



Alma Espartinez

## Karol Wojtyła on Self-Fulfillment in and through the Marital Act

This article calls for an analysis of Karol Wojtyła’s philosophical work, *The Acting Person*, concerning man’s self-fulfillment and participation in and through the marital act. I followed Wojtyła’s line of thinking in presenting his phenomenological and Thomistic analysis of the person. Starting from the more general analysis of man as an acting person, I examined the philosophical analysis of man’s self-fulfillment in and through his self-determining acts and, owing to participation, in his existing and acting ‘together with others.’ Then, I explored the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, which enables man and woman to fulfill themselves in and through the marital act. Finally, I presented Wojtyła’s concept of the marital act, which he discussed in his *Love and Responsibility* and his Wednesday General Audience homilies compiled under the title *Original Unity of Man and Woman*. Two complementary persons—husband and wife—give themselves to one another, and their mutual self-donation in and through the marital union, which is an expression of their love, leads to their perfection. Our discussion of the man-woman relationship is limited only

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to that which exists between husband and wife, since the marital act can be performed only within the context of marriage. This article intends to answer the major problem: how do man and woman fulfill themselves, by way of participation, in their intimate union expressed in the marital act, according to Karol Wojtyła? In what sense is the marital act a participative act?

The “numerous forces that seek to destroy... or in some way deform”<sup>1</sup> the sanctity of the married life and that of the family, Wojtyła observed, have become alarming. Due to this problem, never was it more urgent than now to recapture the real meaning of the marital act “proper and exclusive to spouses” and to understand how self-fulfillment is attained in and through this marital act. Seen in this context, the problems we are faced with are by no means secondary; on the contrary, they are of primary importance.

## **Natural Complementarity of Man and Woman**

Wojtyła argued that the person is a personal supposit who is not only an ontological subject of his own acting and dynamism, but also a subject living through his own deeds and experiences.<sup>2</sup> Through participation, persons are allowed to share in others’ humanity and thereby fulfill themselves in their actions—precisely in their existing and acting together with others. Further, the human person is by nature a sexual being with a “natural predilection for, a tendency to seek, the other

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<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio: Apostolic Exhortation on the Family*. L’osservatore Romano, (English Edition)” no. 3 (November 22, 1981). This will henceforth be called *FC*.

<sup>2</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, 1st edition, vol. 10 of the *Annalecta Husserliana* (Dordrecht; Boston: D. Reidel, 1979), 74. This will henceforth be called *AP*.

sex.”<sup>3</sup> The person, quite naturally, seeks a human being of the other sex whom they perceive as someone who can “complete” them. This is made possible because of the “natural complementarity between man and woman.” This “natural complementarity” enables man and woman, in their total self-donation expressed in and through the marital act, to give their “I’s” to each other, to share with each other “their entire life-project, what they have and what they are.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Person and the Body**

Wojtyła’s analysis of man created in the image and likeness of God, as discussed in his series of Wednesday General Audience homilies (*Original Unity of Man and Woman*), shows that man is “different from the visible world of living beings (*animalia*)” and this leads us to “the affirmation of the absolute impossibility of reducing man to the world.”<sup>5</sup> Owing to his superiority over the “visible world of living beings,” man is placed over the world to subdue it and have dominion over it. Man, in his totality, reveals his transcendence over the rest of God’s creation and his resemblance to God more than the world of nature. However, man is still corporeal; he “is created on earth together with the visible world.” While he bears the marks of “visibility” and “corporeality” by virtue of his being bound to the rest of the world, he is still over and above this world of living beings; he is a unique personal subject.

Due to man’s ontological uniqueness among “the visible world of living beings,” he realized that “man is alone,” owing to his ontologi-

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<sup>3</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H.T. Willets (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 48. This will henceforth be called *LR*.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, FC, no. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman: Catechesis on the Book of Genesis* (Pauline Books & Media, 1981), 43. This will henceforth be called *OU*.

cal uniqueness among God's creatures. A crucial point has to be stressed here: to speak of "solitude," Wojtyła argues, is to say that it is the solitude of 'man' (male and female) and not just of man the *male*, caused by the lack of woman. The term 'man' is used here without reference to sex, for gender is not an additional attribute, but a part of the constitution of personhood. Therefore, "man is alone" is "derived from man's very nature, that is, from his humanity," and it substantially precedes male-female relationships.<sup>6</sup>

