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THE GIFT OF REASON: ST. IRENAEUS AND JOHN PAUL II IN DIALOGUE

St. Irenaeus as a western figure has a different exegetical account of Genesis which provides some of the foundational principles for his theological concepts of the ‘new Adam’ and recapitulation. The western theological tradition has instead taken the approach handed down by St. Augustine which is seen in St. John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*. This article will describe the difficulties of Irenaeus’s view while also showing the faults of the Augustinian position as shown in John Paul II while comparing the fruit of both in order to develop a synthesis that can encapsulate the fruit of both positions.

Pope Francis recently named St. Irenaeus of Lyon a Doctor of the Church on January 21st, 2022¹ as an ecumenical gesture between the Eastern and the Western churches as St. Irenaeus has influenced both eastern and western theology.

I have accepted the proposal which has come from many quarters, and proclaimed Saint Irenaeus of Lyon a doctor of the universal Church. The teaching of this saintly shepherd and teacher is like a bridge between East and West: this is why we call him a Doctor of Unity, *Doctor Unitatis*.²

The French bishop’s conference, led by the Archbishop of Lyon, asked the other bishop conferences to gather support for St. Irenaeus being made a Doctor of

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¹ Pope Francis, *Decree of the Holy Father for the conferral of the title of Doctor of the Church on Saint Irenaeus of Lyon*, January 21, 2022.

² Pope Francis, *Angelus*, Given in St. Peter’s Square on Sunday, January 23, 2022.

the Church. “During their 2019 fall assembly, the U.S. bishops’ conference added their assent to a motion made by the Archdiocese of Lyon, France to have the second-century bishop declared a doctor of the church.”³ Due to his prominence in the history of theology and his relationship with Polycarp, many had already thought that he had been given this honor. It is likely that the thought and life of Irenaeus is needed more than ever and should not be dismissed as some old vestige of past theology. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the great theological *gravitas* which is contained in the Doctor of Unity’s teaching from his intellectual heritage as follows:

The Gospel preached by Irenaeus is the one he was taught by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and Polycarp’s Gospel dates back to the Apostle John, whose disciple Polycarp was. The true teaching, therefore, is not that invented by intellectuals which goes beyond the Church’s simple faith. The true Gospel is the one imparted by the Bishops who received it in an uninterrupted line from the Apostles.⁴

In taking the words of the Pope Emeritus to heart, it is with great interest that I desire to excavate St. Irenaeus’ account of Genesis in contrast with a contemporary foil of St. John Paul II’s account of Genesis in his *Theology of the Body*. St. John Paul the Great’s interpretation of Genesis is not only a synthesis of the Western’s thought on Genesis (based primarily on St. Augustine’s interpretation of Genesis where man and woman breach their relationship with God in enacting a grave moral evil) but John Paul II’s interpretation has become and will stand the test of time and be looked at as the Western Church’s theological synthesis of Genesis in post-modernity. Furthermore, the Polish Pope shows a contrary view to that of St. Irenaeus, and in doing so, compromises some of St. Irenaeus’s underlying foundations. This article seeks to hold both Wojtyla and Irenaeus in tension with one another in order for a greater synthesis to emerge. Both theologians desire to explicate “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”⁵ Therefore, it is the task of this article to re-present the *Doctor Unitatis*’s interpretation of Genesis and show his influence on Wojtyla and the Second Vatican Council.

³ J.A. Esteves, *Pope to Name St. Irenaeus of Lyon a Doctor of the Church*, „National Catholic Reporter” October 8, 2021.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *General Audience: St. Irenaeus of Lyon*, Given in St. Peter’s Square on March 28th, 2007.

⁵ Vatican II, *Gaudium et spes* (henceforth: GS), 22.

ST. IRENAEUS'S ACCOUNT OF GENESIS

In reading Irenaeus's account of Genesis, he makes a patristic claim in saying that Adam and Eve were infants, or youths, in the Garden of Eden. "'Infant' here is a literal translation of the Latin *infans*, itself is a translation of the Greek *νήπιος*."⁶ In using this word literally, Irenaeus removes the ambiguity of the analogy of 'child-likeness' in man's experience of novelty in being newly created. Here, Irenaeus is not alone in his use of the term *infans* to describe Adam and Eve. St. Clement of Alexandria uses the term as well, but uses *infans* in the metaphorical sense; Irenaeus, however, uses *νήπιος* (*infans*) more literally to move beyond a mere analogy of childlikeness and makes it foundational in his anthropology. The garden also has a different connotation for Irenaeus than that of later thinkers. Irenaeus understands the garden to be a place of nourishment and growth because the garden was a nursery of development and education for our first parents who were *infans*.

