

from Logos and Glory

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7. *The Glory of the Logos in John*

“Glory” plays a central role in TOB. John Paul II closely links it with the right ordering of sexuality. “Purity is the glory of the human body before God. It is the glory of God in the human body” (TOB 57:3). Since purity in the sexual union between husband and wife, according to TOB, depends on the authenticity of love as a radical gift of self, glory must be closely associated with love and gift. On this point there is a deep kinship between John Paul II and Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose theological aesthetics focuses on the Johannine connection between gift and glory.¹⁹⁴

“Glory” shapes the deepest vocation of the human person. It is the person’s greatest good inasmuch as it is the common good of the whole universe.

Man is first of all the “glory of God”: “*Gloria Dei vivens homo*,” in the celebrated words of St. Irenaeus, which might also be translated: “The glory of God is for man to be alive.” It could be said that here we encounter the loftiest definition of man: The glory of God is the common good of all that exists; the common good of the human race.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ St. Thomas, *De ente et essentia*, 1.

¹⁹² See above, pp. ###.###.

¹⁹³ Charles De Koninck, Letter to Mortimer Adler, Quebec, June 15th 1938; De Koninck Archive, University of Notre Dame.

¹⁹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit: Eine theologische Ästhetik*, 7 vols. (Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1961-1969). English translation: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 vols. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983-1991).

¹⁹⁵ John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, 11.

The Johannine Prologue proclaims at its highpoint that the divine *logos* became flesh (John 1:14). The Polish word for flesh (*cielo*) also means body. The *logos* became body. This close connection between body and flesh allows John Paul II to explain the foundation of TOB quite simply by reference to John 1:14.

The fact that theology *can also be* “*theology of the body/flesh*” should not astonish or surprise anyone who is conscious of the mystery and fact of the Incarnation. Through the fact that God (Word) became body/flesh, the body/flesh entered theology—that is, the science about God—through the main door, I would say (TOB 23:4).

The glory of God, according to John 17, is particularly related to his love, at root to the love of the Father in which he gives “all” to the Son, expressed in the mission of the Son in which he shows the greatest love (see 15:13) by giving his life. “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” (15:9). The hour of the cross is the moment at which this love unfolds its power and achieves its purpose in “drawing all to himself” (John 12:32) by “bearing away the sin of the world” (John 1:36). The cross is thus the moment in which the Suffering Servant is “lifted up and glorified exceedingly” (Isa 52:13, Septuagint). The first five verses of John 17 present an extraordinarily condensed and rich synthesis of this understanding of glory.

1a: Father, the hour has come:

glorify your Son,

1b: so that the Son may glorify you,

2: so that (as you have given him power over all flesh)
he may give eternal life to all you have given him.

3: And eternal life is this: that they know you,
the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

4: I have glorified you on earth

by completing the work that you gave me to do.

5: Now, Father,

glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed.

The text is constructed in five units. The first (17:1a) closely corresponds to the fifth (17:5). Both speak about the moment of the passion, “the hour” (17:1), “now” (17:5); in both, Jesus asks the Father to glorify him. The second unit (17:1b) closely corresponds to the fourth (17:4). In both, Jesus speaks about his glorifying the Father. The structure is thus concentric arranged like a precious golden setting around the jewel in the middle, the definition of eternal life (17:3).

While the first two units correspond in inverse order to the last two, they interpret the hour of Jesus’ suffering and death in two opposite directions: the first two focus on the *effect* of the hour, namely, the gift of eternal life; the last two show its theological *root and goal*, the pre-existent glory of the Son.

Let us take a close look at them. “Father, glorify your Son” is not a petition for an isolated personal glorification. It is ordered to the glorification of the Father (“so that your Son may glorify you”) which is identified, in turn, with the gift of eternal life to those the Father gave him (“so that . . . he may give them eternal life”). The second final clause probably picks up and explains the first: “so that the Son may glorify you, that is, so that he may give eternal life

to all.” Compare “In this is my Father glorified that you bring much fruit and become my disciples” (15:8).

The parenthetical clause (“as you have given him power over all flesh”) specifies the extent of the power given to the Son in the hour through which he achieves the glorification of the Father. Cf. “When I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all to myself. He said this to signify the kind of death he was to die” (12:32-33). The same point is made in the image of the grain of wheat.

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

Amen, Amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat
falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone.

But if it dies, it brings much fruit (12:23-24).

