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**“THEOLOGY OF THE BODY”:**

**A DISCUSSION ON COMMUNITY, LOVE AND EQUALITY**

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The paper discusses Pope John Paul II’s work “Theology of the Body”. This doctrine of the Holy Father is an adequate anthropology in which the human body reveals God. “Theology of the Body” examines man and woman before the Fall, after it and at the resurrection of the dead. The author has made an attempt to analyse how the Holy Father wrote on the equality of men and women, and so confirmed their parity as persons in religion. Contemporary discourse on femininity has sought to emphasize the importance of the woman’s role in societal and family life. This discourse risks overlooking the man’s role, however, and disregarding the beauty of the woman’s part in a relationship. In “Theology of the Body” Pope John Paul II explained how the man and woman together create a community, which reflects the image of God within itself.

**Keywords:** “Theology of the Body”, Pope John Paul II, Catholic Church, community, the image of God, marriage.

**«ТЕОЛОГИЯ ТЕЛА»:**

**ДИСКУССИЯ О ЕДИНСТВЕ, ЛЮБВИ И РАВЕНСТВЕ**

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В статье исследуется труд Папы Римского Иоанна Павла II «Теология тела». Учение святого отца представляет собой адекватную антропологию, в которой человеческое тело раскрывает Бога. «Теология тела» исследует мужчину и женщину до грехопадения, после него и при воскресении мертвых. Автором сделана попытка проанализировать, как Иоанн Павел II писал о равноправии мужчин и женщин и тем самым подтвердил равенство их личностей в религии. Современный дискурс феминизма стремится подчеркнуть важность роли женщины в общественной и семейной жизни. Однако этот дискурс рискует упустить из виду роль мужчины и проигнорировать красоту

женского начала в отношениях. В «Теологии тела» Папа Иоанн Павел II объяснил, как мужчина и женщина вместе создают единство, в котором отражается образ Божий.

**Ключевые слова:** «Теология тела», Папа Иоанн Павел II, Католическая Церковь, единство, образ Божий, брак.

To find true love and build a family is the goal of many men and women in the 21st century. Yet true love that is lasting seems hard to come by. Divorce, as far as marriage is concerned, and co-habitation have altered the landscape of relationships. Further, marriage seems (from a contemporary perspective) to even risk demeaning a woman by making her the slave of a man. Some modern movements might claim that to preserve her value, a woman should avoid it. Saint Pope John Paul II demonstrated just the opposite in his work “*Theology of the Body*” [6]. This article will examine Pope John Paul II’s writings and investigate how he demonstrated that the Catholic Church promotes the equality of men and women in marriage – thus mirroring marriage as God intended it from the beginning in Eden.

The concept of marriage can be found at the very beginning of the Bible. “In the beginning”, after God created the first man, he later created the first woman to be that man’s “helpmate”. God did not intend the woman to be the man’s maid, his slave, or his secretary. Rather, He gave her a term of respect, which He would later use in other books of the Bible, i.e. “...my father’s God was my helper...” (Exodus 18:4). The woman was to help the man live his life, to be at his side and share his experiences. Formed from his rib, Eve joined Adam, who recognized her as the “...bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). By these words, Adam indicated she was more than a friend or business partner. Eve was part of him, physically and spiritually. Together, in what is termed by the Theology of the Body as a “*communio personarum*”, or communion of persons, they would live life as a couple [6, p. 162-163]. Their sorrows, joys, struggles and accomplishments would be shared in community, rather than endured by one person and observed by the other.

Taking into consideration that so much of the Bible contains poignant and deep symbology, it is especially beautiful to note the material God used to design the woman. Whereas man came from the created earth, the woman was taken from the created Man. In being derived from the Earth, Adam found himself connected to this substance, which he was commanded to tend. Eve was taken from Adam's rib. The symbolism of this gesture is also thought-provoking. God connected her to Adam's life and work. God could have taken her from the man's toe and demonstrated that woman should be under the rule of the man. God could have taken Eve from Adam's spine and indicated she should follow in the man's footsteps and lead. Had He even wanted it, God could have taken the woman from Adam's hand to indicate he should be led by her. Of all these options, God derived Eve her from the man's side, indicating she should be with him, and live together with him. Further, his work was her work – together, as a community, they would tend to the Garden of Eden and fulfil the task God had assigned.

