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# John Paul II's Theology of the Body: The Human Person, Self-Gift, and the Sacramental Dimension of Human Love

Mitchell Johansson

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JOHN PAUL II's THEOLOGY OF THE BODY: THE HUMAN PERSON, SELF-GIFT, AND  
THE SACRAMENTAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN LOVE

By

Mitchell Johansson

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for  
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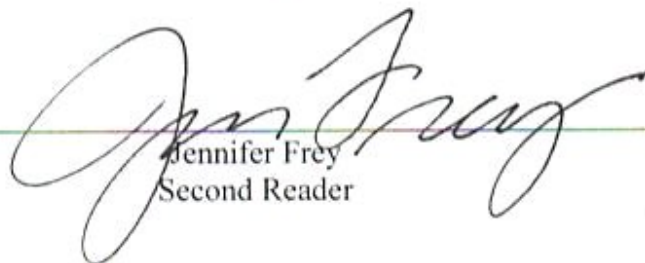
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### Abstract

This thesis is a philosophical defense of certain proposals John Paul II outlined and argued for in his work *A Theology of the Body*. The format of this thesis will be the following, arranged into four parts. In part one, I will give a very brief historical introduction to John Paul II and his work. Then I will sketch the philosophical matrix which the *Theology of the Body* enters, and introduce the synthetic methodology that John Paul II employs. The second part will elaborate and explain John Paul II's metaphysics and phenomenology of the human person, the theological dimension of the body, the thesis of the gift, and the meaning of human sexuality as developed in the *Theology of the Body*. In part three, I will consider certain criticisms against the arguments of the *Theology of the Body*, each of which will be followed by a philosophical defense of John Paul II's thought. In part four, I will conclude with a few final remarks.

**JOHN PAUL II's THEOLOGY OF THE BODY: THE HUMAN PERSON, SELF-GIFT,  
AND THE SACRAMENTAL DIMENSION OF HUMAN LOVE**

**Introduction**

Looming in the background of John Paul II's writings on the human person, love, marriage, sex, and the body, are the traditional metaphysical difficulties of the mind-body problem. When John Paul II delivered his Wednesday audiences, now collected in the work *Theology of the Body*, he was not statically concerned with the reality of the human organism's activity and consciousness, narrowing his phenomenological analysis to the interiority of persons and their experiences as body-soul constitutions. John Paul II was concerned with theorizing the theological groundwork that would be capable of supporting a much larger project: drawing up an integral, Christian vision of the human person. The *Theology of the Body* is a multi-faceted and philosophically dense work, but the central themes John Paul II concerns himself with are the personal experiences found within existence and sexual embodiment, the metaphysical structure of these certain experiences, and the proper ethical view of Christian marriage, love, and sexuality in light of both his personalist phenomenology and Thomistic metaphysics.

The structure of the present thesis will take the form of a philosophical defense of several proposals that John Paul II outlined and upheld in his major work *A Theology of the Body*. The arguments explored in this thesis will be restricted to John Paul II's integral vision for the human person, the dignity of the body, and of personal fulfillment through self-giving love. The format of this thesis will be the following, arranged into four parts. In part one, I will give a very brief

introduction to the man, John Paul II, and his work. Then I will give an introduction to the philosophical matrix which the *Theology of the Body* enters, and the analytic method which John Paul II employs. The second part will elaborate and explain John Paul II's metaphysics and phenomenology of the human person, the theological dimension of the body, the thesis of the gift, and the meaning of human sexuality as developed in the *Theology of the Body*. In part three, I will consider certain criticisms against the arguments of the *Theology of the Body*, which will be followed with a defense of John Paul II's thought. In part four, I will conclude with a few final remarks.

As a final introductory word, I must make a few remarks about the scope of this thesis and its relation to the Christian faith. The following argumentation should not be construed or exaggerated as caught between the struggle between matters grounded on faith versus that which is grounded alone on matters of natural reason. While John Paul II draws heavily on scripture and is primarily concerned with theological exegesis, I do not take a position on the doctrine of the divine inspiration of scripture in this thesis. My aim is not to offer a proof for God's existence, nor is it to offer a comprehensive defense of the Christian tradition. The aim of this thesis is to analyze certain philosophical and theological themes that John Paul II brings up in his analysis of sexual love and provide a philosophical defense for them. The thought of John Paul II, therefore, should not be assumed to be only a work for the faithful, because the normative principles he rests on have a rational and reasonable basis. As such, the plausibility and coherency of John Paul II's philosophical and theological expansion for the field of sexual ethics is easily accessed by those hospitable to the Christian faith as well as those able to understand on the basis of reason that supports his entire sexual ethic. Therefore, I assume that faith and natural

reason are not, by necessity, two mutually exclusive isolated spheres of knowledge, but can and should be seen as two compatible, mutually-enriching orders of human knowledge.

## **PART I: The History, Thought, and Method of John Paul II**

### **The History and Thought:**

The late Pope John Paul II, now canonized as St. John Paul the Great, was given the name Karol Józef Wojtyła when he was born on the 18th of May, 1920. Karol was born in the small southern Polish town of Wadowice into much personal suffering and tragedy, being born a little after the oldest daughter of the family died, then losing his mother to both a heart attack and kidney failure at the age of eight, and finally, watching his elder brother, with whom he was especially close, die from scarlet fever. These losses left his father, Karol Sr., the last of his living family. Karol and his father moved to Kraków in 1938, where he enrolled in Jagiellonian University to study philology. A year later, the Nazis infamously invaded Poland, and Karol was subjected to forced labor in a limestone quarry in order to avoid being deported to a concentration camp. Two years later, in 1941, his father died of a heart attack, leaving him the only surviving member of his immediate family. Karol Wojtyła lost nearly everyone he loved by the age of twenty and lived to see Poland dominated under brutal tyranny and oppression for half a century, spanning from the original Nazi invasion and occupation in 1939 all the way to the fall of Communism and the liberation of Poland in 1989.

Yet, despite being born amid such concentrated forms of evil, Karol Wojtyła never lost his Christian faith, and it may be said that his faith deepened during these early years of trial. He



joined an underground seminary during the Nazi occupation and later became ordained as a deacon in October, 1946, and finally ordained as a priest a month later in November.

After the second World War, Cardinal Sapieha sent Karol to Rome's Angelicum to study in Philosophy. Karol successfully defended his doctoral thesis entitled "The Doctrine of Faith in St. John of the Cross" and received his doctorate in 1948. In 1949, Karol was then given a pastoral assignment for the parish of Saint Florian in Kraków, where he developed his love of teaching young people. Father Wojtyła was an outdoorsman, too, and he especially "loved to take groups of students hiking, skiing, camping, and canoeing in the hills of southern Poland", and use these times to teach these students about the Christian faith (USCCB). In 1954, Karol pursued and earned another doctoral degree in Sacred Theology, where he was evaluating the possibility of building Catholic ethics on the phenomenological system of Max Scheler for his thesis. It was during these years that Karol developed a theological approach called phenomenological Thomism, combining traditional Thomistic philosophy with personalism.

Karol was appointed Bishop of Kraków in 1958 and eventually became elected to the Papacy in 1978. During his time as pope, Karol was enormously accomplished, ranging from his role in the fall of Communism, his role in improving religious and political relations worldwide, his extensive travels as a public figure to 129 countries, and to his large array of philosophical and theological works.

The theological and philosophical work that is the subject of this thesis, officially entitled *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, was written by Pope John Paul II over the span of a little longer than five years. On September 5, 1979, during the Wednesday General Audience, Pope John Paul II delivered the first of the 129 catecheses on exploring the

Christian understanding of human love within the Divine plan. As a Cardinal, Wojtyła wrote a book while he was in office in Poland, entitled *Man and Woman He Created Them*. When Karol was elected to be the Bishop of Rome, he brought this text with him in the original Polish manuscript of *Man and Woman He Created Them* and used these materials to serve as a basis to launch his Wednesday Audiences, then compiled in his massive Italian work, *A Theology of the Body*. The translation and compilation of these 129 catecheses has been completed by Roman Catholic theologian, Michael Waldstein, with the aid of the nuns from the Daughters of St. Paul.

John Paul II's main purpose throughout *Theology of the Body* is to present an integral vision of man, by defending "the spousal meaning of the body against the alienation between person and body in the Cartesian vision of nature" (Waldstein 107). *A Theology of the Body* is a philosophical and theological work constructing an expansion, and in some areas a reformulation, of Christian philosophical anthropology. A traditional philosophical anthropology is, in the words of Peter Kreeft, "a *logos* about *anthropos*, a theory or philosophy about mankind or human nature" (Address). The greater theological and philosophical project of *A Theology of the Body* is no surface-level task, but a comprehensive worldview with deep, cosmic implications. The proper trajectory of *A Theology of the Body* is not just an answer to the questions that arise in ethics about the body. It is a philosophical and theological anthropology that is meant to compete in the modern philosophical arena, which John Paul II saw as a great and important contest surrounding the fundamental questions regarding the essence of man. What is at stake for John Paul II is much more than systematizing church doctrine on marriage and human sexuality, but he is concerned with positively responding to the particular worldviews that outline a particular metaphysics of personhood and therefore, of the entire natural order.

Being written in 1979, *A Theology of the Body* arises partly as a response to the permissive sexual ethic that permeated the sexual revolution, but John Paul II is also responding to the other end of misunderstanding God's plan for human love: puritanism, or prudish, spiritualistic sexual ethics. Further, the scope of John Paul II's anthropology does not end at the border of sexual ethics but extends itself to interact with the modern philosophical theories that purport to provide a comprehensive theory of man as a political and social animal within the natural order. *A Theology of the Body* ought to be seen as a counter-discourse to the discursive traditions of classical utilitarianism, Kantian anti-trinitarian autonomy, Schelerian subjectivism, and a counter-Weltanschauung to the dualistic, Cartesian comprehension of the mind-body problem, to the neo-Darwinian materialist reductionistic conceptions of the person, and its Platonic opposite of radical idealism.

### **The Synthetic Methodology of John Paul II:**

Now, we turn to the analytical method of John Paul II. The way that John Paul II reveals his methodology for *A Theology of the Body* is when he describes the stylistic forms and different purposes of the first two chapters of the book of Genesis. The concurrent scholarship on Biblical criticism divided the two creation accounts of Genesis into the one captured in the first chapter of Genesis, which is called the "Elohists" account, and the other account captured in the second chapter of Genesis, which is called the "Yahwist" account (TOB 134). The sequentially first creation account, the "Elohists", is the chronologically later account, being written sometime historically after the "Yahwist" was written. The Elohist account stems from the Jewish priestly tradition and is given its name "Elohists", because it refers to God as

“Elohim”. Being the sequentially first account and the chronological latter, the “Elohists” account is imbued with more mature theological statements that define man fundamentally by his relationship to God, which, as John Paul II notices, contains within it an affirmation that man can not be absolutely reduced to the created world, to a body among bodies. John Paul II notes that this first creation account “contains within itself a powerful metaphysical content” and “defines man in a more metaphysical than physical way” (TOB 136). The sequentially second creation account, the “Yahwist” account, which has a history more ancient than the “Elohists” account, is given its name primarily through its use of the name “Yahweh” for God. The “Yahwist” account contains more noticeable anthropomorphic depictions of God than the first account does. The “Yahwist” account also contains within it a description of the original innocence and original happiness of man, then following with a description of the experience of shame felt from the first fall of humanity’s first parents. The major stylistic difference from the sequential first is that the second creation account has more experiential depth, which thematically marks it as “above all subjective in nature and thus in some way psychological” (TOB 137).

