
*Theology of the Body Explained*  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

- A. in the modern world the body and sexuality have been drained of their meaning
  - 1. casual or recreational sex
  - 2. sex as a contact sport (George Weigel, *The Truth of Catholicism*)
  - 3. the greatest crisis of the Church and of society is the crisis of marriage and the family
  
- B. The *Theology of the Body* is a collective title given to 129 homilies that JP II delivered in his Wednesday General Audiences between Sept. 5, 1979 and Nov. 28, 1984
  - 1. first set already prepared before he became pope
  - 2. he had already written *Love and Responsibility* which is a philosophical exploration of human sexuality
  - 3. John Paul has presented a depth of understanding of the human person and our call to “nuptial love” never before articulated (West, *Good News* 169)
  - 4. JP 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. When that happens perhaps in the twenty-first century, the theology of the body may well be seen as a critical moment not only in Catholic theology, but in the history of modern thought” (Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 343).
  - 5. 2/3 of what the Catholic Church has taught on Sex and marriage have come from the pontificate of JP II
  
- C. *TB* is divided into 2 Major Parts composed of 7 Cycles
  - 1. Part One: (Original Humanity and Fallen Humanity)
    - a. Cycle 1: Original Unity of Man and Woman - Catechesis on the Book of Genesis

- b. Cycle 2: Blessed are the Pure of Heart – Catechesis on the Sermon on the Mount
- 2. Part Two: Life according to the Spirit (Redeemed Humanity)
  - a. Cycle 3: St. Paul’s Teaching on the Human Body
  - b. Cycle 4: The Resurrection of the Body
  - c. Cycle 5: Virginity for the Sake of the Kingdom
  - d. Cycle 6: The Sacramentality of Marriage
  - e. Cycle 7: Reflections on *Humanae Vitae*
- 3. JPII says his catechesis can be called “Human Love in the Divine Plan: The Redemption of the Body and the Sacramentality of Marriage”

## II. Part One: (Original Humanity and Fallen Humanity)

- A. Cycle 1: Original Unity of Man and Woman - Catechesis on the Book of Genesis
  - 1. Starts with the Pharisees’ question to Jesus about divorce in Mt 19:3ff.
    - a. In responding to their question Jesus takes them back to “the beginning” Mt 19:4-5; Gen 2:24
    - b. Christ takes us back to the way in which man and woman were formed in the mystery of creation in order to teach us about marriage and what it means to be male and female
  - 2. In the beginning Adam needed someone to teach him how to love and how to draw himself out of his original solitude
    - a. In his solitude Adam realized:
      - (1) he was not God, nor matter, nor animals
      - (2) there was no one like him
    - b. the body revealed the nuptial foundation of reality
      - (1) to be human is not to be an isolated individual, an isolated thinking and acting self (Gen 2:18)
      - (2) in the Genesis account man experiences being alone when looking at other bodies and he realizes himself in looking at the body of the woman
        - (a) In the Genesis account man does not have a suitable help-mate in any of the creatures of the garden (Gen 2: 19-20)
        - (b) none of the animals provides the opportunity for man to exist in a relationship of self-giving
        - (c) After God creates woman, the man recognizes himself in her by saying, “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” (Gen 2: 23) – nuptial cry
      - (3) the complementarity of the male and female bodies reveal that we are made to be gift, to express love for one another, to exist for some one – the nuptial meaning of the body