Wojtyła's reflection on man's "original solitude" sheds light on the consciousness and meaning of the body through which man is distinguished and 'separated' from all the *animalia*, and also through which he is a person, with the subjectivity that characterizes him.<sup>7</sup> "The structure of the body," Wojtyła argued, "is such as to permit him to be the author of a truly human activity."<sup>8</sup> The body, in this truly human activity, expresses the person. This point resounded in Wojtyła's *The Acting Person*, where he explained that the human body is seen as the means of expression of the person. Whenever the person externalizes himself in action, in and through the body, he becomes the object of his own acting. Man is aware that he possesses his body so that "when acting he employs his body as a compliant tool to express his self-determination."<sup>9</sup> In this respect, the person's relation to the body is manifested externally in the person's actions. "The personal structure of self-governance and self-determination," Wojtyła asserted, "may be thought of 'traversing' the body and being expressed by the body."<sup>10</sup> Likewise, the dynamic transcendence of the person manifested in his specific power of self-determination exercised through choice and decision, and

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<sup>6</sup> See John Paul II, *OU*, 44–45.

<sup>7</sup> See *ibid.*, 53.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>9</sup> Wojtyła, *AP*, 206.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

which establishes the dynamic subordination to the truth, finds in the human body the territory and the means of expression.

The essential relation of the body to the person prevents us from treating the body as a machine that can be manipulated for one's own purpose. If the body is a machine, then it can be owned (like in slavery), altered (like in tubal ligation, vasectomy, contraception), bought, sold and rented (like in pornography, prostitution and surrogate motherhood).<sup>11</sup> Worse, if the body is viewed as a machine, the sexual contact between two human bodies will mean a contact, not of two distinct persons but of mere machines, and there will be no essential difference between the bodily union of the husband and the wife and the contact of any two objects. The human body then ceases to express a unique, individual person. Reducing the body to a biological machine exposes us to certain dangers whose consequences must not be underestimated. The body, through which the husband and wife express their love, must be seen as the constituent element of their union, and not as a biological machine. Understood in this framework, that the body is related to the person inasmuch as through the body the person is expressed, the body should also be the means of the person's expression of love and of self-donation to another person. The human body, which concretely expresses femininity and masculinity, also manifests and realizes the unity of man and woman to form a communion of persons and through which they mutually enrich themselves in it. Only in this light can we have a clear grasp of the value of the human body in its relation to the person.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Hogan, Richard M. Hogan, and John M. LeVoir, *Covenant of Love: Pope John Paul II on Sexuality, Marriage, and Family in the Modern World* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1985), 159.

## Unity of Man and Woman

Wojtyła's analysis of man's experience of "original solitude" which refers not only to the solitude of the male but of humankind, leads to the unity of man and woman through masculinity and femininity which, in the light of Vatican II, constitutes the first form of *communio personarum*.<sup>12</sup> This original unity, Wojtyła noted, "is expressed as an overcoming of the frontier of solitude."<sup>13</sup> The analysis of original solitude brings us to two crucial points: first, it reveals the "characteristic transcendence peculiar to the person" inasmuch as he is unique among the visible world of living things, and second, it leads to "the discovery of an adequate relationship 'to' the person, and therefore as an opening and expectation of a 'communion of persons.'"<sup>14</sup> This 'communion of persons' gives man and woman "the possibility of being and existing in a special reciprocity"<sup>15</sup> of the self-donation of man and woman to each other in and through the body.

The unity of man and woman, which is realized in and through the body, "indicates right from the beginning not only the 'body,' but also the 'incarnate' communion of persons—*communio personarum*—and calls for this communion right from the beginning."<sup>16</sup> Man and woman, possessing a 'body' that expresses masculinity and femininity in the concrete, see each other as complementary beings capable of completing each other. The mutual attraction to the opposite sex is made possible by the sexual urge which is a natural force inherent in man's physiological makeup. The need to be completed by the other

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<sup>12</sup> Pope John Paul II, *OU*, 71.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> See *ibid.*, 72.

<sup>15</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

shows that the other person possesses sexual values. The person must be affirmed and accepted according to his rightful value. This affirmation of the value of the person is contained in the structure of sexual shame, which further reveals the full consciousness and meaning of the body.

