

THEOLOGY OF
THE BODY
IN ONE HOUR



Totus Tuus

— P R E S S —

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JASON EVERT

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PREFACE

Before retiring to bed on a Tuesday night in the Vatican, Saint John Paul II prayed the Liturgy of the Hours, meditating upon the following words from Saint Peter: “Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”¹

Long after others in the papal apartment were asleep, a noise awoke his secretary, Monsignor Stanisław Dziwisz, who left his room to investigate. His room was adjacent to the Holy Father’s, but he noticed that the sounds were not coming from the Pope’s room, but from his chapel. Although late-night prayer was not uncommon for John Paul, Dziwisz peered in to be certain that everything was all right.

The sight was typical: John Paul immersed in contemplation alone before the tabernacle. The Pope usually spoke to God with very simple words, and often prayed during adoration like Jesus did in Gethsemane, talking with his Father.² This night, Dziwisz noticed that John Paul indeed seemed troubled. The disturbance he overheard was the Pope speaking aloud to God, asking repeatedly, “*Dlaczego? Dlaczego?*” (“Why? Why?”). Out of reverence, the monsignor backed away from the chapel and returned to his room for the night.

John Paul celebrated Mass the next morning, but was unusually reserved during breakfast afterward.

The Pope's typical jovial and engaging demeanor toward the sisters and guests was subdued. Instead of asking questions and conversing about an endless variety of topics, he was recollected and withdrawn. He ate no breakfast, and drank a cup of tea.³

That afternoon would be an important one: During his Wednesday audience, John Paul was preparing to announce the establishment of two ministries in the Church that would address the problems facing families in the modern world.⁴ One of these, the Pontifical Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, would become the main teaching arm of the Theology of the Body.⁵

On his way to deliver his message, the Holy Father rode in the Popemobile across Saint Peter's Square. As he was blessing children and greeting the crowds, gunshots from a Turkish assassin rang out. An ambulance rushed the Pope in his bloodstained cassock to the hospital, where he narrowly escaped death.

Had God given him a premonition of his suffering the night before? The answer to that question will likely remain a mystery known only to John Paul.

Was there a link between his suffering and his efforts to build up marriage and the family? This he affirmed, saying, "Perhaps there was a need for that blood to be spilled in Saint Peter's Square."⁶ He added, "Precisely because the family is threatened, the family is being attacked. So the Pope must be attacked. The Pope must suffer, so that the world may see that there

is a higher gospel, as it were, the gospel of suffering, by which the future is prepared, the third millennium of families. . . .”⁷

After recovering from his wounds, John Paul returned to the Vatican and resumed his proclamation of God’s plan for human love: the Theology of the Body.

PART I

THE WORDS
OF CHRIST

CHRIST APPEALS TO THE “BEGINNING”

Original Man

When most people think about the book of Genesis, they dismiss it as an assortment of ancient and unscientific fables that belong in a children’s coloring book. As a result, they assume that the texts have little to offer modern man.

Although the creation accounts in Genesis are pre-scientific and archaic, it would be a mistake to consider them to be unscientific or outdated. In Genesis, God did not intend to present a scientific treatise, but to express profound truths about humanity that are just as valid and unchanging (and archaic) as the laws of physics.

A person who attempts to scientifically debunk Genesis could be compared to an optometrist who reads the Song of Songs and then uses a retinoscope to prove that the eyes of the woman are not doves, nor are they pools of Heshbon, despite the claims made by her lover. However accurate the doctor’s findings may be, they don’t invalidate or disprove what the lover sees in his bride. Likewise, the truths found in Genesis do not contradict science. Rather, they delve into a realm

of truth that lies beyond the reach of material science.

Therefore, when the Pharisees questioned Jesus about divorce, he led them back to the beginning, to the Creator's own words regarding his plan for human love. The Gospel of Matthew recounts the exchange:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him and asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason?" And he answered them, "Have you not read that from the beginning *the Creator created them male and female* and said, '*For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and unite with his wife, and the two will be one flesh*'? So it is that they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined let man not separate." They objected, "Why then did Moses order to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus answered, "Because of the hardness of your heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, *but from the beginning it was not so.*" (Matt. 19:3–8)

In order to give the Pharisees an adequate answer about marriage, Jesus knew that they first needed to have what John Paul called an "integral vision of man," rather than a partial or fractured one. Unfortunately, our only experience of humanity is the sinfulness that we have inherited. But this isn't the whole picture of man. Jesus leads his listeners back to Genesis in order to take us beyond our limited understanding.

It is easy to prove that we lack this integral vision. For example, if you were to say that the book of Genesis explains the story of “Original . . . ,” what word would you use to fill in the blank?

“Sin.”

While this is true, John Paul pointed out that the story of creation also reveals what humanity, or original man, looked like prior to sin. It reveals his experience of original solitude, original unity, and original nakedness. Understanding these concepts is the basis of understanding what it means to be human. When they are revealed, we see the beauty of the first panel of John Paul’s triptych.

Original Solitude

From the beginning, the body of Adam revealed that he was alone in the world: “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). He wasn’t alone simply in the sense that he lacked Eve. Indeed, his body revealed that he was created for another, and her absence was felt. But even after her creation, man stands alone before God.

The human body reveals that man is alone among all earthly creatures as a person. Unlike the animals, he is not an irrational beast, driven purely by instinct. He is a subject: a person with a conscience who is aware of himself and is capable of self-determination. Therefore, Adam’s solitude is first a reference to his uniqueness as a person within creation.