

THE EMBODIED PERSON AS GIFT AND THE CULTURAL TASK IN AMERICA: *STATUS QUAESTIONIS*

• David L. Schindler •

“We are not our own. . . . Belonging to ourselves at its root is always anteriorly a belonging to God and to others, to the entire community of being.”



The body in its physical structure as such bears a vision of reality: it is an anticipatory sign, and already an expression, of the order of love or gift that most deeply characterizes the meaning of the person and indeed, via an adequately conceived analogy, the meaning of all creaturely being. This is the burden of John Paul II's seeing in the body a theology, which indeed implies an anthropology or, better, a metaphysics rooted in the personal.¹

¹See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006). See also in this connection Joseph Ratzinger's statement: "It is said that the spiritual meaning, not the biological fact, can alone be of importance for theology, and the biological is to be considered only a symbolic means of expression. But however plausible this exit appears, it only leads to a dead end. Closer scrutiny reveals the illusion. The cavalier divorce of 'biology' and theology omits precisely man from consideration; it becomes a self-contradiction insofar as the initial, essential point of the whole matter lies precisely in the affirmation that in all that concerns man the biological is also human and especially in what concerns the divinely-human *nothing* is 'merely biological.' Banishment of the corporeal, or sexual, into pure biology, all the talk about the 'merely biological,' is consequently the exact antithesis of what faith intends. For faith tells us of the spirituality of the biological as well as the corporeality of the spiritual and divine" (*Daughter Zion: Meditations on the Church's*

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in his *God and the World*, says that

man is constructed from within, in the image of God, to be loved and to love In the Trinity, Love's own essence portrays itself. Man is in God's image and thereby he is a being whose innermost dynamic is likewise directed toward the receiving and giving of love.²

Elsewhere Ratzinger, referring to the scholastic understanding of conscience in terms of the two levels indicated in "*synderesis*" and "*conscientia*," suggests that *synderesis* be replaced with the Platonic concept of *anamnesis* (recollection), which, he says, "harmonizes with the key motifs of biblical thought and the anthropology derived from it."³ He says this term "should be taken to mean exactly that which Paul expressed in . . . his letter to the Romans" regarding the law written on the hearts of the Gentiles and on their conscience that also bears witness (31). Ratzinger says that the same idea is also "strikingly amplified in the great monastic rule of Saint Basil. Here we read: 'The love of God is not founded on a discipline imposed on us from outside, but is constitutively established in us as the capacity and necessity of our rational nature'" (31).

Ratzinger goes on:

This means that the first so-called ontological level of the phenomenon of conscience consists in the fact that something like an original memory of the good and true (they are identical) has been implanted in us, that there is an inner ontological tendency within man, who is created in the likeness of God, toward the divine This anamnesis of the origin, which results from the god-like constitution of our being, is not a conceptually articulated knowing, a store of retrievable contents.

Marian Belief [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983], 52–53; and see also 34–35). Cf. also Ratzinger, "Thoughts on the Place of Marian Doctrine and Piety in Faith and Theology as a Whole," *Communio: International Catholic Review* 30 (Spring 2003): 146–60, especially 156–58.

²Joseph Ratzinger, *God and the World*, trans. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 189 (translation modified).

³Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, "Conscience and Truth," in *On Conscience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press/NCBC, 2007), 11–41, at 31. The same essay appears as "If You Want Peace . . . Conscience and Truth," in *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (New York/San Francisco: Crossroad/Ignatius Press, 2006), 75–99.

It is, so to speak, an inner sense, a capacity to recall, so that the one whom it addresses, if he is not turned in on himself, hears its echo from within (32).

And this suggests the ground for mission:

The possibility for and right to mission rest on this anamnesis of the Creator, which is identical to the ground of our existence. The gospel may, indeed must, be proclaimed to the pagans, because they themselves are yearning for it in the hidden recesses of their souls (see Isaiah 42:4)

In this sense Paul can say that the gentiles are a law to themselves—not in the sense of the modern liberal notions of autonomy, which preclude transcendence of the subject, but in the much deeper sense that nothing belongs less to me than I myself. My own “I” is the site of the profoundest surpassing of self and contact with him from whom I came and toward whom I am going (32–33).

Ratzinger says that Paul’s proclamation thus “encountered an antecedent basic knowledge of the essential components of God’s will, which came to be written down in the commandments, which can be found in all cultures, and which can be all the more clearly elucidated the less an overbearing cultural bias distorts this primordial knowledge” (33).

My presentation first (I–VI) shows the sense in which this love and anamnesis of God is reflected in the embodied person and implies a metaphysical anthropology of being as gift. It then (VII) considers a different interpretation of the relational logic carried in this anthropology of being as gift, and (VIII) concludes by reflecting on the nature of the Church’s cultural mission to America, in light of the anthropology of being as gift.

I.

First principle. The soul is “the principle of unity of the human being, whereby it exists as a whole—*corpore et anima unus*—as a person” (*Veritatis splendor*, 48). “It is in the unity of body and soul that the person is the subject of his . . . acts” (*VS*, 48). “The human person cannot be reduced to a freedom which is self-designing, but entails a particular spiritual and bodily structure” (*VS*, 48).

These statements, first of all, affirm the unity of the human being as a dual, or differentiated, unity of body and soul.

But, secondly, in light of the teaching of St. Thomas (following Aristotle), this unity, rightly understood, presupposes the *primacy* of the soul within the mutual relation of body and soul. The soul gives the body its first meaning *as a body*, although, given the unity of soul and body, the causal relationship between them is always mutually internal, albeit asymmetrical.⁴

⁴Note, then, the statement by Edith Stein in her *Self Portrait in Letters, 1916–1942* (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1994), 98–99 (Letter of 8 August 1931): “The insistence that sexual differences are ‘stipulated by the body alone’ is questionable from various points of view. 1) If *anima = forma corporis*, then bodily differentiation constitutes an index of differentiation in the spirit. 2) Matter serves form, not the reverse. That strongly suggests that the difference in the psyche is the primary one.” An important truth is affirmed here which nevertheless demands further qualification. Given the unity coincident with distinctness between soul and body, each contributes to the meaning of the other, in their respective differences *as soul* and *as body*: the soul contributes to the meaning of the body qua body, even as the body, in a subordinate sense, contributes to the meaning of soul qua soul. The important truth affirmed by Stein is that the soul as form has an absolute priority over matter; nevertheless, for the reason given, it is the case that matter at the same time, within the absolute priority of form, maintains a relative priority over form. The “service” between form and matter, therefore, while thus radically asymmetrical, is nonetheless mutual. Cf. in this connection my “*Agere Sequitur Esse: What Does It Mean? A Reply to Fr. Austriaco*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 32 (Winter, 2005): 795–824, at 809f.

Apròpos of the above, see the argument of Adrian Walker regarding Aquinas’s understanding of the soul as the substantial form of the body, which he integrates into a larger context via John Paul II’s theology of the body. Thus Walker states: “the substantial unity of the intellectual soul and the body, grounded in the *actus essendi* that encompasses both but is identifiable with neither, includes a kind of reciprocal though asymmetrical interpenetration of the two components without separation or confusion. In other words, the unity of the human composite includes a circumincessive *communicatio idiomatum* thanks to which the body and the intellectual soul can each enter into the inmost core of the other without destruction or mingling” (“‘Sown Psychic, Raised Spiritual’: The Lived Body as the Organ of Theology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 33 [Summer 2006], 203–15, at 207, footnote 8). Further, citing 1 Cor 15:44 (“it is sown a soul-body [*soma psychikon*] and raised up a spirit-body [*soma pneumatikon*]”), Walker recalls what Henri de Lubac called the “tripartite anthropology” of “body, soul, and spirit,” which Walker says expresses the sense of spirit he wishes to defend (210). He says, however, quite rightly in my opinion, that “it is a mistake to draw too sharp a contrast between a ‘Hebrew’ tripartite anthropology and a ‘Greek’ dual one. Aristotle, for example, makes a sort of tripartition between the body, the soul-

The body accordingly is never, after the manner of Descartes, simply physicalist “stuff” that somehow has its own “organization” prior to and independent of the order provided by the soul.⁵ Thus the body, in its very bodiliness, can participate in the *imago Dei*. The body in its distinctness as a body indicates a new way of being in the world, a distinct way of imaging God and love.⁶

In sum: the soul as it were lends its spiritual meaning to the body as body, even as the body simultaneously contributes to what now becomes, in man, a distinct kind of spirit: a spirit whose nature it is to be embodied.⁷

II.

Second principle. In the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [CSDC] we read: “The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner. This . . . relationship . . . is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is not added from the outside” (109, emphasis original; see CCC, 356, 358). And further: “The relationship between God and man is reflected in the relational and social dimension of human

as-form-of-the-body (roughly Paul’s *psyche*), and the soul-as-intellect-transcending-the-body (roughly Paul’s *pneuma*). . . . This ‘tripartition’ in Aristotle’s account of body-soul-intellect passes over into Aquinas’s attempted reconciliation of Aristotelian anthropology with the Christian doctrine of the Resurrection” (ibid., 211–12). The point here, relative to my argument, is simply that, in the human soul, the spiritual takes on a corporeal meaning, even as the corporeal *in its very distinctness as such* thereby gives new meaning to the spiritual.