### **The Structure of Sexual Shame**

The phenomenon of shame, according to Wojtyła, manifests almost ‘instinctively’ man’s need to be affirmed and accepted according to his rightful value. The need for affirmation and acceptance of oneself by the other person reveals the “essential supra-utilitarian character of the person,” that is, that the person must not be regarded (even in one’s private thoughts) as an object of use.<sup>17</sup>

Shame, says Wojtyła, “is a tendency, uniquely characteristic of the human person, to conceal sexual values sufficiently to prevent them from obscuring the value of the person as such.”<sup>18</sup> The structure of sexual shame thus gives us a two-fold aspect: on the one hand, it is the tendency to conceal sexual values so that they do not obscure the values of the person as such, and on the other hand, it is the longing to inspire or experience love.<sup>19</sup> The shrinking from reactions to mere sexual values goes together with the longing to inspire love, to inspire a ‘reaction’ to the value of the person, and with a longing to experience love in the same light. Sexual shame has to be understood this way: it is not a flight from love; on the contrary, it is the opening of a way towards it.<sup>20</sup> It is love that ensures the affirmation of the value of the person and

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<sup>17</sup> See Wojtyła, *LR*, 178.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, 187.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*, 182.

<sup>20</sup> See *ibid.*, 179.

makes sexual values subordinate to the value of the person. In this regard, the other person cannot be reduced to the status of an object of use. The intimate connection between sexual shame and the nature of the person is clearly seen here. “The experience of shame,” Wojtyła asserted, “is a natural reflection of the essential nature of the person.”<sup>21</sup> The value of the person is intimately linked with its inherent inviolability—that the person cannot be an object of use.

Wojtyła emphasized that sexual shame is a crucial point in a man-woman relationship not so much on account of protecting the value of the person as on account of revealing the value of the person as such.<sup>22</sup> He asserted that shame has a fundamental significance in the relationship between man and woman in the sense that “the analysis of shame clearly indicates how deeply it is rooted precisely in mutual relations, how exactly it expresses the essential rules for the ‘communion of persons,’ and likewise how deeply it touches the dimension of man’s original ‘solitude.’”<sup>23</sup> Wojtyła’s analysis of sexual shame reveals that it leads naturally to love. The presence of true love between two persons no longer requires shame, for the latter is already “absorbed” by the former. While love between man and woman develops on the basis of sexual values, it is still the affirmation of the value of the person which should be the crucial factor in their relationship.<sup>24</sup> In this respect, the unity of man and woman will not be a form of shamelessness, but only the full realization of the union of persons which results from marital love.

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<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 178.

<sup>22</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> John Paul II, *OU*, 93.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wojtyła, *LR*, 182.



## **The Nuptial Meaning of the Body**

The sexual relation between man and woman is founded in and through love which, according to Wojtyła, is the mutual self-donation of husband and wife to one another. The human person exists to love; without love, human life is absolutely senseless. In his first encyclical entitled *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope Wojtyła said,

man cannot live without love. He remains a being incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it.<sup>25</sup>

Wojtyła stated that through the body, the capacity of expressing love is manifested, “that love precisely in which the man-person becomes a gift and, by means of this gift, fulfills the very meaning of his being and existence.”<sup>26</sup> The “nuptial” meaning of the body allows man and woman to make a gift of themselves and at the same time to discover themselves in their sincere and mutual giving.<sup>27</sup> The person emerges in the dimension of mutual gift which is expressed through the human body in all the original truth of its masculinity and femininity.<sup>28</sup> Only in a sincere giving of oneself can one fully discover the true self.<sup>29</sup> This sincere giving of oneself is possible only if the person is free with the very freedom of the gift. Freedom, Wojtyła argued, pre-

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<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, *RH*, no. 10, 1979, 257–324.

<sup>26</sup> John Paul II, *OU*, 114.

<sup>27</sup> See *ibid.*, 114.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, 109.

<sup>29</sup> See *ibid.*

supposes “mastery of one’s self (self-control).”<sup>30</sup> The person’s original nakedness, interiorly free from shame, reveals this “full freedom from any constraint of the body and sex.”<sup>31</sup>

The nuptial meaning of the body has a dual aspect: first, it indicates our capacity of expressing love in which we become a gift; second, it expresses the capacity and deep availability for the “affirmation of the person,” that is, the acceptance of the gift which, through reciprocity and the exchange of the gift of the body according to its masculinity and femininity, creates the *communio personarum*. The exchange of the gift consists in reciprocal “acceptance” of the other; mutual donation leads to *communio personarum*. Wojtyła’s analysis of the “nuptial” meaning of the body shows that it can be understood only in the context of the person. The body has a “nuptial” meaning because through it, man and woman are capable of making a gift of themselves and at the same time can discover their true selves—precisely in the context of a sincere giving of itself.<sup>32</sup>