The image of the grain of wheat interprets the glorification of the Son of Man. As the grain of wheat does not remain alone but becomes fruitful through its death, so also the Son of Man: through his death he no longer remains alone, but constructs the community of his own. His glory appears in the power of his suffering and death to “bear or carry away the sin of the world” (1:29.36) and construct a new community. Many of the Fathers see the creation of the Church from the side of the crucified Christ as the new Eve to be brought to the new Adam as his bride. Hence the first sign at Cana, which celebrates the joy of a wedding with wine (2:1-11), is closely connected with the definitive sign of Golgotha, the opening of the side of Christ and the flow of Eucharistic blood and baptismal water, which constitutes the Church.

The word “glory” is close to the word “power.” “They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom, and tell of your power” (Ps 145:11).

Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all (1 Chronicles 29:11).

What is striking in John 17 is that the divine glory, full of power and lordship, appears as the effectiveness of the gift of love in complete lack of power, in suffering, death and the gift of self accomplished by them. In this manner, the first two units (17:1-2) have a defining importance for the understanding of glory in John.

The last two units (17:4-5) interpret Jesus’ hour in the opposite direction: not in terms of its effectiveness in giving life, but in terms of its root and goal, namely, Jesus’ pre-existent glory. “I have glorified you on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed” (17:4-5). The nature of this pre-existent glory is clarified later in John 17.

I have given them the glory you gave me,
that they may be one as we are one.

I in them and you in me,
that they may be completed toward one,
so that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them as you loved me (17:22-23).

This text suggests that the glory of the Son consists in his unity with the Father or in the Father’s being “in” the Son. This unity, perceived as it is

communicated to human beings, is not an end-point; the true end-point is the Father's love. The gift of glory, made visible, leads to knowledge of the Father's love. A close connection is thereby suggested between glory and love. The same connection is evident in the immediately following verse. "My glory which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world" (17:24). Love is the motive of the gift of glory, which has a profound bearing on the nature of this glory.

An even closer link between "glory" and the Father's love is suggested by the parallel between 17:22 ("I have given them the glory you have given me, that they may be one as we are one") and 17:26 ("I have made your name known to them...that the love with which you loved me may be in them"). The parallel suggests that Jesus' glory is the presence of the Father's love in him. Jesus' pre-existent glory is not only based on the love of the Father, it is determined by this love not only as by its origin, but in its very contents or nature.

The Son's glory before the world corresponds to love before the world and can be explained in terms of it, because the eternal love of the Father does not give something foreign from itself to the Son, but itself. The preexistent glory of Jesus is thus not only based on the love of the Father, it is determined by this love not only causally, but in its very contents or nature. We can understand the "glory" of 17:5,24 as the Son's being filled with the fire and light of the Father's love.¹⁹⁶

17:5 can be understood on this basis: "Now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world existed." The Son's pre-existent glory consists in his unity with the Father, in the presence of the Father's begetting power and love in him. The glory spoken of in 17:1-2 is nothing but a continuation or effective projection of this glory through Jesus in his humanity. In this way, 17:5 interprets Jesus' death, not merely as a passage through to his pre-existent glory, but as the break-through of that eternal glory in time and history. The Father's eternal love of the Son becomes effectively present in Jesus' death; it is transferred and continued into the economy of salvation: "so that the world may know...that you loved them as you loved me" (17:23).

The human career of Jesus is, as it were, a projection of this eternal relation (which is the divine ἀγάπη) upon the field of time. It is such, not as a mere reflection or representation of the reality, but in the sense that the love which the Father bore the Son 'before the foundation of the world,' and which he perpetually returns, is actively at work in the historical life of Jesus.¹⁹⁷

This is the understanding of "glory" in the Gospel of John. This is the ultimate measure by which all else that might be called glory, beauty and power is to be judged.

In conclusion, TOB is based on Scripture, *sola Scriptura*, read in great proximity to Luther in a spousal and ecclesial hermeneutics of the gift, with the help of Greek logos as called for by Scripture itself, measured by the ultimate

¹⁹⁶ Wilhelm Thüsing, *Die Erhöhung und Verherrlichung Jesu im Johannesevangelium* (Münster, 1960) 214. Cf. de la Potterie, *La Vérité dans Saint Jean*, 2.732, with note 247.

¹⁹⁷ Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 262.

standard of glory. “The Logos became flesh and we have seen his glory...full of gift and truth” (1:14). It is this glory of love that John Paul II has in mind when he writes, “Purity is the glory of the human body before God. It is the glory of God in the human body” (TOB 57:3).