⁵Cf. *Veritatis splendor*’s rejection of such a “pre-moral” conception of the body, which implies that the body is simply “matter” with respect to the exercise of human freedom and intentionality (paragraph 48), and does not embed what Benedict XVI calls “moral reasons” already in its nature as a body.

⁶For a discussion of how the body images God in its own distinct and proper way, that is, qua body and not merely as that which enables the revelation of the light (soul) behind it, see José Granados, “Embodied Light, Incarnate Image: The Mystery of Jesus Transfigured,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 35 (Spring 2008): 6–45, at 19ff.

⁷The implications here for the resurrection of the body and the nature of the beatific vision—and of theology—are discussed in Walker, “Sown Psychic, Raised Spiritual.”

nature. Man . . . is not a solitary being but ‘a social being . . . ’” [cf. GS, 12] (110, emphasis original).⁸

(1) Thus the social dimension of human nature, or again the communion of persons toward which each person is ordained, is a matter of constitutive order. It is an order that is first *given to* the creature, and *enacted by* the creature only and always qua anteriorly given.

What the constitutive relatedness among human beings implies, in sum, is that I am in my original and deepest meaning as such a *substantial individual* who is *ordered at once from and toward* God and others.

(2) My being thus bears the character of gift: of a “what” that is given and received. Indeed, my reception is a response to the gift, a response that, in its very character as receptive-responsive, already participates in the generosity proper to gift-giving. I bear a constitutive order *toward* generosity that always-anteriorly participates in the generosity *I have received* and am *always-already receiving*—from God and other creatures in God.

Note that this constitutive order of generosity bears a dual meaning, characterizing both what is proper to man in his being qua natural and his call to share in the trinitarian life of God himself in Jesus Christ. The constitutive creaturely order of generosity, in other words, bears a properly natural meaning even as it also always is open, however unconsciously, to participation in God’s own generosity. Although sin weighs down and profoundly skews the constitutively generous order of being, sin can never destroy the integrity of this order as naturally given. The upshot, in sum, is that I cannot but always, in some significant sense, implicitly and from my depths, tend toward and desire generosity, and this tending is already a participation in a natural generosity that is in search of participation in God’s own generosity as revealed in Jesus Christ.

(3) It is important to see, thirdly, that constitutive relatedness does not undermine the traditional notion of the person as an

⁸Cf. here also the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World” (2004): “The human creature, in its unity of soul and body, is characterized therefore, from the very beginning, by the relationality with the other-beyond-the-self” (par. 8).

individual substance of a rational nature.⁹ For it is the very relation to God, which relation always already includes relation to all other creatures, that establishes each person *in his individual substantiality*.

The crucial point, in a word, is that the relation to God, and to others in God, that establishes the individual substance in being is *generous*. The relation itself makes and lets me *in my substantial being be*. This “letting be” implies a kind of primordial, ontological “circumincession,” or “perichoresis,” of giving and receiving between the other and myself.¹⁰ What I am in my original constitution as a person has always already been given to me by God and received by me in and as my response to God’s gift to me of myself—indeed, has also, in some significant sense, been given to me by other creatures and received by me in and as my response to their gift to me.

⁹Cf. in this connection the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

“108. *The fundamental message of Sacred Scripture proclaims that the human person is a creature of God* (cf. Ps 139:14–18), *and sees in his being in the image of God the element that characterizes and distinguishes him: ‘God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them’* (Gen 1:27). God places the human creature at the center and summit of the created order. Man (in Hebrew, ‘*adam*’) is formed from the earth (‘*adamah*’) and God blows into his nostrils the breath of life (cf. Gen 2:7). Therefore, ‘being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. Further, he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead’ [CCC, 357].

“109. *The likeness with God shows that the essence and existence of man are constitutively related to God in the most profound manner* [cf. CCC, 356, 358]. This is a relationship that exists in itself, it is therefore not something that comes afterwards and is not added from the outside. The whole of man’s life is a quest and a search for God. This relationship with God can be ignored or even forgotten or dismissed, but it can never be eliminated. Indeed, among all the world’s visible creatures, only man has a ‘capacity for God’ (‘*homo est Dei capax*’) [CCC, Title of Chapter 1, Section 1, Part 1. Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 12; *Evangelium vitae*, 34]. The human being is a personal being created by God to be in relationship with him; man finds life and self-expression only in relationship, and tends naturally to God [cf. *Evangelium vitae*, 35; CCC, 1721].”

¹⁰This “marian” dimension of being is thus essential for a relationality that would remain truly generous and not slip, for example, into a kind of “dialectical” relationality that would indeed undermine the “substantial” consistency of the person. But this important point requires sustained development on another occasion.

The substantial unity characteristic of the traditional notion of the person, therefore, while reaffirmed, is nevertheless now conceived from within the order of love. Each individual substance possesses a substantial unity (*esse in*) while bearing from its beginning and in its depths a dynamic reference from (*esse ab*) and toward (*esse ad*). This dynamic reference, given already with the being (*ens: esse habens*) of the person, indicates the *ontological* beginning of the receiving-giving that characterizes the primitive meaning of human action and is (thereby) meant to be realized in every human action. In the words of Cardinal Ratzinger cited above: man “is a being whose innermost dynamic is . . . directed toward the receiving and giving of love.”

(4) The logic of gift characteristic of creaturely being is best described as *filial*. My being in its substantial unity is constitutively dependent on God and on others in God. It is for this reason that Cardinal Ratzinger has stated that the child in the womb provides the basic figure for what it means to be a human being.¹¹ And indeed it is important to recall in this connection what is perhaps the central emphasis in his Christology, summed up in the claim that “Son” is the highest title of Jesus Christ.¹² Thus the basic logic of our being

¹¹See Joseph Ratzinger, “Truth and Freedom,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23 (Spring, 1996): 16–35, at 27: “For what is at stake here? The being of another person is so closely interwoven with the being of this person, the mother, that for the present it can survive only by physically being with the mother, in a physical unity with her. Such unity, however, does not eliminate the otherness of this being or authorize us to dispute its distinct selfhood. However, to be oneself in this way is to be radically from and through another. Conversely, this being-with compels the being of the other—that is, the mother—to become a being-for, which contradicts her own desire to be an independent self and is thus experienced as the antithesis of her own freedom. We must now add that even once the child is born and the outer form of its being-from and -with changes, it remains just as dependent on, and at the mercy of, a being-for. . . . If we open our eyes, we see that . . . the child in the mother’s womb is simply a very graphic depiction of the essence of human existence in general.”

¹²“Let us not forget that the highest title of Jesus Christ is ‘the Son’—the Son of God. The divine dignity is specified by means of a word that describes Jesus as a perpetual child. His existence as a child corresponds in a unique way to his divinity, which is the divinity of the ‘Son.’ And this means that his existence as a child shows us how we can come to God and to deification. This also explains the meaning of his words: ‘Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’” (Joseph Ratzinger, “Ox and Ass at the Crib,” in *The Blessings of Christmas* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007], 65–85, at 76).

as creatures is disclosed in the child: the obedience, humility, and dependence characteristic of the child disclose creaturely being's deepest and most proper symbolic nature.

In a word, each of us as originally constituted is a sign and expression of the relation to God that is always first granted to us by God in and through the order of being: a sign and expression, in other words, of God's relation to (in difference from) the world that is mediated through the "ontological difference" indicated in the distinction between *esse* and *ens* (*essentia*). What this means concretely is that I am always first *granted entry into the generosity* of God and of the order of being in relation to God. I am never the origin or source of generosity but always a participant in generosity: I am the *origin* of generosity *only-always qua recipient* of generosity, a generous giver but *only-always qua receiver* of generous giving.¹³

In sum: the relationality of the human person introduced by love is first the relationality characteristic of the child as the one who is absolutely *from* the Other—God—and from other beings in God, even as he is thereby *simultaneously also for* the Other, and for other beings in God. For this reason, worship and service most basically characterize the order of creaturely being, with worship of God providing the anterior form of what is meant by service, to God and to others.

Also: "A fundamental word in the mouth of 'the Son' is 'Abba.' It is no accident that we find this word characterizing the figure of Jesus in the New Testament. It expresses his whole being, and all that he says to God in prayer is ultimately only an explication of his being (and hence an explication of this one word); the Our Father is this same 'Abba' transposed into the plural for the benefit of those who are his" (Joseph Ratzinger, *The Feast of Faith: Approaches to a Theology of the Liturgy* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986], 26–27).

See also Ratzinger's commentary on *Gaudium et spes*, "The Dignity of the Human Person," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II* (=CDVII), vol. 5, ed. H. Vorgrimler et al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 115–63, especially his comments on articles 12 and 22; and Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 335–44. It is worth recalling here that if Christ is the first-born of all creatures, then Mary is the proto-mother of all creatures.