## Integration of Love

The incorporation of the sexual value into the value of the person or its subordination to the value of the person is what Wojtyła calls the integration of love.<sup>33</sup> There is a need, according to Wojtyła, to incorporate the sexual values into the value of the person “since love is directed not towards ‘the body’ alone, nor yet towards ‘a human being of the other sex’, but precisely towards a person.”<sup>34</sup> Only when it

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>33</sup> Wojtyła, *LR*, 123.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

directs itself to the person can it be love in its real sense. If not, then it is not love at all.

In choosing a woman, a man affirms her value as a person and not merely her 'sexual' value, and in choosing a man, a woman affirms his value as a person and not merely his 'sexual' value. One chooses the person for the sake of the person; the choice is personal, not sexual. Man and woman, in their intimate union expressed in the marital act, must affirm the value of the person and not merely the sexual value. Man and woman recognize the fact that each one, by means of the body, is "willed by the Creator 'for his (her) own sake,' that is, unique and unrepeatable: someone chosen by eternal love."<sup>35</sup> Owing to this 'nuptial' meaning of the body, through which man is capable of expressing love, the person is invited to answer the call of love.

### **The Commandment to Love**

Love, as Wojtyła emphasizes in his work, *Love and Responsibility*, "is the fullest realization of the possibilities inherent in man."<sup>36</sup> Through love, he asserts, the potential inherent in every person is fully realized and the existence of the person is fully developed.<sup>37</sup> The discussion on love is limited to that which exists between two persons of a different sex. Love, Wojtyła defined, "is always a mutual relationship between persons" based on particular attitudes to the good which originates in their mutual attraction. A woman is seen by a man as 'a good' and vice versa; a man is seen by a woman as 'a good.' This mutual attraction results from the sexual urge, which as a natural force is raised to the

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>37</sup> See *ibid.*

level of person precisely in the context of the mutual love between two persons.<sup>38</sup>

Inasmuch as love is a mutual relationship between persons, it possesses a personal character. Love is concerned with persons directly and immediately. It consists in the affirmation of the value of the person and his non-utilitarian value, that is, that the person cannot be an object for consumption or use. The ethical significance of love, on the other hand, is based on the commandment to love. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Wojtyła writes,

God created man in his own image and called him to existence through love; he called him at the same time for love.<sup>39</sup>

Man was not created as a solitary being, “for by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential.”<sup>40</sup> This gives us a clear picture of the innate vocation of man to love, “to surrender oneself to another person.” One way of realizing this vocation, according to Wojtyła, is in marriage, which is an expression of a mutual self-donation of husband and wife in and through their bodies. Since man is an *incarnate spirit*, he “is called to love in his unified totality. Love includes the body, and the body is made a sharer in spiritual love.”<sup>41</sup>

The commandment to love has, for its basis, the personalistic norm which has a negative and positive content. Negatively, the personalistic norm states that a person possesses a value as a person and, as such, should not be treated as a means to an end. Positively, the per-

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<sup>38</sup> See *ibid.*, 74.

<sup>39</sup> John Paul II, *FC*, no. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Vatican II. *Gaudium et Spes*. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” December 7, 1965, no. 12. This will henceforth be called *GS*.

<sup>41</sup> John Paul II, *FC*, no. 11.

sonalistic norm asserts that the person is a kind of good to which the only proper and adequate attitude to relate is love.<sup>42</sup> This is what is contained precisely in the commandment to love.

The Holy Father insists that we must love, and this necessity flows from within ourselves. It is a subjective need that every person feels.<sup>43</sup> Every human being is called to form a *communio personarum*, a relation of love which can be realized, in the context of marriage, by two persons who, through a personal will-act, choose to mutually offer themselves to each other. By virtue of their mutual love for each other, husband and wife affirm the value of the person and refuse to reduce the other person to an ‘object of use.’ The direction in which husband and wife find their mutual fulfillment is revealed to them by love. Love leads them to marriage; from it, they expect their fulfillment—in the context of the participative act expressed in and through the marital act.

