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The Theology of the Body in the United States

JOSÉ GRANADOS DCJM

From 1979 to 1984, John Paul II gave us his catechesis on “Human Love in the Divine Plan,” also known as the “Theology of the Body.” [1] This theology has been widely received in the United States and offers the hope of fruit in the future. What cultural and theological implications does the spread of this catechesis have in America? In order to answer this question, we will need to examine, first of all, the cultural situation of the country during the 20th Century, especially with regard to sexuality and the body. We will then move on to analyze the main points of the Pope’s teachings and their cultural and theological influence. Finally, we will review some of the criticism raised with regard to the Theology of the Body and open some perspectives for the future.

1. America and the Sexual Revolution: The Context for the Reception of the Theology of the Body

What form did the sexual revolution take in the United States? The process that led to it is a long one, and must be described in several steps. [2]

The first step involves the Puritan heritage, which is at the root of the formation of this country. We should avoid caricatures of Puritans as obsessed repressors of sexuality. [3] A more balanced judgment affirms that the Puritans valued sexuality as part of God’s creation and an important part of family life.[4]

It is true, however, that the Puritans had great suspicions regarding sexual desire as such, which they considered as intrinsically and unavoidably disordered because of concupiscence, an evil force that God’s grace does not heal from within. For the Puritan, concupiscence remained an accursed part of being, a force that made the Christian simultaneously a just man and a sinner. The only way of ordering the lustful desires of the heart was the external control of the law: both the law of man and the Law of God. In the words of a historian,

the remedy for the sins of the flesh enumerated and condemned in Puritan sermons was unambiguously a matter of increased control. Control was, first, to be imposed by parental authority. . . . Control was also imposed by the magistracy. . . . Most significantly, control was to be enforced from within, against the nature that struggled for expression. [5]

Thus, Puritan society was characterized by the importance accorded to the Law. Both morality and religion consisted of obedience to the rules given by God to man. All of this was of singular concern to the family, because the latter was precisely the structure provided to keep sexual desire in order.

The situation did not change much with the coming of the Enlightenment. It is true that the thinkers of the time held a more positive view of human nature, in whose goodness they believed. On the other hand, with its exclusive focus on reason, the Enlightenment contributed little to understanding the world of passions and affections. It thus offered a model of submission to the rule of reason that was very close to the Puritan model of control by the Law. Moreover, the Enlightenment completed the secularization of sexuality and the family, cutting its connection with God and the divine mystery, a process the Protestant reform—with its denial of the sacramentality of marriage—had already initiated in some form, maybe without foreseeing the ultimate consequences.

The Enlightenment also brought with it an individualistic vision of the human person, thought of as an autonomous subject of rights. This individualism, of course, was linked in America to a special “art of association” [6] and to the birth of a democracy that proclaimed the equality of all under the law. But this communitarian “corrective” risked remaining on the surface of the understanding of man, without deeply modifying the vision of the person as an autonomous individual. [7]

The Romantic movement arrived in the United States later than it did in Europe. It brought with it a new consideration of love as a passion: romantic love focused on the realm of the emotions, in contrast to the Puritan conception and the cold approach of the Enlightenment. Romanticism’s effect was positive in that it rediscovered the topic of love and insisted on its place in human life; as a result, the relational aspect of marriage was strengthened. The Romantics’ excessive focus on the emotions, however, made of sentiment an invincible force that imposed itself on the lovers, thus prolonging the opposition between reason and love that had been characteristic of the Enlightenment.

The 20 th century saw the fall of Victorian society, which had exaggerated many traits of the Puritan approach. In this regard, the influence of Sigmund Freud is very important. It grew in the United States after 1909, when Freud took part in a conference at Clark University in Wooster, Massachusetts. Freud’s theories were very critical towards the Puritan ethos, which he held responsible for repressing the sexual drives of individuals. Even if Freud did not want his discoveries to be used as an endorsement of free love, the popularized version of his teachings in America tended to do just that. In the United States, Freudianism took the form of

interpreting the sexual urge as an irrepressible force.[8] It was easy to jump to the conclusion that sexuality needed to be freed from the inhibiting rules of society, in particular the family, the basic structure that in Puritan society had regulated the sexual urge.

Throughout the 20 th century there emerged a new way of living and expressing sexuality, manifested especially in a change of behavioral standards among young people, and an increasing interest in sexual expression and pleasure within marriage.[9] This process was aided by the appearance of contraception, which during this period saw a rapid rise in demand. This is the period of “sexual liberation”: sexuality is promoted as a source of pleasure and enjoyment, but an effort is made to confine its exercise to marriage.

This process was indeed a preparation for the crisis that came in the 1960s. For once sexuality was severed from reproduction by contraception, and the value of sexual pleasure tended to become an absolute, it was difficult to contain it within the limits of the family. The structure of “sexual liberation” broke down with the sexual revolution, which brought about a sudden rise in promiscuity.