¹³It may be interesting here to note the etymological link of the meaning of "nature" with *being born* (Latin, *nascor*; Greek, φύω): thus with what originates—bears within itself the source of activity, of movement and rest—but does so only as always already *given* (by another). The roots of this understanding of nature lie in Aristotle (cf. *Physics*, Bk II, ch. 1), though it is only in the context of the Christian doctrine of creation that the full implications of such a link can be adequately seen.

(5) It is important to take note of the structure of human-creaturally being implied in the foregoing: a unity that is differentiated, a dual unity. Each substantial being at once possesses *its own substantial unity* and does so coincident with relationality to God and to other creaturely beings, and this constitutive relationality at once presupposes and always already “causes” a reference *within each person* to God and others.

The relationality characteristic of each person in his substantial unity as a creature, in other words, signifies and expresses what is the triplex unity-in-duality of the person already, as it were, in his “original solitude,” his filiality, before God. In his original substantial “aleness” as *one*, the human person bears a double reference *from* and *toward* God.¹⁴

(6) Further then, as already suggested, this substantial unity *cum* double dynamic reference to God is at once, albeit consequently, a substantial unity *cum* double reference also to other beings. As

¹⁴Cf. here the statement by John Paul II: “The account of Genesis 1 does not mention the problem of man’s original solitude: in fact, man is ‘male and female’ from the beginning. The Yahwist text of Genesis 2, by contrast, authorizes us in some way to think first only about man inasmuch as, through the body, he belongs to the visible world while going beyond it; it then lets us think about the same man, but through the duality of sex. Bodiliness and sexuality are not simply identical. Although in its normal constitution, the human body carries within itself the signs of sex and is by nature male or female, *the fact that man is a ‘body’ belongs more deeply to the structure of the personal subject than the fact that in his somatic constitution he is also male or female.* For this reason, the meaning of original solitude, which can be referred simply to ‘man,’ is substantially prior to the meaning of original unity; the latter is based on masculinity and femininity, which are, as it were, two different ‘incarnations,’ that is, two ways in which the same human being, created ‘in the image of God’ (Gn 1:27), ‘is a body’” (John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 157).

My colleague, Father José Granados, first drew my attention to the link of original solitude, as understood by John Paul II, with the absolute priority of the whole man’s being ordered to God in a relation of prayer and adoration. It is in just this priority of the whole man as originally made for God alone that forms the priority of virginity already in the order of creation. It is important to see that this original “virginal” relation to God must be recuperated in all relations between spouses—even as the spousal relation can then deepen the meaning of virginity itself. On this “circumincision” of the inner meaning of the two states of life (consecrated virginity and marriage), see David Crawford, “Christian Community and the States of Life: A Reflection on the Anthropological Significance of Virginity and Marriage,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 29, no. 2 (2002): 337–65.

Genesis makes clear, the relationality implied in this double reference to other beings is first relationality with another being who is fully human while at once embodying a different way of being human. Thus the text cited from the *CSDC* states that “the relationship between God and man is reflected in the relational and social dimension of human nature.” And, as Joseph Ratzinger points out in his commentary on *Gaudium et spes*,

the sexual differentiation of mankind into man and woman is much more than a purely biological fact for the purpose of procreation but unconnected with what is truly human in mankind. In it there is accomplished that intrinsic relation of the human being to a Thou, which inherently constitutes him or her as human. . . . The likeness to God in sexuality is prior to sexuality, not identical with it. It is because the human being is capable of the absolute Thou that he is an I who can become a Thou for another I. The capacity for the absolute Thou is the ground of the possibility and necessity of the human partner. Here too, therefore, it is most important to pay attention to the difference between content [*Inhalt*] and consequence [*Folge*].¹⁵

The point is that the content of the doctrine of the *imago Dei* is, in the first place, that man is *capax Dei*: it is the relation to God that originally constitutes each person, and this relation immediately expresses itself in and as relation also to others, which is realized in a privileged way through relation to another who is the *same* kind of being as myself, *differently*: through the relation of two beings who share a *common humanity* in the *different ways termed male/masculine and female/feminine*.

Thus there is in the structure of the human person a second dual unity latent within the person as he stands in his original “solitary” unity before God, and that is the one expressed in the ordering of each person toward a *unity between* persons, between a *one* and an *other*. In the substantial (differentiated-)unity of my own person, I am ordered simultaneously toward *unity with* an other, toward what may be called a communion of persons. I am ordered toward a unity of two—a dual unity. But a unity of two implies transcendence into a “we” that is more than simply the sum of parts; this differentiated unity indicates in some significant sense a new

¹⁵Ratzinger, “The Dignity of the Human Person,” 122.

“third” beyond myself and the other.¹⁶ This unity of two that transcends itself into a “third” is, according to Genesis and the text from Ratzinger cited above, expressed in the spousal relation that presupposes the common filial relation of the partners to God¹⁷ and that is fruitful, most concretely in the procreation of the child.¹⁸

III.

Third principle. The constitutive order of human being as gift or love, according to John Paul II, is signified and expressed *in the body*. “Human nature and the body [are not merely] presuppositions or preambles, materially necessary for freedom to make its choice, yet extrinsic to the person, the subject and the human act. [On the contrary,] their functions . . . constitute reference points for moral decisions, because the finalities of these inclinations [are not] merely ‘physical’ goods, called by some *pre-moral*” (VS, 48). The body bears “the anticipatory signs, the expression and the promise of the gift of self, in conformity with the wise plan of the Creator” (VS, 48). It exhibits a “primordial sacrament[ality] . . . understood as a *sign that efficaciously transmits in the visible world the invisible mystery hidden in God from eternity.*”¹⁹

¹⁶This double triplicity, one *within* each person, the second *between* persons, echoes the two traditions seeking analogies of the trinitarian image in the human being: Augustine and Aquinas on the one hand, with their indications of triplicity within each human being, and Richard of Saint Victor on the other hand, with his argument that love, or the unity of two, requires a third.

¹⁷Cf. in this connection Ephesians 5:21, where Paul affirms the common obedience of both spouses to Christ. It is the common submission of both spouses to Christ that grounds their mutual submission to each other as affirmed by John Paul II in *Mulieris dignitatem*, 24—a mutual submission that is asymmetrical.

¹⁸It is the dimension of filiality at the root of their love for each other (each spouse’s acknowledgment of the other as a gift from God and as *capax Dei*) that actually grounds their fruitfulness, that is, the transcendence of their union beyond the “two”—and this may be blessed by God (in/through the order of nature) in the gift of a child that symbolizes the transcendent union. The interesting thing is that this is all written into the order of the body, so that “literal fruitfulness” does not depend only on our actually behaving like or acknowledging the other as a gift or “son.” The order of nature itself is structured filially, structured to crown filiality with fruitfulness.

¹⁹John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 203.

The body, always-already informed by soul or spirit and actualized by *esse*, thus exhibits an order of love. But what is crucial to see here is that this sign of the creature's constitutive relation to God and others takes a *new form qua body*. The body, in other words, indicates a *distinctive way* of imaging God and love, in its very order as a *body*, as personal-creaturely flesh.

IV.

Fourth principle. As the CSDC says, “the fact that God created *human beings as man and woman* is significant” (110). “Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value, not only because they are both, in their differences, created in the image of God, but even more profoundly because the dynamic of reciprocity that gives life to the ‘we’ in the human couple is an image of God” (111). The human body, marked with the sign of masculinity or femininity, “contains ‘from the beginning’ the ‘spousal’ attribute, that is, *the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift* and—through this gift—fulfills the very meaning of his being and his existence. In this, its own distinctive character, the body is the expression of the spirit”²⁰ “Sexuality characterizes man and woman not only on the physical level, but also on the psychological and spiritual, making its mark on each of their expressions.”²¹

By the nuptial or spousal attribute of the body, then, John Paul II refers to the body's capacity for expressing love, as realized especially in the body's sexual difference.

But let me emphasize: the importance accorded by John Paul II to the sexual-gender difference, and thus to what he terms the “nuptial” or “spousal” *body*, does not overturn the traditional emphasis on the human *spirit* as the primary locus of the image of God in the human being. The human person is, *qua embodied*, a new image of what it means to be a person conceived in terms of God's creational love: an image which, as at once *new* and *of the person*, enriches and deepens *in its very difference as a body* what is in

²⁰Ibid., 185–86.

²¹Congregation for Catholic Education, *Educational Guidance in Human Love* (1983), 4.

some significant sense already, and indeed more basically and properly-analogically, *inherent in the reality of person-spirit as such*.²²

John Paul II's theology of the body, in a word, is about God and being as love, and about the body and the sexual difference insofar as these are a sign and expression of this theologically-ontologically-anthropologically prior love, even as the body precisely in its sexual difference provides a *new and just so far enriched and deepened* understanding of this prior love.²³

Aptness for fatherhood and motherhood thus are not "accidental" to the human person conceived as a substantial unity constitutively related to others. On the contrary, fatherhood and motherhood specify in a unique way the aptness for receiving and giving characteristic of the human, embodied person's relationality; they are a realization *in the flesh* of the *imago Dei* that originates and abides in the person's filial relation to God.

V.

