

NAKED CHURCH: A TRINITARIAN ECCLESIOLOGY OF THE BODY

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In his extraordinary treatment of the human body, John Paul II weaves exegesis with theological insight to establish the givenness of humanity's physicality.¹ The breadth and range of his argument caution the reader of TOB against hasty critical analysis of the book. At the same time, one can criticize even so sweeping a work as TOB, if not for what it does say then for what it does not.

This article expands on one under-developed facet of John Paul II's theology of givenness: the physicality of the church. To be sure, in TOB, he has not wholly neglected a theology of the church, but, with particular reference to the church's physicality, the book is suggestive rather than the definitive. A full-bodied investigation of the church as the physical presence of Christ, in relation to the givenness of the body, remains to be developed. Here, I shall extrapolate a theology of the human body into a theology of the ecclesial body, revealing the church, naked on earth as it is heaven.

John Paul II does not refer to the church as naked, but the term is apt; the naked church, like the naked human body John Paul II exposes so completely, is the church in itself, viewed in its truest sense. Like the human body, the naked church is both physical and given by the Gift-giver himself.² A physical theology of the church must grapple with the myriad parallels between the human body and the body of the Christ. And, admittedly, sterling treatments of ecclesiology do so already.³ However, within TOB lies the seed of a fresh perspective for ecclesiology and, by implication, for those who compose the *ekklesia*.

Since a full physical theology of the church lies beyond the confines of this paper, the focus here falls upon seeing the church, like the human body, as the visible emblem of the Gift-giver's love toward humanity. This is the heart of the naked church. Part 1 shows the human body and the ecclesial body in mutually illuminating parallel. John Paul's own intimations of an ecclesiology function as a springboard. Part 2, again expanding on TOB, establishes the trinitarian backbone of the ecclesial body. Part 2 sketches a biblical theology of the ecclesial body's purpose. Part 4 argues that the ecclesial body, like the human, retains a certain

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¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), hereafter cited as TOB.

² TOB, 11:1-13:1.

³ E.g., Edmund Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1995).

sacramentality, expressed chiefly in the spousal love of worship. Taken together, these four considerations provide an avenue into the heart of a physical ecclesiology, and the theology of the human body articulated by John Paul II gives rise to the theology of the ecclesial body latent in Scripture.

I. BODIES IN PARALLEL

The warrant to juxtapose the human body with the ecclesial body arises from Scripture, as John Paul II demonstrates. He draws several Pauline passages to link the human and ecclesial bodies. However, the Pope reads the comparison primarily for its insights on the human body, rather than for how the human body illuminates the ecclesial body.

His first audience on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 feeds his reflections on purity, arguing that in this passage, Paul “wants to teach the recipients of his letter the right understanding of the human body.”⁴ However, reading with the grain of 1 Corinthians 12 suggests that Paul intends not to instruct them about their mortal bodies but to compel the divisive believers at Corinth to redouble their efforts at unity.⁵ After all, the image of the body occurs late in a letter that has repeatedly addressed ecclesial unity. Closer examination of 1 Corinthians 12 shows that Paul uses the human body to illuminate the ecclesial body, not vice versa as the Pope suggests.⁶

Another key passage for linking human and ecclesial bodies is Ephesians 5, which John Paul II exegetes with extraordinary insight. However, again his focus on the human body prevents a full clarity regarding its parallel with the church. Similarly, the exposition of Colossians 1:18 (“And he is the head of the body, the church”) overlooks the connection between the human and ecclesial bodies, addressing instead continence for the kingdom. Not surprisingly, the cognate texts of Ephesians 1:22; 4:15-16; and 5:23 provide no insight for the matter either. In TOB, John Paul finds a theology of the human body within these passages because, like a master distiller, he has pursued a complex, rich and smooth creation, juxtaposing unexpected components to produce an astonishingly unified blend of ideas. But, while Scripture warrants the parallel between the human and ecclesial bodies, the Pope has neglected to draw it, at least in the direction Scripture suggests most intuitively.