The gift of rationality is an infinite gift, ontologically contained within the confines of a finite creature as seen in the human person. *Infans* for Irenaeus principally deals with the belief that man is by nature, created in a 'broken' state because he lacks the education to responsibly enact the nature of the gift. Irenaeus describes the garden as follows:

The man, was a little one; for he was a child and had need to grow so as to come to his full perfection. And so that he might have nourishment and grow up in luxury, a place was prepared for him better than this world, well-favoured in climate, beauty, light, things good to eat, plants, fruit, water, and all other things needful to life; and its name is the Garden. And so fair and goodly was the Garden, the Word of God was constantly walking in it; He would walk round and talk with the man, prefiguring what was to come to pass in the future, how He would become man's fellow, and talk with him, and come among mankind, teaching them justice. But the man was a little one, and his discretion still undeveloped, wherefore also he was easily misled by the deceiver.⁷

Irenaeus believes that man's rationality is an impossible burden to the immature and is doomed to failure simply because the gift of rationality is simply too high for man as a maturing *infans* to grasp. Furthermore, Irenaeus holds that the garden was intended as an environment for education and maturity in light of the divine pedagogue. Man's finite mind and reason needed time in order to mature and use his reason.

⁶ M.C. Steenberg, *Children in Paradise: Adam and Eve as „Infants” in Irenaeus of Lyons*, „Journal of Early Christian Studies” 12 (2004) 1, p. 4.

⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J.P. Smith, vol. 16, Westminster, MD 1952, p. 55.

Because of the greatness of the task which man was entrusted with – to grow as the *imago dei* through rationality – he needed to learn how to be a rational creature in relation with God Himself. Man, in being the finite *logos* and *imago dei*, attempts to mirror the infinite *Logos*. Mankind found the school of his own maturity challenging and fell from grace. This path chosen for man by God displays God’s plan for man’s maturity to realize his potential as *imago dei*. Irenaeus beautifully illustrates this point in his analogy of where God is a motherly figure who gives their child strong milk to grow and receive hard food:

For as it certainly is in the power of a mother to give strong food to her infant [but she does not do so], as the child is not yet able to receive more substantial nourishment; so also it was possible for God himself to have made man perfect from the first, but man could not receive this [perfection] being as yet an infant. [...] Therefore, it was He, who was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us as milk, [because we were] as infants.⁸

Man, in his postlapsarian state must receive the ‘milk,’ the ‘bread of the father’ which allows him to mature to the point of being capable of living to his potential as *imago dei*. Therefore, man’s rationality, the highest of all his gifts, was not disclosed from the possibility of fallenness. This imagery of man as *infans* shows that even though now outwardly mature, man’s heart is still in a state of need; just as a child is in need of its mother. The state of infancy of which Irenaeus is speaking seems, above all else, to be a state of *want*: the first man is a child because he ‘falls short of the perfect’ because he cannot receive perfection, because he cannot endure God’s greatness.⁹ This state of want which is seen in man is present as man cannot perfect his ‘imperfect’ nature as he is in need of God’s fatherly care and his regimen of maturity in order to actualize the fullness of his potential.

The problem that arises with this view, is that Irenaeus believes that “God created an imperfect Adam not solely because it was His desire at a later time to confer upon him a proper perfection, but because Adam *could not have been created into any other state than the imperfect.*”¹⁰ Man is created as an unfinished creation because finite rationality requires it. Irenaeus believes that man’s becoming is an ongoing process: “having been created, [mankind] should receive growth; and after having received growth, should be strengthened, and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover [from the disease of sin]; and having recovered, should be glorified; and having been glorified, should see his Lord.”¹¹ Therefore, Irenaeus believes that man must to ‘die’ in his created

⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Salt Lake, UT 2010 (hereafter: AH), IV.XXXVIII.I.

⁹ M.C. Steenberg, *Children in Paradise...*, p. 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹¹ AH, IV.XXXIX.III.

substance through a lapse in his nature in order to necessitate a redeemer and in doing so, allows man to fully participate in the gift of rationality which he only partly enjoyed in the garden.

This is the plan of redemption as seen in Irenaeus's theology shows not only man's ability to participate in the gift of rationality, but in doing so, shows God's plan to assimilate Creation into himself through man who is the apex of creation.

He [God] knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences which would flow from it; but through [His] love and [His] power, He shall overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil.¹²

Thus, we see that Irenaeus' anthropology is profoundly and pivotally soteriological. Man was destined to fall from grace because of the *gravitas* of the gift that he needed to mature in. Man's finite nature and creatureliness needed to be 'swallowed up by immortality' in order for him to participate in the fullness of the divine life, he was never intended to be complete at the time of his creation. Thus, man's maturity as seen in Genesis displays the beginning stages of that maturity which allows God to consummate himself with creation. It is here where we must remark that Irenaeus's account of Genesis shows that the creation narrative takes place before Adam and Eve's arrival at the age of reason. Whether or not Adam and Eve were infants or children is up for debate, especially when one thinks of the implications of a child being left alone to their own devices and the image of God being a neglectful babysitter. However, what remains true is that for "the second-century bishop, Adam and Eve were created not as the perfect man and woman that both earlier and later tradition assert them to be, but as νηπιοι."¹³ St. Irenaeus' view of Genesis, which predates St. Augustine's idea of Adam and Eve as mature agents, gives a new theological reading to Genesis which allows the reader to think deeply upon St. Irenaeus's theological and soteriological thought which predates the traditional Augustinian view; a view to which St. John Paul II ascribed.