It is important to notice that this process also had an economic side. The industry of pornography and the exploitation of sex by television and marketing companies is part of the history of America during the 20 th century. Hugh Hefner built an economic empire around Playboy magazine. The desire for sex was conceived as a market opportunity that the business genius of America was eager to exploit. The focus on pleasure ended up being a focus on performance, for which the industry continually provided the means of improvement, thus increasing the needs that it claimed to satisfy.

All these cultural shifts took place along with the suburbanization of America in the post-World War II era, which brought about a greater separation between the private realm of the family and the public realm of work, thus making the family less influential in society and stressing the separation between the private life of the individual and the public square. [10]

Within this process, the focus shifted from a conception of sexuality as something to be controlled and repressed or contained within marriage, to a vision of sexuality as an impulse vital for the flourishing of the human person, and whose unlimited expression was both an inalienable right and an irrepressible need of the individual. These are the roots of the Pansexualism that grew with the sexual revolution. [11]

Some historians talk of the “other sexual revolutions” referring to the gay movement and feminism. These movements stressed the view that sexuality is not only a source of pleasure to be liberated, but also a place for the free expression of subjectivity, a realm open for transformation according to the personal project of each individual. As the sociologist Anthony Giddens has argued, sexuality now has become plastic, to be lived out according to the model of “pure relations,” that is, relations in which what is central is the autonomous will of each citizen, freed from any constraints of nature or tradition. In his view, the gay rights movement

has the distinction of having pioneered this enterprise. [12]

It is necessary to highlight the countermovement that followed in the United States during the 80s and 90s, as the realization of the damage caused by the sexual revolution grew. This countermovement placed a great emphasis on family values and appealed to a large sector of the population, thus playing an important role in politics. [13] This reaction reveals an important difference between American and European society. Among the reasons that provoked it, one can surely point to a resurgence of Puritan ideas, which were more deeply rooted in American soil, but also to the capacity of American society to react to the devastation that followed the years of sexual revolution, a capacity that seemed to be absent in many European countries. [14] Maybe this concern for the family can also account for the success of John Paul II's proposal in the United States, for the Pope's catechesis emerges precisely as a response to this situation, as a coherent vision of human sexuality.

However, in order to be effective, the catechesis cannot be read in a superficial way, as merely an appeal to an adequate moral response to the problems of our time. The teaching needs to be addressed in all its anthropological and ontological depth. For the cultural process we have described is the forging of a new vision of man, together with a new perspective on love and the body. What we have at its end is the image of a person as someone who drives forward the realization of his own life, a man liberated from a repressive superstructure (God and society, and especially the family) and is finally free—meaning radically autonomous. Paradoxically, this autonomy is linked to a vision of nature as a force that imposes itself upon the subject: man is obliged to satisfy the sexual urge and its dictates. And so, the freedom that man seems to achieve is contradicted by the dictatorships of the impulses, which annul this very freedom. This internal contradiction of a broken subject, who is at the same time self-sufficient and fully dependent on sentiments and impulses, can only result in anxiety as its fruit. What response can the Theology of the Body offer to this situation?

2. John Paul II's Theology of the Body

The cultural context of the sexual revolution helps us understand the depth of John Paul II's proposal. To be sure, John Paul II's catechesis expresses his desire to strengthen the vocation to the family—in the context of the effects brought about by the sexual revolution—yet it does so by addressing the deeper problems that underlie these cultural changes, problems that are anthropological in nature. The greater scope of the catechesis is shown in the fact that John Paul II's interest in the Theology of the Body was not limited to the beginning of his Pontificate, but was in fact a project he pursued throughout his life, as is laid out in other documents such as *Familiaris Consortio*, *Evangelium Vitae*, and his *Letter to Families*. An interesting example of this continued concern is the book of poems *Roman Triptych*, one of the last things he wrote, in which he returns to topics developed in the Wednesday catecheses.

Three factors are crucial for interpreting John Paul II's contribution: a) a renewed theological vision, at the core of the Second Vatican Council, that places Christ and the Incarnation at the center of the interpretation of man and society (cf. GS 22); b) a vision of the human body that

allows one to recover for theology the concept of experience and to describe human life in the overall context of love, and; c) a corresponding anthropology of love, centered in the family, as a privileged place in the world where God reveals himself, thus opening up the possibility of understanding, in this light, the Christian vision of God, man, and the world. [15]

a. The Centrality of Christ's Revelation

The *Catecheses on Human Love in the Divine Plan* are a theological text, inspired by Christian revelation; they deal with the meaning of human love in the divine plan and with the sacrament of marriage. Thus, the Pope bases his reflection on biblical texts (mainly Genesis, the Gospels, and the Epistles of Paul, but also references to the Prophets, the Wisdom tradition, the Song of Songs, the book of Tobit, the Gospel and Epistles of John).

Crucial for John Paul II's teaching is a paragraph from *Gaudium et spes*, 22: "Christ, the final Adam by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear." This text provides for John Paul II the key to interpreting the Second Vatican Council: the Church can in fact talk to the modern world only when she is grounded in her own center, and this center is Christ. It is from the mystery of Christ, who has assumed human life in all its depth, that any dialogue with the world becomes possible and fruitful. In Christ, because of the Incarnation, it is possible for the Church to stand in the place of the world, so as to look at it, not from the outside, but from within. This also makes it possible to elevate the world towards God, not by denying its reality, but by bringing it to fulfillment.

