

## **Theology Day 2019: The Moral Vision of Saint Pope John Paul II**

Dear Friends of the SOT/Sem - Theology Day 2019 participants,

I look forward to meeting with you in a few short weeks to look back on the life and pontificate of Saint Pope John Paul II. Part of my rationale in doing this particular theme for Theology Day is because so many of my conversations with you have included some reference to JP2's teaching. Thus, I wanted to dive a little deeper this time around and discuss not just JP2's teaching on marriage and family but also his vision of the human person and his understanding of the importance of work.

I also wanted you to receive the opportunity, if you wanted to embrace it, to read what my students encounter in the classroom. Therefore, there is some "prep" reading you could engage in if you so choose. I have selected five readings that are accessible to students, and they can be read in the following order:

1. Michael Walsh's essay "From Karol Wojtyla to John Paul II" helps you understand JP2's early life as he transitioned from parish life in Poland to becoming Pope in Rome;
2. A second reading by Avery Dulles, "The Theological Vision of John Paul II" begins to paint a portrait of the many dimensions included in JP's thoughts and vision for the human person and the world;
3. The last three readings get into some specifics regarding the theological vision of JP2;  
Let me explain;
  - a. Susan Rakoczy's essay takes a hard look at the ways in which JP's proclamations on women were both embraced and challenged by women (and men) across the globe;
  - b. Two other essays- those by Luke Timothy Johnson and Christopher West- offer differing remarks and receptions of JP2's now famous radio addresses that eventually became dubbed his "Theology of the Body". Both these essays are meant to expose you to the ways in which this line of thinking has been criticized by some and embraced by others;

In conclusion, these readings are offered as an opportunity. In no way are they mandatory for your presence at this Theology Day. Rather, I wanted to offer you the chance to read more (and beforehand) if you so choose.

God bless, and I look forward to seeing you all on Friday September 20<sup>th</sup> at Emmaus Hall at St. John's or at St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Maple Grove on Thursday October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

My best,

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From: *The Vision of John Paul II: Assessing His Thought & Influence* (Lit Press, 2008) Edited by Gerard Mannion

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## From Karol Wojtyla to John Paul II: Life and Times

Michael Walsh

By whatever standard one chooses, the life of Karol Wojtyla was extraordinary. There are many accounts of his life and, full of incident as it was, perhaps no life of a recent pope has been so well known.<sup>1</sup> In part this is simply a result of the length of his reign. As Pope John Paul II, Wojtyla's pontificate was the second longest in the two millennia of the church's history, from October 16, 1978, "the year of the three popes"—remarkable enough in itself—down to his death on April 2, 2005. Leaving aside the "papacy" of St. Peter, in length of time it was outdone only by the thirty-two-year reign of Pius IX who was fifty-two years old when elected, six years younger than Wojtyla.

Such longevity itself has consequences, not least the opportunity to model the church according to one's own conception of what it should be—which, one cannot help thinking, is why the cardinals in conclave after a long pontificate choose an older man to succeed to the throne.

1. John Paul II has attracted a large number of biographers. The most sympathetic, and the most detailed, is George Weigel's *Witness to Hope* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999). Both Tad Szulc's *Pope John Paul II: The Biography* (New York: Scribner, 1995) and Jonathan Kwitny's *Man of the Century* (New York: Henry Holt; London: Little, Brown, 1997) are useful. My own *John Paul II: A Biography* (London: HarperCollins, 1994) and John Cornwell's study of the pope's closing years, *The Pope in Winter* (London: Viking, 2004), are more critical of the pontificate.

2. Peter Hebblethwaite published a book with this title (London: Collins, 1978). Paul VI died August 6, 1978; John Paul I was elected August 26th and died September 28th.

Perhaps the cardinal electors recognize, maybe even subconsciously, that there is something not quite "catholic" about the church when one person, no matter how highly placed, can attempt with some success to mold the church according to his own particular vision. Be that as it may, no pope has issued more encyclicals than John Paul II, no pope has proclaimed more saints, and none has created more cardinals. But then only two, Pius IX and Leo XIII, had quite as much time to do so. Indeed, given the difference in the number of years each presided over the church, Pope Paul VI at least managed a proportionally comparable number of cardinals to the creations of John Paul II.

But undoubtedly no other pope traveled so widely. Until the time of Paul VI, of course, no Roman pontiff had a realistic opportunity of doing so. It is true Pope Paul traveled, but to eucharistic congresses, to the UN, or to the Holy Land: quite specific voyages of which much was made at the time. They were highlights of his pontificate but not part of its very essence, as the papal voyaging has appeared to be during the last quarter of the twentieth century. The figures are staggering. Quite apart from his many journeys around the Italian peninsula in his nearly twenty-seven years as pope, John Paul II left Italy nearly a hundred times.<sup>3</sup>

Above all, and despite the warning that comparisons are odious, it is doubtful that there has ever been so intellectually gifted a bishop of Rome, with two well-earned doctorates, one in theology, the second in philosophy. Previous popes have published books, though usually before, rather than during, their pontificates. Pope John Paul published three books while pope. His most significant writing, apart from his encyclicals, was a hefty, challenging, and philosophically sophisticated study, *The Acting Person*, which was first published in Polish in 1969 when he was Archbishop of Krakow.<sup>4</sup>

### Early Career

There is no doubting his intellectual achievements in philosophy and theology, but by all accounts he was also no mean soccer player, his preferred

3. He touched down in 181 countries, some of them more than once, and Poland eight times. He visited two Muslim countries, Sudan and Morocco—three, if Turkey is included.

4. The English edition (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979) was a much-revised version.

position being, somewhat predictably as it now seems, that of goalkeeper. He was also a canoeist, a skier, and something of a mountaineer. And not only was he an all-around sportsman, he acted, and considered taking up the stage as a career. He wrote plays, at least one of which was thought good enough to be performed in a major theater.<sup>5</sup> Even as an assistant bishop he still found time to publish theater criticism.<sup>6</sup> He also went on to compose and, what is more unusual, to publish poems, a collection of which appeared while he was pope.

He found scope for at least some of these talents at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, which he attended after leaving school. There he studied the humanities, specializing in Polish literature. The choice of the Jagiellonian University was perhaps inevitable, given its proximity to his hometown, but it was also significant.

The university had been named after Jagiello, the grand duke of Lithuania whose marriage in 1386 to the eleven-year-old Polish queen Jadwiga brought about the union of Poland and Lithuania, a high point in the history of both nations. Krakow was then the capital, and remained so until the end of the sixteenth century. It was chiefly the Jagiellonian that supplied teachers to staff the universities elsewhere in the new Poland that emerged after World War I, for it was in Krakow in particular that the sense of Polish identity, language, culture, and religion was preserved through the long years of suppression after the country had been partitioned among Russia, Prussia, and Austria. For a time in the nineteenth century, Krakow was a Free City, in the governance of which the rectors of the Jagiellonian played a leading role. Even after the Free City had disappeared into the relatively benign rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1846,<sup>7</sup> it still served as a center of Polish nationalism. In this confused historical geography of the period, the future pope's father, also named Karol, had served in the army of the empire, rising through the ranks to become a noncommissioned officer.

5. *The Jeweller's Shop* was given its world premier in Hammersmith, London, in April 1979.

6. Karol Wojtyla, *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

7. Relatively benign compared with Russia, which tried to impose Orthodoxy, and with Prussia, which did likewise for Protestantism. This region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was known as Galicia.

Lolek, as the young Karol Wojtyla was nicknamed, was born on May 18, 1920, not two years after Poland had been reestablished as an independent state in the aftermath of World War I, and only a few months after its boundaries had been redrawn formally to include Krakow and Wojtyla's birthplace of Wadowice, a small town of—then—some fifteen thousand inhabitants, fifty kilometers to the southwest of Krakow. In 1980, addressing a UNESCO gathering in Paris, he said:

I am the son of a nation that has lived through the greatest experiences in history, a nation which, though condemned to death by its neighbours, has survived and remained itself. It has conserved, regardless of foreign occupation, its national (as distinct from its political) sovereignty, not by depending on the resources of physical power, but uniquely by depending on its culture. As it happened, this culture revealed itself as being a greater power than all the other forces.<sup>8</sup>

In September 1938 Lolek began his studies in Polish language and literature at the Jagiellonian. He was not left free to study for long. On September 1, 1939, just a year after he had become an undergraduate, Germany invaded Poland. Soon afterward 184 professors of the university were arrested and deported to Sachsenhausen. Wojtyla was sent first to a quarry, where he worked for a year, and then to a chemical factory; when he wrote in his encyclicals about the hard toil of laborers he, perhaps alone of the popes (since in the early centuries of the church when some were sent as captives to the lead mines of Sardinia), knew firsthand the reality of which he was speaking.<sup>9</sup> And although the city of Krakow itself survived unscathed, at least outwardly, the pope likewise knew firsthand some of the terrors of war, the clandestine meetings, the fear of arrest, the disappearance of those judged hostile to the regime. And Krakow, of course, is not far from the horrors of Auschwitz.

While still at school, he had several times taken part in plays put on by a history teacher at a neighboring girls' school. In all he took part in ten such productions, always being allotted the leading role, which was usually a heroic, patriotic one. After the fall of Poland the friend who had directed plays in Wadowice came to Krakow, and Wojtyla once

8. *L'Osservatore Romano*, English weekly edition, June 23, 1980, 11.

9. He wrote a poem, "The Quarry," included in his *Collected Plays and Poetry* (Krakow: Znak, 1972).

more took up acting. Together they founded a new theater company, the Rhapsodic Theatre, which survived the war only to be closed down by the communist regime. Plays were performed in private houses. There was no scenery and few props; all had to depend on the power of the word, which Wojtyła regarded as an advantage.

Explicitly or implicitly, the plays performed by the theater company had a heroic and patriotic message. He wrote of the fall of Poland in November that year:

No matter how this has come about and who is to blame for it, one thing becomes obvious: in Europe, Poland has been the greatest martyr, she whom He [God] had raised as Christ's bulwark for so many centuries . . . I think that our liberation ought to be a gate for Christ, I think of an Athenian Poland, but more perfect than Athens with all the magnitude of Christianity, such as our great poets imagined, those prophets of Babylonian captivity. The nation fell like Israel because it had not recognised the messianic ideal, already raised like a torch—but unrealised.<sup>10</sup>

In nineteenth-century Polish romantic literature, by which Wojtyła was much influenced, the dismembered country had been a figure of the suffering Christ.

Wojtyła explored these themes in two plays he wrote about this time. In the prologue to *Job* he explicitly draws a parallel between the time of Job and Poland in 1940. He develops a similar argument in *Jeremiah*, which he even subtitles “a national drama.” The first two acts of the play take place on Palm Sunday 1596, at the outset of Poland's greatest period of power, its “golden age.” Wojtyła saw its role as a buffer between infidel Turk and schismatic Russian. The setting of the play is a gathering for a sermon to be delivered by a Jesuit priest, Piotr Skarga, who was renowned for prophesying that Poland would fall if it did not put its house in order. Skarga is a historical character, as are the other dramatis personae, though in reality they were not all alive at the same time. One of the central characters is St. Andrew Bobola, another Jesuit and a Polish aristocrat, who was murdered by Cossacks in 1657 and canonized as a martyr in 1938. Wojtyła's play closes in 1620 with a Polish defeat in battle. In his sermons Skarga analyzed the ills of society

10. Quoted in Wojtyła, *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, 73.

and condemned in particular the oppression of the poor. As Wojtyła did in his play, Skarga equates Poland with Jerusalem. “Let the theatre be a church where the national spirit can flourish,”<sup>11</sup> wrote Wojtyła to his friend the theater director.

Lolek's mother had died when he was nine, and his elder brother—by more than a dozen years—died a couple of years later, leaving his father as his only close relative.<sup>12</sup> Father and son lived together in a flat in Krakow, and it was only after his father's death—and surviving being accidentally knocked down by a German truck—that Wojtyła decided to become a priest rather than an actor. He started his studies in secret while still working at the chemical plant. He later joined those preparing for the priesthood in the clandestine seminary hidden within the palace of Archbishop Adam Stefan Sapieha. The immediate occasion of his taking refuge in the archiepiscopal palace was a roundup by the Germans of all young men who might have taken up arms against them. The house where Wojtyła was living was searched, but he escaped unnoticed and took refuge in the archiepiscopal palace.

When the war was over he traveled to Rome for doctoral studies, leaving Krakow just a fortnight after his ordination on November 1, 1946. His supervisor in Rome for his thesis on the notion of faith in the Carmelite mystic St. John of the Cross<sup>13</sup> was Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, perhaps the leading Dominican Thomist of his day. He became, though after Wojtyła had traveled back to Poland, the chief adversary of what was known as “the new theology,” a theology characterized by a “return to the sources,” to the Bible and the fathers of the church. Pope John Paul's Thomism owes far more to that of Garrigou-Lagrange than it does to the modern school, though it is the theology of Karl Rahner, Yves Congar, and Edward Schillebeeckx, all influenced by *la nouvelle théologie*, which had the most impact upon the documents of Vatican II.

11. *Ibid.*, 5.

12. Much has been made of the impact on the life of Wojtyła by the early death of his mother. “Such speculations, frequently based on amateur psychoanalysis conducted from afar, are of no use to serious students of Wojtyła's life,” says Weigel (*Witness to Hope*, 29). There had also been a sister, but she died, it seems, when only a few weeks old.

13. Wojtyła had been introduced to the writings of the Carmelite mystics by a devout layman in Krakow, Jan Tyranowski.

But in fact it was not neoscholasticism of any variety that became Karol Wojtyła's preferred style of philosophical or theological thought. After his return to Poland for a brief period in a country parish and then work in Krakow itself as a curate and university chaplain, he went to the university of Lublin to begin a doctorate in ethics, making a special study of the ethics of Max Scheler—a man whose own ethics, one should perhaps add, scarcely lived up to the ideals that moral philosophers put before their readers. Scheler and many others, including Edith Stein whom Wojtyła as John Paul II was, rather controversially,<sup>14</sup> to canonize, had been much influenced by the thought of the founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. Not that John Paul would ever forget the rather traditional Thomism of Garrigou-Lagrange. As the Fordham philosopher John Conley commented on reading the pope's writings, "I often have the impression of banging into scholastic steel as I wander through the phenomenological fog."<sup>15</sup> But in the end it was in philosophical phenomenology rather than in theological scholasticism that John Paul was to be most comfortable.<sup>16</sup>

As a theologian, John Paul did not greatly return to the "sources" in the manner of the practitioners of the *nouvelle théologie*. His use of the Bible, for instance, falls more into a meditative than a strictly scientific category and is sometimes the despair of Scripture scholars.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless he has used it powerfully to put before the world that fundamental question which straddles the boundaries of philosophy and theology: what is it to be human? This is a topic he treats in a distinctly phenomenological fashion.<sup>18</sup>

14. To be more exact, the controversy was attached to her beatification in Berlin in 1987. Stein, known as a Carmelite nun under the name of Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was beatified as a martyr. A martyr, of course, is someone who dies for his or her faith. But Edith Stein was put to death because she was by birth a Jew, not because she had become a Christian.

15. John M. McDermott, ed., *The Thought of Pope John Paul II* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993), 28.

16. Cf. also, chapter 3 of the present volume.

17. See the article by Terrence Prendergast and the response to it by James Swetnam in McDermott, *The Thought of Pope John Paul II*, 69–97.

18. See my article "John Paul II" in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, ed. Adrian Hastings, 351–52 (Oxford University Press, 2000).

An example of this approach is to be found in his first book, *Love and Responsibility*.<sup>19</sup> It was published when he was already a bishop—he was named assistant bishop of Krakow in July 1958, learning of the appointment while on a canoeing and camping trip with students, and was consecrated on September 28th that year. The origins of the book lay somewhat earlier. He had been a popular student chaplain and an equally popular lecturer at the University of Lublin. Students willingly accompanied him on these camping and canoeing holidays. In their discussions, especially with a group he took to the Mazurian Lakes in 1957, lay the genesis of this book on sexual ethics. He reflected upon their experience, assisted by a close friend, an eminent woman psychiatrist in Krakow.

The book was a spirited, if radical, defense of Catholic sexual ethics in the face of a communist government's efforts to undermine the church by undermining traditional family values. It stays close to the traditional Catholic view that marriage, though it may have many purposes, is primarily for the procreation of children, a position which, less than a decade later, the Second Vatican Council carefully avoided endorsing. Although Wojtyła regularly puts the female before the male (i.e., "woman and man," rather than vice versa), there are limits to such feminism: trusting "surrender" of the wife to her husband is for him the distinctive trait of the woman in love, and "possession" is the characteristic modality of the devotion of the man to the woman he loves.<sup>20</sup> There is no mention of abortion, none of premarital sex or homosexuality. On the other hand, it is remarkably frank on the sexual pleasure enjoyed by both men and women. Too frank for some, it seems, and Wojtyła apparently considered dropping that particular section from his book, though in the end, and with the encouragement of the Jesuit Henri de Lubac, he retained it.<sup>21</sup> It was this book that encouraged Pope Paul VI to appoint the by-then Archbishop Wojtyła (he was named Archbishop of Krakow on December 30, 1963) to his commission on birth control. In the end he never attended, the Polish government making it difficult for him to obtain a visa to leave the country. Whether he

19. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willetts (London: Collins, 1981).

20. Op. cit., 98–99, 251.

21. Cf. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 143.

would in any case have been swayed by the arguments eventually contained in what became known as the “Majority Report” in favor of the church approving at least some methods of artificial contraception, one may well doubt. He was opposed to such means in *Love and Responsibility* and remained so throughout his life.

This was evident in his preaching as well as in his encyclicals, especially *Veritatis Splendor* of 1993 and the follow-up, *Evangelium Vitae*, two years later. That these issues of sexual morality loom so large in the papal teaching, however, is perhaps not simply because they were in themselves major issues. Although many if not most Catholics shared the pope’s opposition to abortion, the same could not be said of their reaction to Pope Paul VI’s *Humanae Vitae* of July 1968. It is generally acknowledged that very many Catholics simply ignored Pope Paul’s endorsement of the Minority Report produced by his birth control commission. This appeared to John Paul as a significant act of disobedience to the papal magisterium. It was the desire to call Catholics back into line that determined one aspect of the trajectory of Wojtyła’s papacy. It was that which took him from Rome to so many different Catholic communities around the globe.

### Election

But first he had to be elected. He was chosen by his fellow cardinals on the eighth ballot, on October 16, 1978. Conclaves are intended to be secret and to remain so. George Weigel remarks that little is known about what happened beyond the fact that Wojtyła occupied cell 91, and that he took with him into the conclave, presumably as recreational reading, a journal of Marxist philosophy.<sup>22</sup> It is nonetheless generally accepted that the main contenders were the cardinal of Genoa, Giuseppe Siri, and the cardinal of Florence, Giovanni Benelli, representatives respectively of the conservative and liberal factions among the cardinals. When it became evident that neither stood a chance of defeating the other by the requisite two-thirds majority, the candidature of Wojtyła rapidly advanced. It is also widely agreed that his chief backer, the “great elector” in conclave parlance, was the cardinal of

22. *Ibid.*, 252.

Vienna, Franz König, who knew him, liked him even if he thought him somewhat conservative, and in any event wanted a non-Italian.

Despite Weigel’s remarks on conclave secrecy, a detailed account of the voting is provided by Francis Burkle-Young,<sup>23</sup> and his version sounds highly credible. He accepts that König was the main player in the choice of Wojtyła, but argues that the election came about as the conservative faction, realizing they could not move forward with Siri,<sup>24</sup> switched their votes to the cardinal of Krakow.<sup>25</sup> Thus if Burkle-Young is to be believed, Wojtyła was elected because he was conservative, not something that was evident to the church at large, who knew little of him before he appeared to acknowledge the applause of a rather stunned crowd in the piazza below. “Forgive me if I make mistakes in your—no, our, language,” said Papa Wojtyła, addressing the crowd from the loggia of St. Peter’s. The “your—no, our” was very theatrical—the former actor had not lost his old skills—but it had the desired effect: the Italians, deprived of an Italian pope for the first time since the death of the Utrecht-born Hadrian VI in 1523, loved him for it.

Among the Polish romantic poets of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries whom Karol Wojtyła had once so assiduously studied, there was a strong sense of destiny. For an oppressed people without leaders they provided a different kind of leadership and elevated the national consciousness of the Polish people by portraying them as liberators not only of their own land, under Russian, Prussian, and Austrian domination, but of other countries as well. Some put this into practice, leaving Poland to fight in the American and Italian revolutions. They were therefore not enamored of popes such as Gregory XVI and Pius IX who, in 1830 and 1848 respectively, appeared to betray nationalist aspirations. One of the chief among the romantic poets, Juliusz Slowacki (1809–49) even wrote a poem on the flight of Pope Pius IX

23. Francis Burkle-Young, *Passing the Keys* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 2001), 265–86.

24. Siri had announced in a newspaper interview that, were he elected, he would reverse many of the changes brought about by Vatican II. He had intended that the interview would not appear before the conclave opened, and would therefore not be seen by the cardinal electors, *incommunicado* in the Sistine Chapel. Unfortunately for Siri, *Gazzetta del Popolo* published it a day early.

25. Wojtyła had become archbishop of Krakow on March 8, 1964, and was named cardinal on June 28, 1967.

from Rome in November 1848. In the poem he foretold the coming of a "Slavic pope," a "brother to all mankind."<sup>26</sup> This Slavic pope would be made of sterner stuff than Pius IX. John Paul II was the first Slavic pope, and he was conscious of his destiny.

