

The Human Person as Gift: John Paul II and the Theology of the Body

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³ And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” ⁴ He answered, “Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning *made them male and female*, ⁵ and 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*’? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. *What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.*” (Matthew 19:3–6)

Creation of Humanity in Genesis 1

²⁶ Then God said, “Let *us* make man in *our* image, after *our* likeness; and let them have *dominion* over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” ²⁷ So *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* ²⁸ And God blessed them, and God said to them, “*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.*” (Genesis 1:26–28)

Although man is so strictly tied to the visible world, nevertheless the biblical narrative does not speak of his likeness with the rest of creatures, but only with God.—John Paul II¹

God in His deepest mystery is not a solitude but a family because He has within Himself, Fatherhood, Sonship and the essence of the Family which is Love.—John Paul II²

Humanity images God in the family.— John Paul II³

One must recognize that the first account is concise, *free from any trace of subjectivism*: it contains only the objective fact and defines the objective reality.—John Paul II⁴

Creation of Humanity in Genesis 2

... then the LORD God formed *man* of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and *man* became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)

Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day.—Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes* 14, 1

The Creation of Eve from the Side of Adam in Genesis 2

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a *helper* [‘*ēzer*’] fit for him.”

¹⁹ So out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The *man* gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for the *man* there was not found a *helper* fit for him. ²¹ So the LORD God caused a *deep sleep* to fall upon the *man*, and *while he slept* took one of

¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (trans. Michael Waldstein; Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 135.

² John Paul II, *Puebla: A Pilgrimage of Faith*. Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1979.

³ *Letter to Families*, 6.

⁴ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 136.

his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; ²² and the rib which the LORD God had taken from the *man* he made into a *woman* and brought her to the *man*. ²³ Then the *man* said,

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called *Woman* [‘*iššā*] because she was taken out of *Man* [‘*iš*].”

²⁴ Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:18–24)

Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our *help* [‘*ezer*] and shield. (Ps 33:20; cf. Ps 115:9, 10, 11; 70:6; Exod 18:4)

Original Solitude

... the body expresses the person...—John Paul II⁵

The body, by which man shares in the visible created world, makes him at the same time aware of being “alone.—John Paul II⁶

Original Unity

... for the first time, the man (male) shows joy and even exultation, for which he had no reason before, due to the lack of a being similar to himself. Joy for the other human being, for the second “I,” dominates in the words the man (male) speaks on seeing the woman (female)... The concise text of Genesis 2:23, which contains the words of the first man on seeing the newly created woman, “taken from him,” can be considered *the biblical prototype of the Song of Songs*.—John Paul II⁷

In the light of this text we understand that the knowledge of man passes through masculinity and femininity, which are, as it were, two “incarnations” of the same metaphysical solitude before God and the world—*two reciprocally completing ways of “being a body” and at the same time of being human*—as ... *two complementary ways of being conscious of the meaning of the body*... Precisely the function of sex [that is, being male or female], which in some way is “constitutive for the person” (not only “an attribute of the person”), shows how deeply man, with all his spiritual solitude, with the uniqueness and unrepeatability proper to the person, is constituted by the body as “he” or “she.”

—John Paul II⁸

When both unite so intimately with each other that they become “one flesh,” their conjugal union presupposes a mature consciousness of the body. Better yet, this union *carries within itself a particular awareness of the meaning of that body in the reciprocal self-gift of the persons*.—John Paul II⁹

The Gift of the Body of Christ

“Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking.”

—Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4:18:5 (A.D. 189)

“He took from among creation that which is bread, and gave thanks, saying, ‘This is my body.’ The cup likewise, which is from among the creation to which we belong, he confessed to be his blood.” —Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4:17:5 (A.D. 189)

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⁵ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 154.

⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 152.

⁷ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 161–62.

⁸ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 166.

⁹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 169.