

ON POWER AND FRAGILITY: REFLECTIONS
ON JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY
OF BODILY WOMANHOOD

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“The constitution of the woman is different, as compared with the man. We know today that it is different even in the deepest bio-physiological determinants.” – John Paul II

“If girls and young women ruptured their A.C.L.’s at just twice the rate of boys and young men, it would be notable. Three times the rate would be astounding. But...female athletes rupture their A.C.L.’s at rates as high as five times that of males.” – Michael Sokolove

In 2013 in Richardson, Texas, a quirky, wild-haired youth speaker named Justin Lookadoo stood up in front of a high school audience and did the unthinkable: he called young men to be “be honest, chivalrous, wild and adventurous” and for young women to “be feminine” and “let men lead” in relationships. According to a report from the *Dallas News*, Lookadoo’s remarks occasioned a stern rebuke from Jaime Clark-Soles, a theology professor at Southern Methodist University: “I felt that such a person with those publicly expressed views about gender roles would not have access to my child,” she said. The response to Lookadoo’s remarks reached fever pitch among several students, a dozen of whom surrounded him and charged him with insensitivity toward transgender peers.¹

This exchange, occurring in Dallas, Texas, suggests that in American society today there is no sphere that is more contested than the body. This is true of a wide range of issues related to our form and physique. Gender fluidity is now an accepted part of the spirit of the age. Few students who undertake a modern collegiate education will fail to hear the words “social construct” when the topic of human sexuality is raised. The message asserted by many leading cultural voices today is this: gender is fluid. Opposition to this idea is increasingly seen in nearly the same terms as overt racism.

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¹ Jeffrey Weiss, “Motivational Speaker at Richardson School Criticized for Gender Stereotyping,” *Dallas News*, November 13, 2013. Accessed at <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/community-news/richardson-lake-highlands/headlines/20131113-motivational-speaker-at-richardson-school-criticized-for-gender-stereotyping.ece>

Lookadoo is not the first of his ilk, however. There is a long and vast tradition of affirming sexual differences among Catholics, Protestants, and essentially every other religious group.² Few theologians have stated the case for constitutional sexual differences better than Pope John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body*. There are elements of John Paul's text that I disagree with. These include his occasional dependence on higher-critical categories and, not insignificantly, his Catholic soteriology. With that said, I affirm a central concern of John Paul's text: that the bodies of men and women are different, and womanhood as an embodied reality has a special dignity and glory that owes to God's design and serves God's unique purposes. In what follows, I interact with and reflect on John Paul's stated views. I conclude with a brief test-case of this perspective from a recent discussion in the *New York Times*.

I. A THEOLOGY OF BODILY WOMANHOOD IN "THEOLOGY OF THE BODY"

The Pope's words on the subject of the uniqueness of the womanly body are economical in *Theology of the Body* but offer in summative form a theology of the womanly body. We will look at three sections in particular from the broader work. In "Mystery of Woman Revealed in Motherhood," John Paul notes the Bible's own economical description of the human body and its distinctiveness:

The theology of the body contained in Genesis is concise and sparing with words. At the same time, fundamental and in some sense primary and definitive contents find expression in it. All human beings find themselves in their own way in that biblical "knowledge." Woman's constitution differs from that of man; in fact, we know today that it is different even in the deepest bio-physiological determinants. The difference is shown only in a limited measure on the outside, in the build and form of her body. Motherhood shows this constitution from within, as a particular power of the feminine organism, which serves with creative specificity for the conception and generation of human beings with the concurrence of the man. "Knowledge" conditions begetting.³

The woman's unique design is, according to the Pope, "different" from that of the man. John Paul qualifies himself, arguing that the feminine form and construction differs "only to a certain extent" from the man. This is a reading of the sexes consonant with evangelical complementarianism, which asserts that men and women have fundamental unity and equality

² The foundational evangelical resource articulating this position is John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Carol Stream, IL: Crossway, 1991). The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood was founded in 1987 to promote "complementarian" theology, which recognizes and celebrates sexual differences between men and women.

³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 211.

of worth as image-bearers (see Genesis 1:26-27).⁴ John Paul, then, does not set the sexes up against one another. For him, they are equal. But equality does not mean sameness. It is only the “feminine organism” that has the “particular power” of “maternity,” childbearing. This is the marker “within” the woman. A woman is thus justified in finding a constitutive element of her human identity in her possession of a womb. She need not bear children to perceive that her womb owes to the design of God; made in her own way by God, she is inherently womanly, blessed with the possibility of creating and nurturing life. This is a matter of dignity; it is not incidental to womanliness.

