



A synthesis of Pope John Paul II's “Theology of the Body”

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This article is an introduction to John Paul II's catechesis on human love, also known as the Theology of the Body. In this essay, the authors highlight and explain twenty essential themes from the original text and relate some of these themes in the Philippine context. These themes revolve around the principle that the body is gift, and as such, is capable of revealing the divine image, in which every human being is made. This positive view of the body becomes possible by recapturing man's original experience in Genesis which, according to John Paul II, has three dimensions: original solitude, original unity and original nakedness. The article summarily explains what he means by these three concepts, and then re-echoes the Holy Father's claim that the body's capacity to make visible the divine reality is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who is the Incarnate Word of God. This is why the understanding of marriage found in the original text reminds us that the vocation of married love is to imitate Christ's self-giving love for the Church. This reminder helps elevate the common secular understanding, and in this way, helps recapture the deeper beauty found in being created male and female.

Keywords: *Theology of the body, marriage, divine love, gift*

This synthesis was written by two professors who have been teaching clerics, religious and laypeople regarding Pope John Paul II's monumental catechesis on human love and marriage called “Theology of the Body” (TOB). It may be that the reader has indeed heard of this teaching but not yet encountered it in its entirety. The following article hopes to provide an insightful overview of the topic. It is divided into 3 sections: Section 1 gives ten basic outline points to help us understand what TOB is. Section 2 continues the explanation

focusing specifically on the theme of John Paul II's vision of married love. The third and final part, section 3, provides a useful synthetic overview of the whole corpus of TOB.

Section 1: Ten key points regarding TOB

1.1 What is TOB?

Theology of the body is the name given to a series of 129 talks given in Italian by Pope John Paul II as part of his Wednesday audiences. The original corpus was written in Polish while he was still a Cardinal, divided into 135 talks but 6 were not given. The whole cycle took a little over 5 years to give running from September 1979 to November 1984. They were not given consecutively as there were some breaks including one for the holy year.

The content pertains to marriage and sexual love but according to Christopher West, his catechesis also “illuminates the entirety of God’s plan for human life from origin to eschaton with a splendid supernatural light.”¹ The main thesis statement of the Pope’s TOB runs thus “the body, in fact, and only the body is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it.”² It is a most useful catechesis providing us with a renewed understanding of the human body, the gift of sexuality and the value of married love - fundamental themes that are vital to deeply understand, in view of the many contemporary problems in these areas. The Pope also insists that the TOB “is quite indispensable for an adequate understanding of the magisterial teaching of the contemporary Church.”³

1.2 What is the structure of the TOB corpus?

Michael Waldstein, who prepared the new translation of TOB in 2006, proposes the following structure:⁴

Part 1 (TOB 1-86) focuses on the words of Christ that play a key role in his teaching about God’s plan for the person and for human love. Chapter 1 (TOB

¹ Christopher West’s preface in Pope John Paul II’s *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006).

² Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. Translation, Introduction, and Index by Michael Waldstein, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 19:4. Henceforth cited as “TOB 19:4” where TOB represents “Theology of the Body,” the first number (here 19) represents the number of the general audience as designated by Waldstein and the second number (here 4) the paragraph number.

³ TOB 59:7.

⁴ Michael Waldstein’s introduction in Pope John Paul II, *Man and Woman ...*, 106.

1-23) where Christ appeals to the “beginning,” chapter 2 (TOB 24-63) where Christ appeals to the human heart and Chapter 3 (TOB 64-86) where Christ appeals to the resurrection.

Part 2 (TOB 87-113) titled “The Sacrament” unfolds this teaching of Christ by turning to the Pauline teaching on “the mystery” of spousal love in Ephesians 5. Chapter 1 (TOB 87-102) looks at the dimension of covenant and grace, chapter 2 (TOB 103-117) considers the dimension of sign, and chapter 3 (TOB 118-133) applies the insights gained to the concrete conjugal lives of men and women.

Christopher West, one of the foremost exponents of TOB, has an alternative and equally valid catechetical proposal which is simple and is useful for teaching purposes:⁵

A: What is the theology of the body?

- An education in being human
- The great analogy of spousal love

B: The gift of our creation and redemption

- Man and woman he created them (our origin)
- Man and woman he redeemed them (our history)

C: The marriage made in heaven

- The resurrection of the body (our destiny)
- Celibacy for the Kingdom

D: The marriage made for earth

- Marriage as sacrament
- The language of sexual love

1.3 What is the starting point of the TOB?

The catechesis begins by examining the words of Christ in answer to the Pharisees’ question about marriage in Matthew 19:3-8:

³Some Pharisees approached him, and tested him, saying, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” ⁴He said in reply, “Have you not read that from the **beginning** the Creator ‘made them male and female’ ⁵and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, no human being must separate.” ⁷They said to him, “Then why did Moses command that the man give the woman a bill of divorce and dismiss her?”

⁵ Christopher West, *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body*, Student Workbook, (Pennsylvania: Ascension Press, 2009).

⁸He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the **beginning** it was not so.”