When the two accounts are compared, the “Yahwist” and the “Elohists”, the subjectivity presented in the “Yahwist” account is meant to correspond to the objectivity presented in the “Elohists” account. In other words, what John Paul II is doing is developing a principle that links a person’s subjectivity to their sexuality, to their body. In modern philosophy and thought, the dominant methodology in pursuing a sexual ethic is to consider with great seriousness the subjective dimension, often distancing oneself from the objective, biological considerations of the body, particularly the body’s procreative capacity, and emphasizing the internal experience of the person as the locus of moral gravity, given the principle that they harm no one else’s dignity

or any other person's subjective autonomy. This principle of correspondence between subjectivity and objectivity is the hinge-point to the synthetic methodology of John Paul II's philosophical anthropology. This is the theological approach of phenomenological Thomism, which he developed during his second doctorate. The overall goal for John Paul II in creating this linkage, is to justify the the older, more objective, biologically-oriented approaches of Thomas Aquinas on personalist grounds. In the beginning pages of *A Theology of the Body*, John Paul II asserts that "the laws of knowing correspond to the laws of being", where the "laws of knowing" is the structure for a person's subjectivity and experience and the "laws of being" is the structure for a person's bodily and natural constitution (TOB 143). This is a succinct formulation for the principle of correspondence, that bridges the gap between the subjective dimension and objective dimension, between a person's interior "I" and their embodied sexuality, between the "Yahwist" account and the "Elohists" account.

Before undergoing his major analysis on the theology of the body, John Paul II acknowledges that his synthetic method for theological interpretation consists in the relation between experience and revelation. Throughout the course of his analysis of the body, he considers that there are key philosophical factors that underpin the whole argumentative endeavor, which is to construct a new, more integral theory of humanity. As asserted earlier, he holds a metaphysical principle that delineates the "absolute impossibility of reducing man to 'world'", meaning man is more than simply a material body among material bodies, the human person is not just another object in a world of objects (TOB 135). Yet, at the same time, "man too is a body" (Ibid.). It is the revelation of man and his essence, which is above all about the body, that is the heart of the current investigation. If the philosophical interpretation of man

necessarily relies on the personal revelation of man through his body, then it is understandable that there be an appeal to experience, because it is through experience that bodily man becomes manifest to us. John Paul II asserts that “we must reach the conviction that in this case, our human experience is in some way a legitimate means for theological interpretation” (TOB 145). Human experience then, in a certain sense, is an indispensable point of reference for theological revelation.

This methodological groundwork ought to be seen specifically as a unique synthesis between Schelerian phenomenology and Thomistic scholasticism. As scholar Jennifer Bader points out, “from Thomas Aquinas, he takes his understanding of objective moral values and how such values contribute to or detract from the good of the human person. From Max Scheler, Wojtyła takes his phenomenological treatment of human experience” (Bader 93). Professor Jarosław Kupczak argues that John Paul II “emphasizes that Scheler was right in asserting that the method needed for ethics is the phenomenological method, because it grasps the entire content of human experience, including its ethical dimension” (Kupczak 22). In his emphasis on the philosophical treatment of the subjective, it is important to see that John Paul II never drops metaphysics for phenomenology, but develops the previously explained principle of correspondence between the two disciplines: “the laws of knowing correspond to the laws of being” (TOB 143). John Paul II asserts that an adequate philosophical anthropology ought to rely on both phenomenology and metaphysics in order to do justice to both the “the laws of knowing” and “the laws of being”, both existence and essence, in order to construct an adequate understanding of humanity. John Paul II’s synthetic methodology provides the basic groundwork

that he then uses to construct an integral vision of man that inform his whole understanding of sexual experience and morality within the theological structure of human love.

## **PART II: The Meaning of Human Dignity and the Gift of Persons in Embodied Existence**

### **The Philosophical Background of *A Theology of the Body*:**

The myriad problems of our sexual embodiment and our sexual actions are not simply matters meant to be isolated to the sphere of ethics. Rather, the subject of our personal sexual existence is a doorway that leads into the largest of philosophical issues about the mysteries of the human essence. The ethical question of “how ought I to live?” is logically linked as a consequence to whatever answer has already been given to the prior metaphysical question “what am I?”. This link raises the need for a metaphysics to be the groundwork for ethics.

In the context of this philosophical project, in the Sermon on the Mount Christ was asked by the Pharisees “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?”, in hopes that Jesus would misspeak in contradiction to the custom of Jewish law (*The New Geneva Study Bible*, Matthew 19:3). The response Christ gave, however, appealed first to the beginning recorded in the book of Genesis, or in other words, Jesus spoke an answer to the question of ethics by grounding his understanding of marital ethics on the prior question concerning the essential definition of what man is. In the same way, John Paul II, responds to the ethical questions raised in the problematic midst of modern sexual politics by proposing a refreshed and deepened understanding of human love by reconstructing a philosophical anthropology that undergirds the dignity, and theology, of the body and pulls out the integral core of the human essence.

As explained earlier, John Paul II had a rich interaction with the writings of Immanuel Kant, Max Scheler, the mechanistic traditions of Francis Bacon and René Descartes, and even the psychological tradition of Sigmund Freud. John Paul II writes *A Theology of the Body* in response to all these concurrent philosophical traditions intending to be a response echoing Christ's response to the Pharisees, as if he thinks the Christian philosophical response must be continually mobilized to remind their fellow neighbors who they are, what their essence is. It is hard not to notice that *A Theology of the Body* was compiled during the heat of the sexual revolution. It certainly is a carefully formulated response to the sexual revolution, yet it is certainly also a response to the Enlightenment itself. *A Theology of the Body* is John Paul II's response to certain kinds of contemporary ethics which he believes to have incompletely captured the prior question of man's fundamental essence.

In his other philosophical work, *The Acting Person*, John Paul II makes the acknowledgement that Max Scheler and Immanuel Kant were the "starting ground" that his reflections are built on (Wojtyła, no. 8 302). At one level, John Paul II is deeply concerned with the ethics of marriage and the questions of human sexuality. He is deeply committed to the beauty of human love and *A Theology of the Body* is a profound expression of that, but on another level, his larger reflections about creation and its relationship to God the Creator stand at the heart of his argument, as the full title suggests: *Man and Woman He Created Them*.

John Paul II's reflections on creation stand in contradistinction to Francis Bacon and René Descartes, who launched human ambition into modernity, subjecting nature to human power. The Baconian project empowered a mechanistic philosophy of nature, as Bacon asserts, a proper, modern understanding of nature is one that would reformulate the relation of culture to



nature, of mind to material, so “that the mind may exercise on the nature of things the authority which properly belongs to it” (Bacon, 3-4). Bacon further asserts, “if man endeavor to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe, his ambition is without doubt both a more wholesome and a more noble thing... Now the empire of man over things depends wholly on the arts and sciences. For we cannot command nature except by obeying her.” (Bacon, 118). Such an ambitious vision of man’s power over the universe can seem chilling in light of the brutality of modern and historical man, including the advanced resumé of the past century, with two devastatingly industrialized world wars, modern terrorism, mechanical mass murder of incomprehensible statistical proportions, the brutally efficient totalitarian regimes, the constant threat of nuclear fallout, and the looming environmental disasters associated with the empire of man over things. It is a relevant question in response to the past 100 years: is man’s ambition for power noble enough to save itself? If not, how should man revise his understanding of nature and of himself?

René Descartes may be held responsible also, for creating a rift between the modern persons’ relationship to nature. Descartes shares in the Baconian project, extending the empire of man over things, all the while setting up the conceptual stage for a rigorous dualism to take precedence. The human is the master over nature and with his proper power of self-determination he is able to freely decide what to do with nature, not being bound by any preexisting teleological construction, but freely determining the ends which the master himself prescribes. On the one hand, man's mechanization of nature instrumentalizes the external world to man’s freewill and declares it to be merely extended things, pure externality, and completely vacant of all interiority. On the other hand, there is the soul, the thinking thing, who inhabits the

world of pure interiority. As the realm of nature comes to be conceptualized as pure externality and the realm of thought comes to be conceptualized as pure interiority, these realms gradually become purified of each other and the relation of the human to nature becomes severed off into two non-overlapping conceptual spheres.

The theoretical dialectic of man's dominion and power over the mechanical forces of nature are important because it's closely connected to the ethics of use and consumption. The chief concern that John Paul II has with this mechanization of nature is that it is often connected to utilitarianism in practice and ethics. "Utilitarianism is a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of things and not of persons, a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used" (Letter to Families, 13). He saw the philosophical anthropologies of Bacon and Descartes as forms of new Manicheanisms, in which body and soul are in opposition, radically alienated from each other. The body doesn't receive or instantiate the life of the soul and the soul is independent from the body. In John Paul II's mind, this causes man to discontinue living as a person and subject: "regardless of all intentions and declarations to the contrary, he [or the human person] becomes merely an object. This neo-Manichean culture has led, for example, to human sexuality being regarded more as an area for manipulation and exploitation than as the basis of that primordial wonder which led Adam on the morning of creation to exclaim before Eve: 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh (Gen 2:23)'" (Letter to Families, 23).

As is evident from the previous quote, the theoretical problems in the metaphysical conceptions of the human person, and therefore also of nature, bears serious implications in the ethical arena human sexuality. To take Immanuel Kant as an example, he views sexual

intercourse as an act sharply in contradiction to the dignity of the human person. In his *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant defines human sexuality as such: “sexual intercourse is the mutual use which one human being makes of the sexual organs and faculty of another... marriage, that is, the union of two persons for the lifelong mutual possession of their sexual characteristics” and a little later, asserts that “in this act, a human being makes himself into a thing, which is contrary to the right of human nature to one’s own person” (qtd. in Waldstein’s Introduction, 56-57).

Spousal love and the gift of oneself for another, as John Paul II understands it, are not able to be fully comprehended or realized within Kant’s rigorous worldview.

### **John Paul II’s Philosophical Anthropology:**

John Paul II constructs his adequate anthropology in dialogue with all these philosophical anthropologies in mind and in the same way that Christ responded to the questions of the Pharisees by laying out an integral vision of man, so also John Paul II responds to the modern man, male and female, and all their questions, that this integral vision of man must be built from the “beginning”. John Paul II acknowledges that this “beginning” tells little about the human body in the naturalistic and contemporary scientific sense of the word. Yet, while there isn’t a focus on the inner structures of the human organism, this “beginning”, drawn from the picture given by the book of Genesis, concerns the meaning of the human body in the structure of the personal subject. Building a philosophical anthropology from this foundation, from the “beginning”, allows John Paul II to extend the meaning of his project to the next step, which is entering into the broader meaning of the whole sphere of human intersubjectivity, especially the perennial relationship of man and woman. Although John Paul II acknowledges that

contemporary science and naturalistic bio-physiology offer incredibly precise information about human sexuality, he asserts that the “knowledge of the personal dignity [and the meaning] of the human body and of sex must still be drawn from other sources” (TOB 222).

The book of Genesis is John Paul II’s source that allows him to begin a philosophical anthropology that utilizes a phenomenological reflection on the human body and reveals its profound and integral dignity. For matters concerning revelation, such as the revelation of the human body as expressed in Genesis, John Paul II finds it necessary to “appeal to experience, because bodily man is perceived by us above all in experience” (TOB 145). This shift from using logic and theoretical reasoning about the nature and essence of the human person, as found in the writings of other theologians, like St. Thomas Aquinas, to the use of concrete experiences of persons is due to the methodological and existential concerns that John Paul II is dealing with. The language of the revelation and experience of the person through their body is central for John Paul II’s methodology and ought to bring up the categories or notions of faith and reason. John Paul II elaborates on this point of revelation through language further in his notes about St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans, speaking of the “redemption of the body”, of a heavenly content or rather another reality altogether that’s presented within and through the language of revelation, wherein the same content or reality is ungraspable without revelation or the language of experience (TOB, no. 8, 145-146). However, on the basis that St. Paul writes of an “inward groan” eagerly awaiting the “adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23), John Paul II asserts that we may take everything offered to us through the experiences of human existence, such as the St. Paul's experience of an inward groan, into account when considering matters of revelation, because revelation is that which occurs fundamentally within an embodied

existence and therefore in relation to human experience. What John Paul II is putting forward is that there is not a radical antinomy between revelation and experience, but rather as he puts it, theological revelation can have a “harmony with [subjective] experience” (TOB 145). The subjective, and often existential, experiences fundamental to human life are, in fact, precisely the sort that “theology desires to respond [to]” (TOB 146).

