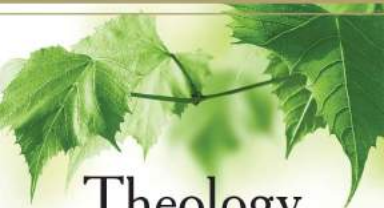


William E. May



Theology
of the Body

IN CONTEXT

Genesis and Growth

"I've been awaiting just such a book...."—Christopher West

Introduction

This book seeks to summarize the rich and comprehensive teaching of Pope John Paul II on the person, marriage, and family. Even before he became pope, Karol Wojtyła devoted considerable attention to these questions in plays such as *The Jeweler's Shop*, *Our God's Brother*, and *The Radiation of Fatherhood*. He wrote an important book on the subject of family in Polish in 1960, which was translated into English in 1981 under the title *Love and Responsibility*.¹

From the time he became pope in 1978, John Paul II devoted much of his considerable energy to thinking, writing, and speaking on the person, marriage, and family. From September 1979 through November 1984 he gave a remarkable series of Wednesday audiences devoted to the “Theology of the Body,” marriage, and human sexuality. In response to the 1980 Synod of Bishops devoted to the role of the Christian family, he issued his masterful apostolic exhortation “The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World” (*Familiaris Consortio*), surely one of the most important magisterial documents ever promulgated on the person, marriage, and the family. In 1988, on the occasion of the Marian Year, he issued his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (“The Dignity and Vocation of Women”), sections of

which beautifully summarize major ideas developed in the “Theology of the Body” and deepen his reflections on the man-woman relationship. In early 1994 he published his beautiful *Letter to Families* as a contribution to the International Year of the Family, another document beautifully summarizing major ideas of the “Theology of the Body.” In addition, every year of his pontificate from October 16, 1978, through April 2, 2005, witnessed hundreds of addresses devoted to the person, marriage, and the family, given throughout the world to a wide range of audiences. Thousands of pages in the many volumes of the *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* published by the Vatican are devoted to this teaching. He can surely be regarded as one of the greatest champions of the human person, marriage, and the family of all time.

In addition, in 1981 John Paul II founded the Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II per Studi su Matrimonio e Famiglia at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome. In 1988 he founded the American session of the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family in Washington, D.C. In 1991 I was named the Michael J. McGivney Professor of Moral Theology at this institute for graduate studies in theology, focused on marriage and the family. Since then I have regularly taught courses in the various graduate programs the institute offers. These courses have covered in depth John Paul’s teaching on the person, marriage, and the family, and through the years I have grown in my appreciation for the work he has done. The writings of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II are indeed profound; some are difficult to understand in parts and certainly challenge the reader. This is perhaps particularly true of *Love and Responsibility* and the addresses on the “Theology of the Body.” I believe I have now read *Love and Responsibility* at

least twenty times; each time I discover something new and important. Many times students have helped me come to a better grasp of certain texts.

John Paul's addresses on the "Theology of the Body" (hereafter TOB) present the culmination and living core of his thought on the person, marriage, and the family that began with his doctoral study of the theology of Saint John of the Cross, developed and deepened in *Love and Responsibility*, and ultimately found fullest expression in TOB. Michael Waldstein points out that Karol Wojtyła's/John Paul II's point of departure as a theologian is the "spousal" personalism of Saint John of the Cross:

Saint John of the Cross does not thematically discuss love between man and woman. Yet, his frequent use of bride-bridegroom imagery contains a rich implicit theology of marriage inspired above all by the Song of Songs. In *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła makes this implicit theology of marriage explicit, enriching it by further insight.... [T]he core of Wojtyła's philosophical concern in *Love and Responsibility* is the understanding of the gift of self as the key element of spousal love.... [T]he spousal theology of Saint John of the Cross ultimately shapes the agenda of *Love and Responsibility*.²

In this book I want to show how *Love and Responsibility*, a profound, challenging, and difficult work, helps prepare the way for TOB. I will then show how the teaching found in *Familiaris Consortio*, written when TOB was about halfway completed, embraces many of TOB's key ideas and themes. I will conclude by considering two documents written after TOB was completed, the apostolic letters *Mulieris Dignitatem* and *Letter to Families*. I will thus take up the writings in this order: (1) *Love and Responsibility*, (2) *Familiaris Consortio*,

(3) *Theology of the Body*, and (4) *Mulieris Dignitatem* and *Letter to Families*.

