JOHN PAUL II'S USE OF SCRIPTURE IN HIS MORAL TEACHING

Charles E. Curran
Southern Methodist University

The celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the College Theology Society naturally turns our focus to what has transpired in these fifty years. In terms of Roman Catholic theology, the two most significant historical realities are the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and the now twenty-five-year pontificate of John Paul II as Bishop of Rome.

In my discipline of moral theology, Vatican II and its document on the training of priests called for the renewal of moral theology with a special emphasis on its Scriptural bases. "Special care is to be taken for the improvement of moral theology. Its scientific presentation, drawing more fully on the teaching of holy Scripture should highlight the lofty vocation of the Christian faithful and their obligation to bring forth fruit and charity for the life of the world."[1]

John Paul II as pope has written and taught extensively in the area of morality. In the light of the Vatican II mandate to renew moral theology through a greater appreciation of its scriptural roots and bases, this essay will critically evaluate John Paul II's use of scripture in his teaching on morality.

By definition, this is not a systematic moral theology that John Paul II has attempted to write, nor has he addressed directly the methodological question of the use of Scripture in moral theology. He writes as an authoritative teacher for the whole church on moral issues and questions. Such official documents deal with specific issues or problems that have arisen in the course of his papacy; for example, he has published three encyclicals in the area of Catholic social teaching and has devoted one encyclical, *Veritatis splendor,* especially to moral theology in the light of what the encyclical describes as a "genuine crisis" affecting moral theology.[2] In these and his other moral teachings, he

[1]*Optatam Totius* (Decree on the Training of Priests), 16, in *The Basic Documents: Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decress, Declarations,* inclusive language translation, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello, 1996), 376.

[2]Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor,* 5.1, in *Encyclicals of John Paul II,* ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2001), 587. Encyclicals proposing authoritative moral teaching to some extent include the following: *Redemptor Hominis* (*RH*), 1979; *Dives in Misericordia* (*DM*), 1980; *Laborem Exercens* (*LE*), 1981; *Dominum et Vivificantem* (*DV*), 1986; *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (*SRS*), 1987; *Centesimus Annus* (*CA*), 1991; *Veritatis Splendor* (*VS*), 1993; *Evangelium Vitae* (*EV*), 1995; *Fides et Ratio* (*FR*),

HORIZONS 31/1 (2004): 118-34

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

definitely gives a significant role to the Scriptures. Thus, it is appropriate to reflect critically on exactly how he has employed Scripture in his moral teachings.

One preliminary problem concerns the large volume of papal addresses, talks, and documents. For example, the Vatican website (*www.vatican.va*) contains more than fifty addresses given by the pope during his first visit to the United States, October 1-7, 1979. Obviously, the pope does not write all these speeches himself. Two different genres of papal teaching stand out. First of all, I will consider the more authoritative documents, namely the papal encyclicals. Since encyclicals have such a significant teaching authority, the pope obviously is more intimately connected with their writing.

The second part of this essay will concentrate on his teaching on sexuality and marriage given especially in the talks at the first general audiences of the pope held weekly from September 1979, to November 1984, with some interruptions. Ordinarily a discussion of papal teaching does not focus on the short talks given at the pope's weekly audiences. Often such talks are merely salutatory or completely homiletical, and most of the time are probably not written by the pope himself. But, in this case, no one doubts that the pope is the primary author of these short talks. Karol Wojtyla obviously had these talks written before he became pope and used them at the beginning of his pontificate.

The content of these talks seems quite inappropriate for a general papal audience. They are too intellectual, too theological, and can only be totally understood as parts of a whole. Most participants in the general audience probably could not and did not follow what the pope was trying to communicate. But these talks constitute a real source for understanding the pope's approach to sexuality and marriage and the way he uses Scripture in developing his understanding. These talks have been published in English in one large volume, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*.[3]

I. Use of Scripture in the Encyclicals

John Paul himself implicitly and explicitly calls attention to the primary role of Scripture in moral theology. His references to Scripture far outnumber any of the other references made within his fourteen encyclicals, many of which deal with the moral life. The encyclical *Veritatis splendor* explicitly invokes the importance of the Scripture

1998. Subsequent references to these encyclicals will be given in the text to the abbreviation of the document followed by the paragraph number. All these encyclicals can be found in Miller, *The Encyclicals of John Paul II*.