### **The Original Experience of Solitude:**

John Paul II begins his theology of the body with an analysis of the first chapters of Genesis, with close attention to the original experiences of the human person. The words presented in Genesis 2:18, when God speaks “It is not good for man to be alone”, prepare the way for John Paul II’s analysis. It is significant that when God-Yahweh speaks these words about human solitude, He speaks of “man”, or in Hebrew “hā’ādām”, which is more precisely solitude of the “human” as a human. “Hā’ādām” is the Hebrew term that expresses the collective concept of the human species, without reference to the person’s sex, and the Bible refers to the creation of the first human being, the “man” as “hā’ādām”. Only after the creation of the woman, the Bible calls him “male”, or “iš”, in relation to the “female”, the “iššā”.

On these linguistic differences in the way the Bible treats the creation, John Paul II’s reconstructive analysis specifies this primordial experience of the first human’s solitude into two meanings: first, because the Bible calls him “hā’ādām”, as the human, the solitude is not only in reference to that of the male, but particularly to the human as a human person, or one “deriving from man’s very nature [or humanity]”, and second, the kind of solitude “deriving from the relationship between male and female”, or lack of one (TOB 147). John Paul II treats the first

experience, the experience of solitude proper to human persons, as the more fundamental experience to examine. In Genesis, man's existential solitude is connected to his task of cultivating of the earth. The Lord God formed animals of the field and birds of the air and "brought them to the man to see what he would call them...[and] that was to be its name" (Genesis 2:19). In performing this task, given to him by his Creator, of cultivating the earth, he finds that he is dissimilar from all the animals of the field and the birds of the air: "but man did not find a help similar to himself" (Genesis 2:20). This remark is meant to point to the fact that man is fundamentally in search of his own essence and ends up finding a negative meaning, namely, finding out what man is not, during this search.

This same fundamental human experience of the search for self is verbalized by the Psalmist in the form of a question "what is man that You are mindful of him?" (Psalm 8:4). It is this self-consciousness, that the human is aware of his self, that breeds the context of the original solitude of man, a solitude still felt so profoundly in human experience. In a similar, yet certainly different, way to the Baconian project of becoming aware of man's rightful dominion over creation, man's original self-consciousness reveals the human as the one who possesses the power of knowing with respect to the world, and it is this knowledge that leads man to his meaning, to the distinctiveness of his being from all other living beings. It's important that this first analysis on existential solitude is also an analysis on the category of the ontological solitude for human because, as revealed in the book of Genesis, the original situation of man's solitude is the beginning of John Paul II's delineation of the human being as a human person.

Genesis describes man in his original situation in solitude as "alone" in his own humanity, but at the same time is "set into a unique, exclusive, and unrepeatable relationship

with God himself” (TOB 151). Existential solitude links with John Paul II’s phenomenology of the body because the Yahwist text allows for the key interpretation that solitude is an awareness of the body, of own’s own bodiliness among other bodies, which leads the man to discover the meaning of his own embodied personhood, “through which man distinguishes himself from all the animalia and ‘separates himself’ from them, and through which he is a person” (TOB 152). In a way, these reflections on the body are meant to uncover a more subtle ontological truth about the human body, that bodiliness and sexuality are not simply identical modes of being. The ontological priority given to the fact that the human is a “body” is built on the first of the two meanings of solitude, the existential experience of solitude proper to humans, and further reveals that the human in his or her embodiedness belongs more deeply to what John Paul II calls “the structure of the personal subject”, more so than his or her simultaneous somatic structure as male or female (TOB 157).

### **The Original Experience of Unity:**

As his analysis of the Genesis narrative continues, John Paul II is brought to the moment of the creation of woman, the revelation of “iššā”. Immediately preceding this creation, the Bible narrates: “So the Lord God caused torpor (*tardēmā*) to fall upon the man, who fell asleep; then he took one of his ribs and closed the flesh again in its place. With the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he formed a woman” (Genesis 2:21-22). The fact that God placed man under *tardēmā*, a deep, unconscious slumber, and not the Hebrew word *halôm*, which connotes a sleep full of dreams, shows that the Biblical account goes beyond the human subconscious, since *tardēmā* indicates an certain absence of consciousness. John Paul II suggests that if one holds

the Bible's diversity of vocabulary to be significant, then it could be concluded "that man (hā'ādām) falls into that "torpor" in order to wake up as "male" (îš) and "female" (iššā)" (TOB 159). More specifically, this torpor, this deep slumber, is not a transition from consciousness to the subconscious, but in a certain way marks the human's special return to non-being, to the annihilation of consciousness, as it was before creation, specifically in order that the solitary "human" may reemerge, by God's creative design, into his dual unity as male and female. In this reemergence, John Paul II carefully remarks that "the circle of the human person's solitude is broken, because the first "man" reawakens from his sleep as "male and female"" (TOB 159-160). This is captured in the man's experience of unexpected wonder, when the man (îš) exclaims over the woman (iššā), "flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones!" (Genesis 2:23). John Paul II makes this a point to argue that despite the constitutive sexual difference, there is a fundamental somatic homogeneity between the male and female that finds its ground in human nature. The two human beings portrayed in Genesis demonstrate a synchronous unity and duality, unity in their humanity and duality of their sexual difference. Importantly, the unity of human nature, which is the context of original solitude, is substantially prior to humanity's duality expressed in sexual difference, being the context of original unity. John Paul II sums this priority up in saying that man (îš) and woman (iššā), expressed through their masculinity and femininity, are "two different "incarnations", that is, two ways in which the same human being, created "in the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), "is a body"" (TOB 157).

Additionally, the ontology that John Paul II elaborates of the human essence has a specific axiological dimension. The human person experiences himself as a creature with a particular and essential value before God, as the artistic masterpiece has a particular value before



the Artist. This should be understood as defining the vertical direction of the human person's axiological dimension. That is, that the human qua human, in its existence within space-time and the natural order, is also a creature fashioned as an eternal value before its Creator.

Before moving on to describe John Paul II's thought on the "personal order", it would be appropriate to lay the proper meaning of the natural order, in order to avoid confusion. The natural order is meant to explicitly encompass the scientific disciplines, notably chemistry, biology, and physics, as well as all their sub-disciplines. However, John Paul II does not collapse the natural order to these disciplines. In *Love and Responsibility*, he explicitly distinguishes between what he calls the "biological order" and the "natural order" (56). Specifically, the biological order is encompassed within the natural order, but only insofar as "this is accessible to the methods of empirical and descriptive natural science" (LR 56). The natural order is, most precisely, a specific order of physical existence, encompassing all that the descriptive sciences offer, yet with an obvious relationship to God the Creator. It is incredibly important that the natural order, with its openness to God as the Creator, is not collapsed to the biological order, because "the knowledge of the personal dignity of the human body and of sex" cannot come from merely descriptive information (TOB 222). Further, the collapse of the natural order into the subsidiary biological order is the precise theoretical move of René Descartes, when he claims that if we could only perfect the sciences to a pinnacle of exactitude, "we might be able...to use [nature] for all the purposes for which they are appropriate, and thus render ourselves, as it were, masters and possessors of nature" (Descartes 35). In his analysis of this statement, Cardinal Schönborn terms this kind of knowledge "power knowledge", which is the kind of knowledge concerned about "not what things are, what constitutes their "nature", or, to put it another way,

what their “logos” is, the divine idea that is being expressed in them—but rather what we can make out of them for ourselves” (*Chance or Purpose*, 155). This reductive manner that characterizes modern thought on the order of nature ought to be avoided for an appropriate understanding of John Paul II’s thought, because it is precisely his all-encompassing model of the natural order, especially nature’s obvious relationship to the Creator, that allows John Paul II’s beloved phrase, the “language of the body”, to be a clear reference “to the moral meaningfulness of the natural order, particularly as it is expressed in and through the body and human sexuality” (Swafford 66).

With this crucial distinction in mind, John Paul II shows that man’s axiological dimension extends not only vertically towards God, but horizontally as well, towards other persons. I refer to this as the horizontal direction of the person’s axiological dimension. The setting in which the human person realizes the horizontal direction of his value, that is, person-to-person, is only within the personal order. In the creation narrative of Genesis, the value of human persons becomes extended from the natural order to encompass and conceive the personal order. This extension of man’s axiological dimension is significant because it marks the moment that the man sees his personal value standing before himself revealed through an other. The kind of value that is given, however, shouldn’t be understood as simply subjective affirmation, but should be understood within the realm of ontology, marking a moment of a realization occurring within himself as a personal subject in relation to the other natural objects and other personal subjects in the world. In other words, the transition from the original solitude of man (*hā’ādām*) to the original unity of male (*iš*) and female (*iššā*), is most fundamentally a change in the way that the human being is conscious of his own existence. It might be said that the original,

solitary human experienced himself as a person made in the image of God in a circular mode interior to himself, encompassing his unique relationship with God, but dissociating himself from the rest of the natural order. However, upon the differentiation of man into male and female, his fundamental mode of being a human being in the natural order has completely changed. Now, the male's subjective "I" has an other's subjective "I", the female's interiority, that allows for a new, reciprocal, and exterior circle of experience, one that mutually confirms each person's magnitude as a person created in the image of God within the natural order, simultaneously affirming and being affirmed as the only creature for whom God willed into being for his own sake.

So man has two axiological dimensions to his revelation: firstly, on the basis of his humanity the human stands in the created order with a fundamentally different sort of spiritual constitution and special psychological capacity that allows him to reflect on all that exists in the natural order and experience wonder before all that has been made. It is in this first sense that the human person comes to realize themselves as a chief value before God, in the same way a child comprehends their value through their parent's love. This experience initially says nothing of the value of others, not because their value is not present, but because the person's experience of being seen as a value causes them to arrange the center their focus precisely on the one who recognizes them as a value. In the Genesis narrative, the first human experienced his meaning precisely as a creature affirmed as a value through the love of his Creator. The second part of man's axiological revelation occurs within the relational dimension within the personal order. It is the shared experience that the "woman is for the man and the man for the woman", that there is a reciprocal and personal value perceived by each, about themselves and the other, that causes

each to become conscious of each other as wonderfully unique and unrepeatable persons (TOB 162).

The second dimension of man's axiological meaning is within the personal order and is what John Paul II calls "the first circle of experience lived by man as a value" (TOB 162). The first dimension of man's axiological meaning is within the natural order and is meant to provide the axiological underpinnings that guide human self-consciousness to experience oneself as "distinct" from that of the rest of the natural or created order to realize oneself as a value. The second dimension, or the personal dimension, builds on the consciousness of the first dimension and marks a moment of "opening toward" a being like oneself, like Genesis describes in Adam's embrace of Eve (TOB 162). This opening towards another person is distinctive and definitive for the human as a person, because, as the Genesis narrative alludes, it marks the first moment of an individual's discovery of the kind of transcendence proper to the human as a person. This is a phenomenon of wanting to move beyond one's own interior self towards the interiority of an other, which is characteristically marked by a kind of happy self-forgetfulness and a loving preoccupation with the other. This becomes what John Paul II calls the discovery of the "adequate relation 'to' the person, and thus as opening toward and waiting for a 'communion of persons'" (TOB 162).

Here, the phrase "communion of persons" is meant to delineate something more than a mere community or social arrangement of persons. Where a community is a unified collection of individuals, existing as a whole made up of the collection of its parts, the phrase "communion of persons" is meant to express a state of being more in line with the etymological meaning of the word "communio". "Communio" is the bringing together, the perfection and completion of

parts, forming a new and fortuitous bond. This meaning of *communio* implies an emergent and holistic structure to the ontology of human nature that is expressed precisely in this state of being a “communion of persons”.

In deriving an emergent ontological holism as the structure of the “communion of persons”, it would be appropriate to clarify the meaning of this structure. First, if it is an emergent structure, then it is not reductive. Emergentism of this sort refuses any sort of psychosocio-physical reductionism and any form of ontological atomism. This goes to show that the fullness of humanity is never in either what is masculine or what is feminine, nor even the willful union of the mutually autonomous individuals of each sex. What is emergent is new, something created that wasn’t there before, some sort of realization or instantiation of a novel and whole reality that outshines the sum of its parts. This coincides with John Paul II’s thesis that the Image of God is more fully realized and expressed precisely in this communion of persons.

