

## Shame, Lust, and the Human Body after the Fall: A Comparison of St. Augustine and Pope John Paul II

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ALTHOUGH they are writing from different philosophical frameworks, the theological anthropologies of John Paul II and that of St. Augustine of Hippo share remarkable continuities in the area of human sexuality. In this article, I will draw out these theological continuities on the topics of shame, lust, and the human body. I intend to demonstrate that the Holy Father, specifically in his teachings in *The Theology of the Body*, offers an important development in thinking on these topics. At the same time, it will also become obvious that these developments do not stand isolated in the Tradition of the Church, but have their roots precisely in the theological anthropology of St. Augustine.

In his *City of God*, St. Augustine treats the state of man before and after the fall in great detail. He describes an order within the original human person that was the reason for man's blissful enjoyment of Paradise. The human person, he explains, was created according to a specific order in which God himself was the source of life for the soul and the soul, in turn, was the source of life for the body.<sup>1</sup> As long as the soul remained in union with God, life flowed directly from God to the soul and from the soul to the body. In this order, every operation of the body was in full submission to the will and the human will was, in turn, in full submission to the divine will. Through his continued obedience to God, man existed in a material and spiritual paradise that was made possible by the rightly ordered state of his own person.<sup>2</sup> In this paradise, the entire

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 1972): 13.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.11.

human person was covered with a “garment of grace” through which their bodies “did not know how to rebel against their will.”<sup>3</sup> This garment of grace kept the human person in perfect order. This perfect order resulted in the blissful experience of the first human beings in which “true joy flowed perpetually from God, and toward God there was a blaze of ‘love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith that was no pretence’ . . . there was harmony and a liveliness of mind and body, and an effortless observance of the commandment. Man was at leisure, and tiredness never wearied him.”<sup>4</sup> This harmony of body and mind that characterized the state of Paradise is important for Augustine’s anthropology of lust and shame. It is through the Fall that the harmony between the body and mind is ruptured and man experiences for the first time his body as no longer in submission to his will. This is the entrance of lust into the human experience.

The lack of submission of the body to the will was not the first failure of the human being. Augustine instead describes the lack of submission of the body as a secondary result of man’s initial lack of submission to God that constitutes the original sin. Given the ordering of the human person as body dependent upon soul and soul dependent on God, it is clear how man’s first disobedience to God through his will would result in a secondary disobedience of the body to man’s will. A rupture in one aspect of the organic continuity that the man experienced between his constituent parts resulted in a rupture throughout the entire man. Augustine explains, “The soul, in fact, rejoiced in its own freedom to act perversely and disdained to be God’s servant; and so it was deprived of the obedient service which its body had at first rendered.”<sup>5</sup> Upon the break of the will with God came the break of the body with the soul.

In a brilliant move, Augustine then goes on to explain that the disobedience of the flesh now serves as a visible sign of man’s disobedience to God. The sexual body parts are those body parts to which Augustine explicitly refers when speaking of the disobedience of the body. They are the parts of the body that are moved by lust alone, completely apart from man’s will.<sup>6</sup> These sexual body parts, insofar as they move independently of man’s will, give witness to man’s movement independently of God’s will. This is the reason that shame is attached to the sexual parts of the body. Augustine explains, “For after their disobedience to God’s instructions, the first human beings were deprived of God’s favor; and immediately they

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.17.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.26

<sup>5</sup> 13.15 [?AU?ED: footnotes 5, 6, 7: Not *Ibid.*? Unclear]

<sup>6</sup> 14.16

were embarrassed by the nakedness of their bodies. They even used fig leaves . . . to cover their *pudenda*, the 'organs of shame.' These organs were the same as they were before, but previously there was not shame attached to them. Thus they felt a novel disturbance in their disobedient flesh, as a punishment which answered to their own disobedience."<sup>7</sup> Notable in this passage is Augustine's insistence that the sexual body parts, the *pudenda*, or parts of shame, were originally *not* shameful but are only called so now precisely because they are a witness to the soul's shameful disobedience to God. This explains the embarrassment of the original pair upon realizing their nakedness. With the garment of grace removed, their bodies became disobedient to their wills and in so doing served as a witness to their own disobedience before God.

