

*The "Spiritualisation" of the Body*1. Anthropology of the Resurrection

The resurrection of the human body is part of our Christian faith. As Christians we believe that in the eternal life we don't become disembodied spirits. We believe that we participate in the resurrection as body-persons. Our bodies are not sloughed off or left behind (as thought by some other religions). They will be an indispensable part of who we are as unique, individual human beings, just as they are in this life. In fact we shouldn't even be talking about "our bodies" as if they are some kind of appendage to who we are. That kind of talking betrays a thinking that is already infected by dualism, the idea that there is an essential self that inhabits a body, the "ghost in the machine"¹, that could in some way exist apart from the body. We are "body-persons" in this life, to use Christopher West's useful expression, and we will continue to be "body-persons" in the next. I am this body in this life and I will be this body in the next.

Clearly there is an essential continuity between this life and the next. Each of us is the same person in the next life as in this one and the sameness of the body provides the continuity. I am this body in this life and I will be the same body in the next. But as well as a continuity there is also a change, a transformation. This transformation, John Paul describes as a "spiritualisation of man" (TB66) and he says it's a spiritualisation that is different from any spiritualisation that takes place in this life (for example through the sacraments), and different even from the spiritualisation of man in the original situation before the fall. Again, "spiritualisation" here does not mean that man becomes pure spirit. It does not mean that man becomes any less bodily. In fact the opposite is the case. In this new spiritualisation that takes place with the resurrection the human body attains its fullness. The human senses, for example, do not become in any sense redundant. In the resurrection "spiritual" body should signify what John Paul calls the "perfect sensitivity of the senses", their "perfect harmonisation with the activity of the human spirit in truth and in freedom" (TB72).

How this transformation takes place is of course way beyond our ability to comprehend, but the fact of this bodily transformation is there in the scriptures. St Paul (1 Corinthians 15) uses the analogy of a grain of wheat that is sown in the ground. It begins as a mere seed. It is then buried in the ground, analogous to death. The wheat that springs up in the harvest is analogous to the resurrection. Clearly there is a continuity between the grain that is sown in the earth and the wheat that springs from it at harvest time. It is not a different organism – it's the same organism. But what is most striking is the transformation that has taken place. So it will be with the resurrection of the body. This is how St Paul represents the transformation: "What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." (1 Cor 15:43,44). That final phrase is the key: "it

¹ Gilbert Ryle's derogatory description for René Descartes' mind-body dualism

is raised a *σωμα πνευματικον* a “spiritual body”. Hence John Paul’s teaching on the “spiritualisation” of the body. Notice also that the grain does not become any less bodily, any less substantial after its transformation. In fact it becomes considerably more substantial, the beautiful sheaf of wheat, the fully grown organism in all its glory, compared with its pre-burial seed-form. So it is with the human body in the resurrection due to this process of spiritualisation. The “spiritualisation” of the body will be the source of its power and imperishability. (TB72)

2. Eschatological Communion

But the focus of the Theology of the Body is not on the power and imperishability of the resurrected human body, which is taken as read, and well known in the Christian teaching. The focus is on the sexuality of the human body and the significance of human sexuality for interpersonal relationship. More precisely the focus of the Theology of the Body is on the human body as the *substratum* of interpersonal relationship, the *substratum* of the *communio personarum*, the communion of persons. We don’t cease to be bodies in the eternal life. That is now clear. But what about the maleness and femaleness of our human bodies? We know what role these have for this life, and I hope that the Theology of the Body has already pointed to a meaning of maleness and femaleness that goes way deeper than the superficial understanding our fallen world attaches to our human sexuality. What function does the maleness and femaleness of the human body have in the eternal life?

The key text that John Paul begins from is again the words of the Master himself. The Sadducees, who didn’t believe in the resurrection, put this trick scenario to him. A woman is married and widowed seven times, so that she had been at some point married to each of the seven. In the so called “resurrection”, quip the Sadducees, “whose wife will the woman be?” Jesus replies

The sons of this age take wife and take husband; but those who are considered worthy of the other world, and the resurrection from the dead, take neither wife nor husband. Indeed they cannot die any more, because they are equal to the angels (Matthew: “like the angels”) and, being sons of the resurrection, they are sons of God. (Luke 20:34-36)