[3]Pope John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: Pauline Books, 1997).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for moral theology. "The specific purpose of the present encyclical is this: To set forth, with regard to the problems being discussed, the principles of a moral teaching based upon Sacred Scripture and the living Apostolic Tradition . . ." (5.3). Here he footnotes the teaching of *Dei Verbum* of Vatican II on this point.[4] At the beginning of chapter two, which constitutes the bulk of the encyclical dealing with certain present day tendencies in moral theology, the pope insists that "Sacred Scripture remains the living and fruitful source of the Church's moral doctrine; as the Second Vatican Council recalled, the Gospel 'is the source of all saving truth and moral teaching' " (28.2). The church's moral reflection is developed in the theological science called moral theology that recognizes both revelation and reason as sources of moral wisdom and knowledge. In this context, John Paul II cites Vatican II's call for the renewal of moral theology "increasingly based on the teaching of Scripture . . ." (29.2).

John Paul II's Basic Approach

How precisely does the pope use Scripture in developing his moral teaching in his encyclical writings? Two questions come to the fore. First, how does the pope use the contemporary critical understanding of the Bible? In the mid-twentieth century Catholic biblical scholars began to develop and employ a more critical approach to the Scriptures. Thus, for example, the scholars recognized different sources that are found and used in the scriptural books both in the Old Testament and the New Testament that were ultimately put together by a redactor. New Testament critical scholarship distinguishes different levels such as what was said by the historical Jesus, how it was understood by the early church, and how it was used by the evangelist to achieve his own purposes.[5]

Generally speaking, the pope does not allude to the findings of critical biblical scholarship. His footnotes never mention contemporary biblical scholars nor do they mention contemporary scholars of any type. John Paul II, however, does recognize two different sources in the accounts of creation in Genesis.[6] Likewise, in discussing the prodigal

[4]*Dei Verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), 10, in *Vatican Council II,* ed. Flannery, 103-04.

[5]For this statement of the issues and for a helpful study of John Paul II's use of Scripture, see Terrence Prendergast, "'A Vision of Wholeness': A Reflection on the Use of Scripture in a Cross-Section of Papal Writings," in *The Thought of John Paul II: A Collection of Essays and Studies,* ed. John M. McDermott (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1993), 69-91.

[6]Pope John Paul II, "General Audience of September 12, 1979," in *Theology of the Body,* 27-29. Subsequent references will be given in the text to *TB* followed by the page numbers.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

son and mercy of God, he refers to the fact that Luke's Gospel "has earned the title of the 'Gospel of Mercy' " (*DM* 3.5).

In fairness to the pope, most Catholic moral theologians themselves do not employ critical biblical scholarship in their use of Scripture in moral theology.[7] There exist some inherent difficulties in trying to use the critical approach to the Scriptures in moral theology. Critical biblical scholarship emphasizes the unique approach of each biblical author. Critical historical scholarship reminds us that there is no such thing as a biblical moral theology, but there are the biblical teachings of individual authors written in very different times and circumstances. Moral theologians today by their very nature are trying to develop an approach calling for how Christians should be and live in this world. Therefore, they must move from the different approaches of different biblical authors to their own somewhat unified understanding of how Christians should live today. Thus, there exist inherent tensions between some of the results of critical biblical scholarship and the need for moral theologians to develop a systematic theological ethic.