Womanhood is a mysterious reality and a wondrous one as John Paul views it. This is true of internal femininity and of a second way that women manifest their uniqueness: “outside” themselves. The unique “construction and form” of the womanly body expresses a profound truth: woman is not man. Though equal with him, she is in a sense a new creation, formed from the rib of Adam. Discussions of sexual difference can lead to embarrassment on one hand and prurience on the other, but John Paul offers another perspective, a theological one. The discovery of “bio-physiological” difference, the creative power of God on display, is not first carnal, but is a kind of little miracle.

It is a fearsome thing as a little child to slowly understand that boys and girls are different, and that one’s father and mother are not the same. Typically, sexual distinctions are not drilled into the minds of children. It is not necessary to do so. This knowledge is a matter of wonder, not an outcome of social engineering.⁵ We are surprised as children to attain this knowledge; we were not expecting it, we did not create it, and it is both surprising and beautiful. This learning, we could say, is an emulation of God, an act of seeing the world as the Lord sees it, and has made it to be seen. But this wisdom is not only for contemplation. In the Pope’s elegant turn of phrase, “Knowledge conditions begetting.” This is the truth that not only makes sense of the world, but that shapes the very direction of our lives. Understanding sexual difference, in other words, is an initial miracle that leads to another: becoming like God himself, and creating life.

The discussion of womanhood in *Theology of the Body* becomes less abstract and more concrete elsewhere. In John Paul’s “Eulogy of motherhood,” he zeroes in on the feminine form: “The whole exterior constitution of woman’s body, its particular look, the qualities that stand, with the power of a perennial attraction, at the beginning of the “knowledge” about which Genesis 4:1–2 speaks, (“Adam united himself with Eve”), *are in strict union with motherhood.*” He continues by noting how “the Bible (and the liturgy following it) honors and praises throughout the centuries “the womb that bore you and the breasts from which you sucked milk

⁴ See, for example, Andreas Kostenberger and David Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family, 2nd Edition: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation of the Family* (Carol Stream, IL: Crossway, 2010).

⁵ Contra the perspective of feminist scholars advocating the “social constructivist” view of gender like Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

(Lk 11:27). These words are a eulogy of motherhood, of femininity, of the feminine body in its typical expression of creative love.” This was true of “the Mother of Jesus, Mary, the second Eve. The first woman, on the other hand, at the moment in which the maternal maturity of her body revealed itself for the first time, when she “conceived and bore,” said, “I have acquired a man from the Lord” (Gen 4:1).”⁶

This is a frank and yet honest discussion of the womanly body. The frame and form of a woman does indeed have “the power of perennial attractiveness.” The “exterior constitution” of the woman is intended, we might say, to draw Adam to Eve. Sexual attraction is no accident, in other words. It is unclear exactly when John Paul believes that this “knowledge” dawns in a man, but given that Adam was an adult, it seems right to associate sexual desire with adulthood. John Paul thus operates with two stages of sexually oriented knowledge: the first involves the discovery of sexual difference, the second involves the emergence of sexual desire. These reflections remind us that sex is the invention not of modern pornographers or fast-living celebrities, but God. God, we could say, gives us this second knowledge. It is a gift to his creation, as evidenced by Adam’s cry of delight in Genesis 2:23: “This at last is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.”⁷

The womanly power to attract raises some questions. Does manly desire for women correspond to the feminine conformity to a pre-rational standard of beauty? Or does manly desire proceed from the hard-wiring of God’s design—God made men to want women, and so men naturally find women desirous? John Paul does not explicitly answer this compelling question. His affirmation of this power, however, cannot help but prompt such lines of discussion. Whatever the case, the biblical record suggests that there is something in Eve that exceeds Adam’s ability to grasp. Desire is a mighty force, one of the many aspects of life that transcends the intellectual and verges into the spiritual. Not for nothing do many fallen human beings worship the body and, beyond even this, view sex as giving meaning and purpose to life.⁸ We need not make this tragic mistake to affirm that Eve possesses in Adam’s eyes an ethereal quality. She is the direct gift of God to him. He did not cry out over the privilege of naming the animals. He shouted with relief and joy and awe when his wife, naked and unashamed, was brought to him.⁹

⁶ John Paul II, *Man and Woman*, 212.