John Paul II notes the repeated reference of Christ to “the beginning.” The TOB thus begins trying to elucidate the meaning of this beginning. These words of Christ refer to the first and second accounts of creation in Genesis. The first, from the Priestly and Elohist tradition is more recent than the second, the Yahwist account. The former account describes how man is objectively made in the image and likeness of God (see Genesis 1:26-27). The latter describes man’s original state of innocence but also the fall (Genesis 3). A boundary line between the state of original innocence and the state of original sin is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Before eating from this tree the original couple was in a state of original innocence. Their transgression in eating from this tree is part of the story of the fall. In responding to this, Christ refers to the state of original, “pre-historic” and fundamental innocence.

Mankind is not merely a passive victim of the fall in Eden, a kind of innocent by-stander in a story of sin of his forbearers, but with the coming of Christ becomes part of a story of salvation. The one answering the Pharisees has the key to unlock their chains - Christ himself is the redeemer. Like St Paul we too await the redemption of our body - “we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for ... the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). Christ points his interrogators to how it was at the beginning, not for the sake of nostalgia, but to awaken in them the desire to aspire to that original state. Only in Christ is a return to that state possible, to become a new creation.

1.4 According to TOB, what are the key elements in the original experience of Genesis?

In TOB 5 onwards, John Paul II continues to look at the beginning, to the original experience of Genesis. Three aspects are examined - original solitude, original unity and original nakedness.

Original solitude - Genesis 2:18 - The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.” The Hebrew word used for man in this verse is *adam* meaning man in the generic sense like “humanity” or “mankind” and thus not only refers to man but man and woman. Man is alone because there is no one else like him in the animal kingdom. Man is special and set apart. Man is also alone because he is incomplete without God.

Original unity - when Adam sees woman he cries out, “this one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). There is an experience of union in the sense that man sees one like him and feels identified. There is another, the woman, who also expresses her being in a body. Genesis 2:24 reveals that these

two bodies in solitude become united in one flesh – “that is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” John Paul II views the one flesh union between spouses as a privileged expression of the *imago Dei* because of its capacity to express the deepest kind of personal communion at the human level.⁶

Original nakedness - in the beginning, man and woman were naked yet “they felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). The woman had no need to cover herself because before the fall the gaze of the man was not lustful. In this nakedness the original couple could see the love of God expressed in the body. The body was given by God to express love through total self-donation such that man and woman are meant to be a gift for each other.⁷

1.5 How does TOB help us understand our body as a gift?

In TOB 13-19, man in the dimension of gift is presented. Man's body is a gift because it was created from nothing. The passage from nothing to being created is already a great gift from God – “Creation is a gift, because man appears in it, who, as an “image of God,” is able to understand the very meaning of the gift in the call from nothing to existence.”⁸ It is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18) and thus the existence of another, the gift of the other, makes it possible for man to live in a relationship of reciprocal gift. The gift of the body takes two forms, man and woman. Thus masculinity and femininity are mutual gifts for one another – “The body, which expresses femininity ‘for’ masculinity and, vice versa, masculinity ‘for’ femininity, manifests the reciprocity and the communion of persons.”⁹

Man finds meaning in his life in the context of gift and the giving of him or herself. Pope John Paul II notes the Second Vatican Council teaching found in *Gaudium et Spes*, “Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.”¹⁰ For man to be able to give himself, self mastery is needed such that his giving will be disinterested and not tainted by self-seeking or selfishness. A “disinterested gift of self” is required.¹¹ The words of Genesis where we are told that man was naked but did not feel shame (Genesis 2:25) indicate that man originally had a freedom, entailing a certain self-mastery, that allowed him to appreciate the full truth of the other. The other was never an object but a subject, a creature made in the image and likeness of God, “flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones” (Genesis 2:23).¹²

⁶ TOB 9:2-3.

⁷ Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, (Pennsylvania: Ascension Press, 2009), 28.

⁸ TOB 13:4.

⁹ TOB 14:4.

¹⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 24.

¹¹ TOB 15:3.

¹² TOB 19:1. “The fact that ‘they did not feel shame’ means that the woman was not an ‘object’ for the man, nor he for her.” They could appreciate the gift of the other in their fullness not just being

The other is “through the body someone willed by the Creator ‘for his own sake’ [*Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3], that is, someone unique and unrepeatable, someone chosen by eternal Love.”¹³ In the beginning, in the state of original innocence the man and woman could exist in the reciprocal relationship of the disinterested gift of self.¹⁴ This implies a mutual acceptance of one another as gift – the other is a gift for me and to me and in my self-giving and its acceptance by the other, I discover the gift of my life.

1.6 Does TOB present the human heart as lustful or “loveful”?

Later in TOB, the human heart is directly addressed through the analysis of Christ’s words from the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5 of Matthew’s gospel “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28). The question asked here is do these words of Christ accuse the human heart or call it? For Pope John Paul II, these words call the heart to “a critical and, in fact, self-critical examination.”¹⁵ With the entrance of sin and the event of the fall, man has been in need of redemption. Christ comes to bring that in a living way. At the heart of the sermon of the Mount is a call to the transformation of the human person, including the need to re-discover in his body and sexuality the original and true meaning intended by the Creator.

The problem with a lustful gaze is that the other is not sufficiently appreciated – the man who gazes lustfully undervalues or devalues the woman. The words of Christ thus contain “a call to discover this value and this dignity.”¹⁶ Christ comes to redeem man of his lustful desires and man must feel himself called, and “called with effectiveness” by Christ to enter into a full giving of himself. The words of Christ are heard externally but also interiorly, reminding the listener of the “good beginning”¹⁷ and of “who man is, who woman is, and who they are reciprocally: one for the other in the work of creation.”¹⁸

Christ’s words then reactivate the deepest inheritance of the human heart to love the other, and also give the listener power to actually do it.¹⁹ They are in essence an appeal to the human heart not to water down or cheapen its capacity of loving: taken by the partial truth of the exterior beauty of the body but rather receiving the whole person as a gift.