In the light of Christ, a new interpretation of the human person can be put forward: the human being is seen now in the light of love, the love of the Father that surrounds him from the beginning of his existence and calls him to communion with God and men. Being based on the Incarnation and life of Christ, this vision of the human being gives pride of place to the body, as the realm where God's love, his mystery, becomes manifest. To see the importance of the body, it suffices to think of any of the Christian mysteries: the Incarnation, the Resurrection of the Body, the Eucharist, or the Ecclesiology of the Body of Christ.

In this regard, the Theology of the Body can claim deep roots in tradition. First, it has been the constant teaching of the Church that love is placed at the center of Christianity. As Maximus the Confessor puts it, the Disciples of Christ are those who can talk best about love, because they have as their Master "Charity himself." [16] The focus on the body is also justified by tradition: the Church Fathers promoted a vision of the human person based on the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus, which shed new light on their understanding of man. [17] Recent studies highlight the importance given to the body by key Fathers and Doctors of the Church: Irenaeus, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor, Thomas Aquinas, etc. [18]

A vision of man that starts from Christ will understand the person as someone loved by the Father and called to love in return, and will reveal the centrality of the body in carrying forward this call to love. The Theology of the Body is an exploration of the way the following

three dimensions interrelate: a) Christ's revelation of himself and the Father's love, b) the meaning of the body in light of the Incarnation, c) love as the key to understanding the link between God, man, the world.

This link leads us to point out a crucial methodological point: the circularity between the revelation of Christ's love and the experience of man. The connecting point that allows Wojtyła to articulate human experience and divine revelation is the reflection on love and the body. We have, on the one hand, the revelation of Christ, who shows us the path of love, and on the other hand, the analysis of human experience, in which the encounter of love, made possible through man's corporeality, takes on crucial importance. This circularity is such that each of the poles is related from within itself towards the other. First, the experience of love is open towards the coming of God's revelation. Second, only the revelation of Christ shows us the final horizon and primordial origin of man's call to love. Thus, the analysis of love is crucial for the presentation of Christianity, for love is this point in human experience in which the divine can make itself present and manifest.

We will now analyze these two dimensions opened up by the revelation of Christ to man: the importance of the body and the centrality of love.

b. A Theology of the Body

The body has become important in contemporary reflection precisely as the way to rethink the vision of man and to break the isolation proper to modern individualism. Reflection on the body is seen as crucial in the new cultural situation, not only to understand the private life of individuals, but the very building of society. In some authors we see a vision of the body as plastic material for man to give form to (cf. the Sociology of the Body initiated by A. Giddens). In this way the new understanding of the body could serve the project of modernity towards a democratic understanding of human life that enters finally into the private sphere of individuals. Others, such as M. Foucault, see the body as a social construct, as a way in which society exerts power over the individual. Inasmuch as the body reveals the sexual difference of man and woman, the study of the body is linked to the concerns raised by the sexual revolution.

Why did the body become so important in our time and what is the right way of understanding it as an element of man's constitution? The topic of the body as a philosophical and theological theme acquired weight during the second half of the 20th century. Whereas the phenomenology of Husserl and the existentialism of Heidegger paved the way for the appearance of this reflection, both philosophers failed to develop it in all its richness. [19] In their wake, thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gabriel Marcel, Emanuel Lévinas and Hans Jonas issued a rich philosophical reflection on the body.[20]

Merleau-Ponty makes the body the center of his "Phenomenology of perception," by describing corporeality as man's form of having a world. Lévinas, who accepts Merleau-Ponty's analysis, sees in the body the place where the presence of alterity, of the Other, is revealed to consciousness. Hans Jonas, a disciple of Heidegger, insists also on the body as the point that

allows one to overcome modern dualism by being the point of connection between man and his environment; Jonas' disciples have continued his reflections, especially in studying the link between medicine and philosophy. [21] Finally, Gabriel Marcel connects reflection on the body with a philosophy of the family. Man's incarnate condition, for Marcel, is deeply connected to man's belonging to a family, by which one's identity is constituted.[22]

John Paul II's contribution was to present the body in its connection with love, an operation from which both reflection on the body and reflection on love came out enriched. The body, being at the same time objective and subjective, belonging both to the external world and to man's interiority, makes man's presence to and participation in the world possible. At the same time, it opens up man's life to the encounter with the other and towards the horizon of transcendence. The great question that man is for himself, if placed concretely in the body, that is, taking into account that man is an incarnate being, becomes answerable only in terms of relationship with the world, others, and God. Thus, reflection on the body prevents love from becoming an accidental ingredient in man's life, rendering it instead an intrinsic part of his constitution.