Regardless of Irenaeus' different exegetical account of Genesis, he western theology the notion of Jesus and Mary as the 'new Adam' and the 'new Eve' which bring about the theological parallels that come from his analogy of these pivotal figures. "Adam had necessarily to be restored in Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin, become the advocate of a virgin,

¹² AH, IV.XXXIX.IV.

¹³ M.C. Steenberg, *Children in Paradise...*, p. 2.

should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.”¹⁴ Irenaeus’ idea of the ‘new Adam’ and the ‘new Eve’ being fulfilled in Christ and his mother have been a cause for great theological study for a millennium and his conception of Adam and Eve being virgins in the garden at the time of the fall are essential to his idea of Christ and the Blessed Mother being the fulfillment of humanity’s first parents. It is through this parallel idea that Irenaeus also believes that it is fitting that Christ came in the form of a child in the incarnation, which is why Irenaeus believes it is important to see Adam and Eve as *infans* in the garden as well. It was for this reason that the Son of God, although He was perfect, passed through the state of infancy in common with the rest of mankind, partaking of it thus not for His own benefit, but for that of the infantile stage of man’s existence, in order that man might be able to receive Him.¹⁵ Thus, for western theology to use the idea of St. Irenaeus, we cannot simply take the fruit of his thought and undercut the logic behind his idea of Christ as the ‘new Adam.’

The childlike nature and virginity of Adam and Eve in the garden is the analogical link that keeps St. Irenaeus’ concept of the ‘new Adam and Eve’ grounded. Many of the Church Fathers believe the idiom ‘*what God had not assumed, he could not save.*’ Thus, for the Early Church theologians, it would make sense that Jesus’s incarnation would occur through Christ becoming an infant through the *fiat* of Mary. Therefore, it is fitting that Christ came as a small child, which is fitting to St. Irenaeus’ interpretation of Christ as the ‘new Adam.’ There is little doubt that Irenaeus understood Jesus’ infancy in a most literal and genuinely physiological sense. [...] If Adam was never an infant, was never a child, the parallelism behind Christ’s recapitulative activity is substantially hindered.¹⁶ It is this parallel that gives some substance to Irenaeus’s’ claim of Adam and the ‘new Adam’ as children that is lacking in the thought of St. Augustine. Although St. Augustine makes a very compelling case for the maturity of Adam and Eve in the garden, St. Irenaeus’ account of Genesis should not be taken lightly as it is a much more ancient account that was possibly held by many of the apostles.

In modern biblical scholarship, it is widely known that in Genesis, the biblical language of the marital act does not occur until after Adam and Eve’s expulsion from the Garden. To ‘know’ each other in the biblical sense, means that the figures in the Bible had relations with each other. The first time this language of ‘knowing’ the other spouse occurs immediately after they are cast out of the garden. “Now Adam *knew* Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain” (Gn 4:1). Adam and Eve’s act of concupiscence which occurred after their expulsion from

¹⁴ St. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*..., p. 69.

¹⁵ AH, III.XXII.IV.

¹⁶ M.C. Steenberg, *Children in Paradise*..., p. 12.

the garden displays man's fallenness to the level of succumbing to their animalistic passions and thereby forgetting the gift of the rational nature. This event occurred because of man's longing and desire to be in the comfort of the Garden. It is from this act of concupiscence of mankind's first parents that Cain is conceived and will later become the first murderer within human civilization. This martial act which occurs after mankind's expulsion from the garden acknowledges Adam and Eve's sexual maturity which would correlate to their intellectual development and thereby shows that they have transgressed beyond the age of reason. It is from this maturity that St. Irenaeus believes that Adam and Eve had grown beyond the age of reason and fallen into sin, even if not mortally; they are nonetheless expelled from the garden because they are no longer worthy to mature in the garden because of their rebellion through sin. What seems to be neglected in the view of St. Augustine and subsequently in St. John Paul II, is the lack of acknowledgment in the biblical language of 'knowing' which does not occur until outside the garden when Adam and Eve conceive Cain. Thus, according to the view of St. Irenaeus, there is a lack of the consummation of Adam and Eve's marriage and thereby does not show the beauty of the pure mature martial bond which is displayed in St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. Thus, it is this lack of the biblical language of 'knowing' the other which gives credence to St. Irenaeus' interpretation of Genesis and his subsequent theological conclusions.

Although St. Irenaeus's idea of Adam and Eve as youths or infants in the narration of Genesis is unique, it provides a bedrock for the patristic thought of education and maturity in man's rationality. This narrative allowed him to make a patristic exegesis of the principles and mystery of man's journey towards freedom and redemption both anthropologically and soteriologically. This tradition bourgeoned by St. Irenaeus must be recovered and held in tension with the Augustinian reading of Genesis.

