



**Applying the Theology of the Body
to Life & Relationships**

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Student Workbook


ASCENSION
West Chester, Pennsylvania

Abbreviations

CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> , Second Edition (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997)
DV	<i>Dominum et Vivificantem</i> , John Paul II's Encyclical Letter on the Holy Spirit (Pauline, 1986)
EA	<i>Ecclesia in America</i> , John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in America (Pauline, 1999)
EV	<i>Evangelium Vitae</i> , John Paul II's Encyclical Letter on the Gospel of Life (Pauline, 1995)
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> , John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation on the Christian Family (Pauline, 1981)
FR	<i>Fides et Ratio</i> , John Paul II Encyclical Letter on Faith and Reason (Pauline, 1998)
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Pauline, 1965)
KW	<i>Karol Wojtyla: The Thought of the Man Who Became John Paul II</i> , Rocco Buttiglione (Eerdmans, 1997)
LF	<i>Letter to Families</i> , John Paul II's Letter to Families in the Year of the Family (Pauline, 1994)
LR	<i>Love and Responsibility</i> , Karol Wojtyla's philosophical work on human sexuality (Ignatius Press, 1993)
MI	<i>Memory and Identity</i> , John Paul II's final written work before his death (Rizzoli, 2005).
PC	<i>Person and Community</i> , Selected Essays by Karol Wojtyla (Peter Lang, 1993)
RH	<i>Redemptor Hominis</i> , John Paul II's Encyclical Letter on the Redeemer of Man (Pauline, 1979)
TBE	<i>Theology of the Body Explained</i> , Christopher West's revised commentary on TOB (Pauline, 2007)
TOB	<i>Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body</i> , John Paul II's general audience addresses on Human Love in the Divine Plan (Pauline, 2006)
TM	<i>The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality</i> , Pontifical Council for the Family (Pauline, 1996)
VS	<i>Veritatis Splendor</i> , John Paul II's Encyclical Letter on the Splendor of Truth (Pauline, 1993)
WH	<i>Witness to Hope</i> , George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II (Harper Collins, 1999)

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“The body, in fact, and
only the body, is capable of
making visible what is invisible:
the spiritual and the divine.”

–St. John Paul II

God's Eternal Plan of **LOVE**

A Brief Overview of the Theology of the Body

1. What is the Theology of the Body?

Rediscovering the Meaning of Life

"Theology of the body" (TOB) is the working title John Paul II gave to 129 short talks he delivered between September 1979 and November 1984. It is a biblical reflection on the meaning of *human love*, especially how the love of man and woman is meant to reveal God's eternal plan of love to the world.

- While the TOB offers a beautiful and extensive reflection on the meaning of marital love, it is *critical* to realize that the TOB is not only for married people.
- If you have a body, this theology applies to you!

1a. Within the context of human sexuality and marital love, the TOB affords "the rediscovery of the meaning of the whole of existence, of the meaning of life" (TOB 46:6).

1b. Understanding the true meaning of the body and sexuality "concerns the whole Bible" (TOB 69:8). It plunges us into "the perspective of the whole Gospel, of the whole teaching, even more, of the whole mission of Christ" (TOB 49:3).

1c. The TOB "has barely begun to shape the Church's theology, preaching, and religious education. When it does, it will compel a dramatic development of thinking about virtually every major theme in the Creed" (Weigel, WH, p. 853).

1d. These "catechetical addresses, taken together, constitute a kind of *theological time bomb* set to go off with dramatic consequences ... perhaps in the twenty-first century" (Weigel, WH, p. 343).

What Makes the Human Body "Theological"?

We cannot see God. As pure Spirit, God is totally beyond our vision. Yet Christians believe that the invisible God has made himself visible. How?

1e. In "the body of Jesus 'we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see'" (CCC 477).

1f. "Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology ...through the main door" (TOB 23:4).



God's mystery has been revealed *in human flesh* – “theology of the body.” This phrase is not only the title of a series of talks by John Paul II. It represents the very *logic* of Christianity.

1g. “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” (TOB 19:4).

1h. Man “is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body...is a *spiritualized body*, just as man's spirit is...*an embodied spirit*” (LF 19).

The Eternal Exchange of Love

What is the divine mystery that the body signifies?

- It is the mystery of Trinitarian Life and Love – of God's eternal *Communion* as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- It is also the plan “hidden from eternity in God” (Eph 3:9) that man is destined in Christ to share in God's eternal bliss.

1i. “God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and he has destined us to share in that exchange” (CCC 221).

2. The Spousal Analogy

Scripture uses many images to describe God's love. Each has its own valuable place. But the spousal image is used far more than any other. It is also the favored image of the mystics.

- The Bible begins and ends with marriages – Adam-Eve and Christ-Church.
- The spousal book-ends of Genesis and Revelation are a key for interpreting all that lies between.
- The spousal analogy (like all analogies) is certainly limited and inadequate. No human image can do justice to the divine mystery. Yet JP II considers the spousal analogy the *least* inadequate.

God wanted this eternal plan of love and communion to be so obvious to us that he stamped an image of it in our very being by creating us as male and female.

2a. Man “became the image of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons, which man and woman form from the very beginning.... On all this, right from the beginning, the blessing of fruitfulness descended” (TOB 9:3).