The first thing to note is that marriage and procreation are for this world only. They do not constitute man’s eschatological future. (TB66) Those who make it to the “other world” do not marry. So what meaning will attach in the “other world” to being male and female? Will it be like your appendix which had an important use some time back in evolutionary history but is now useless and redundant, a kind of vestige of some previous era? The answer is an emphatic No. Not only will the maleness and femaleness of the human body not be redundant in the “other world”. In the “other world” maleness and femaleness of the human body will attain their fullest significance and purpose, surpassing the significance and purpose that they have in this world, surpassing the significance and purpose that they had even in the beginning in the original situation of original innocence and original unity. This will all be brought about by the “spiritualisation” of the human body that takes place in the resurrection, a spiritualisation that will penetrate and elevate every aspect of the human body including its sexuality.

3. The Spousal Meaning of the Body

God did not make man male and female so that they could get married and have children. After all that has been said in the first two cycles about Original Man and the mutual self-giving of the spouses in Original Unity, that might seem a surprising thing to say. But this is what is emerging from the Theology of the Body. The maleness and femaleness of the human body only reaches its fullest meaning and purpose in the “other world” when marriage and procreation have been left behind. Even in this world the significance of human sexuality goes beyond its meaning and purpose in marriage as will become clear in the fourth cycle when we look at the celibate vocation. Men and women don’t stop being male and female when they embrace the celibate life, and as we shall see their maleness and femaleness continues to have an important significance for those called to the celibate life. God made them Male and Female for some deeper purpose that goes beyond their significance in marriage. In fact marriage is just one particular vocation, one particular way of living out our bodiliness as male and female in this world, and in the “other world” we will all of us be living out our bodiliness as male and female in a way that goes beyond marriage.

So why did God make Man male and female? The answer given in the Theology of the Body reconnects us to the central principle of John Paul’s teaching. God made Man male and female to inscribe in the human body its “spousal meaning”. The eternal dynamic of self-giving that lies at the very heart of God, that permeates the whole of creation as it springs from his creative hand, the entire movement of self-giving, referred to simply as “the Gift”, as it flows through every facet of the universe in revelation of the Creator’s inner being, is inscribed in the most exquisite way in the human body, in its maleness and femaleness. This is the meaning of the human body’s sexuality. It is the highest expression of the Creator’s nature as Gift.

“Let us make Man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves”
(Genesis 1:26)

In this world, marriage is one way, perhaps the most obvious way, to live out the “spousal meaning” of the body. If marriage is left behind or in some sense transcended in the “other world”, how is its “spousal meaning” lived out in the “other world”? The clue lies in St Paul’s teaching to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:28) that the other world is the world of God who will completely fill it, becoming “all in all”. (TB66). The fact is, the new “spiritualisation” of the body that we have been talking about will be effected by God’s self-gift to man. The mutual self-giving that took place between husband and wife in marriage in this world is superseded by a mutual self-giving between God in his divinity and man in his humanity. The mutual self-giving between two equals is superseded in the other world by the mutual self-giving between non-equals, between the infinite Creator and the finite creature. The self-giving of God to man, and this means to each man and woman as a unique individual, is not pure spirit to pure spirit as between the persons of the Blessed Trinity, but to man in his bodiliness. As John Paul puts it, this is “God’s self-communication in his very divinity to the whole of man’s psychosomatic subjectivity” (TB67). The self-gift permeates man in every psychological and bodily dimension of his being. And this

self-giving is reciprocated by man in a response of total self-gift as a body-person to his Creator.

You might be inclined to imagine due to the sheer inequality between God and man in this mutual act of self-giving that Man would be absorbed into God. Some religions certainly lean in this direction with the sense of losing oneself in God, merging into the all in all. This is not the Christian teaching and in particular it is not the teaching of the Theology of the Body. This intimacy with God will not absorb man's personal subjectivity, but will make it emerge in an incomparably greater and fuller measure. (TB67). It is in fact in this mutual self-giving between God and man that man becomes most fully actualised, most fully who he is meant to be, just as in this world man finds his fulfilment in the mutual self-giving of conjugal union.