- (4) Being two aspects of a unified image of love, Man and Woman only find who they are through each other
- 3. between man and woman there was original unity (dual-unity)
  - a. Man and woman are created in God's image (Gen 1:26 – “let us make”)
    - (1) “male and female he created them...” (Gen 1:27)
    - (2) in creating man male and female God gives man and woman equal personal dignity (CCC 2334)
  - b. Equal dignity does not equal identity or sameness
    - (1) each of the two sexes is an image of the power and tenderness of God, with equal dignity though in different ways (CCC 2335)
    - (2) sexuality affects all aspects of the human person in the unity of body and soul (CCC 2332)
    - (3) every man and woman should accept his or her sexual identity because sexuality is a gift which I receive from God (CCC 2333)
    - (4) our sexuality determines our affectivity, how I can relate interpersonally, and the capacity to love and procreate (CCC 2332)
    - (5) sexuality is not just about “parts”
  - c. the physical and spiritual difference of man and woman is oriented towards complementarity (CCC 2333)
    - (1) without woman the work of Creation is unfinished
    - (2) only with woman is the Image and the human person completed
- 4. the body and the duality of the sexes is a revelation of God inscribed in creation
  - a. “God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image..., God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the *vocation*, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of *love* and communion.” (CCC 2331)
    - (1) Only in the distinction between masculinity and femininity can love be realized through the body and the love within the Godhead be fully imaged
    - (2) sexuality governs the way in which we form bonds of communion with other people, and makes communion possible
  - b. thus our bodies can express and reflect the Image of the Trinity
    - (1) it is sexual difference which allows man and woman to unite in a communion of persons in marriage, express love through a body, and imitate in the flesh the Creator's fecundity and generosity (CCC 2335; Gen 2:24)
    - (2) all human beings proceed from this union, which means

that the harmony of the couple and of society depends in part on the way in which sexual complementarity, needs, and mutual support between the sexes are lived out (CCC 2333)

- (3) The “image” is only completed in a communion of love, between man and woman, that mirrors that of the Trinity
  - (4) Thus each person, male and female, possesses a specific dignity according to how God has made them and only by giving as gift what is uniquely theirs can they complete God’s image
  - c. reciprocal self-donation of body and soul in intimate communion is the experience of original union (Gen 2:25)
5. the human body is meant to make love visible in the world - the Incarnation shows this
- a. only the human body can express love
  - b. the body expresses who the person is
    - (1) we are an intimate union of body and soul (CCC #364-365) – embodied spirits
    - (2) our bodies are sacraments of our souls
    - (3) John Paul II calls the body a visible part of the soul
    - (4) what we do with our bodies we do with our person
      - (a) Our society acts as if this were not true
      - (b) sexual intercourse is a personal act, not just a bodily act
  - c. The body plays a part in revealing God’s love in the world
    - (1) The body is part of God’s revelation and man expresses himself through it (1 Cor 6:13-20)
    - (2) Man is a Unity of Body and Soul, and in this totality man images God
    - (3) “The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus be a sign of it.”
    - (4) Masculinity and femininity are visible signs (sacraments) of the inner life of God who is a Communion of Persons
    - (5) sexual union is meant to be a window on the total gift of self among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
6. Summary of Original Meaning of Sexuality
- a. Person = Being-Gift; We can only find ourselves by making a sincere gift of ourselves.
  - b. Body = Gift-Sign; Sexuality expressed the total reciprocal self-gift of man and woman which imaged the Self-Gift of the Trinity
  - c. Freedom - the fundamental characteristic of the person that allows us to live out our being-gift
    - (1) if we seek the meaning of freedom and why God gave it to us we see it is our capacity for giving and God gave it to us to be able to give

- (2) an abuse of freedom leads to a breakdown of communion
- (3) realizing oneself as self-gift is true freedom
  - (a) John Paul II sees the lack of understanding of human sexuality and marriage stemming from a misunderstanding of freedom<sup>1</sup>
  - (b) True freedom is contingent upon the truth that comes from God about our nature and can never be separated from it
  - (c) A concept of freedom that claims to be absolute (i.e. doing whatever one wants) ends up treating the human body as raw datum or a tool for pleasure