¹³ TOB 15:4.

¹⁴ TOB 16:3.

¹⁵ TOB 45:1.

¹⁶ TOB 45:5.

¹⁷ The “good beginning” refers to the original state, in the beginning, before sin entered.

¹⁸ TOB 46:5. In the middle of lust does not man also experience a reminiscence, a primeval call to honor the other, to exalt the beauty of the other, to confer on them their full dignity and majesty? Does not man also experience in the concupiscence of his flesh the desire to actually love the other?

¹⁹ TOB 46:6.

an appeal to not treat the other as an object but as a beautiful subject. An appeal to rise above concupiscence and an appeal to the primordial instinct in the human heart, present from the beginning, to love the other through a sincere gift of self. This appeal is a demanding one. Man must learn in his interior life to distinguish the attractions that come from the complementarity and attraction between the sexes, and those that spring from concupiscence and this inner sensibility can only be learned by perseverance and consistency.²⁰

1.7 The vision of TOB helps us go forward by first looking backward

The TOB catechesis began by analyzing the words of Christ where he refers to the beginning. But Christ looks back to project the future. In what sense? It is not a nostalgic looking back, a painful reminder to how good things once were, with no hope of recovering those "glory days." Christ himself brings the newness. He calls the listeners back precisely to reawaken those initial desires, which are lying dormant like hot embers, waiting to roar into life again. Christ himself brings the newness, the new *ethos*, the new way of living one's bodiliness and one's sexuality. He announces that he is the Way (see John 14:6), a new way that is a redeemed way. Man is called to find new ways of living as a "new man."²¹ This path involves the virtue of temperance and the mastering of unruly desires whereby man gradually realizes the freedom of the gift and comes to know himself in deeper way, much deeper than can ever be known by merely following the superficial desires of the flesh.

The Pope thus devotes time to analyze the "beginning" in Genesis not only to show the original innocence of man and woman but to reveal "the theological basis of man's truth, the truth about his particular vocation that springs from the eternal mystery of the person as image of God, incarnated in the visibly and bodily fact of the masculinity and femininity of the human person."²² Whilst it is true that through original sin man will carry the cost through hereditary sinfulness, the sermon on the Mount calls man to a new vision. Christ denounces an adulterous, lustful gaze that reduces the other to an object. The evil of the concupiscence of the flesh is to be avoided thus opening the way for a richer and deeper understanding of the other in the form of purity of heart which is freedom from sin.

The man of original innocence becomes the man of concupiscence but he is also the man Christ comes to redeem. It is a call not to go back to the original innocence but instead to strive forward for the redemption of the body. This process, assisted by the gift of piety, gradually fills the person with interior joy.²³ It is not simply

²⁰ TOB 48:3-4.

²¹ See TOB 49:4.

²² TOB 58:2.

²³ See TOB 58:7.

to dull or kill the passions. “The satisfaction of the passions is, in fact, one thing, quite another is the joy a person finds in possessing himself more fully, since in this way he can also become more fully a true gift for another person.”²⁴

1.8 TOB helps us realize the dignity and holiness of the body

Pope John Paul II notes that Christ gives a new dignity to the human body “because he himself has taken up the human body together with the soul into union with the person of the Son-Word...the fact that in Jesus Christ the human body became the body of the God-Man has the effect of a new supernatural elevation in every human being, which every Christian must take into account in his behavior” towards his own body and that of others.²⁵ We have been bought at a great price (1 Corinthians 6:20) so we should use our body to glorify God and keep our body holy (1 Thessalonians 4:3-4). Christ has redeemed our bodies.

The redemption of the body achieved by Christ “is the source of a particular moral duty that commits Christians to purity.”²⁶ The awareness of the holiness of the body calls man to new ethical standards, a new commitment to living out well his bodiliness. For Pope John Paul II, the gift of the Holy Spirit which most pertains to this virtue of purity is piety which makes the person sensitive to the dignity of the body. Purity as exercised by the believer coupled with the gift of piety “causes in the body such a fullness of dignity in interpersonal relations that God himself is thereby glorified.”²⁷

1.9 In TOB, Pope John Paul II tackles the issue of the naked body in art

Pope John Paul II, in his general audience of April 15, 1981, tackles the issue of artistic works that are displaying the human body in various media such as art, drama, sculpture and the art based on modern audiovisual technologies.²⁸ Whilst these can be appreciated from an aesthetic viewpoint this act of looking involves the whole of the viewer and evokes in him or her reactions and judgments, thus the viewing is not merely an aesthetic act but also an ethical one. We should seek to create “a climate favourable to purity”²⁹ so that an aesthetic look is not simply a lustful one.

²⁴ TOB 58:7.

²⁵ See TOB 56:4.

²⁶ TOB 57:1.

²⁷ TOB 57:3. “From purity springs that singular beauty that permeates every sphere of reciprocal common life between human beings and allows them to express in it the simplicity and depth, the cordiality and unrepeatable authenticity of personal trust.”