As a community of persons, Adam and Eve's equality is expressed repeatedly. Adam and Eve were presented naked to each other and lived in nakedness during their time in the Garden of Eden. Their nakedness "...describes... their reciprocal experience of the body, that is, the man's experience of the femininity that reveals itself in the nakedness of the body and, reciprocally, the analogous experience of masculinity by the woman" [6, p. 162-171]. Eve was not held in this state for Adam's enjoyment, nor vice versa. As Pope John Paul II explained in his *"Theology of the Body"*, this nakedness (not delving into the later issues of shame) was *reciprocal*. It was an equal experience. They perceived each other's bodies and truly knew each other for who they were. Their mystery was emphatically only for the other to discover.

This particular thinking has remained constant through the Old and New Testaments. Genesis (2:23) says that the man declared: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man". Initially, might seem as if this was an act of subjugation of Adam's volition. Upon closer evaluation, it becomes clear that his statement indicated the opposite. By

coming from him (man), she was his equal. Eve came from Adam's body, and so she was no stranger to him. She was given to him by God, of course, but she was also dear to him. Yet, as his helpmate and the future mother of his children, she would have a different character and role from him. Her feminine nature was not in any way a detraction from her equality with Adam – rather, it was a characteristic of her person that made her different.

Throughout the Bible, God often spoke to women and inspired them when the Children of Israel needed intervention. One may consider Queen Esther, Deborah the Judge or Huldah the Prophetess. In the New Testament this consideration continued. Most poignantly, God chose the Blessed Virgin Mary to bring forth and raise Jesus Christ, His Son (with St. Joseph, Her spouse). Christ could have willed Himself into existence as a 33-year-old man and immediately commenced His ministry. Yet, He chose the route of ordered human existence and precluded it with the Angel Gabriel's salutation to Mary. In doing so, He honoured both Mary and the model of family, as He dwelled with Mary and Joseph for years. When His mother bid him assist the bride and groom at the Wedding of Cannae at the beginning of his adult life, he continued to display this respect. Rather than rebuke His mother for her wish, He humbly obeyed her, in recognition of her maternal authority.

In the New Testament, Christ blessed the marriage at the Wedding of Cannae, and from this point, the later writings of the Apostles indicated the importance of marriage in the Church. The man and the woman become "one flesh" through the unity of marriage [8]. The Catholic Church has observed this thinking through the Sacrament of Marriage. In the book of Ephesians (5:21-33) it may read: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the 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. For the husband is the head of the wife and 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".

These lines might be misinterpreted to demonstrate the Catholic Church advocates for women to be reduced to tools – blindly enduring mistreatment at the hands of authoritarian men. Yet, the vows taken by the bride and groom serve to unite their lives and tie them together, as two agreeing members of a single unity. Their consent before God is such that this new relationship, which they have entered, is, on one hand, an agreement between each other mutually [q.v.: 9]. Yet, God is also involved in the marriage. Through their vows, the Holy Ghost mystically seals their union. The two become one flesh. And from this point forward, anything that happens to *one* happens to both. Ephesians 5:25 exhorts men to love their wives as Christ loves the Church, and women to love their husbands as the Church loves Christ.

In understanding this idea, one realizes a wife should be able to entrust herself to her husband *because* Christ loves the Church to the extent that He willingly suffered death for Her. In marriage, there is a dimension of authority, but this authority is based on a love that is so great the man would be (and should be) willing to die for his wife. The husband is the authority not because he is a dictator, but because the wife should be able to entrust herself totally to him, knowing that he will use his authority to care for her as Christ cares for His Church. He will not (should not) ever use this authority as a method to utilize his wife as a means to an end.

In marriage the new reality that emerges necessitates the love to be exclusively between the two people involved and for the two people involved. This is what Pope John Paul II advocated – the woman’s role in marriage and the Church is not one of a lesser person. Her reality is not one that comes after the man. And this is the subject that shall now be examined.

Marriage is a unification of two people’s bodies, hearts and souls. John Paul II explained how this could happen in “*Theology of the Body*”, where he further demonstrated how marriage continues to honour and preserve the dignity of the woman. The shared, physical intimacy of a man and woman was called “knowing” in the Bible. From a linguistic perspective one understands the word “know” as to be aware of something. One can conclude, then, that God intended for marriage to

feature a complete physical, spiritual and emotional awareness of the two people towards each other. With this Pope John Paul II said reveal themselves to one another with that specific depth of their own human “I”, which precisely reveals itself also through their sex, their masculinity and femininity. And thus, in a singular way, the woman “is given” in the mode of knowledge to the man, and he to her [6, p. 206].