It is important to note that man and woman each contain the *whole meaning* of the person, but *in a different order*. It is from within the *substantial wholeness* of each as human that the man and woman

²²Note here Fergus Kerr's sardonic criticism of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's "Letter on the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World," which he interprets as follows: "According to the Congregation document . . . [t]he human creature, as 'image of God', . . . is 'articulated in the male-female relationship.' It is not in our rationality but in sexual difference that we image God—in our genitalia, not in our heads, so to speak" (*Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians: From Neo-Scholasticism to Nuptial Mysticism* [Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2007], 194). Such a criticism misses the point that sexuality is understood in this document—and by Ratzinger—as a *consequence (Folge)* of the *capax Dei* and filial love (hence spirituality/rationality), which latter is the *content (Inhalt)* of the image of God: thus "likeness to God is prior to sexuality, not identical with it" (cf. Ratzinger, "The Dignity of the Human Person," 122). It must be said, however, that there are interpretations, for example, of John Paul II's theology of the body, which, failing to take note of the distinction made here by Ratzinger, give credibility to criticisms such as Kerr's.

²³For a discussion of the notion of analogy that is operative in the spirit's and body's distinct ways (similar-within-ever-greater-difference) of imaging God as conceived here, see my "Person, Body, and Biology: The Anthropological Challenge of Homosexuality," section VI (to appear).

bear *differently a dual reference* from and toward others that is ordered differently in each. Needless to say, even with its rejection of a fragmentary understanding of the sexual-gender difference, the unified polarity of man and woman indicated here, along with the filial meaning of both indicated earlier, meet with strong resistance in the current cultural situation. It is important to take note of the assumptions that drive this resistance. These seem to me above all three, involving, first, the role of the biological in interpreting the meaning of the personal; second, the nature of unity and distinction and hence equality and difference; and, third, the idea of receptivity, with its related ideas of obedience and dependence.

(1) Following John Paul II, I have proposed that the physical-sexual difference, precisely in and as physical-sexual, symbolizes an ontological-spiritual and also psychological difference. The language of giving and receiving and fruitfulness, for example, in their physical meaning as applied to the body—in the *consummation*, conception, and the like—signify and express *qua body* what is characteristic of a spiritual act or activity in its most basic meaning as an order of love. This language, in other words, symbolizes *in bodily form* what is termed the giving and receiving, and indeed just so far what may be termed the “transcendence” and “immanence,” necessary for personal love in its full and proper meaning. A common contemporary objection is that this use of terms characteristic of the sexual-physical weights the latter with a human-spiritual and indeed ontological significance all out of proportion to what is typically today viewed as simply biological. It suffices here simply to note that this objection presupposes, however unwittingly, a Cartesian idea of the body.

(2) Regarding the second: using language that indicates a unity *within* difference creates difficulties because the dominant culture is accustomed, again, to making distinctions in an unwittingly Cartesian manner: if x is truly distinct from y, x must just so far share nothing in common with y.²⁴

²⁴Recall Descartes’s fondness for the straight lines of (abstract) geometry: x and y lie on opposite sides of the line from each other, in a way that insures that x is only x and is entirely exclusive of y, and vice versa. The first consequence is that what is distinct from x must be simply different from x. But this first consequence needs to be seen immediately in terms of a second, more paradoxical consequence. For Descartes’s mechanistic way of distinguishing between x and y, which would render each wholly different from the other, hiddenly imports its own new sense

It seems to me difficult to exaggerate the significance of this modern-“Enlightened” idea of unity and distinctness. Such an idea precludes *a priori* any unity between x and y that is inclusive, precisely *qua unity*, of real difference between x and y, and hence of any asymmetry in the mutual relation of x and y. And it precludes any difference between x and y that is inclusive, precisely *qua difference*, of any real unity hence equality between x and y. In a word: insofar as x and y are equal, they are necessarily the same; and insofar as they are different, they are necessarily unequal, lacking the unity that would render them equal.

(3) Regarding the third assumption: human agency as typically conceived in modern culture, after the manner, say, of Francis Bacon (and Descartes), is characterized by a primacy of *originary power*. This idea of human agency, in other words, precludes the possibility of any kind of power in which the agent is essentially a participant, and thus is anteriorly receptive and dependent and indeed obedient, *in his original power*. On this dominant post-Enlightenment understanding, an original receptivity in the agent would indicate a passivity that is *eo ipso* defective.²⁵

of unity. In their would-be simple difference from each other, x and y in fact remain hiddenly the *same* as each other, that is, in each’s still mechanistically distinguished identity. The Cartesian idea of unity and distinctness, in other words, which on the one hand *separates in an equivocal manner* what it would distinguish, at the same time unwittingly, at a deeper level, *unifies in a univocal manner* what it would distinguish. Cf. the discussion of Descartes on unity and distinctness in my “The Given as Gift: Creation and Disciplinary Abstraction in Science,” pages 10–14 (manuscript), to appear in my *Ordering Love: Creation and Creativity in a Technological Age* (in the Eerdmans “Interventions” series), Chapter 7.

²⁵It should be pointed out here, however, that the understanding of receptivity as primarily negative, a sign of an imperfect agent, has roots in a significant sense already in the classical tradition of Christian philosophy as well. It must be said nonetheless that the classical tradition has resources countering a purely negative idea of receptivity or patience that “Enlightened” thought does not have: its primacy of the contemplative or the “theoretical” or indeed of leisure and worship, its cognitional realism, its convertibility of the true, the good, and the beautiful with being (i.e., in its givenness as such: *verum et bonum qua ens* and not *quia factum*), and so on. (The work of Josef Pieper is very helpful on these points.) There nevertheless remain many—significant—difficulties in the classical tradition of philosophy, in terms of integrating the patient-receptive (or indeed the childlike and the “poor”) into the proper meaning of act or activity, which indeed becomes possible only insofar as one (re-)conceives the primary meaning of act or activity in terms of love. Here the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar and Ferdinand

The understanding of the human person-body developed in this article in the light of creation and the “ontological distinction” demands receptivity and dependence for its integrity. A person who is constitutively from God is “rich” in the very “poverty” of the receptiveness that enables his *full and substantial being* as a creature; and his obedient dependence is itself always already a *creaturely*

Ulrich—and Joseph Ratzinger—is especially helpful.

For a limited discussion of this problem in terms of Thomism, see my *Heart of the World, Center of the Church: Communio Ecclesiology, Liberalism, and Liberation* (Grand Rapids, Mich./Edinburgh: Eerdmans Publishing Company/T&T Clark, 1996), 292–309; and also the articles by Stephen Long and recently deceased Father Norris Clarke, which develop two strong but different interpretations of Thomism on the above matters. See Stephen A. Long, “Divine and Creaturely ‘Receptivity’: The Search for a Middle Term,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 21, no. 1 (1994): 151–61; and W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “Response to David Schindler’s Comments,” *Communio* 20, no. 3 (1993): 593–98; and “Response to Long’s Comments,” *Communio* 21, no. 1 (1994): 165–69. Available at communio-icr.com/person.htm. See also in particular Fr. Clarke’s concluding statement in the matter:

“I had not thought of this profound dimension of receptivity, hence relativity, in all of us, even preceding any action on our part. Hence I am quite willing to broaden my description of all—at least finite—being to include a triadic aspect: being from another, being in itself, being toward others, or in the luminous terseness of the Latin, *esse ab, esse in, esse ad*. That is why the first appropriate response of a conscious being should in principle be gratitude for its own being as a gift from. . . .

“Can we go further and assert that this relation of primordial receptivity of its own being is proper not only to created being but to all being, including the divine? We could not affirm this on the basis of philosophical inference about the divine, hidden in mystery from our limited concepts, extrapolated from our experience of finite beings. But the Christian revelation of God as triune opens up to us a vision of the interior life of God as containing receptivity within it as part of its very being as divine life, i.e., it is of the very nature of the supreme divine being that the Second and Third Persons within possess the one, whole, and complete divine nature as gift *received from* the First Person through the eternal processions of the Son from the Father and the Holy Spirit from both. Thus this primordial relation of receptivity is somehow present in all being, though in a highly analogous way in God, freed from all limitation and imperfection.

“I might add that in created beings this primordial relation of receptivity in being extends not only to God but also to many other preexisting beings, such as our parents, and indeed to the whole supporting environment of our tightly interwoven material cosmos. We are indeed *from* this whole material world in some significant way and should extend our gratitude appropriately to it” (W. Norris Clarke, S.J., “To Be Is To Be Substance-in-Relation,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being, God, Person* [Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994], 102–22, at 119–20).

participation in God's generosity and thus at once *an image of that generosity*.²⁶ Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI deepens the point here in christological terms, stressing repeatedly in his work that Christ's *unconditionally obedient* fidelity to the will of God is an integral sign and expression of his being united with God—his being *Son of God*.²⁷ Obedience and receptivity at their root are thus “perfections” of what it means to be human, indeed of what it means to *be* in a filial sense. And unity and equality, while affirmed, are nevertheless now differentiated into an order of service and just so far “subordination” to an other. This “subordination” is not dehumanizing, but on the contrary humanizing in the fullest sense, given the constitutive reality of human being as created in love and for love. In a word, unity on a Christian understanding is never the mono-unity required by Descartes's logic of the machine, but always the dual unity (which, as fruitful, is in fact a tri-unity) required by the constitutively creaturely logic of love.

