

The Theology of The Body According To Pope John Paul II

I. General Outline of the Theology of the Body

Cycle I: The Original Unity of Man and Woman

In Matthew 19:3-12 (the question of the Pharisees regarding divorce), Jesus twice refers to “the *beginning*” as a normative revelation. He appeals to Genesis 1 and 2 to establish a *theological anthropology*, which underscores the importance of the *body* as the means to reveal the person, carrying out truly personal actions in the material world. This person-centered approach (*personalism*) relies on a philosophical method known as *phenomenology*, which brings basic human experiences to articulate awareness in order to discover objective truths enshrined in experience.

Jesus’ appeal to “the beginning” allows us to distinguish between the state of *original innocence* or *original justice*, and the state of original sin. Traces or “*echoes*” of this original justice are still present to human experience, even for *historical man* who lives under the influence of sin but with echoes of original justice and open to the power of redemption.

Adam (the first human person, given self-knowledge and the power of choice) finds himself “alone” among the animals in *original solitude*. When the woman (*ishah*) is created from the rib taken from the man (*ish*), he responds with joy that God has provided a helpmate and another person capable of loving and being loved in a *communion of persons*. This *original unity* of man and woman was experienced in *original nakedness*, in which the *nuptial meaning of the body* of the man and the woman is understood with a full, pure consciousness as the perfect revelation of the person, who is called to love through the free, total gift of self; this is the *freedom of the gift*. Their original unity reveals the broad mystery of marriage as the *primordial sacrament*: the mystery of marriage is willed by God from all eternity as the pattern for the divine plan of salvation. Marriage is a sacrament in the broadest sense of something that makes visible an invisible reality: namely, the eternal plan of God’s love to call us into union with Him to share divine life. The man and the woman “know” one another in sexual intercourse; this *knowledge* is a deep, conscious participation in the mystery of the full nuptial meaning of the body as a total gift of oneself through the body.

Original sin, human’s first disobedience to God, leads to the “boundary experience” of *shame*, in which the peace of the original unity is lost and the state of “historical man” begins. Shame has both a negative meaning (loss of respect in the heart for the nuptial meaning of the body) and a positive, protective meaning (the inherent drive to protect that nuptial meaning from violation). “As a result of the sinfulness contracted with original sin, man and woman must reconstruct, with great effort, the meaning of the disinterested mutual gift.”

Cycle II: Blessed Are the Pure of Heart

In speaking about “adultery in the heart” (Matthew 5:27-28), Jesus reveals the interaction between *eros* (sexual attraction and desire) and *ethos* (the authentically good). For “historical man,” living with the reality of original sin and the loss of original justice, *eros* is tainted by *lust*, leading to *concupiscence*. This distorts the meaning and freedom of the gift and disrupts the interpretation of the body – *lust* now changes the relationship between man and woman into one of opposition, fear of vulnerability, and the desire for the possession and use of the other’s body for selfish ends. *Lust* affects the “*heart*” (the deepest center of personal choice and activity). It does not destroy, but continually threatens, the possibility of living the true nuptial meaning of the body. Thus “purity of heart” allows us once again to see the revelation of the mystery of God’s love in the naked human body.

This understanding of the influence of *lust* for historical man does not in any way imply a Manichean understanding of the body as “evil” or “tainted.” In fact, the problem is not the body but rather the heart of historical man, when it does not fully appreciate and integrate the positive values of the body as the means for the communion of persons. When these values are properly understood, *eros* can lead to *ethos*. Thus the way is open for the *redemption of the body*, through the restoration of the integrity of the body/soul harmony of the person; this integration is *life according to the Spirit* which leads to *purity of heart*. This restoration can only take place through the grace of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, which heals the wounds of original sin and gives us access to life according to the Spirit (the *last Adam* [Christ] healing the *first Adam* [historical man]). Because of this indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, our bodies now not only express our own spirits, but also the Holy Spirit, in the world.

The sphere of *ethos* and purity of heart (which “glorifies God in the body,” as Paul says in I Corinthians 6:20) also opens up the horizon of the vision of God in the body (Matthew 5:8) and the *resurrection of the body*, which is the state of *eschatological man* in heaven. This revelation of bodily resurrection appears in a dispute with the Sadducees and Pharisees (Matthew 22:24-30), where Jesus notes that in the future life, “they neither marry nor are given in marriage.” Thus marriage and procreation belong only to “this age” (historical man); they do not exist for *eschatological man* because they will not be needed then. The psychosomatic (body/soul) unity of the human person will remain, but we will not be subject to death. Thus the perfection of human life will not be through a “disincarnation” but through a more complete *spiritualization of the body*, when the body will be fully in harmony with the spirit and the struggles of historical man with *lust* will cease. Further, our bodies will be divinized (made sharers in the divine nature) in a way we cannot imagine. This *divinization of the body* will be the basis for the heavenly communion of persons (that is the goal of marriage here with one other person), which will be perfected for and among all persons, in God (this is the communion of saints).