Shame, then, for Augustine is a secondary reaction, a reaction to sin in man's heart. In the case of sexuality, shame is a reaction to the lust that arose in man's heart because of sin. Especially in reference to the sexual body parts, shame is attached to them because they move in obedience to lust, disobedient to the rightly ordered will.<sup>8</sup> The entrance of lust into the human experience was a direct result of the Fall. The rupture in the unity between body and soul as a result of man's break with God allowed for the disordering of man's desires. In this disorder, emotional and physical desires created a deep disturbance within the interior man because they were no longer submissive to man's will. Sexual lust is one of the strongest of these disturbances. Augustine explains that sexual lust "disturbs the whole man, when the mental emotion combines and mingles with the physical craving . . . there is an almost total extinction of mental alertness."<sup>9</sup> This lust in man's interior self is the force that motivates the movement of his sexual organs. For this reason, the sexual body parts become visible signs of man's interior lust.

The experience of shame in reference to sexuality lies precisely in this fact that physical sexuality now gives witness to the lust that taints the whole experience of man. Shame, then, is a rightful part of the human experience of sexuality in that it is a reaction against the lust that is present in these experiences. "It is right, therefore, to be ashamed of this lust, and it is right that the members which it moves or fails to move by its own right . . . should be called 'parts of shame,' which they were not called before man's sin."<sup>10</sup> In this passage, a certain positive function of shame can be identified. While on the negative side, shame arises from the experience of

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<sup>7</sup> 13.13

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 14.19.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14.16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 14.17.

lust and professes that man was not made to experience it, it can also be said that shame, precisely as a reaction *against* lust, positively bears witness to the fact that man knows he was originally created with a wholly integrated order within himself, free from lust. For Augustine, shame declares that the human body was originally obedient to the human will, which in turn was obedient to God. The body, then, and in particular the sexual organs in the beginning bore witness to man's faithful obedience to God by their own faithful obedience to the human will. The reality of shame as a reaction to lust professes precisely this truth about the human person. In a sense, the experience of shame in reaction to lust is a proclamation from man's heart in which he declares with Christ "in the beginning, it was not so," in the beginning, man did not have this experience of lust.

This same positive function of shame is found in John Paul II's reflections upon the human person after the Fall. Like Augustine, John Paul II identifies shame as a secondary experience that results from the experience of lust. More precisely, shame "reveals the moment of lust."<sup>11</sup> In revealing the moment of lust, shame in a sense bears witness against it. From this negative meaning, a positive value also emerges. The Holy Father explains, "If [shame] reveals the moment of lust, at the same time it can protect from the consequences of the three forms of lust. It can even be said that man and woman, through shame, almost remain in a state of original innocence."<sup>12</sup> By this statement, John Paul II radically deepens the Augustinian positive value of shame: Shame in some sense makes possible the upholding of the original grace-filled dignity of the original man who was free from sin. While shame does not keep man from lust, it protects him from its demoralizing effects: "From shame springs respect for one's own body."<sup>13</sup> It does so as a reaction that identifies lust as a "threat" to man's original intrinsic value and precisely by doing so "preserves" the original and irrevocable dignity of man.<sup>14</sup> In other words, the Holy Father wants to say that the experience of shame is actually a witness to man's intrinsic dignity, which while constantly offended through sin, is nevertheless a truth about man that was not lost in the Fall. Shame is man's way of preserving the dignity bestowed upon him from the beginning.

From the beginning man was created with an interior order, according to the Holy Father. He follows in the Augustinian tradition of affirming

<sup>11</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997: General audience of 6/25/80.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, audience of 2/4/81.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, audience of 5/28/80.