²⁸ See TOB 60.

²⁹ TOB 60:3.

One problem with the objectification of the body is that the body presented is usually anonymous. The Pope reminds us that the human body in its nakedness belongs to the realm of inter-personal gift. Through works of art or representations in the media the naked body is taken out of this context. When this happens, the Pope notes that "the human body loses that deeply subjective meaning of the gift and becomes an object destined for the knowledge of many, by which those who look will assimilate or even take possession of something that evidently exists (or rather should exist) by its very essence on the level of gift – of gift by the person to the person, no longer of course in the image, but in the living man."³⁰

It is often seen in contemporary audiovisual culture that the nakedness of the human body is not treated with dignity or respect. In cases of pornography or even what is known as "pornovision" one violates the body's right to intimacy in its masculinity and femininity and violates too the deep sense of gift and reciprocal self-giving.³¹ The naked body in pornography is a play thing, an object of the viewer's abuse and pleasure. In media the element of the body being a gift may become "lost in translation." In being concerned about how the body is portrayed we are not being prudish but prudent. Art can help to deepen our appreciation of the dignity of the human body, helping to form a more profound understanding of the personal character and eloquence of the human body but the same media, through misrepresentation, can even destroy and deform the body.

The artist therefore has a particular responsibility because in his depictions he also transmits some of his personal values: through his creativity the artist expresses "his inner world and values and thus also his way of living the truth"³² of the object he is seeking to depict through his art. For this reason he needs to take care because "the artist who takes up this subject in any sphere of art or by audiovisual technologies must be conscious of the full truth of the object, of the whole scale of values connected with it; he must not only take them into account abstractly, but also live them rightly himself."³³

Pope John Paul II notes that "there are works of art whose subject is the human body in its nakedness, the contemplation of which allows one to concentrate in some way on the whole truth of man, on the dignity and beauty – even "suprasensual" beauty – of his masculinity and femininity. These works bear within themselves in a hidden way, as it were, an element of sublimation that leads the viewer through the body to the whole personal mystery of man."³⁴ However there are other works

³⁰ TOB 61:1.

³¹ TOB 61:4.

³² TOB 63:4.

³³ TOB 63:4.

³⁴ TOB 63:5.

of art, also displaying the human body, that “stir up objections in the sphere of man’s personal sensibility” because we disapprove of the “reduction of the human person to the rank of an object of ‘enjoyment’ intended for the satisfaction of mere concupiscence.”³⁵ The viewer is also called to draw near to the deeper truth of the body and not to remain only a superficial consumer, that is “one who exploits the encounter with the anonymous subject-body only on the level of sensuality.”³⁶

1.10 The Pope’s vision of the body and human sexuality is revolutionary

Reading the Pope’s vision of the human person, the gift of masculinity and femininity, and the meaning of human sexuality in his TOB is both revolutionary and refreshing. It looks at the body with a positive attitude and helps us see that the Catholic view of the body is not merely puritanical or “Victorian.” The Pope stresses that the answer is not repression of our senses but shaping and orienting them in a way that allow us to see a deeper and wider vision of the human being. George Weigel, a Catholic theologian, stated that the Pope’s TOB is “one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries” – “a kind of theological time bomb set to go off with dramatic consequences ... perhaps in the twenty-first century.” And Christopher West surmises that “if we take John Paul II’s ‘sexual revolution’ to heart, we will never see ourselves and the universe quite the same way again.”³⁷

Section 2: John Paul II’s vision of marriage in theology of the body with an application in the Philippines context

2.1 Marriage contains an image of Christ’s love for the Church

The images commonly associated with marriage in the Philippines are usually limited to the things which make the ceremony beautiful. Elements include lavish gowns, a Church filled with flowers, a multi-tiered cake, a long line of *ninongs* and *ninangs*, and an expensive bill at the end of the celebration. Even if they help make the wedding feel memorable, the meaning of Christian marriage goes beyond these material elements. In his Theology of the Body (TOB), John Paul II discusses human love and marriage explaining that human love is meant to make visible a sacred reality hidden in God himself. This is what constitutes the sacramentality of marriage. To explain this deeper dimension of how marriage is called to make visible the divine mystery, he uses Ephesians 5:21-33 as the springboard for his reflections.

In these lines by St. Paul, we find a view that sees in marriage something more than just a human institution. He writes, “For the husband is the head of the

³⁵ TOB 63:5.

³⁶ TOB 63:7.

³⁷ C. West, “Theology of the Body ...,” ix.

wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.”³⁸ This passage points to how marriage is meant to mirror Christ’s love for the Church and in this way, make visible God’s love for man. The meaning of this love reaches its zenith in Christ’s self-emptying on the cross, through which he gave up himself for the Church. Therefore, Christian marriage is called to imitate the self-gift of Christ on the cross, even to the point of sacrifice and death. This challenges the common notion of human love which is limited to sentiment and physical pleasure.