Concretely, this bodily presence of man in the world opens up towards the two dimensions in which John Paul II develops his anthropology: man's relationship to God (called by John Paul II original solitude) and the relationship between man and woman that gives birth to the family (original unity, in John Paul II's language). In and through the body, John Paul II develops an anthropology of love, that is, a vision of man intrinsically constituted by love (human and divine). [23] Let us focus now on this important point.

c. An Anthropology of Love

John Paul II's catechesis refers directly in its title to the meaning of human love and the sacrament of marriage. The original title of these reflections is not *The Theology of the Body*, but *Man and Woman He Created Them*. John Paul II says also that this teaching can be grasped under the title: Human Love in the Divine Plan.[24] What this reveals is that the center and focus of the catechesis is not the body in itself, but the truth of human love in the context of the divine plan. It is because it is intrinsic to this truth of love, in which John Paul II sees the way to fulfillment of the human being, that the body is of crucial interest.

As we have said, the body reveals man's participation in the world and, in this way, defines him as a being constituted by relationality. The Theology of the Body insists that this corporeal relationality is, from the beginning of man's journey in life, the way in which he opens himself to transcendence and thus relates to God. God does not appear, then, as someone in front of whom man is placed, in a subject-object relationship; nor primarily as the totally Other who always lies beyond the horizon of comprehension or reach; but first of all as the all-embracing background in which man lives and moves. He appears as the ultimate origin which first surrounds man when he comes into the world, and which then calls man to communion with him. God appears both as the origin and the destiny of human life, which takes the form of a

path in time towards fulfillment.

John Paul II refers to this fundamental coordinate of man's experience as original solitude, in connection with God's statement in Genesis: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). This solitude before God is, then, from the beginning, a matter of relationship with him, both as the Creator and as the fulfillment of man's aspirations. The fact that this transcendence is rooted in the body is crucial to understanding the form God's presence takes in the life of man. Contrary to what the spiritualistic conception may be, God is not to be found by transcending the body, but rather by increasing the level of incarnation: that is, of man's relationship to reality and the world. Man's incarnate condition allows for God to appear as the true and living God, as the Creator, origin and end of the world. He is not the God of the idols, who can be manipulated as an object, nor the Gnostic God, an unattainable being always beyond man's reach.

The possibility of God appearing as a Giver, and not as an oppressive Master who always demands too much from man, is opened up by God's connection with a decisive experience in human life: the encounter of love between man and woman. Adam's encounter with Eve, as a help-meet for him, bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh (cf. Gen 2:23), is called by John Paul II the experience of original unity. In original unity the human body (in its masculinity and femininity) reveals that man is called to love. This unity is to be connected with the experience of original solitude (man's relationship to God), for it is this encounter between Adam and Eve that finally reveals the face of God as a Father, who has entrusted Eve to Adam and vice versa. In the gift of Eve, in fact, God is infinitely exceeding his previous bestowals upon the first man, entrusting him with a being who, like Adam, is called to transcend this world and is loved by God for her own sake (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24). Thus, the possibility of the body revealing God is linked, for John Paul II, with its capacity to reveal the other person in his or her dignity. It is in the bodily encounter of love between man and woman that God reveals himself to man as a Father, as the loving origin and destiny of man's journey.

The coming of a child is the seal of unity between Adam and Eve (who, in the child, are forever one flesh) and the final proof of God's presence in their love (cf. Gen 4:1: "I have conceived a child with the help of the Lord"). The fecundity of the union witnesses in a singular way to God's presence in the love of the couple, and to the ultimate divine mystery manifested in their union.

At this point, the Theology of the Body becomes a theology of the family, according to what John Paul II calls the "genealogy of the person." [25] God's revelation takes place, not only in the relationship between Adam and Eve, but in all the family relationships, especially in the link between parents and children. The way of love that the person is called to walk can be described in three steps: accepting one's being as a child, who proceeds ultimately from the Father (original solitude); thus being able to give oneself as a spouse, rooted in the love received from the Father (original unity); and finally becoming a father or mother, with the fecundity that comes from the union. The fact that all these relationships are inscribed in the body allows us to speak of a triple meaning of the body: filial (the body reveals to man that he is a child), spousal (the body tells him that he is called to give himself), procreative (or paternal /maternal: the body attests to the human being's capacity to become a father or a mother).

The Christological perspective of all of the above is present, even if not always explicitly, in John Paul II's vision. Christ is the Son of the Father who gives himself up for the Church, his Spouse, in order to generate the new life of Christians. The history of Christ's life in the flesh, as a history of filiation, spousality and paternity, becomes the pattern that explains in its fullness the way of man, and brings the human family to communion with the Father.

In this brief description there are some important topics that we do not have the space to develop. One of them relates to the effect of concupiscence, man's refusal to accept God's logic of love. Because of concupiscence the body loses the clarity and transparency of the language of gift, substituting instead a logic of domination and possession. A second, crucial topic is the eschatological perspective John Paul II gives to his catechesis by including the topic of the resurrection of the body and connecting this with the virginal state of life.

As is clear from this presentation of John Paul II's thought, a theology of the body is not concerned only with the topic of sexuality. [26] It includes many other areas, which are only developed in a small part by the Pope in his catechesis. Some of these are addressed in other writings, such as, for example, the issue of work in *Laborem Exercens* or the "suffering body" in *Salvifici Doloris*. The consequences of the Theology of the Body apply transversely to all of theology and they affect the way we understand all theological themes. As an example we can think of the theology of the liturgy, ecclesiology or sacramentology, as areas that could profit from this vision of the body. [27]

After having summarized the understanding of John Paul II's Theology of the Body, we will examine some of the objections raised against it in the Anglo-Saxon realm.