Second, if it is ontological, then the experience of yearning for the communion with an other is active on the very basic level of being human. One could say, each person finds themselves in different circumstances of awareness that stand on the primordial condition of existential solitude, concerned about the meaning of things and one’s place in the midst of it all. This seems to be often, but sometimes unknowingly, central in the psychological development of adolescents when they find themselves concerned with the meaning of their own life and body. Specifically, what is meant by the claim of ontology, is the assertion that part of the core essence of a person is to be pre-made in relation to and for the other, to already have the spousal meaning of the body written into the structure of the personal subject. The mode of existing “for” an other is negatively given shape precisely by a person’s experience of first dimensional and second

dimensional solitude. This is what's meant to be expressed when the Lord God resolves about the solitary human, "I want to make a help similar to himself" (Genesis 2:18). On this subject, John Paul II argues that the foundation of the communion of persons is built upon the basis of "double solitude", that both the human male and human female experience the first and second dimensions of solitude, that is, both have the experience of self-consciously being aware of his or her own distinctiveness before all that is and his or her own specific lack of an other, a second self (TOB 163). The basis of double solitude infused with the conditions of mutual self-giving, sets the direction of gifting one's own "I" to and for the other person, the other "I", ends up creating the possibility "of being and existing in a particular reciprocity", that is, of generating the real potentiality of becoming a true communion of persons (TOB 163).

Lastly, what is meant by the claim of holism is that human nature becomes a uniquely complete, visible whole when both masculinity and femininity are each fully realized, in all their genius, within the communion of persons. This assertion about holism is at the heart of the ancient meaning of *communio*. If the communion of persons holistically expresses human nature, then this implies that the completed and perfected expression of human nature lies precisely in the unification of all its parts, not in the atomization of its parts. Abstractly speaking, the full communion of the sexes, of all that is masculine and all that is feminine, with each other forms the fullest, completed image of human nature.

### **The Communion of Persons and the *Imago Dei*:**

With reference to Genesis chapter one, it is this human nature that is explained to be created in the image of God. In contradistinction, it is important to notice that Genesis 2 does

not speak of the human as an image of God, but describes and pictures man's subjective life with a particular depth, in specific relation to the communion of persons that the man and the woman form. It could be said that while simultaneously describing the psycho-somatic constitution of the human, Genesis 2 is elaborating on the deeper meaning, the subjective dimension of the declaration of man being created in the image of God. If the meaning of the *Imago Dei* in humanity is to be recovered or more fully understood in light of the second chapter of Genesis, then in line with John Paul II, we may derive that "man became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons" (TOB 163). According to Cardinal Schönborn, this theological move is incredibly important for an understanding of human dignity and is the first of John Paul II's three "striking theses": namely, that "image of God is found in man and woman above all in the communion of love between them" because it is this love, this communion of persons, that most fully reflects the communion of love between the Divine Persons of the Trinity (Forward, xxv).

There are several things to notice about John Paul II's thesis about the image of God being most fully expressed through spousal love within the communion of persons. The metaphysical implications that John Paul II's link between the Image of God and spousal love has many implications in areas of philosophical theory, ethical practice, and for theological systems, but I will focus on only a few. The areas to keep in mind are the implications this has for the metaphysics of love, nature, and human dignity and I will draw them out in the stated order.

This link rests on a logical structure that John Paul II uses to argue that authentic spousal love inherently realizes a communion of persons. From experience and observation this

automatically creates a distinction from any sort of sexual love that does not realize a communion of persons. The logic prior to this theoretical move is a conditional statement that if authentic spousal love is realized, then the communion of persons is realized. Spousal love, importantly, is tied to man's psycho-physical constitution, to his or her body, and stands in a clearly confined, conditional relationship to the legitimation status, which is an objective state of affairs, of the realization of the communion of persons. Based upon the preceding premises, it may be supposed that human sexual love can be bifurcated into authentic spousal love and inauthentic spousal love. Therefore, in order to qualify the conditional logic of the communion of persons on the antecedent essence of authentic spousal love, the essence of the communion of persons must be elaborated in order to formulate the concept of authentic spousal love, and thus, differentiating it from inauthentic spousal love.

Here, too, the ontological criterion of the communion of persons is theologically and philosophically given in the account of man's creation recorded in the second chapter of Genesis. The communion of persons begins with solitary existence, with a state of singleness, and a experience, as it were, outside of the communion of persons. This is the condition of man's original and enduring solitude. In this modality of being, man knows himself as an individual, a solitary body among others, who's psycho-somatic constitution marks the quasi-absolute border that contains within itself man's subjective dimension. In solitude, man may be said to exist within himself. However, as it has already been shown, this solitude is not the end, but the beginning from which the person learns to open themselves toward an other. In Genesis, the man existed in a unique relationship with God while he was in solitude before the creation of Eve, and God was the first Person he learned to open himself towards. This dialogic relationship between



man with God is incredibly important as the initial and most fundamental realization Adam comes grasp. The man became aware of himself as unique through his experience of the world, giving rise to original solitude, and this solitude allowed man to open himself to the world, ultimately towards his relationship with God. José Granados and Carl Anderson argue that from these premises, “it follows from this that man is aware of himself when he is in dialogue with God” (33).

The man’s unique relationship with God, who is also the Source of Love itself, is then extended, where upon first sight of the woman the man exclaims, “flesh from my flesh and bone from my bones!” (Genesis 2:23). John Paul II alludes to this exclamatory moment as if it were “only at the sight of woman that he could identify and call by name that which makes them in a visible way similar, the one to the other, and at the same time that in which humanity is manifested” (TOB 164). The revelation of body, the woman's to the man and the man’s to the woman, reveals oneself to the other person, because it is “the body reveals man” (TOB 164). It is in this formula that the person is expressed and revealed through their body, that the authentic relation of the person to their body becomes evident. If a person is expressed through their body, then the physical body stands in a necessary relationship to the interior dimension of the person. The sexual body, then, is whole-heartedly included in the personalistic norm which declares a “person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end” and is therefore “a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love” (LR 41).

First, this inalterable relationship a person has to their body has dramatic consequences for metaphysics. Dualism cannot be saved from the personalistic norm. The separation and

subsequent isolation of the mind from the body, person from nature, spirit from matter, collapses under the hylomorphic presentation of the body manifesting the person. This presentation of the necessary relationship of the body and the person seems to demand that it be mutually asserted that the person is their soul and, simultaneously, the person is their body. Each person's soul and body bear a clear relationship to personal expressions of spousal love and therefore, also to the structure of the communion of persons. Spousal love then cannot be disembodied from our sexual physiology, and our sexual physiology cannot be detached from the person who is manifested by it. The communion of persons, as an emergent ontological holism, rests on the assumption of normal, binary sexological constitutions found in the bodily expressions of male and female.

This metaphysical formula also mounts criticisms against modern and classical versions of substance monisms. Metaphysical materialism generally asserts the person is only their body and finds tough criticisms when run up against the personalism of John Paul II. The major objection is that while the person is their body and is revealed by their body, the person is not merely their body. By covering an analysis of sexual and spousal love, John Paul II is bringing the contending theories of the mind-body problem back to reality and allowing them to re-enter through the crucible of personal experience by walking through the main door, as it were, finding itself realized in the intimate context of sexual love. In response to metaphysical materialistic conceptions, John Paul II asserts that sexual love is never merely a physical union of bodies, because our bodies are intimately tied to us as persons. Sexual and spousal love is a phenomenon more than the precise descriptions of sexology and physiology, and it enters into what John Paul II understands as the sphere of the personal order, where a deeper understanding

of one's own bodiliness is realized and the personal value of another is found being expressed through their own bodiliness. John Paul II doesn't suggest that the psychological sciences cannot be naturalized and understood in the basic models of human behavior and cognition, but he asserts that that which exists within the personal order cannot be simply reduced to that which exists in the natural order.

John Paul II also contends against idealists, who deny the real and substantive presence of the body and assert the only true and real existence is the mind and spirit. Held up to the crucible of John Paul II's formulaic test, the spirit is clearly not all that exists because the body and the physical have a crucial role in the perennial revelation of person. The human's first access to understanding anything spiritual is through the material world, in the same way that the path to the spiritual, interior essence of the beloved other begins at the recognition of the beloved being revealed before oneself as a body. It is the revelation of the physical body that echoes the experience of the first man upon sight of the woman: "flesh of my flesh and bone from my bones!". If the body reveals the person, then without the concrete reality of the experience of the body, there could be no person. The positive vision for the human experience of sexual embodiedness John Paul II constructs creates problems for both kinds of monists.

Second, by grounding the communion of persons in the image of God, John Paul II is reaching for the heart of the *Imago Dei*. If the love that is lived and expressed in the communion of persons is the fuller revelation of the image of God, then this is in harmony with the Christian theological statement about Love's centrality to the nature of the Divine. Human love within the communion of persons, then, not only implies an emergence of a new fortuitous bond within the personal order, but further, an emerging expressive quality that can be traced back to the Source

of Love, to God. From this line of reasoning, the qualitative element that allows spousal love to be more than the sum of its parts, is its reflection of God, the Source of Love. Spousal love is given the spotlight in creation as the beaming expression of the Image of God in the natural order and therefore, authentic spousal love does not reduce its basis of biological and psychological factors, but because it reflects the innermost characteristic of the Divine, it becomes something beyond its basic components. Analogically speaking, a full moon shines brilliantly in the night sky, not because the source of radiancy is to be found alone within the moon, but because the moon is able to sufficiently reflect the light from the Sun as its source. In the same way, the beauty and dignity of spousal love then, inherently points to God as its Source, and it is this reflective citation and essential linkage to its Source, that creates the spousal bond that solidifies the “communion of persons”. This is to say, that human spousal love makes visible the mystery of God’s revelation which was “hidden for ages”, that God is Love (Colossians 1:26). To put it more simply, just as the body expresses most fully the person, the communion of persons most fully express the Image of God.

For the final implication of the John Paul II’s striking thesis that the *Imago Dei* is most fully expressed through the communion of persons, it may be pointed out that the human’s *Imago Dei* is certainly expressed in the life and dignity of individual persons themselves and may be expressed in the absence of the communion of persons. However, no man is an island, and the original solitude of the singular human never conveyed this. The spousal meaning of the body is equally the spousal meaning of the person. Original solitude is not a descriptor for hopelessness and loneliness, but it is the context that reveals man’s uniqueness in comparison to all living beings. Certainly, then, original solitude “is thus another way of expressing man’s special

dignity, which rests on the basis of his unique privilege of being fashioned in the image and likeness of God as his partner in the dialogue of love. Man is the only living being on earth whom God addresses as a father addresses his son” (Anderson and Granados 27). To say that Imago Dei, like the human body, is manifestly more revelatory through the communion of persons in spousal love, is not to under-appreciate the dignity of individuals, but to take the interior, spiritual dimension of the Imago Dei’s spousal meaning and give it a vivid materiality, an incarnation, so to speak.

### **Humanity in the Dimension of the Gift:**

This theological assertion of the Imago Dei being expressed through the communion of persons is a philosophical statement about the nature of human dignity. John Paul II’s thought about the Imago Dei and dignity of each person refers to the assertion found in *Gaudium Et Spes*: “Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself” (24). Each person is unique and unrepeatable as an individual and the human person is the “the only creature on earth which God willed for itself”. This grounds the dignity of the image of God indelibly on each individual person, apart from their natural relationship with others. This essential mark of the Image of God on the human person is not socially endowed by other humans, nor does this mark alter based on what man may believe about himself. From without, God inscribed His indelible image within mankind. Therefore, man cannot lose this image, no matter his will or it’s extension in actions.