If John Paul II does not use a critical approach to Scriptures, how does he employ them in his moral theology? He tends to consider Scripture as a unified whole and often develops his understanding on the basis of a meditative and even homiletic reflection on them. This approach is somewhat similar to that used by the writers in the so-called patristic age of the early church and to the practice of *lectio divina*—a meditative and contemplative reading of Scripture. *Dives in misericordia,* dealing with the God who is rich in mercy, devotes one chapter to the Old Testament understanding of mercy, using many different texts from many different genres. The encyclical then moves to the New Testament and especially the parable of the prodigal son. "*In the teaching of Christ himself,* this image inherited from the Old Testament becomes at the same time *simpler and more profound*. This is perhaps most evident in the parable of the prodigal son" (5.2). Meditating on this parable, the pope draws out meaning for us today. Love is transformed into mercy when it goes beyond the precise and narrow norm of justice (5.6). The father in the parable is faithful to his fatherhood and faithful to his love, thus illustrating the mercy of God (6.1). The parable expresses in a profound and simple way the reality of conversion, the most concrete expression of the working of love and of the response of mercy in the human world (6.5). A subsequent chapter describes this merciful love as revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus (7.1–9.6).

[7]Jeffrey S. Siker, *Scripture and Ethics: Twentieth-Century Portraits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Another example of using the Scriptures in a homiletic and catechetical way not recognizing critical biblical scholarship is the use of a Scripture text to begin each chapter in the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*. "Teacher, What Good Must I Do . . . ?" (Mt 19:16) is the text for chapter one, "Christ and the Answer to the Question About Morality." "Do Not be Conformed to This World" (Rom 12:2) is the text for chapter two, "The Church and the Discernment of Certain Tendencies in Present Day Moral Theology." "Lest the Cross of Christ be Emptied of Its Power," (1 Cor 1:17) is the text for chapter three, "Moral Good for the Life of the Church and of the World." Another example of a homiletic and catechetical use comes in *Evangelium vitae* when the subheadings of all three chapters involve a Scripture text followed by a theme. Thus, for example, "'*You have come to the sprinkled blood' (cf. Heb. 12:22, 24): signs of hope and invitation to commitment" (25.1).* "'*It is I who bring both death and life' (Dt. 32:39): the tragedy of euthanasia"* (64.1). At the very minimum there is no direct connection between the Scripture text and the enunciated theme.

The encyclicals have different genres that influence how Scripture is used. *Dives in misercordia* is a more contemplative and meditative document that heavily rests on Scripture. On the other hand, *Centesimus annus* commemorates the one hundredth anniversary of *Rerum novarum* and devotes one of its chapters to the political changes of 1989. By its very nature, such a document makes few appeals to Scripture.

The Hermeneutical Issue

The major issue in using Scripture in moral theology involves the hermeneutical problem—how one moves from the time and place of the Scriptures (and recognizing that there are different times and places for the different scriptural books) to the time, culture, and place of today. Most contemporary theologians recognize there is no presuppositionless way to approach Scripture. Such an interpretation involves a fusion of two different horizons—the horizon of the scriptural author and the horizon of the contemporary person. According to David Kelsey, the theologian brings to the Scripture an imaginative judgment or metaphor for understanding Scripture. He calls this metaphor the *discrimen* according to which the individual theologian tries to understanding the meaning of the Scriptures.[8] Many scholars writing after Kelsey have developed the same fusion of horizons approach.[9] William

[8]Prendergast, "A Vision of Wholeness," 84; David H. Kelsey, *The Use of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 167-78.

[9]See, e.g., Thomas W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics: A Constructive Essay* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Spohn emphasizes that such a hermeneutics or interpretation is not the work of individuals but of communities. The original Scriptures were produced by communities and addressed to communities and are now speaking to the communities of the disciples of Jesus.[10]

The great danger here is that of *eisegesis* or of reading into Scripture the contemporary viewpoint of the theologian. One uses Scripture to support one's own presuppositions and thus to a great extent distorts Scripture itself. The use of Scripture as a proof text to give support to something proved or asserted on other grounds is similar to this problem of *eisegesis* or reading something into the Scripture.