The chapter on the theology of the body has been written in light of Michael Waldstein's new translation and superb introduction to John Paul II's catecheses on this subject in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*.³ It was my privilege to serve as the *censor deputatus* to grant the *nihil obstat* for this magnificent publication. It has also been my privilege to serve in the same capacity for the revised edition of Christopher West's *The Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's "Gospel of the Body,"* with a foreword by Michael Waldstein.⁴

CHAPTER 1

Karol Wojtyła's *Love and Responsibility*:
Themes Relevant to the Theology
of the Body

Karol Wojtyła wrote *Love and Responsibility* to give spiritual and moral advice to his students at the Catholic University of Lublin. In fact, it was given its first form, prior to publication in 1960, as a series of lectures to these students in 1958–59. Wojtyła was a celibate priest. In his introduction to the first edition he writes:

It is sometimes said that only those who live a conjugal life can pronounce on the subject of marriage, and only those who have experienced it can pronounce on love between man and woman. In this view ... priests and persons living a celibate life can have nothing to say on questions of love and marriage.

He notes that in his pastoral work a priest often encounters the problems facing men and women seeking to live good lives, and spouses who are doing their best to be good husbands and wives. He then says that is how the book came about, as a constant confrontation of doctrine, i.e., Catholic teaching on sexual morality and marriage, and life. His purpose is to show why this teaching is true and rooted in the

truth about human persons and the goods that fulfill them (see *Love and Responsibility*, pp. 15–16).

Published in Polish in 1960 and in English in 1981, *Love and Responsibility* has five chapters:

CHAPTER 1: The Person and the Sexual Urge

CHAPTER 2: The Person and Love

CHAPTER 3: The Person and Chastity

CHAPTER 4: Justice Toward the Creator

CHAPTER 5: Sexology and Ethics

I will summarize material from these chapters central to John Paul II's teaching that I believe are relevant to his "Theology of the Body," where his magnificent, faith-filled, and philosophically and theologically rooted teaching on the human person, marriage, and family finds its richest and fullest expression. I will note those sections of TOB in which I believe the ideas and themes set forth in *Love and Responsibility* are developed.

Love and Responsibility, Chapter 1: The Person and the Sexual Urge

Six ideas found in this chapter are crucial:

1. A human person is *never* to be used merely as a means to an end of another person.
2. One major way of "using persons" in this way, particularly in the realm of sex, is to use them as a means of experiencing pleasure.
3. Love between persons demands a *common good*, as illustrated by the love between man and woman in marriage.
4. The command to love is rooted in the *personalistic norm* and its requirements.

5. Every human person is a sexual being, and by reason of his “sexual urge” is dynamically oriented from within toward a person of the opposite sex.

6. The “sexual urge” has an “existential dimension” by which it is ordered to the preservation of men, of human persons.

Each of these ideas is deepened and enriched immeasurably by Wojtyła/John Paul II's TOB.

1. A Human Person Is Never to Be Used Merely as a Means to an End of Another Person

Your Dictionary Online (<http://www.yourdictionary.com>) defines “to use” in its first and basic definition as: “to put or bring into action or service; employ for or apply to a given purpose.” This seems to me to be the basic sense in which Wojtyła uses the expression. There is a legitimate sense in which human persons do “use” other persons as means to eternal ends; for example, a basketball coach “uses” some individual human persons as players in a game, and he freely substitutes other human persons for different players during the game. There is nothing wrong in this. What is always gravely wrong is for one human person to “use” another human person *merely* as a means to some end, ignoring the truth that human persons, precisely because they are persons, are never to be used in this way. An example is a medical scientist using human persons as subjects without their free and informed consent in experiments that could be harmful to them. Wojtyła insists that, as *persons*, human beings are totally different from other animals because they have an “inner self” and “interior life,” and as such are irreplaceable and nonsubstitutable (pp. 22–23). He affirms that “a child, even an unborn child, cannot be denied personality in its most objective ontological sense, although it is true that it has yet to

acquire, step by step, many of the traits which will make it psychologically and ethically a distinct personality” (p. 26). This is most important: unborn children, still in the embryonic or fetal stage of development, are indeed persons while in their mothers’ wombs and do not *become* persons at some later stage of development.

In his “Theology of the Body,” Pope John Paul II richly develops the truth that all human beings, from conception until natural death, are “persons” as the ethical significance of an important truth: that the human body reveals the human person who is made in the image and likeness of God and is a being who is to be loved and whose vocation is to love. Thus in TOB 5–7 he beautifully develops what can be called man’s “existential” solitude, his solitude as the only visibly created being who is “alone before God.” Moreover, it is through his awareness of his own body that man realizes he is “other than” the other animals in being alone before God, whose living image he is. This solitude is even deeper than the solitude of the male-person vis-à-vis the female-person. Man, male and female, is “alone” with God because only man realizes that he is “the only creature on earth which God willed for itself” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24). To put this truth another way, man, male and female, realizes that he is the only animal who is a “person.” He is, as it were, the “created word” that the Uncreated Word, the only-begotten Son of the Father, became precisely to show us how deeply God loves us.