But in order for a proper understanding of the implication John Paul II’s thesis on human dignity, it is important to refresh the philosophical distinction between the image and likeness of

God in man. The image-value placed on man from God speaks to each person's individual value before God and the inalienable dignity each person has within themselves. This dignified magnitude also speaks to man's transcendent capacity, which is contained within man's consciousness expressed through the original experience of solitude. The "likeness" proviso is a quality that is not, however, inalienable, but constrains man's purpose to be conformed to the similitude of God in his will and action. This bears witness to the human person's unique capacity of self-determination, which stands as an essential continuation from the first clause of the "image", since self-determination also constitutes the human's distinctiveness from other living beings in the natural order. Importantly, this fulfillment of the "likeness" to God, is the beginning of the of a person's realizing his or her personal dignity.

The "likeness" of man to God through will and action is crucial to human dignity for John Paul II, and it is in this way that John Paul II opens the door to the teleological and ethical dimension of human dignity. In this way, the Image of God is not just declaration of man's value, but also a tremendous moral task he becomes responsible for. The arena this "likeness" is championed in is in the personal order, where the dignity in man drives the person to make a "sincere gift of himself" for the other (Gaudium et Spes 24). John Paul II puts it this way: "In the biblical account, this fact becomes *eo ipso*—through itself—existence of the person 'for' the person, given that in his original solitude man existed in some way already in this relation" (TOB 163). In other words, the sexual union of man and woman is enacted within the sphere of the personal order and therefore has a dual-form dimension: an ethical dimension and a sacramental dimension, both carrying the theological implications that come from the image of God and the communion of persons. Here, this union in love expresses the duality of mankind's somatic

constitution, as male and female, but moves beyond this to indicate “the new consciousness of the meaning of one’s body” (TOB 165). This new consciousness is precisely the indicative consciousness of one’s body that recognizes oneself in a relationship to another person for the purpose of reciprocal enrichment. This reciprocal enrichment has meaning and value deeper than the human person’s sexual physiology because it is realized only within the personal order. Reciprocal enrichment is therefore also a mutual awareness of the personalistic norm, that the only proper attitude towards a person is love, which leads to the mutually recognized circle of shared intimate experience between persons, the communion of persons. Reciprocal enrichment, however, presupposes a mature awareness of the meaning of the body. Relational maturity, which I will argue is lived through the virtue of purity, is the ground-state that allows persons to recognize the theological meaning of the body, both the dimensions of the ethical and the sacramental, and also rightly orders the original capacities proper to human beings to their ultimate end in the dialogue of love: self-consciousness and self-determination. This is precisely what John Paul II argues when he says that sexual purity in union “carries within itself a particular awareness of the meaning of that body in the reciprocal self-gift of the persons” (TOB 169).

### **The Original Experience of Nakedness and Innocence:**

In the sequence of John Paul II’s exegesis of Genesis as the “beginning”, however, the original experience of nakedness follows immediately after the original experience of unity and precedes his explanation of the personal dimension of the gift. Returning to the Genesis narrative, the man has come through two original experiences, from the wonder of his original

solitude to the joy of his original unity with Eve, and it is on this precedence that Genesis 2:25 describes the third original experience of nakedness by saying, “now both were naked, the man and his wife, but they did not feel shame”. The original experience of nakedness is the third element to understanding the constitutive, original experiences of the original male and female human beings. The original experience of nakedness allows John Paul II to formulate the full ontological depth of human nature from what is presented in the revelation of man’s “beginning”, specifically man’s revelation as a body from this beginning. The clause, “but they did not feel shame”, is significant for John Paul II’s analysis of the original experience of reciprocal nakedness. John Paul II notes that shame is among the first recorded experiences of human consciousness since it expressed in the Yahwist text and its context is theological for the reciprocal revelation of the body. The fact that the first spouses were “naked” but did not “feel shame, undoubtedly describes their state of consciousness, or even better their reciprocal experience of the body” (TOB 171). This experience of the naked body without shame informs the historical audience of the prehistorical situation of the original man and woman in their reciprocal embrace of the other’s body.

It might be objected that any attempt to examine this historical a priori is experientially inaccessible to historical man, because no one can truly say they are without shame, and this is valid. Children would seem to come as close as one could get, but the context described in Genesis does not indicate either a mature or, in the case of children, an immature shamelessness. The original parents are described as being altogether outside the measure of the experience of shame. However, even though such a condition is not experientially accessible for historical man, it is possible to imaginatively reconstruct the context of the innocence of the first man and



woman. John Paul II is aware that the kind of experience with shame historical man is certainly familiar with begins in Genesis 3:7, where the moment of moral, theological, and historical lapse into sin occurs: “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they realized that they were naked; they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths”. The adverb “then” that immediately expresses the tension of their desperate moment, also expresses a fundamentally new situation. This new situation of shame is an entirely new circle of human experience that jolted the structure of the personal order, placing on a tilt what had been thus far experienced.

The altered experiences of Genesis 2:25 and Genesis 3:7 mark a significant transformation of the entire experience of the body, and thus distort the reciprocal experience of the person. A comparative analysis of the two situations in Genesis shows that this shift from prelapsarian to postlapsarian phenomenology is not an epistemic transition, going from “not knowing” they were naked to “knowing”, as a child does, but a “radical change in the meaning of the original nakedness of the woman before the man and the man before the woman” (TOB 172). Shame, particularly sexual shame, is the sort of experience that John Paul II outlines as “fear in the face of the ‘second I’, and this is substantially fear for one’s own ‘I’”, of being used and appropriated as an object for another” (TOB 173). This marks a new interpretation in the meaning of the body as a object for acquisition. This modality of being in the world desecrates the personalistic norm and cannot recognize or become conscious of the proper value of what the body reveals, namely the person. In the face of the experience of shame, the tilted personal order, the human person finds themselves instinctively manifesting fear because of “the need for the affirmation and acceptance of this ‘I’ according to its proper value” (TOB 173).

John Paul II calls this historical, postlapsarian experience of shame felt by all of historical man and expressed poignantly by the man and woman of Genesis, a “boundary experience” (TOB 172). There are three conclusions to take from shame as a “boundary experience”. The first conclusion is that shame is a boundary that expresses man’s demarcation from his theological prehistory, from his historical a priori, to the historical situation that is post-Fall. Second, shame is the boundary that establishes ethos within a communion of persons. This ethos is centrally the virtue of purity, which gives rise to the sort of authentic love that, even in the postlapsarian condition of original sin and the phenomenal paradigm of shame, allows for the resumed consciousness of wonder before the full meaning of the body in its proper value, mutually establishing a true communion of persons. Third, it is important to note that man and woman before experiencing shame, were not shameless, but were without shame entirely.

Mature shamelessness is the sort of debased psychological condition of either a man or a woman that comprehends the standard of the personalistic norm bounded by the experience of shame, but distances its authoritative measurement from their lives. The shameless person imagines themselves free from moral conscience, and thus are characteristically marked by a spirit of boundlessness and rebellion against the very boundary marker of shame. John Paul II argues that for the purposes of a fuller understanding of the meaning of *communio*, the original and full union of man and woman, it is important to establish that the condition of original nakedness before shame is a “true non-presence of shame, and not a lack of it or its insufficient development” (TOB 174). Before the Fall, the man perfectly perceived the femininity of the woman and understood her as a person most fully through her revelation in her bodily nakedness, and reciprocally, the woman perfectly perceived the masculinity of the man and understood him

as a person most fully through his bodily revelation in nakedness. This non-presence in no way can be linked to a situation of cognitive lack or immaturity, like children, because the account of Genesis 2:25 is meant to indicate a particular and unique fullness of the consciousness and personal experience in authentically understanding the meaning of the body as expressing and revealing the whole person.

Set on the stage that the first human had the original experience of solitude, which was characterized by a special non-identification with the world of living beings, it was here that the creation of man as male and female, that the woman became a particular “help” to the man, a help in recognizing and discovering his own humanity, his uniqueness. The solitary human, through self-consciousness, was in search of his own essence and the creation of woman, a being similar to himself, became a “help” to him in orienting him on his search for his essence, and reciprocally, the man became a “help” for the woman in her search. The realization of the other as a help to one’s own humanity is marks the encounter with the other an “act of discovery”, of one’s own self as a value and mediated through the perception of the naked body of the woman before the man and the naked body of man before the woman.

To reach a conclusion in further coherence with the Yahwist emphasis on the subjective dimension of man’s existence, the content of Genesis 2:25 motions for a exegesis that moves beyond the exterior vision of the world and of the naked body, demanding a deeper investigation into the dimension of human interiority. John Paul II describes the intimate, inter-bodily experience of man and woman as a communication, in the original and full meaning of the word. The meaning of communication is directly tied with the truth that “subjects who communicate [do so] precisely based on the common union that exists between them”, and the theological truth

that the “exterior” perception of man and woman, expressed in physical nakedness, “corresponds to the ‘interior’ fullness of the vision of man in God, that is, according to the measure of the ‘image of God’” (TOB 176). This second truth is meant to underscore the fact that nakedness is meant to signify and echo the decreed goodness and value of the human person before the Divine and is meant to be the theological basis on which the reciprocation and affirmation of this value for the other occurs.

It is important that even in the experience of shared personal intimacy and the full consciousness of the theological meaning of the body, John Paul II asserts this “does not contain an inner break and antithesis between what is spiritual and what is sensible”, in the very same way that this expresses no inner break or antithesis between what constitutes the person as a human and what constitutes the sexuality of man as male and female (TOB 177). John Paul II calls this spiritual understanding and perception of the proper value as the image of God, the “interior gaze” and it is this full, contemplative grasp of the value of persons, according to the measure of God, that creates precisely the fullness of intimacy between persons (TOB 178). This contemplative gaze is the virtue that comprehends the interior value of persons and through which, the communion of persons is established and each becomes an authentic gift for the other in all their sexuality, through their femininity and masculinity. The development of the “interior gaze” of the body is a virtue of purity for historical man, and this basis is the adequate foundation for the renewed, historical consciousness of what John Paul II calls the “spousal meaning of the body” (TOB 178).

### **The Theological Dimension of the Gift and the Sanjuanist Triangle:**

The spousal meaning of the body opens the theological dimension of the gift of self, which is actualized on the foundational depth of the original experiences of solitude-unity-nakedness. The dimension of the personal gift requires, on John Paul II's part, further development of a more concrete "hermeneutics of the gift" for his larger project of the theology of the body. The structure of the gift in John Paul II's personalism may be organized as an emergent structure influenced by the Carmelite personalism of St. John of the Cross, specifically in the development of the Sanjuanist, or St. John's, triangle. Wojtyła's Carmelite personalism and his comprehensive theology of gift has a clear and distinctive continuation that can be traced through *Gaudium et Spes* 24:3, that man "is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self". The theology of the gift is deeply imbedded in the *Theology of the Body* and in his other works, but the first major influence with the trinitarian core of the theology of the gift can be traced back to his encounter with the poetry of St. John of the Cross as a youth.

The major trinitarian points to the Sanjuanist triangle are (1) that love implies a cycle of mutual giving, supremely the gift of self, (2) the paradigmatic instance of such self-gift in human experience is the spousal relation between man and woman, and (3) the Trinity is the archetype of such love and gift from which the love between God and human persons as well as love between human beings derives as an imitation and participation. John Paul II begins his "hermeneutics of the gift" by reflecting on the more abstract theological realities of (3), where taking consideration of love as the divine motivation for creation and source from which being springs, because "only love, in fact, gives rise to the good and is well pleased with the good" (TOB 180). John Paul II observes that the creation account is not only a theological

mystery, but a signification of the gift, a sign-post to “a fundamental and radical gift” that shows “an act of giving in which the gift comes into being precisely from nothing” (TOB 180).