3. Review of Some Criticism on the Theology of the Body and Perspectives for the Future

The Theology of the Body constitutes one of the main heritages of John Paul II's Pontificate. Prompted by the cultural crisis of the sexual revolution, and written in support of *Humanae Vitae*, his analysis develops a solid anthropology of love. Scholars have not failed to acknowledge the importance of his proposal. [28] George Weigel, in his well-known biography of John Paul II, praises its theological potential for the future of theology and society. [29] Fergus Kerr, in his review of 20th century Catholic Theology, counts it among the two most significant initiatives of John Paul II's Pontificate: the first regards "the future of the papal ministry, when he invited interested parties to help reshape the office, and the other, even more remarkable, in theological anthropology, when he made nuptial mysticism the center of his teaching." [30]

We shall divide our comments on the evaluation of the Theology of the Body into three sections. The first one regards the method; the second, the anthropological consequences of the Theology of the Body in the framework of a theology of love; the third deals with the capacity of this approach to explain the whole Christian vision of God, man and the world. Alongside the presentation we will offer some remarks on the aspects that need to be developed for the

Theology of the Body to continue being fruitful.

a. Methodological Questions

In his *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism*, Fergus Kerr describes the novelty of the method John Paul II uses to defend the conclusions held by *Humane Vitae*. According to his description, the new line of argument does not follow the path of natural law (which had been customary in arguing against contraception), but is based on a commentary of biblical texts and revelation: “John Paul II’s faith-based doctrine of nuptiality seems to render non-theological natural law thinking in sexual ethics quite redundant. Putting this another way, we may say that it looks as if Catholic Christian ethics, in regard to marriage, depends entirely on the nuptial meaning of the body as revealed in the opening chapters of the book of Genesis.”^[31] Kerr notes that many a scholar remained puzzled by this change.^[32]

It is true that John Paul II develops an argument based not only on natural law premises but also on biblical revelation, thus providing a larger context for his presentation. This framework better serves to highlight the connection between love and procreation, understood as an intrinsic element of truth about love, and as a token that reveals God’s presence within the union of love. But it is worth emphasizing that this reasoning does not entail a rupture concerning the doctrine of natural law, as if the latter were no longer necessary. On the contrary, John Paul II bases his method on a correlation between human experience (thus including in itself arguments from natural law) and Christian revelation. ^[33] Both are connected because both are interpreted in terms of the (corporeal) encounter of love, as we have explained above. While human experience finds its summit in love, divine revelation shows us the fullness of God’s love in Christ’s life and death in the flesh.

From this point of view, the defense of natural law is made from the perspective of the acting person (with its focus on experience), and not from a purely naturalistic point of view (cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 78). It is also connected with the meaning inscribed in the body, as having a language proper to itself (cf. *Veritatis Splendor*, 48). But this was always the perspective of authentic Catholic tradition in the first place.

The method developed by John Paul II in his catechesis is the one indicated in *Fides et Ratio*, 73, which explains the circularity between faith and reason, while the Theology of the Body catechesis prefers to speak from a phenomenological perspective of a circular link between human experience and divine revelation. It is important to note that John Paul II, in speaking of experience, avoids the risk of subjectivism, for his point of departure is the experience of love, which implies an openness to otherness and towards transcendence. In this perspective the body plays a crucial role as the locus of encounter with the world, others, and God. Divine revelation, on the other hand, is understood not as a mere communication of knowledge, but as the personal revelation of love’s fullness (cf. 1 John 4:9-12; 16) in Christ’s body, and is thus not alien to human experience, but intimately connected with it.

Some criticism has been raised against John Paul II's way of interpreting the Scriptures. He has been accused of jumping too quickly to conclusions that are out of the perspective of the biblical text. [34] To this criticism we could respond that John Paul II's reading of Scripture witnesses to the richness of scriptural interpretation, a richness not exhausted by one perspective alone. Proper to his method is the search for unity, which does not despise critical analysis but offers a broader perspective to integrate the results of this analysis. This unity is provided by placing the Bible in dialogue with human experience and by reading it in the unity of the two Testaments, which includes the light of its fulfillment in Christ.[35] This method allows for a nuptial interpretation of the Bible to emerge, following what John Paul II calls the "Great Analogy" of God's love towards his People, as to a Bride. There is no lack of new proposals in biblical hermeneutics that allow for this comprehensive reading of the Bible.[36]

b. Anthropological Significance of the Theology of the Body

Let us now consider the criticisms referred to the anthropological significance of the Theology of the Body, especially regarding moral theology and the family. The merit of John Paul II's contribution has been acknowledged; the Pope offers a deep and renewed reflection on the meaning of sexuality and human love based on a personalistic perspective. Many argue, however, that he develops his theology of the body in too narrow a frame. [37]

