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John Paul II's „theology of the body" demonstrates that the interpretive key for understanding who man is and how he is to live is the „dimension of the gift". Indeed the reality of „the gift" determines „the essential truth and depth of the meaning" of man's original dignity before God and all of creation[1].

In this essay I will briefly unfold John Paul's „hermeneutic of the gift" and then apply it to the question of *in-vitro* fertilization. While the immorality of this procedure can be argued from various perspectives, I simply wish to demonstrate that *in-vitro* fertilization (as well as all reproductive technologies that supplant the marital embrace as the means of conception) is a fundamental denial of „the gift" and, as such, a fundamental betrayal of our humanity. In this way we approach the deepest foundations of the Church's teaching on respect for the dignity of life in its origins.

The Reality of „the Gift"

First and foremost, „the gift" refers to the overflowing exchange of love within the Trinity that shot us – and the whole universe – into being. „St.

[1] See John Paul II, *General audience of Jan 2*, 1980.

Bonaventure explains that God created all things »not to increase his glory, but to show it forth and communicate it«, for God has no other reason for creating than his love and goodness"[2].

This is „the gift" – God created man not in servitude but in freedom so as to participate in the divine goodness, in God's own eternal exchange of love[3]. As John Paul says, „I creation is a gift given to man, […] then »its fullness« and deepest dimension is »determined by grace«, that is, by participation in the inner life of God himself, in his holiness"[4].

This is man's beatitude, and all he need do to live it is open up to „receive" the gift. When he does, his heart is filled with gratitude for having been granted so great a gift. In turn, he desires nothing but to put his freedom at the service of the gift – first to „reciprocate" the gift of love to God in thanksgiving („eucharistia"), and then to „recapitulate" that gift by being the same gift to others that life is to him.

This is why it „is not good that the man should be alone" (Gn 2:18). He needs someone with whom to share the gift. Thus, the human person experiences a certain „solitude" as the only creature in the visible world capable of „iving the gift". The animals are not suitable „helpers" in this regard.

As the Pope expresses, „Man appears in the visible world as the highest expression of the divine gift, because he bears within himself the interior dimension of the gift"[5]. Only a person endowed with self-determination is capable of „receiving" „the gift" of God, „reciprocating" that gift (i.e., loving God in return), and „recapitulating" that gift (i.e., sharing God's love with others). But this lofty dignity – this „gift" – bestowed upon the human person also bears with it a special responsibility. Freedom can be abused.

The Nuptial Meaning of the Body

The term „nuptial," according to the Holy Father, „manifests in a word the whole reality of that donation of which the first pages of the book of Genesis speak to us"[6]. Nuptial love, therefore, is a love of „total self-giving". Man experiences his call to recapitulate the divine gift from „within" – from the invisible mystery of his spiritual soul. Yet, since man is a unity of body and soul, the „interior dimension of the gift" is confirmed „exteriorly" and visibly by the nuptial meaning of the human body.

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[2] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 293.
[3] See ibidem, 221.
[4] John Paul II, *General audience of Jan 30*, 1980.
[5] Ibidem, Feb 20, 1980.
[6] Ibidem, Jan 16, 1980.

John Paul II speaks of a „theology of the body" because the „body, in fact, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the mystery hidden since time immemorial in God, and thus to be a sign of it"[7]. In a word, as we have been learning, the divine mystery which the body symbolizes is „gift". „This is the body: a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and so a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs"[8].

The „nuptial meaning of the body, therefore, refers to the body's capacity of expressing love: 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"[9]. Here the Pope echoes that key text from the Second Vatican Council: „man can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself"[10]. What John Paul wants to establish in his theology of the body is that the Council's teaching is rooted not only in the spiritual aspect of man's nature, but also in „his body".

The human being is a „body-person". He images the divine gift by being a gift to others „in his body". Now the words of Genesis 2:24 take on their meaning: „For this reason [to recapitulate the divine gift] a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh". Of course, marital union is not the only way to „live the gift", but sexual difference and our call to union are primordial revelations of the divine gift.

In short, if sexual difference and union is given by God as a gift, it is meant to be lived as a gift through which all generations receive the greatest gift there is – life itself. This is „the meaning with which sex enters the theology of the body"[11]. When man fails to respect this meaning, he tinkers with the very „foundation of human life"[12] and alters the „deepest substratum of human ethics and culture"[13].