This enrichment or self-fulfillment that Wojtyła speaks of here is made possible not only through the gift of self of the other person, but also through the gift of themselves. In the act of ‘giving oneself,’ not only does the person fulfill the other person, but they at the same time fulfill their own self. This act of ‘giving oneself’ already constitutes a fulfillment of the person in its ontological sense. In its axiological dimension, self-fulfillment consists of the moral value of the act. In this sense, there is a true gift of oneself only if the person affirms the value they possess and the value as a person of the other to whom they make a gift of themselves. Moreover, self-giving can have its full value only when it involves, and is the work of, the will. It is the free will that makes the person its own master—a *sui iuris*, an *alteri incommunicabilis*. Betrothed love commits the will to the truth which refers to

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<sup>42</sup> See Wojtyła, *LR*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> See Hogan & LeVoir, *Covenant of Love*, 38.

the truth about the value of the person. His turning towards the value of the person as such, rather than their sexual values—in his moment of decision and choice—expresses the dynamism of autodeterminism.<sup>44</sup> The will does not passively direct itself to the good or value, nor does it allow an object to be imposed upon it (the will) as a good. The will exhibits itself as self-determination; it wants to choose and affirm its choice. Sexual values attached to the person tend to impose themselves on the will. However, the “value of the person waits to be chosen and affirmed.”<sup>45</sup> The person who is neither determined by, nor dependent on, the object, becomes independent of the objects of his own acting—precisely in the context of the moment of truth, which ultimately accounts for the person’s transcendence in action.

Since the ‘giving of oneself’ is mutual and total, it cannot have a merely sexual significance. The husband and wife belong equally to each other because of the reciprocated gift of self. Mutual sexual exploitation has no place in their love. Through mutual self-giving, love finds its realization in the union of persons. Sensuality and sentiment, which are sensual and emotional experiences, Wojtyła held, cannot be identified with this unification of persons, though they create the ‘material’ of love in which it is realized in practice. Betrothed love, which carries within itself the objective, ontological need to make a gift of one’s own person to another human being, demands the fullness of self-surrender, the completeness of personal commitment.<sup>46</sup>

The marital union, a mutual self-donation of husband and wife expressed in and through their bodies, has a moral value if it is justified by true love between husband and wife. The Creator, Wojtyła asserted, has written into the nature of the human being the capacity to

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<sup>44</sup> See Wojtyła, *AP*, 108–116, 120ff.

<sup>45</sup> Wojtyła, *LR*, 136.

<sup>46</sup> See *ibid.*, 128–129.

give oneself to others, which is rooted in his ontological inalienability.<sup>47</sup> It is for them to choose freely the end to which their marital union leads. The ability of the two persons to choose a certain good as their end indicates the existence of love between them. The commandment to love reveals that in their mutual self-donation expressed in and through their marital union, their end must not only be the preservation of the species based on the sexual urge but also, and above all, the preservation of the marital union based on love worthy of persons.<sup>48</sup>

A distortion of the real essence of betrothed love will emerge if one gives himself only sexually, devoid of a complete gift of oneself. There would be a privation of the gift itself—a reduction of the other to an ‘object for myself.’<sup>49</sup> I mentioned that there is an intimate connection between sexual shame and the nature of the person in that the “fullness of the consciousness of the meaning of the body” demands the fullness of the understanding of the value of the person as such. Sexual shame reveals the person’s inviolability, that is, that he cannot be treated as an ‘object of use.’

The gift of one’s self must be a total and irrevocable surrender. Anything less of this is a deception, a lie.<sup>50</sup> Since betrothed love demands total surrender, a woman’s giving of herself to the man and a man’s giving of himself to the woman presuppose exclusivity and preclude a simultaneous gift of one’s self to persons other than the spouse. “Encroachment on another person’s property (another person’s husband or wife)” or a second gift of self to another to whom he or she is not married is described by Wojtyła in strong terms as a specific form of theft.<sup>51</sup> This form of giving damages the interpersonal communion of

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<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*, 59–60.

<sup>48</sup> See *ibid.*, 60ff.

<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*, 130.

<sup>50</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> See *ibid.*, note 58, 306.

love. Wojtyła clearly explained that “sexual intercourse has the effect of limiting that love to a single pair of persons, though at the same time it gains its intensity.”<sup>52</sup> Sexual union excludes all other persons from the same degree of intimacy; any other union is rejected which might debase the first union to a level of possession of property.

The ability to share in the very humanness of the other, which we have discovered in the total, mutual self-donation of husband and wife expressed in and through the marital union within the context of marriage, allows them (husband and wife) to enter into a *communio personarum* which is what betrothed love precisely wants to realize. This is also what is contained in the concept of participation; participation makes possible the realization of the interpersonal communion and ensures that man and woman, in and through their marital union, preserve and experience their subjectivity proper to them, rather than experience themselves merely as an ‘object of use.’