The first of his many overseas journeys was to Puebla, Mexico, in January 1979. This visit to the meeting of the Latin American bishops (CELAM) was to have been undertaken by Paul VI. John Paul took over and set the tone for the remainder of his pontificate. He was vigorous in defense of human rights, but equally vigorous in criticizing what he regarded as the politicization of the church in the name of liberation theology. Though not itself Marxist, liberation theology undoubtedly drew some of its inspiration from a Marxist analysis of Latin American society. Though ready enough himself from time to time to use Marxist concepts (that of "alienation" in particular<sup>27</sup>), he had lived too closely with a communist regime to be prepared to tolerate what appeared to be so close an adhesion to Marxist philosophy.<sup>28</sup>

Naturally he had no such problems during his visit to Poland, his next foreign trip out of Rome. He spoke again of human rights, but his message to the episcopate was different. They had, he said, a special obligation to preserve, not Catholicism precisely, but Polish culture. "It is well known," he said, "it is precisely culture that is the first and fundamental proof of a nation's identity."<sup>29</sup> That took him on to the issue of European identity:

Europe, despite its present long-lasting divisions of regimes, ideologies and economic and political systems, cannot cease to seek its fundamental unity, and must turn to Christianity. Christianity must commit itself anew to the formation of the spiritual unity of Europe. Economic and political reasons alone are not enough. We must go deeper to the ethical reasons. The Polish episcopate, all the episcopates and churches have a great task to perform.

26. Cited in Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 35.

27. Cf., for example, *Centesimus Annus* 41.

28. In *Centesimus Annus* he provides his own critique of Marxism, cf. 22-24. This was, of course, after the collapse of communist regimes in Europe.

29. John Paul II, *Return to Poland* (London: Collins, 1979), 83-84. The collected translations in this volume are taken from the English edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*.

Despite its unhappy history, Poland had retained its identity through its culture, at the heart of which was Christianity; Europe, the pope seemed to be saying, ought to do likewise.

The papacy has always been Eurocentric. Despite his many travels, that remained true of John Paul II. At the opening of his pontificate, the pope from Poland was understandably preoccupied by the communist domination of so much of Eastern Europe. In April 1979 he addressed members of the European parliament. He told them very firmly that Western Europe was not Europe; Europe included also the states of the East. Soon afterward he addressed the European bishops. Europe, he said, is the cradle of creative thought. Toward the end of 1980 he declared Cyril and Methodius, the apostle of the Slavs to whom he afterward dedicated an encyclical, patron saints of Europe. On October 8, 1988, he visited various European institutions in Strasbourg, including once again the European parliament, where the Reverend Ian Paisley, later to be Northern Ireland's first minister in a power-sharing executive embracing Catholics and Protestants, had to be removed from the chamber for abusing the pope as Antichrist. On this occasion, John Paul II warned the members not to have too narrow a notion of what constituted Europe. "Other nations could certainly join those which are represented here today," he said. "My wish as supreme pastor of the universal church, someone who has come from Eastern Europe and who knows the aspirations of the Slav peoples, that other 'lung' of our common European motherland, my wish is that Europe . . . might one day extend to the dimensions it has been given by geography and still more by history."

A year and a half earlier he had spoken of Europe as embracing the continent "from the Atlantic to the Urals." By the time he used that phrase, during a homily at Spire in France in May 1987, the die, as far as the Soviet bloc was concerned, was already cast. Opinions will differ about the significance of the role played by the pope in the collapse of communism.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless it is highly probable that if the pope had not

30. I do not accept the line taken by Carl Bernstein and Marco Politi in their biography of John Paul II that there was an unacknowledged agreement between the Vatican and the Reagan administration on how to bring down communism. One has only to recall that in December 1981 the Vatican took the unusual step of calling a press conference to deny Reagan's claim that the Holy See favored sanctions against Poland. Cf. *His Holiness* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 358-61.

made his historic visit to his homeland in 1979, Solidarity, the Polish trade union and populist movement, would never have become the force that it did. The support given by the pope to Lech Walesa and the other leaders of Solidarity kept them, at least to a degree, safe from government persecution and prevented the complete suppression of their movement. And what happened in Poland proved a catalyst for the other nations of Eastern Europe.

John Paul II was appropriately modest about his own role. His encyclical *Centesimus Annus* of 1991 contains a very realistic assessment of the failure of communism, for economic as well as ideological reasons. Agostino Casaroli, Cardinal Secretary of State from 1979 to 1990, once remarked that the Holy See was surprised by the speed of the collapse, and it is highly unlikely that John Paul II himself was expecting quite so sudden a demise. He, like Cardinal Wysziński, had in 1981 been afraid of a Russian invasion of their country, though there were others in Poland who believed, probably correctly, that Russia, bemired in Afghanistan, was by that time no longer in a position militarily to suppress an uprising in its satellite countries.

But if the USSR could not suppress revolt, did it attempt to eliminate the pope himself? On May 13, 1981, at 5:17 in the afternoon Mehmet Ali Ağca, a member of the fascist Turkish group the Grey Wolves, shot the pope as he was being driven across the Piazza of St. Peter's in his open popemobile. At least three shots were fired and two in the crowd of pilgrims were injured, but not seriously. The gravely wounded pontiff was driven directly to the hospital, where he was to remain until June 3rd. He was, perhaps, released from care too soon: on June 20th he was back in the hospital, this time not returning to the Vatican until August 14th, though during that time he was able to conduct much of the routine business of the papacy, including nominating Jozef Glemp, his former secretary, to replace the Polish primate, Cardinal Wysziński, who died a fortnight after the assassination attempt.

A mystery surrounds Ali Ağca. He was already a convicted terrorist, having assassinated the editor of a respected Turkish newspaper in 1979. He had, rather remarkably, escaped from custody, and had written a letter to the newspaper whose editor he had murdered, saying he would kill the pope were he to visit Turkey, which the pope had done without incident. It is difficult to believe that Ağca mounted the assassination attempt

entirely on his own, but there is no evidence from such material as has become available since the breakup of the USSR that the KGB was involved, as many suspected.<sup>31</sup> Some thought at the time that the KGB was acting by proxy through the Bulgarians (there was a series of suspicious events at the Bulgarian embassy in Rome just at that time), but that also has been largely discounted.<sup>32</sup> The affair remains without an adequate explanation. The pope, who immediately forgave his would-be assassin and visited him in prison, appeared to make a full recovery. Much later, however, Monsignor (now Cardinal) Stanislaw Dziwisz, John Paul's secretary who was with him in the popemobile, commented that the assassination attempt had in the long term damaged the pope's health.<sup>33</sup> The pope's own interpretation centered not on the attempt but on the fact that the professional assassin failed to kill him, which he clearly regarded as miraculous<sup>34</sup> and gave thanks to Our Lady of Fatima, whose feast day falls on May 13th. He later visited Fatima and gave the shrine the bullet that had struck him in the stomach. It is now in the crown on the head of the statue of the Virgin of Fatima.

If John Paul had suspicions that one of the communist satellite regimes, or the KGB itself, was behind the assassination attempt, he kept them to himself. It is perhaps one of the surprising aspects of John Paul II that, as already remarked, he was not wholly unsympathetic to Marxism. He has made a great deal of use, both as a philosopher and in his social encyclicals, of the concept of alienation, and he readily accepts that there are "grains of truth" in the socialist program.<sup>35</sup> And he was clearly no great admirer of the consumerism which seems to be inevitably associated with Western capitalism: one may recall the howls of protest which arose, especially in the United States, at the "moral equivalence" he once seemed to be suggesting between capitalism and communism.

31. See Felix Corley, "Soviet Reaction to the Election of Pope John Paul II," *Religion, State and Society* 22, no. 1 (1994): 37-64. Corley discusses the assassination attempt on pp. 58-59.

32. Cf. Edward Herman and Frank Brodhead, *The Rise and Fall of the Bulgarian Connection* (New York: Sheridan Square Publications, 1986).

33. John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2005), 185-86.

34. *Ibid.*, 179-85.

35. See also the speeches of "The Stranger" in *Our God's Brother* (Wojtyła, *Collected Plays and Writings on Theater*, 188-92).

Whereas previous popes in their social encyclicals had condemned the injustices suffered by workers, from his experience of living under a communist regime the late pope recognized that it is the dehumanizing processes which they suffer under oppressive systems of whatever kind that is the greater threat to their dignity. His solutions were therefore not solely economic but also cultural and religious.

Similarly, John Paul's vision of one Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals was not simply a political one. It was also cultural and religious. One has to remember that the Poland of today is a much more religiously homogeneous nation than the Poland into which Lolek Wojtyla was born. It is not just that the Jewish population has, tragically, been vastly reduced in number, but the Greek Rite Catholics with whom Lolek Wojtyla would have been familiar in his youth have disappeared back into the Ukraine. There of course, after World War II, their style of Catholicism was brutally suppressed and forced into the Orthodox Church.

In re-creating a unity across Europe the pope was, from the beginning, conscious of the need to improve relations with the Orthodox Churches, and especially, though not only, with the Russian patriarchate.<sup>36</sup> This proved to be one of the major failures of the pontificate, though it is something for which John Paul II himself can hardly be blamed. The revival of the Catholic Churches of the Byzantine Rite, particularly though not only in the Ukraine, has given rise to innumerable problems, not least problems concerning the ownership of property. The Byzantine Catholics have perhaps not always behaved in the most conciliatory manner, but the pope believed that right is on their side.

This does not alter the fact that the revival of the Catholic Byzantine Rite Churches has been resented by the Orthodox. And the Moscow patriarchate has also been angered by what it sees as Roman Catholic proselytism in the sacred territory of Holy Russia. It is perhaps difficult for those used to living in a religiously plural world to understand the depth of Orthodox feeling or to sympathize with it. But the Vatican under John Paul II was not always as sensitive as it might have

36. Here cf. also chapter 13 of the present volume which explores ecumenism in greater detail.

been to Orthodox susceptibilities: witness the appointment of a Polish-born archbishop<sup>37</sup> to preside over Catholics in Moscow.

What was at issue was the link between religion and national identity, a link important to the Russians but also to John Paul II. It has been remarked above that Krakow was the center of Polish national identity when Poland itself did not, politically, exist. Catholicism was central to that identity. The pope has constantly urged the many nations he has visited to take pride in their national culture and to recognize as the cement that holds that culture together the power of religion. This is one of the reasons for his creation of so many saints, and his desire whenever possible to beatify or to canonize them in their native or adopted lands. Saints are for the pope not only exemplars of Christian living, heroes, one might say, of the Catholic faith, they are markers in the Christian history of a people, reminders of the faith of one's ancestors which he believes ought to be celebrated as a central aspect of one's national history and cultural identity.<sup>38</sup>

But the identification of religion and national identity is a heady, and dangerous, doctrine: just how dangerous has been seen above all in the Balkans. The former communist regime had suppressed without—except perhaps in the case of Albania—extirpating religion, and kept warring Catholics, Orthodox Serbs, and Muslims in more or less peaceful coexistence. As his warning to the late President Franjo Tudjman of Croatia bore witness, the pope was aware that the revival of religious consciousness as part of a struggle for national identity had its dangers.

37. Transferred by John Paul's successor to a less-controversial see.

38. It is well known that John Paul II created a large number of new saints. From the first papal canonization in 996 down to the establishment in 1588 of the Congregation of Rites, which was originally charged with overseeing the process, the number of formal canonizations is 111; those canonized from 1588 down to 1963—i.e., down to the election of Pope Paul VI, is 350. Paul VI created 92 saints in 20 ceremonies. John Paul II conducted 52 ceremonies, an average of 2 ceremonies for each year of his pontificate in comparison with Paul's 1.3. In the course of the 52 ceremonies he canonized no fewer than 483 saints. Those doing the math will realize that, taking all formally canonized saints together, up to the pontificate of John Paul II, 551 persons had been raised to the altars. In other words, the late pope canonized more saints than all his predecessors of the past 450 years—from the establishment of the Congregation of Rites—put together, and practically as many as had been canonized from the time the popes started to take the process over. He canonized three times as many saints each year as did Paul VI.

It was as much a challenge for Christians as it is for Muslims—and indeed, though in a somewhat different context, for Jews.

The late pope's concern for ecumenical relations in the context of the reunification of Europe has been mentioned. He also tried to reach out across the faiths. As a boy in Wadowice one of his closest friends was Jewish, an unusual situation in Poland.<sup>39</sup> Karol Wojtyła shared little or none of the prejudices of many of his fellow countrymen. As pontiff, relations with Judaism meant an accord between the State of Israel and the Holy See, the first visit of a reigning pontiff to a synagogue, and the deeply emotional visit to the Holy Land in March 2000. He also visited Muslim countries, and was generally, though not everywhere,<sup>40</sup> welcomed, but relations between Catholicism and Islam have not greatly progressed. John Paul II was no supporter of peace at any price, as his attitude to conflict in Kosovo and Rwanda indicated. Nonetheless his unremitting opposition both to the Gulf War and the more recent war in Iraq reflected the very reasonable fear that these wars do serious damage to relations between Christians and Muslims.

So among what might be called Pope John Paul II's geopolitical aims were the overcoming of communism, the reunification of Europe, improved relations with other churches but especially with the Orthodox Churches of Eastern Europe, and the establishment of links with other faiths, Judaism in particular and to a lesser extent Islam. Some of these aims progressed but with varying success.

This essay has attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which the early life of Karol Wojtyła helped to form the style of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. As has been seen, one of the aspects of his youth was the impact, both through his acting and through his study of literature, of the vision of the Polish romantic poets of the nineteenth century, and in particular the poetry of Juliusz Slowacki with his "prophecy" of a Slavic pope. Wojtyła's apparently charmed life before his entry into the seminary and the fact that he so narrowly escaped death in the as-

39. His friend survived the war and eventually settled in Rome, where the friendship was reestablished.

40. During a visit to Nigeria early in his pontificate, a group of imams who had been scheduled to meet him failed to appear.

sassination attempt<sup>41</sup> reinforced his belief that he had a particular mission given him by God. "I am constantly aware," he said in an interview, "that in everything I say and do in fulfilment of my vocation, my ministry, what happens is not just my own initiative. It is not I alone who act in what I do as the Successor of Peter."<sup>42</sup> He carried this messianic sense with him to the end of his life.

### Final Years

Even in the early 1990s it was clear that he was ill, an illness rapidly identified as Parkinson's disease, though the Vatican was unwilling, at least initially, publicly to acknowledge the fact. He continued with his punishing round of foreign visits but could no longer kneel to kiss the earth as he descended from his plane. At first it seemed admirable, but as time went by it was painful to watch. It is known from his testament that he considered resigning, and Cardinal Dziwisz has confirmed it. Clearly he was suffering, but he had a very positive view of suffering: "The passion of Christ on the cross," he wrote in *Memory and Identity*, "gave a radically new meaning to suffering, transforming it from within. It introduced into human history, which is the history of sin, a blameless suffering, accepted purely for love."<sup>43</sup> Christ, he said to a general audience, did not come down from the cross. The comparison is illuminating. Christ's suffering was redemptive. Did Pope John Paul, as an element in his almost messianic vision of his papacy, see his own suffering as in some way also redemptive? If so, it would explain why he struggled on to his death in the Vatican Palace on April 2, 2005. The presence of such hordes of world leaders at the funeral mass witnesses to the huge impact Karol Wojtyła had exercised in his years on the throne of St. Peter.<sup>44</sup>

Each papacy molds the church, and, as I remarked at the beginning, only one pope has had a longer time to do so than did Pope John Paul II. But he also molded the papacy itself. He altered the form of papal

41. "It was as if someone was guiding and deflecting that bullet," John Paul II, *Memory and Identity*, 179.

42. *Ibid.*, 187.

43. *Ibid.*, 190.

44. On his declining health, see Cornwell, *The Pope in Winter*, 262–70.

discourse, which no longer wholly depended upon the hitherto traditional language of natural law theory when talking about ethics. He claimed for the papacy the role of moral arbiter in world affairs. He changed the understanding of the manner in which a pope fulfills his office. Nonetheless, one may question how long the late pope's model of the church will survive. Forms of papal governance, it could be argued, have tended to mirror those contemporary forms of governance found in society at large. So there have been popes who were medieval barons, popes who were renaissance princes, popes who were enlightened despots, popes who veered to the democratic, and there have even been popes who were simply bishops of Rome (though that was rather a long time ago). And now, it seems, as a legacy of Pope John Paul II we have a presidential pope.

## Karol Wojtyla the Philosopher

Ronald Modras

With the very first words of his 1998 encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II declared his high personal esteem for philosophical inquiry: "Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth."<sup>1</sup> With the metaphor of a soaring bird, the sometimes poet-playwright described how closely linked philosophy and theology are to one another in the Catholic tradition. (And, by implication, how crippled and defenseless is a Reformation theology of *sola Scriptura*.) For Karol Wojtyla, faith and reason together are indispensable for human beings to come to know "the truth about the human person," a phrase that arguably more than any other became the hallmark of his papal teaching.

The purpose of this brief essay is to present the main outlines of the pre-papal philosophical writings of Karol Wojtyla along with some indications of how they influenced his papal teaching. In itself this is no small enterprise, since his complete pre-papal bibliography exceeds 250 titles.<sup>2</sup> And as the opening words of *Fides et Ratio* indicate, his philosophical deliberations cannot be easily disengaged from his theological intentions. Father Karol Wojtyla never chose to become a philosopher. To understand what he attempted to argue philosophically, one must be

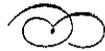
1. *Fides et Ratio*, in J. Michael Miller, CSR, ed., *The Encyclicals of John Paul II* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2001), 850.

2. For a select bibliography of the more significant writings, see John M. Grondelski, "Sources for the Study of Karol Wojtyla's Thought," in *At the Center of the Human Drama: the Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyla/Pope John Paul II*, ed. Kenneth Schmitz (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 147.

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# *The Splendor of Faith*

*The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II*



AVERY DULLES, S.J.



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elevating impact on society, strengthens the bonds of social unity, and imbues individual lives with a deeper sense of meaning and direction (CL 33; cf. GS 40). Some members of the laity, including even married couples, will be called to go into mission territory in imitation of Aquila and Priscilla (CL 35; cf. Acts 18:1-3, 18, 26; Rom. 16:3-4).

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## THE FAMILY

### *Basic Unit of Society*

As a personalist, John Paul II is convinced that persons are inherently social; they are called in the innermost depths of themselves to enter into communion with others and to give themselves to others. There is a relationship of interdependence and reciprocity between the person and society. Whatever is done in favor of society redounds to the benefit of the individual while, on the other hand, all that builds up the individual members has a positive impact on the quality of the society (CL 40).

From the beginning God created human beings male and female, in a relationship of partnership. The first and most basic expression of the social dimension of the person is the married couple and the nuclear family. The family is the basic cell of society (CL 40; cf. FC 42 and CA 49). It is the place where future citizens are formed, and from it they receive their basic training in virtue. As the larger society becomes more highly structured, people tend to be reduced to a kind of anonymity that prevents them from realizing their dignity. The family is a force that can humanize and personalize society. It can counteract the depersonalizing influences of collective organizations and give individuals a sense of their own uniqueness and unrepeatability. Since the good of society depends on the personal formation and virtue of its members, every attack on the family is implicitly an attack on society itself (CL 40, 43).

In his "Letter to Families" written on the occasion of the United Nations International Year of the Family (1994), John Paul II expresses his concern at the worldwide deterioration of the family. "Unfortunately," he says,

various programs backed by very powerful resources nowadays seem to aim at the breakdown of the family. At times it appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as normal and attractive, and even to glamorize, situations which are in fact "irregular." Indeed, they contradict "the truth and love" which should inspire and guide relationships between men and women, thus causing tensions and divisions within families, with grave consequences particularly for children.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>John Paul II, "Letter to Families" §5; *Origins* 23 (March 3, 1994): 637-59, at 640.

The vigorous participation of the Holy See in the Cairo Conference on Population and Development in 1994 and in the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 demonstrated the pope's determination to protect the family as the basic cell of society.

### *Conjugal Union between Spouses*

God himself, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is a loving communion of persons. He created human beings to share in this mystery of communion. The conjugal community, even when not blessed with children, is a communion of life and love. Marriage takes on an added dimension in relation to Christ the redeemer. Speaking to a group of American bishops at their *ad limina* visit on September 24, 1983, the pope declared: "Human conjugal love remains forever a great sacramental expression of the fact that 'Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her' (Eph. 5:25)."<sup>11</sup> Christian marriage is a real symbol of the nuptial union between Christ as Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride for whose sake he sacrificed himself (TB 318–24).

The Church recognizes two ways of realizing the vocation of the human person to love: marriage and virginity or celibacy (FC 11; TB 276–78). Conjugal charity is the specific way in which spouses participate in the charity of Christ (FC 13). The family accordingly has the mission to reveal, safeguard, and communicate interpersonal love, and thereby to actualize in a particular way the love of Christ for the Church (FC 17). It follows that the union between husband and wife, like that between Christ and the Church, is a permanent and exclusive bond between two parties, who mutually give themselves to one another. The institution of marriage is not a regulation imposed from outside to restrict the freedom of the parties, but an intrinsic requirement of the covenantal love it expresses (FC 11). Any union that was not permanent and exclusive would fail to express and foster that type of love.