IRENÆUS & VATICAN II

St. Irenaeus's thought has been influential to the Church's tradition for many years, most recently in the thought of the Second Vatican Council. The Council relied on Irenaeus's idea that Adam and Eve required maturing in accordance with their human nature. "Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear."¹⁷ The Council Fathers show with clarity the maturation that must

¹⁷ GS, 22.

take place in man in light of the Incarnate Word. Only through Christ, the ‘new Adam,’ can man fully realize his capacity to be integrated into God. Man’s journey in maturation can only be accomplished through the example he has received in Jesus of Nazareth. St. John Paul II unites St. Irenaeus’ idea of Christ as the ‘new Adam’ and the Council Father’s idea of Christ revealing man to himself in his encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*.

Christ the Lord. Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, *fully reveals man to himself* and brings to light his most high calling”. And the Council continues: “He who is the ‘image of the invisible God’” (*Col 1:15*), is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare. For, by his Incarnation, he, the son of God, *in a certain way united himself with each man*.¹⁸

John Paul II understood the connection of St. Irenaeus’ teaching of the ‘new Adam,’ which becomes a fundamental basis on which his *Theology of the Body* rests. Furthermore, it is the task in this article to show the convergence and divergence which the Polish Pope makes to the *Doctor Unitatis* in their different views of the Genesis account; and see why a synthesis of the traditional Augustinian view of Genesis in light of the contributions made by Irenaeus would be beneficial to the view of the council fathers that ‘Christ fully reveals man to himself.’

Irenaeus’ believes Jesus Christ is the fullness of humanity that man needs to mature into and that He is the only way in which man can become fully united in himself. This full humanity, the whole, and complete man, is for Irenaeus unequivocally the person of Jesus Christ. [...] Irenaeus’ references to Adam as ‘child’ are established in connection and contrast to Adam as ‘adult’ (*perfectus homo*), that is, Adam as perfected in Christ, and this is the key to his entire notion of human development.¹⁹ It is from this notion of man’s fallenness and the integration of man into Christ who is the *perfectus homo* that man can become completely whole again. Thus, the idea that Christ is the ‘new Adam’ and man’s human perfection which resides in Christ’s humanity becomes a major theme within western theology, most recently in *Vaticanum Secundum*. The Council Fathers truly believed that Christ reveals man to himself, which shows that the human person’s perfection lies in a maturing process that can only happen through, with, and in Christ. This theme was originally being played out in the Garden as *’ādām* (man) and God would walk in the garden together. However, due to the rupture –which Irenaeus

¹⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 8.

¹⁹ M.C. Steenberg, *Children in Paradise...*, p. 16.

believed inevitably had to happen— man’s perfection necessitated a Savior who could swallow up man’s sinfulness and restore him back into a relationship of parental maturity with God.

The Second Vatican Council provided the Church to come together and reassess the important theological ideas of the Church’s past; which exfoliated into a *ressourcement* approach that eventually won out as seen in the council documents. Therefore, many of the themes of the council refocus on an *ad fontes* approach; one of the fruits of this methodology is a re-presentation of the thought of St. Irenaeus who becomes a major figure of the council. This *ressourcement* approach allowed new energy to take place inside the Church through a renewal in patristic thought, *ad fontes*, and became a formative moment in the life of the Church, including for its future leaders in the post-conciliar period. It particularly had a deep impact on St. John Paul II who called the council a ‘seminary of the Holy Spirit.’ This event would later become one of the most foundational and fundamental events which changed the course of his pastoral life. Therefore, to look at the Council is to look at the teaching and thought of John Paul II whose mission was to fully implement the Council in his own Papacy. One of the most quoted paragraphs in John Paul II’s writings is in *Gaudium et Spes* located in paragraph twenty-four.

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, „that all may be one as we are one” (John 17:21–22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God’s sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.²⁰

From this important passage, the reader also can detect the parallel of personhood in the Divine persons and man’s co-share within it which can also be described as *imago dei*. This underlying thought of St. Irenaeus in the council is of utmost importance to this study. Irenaeus associates all human beings as ‘child-like’ in their participation because they are unable to give of themselves fully as persons and live out the *telos* of their human nature. *Gaudium et Spes* shows that there is a link between the Divine Persons and humanity, which is why Christ becomes the ‘new Adam’ to show man how to live to his capacity as *imago dei*. It is through Christ’s determination to show man how to live his capacity as *imago dei* and that we see Christ as the rabbi who wants to teach mankind how to mature into the Divine nature because mankind and God have an ‘implied likeness.’ This ‘implied likeness’ of the Trinitarian Persons and God’s sons, show the need for

²⁰ GS, 24.

Christ become the teacher to demonstrate to humanity how to live their giftedness like Trinitarian Persons. Therefore, man must be *recapitulated* into Christ as man enters into the Body of Christ through the sacrament of Baptism. It is from this moment of sacramental grace that the human person becomes a new creation in order to attempt to live and act as a person worthy of paradise in *communio* with the Divine Persons. Only in man's maturity in his human nature can he eventually grow into a more participatory form of the *imago dei*.²¹ Furthermore, in Genesis Irenaeus describes Adam, the first man, as a figure of Christ who was to so that God could conquer the world and allow it to participate it fully in Himself, including man's who should be "conquered and swallowed up by immortality, [...] and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil."²² Thus, man was destined in the thought of the *Doctor Unitatis* to be corrupted, but also to be glorified in Christ who makes all things new.