2.2 *The meaning of marriage is anchored on God’s eternal plan for man*

To gain a more comprehensive view of St. Paul’s description of marriage, John Paul II situates the passages about marriage in Ephesians in the context of the entire letter. The Holy Father explains that when you look at the lines Paul wrote regarding marriage in light of the whole text, one notices that it is anchored on the fundamental truth that God’s plan for man’s eternal salvation is revealed in Jesus Christ.³⁹ This observation affirms the incarnational principle articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* about how the Incarnate Word, “reveals - in a particular way - man to man himself and makes his supreme vocation clear.”⁴⁰

This observation reminds us that by virtue of being a sacrament, Christian marriage also communicates to the couple the grace that enables them to fulfill the fundamental Christian vocation of finding eternal salvation and holiness in and through Jesus Christ. In this, one sees a deep connection between the sacrament of marriage and the sacrament of baptism. Bringing out this connection between marriage and baptism is a reminder that marriage, albeit different in many ways, has the same end as the celibate or religious vocation. This reminder corrects the popular view that sees holiness as a call only for those in seminaries and convents. Holiness is also a call for those who are married, re-echoing the theme “The Universal Call to Holiness,” which was central to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council.⁴¹

2.3 *Christian marriage is linked to the family*

Because of contemporary culture’s tendency to focus almost exclusively on the physical aspect of the sexual act, it is not uncommon to view the significance of marriage only in terms of its sexual aspect. Although this aspect is important, John Paul II reminds us that marriage is logically linked to something broader: the

³⁸ Ephesians 5:23-26.

³⁹ TOB 88:1.

⁴⁰ *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 22.

⁴¹ See *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter 5. (Henceforth LG).

building of a Christian family. This reflection comes from the observation that the segment on marriage in the letter to the Ephesians is followed by a description of how a Christian household must be ordered. It is for this reason that the Pope makes the following claim: “Thus, the text of Ephesians we are proposing as the object of a deeper and more thorough analysis is found in *the immediate context of teachings about the moral obligations of the society of the family*.”⁴² Moreover, it is noteworthy that the household code of Ephesians 6 is followed by an exhortation to “be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”⁴³ This spiritual exhortation appears to be the “point of arrival” of the letter’s main theme of living according to the dignity that is fruit of the love and salvation revealed and given by Christ.

2.4 *Both husband and wife are called to subjection, but of a different kind*

When we think about subjection, it is not uncommon to automatically think of the “master-slave” relationship and therefore it is in this light that one tends to interpret St. Paul’s exhortation for wives to be subject to their husbands. This reading makes the passage seem like a remnant of an ancient patriarchal mindset that does not appreciate how both man and woman possess equal dignity. A close reading of the text itself, however, reveals a different understanding of what St. Paul means by “subjection” because the exhortation addressed to wives only comes after a line addressed to both spouses, namely, “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.”⁴⁴

Regarding this line, John Paul II explains that “love excludes every kind of submission by which the wife would become a servant or slave of the husband.”⁴⁵ Her submission to him has to have as its motivation her reverence and love for Christ. In other words, her submission is a response to Christ’s ultimate act of love: his self-emptying on the cross, which her husband is called to imitate.⁴⁶ In this way, her submission to her husband is not a decision to become less than her husband, but rather one which responds to a prior act of love: the love of her husband, and also that of Christ who gives himself to her. Therefore, her submission is not self-defeating but the path which leads her to becoming who she was called to be by virtue of baptism: a woman made new by an experience of God’s love.

As mentioned above, the love the husband is called to imitate, according to this passage, is Christ’s sacrifice of himself. Since it is Christ who initiates this act

⁴² TOB 88:5.

⁴³ Ephesians 6:10-11.

⁴⁴ Ephesians 5:21.

⁴⁵ TOB 89:4.

⁴⁶ In Ephesians 5:25, Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.”

of submission, and the man is called to imitate Christ more explicitly, it should be remarked that the kind of submission and sacrifice the husband is called to, is not less, but rather, more demanding than the submission of his wife.

It is worth juxtaposing to this ideal the phenomenon of wives sacrificing for their husbands to the extent of meriting the label “nagpapaka-martir,” (becoming a victim) while their husbands persist in less-than-ideal habits such as alcohol, pornography, and having mistresses. The prevalence of this phenomenon in our country, in contrast to the Christian ideal for husbands sketched out in Ephesians 5, shows that work needs to be done in educating and forming couples towards a deeper understanding of the married vocation.

2.5 *Obedience to the Father is the source of Christ's spousal love for the Church*

This passage from Ephesians on marriage also presupposes that the Church is born from Christ's gift of himself on the cross. This may be a good place to recall who the Church is. In the Philippines and elsewhere it is not uncommon to associate the Church merely with the hierarchy or the architectural structure. More fundamentally, however, tradition has held that the Church of Christ is the People of God redeemed and transformed by Christ's salvific act on the cross. This line taken from the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church *Lumen Gentium* articulates well this idea, “The Spirit dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in a temple, prays and bears witness in them that they are his adopted children.”⁴⁷ Therefore, the Church is comprised of persons who, by virtue of baptism and their decision to open themselves to God's love and grace, become a living stone in the temple of Holy Spirit. And it is these people that Christ has decided to make his bride.

Christ's spousal love for the Church, however, has as its starting point a decision to obey the will of the Father even to the point of death. It is significant that his death is anchored on an act of obedience, thereby revealing that the fruitfulness of his death comes from his surrender to the Father.⁴⁸ If Christ's spousal love for the Church is to be the model of every Christian marriage, marriage too needs to be grafted on a prior obedience to God. This is because only in obedience to God will human love attach itself to the source of Love.