That said, John Paul’s reading of these and other texts has fostered the seminal insight of his theology of the body: the givenness and givability of the human body.⁷ Here is a characteristically pithy expression of the

⁴ TOB, 55:6.

⁵ For a summary of the unifying themes in 1 Corinthians, A. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 36-41.

⁶ For a compact summary of the implications, O. Tjørhom, *Visible Church, Visible Unity: Ecumenical Ecclesiology and “The Great Tradition of the Church”* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2004), 44-45.

⁷ This theme recurs throughout TOB, e.g., “The human body...contains...the power to express love: precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift and—through this gift—fulfils the very meaning of his being and existence,” 15:1.

matter: “This is the body: a witness to creation as a fundamental gift, and therefore a witness to Love as the source from which this same giving springs.”⁸ If this is the human body, and the corporate people of God are, in Pauline language, called the body of Christ, then is not the church also a witness to creation’s givenness and Love’s generosity? John Paul II whispers the possibility: “Through a total gift that springs from love, he [Christ] formed the church as his body and continually builds her.”⁹

The closeness of the parallel between human and ecclesial bodies cries out for more description, and a physical theology of the church builds upon this foundation. The ecclesial body receives its existence as a gift within the physical sphere. The Anglican minister, Samuel J. Stone, encapsulated this biblical teaching in his poem, “The Church’s One Foundation,” as he reflected on the crisis gripping his denomination.¹⁰ In Stone’s famous words, the church “is his new creation by water and the word.” And, of course, Stone himself is no innovator but derived his line from Ephesians 5:26. As John Paul II explains, this verse portrays the church as the recipient of “redemptive and spousal love” that is the fullest expression of love, which the church then mirrors as a response of love.¹¹

The human and ecclesial bodies share Love as a common origin. They also require the same nourishment for full expression of their being: relationship. The Pope refers to lonely Adam in the garden as incapable of fulfilling his true essence. Indeed, with Love pulsing in his veins he can only find it “by existing ‘with someone’—and, put even more deeply and completely, by existing ‘for someone’.”¹² Similarly, the church exists with and for another being. Chiefly, of course, that other, the supreme Other, is Christ himself, whose body the church is.¹³ The church, like humanity as a whole, depends upon relationality, an unobstructed flow of reciprocal love between itself and its Creator. In this way, the parallel with the human body expands, for the human body, as a constituent part of the human being, derives its *telos* from providing a visible representation of God. Daniel Migliore summarizes well, “Being created in the image of God means that humans find their true identity in coexistence with each other and with all other creatures.”¹⁴

Although Scripture does not identify the church as the image of God, the parallel between the human and ecclesial bodies allows for this inference.¹⁵ For now, what matters is to see the necessity of relationality

⁸ TOB, 14:4.

⁹ TOB, 90:5.

¹⁰ B. Stone, *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012), 143.

¹¹ TOB, 91:8.

¹² TOB, 14:2.

¹³ Buber’s observations about the necessity of the functional pair in all relationship holds true even with Christ and the church. See *I and Thou* (W. Kaufman, trans.; New York: Scribner, 1970).

¹⁴ D. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 125.

¹⁵ See Section 3 below. Also S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of*

for the ecclesial body in parallel with relationality for the human body. In both cases, existence as well as essence depend upon it. For, as John Paul explains, the creation account in Genesis 2 indicates that the man was incompletely human until the woman joined him. The human body is only fully itself when in relationship with another and for another—what John Paul calls the “spousal” dimension of the body.¹⁶ This is the fulfilment of the physical body. It is also the fulfilment of the ecclesial.