### **Man’s Self-fulfillment in and through the Marital Union**

This is the very core of this article: the fulfillment of the person in and through the marital union. Pope Paul VI in his encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, declared that,

by means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Pope Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” no. 8, *Dicastero per La Comunicazione – Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, July 25, 1968. This will henceforth be called *HV*.



I examined in this section how man's fulfillment is achieved in the two areas of relationship: the person–marital union–marriage correlation and the person–marital union–Creator correlation.

### Person–Marital Union–Marriage Correlation

Man and woman are called to become “a gift for each other through the whole of their humanity made of femininity and masculinity”<sup>54</sup> and to realize themselves thereby. This is clearly manifested in and through the marital union, a participative act in which the husband and wife reciprocally give themselves to each other in love.<sup>55</sup> However, this communion of persons in and through the marital union takes place only through a mutual choice. As Wojtyła discussed, man is a person capable of determining himself in the direction of the good, willed and chosen in the light of truth. In his moment of choice, man is able to determine and fulfill himself—in the context of this *communio personarum*.

Following St. Thomas' analysis of the human act, Wojtyła asserts that every *actus humanus* inasmuch as it is an act, constitutes the perfection of the human person, for every act of an existing being constitutes the perfection of that being in the ontological sense. Thus, the husband and wife “create” themselves in and through their mutual self-donation, particularly in its distinctively human aspect and through their mutual self-personal element intrinsic to the marital union as an act of the person. Axiologically, self-fulfillment consists of the moral value of the act. In the marital union which expresses the *communio personarum*, each of them—man and woman—accepts each other

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<sup>54</sup> Pope John Paul II, *OU*, 107.

<sup>55</sup> See *ibid.*, 107.

based on an unqualified affirmation of the value of the person with a view to a lasting union in marriage and with a clearly defined attitude to parenthood.<sup>56</sup>

The marital union which is a human act brings out this affirmation of the value of the person only if seen within the context of marriage.<sup>57</sup> In marriage, man and woman receive each other as a gift of each other to the other—as husband and wife. It is also in marriage that the “sacramental confirmation” of their right to the marital union, which is a manifestation of their mutual self-giving imprinted into the nature of the person by God, is received.<sup>58</sup> Since the ‘gift of oneself’ precludes a second gift of self to someone other than the spouse, monogamy and the indissolubility of marriage are preserved, and the sexual union is raised to the personal level—an answer to the demands of the personalistic norm.

Marriage also has a social structure; it gives the “justification” for the sexual relationship between the husband and wife “in the eyes of society” of which both of them are part. Wojtyła clarified the term “justification” to imply the objective order of justice contained in the institution of marriage. Marriage “creates” the objective framework for a lasting union of husband and wife in accordance with the principle of monogamy and indissolubility.

Seen in this light, marriage and the marital union are intimately connected. Only in marriage can the marital union between husband and wife be ordered both to the birth of the child and to the total union of persons. Any act of sexual intercourse between married people, with the character of reciprocal self-surrender (betrothed love) is “procreative” and “unitive” by its very nature. That being so, we can conclude that this marital union is not merely the physical union of the husband

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<sup>56</sup> See *LR*, 185.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, 211ff.

<sup>58</sup> See *ibid.*, note 59, 306.

and wife; there is something more to it than that. In the following portion, we will expound on the two dimensions of the marital union—(1) the communion of persons and (2) procreation and parenthood.

### **The Communion of Persons**

The communion of persons, which is established in the mutual and total gift of self of husband and wife, has its root in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman and is nourished through their mutual choice to share their lives with each other.<sup>59</sup> This union of persons is manifested in and through the marital union which is completely human in that it is a contact of a person with a person. Husband and wife are mutually aware and mutually conscious of their mutual gift of self, expressed in their bodily union in which the interior riches of the person as subject are manifested.

The communion of persons, manifested in and through the marital union, expresses the reality of the person “existing as a person beside a person.” The interpersonal character of the marital union is also presented such that the husband and wife, in the intimacy of their sexual union, do not focus merely on the affirmation of the value of the ‘body and sex’ (as in sensuality), but also on the affirmation of the value of the person—upon his or her own true good.