Cycle III: The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy

Continuing the discussion of the implications of the state of *eschatological man*, the Pope first turns to “contenance for the sake of the Kingdom.” The choice to remain unmarried Jesus

proposed was a radical departure from Jewish tradition. For both Jesus and Paul, this choice is a counsel, not a command, and it must be freely chosen and for spiritual, supernatural reasons as testimony to the state of eschatological man in heaven. There, “non-marriage” will be the proper, common, basic mode of life for all; for historical man, however, renouncing marriage is an exception and an anticipation of the future life in which the current normal state of marriage is taken up into the perfect communion of persons. Continence for the sake of the Kingdom and marriage are thus **complementary vocations**, two ways of witnessing to the meaning of the body ordained to the communion of persons. Such continence is “superior” to marriage for historical man only in the sense that it testifies to the superior eschatological state of man. Those who choose this path retain the same “historical” humanity with its lustful weaknesses, and continual renunciations, sustained by grace, are required to make it truly a response of love for the Divine Spouse and an offering of one’s life in service to “the affairs of the Lord.”

Next, the Pope engages in an extended discussion of Ephesians 5:21-33 regarding the sacramentality of marriage. The ideal of **mutual subjection** out of reverence for Christ is directly contrary to the domination imposed by lust. This text is a “great analogy” in which the relationship of the spouses and the relationship of Christ and His Bride, the Church, illuminate one another. The sacrificial love of the Cross, in which Christ the Head offers Himself for the sake of His Body, is also and at the same time spousal love, a one-flesh union through the mutual gift of self. Saint Paul calls this a great “*mysterion*” (Greek; Latin *sacramentum*). Here, the Pope refers to the sacramentality of marriage in the broadest sense: marriage is the most fundamental mystery of all (thus, the **primordial sacrament**); it is the prototype and pattern that interprets both creation and redemption as revelations of the mystery hidden in God from all eternity, that is, the mystery of God’s total and irrevocable gift of Himself to us in Christ.

Marriage as a **sacrament of creation** (the original plan of God) and as a **sacrament of redemption** (the sacrament of marriage in the Church as an expression of the spousal love of Christ and His Church, Bridegroom and Bride) are in continuity, sharing the same essential qualities of unity and indissolubility and the same ordination to the mutual good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children. However, Christian marriage perfects these qualities for historical man through the action of grace. Christian spouses are now called to reflect the fullness of the nuptial meaning of the body in a life according to the Spirit. This love is called to reflect both the spousal and the sacrificial/redemptive aspects of Christ’s love. Thus marriage is an intentionally chosen, enduring, and continually renewed “re-reading” of the spousal truth of the body.

Cycle IV: Reflections on *Humanae Vitae*

Pope John Paul II has elaborated the theology of the body as a phenomenological, personalist, and Scriptural approach to presenting and applying the doctrine of Pope Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical, *Humanae vitae*. In particular, he focuses on the requirement that every act of marital intercourse must remain open to the possibility of the transmission of life, and the intrinsic inseparability of the two simultaneous meanings of intercourse: the unitive and the procreative. He acknowledges the practical and pastoral challenges of this teaching, but shows how the insights of the theology of the body confirm and extend Paul VI’s teaching, especially at the

level of the differing fundamental attitudes at the root of the use of contraception and the use of natural family planning in accord with the authentic nuptial meaning of the body. While the former places the unitive and the procreative meanings in opposition as competing goods, the latter approach allows the continent person to see them as harmonious and direct his or her sexual reactions and personal emotions in accord with the truth of the body, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

The Pope concludes: *“To face the questions raised by Humanae Vitae, to formulate the questions and seek their reply, it is necessary to find that biblical-theological sphere to which we allude when we speak of ‘redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage.’ In this sphere are found the answers to the perennial questions in the conscience of men and women and also to the difficult questions of our modern world concerning marriage and procreation.”*

II. Key Scriptures used in the Theology of the Body

Genesis 1-4 (*the creation of human persons; the Fall; “knowledge” and begetting*)

Matthew 5:27-30 (*adultery in the heart*)

Matthew 19:3-12 (*the Pharisees question Jesus about divorce; eunuchs for the Kingdom*)

Matthew 22:23-32 (parallels Mark 12:28-34, Luke 20:27-38) (*no marriage after the resurrection*)

Romans 7-8 (*the internal battle between spirit and flesh; the redemption of the body*)

I Corinthians 6:12-20 (*the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit*)

I Corinthians 7 (*on marriage and celibacy*)

I Corinthians 15 (*the manner of the resurrected body*)

Galatians 5:16-25 (*life according to the Spirit*)

Ephesians 5:22-33 (*the “great mystery” of marriage as a sacrament*)

Titus 1:15 (*“to the pure all things are pure”*)