B. Cycle 2: Blessed are the Pure of Heart – Catechesis on the Sermon on the Mount

1. JPII focuses on the text in Mt 5:27-28 in which Christ speaks of “adultery in the heart”
2. the Fall destroys the original unity of man and woman and violates the gift of self
  - a. Gen 3:7 shows the appearance of lust in the relationship and a loss of inner harmony
  - b. Gen 3:12 – the blame game - shows the breakdown of interpersonal communion between man and woman
  - c. Gen 3:16 - the tendency to dominate each other
  - d. Satan strikes at the nuptial bond between man and woman
3. lust looks at another person as an object of gratification
  - a. violating the person as gift and distorting the meaning of the body
  - b. things move from giving to taking
  - c. fear of relationships results (covering themselves in Gen 3:7)
  - d. becoming a taker rather than a giver affects our total outlook on persons and on life
4. lust and adultery of the heart can exist in a marriage between spouses
5. Jesus is telling us that self-mastery to control our desires must be undertaken instead of letting them control us
  - a. this involves practicing virtue to become self-gift
    - (1) *chastity* is the virtue that enables us to express true love in our physical displays of affection and avoids genital stimulation outside of the marital embrace
    - (2) *purity* allows us to see God’s glory revealed in the body
    - (3) *modesty* guards the holiness of the body
  - b. with these virtues we can experience true freedom and sexual love can be a means of sanctification
6. JPII asks, “Are we to fear the severity of these words [Mt 5:27-28], or have confidence in their salvific content, in their power?”
  - a. Christ came to restore God’s original intention of love in the world
  - b. through an ongoing conversion of heart we can experience the

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<sup>1</sup> See especially *Familiaris consortio* 6.

- redemption of our sexuality
- c. Christ wants to redeem all of us, body and soul
- d. Christ redeems our love by incorporating us into his union with his Church and nourishing us through the sacraments
- e. This is the “Good News about Sex and Marriage” and we must not empty the Cross of Christ of its power

### III. Part Two: Life According to the Spirit (Redeemed Humanity)

#### A. Cycle 3: St. Paul’s Teaching on the Human Body

1. Paul contrasts life according to the flesh (Rom 8:5-11; Gal 5:21) with life according to the Spirit (Gal 5:1, 13-14)
2. 1 Cor 6:18-19 shows that we are not our own, but are temples of the Holy Spirit
3. Our bodies are holy!
4. We cannot turn the body into an object or a thing!

#### B. Cycle 4: The Resurrection of the Body (the Fullness of Redemption)

1. the resurrected life is the fulfillment of God’s plan
2. this fulfillment includes the perfect integration of man as embodied spirits made in the image and likeness of God
3. Jesus speaks of the resurrected life in Mt 22:24-30
  - a. marriage will not exist
  - b. yet, gender will not be destroyed, but fulfilled
4. the body will partake in ultimate happiness which is personal/nuptial union with God in the ultimate communion of persons (shows just how holy the body is)

#### C. Cycle 5: Virginity for the Sake of the Kingdom

1. Jesus speaks of “eunuchs for the Kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:10-12)
  - a. the ultimate reason for celibacy and virginity is for the Kingdom
  - b. this higher purpose is a spousal unity through a gift of self
  - c. the purpose for permanent continence is love in imitation of Christ, who is both fully consecrated and fully spouse
2. celibacy is the greatest sign of the resurrected life when God will be everything to everyone
  - a. Everyone is meant to be in a nuptial relationship with Christ
  - b. celibates do not have contempt for sexuality, but willingly forego marriage out of a desire to give themselves wholly to God, and so wholly to others for God’s sake
    - (1) this is why celibacy is the higher calling
    - (2) it is not a refusal to give oneself, but a willingness to be nothing but a gift, body and soul – thus realizing one’s humanity
  - c. human spousal union is a sign of the spousal union that the

- celibate is already experiencing
- 9. marriage and celibacy complement each other in revealing the nuptial meaning of the body
  - a. they are not opposed, and when one suffers the other suffers
  - b. celibates shows married spouses how to subordinate and consecrate their love to Christ
  - c. married spouses remind celibates of the spousal nature of their union with Christ