We've started with an understanding of what is meant by the "spousal meaning" of the body in this world. We can even acknowledge some kind of recognition of what is meant by this as we turn to our own experience of the human body. We can see in the human body its potential for sincere self-gift, for example in marriage, inscribed into its maleness and femaleness, though our discernment of this in our fallen state is dim and hazy. This dim and hazy apprehension of the spousal meaning of the body is an echo of the Beginning when the "spousal meaning" of the body was self-evident and as clear as the day. But it has been possible to reconstruct a fuller understanding of the "spousal meaning" of the body as experienced in the beginning, and it is also possible to extrapolate forward to the fullness of the "spousal meaning" in the other world and the resurrection. This two way reconstruction which extends our experience of the human body is the project that we call the Theology of the Body. (TB68).

4. The Beatific Vision

In the "other world" the spousal meaning of the body becomes the "virginal" meaning of the body. Man lives out the spousal meaning of the body in a way that dispenses with the conjugal union of this world, because it is now lived out in the mutual self-giving with his Creator. This is the "virginal" meaning of being male and female. (TB67). For historical man, and even for original man God's self-gift to man was through the mutual self-giving of the spouses. It was by living out the spousal meaning of the body in conjugal union that they experienced God's self-gift. In the "other world" the spousal meaning of the body is lived out in God's direct self-gift to man and the response of man's self-gift directly to his Creator.

To understand this we need to penetrate more deeply into what Christian tradition has called the "Beatific Vision". As John says in his first letter "We shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is." (1 John 3:2). This is the "beatific vision" of God. I used to think that John had got this the wrong way round, I mean got the causality the wrong way round. Surely we've got to become like him before we are able to see him as he really is. But John is saying that it is this way round, that it is the Beatific Vision that causes us to become like him. The Theology of the Body throws some light on how this works. First we've got to be clear what the Beatific Vision is not. It is not about seeing God with our bodily eyes, except in so far as it will include the bodily gaze upon the humanity of the incarnate Son of God. In all

other respects God is invisible. The Father is invisible, and the Spirit is invisible. So the expression Beatific Vision is a metaphorical expression for the way in which we will apprehend God in the “other world” and in the resurrection. It will be an apprehension and experience of God that will far surpass bodily vision. It will be brought about in each of us by God’s act of self-giving to ourselves in our humanity. This act of self-giving will completely fill us and we will experience ourselves as being completely filled by him, our minds, our bodies, our senses, the whole of our psychosomatic subjectivity. This means that he will be apprehended not just by the faculty of seeing, but by the whole of our being. Not just the eyes, but the whole body-person becomes an organ of perception for the divine being. This is the Beatific Vision. Vision is a good metaphor for this because it is an experience based on something, light, entering the body, pouring into the organ of sight, resulting in the experience of vision. The Beatific Vision is God pouring himself into the whole of man’s being, resulting in an experience that will include the vision of the Son’s glorified humanity, but will far surpass this as a whole bodily apprehension of God’s self-giving pouring into his whole being. Man will be completely filled with God’s self-gift, overflowing into all these senses and sensitivities. This is the “spiritualisation” of the body, and the perfection of the senses that John Paul speaks about in the Theology of the Body (TB72)

This seems to be borne out by the mystics, some of whom seem to have experienced this even in this life as a kind of foretaste of the “other world”. St John of the Cross (*Fire Within* p. 42-43): “Sometimes the unction of the Holy Spirit overflows into the body and all the sensory substance, all the members and bones and marrow rejoice, not in so slight a fashion as is customary, but with the feeling of great delight and glory, even in the outermost joints of the hands and feet. The body experiences so much glory in that of the soul that in its own way it magnifies God.” (quoted from *Living Flame of Love* 2:20, page 603)

5. The Perfection of the Human Subject

In the Original Situation, Man attained the perfection and fulfilment of his subjectivity through self-gift in conjugal union. The more deeply man gave himself to woman the more fully he discovered himself, the more he attained his full actualisation as a human subject. And the more fully he attained full actualisation as a human subject the more he could make of himself a sincere gift in conjugal union. There was a cumulative progression of subjective actualisation and a cumulative progression of mutual self-gift. (See TB17). In the “other world”, the eschatological situation, God’s self-gift to Man is the cause of the new “spiritualisation” that takes place in Man and brings him forward to his fullness. But it is through his response of self-gift to God that he actually attains to this fullness as a body-person. This in turn facilitates an even deeper and fuller possibility of self-gift, so that we can perhaps talk here also of a progression of ever deeper actualisation to personhood in the other world and an ever deeper possibility of self-gift to God.