II. TRINITARIAN BACKBONE

As noted above, TOB merits little criticism for its comprehensive approach to the human body. Its lacunae largely concern related topics, such as the subject to hand. Still, John Paul II might have provided a more robust trinitarian window onto humanity’s physicality. To speak of God at all is to speak of a triune deity.¹⁷ Even more, there is no love for God to overflow into humanity if not for the inner-trinitarian love that binds together the three persons. T.F. Torrance grasped the complexities of this dynamic:

[T]hat God is Love as this loving One in Christ and in the Spirit means that in their interpersonal reciprocal relations the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the Communion of Love which the One God eternally is in himself and indeed is also toward us. It is as this ever living and acting Communion of loving and being loved that God is who he is, the perfection and fullness of Love that will not be confined within the Godhead but freely and lovingly moves outward toward others whom God creates for fellowship with himself so that they may share with him the very Communion of Love which is his own divine Life and Being.¹⁸

John Paul II hints at this perichoretic wonder when he mentions “the mystery of Truth and Love, the mystery of divine life.”¹⁹ Similarly, he admits that the gift of love permits “a participation in the divine nature,” but created humanity cannot receive the fullness of the gift since it belongs only to “the Trinitarian communion of persons.”²⁰

But TOB lacks substantive reflection on how the Triune nature of the Gift-giver relates to human identity and activity. More development of the “mystery of divine life” could only have buttressed the insights on the ramifications of the divine life; after all, the bulk of TOB concerns just how the overflow of divine love impacts human life in the body.

Other theologians of the twentieth century have capitalized on the significance of inner-trinitarian love, perhaps chief among them, John

God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 482-485.

¹⁶ TOB, 14:5.

¹⁷ An accessible argument to this effect is T. Peters, *God as Trinity* (Louisville: WJK, 1993), 13-16.

¹⁸ T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (London: T&T Clark, 1996), 165-66.

¹⁹ TOB, 19:4.

²⁰ TOB, 95b:4.

Zizioulas. Zizioulas, unlike John Paul II, explored the ecclesiological implications of inner-Trinitarian love.²¹ His sensitivity to trinitarian dynamics enabled him to tune into the high-register ramifications of God's essence as Love. To Zizioulas, the church finds its essence in its fellowship with Christ; her being is communion. As the body of Christ, the church is given by the Father, to the Son and as the Son's body, sustained by the Spirit. Love from three corners penetrates the church as each member of the Trinity participates in the work of the other, giving itself for the other so that being in communion becomes the life pulse of the church just as in the godhead.²²

A fuller trinitarian theology would have permitted John Paul II to create a wider and more secure theological foundation for reflecting upon the givenness of the human body.²³ By focusing (even if by default) on the unified nature of God, the Pope verged on truncating the deity's identity, and, more concerning, he allowed little room for exploring the source of the love that humanity receives and reflects. To be sure, spousal love is the love of the Triune God, and humanity mirrors spousal love only because Father, Son and Spirit have generated and reflected that love for eternity. So, although not explicitly, John Paul II does deal with the inner life of the Trinity. At the same time, an overt discussion of the immanent Trinity would have opened still further avenues of fruitful reflection on the nature of spousal love.

A theology of the ecclesial body needs a trinitarian backbone for precisely the same reasons TOB would have benefitted from a more robust doctrine of God. Firstly, reflection on the church of Jesus Christ is necessarily trinitarian. Miroslav Volf explains,

One can construct a private relationship with Christ as little as one can create a private relationship with the triune God... To believe in Christ accordingly means to "enter" into this corporate personality and for that reason also into communion with others.²⁴

Secondly, as intimated above, the *raison d'être* of the church mirrors that of the human individual. Spousal love, then, though obviously not expressed in marital intimacy, remains the supreme vehicle for the church to fulfil her identity. Only a trinitarian substrate nurtures ecclesial love and life for the ecclesial and human bodies alike.

²¹ J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

²² Loudovikos, "Christian Life and Institutional Church" in *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and Church*, 125-132.