⁷ Other theologians have given voice to the role of beauty and attraction in marriage. See, for example, John Calvin, Commentary on 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. Calvin believed there was a “secret kind of affection that produces mutual love,” by which he meant attraction. This topic and others receive judicious treatment in John Witte, Jr. and Robert M. Kingdon, *Sex, Marriage, and Family Life in John Calvin’s Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage*, Religion, Marriage and Family Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

⁸ On this topic, see Peter Jones, *The God of Sex: How Spirituality Defines Your Sexuality* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2006).

⁹ The Christian tradition, despite allegations of prudishness, has similarly celebrated the goodness of sex, particularly in the last several hundred years. See, for example, the classic text on the Puritan view of the family by Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family*:

John Paul transitions his fruitful consideration of womanly beauty to procreation. It is the design of God that desire exist “in close union with motherhood” and in fact, in normal circumstances, lead to it. The womanly body is made for a “typical expression of creative love,” the procreation and bearing of children. There is of course a long-standing debate among Catholic and Protestant sexual ethicists over the exact character of the relationship between lovemaking and childbearing. I tend, not surprisingly, toward the Protestant side and see sex as a gift in itself. But this should not obscure my strong appreciation for neither John Paul’s conception of the relationship nor that of leading Protestant theologians like Martin Luther, who taught that “by nature woman has been created for the purpose of bearing children. Therefore she has breasts; she has arms for the purpose of nourishing, cherishing, and carrying her offspring. It was the intention of the Creator that women should bear children and that men should beget them.”¹⁰

This pro-procreative perspective has gone missing in sectors of our society. The womanly body on its own terms has never been more an object of fixation. It is connected in the cultural mind to an image of “glamour,” the brainchild of Helen Gurley Brown. Young single women are the most coveted reality today in society, used to sell everything from paper towels to website addresses. Though the womanly frame is obviously an object of delight for husbands—see the Song of Songs—its attractiveness is not intended for public consumption, but marital pleasure and, in some circumstances, procreation.

In all this, then, we see that the uniqueness of the womanly body leads to a function that only she can perform. The womanly body is different from the man’s. Ultimately, as the Pope points out, this unique function—childbearing—leads to the birth of a Savior. Modern culture would seek to rewrite womanhood; abortion speaks to the ultimate act of gender rebellion, for mothers made to bear life instead choose death for their children. Even women who do not commit this terrible act are influenced, with their husbands, by the cultural outlook on children such that they deride them.¹¹ No doubt women must deal with many challenges in bearing and raising children; it is precisely this sphere of their lives that is cursed (Genesis 3:16). But as John Paul rightly indicates, childbearing is an act of privilege.¹² It bestows a unique dignity on womanhood, for only a woman could bring the Son of God into the world.

The final section we will treat on the subject of womanhood in John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* stems from the essay entitled “The Man-Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love.” Here the Pope fleshes out how

Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955–present), 5:355.

¹¹ See, for example, the cover story of *Time Magazine* on August 12, 2013, entitled “The Childfree Life.”

¹² It is a privilege that the West is losing sight of. See Jonathan Last, *What to Expect When No One’s Expecting: America’s Coming Demographic Disaster* (New York: Encounter, 2013).

it is that the act of childbearing occurs, and in what state of mind the man and woman discover one another. First, the man “accepts” the woman:

If, as we have noted, at the root of their nakedness there is the interior freedom of the gift—the disinterested gift of oneself—precisely that gift enables them both, man and woman, to find one another, since the Creator willed each of them “for his (her) own sake” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 24). Thus man, in the first beatifying meeting, finds the woman, and she finds him. In this way he accepts her interiorly. He accepts her as she is willed “for her own sake” by the Creator, as she is constituted in the mystery of the image of God through her femininity.

For her part, the woman “accepts” the man:

Reciprocally, she accepts him in the same way, as he is willed “for his own sake” by the Creator, and constituted by him by means of his masculinity. The revelation and the discovery of the nuptial meaning of the body consists in this. The Yahwist narrative, and in particular Genesis 2:25, enables us to deduce that man, as male and female, enters the world precisely with this awareness of the meaning of the body, of masculinity and femininity.¹³

The coming together of the man and woman necessitates that both man and woman honor and “accept” the inherent bodily design of the other. Every such act, we might say, is complementarian, proceeding from the manliness and womanliness of the couple. The man does not determine the woman’s nature; he receives it as it is given to him, “interiorly,” as the Pope says. On the other hand, the woman makes her own kind of discovery. She finds that the man possesses “masculinity.” Adam and Eve knew this instinctively, it seems. They, like the heavens, were without form, but in Yahweh’s creative act, they were given sexuality.