The Child Embodies the Gift

Love, of course, is diffusive of itself. It seeks to increase its own circle of communion. God – who *is* love – is a life-giving Communion of Persons. The eternal reality of „gift" in the Trinitarian exchange is at the same time a myste-

[7] Ibidem, Feb 20, 1980.
[8] Ibidem, Jan 9, 1980.
[9] Ibidem, Jan 16, 1980.
[10] *Gaudium et spes*, 24.
[11] John Paul II, *General audience*, Jan 9, 1980.
[12] John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* 46.
[13] John Paul II, *General audience*, Oct 22, 1980.

ry of „eternal generation"[14]. Although essentially different, the male-female communion in some way echos the divine mystery of „gift-generation" in the created order.

Thus, in a grand development of Catholic thought, John Paul deduces that „man became the »image and likeness« of God not only through his own humanity, but also through the communion of persons which man and woman form right from the beginning". This „constitutes, perhaps, the deepest theological aspect of all that can be said about man". And the Pope adds that on „all this, right from the beginning, there descended the blessing of fertility linked with human procreation"[15].

The Trinity's uncreated mystery of „Gift-Generation" communes with man and woman's created mystery of „gift-generation" most tangibly in the „co-creation" of a new human being. In this moment, Gift meets gift and grants the greatest of all gifts – life! If they are faithful to the promises they made at the altar, husband and wife „receive" that gift lovingly from the hands of God.

In this light we can understand John Paul's affirmation that „Procreation is rooted in creation, and every time, in a sense, reproduces its mystery"[16]. This is the mystery of „gift" – of God's life and love poured out for man. In turn, „the third" that springs from the „unity of the two" embodies the gift[17]. In some sense, the child is the „one flesh" that spouses become – the living, breathing sign of spousal donation[18]. And since the origin of all that exists is the self-donating love of the Trinity, when spouses donate themselves to one another in „one flesh", they renew the mystery of creation „in all its original depth and vital power"[19].

Sin & „the Denial of the Gift"

Through this „hermeneutic of the gift" John Paul says we approach „the very essence of the person"[20]. In fact, the call to be gift inscribed in the nuptial meaning of the body is „the fundamental element of human existence in the world"[21]. This is why sin – which is always a direct affront to „the very essence of the person" – invariably involves „the denial of the gift".

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[14] See John Paul II, *Mulieris dignitatem*, 18.
[15] John Paul II, *General audience*, Nov 14, 1979.
[16] Ibidem, Nov 21, 1979.
[17] See ibidem, Mar 12, 1980.
[18] See John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 14.
[19] John Paul II, *General audience,* Nov 21, 1979.
[20] Ibidem, Jan 2, 1980.
[21] Ibidem, Jan 16, 1980.

To help us understand the inner-workings of the original sin, John Paul points to the key moment of the serpent's dialogue with the woman: „You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gn 3:4-5). Satan plants suspicion in the human heart towards the Creator. As the Pope says, this temptation „clearly includes the questioning of the Gift and of the Love, from which creation has its origin as donation"[22].

One could read the serpent's critique like this: „God does not love you. He does not want you to be like Him. He has no intention of making a »gift« of His life to you. In fact, He is specifically withholding it from you by forbidding you to eat from this tree. If you want life (happiness), if you want to be »like God«, then you are going to have to reach out and grasp it for yourself because God sure isn't going to give it to you".

Man determines the intentionality of his very existence by one of two fundamental and irreconcilable postures: „receptivity or grasping"[23]. The posture each person assumes depends upon his concept of God. If God is Love and the giver of all good things, then all we need do to attain the happiness for which we long is „receive". We trust that God's ordering of the universe is „for us" and we desire to live in accord with it. On the other hand, if we conceive of God as a tyrant, then we will see him and his ordering of the universe as a threat to our happiness, turn from our natural posture of receptivity, and seek to „grasp" life for ourselves.

It is true, of course, that man also has the task of imaging God by taking the initiative and developing the world („till [the earth] and keep it", Gn 2:15). But, as a creature, man becomes „like God" only by first „receiving" this likeness „from" God. In other words, as a creature, man's proper initiative always proceeds from his receptivity to the gift. When man fails to respect this posture of receptivity – when he seeks to initiate his own endeavors apart from this receptivity – he makes himself „like God". He ventures „beyond that limit which remains impassable to the will and freedom of man as a created being"[24].

As the *Catechism* explains, „Seduced by the devil, [man] wanted to »be like God«, but »without God, before God, and not in accordance with God«"[25]. Man sets himself up as the initiator of his own existence and grasps at life. And as John Paul emphasizes, sin consists precisely in this – „in the

[22] Ibidem, April 30, 1980.

[23] For an excellent article on the nature of sin in relation to receptivity and grasping see: Jean-Pierre Baput, *The Chastity of Jesus and the Refusal to Grasp,* Communio 24 (1997), pp. 5–13.

[24] John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, 36.

[25] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 398.

rejection of the gift and the love which determine the beginning of the world and of man"[26].