²³ To be fair, he provides a skeletal understanding of the Trinity, noting Father-Son relations in the church's creation, but he omits discussion of the Spirit, TOB, 95a:5-7. At best, then, this is a hopeful trinitarianism but hardly satisfactory.

²⁴ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 33. Further research on a Trinitarian theology of the ecclesial body would engage John Paul II's successor, Cardinal Ratzinger, the future Benedict XVI. Volf is indebted to Ratzinger's ecclesiology.

III. BEING THE BODY

The ecclesial body shares with the human body the task of transferring “into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God.”²⁵ The human body is a communication made visible; John Paul II employs the phrase “the language of the body,” seeing the body itself as an expression of deep reality.²⁶ Similarly, James Jordan observes, “Human beings might be called the visible words of God, though perhaps ‘fleshly words’ might be better. We are words in the sentences of the Divine Book of the Kingdom.”²⁷ Of course, individuals do not devise their own body-cum-language but, led by Christ, they re-learn what sin has erased from their corporeal memories.²⁸

Yet just as the human body mysteriously provides physical representation of the deity, so the corporate people of God create the physical entity demonstrating his qualities to the world. Corporate responsibility to bring God’s presence to earth fell first to ancient Israel, as Yahweh called a tribe of former slaves to construct his residence on earth.²⁹ The tabernacle construction account in Exodus 35-40 tells a consistent story: God elected to use people to build his earthly dwelling. And this choice is significant, for, as is well known, Israel’s Scriptures attribute creative power to God alone (e.g., Gen 1, Job 38). God’s choice to draft his people demonstrates his self-giving love, for, rather than displaying himself by fiat, he gave his love and enabled a people to reflect it.

There is substantial overlap between Exodus 25-31 and 35-40.³⁰ Scholars, predictably, dispute the value of the repeated material in Exodus 35-40. Yet no scholar has located a rationale for the passage in the corporate participation required for the tabernacle’s construction. Yet, from the outset, the many people of God act as the one people of God. Their task is to provide a physical location so that that the invisible deity might rest among them and that they, in turn, may take up the challenge to display his qualities.³¹ Though slightly anachronistic, it is not inaccurate to see in ancient Israel the work of the ecclesial body: physical representation of God to the visible world.

²⁵ TOB, 19:5

²⁶ TOB, 104:4.

²⁷ James B. Jordan, *The Liturgy Trap: The Bible versus Mere Tradition in Worship* (3rd ed.; Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2008), 62.

²⁸ R. Greco, “Recent Ecclesiastical Teaching,” in *John Paul the Second and Moral Theology*, (C.E. Curran and R.A. McCormick, eds.; Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998), 145. Cf. TOB, 105:3.

²⁹ For recent scholarship in this vein, M.B. Hundley, *Keeping Heaven on Earth: Safeguarding the Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle* (FAT II,50; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

³⁰ T. Dozeman provides a table comparing the sections, *Exodus: A Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 430.

³¹ As C.J.H. Wright concisely explains, *The Mission of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 330-331. Also, W. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), particularly for discussion of Yahweh’s presence as the bedrock of Israel’s corporate, religious identity.

Israel, of course, failed her mission. But Yahweh's zeal to make his presence known physically to his world continued. The Gospels burgeon with evidence of Jesus' identity as the continuation of Israel's story, not least in regards to the project of displaying God to the world. The contested fulfilment passages in the Matthew lay a foundation for reading Jesus as Israel's replacement. In his body, Jesus presented God bodily to the world, as numerous passages in John make clear (e.g., 1:14). Most notably, Jesus identifies himself as the temple of God, much to the bafflement of his audience.

This brief biblical theology sketches the arc of Scripture's interest in the presence of God rendered visible for the physical world. Just as Israel feeds Jesus' identity as the human agent responsible for presenting God to the world, so Jesus-as-temple-builder informs Paul's understanding of the early Christians. In 1 Corinthians he writes, "You are God's field, God's building" (3:9) and "Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and God's Spirit dwells in you?" (3:16). On account of Jesus' obedience, fulfilling Israel's mission, the corporate people of God—Christ's body on earth—once again receive the task of presenting God to the world through physical means.