the rightful submission of the body to the soul as proper to the order and dignity given to man. Like St. Augustine, therefore, he describes an original psychosomatic unity within the human person in which the body gave full visible witness to the reality of the entire person.<sup>15</sup> This unity between body and soul was a direct result of man's unity with his Creator. Through the disobedience of the first man and woman, man's unity with God was ruptured. In choosing not to obey the command of God, the original man "casts God out of his heart." In doing so, he "detaches his heart and almost cuts it off from what 'is of the Father.'"<sup>16</sup> Through this rupture with God, a rupture takes place also within the man. John Paul II calls it a "rupture of man's original spiritual and somatic unity."<sup>17</sup> The Holy Father explains that this rupture gave rise to the entrance of lust into the human experience. Without the rightful submission of the body to the soul and the soul to God, human desires became disordered. In casting God out of his heart, "there remains in him what 'is of the world.'"<sup>18</sup> Concupiscence, or lust, is the result: "Flaring up in man, [lust] invades his senses, excites his body, involves his feelings and in a certain sense take possession of his heart. . . . [lust] suffocates in his heart the most profound voice of conscience, the sense of responsibility before God."<sup>19</sup> Therefore, lust is that experience in which man's disordered desires overturn the rightful authority of the intellect and will and become themselves the authors of man's actions.

John Paul II defines sexual lust as above all the desire to appropriate another person for the satisfaction of one's own desires, in this case, sexual desires. In the beginning, all sexual desires were ordered toward fulfilling the nuptial meaning of human existence, that call to make a disinterested gift of oneself in love to another human being.<sup>20</sup> With the disordering of those desires originally intended to call man to communion came the disordering of the purpose of those desires. The reality of lust in the human heart causes the communion of persons, which is based on mutual self-giving in love, to give way to a "relationship of possession of the other as the object of one's own desire."<sup>21</sup> In the context of the nuptial meaning of human existence and the communion of persons, lust takes on a whole new dimension. Not only does lust cause the breakdown of the

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., audience of 11/14/79.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., audience of 4/30/80.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., audience of 5/28/80.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., audience of 4/30/80.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., audience of 9/10/80; cf. *City of God* 14.16.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, audience of 1/16/80.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., audience of 6/25/80.

unity and harmony *within* the *individual* human person, but also it represents the breakdown in the unity and harmony *between* persons. For this reason, lust becomes not just destructive on a personal level, but on a social level as well.

One finds here a development on St. Augustine's formulation that the dominance of carnal desire lies at the foundations of the city of man, that human society which exists counter to the harmony and righteousness of the City of God. Augustine identifies the beginnings of this earthly city with Cain who, "overcome by envy," slew his brother Abel.<sup>22</sup> The notion of being "overcome" by disordered desire marks the roots of the city of man. From this point on in human history, the disorder in man's own heart, that disorder whereby carnal desire supercedes the authority of the will, creates conflict and division in human society. Augustine describes this breakdown as a battle between spiritual and carnal desire, a battle that he also insists occurs not just within the individual, but *between* individuals: "And in the individual it is true that 'the flesh has desires which resist the spirit, and the spirit has desires which resist the flesh.' Accordingly, spiritual desire can fight against the carnal desire of another person, or carnal desire against another's spiritual desire, just as the good and the wicked fight against one another."<sup>23</sup> So it is clear that for Augustine (and here we find the roots of John Paul II's thought) the reality of carnal desire, or concupiscence, in man is the source and cause of the breakdown of the communion of persons in human society.

Although for Augustine and John Paul II lust has destroyed the original unity that existed within the person and between persons, the break is not complete and definitive. While for the Holy Father original sin represents an irrevocable loss of the original bliss and harmony of paradise, there remains in the human person the call to self-giving love even after the Fall.<sup>24</sup> Concupiscence has not completely dominated the heart of man. Furthermore, through the death and resurrection of Christ, redemptive grace is made available for overcoming lust and the restoration of the communion of persons. The Holy Father explains, "The fruit of redemption is the Holy Spirit, who dwells in man and in his body as a temple."<sup>25</sup> Insofar as the Holy Spirit dwells in man through his faithfulness to the grace of redemption, man is said to live a life "according to the Spirit" that affords him the gradual regaining of his original dignity, the transformation of his desires, and the harmonization of his body and

<sup>22</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, 15.5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, audience of 2/13/80.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 2/11/81.

soul. This healing and reordering of man's desires renders him free to give himself away in love. This makes man capable of experiencing human sexuality as it was originally intended, as an incarnation and expression of the nuptial meaning of his existence. Human sexuality becomes, through a life lived according to the Holy Spirit, no longer a source of shame but the sign and sacrament of self-giving love.