First, some see in the Pope's approach an excessive focus on the gift of self that neglects other dimensions of sexuality, such as its beauty, passion, and spontaneity. [38] It is true that the idea of gift of self can lead to oversimplifications when it is read in a merely moralistic sense, as if it were the result of a voluntaristic desire to forget oneself in favor of others. For John Paul II, however, the gift of self does not come out of the sole self-determination of the subject, but is rooted in a previous acceptance of one's self as issuing from the hands of God, mediated by others (in the first place, one's parents). This means that the gift of self to the other always recognizes the prior goodness of one's identity, recognized in the love by which a person is surrounded when he comes into existence. Self-dominion, as a consequence, is not just a stoic virtue of control, but is rooted in man's receptivity: he possesses himself when he has received himself from the hands of another. It is the reception of the gift, and the gratitude that comes from it, that moves us to love in our turn. This love is in fact the only way to keep the gift alive: one possesses oneself only inasmuch as one gives oneself out to others. It is only in this context that a true spontaneity can be obtained: not the spontaneity of "anything goes," but a spontaneity analogous to that of the consummated artist who expresses beauty, a spontaneity which the Christian tradition has associated with the concept of virtue. [39]

Secondly, a more radical objection is that the Theology of the Body has a flawed understanding of sexual complementarity and its significance for Christian life. Such an emphasis leads allegedly to the conclusion that men and women who are not married are not complete and their humanity is lacking something. [40] But this conclusion does not follow from the way John Paul II reads sexual complementarity. Each Christian vocation develops in the body, is

connected with corporeality, and takes into account the person's concrete sexuality. What is common to all is the vocation (call) to love, and the pattern of filiation, sponsality and parenthood (the pattern of the family) inscribed in our bodies. What is crucial to all walks of life is that love has to be received (as children), given away (as spouses) and become fruitful (as parents). This pattern is common to marriage and virginity, and does not exclude anyone from the common vocation to love. Virginity, let us note, is for John Paul II not a denial of bodiliness, but a participation in the fullness that Christ himself, virgin and son of a virgin, brought to the body by his Incarnation, bodily death and bodily Resurrection.

Some have accepted the notion of complementarity, but have redefined it by distinguishing its different levels: heterogenital, reproductive, communal, affective, and parental, to which an orientation complementarity is added in order to include homosexual persons. [41] Heterogenital complementarity is considered then relevant for some people, according to their orientation. The argument, however, does not take into account that the body is—already in its physical aspect—the primordial connection between the person and the world, as John Paul II argues in his *Theology of the Body*. An essential element of my own being, and of my gift to the other person, is this bodiliness I have not created, a bodiliness that witnesses to my coming from another. Not to integrate genital complementarity is to leave out an essential element of experience, preventing it of its wholeness and truth.

This criticism suggests two important areas of development of the *Theology of the Body*. The first refers to the connection between the body and nature and how the natural dynamism of the body is integrated into human action as a necessary part of it. Biology, in the human being, is never mere biology. In this sense, the structures of nature convey a meaning that is needed in order to understand how love takes into account the wholeness of experience.

Secondly, it is necessary further to develop the meaning of the sexual difference between man and woman by better clarifying the meaning of masculinity and femininity. The problem is only hinted at in the *Theology of the Body* and deserves more study. In any event, in John Paul II's vision, complementarity is not to be seen as the relationship of two halves that, when put together, constitute the whole (theories of polarity, in Prudence Allen's terminology). [42] Thus, stereotypes of the understanding of masculinity and femininity, such as, for example, in terms of activity and passivity, are to be avoided. In fact, John Paul II conceives of the union as an encounter of two solitudes that refer towards God and only find fulfillment in him. This means, first of all, that the two persons remain a whole in their union (Prudence Allen speaks in this regard of integral complementarity), and also that both are open towards transcendence. Masculinity and femininity represent two incarnations of the same original solitude before God and, in this sense, two ways in which the divine becomes present in the world. This openness of complementarity towards transcendence allows us better to understand its fulfillment in consecrated virginity.

Finally, it has also been said that John Paul II has too narrow a vision of bodiliness, as if the body referred only to the sexual body. This concern is indeed a valid one. However, one can argue that John Paul II was already aware of this limitation of his catechesis. He did not want to

offer a complete Theology of the Body, but limited his reflections to marriage and family. At one point in his catechesis he notes, for example, that a theology of suffering would need to be developed as an essential part of theological reflection on the body. [43] What is essential here is not how much ground the catechesis covers, but the greatness of the horizon it opens up.

c. On the Theology of the Body as a Viewpoint for Understanding the Whole of Theology

Other studies have seen the Papal text as an occasion to develop a complete theological synthesis. The Theology of the Body becomes a way to interpret the whole of Christianity, taking as its point of departure the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The most basic approach for such a synthesis is the development of the intuition expressed by Tertullian: *caro salutis est cardo* (the flesh is the hinge of salvation). [44] The body—body of Christ, body of the Church, body of the Eucharist—is in the New Testament the place where God has revealed himself and his love: it is the place of the manifestation of God as love. From the point of view of this connection between body and love, proper both to human experience and divine revelation, a presentation of the different aspects of the faith can be offered.