Persons find fulfillment in the marital union precisely because in and through it is expressed the *communio personarum*. In the marital union, the *communio personarum* is expressed more deeply—insofar as persons are embodied beings—in two ‘incarnate’ subjectivities. The body, through its own visibility, manifests the person and as such, acts as an intermediary enabling man and woman right ‘from the begin-

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<sup>59</sup> See John Paul II, *FC*, no. 19.

ning' to communicate with each other according to that *communio personarum* willed by the Creator precisely for them.<sup>60</sup>

Wojtyła has further analyzed the meaning of the marital union in relation to the biblical term “to know.” A man is said not to “know” his wife until he has intercourse with her.<sup>61</sup> In this knowledge is contained the consummation of marriage; in it, the marital union of man and woman through which they become “one flesh” is raised and introduced into the specific dimension of persons. The definitive discovery of the meaning of the human body in its masculinity and femininity makes us understand that the marital union act does not rest solely on the level of nature. “On the contrary,” Wojtyła argues, “precisely because of the fact that they are a man and a woman, each of them is ‘given’ to the other as a unique and unrepeatable subject, as ‘self,’ as a person.”<sup>62</sup> Connected, thus, with the act of knowing is that the “discovery of the ‘pure’ subjectivity of the gift, that is, mutual self-fulfillment in the gift, seems to be reached,” and together with it is “the specific level and control of self—conscious and self-determinant persons.”<sup>63</sup>

To conclude this portion, we can say that husband and wife fully understand the true value of themselves, of each other, in and through the marital union. To be able to participate in the “I” of another being, to mutually fulfill each other by experiencing one's own “I” in “light of another ‘I,’” to mutually disclose the secret of one's own being with the possibility that this mysterious union of two unique and unrepeatable “I's” will result in the incarnation of a third person helps explain the mystery, the greatness and the beauty of the marital union.

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<sup>60</sup> John Paul II, *OU*, 97.

<sup>61</sup> See *ibid.*, 147.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

## **Procreation and Parenthood**

In his analysis of the meaning of the body in relation to the person, Wojtyła unfolds the nuptial meaning of the body and its generative meaning.<sup>64</sup> The marital union makes possible the communion of two persons—husband and wife; fundamentally, it is directed towards the possibility of procreation. The order of nature aims precisely at ‘procreation’ in and through the marital union. The peculiar duality of the marital union is thus clearly shown here: on the one hand is the order of nature which has the birth of a human being as its result; on the other hand is the personal order which is the communion of persons realized in the expression of their love in and through the marital union.<sup>65</sup> At this point, we can say that the marital union act is essentially a communion of persons affected by the possibility of procreation. The two orders must be properly harmonized, for each depends upon the other. While the personal order is superior to the order of nature owing to the fact that the personal order focuses primarily on the affirmation of the value of the person and not merely on the value of body and sex, the latter must fit into the framework of the former.

We have mentioned throughout our discussion that the marital union is expressive of the total self-giving of husband and wife. We cannot give ourselves totally and hold something back at the same time. We cannot give ourselves entirely to the experience of what is there while at the same time refusing to accept everything that is there. It also has to be noted, on the other hand, that if the person engages in the marital union with the sole purpose of having a child, there exists likewise the reduction of the person to an ‘object of use,’ a ‘means to an end,’ for the true value of the person is denied of him. While mar-

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<sup>64</sup> See *ibid.*, 155.

<sup>65</sup> See Wojtyła *LR*, 226.

riage is essentially ordered to the child, the natural order demands that the child only be arrived at through love. Husband and wife, according to Wojtyła, “become father and mother only in consequence of the marital union; it must be an act of love, an act of unification of persons.”<sup>66</sup>

The discussion on procreation brings us to a deeper meaning of the biblical term ‘reciprocal knowledge,’ which refers to the marital union. In it, Wojtyła delineated three levels of knowledge derived from marital relations. First, in marital union, man and woman are allowed to enter and participate in the humanity of the other. Each one has full awareness of the person’s true value in their total, reciprocal self-donation. Second, the mystery of femininity is completely revealed in motherhood and that of masculinity in fatherhood. Third, begetting a child is a perspective contained in this reciprocal knowledge.<sup>67</sup> Through the child, they know themselves. Both recognize in the child a continuation of their personality.