In-vitro Fertilization & „the Ethos of the Gift"

Since children are „the supreme gift" of marital love[27], it is entirely natural for spouses to suffer greatly when they find they are unable to conceive. What recourse does such a couple have? While the desire to overcome infertility is certainly legitimate in itself, it is precisely the „hermeneutic of the gift" that helps us understand „that limit which remains impassable to the will and freedom of man as a created being"[28].

Despite the good intentions of those who resort to *in-vitro* techniques, to extract human gametes and technologically impose the conception of a human life shatters the dynamic of „gift". It shatters the „gift" between God and man, between man and woman, and between parents and child. We will look briefly at each.

John Paul reaches the pinnacle of his assessment of marital love when he describes conjugal life as „liturgical"[29]. The marital embrace itself is meant to be an experience of profound communion with God, an act of „veneration for the majesty of the Creator"[30]. It is meant to express the couple's creaturely „receptivity" and thanksgiving before God, and their „reciprocity" and „recapitulation" of the divine gift. Here, in a profound co-operation of the human and the divine, Gift meets gift and grants – or, according to his own good will does not grant – the gift of life.

Spouses are certainly free, in recapitulating the gift, to make the conditions for conception as optimum as possible. Hence, the Church does not oppose those techniques which assist the marital embrace in achieving its natural end. But the couple must never shift their posture from receptivity to „grasping". As soon as they do, they „deny the gift" and make themselves „'like God', but 'without God, before God, and not in accordance with God'"[31].

Consciously or unconsciously, those who resort to *in-vitro* fertilization demonstrate that they are not content with remaining receptive before the One who alone is „Lord and Giver of life". Since the Creator has not granted the gift through their own self-giving, they seek to „extort the gift".

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[26] *Dominum et vivificantem*, 35.
[27] See *Gaudium et spes*, p. 50.
[28] John Paul II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, 36.
[29] See John Paul II, *General audience,* July 4, 1984.
[30] Ibidem, Nov 21, 1984.
[31] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 398.

Spouses who live the „ethos of the gift" experience a „salvific fear" of ever violating or degrading the religious content" and theological meaning of their mutual self-donation[32]. The „one flesh" union speaks of a „great mystery"(see Eph 5:31-32) – the human-divine mystery of „gift-generation", *In-vitro* fertilization denies this „great mystery" by usurping the mutual donation of spouses.

Far removed from the physical and spiritual milieu of spousal union, *in-vitro* techniques instrumentalize human sexuality. Instead of revering the body and its nuptial meaning, doctors, technicians and the spouses themselves treat their bodies as objects to be mined for the raw materials" necessary in the „production" of a child. A typical part of this procedure, of course, is male masturbation which in itself radically denies the husband's „gift" and his bride's receptivity to the gift.

Furthermore, while there are many acts through which a child can be conceived (the marital embrace, rape, fornication, adultery, incest, various technological procedures) only one is in keeping with the dignity of the child as a divine „gift". To desire a child not as the fruit of marital love, but as the end result of a technological procedure is to treat the child as a „product" to obtain, rather than a „gift" to receive and a „person" to be loved for his own sake[33]. This creates – consciously, or unconsciously – a depersonalized orientation towards the child.

Products are subject to quality control. When a person spends top dollar for a new TV, he wants it in mint condition. He does not care about the TV he pulled out of the box „for its own sake". If it is defective, he will take it back for a refund or exchange it for another one. Similarly, the temptation is all too real for a couple paying thousands of dollars for *in-vitro* fertilization to want a „refund" or an „exchange" if their „product" is „defective".

The „denial of the gift" inherent in *in-vitro* techniques leads people to want not the particular baby conceived „for his own sake", but babies in „mint condition", even babies „made to order". The only way to ensure that „every" child is received as a divine gift is to ensure that every child is conceived as a recapitulation of the divine gift. Unconditional love begets unconditional love.

In Conclusion

We have learned that the „dimension of the gift" is the interpretive key of John Paul's „adequate anthropology". Since the mystery of „gift" originates in God himself, an adequate anthropology must be a theological anthropology. In

[32] See idem; see also John Paul II, *General audience*, Nov 14, 1984.
[33] *Gaudium et spes*, 24.

turn, since „the gift" is inscribed in the human body, an adequate anthropology must be a „theology of the body".

The proliferation of *in-vitro* fertilization is only one sign among many that the modern world is in desperate need of John Paul II's revolutionary catechesis on the human body. Much more is at stake in questions of sexual morality and procreation than many are willing to admit. Indeed the „choices and the actions [of men and women] take on all the weight of human existence in the union of the two"[34]. When we *grasp* at life we die (see Gn 2:17). When we »receive« the gift, *reciprocate* it and *recapitulate* it, we fulfill „the very meaning of [our] being and existence"[35].