The link between body and love allows us also to introduce, in the context of a theology of the body, the nuptial perspective. [45] Fergus Kerr has summarized the path of 20th century Catholic theology with this subtitle: From Neo-scholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism. [46] Kerr reviews the change engaged in by theology during the 20th century as a surprising growth of the nuptial interpretation, tracing it back to de Lubac's reading of Origen, followed by Von Balthasar's and continued by Karol Wojtyła and Joseph Ratzinger. Kerr's judgment regarding the future of John Paul II's Theology of the Body remains suspended: "Whether his distinctive theology of nuptiality will pass into the common teaching of the Catholic Church, as he obviously hoped, it is surely too early even to guess." [47]

With regard to this, it is important to note that the possibility of developing a Theology of the Body is not rooted mainly upon a particular interpretation of Origen. Understood, first of all, as a theology that places at its center the connection between body and love, branches of the tradition such as the one represented by Irenaeus of Lyons and Tertullian—centered in the *salus carnis*, the salvation of the flesh—offer a solid grounding. The nuptial image was used by these Fathers to express the union between the Spirit (as God's love) and the flesh, in which they saw a summary of the history of salvation. [48]

In any event, if it is to offer the key for an entire theological synthesis, the focus on nuptiality is to be broadened to embrace the whole path of the family, thus including the entire set of family relationships: parents and children, husband and wife, brothers and sisters.... In other words, the characterization of this theology as nuptial must not forget that nuptiality is first of all rooted in filiation, and open always towards a relationship with God, present in the love between man and woman. [49] Only in this way does Scripture offer a solid ground from which to build up this synthesis, both in the Old and New Testament, where family relationships

appear as a key image for reading the covenant between God and man. Only in this way can a proper analogy of love be developed, an analogy that recognizes the differences between filial, nuptial and paternal/maternal love. Precisely the fact that these relationships extend in time and cannot be grasped in a simultaneous way, prevents a clear correspondence between the members of the family and the divine persons of the Trinity, thus preserving the *maior dissimilitudo* of the Fourth Lateran Council.

This suffices for an evaluation of the cultural and theological potential of John Paul II's catechesis in the United States. When one studies the causes that led to the sexual revolution in this country, one sees how deep the roots are. Thus, the response, in which different fields each contribute their approach, needs to address the deepest anthropological problems. The development of a Theology of the Body is now a necessity for the Church, as well as an opportunity to present the core of her message, centered on the Incarnation and the Resurrection of the Body. Once again, in her effort to defend herself and the Gospel, the Church has the means not only to respond to her critics, but also to make these responses a greater presentation of the beauty of the truth from which she draws her life.

[1] For the text, cf. the translation by Michael Waldstein: John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006) which greatly improves the previous edition.

[2] For the following presentation, cf. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters : A History of Sexuality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) and Juan José Pérez-Soba, *El corazón de la familia, Presencia y diálogo* (Madrid: Publicaciones de la Facultad de Teología San Dámaso, 2006).

[3] Cf. Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritans and Sex," *The New England Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1942): 591–607.

[4] Cf. Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

[5] Cf. Kathleen Verduin, "'Our Cursed Natures': Sexuality and the Puritan Conscience," *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1983): 220–37, here 231–32; cf. p. 226: "Though officially approved and accommodated by marriage, sexuality to the Puritan conscience must have remained the sign of a dangerously stubborn self-will whose indulgence challenged the power and authority of God."

[6] Cf. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, part II, chapter XXVII.

[7] Cf. D. L. Schindler, "Is America Bourgeois?" *Communio: International Catholic Review* 14 (1987): 264–90.

[8]Cf. D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 223–24: “Above all, Americans absorbed a version of Freudianism that presented the sexual impulse as an insistent force demanding expression. ‘The urge is there,’ wrote an American analyst, A. A. Brill, ‘and whether the individual desires or no, it always manifests itself.’”

[9]Cf. Ibid.

[10]On this regard, cf. Allan C. Carlson, *The Family in America: Searching for Social Harmony in the Industrial Age* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003).

[11]For a vision of some of the consequences of the sexual revolution, cf. Laura Sessions Stepp, *Unhooked : How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love and Lose at Both* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007); Elizabeth Marquardt, *Between Two Worlds: The Inner Lives of Children of Divorce* (New York: Crown, 2005); Allan David Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind : How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987); Wendell Berry, *Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

[12] Cf. Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

[13]Cf. Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: Free Press, 1999); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997).

[14]Cf. Julián Marías, *America in the Fifties and Sixties: Julián Marías on the United States* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1972).

[15]For studies on the Theology of the Body that deepen its different perspectives, cf. Mary Shivanandan, *Crossing the Threshold of Love: A New Vision of Marriage in the Light of John Paul II's Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1999); Mary Timothy Prokes, *Toward a Theology of the Body* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); Avery Robert Dulles, John M. McDermott, and John Gavin, *Pope John Paul II on the Body: Human, Eucharistic, Ecclesial: Festschrift Avery Cardinal Dulles, SJ* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2007).