However, this is not to say that the gift comes from a nowhere and is given by a nothing, but rather, while Creation itself comes to be from nothing, the giving of the gift of Creation comes precisely from the Creator who gives it. The conceptual structure of the gift is inherently trinitarian because it must include the giver of the gift, the one who receives the gift of the giver, and the newly formed reciprocal relationship of self-gift established now between them. It is this sort of relationship in the dimension of the gift that is established at the moment of the creation of man. We should say that the creation of the natural world is itself a gift given from God, because of the fact that “man appears in it” as the agent of receptivity to the gift of the Giver since he is conscious and “is [therefore] able to understand the very meaning of the gift” (TOB 180). The trinitarian structure of the gift is substantiated in the creation of nature and of the person within it, and this gift-structure weaves a symbolic ecology of relations within the created order itself. This is a theological super-structure which creates the human person *media res*, in the middle of symbolic things, that is, the human person is created at the center and is pre-structured, due to his capacity for higher consciousness, in a symbolic relationship with the natural world. In other words, the human’s original experiences of solitude-unity-nakedness, especially his original solitude, occurs precisely because there was a pre-meditated structure of the gift. The uniqueness of man’s consciousness allows him to rise “above the rhythm of the universe” and to take a contemplative step back and question the meaning of world (Anderson and Granados, 2). At his origin, in man’s theological “beginning” he stands awakened by the spectacle of nature and finds himself in wonder about the external world and, ultimately,

prompted by wonder searches for answers to the questions about the meaning of himself. The theology of the gift is densely packed into the original experience of solitude. Adam's realization of his uniqueness and his subsequent curiosity and questioning "awakens as a response to an experience of wonder that precedes it. Wonder gives birth to the question about who we are, and this priority of wonder determines the very nature of our search for an answer to it" (Ibid. 5). The priority and precedence of the experience of wonder, points to a super-structure of the gift, because "wonder can be born only in the matrix of love...[and] the experience of love is the birthplace of wonder" (Ibid. 10). John Paul II's theology of the gift permeates through his exposition of the original situation of man's solitude in his theological prehistory because the first human's understanding of the world and of himself must be understood through the "hermeneutics of the gift". Creation, through these lenses, constitutes the original and most fundamental Gift, where "man appears in creation as the one who has received the world as a gift, and vice versa, one can also say that the world has received man as a gift" (TOB 181).

The original situation of the human before the creation of the woman, even though it would be possible to speak of his original happiness by his relational proximity to the Creator in Eden, God-Yahweh clearly emphasized that it is not good that man be alone, noticing a certain lack of good in his bodily solitude. In this condition of original solitude, man recognizes that none among the other living beings can offer him the basic conditions "that make it possible to exist in a relation of reciprocal gift" (TOB 181). This relation of reciprocal gift is a particular dimension of personal existence, and without its actualization, God-Yahweh affirms that he cannot fully realize his essence in the image of God. On this point about the centrality of love in human life, John Paul II wrote elsewhere that "man remains a being that is incomprehensible for

himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love” (RH, 10). John Paul II, speaking indirectly to different philosophical conceptions of identity that rests on self-centered politics of individualistic actualization and personal autonomy, argues that man is the kind of being that only realizes his essential value as a person insofar as the he is existing “with someone—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing ‘for someone’” (TOB 182). John Paul II’s sexual politics are meant to fly in the face of the contemporary philosophical conclusions of most moderns like Margaret Sanger, Karl Marx, Descartes, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Kant, to name a few, arguing that the power and freedom of individual autonomy stands in service to a greater freedom, specifically the “freedom of the gift”.

This thesis of the man’s theological dimension as a gift, permeates like a watermark the *Theology of the Body*, subtly revealing the underlying continuity of John Paul II’s theology, where the lived essence of the “communion of persons means living in a reciprocal ‘for’, in a relationship of reciprocal gift” (TOB 182). The body becomes a witness to creation as a fundamental gift of self when the gesture of self-donation occurs in the union of spousal love, and this witness of the body also ultimately points to Love as the Source from which this giving springs. This moment of discovering the gift of self through the spousal meaning of the human body, in all it’s sex, is the moment, that “sex enters into the theology of the body” (TOB 183).

The spousal meaning of the body thus uniquely translates into “the power to express love”, the kind of love that the whole human person “becomes a gift” and through giving themselves as a gift, “fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence” (TOB 185-186). John Paul II’s continuation from *Gaudium et Spes*, here becomes most evident, where he continues and deepens the normative dimension of man’s existence in the image of God, that man “cannot



fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self” (24:3). It is important to note that the reciprocal gift of self stands on the constitutive foundations of consciousness of the meaning of the body, and also on the foundation of self-determination, of personal freedom. John Paul II, describes this freedom as logically negative, as freedom from, in a certain sense, the body and its sex. The internal constraint of impulsiveness that the sexual drive imposes on the ordering of the will stands as a direct hindrance to the freedom of the gift and as a threat to the conscious mode of existence of being a reciprocal gift. As such, personal freedom as a constitutive dimension of the spousal meaning of the body, is above all freedom in the sense of self-mastery. Such mastery over oneself makes it possible for man to give himself, to become a gift for another. The interior freedom of the gift is necessary for the disinterested gift of self expressed in the narrative of Genesis to be realized. This is especially poignant through the expressions of the experiences of original nakedness in Genesis, since this interior freedom of the gift allowed each to find each other reciprocally, that is, each became conscious of the theology of the body which prophesies that the Creator willed each for their own sake. The freedom of the gift is important because it creates room for the revelation of personal value and opens a sexual politics that recognizes this gift in the body, attesting to the truth that the dimensions of value, dignity, and beauty “goes beyond the simply physical level of sexuality” (TOB 188).

In more specific terms, John Paul II is sketching the two aspects of full consciousness of the meaning of the body: first, this meaning of the body, in its femininity and masculinity, points to a power to express love in which the giver becomes a gift, and second, consciousness of the meaning of the body offers a powerful and deep availability for the “affirmation of the person”, meaning in a literal sense to live and express that, through the body, the other person is willed by

the Creator “for his own sake, that is, someone unique and unrepeatable, someone chosen by eternal Love” (TOB 188). This “affirmation of the person” is the intentional act that emerges a true communion of persons built on the constitutive factors of self-determination and consciousness, since it is in affirming the person that one receives the gift of another, instantiating the reciprocal “for”, and sparking the mutual cycle of spousal self-donation.

In light of John Paul II’s greater project, to provide an integral vision for the human person and of spousal love, it would be amiss to make no mention of his discussion on the subject of original innocence. It is precisely in this moral condition of innocence that each is preserved faithful to the theology of the gift, specifically faithful to the spousal meaning of the body. This descriptive moral condition of original innocence, or also the original righteousness of intention, of the first parents described in Genesis, indicates a certain innocence of the heart, and therefore a certain innocence in the experience of the body. In this condition, the human will is originally innocent, thus furthering the experienced reciprocity of the exchange of the gift of the body, in all its sex, and inspiring the continuation of that exchange of the gift. This innocent exchange of the gift is a certain acceptance and welcoming of the other in the context of reciprocal nakedness that consequentially leads to a personal contribution that deepens each’s experience of reciprocal dignity. As mentioned in the discussion of shame, John Paul II is not ignorant to the condition of the historical human person, who tends to, as a norm, reduce the other person to an object of appropriation for themselves. John Paul II explicates this moment of interior reduction of the other as the fundamental moment of loss of the gift, the breaking of the dynamic cycle of reciprocal enrichment, and the condition of living in direct antithesis to the gift, that is, living in a mode of extortion to the gift of the other person. This distinguishes the model

of Christian sexual politics in the relational mode of reciprocal gift from the all-too-often descriptive status of sexual politics in man's lived, historical and sinful condition.

Developing and forming one's personal existence to stand in service to the freedom of the gift is marked by an inner characteristic of self-donation and of an acceptance of the other. These two conceptual functions of mutual exchange are deeply connected to the whole process of the "gift of self" for John Paul II, that "the very act of giving becomes acceptance, and acceptance transforms itself into giving" (TOB 196). The reciprocal awareness of the spousal meaning of the body, especially in the narrative of Genesis, expresses in full force the whole inner richness of the person as a subject expressed through his and her bodies. The reciprocal interpenetration of each subjective "I" excludes the subjective condition of reducing the "other" to an appropriated object.

It is through these conceptual moves that John Paul II examines trinitarian structure of the Sanjuanist triangle, opening the discussion of the communion of persons to the sacramental constitution of the primordial communion of persons. John Paul II's understanding of the primordial sacrament is that it is a "sign that efficaciously transmits in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from eternity" (TOB 203). First, John Paul II distinguishes the body as the only material vessel capable of "making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine" (TOB 203). On the one hand, in this comment about the constitutive sacramental nature of the body, John Paul II intends to make full use of the Christian understanding of the doctrine of the soul when he remarks over the body's ability to make visible the "spiritual", expressive aspect of the person. On the other, John Paul II is holding the traditional Christian understanding of the sacramentality of the world, that through the person's bodiliness,

specifically in his sexuality, that is, in his masculinity and femininity, “man becomes a visible sign of the economy of Truth and Love” found in the mystery of the Triune God as Love (TOB 203). It is in this second way of the revelation of the body, the sacramental dimension that expresses the Divine economy of Truth and Love, that the theological dimensions of human sexual physiology and sexual love come to circle full round John Paul II’s project to develop an adequate theological anthropology from which a theology of the body is derived. Consciousness of the meaning of the body in the deepened, sacramental dimension of the gift, fill in the subjective content that becomes the constitutive condition for the actualization of the communion of persons.

The phenomenon of this grasping the hidden dimension of the unitive meaning in conjugal union anew is also closely connected to the Semitic term “yāda”, meaning “knowledge”. John Paul II notes Genesis 4:1 as significant for his theological anthropology, that the situation in which man and woman unite so intimately with each other is described as, according to the literal Semitic, a moment of knowledge, when Adam “knew his wife” (TOB 206). It is important to carefully extinguish any intellectualization of John Paul II’s analysis of knowledge, for the term itself doesn’t mean intellectual enlightenment, but an acquaintance with certain concrete experiences. “Knowledge”, in this context, raises the conjugal pact, realized in innocence, between Adam and Eve into the “specific dimension of the persons” through physical experience and familiarity (TOB 206). Since the body expresses the person, then this moment of “knowledge” of the person is knowledge of a specific depth of the human person’s subjective “I” revealed expressly through their sex, their masculinity and femininity. This is important: it is

knowledge precisely of the person's subjective "I", which is fully and objectively expressed through their bodily dimension, that is, their sex.

It is through this analytical move that John Paul II upholds the dual dimensions of conjugal love, the unitive and procreative, as expounded by Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*. This form of reciprocal "knowledge", is deeply connected to the dimension of the gift, since in fact each of them, the male and the female, is given to each other "as a unique and unrepeatable subject, as 'I', as person" and is concretely experienced in the full realization of the body's sex (TOB 208). The body's sex, expressed in its masculinity and femininity, is inherently connected to the body's procreative capacity. John Paul II remarks that "the mystery of femininity manifests and reveals itself in its full depth through motherhood" and the mystery of masculinity is manifested and revealed through its "generative and 'paternal' meaning" (TOB 211). In reception of the gift of the body, that is of the unique femininity or unique masculinity of the body, one receives both dimensions, the personal and the sexual. The person is expressed through their sex and as "knowledge" of the sexual meaning of the body reveals their motherhood and fatherhood are consequences of femininity and masculinity.

Therefore, given the theoretical structure of the gift and its imperative to give one's full self and receive totally the gift of the other, upholding both the unitive and procreative dimensions shows itself to be the natural extension of the thesis of giving the gift of self and receiving the gift of another. To give the gift of oneself in the intimacy of the conjugal embrace is to already be aware of the consciousness of the body's sexuality, however, John Paul II argues that a mature awareness includes that in giving oneself fully, one also is aware and willing to give as a personal gift one's own fatherhood and motherhood to the other. Through the body, the

human person is “husband” and “wife” and simultaneously “in this particular act of ‘knowledge’ mediated by personal masculinity and femininity”, the human person becomes father and mother. The inherency of the procreative dimension to sexual union does not hinder the full and free gift of self, but in a mode of mutual and receptive discovery, John Paul II describes this openness to the procreative and unitive dimension of the body in conjugal sexuality as the heart of the “pure subjectivity of the gift: that is, the mutual self-realization in the gift” (TOB 211).

### **PART III: Criticisms and Responses**

John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* hasn’t come onto the theological and philosophical stage without its proper criticism. In this section I will address three challenges and criticisms to John Paul II’s conception of nuptial sexuality.