### *The Transmission of Life*

Sexual union is the preeminent means by which a man and a woman express their total mutual self-giving. Such an expression could not appropriately take place except within the permanent and exclusive commitment of marriage. In his apostolic exhortation on the family John Paul II summarizes very concisely the doctrine of his earlier work, *Love and Responsibility*. He writes:

Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means some-

<sup>11</sup>John Paul II, "The Family, Marriage, and Sexuality," *Origins* 13 (October 13, 1983): 316–18, at 318.

thing purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: If the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally. (FC 11)

The pope then goes on, in the same article of *Familiaris consortio*, to show that this total self-giving also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. According to God's design, the act of sexual union gives the couple the capacity to cooperate with God in the generation of a new human person (FC 14). Fecundity is the sign and fruit of conjugal love (FC 28). The inherent language of the conjugal act, expressing as it does the total reciprocal self-giving of the husband and wife, is falsified if the couple positively exclude openness to procreation, thus separating the unitive from the procreative meaning of the act (FC 32).

In *The Theology of the Body*, some forty pages are devoted to the exposition and defense of the teaching of Paul VI on marriage in *Humanae vitae*. Whereas Paul VI had expressed the challenge to marital chastity in terms of endurance, John Paul II puts it rather in terms of living out the call to be faithful to the iconography of marriage as a sign of full mutual self-giving. He also goes beyond Paul VI by maintaining that the wrongfulness of contraception stems not only from natural law but also from revelation. When the biblical teaching on marriage and sexuality is taken in its full context, it becomes evident that the precept "belongs not only to the natural moral law but also to the *moral order revealed by God*" (TB 389, italics in original).

At Vatican II Bishop Wojtyła submitted a written intervention in which he maintained that modern scientific knowledge about fertility can serve the purpose of responsible parenthood and be consonant with the dignity of the persons as rational agents.<sup>12</sup> He repeats this in his teaching as pope. Natural family planning, unlike artificial contraception, does not block the natural process within the womb. Instead, the couple waits on God, so to speak, by waiting on nature, which allows for sexual relations that will not result in procreation. Periodic continence during fertile periods requires an exercise of self-control and chastity and helps the spouses to grow in love and responsibility, thus living out their marital relationship in a human and virtuous manner (FC 33; TB 399–401).

Parenthood cannot be restricted to the conception and birth of offspring. Since children require nurture in order to live a full human life, the parents have the responsibility and the right to educate their children, a process that completes pro-

<sup>12</sup>Text in AS IV/35, 242–43.

creation (FC 36). Children must be educated in all that is needed for their growth and maturation. This includes, in the case of Christian families, the raising of the children in the faith. "The State and the Church have the obligation to give families all possible aid to enable them to perform their educational role properly" (FC 40).

### *The Family as Miniature Church*

Vatican II said that the family is, so to speak, a "domestic church, in which the parents must be for their children, by word and by example, the first preachers of the faith" (LG 11). John Paul II has frequently repeated the term "*ecclesia domestica*" without adding the qualifier *veluti* ("as it were") used by the council (e.g., CT 68; FC 49, 52; EV 92).<sup>13</sup> Parents, he declares, are the first heralds of the gospel for their children. They become fully parents by communicating not only bodily life but also the life of the spirit (FC 39). It is in the family that human persons are not only inducted into the human community but also, by means of baptism and education in the faith, introduced into God's family, which is the Church (FC 15). By reliving the sacrificial love of Christ the family becomes a saved community and, by communicating that same love, it becomes also a saving community (FC 49). The family is called to be a hearth from which radiate faith and charity, transforming society in accordance with God's plan.

### *The Rights of the Family*

As noted in *Familiaris consortio* the Synod of 1980 proposed the issuance of a Charter of Family Rights (FC 46). Following up on this suggestion, the Holy See drew up such a charter, and released it in November 1983. It included rights such as the following: the right to marry, to have children, to educate children in accordance with the parents' moral and religious convictions, to choose schools for their children, to earn a suitable family wage so that mothers will not be obliged to work outside the home to the detriment of the family; the right to decent housing; and the right to emigrate and immigrate with one's family in cases where persons are compelled to leave their native land.<sup>14</sup>

## THEOLOGY OF WOMAN

John Paul II has frequently spoken of the status and rights of women. The document in which he most fully explores the theology of woman is the apostolic let-

<sup>13</sup> See also John Paul II, "Letter to Families" §§3, 15; pp. 639 and 649.

<sup>14</sup> Holy See, "Charter of the Rights of the Family," *Origins* 13 (December 15, 1983): 461-64.

ter *Mulieris dignitatem*. The following analysis will be based primarily on this letter.

### *The Equal Dignity of Women*

Following the first creation account, John Paul II frequently quotes the verse, "God created man in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Man and woman, he concludes, are equally persons; they are equally created in God's image. The second creation account, in the second chapter of Genesis, represents Adam as having been created first, and Eve as taken from his rib in order to be his helpmate. Adam and Eve together are one flesh. They are called to live in a community of love. Adam was incomplete without Eve, whom he needed as his helper, but he was also needed to help her, because the dependence was mutual. Through their loving union Adam and Eve are called to mirror in the world the communion of love that is in God (MD 6-7). In the communion of marriage both of the spouses are enriched by being welcomed and accepted by the self-giving of the other (TB 69-72).

Only in the third chapter of Genesis, where the penalty of original sin is imposed, do we hear of the domination of the wife by the husband: "He shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Women habitually suffer from the aggressiveness of men, which is common because of the effects of sin. But sin is not the last word. In Christ we have the founding of a new order based on redemption. In his own sacrificial love for the Church he sets an example for husbands. Paul can therefore teach in Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). Husband and wife, according to Paul, are one flesh. Just as no one hates his own flesh, so husbands must cherish their wives. By this love the husband affirms the wife as a person. As reconstituted in Christ, the headship of the husband takes the form not of domination but of loving sacrifice. Even though the husband is the head, the subjection of husband and wife is not one-sided but mutual (MD 23-24). Paul can therefore write to husbands and wives that they should "be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21).

### *The Vocations of Motherhood and Virginity*

By their physical constitution women are naturally oriented to motherhood—conception, pregnancy, and giving birth. But motherhood should not be understood in merely physical terms. It is linked to the personal dimension of feminine life. The mother is filled with wonder at the mystery of life as it develops in her womb. She has a unique contact with the new human being developing within her. In general it may be said that women are more capable than men are of paying

attention to other persons. For this reason the mother makes a special contribution to the education of the child, though the father should make his own contribution also (MD 17–19).

Jesus' doctrine of virginity or celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God represents a clear innovation with respect to the Old Testament. This vocation is not given to all; it comes through a special grace or calling from God. By freely choosing virginity in accordance with God's call, some women are able to realize their femininity in a way distinct from marriage. It is a special participation in the bridal relationship of the Church to Christ. Like marriage, virginity is a total self-gift, in this case to Christ as Bridegroom. While involving a renunciation of physical motherhood, virginity can open up the possibility of various kinds of spiritual motherhood. Women's religious orders have traditionally served the needy, including the sick, the handicapped, the abandoned, orphans, the elderly, and others on the margins of society (MD 20–21).

Much as he esteems the vocation of motherhood, John Paul II should not be understood as though he wished to resurrect male domination and confine women to the privacy of the home. In his Letter to Women on the eve of the Beijing Conference of 1995 he deplored the marginalization of women in society and called for their full presence and activity in every area of life—social, cultural, artistic, and political. Women, he believes, have a special contribution to make for the sake of peace and reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere John Paul II calls for a “new feminism” that rejects the temptation of imitating models of male domination; one that affirms the true genius of women and overcomes all discrimination, violence, and exploitation (EV 99; VC 58).

### *Diversity of Roles*

John Paul II teaches that the value and dignity of women will be best promoted not by ignoring their differences from men but rather by celebrating and profiting from the diversity. Womanhood, he says, expresses humanity just as much as manhood does, but in a different and complementary way.<sup>16</sup>

At various times John Paul II has addressed the phenomenon of contemporary feminism. In certain expressions this movement tends to disregard what is specific to each sex and even to “masculinize” women, with the result that less respect is accorded to those gifts that are distinctively feminine. He notes with satisfaction, however, that “in the midst of this very situation the authentic theology of woman is being reborn. The spiritual beauty, the particular genius, of women is being rediscovered” (CTH 217).

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, “Letter to Women,” *Origins* 25 (July 27, 1995): 137–43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, §7, p. 141.

These diverse gifts have their place also in the Church, which in its sacramental life reflects the different roles of the two sexes in salvation history. The priest at the altar, who offers the sacrifice of Christ, is an icon of Christ in his capacity as Bridegroom. The ministerial priesthood is a humble service, oriented toward the growth of the whole People of God in faith and love. Following Hans Urs von Balthasar, the pope holds that the Church lives both by a Petrine principle of apostolic ministry and by a Marian principle of life and fruitful receptivity. Of the two, the Marian principle is primary. The whole purpose of the hierarchical ministry is to form the Church according to the sanctity prefigured in Mary, who is par excellence the type and figure of the Church (cf. MD 27).

### *Mary as Archetype*

In *Mulieris dignitatem* John Paul II calls attention to Mary as the human person most perfectly united to God. By a singular privilege, she who is both virgin and mother, exemplifies the dual vocation of woman. She can help all women to see how the two vocations explain and complete each other. As Spouse of the Holy Spirit, Mary brings forth the Incarnate Word, thus realizing the vocation of physical motherhood in a prototypical way. But her motherhood is also spiritual. As New Eve, she is mother of all those who live by the grace of Christ. Virgins who dedicate themselves to Christ in a bridal relationship are privileged to enjoy a spiritual fecundity that assimilates them to Mary. The Church is most perfectly realized in its highest member, Mary, a virgin who remains faithful to her heavenly Spouse and who becomes a Mother in the order of grace by accepting God's word in faith (MD 20–22).

The Church grows through love, which is the true and final measure of sanctity. In relation to the holiness that is the goal of the Church's existence the hierarchical and sacramental aspects of the Church are secondary and instrumental. Women, since they are by nature especially disposed to love, have a natural affinity with the Church. The Church, typified by Mary as its most outstanding member, is unceasingly grateful for all the fruits of feminine holiness (MD 31).

### CONCLUSION

John Paul II's energetic promotion of theology of the laity shows his freedom from every semblance of clericalism. Although he sees the hierarchical priesthood as essential to the Church, he views it as a service for the sake of building up the whole body in holiness. The call to Christian holiness goes out to every baptized Christian, clerical or lay.

Pope John Paul's theology of the laity represents a fresh reading of Holy Scrip-

ture in the light of a rich personalist philosophy. He meditates at length on the early chapters of Genesis as well as on the Gospels and Pauline letters. From the original solitude of Adam, he passes on to consider the spousal relationship of Adam and Eve as a reflection of the divine communion of persons. The body, with its sexual characteristics, bears a nuptial meaning, which must be lived out personally through the mutual self-gift of persons. In the perspectives of the New Testament, marriage appears as a sacrament or efficacious sign of spousal relationship of Christ to the Church.

Sexual love, as seen by John Paul II, is a visible expression of the interior moral structure of the human person. Contraception, he contends, violates the true meaning of marital union, as known both by reason and by revelation.

Taking up a hint in Vatican II, the pope describes the Christian family as an *ecclesia domestica*—a church in miniature. Secular society must respect the rights of the family as the basic unit on which its survival and health depend. In the Church and society at large, men and women have equal dignity, but their roles should not be confused, since they have distinct contributions to make.

All the baptized, whether male or female, participate in Christ's threefold office. In ways distinct from the clergy, they are called to worship, to bear witness, and to order creation to its true end. As individuals and in associations, the laity play an indispensable part in evangelizing the worlds of politics, business, science, and culture. In the new communities and ecclesial movements founded in the present century the pope sees a remarkable rediscovery of the laity's conscious and active participation in the mission of the Church.

## Theology of Culture



VATICAN II AND POPE JOHN PAUL II, as we have noted, understand the vocation of the laity as predominantly secular. Lay persons are expected to “engage in temporal affairs and order them according to the plan of God” (LG 31). The meaning of “temporal affairs” is spelled out more concretely in part 2 of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. The first chapter deals with marriage and the family; the second and third chapters with culture and work; and the last two chapters with politics and international life. Having already discussed marriage and the family in chapter 8, we may in this chapter turn to the sphere of culture.

From his early years Karol Wojtyła, as a poet, dramatist, and philosophy professor in a Communist country with a deeply rooted Catholic heritage, developed a keen interest in the relations between faith and culture. As a young man he wrote poems and plays, using literature and drama as ways of sustaining the national culture and faith-traditions of his people under the brutalities of the Nazi occupation and the oppressive heel of Soviet Marxism.

As a bishop at Vatican II Wojtyła took an active part in the composition of *Gaudium et spes* and submitted a written intervention proposing about a dozen emendations to the draft of the chapter on the Church and culture.<sup>1</sup> Early in his pontificate, in 1982, he set up a Pontifical Council for Culture. In the letter establishing this council he wrote: “Since the beginning of my pontificate I have considered the Church’s dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of the twentieth century is at stake.”<sup>2</sup>

The teaching of John Paul II on the relationship between faith and culture is scattered through innumerable encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, letters,

<sup>1</sup> AS IV/3, 349–50.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, May 20, 1982, establishing the Pontifical Council for Culture, *L'Osservatore Romano* (Eng.), June 28, 1982, pp. 19–20 at 19.

## Economic and Social Order



### THEOLOGY OF WORK

JOHN PAUL II, THOUGH HIS LIFE has been primarily devoted to the service of the Church, is not a stranger to the world of work. As a young man he was forced to do hard manual labor in a chemical plant during the Nazi occupation. In the course of his doctoral studies he visited France and Belgium, where he became interested in the Young Christian Workers (JOC) and the worker-priest experiment. As a professor he specialized in social ethics. Pursuing this field of specialization during the council, he took an active part in the composition of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. Subsequently, as a cardinal and as pope, he became a key supporter of the shipyard workers at Gdansk and the spiritual father of the Solidarity movement headed by Lech Walesa.

The pope's theology of work and the economy, as of many other subjects, is in strict continuity with Vatican II. He draws frequently on the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, especially the third chapter of part 1, dealing with human activity throughout the world (§§33–39), and the third chapter of part 2, on economic and social life (§§63–72). His own book *The Acting Person* provides the dynamic personalist perspective for his elaborations on these sources. As pope he has issued three important social encyclicals: *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987), and *Centesimus annus* (1991). The first and third of these encyclicals were composed to commemorate the ninetieth and hundredth anniversaries, respectively, of Leo XIII's great encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891). All three of John Paul II's social encyclicals contain important passages dealing with work and the economy.

Although he sometimes makes rather detailed applications to technical economic and social questions, John Paul II insists that Catholic social teaching is not ideology. Founded as it is on the Christian doctrine of God, humanity, and nature, it pertains to the field of theology. Proclamation of this social doctrine is an inte-

gral part of the Church's evangelizing mission (SRS 41; CA 5). The specific competence of the Church, according to the pope, is not to propose particular social and economic systems but to lay down principles and criteria that can direct work toward the authentic progress of society, safeguarding the dignity and rights of all persons, including very specifically those who work.

### *Work in Relation to Creation, the Fall, and Redemption*

The theology of work may be considered in relation to the creation, the Fall, and the redemption. In his exposition the pope turns in the first place to the opening chapters of Genesis, which in his view set forth a kind of proto-gospel of work. The paradigm for all work is given in the divine activity of creation. God toils for six days, at the end of which he enjoys a Sabbath rest.

The creation accounts in Genesis, according to John Paul II, constitute the first "gospel of work" (LE 25; DD 10). They are intended to instruct us about our own activity. Among all visible creatures, only human beings were created to the image and likeness of God, as sharers in his sovereignty. Human work is therefore a participation in, and prolongation of, the creative activity of God. The Father, even when he enters into his Sabbath rest, in some sense continues to work throughout history, as Jesus indicated when he said, "My Father is working still, and I am working" (John 5:17; DD 11).

God intends that human beings should be his fellow-workers. Without human activity there would be no one to till the earth (TB 28, 39; cf. Gen. 2:5–6).<sup>1</sup> Man, according to Vatican II, is the only creature in the visible world that exists for its own sake; others are for the sake of man (GS 24; cf. RH 13; SR 114; CA 32). In the original blessing pronounced at the moment of creation, humanity is given dominion over all other creatures on earth (Gen. 1:26–28). Invested though they are with dominion over the rest of creation, human beings did not receive arbitrary dominative power. They are obliged to respect the order of creation, the goodness of which God recognized even before the "sixth day," when Adam was formed. "The dominion granted to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of a freedom to 'use or misuse,' or to dispose of things as one pleases" (SRS 34). People too easily forget that their power to reshape the world through their own labor is always based "on God's prior and original gift of the things that are" (CA 37). The relationship of men and women to the rest of creation is therefore one of responsible stewardship.

<sup>1</sup> For commentary, see Kenneth L. Schmitz, *At the Center of the Human Drama: The Philosophical Anthropology of Karol Wojtyła/Pope John Paul II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 96–97.

The nature of work has been affected by the Fall. Work has become difficult, onerous, often painful, and even at times dangerous. The earth brings forth thorns and thistles; man lives by the sweat of his face (Gen. 3:17–19; LE 9; 27). Human activity is weighed down by the slavery of creation to corruption (Rom. 8:21–22). Work consequently assumes a penitential aspect.

Another effect of sin is concupiscence, which involves an inordinate desire for riches, pleasures, and esteem. This leads easily to the kind of consumerist culture that is rampant in the affluent societies of our time. The senseless destruction of the environment, which unfortunately is widespread in our day, is rooted in the anthropological error by which man regards his own desires as the norm, setting himself up in place of God and forgetting his mission to be a cooperator with God in the management of creation (CA 37).

John Paul II describes the devastating effects of consumerism in many of his encyclicals (RH 16, DM 11, SRS 28, and CA 36 and 41). In the consumerist culture, he says, the market is flooded with luxury goods that are acquired for purposes of amusement or as status symbols. The rich are surfeited by a superabundance of possessions and enslaved by the tasks of protecting and managing their wealth. Meanwhile the poor are left in dire misery. The Church has a prophetic charge to give a voice to the poor and a conscience to the rich and powerful.

Work should be understood not only with reference to creation and the Fall but also with reference to the redemption (LE 26). Christ the Son of God became a worker, a carpenter, and by the labor of his hands at Nazareth he ennobled the dignity of work (SR 303; cf. Vatican II, GS 67). By painful toil endured in union with the Crucified, we can take up our cross and follow the Master. "The Christian finds in human work a small part of the cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his cross for us" (LE 27). As the cross contains the seeds of the resurrection, so the labor of the human family prepares for the final advent of the kingdom of God.

### *Work as Transitive and Intransitive Action*

With the help of his philosophy of human action, John Paul II points out that work, like any human activity, has two aspects, transitive and intransitive.<sup>2</sup> Transitive action is that which terminates in an external product—for example, a pot or pan, a car or a garage. The purpose of transitive action is to make the world a fitter place for human habitation, and in that sense to "humanize" the world.

<sup>2</sup> Karol Wojtyła, "The Problem of the Constitution of Culture Through Human Praxis," in Karol Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 263–75, at 266.

Because the world was created for the sake of humanity, production is not in itself an act of violence against creation. The world and nature have a certain readiness to be put at the disposal of humanity. Transitive action, however, goes awry when the world is polluted, when its resources are depleted, when its natural beauty is defaced. Care of the environment is a moral responsibility. The world was created not simply to be used through transitive activity but also to be contemplated and appreciated—activities that are intransitive.<sup>3</sup>

The intransitive aspect of human action—that which remains in the agent as subject—is the second dimension. Even when we work on external matter, something of our labor remains within us. We are transformed by what we do. Through our action we shape ourselves into what we in fact become.

In Wojtyła's personalist perspective the intransitive dimension is more important than the transitive, because personal subjects are more important than things, including the products of their labor. The pope's foremost concern is with what people do to themselves by acting. The tendency to subordinate persons to things, which is a mark of contemporary consumerist societies, is shared in varying degrees by Western liberalism and by Chinese and Soviet Marxism. These ideologies, though in some respects opposed to each other, are alike in giving primacy to material goods on the ground of their superficial attractiveness and utility (LE 13).

Marxist theory depicts the human person as a product of praxis, which is said to recoil upon the agent and shape the latter's consciousness (LE 13).<sup>4</sup> In opposition to dialectical materialism John Paul II holds that industry and culture are not determined by simply economic factors, such as the conditions of production. As the self-expression of the spirit, human activity is essentially related to truth, goodness, and beauty. Although work and culture are always objectified in products of one kind or another, human activity, as an actualization of the subject, is perfective of the agent. The essence of praxis consists in the self-realization of the acting subject, who at the same time renders the nonhuman environment in some way more human. Praxis must therefore be understood as proceeding from the human subject and perfecting it, rather than as degrading the person and turning the agent into a mere product.<sup>5</sup>

### *Personalist Principles*

In accordance with his personalist humanism John Paul II insists on the priority of labor over capital (LE 12). By this he means not that laborers are to be preferred to capitalists, but that the persons involved in the production process are more

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 270–71.

<sup>4</sup> Marxist theory on this point is well expounded by Rocco Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 292–305.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, *Person and Community*, 266–67.

important than the impersonal instruments they use (factories, machines, laboratories, computers, and the like). The deep chasm between capitalists and workers that existed at the time of Leo XIII no longer obtains in most parts of the world (LE 7; CA 4-5). The historical antagonism is being progressively transcended. Many workers share in the tasks of management and enjoy some measure of ownership. The task of management can itself be considered as a form of labor.

Labor, while it should ideally redound to the benefit of the laborer as an individual, has larger purposes. It is intended also to benefit the family, the nation, and the universal human community. Opposing the unbridled thirst for profits and power, John Paul II calls for a theology of development that takes account of the whole human person and every person. Authentic development, he maintains, must respect the cultural, transcendent, and religious dimensions of human life (SRS 46; CA 29). In light of these broadly humanistic goals it is possible to correct some of the errors of what the pope calls "economism"—a view that evaluates enterprises only in terms of productivity and profits (LE 13).