Paul's ecclesiology in 1 Corinthians is also shot-through with trinitarian agency. The equality of Father and Son appears in Paul's opening greeting (1:1, 3) and thanksgiving (1:9); believers enter relationship with the one God because of the Father's call and the Son's saving action. While the work of Christ is the primary expression of divine action (e.g., 2:2), he depends upon the Spirit (e.g., 3:11). In fact, Paul explicitly claims that believers have "received...the Spirit who is from God" (3:12), and, consequently, the "mind of Christ" is theirs (3:16). In the lyrical words of John Donne, believers receive the "three-person'd God" through a triangulated barrage of batterings, each equally loving and necessary but no one sufficient in itself. Humanity participates in the divine life (2 Pet 1:4) as the whole deity, Father, Son and Spirit collaborate in love.

Colin Gunton argues forcefully that a major impediment to a robust Trinitarian ecclesiology is an exaggerated gulf between pneumatology and Christology.³² To Gunton, the agency of the Son receives overemphasis while the Spirit floats in the ether; after all "the wind blows where it wishes" (John 3:8). To recover its trinitarian bedrock, a biblical ecclesiology requires a corrected view of Son and Spirit.³³ But Gunton may overstate the case, for the root of the problem is not relating Son and Spirit but understanding the humiliation of the Son and the fullness of his humanity.³⁴ In this, however, Gunton is correct: analysis of Spirit and Son has been "docetic in direction, producing a tendency to conceive

³² Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 68.

³³ At this, one might despair of rapprochement given the chasm of dispute created by centuries of wrangling over the relation between Son and Spirit, on which see R. Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 201-220.

³⁴ On so-called *kenotic* Christology, C. Stephen Evans, ed., *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

the motive force, so to speak, of Jesus' life as being the eternal Word."³⁵ Consequently, ecclesiology, tethered immovably to Christology, bears hints of an inverse docetism in which the church only appears to be the physical presence of Christ on earth.

Yet Paul clearly teaches a sacramental relation between Christ and the church. The mystery parallels the sacramental theology John Paul II identifies in the human body. A full embrace of this mystery and its parallel with the human body is essential to avoiding a heretical (docetic) conception of Christ's body, the church. And greater attention to the pneumatological nuances of 1 Corinthians is a sure way forward.

Paul's special interest in 1 Corinthians 3 is the corporate identity of the people of God, as the plural pronoun indicates. Antony Thiselton underscores Paul's concern, "Here Paul is not saying that each individual Christian is a temple within which God's Spirit dwells, but rather that the Spirit of God dwells in the Christian community *corporately as a community*."³⁶ The circle thus closes. Like ancient Israel, the corporate people of God bear responsibility for creating a physical emblem of God's presence.

The Corinthian community's social ethic derives from its identity as the reflector of God himself. Paul tolerates no excuse for disunity: "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple" (3:17).³⁷ This law of retribution resembles the small but notable sections of *lex talionis* found in the Hebrew Bible;³⁸ not only does the Lord promise repayment in like kind, but, in both cases, he redresses crimes against the body, here ecclesial, there human. Brevard Childs contends that ancient Israel did not implement the laws literally but heralded them as guides for ideal ethical behavior.³⁹ Regardless, the point remains: the Lord despises actions that jeopardize the display of his physical presence.⁴⁰ And a supreme, ordinary means of that self-revelation is the corporate life and practice of his people. The church is the body—the physical presence—of God in the world.

On this point, Petrine ecclesiology squares with Pauline. Peter, like Paul, reflects a thick understanding of ancient Israel's vocation as the stewards of God's presence. As in 1 Corinthians, a trinitarian substratum suffuses 1 Peter, enabling the apostle to declare believers "living stones... built up as a spiritual house" (2:5). These individuals have been chosen by the Father, for membership in the Son, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit.⁴¹ The designation "spiritual house" contrasts with the Jerusalem

³⁵ Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, 68.