#### D. Cycle 6: The Sacramentality of Marriage

1. JPII analyzes Eph 5:21-33
2. the sacramental understanding of marriage is drawn from Christ's relationship to the Church
  - a. the primordial sacrament of marriage lost its meaning after the Fall
  - b. Christ not only restored marriage to the beginning, but he elevated it to a means of obtaining grace
  - c. baptized spouses participate in Christ's spousal love for the Church
    - (1) sacramental marriage is indissoluble because Christ never leaves his Church (Mt 19:9)
    - (2) marriage is also to be fruitful and faithful because Christ's love is
  - f. Eph 5:21 shows that, "The mutual relations of husband and wife should flow from their common relationship with Christ," in mutual subjection to each other
3. in the sacrament of marriage the body becomes an efficacious sign of grace
  - a. Eph 5:28 shows that the bodies of husbands and wives are sacred in their one-flesh union
  - b. Christ gives the grace to spouses to discover the true freedom of being a gift through the nuptial meaning of the body to form a life-long communion of persons
  - c. sexual intercourse in marriage can be a means of attaining grace
4. JPII says that the essential sign of the sacrament of marriage is the "language of the body" that speaks truth
  - a. sexual intercourse is meant to be a physical expression of the wedding vows
    - (1) free, total, faithful, fruitful
    - (2) a liturgical language of praise and worship
  - b. sexual intercourse is a gift of one's whole self to another
    - (1) a eucharistic offering of one spouse to the other
    - (2) the Eucharist is the sacramental consummation of the marriage between Christ and his Church (West, 20) – a Spousal union in one-flesh
  - c. anything short of this language of complete mutual self-donation is

“speaking” a lie with the body (why only spouses have a right to sexual intercourse)

E. Cycle 7: Reflections on *Humanae Vitae* (Paul VI, 25 July 1968)

1. JPII says his whole catechesis can be seen as a commentary on HV
2. thus, JPII grounds the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* in the gift of self and the language of self-gift that the body should speak
  - a. the morality of the marriage act is determined by the nature of the act and the personal dignity of the spouses
    - (1) the act itself is designed for union and procreation (natural law)
      - (a) sexual intercourse is a unique expression of love which has an inherent procreative potential
      - (b) spouses have the responsibility of maintaining the full meaning of every act of sexual intercourse in both its procreative and unitive dimensions
      - (c) these two ends are not opposed to each other and neither one or the other can be purposefully bracketed off of the act without damaging the inherent structure of the act and the persons involved
    - (2) thus the language of truth that the body must speak in sexual union is the language of life-giving love
  - b. rejecting one’s fertility is rejecting what intercourse is most made for
    - (1) it rejects life
    - (2) it also rejects a total gift of self and thus also opposes love
  - c. the difference between contraception and NFP
    - (1) contraception is an act which attempts to change the nature of sexual intercourse by directly opposing the life giving potential of the act
      - (a) contra – [con]ception
      - (b) spouses make themselves the lords of life
    - (2) contraception also does not allow for a communion of persons because the fullness of the person is not being communicated – “I want all of you...but that”
      - (a) it falsifies the wedding vows in which one pledged a total gift of oneself that is open to fruit
      - (b) it turns the human person into “an object of manipulation”
    - (3) NFP can be used for serious reasons to avoid conception (e.g. medical, financial, psychological, social) by having intercourse during infertile times
      - (a) it is working with God’s design of sexuality, not trying to change it

- (b) NFP is natural because it conforms to God's plan for the sexual act and His plan for the good of the person
  - (c) this is not "natural contraception" because there is no attempt to change the nature of the sexual act
  - (d) the woman's or man's fertility is not rejected, and there is still a total giving of self
  - (e) NFP promotes communication and can keep a couple from overemphasizing sex in their relationship
  - (f) NFP is true family planning because it can be used to conceive life
  - (g) NFP promotes self-mastery through the practice of virtue and helps the couple overcome lust
- d. responsible parenthood involves dialogue with God and must preserve His plan for sexual intercourse
- (1) responsible parenthood is a vocation of service to life-giving love ("birth control" is not about birth or control)
  - (2) God has engrained His plan for human love in our sexuality
  - (3) God's plan is for our good and our happiness
  - (4) Any difficulties can be overcome through grace
    - (a) We *can* direct our sexuality to express true love and experience the freedom of being self-gift
    - (b) 3 means of self-mastery to achieve God's plan for human love in marriage
      - [1] prayer – with each other
      - [2] penance – to strengthen our wills to adhere to the good and the true
      - [3] eucharist – allowing Christ to consummate his nuptial union with us so that he may live in us and enable us to make the same offering of ourselves to our spouse and to Him

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