Following a long Catholic tradition, John Paul II favors the institution of private property as a natural right, but he also notes, as did Leo XIII, that the use of private property must be subordinated to the common good (LE 14; CA 30). In *Centesimus annus* John Paul II notes that in older economies the possession of tangible property was the primary basis of wealth. In the modern world the decisive factor is increasingly man himself, with his knowledge and technical skills (CA 31-32). Human resources, developed through interaction among persons, are more important today than physical property, which can usually be replaced in case of loss.

Technology is a great ally of human progress, since it renders work more efficient and less onerous. But it has a shadow side. It diminishes the personal satisfaction that laborers have often felt in their own products. Sometimes, too, technology makes workers the slaves of the machines they use. New technological advances often cause unemployment or, at best, require difficult retraining (LE 5).

Modern trade unions, the pope recalls, grew up in the struggle of workers to protect their rights against exploitative entrepreneurs and owners. But the history of such organizations goes back to the medieval guilds of artisans, which had much broader purposes, involving solidarity, support, and mutual benefit. If unions are to be of value today, they must overcome their tendency to serve as weapons in a class struggle; they must not take on the characteristics of political parties struggling for power or allow themselves to succumb to the class egoism that they deprecate in the capitalist class. They cannot be denied the right to strike, but strikes should be seen as a last resort and should not be abused in ways detrimental to the common good (LE 20).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup>The role of unions and other teachings of the encyclical are clearly set forth in Robert A. Destro,

While calling attention to problems such as those here mentioned, John Paul II denies that it is the Church's proper task to prescribe concrete solutions. Real and effective solutions "can arise only from within the framework of different historical situations through the efforts of all those who responsibly confront concrete problems in all their social, economic, political, and cultural aspects as these interact with one another" (CA 43). Every effort should be made to organize society in such a way that work is available for all who wish and need to work. The right to work must not be systematically denied (CA 43).

### *Theology of Leisure*

Work, fruitful though it be, is not the goal of human existence. Inasmuch as work is for human beings, not they for it (LE 6), work must be understood in relation to leisure. John Paul II's thought on this matter is most thoroughly expounded in his apostolic letter, "The Day of the Lord," issued on Pentecost Sunday, 1998.<sup>7</sup>

Even on the purely humanistic level, cycles of work and rest are built into the natural order (DD 65). Intense application is normally followed by rest and recreation. By the precept of the Sunday observance, the Church lightens the burdens of servants and laborers and protects them from being abused (DD 66).

Rest, however, should not be a merely negative thing. Rather than degenerate into emptiness and boredom, it should be an affirmation of human dignity and contribute to personal growth (DD 68). It should be a time to cultivate family life, social relationships, cultural pursuits, and the enjoyment of the glories of nature (DD 52, 67).

On a higher level, observance of the Sabbath raises our minds beyond all creation to the contemplation of the Creator. God sets the example by taking the first Sabbath to contemplate the beauty of the world he has made (DD 11). In honoring God's rest, we are able to discover our dependence on the Creator and in so doing to achieve better understanding of our true condition (DD 61, 65).

In the Decalogue we are commanded to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy (Deut. 20:8; DD 13, 62). We sanctify it by taking time to praise God and give thanks for his blessings (DD 16). Under the Mosaic Law the Sabbath day celebrated not only the gifts of creation but also the liberation given in the exodus (Deut. 5:15; DD 12, 17). The Christian Sunday observance goes a stage further by celebrating the liberation from the more radical evil of sin achieved for the whole human race through Christ's resurrection from the dead (DD 63). By its selection

"*Laborem exercens*," in *A Century of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. George Weigel and Robert Royal, (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1991), 145-61, esp. 149-50.

<sup>7</sup>John Paul II, "Observing and Celebrating the Day of the Lord," *Origins* 28 (July 30, 1998): 133-51.

of Sunday, Christianity recalls the day when Christ rose from the grave and entered into his Sabbath rest (Heb. 4:9-10; DD 8). Each Sunday also evokes the creation of light, which the first creation narrative situates on the first day (Gen. 1:3; DD 18, 24). Christ is the true light, the sun that knows no setting (DD 27, 37).

For the Church, Sunday has added significance as the day appointed for the regular assembly of the faithful, when they recall their identity as a people brought into unity by God, the *ekklesia* (DD 31). From another angle, Sunday may be seen as the eighth day, prefiguring the final consummation (DD 26, 37-38). By our Sunday worship we renew our energies and anticipate the final Sabbath rest of the people of God, "for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his" (Heb. 4:10; LE 25). By keeping Sundays holy the Church bears witness to its eschatological hope (DD 75).

Having this deep religious significance, Sunday must not be allowed to be swallowed up into vacuous weekends, in which people engage in frivolous or even morally questionable forms of entertainment (DD 4, 82). It should be the animating force of the entire week, the soul of the other six days (DD 83). Time given to God in prayer and worship is not lost (DD 7).

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

### *Christian Responsibility*

As a Pole living through the horrors of the Second World War, the Nazi occupation, and the disastrous consequences of the Yalta conference, Wojtyła became acutely conscious of violations of the rights of nations and of the devastations wrought by tyranny and war. Such calamities, he believes, have their ultimate root in human sinfulness, and more specifically in the inordinate appetite for possessions, power, and status. To prevent the inequities that breed violence and war, spiritual remedies are essential. The Church therefore has a right and a duty to use her influence on behalf of peace and justice. The quest for human rights, if it is not to bring about new conflicts, must itself be animated by the spirit of the gospel. The Church's religious mission, as noted by Vatican II, equips her with "a function, a light, and an energy that can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to divine law" (GS 42). The "widest sphere of Christian responsibility," having to do with the promotion of peace and international community, is dealt with in the final chapter of *Gaudium et spes* (SR 305).

Building on texts such as this, Cardinal Wojtyła in *Sources of Renewal* proclaimed that economic cooperation is a basic tool of national communities and international institutions (SR 306). "The Council," he wrote, "emphasizes the value of the constructive presence of the Church in the international community,

helping to strengthen peace throughout the world and to lay a solid foundation for the construction of fraternal union among all men by proclaiming the divine and natural law" (SR 307). As pope, Wojtyła has continued to speak of the spirit and structures needed if human and social development are to proceed according to the divine plan.

### *Socioeconomic Systems*

On various occasions John Paul II has given some broad principles regarding the kinds of system that would be most compatible with the principles of natural law and revelation. He clearly rejects the Marxist ideology, which depends on a radically false anthropology and leads to class struggle, the "dictatorship of the proletariat," and the concentration of power in the hands of an oppressive elite (LE 11). But he is equally critical of "capitalist neo-liberalism," which, as he puts it, "subordinates the human person to blind market forces and conditions the development of peoples on those forces. From its centers of power, such neo-liberalism often places unbearable burdens upon less favored countries."<sup>8</sup>

Capitalism, however, can be admissible if one means by it "an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production as well as free human creativity in the economic sector" (CA 42). The pope praises the free market as "the most efficient system for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs" (CA 34). While asserting this much, he acknowledges that the mechanisms of the market often fail to take care of individual needs. State intervention may be needed to provide for such cases, to preserve the common good, and to safeguard the natural and human environments (CA 40).

Responsibility for securing human rights in the economic sector, according to the pope, belongs in part to the state but "it cannot mean one-sided centralization by the public authorities." Individuals, free groups, and local work centers and complexes must exercise their initiatives (LE 18). In the "welfare state" personal initiative is crushed and inefficiency abounds. At this point reference is made to the "principle of subsidiarity," according to which "a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions" (CA 48). The family and other intermediate structures can frequently care for the needs of individuals who would otherwise be "suffocated between two poles represented by the state and the marketplace" (CA 49).

<sup>8</sup>John Paul II, "Homily in Havana's Plaza of the Revolution," §4; *Origins* 27 (February 5, 1998): 545-48, at 547.

### *International Solidarity*

In his speeches and encyclicals John Paul II calls attention to urgent problems that cut across the boundaries of individual nations, such as care for the environment, international peace, the arms race, refugees, terrorism, and the marginalization of whole subcontinents in the spheres of economic and human development (LE 17; SRS 22–26; CA 58). He expresses his conviction that an adequate response to these problems requires the action of international agencies. Just as structures below the national state are needed for the protection of individuals, so also it is necessary, in the current phase of increasing globalization, to have effective international structures.

The Church's "preferential option for the poor" must be understood in a global context. In the past the Church, following the example and teaching of Jesus, has shown its love for the poor by personal care of individuals and by running charitable institutions. In our day these remedies no longer suffice. Since poverty is assuming massive proportions in spite of technological and economic progress, internationally coordinated measures on a global scale must be taken while there is still time to avert tragic crises (CA 57).

The increasing globalization of the economy can sometimes be degrading and impoverishing for needy and dependent nations, but it can also be beneficial if guided by the virtue of solidarity, with the realization that the goods of creation are divinely intended for all (SRS 39; CA 58). The "virtue of solidarity" in this context means "a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are *all* really responsible for *all*" (SRS 38).

In the past such solidarity has been conspicuously absent. The history of Europe, as seen by John Paul II, is marked by terrible events incompatible with the true spirit of humanity. In cruel wars "millions of people have been murdered because of their race, their nationality, their convictions, or simply because they were in the way."<sup>9</sup> As shown by persecutions and genocides, "the general acceptance of legitimate plurality on the social, civil and religious levels has been arrived at with great difficulty."<sup>10</sup> It is imperative to renounce the intransigent nationalism, selfish ambitions, and racist ideologies that have repeatedly led to oppression and war.<sup>11</sup> In a speech to UNESCO in 1980 the pope declared:

<sup>9</sup> John Paul II, "The Heart of Europe," speech at Vienna, September 10, 1983, §3; *Origins* 13 (September 29, 1983): 267–70, at 268.

<sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Visit to the Synagogue in Rome, April 13, 1986, §3; *Origins* 15 (April 24, 1986): 729–33, at 731.

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, "Message Marking the 50th Anniversary of the War's End in Europe," May 16, 1995; *Origins* 25 (June 1, 1995): 33–39, at 36–37.

Referring to the origins of your Organization, I stress the necessity of mobilizing all forces which direct the spiritual dimension of human existence, and which bear witness to the primacy of the spiritual in man . . . in order not to succumb again to the monstrous alienation of collective evil, which is always ready to use material powers in the exterminating struggle of men against men, of nations against nations.<sup>12</sup>

Respect for the inalienable rights of the human person, John Paul II believes, is the key to a more promising future. In his address to the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York in October 1979, he resoundingly affirmed his support for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, describing it as "the basic inspiration and cornerstone of the United Nations organization."<sup>13</sup> He gave a detailed list of universally recognized human rights, which, he said, "concern the satisfaction of man's essential needs, the exercise of his freedoms and his relationships with others; but always they concern man, they concern man's full human dimension" (§13). Violation of such rights is, in the pope's view, "a form of warfare against humanity" (§16).

In his next visit to the United Nations General Assembly, on October 5, 1995, John Paul II returned to the theme of the rights of individuals and nations. He condemned exclusive nationalism and called for an ethic of solidarity. He appealed to the United Nations to "rise above the cold status of an administrative institution and to become a moral center where all nations of the world would feel at home and develop a shared awareness of being, as it were a 'family of nations.'"<sup>14</sup>

In this and similar addresses John Paul II has made it clear that faith and theology are not simply the private concern of persons who happen to belong to a certain religious group. They are public matters that the world ignores at its peril. Vatican II, in words quoted by Cardinal Wojtyła, addressed its teaching on the community of nations to a universal audience:

Drawn from the treasures of the teaching of the Church, the proposals of this Council are intended for all men, whether they believe in God or whether they do not explicitly acknowledge him; they are intended to help them to a keener awareness of their own destiny, to make the world conform better to the surpassing dignity of man, and to meet the pressing appeals of our times with a generous and common effort of love. (GS 91; quoted in SR 309)

In this spirit John Paul II, speaking to the United Nations in 1995, expressed

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, "Man's Entire Humanity Expressed in Culture," Address to UNESCO, Paris, June 2, 1980, §4; in *The Church and Culture since Vatican II*, ed. Joseph Gremillion (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 187–97, at 188–89. A different translation from the French original appears in *Origins* 10 (June 12, 1980): 58–64, at 60.

<sup>13</sup> John Paul II, "The U.N. Address," §9; *Origins* 9 (October 11, 1979): 257–66, at 260.

<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, "The Fabric of Relations among Peoples," §14; *Origins* 25 (October 19, 1995): 293–99, at 298.

his hope that God's loving care for all creation, as revealed in Jesus Christ, would put an end to hatred and intolerance and promote the solidarity of the entire human family. As we come to the close of the second Christian millennium, he declared, the peoples of the world must unite in a common effort to build a civilization of love, a true culture of freedom worthy of the human person. More succinctly, the pope said in another context: "Peace bears the name of Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The views of John Paul II on work, leisure, and the socioeconomic order are of a piece with his teaching on culture. He consistently opts for a personalism that contemplates human beings as free and responsible subjects, socially related to one another in community and ordered toward God as their final end. He is deeply conscious of the effects of sin, which lead us into conflict with ourselves, with one another, and with God. But he is even more conscious of the redemptive grace of Christ, which liberates us from the burden of sin and redirects us toward our true goal.

The pope stands firmly in the tradition of Catholic social teaching from Leo XIII through Vatican II and the recent popes. He defends private property and economic initiative against all forms of totalitarian socialism. In *Centesimus annus* he comes close to endorsing free-market capitalism, but even in this encyclical he is on guard against individualistic liberalism. He recognizes the necessity of state control to prevent wealth and power from falling into the hands of a privileged class or privileged nations. The Church, he believes, has an indispensable role in making people aware of their inherent dignity and their eternal destiny. If its voice is heard, the Church can make a unique contribution toward fashioning a civilization of peace and love.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, Closing address at Assisi, October 27, 1986, §4; *Origins* 16 (November 6, 1986): 370-71, at 370.

## *The Free Person in a Free Society*



### PERSONAL FREEDOM

VATICAN II'S PASTORAL CONSTITUTION on the Church in the Modern World has five chapters. We have already dealt with the themes of the first three and the fifth: those on culture, the family, the economy, and the international community. It remains for us to discuss how John Paul II has responded to the concerns of the chapter on the political community, in which the council addresses the questions of human rights, the common good, civil liberty, and Church-state relations. Before plunging directly into social and political aspects it will be helpful to sketch the main lines of Wojtyła's analysis of human freedom in relation to conscience and the law of God. Vatican II dealt with this personal aspect of freedom in the first chapter of *Gaudium et spes* and in its Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis humanae*.

#### *The Concept of Freedom*

The word has different though analogous meanings at the natural and the personal levels. At the lowest level, that of nature, freedom means only the absence of physical constraint. A balloon rises freely when nothing obstructs it; a stone falls freely when nothing impedes it. A dog is free if it is let off the leash so that it can follow its impulses. To be free, in this sense, is to act according to an inner inclination. To be unfree is to have that inclination frustrated.

At a higher level, distinctive to persons, freedom demands, in addition, the absence of psychological compulsion. My freedom as a person is diminished to the extent that instinct or passion compels me to act in certain ways, for example, to flee from danger or flinch with pain.

If my motives could never transcend my individual self-interest or the collective self-interest of my group, I could never be psychologically free. I could

# The Vision of John Paul II

Assessing His Thought  
and Influence

Gerard Mannion, Editor



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## Mixed Messages: John Paul II's Writings on Women

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In contrast to all other popes preceding him, Pope John Paul II often wrote and spoke about women. Some of his thought is new and groundbreaking, but much of it sends mixed messages to Catholic women.

While asserting that women are truly created in the image of God, he constructs an anthropology based on the biological differences between men and women, leading to an essentialist position. His interpretation of women's presence in society is predicated on his perspective that mothers should be at home with their children. There is little good news for Catholic women when he speaks of women in the church, and he closes the door unequivocally to women's ordination.

### Women's Equality and Dignity

In his writings on Christian anthropology and specifically on women, Pope John Paul II strikingly breaks with Christian tradition by affirming woman's equality and dignity as a human being. In 1963 Pope John XXIII in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* acknowledged the increasing role of women in society as one of the signs of the times, pointing out that

it is obvious to everyone that women are now taking a part in public life . . . Since women are becoming ever more conscious of their human dignity, they will not tolerate being treated as mere material instruments,

but demand rights befitting a human person both in domestic and in public life. (PT 16)<sup>1</sup>

The documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) have little to say about women. On the one hand, the bishops insisted that “any kind of social or cultural discrimination in basic personal rights on the grounds of *sex*, race, color, social conditions, language or religion, must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design”<sup>2</sup> (GS 29, emphasis added), but in speaking of women’s involvement “in nearly all spheres of life” they stressed that “they ought to be permitted to play their part fully according to their own particular nature” (GS 60), implying that women had a different “nature” than men.

The twentieth century inherited the teachings of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas on how woman is to be understood as an image of God. Both positions are deficient in terms of asserting woman’s dignity and equality. Augustine (d. 430) argued that only the male is created in the image of God. Woman becomes the image of God when she is joined to her husband:

The woman with her husband is the image of God in such a way that the whole of that substance is one image, but when she is assigned her function of being an assistant, which is her concern alone, she is not the image of God, whereas in what concerns the man alone he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman is joined to him in one whole.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) builds on Augustine’s thought and asserts that the male possesses the image of God in a different and superior way to that of woman. He identifies her essence as her sexuality and, using the perspective of the mind-body dualism inherited from Greek philosophy, argues that she has a weaker and more imperfect body which then affects the mind and intelligence.<sup>4</sup> Following Aristotle, Aquinas describes

1. Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) (Pretoria: The Southern African Catholic Bishops’ Conference, n.d.), no. 16, p. 10.

2. Austin Flannery, OP, *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 194.

3. Augustine of Hippo, *The Trinity* (12.10), trans. Edmund Hill, OP (Brooklyn: New City Press, 1991), 328.

4. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (II–II. q. 70, a. 3, reply), vol. 10, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oats and Washbourne Ltd., 1929), 270.

the female as a defective human being since she was conceived because of an accident to the male sperm due to a south wind or the presence of a full moon.<sup>5</sup>

These perspectives continued to exert authority in Catholic theology into the twentieth century. In 1912, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* described women “as inferior to the male sex, both as regards the body and soul.”<sup>6</sup>

In striking contrast, John Paul II asserts that “both man and woman are human beings to an equal degree, both are created in God’s image” (MD 6).<sup>7</sup> Writing in 1995, at the time of the Fourth World Conference of the United Nations on Women held in Beijing, he phrases this conviction as “the inherent, inalienable dignity of women.”<sup>8</sup> The image of God, shared equally by man and woman, means that “he or she is a rational and free creature capable of knowing God and loving him” (MD 7).

In his exegesis of the creation texts in Genesis 1 and 2 in *The Theology of the Body*,<sup>9</sup> John Paul II affirms “the homogeneity of the whole being of both” (TB 44). He sees this homogeneity in terms of the body, the somatic structure. But there is also the recognition by the man: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). The man recognizes the humanity of the woman.

While many of his writings on women present a “biology is destiny” perspective and a romantic sense of the “feminine,” John Paul II’s conviction that women are fully equal human beings with men represents a new and official teaching in the Catholic tradition.

5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (I. q. 92, a. 1, reply 1), vol. 13, trans. Edmund Hill, OP (London: Blackfriars, 1964), 37.

6. Quoted in Lisa Isherwood and Dorothy McEwan, *Introducing Feminist Theology*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 40.

7. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women) (Kampala: St. Paul Publications-Africa, n.d.), 18.

8. John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks to Women* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 5.

9. John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1997), (hereafter, TB). This book is composed of 129 general audience addresses divided into four themes: “Original Unity of Man and Woman” (September 5, 1979–April 2, 1980), “Blessed are the Pure of Heart” (April 16, 1980–May 6, 1981), “The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy” (November 11, 1981–July 4, 1984), and “Reflections on *Humanae Vitae*” (July 11–November 28, 1984). Cf. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 335–36.

**Von Balthasar's Influence on John Paul's Thought**

George Weigel, biographer of the pope, asserts that Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) was “an important influence on John Paul’s thinking.”<sup>10</sup> Von Balthasar’s interpretation of the relationship between men and women, and the distinct roles of each, are clearly echoed in many aspects of John Paul’s thought, as will be developed below.

For von Balthasar, nature has determined the relationships and roles of men and women, and it is injurious to each and to society as a whole if there are “incursions of one sex into the other’s natural role,” since this “damages a critical balance, with baleful consequences.”<sup>11</sup> This is a position of essentialism and it is expanded in many ways.

Von Balthasar does assert that both women and men are the image of God: “both man and woman *individually* (and not only *together*) constitute an ‘image of God’; thus each has a guaranteed access to God.”<sup>12</sup> Woman “is oriented to the man, yet has equal rank with him, sharing in the same free human nature.”<sup>13</sup> Both man and woman are “seeking complementarity and peace in the other pole.”<sup>14</sup>

Much of his language about the relationship of man and woman is a romantic abstraction, but one with significant consequences for women in society and the church. Woman is “the help, the security, the home man needs; she is the vessel of fulfillment designed specially for him.”<sup>15</sup> Woman’s “essential vocation [is] to receive man’s fruitfulness,” and her response is “reproduction.”<sup>16</sup>

10. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 565.