Gender, we see, is not incidental to humanity. It is foundational for our identity. It constitutes our reality. To be in this world is to be either a man or a woman. It is of course true that we must own our inherent sexuality; not for nothing did David tell Solomon to “be strong” and “show yourself a man” (1 Kings 2:2-3). The Deuteronomic code forbade the blurring of sexual differences, indicating that the temptation to subvert God’s design is not new, but ancient (Deuteronomy 22:5). In 1 Corinthians 11:3-16, Paul elaborates on the distinctions between the sexes, instructing both men and women to embody their God-given identity. All this builds to Paul’s account of a husband and wife joined together in marriage, imaging the Christ-church covenant of love. When a husband and wife unite, it is clear that we are dealing with ineffable realities. The numinous is upon us. Marriage, the union of one man and one woman, is a profound mystery, and displays the very telos of the cosmos: God and his people as one.¹⁴

¹³ John Paul II, “The Man-Person Becomes a Gift in the Freedom of Love,” accessed at [http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/John Paul14.htm](http://www.ewtn.com/library/papaldoc/John%20Paul%2014.htm).

¹⁴ Evangelicals do not often write extensively in these terms when discussing marriage; one work that treats this mystery at length is Mike Mason, *The Mystery*

II. CULTURAL DISCUSSION OF THE UNIQUENESS OF THE WOMANLY BODY

There are many angles from which to apply John Paul's reflections. Feminine sexuality, embodied by the womanly body, is perhaps the most coveted and abused aspect of modern American life. Young men are snared by lust through the outreach of pornographers, and are not restrained by the family, the receding moral consensus, or their educators from preying on young women whom they have been trained from birth to desire.¹⁵ This generation has been reared to believe that life can and should be a "great continuous Bacchanalia," as Allan Bloom once said.¹⁶ In quite another sense, sexual difference is flatly denied by the spirit of the age. This corresponds, of course, to the quixotic success of a Marxian, economics-driven worldview. We are all commodities today. If we may amend the famous feminist creed, the personal is economical. Our value is determined by our worth in the marketplace. Few societal forces have been more damaging to preserving the uniqueness of womanhood.

There are less intellectual venues for the blurring of gender lines, however. Among many we could cover, I will mention just one that recently caught my eye. Several years ago, journalist Michael Sokolove started a heated conversation on the topic of the womanly body when he published a *New York Times* magazine piece on the relatively high rates of severe injury among women athletes.¹⁷ Sokolove, we should note, does not support the views on sexual difference expressed here, either by John Paul or by my far less magisterial pen. He wrote his piece and his book out of concern for young girls who were experiencing a kind of silent assault on their bodies from the game of soccer. In a non-theological way, Sokolove's arguments dovetailed rather fluidly with the basic position of *Theology of the Body*.

Sokolove's book ends up arguing that girls can retrain their bodies—particularly by stretching exercises—to overcome the threat of injury. Nonetheless, he made a brave, if straightforwardly commonsensical—case for basic sexual differences. The physical differences between the sexes mean that they respond to heavy contact uniquely, for example: "Girls and boys diverge in their physical abilities as they enter puberty and move through adolescence. Higher levels of testosterone allow boys to add muscle and, even without much effort on their part, get stronger. In turn, they become less flexible." He continued the point: "Girls, as their estrogen levels increase, tend to add fat rather than muscle. They must train rigorously to get significantly stronger. The influence of

of Marriage (20th Anniversary Edition): Meditations on the Miracle (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2005).

¹⁵ For a biological chronicle of the effects of pornography on the male brain, see William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009).

¹⁶ Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), 99.