It is this process of “spiritualisation” of the body brought about by God’s self-gift, and experienced by the body as the Beatific Vision, that assimilates us to God. “We shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is.” (1 John 3:2). We shall become like him. More precisely we shall become assimilated to the Second Person of the

Trinity in his humanity, to the incarnate Son of God in his resurrected and glorified humanity. The Risen Christ is the prototype of Eschatological Man. The humanity of the “first Adam”, writes John Paul, carries a particular potentiality for receiving all that the “second Adam” became, what he (Christ) became in the resurrection, in the glorification of his humanity (TB71). The mutual self-giving that characterises the eternal relationship between Father and Son in the eternal life of the Trinity is to be adapted to created persons (cf TB68) and extended to ourselves. It’s the way we will live out the spousal meaning of the human body in the “other world”. It’s the way that we become assimilated to God. The eschatological reality will become the perfect realization of the “Trinitarian order” in the created world of persons (TB68).

6. Maleness and Femaleness in the other world

Maleness and femaleness is the way that the “spousal meaning” has been inscribed in the human body. This is the perennial reason for the maleness and femaleness of the body. From the beginning man comes to be as male and female and discovers the spousal meaning of the body even before entering into marriage and procreation (TB69). The original meaning of being a body (writes John Paul), precisely that “spousal meaning”, is to be found in the fact that man is created as a person and is called to a life “*in communione personarum*” (TB69). Marriage is one way, in this world, of realising this *communio personarum*. In the other world the *communio personarum* is between God and Man.

However, it’s natural that we want to know how the actual mechanics of being male and female works out in the other world and it’s quite right that we ask the question. It’s not surprising that the Theology of the Body can’t go very far in this direction. We have such a limited and narrow understanding of what it means to be male and female. This has been further limited and narrowed by the concupiscence that characterises fallen man as we saw in the second cycle. However, we have the following facts:

1. that as bodies we are male and female.
2. that resurrection means resurrection of the body.
3. that there is no marriage in heaven (no fornication either).

The closest John Paul gets to answering the question is in the following statement (TB68):

The keeping of masculinity and femininity despite taking neither husband nor wife is explained by the “eschatological authenticity” of the response to that “self-communication” of the Divine Subject that will constitute the beatifying experience of God’s gift of self.

What he appears to be saying is that being male and female is central to the authenticity of our self-giving response to God’s self-gift to ourselves. If God’s self gift to Man is to be true, as indeed it will be, and complete, as it will be, then it will take into account the maleness or femaleness of the human subject. Conversely Man’s response of self-gift to God must involve and engage the maleness or femaleness of the human subject. For the maleness or femaleness of the human subject to be in some sense left out of the equation would be to render the reciprocal self-giving between God and Man less than complete and therefore less than authentic. Man is to be fulfilled and brought to perfection in this reciprocal self-giving with God actually in his maleness and femaleness. We have to be careful not

to reduce this vision of union between God and Man in his maleness or femaleness to the narrow understanding of human sexuality that we have to make do with at present. One can imagine that this experience will transcend the ecstatic experience of conjugal union of this world.

7. The Communion of Saints

Where do other people fit in within this picture? Is eternal life in heaven going to be an exclusive relationship between Creator and creature? The Theology of the Body says No. We've looked at the Beatific Vision, the bodies integral reception and experience of God's act of self-giving to the human subject. John Paul says that the experience of the Beatific Vision, the experience with one's whole being of God's self-giving, will be the discovery in God and the experience in God of the whole "world" of relations that are constitutive of the world's perennial order (TB68). We've looked at how the human subject attains the perfection of his personal subjectivity through God's self-gift to himself and through his reciprocal response of self-gift to God. John Paul says that the discovery of a new, perfect subjectivity of each person will be accompanied by the discovery of a new, perfect intersubjectivity of all. (TB68). This, he says, is the definitive fulfilment of human subjectivity in a *communio personarum* that is centred on God but embraces the whole Communion of Saints. This, he says, is the definitive fulfilment of the "spousal" meaning of the body, the ultimate way in which we live out the spousal meaning of the body.

The perennial meaning of the human body will then be revealed again in such *simplicity and splendour* that everyone who shares in the "other world" will rediscover in his glorified body the fountain of the *freedom of the gift*. This is the perfect "freedom of the sons of God" spoken of by St Paul in his letter to the Romans (Rom 8:21). Living this rediscovered freedom of the gift they will nourish with this gift all the communions that will constitute the great community of the communion of saints. (TB69).

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