ZAPŁODNIENIE *IN VITRO* A HERMENEUTYKA DARU
(STRESZCZENIE)

Teologia ciała Jana Pawła II ukazuje klucz interpretacyjny do zrozumienia tego, kim jest człowiek oraz jak ma żyć w postaci „hermeneutyki daru". Autor niniejszego artykuł pragnie ukazać, że zapłodnienie *in vitro* oraz inne techniki reprodukcyjne zastępujące zjednoczenie małżeńskie stanowią zasadnicze zaprzeczenie owego „wymiaru daru" i jako takie są również fundamentalną „zdradą" człowieczeństwa. Z teologicznego punktu widzenia „wymiar daru" odnosi się przede wszystkim do wymiany miłości wewnątrz Trójcy Świętej, na wzór i podobieństwo której człowiek został stworzony mężczyzną i niewiastą. Stąd też miłość oblubieńcza między kobietą i mężczyzną jest miłością całkowitego obdarowania sobą we wzajemnym oddaniu. Człowiek jest jednością duszy i ciała, dlatego jego „wewnętrzny wymiar daru" potwierdza się na zewnątrz, widzialnie w jego ciele. Dziecko, które jest owocem zjednoczenia cielesnego małżonków, stanowi uosobienie ich bycia „jednym ciałem" – żyjący znak ich wzajemnego oblubieńczego obdarowania. Dlatego też, pomimo niejednokrotnie dobrych intencji tych, którzy uciekają się do metody *in vitro*, sztuczne techniki zapłodnienia całkowicie niszczą „dynamikę daru"; niszczą „dar" pomiędzy Bogiem a człowiekiem, między mężczyzną i kobietą oraz pomiędzy rodzicami i dzieckiem. Chociaż bowiem istnieje wiele aktów, poprzez które może zostać poczęte dziecko (zjednoczenie małżeńskie, gwałt, cudzołóstwo, zdrada, kazirodztwo, techniki reprodukcyjne), to jednak tylko jeden zabezpiecza godność dziecka jako Bożego daru. Jest to akt widzialnego oblubieńczego obdarowania, na wzór niewidzialnej wymiany miłosnej Trójcy Świętej, który wyraża się w oblubieńczym zjednoczeniu małżonków.

IN-VITRO-FERTILISIERUNG UND DIE HERMENEUTIK DER GABE
(ZUSAMMENFASSUNG)

Im folgenden Text wird die In-Vitro-Fertilisierung (wie auch andere, die eheliche Vereinigung ersetzende Reproduktionstechniken) als ein grundsätzlicher Widerspruch zum „Austausch des Gebens" bezeichnet. Als solche tangieren sie das ganze Mensch-Sein. In ihrer ursprünglichen

[34] John Paul II, *General audience*, June 27, 1984.
[35] Ibidem, Jan 16, 1980.

Bedeutung bezieht sich die „Dimension der Gabe" auf den Austausch der Liebe im Wesen der Heiligsten Dreifaltigkeit, auf deren Bild und Gleichnis der Mensch als Mann und Frau geschaffen wurde. Aus diesem Grund ist die bräutliche Liebe zwischen Mann und Frau ein ganzheitliches gegenseitiges Beschenken in der Selbst-Gabe. In seinem Inneren, im Geheimnis seiner Seele erfährt der Mensch den Aufruf zur Existenz im Bewusstsein des Bild- und Gleichnis-Seins der ewigen Liebe. Als eine leib-seelische Einheit, bestätigt sich diese innere Dimension des Sich-Schenkens auch nach Außen, sichtbar in seinem Leib. Das Kind, das die Frucht der leiblichen Vereinigung des Ehepaares ist, verkörpert ihr Ein-Leib-Sein; es wird zu einem sichtbaren Zeichen ihres gegenseitigen bräutlichen Sich-Beschenkens. Trotz der guten Absichten jener, die zur In-Vitro-Methode greifen, zerstören solche künstliche Methoden der Fertilisierung gänzlich die Dynamik der Gabe. „Die Gabe", die sich zwischen Gott und Mensch, Mann und Frau, aber auch Eltern und Kind ereignet, wird hier zerstört. Das Kind kann zwar auf verschiedenen Wegen gezeugt werden (elterliche Vereinigung, aber auch Ehebruch, Inzest, Vergewaltigung, sowie Reproduktionstechniken), nur eine jedoch bestätigt und bewahrt die Würde des Kindes als einer göttlichen Gabe: es ist der Akt des sichtbaren Sich-Beschenkens nach dem Bild und Gleichnis des Austausches der Liebe im Wesen der Dreieinigkeit.