¹⁷ Michael Sokolove, "The Uneven Playing Field," *New York Times* magazine, May 11, 2008. See also Sokolove, *Warrior Girls: Protecting Our Daughters Against the Injury Epidemic in Women's Sports* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008).

estrogen makes girls' ligaments lax, and they outperform boys in tests of overall body flexibility—a performance advantage in many sports, but also an injury risk when not accompanied by sufficient muscle to keep joints in stable, safe positions.” Some of these problems owed to a uniquely feminine running style: “Girls tend to run differently than boys—in a less-flexed, more-upright posture—which may put them at greater risk when changing directions and landing from jumps. Because of their wider hips, they are more likely to be knock-kneed—yet another suspected risk factor.”

These physical traits add up to some notable difficulties for some young women who play high-contact sports. Sokolove pointed to data from the NCAA that, in his view, poignantly showed that women are less suited to high-contact sports:

The N.C.A.A.'s Injury Surveillance System tracks injuries suffered by athletes at its member schools, calculating the frequency of certain injuries by the number of occurrences per 1,000 “athletic exposures”—practices and games. The rate for women's soccer is 0.25 per 1,000, or 1 in 4,000, compared with 0.10 for male soccer players. The rate for women's basketball is 0.24, more than three times the rate of 0.07 for the men. The A.C.L. injury rate for girls may be higher—perhaps much higher—than it is for college-age women because of a spike that seems to occur as girls hit puberty.”

This was, in Sokolove's estimation, a catastrophic situation. Parents and educators simply could not ignore:

If girls and young women ruptured their A.C.L.'s at just twice the rate of boys and young men, it would be notable. Three times the rate would be astounding. But some researchers believe that in sports that both sexes play, and with similar rules—soccer, basketball, volleyball—female athletes rupture their A.C.L.'s at rates as high as five times that of males.¹⁸

Sokolove's presentation came in for major critique, as one would expect. For example, Steven D. Stovitz, Assistant Professor of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Minnesota, and Elizabeth A. Arendt, Professor of Orthopedic Surgery at the same, responded at length to Sokolove. We will quote at length from their rebuttal of *Warrior Girls*: “One major theme is that females simply can't do what males do. Therefore, when they try to “act like males,” meaning be competitive, powerful and aggressive, they will inevitably become injured.” In addition, “We don't know why girls suffer ACL injuries at rates higher than boys. Theories include factors such as differences in strength, joint laxity and gait. The author presents each theory as a ‘known risk factor’ implying that all girls inherently contain every risk factor which places all females at enormous risk.” Finally, Sokolove's language was problematic: “overwrought language permeates Sokolove's writing and contributes to

¹⁸ Sokolove, “Uneven Playing Field.”

the sense of fear he creates when discussing the ‘injury epidemic’ he claims exists.”¹⁹

This response by Stovitz and Arendt captures the general tenor of the response to Sokolove on the *New York Times* website. At base, the authors viewed Sokolove as promoting gender inequality. Many commenters on the article were far less nuanced, equating the journalist’s position with bigotry. To even suggest that girls might have some inherent physical differences that led to higher rates of injury than boys in high-contact competition was to speak out of prejudice. A social and cultural code had been betrayed.

The problem with this outcry, however, is that Sokolove’s arguments have scientific grounding. To give one example, Anne and Bill Moir, British scientists working from an evolutionary standpoint, have written extensively of sexual differences. Oxford-trained, associated with the production of numerous BBC specials on science, the Moirs authored a boldly iconoclastic text entitled *Why Men Don’t Iron*. In the text, they discuss a study conducted at the University of Limburg at Maastricht in Holland, in which 16 men and 16 women were put through a five-month endurance training program. As the Moirs report, their average daily metabolic rate—the amount of energy they each needed to keep their body functioning—was measured. All 32 subjects increased their physical activity by 60 percent, but the effects on the sexes were quite different. The men’s metabolic rate increased markedly: at the end of the 20 weeks they needed an extra 800 calories of food a day just to maintain their body weight, but no such change was detected in the women.²⁰

What did this finding show, in the words of the husband and wife? Basically this: “Life is not fair. A man can jog away the pounds, but a woman cannot. She has to diet too.” This is true, according to the Moirs, of those who compete in track-and-field. In such events, “males have a 10 percent advantage, and nature will keep it that way.” Why is this so? The Moirs note that on average men are larger, and, pound for pound, their physiology is more efficient in terms of utilizing energy than a woman’s physiology. Your average man, at base, “can burn energy faster than she can. Not only that, but women carry a higher proportion of body fat than men because women are more efficient at converting energy into storage.” Because of this, “She might survive famine, but he will always run faster.”²¹