“For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church” (Eph 5:21-32).

2b. “The Church cannot therefore be understood ...unless we keep in mind the ‘great mystery’ ...expressed in the ‘one flesh’ [union] of marriage and the family” (LF 19).

2c. “Saint Paul’s magnificent synthesis concerning the ‘great mystery’ appears as the...*summa*, in some sense, of the teaching about God and man which was brought to fulfillment by Christ” (LF 19).

3. Three Key Words of Christ

In his discussions about the love of man and woman, Christ himself points to the marriage of the *beginning* and the Marriage of our ultimate *destiny* (the two book ends of the Bible). Within *history* we live in a kind of “tension between these two poles” (TOB 71:2). This tension can awaken in us a great hope for the “redemption of our bodies” akin to the hope of a woman in labor (see Rom 8:22-23).

Our Origin

“For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8).

- We think all the tension, heartache, and difficulty in the male-female relationship is “normal.” In the beginning it was not this way. Something has gone dreadfully wrong.
- The good news is that “Jesus came to restore creation to the purity of its origins” (CCC 2336).

“And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25).

- John Paul II calls this the “key” for understanding God’s original plan for man and woman (see TOB 11:2).
- They experienced sexual desire (*eros*) only as the desire to love as God loves (*agape*). There is no shame (or fear) in love. “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn 4:18).

3a. Nakedness without shame reveals the *spousal meaning of the body* which is the body's "power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and – through this gift – fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence" (TOB 15:1).

3b. After sin, shame enters as "a natural form of self-defense for the person against the danger of descending...into the position of an object for sexual use" (LR, p. 182).

Our History

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28).

3c. Should we *fear* the severity of Christ's words, or rather *have confidence* in their power to save us (see TOB 43:7)?

3d. Christ's words are "an invitation to a pure way of looking at others, capable of respecting the spousal meaning of the body" (VS 15). Christ wants to inspire our sexual desires "with everything that is noble and beautiful," with "the supreme value which is love" (TOB 46:5).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ not only confirms the ethical demands of God's law, he proclaims the "new ethos" of the Gospel.

- *Ethos* refers to our inner-world of values, what attracts and repulses us.
- Christ doesn't want to impose laws on us. He wants to change our hearts – to "free us from the law" (see Gal 5:18).

3e. "Christian ethos is characterized by a *transformation of the human person...such as to express and realize the value of the body and sex according to the Creator's original plan*" (TOB 45:3).

We "groan inwardly as we wait for ...the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23).

3f. The "redemption of the body" expresses itself not only in the resurrection as victory over death. It is present also in the words of Christ addressed to the men and women of history when he invites us to overcome lust even in the inner movements of our hearts (see TOB 86:6).

Our Destiny

"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mt 22:30).

- Recall the two book-ends of the Bible. Which marriage is our ultimate fulfillment?
- Jesus is basically saying, "You no longer need a sign to point you *to* heaven when you're *in* heaven."



3g. In “the resurrection, we discover – in [a heavenly] perspective – the same...‘spousal’ meaning of the body...in the encounter with the mystery of the living God...face-to-face” (TOB 67:5).

3h. “In the joys of their love [God gives spouses] here on earth a foretaste of the wedding feast of the Lamb” (CCC 1642).

3i. The Church “longs to be united with Christ, her Bridegroom, in the glory of heaven” where she “will rejoice one day with [her] Beloved, in a happiness and rapture that can never end” (CCC 1821).

Some “have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 19:12).

- A eunuch is someone who cannot physically impregnate a woman.
- A eunuch “for the kingdom” is someone who freely forgoes sexual relations in order to devote all of his or her energies and desires to the union that alone can satisfy.
- Those who are celibate for the sake of the kingdom share the same vocation to love as those who marry, but manifest this same vocation in a different manner (See FC 11).

3j. On the basis of the same spousal meaning of the body there can be formed the love that commits a person to marriage for the whole of life (see Mt 19:3-9), but there also can be formed the love that commits a person to a life of celibacy “for the kingdom” (see TOB 80:6). Celibacy for the kingdom has “*acquired the meaning of an act of spousal love*” (TOB 80:1).

Study Questions for:

Talk 1: God's Eternal Plan of Love

1. Why is the Theology of the Body for everybody, and not only married people?
2. We are used to studying the body as an organism, as something *biological*. What makes the body something that is also *theological*. What makes the body a "study of God"?
3. John Paul II makes the remarkable claim that the verses of Ephesians 5 that link the "one flesh" union of spouses with the love of Christ and the Church is a kind of "summa" (or summary) of Christian teaching about who God is and who we are as human beings. How does this connection between true sexual love and divine love summarize Christian teaching about God and man?
4. What is your initial reaction to the idea that God wants to "marry" you?
5. Why is it important to look at our origin, history, and destiny in order to understand God's plan for love and sexuality?
6. Why do you think shame in their nakedness was the first result of original sin? What does it mean to be naked without shame and why is that important for understanding God's plan for sexuality?
7. What is the ultimate "sexual orientation"? In other words, what is the ultimate reason God gave us sexual longings and desires? Where does it all lead?

Notes:

Not for Duplication