11. Corinne Crammer, “One Sex or Two? Balthasar’s Theology of the Sexes,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hans Urs von Balthasar*, eds. Edward T. Oakes, SJ, and David Moss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95.

12. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3: *Dramatis Personae: The Person in Christ*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 286. (Emphasis in original.)

13. *Ibid.*, 297.

14. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 2: *Dramatis Personae: Man in God*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 355.

15. Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 3:285.

16. *Ibid.*, 3:286. Von Balthasar refers to Karl Barth’s (*Church Dogmatics* III/1, 312) commentary on Genesis 2 “which speaks of man and woman as such, not on fatherhood and motherhood” (286).

There is a hierarchy of relation between man and woman and man has priority:

The apparent paradox that men and women are equal but men have priority and headship may have its resolution in what has been described as the rule of “subordination in the order of creation and equality in the order of redemption.”<sup>17</sup>

In other words, men and women are equal before God, but this equality is limited in the creaturely realm because of Man’s natural priority. Although Balthasar asserts the equality of the sexes before God, he appears to regard equality in the created order as a threat to sexual difference and as contributing to the excesses of an overtly masculinized, overtly technological, technocratic society.<sup>18</sup>

For von Balthasar, man’s definite priority is “maintained by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,”<sup>19</sup> since man has a monadic character—oriented to woman—while woman has a dyadic character of orientation to the man and to the child.

Woman’s character is that of “receptivity, obedience, disponibility and willing consent to the action of another,” while “leadership is identified as masculine.”<sup>20</sup> Although he does maintain that receptivity and obedience are qualities of all persons before God, they are particularly feminine qualities. Thus Mary is “the archetype of the feminine,” for she “displays the paradigmatically feminine qualities as a model for all Christians in relation to God, although she also serves as a model for women in particular.”<sup>21</sup>

For von Balthasar, men are doers and makers, leaders who are focused on goals and achievement. Women are receptive vessels of the man; in sexual intercourse (he maintains that man always initiates sexual activity because of his primary fruitfulness<sup>22</sup>) and in life, man represents and woman receives. Thus ordination to the priesthood is impossible for

17. Karl Lehmann, “The Place of Women as a Problem in Theological Anthropology,” *Communio* 10 (1983), 222. Cited in Crammer, “One Sex or Two?” 108n9.

18. Crammer, “One Sex or Two?” 96.

19. Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 3:292.

20. Crammer, “One Sex or Two?” 98.

21. *Ibid.* John Paul’s very forthright Mariology is certainly linked with von Balthasar’s thought. In many of the papal statements about women, a separate section links women’s roles with Mary’s obedience and receptivity.

22. *Ibid.*, 99.

woman since her role is “being” while man’s is that of representing Christ, who is male, and woman “is not called upon to represent anything that she herself is not.”<sup>23</sup>

Von Balthasar’s thought is clearly essentialist, emphasizing that women and men have a clear essence which perdures throughout history and is the same in every cultural and historical context. This position is the basis of the kinds of sexual stereotyping of women which have been addressed and critiqued in various ways since the middle of the nineteenth century, from the right of women to vote to women’s leadership in business, government, and the church.

Corinne Crammer comments on the implications of von Balthasar’s theological perspective: “Given the historical experiences of women, a theology of the sexes that is so insistent on the priority of Man and that associates divinity with Man while associating creatureliness and subordination with Woman is inimical to social equality between the sexes and lends support to male-female relationships marked by dominance and subordination.”<sup>24</sup>

John Paul II’s interpretation of woman as person, of the relationship of man and woman, and of women’s roles in church and society is not an exact parallel with von Balthasar’s thought, but there are many clear similarities.

### Woman as Person

The assertion of woman’s equality with man is the good news in John Paul II’s anthropology. Humanity is one since both women and men “were created in the image and likeness of the personal God” (MD 6), and this image is human rationality. In view of the ecological crisis now confronting humanity, the statement, “Thanks to this property, man and woman are able to ‘dominate’ the other creatures of the visible world (cf. Gen 1:28)” (MD 6), while a traditional interpretation, shows the unfortunate anthropocentric character of theology that has brought humanity to the precipice of an uncertain planetary future.

But much of the papal anthropology is decidedly mixed and often detrimental to women. John Paul’s emphasis on the biological differences between men and women, which of course are true, often leads to a position of “biology is destiny” for woman and an extrapolation of the physical to the psychological.

In his meditations on Genesis 1 and 2 in *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul II traces the creation of male and female. The original solitude of the male, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18),<sup>25</sup> leads to the creation of woman. While he asserts the original unity of man and woman as the image of God, the language used prepares the way for the link of woman’s body with her destiny as mother. The original unity “is based on masculinity and femininity, as if on two different ‘incarnations,’ that is on two ways of ‘being a body’ of the same human being created ‘in the image of God’ (Gen 1:27)” (TB 43).

In the second creation account in Genesis 2:18-25, the image of sleep is used during which woman is created. The man recognizes the woman as “a second self” (TB 44), not another self. The first self is the primary self. The pope states that the “circle of the solitude of the man-person is broken, because the first ‘man’ awakens from his sleep as ‘male and female’” (TB 44). The language of the Genesis text, that the woman is “a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18, 20), introduces the subordination of woman to man that has been seen throughout human history. Although John Paul II stresses the unity of the communion of persons of male and female as the image and likeness of God (TB 46), there is much in the papal writings that demonstrates that the two different “incarnations” are not really equal since the male is the norm.

✕ In asserting the central importance of the body in the creation of humanity—we are embodied as male and female—John Paul states that the “theology of the body is bound up with the creation of man in the image of God” and “becomes, in a way, also the theology of sex, or rather the theology of masculinity and femininity, which has its starting point here in Genesis” (TB 47).

23. Ibid., 100. This position on women and priesthood is clearly shown in John Paul II’s thought. See the section below on the ordination of women.

24. Ibid., 107.

25. Because the English translations of John Paul’s writings use exclusive language, the use of “man” for humanity at times obscures his thought by sometimes conflating man and male.

An early example of the relation of male and female is present in the language of male power over woman. The consequences of the Fall in Genesis are more serious for woman than for man since "he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). John Paul sees this domination as breaking the original unity of male and female, "especially to the disadvantage of the woman" (MD 10). Indeed, throughout history this text has been interpreted as justifying male oppression of women, rather than indicating that the original unity of male and female has been broken to the detriment of both.

The pope interprets this domination both in terms of marriage, in which both bear the inclination to sin, but also "indirectly they concern the different spheres of social life: the situations in which the woman remains disadvantaged or discriminated against by the fact of being a woman" (MD 10).

### The Female Body

In his descriptions of the female body, John Paul II presents a foundation for the view that "biology is destiny." The body "which expresses femininity manifests the reciprocity and communion of persons" (TB 61-62), but it is also a body made for self-giving. As the woman

"is given" to man . . . she is accepted by man as gift . . . At the same time, the acceptance of the woman by the man and very way of accepting her, becomes, as it were, a first donation. In giving herself (from the very first moment in which, in the mystery of creation, she was "given" to the man by the Creator), the woman "rediscovers herself" at the same time. (TB 71)

The biological differences become the basis for psychological differences.

Self-giving is then the essence of woman, since the second creation narrative "has assigned to man 'from the beginning' the function of the one who, above all, receives the gift" (TB 71). While John Paul II stresses the mutual relationship of man and woman, in which the man also gives himself, it is the woman who in her self-giving "reaches the inner depth of her person and full possession of herself" (TB 71).

In the papal view, the female body is formed for motherhood: "Maternity manifests this constitution internally, as the particular potential of the female organism. With creative particularity it serves for the conception and begetting of the human being, with the help of man" (TB 81). This is

a traditional interpretation of woman's role in society: she is first a mother; all else is secondary. It ignores the fact that many women are not mothers, by choice and by circumstance, and that the potential for physical motherhood encompasses only a percentage of a woman's life, for example ages fourteen to forty-eight in an average life span of eighty years.

By stressing the maternal role of women, the pope reinforces traditional gender roles of women and men. Even though in other writings he supports woman's role in society, there is always the perspective that her primary place is at home with the children.

### Idealization of Women

There is a great deal of idealization of woman as person in John Paul's writings. In his reflections on Christ's injunction on adultery and lust (Matt 5:27-28), he uses the phrase the "eternal feminine"<sup>26</sup> in describing how "the woman—who owing to her personal subjectivity exists perennially 'for man,' waiting for him, too, for the same reason, to exist 'for her'" (TB 150). Adultery and lust make woman into an object, but woman's very identity is as one who exists "for the other," not for herself.

He speaks of the "genius of women" which flows from Mary's "feminine genius."<sup>27</sup> The language both exalts and isolates. This "genius" is a "specific part of God's plan which needs to be accepted and appreciated"<sup>28</sup> both in society and in the church.

In his Angelus address of July 23, 1995, John Paul II elaborates the meaning of the "feminine genius." Women and men are not to be compared with one another since they hold much in common in terms of fundamental dimensions and values. He qualifies this by stating, "However, in

26. This perspective has links with C. G. Jung's concept of the feminine in which he "sees the feminine as a psychic element quite apart from its biological or cultural existence" (Ann B. Ulanov, *The Feminine in Jungian Psychology and in Christian Theology* [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971], 141). The scientist and theologian Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ (1881-1955) wrote of the "eternal feminine" as born in creation: "I issued from the hand of God—half formed, yet destined to grow in beauty from age to age, the handmaid of his work" (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, "The Eternal Feminine," in *Writings in Time of War*, trans. René Hague [London: Collins, 1968], 193). See Susan Rakoczy, "The Tension of the Feminine in Teilhard de Chardin," *Grace & Truth* 22, no. 2 (2005): 68-82.

27. John Paul II, "Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women," in *The Pope Speaks to Women*, no. 10, p. 22.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

man and in woman these acquire different strengths, interests, and emphases."<sup>29</sup> This "genius" is located in woman's "particular capacity for accepting the human being in his concrete form," which "prepares her for motherhood, not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually."<sup>30</sup>

At the close of his apostolic letter *Mulieres Dignitatem*, he gives thanks for all women (perfect and weak) for the fruits of feminine holiness and speaks again of their feminine "genius" and their "mystery" as woman. The Spirit of Christ reveals to women "the entire meaning of their femininity," which will lead them to "a sincere gift of self to others, thus finding themselves" (MD 31). He describes Mary as "the highest expression of the 'feminine genius,'"<sup>31</sup> for it is she who through obedience and service lived her vocation as wife and mother.

In these statements, there is a sense of distance from women as they really are. Woman is idealized throughout the papal writings; she does not live and breathe as a real person, but rather the pope constructs an abstract anthropology of her special nature.

This is clearly apparent when John Paul II speaks of the particular value that women represent in view of their femininity. This is the "truth about woman as bride. The Bridegroom is the one who loves. The Bride is loved: it is she who receives love, in order to love in return" (MD 29).<sup>32</sup> This relationship extends beyond marriage to all women's interpersonal interactions with others. This interpretation of woman as first one who receives is universal and thus "shape(s) society and structure(s) the interaction between all persons—men and women" (MD 29). It extends to every woman and operates "independently of the cultural context in which she lives, and independently of her spiritual, psychological and physical characteristics, as for example, age, education, health, work and whether she is married or single" (MD 29).

All women are a universal sisterhood of receptivity and self-giving. There is no room in John Paul's anthropology for initiative and self-determination.

29. John Paul II, *The Genius of Women* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1997), 28.

30. *Ibid.*, 28.

31. John Paul II, "Letter to Women," no. 10, p. 22.

32. This echoes von Balthasar's bridal imagery for the church: "The institution guarantees the perpetual presence of Christ the Bridegroom for the Church, his Bride." The priesthood is entrusted to men alone because "their function is to embody Christ, who comes to the Church to make her fruitful." Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, 3:354.

Even when he lauds a saint, Catherine of Siena, named a Doctor of the Church in 1970, his remarks are ambivalent. In his homily on the six hundredth anniversary of her death (April 29, 1980) he said, "Her feminine nature was richly endowed with fantasy, intuition, sensibility, an ability to get things done, a capacity to communicate with others, a readiness for self-giving and service."<sup>33</sup> The first three characteristics, especially fantasy, are not necessarily positive, since stereotypes of the female often associate women with fantasy and intuition in contrast to the male who is rational and decisive. But Catherine breaks these stereotypes, since she worked for church reform and engaged in peacemaking efforts among the warring city-states of Italy. She wrote strong letters to popes and civil authorities. She was not a passive woman lost in fantasy.

In his writings on anthropology there is no reflection on "masculine nature." Man is the norm; woman is different, idealized, and physically and psychologically passive and receptive to men and the world.

### Relations between Men and Women

John Paul's interpretation of male-female relations is both positive and affirming for women but also has a number of negative connotations.

Building on his assertion of woman's inherent dignity and equality as person, he uses the language of communion to describe male-female relationships. He finds that "communion" is a broader and more accurate word than "help" or helper, one for the other. The relationship of communion of male and female is also constitutive of the image of God. He states that "we can deduce that man became the 'image and likeness' of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning" (TB 46).

This movement from the original solitude of the "one man" to communion of male and female is also an image of the communion of the Persons of the Trinity.<sup>34</sup> This is a communion of equals, male and female, each reflecting the image of God.

33. Quoted in Peter Hebblethwaite, *Introducing John Paul II* (London: Collins, 1982), 121.

34. Catherine Mowry LaCugna describes this Communion in the Trinity: "communion is the unifying force that holds together the three coequal persons who know and love each other as peers." *God for Us: The Trinity in Christian Life* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 249.

However, the pope also stresses that “devout and trusting surrender is the distinctive trait of the woman in love,” while “possession [*posiadanie*] is the characteristic modality of the devotion of man to the woman he loves.”<sup>35</sup> He further describes woman’s dignity as “measured by the order of love” (MD 29). John Paul links this with the analogy of the bridegroom and the bride, in which all human beings are loved by God. And it is “precisely the woman—the bride—who manifests this truth to everyone” (MD 29). As in so many other places in his writings, he then moves to Mary as embodying “this truth”: “The ‘prophetic character’ of women in their femininity finds its highest expression in the Virgin Mother of God” (MD 29).

The language of “domination” in Genesis 3:16—“he shall rule over you”—breaks this communion of persons into a “relationship of possession of the other as the object of one’s own desire” (TB 123). John Paul II discusses this text in the context of lust, which can be experienced by both men and women, and which distorts the “nuptial meaning” of the body, which is one of gift and receptivity. Yet his reflections here are again abstract, and thus he does not take his analysis a step further to comment on how women’s bodies are made the objects of lust in rape and sexual violence.<sup>36</sup>

But this positive interpretation of communion between men and women is not evident in other writings. He recognizes that women can take offense from the text “he shall rule over you,” but this “must not under any condition lead to the ‘masculinization’ of women. In the name of liberation from male ‘domination,’ women must not appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their own feminine ‘originality’” (MD 10). He speaks of the fear that if women appropriate masculine characteristics, which he does not name, they “will deform and lose what constitutes their essential richness,” which is their voca-

35. George Huntston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 161–62.

36. In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II does criticize the mentality which objectifies the human and names women as the first victims: “This mentality produces very bitter fruits, such as contempt for men and for women, slavery, oppression of the weak, pornography, prostitution—especially in an organized form.” John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Regarding the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) (Vatican: Vatican Polygot Press, 1981), no. 24, 46–47.

tion to love (MD 10, 30). But reading between the lines in light of his other writings, these unfeminine characteristics may well include initiative and leadership. In John Paul II’s perspective, gender roles and characteristics are determined by “nature,” and attempts to change will distort God’s original intention. In the papal writings, there is no awareness at all that gender is a social construct, not an ontological category, and thus he speaks of the “special qualities proper to each” (MD 7).

The language of “complementarity” is a familiar one in his writings. Man and woman are seen to bring to the other something that is lacking. What is lacking? Since the underlying assumption is that “masculine nature” is human nature, a man cannot lack what a woman has. But a woman can somehow be completed by a man. He states that the “personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than of masculinity” (MD 10), yet in his writings there is a sense that these “personal resources” are not only different (“the feminine genius”) but less than a man’s.

Shortly after the release of *Mulieres Dignitatem* in 1988, the pope told a group of American bishops that “Whatever violates the complementarity of women and men offends the dignity of each.”<sup>37</sup> Feminist scholar Sandra Schneiders has remarked that “Women have been seen to complete men the way a second coat of paint completes a house, whereas men have been seen to complete women the way a motor completes a car.”<sup>38</sup> In the post-synod apostolic exhortation of 1988, *Christifideles Laici* (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World), signed by Pope John Paul II, the issue of complementarity is also raised:

The condition that will assure the rightful presence of women in the Church and in society is a more penetrating and accurate consideration of the *anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity* with the intent of clarifying woman’s personal identity in relation to man, that is a diversity yet mutual complementarity, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person.<sup>39</sup> (CL 50, emphasis in original)

37. Quoted in Deborah Halter, *The Papal “No”: A Comprehensive Guide to the Vatican’s Rejection of Women’s Ordination* (New York: Crossroad, 2004), 79.

38. Sandra Schneiders, *Beyond Patching: Faith and Feminism in the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 13.

39. John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and the World) (London: Catholic Truth Society, n.d.), p. 48.

John Paul's highly developed anthropology ranges wide over many areas: the creation of men and women as sexual beings, woman as person, the female body, and the relations of the men and women. But we can question whether his thought assists women in affirming their dignity as human beings. Do women recognize themselves in his interpretation of their bodies, their selves, and their relations with men? On the evidence considered thus far, his anthropology is sometimes good news, at other times bad news, and offers a mixed message indeed.

### Women in Society

There are a number of references in the writings of John Paul II to women's roles in society and the world of work. While he describes the increasing presence of women in public life, his Polish context informs his argument that women should not be compelled by government or economic necessity to work outside the home.

Polish women under communism had to work outside the home. After the fall of communism, they continued to work out of economic need. Like so many women around the world, Polish married women had *two* full-time jobs—taking care of the home and family and their outside work. Husbands and wives did not divide up the household tasks equally. The conditions under which women worked within and outside the home—very cramped living quarters, doing dangerous jobs in mines, factories, etc.—made their lives extraordinarily difficult.

John Paul projects the Polish experience onto women throughout the world. "While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are *not in practice compelled* to work outside the home, and that their families can live and prosper in a dignified way even when they themselves devote their full time to their own family" (FC 23, emphasis in original).

What will allow women to stay home and raise the children? The answer is to restructure society so that there is no economic necessity for women to work. The pope states that "society should create and develop conditions favouring work in the home" (FC 23).

This can be done by the introduction of a "family wage," which is "a single salary given to the head of the family for that person's work or

other measures such as family allowances or grants to mothers devoting themselves exclusively to their families."<sup>40</sup> For John Paul II, the traditional roles are to continue: the head of the family is the father and the bread winner; the wife and mother stays home. In *Laborem Exercens* he writes:

It will profit society to make it possible for a mother—without curtailing her freedom, without psychological or practical discrimination, without handicapping her in any way whatsoever in regard to other women—to dedicate herself to the care and education of her children.

Having to abandon these tasks to take up work outside the home is wrong for society and the family when it hinders these main goals of a mother's mission. (LE 19)

Once again it appears that "biology is destiny." There is no awareness of the father's role in the family—the children are the mother's responsibility alone. There is no differentiation between women compelled to take up menial jobs for low pay and the need of professionally educated women to work as doctors, teachers, lawyers, etc., not only to contribute to society but for their own psychological and spiritual well-being as persons. The pope's warnings about mothers working outside the home must always be considered against the Polish context, which "he is reacting vigorously against."<sup>41</sup>

In the discussions of the 1980 synod on the family, there were many interventions that "emphasized that the time had come to take women seriously in the Church and in society."<sup>42</sup> But this did not appear in *Familiaris Consortio* and later in *Laborem Exercens*. *Familiaris Consortio* does recognize that women today are participating in the "public space" of society, but it emphasizes women's work should primarily take place in the home. "While it must be recognized that women have the same right as men to perform various public functions, society must be structured in such a way that wives and mothers are *not in practice compelled* to work

40. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), in *John Paul II: The Encyclicals in Everyday Language*, ed. Joseph G. Donders (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996), no. 19, p. 61.

41. Hebblethwaite, *Introducing*, 127.

42. *Ibid.*, 123.

outside the home . . . and that society should create and develop conditions favouring work in the home" (FC 23, emphasis in original).

The pope is not against women working, but opposes mothers working outside the home. Once she has children, she must stay home. This may be more necessary when the children are young (and many women today who are financially able choose to do this), but his view is that mothers should be home with the children. Thus we should interpret the many statements that he makes about women in society as applying only to women without family responsibilities.

✱ In many places in his writings John Paul does laud and support women's contributions to society through their work. In his "Letter to Women" he expresses gratitude to them: "Thank you, women who work! You are present and active in every area of life—social, economic, cultural, artistic and political. In this way you make an indispensable contribution to the growth of a culture which unites reason and feeling."<sup>43</sup> In recognizing women's increasing contributions to society through their work, the pope continues to speak of "the proper nature of femininity":

✱ The Church is well aware of how much society needs *feminine genius* in all aspects of civil society and insists that *every form of discrimination of women be eliminated* from the workplace, culture and politics, while still respecting the proper nature of femininity: an inappropriate leveling of roles would not only impoverish social life, but would ultimately *deprive woman herself* of what is primarily or exclusively hers.<sup>44</sup> (emphasis in original)

The pope appeals for a just wage for women who work outside the home (LE 19). He recognizes that "in many societies women work in nearly every sector of life" and he stresses that "they must be able to do so without discrimination and exclusion from jobs, and also without having to give up their specific role in family and society" (LE 19), which is that of mother. Thus mothers who work outside the home by choice and/or necessity are faced with two full-time jobs. At least the pope affirms that they should receive a just wage, even though they may have to do what he does not support: work outside the home even though they have children.