THE FRUIT OF THE AUGUSTINIAN TRADITION IN POST-MODERNITY: *THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY*

In St. John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, there is only one reference to St. Irenaeus in a footnote in all of his Wednesday audiences.²³ It is in this audience that John Paul II credits St. Irenaeus with the concept of the *protoevangelium*. "Christian exegesis, beginning with St. Irenaeus (*adv. Haer.* III, 23, 7), sees this text [Gen. 3:15] as the 'protoevangelium [first gospel],' which tells in advance the victory over the Satan won by Jesus Christ."²⁴ John Paul II knows the influence of Irenaeus's presentation of Christ as the second Adam; which is also intrinsically tied to Irenaeus' idea of *recapitulation* which John Paul II also gives devotes a whole Wednesday audience outside of the classical Theology of the Body audiences.²⁵ John Paul II's reference to Irenaeus shows Papa Wojtyla's understanding of the importance of the idea of the *protoevangelium* which is intrinsically tied to the concept of *recapitulation* and Christ as the figure who fully reveals man's

²¹ Th.G. Weinandy, *St. Irenaeus and the Imago Dei: The Importance of Being Human*, „Logos. A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture” 6 (2003) 4, p. 22–23.

²² AH, IV.XXXIX.IV.

²³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. by M. Waldstein, Boston, MA 2006 (henceforth: TOB), 144. From the General Audience of September 26, 1979.

²⁴ TOB, 144.

²⁵ John Paul II, *General Audience: All Creation will be 'Recapitulated' in Christ*, Given on February 14, 2001.

humanity to himself. Although the Polish Pope uses St. Irenaeus sparingly, he does reference him, which is a huge compliment as Wojtyla was never extremely academic in his work as he was very busy with his pastoral work in addition to being a professor which is when *Theology of the Body* was written. *Theology of the Body* was only disseminated in the Wednesday audiences after being elected from a manuscript that Wojtyla had not yet published. This unpublished text which was used for a series of Wednesday audiences is has now become the greatest preaching series ever seen in papal history. However, despite the lack of footnotes and references, there is no lack of depth in the Wednesday audiences that John Paul II gave on the *Theology of the Body*.

Although John Paul II uses many of the foundational principles of Irenaeus, including that of Christ as the ‘new Adam,’ *protoevangelium*, and the idea of *re-capitulation*, John Paul II does not use the same understanding of Adam and Eve as youths in the Genesis narrative. Instead, John Paul holds to the traditional view which is upheld by St. Augustine which displays Adam and Eve as mature agents in the garden. Perhaps unaware of Irenaeus’ analysis of Genesis, there are points of contact within St. John Paul II’s interpretation with the thought of St. Irenaeus where a dialogue can take place. Thus, it is the task for the concluding part of this article to show the points of departure of Irenaeus’s view that the Polish thinker upholds and the reasons for doing so. The *Theology of the Body* can be discussed in comparison to the thought of Irenaeus; in three ways: 1) the ‘wedding song’ and the full perfection of marriage as seen in prelapsarian man, 2) the complementarity and division of the sexes, and 3) the wholistic view of the human person before the fall. These three major themes as seen in the *Theology of the Body* display the beauty of the traditional Augustinian notion of Adam and Eve as mature agents in the garden, which should not be neglected when trying to incorporate the theology of both into a greater synthesis.

THE ‘WEDDING SONG’ & THE COMPATIBILITY OF THE SEXES

John Paul II displays the moment of encounter in which Adam meets Eve for the first time in Genesis as a primordial moment in which marriage is born and coins this first encounter as the ‘wedding song.’ It is in this song where Adam exclaims “flesh of my flesh and bones of my bones” (Gn. 2:23). This moment of self-identification with the other is the moment of marriage *par excellence* in the pope’s thinking. It is in this moment of existential bliss where Adam sees the significance and giftedness of his bride that becomes a fundamental scriptural event which the *Theology of the Body* is based upon. The ‘wedding song’ becomes is

the basis of what John Paul terms the ‘complementarity of the sexes.’ Not only does Adam see the beauty of Eve as she is similar to himself, but she becomes for him a suitable partner. Because of Adam’s original solitude where he discovered his longing for a human partner, he also understood the intrinsic need for reciprocity. This would become abundantly clear when he looks upon Eve and sees that she shows his complementarity through looking at their biological anatomy. To describe this, Wojtyła coins the phrase the ‘compatibility of the sexes’ which demonstrates the need for reciprocity which is desired as the male/female to make sense of themselves as a human person in his recognition of the reciprocity which his/her own sex necessitates. It is here we see in the reciprocity of the sexes that “the basic conditions that *make it possible to exist in a relation of reciprocal gift*”²⁶ are met as man looks at him/herself in comparison to that of the other. Without the other, sex is not sex at all, it is just vague humanity; which is why John Paul II makes the distinction that this moment of the ‘wedding song’ not only shows the reciprocity and complementarity of the sexes but the division of the sexes as well.