³⁶ Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 316, emphasis original.

³⁷ Intentionally or not, Paul echoes Old Testament depictions of Yahweh's wrath for abuse of the temple, e.g., Ezekiel 8:16-19, Joel 3:5.

³⁸ Exodus 21:23-27, Leviticus 24:17-22, Deuteronomy 19:16-21.

³⁹ Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1974), 94.

⁴⁰ As implied by Dozeman's suggestion that the *leges talionis* synthesize Israelite law, *Exodus*, 536. Cf., B. Jackson, "Revolution in Biblical Law: Some Reflections on the Role of Theory in Methodology," *JSS* 50.1 (2005): 91, n. 21.

⁴¹ Geoffrey Wainwright denies that the Trinitarian reference in 1 Peter 1:2 signals any relations within the godhead, *The Trinity in the New Testament* (London:

temple; it cannot imply that Peter is disinterested in the physical representation of God's presence. After all, Peter recognizes what John Paul II has labored to demonstrate: the human person is necessarily physical. He expects a physical existence in the life to come when God will "restore" his people after their sufferings (5:10). Peter, then, holds that God's people corporately provide a residence for God within the physical world; God's presence appears through his people.

From Peter and Paul, building on the long arc of Israel's story, the corporate people of God exist to display the fullness of God to the world. The grammar of "tabernacle" and "temple" infuses their ecclesiology with an expectation that what John Paul hears in the language of the human body also sounds forth from the ecclesial body. As noted above, the Pope identifies the human body as a sacrament. This bears development in relation to the ecclesial body.

IV. SACRAMENTALITY AND WORSHIP

In TOB, the strongest expression of the human body's sacramentality arises in analysis of marriage in Ephesians 5:21-33.⁴² Within the Roman Catholic tradition, John Paul II unsurprisingly presents marriage between man and woman as a sacrament,⁴³ but he rightly grounds assessment of marriage in a theology of the body.

According to the generally recognized meaning the sacrament is in fact a "visible sign." "Body" also refers to what is visible; it signifies the visibility of the world and of man. In some way, therefore—even if in the most general way—the body enters into the definition of sacrament, which is "a visible sign of an invisible reality," namely, of the spiritual, transcendent and divine reality. In this sign—and through this sign—God gives himself to man in his transcendent truth and in his love. The sacrament is a sign of grace, and it is an efficacious sign. It does not merely indicate and express grace in a visible way, in the manner of a sign, but produces grace.⁴⁴

In light of the parallels noted above between human and ecclesial bodies, a full reading of the body extends the sacramentality of the human body to the ecclesial. After all, under the broad understanding of sacrament, the corporate people of God function precisely as John Paul describes the human body. Together, God's people signify the invisible reality of God's presence. The ecclesial body becomes a sacrament.

SPCK, 1962), 255. But, if each person participates in creating the diaspora believers, at a minimum, the persons co-operate. It is no great leap, then, to assert their mutual inherence and love.

⁴² John Paul II refers to the human body's sacramental quality multivalently, sometimes in relation to the body itself (e.g., TOB, 19:3-5) and sometimes in relation to the body given in marital intimacy (e.g., TOB, 103-104).

⁴³ M.G. Lawler provides a concise expression of this doctrine, *Marriage and Sacrament: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 11-15.

⁴⁴ TOB, 87:5.

Oddly, however, John Paul II downplays the sacramentality of the church. Quoting *Lumen Gentium*, he prefers merely to compare the church to a sacrament.⁴⁵ And, later, he refers to “the sacramentality of the Church” only to qualify that reference as “the sacramentality of Christ’s union with the Church.”⁴⁶ Yet, the ecclesial body has received the duty of displaying God’s love, and the proper discharge of that duty signifies the love itself.