43. John Paul II, "Letter to Women," no. 2, pp. 13–14.

44. John Paul II, "Feminine Genius Needed in all Aspects of Life," Angelus Homily, August 14, 1994. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 34 (August 24, 1994): 2.

John Paul evidences awareness of the double shift that women work when he points to "a widespread and distorted culture which unduly excuses man from his family responsibilities, and, in the worst cases, inclines him to look upon woman as an object of pleasure, or a mere reproductive device."<sup>45</sup>

✱ In his writings John Paul II recognizes, and to a certain extent supports, women's increasing presence in society. But he also holds a romantic nostalgia for the mother at home with her children.

### Women in the Church

Although the pope discusses women's contributions to many areas of society, there are relatively few references in his writings to women's ministries and experience in the life of the church. Even when consecrated women are praised, it is because they "help the Church and all mankind to experience a 'spousal' relationship to God."<sup>46</sup> He is best known for his total opposition to the ordination of women, but the paucity of references to women in the life of the church as a whole is troubling.

*Mulieres Dignitatem* is a sustained theological reflection on many aspects of women's dignity and vocation, with particular attention to anthropological issues, motherhood and virginity, and the spousal nature of the church. The section on "Jesus Christ" does present positive comments on Jesus' interaction with women in the gospels (MD 12–14), and the pope concludes that "Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent *protest* against whatever offends the dignity of women" (MD 15, emphasis in original).

Affirming the presence of women as the first witnesses to the resurrection of Christ (MD 16), John Paul II stresses that this "confirms and clarifies, in the Holy Spirit, the truth about the equality of man and woman" (MD 16). The outpouring of the Spirit is given equally to man and woman. Here there are no limits in the pope's thinking about women's roles, though later in the document he will emphasize that women cannot be priests.

In the chapter on "The Church—the Bride of Christ," John Paul speaks approvingly of "a number of women" from the earliest days of the

45. John Paul II, "Feminine Genius," 2.

46. John Paul II, "Letter to Women," no. 2, p. 14.

church who followed Christ unreservedly, from the first women disciples to Macrina, Catherine of Siena, Teresa of Avila, Mary Ward, and Rose of Lima among others, all of whom “have shared in the Church’s mission” (MD 27). These women are lauded for their holiness “as an incarnation of the feminine ideal” (MD 27) and as a model for the whole church.

✱ Nowhere is there mention of women’s leadership in the church.

In several of his writings the pope again uses the phrase “genius of women” to refer to women in the church. Writing on the eve of the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995, he affirmed that the “genius of women” should be “expressed more fully in the life of society as a whole, as well as in the life of the Church.”<sup>47</sup> Once again, Mary is the model of this “genius” since she lived a life of service to others.<sup>48</sup> Other women throughout the history of the church—martyrs, women, and mystics—“have left an impressive and beneficial mark in history,” together with “the many women, inspired by faith, who were responsible for initiatives of extraordinary social importance, especially in serving the poorest of the poor.”<sup>49</sup>

✱ Writing to the priests of the world on Holy Thursday in 1995, the pope urges them to read *Mulieres Dignitatem*. Following the teaching of Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium*, he situates the place of women theologically as members of the People of God and affirms that “all her members, men and women alike, share—each in his or her specific way—in the prophetic priestly and royal mission of Christ.”<sup>50</sup> Later in the same section he reiterates that women share in the “prophetic mission of Christ,”<sup>51</sup> together with his priestly and royal mission. One might legitimately wonder precisely *how* he interpreted women’s prophetic role in the church of the late twentieth century. Catherine of Siena spoke truth to power to the popes of her day; she is safely canonized. But today other Catherines continue to challenge the church.

There is no awareness of the burdens of sexism in the church and how it severely limits women’s initiative and contributions. John Paul states: “If anyone has this task of advancing the dignity of women in

the Church and society, it is women themselves, who must recognize their responsibility as leading characters” (CL 49).

Women can act in the church according to the “ample room for a lay and feminine presence recognized by the Church’s law,” and he names “theological teaching, the forms of liturgical ministry permitted, including service at the altar,<sup>52</sup> pastoral and administrative councils, Diocesan Synods and Particular Councils, various ecclesial institutions, curias, and ecclesiastical tribunals, many pastoral activities, including the new forms of participation in the care of parishes when there is a shortage of clergy, except for those tasks that belong properly to the priest.”<sup>53</sup> Nowhere is the word “leadership” used in reference to women in the church; that is reserved to men alone.

John Paul II’s contacts with women were limited by the exclusively male context of the Curia and his personal staff.<sup>54</sup> Occasionally a woman did speak her mind and heart to him in public, and it was a very disconcerting experience.

On November 20, 1980, Barbara Engl, President of the Munich Association of Youth, was to say farewell to the pope after his visit to Munich. Peter Hebblethwaite relates that “after listening to his homily on Satan in our midst, she threw away her manuscript” and spoke from her heart “as John Paul hid his head in his hands.”<sup>55</sup> After speaking about

52. Early in his pontificate he vigorously opposed girls and women as altar servers, and the 1980 “Instruction of the Sacred Liturgy for the Sacraments and Divine Worship excluded . . . all women as altar servers” (Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, 351). This position was guardedly reversed in 1994 in a similar instruction to the world’s bishops. Females were now allowed to be servers “by temporary deputation” for the duration of need. Local bishops were to make the decision whether women could serve, and they were to keep in mind “the noble tradition of having boys serve at the altar,” which has led to a “reassuring development of priestly vocations” (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, “Use of Female Altar Servers Allowed,” *Origins* 23, no. 45 [April 28, 1994]: 777–779). The pope saw clearly that if females served Mass, they, like males, might think of a priestly vocation—which in his thinking was totally impossible. It was therefore better to limit their presence as much as possible, while implicitly acknowledging the fact that females were already serving in many parts of the world, especially North America and Europe.

53. John Paul II, *The Genius of Women*, 35–36.

54. Polish nuns cooked for him and oversaw his domestic needs. There are, of course, some women who do work in the Vatican as secretaries and in some responsible positions in the Vatican dicasteries, but because of the prohibition of the ordination of women, no woman can head any of these dicasteries.

55. Hebblethwaite, *Introducing*, 117.

47. John Paul II, “Letter to Women,” no. 10, p. 21.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*, no. 11, p. 24.

50. John Paul II, “Excerpts from Pope John Paul II’s Holy Thursday Letter to Priests,” in *The Genius of Women*, 68.

51. *Ibid.*, 70.

young people's lack of understanding of why the church insists on priestly celibacy, she said: "Nor can young people understand why a greater sharing of women in the ministry should be ruled out. We know perfectly well that the Gospel challenges us, but we do not feel oppressed by neurosis or a lack of courage because we know that Christ has promised us the fullness of life."<sup>56</sup>

In the future, organizers of papal events took care to make sure that women were never able to approach the pope again and speak their hearts.

### The Ordination of Women

During his pontificate, John Paul II consistently maintained that the ordination of women was a theological and ecclesial impossibility. In various documents, such as *Mulieres Dignitatem* (26–27) and the 1995 "Letter to Women," he argues that the free choice of Christ of only men "in no way detracts from the role of women"<sup>57</sup> in the church, nor that of anyone else who is not ordained. This is in terms of the "sacramental economy" by "which God freely chooses in order to become present in the midst of humanity,"<sup>58</sup> and he asserts that only men can be these sacramental signs of God's presence.

The movement for the ordination of women in the Catholic Church began in the 1960s with the formation of the St. Joan's Alliance in England. In 1974, a group of women religious in the United States sent a resolution to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops that urged them to expand the scope for women's ministries, including ordination to the priesthood.

A year later, in 1975, the first Women's Ordination Conference (WOC) was held in Detroit, Michigan. Over twelve hundred people attended and hundreds were turned away for lack of space in the meeting venue. After this meeting the WOC evolved into an organization in the United States; gradually similar bodies were founded in many countries of the world.

Also in 1975 the Papal Biblical Commission issued its report on women's ministry and the seventeen members "voted unanimously; that the

56. Quoted in *Ibid.*

57. John Paul II, "Letter to Women," no. 11, p. 23.

58. *Ibid.*

New Testament alone seemed unable to settle the question of the possibility of women priests, and the members voted 12–5 that scripture alone was not sufficient to rule out the admission of women to priesthood."<sup>59</sup>

Taking note of this rising tide of enthusiasm for what Rome saw as impossible, in 1976 the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) published the declaration *Inter Insigniores* (On the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood). This document said a decisive "no" to women's ordination and used three arguments: tradition (that the church has not ordained women), Scripture (that Christ chose only men and that not even Mary was a priest), and the need for the priest to have a physical resemblance to Christ.

It was the last argument which aroused the most controversy. The document stressed that the sacraments are based on "natural signs, on symbols imprinted on the human psychology."<sup>60</sup> Thus only men can represent Christ as priests:

The same natural resemblance is required for persons as for things: when Christ's role in the eucharist is to be expressed sacramentally, there would not be this "natural resemblance" which must exist between Christ and his minister if the role were not taken by a man: in such case it would be difficult to see in the minister the image of Christ. For Christ himself was and remains a man.<sup>61</sup>

The theological implications of this position are very severe for women, since it implies that although they are baptized into Christ, they are unable to represent Christ. It also makes the gender of Christ as male the determining point of his identity, a position never before taught in the church.

This document was not "received" by most Catholics and did not enter into the lived experience of the faith. Three years later, in 1979, John Paul II was strongly challenged by Sister Theresa Kane, RSM, president of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR),

59. Phyllis Zagano, *Holy Saturday: An Argument for the Restoration of the Female Diaconate in the Catholic Church* (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 54.

60. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Inter Insigniores* (Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood), no. 44, in Halter, *The Papal "No"*, 191.

61. *Ibid.*, no. 45, p. 191.

who greeted him at a liturgy in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC, and spoke on behalf of the Catholic women of the United States:

As women we have heard the powerful messages of our Church addressing the dignity and reverence for all persons. As women we have pondered upon these words. Our contemplation leads us to state that the Church in its struggle to be faithful to its call for reverence and dignity for all persons must respond to providing the possibility of women as persons being included in all ministries of our Church. I urge you, Your Holiness, to be open to and respond to the voices coming from the women of this country who are desirous of serving in and through the Church as fully participating members.<sup>62</sup>

The pope's demeanor during her welcome has been interpreted variously from silence to murmuring "no, no" with a pained expression on his face, which resembled his response to Barbara Engi's plea. He was responding not only to a twentieth-century woman's plea but perhaps was also thinking of his Polish context in which there is a schismatic group called the Mariavites who do ordain women.<sup>63</sup>

After the fall of communism in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, reports began to surface of the ordination of five or six Czechoslovakian women in order to serve a local church under the threat of suppression.<sup>64</sup> The publicity about these women and the fact that the ordination controversy would not go away led John Paul to state his total opposition to the ordination of women in the document *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (On Reserving the Priesthood to Men Alone, 1994). In it he states that the church's teaching authority "has consistently held that the exclu-

62. Quoted in Halter, *The Papal "No,"* 32.

63. Based on the revelations of a Polish Sister of St. Clare, Felicja Kozłowska, in the late nineteenth century, which called for renewal of the Church in Poland, the followers, both men and women, of Sister Kozłowska organized themselves into an order, the Mariavites. They were excommunicated by Pope St. Pius X in 1906, but the order continued as a schismatic group with 100,000 followers. The group began to ordain women in 1928. They have a cooperative association with the Old Catholic Church. See Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II*, 36–37.

64. See the biography of one of these Czech women, Ludmila Javorova, by Miriam Therese Winter, *Out of the Depths: The Story of Ludmila Javorova Ordained Roman Catholic Priest* (New York: Crossroad, 2001).

sion of women from the priesthood is in accord with God's plan for his Church" and thus the Roman Catholic Church "has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women" (OS 3, 13).<sup>65</sup>

Invoking his Marian spirituality, the pope called attention to the fact that Mary was not a priest as a sign that "the nonadmission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe" (OS 9).<sup>66</sup>

The argument against ordination now shifted from the "physical resemblance" that a priest must have to Christ in *Inter Insigniores* to ecclesiological arguments:

The priesthood belonged to the church's divinely mandated structure.

It was reserved to men alone.

The pope could not change what Christ had decreed.

This judgment was to be "definitively held" (OS 13) by all the faithful.<sup>67</sup>

The reception of this document was decidedly mixed. What did it mean that this teaching was to be "definitively held" by all the baptized? A document issued in 1995, *Responsum ad Dubium* (Response to a Question), by the CDF, headed by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), and approved by John Paul II, invoked infallibility. It stated that "the teaching that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women . . . requires definitive assent since, founded on the written Word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the Church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium" (RD 3).<sup>68</sup>

This document unleashed a new firestorm of questions. Did the non-ordination of women belong to the deposit of faith? Could a Vatican office speak infallibly? Did not only the pope, speaking *ex cathedra* on mat-

65. John Paul II, *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (On Reserving the Priesthood to Men Alone) in Halter, *The Papal "No,"* 211, 213.

66. *Ibid.*, 212.

67. Halter, *The Papal "No,"* 98.

68. *Responsum ad Dubium* (Response to a Question Regarding *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*), no. 3, in Halter, *The Papal "No,"* 225. On the wider implications of this seemingly new category of "definitive doctrine" see chapter 4 of the present volume.

ters of faith and morals, speak infallibly? Eminent canonists such as Ladislav Orsy disagreed with this use of infallibility: "The reason for this is theological. Infallibility cannot be delegated. It is a charism granted to the pope (as well as to the episcopal college and to the universal body of the faithful); no other office or body in the church can possess it."<sup>69</sup> Others pointed out that the church had not, for twenty centuries, consistently taught that women cannot be ordained. This is a new question.

But for John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger the question was now closed for all eternity. The argument in both documents had been an argument from authority, papal authority, and the church was to accept it and end discussion. But still discussion goes on.

George Weigel, in his laudatory biography of John Paul, *Witness to Hope*, sees the arguments used in the two documents as a "strategic error." Rather than appealing to authority, Weigel maintains that the pope should have recast the argument according to his own interpretation of the spousal nature of the church. He says that the argument should have been built on the "theology of the body" that John Paul had developed, an approach that insisted that the differences between men and women "were not biological accidents but revelations of deep truths about the human condition that directly touched God's redemptive purpose for the world."<sup>70</sup>

Weigel states that this argument would have strengthened the pope's concepts of the "Marian" and "Petrine" churches. Mary in her obedience is the first disciple, and thus the Marian church is the church of disciples; it makes possible the Petrine church of office and authority. The Petrine church has no other purpose than "to form the Church in line with the ideal of sanctity already programmed and prefigured in Mary."<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

In evaluating Pope John Paul II's teachings and writings on women, it must be emphasized that his insistence on woman's dignity as a human

69. Ladislav Orsy, "The Congregation's 'Response': Its Authority and Meaning," *America* 173 (December 9, 1995): 4.

70. Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 733.

71. John Paul II, "Annual Address to the Roman Curia," *L'Osservatore Romano* (January 11, 1988), 6-8, quoted in Weigel, *Witness to Hope*, 577. Weigel describes the basis of these two "churches" in the thought of von Balthasar.

being, made in the image of God, and equal as a person to man, is a new and extremely significant teaching in the Catholic Church.

His interpretations of the relationships of men and women, of the female body, of the role of women in the family and society, are all premised upon his anthropology, which was highly influenced by the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Biological differences are the basis of psychological differences. His use of "feminine genius" and "the proper nature of femininity" imply that perhaps there are two human natures, one male and one female.

While he often spoke of the growing roles of women in society, he was much more circumspect about women's ministries in the church. He never spoke about women's leadership in the church. His insistence that it is impossible for women to be ordained to the ministerial priesthood admitted of no dialogue and no change.

The pope used to remark that he was "a feminist," and his perspective is often termed the "new Catholic feminism."<sup>72</sup> Feminism is built on the principle of the full humanity of women and "whatever enables this to flourish is redemptive and of God; whatever damages this is non-redemptive and contrary to God's intent."<sup>73</sup> John Paul II's "new" feminism is decidedly mixed. It admits the principle of women's dignity and equality but draws back sharply from the implications of that equality both in society and in the church.

72. See Tina Beattie's *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), in which she engages with von Balthasar. For her comments on the foundations of this new Catholic feminism, see pp. 19-26. See also, Michele A. Gonzalez, "Hans Urs von Balthasar and Contemporary Feminist Theology," *Theological Studies* 65 (2004): 566-595.

73. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 103.

# Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition

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## 7

### A Disembodied "Theology of the Body": John Paul II on Love, Sex, and Pleasure\*

Luke Timothy Johnson

Papal teaching on human sexuality has received some positive reviews recently. A number of these have appeared in the journal *First Things*. In "Contraception: A Symposium,"<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., declares that Pope Paul VI has a lock on the title of prophet because, in *Humanae Vitae*, he was right. In the same issue, Janet E. Smith thinks that people who regard the papacy's condemnation of contraception to be based on the "artificial" methods employed simply have not acquainted themselves with the richness of papal teaching. In particular, she says, "those who appreciate precise and profound philosophical reasoning should read Karol Wojtyla's *Love and Responsibility*," while offering a strong recommendation also for "the extensive deliberations of Pope John Paul II." Even more recently, Jennifer J. Popiel states that "unlike many women, I find the church's doctrinal statements on contraception and reproduction to be clear and compelling," and argues that Natural Family Planning is fully compatible with feminism, since "only when we control our bodies will we truly control our lives."<sup>2</sup>

George Weigel joins this chorus of praise in his biography of John Paul II, *Witness to Hope*.<sup>3</sup> Under the heading, "A New Galileo Crisis," Weigel traces the pope's systematic response to the "pastoral and catechetical failure" of *Humanae Vitae* in a series of 130 fifteen-minute conferences at papal audiences beginning on September 5, 1979 and concluding on November 28, 1984. The conferences were grouped into four clusters: "The Original Unity of Man and Woman," "Blessed Are the Pure of Heart," "The

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Theology of Marriage and Celibacy," and "Reflections on *Humanae Vitae*." These talks were brought together under the title *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*.<sup>4</sup>

Weigel himself considers John Paul II's work to be a "theological time bomb" that may take almost a century to appreciate fully, or even assimilate. It "may prove to be the decisive moment in exorcising the Manichaean demon and its deprecation of human sexuality from Catholic moral theology," because the pope takes "embodiedness" so seriously. Weigel considers these conferences to have "ramifications for all of theology," and wonders why so few contemporary theologians have taken up the challenge posed by the pope. He is surprised as well that so few priests preach these themes and only a "microscopic" portion of Catholics seem even aware of this great accomplishment, which he considers to be "a critical moment not only in Catholic theology, but in the history of modern thought." Weigel provides three possible reasons for this neglect: the density of the pope's material, the media's preoccupation with controversy rather than substance, and the fact that John Paul II is himself a figure of controversy. It will take time to appreciate him and his magnificent contribution.

Is Weigel right? Have the rest of us missed out on a theological advance of singular importance? Can the claims made for the pope's *Theology of the Body* be sustained under examination? Recently, I devoted considerable time (and as much consciousness as I could muster) to reading through the 423 pages of the collected conferences, and I have reached a conclusion far different from Weigel's. For all its length, earnestness, and good intentions, John Paul II's work, far from being a breakthrough for modern thought, represents a mode of theology that has little to say to ordinary people because it shows so little awareness of ordinary life.

I want to make clear that I am here responding to the theological adequacy of papal teaching. I do not dispute the fact that, in some respects, papal positions can legitimately be called prophetic. Certainly John Paul II's call for a "culture of life" in the name of the gospel, against the complex "conspiracy of death" so pervasive in the contemporary world, deserves respect. Likewise, the pope's attention to the "person" and to "continence" stands as prophetic in a time of sexualized identity and rationalized permissiveness. It is small wonder that those worried about moral confusion in sexual matters would want to accept all the papal teachings, since some of them are incontestably correct.

But I want to ask whether we ought to make some distinctions even where the pope does not, whether while approving some of his positions we can also challenge others. Weigel is correct in noting that these conferences are dense and difficult to read—what must they have been like to hear? But Weigel fails to note how mind-numbingly repetitious they are. He does not seem to notice that the pope only asserts and never demonstrates,

and that he minimizes the flat internal contradictions among the conferences. For example, on October 1, 1980, the pope declares that a husband cannot be guilty of "lust in his heart" for his wife, but a week later, in the conference of October 8, he states confidently that even husbands can sin in this fashion. But beyond such relatively minor deficiencies (how many theological writings are not dense, repetitious, and inconsistent?), the pope's *Theology of the Body* is fundamentally inadequate to the question it takes up. It is inadequate not in the obvious way that all theology is necessarily inadequate to its subject, and therefore should exhibit intellectual modesty, but in the sense that it simply does not engage what most ought to be engaged in a theology of the body. Because of its theological insufficiency, the pope's teaching does not adequately respond to the anxieties of those who seek a Christian understanding of the body and of human sexuality, and practical guidance for life as sexually active adults.

If the pope had only made casual or passing comments on the subject in a homily, then a critical response would be unfair. But everything suggests that John Paul II intended these conferences to be read as a "theology of the body" in the fullest sense of the term "theology." The pope uses academic terms like phenomenology and hermeneutics, refers to contemporary thinkers, provides copious notes, and in the very commitment to the subject over a period of 5 years in 130 conferences, indicates that he wants his comments to be given serious attention. It is perhaps appropriate to offer a number of observations concerning things that someone far removed from the corridors of doctrinal declaration, but not unschooled theologically, and certainly not disembodied, might want to see yet does not find in John Paul II's discourses.

## PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

A starting place is the title itself, which, while perhaps not chosen by the author, legitimately derives from his frequent reference to a "theology of the body" and his constant focus on "human love in the divine plan." Surely, though, an adequate theology of the body must encompass far more than human love, even if that were comprehensively treated! The pope cites 1 Corinthians 6:18 approvingly: "Flee fornication. Every sin a person commits is apart from the body. But the one who fornicates sins in his own body." But Paul's rhetorical emphasis cannot be taken as sober description. Do not the sins of gluttony and drunkenness and sloth have as much to do with the body as fornication, and are not all the forms of avarice also dispositions of the body? Reducing a theology of the body to a consideration of sexuality falsifies the topic from the beginning. Of course, an adequate theological phenomenology of the body as the primordial mystery/symbol

of human freedom and bondage must include every aspect of sexuality. But it must also embrace all the other ways in which human embodiedness both enables and limits human freedom through disposition of material possessions, through relationships to the environment, through artistic creativity, and through suffering—both sinful and sanctifying. The pope's title provides the first example of the way in which a grander—or, to use his word, "vast"—conceptual framework serves to camouflage a distressingly narrow view of things.

The pope's subtitle is "Human Love in the Divine Plan," but no real sense of human love as actually experienced emerges in these reflections. The topic of human love in all its dimensions has been wonderfully explored in the world's literature, but none of its grandeur or giddiness appears in these talks, which remain at a level of abstraction far removed from novels and newspapers with their stories of people like us (though not so attractive). John Paul II thinks of himself as doing "phenomenology," but seems never to look at actual human experience. Instead, 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 that lacks any of the messy, clumsy, awkward, charming, casual, and, yes, silly aspects of love in the flesh. Carnality, it is good to remember, is at least as much a matter of humor as of solemnity. In the pope's formulations, human sexuality is observed by telescope from a distant planet. Solemn pronouncements are made on the basis of textual exegesis rather than living experience. The effect is something like that of a sunset painted by the unsighted.

The objection may be made: Isn't it proper to base theology in Scripture, and isn't John Paul II correct to have devoted himself so sedulously to the analysis of biblical texts, rather than the slippery and shoddy stuff of experience? It depends on how seriously one takes the Catholic tradition concerning the work of God's Holy Spirit in the world. If we believe—and I think we have this right—that revelation is not exclusively biblical but occurs in the continuing experience of God in the structures of human freedom,<sup>5</sup> then an occasional glance toward human experience as actually lived may be appropriate, even for the magisterium.

As for the pope's way of reading Scripture, the grade is mixed. Certainly he is careful with the texts. Nor does he misrepresent those aspects of the text he discusses in any major way—although he leaves the impression that Matthew's "blessed are the pure of heart" (5:8) refers to chastity, when in fact he knows very well that the beatitude does not have that restricted sense. Even more questionable are the ways John Paul II selects and extrapolates from specific texts without sufficient grounding or explanation. First, he scarcely treats all the biblical evidence pertinent to the subject. His discourses center on a handful of admittedly important passages, with

obligatory nods at other texts that might have rewarded far closer analysis, such as the Song of Songs (three conferences) and the Book of Tobit (one). Other important texts are given scant or no attention. A far richer understanding of Paul would have resulted, for example, from a more sustained and robust reading of 1 Corinthians 7, which truly does reveal the mutuality and reciprocity—and complexity—of married love.

Second, John Paul II does not deal with some of the difficulties presented by the texts he does select. For instance, he manages to use Matthew 19:3–9, on the question of marriage's indissolubility, without ever adverting to the clause allowing divorce on the grounds of porneia (sexual immorality) in both Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. What does that exceptive clause suggest about the distance between the ideal "in the beginning" evoked by Jesus, and the hard realities of actual marriages faced by the Matthean (and every subsequent) church?

Third, for all of his philosophical sophistication, John Paul II seems unaware of the dangers of deriving ontological conclusions from selected ancient narrative texts. He inveighs against the "hermeneutics of suspicion," but the remedy is not an uncritical reading that moves directly from the ancient story to an essential human condition. He focuses on the Yahwist creation account in Genesis 2, because that is the account cited by Jesus in his dispute with the Pharisees concerning divorce (Matt. 19:5), and, I suspect, because its narrative texture—not to mention its human feel—allows for the sort of phenomenological reflection he enjoys. But as the pope certainly understands, this creation account must also be joined to that in Genesis 1 if an adequate appreciation of what Jesus meant by "from the beginning" (Matt. 19:8) is to be gained. If Genesis 1—which has God creating humans in God's image as male and female—had been employed more vigorously, certain emphases would be better balanced. John Paul II wants, for example, to have the term "man" mean both male and female. But the Genesis 2 account pushes him virtually to equate "man" with "male," with the unhappy result that males experience both the original solitude the pope wants to make distinctively human as well as the dominion over creation expressed by the naming of animals. Females inevitably appear as "helpers" and as complementary to the already rather complete humanity found in the male. Small wonder that in virtually none of his further reflections on sexuality do women appear as moral agents: men can have lust in the hearts but not women; men can struggle with concupiscence but apparently women do not; men can exploit their wives sexually but women can't exploit their husbands sexually.

Such tight focus on male and female in the biblical account also leaves out all the interesting ways in which human sexuality refuses to be contained within those standard gender designations, not only biologically, but also psychologically and spiritually. What appears in the guise of description serves prescription: human love and sexuality can appear in only one

approved form, with every other way of being either sexual or loving left out altogether. Is it not important at least to acknowledge that a significant portion of humans—even if we take a ludicrously low percentage, at least tens of millions—are homosexual? Are they left outside God's plan if they are not part of the biblical story? Would not an adequate phenomenology of human sexuality, so concerned with "persons," after all, rather than statistics, take with great seriousness this part of the human family, who are also called to be loving, and in many fashions to create and foster the work and joy of creation?

Even within this normative framework, out of all the things that might be taken up and discussed within married love and the vocation of parenting, John Paul II's conferences finally come down to a concentration on "the transmission of life." By the time he reaches his explicit discussion of *Humanae Vitae*, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that every earlier textual choice and phenomenological reflection has been geared to a defense of Paul VI's encyclical. However, there is virtually nothing in this defense that is strengthened by the conferences preceding it.

### WHAT THE POPE LEAVES OUT

John Paul II is certainly to be appreciated for trying to place the knotty and disputed questions concerning procreation into a more comprehensive theology of the body. But there are a number of things lacking in these conferences and in the various declarations of the pope's apologists. I will simply list some obvious ones without development.

Most important, I would like to see a greater intellectual modesty, not only concerning the "facts" of revelation but also with the "facts" of human embodiedness. In everything having to do with the body, we are in the realm of what Gabriel Marcel calls mystery. The body does not present a series of problems that we can solve by detached analysis. The body rather is a mystery in two significant ways. First, we don't understand everything about the body, particularly our own body. The means by which we reveal ourselves to others and lovingly unite with others is not unambiguous. The body reveals itself to thought but also conceals itself from our minds. Second, we cannot detach ourselves from our bodies as though they were simply what we "have" rather than also what we "are." We are deeply implicated and cannot distance ourselves from the body without self-distortion. Our bodies are not only to be schooled by our minds and wills; they also instruct and discipline us in often humbling ways. Should not a genuine "theology of the body" begin with a posture of receptive attention to and learning from our bodies? Human bodies are part of God's image and the means through which absolutely everything we can learn about God must come to us.

In this regard, I find much of contemporary talk about "controlling our bodies" exactly contrary to such humility, whether such language derives from technocrats seeking to engineer reproductive processes or from naturalists who seek the same control through continence. I am not suggesting that a lack of continence or temperance is a desirable goal. But self-control is not the entire point of sexual love; celibacy is not the goal of marriage! And it may help to remember, in all this talk of controlling the body, that Dante assigned a deeper place in hell to the cold and the cruel than to the lustful. It can be argued, especially from the evidence of this century, that more evil has been visited upon us by various Stalins of sexless self-control than by the (quickly exhausted) epicures of the erotic. Recognition of the ways in which we suffer, rather than steer, our bodies is a beginning of wisdom.

Along these lines, 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, also God's gift. A sadly neglected text is 1 Timothy 6:17, where God supplies us all things richly for our enjoyment. Sexual passion, in papal teaching, appears mainly as an obstacle to authentic love. Many of us have experienced sexual passion as both humbling and liberating, a way in which our bodies know quicker and better than our minds, choose better and faster than our reluctant wills, even get us to where God apparently wants us in a way our minds never could. Along the same lines, papal teaching might find a good word to say about the sweetness of sexual love—also, I think, God's gift. Amid all the talk of self-donation and mutuality, we should also remember, "plus, it feels good." Come to think of it, why not devote some meditation to the astonishing triumph of sexual fidelity in marriage? Faithfulness, when it is genuine, is the result of a delicate and attentive creativity between partners, and not simply the automatic product of "self-control." In short, a more adequate theology of the body would at least acknowledge the positive ways in which the body gifts us by "controlling" us.

As with pleasure, so with pain. A theology of the body ought to recognize the ways in which human sexual existence is difficult: how arduous and ambiguous a process it is for any of us to become mature sexually; how unstable and shifting are our patterns of sexual identity; how unpredictable and vagrant are our desire and craving, as well as our revulsion and resistance; how little support there is for covenanted love in our world; how much the stresses of life together—and apart—bear upon our sexual expression. John Paul II and his apologists seem to think that concupiscence is our biggest challenge. How many of us would welcome a dose of concupiscence, when the grinding realities of sickness and need have drained the body of all its sap and sweetness, just as a reminder of being sentient! I would welcome the honest acknowledgment that for many who are married the pleasure and comfort of sexual love are most needed precisely when least available,

not because of fertility rhythms, but because of sickness and anxiety and separation and loss. For that matter, a theology of the body ought to speak not only of an "original solitude" that is supposedly cured by marriage, but also of the "continuing solitude" of those both married and single, whose vocation is not celibacy yet whose erotic desires find, for these and many other reasons, no legitimate or sanctified expression, and, in these papal conferences, neither recognition nor concern.

The pope does not examine these and many other aspects of the body and of "human love in the divine plan." Instead, the theology of the body is reduced to sexuality, and sexuality to "the transmission of life." The descent to biologism is unavoidable. What is needed is a more generous appreciation of the way sexual energy pervades our interpersonal relations and creativity—including the life of prayer!—and a fuller understanding of covenanted love as life-giving and sustaining in multiple modes of parenting, community building, and world enhancement.

### REVISITING *HUMANAE VITAE*

John Paul II's conferences and the recent articles I have quoted have meant to defend the correctness of *Humanae Vitae*, but paradoxically they remind readers with any historical memory how flawed that instrument was, and how badly it is in need of a fundamental revisiting. George Weigel calls it a "pastoral and catechetical failure," as though the encyclical's deficiencies were merely those of tone or effective communication. John Paul II's biblical reflections, in fact, appear as nothing less than a major effort to ground *Humanae Vitae* in something more than natural law; an implicit recognition of the argumentative inadequacy of Paul VI's encyclical. As my earlier comments indicate, I would judge his success as slight. It would be a weary business to take up the entire encyclical again, but it is important at least to note five major deficiencies that require a genuinely theological response rather than enthusiastic or reluctant apology.

In these comments, I will speak of "artificial birth control" only in terms of using a condom, diaphragm, or other mechanical device, mainly because I have considerable unease concerning chemical interventions and their implications for women's long-term health.

First, the encyclical represents a reversion to an act-centered morality, ignoring the important maturation of moral theology in the period leading up to and following Vatican II, which emphasized a person's fundamental dispositions as more defining of moral character than isolated acts. I am far from suggesting that specific acts are not morally significant. But specific acts must also be placed within the context of a person's character as revealed in consistent patterns of response. The difference is critical when the

encyclical and John Paul II insist that it is not enough for married couples to be open to new life; rather, every act of intercourse must also be open, so that the use of a contraceptive in any single act in effect cancels the entire disposition of openness. But this is simply nonsense. I do not cancel my commitment to breathing when I hold my breath for a moment or when I go under anesthesia. Likewise, there is an important distinction to be maintained between basic moral dispositions and single actions. The woman who kills in self-defense (or in defense of her children) does not become a murderer. The focus on each act of intercourse rather than on the overall dispositions of married couples is morally distorting.

Second, the arguments of Paul VI and John Paul II sacrifice logic to moral brinkmanship. When Paul VI equated artificial birth control and abortion, he not only defied science but also provoked the opposite result of the one he intended. He wanted to elevate the moral seriousness of birth control but ended by trivializing the moral horror of abortion. Similarly, from one side of the mouth, John Paul II recognizes two ends of sexual love, unitive intimacy and procreation. But from the other side of his mouth he declares that if procreation is blocked, not only that end has been canceled but also the unitive end as well. He has thereby, despite his protestations to the contrary, simply reduced the two ends to one. This can be shown clearly by applying the logic in reverse, by insisting that sexual intercourse that is not a manifestation of intimacy or unity also cancels the procreative end of the act.

Third, the position of the popes and their apologists continues to reveal the pervasive sexism that becomes ever more obvious within official Catholicism. I have touched above on the way John Paul II's reading of Scripture tends to reduce the moral agency of women within the marriage covenant and sexual relationships. This becomes glaringly obvious in the argument that artificial birth control is wrong because it tends to "instrumentalize" women for men's pleasure by making the woman a passive object of passion rather than a partner in mutuality. Yet the argument makes more experiential sense in reverse. Few things sound more objectifying than the arguments of the natural family planners, whose focus remains tightly fixed on biological processes rather than on emotional and spiritual communication through the body. The view that "openness to life" is served with moral integrity by avoiding intercourse during fertile periods (arguably times of greatest female pleasure in making love) and is not served (and becomes morally reprehensible) by the mutual agreement to use a condom or diaphragm, would be laughable if it did not have such tragic consequences. And what could be more objectifying of women than speaking as though birth control were something that only served male concupiscence? How about women's moral agency in the realm of sexual relations? Don't all of us living in the real world of bodies know that women have plenty of reasons of their own to be relieved of worries about pregnancy for a time and

to be freed for sexual enjoyment purely for the sake of intimacy and even celebration?

Fourth, the absolute prohibition of artificial birth control becomes increasingly scandalous in the face of massive medical realities. One might want to make an argument that distributing condoms to teenagers as a part of sex education is mistaken, but that argument, I think, has to do with misgivings concerning sex education—and a general culture of permissiveness—as a whole. But what about couples who can no longer have sexual relations because one of them has innocently been infected by HIV, and not to use a condom means also to infect the other with a potentially lethal virus? When does “openness to life” in every act become a cover for “death-dealing”? Given the fact that, in Africa, AIDS affects tens of millions of men, women, and children (very many of them Christian), is the refusal to allow the use of condoms (leaving aside other medical interventions and the changing of sexual mores) coming dangerously close to assisting in genocide? These are matters demanding the most careful consideration by the church, and the deepest compassion. It is difficult to avoid the sense that the failed logic supposedly marshaled in the defense of life is having just the opposite result. If the political enslavement of millions of Asians and Europeans led the papacy to combat the Soviet system in the name of compassion, and if the enslavement and murder of millions of Jews led the papacy to renounce the anti-Semitism of the Christian tradition in the name of compassion, should not compassion also lead at the very least to an examination of logic, when millions of Africans are enslaved and killed by a sexual pandemic?

Fifth, and finally, shouldn't *Humanae Vitae* be revisited rather than simply defended for the same reasons that it was a “pastoral and catechetical” failure the first time around? It failed to convince most of its readers not least because its readers knew that Paul VI spoke in the face of the recommendations of his own birth-control commission. The encyclical was, as Weigel calls it, a “new Galileo crisis,” not simply because it pitted papal authority against science, but also because the papacy was wrong both substantively and formally. It generated an unprecedented crisis for papal authority precisely because it was authority exercised not only apart from but also in opposition to the process of discernment. Sad to say, John Paul's theology of the body, for all its attention to Scripture, reveals the same deep disinterest in the ways the experience of married people, and especially women (guided by the Holy Spirit, as we devoutly pray) might inform theology and the decision-making process of the church. If papal teaching showed signs of attentiveness to such experience, and a willingness to learn from God's work in the world as well as God's word in the tradition, its pronouncements would be received with greater enthusiasm. A theology of the body ought at least to have feet that touch the ground.

Since God is the Living One who continuously presses upon us at every moment of creation, calling us to obedience and inviting us to a painful yet joyous quest of wisdom, theology must be inductive rather than deductive. Our reading of Scripture not only shapes our perceptions of the world, but is in turn shaped by our experiences of God in the fabric of our human freedom and in the cosmic play of God's freedom. Theology that takes the self-disclosure of God in human experience with the same seriousness as it does God's revelation in Scripture does not turn its back on tradition but recognizes that tradition must constantly be renewed by the powerful leading of the Spirit if it is not to become a form of falsehood. Theology so understood is a demanding and delicate conversation that, like sexual love itself, requires patience as well as passion. If we are to reach a better theology of human love and sexuality, then we must, in all humility, be willing to learn from the bodies and the stories of those whose response to God and to God's world involves sexual love. That, at least, is a starting point.

## NOTES

1. Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., Cap, “Contraception: A Symposium,” *First Things* (December, 1988).
2. Janet Popiel, “Necessary Connections? Catholicism, Feminism, and Contraception,” *America* (November 27, 1999).
3. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999).
4. *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997).
5. See *Dei Verbum: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, Solemnly Promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, November 18, 1965, in *Vatican Council II: A Completely Revised Translation in Inclusive Language*, ed. Austin Flannery, O.P., (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1988), 2:8.

# THEOLOGY OF THE BODY *for beginners*



A Basic Introduction to  
Pope John Paul II's *Sexual Revolution*

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ASCENSION  
ADDRESS

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## Chapter 8

### THEOLOGY IN THE BEDROOM: A LIBERATING SEXUAL MORALITY

*"Every man and every woman fully realizes himself or herself through the sincere gift of self. For spouses, the moment of conjugal union constitutes a very particular expression of this."*

—John Paul II (LF 12)

In this brief introduction to John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, we have examined our origin, our history, and our destiny, and the vocations of celibacy and marriage. Now we have the proper context in which to understand the Church's teaching on sexual morality.

Perhaps at this point you are feeling some trepidation. You have understood the Pope's logic, you can see where it is headed, and you know your life does not "measure up." Welcome to the human race. We all fall short of the glory (see Romans 3:23). But the good news is that Christ can restore us to glory. Remember—it does not matter where you have been or what mistakes you have made. The *Theology of the Body* is part of the message of salvation, not condemnation.

Authentic Christian morality is not against us. It is unstintingly *for* us. The first line in the *Catechism's* section on morality speaks volumes. It is *not*, "Give up everything you really want and follow all these miserable rules or you're going to hell." It is "Christian, recognize your dignity" (CCC 1691). This is what John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* has been proclaiming all along—our dignity, our "greatness" as male and female. Now it is time to see it through. Be not afraid!

***Applying the Basic Principle***

At the close of the last chapter, I observed that all questions of sexual morality ultimately come down to one: Does this given act truly image God's *free, total, faithful, fruitful* love or does it not? My book *Good News About Sex and Marriage* uses this principle to answer 115 of the most common questions and objections to Church teaching. I refer you to that for a more detailed discussion. For now we'll just apply the principle to a few questions with the aim of arriving at the core of sexual morality.

If it challenges you, my challenge to you is to *let it challenge you*. We need not fear the demands of love. We need only fear that "hardness of heart" Christ spoke of that resists the demands of love (see Matthew 19:8). As you read the following questions, consider all we have learned about the "great mystery" of our creation as male and female and the call of the two to become "one flesh." Here we go.

Does masturbation image God's *free, total, faithful, fruitful* love or does it not? Does fornication (pre-marital sex) image God's *free, total, faithful, fruitful* love or does it not? Does adultery? Does homosexual behavior? Does lusting after pornographic images? And here is where the rubber hits the road (pun intended): Does an intentionally sterilized act of intercourse between spouses image God's *free, total, faithful, fruitful* love or does it not? If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts (see Hebrews 3:15).

Wise men and women throughout history (including many non-Catholics) have recognized that respect for the procreative function of sexual union is the linchpin of all sexual morality. Even Sigmund Freud recognized this. He wrote that the "abandonment of the reproductive function is the common feature of all perversions. We actually describe a sexual activity as perverse if it has given up the aim of reproduction and pursues the attainment of pleasure as an aim independent of it" (*Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis*).

Consider this: When we divorce sex from its natural orientation toward new life, what is left to prevent the

justification of any and every means to sexual climax? When we deliberately sterilize sex we fundamentally disorient the act. It no longer points of necessity to marriage and the raising of a family. Indulging libido for its own sake becomes the name of the game and we eventually treat natural, vaginal intercourse as only one of a-million-and-one ways of indulging libido. When we pry sex loose from its most natural consequence, we inevitably lose our moral compass. Welcome to the world in which we live.

***Sex and Marriage Redefined***

The monogamous, life-long union of the sexes and the family that results have served as the bedrock of Western civilization for centuries. Yet during the twentieth century, in only a few generations, sex, marriage, and the family have been radically deconstructed and redefined. Behaviors once commonly considered as an affront to human dignity and a serious threat to the social order are not only touted by the media as goods to be pursued, but are sanctioned and protected as legal "rights" by the government.