While it is true that the child is the natural consequence of the marital union, marriage doesn’t lose its value when procreation is impossible (like in permanent or temporary infertility). In *Gaudium et spes* we read that “marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when... offspring are lacking.”<sup>68</sup> It also affirms that marriage retains its value even without children when the parents desire them but cannot have them. We can also add that marriage has and retains its own meaning even when, for grave reasons, the parents should not have children. Marriage, even without children, if there cannot be any, has its own value insofar as it

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>67</sup> See John Paul II, *OU*, 156.

<sup>68</sup> *Gaudium et spes*, no. 50. Wojtyła says, “infertility in itself is not incompatible with inner willingness to accept conception ... It makes no difference that conception may not occur because it is precluded by nature.” Wojtyła, *LR*, 236.

is according to its own nature—this marital ‘two-in-one’ flesh for a whole lifetime. *Gaudium et spes* made it clear that marriage is not instituted solely for procreation.<sup>69</sup>

At this point, we can say that there is an inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative aspects of the marital union. The couples are urged to safeguard these essential aspects and in doing so, “the marital union preserves in its fulness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man’s most high calling to parenthood.”<sup>70</sup> We can say, therefore, that marriage rests entirely upon a double offering: the husband and wife (I-You) give themselves mutually to constitute the couple (We); they likewise give themselves to the child to form a family—a familial communion. These two dimensions are so intimately interwoven that it is impossible to separate them without at the same time toppling the whole structure.

### **Person–Marital Act–Creator Correlation**

As there is a need to justify the sexual relation between husband and wife internally (between the two of them) and externally (in the eyes of society), there is also an objective need to justify it in the eyes of the Creator.<sup>71</sup> Since both of them owe their existence to the Creator (who has proprietorial rights over them) owing to the fact that they are His creatures dependent upon their Maker, they have to seek approval, so to speak, in entering into marriage because “if each of these persons is simultaneously the property of the Creator, He also must... approve the

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<sup>69</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Paul VI, *HV*, no. 12.

<sup>71</sup> The justification of the sexual relation in the eyes of the society is termed horizontal justice. The justification of the whole sexual relation—of man and woman—in the eyes of God is called vertical justice. Cf. Wojtyła, *LR*, 245.

reciprocal gift of self implicit in the institution of marriage.”<sup>72</sup> The analysis of man’s relation to God has something to do with the marital relation between husband and wife. To answer to the demands of the personalistic norm, each must have a correct attitude towards one another. One must affirm the value of the person, for he is a creation of God in which the whole personal order originates. Through the marital union which, in the order of nature, has, for its normal consequence, the birth of a child, husband and wife are made conscious participants in God’s creation—*particeps Creatoris*. This puts them on a higher plane by not merely succumbing to the order of nature, but by transcending it and fulfilling the value of the personal order, placing their relationship on the level of a truly personal union. Only when husband and wife respect both the order of nature and the personal order can it be said that their relationship is based on love, “for man would not exist were he not created by God’s love and constantly preserved by it; and he cannot live fully according to truth, unless he freely acknowledges that love and devotes himself to his Creator.”<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusion

In his analysis of the biblical account of creation, John Paul II asserted that solitude leads to the *communio personarum* based on the reciprocal complementariness and the mutual self-giving between man and woman. Two complementary persons give themselves to one another to achieve mutual perfection. Thus, the mutual self-donation of husband and wife in and through the marital union, which is an expression of their love, leads to their perfection. All by himself, man—

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>73</sup> Vatican II, *GS*, no. 19.



Wojtyła explains—“does not completely realize this (very) essence (of the person).” He realizes it only by existing “with someone”—and even more deeply and completely by existing “for someone.”<sup>74</sup>



### Karol Wojtyła on Self-Fulfillment in and through the Marital Act

#### SUMMARY

Our whole discussion has focused on man’s self-fulfillment in and through the marital union. The mutual self-donation of man and woman is a participative act in that whenever acting is performed ‘together with the other,’ the husband and wife transcend themselves in action and thereby realize the authentically personalistic value of the action and man’s self-fulfillment in it. This mutual self-giving of husband and wife finds its expression in and through the body. This self-fulfillment, however, is attained only when the husband and wife become responsible for each other and meet the demands of the personalistic norm. The marital union must adapt itself to the objective demands of the personalistic norm, without which the act of mutual love between husband and wife is degraded to the ‘utilitarian’ level. The structure of responsibility which demands reference to the object in accordance with its true value must be satisfied.

**Keywords:** Karol Wojtyła, self-fulfillment, marital act, love, husband and wife, procreation, marriage

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<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, *OU*, 107.

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