Support for the church’s sacramentality comes from beyond the Western philosophical and theological tradition of John Paul II. Alexander Schmemmann, an Orthodox priest of the 20th century, identified the church as a sacrament of grace, at least by extension. More specifically, he viewed corporate worship of God as signifying the invisible reality of God for the world. Arguing *a fortiori*, Schmemmann contends that corporate worship is the sacramental expression *par excellence*, since even life in the world bears sacramental power.⁴⁷ The argument requires the fundamental assumption that man is essentially a creature made for communion with God through worship, in Schmemmann’s words, “‘*homo sapiens*’, ‘*homo faber*’...yes, but, first of all, ‘*homo adorans*’.”⁴⁸ When God’s image bearers, recreated in the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), gather for worship, they participate in the fulfilment of human existence, signalling the loving being of God in their corporate activity. Worship enables sacramentality.

On analogy with the human body, the ecclesial body—the bride (Rev 19:7)—expresses spousal love to her Lover by finding her entire being in devoted self-giving to the Other.⁴⁹ John Paul II hints at the place of worship within the theology of the body; the liturgy of the church parallels the self-giving love husbands owe their wives.⁵⁰ Yet even without the Pope’s whisper on the liturgy, worship’s function within the body paradigm is clear. The ecclesial body gives of itself by joining the voices of the many members into the voice of one.

A glimpse at Revelation provides a further clue to the relevance of worship in the ecclesial body. Following the victory over Babylon the Great (Rev 18), John witnesses torrents of praise, as the chorus in heaven lauds the Lamb for his triumph (19:6-8). He impulsively mimics the great multitude, only to receive the angel’s rebuke: ‘You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God’ (19:10). The sequence implies that worship is the activity of heaven because God, through the Lamb, has perfected his people, the bride.⁵¹ She becomes what she worships. No longer is she

⁴⁵ TOB, 93:6.

⁴⁶ TOB, 98:8.

⁴⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1973), 120-21.

⁴⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

⁴⁹ The church-as-bride features heavily in TOB, 87-103, as John Paul II explores the analogy between male-female relations and those of Christ and the church. But the emphasis falls on the constitutive love of Christ and the male, not the equally spousal love of the church and the female.

⁵⁰ TOB, 117a:6.

⁵¹ Beale, *Revelation*, 946.

prone to idols and their deadness, for the former things have passed away' (Rev 21:4). To the contrary, she is now fully alive, basking in the full life of Life itself (John 14:6). When perfected, the bride mirrors her Spouse. In Charles Wesley's immortal phrase, Christ "emptied himself of all but love," and the eschatological body of Christ responds by emptying herself of all but worship. As the church's gift of self reflects the love of the Triune God back to God himself, worship becomes the ecclesial body's fullest expression of spousal love. This supreme act of self-effacement fulfils the church's purpose, just as spousal love completes the human person.⁵²

Worship, like all components of ecclesial life, depends upon trinitarian agency, not only to constitute the ecclesial body performing worship but to inspire, validate and receive the worship. The activity of the Trinity enriches the view of worship as total fulfilment of the church's being. Not only does worship mirror the spousal love of God, but, more specifically, worship enables the church to follow in the Master's steps. With Hebrews 2:12 as impetus, Reggie Kidd develops an entire theology of worship around the notion that Christ is the quintessential worshiper since he offered himself wholly to the Father.⁵³ And the church, drawn by the Spirit to follow Christ, offers its worship to the same Father but only because of the Son's.⁵⁴ Worship, then, doubly fulfils the church.