This moral principle can be utilized to counter claims that it is so difficult for a man to practice abstinence during his wife's fertile period that artificial contraception can be justified. Ephesians 5 invites the Christian couple to ground their moral decision not only on their practical concern and need to experience love in a bodily way, as important as these are, but also on a desire to obey God's design for human

⁴⁷ LG, n. 4.

⁴⁸ See TOB 90:6.

love. And this obedience has the power to make their human love spiritually fruitful, as Christ's death and resurrection reveals.

2.6 *Making the other's 'I' one's own 'I'*

One of the most beautiful tasks of marital love is “building a bridge” to the other. Love not only binds, but also transports the lover into the interior of the beloved. This is not only true of human love, but also of Christ's love for the Church. This is why even if Christ is distinct from the Church, he continues to dwell within her through his Word and sacraments. It is for this reason that the Church is called Christ's body. Furthermore, it is because of this in-dwelling that the Church is able to live up to her vocation to make present Christ in the world.

The characteristic of love explains why St. Paul writes, “Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.”⁴⁹ In other words, the love between husband and wife enables the spouses to find themselves by giving themselves to the other. This self-gift to the other is what enables the lover to be present in the beloved. Furthermore, there is something creative about this gift of self. John Paul II talks about how the husband's gift of himself to his wife is what makes her beautiful and this beauty that he both creates and perceives in her is what draws his love to her.⁵⁰ In marriage, this in-dwelling is meant to be permanent because the kind of love it makes visible is an eternal love. Hence, it is for this reason that the Church protects the indissolubility of marriage.

2.7 *Marriage as Primordial Sacrament*⁵¹

What distinguishes TOB from more traditional explications of Christian marriage is that it is unafraid to affirm the value of the human body. In these addresses, John Paul II explains that there is something unique about the human body that sets it apart from the rest of creation. He wrote, “The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it.”⁵² This is precisely what the event of the Incarnation reveals, namely, that the human body can reveal the very person of God.

⁴⁹ Ephesians 5:28.

⁵⁰ TOB 92:4. “What is at stake here is also visible beauty, physical beauty...The good that the one who loves creates with his love in the beloved like a test of that same love and its measure. Giving himself in the most disinterested way, the one who loves does not do so outside the limits of this measure and this verification.”

⁵¹ See TOB 96:1 and following.

⁵² Quoted in TOB 96:6 from 19:4.

Then, he also notes that the original design of the human body includes its spousal characteristic. This spousal meaning of the body is what is articulated in Genesis 2:24 which reads: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." Thus this spousal meaning which was present from the beginning tells us that marriage is an "integral part" of the "sacrament of creation."⁵³ Since this sacrament of creation is fulfilled in what is revealed by Christ, marriage too shares in his salvific mission. Hence, John Paul II wrote, "As for marriage, one can deduce that - instituted in the context of the sacrament of creation in its totality, or in the state of original innocence - it was to serve not only to extend the work of creation, or procreation, but also to spread the same sacrament of creation to further generations of human beings..."⁵⁴ This insight makes explicit what is presupposed in section 2.3 above: the logical connection between marriage and the building up of a Christian family. This latter insight from John Paul II brings to light how a Christian family is distinguished by a way of life that strives to make visible the love of God in all aspects of its daily life, thereby extending the invisible reality hidden in God to each member of the family.

2.8 *The sacrament of marriage as an efficacious sign of grace*

It was mentioned earlier that the sacrament of marriage, as understood in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, takes its meaning from the broader plan of God: man's call to eternal salvation in Christ. Perhaps, in our context, we have taken this saving truth for granted, having heard it time and again from studying in Catholic schools and attending weekly Sunday masses. However, in his addresses, John Paul II invites us to look at this old truth with a newfound awe by highlighting how Paul calls this spousal union between Christ and the Church a "great" mystery."⁵⁵ This is what we find in Ephesians 5:32, "This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church." To further bring out the source of this awe, it is helpful to think about how surprising it is that God, the source of all being, decides to unite himself in such an intimate way to creatures. Moreover, it is even more surprising that he decided to do this after the many times man has fallen.

If the sacrament of marriage is meant to make visible this mystery of God's eternal and enduring love for man, it cannot do so simply through human means. Human love is always limited and therefore, needs the "fuel" of God's own life, that which is communicated by grace, to fulfill this lofty call. John Paul II taught that this life is drawn from Jesus Christ, in whom we have been blessed "with every spiritual blessing."⁵⁶ Therefore, the source of the couple's love and the guarantee of its

⁵³ TOB 96:6.

⁵⁴ TOB 96:7.

⁵⁵ See TOB 93:3-7.

⁵⁶ See Ephesians 1:3.

endurance and permanence is Christ's love for each of them. This love communicates itself and allows them to participate in his own life and love through grace. Moreover, this communication of divine life is what will renew the Church and make her the spotless bride to be joined in marriage to Christ at the end of time.

2.9 *Reflections on the Song of Songs*

Towards the end of the section regarding the sacramentality of marriage, and before his discussion on *Humanae Vitae*, John Paul II pauses to reflect on two Old Testament texts that take up the theme of human love. The first text is the Song of Songs which, because of the intensity of its words, has had a paradoxical history.⁵⁷ Nevertheless he uses the biblical text to bring out how the language of the body has the capacity to speak the language of the heart. The following line from TOB captures this idea well, "The words, movements and gestures of the spouses, their whole behavior, correspond to the inner movement of their hearts."⁵⁸

The use of the word "language" to describe what takes place between the lovers in the text of the Song of Songs, points to how the marital act is not simply a physical act but also a conversation and dialogue between *persons*. This is a gentle corrective against the modern/postmodern tendency to view sexuality as a purely physical activity.