The errors carried in above “Enlightened”-liberal assumptions can be given names: for example, gnosticism, which fails to recognize the giftedness proper to creation and its penetration down through the order of the body, such that the body is good already *qua ens* (being) (intrinsically good) and not only *quia factum* (qua being [re-]made by humans) (good qua instrument of humans), and that the body thus participates in the “transcendental” meaning of being as at once true, good, and beautiful. Deism and pelagianism, both of which fail to recuperate divine-fatherly origin as an immanent presence informing the original-constitutive meaning of human being and acting. Nominalism, which denies the singular being, in its very singularity, any inherent symbolic reference to another; or

²⁶See here the work of Ferdinand Ulrich, *inter alia*: *Der Mensch als Anfang. Zur Anthropologie der Kindheit* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1970); *Homo Abyssus. Das Wagnis der Seinsfrage* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1998); and “A Dangerous Reflection on the Fundamental Act of the Creature,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 23, no. 1 (1996): 36–46. See also Martin Bieler's “The Analogia Entis as an Expression of Love According to Ferdinand Ulrich” (paper given at the conference, “The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Anti-Christ or the Wisdom of God? A Symposium,” Washington, D.C., 4–6 April 2008). The burden of Ulrich's argument is implicit in what we stated earlier: namely, that the primordial act of reception (“poverty”) that constitutes the creature is at once a participation in God's own giving (“wealth”), expressed in what is now the creature's own autonomy as a creature.

²⁷Cf., *inter alia*, Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

again which permits no complex or differentiated unity and thereby reduces the singular always and everywhere to a “mono-unity” exclusive of a dual unity that is fruitful. And so on.

Such errors, again, entail denial of the distinctly ontological meaning of the human being as a creature. Having abstracted from the concrete, filial-spousal, order of love established by God in the act of creation, the dominant “Enlightened” vision of reality eliminates adoration and service as the fundamental order of man’s being—an order that is inclusive of his body—even as it tends of its inner logic to reduce the body to a merely “empirical” reality, freedom to a purely formal exercise of choice, sexual-gender difference to a more or less inconsequential physical difference, and receptivity and obedience to dehumanizing passivity. It is important, in light of the foregoing argument, to see that, though the fullness of what is meant by adoration and service as the fundamental order of man’s being can be understood finally only in light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, this order is manifest in principle, in some significant sense, in the creature already in his being as a thing of “nature,” and is just so far accessible in principle to reason (*anamnesis*).

VI.

My argument, in sum, is that being, viewed at once in light of creation and of the “ontological,” or “real,” distinction between *esse* and *ens* (*essentia*) that gives creation its first and basic “natural” meaning is gift, and that this giftedness is signified and expressed in a uniquely privileged way in the body: in the filial and spousal-fruitful relations that constitute marriage and family. The suggestion that being is gift or love does not indicate the invention of a new “transcendental” called love, in addition to unity, truth, goodness, and beauty. On the contrary, it affirms these latter anew, understanding them now analogically (*analogatum princeps*) in terms of the filial-spousal-fruitful relationality constitutive of human persons vis-à-vis God and others. It is the love proper to persons in this sense, in other words, that properly realizes the depth and breadth of being as such in its “transcendental” truth and goodness: realizes fully, in a truly analogical way, what it means for cosmic entities to be and to act and indeed to interact. In a word, it is in persons so

understood that meta-physics takes its proper form as at once meta-anthropology.²⁸

What all this implies for our cultural-“worldly” task can be put in terms of Maximus the Confessor’s understanding of the order of creaturely being as a “cosmic liturgy”²⁹—which we might amplify, in light of our argument, as a cosmic liturgy unfolding at once into “cosmic service.” Every creaturely being is a gift from and toward God and other creatures in God, a gift that is as such ordered constitutively to worship and service of God, and service of others. Every cosmic entity is a gift that participates, via its creaturely receptivity and each in its own (analogical) way, in the gift-giving of God and in the generosity of being itself.³⁰ According to Maximus, the human being is the mid-point, as it were, of the order of creation. In the human being, physics and biology become personalized, even as the person takes the shape of a body. Thus the human person—after Christ and in Christ—becomes the mediator (*analogatum princeps*) for the whole of creation. In and through the human

²⁸Cf. Balthasar’s *Epilog* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1987) (*Epilogue* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004]).

²⁹Pope Benedict XVI, in his weekly audience of 25 June 2008, dedicated to Maximus the Confessor, said, “God entrusted to man, created in his image and likeness, the mission of unifying the cosmos. And just as Christ reunified the human being in himself, the Creator unified the cosmos in man. He showed us how to unify the cosmos in the communion of Christ and thus truly arrived at a redeemed world. Hans Urs von Balthasar, one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, referred to this powerful saving vision when . . . he defined Maximus’s thought with the vivid expression *Kosmische Liturgie*, ‘cosmic liturgy.’ . . . We must live united to God in order to be united to ourselves and to the cosmos, giving the cosmos itself and humanity their proper form.” (For an English translation of the work in question, see Balthasar’s *Cosmic Liturgy: The Universe According to Maximus the Confessor* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003]).

³⁰See Karol Wojtyła, “The Problem of the Constitution of Culture Through Human Praxis,” in *Person and Community* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 63–275, at 269–70:

“Culture forms . . . a kind of organic whole with nature. It reveals the roots of our union with nature, but also of our superior encounter with the Creator in the eternal plan: a plan in which we participate by means of reason and wisdom There exists in nature, or the world, an anticipation of . . . human activity and a radiation of humanity through praxis. There is also in nature, or the world, a kind of readiness to put itself at our disposal: to serve human needs, to welcome within it the superior scale of human ends, to enter in some way into the human dimension and participate in human existence in the world.”

being, the cosmos itself *properly* realizes its destined participation in worship of God and fruitful service to God and others.³¹

VII.

Let us now consider an alternative interpretation of the theology of the body and gift: that provided by Professor Michael Waldstein in the long introduction to his fine translation of John Paul II's discourses on the theology of the body. My intention is to propose a friendly line of criticism, inviting mutual clarification relative to issues that seem to me crucially significant for our conception of the Church's cultural task in contemporary America. I raise the issues, not simply because of their relevance to Waldstein, but because he articulates in an especially clear and sophisticated manner what I believe is a dominant reading of the theology of the body.

Waldstein rightly emphasizes John Paul's rejection of a Cartesian in favor of an Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding: "the purpose of TOB as a whole," he says, "is to defend the spousal meaning of the body against the alienation between person and body in the Cartesian vision of nature."³² My question, however, is whether his argument suffices to give us more than Aristotle's human-organic body: in other words, whether what this line of argument gives us in the end is truly a filial-spousal body or indeed person: a body or person understood as gift or love already in its

³¹It is helpful to recall in this connection the original, comprehensive meaning and order of the sin of Adam and Eve. Their sin consists most basically in actualizing in freedom a privation of their creaturely-filial relation to God (Gn 3:5); the sin results immediately in a rupture of their spousal relationship, in a way expressed differently with respect to Adam and to Eve (in terms respectively of control and of desire: Gn 3:16); and this double rupture of filial and spousal relations immediately results in a third rupture: that between the human couple and the rest of creation, and among all of created-cosmic entities themselves (Gn 4:12). It is important here, then, to note the order (filial, spousal, cosmic) and comprehensive effects of sin in its original meaning: both the order and the effects are somehow recapitulated in every sin. It is sin in just this comprehensive sense that the human person, as integral to Maximus's "cosmic liturgy," is meant to address, that is, in and through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, and his Petrine-sacramental Church that is brought into being in and by the immaculate *fiat* of Mary.

³²Michael Waldstein, "Introduction," to John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline, 2006), 1–128, at 107.

constitutive order *qua body* and *qua person*. This assertion may seem strange, since the explicit intention of this argument is to affirm that the body is meant to express the logic of gift: “*the Incarnation shows that the meaning of the body is spousal. . . . Christ’s gift of self is . . . the goal that most deeply explains God’s original intention in creating the body*” (97). Nonetheless, I take his argument in its entirety to harbor an ambiguity. What is this ambiguity, and why is it significant?

Consider what is the first and basic assertion of the argument: “To love is to give oneself” (24). Waldstein links this assertion with “the spousal love between a man and a woman,” which he understands as the “paradigmatic case of a total gift of self in our experience” (24), and he then links the latter in turn with the “Trinity as the exemplar of love and gift” (24). Thus “the gift of self is present with particular completeness in the spousal love between man and woman”; and “Love and Gift take place in complete fullness in the begetting of the Son and the procession of the Spirit” (24). Citing *Gaudium et Spes*, 24:3, a text he (rightly) says is key for John Paul II’s theology of the body and gift, Waldstein emphasizes the fundamentality of the principles contained in the last sentence of this text: “First, God wills human beings for their own sake, for their good. . . . Wojtyla calls this principle ‘the personalistic norm.’ Second, persons can only find themselves in a sincere gift of self” (23).