2. One Major Way of “Using Persons” This Way, Particularly in the Realm of Sex, Is to Use Them as a Means of Experiencing Pleasure

“To use” also means “to enjoy or experience pleasure,” and frequently, particularly in the realm of sex, human persons are

“used” as the source of pleasure and enjoyment. Here sexual morality comes into play. One person can make pleasure the aim of his activity by using another person as a means of obtaining pleasure. To do so is to treat the person not as he or she is — an utterly irreplaceable and nonsubstitutable person — but rather as a “thing,” a commodity meant to satisfy desires. Thus a man uses a woman in this way, even his own wife, if he has sex with her *only* because her body can be used to satisfy his sexual desires without even caring that the “body” satisfying his lust is the body of his own wife. However, “the belief that a human being is a person leads to the acceptance of the postulate that enjoyment must be subordinated to love” (p. 34).

In TOB 8–10 John Paul II beautifully shows the original unity, one of love, between the first man and woman, and in TOB 13.5 and following he develops what he calls “the spousal meaning” of the human body in its masculinity/femininity, which shows that the man in his very bodiliness is meant to be a “gift” to the woman and she in her very bodiliness to be a “gift” to the man. In getting married a man and a woman “give” themselves to each other and “receive” one another as irreplaceable, nonsubstitutable, and nondisposable persons. And they do so precisely as bodily persons whose bodies are integral to their being as man and woman. Their bodies have a “spousal” meaning or significance, i.e., the man’s body is a sign that he is meant to be a gift to his wife, and her body is a sign that she is to be a gift to her husband. Non-married men and women who engage in fornication or adultery are in principle replaceable, substitutable, and disposable. Rather than “giving” their bodies to one another they simply “lend” them to each other as long as each gets pleasure from doing so.

3. Love Between Persons Demands a Common Good Among Persons, as Illustrated in the Love Between Man and Woman in Marriage

Commitment to a common good unites and distinguishes a real *community of persons* from a disorganized mob or crowd. Thus an *academic community*, composed essentially of teachers and students and assisted by administration and staff, has as its common good the good of learning, to which faculty and students and staff are committed. A larger and greater common good is what makes our nation united and one: *e pluribus unum*. The citizens of our country hold certain truths as central, to which they dedicate themselves (see the *Declaration of Independence*). And commitment to a common good is, as Wojtyła argues, necessary for *love* between a man and a woman to flourish.

“‘Love’ is the opposite of ‘using,’” and love is the only proper attitude to have toward a person. But love is possible only if there is a “bond of a *common good*” uniting persons. Indeed, “Man’s capacity for love depends on his willingness consciously to seek a good together with others, and to subordinate himself to that good for the sake of others, or to others for the sake of that good. *Love is exclusively the portion of human persons*” (pp. 28–29). Wojtyła applies this to marriage, one of the most important areas where the principle that love is possible only if there is some common good is applicable. In marriage, “a man and a woman are united in such a way that they become in a sense ‘one flesh,’ ... i.e., one common subject, as it were, of sexual life.” To ensure that they do not become mere means in each other’s eyes

they must share the same end. Such an end, where marriage is concerned, is procreation, the future generation, a family,

and, at the same time, the continual ripening of the relationship between two people, in all the areas of activity which conjugal life includes. (p. 30)

This is shown by the commitment a man and a woman make when they “give” themselves to each other and receive each other in marriage. In doing so they commit themselves irrevocably to one another by committing themselves to marriage — a lifelong and intimate covenant of love and life, and to its “goods,” i.e., faithful spousal love, the gift of children, the effort to help each other grow in holiness.

In considering the man-woman relationship in its widest sense, Wojtyła maintains that the love he is talking about “is identified with a particular readiness to subordinate oneself to that good, which . . . the value of the person represents, regardless of difference of sex” (p. 31). In other words, the value of the person is the ultimate “common good” uniting men and women in love.

John Paul II richly develops the meaning of marriage in TOB 87–117. He takes up in depth the meaning of marriage as a sacrament and of the human body, male and female, as a special gift in this sacrament. What “makes” marriage is the free and irrevocable consent of the man and the woman to give and receive each other as wife and husband and to pursue the “common good” of marriage. Their marriage is sacramental if the man and the woman are baptized, i.e., irrevocably joined to Christ through baptism for weal or woe; and in baptism they commit themselves to the “common good” of the triune God and of his adopted children in Christ, i.e., holiness. This matter will be taken up in depth in the chapter on John Paul’s theology of the body.