Man (’āḏām) falls into that “torpor” in order to wake up as “male” (’iš) and “female” (’iššāh). In fact, it is here in Genesis 2:23 that we come across the distinction between ’iš and ’iššāh for the first time. Perhaps, therefore, the analogy of sleep indicates here not so much a passage from consciousness to the subconscious, but a specific return to nonbeing (sleep has within itself a component of the annihilation of man’s conscious existence), or to the moment before creation, in order that the solitary “man” may by God’s creative initiative reemerge from that moment in his double unity as male and female.²⁷

John Paul understands that Adam should not only see himself as a complementary agent to Eve, and vice versa, but also John Paul sees this as a moment of solidarity with the other as Eve (who shares in the being of Adam), being taken from his side, share in the same humanity.²⁸ This humanity is seen in John Paul II’s distinction that man (’āḏām) now becomes differentiated as two separate sexes: male (’iš) and female (*issa*). Thus, “masculinity-femininity—namely, sex— is the original sign of a creative donation and at the same time «the sign of a gift that» man, male-female, becomes aware of as a gift lived so to speak. In an original way. This is the meaning with which sex enters into the theology of the body.”²⁹ This separation of the sexes from mankind or ’āḏām shows the beauty which occurs at

²⁶ TOB, 181.

²⁷ Ibid., 159.

²⁸ Ibid., 160.

²⁹ Ibid., 183.

the moment of the ‘wedding song’ that not only shows the unity of the figures of male and female but also the compatibility of the sexes and differentiation of the sexes that occur in the song expressed by Adam. Therefore, the giftedness which is discovered in this ‘wedding song’ shows the ability of man to give himself as a self-donation to the and in doing so, concretely finds himself and the meaning of his own body; the complementarity which is found in the male’s masculinity and its mirror found in the female’s femininity (and vice versa).

THE MEANING OF SHAME

John Paul II’s idea of the marriage which springs forth from the moment of found in the ‘wedding song,’ one can see the need for both Adam and Eve to be mature agents who can conceive of the other sexually, not as an object of use, but as a fitting partner for the other. This is in direct contrast to St. Irenaeus’ account of the ‘wedding song.’

Adam and Eve (for this is the name of the woman) *were naked and were not ashamed*, for their thoughts were innocent and childlike, and they had no conception or imagination of the sort that is engendered in the soul by evil, through concupiscence, and by lust. For they were then in their integrity, preserving their natural state, for what had been breathed into their frame was the spirit of life; now, so long as the spirit still remains in proper order and vigour, it is without imagination or conception of what is shameful. For this reason they *were not ashamed*, as they kissed each other and embraced with the innocence of childhood.³⁰

Now, as naïve as some might think of Irenaeus in his vision of the creation of Eve, it does give an explanation of why we don’t see the biblical idea of ‘knowing’ the other until after the fall. Thus, there is a real argument to be made on whether or not Adam and Eve consummated their marriage in the Garden, and whether or not they were actually capable due to their maturity. Nevertheless, John Paul does not take this biblical language of ‘knowing’ into account when he speaks of ‘wedding song’ in Genesis. He does so to speak of the theological conception of ‘non-presence of shame’ which was experienced in the mature marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden to show the beauty and divine plan for marriage before the fall.

³⁰ St. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. J.P. Smith, vol. 16, Westminster, MD 1952, p. 56.

What is the meaning, by contrast of its original absence [of shame] in Genesis 2:25, “They were naked, but did not feel shame?” We must establish, first of all, that it is a true non-presence of shame [...]. It excludes even more the possibility of explaining it by analogy with positive human experiences, e.g., those of childhood or those of the life of so-called primitive peoples.³¹

John Paul makes it clear that his conception of shame, or rather, the lack thereof in the garden goes beyond the childlike minds of Irenaeus’ conception of Adam and Eve in the garden. The Polish thinker’s idea of shame in the garden becomes a moment of paramount reflection for him as an accomplished professor of ethics. Shame in the garden becomes a beautiful moment of reflection in the *Theology of the Body* that cannot be explained as a lack of maturity of ‘youths’ who were not aware of the full dignity of their humanity. Wojtyla believes this to be a cheap interpretation of ‘being without shame.’ To suppose that Adam and Eve were without full knowledge of themselves as sexually mature beings would denigrate the encounter contained within the ‘wedding song.’ Although John Paul II does not agree with Irenaeus in this regard, he does show Irenaeus’ reasoning of why the *Doctor Unitatis* believes that Adam and Eve needed to be children in the garden in a fairly sophisticated philosophical manner.

The tendency to conceal sexual values themselves, particularly in so far as they constitute in the mind of a particular person ‘a potential object of enjoyment’ for persons of the other sex. For this reason, we do not encounter sexual shame in children at an age when the sexual values do not exist for them because their minds are not yet receptive to those values. As they become conscious or are made conscious of the existence of the sphere of value they begin to experience sexual shame – not as something imposed on them from the outside, by the milieu in which they live, but as an interior need of an evolving personality.³²

John Paul makes it clear, that he agrees with Irenaeus (at least implicitly), that children do not possess this shame of the sexual parts as they do not know that they could be sexualized by an onlooker. It is only through one’s full grasp of self-knowledge, which comes when a person comes to an age of maturity. It is in this personal maturity that one sees through self-reflection that they could be looked at as an object of use by the other because they themselves have done the same to someone else.