There is another beautiful observation from John Paul II in this section. He says that if one pays close attention to the dialogue between the lovers, one will notice that they use many images from nature as metaphors to express their fascination towards the other. Yet, they quickly find that these images from the material world cannot capture the profundity of the person before them. It is for this reason that they decide to use a name which can only be given to someone beloved. This name is that of a friend, and it is only this title that is able to capture the entirety of the person before them.⁵⁹

2.10 *Tobit: "When the 'Language of the Body' becomes the Language of the Liturgy"*

The second Old Testament text John Paul II devotes his reflections to is the story of Tobit. This text is different from that contained in the Song of Songs because

⁵⁷ In TOB 108:2, John Paul II noted, "It has become the object of many exegetical studies, commentaries, and hypotheses. With regard to its content, apparently 'secular,' the positions have been varied. On the one hand, it has been among books forbidden to read, and, on the other hand, it has been the source of inspiration of the greatest mystical writers, and the verses of the Song of Songs have been inserted into the Church liturgy."

⁵⁸ TOB 108:4.

⁵⁹ TOB 108:8.

the love story of Tobit emphasizes the element of sacrifice and overcoming difficulty, while that of the Song of Songs emphasizes the themes of passion, affection and romance.

In this text, Tobit had to overcome several trials before being able to marry Sarah. One of these trials is that prior to Tobit, seven men were married to Sarah, and all died before uniting themselves to her because of the evil spirit Asmodeus. So, on their wedding night, Tobit faces the same fatal possibility as the seven men before him. Fortunately for him, his fate turns out differently from the other seven. Therefore, one can say, that his story shows how love can conquer death. John Paul II interprets this outcome as happening "*on account of prayer*."⁶⁰ But this prayer is anchored on an earlier promise revealed by an angel telling Tobit that Sarah had been destined for him from all eternity.

In the story of Tobit and Sarah, we see a drama that is similar to what takes place during the liturgy. In the liturgy, human affairs, including that of human love, are offered up to God and entrusted to his plan and power. And it is this act of surrender and self-offering that opens up time and humanity to the fruitfulness and life hidden in eternity.

Section 3: Summary of John Paul II's addresses on the theology of the body

Part I. The Words of Christ

1. Christ appeals to the beginning (TOB 1-23)

- Starts from the Pharisees, question about divorce, when Christ appeals to the beginning (Matthew 19:3-5).
- Goes beyond shame, and sees through shame the instinct still in man to be affirmed according to his proper value, which is to be loved as a person, for his own sake. To be loved for one's own sake is to see the other as Adam and Eve saw each other's bodies in the beginning; "they were naked but knew no shame." They could see that the body of the other expressed the fullness and richness of his and her person. They saw the other person as gift.
- Christ leads man to recover his ability to see the other as gift, as Adam experienced when he first encountered Eve. In seeing her, he experiences a call to love which emanates from seeing her body. The body in itself has a meaning, a grammar and a language indelibly written by God. And to

⁶⁰ TOB 114:7.

know the gift of the other is to belong to it by the act of self-surrender (self-gift), which leads to a fruitful union.

- This hermeneutics of gift is key to man's original experience, and uncovers a more complete understanding of the human body. This more complete understanding is one that does not reduce masculinity and femininity to sex alone but as revelatory of the entire personal subject, as a being fashioned by love, and called to love. To see the person revealed in the body is also to see that the body is not a cage of the soul, but its expression.
- Recovering this metaphysical and ontological view of the human body leads to a metaphysical and ontological view of the rest of reality and creation, that is able to recognize that the entire world bears within it both a primordial order that comes from love, and a call to be brought into this original source once again.
- This is the order redemption seeks to restore. How? By transforming the human heart.

2. *Christ appeals to the human heart (TOB 24-63)*

- In Matthew 5:27-28, Christ talks about the commandment "You shall not commit adultery." Then, he shows how adultery begins in the human heart.
- By doing this, he shows a connection between the law etched on stone and the law of the heart: *ethos*. This law of the human heart is one of love, and to discover it, is like listening to the echoes of the beginning in one's innermost being.
- These echoes are contained even in the schism brought about by Original Sin which began with Eve casting doubt on the gift. There are three dimensions of this division from Original Sin, which John Paul II refers to: Cosmic Shame (Body-World), Immanent Shame (Body-Spirit), and Relative Shame (Man-Woman).
- This echo is one of unity. The principle of which is that *ethos* and *eros* do not actually diverge but are designed to meet in the human heart in order to bear fruit.
- Purity is brought about by this meeting of *ethos* and *eros*, for its essence is seeing the other with the eyes of piety, with eyes which look through

lenses of the memory of the dignity of the other. This gaze always begins with the heart.