The relationship between a husband and wife is based on the vows, which enable *conjugal consent* to act as the form of the marriage, from which the conjugal bond can lawfully (in the eyes of the Church) be made. This bond introduces the man and woman into “...the organic structure of the Church’s sacramental being...” as they enter the *ecclesiastical reality* of their new life (freely taken up by the consenting partners and blessed by God) together [10, p. 75]. Pope John Paul II said the words of consent are crucial to marriage because “...the spousal significance of the body in its masculinity and femininity is found expressed in them”. Consent honours the freedom of the individual, as it (theoretically) ensures a marriage only takes place when two people desire it. Their desire comes from the attraction they have mutually experienced, which has motivated them to pursue a life together. Further, the notion of consent emphasizes how serious the sacrament of marriage is, as, without the free exchange of consent from both the man and woman, it cannot be seen as valid. In giving their consent, the spouses confirm their participation in the “prophetic mission of the Church received from Christ” [5]. The Catholic Church’s understanding of consent seeks to protect both the man and the woman from a potentially unhealthy relationship.

Through their marital union, the man and woman form a “communion”, which Pope John Paul II saw as the moment when the man “becomes the image of God” [6, p. 20]. It is not that a man or woman alone is insufficient for God. They are, in and of themselves, the being God intended them to be. Yet, when united as a “communion” – through their mutual self-giving – they reflect the mystery of God’s original creation of Adam and Eve. Through this reflection, they create the “image” of God. “Since the same man, as male and female, knows himself reciprocally in this specific community-communion of persons, in which man and women unite so closely with

each other that they become ‘one flesh’, he constitutes humanity, that is, he confirms and renews the existence of man as an image of God. Every time, both man and woman take this image again, so to speak, from the mystery of creation and transmit it with the help of God-Yahweh” [6, p. 213-214]. What must be emphasized here is that such a communion *necessitates* the man *and* the woman. Neither is sufficient to form this image of God on their own. God intended from the beginning that they would need each other, and through their self-giving, become fully themselves – together.

Within the folds of marriage, the man and woman bring forth life. Together, as a couple, they tend to this life and nurture the family that emerges from their love. The occurrence of sexual love allows for the community of persons, and from this community the woman is able (with the love of her partner) to conceive the child whom she nurtures for nine months. Feminist thinker Simone de Beauvoir perceived this marital role of a woman as representative of her female nature a “misfortune” as it “enslaved” her to the human “species”. Generally, she sees the woman in a traditional marriage as reduced to being a slave of childbearing – and therefore being in service to the man, above all [11, p. 466].

This perspective of thought may be seen as representative of some schools of 21st century feminist thought. Rather than perceive womanhood and femininity as a character of a being, de Beauvoir regarded womanhood as simply a primal distinction justifying the woman to perform the “animal act of giving life...” [11, p. 466]. For feminist thinkers such as de Beauvoir, a woman’s femininity is a prison that enslaves her to the animalistic practice of reproducing. It further serves to justify the man’s rule over her.

This feminist perspective is exactly what Pope John Paul II overcame in “*Theology of the Body*”. A woman can become pregnant, and she can give birth. Nonetheless, these two facts of her biology and human process do not define her. Interestingly, feminists argue this. Yet, as one may see in de Beauvoir’s words, they also risk reducing the woman to this in *exactly* their attempt to prove how “man” has dominated woman or how woman’s tendency to motherhood lessens her worth.

Instead of diminishing women to their life-giving role, they deride this special distinction by reducing its supernatural character to its biological features. This can consequentially reduce the experience of love is reduced to a series of animalistic acts

The marital union is one of two equal persons, the marital experience unites these two equal beings as they are “given” to each other through their mutual consent, in the presence of God. “Give” linguistically indicates they now belong to each other and constitute a new reality – the married life. Through the mutual giving, the two spouses engage in a “...discovery of the created world...”, which allows the partners to understand (to “discover”) themselves as “... a subject: as one for whom the world is given as an object to know and thus to name” [11, p. 472]. The relationship, stemming from a physical attraction, culminates in an unselfish exchange of the selves that bring spiritual unity with its physical unity.