**Criticism 1: The Theology of the Body is Out of Touch with Reality.** This criticism has two particular nuances. First, it claims that *A Theology of the Body* is too abstract, and therefore is not practical enough. Second, it claims that *A Theology of the Body* is too serious, and therefore does not encompass the many different ways one may experience the human body. Both of these objections are concerned with the practical, everyday usefulness of papal teaching, but the second nuance may be expanded to more comprehensive, axiological understanding of sexuality itself. The first nuance, complaining about the level of abstraction, contains within it,

on one side, a pragmatic attack on John Paul II's theses and on the other, an attack on an idealistic bias of his synthetic methodology.

Considering the pope's intention to develop a Christian incarnational theology for the good of the Church, we might find it an oddly incomprehensible work. There certainly are moments in John Paul II's narrative that place vivid descriptions of human feeling and interiority that express a certain spiritual grandeur, giving its reader a deeper understanding of the moments depicted in Scripture. However, the *Theology of the Body* is hardly narrative literature. The *Theology of the Body* is a deep and highly complex philosophical work constructing a theological anthropology that's meant to be substantiated in the lived bodily experience of everyday persons. The theological critic, Luke Timothy Johnson, criticized John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, objecting that "he dwells on the nuances of words in biblical narratives and declarations, while fantasizing an ethereal and all-encompassing mode of mutual self-donation between man and woman" at a level of abstraction far removed from ordinary people and ordinary life (Johnson, 114). The pragmatic attack against the theology of the body is that while the core theses defended in the *Theology of the Body* may have fascinating theological and philosophical implications, they remain too theoretical, too intangible to be practical. The matters of ethics are first and foremost considerations of the real, lived interactions of human persons, and if an ethical theory cannot sufficiently be implemented into the real existence of persons in their ordinary lives, then such a theory is literally useless and ought to be discarded entirely or revised.

The second part of complaint against abstraction is an attack on John Paul II's phenomenological method—it is not sufficiently based in the real, lived experiences of human

people and their interactions but rather, seems lost in the hermeneutical techniques employed in his Biblical exegesis. This follows the same form as the insubstantiability critique, except on the theory's incomprehensibility. If a theory cannot be implemented into the real lives of persons in their ordinary lives, by fault of the theory's incomprehensibility, then it, too, ought to be discarded.

The criticism that claims that *A Theology of the Body* is out of touch with reality has a second nuance that claims it is too serious, and therefore does not encompass the many different ways one may experience the human body. Human sexuality is not solely concerned with the problems of metaphysics and theoretical forethought, and in fact, rarely is it so. The real, lived expressions of erotic love are not always a serious, theologically-minded, teleologically-orientated endeavor, but are, in fact, often humorous: it's messy, clumsy, awkward, dorky, charming, casual, and even downright silly. This criticism does not contend that sex is not a serious matter, but claims that it can be made serious in the wrong way. The famous writer, C.S. Lewis, confesses, "I believe we are being encouraged to take Venus [the physical act of sex] too seriously...one author tells us that Venus should recur through the married life in 'a solemn sacramental rhythm'...as if a long face were a sort of moral disinfectant...And the psychologists have so bedeviled us with the infinite importance of complete sexual adjustment...that I could believe some young couples now go to it with the complete works of Freud, Kraft-Ebbing, Havelock Ellis and Dr. Stopes spread out on bed-tables all round them. Cheery old Ovid, who never either ignored a mole-hill or made a mountain of it, would be more to the point. We have reached the stage at which nothing is more needed than a roar of old-fashioned laughter" (C.S. Lewis, 265).



**Response:** I will deal first with the claim that the Theology of the Body is too abstract and is, on those grounds, impractical. Firstly, I would directly counter-argue that the intangibility objection, that is, that the Theology of the Body cannot be made into a descriptive condition of a person's real experience in life, is entirely groundless. As far as logical possibilities are concerned, there are no reasons why the awareness of the gift, the consciousness of the sacramentality of marriage, and purity of heart cannot be integrated into a person's everyday experience. Put another way, there is no logical factor that acts as a practical inhibitor that separates the anthropological phenomenology presented in *Theology of the Body* from lived history. However, it is true that the reality of the religious and ethical ethos put forward in the *Theology of the Body* is not generally seen in everyday peoples. Here the critic might distinguish between logical possibilities, where there is no contradiction between being pure of heart and a human, and live options, where the real possibility for one to live out the Christian religious ethos is much more difficult, given certain assertions about the weakness of the human will and lack of disciplined focus. It should be noted that the acceptance of this assertion, that human nature renders the live option highly improbable or impracticable, is to first and foremost make an assertion on human nature. Fundamental to the constitutive condition of man is the capacity for self-determination. To affirm this capacity is to make a statement on the essential freedom of the human will. Sometimes the human will may be misinformed or even crippled, such as is the case of those who think drunkenness will bring them happiness and those whose willpower to escape the grip of alcoholism does not have enough real power to fight the urge to drink on its own. If self-determination is accepted as constitutive of human nature, then it is realistically

possible for a person to live out the religious ethos of Christian love. To assert its practical impossibility, is to apathetically accept a moral condition of Akrasia, confronted by one's own lack of self-control. While I make no assertions regarding degrees of perfection or the moral impenetrability of persons who have achieved John Paul II's description of "pure at heart", I do make a fundamental assertion that the conditions of chastity dictated by moral and spiritual purity, as presented in *Theology of the Body*, must be a live option for human persons.

The second half to the first criticism of the level of abstraction attacks John Paul II's synthetic methodology as incomprehensibly abstract and therefore, for a general audience, it is impractical because it fails to make sense. While this would be a concern if it was a statement on the work itself, this is more of a statement on the difference of language-games being played. It is incomprehensible because the interlocutors do not know the constitutive content, theology, and philosophy that John Paul II is engaging with. Therefore, since the incomprehensibility criticism against John Paul II's language-game is not an attack on the essence of the language-game, but on its philosophical setting, the theological concepts, its language and metaphors, the task for the general audience is analogous to learning a language: we need teachers to explain and we need students to study. The fact that the average, non-philosophical reader most likely wouldn't grasp the deeper meanings presented in the *Theology of the Body* is troubling, but it does not discredit the larger theological project.

For the second criticism, that *Theology of the Body* is too serious, I think three things must be considered: the sacramental dimension of marriage, the nature of freedom in love, and the revelation of the person through their body. It seems correct to me to affirm C.S. Lewis' diagnosis about the social condition of making sex too serious is not a positive thing. I'd agree

that this is, in fact, potentially a harmful thing for the institution of marriage itself. However, while C.S. Lewis' criticism seems a correct criticism to make, the use of it by contemporaries against John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* seems to miss the point. The serious, somber, and seemingly penitent, interpretation of the sacramental meaning of marriage misses the more theological point that John Paul II wants to drive home: the love between spouses ought to express the essential love between the Persons of the Trinity. Therefore the problematic practice of somber, serious, and perhaps expressionless spousal love is a praxis that reflects a certain doctrinal misunderstanding. Orthodoxy in Christianity is always incarnational, and therefore carries its authority over to create Orthopraxy. I would argue that John Paul II's theologically orthodox understanding of the joyful, wonderful love within the Trinity informs his readers that human spousal love with the joyful, wonderful expressions and micro-expressions of each person constitutes a kind of orthopraxy: authentic Christian living and practice. The opposite, where spousal love is an unspeakable taboo, devoid of the joys, wonder, and laughter that conjugal love brings, is a kind of heteropraxy: a heresy in practice. Spousal love is meant to express fully the image and love of God on earth and as such, the sacramental dimension of marriage ought to be perhaps the most wonderful of physical phenomena.

In the same way, considering the other two matters, of freedom's role in love and the sacramental dimension of the body, I believe that John Paul II would fundamentally agree with C.S. Lewis' assessment. However, in order to avoid a wrong understanding about the relationship between Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy, John Paul II, in agreement with Lewis, would clarify that freedom is never license. The freedom derived from self-determination and self-consciousness is a component of the greater "language of the body", and to argue in any way a

freedom from the dual meaning of the conjugal act, unitive and procreative, marks a fundamental error in both one's understanding of freedom and one's understanding of the conjugal act. To have sex free from procreation or to have sex free from union with the other, is to not accept the gift of other in the fullness their body and it is to refuse to give the full gift of oneself for the good of the other. The personality is fully expressed through a person's body and so to reject the unitive meaning of the body would constitute a moment of appropriation of another body for oneself. It obvious that this is clearly against Christian ethics and this is specifically argued against by John Paul II throughout *Theology of the Body*. Further, to reject the procreative meaning of sex is to reject the sexual dimension of the body itself. Specifically, because the procreative meaning is written into the sexuality of the person's body. This rejection, this freedom from procreation, is a rejection of the gift of the other person's sexuality and it is a refusal to give as a free and full gift one's own sexuality, including one's fatherhood and motherhood, to the other. To do so not only marks a misunderstanding of the conjugal act, but also makes the person function as a dishonest interlocutor in the intimate and sexual sphere of the bodily intercommunication of the "language of the bodies".

### **Criticism 2: The Dual Meaning of the Conjugal Embrace Collapses to One.**

This criticism is ultimately an accusation against the Christian's indissolubly dual meaning of the conjugal embrace, the procreative and the unitive. If every occurrence of the conjugal embrace between spouses must be directed towards generating life, then, it seems, the biological direction of the act demands that the semen must always be oriented to end of fertilizing the egg. If it is

not, then the act is consequently wrong. In this view, it is easy to see how the strong focus on the procreative end could overwhelm and suppresses certain spontaneous expressions that spousal love may arouse, by confining them to the categorical box of exterior biological ordering, constructing how their intimate interactions ought to occur. This rigidity towards procreation also risks collapsing the dual ends into a hierarchy of ends, where the desire for spousal union is an end in submission to the ultimate end of procreation. Such a strict interpretation on the “end” of the conjugal embrace has the grave potential to lose value of the unitive end entirely. This criticism is not so abstract once one considers the real-life situations of heterosexual spouses in poverty or in some other family-restrictive condition and the situations of infertile heterosexual couples. If every conjugal embrace ought to be actually guided towards procreation, then what does John Paul II say about those couples who struggle with serious poverty, who cannot support a child in their present condition? Given their limited resources for child-support, wouldn't it be irresponsible of spouses to orient themselves to have as many children as often as they come together to have sex? In a slightly different situation, what about spouses who are busy attempting to build a secure financial future by devoting more time to their education and career, for the eventual purpose of rearing a family? Should they abstain from sexual union because they do not presently possess the resources constitutive for a family? Finally, how is an infertile heterosexual couple supposed to react to their inability to honor the procreative end of their marriage? Therefore, this criticism contends, the Christian's insistence on the indissolubility of the unitive and the procreative ends practically collapses into an insistence merely to the procreative end.

**Response:** I will respond to the two different underlying strains in this criticism: first, the denial of one or both of the ends of sex and second, the indissolubility of unity and procreation for conjugal sex.

I would begin by asserting that John Paul II does not put forward a rigoristic strain on the dual ends of procreation and unity. Considering the procreative dimension in contexts where there is the lack of fertility, lack of convenience, or a lack of resources under a rigoristic interpretation of John Paul II's thought would be wrong and unhelpful. To consider the last two, lack of convenience or resources, there are obviously responsible reasons for spouses to avoid procreation for a period of time. For legitimate reasons to avoid procreation for a time, John Paul II upholds the solution of Natural Family Planning. In a sermon he gave to some students prior to his papacy, he explicitly remarked that "the expression and demonstration of love does not always mean that a conception must take place" (SE 57).