In this life, however, the bride has not met her groom. She practices but falters. Her worship is imperfect, for she too often pursues worship for self rather than giving it for the other. In developing a theology of the human body, John Paul all but predicts this selfish worship as he explores how, in the sexual arena of marriage, a man and woman desire the other for self-gratification rather than longing to give of self out of worship (love) for the other.⁵⁵

The ecclesial body faces a similar temptation in worship: feigning the gift of self while actually withholding it and using the Other for self-gratification. The Old Testament produces myriad examples of God's people worshipping for their own satisfaction rather than out of self-sacrificial love in response to the unparalleled love of Yahweh (e.g., Jer 7:1-4). Jesus himself confirmed God's pursuit of worshipers not in name only but 'in spirit and in truth' (John 4:23-24). Paul's Corinthian correspondence implies the universality of objectifying God; Paul chastises the believers for using corporate worship as the vehicle for achieving self-exaltation (e.g., 1 Cor 11:17-34).

Imperfect worship notwithstanding, the ecclesial body pursues right worship in much the same way men and women, in spite of proclivity to violating the gift, strive for truly spousal love. Purity for the human body stems from the work of God; the Spirit gives life (John 6:63). Yet, of

⁵² TOB, 15:5, "the human person...cannot fully find himself except through the gift of self."

⁵³ R. Kidd, *With One Voice: Discovering Christ's Song in Our Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). Heb 2:12 puts Ps 22:22 in the mouth of Jesus: "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."

⁵⁴ Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), 100.

⁵⁵ TOB, 32:6.

course, the Spirit's re-creative breath works in tandem with the atonement wrought by the Son and the gift of the Son by the Father. Trinitarian agency is inevitable. Additionally, as the body of Christ, the physical representation of God in the visible world, the church must really act. Passivity has no place in the ecclesial body any more than in the bodies of men and women that compose the church. John Paul II expresses the call to action with piercing clarity: "The fact that we 'were bought at a great price' (1 Cor 6:20), the price of Christ's redemption, makes precisely a new special commitment spring forth, namely, the duty of 'keeping one's own body with holiness and reverence'."⁵⁶

In other words, out of love and respect for Christ, the church must endeavor to keep itself pure, to worship by the Spirit rather than the spirit of this age. After all, the heavenly multitude in John's vision, commended the Bride herself for she had "made herself ready" (Rev 19:7). The ecclesial body must reciprocate the love she has received, and in this way, she yet again models the eternally reciprocal inner-Trinitarian love. God grants agency to his people, corporate and individual, because God is Love, and love creates more love. Thus the overflow of God's love to his people becomes the engine of their love to him. "The love that turns the sun and other stars" turns his people toward himself.⁵⁷ Gregory of Nyssa identifies the Spirit as the "principle of unity between God and creature," integrating the people of God into God himself in order that Triune love may fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.⁵⁸ The church requires love for life and receives love from God because the church is the body of Christ, the presence of God in the world until the day when God himself shall re-appear in the flesh.

CONCLUSION

Christopher West draws on Augustine to assert that "the deepest desire of the human heart is to see another and be seen by the other's loving look."⁵⁹ If such is possible for two humans, then perhaps, by analogy, it is also feasible for humans as they gaze upon another physical body, the church of Jesus Christ.⁶⁰ This paper has endeavored to provide just such a loving look at the ecclesial body. Following West, himself deeply influenced by John Paul II, the purpose goes beyond creating knowledge, for this is no voyeuristic look. Rather, the point is to stir up new love for the ecclesial body. But, of course, just as to know a human being is to receive a glimpse of the Creator, so also gazing upon the church. In the end, then, the aim of the paper is to create more love for the one who is Love itself so that the church may "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Eph 4:15).

⁵⁶ TOB, 56:5.

⁵⁷ Dante, *Paradiso* xxxvi.v.145.

⁵⁸ H. U. von Balthasar, *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa* (M. Sebanc; San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 168.

⁵⁹ West, *Theology of the Body Explained*, 93.

⁶⁰ Such was true of the first man and woman: "seeing and knowing each other in all the peace and tranquillity of the interior gaze, the 'communicate' in the fullness of humanity," TOB, 13:1.