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 Manuscript by Dr. Michael Waldstein

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c. The Image of the Trinity in Man and Woman

On this Trinitarian foundation, John Paul II uses the hermeneutics of the gift to link the mystery of the Trinity with marriage by means of “gift.”

God is love and in Himself He lives [lat. out of] a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility [lat. joined with the consciousness] of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being... Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death. The *total physical self-giving* would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a *total personal self-giving*, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be *giving totally*.<sup>3</sup>

This text connects the divine image with the vocation of man and woman to love and communion. It is in the light of this truth that it considers sexuality. Because man and woman are created in the image of God, who is in himself eternal gift and love, their sexuality is fully human, fully in correspondence with the truth of the sacrament, only if it is lived as a gift of love, a total gift.

In the *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II unfolds this understanding of marriage in great detail. The communion of man and woman in marriage, he argues, is an image of the divine communion of persons in the Trinity.

*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. The function of the image is that of mirroring the one who is the model, of reproducing its own prototype. Man becomes an image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. He is, in fact, “from the beginning” not only an image in which the solitude of one Person, who rules the world, mirrors itself, but also and essentially the image of an inscrutable divine communion of Persons... This is obviously not*

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11, emphasis added. The phrases in angled brackets are present in the Latin text but absent from the official English translation, which is based on the Italian. The translator of the text into Latin probably added “out of,” because in Latin “live” is not a transitive verb.

without significance for the *theology of the body*, but constitutes perhaps the deepest theological aspect of everything one can say about man (TOB 9:3).

The emphatic superlative in the last sentence (“the *deepest* theological aspect of *everything* one can say about man”) deserves special attention. That the communion of persons in marriage is an image of the communion of persons in the Trinity, this is the *deepest* theological truth that needs to be grasped about the human person, deeper than *everything* else.

It is important to point out that the image of the Trinity is not limited to marriage. The consecrated life is in a more eminent way an image, a witness and testimony to the Trinity.

The deepest meaning of the evangelical counsels is revealed when they are viewed in relation to the Holy Trinity, the source of holiness. They are in fact an expression of the love of the Son for the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit. By practising the evangelical counsels, the consecrated person lives with particular intensity the Trinitarian and Christological dimension which marks the whole of Christian life.

The *chastity* of celibates and virgins, as a manifestation of dedication to God with an *undivided heart* (cf. *1 Cor* 7:32-34), is a reflection of the *infinite love* which links the three Divine Persons in the mysterious depths of the life of the Trinity, the love to which the Incarnate Word bears witness even to the point of giving his life, the love “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (*Rom* 5:5), which evokes a response of total love for God and the brethren.

*Poverty* proclaims that God is man’s only real treasure. When poverty is lived according to the example of Christ who, “though he was rich...became poor” (*2 Cor* 8:9), it becomes an expression of that *total gift of self* which the three Divine Persons make to one another. This gift overflows into creation and is fully revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and in his redemptive death.

*Obedience*, practised in imitation of Christ, whose food was to do the Father’s will (cf. *Jn* 4:34), shows the liberating beauty of a *dependence which is not servile but filial*, marked by a deep sense of responsibility and animated by mutual trust, which is a reflection in history of the loving *harmony* between the three Divine Persons.

The consecrated life is thus called constantly to deepen the gift of the evangelical counsels with a love which grows ever more genuine and strong in the *Trinitarian* dimension: love *for Christ*, which leads to closeness with him; love *for the Holy Spirit*, who opens our hearts to his inspiration; love *for the Father*, the first origin and supreme goal of the consecrated life. The consecrated life thus becomes a confession and a sign of the Trinity, whose mystery is held up to the Church as the model and source of every form of Christian life.

Even *fraternal life*, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with “one heart and soul” (*Acts* 4:32), is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims *the Father*, who desires to make all of humanity one family. It proclaims *the Incarnate Son*, who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by his example, his prayer, his words and above all his death, which is the source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered humanity. It proclaims *the Holy Spirit* as the principle of unity in the Church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families and fraternal communities.<sup>4</sup>

In light of John Paul II’s teaching on the Trinitarian image, one can understand the main thesis of the *Theology of the Body*: the body was created as a sacramental sign of Trinitarian love. As the consummation of the marriage vows, the bodily gift of self in the conjugal act plays an important role in the consti-

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Vita consecrata*, 21.

tution of the sacramental sign. The communion between man and woman completed by sexual union effectively signifies the union between Christ and the Church and, more deeply, the communion of persons in the Trinity. In accord with the double aspect of a sacrament as an efficacious sign of grace, the body not only signifies supernatural communion in the Holy Spirit, but effectively makes it present.

Man appears in the visible world as the highest expression of the divine act of giving, because he bears within himself the inner dimension of the gift. In this dimension, he brings into the world his particular likeness to God with which he transcends and also rules his “visibility” in the world, his bodylines, his masculinity or femininity, his nakedness. A reflection of this likeness is also the primordial awareness of the spousal meaning of the body pervaded by the mystery of original innocence.

In this way, in this dimension [that is, the dimension of the gift], this most original sacrament [namely, marriage, as instituted in the creation of man and woman] is constituted. We understand a sacrament as a sign that efficaciously transmits in the visibility of the world the invisible mystery hidden in God from eternity. It is the mystery of Truth and Love [that is, the mystery of the Trinity, cf. *Gaudium et spes* 24:3], the mystery of divine life, in which man receives a real participation. In the history of man, original innocence realizes the very beginning of this participation and it is also the source of original happiness. The sacrament [marriage as the most original sacrament], as a visible sign, is constituted through man as a “body,” through the body’s “visible” masculinity and femininity. 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 19:3-4).<sup>5</sup>

Here is the main thesis statement of John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. Why did God create the human body? He created it to transfer into the visible world the mystery of the communion of persons in the Trinity in which human beings come to share through sacramental signs. The most original sacrament, which introduces the whole sacramental order, is the marriage instituted in Genesis 2 with the divine words: “they will be one flesh” (Gen 2:24).<sup>6</sup> The total gift implied in spousal love reflects and communicates the eternal total gift in the Trinity.

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<sup>5</sup> Emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Jesus attributes these words to the Creator himself. “Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator created them male and female *and said*, For this the man will leave his father and his mother and unite himself with his wife and the two shall be one flesh?” (Mt 19:4-5).