The Holy Father contrasts this "life in the Holy Spirit" with a life lived "according to the flesh" in which lust overcomes and gradually takes over the interior life of the man. Instead of experiencing freedom, the continued indulgence or passive compliance with lust leads to slavery in the heart of man.<sup>26</sup> Human sexuality becomes a source of slavery and as a consequence also a source of shame. Man knows deep in his heart that he was created for freedom and self-giving love. The man of lust recognizes the disorders of his heart and is ashamed of them, even if he is not yet willing to open himself to the redemption of these disorders.

It is important here to note that in the distinction between "life in the Spirit" and "life in the flesh," one does not understand "flesh" to represent the body, as if the body were the source of all that is contrary to the work of the Holy Spirit. This point is also made by St. Augustine. Both refer to the Pauline text that lists the "works of the flesh" (Gal 5:20–21) and remark that many of the "works" listed have their source in the mind. Augustine states, "For among the 'works of the flesh' which [Paul] said were obvious, and which he listed and condemned, we find not only those concerned with sensual pleasures . . . but also those which show faults of the mind."<sup>27</sup> John Paul II echoes this argument: "It is significant that Paul mentions not only 'fornication, impurity, licentiousness . . . drunkenness, carousing.' He names other sins too . . . 'idolatry, sorcery, envy. . . .' According to our anthropological categories, we would rather be inclined to call all the works listed here sins of the spirit."<sup>28</sup> In other words, both theologians want to argue that the Pauline distinction between flesh and Spirit is not so much about the body as contrary to the spirit as it is about *sin* in contrast to the Holy Spirit. This is important for maintaining the dignity and inherent goodness of the body that both Augustine and John Paul II affirm in their reflections.

For both Augustine and John Paul II, the human body has inestimable worth and value. Augustine, however, stops short of articulating the full beauty of those parts of the body that express human sexuality. Whereas

<sup>26</sup> Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, trans. H. T. Willets (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 159–66.

<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, 14.2.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, audience of 1/7/81.

he recognizes the *original* dignity of the human sexual body parts, he maintains that they are rightfully named *pudenda*, or ‘parts of shame,’ in the *historical*, post-lapsarian reality of man’s lust-tainted existence. They are ‘parts of shame’ because they irrevocably bear witness to man’s disobedience in the Fall and are thus the “private property of lust.”<sup>29</sup> Man rightfully blushes at this reality and treats human sexuality with a sense of modesty and protective shame.

John Paul II echoes this stance when he says that “man is ashamed of his body.”<sup>30</sup> However, the Pope also opens up for us a new perspective in his theology of the body: the “absorption of shame by love.”<sup>31</sup> Applying an Augustinian theology of grace to human sexuality, John Paul concludes that the shame that is rightfully a part of the human sexual experience can give way to an experience of love as the grace of redemption transforms the heart. As man’s heart is continually healed and redeemed, he experiences the victory of love over lust. Shame, defined as man’s reaction to lust, has no foothold where love prevails. In this way, Augustine’s “parts of shame” begin to speak a theology of nuptial love. They no longer incarnate man’s shame, but with the absorption of shame by love, they incarnate for man the entire meaning of his being and existing in the world: namely, to give himself away in love.

This is an astonishing and life-changing stimulus to hope. For as sure as are the promises of Christ, so is the truth that a life lived in the Spirit will offer the gradual redemption of human sexuality. The possibility of experiencing in this life human sexuality not as a source of lust and shame, but as a sign and sacrament of self-giving love stirs the human heart to its depths and brings forth a hope for joy hitherto untapped in the hearts of men and women. While Augustine has provided the seeds for this anthropology, John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* thus moves theological anthropology forward in a profound, and as yet insufficiently noticed, manner.

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<sup>29</sup> St. Augustine, *City of God*, 14.19.

<sup>30</sup> John Paul II, *Theology of the Body*, audience of 5/28/80.

<sup>31</sup> Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 181.