The 20th century feminist movement stemmed from the previous century’s suffrage work to obtain certain political and social rights for women. Specifically, the 19th century efforts that started under Susan Anthony looked to release women from coverture laws, give them the right to participate in voting, and have access to educational and work opportunities [7]. The second wave of feminism in the 20th century laboured for the achievement of various goals in the areas of the workplace, politics, education, and marriage (which included the additional points of sexuality and family) [2]. After centuries without voices, many women found their platform to speak. They gave a voice to the feelings of oppression or disregard that have developed over the centuries. In the process, however, they began to perceive such institutions as the Catholic Church as being responsible for their oppression [3]. This led to a fundamental misunderstanding of the relation between women and God – and from that, women and their position in marriage. In light of this “*Theology of the Body*” offers a surprising perspective on Catholicism’s perspective of women, men and marriage.

The teachings of “*Theology of the Body*” contributed to “New Feminism”, a movement that “...treats men and women as equal, different, and complementary, as well as called to love” [4]. Whereas the preceding centuries may be perceived as



having viewed women as a commodity, a vessel for childbirth, and lacking her own worth, the 20th century's feminist movement diminished the value of the man in its efforts to emphasize and recapture the dignity of the woman. “*Theology of the Body*” managed to find the equilibrium between the two genders by exactly establishing the equality of men and women, and further demonstrating how they not only need each other but also complement each other. The significance and necessity of one sex ostensibly underlines the significance and necessity of the other. Pope John Paul II succinctly indicated as much when he said “...femininity in some way finds itself before masculinity, while masculinity confirms itself through femininity” [6, p. 166].

The concept of masculinity and femininity working together is reminiscent “*Mulieribus Dignitatem*” of Pope John Paul II, in which he said “... the Word one in substance with the Father, becomes man, born of a woman, at "the fullness of time"” [1]. The magnitude of the incarnation was discussed earlier in this paper. Yet it must be mentioned again due to this point. Christ came into His own humanity through a woman – His Mother. A husband and wife, both individual humans imbued with dignity, come into true fulfilment through their community with each other. This community thus reflects God's image in His creation. On their own, a man and woman are each one – perfectly equal, dignified beings. Together, through matrimonial unification, they remain individual beings, yet also become “one”. And this one-ness is creative, as it produces a child, who is the fruit of their love. This completes the reflection of the *Imago Dei*, God in His Trinitarian mystery.

This explanation of “confirmation” is beautiful not only because it established that men and women are equal and that they need each other, but because it demonstrates how through marriage they can even become more of themselves i.e., how they can find fulfilment in each other. Pope John Paul II found men and women to “complement” each other, a word which can be defined as the features of one thing adding to another in such a way as to “emphasize or improve it”. On its own, it is fine. It exists and works. But with the other part, it becomes more so. In a similar fashion, two people who engage in marriage are both complete on their own. Each one is a human being with dignity as a child of God. Finally, the couple finds that together,

they become more themselves, and they emphasize each other's dignity – bringing each other into the fullness of being.

This article has investigated Pope John Paul II demonstrating in his work “*Theology of the Body*” the way the Catholic Church promotes the equality of men and women in marriage – thus mirroring marriage as God intended it from the beginning in Eden. In Genesis God set the example of marriage through His creation of Adam and Eve. Their coming forth from God and union with each other is the example of the *persons communion* which reflects the *Imago Dei* that Pope John Paul II indicated in “*Theology of the Body*”. The man and woman's love produces a unity between them. The fruit of this loving union then becomes creative, and children are born of it. It is therefore a mirror of the Trinitarian nature of God – wherein the mutual love of the Father and the Son produces the Holy Ghost.

In reflection of this God Image the union of a man and woman, therefore, must be based on love and treatment of each other that is in keeping with their dignity as persons. Equality exists between the man and woman, even as they hold differing positions in the marriage. In current times, when the institution of marriage is frequently attacked and the dignity of women in the Catholic Church is criticized by many, Pope John Paul II's teachings highlight how women are honoured (both as individuals and within marriage) by the Catholic Church. The Holy Father respect for the woman is centred around her as a person, as well as her unique vocation and privilege to bring forth and nurture life. And in keeping with this honour, Pope John Paul II did not detract from the man's dignity either. Rather, he demonstrated how much beings possess individual dignity that becomes a mysterious unification through love and marriage.

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