Men will “run faster” in part because of their generally much higher testosterone levels. The Moirs call attention to the marked difference between men and women on this point:

¹⁹ Steven D. Stovitz and Elizabeth A. Arendt, “Anatomy Isn’t Destiny: A Response to Michael Sokolove (A Sports Medicine Perspective),” *The Tucker Center Newsletter*, Fall 2008. Accessed online at <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/tuckercenter/newsletter/2008-fall/feature.htm>

²⁰ Anne and Bill Moir, *Why Men Don’t Iron: The Fascinating and Unalterable Differences Between Men and Women* (New York: Citadel Press, 1999), 56. See also Michael Gurian, *The Wonder of Boys* (New York: Tarcher, 2006).

²¹ Anne and Bill Moir, *Why Men Don’t Iron*, 165–66.

Men's competitive drive comes from testosterone, and, because in real life not everyone can be a winner, it will come as no surprise that testosterone levels vary between individuals. They also vary enormously between men and women: the adult male's T levels (5,140-6,460 units) are about 11 times higher than a woman's (285-440 units). Give a man the challenge of competition and his already high T level will rise, increasing still further his competitive edge.²²

If the Moirs are correct in the foregoing, these basic physiological realities suggest, as noted earlier, that men and women are "different even in the deepest bio-physiological determinants" as John Paul put it.²³ This is not, of course, to suggest that there are not women who are far better athletically than men, or women and men alike whose bodily experience counters the norm. That surely is not the case. It is not, additionally, to say that women are somehow physically inferior to men. The design of God for men and women is intentional, and no value difference should be seen in bodily difference. What, after all, is of greater importance than the bearing and nurturing of children, for which the woman is uniquely constituted?

The preceding discussion of the work of Sokolove and the Moirs is but a foray into a much larger cultural conversation. Whatever our theological lens, it seems that we are free to deny the physical differences between men and women in our argumentation. No harm, no foul (no pun intended). We deny them in the actual living of our days, however, to our peril. From different angles and in some unexpected ways, our personal flourishing is at stake when we question and compromise sexual difference.

CONCLUSION: SEVEN REFLECTIONS

We have put a good deal on the table in this essay. In conclusion, I want to suggest a few points that may stimulate reflection.

First, we should honor the basic physical differences between men and women and, as John Paul so elegantly did, ground them in the creativity of God. *Second*, this means that sex differences, proceeding from the wisdom of God, redound to the glory of God. *Third*, we are right to see the womanly body as an object of "perennial attractiveness," an object of delight. It is not perverse to do so. The discovery of a basic understanding of sex (gender) and a deeper understanding of what one might call "mutuality" is sacred, precious, and given us by God. *Fourth*, the glory of womanhood is not an end unto itself. Broadly speaking, it is a catalyst for both delight in marriage (see the Song of Songs) and the procreation and nurture of children.

Fifth, we must therefore be careful that we do not conceive of the woman's body as we do the man's. The design of the sexes matters. Women are suited to roles and tasks that men are not; the reverse also is true. However Christians apply it, the biblical portrait of the woman as "weaker

²² Ibid, 168.

²³ George Gilder has offered a persuasive case for how biological realities shape society-sustaining patterns in texts like *Men and Marriage* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

vessel” (1 Peter 3:7) must factor into our consideration of this controverted material. *Sixth*, this does not necessarily mean that girls should not play contact sports. It does mean, however, that Christians who respect God’s design for the body will, in making such decisions, make them under advisement of Scripture and wisdom gleaned from other less authoritative sources.

Seventh, and finally, pastors should lead this discussion on the body in their churches. Preaching, as theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has persuasively argued, is the shedding abroad of gospel wisdom.²⁴ It is the formation of reality in a world of un-reality. Perhaps this subject powerfully illustrates this central function of the pastor, indeed the pastor-theologian, for it shows that the preaching of the Word of God creates reality by, in many cases, calling the believer *back to reality*. Pastors must perform this vital task in offering the biblical account of sexuality and gender. To fail to do so is to leave many around us in a state of confusion.

We do so not because we want to offer thunderous declamations at those who disagree with us, but because we seek the vitality and well-being of our neighbor, an end that is achieved by the power of the gospel and by the application of the wisdom it fosters.

²⁴ See Vanhoozer’s 2009 Page Lectures at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the forthcoming work by Kevin Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian* (Brazos, 2014).