Have you ever wondered what brought about so radical a shift so quickly? The answer is complex, but one thing is certain: If the modern brand of sexual "liberation" was to flourish, the natural consequence of sex (procreation) *had* to be eliminated. The sexual revolution of the twentieth century is simply inexplicable apart from the nearly universal acceptance of contraception.

Proponents of contraception in the early 1900s knew that advancing their cause would be impossible without the "blessing" of the Christian churches. Until 1930, Catholics, Orthodox, and Protestants stood together in their condemnation of any attempt to deliberately sterilize the marital act. That year, the Anglican Church broke with more than 1,900 years of uninterrupted Christian teaching. When the Pill debuted in the early 1960s, the Catholic Church was the only Christian body retaining what in thirty short years had come to be seen as an archaic, even absurd position.

Inspired by a widespread but faulty view of the Second Vatican Council, many expected that a papal blessing of contraception was imminent. Withstanding unimaginable global pressure, Pope Paul VI shocked the world when he reaffirmed the traditional teaching against contraception in his 1968 encyclical letter *Humanae Vitae* (*Of Human Life*). It fell like a bomb. The widespread dissent that immediately followed has not ceased to this day.

### *We Need a "Total Vision of Man"*

Was Paul VI hopelessly "out of touch" with reality? Or, maybe—just maybe—was he speaking a difficult, yet unchangeable truth to a world blinded by its excesses? If you have resisted the Church's teaching on contraception, believe me, I can relate. In fact, I almost left the Catholic Church because of this "blasted teaching." "Give me a break," I thought. "Denying people contraception is like denying people toothpaste or toilet paper. It is just another modern convenience. I should be able to express my love for my wife whenever I want without having to worry about raising fifteen kids!"

Pope Paul knew it would be difficult for the modern world to understand the immorality of contraception. Modern men and women have lost sight of the greatness, dignity, and divine purpose of human life (*Humanae Vitae*). When that happens, we no longer see the sexual union as a "great mystery" proclaiming God's love for humanity and foreshadowing heaven. We quickly reduce sex to a biological process subject to all sorts of human manipulations. Today, because of this mindset, most men and women give no more thought to tinkering with their fertility than they do to tinkering with their hair color.

Sex is certainly biological, but that is only a partial perspective. As Paul VI observed, in order to understand Christian teaching on sex and procreation, we must look "beyond partial perspectives" to a "total vision of man and of his vocation" (HV 7). This is what John Paul II set out to do in his *Theology of the Body*—provide the "total vision

of man" that would enable us to understand the Church's teaching on contraception. In fact, John Paul II says that the entire TOB can be considered "an extensive commentary on the doctrine contained precisely in *Humanae Vitae*" (TOB 133:2).

All of our preceding reflections have led us to this point. If I have successfully introduced you to John Paul II's beautiful vision of the body and sex, the basic logic of *Humanae Vitae* should be fairly clear. But important questions raised by Paul VI's encyclical still remain. What particular insight does John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* offer us in understanding *Humanae Vitae*? Why does the Church reject contraception but accept natural methods of regulating fertility? What does the Church mean by the practice of "responsible parenthood"? Doesn't the Church's teaching against contraception impede couples from expressing their love for one another? Let's take a closer look. And remember: Be not afraid! The truth is not afraid of our questions. The question is, are we afraid of the truth? There is no need to be. It is the truth—and only the truth—that can set us free to love.

### *Ethics of the Sign*

As the Pope writes, the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* "is strictly linked with our earlier reflections about marriage in the dimension the (sacramental) sign" (TOB 118:3). We can argue against contraception entirely from human reason and philosophy. But John Paul II shows the deepest theological reason for the immorality of contraception—it is fundamentally sacrilegious because it falsifies the sacramental sign of married love.

As a sacrament, marriage not only signifies God's life and love, it *really participates* in God's life and love—or, at least, it is meant to. For sacraments to convey grace (God's life and love), the sacramental sign must accurately signify the spiritual mystery. For example, as we mentioned in the last chapter, baptism, through the physical sign of immersion or infusion with water and the invocation of

the Trinitarian formula, really and truly brings about a spiritual cleansing from sin. But if you were to baptize someone with mud or tar, no spiritual cleansing would take place because the physical sign is now one of making dirty. This would actually be a counter-sign.

All of married life is a sacrament. All of married life is meant to be a sign of God's life and love. But this sacrament has a consummate expression. Spouses signify God's love most profoundly than when they become "one flesh." Here, like no other moment in married life, spouses are called to participate in the "great mystery" of God's love. But this will only happen if their sexual union accurately signifies God's love. Therefore, as the Pope concludes, we can speak of moral good and evil in the sexual relationship based on whether the couple gives to their union "the character of a truthful sign" (TOB 37:6).

John Paul II says that the essential element for marriage as a sacrament is the language of the body spoken in truth. This is precisely how spouses "constitute" the sacramental sign of marriage (see TOB 104:9). By participating in God's eternal plan of love, the language of the body becomes "prophetic." As John Paul observes, the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* simply carries this truth to its logical conclusions (see TOB 123:2).

Insert contraception into the language of the body and (knowingly or unknowingly) the couple engages in a *counter-sign* of the "great mystery." Rather than proclaiming, "God is life-giving love," the language of contracepted intercourse says, "God is *not* life-giving love." In this way spouses (knowingly or unknowingly) become "false prophets." Contracepted sex denies and attacks our creation in the image of the Trinity at its roots. From this perspective we can see that contraception is a betrayal of the deepest truth of our humanity.

### *Fidelity to the Wedding Vows*

Most couples who use contraception simply have no idea that this is what they are saying with their bodies, so this is

not a matter of assigning culpability. But even if a couple is innocent in this regard, contraception will still have its damaging effect on their relationship. For example, if I drink a cup of poison, but do not know it is poison, I have not committed suicide and am not culpable for my own death. But it will still kill me. Whether I *think* it is poison or not has no bearing whatsoever on whether or not it is poison.

The causes of the dramatic rise in divorce in our culture are multiple and complex. Still, it should not surprise us in the least that the spike in divorce has coincided with the acceptance and practice of contraception. What is the connection? In short, as I asked in the last chapter, how healthy would a marriage be if a husband and wife were regularly unfaithful to their wedding vows? Sexual intercourse is meant to renew and express wedding vows. But contraception turns the "I do" of those vows into an "I do not."

During conjugal intercourse, a "*moment so rich in meaning*," it is ... particularly important that the 'language of the body' be re-read in truth" (TOB 118:4). We are free to choose whether to engage in sex. But if we choose to engage in sex, we are not free to change its meaning. The language of the body has "clear-cut meanings" all of which are "programmed," the Pope says, in the conjugal consent, in the vows. For example, to "the question: 'Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God ...?' the man and the woman answer, 'Yes'" (TOB 105:6, 106:3).

If spouses say "yes" at the altar, but then render their union sterile, they are lying with their bodies. They are being unfaithful to their wedding vows. Such dishonesty at the heart of the marital covenant cannot *not* have a deleterious effect.

Someone might retort, "Come on! I can commit to being 'open to children' at the altar, but this doesn't mean *each* and *every* act of intercourse needs to be open to children." But that makes as much sense as saying, "Come on! I can commit to fidelity at the altar, but this doesn't mean *each* and *every* act of intercourse needs to be with

my spouse.” If you can recognize the inconsistency of a commitment to fidelity ... *but not always*, you should be able to recognize the inconsistency of a commitment to being open to children ... *but not always*.

Perhaps another way out of this logic is simply for a couple to exclude “openness to children” in the commitment they make at the altar. Then a couple wouldn’t be “lying” with their bodies by using contraception, would they? It would reflect what they committed to, yes. But what they committed to would not be to love as God loves. What they committed to would not be marriage. Indeed, as the Church has always recognized, willfully excluding openness to children renders a marriage null from the start.

### *Responsible Parenthood*

So, does fidelity to the wedding vows imply that couples are to leave the number of children they have entirely to “chance”? No. In calling couples to a responsible love, the Church calls them also to a responsible parenthood.

Pope Paul VI stated clearly that those are considered “to exercise responsible parenthood who prudently and generously decide to have a large family, or who, for serious reasons and with due respect to the moral law, choose to have no more children for the time being or even for an indeterminate period” (HV 10). Notice that large families should result from prudent reflection, not “chance.” Notice too that couples must have “serious reasons” to avoid pregnancy and must respect the moral law, the “ethics of the sign.”

Assuming a couple has a serious reason to avoid a child (this could be financial, physical, psychological, etc.), what could they do that would not violate the consummate expression of their sacrament? In other words, what could they do to avoid conceiving a child that would not render them unfaithful to their wedding vows? You are doing it right now (I presume). They could *abstain* from sex. There is nothing wrong with abstaining from sex when there is a good reason to do so. The Church has always recognized

that the *only* method of “birth control” that respects the language of divine love is “self-control.”

A further question arises: Would a couple be doing anything to falsify their sexual union if they embraced during a time of natural infertility? Take, for example, a couple past childbearing years. They know their union will not result in a child. Are they violating “the sign” if they engage in intercourse with this knowledge? Are they contracepting? No. Contraception, by definition, is the choice to engage in an act of intercourse, but then do something else to *render* it sterile. This can be done by using various devices, hormones, surgical procedures, and the age-old method of withdrawal, or *coitus interruptus*.

Couples who use natural family planning (NFP) when they have a just reason to avoid pregnancy *never* render their sexual acts sterile; they never contracept. They track their fertility, abstain when they are fertile and, if they so desire, embrace when they are naturally infertile. Readers unfamiliar with modern NFP methods should note that they are ninety-eight to ninety-nine percent effective at avoiding pregnancy when used properly. Furthermore, any woman, regardless of the regularity of her cycles, can use NFP successfully. This is not your grandmother’s “rhythm method.”

### *What’s the Difference?*

To some people this seems like splitting hairs. “What’s the big difference,” they ask, “between rendering the union sterile yourself and just waiting until it is naturally infertile? The end result is the same: both couples avoid children.” To which I respond, what’s the big difference between killing Grandma and just waiting until she dies naturally? End result’s the same thing: dead Grandma. Yes, but one is a serious sin and the other is not. It is exactly the same with contraception and NFP.

As John Paul II observes, the difference between periodic abstinence (NFP) and contraception “is much wider and deeper than is usually thought, one which

involves in the final analysis two irreconcilable concepts of the human person and of human sexuality" (FC 32). The difference, in fact, is one of cosmic proportions.

First, it is important to realize that the Church has never said it is inherently wrong to avoid children. But the end (avoiding children) does not justify the means. There may well be a good reason for you to wish Grandma would pass on to the next life. Perhaps she is suffering terribly with age and disease. But this does not justify killing her. Similarly, you may have a good reason to avoid conceiving a child. Perhaps you are in serious financial straights. Perhaps you have four kids under the age of four and you have reached your emotional limits. But no scenario justifies rendering the sexual act sterile, just as no scenario justifies killing Grandma.

Grandma's natural death and a woman's natural period of infertility are both acts of God. But in killing Grandma or in rendering sex sterile, we take the powers of life *into our own hands*—just like the deceiver originally tempted us to do—and we make ourselves like God (see Genesis 3:5). Therefore, as the Pope concludes, "Contraception is to be judged so profoundly unlawful as never to be, for any reason, justified. To think or to say the contrary is equal to maintaining that in human life, situations may arise in which it is lawful not to recognize God as God" (Address, October 10, 1983).

### *Love or Lust?*

One of the main objections to *Humanae Vitae* is that following its teaching (that is, practicing periodic abstinence when avoiding pregnancy) impedes couples from expressing their love for one another. But of what "love" are we speaking: authentic conjugal love that images God or its perennial counterfeit—lust?

God is the one who united marital love and procreation. Therefore, since God cannot contradict himself, a "true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining

to the fostering of authentic conjugal love" (GS 51). It may well be difficult to follow the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, but it could never be a contradiction of love.

Following this teaching is difficult because of the internal battle we all experience between love and lust. Lust impels us, and impels us very powerfully, towards sexual intercourse. But, as the future Pope observed in *Love and Responsibility*, if sexual intimacy results from nothing more than lust, it is not love. "On the contrary," he says, it "is a negation of ... love" (LR, pp. 150-151). In reality, what we often call love, "if subjected to searching critical examination turns out to be, contrary to all appearances, only a form of 'utilization' of the person" (LR, p. 167).

What purpose does contraception really serve? This might sound odd at first, but let it sink in. Contraception was not invented to prevent pregnancy. We already had a 100 percent safe, 100 percent reliable way of doing that—*abstinence*. In the final analysis, contraception serves one purpose: to spare us the difficulty we experience when confronted with the choice of abstinence. When all the smoke is cleared, contraception was invented because of our lack of self-control; contraception was invented to serve the indulgence of lust.

Why do we spay or neuter our dogs and cats? Because they cannot say no to their urge to merge; they are not free. If we deliberately deprive the conjugal act of its procreative purpose through contraception, we are reducing the "great mystery" of the one-flesh union to the level of animals. What distinguished us from the animals in the first place (remember original solitude)? *Freedom!* God gave us freedom as the capacity to love. Contraception negates this freedom. It says, "I can't abstain." Hence, contracepted intercourse not only attacks the procreative meaning of sex, "it also *ceases to be an act of love*" (TOB 123:6). If you cannot say no to sex, what does your "yes" mean? Only the person who is *free* with the freedom for which Christ set us free (see Gal 5:1) is capable of authentic love.

### *Chastity and the Integration of Love*

Chastity, so often considered “negative” or “repressive,” is supremely positive and liberating. It is the virtue that frees sexual desire from “the utilitarian attitude,” from the tendency to *use* others for our own gratification. Chastity requires “an *apprenticeship in self-mastery* which is training in human freedom. The alternative is clear: either man governs his passions and finds peace, or he lets himself be dominated by them and becomes unhappy” (CCC 2339).

As we learned in chapter three, self-mastery does not merely mean resisting unruly desires by force of will. That is only the “negative” side of the picture. As we develop self-mastery, we experience it as “*the ability to orient* [sexual] reactions, both as to their content and as to their character” (TOB 129:5). The person who is truly chaste is able to direct erotic desire “toward what is true, good, and beautiful, so that what is ‘erotic’ also becomes true, good, and beautiful” (TOB 48:1). As spouses experience liberation from lust, they enter into the freedom of the gift which enables them to express the language of their bodies “in a depth, simplicity, and beauty hitherto altogether unknown” (TOB 117b:5).

It is certainly true that chastity requires “asceticism,” understood as a ready and determined willingness to resist the impulses of lust. But, remember, authentic chastity does not repress. It enters into Christ’s death and resurrection. As lust dies, authentic love is raised up. As the Pope expresses, “If conjugal chastity (and chastity in general) manifests itself at first as an ability to resist [lust], it subsequently reveals itself as a *singular ability* to perceive, love, and realize those meanings of the ‘language of the body’ that remain completely unknown to [lust] itself” (TOB 128:3). Hence, the discipline required by chastity does not impoverish or impede a couple’s expressions of love and affection. Rather, “it makes them spiritually more intense and thus *enriches* them” (TOB 128:3).

### *Marital Spirituality*

Such chastity, the Pope says, stands at the center of the spirituality of marriage (see TOB 131:2). What is “marital spirituality”? It is living according to God’s in-spiration in married life. It involves spouses opening themselves to the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit and allowing him to guide them in all their choices and behaviors. The Pope says that sexual union itself—with all its emotional joys and physical pleasures—is meant to be an expression of “life according to the Holy Spirit” (see TOB 101:6). When spouses are open to the gift, the Holy Spirit infuses them “with everything that is noble and beautiful,” with “the supreme value which is love” (TOB 46:5). But when spouses, because of their “hardness of heart,” close themselves off to the Holy Spirit, sexual union quickly degenerates into an act of lust, an act of mutual exploitation.

Apart from the Holy Spirit, human weakness makes the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* a burden no one can bear. But to whom is this teaching given? To men and women enslaved by their weaknesses? Or to men and women set free by the *power* of the Holy Spirit? This is what is at stake in the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*—the power of the Gospel! The Church holds out the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* with absolute confidence in the fact that “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5).

Married couples “must implore [God] for such ‘power’ and for every other divine help in prayer ... they must draw grace and love from the ever-living fountain of the Eucharist; ... ‘with humble perseverance’ they must overcome their own faults and sins in the sacrament of Penance. These are the means—*infallible and indispensable*—to form the Christian spirituality of conjugal ... life” (TOB 126:5). All of which, of course, presupposes faith; that openness of the human heart to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If spouses are not living an authentic spirituality—in other words, if their hearts are closed to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit—they will inevitably view the

Church's teaching against contraception as an oppressive rule to follow. On the other hand, for couples who engage in their sexual embrace as an expression of "life according to the Holy Spirit," deliberately rendering their union sterile becomes unthinkable. They understand that their union is meant to signify Christ's life-giving love for the Church. In other words, they understand the theology of their bodies. Filled with "veneration for *the essential values of conjugal union*" (TOB 131:5), they are ready and willing to make every sacrifice necessary so that lust does not trump love.

I am far from being a perfect man and a perfect husband. I have a long way to go. But I also know, thanks to God's grace, that I have come a long way. This vision of marital spirituality is *real* to me. As I already said, at one point I almost left the Church because of her teaching against contraception. I saw it as an oppressive, arbitrary ethic. But when I finally let go of my stubborn pride and prayed, "OK, God, if this is true, you gotta change my heart," go figure, God started changing my heart. I continue gradually to experience the "ethos of redemption" in this area of my life. For those who live an authentic Christian ethos, the idea of engaging in contracepted intercourse becomes repulsive. Such people are free from the law! It doesn't feel imposed on them. It wells up from within as an expression of "life according to the Spirit." To the degree that such a change takes place in a person's heart, he begins to understand why the martyrs preferred to die rather than to break God's law. Again, I am not perfect, but I can attest to this ongoing transformation. And if this change is possible in my life, it is possible in anyone's life.

### *The Antithesis of Marital Spirituality*

The Pope observes that life in the Holy Spirit leads couples to a profound awe and respect for the mystery of God revealed in their bodies. It leads couples to understand, among all the possible manifestations of love and affection, "the singular, and even exceptional meaning" of the sexual embrace (TOB 132:2).

Contraceptive practice—and the mentality behind it—demonstrates a total lack of understanding of the exceptional significance of the sexual embrace in God's plan. Such a lack, the Pope says, in a certain sense constitutes "the antithesis" of marital spirituality (see TOB 132:2). If marital spirituality involves spouses opening their bodies—and the "one body" they become in the sexual act—to the Holy Spirit, contraception marks a specific "closing off" to the Holy Spirit. Who is the Holy Spirit? As we say in the Nicene Creed every Sunday, he is "the Lord, the Giver of Life." Contraception says, "Lord and Giver of Life, we don't want you here."

Does not such a denial follow the pattern of original sin? In the act of creation, God had "in-spired" the human body with his own life and love (see Genesis 2:7). When man and woman sinned, they "ex-spired"; they breathed God's Spirit *out* of their bodies. Or, you might say, they refused the Spirit's penetration because of their "hardness of heart." So, once again, I appeal to you: If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts! (Hebrews 3:15).

Sexual union, right from the beginning, was meant to participate in God's eternal exchange of love. Do you know what couples actually say with their bodies when they close their union to the Lord and Giver of Life? In short, whether they realize this or not, contracepted intercourse says, "We prefer the momentary pleasure of a sterilized orgasm over the opportunity of participating in the inner-life of the Trinity." To which I respond, "*Bad choice!*" But do you think if couples really knew they were choosing this, that they would continue to do so? I cannot help but think of Christ's words from the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

There is no tragedy in admitting we have sinned. There is no tragedy in admitting we have been duped by a counterfeit and sold a "pill" of goods. The only tragedy is the hardness of heart that refuses to admit its own sin. Be not afraid! As we have said so many times throughout this book, Christ came not to condemn but to save (see John 3:17). It does not matter how much lust has dominated

your life. It doesn't matter how "dyslexic" or even "illiterate" you have been in reading the divine language of the body. As John Paul II boldly proclaims, through the gift of redemption "there is always the possibility of passing from 'error' to the 'truth'... the possibility of ... conversion from sin to chastity as an expression of a life according to the Spirit" (TOB 107:3).

*Come, Holy Spirit, come! Convert our hearts from lust to love. Impregnate our sexual desires with divine passion so that, loving as God loves on earth, we might one day rejoice in the consummation of the "marriage of the Lamb" in heaven. Amen.*

## Chapter 9

### SHARING THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY IN A "NEW EVANGELIZATION"

*At "the core of [the] Gospel ... is the affirmation of the inseparable connection between the person, his life and his bodiliness."*

—John Paul II (EV 81)

If the future of humanity passes by way of marriage and the family (see FC 11), we could say that the future of marriage and the family passes by way of John Paul II's Theology of the Body. Put simply, there will be no renewal of the Church and of the world without a renewal of marriage and the family. And there will be no renewal of marriage and the family without a return to the full truth of God's plan for the body and sexuality. Yet this will not happen without a fresh theological proposal that compellingly demonstrates how the Christian sexual ethic—far from the cramped, prudish list of prohibitions it is assumed to be—is a liberating message of salvation that corresponds perfectly with the yearnings of the human heart.

This is precisely what John Paul II's Theology of the Body offers us. As such it provides the antidote to the culture of death and a theological foundation for the "new evangelization."

#### *What is the New Evangelization?*

John Paul used the expression "the new evangelization" during a trip to Latin America in 1983. Ever since he has "unstintingly recalled the pressing need for a *new evangelization*" (FR 103). This urgency stems not only from the fact that entire nations still have not received the Gospel, but also because "entire groups of the baptized