- The Incarnation accomplishes this unity by redeeming the body. This redemption of the body is essentially a re-establishment of its continuity with creation, but it also brings something new.
3. *Christ appeals to the resurrection (TOB 64-86)*
- Jesus' historical experience reveals that the body not only contains the beginning but also the end. He reveals this in and through the resurrection - Matthew 22:24-33 (also in Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40).
 - The path of our bodies towards the end means "Spiritualization" and "Divinization:"
 - Spiritualization refers to the deep unity between body and spirit not possible in this earthly life.
 - Divinization refers to a new formation of man's personal subjectivity according to the measure of union with God, which allows him to enter into perfect communion with each person. For this reason we say that the spousal meaning of the body is fulfilled in the union with God.
 - Jesus' virginity therefore fulfills the original experience of solitude (receives all from the Father), unity (receives Church as gift), and fruitfulness (spiritualization of man)

Part II. The Sacrament

1. The dimension of covenant and of grace (TOB 87-102)

- A sacrament is a visible sign. Now what is visible is the sign, but this visible entity implies an invisible content: mystery and grace. Hence, John Paul II mentions the importance of distinguishing between sacrament and mystery, because the former is concerned with what is visible and the latter, with what is invisible.
- In this section (TOB 87-102), it is the invisible dimension that is highlighted.
- This dimension is, as the title says, of covenant and grace. God's covenant

as it was in the Old Testament, albeit in incipient form, already uses a nuptial imagery. In Isaiah, Yahweh is shown as describing himself as the husband of Israel.

- This covenant reaches its fullness in Christ, who by giving himself completely through a human body, forms the Church. “Form” is inadequate however, because the Christ is not source of the Church as its manufacturer. He, as her bridegroom, is her source. She is born from his side. “Born” connotes a receptive response on creation’s part (by a feminine figure) of the gift that Christ gives of himself by dying on the cross. Linking the human reality of marriage to the mystery of Christ’s relationship with the Church is what Ephesians 5 explicitly describes.
- Because this mystery of Christ’s relationship to the Church is what Christian marriage signifies, it transposes into the historical dimension God’s eternal plan for man’s salvation. The totality of self-gift that is expressed by its indissolubility is what makes marriage an authentic sign of this mystery, and therefore properly sacramental.
- Concupiscence remains an aspect of reality to contend with; hence, grace is another invisible dimension, which the sacrament of marriage signifies, as it aids the spouses to live out the complete mystery of love which marriage was called to signify from the beginning. This mystery of love is what creation is, but only fully revealed in Christ, particularly through the gift of himself on the cross.

2. *The sign (TOB 103-117)*

- The Pauline image (Ephesians 5) brings together the redemptive dimension of love with its spousal dimension. This allows one to see in the spousal dimension the three original meanings of the body (filial, nuptial, and generative, in both the bodily and spiritual sense) as well as a door which opens up to the rest of the sacraments within the Church.
 - The Pope includes a brief etymology of nuptial and spousal which is illustrative of important themes he attempts to uncover in marriage.
 - Nuptial comes from “nubis” which means a veil, and somehow expresses the already-not yet character of marriage.
 - Spousal comes from “pondus” which means weight, thereby pointing to how Love is man’s entire weight.

- Consent is the essence of marriage involves three aspects:
 - Promise (of the future) which is made possible by God's promise to the couple.
 - Consent, not only that they agree to love each other, but together to enter into the mystery of love which is always greater than them but at the same time calls for their participation. It is in responding to this call that the couple becomes the author of marriage.
 - Realization of one flesh: the fruit of marriage, as seen in the child.
- Language of the body, as *eros* (as highlighted in the Song of Songs)
 - The Book of the Song of Songs highlights the love between bridegroom and bride as it is expressed in and through the body. But through this bodily experience, words come forth to reveal what the body means in the most profound sense: love.
 - These words also contain what love means:
 - Love as stronger than death.
 - Love as unity, for both come from a common source and are journeying towards it.
 - Love as belonging and entrustment.
 - Love as mystery, both within and beyond the person.
- Tobias' love for Sarah, as *ethos* (which confirms and validates *eros*)
 - Here, Tobias' love for Sarah is shown as coming from a conscious choice.
 - There is also the evidence of the element of prayer, in particular, of prayer in unison. "This inclusion of prayer turns the language of the body into a liturgy" (TOB 115:4-6 and 116:2). Here we see how the nature of the love in which the spouses participate finds its fulfillment in their returning together to their original source, God.

3. *He gave them the law of life as their inheritance (TOB 118-133)*

- This section responds to criticisms against *Humanae Vitae's* teaching forbidding contraception. It understands these criticisms as three: scientific, moral, pastoral.
- The scientific criticism is: why should not artificial contraception be allowed if man is technically capable of it? John Paul II answers that this would be to submit to a dualistic view of the body that pits biology against the nature of man, which is the nature of love.

- The moral criticism is why can't a couple make some acts of conjugal union intentionally infertile? The text says that the psychological intention to love another while making the act infertile can't change the moral language of the body.
- The last criticism which is pastoral, is perhaps the most compelling, especially when faced with distressing situations such as poverty.
- Nevertheless, the Pope stands firm on how the Church's maternity is expressed in her recommending a method that views the human person in his totality, as someone called to love. Love, not just as it is experienced through conjugal union, but also in chastity and its rhythm is always one that brings together unity and fruitfulness.
- The message of the Church is the totality of love, which is expressed in her maternal recommendation of calling man to live according to this call, which is the essence of his lofty dignity that Christ reveals to him. This is the answer she gently gives to the question, "what does human life really mean?" ■



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