[16]Cf. Capitulum de caritate, IV, 100 (Patrologia Graeca 90, 1073 A).

[17] For the Fathers, cf. chapter three of Adam G. Cooper, *Life in the Flesh: An Anti-Gnostic Spiritual Philosophy* (Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); for Aquinas, cf. Benedict M. Ashley, *Theologies of the Body: Humanist and Christian* (Braintree, MS: Pope John Center, 1995); M.-D. Chenu, “Pour une anthropologie sacramentelle,” *La Maison-Dieu. Revue de pastorale liturgique* 119 (1974): 85–100.

[18] Cf. Antonio Orbe, *Antropología de San Ireneo* (Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Madrid: 1969); Margaret Ruth Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979); Adam G. Cooper, *The Body in St. Maximus the Confessor: Holy Flesh, Wholly Deified* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); G. J. McAleer, *Ecstatic Morality and Sexual Politics : A Catholic and Antitotalitarian Theory of the Body* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005). Cf. also: Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, *Lectures on the History of Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[19] Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago: 1992).

[20] Cf. Gabriel Marcel, “L'être incarné, repère central de la réflexion métaphysique,” in *Du refus à l'invocation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1940); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, *Bibliothèque des idées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945); Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Evanston, IL: 2001).

[21] Cf. Stuart F. Spicker, *The Philosophy of the Body: Rejections of Cartesian Dualism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

[22] Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Homo viator : prolégomènes à une métaphysique de l'espérance* (Paris: Aubier, 1963).

[23] Cf. Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993).

[24] Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 659.

[25] Cf. *Letter to Families Gratissimam Sane* 9 (AAS 86 [1994] 878).

[26] Cf. José Granados, “Toward a Theology of the Suffering Body,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33 (2006): 540–63.

[27] On the liturgy and the body, cf. Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Experience and the Absolute : Disputed Questions on the Humanity of Man, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004). On the sacraments, cf. Louis-Marie Chauvet, *The Sacraments : The Word of God at the Mercy of the Body* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

[28] For a bibliography of publications in the United States, cf. L. A. Mitchell, “A Bibliography for the Theology of the Body,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (2003): 69–77.

[29] Cf. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Cliff Street Books, 1999).

[30] Cf. Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: from Neoscholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2007), 176.

[31]Cf. Ibid., 179.

[32]Cf., for example, Charles E. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 178: “One coming out of the Catholic tradition is also surprised by the lack of explicit development of natural law that continues to be the basis even for John Paul II’s position on norms governing sexuality.”

[33] In fact, some have criticized part of John Paul II’s argument, precisely on account of his reflection on human experience; cf. Christopher Chenault Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2007), 181, who nonetheless offers an overall positive appraisal of John Paul II’s contribution.

[34] Cf. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*, 177–79.

[35]Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 143–44.

[36]Cf., as an example, the work of Paul Beauchamp: Paul Beauchamp, *L’un et l’autre testament: essai de lecture* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977).

[37] Part of this refusal to accept the Theology of the Body is connected with the rejection of the Catholic Church’s sexual morality. Some think of the Theology of the Body as just an enormous apparatus to justify *Humanae Vitae* which, in their opinion, is flawed in its argument and wrong in its conclusions.

[38]Cf. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*, 170: “... there is no in-depth or systematic discussion of human love. . . . The opposite of love is treating the other as an object or as a means of sexual self-gratification. The contrast is between disinterested giving and selfish enjoyment (TOB 130). A more complete picture should recognize that the gift of self also involves some human fulfillment and sexual enjoyment.”

[39]Cf. L. T. Johnson, “A Disembodied Theology of the Body: John Paul II on Love, Sex and Pleasure,” *Commonweal* 128, no. 2 (2001): 11–17.

[40]Cf. Curran, *The Moral Theology of Pope John Paul II*, 168: “The theology of the body as developed by John Paul II, however, cannot serve as a theology for all bodies. In other words, there are different theologies of the body. What the pope develops in terms of the nuptial meaning of the body really does not apply to people who are single or those who are widows or widowers.”

[41]Cf. Michael G. Lawler, “Catholic Sexual Ethics: Complementarity and the Truly Human”, *Theological Studies* 67 (2006): 625-52.

[42]Cf. Prudence Allen, “Man-Woman Complementarity: The Catholic Inspiration,” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 9, no. 3 (2006): 87–108.

[43]Cf. John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 660.

[44] Cf., for an attempt of a theological synthesis based on the body: Adolphe Gesché, “L’invention chrétienne du corps,” *Revue théologique de Louvain* 35 (2004): 166–202.

[45] Cf. Angelo Scola, “The Nuptial Mystery: A Perspective for Systematic Theology,” in *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

[46] Cf. Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians*.

[47]Cf. *Ibid.*, 182.

[48]Cf. José Granados, “The Family, the Body, and Communio Ecclesiology: The Mission of the Family in the Midst of the Church as Communio,” *Anthropotes* 23, no. 2 (2007): 175–214.

[49]Cf. Angelo Scola, “Il Mistero nuziale: Originarietà e fecondità,” *Anthropotes* 23, no. 2 (2007): 57–70.