However, it is important to note that he does not condone that the institution and sacrament of marriage be undertaken with an intentional view to pervasively deny and permanently reject either one of its dual meanings. To attempt to explain this distinction between a respectful avoidance of procreation and a pervasive denial of the generative meaning as essential, first, we may assume that there is a difference between acting in contradiction to an end and not actualizing an end. The latter is necessarily contained within the former, but the former is not necessarily contained within the second. If sex is for babies and bonding, then to act in contradiction to babies or bonding would be to purposely change one's attitude and actions to effect the sterility of the sexual organs or the sterility of intimate affection. Both constitute the reduction of the other person to an object of use, since neither welcome the full personal

meaning of the other as a gift. The person who denies either end of babies or bonding is concerned with ends that are not appropriate to the interaction. This transference of ends renders the potential of the conjugal act itself denied, since it inherently is oriented to procreation and bonding. While I suggest the avoidance of actualizing procreation may be permissible under legitimate constraints, I don't suggest that avoiding the actualization of bonding or union for spouses is ever permissible. Legitimate constraints are the kind of constraints that protect persons from the actualization of the act under times that would threaten the full actualization. So, for example, if sex ought to lead to babies and this is for the purpose of educating and rearing those children in a family setting, if procreation would cause a threat to the child's being educated by their parents or their being reared in a family setting, then this constitutes legitimate reason to avoid actualizing procreation.

Next, in order to begin to understand how each meaning, the procreative and the unitive, are indissoluble in John Paul II's mind, it would be proper to insist that the procreative dimension of sex is not a move to reduce ethics to its basic biological direction, biologizing or naturalizing ethics. This would be a faulty starting point for at least two serious reasons. First, this position doesn't seem understand that the unitive meaning of sex, the bonding of spouses, also has a clearly biological and natural dimension. There seems to be an underlying assumption to this criticism that the unitive end of the conjugal embrace is not as firmly rooted in natural biology, like the procreative end clearly is. This position tends to characterize the insistence of the procreative end of the conjugal embrace as a fundamentalist overemphasis on the observations of natural biology. However, the unitive dimension of the conjugal embrace should not be construed as the spiritual or esoteric element of the conjugal embrace and the procreative

end the physical or exoteric element. Christian author Sam Black elaborates on the physicality of the unitive end when he refers to the stimulation and release of neurochemicals during sex, such as dopamine, testosterone, norepinephrine, oxytocin, vasopressin, endogenous opiates, and serotonin, as the “brain’s sexual cocktail”, (Black, 9). To construe the difference of the unitive and the procreative as a dialectic between esoteric personal fulfillment and its counterpart of an overly biological emphasis, not only ignores the natural dimension of the unitive end, but also misunderstands the personal order. The personal order does not stand in a dialectical hostility or opposition to the natural order, like this criticism seems to construe of the unitive end standing in a dialectical difference from the procreative end. The personal order is the contemplative modality of man’s conscious existence, and this surely includes man as a natural body in the natural world.

This leads to the second reason why John Paul II’s insistence on the procreative meaning of the body and of its sex, isn’t naturalizing ethics, precisely because of the personal order. The personal order takes into account the conscious experience and personal awareness of the meanings of the body, and therefore to consider the bodily norms biologically correlated with the conjugal act, is not to assert that John Paul II’s sexual ethics is a merely natural consideration. This is the philosophical development that above all leads John Paul II to the theological dimensions of the body, which surely is not a reduction of the body to its biological components.

Each end, the unitive and procreative, then simultaneously has a concretely biological dimension, a sacramental or personal dimension, and a theological dimension. Part of the reason why the procreative dimension cannot be stripped away from the unitive is because the procreative meaning cannot be isolated and separated from a human person’s body. On this



point, John Paul II argues specifically that “masculinity contains in a hidden way the meaning of fatherhood and femininity that of motherhood” (TOB 217). To reject this dimension in another person’s sexuality is simultaneously a refusal to give one’s whole sexual self to the other and a refusal to accept and welcome the sexual self of the other, threatening the mutual exchange of the gift. An editor of *Communio*, Adrian J. Walker, has argued that the procreative and unitive dimensions each contribute to an inner logic of the conjugal embrace, where the nature of the act in and of itself is tied to procreation: “even contraception presupposes the procreative “signification” of the act” (Walker 30). However, it is important to realize that those who engage in conjugal relations for the sole purpose of procreation is, in attitude and action, the use of another person.

John Paul II would in no way support a hierarchy of ends, arranging either the unitive or procreative ends in a superior-inferior relation to each other. The dual meanings of unity and procreation ought to be understood in the way that he develops it in his book *Love and Responsibility*: “parenthood—motherhood in a woman, fatherhood in a man—considered on the personal and not merely “biological” plane, is in a sense a new crystallization of the love of persons that grows on the substratum of their already mature union” (LR 244). This is the basis that supports John Paul II’s thesis that mature love between spouses recognizes the dual meaning of sex.

**Criticism 3: What of Sexual Pleasure and Desire?** Christine Gudorf argues at length that the way that the Catholic Church views human sexuality, both historically and presently, is

insufficient because it does not make sense of pleasure. She makes the historical note that “Augustine asserted that even marital sex for the purposes of procreation was venially sinful because it was so impossible to experience it without pleasure”, pleasure being a direct result of the state of man’s original and historical sin (Gudorf, 124). This criticism of *Theology of the Body* sustains that there is a lack of focus on the relational good, opposed to a reproductive good, of pleasure. Gudorf asserts that the Church ought to instead confirm the goodness of pleasure and it ought to be included as an essential component of the vocation of marriage. Among others, Luke Timothy Johnson also voices the same criticism when he reviews the *Theology of the Body*: “I would welcome from the pope some appreciation for the goodness of sexual pleasure—any bodily pleasure come to think of it! Pleasure is, after all, God’s gift also. . . . Sexual passion, in papal teaching, appears mainly as an obstacle to authentic love.” (Johnson 117). However, this criticism is not all about the supposed suppression of pleasure in the conjugal embrace by the Christian view, but that this “ignorance of sexuality” leads to a fundamental “lack of [ecclesiological] communication” on these issues, and further, leads to a lack of a fuller “theological appreciation for sexuality and sexual communion” (Gudorf, 136). The specific point voiced is that the traditional and historically Augustinian picture of sexual pleasure as something innately rooted in sin ought to be abandoned, and if it isn’t, it actually places the institution and sacramentality of marriage at serious risk.

**Response:** Attention to the full context of *Theology of the Body* reveals that John Paul II clearly spoke of the role of pleasure, arousal, and erotic love in multiple audiences and also in his other works, most notably in *Love and Responsibility*. To consider the audiences 47 and 48, to

use explicit examples among others, the role of eros and ethos is distinguished and made clear. The point that John Paul II is making in this distinction between common eros and ethos is “to call attention to the danger of reductionism and exclusivism”, because such psychological dispositions render individuals morally and psychologically incapable of actualizing the communion of persons, since the constitutive factor of being conscious of a person is lacking (TOB 316). Eros, as it is commonly used, reflects an attraction that is “above all of a sensual nature” and it’s important to note that John Paul II is not being puritanical, it isn’t the sensuality that is dangerous (TOB 316). The danger is of the incapacity that comes with libidinous dispositions of not being able to become conscious of the spiritual or personal nature of the person one finds themselves attracted to. John Paul II states elsewhere that “this [erotic] love can be correctly formed only inasmuch as it is formed in close harmony with the proper finality of the [sex] drive”, which is the conjugal union with another human person (LR 36-7).

In agreement with John Paul II, C.S. Lewis elaborated this point in *The Four Loves* when he said that “sexual desire, without Eros, wants it, the thing in itself; Eros wants the Beloved” (Lewis 263). C.S. Lewis’s use of the term “Eros” is in fundamental harmony with John Paul II’s, and this is especially evident when C.S. Lewis considers the kind of sexual desire and pleasure that John Paul II is adamant in warning against: “We use a most unfortunate idiom when we say, of a lustful man prowling the streets, that he “wants a woman.” Strictly speaking, a woman is just what he does not want. He wants pleasure for which a woman happens to be the necessary piece of apparatus.” (Lewis 263).

Not only does John Paul II talk abundantly about erotic pleasure, arousal, and desire, but the character of his analysis of the original unity in Genesis and the true love of the chaste

spouses, especially outlined in his analysis of the book of Tobit and the Song of Songs, suggests that the second complaint, that he doesn't affirm it as inherent and good within the vocation of marriage, is simply unfounded.

I am, however, open to the third part of this criticism, namely that there is a lack of ecclesiological communication about the Christian teaching on love, sex, and marriage, which seriously does endanger the future respect and understanding of marriage. I am in full agreement that Christians ought make a serious effort to fulfill the duties of their biological and spiritual parenthood: the education and rearing of the young, especially concerning the meaning of their personal sexuality. This is, of course, a descriptive complaint over the contemporary and cultural state of affairs and not a theological criticism against John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*.

#### **PART IV: Conclusion**

In the landmark U.S. court case of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, at the close of the court decision, Justice Kennedy remarked the following about the essential nature of marriage:

“No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their

plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization's oldest institutions.” (2015)

Justice Kennedy’s romanticization of spousal unicity as the ineffable essence of matrimony apart from the procreative end is a sentiment that John Paul II was keenly aware of while he was writing and delivering his Wednesday audiences about the Divine plan for human love. By the time of the Pope’s deliverance, the underlying liberationist premises of the Sexual Revolution had already become a formidable ideological force of influence that had begun shape to the modern mind. The influence of the Sexual Revolution catalytically prompted modern man’s dilemma of forming a new, ideological synthesis that would become the modern *Weltanschauung* on the human person, the nature of love, and human sexuality. The dialectical trajectory of the modern *Weltanschauung* regarding human love, as captured in Justice Kennedy’s wording, however, has precedent. *Roe v. Wade* set the legal standard of legally dissolving the unitive and procreative meanings of the conjugal act and *Griswold v. Connecticut* before that. The greater cultural disintegration of the unitive from the procreative meaning of love, however, socially preexisted these U.S. Supreme Court decisions, especially in the voices of many major writers. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, had been a figure that added momentum to separation of the unitive meaning and the procreative. As Waldstein notes in his introduction to his translation of the *Theology of the Body*, Sanger had written in *Women and the New Race*, rhetorically asking, “What effect will the practice of birth control have upon women’s moral development?...It will break her bonds. It will free her to understand the cravings and soul needs

of herself and other women. It will enable her to develop her love-nature separate from and independent of her maternal nature” (qtd. in Waldstein, 2). On this point in particular, Christopher West is astute to note that the philosophical root of the problem of Sanger goes much deeper, and this is why *Theology of the Body* is “not only a response to the sexual revolution, it’s a response to the Enlightenment. It’s a response to modern rationalism, Cartesian dualism, super-spiritualism, and all the disembodied anthropologies infecting the modern world” (West xxvii).

The central attention that John Paul II pays in the *Theology of the Body* is to present a deepened analysis of the Christian proposal for human love, with particular attention the words of Christ to the Pharisees who ask him about the indissolubility of marriage and the Law of Moses. These questions, which are linked to the modern questions of personhood, human love, and sexuality, are pressing indeed and are questions being reformulated by John Paul II’s contemporaries, by “single persons, by married and engaged couples, by young people, but also also writers, journalists, politicians, economists, demographers, in sum, by contemporary culture and civilization” (TOB 219). The *Theology of the Body* is meant to be a positive answer for these questions, in presenting an integral vision for the human person and for human love, which is a certain retrieval of man’s dignity, a dignity that’s drawn from threshold of man’s theological history. John Paul II wonderfully presents the beauty of the Christian vision for human love, showing that the body reveals God in the world and it reveals the person and this revelation also reveals humanity’s great vocation to love. This call to love is a vocation for humanity that is beautifully expressed by the first man and first woman in Genesis and one that draws us towards the enrichment of the communion of persons. John Paul II shows that the Christian tradition presents a biblical anthropology that incorporates an integral picture for human love into the

person's lived experience and is meant to radically change people's lives, opening their experience to the life-giving love of God and to the circle of experience shared between man and woman living in an authentic mode of reciprocal self-gift. As John Paul II put it, it is necessary to cultivate the contemplative gaze that is able to truly grasp the beautiful mystery of the body and every person's great vocation to love. It is in this way that John Paul II greatly contributes through the *Theology of the Body* to show the authentic beauty of the Christian proposal for spousal love.

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