III. Glossary of Key Concepts in the Theology of the Body

“beginning”	<i>the original state of justice, prior to sin and “historical man”</i>
theological anthropology	<i>understanding the human person as made in the image of God</i>
“echo”	<i>traces of the state of original justice still present to human consciousness</i>
body	<i>significant as the means of the revelation of the person made in God’s image</i>
phenomenology	<i>a philosophical method of bringing basic human experiences to articulate awareness, discovering the <u>objective</u> and essential truths enshrined there</i>
personalism	<i>any philosophical/theological approach that is centered on the dignity, qualities, and bodily-spiritual realities of the human person; usually based in a <u>subjective</u> analysis of conscious experience</i>
personalistic norm	<i>negatively stated, the person may never be used as a means; positively stated, the only proper response to a person is love</i>
historical man	<i>the state of humans after the Fall, under the influence of original sin but with “echoes” of original justice still present</i>
eschatological man	<i>the state of humans after the return of Christ, in the life of heaven</i>
communion of persons	<i>the all-encompassing interpersonal relationship of unity rooted in self-giving between the divine Persons in the Trinitarian communion, and thus between human persons made in the divine image</i>
original innocence	<i>the state of humans before the Fall; a state of body/soul harmony (harmony between the physical and the spiritual aspects of the person)</i>
original solitude	<i>based on Gen. 2:18; the “aloneness” of adam, whose personhood transcends the animals, without a suitable partner (another human person)</i>
original unity	<i>“bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh” – the first realization of the communion of persons between ish and ishah as mutual sharers in the dignity of personhood</i>

original nakedness	<i>the experience of nakedness untainted by shame (Gen. 2:25) in the integrity of the person prior to the Fall</i>
nuptial meaning of the body	<i>the body itself is the means for the expression of interpersonal love and life-giving communion through total self-giving, both in marriage (especially in intercourse) and in celibacy (freely sacrificing marriage)</i>
freedom of the gift	<i>the “gift” is the utterly gratuitous love of God in calling us into existence from nothingness in order to give us a share in the mystery of His divine life. The “freedom of the gift” is the dignity of our complete freedom in imitating God and bestowing the gift of our love on one another; in intercourse, this total gift of love begets new life “with the help of the Lord” (Gen. 4:1). All human relationships are to be governed by this approach, the “ethos of the gift.”</i>
primordial sacrament	<i>the mystery of marriage is willed by God from all eternity as the pattern for the divine plan of salvation; marriage is a sacrament in the broadest sense of something that makes visible an invisible reality: namely, the eternal plan of God’s love to call us into union with Him to share divine life</i>
knowledge	<i>profound awareness of the meaning of the mystery of the person; more than an euphemism for sexual intercourse, it refers to the deep conscious participation in the mystery of body/soul human love as an “echo” of time before the Fall (Gen. 4:1; Luke 1:34)</i>
heart	<i>the deepest interior of the person where good and evil battle for control; the motivating force of our exterior actions</i>
shame	<i>the first consequence of the Fall, losing the peace of the original unity. Shame has a double meaning: both a loss of respect in the heart for the nuptial meaning of the body, and the inherent drive to protect it</i>
lust/concupiscence	<i>the disorder of our desires and passions caused by the rupture of the physical and the spiritual within us; leads to viewing others as objects to use rather than subjects to love</i>
redemption of the body	<i>the restoration of the integrity of the body/soul harmony of the person through the grace of the Paschal Mystery of Christ, the God-Man, Whose Incarnation and self-donation of that body on the Cross to His Bride, the Church, reunites heaven and earth, body and soul, spirituality and sexuality. As we gradually enter this mystery through grace, we experience ongoing conversion of</i>

heart and healing of lust. Living in time, we cannot return to original innocence, but redemption does allow us to live in love as God intended for us “in the beginning.”

eros and ethos

eros is Greek for love as sexual desire and attraction (as in “erotic”); ethos is Greek for the pursuit of the authentically good (as in “ethical”). Through redemption in Christ, the ethical goodness of eros as intended by God is revealed

purity and impurity

rooted in the contrast between Matthew 5:8 and Romans 1:24; purity is the ability (and impurity the inability) to see the revelation of the mystery of God’s love in the naked human body

life according to the spirit / to the flesh

from Galatians 5; “life according to the spirit” is the re-integrated and redeemed life of grace by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit; “life according to the flesh” is life in the dis-integrated fallen nature without the influence of the Spirit

spiritualization and divinization of the body

at the resurrection of our bodies in the life of glory, our bodies will be spiritualized (the physical will be perfectly integrated with the spiritual) and divinized (participate in the very divine nature of God) because as persons we are a psychosomatic unity

communion of saints

the ultimate consummation of the universal communion of persons that in this life is sacramentalized in marriage

first Adam / last Adam

the adam from Genesis / Christ, Who is the perfect embodiment of both divinity and humanity; this reflects a common theme of JPPII: “Christ fully reveals man to himself”

complementarity of vocations

the conviction that both marriage and celibacy are mirrors of the relationship between Christ and the Church; they are not in competition but mutually support one another

mutual subjection

from Ephesians 5:21; both husband and wife submit to one another in their total and reciprocal self-giving out of reverence for the mystery of Christ revealed in each other

sacraments of creation / redemption

marriage is a natural sacrament as the original plan of God, raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament, an effective sign of His presence and the saving work of His Paschal Mystery in the world