Although John Paul II shows an understanding and maybe even sympathy towards Irenaeus’s view; the Pope wants to show the value of a couple being

³¹ TOB, 174.

³² K. Wojtyla, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by H.T. Willetts, New York 1981, p. 176.

without shame, which is contained most perfectly in the view of Adam and Eve before the fall. It is this view of marriage that more perfectly emulates the lack of shame that is seen in the original view of marriage of man and woman that John Paul II wants to more fully recognize. This display of the integral character of marriage as seen in the garden allows each person to view the other not as an object of use, but as a gift for the other as other. By seeing the mature agents in the garden, the Pope shows that man and woman can move beyond their fallen state to the primordial moment of the ‘wedding song’ where there is no lust. The pope wants to show that mature agents can indeed look at the other sex as a person as being complementary to the other, not for use (or even mutual use) but to see the person as a person. Thus, the spousal meaning of the body allows the couple to rediscover their original innocence which they lost in the fall. What becomes perhaps most of all directly apparent in Genesis 2:25 is precisely the mystery of this innocence [...] about reciprocal nakedness free from shame – is a statement unique in its kind in the whole Bible, so much so that it was never to be repeated.³³ It is of vital importance here, that man is created *good*, he has no shame and is not insecure in himself because of some lack in his nature. Therefore, man’s shame being driven by his sexual desire and using someone as a means to an end displays man’s fragmented character which John Paul seeks to reconcile with his adequate anthropology. It is through looking at the human person in a personalistic sense that provides the impetus to move beyond the realm of sin and degradation of using the other as a means to an end but showing man’s unique transcendental character and living in the integrity of and moving towards the unity that he had before the fall. Thus, there is still hope through a *felix culpa* that man could still be designed and is destined for full maturity as *imago dei* and will have an even greater relationship with God.

ORIGINAL SOLITUDE AND PERSONHOOD

Although John Paul denies the idea that Adam and Eve were youths in the garden because of his emphasis on the lack of shame in the garden which is displayed in the ‘wedding song’ sung by Adam in the garden, it is clear that Wojtyla does not throw out all of St. Irenaeus’ ideas on Genesis. John Paul II’s idea of ‘original solitude’ which was the idea that man should not be alone displays the communitarian character of man as he is trying to discover who he is in the garden. It is the idea of original solitude which correlates to Irenaeus’s idea of man’s need for

³³ TOB, 191.

maturity in the garden, both of these concepts involve a questioning of man's role and nature as an *imago dei*. Man is 'alone': *this is to say that through his own humanity*, through what he is, he is at the same time set into a *unique, exclusive and unrepeatable relationship with God himself*.³⁴ It is in this relationship with God himself that in the Garden, man comes to discover who he is as he tills the garden and subdues it.³⁵ Karol Wojtyla's philosophical anthropology comes on display in John Paul II's thought as he speaks of man's self-discovery of himself through self-mastery and self-knowledge which takes place in man's interior subjectivity.

Solitude also signifies man's subjectivity, which constitutes itself through self-knowledge. Man is alone because he is "different" from the visible world, from the world of living beings. When we analyze the text of Genesis, we are in some way witnesses of how man, with the first act of self-consciousness, "distinguishes himself" before God-Yahweh from the whole world of living beings (*animalia*), how he consequently reveals himself to himself and at the same time affirms himself in the visible world as a "person."³⁶

John Paul II shows the youthful character of man in the primitive sense when man is discovering the nature and freedom contained in personhood. In a very real way, historical man has come to know more of himself as a person through the incarnation of Christ who has taught man how to be human in the fullest sense. It is in Christ that the human person can know the fullness of their drama and their destiny, even more so than our first parents. Thus, it is here in the garden that man learns to understand himself as a subject in the drama of human history and to see his destiny within the history of human sinfulness.

He ["historical man"] participates not only *in the history of human sinfulness*, as a hereditary, and at the same time personal and unrepeatable, subject of this history, but he also participates *in the history of salvation*, here too as its subject and co-creator. He is thus not merely shut out from original innocence due to his sinfulness, but also at the same time open to the mystery of the redemption realized in Christ and through Christ.³⁷

John Paul displays that man's original innocence, which is lost due to his sin, at the same time does not display that character of true personhood displayed in Christ as he has not yet seen the model of which he can direct his *telos*. In a sense,

³⁴ Ibid., 151.

³⁵ More of John Paul II's idea of finding man's dignity through work can be seen in his encyclical *Laborem exercens*.

³⁶ Ibid., 150.

³⁷ Ibid., 144.

mankind does not yet know the *gravitas* of their rational nature which can take them down the path of sinfulness.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a boundary line between the two original situations about which Genesis speaks. The first situation is that of original innocence in which man (male and female) finds himself, as it were, outside of the knowledge of good and evil, until the moment in which he transgresses the Creator's prohibition and eats the fruit of the tree of knowledge.³⁸

Therefore, the gift of rationality can only be fully grasped when in fact man falls from grace in order to see the full repercussions of that gift. Regardless of man's maturity in the garden, both Irenaeus and John Paul II should agree that there is a distinct coming together in humanity that comes when the God-man recapitulates himself as the head of humanity. It is here that the Council Fathers (including Wojtyla), would declare that Christ reveals man to himself.