This text from *GS*, and the two principles stated here, are indeed essential for John Paul II’s theology of the body and gift. But their proper meaning needs to be seen in light of the whole of his theology. As emphasized repeatedly earlier in this paper, the giving of self is always, anteriorly, a being-given of the self by another. I give only *qua* being-given, as a participant in a generosity originating in the Creator God and carried consequently, always-already, in the generosity of other creatures—the generosity inherent in the universal community of creaturely being as such. Love is something I *do* only as always, anteriorly, a *being-done to (fiat)*. In the words of philosopher Robert Spaemann, the fundamental act of freedom is “letting be”:³³ the letting be of the being-given of myself to myself by God and others—the letting be of the effectiveness of God and others *in* me that originally constitutes my being as a gift that *itself* gives. My freedom at its core and thus in each of its acts actively-

³³Robert Spaemann, “Natur,” in *Philosophische Essays*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1994). English translation forthcoming in the *Spaemann Reader* from ISI Books.

receptively recollects my being-given as gift and thus as apt for gift-giving (cf. Benedict's discussion of *anamnesis*): it recuperates the relation to God and others in which I find myself always already a participant and of which, consequently, I am *never first or simply the origin*.

The point, in a word, is that I *enact* generosity only insofar as my *being* is always already effectively generous by virtue of the presence *in* me of the generosity of God and others. I am an *agent* of love only as one whose *being* is always already constituted *by* love and *in* love.

Note that there thus can be no disjoining of *esse* (being) and *agere* (acting): *esse* and *agere* are each inside the other, and just so far presuppose a unity inside their distinctness. They nevertheless bear an order within their coextensiveness. My acting in its primordial meaning bears a memory of the relation to God and others in God that is constitutive of my very *being* as an agent. My being to be sure presupposes in some significant sense an act of receiving on my part, even if this act is not yet a fully reflexive act of freedom. The point is that this act is just that: an act which, precisely in its form at once as act and as act of receiving, presupposes the being-given of my self—the gift of my being. It is an act precisely qua reception of my being as gift-from-another.

The point here can be clarified in terms of the way in which Waldstein conceives the relation between GS, 24, and GS, 22 (a text which is cited in significant ways in nearly every one of John Paul II's encyclicals). He says these two texts are closely connected:

According to GS, 22:1, Christ reveals man to himself through the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love. According to GS, 24:3, the trinitarian exemplar of union between the divine Persons shows that man can only find himself through a sincere gift of self. These two formulations seem to aim at one and the same thing: for man to be fully revealed to himself and to find himself are at least closely connected, if not identical . . . (96). Waldstein then says, further: "From the Father's love and the Trinity of Persons, through the creation of the world, all the way to the body, there is a single logic of gift" (97).

All that Waldstein says here is true. My argument, nevertheless, is that there still lacks the crucial qualifier which comes with recognition of the distinctly filial dimension of self-giving. It is this *filial* dimension of self-giving that is brought into relief in the phrasing of GS, 22: it is in his revelation of the Father and the

Father's love that Christ—the second Person of the Trinity, the Son-Word of the Father from all eternity—reveals the meaning of man to himself as ordered toward the giving of self. That is: creatures image the Father as unoriginate origin of self-giving only in and through the Son, the one who gives what he is given, who is *for* another only and always as *from* another.

The point here is clarified further in light of Colossians 1:15–18, which says that Christ is the firstborn of creatures, that we are all created in him and for him—as sons and daughters in the Child-Son. And again in light of the First Letter of John, which tells us that “in this is love, that God has first loved us” (1 Jn 4:10).

The text of GS, 22, in other words, together with scriptural texts such as these, helps us see the fuller implication of the principle emphasized in GS, 24, that God wills human beings for their own sake. God gives us our being for our own sake, and this means generously: he gives us our being such that, in this *being-given*, we are at once exercisers of our own being as *responsive givers*.

In a word, Jesus gives of himself only as the one who has always already and from all eternity received all that he is as divine Son from the Father—even as he has always already and from all eternity returned all that he is as divine Son to the Father. And it is only in this Sonship, this filiality, that creatures image the Father.

This, then, in a word, is what it means for God to will creatures for their own sake: he grants them their own generosity, their own *intrinsic participation* in generosity, in and through the *filial generosity* characteristic of sons and daughters in the Son.

Further, then, it is this filiality constitutive of the creature that lies at the root and informs the first meaning of the constitutive community of all creatures in and under God: the constitutive community, in other words, that takes its primordial form as a creaturely *communio personarum* in the spousal, fruitful relation of Adam and Eve. The spousal community characteristic of the human person is given to Adam and Eve inside their filial community with God, as a sign that expresses this anterior filial community: a sign that expresses in a new creaturely and personal way the generous, fruitful love between the Creator God and his creaturely world that is properly termed a filial-spousal relation. Any failure to incorporate filiality within the constitutive meaning of the human being logically entails a failure also to incorporate nuptiality, and filial-nuptial fruitfulness, within the constitutive meaning of the human being.

It is this *constitutive* filial-spousal-fruitful relationality that alone, in my opinion, gets us to the root meaning of John Paul II's theology of the body. As I read that theology, especially in light of *Gaudium et spes* and indeed in interpretation of the fundamental meaning of the Second Vatican Council, its burden is that creaturely being is gift; that this order of gift is disclosed above all in the human person; and that this order reaches down through the body of the human person, such that the sexual-gender difference, and the filial-spousal relation presupposed and expressed in this difference, play a privileged analogical role (*analogatum princeps*) in symbolizing (in a primordially "sacramental" way) the meaning of creaturely being in its relation to God and to the community of creatures under God.

Waldstein himself notes the father-son relation as the normative image for the Trinity in the teaching of Jesus (33). My question, simply, is whether the creature's constitutive being-as-memory of God and others has been integrated into the logic of gift in the way required by creation in Christ, in the sense indicated. That was the burden of my suggestion above that his appeal to the organic-personal body of Aristotle and St. Thomas as decisive in Wojtyła's rejection of Descartes is necessary but not yet sufficient. On Waldstein's reading, it seems to me, the human person really becomes a matter of love first via his own enactment of the gift of self (*agere*). On such a reading, however, it is more the case that we make the body into a gift than that we reenact in freedom—to be sure, in a new way—what the body itself already signifies and expresses in its very givenness, or giftedness, *qua* body. Again, it is more the case that we first bestow a spousal meaning on the body in its sexual difference than that we reenact in freedom—in reflexive awareness and with new and deepened meaning—what the sexually differentiated body always already symbolizes in its original constitution as a body. The qualifier indicated here indeed reveals what is a significant ambiguity in Waldstein's sense of "completeness," as in his statement cited above that "the gift of self is present with particular completeness in the spousal love between man and woman." It makes all the difference whether the human-spousal act that completes the gift of self is understood as a recuperation in a new and reflexive way of what is the *already given* meaning of the body as spousal, or on the contrary as a *simple addition* of spousal meaning, *via human intention*, to a body conceived to be sure as an organism rather than a machine, but not yet as a matter of spousal meaning, already *qua* body.

There is to be sure much to be argued further with respect to the issues I have raised relative to Waldstein's reading of John Paul II's *Man and Woman He Created Them*.³⁴ My limited purpose in the present article is to bring into relief what is perhaps the most fundamental constructive question raised by Waldstein's reading: that regarding the original source and nature of the *givenness* or *giftedness* or *givingness* characteristic of the body-person. When and on what terms does generosity/gift-giving first emerge in the (human) creature? In what sense does this gift-giving presuppose an always anterior being-given by another—a given-giving that is reflected in the human body thus as a *constitutive* filial-spousal order? Answers to these questions, in the end, demand distinct but interrelated theological and philosophical accounts of the relation/distinction between God and the world and of the relation/distinction between be-ing (*esse*) and essence or substance (*ens*)—and indeed between each being and all other beings (*esse commune*).

It is in terms of these issues, in a word, that the question of how best to conceive the theology of the body must finally be framed and argued.