CONCLUSION

"Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear."³⁹ Irenaeus' literal interpretation of *infans* has shown the magnitude and radicality of man's rationality. This anthropological stance taken by the Doctor of Unity presents man's original need to be educated by God in the garden, and postlapsarian man by Christ outside the garden. The Council Fathers recognized this foundational need when they stated 'Christ fully reveals man to himself' in Vatican II. It is from St. Irenaeus's theological concepts of *recapitulation* and the concept of the 'new Adam' that he has been widely recognized and has culminated to our present-day for him to be given his new title as 'Doctor of the Church.'

However, Western theology fails to realize the foundations on which Irenaeus' thought is built and as such, uses the fruit of his thought without recognizing its origin. Wojtyla (and the Augustinian tradition) disregards Irenaeus's interpretation of his Genesis account and believes that Adam and Eve were mature sexual agents in the garden. They do so while also using Irenaeus' idea of *recapitulation* and Christ as the 'new Adam;' both of which were developed upon Irenaeus' conception of Genesis and have become intertwined with the tradition itself, most recently in the thought of Vatican II.

³⁸ Ibid., 140.

³⁹ GS, 22.

Despite Wojtyla's disregard of Irenaeus through his use of the Augustinian tradition, Wojtyla in his brilliance shows Adam and Eve as fully developed and matured agents who possess their cognitive and sexual faculties which displays the divine intention of marriage before the fall. Wojtyla's concepts of the 'wedding song,' lack of shame, and original solitude show man's original position in the garden as not destined for failure as an ontological broken creature, but as agents in full possession of their mature goodness. Wojtyla luminously displays the peace and beauty of man and woman in the marriage act as mature adults which is not theologically possible in the approach taken by St. Irenaeus. Wojtyla's approach as seen in *The Theology of the Body* cuts to the heart of contemporary problems as seen in the philosophical influences as seen in the Hegelian master-slave dialect or the Nietzschean will to power; both of which can be read into the Genesis account and cause further division amongst the Christian faithful. "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gn. 3:16). It is Wojtyla's foresight in using the Augustinian tradition and presenting it for his own time which allowed him to show the integrity of man and woman's original design as full mature persons who were designed for full unity with each other to participate in *communio*.

The two different exegetical accounts of Genesis, as seen in the work of Irenaeus and John Paul II, are different theologies which have sprung forth from their interpretations which have become embedded in the western church and most recently seed in the Second Vatican Council's dogmatic constitution on the Church. Furthermore, St. Irenaeus' new title as 'Doctor of Unity,' the Church should not necessarily disregard his irregular idea of Adam and Eve as children in the garden. Although there is the traditional western view of Adam and Eve as mature agents, which becomes a necessary concept for John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, there is much soteriological and anthropological material to see man as a maturing agent, as *infans*, who eventually fell from grace because the gift of rationality was too large for man to grasp alone without the Incarnation. It is here that mankind experiences the poignant truth that "apart from me you can do nothing."⁴⁰ Although it may be possible to adhere to some parts of the theology of St. Irenaeus without following his ideas of Genesis, there is much exegetical work that can be done here to assist in reconciling his view to the Augustinian idea of Genesis. Despite the different views on Genesis, which by all accounts is not a strictly historical view of what actually occurred in the garden, the *protoevangelium* is a cause for hope as the Council Fathers instill in us that "*fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.*"⁴¹ It is this anthem, regardless or not of one's exegetical conception of Genesis that both St. Irenaeus and St. John Paul

⁴⁰ John 15:5.

⁴¹ GS 22 (Emphasis added).

the Great did with great vigor and great enthusiasm because it is Christ the Lord who created man and who has cast his lot with humanity *pro nobis*.

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Keywords: John Paul II, Karol Wojtyła, St. Irenaeus of Lyon, theology of the body, Genesis, anthropology

DAR ROZUMU: ŚW. IRENEUSZ I JAN PAWEŁ II W DIALOGU

Streszczenie

Święty Ireneusz jako postać teologii zachodniej wyróżnia się swoistą egzegezą Księgi Rodzaju, która wyznaczyła fundamenty dla jego teologicznych koncepcji „nowego Adama” i rekapitulacji. Zachodnia tradycja teologiczna przyjęła zamiast tego podejście przekazane przez św. Augustyna, które widać w teologii ciała św. Jana Pawła II. W niniejszym artykule opisuję trudności poglądu Ireneusza, jednocześnie ukazując wady stanowiska Augustyna rozwijanego przez Jana Pawła II, i porównuję owoce obu koncepcji w celu wypracowania ich syntezy.

Słowa kluczowe: Jan Paweł II, Karol Wojtyła, Ireneusz z Lyonu, teologia ciała, Księga Rodzaju, antropologia