The significance of the issues I have raised comes into view when we recall our earlier references to the problems of deism, pelagianism, nominalism, and gnosticism. Each of these problems turns on the nature of creaturely being as gift from God and indeed

³⁴There are for example many hermeneutical issues that arise relative to the question of the various sources of Wojtyła's/John Paul II's thought, among which sources St. John of the Cross is certainly central, as Waldstein argues. Here I would only insist that an adequate interpretation of that thought needs to take integrated account of what was basic to Wojtyła's life experience as a pastor and indeed as a participant in the Second Vatican Council: the centrality of love in his understanding of the human person, and his clear recognition of the Council's (re-)centering of its understanding of the human person and indeed of creation in Christ—and, in this connection, John Paul II's repeated singling out for emphasis *Gaudium et spes*, 22, with its linking of man to love in and through Christ's revelation of the love of the Father. Cf. in this connection, *inter alia*: Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, *Sources of Renewal* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 75; John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 1: regarding the integration of Christology and anthropology as perhaps the central teaching of the Council. Needless to say, the historical-methodological issues raised here are complicated, and need more discussion elsewhere. My limited purpose has been to try to draw attention to "systematic" or "constructive" issues that seem to me of crucial importance for a right understanding of the theology of the body and gift and that are very much bound up with these methodological questions.

of the creaturely community of being established in this gift. The filial-spousal relations of the human person rooted and reflected in the sexually differentiated human body indicate the *most basic and concrete logic* of the being of the creature as gift. Conceiving this giftedness sufficiently radically in light of creation demands the primacy of the features of being—from another and (thereby) being-symbolic of another: the primacy of a generosity or gift-giving that is always already a *being-given*, hence a *received* or *participated* generosity. An adequate sense of creaturely giftedness demands the affirmation, again, of being as constitutive memory of God and others, already in its original constitution *in* and *as* a substantial self. It is the absence of this being as memory that most basically defines deism and pelagianism. It is this absence of memory in a different sense—this failure to recapitulate analogically the universe of being in which an entity is always-anteriorly a participant—that defines nominalism in its most primitive meaning.³⁵ Finally, it is in this absence of being as constitutive memory and constitutive relatedness to other creatures that we find the primitive roots of what is meant by gnosticism in its distinctly modern sense, by gnosticism’s failure to see the body as good already in its givenness as such (*verum et bonum qua ens*)—and not good only insofar as it is acted upon or “re-made” by the human being (*verum et bonum quia factum*). Each of the foregoing errors then becomes in the end but a different violation of the logic of freedom as most fundamentally a “letting-be”—which is to say a different expression of freedom qua forgetful of its being-given.

My presupposition, in a word, is that, in order to understand the idea of the embodied person as gift in the radical sense needed properly to identify, and respond to, these fundamental errors, we need to recover relationality in its *constitutive* roots in being as created by God.

These errors are not merely “theoretical” problems. More properly understood, they are on the contrary articulations of entire ways of life: they indicate the root meaning of the dominant contemporary patterns of life.

³⁵Indeed it is in deism, pelagianism, and nominalism as summarily defined here that we find the primitive roots of the liberal conception of human *agere* as purely formal agency, an agency abstracted from the inner reference to another carried in the sexually differentiated body with its filial-spousal meaning.

VIII.

We conclude, then, with an overview of what all of the foregoing implies for the Church's cultural task specifically in America.

(1) Writing on the hundredth anniversary of Leo XIII's *Testem benevolentiae* at the end of the twentieth century, many Catholics on both the left and the right insisted that history had borne out the truth of the judgement that the so-called "Americanist heresy" criticized in Leo's encyclical was a phantom heresy.³⁶ Framing the issue of Americanism in terms of the relation between Catholicism and distinctly Anglo-American liberalism, these Catholics argued that the Church of the Council and the post-conciliar period, reflected in such documents as *Dignitatis humanae* and *Centesimus annus* and indeed *Gaudium et spes*, had now come to see more clearly an inner harmony between her own tradition and the juridical—"political" liberalism present in the history of America, in contrast to the doctrinaire liberalism present in post-revolutionary Europe. The Church had come to accept Anglo-American liberalism's juridical conception of public—political and economic—institutions, with their (so-called) "negative" rights and formal freedom; and had come to a greater appreciation for the "legitimate autonomy" of human-natural being and action—a double claim that has its "classical" expression in the work of Father John Courtney Murray.

The presupposition of my argument, relative to those who have insisted that the problem of the relation between Catholicism and American liberalism has been put to rest especially with the Council and in the pontificate of John Paul II, is that in fact the Council, and John Paul II and now Benedict XVI as interpreters of

³⁶In his 1899 encyclical, *Testem benevolentiae*, Leo XIII highlighted some problematic tendencies in America that he thought were becoming influential among Catholics. Notable among these were a sense of freedom that risked drawing men "away from conscience and duty"; a certain primacy of the natural over the supernatural virtues; a division of the virtues into passive and active, with the former viewed as "better suited for . . . past times"; a conception of the evangelical virtues as passive, with a consequent sense of the life of religious vows as "out of keeping with the spirit of the age"; and so on. As is well-known, many leaders of the Church at the time, while acknowledging that in principle such tendencies were aptly seen as errors, said nevertheless that such errors did not characterize Catholic life in America, hence the term, "phantom heresy."

the Council, give us the terms in which this problematic can be properly taken up—for the first time, we might say. My limited purpose in the present forum has been to frame the historical problematic in the constructive terms provided by the theology of body and gift as articulated in John Paul II and developed further in Benedict XVI's christological anthropology of sonship. What is developed in the work of these men is nothing less than a renewed understanding of what it means *to be*, in light of creation, an understanding that is theological while bearing also a distinctly *metaphysical* anthropology.

What I am arguing is that it is just the question of the meaning of the ontological generosity of man as rooted in his constitutive being-given that is invoked most basically, even if mostly unconsciously, at the heart of the controversy regarding the meaning of Catholicism relative to American culture: at the heart of how one is, *vis-à-vis* American culture, to understand liberty in its relation to conscience and duty; the distinction between natural and supernatural virtues; the nature of the virtues in their so-called passive as distinct from active meaning, and so on—all of these issues given a first formulation in *Testem benevolentiae*. The meaning of each of the issues has to do with how one conceives the self in its relation to God and to other beings: with the sense in which that relation is first given by God and by others to the self—or better, is mutually given by each to the other in radically asymmetrical ways. John Paul II's theology of the sexually-and-gender-differentiated nuptial body as gift and Benedict's theology of sonship in Christ and of conscience as constitutive *anamnesis* of God and others are more ample articulations of this sense of the self's relation to God.

Filial-nuptial fruitfulness, in other words, understood at once in light of the doctrine of creation (and redemption) in Christ, and of the family as the first and most basic “secular” *communio personarum*, does not indicate just one particularly important—or “complete”—way of expressing the meaning of the human being as gift. On the contrary, it is the *most basic and concrete content* of human being as gift. It is not as though the human being were a gift ordered to giving who happened to be male and or female and whose being born was merely a necessary biological condition for the free and intelligent acts of giving to come later. On the contrary, being born, and being born as male or female and apt for paternal- or maternal-nuptial fruitfulness, indicate the original and abiding *order* of gift-receiving and gift-giving as actualized qua embodied persons. Filial

and gender-differentiated nuptial relationality is never first simply “contractual” in nature. It is rather a “primordially sacramental” sign and expression of the ordered relationality that is always first given by God and by other creatures in God. It is because of this constitutive filial and nuptial relationality, of this being first a child of God and indeed of the universe of being itself in and through one’s own parents, that each one in each of his acts cannot but recuperate his being always already—in a basic if not wholly conscious way—as a generous-responsive “letting be” of oneself, and thus of God and of the others relation to whom is always already generously effective in one’s self.

My basic point with respect to the relation between Catholicism and America’s “exceptional” liberalism is thus that “letting be,” as the original-anterior form of creaturely being and action, is the key enabling us to go to the root of the criticisms first identified by Leo XIII. “Letting be,” as generous-responsive participation in being as gift, is the key enabling us to appropriate the primitive meaning of conscience and duty with their implication of being bound to God and others; to see the unity within distinction of the so-called passive and active virtues, and to understand (thus) that “passivity” and “activity” each give primitive form to the other in each’s most basic meaning as such; and, finally, to perceive the originally positive character of the obedience and poverty proper to the consecrated life of virginity—indeed to perceive why the consecrated life of virginity in obedience and poverty fulfills the original creaturely meaning of man as man—hence including also modern man—in his destined covenant with God.

It is only in light of this that we can interpret properly the “legitimate autonomy” and indeed legitimate natural secularity of man; and to see how and why the putative purely formal freedom and intelligence presupposed by juridical liberalism is, *eo ipso*, however paradoxically, “full” of ontological (and implicitly theological) form—revealing this ontological-theological form to be of its inner dynamic deistic, pelagian, nominalist, and gnostic in nature, bearing an unwitting logic of violence toward being in its defenseless givenness and “transcendental” truth, goodness, and beauty.

My summary argument, then, is that the problems of America in our time can be identified and addressed properly only through recuperation of generous “letting be” as constitutive of our being and acting—this as a matter not of mere “theory” but of the concrete logic of our being, of our entire way of life. Which is to

say, only through recuperation of our basic and abiding reality as children of God and of our parents, and as participant, via our sexually differentiated, spousal fruitfulness, in the *always anteriorly given* generosity of the creaturely universe of being itself. Our mission to the culture of today, in a word, is most basically *to be* in this sense, and to extend this logic of being, in all of its analogical forms, into all aspects of natural-cosmological and cultural life.

Insofar as we fail to embrace being in its constitutive (filial-nuptial) relation to God and others as the basic logic of our lives, we will, *eo ipso*, lack the capacity to transform our culture in the required Christian and human sense.

(2) As we conclude, however, we must take special note of the political question. In urging the above as our main cultural task, we must reckon with the question of how much of the content of what we have proposed can or should become part of the public-constitutional order, and by what means, that is, in light of the distinction between society and state and again the Gospel-indicated distinction between Church and state, and indeed in light further of America's pluralism and of every human culture's need for a legitimate secularity.

Since it is impossible for a state actually to avoid a truth claim (whether it intends one or not),³⁷ the only finally reasonable approach to statecraft thus involves taking seriously the question of truth, in order to secure in its fullest form the best intention of the liberal democratic state itself: which is to secure the dignity, the equality and liberty, of every human being, including those who hold views different from ours and indeed the weakest and most vulnerable among us. It is not the absence of truth that enables the most comprehensive civil peace and community. Nor is it the presence of truth—but only the privation of truth that is destructive of truth in its integrity—that causes the breakdown of civil peace and community.

It is in this light that we can and must consider whether, or how much of, the ontology-anthropology of gift I have outlined can

³⁷See my "Multiculturalism and Civil Community Inside the Liberal State: Truth and (Religious) Freedom," *Revista Española de Teología* 67 (2007). For a much more complete statement of the argument, however, see my "Civil Community Inside the Liberal State: Truth, Freedom, and Human Dignity," to appear in *Ordering Love* (Eerdmans, 2010).

legitimately be proposed for the public or constitutional order of society. I limit myself here to a statement of principles. Note again, first of all, that what we are proposing affirms the separation of church and state, but in accord with a Gospel-coherent, as distinct from a liberal-judicial, reading of this separation. Further, our proposal entails accepting what is often termed “public reason,” and indeed “Christian secularity,” but only in terms of an understanding of these that sees that “public reason” will always reflect some ontology and that “secularity” always bear some ontological sense of relation to God. Thus members of the Church should understand that their engagement with the culture of its inner logic includes engagement with the political, or public-constitutional, order, in a way that respects the distinctness of the latter.³⁸ Members of the Church should take up the cultural task in a way that proceeds with prudence and is committed to showing the *inherent reasonableness* of the God- and other-centered, filial-nuptial, relationality implied in the Christian doctrine of creation. Indeed the foregoing argument presupposes that this reasonableness is always already implied by the experience and deepest intentions even of those who ignore or reject Christianity, or who would reject substantive justice in favor of purely procedural justice. Christians should take up the cultural task in a way that thus respects the equal freedom and dignity of every human being; and should do so in a way, finally, that affirms that the state is neither the source nor the sacrament of God’s truth about man and God, thus, again, distinguishing the Church and state and radically limiting the power of the state.

It is crucial for our argument to see that the requirements noted here arise not from outside but from within the truth of man’s

³⁸Thus the issue for a Catholic is not *whether* the cultural, political, and economic orders should be distinguished, as affirmed for example in *Centesimus Annus*, but how the distinction is properly to be conceived (see, *inter alia*, paragraphs 39, 47, and 51). The burden of my argument is simply that, given the fundamental unity of the human person indicated in the person’s constitutive relation to God, hence in what is the person’s constitutive memory (conscience as *anamnesis*) of God, it follows that these three orders can never be cleanly separated, or rightly construed as merely extrinsic to each other: since they all involve the reality of man whose most profound structural feature is this *anamnesis* of God that never goes away even if ignored or left unconscious. There can be no political or economic order that, in its very constitution qua political or economic, is simply “formal” or juridical, hence neutral, with respect to the metaphysical (and finally theological) question of the meaning and existence of God.

constitutive, God- and other-centered, filial-nuptial, relationality as affirmed in the Christian doctrine of creation. We need not, and indeed must not, go outside of the ontological truth of God and man (even if this truth in its supernatural fullness is revealed only in Jesus Christ and need not, as such, always be explicitly invoked), in order to make a reasonable claim on the public-constitutional order. We need not and should not conceive public reason and Christian secularity in terms of the liberal state's formal-procedural justice and formal freedom—which in any case are already “full” of a “contractual” relationality and thus never realize their intuition of metaphysical neutrality. The necessary distinction of citizen and believer will always invoke some sense, positive or negative, and however unconsciously and hence hiddenly, of the constitutive relation to God and others that unifies man *within* all the diverse aspects of his being and that alone can give this diversity its final, rightful meaning. The proper—and most truly reasonable—form of this distinction, accordingly, can be realized only by coming to terms with the implications of this ever-present, always at least implied, *anamnesis* of God and others that is (co-)constitutive of my being.

The burden of my argument has been, in a word, that it is precisely the rightly-conceived ontological truth about God and man that both guarantees a proper sense of creaturely autonomy and secularity and sustains the legitimate idea of church-state separation, and secures protection for the equal freedom and dignity of all human beings, all of which liberalism intends but which the (onto-)logic of its would-be purely procedural-juridical state radically undermines.

Attention is often called today, and rightly so, to the fact that Benedict XVI has highlighted the importance of the separation of Church and state. It is nevertheless crucial to see that his understanding has its roots in the Gospel sense of this separation, and does not entail embrace of this separation as expressed in the liberal-juridical idea of the state. Thus he has insisted that “law needs to be a fundamental image of justice,”³⁹ that the inviolable dignity of the human being, monogamous marriage, and respect for the natural religious sense of humanity represent “human foundations . . . accessible to reason and . . . essential to the construction of a sound

³⁹Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (Slough, England: St. Paul Publications, 1988), 210.

legal order.”⁴⁰ Further, he says that “the legal enactment of the value and dignity of man, of freedom, equality, and solidarity . . . entails an image of man, a moral option, and a concept of law that are not at all self-explanatory;”⁴¹ that “politics is not the sphere of theology but of ethics, which . . . can only be given a rational basis in theology.”⁴² All of this reflects what is basic to Benedict’s theology, and is summed up in a basic way in the quotations cited at the outset of this article: regarding man’s constitutive *anamnesis* of relation to God and by implication to other creatures in God;⁴³ by Benedict’s insistence, taken up and emphasized again in his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, that man is made to love and be loved, made in love and for love.

⁴⁰Joseph Ratzinger, “Letter to Marcello Pera,” in Joseph Ratzinger and Marcello Pera, *Without Roots* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 129; cf. 74–78.

⁴¹Joseph Ratzinger, “Europe’s Identity,” in *Values in a Time of Upheaval* (New York: Crossroad, 2006), 129–50 at 147.

⁴²Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics*, 216.

⁴³Cf. in this connection the following statement by Ratzinger: “And this brings us back to the two controversial points in the preamble to the European Constitution. The failure to mention Christian roots is not the expression of a superior tolerance that respects all cultures in the same way and chooses not to accord privileges to any one of them. Rather, it expresses the absolutization of a way of thinking and living that is radically opposed (*inter alia*) to all the other historical cultures of humanity. The real antagonism typical of today’s world is not that between diverse religious cultures, rather, it is the antagonism between the radical emancipation of man from God, from the roots of life, on the one hand, and the great religious cultures, on the other. If we come to experience a clash of cultures, this will not be due to a conflict between the great religions, which of course have always been at odds with one another but, nevertheless, have ultimately always understood how to coexist with one another. The coming clash will be between this radical emancipation of man and the great historical cultures. Accordingly, the refusal to refer to God in the Constitution is not the expression of a tolerance that wishes to protect the non-theistic religions and the dignity of atheists and agnostics; rather, it is the expression of a consciousness that would like to see God eradicated once and for all from the public life of humanity and shut up in the subjective sphere of cultural residues from the past. In this way, relativism, which is the starting point of this whole process, becomes a dogmatism that believes itself in possession of the definitive knowledge of human reason, with the right to consider everything else merely as a stage in human history that is basically obsolete and deserves to be relativized. In reality, this means that we have need of roots if we are survive and that we must not lose sight of God if we do not want human dignity to disappear” (Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006], 43–45).

What I am contending is that this *anamnesis*, reflective of man's constitutive relationality, is presupposed in, and lies at the heart of, all that Benedict proposes regarding political-constitutional order. His proposal of natural law and its public reasonableness is not simply formal but is always already metaphysical, in a way that is itself always open to the theological. His proposal of natural law and public reasonableness—and indeed legitimate “secularity”—always implies, and is thus shaped from within by, memory of man's constitutive relationality to God and others.

In sum, then: the cultural task of our time in America must involve an effort to tie the political-constitutional order intrinsically to a natural law the public reasonableness of which is always already metaphysical (and open to the theological) and not—as a matter of principle is not ever—first simply formal or merely “political”-juridical. Precisely as a necessary condition for securing the most comprehensive civil community, for protecting the weakest members of society and respecting those who differ most from us in their beliefs, we need to recover a sense of the truth of being in its defenseless givenness as good: of the unity of the true and the good qua *ens* and not only *quia factum*. We need, in a word, to recuperate, in its relevance also for the constitutional order, the *anamnesis* that Benedict XVI proposes: the awareness that *we are not our own*, that belonging to ourselves at its root is always anteriorly a belonging to God and to others, to the entire community of being, a belonging whose basic (indeed, in light of Christian revelation, whose primordially sacramental) form is given in filial-nuptial relationality. Only such an awareness will enable us to bring to fruition the positive meaning of America, her generosity and achievements, while transforming these from within toward a genuine civilization of love and culture of life. □

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