The concerns and horizon of the author are bound to affect the Scriptures that are selected. John Paul II uses the Gospel of John more than any other Gospel despite the fact that two of the encyclicals develop at length the parable of the prodigal son from Luke and the story of the rich young man in Matthew.[11] The emphasis on John fits in very well with the pope's emphasis on a Christology from above. John Paul II's very first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis,* stresses that Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God who redeems us and brings about the new creation. John's Gospel stresses that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." This passage from John 3:16 is cited by *Redemptor hominis* (8.1). A high Christology or a Christology from above starts with the pre-existing Word of God that became flesh in Jesus for the salvation and redemption of the world. Such an approach to Christology leaves out much of the life and circumstances of the ministry of Jesus.

John Paul II cites Genesis 1–4 more often than any other texts in the Hebrew Bible.[12] The pope in his encyclicals insists in a special way on Genesis 1:26 (the human being made in the image of God) and Genesis 1:28 (the human being given dominion over all of creation). These two texts cohere with John Paul II's emphasis on the nature and dignity of the human person that he has consistently made the center of his thought and writing on ethics. Every encyclical dealing with the human person cites these verses from Genesis (*RH* 16.1; *DM* 2.3; *LE* 4.2-3, 6.2-3, 9.1-2; *SRS* 29.2-4, 30.5; *CA* 11.3, 31.2; *VS* 38.2; *EV* 34.2-3; 42:1-2, 52.3, 53.3). It is obvious that the pope uses these texts because they support the central points he is making. He is not distorting the indi-

Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991); J.I.H. McDonald, Biblical Interpretation and Christian Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[10]William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics*?, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist, 1995), 11-13.

[11]J. Michael Miller, "Introduction to the Papal Encyclicals," in Miller, *Encyclicals of Pope John Paul II,* 28.

[12]Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vidual tests but he obviously highlights some aspects and leaves out others.

At times, John Paul II draws inferences from the biblical texts that are creative and appear very apropos in the contemporary situation, even if they might not be absolutely present in the original texts themselves. In discussing the parable of the prodigal son, he is concerned that the person who is the object of mercy not feel humiliated, as so often happens in our world. The very essence of fatherhood in the story calls for the father to be concerned about his son's dignity. In keeping with his understanding of Scripture as a whole, the pope here cites Pauls praise of *agapē* in 1 Corinthians 13. Such a love does not humiliate its receiver. The father has always recognized that the prodigal son has remained his son even when he went away (*DM* 6.3).

Evangelium vitae begins with a meditation on the story of Cain and Able to show how death and killing came into the world through sin. The pope supports the theory of killing's coming through sin by citing the Gospel of John (8:44) and the First Letter of John (3:11-12). In Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper," the pope sees the tendency of so many people today to refuse to accept responsibility for their sisters and brothers (8.5). Cain is punished by God because God cannot leave this crime of killing unpunished. The encyclical finds scriptural support for this punishment in Genesis 37:26, Isaiah 26:21, and Ezekiel 24:7-8. (We know, however, of many instances where God leaves even the crime of murder unpunished.) The pope goes on to say that God is always merciful even when he punishes. Thus, he puts a mark on Cain lest anyone who came across him should kill him (Gn 4:15). *Evangelium vitae* draws the conclusion, "*Not even a murderer loses his personal dignity* and God pledges to guarantee this" (9.3). Thus, John Paul II prepares the way for his own position enunciated later in the encyclical practically opposing capital punishment today (56). All have to recognize that one really cannot use this text to argue against capital punishment; nonetheless, in a homiletic way the pope makes a point.

Theologians acknowledge a greater role for Scripture on the more general level of moral realities that are not so much subject to historical and cultural change, but they recognize a greater problem on the level of specifics where historical and cultural circumstances are intertwined. There can be no doubt that John Paul II often invokes Scripture when referring to the general responses and attitudes that should characterize the Christian life, such as discipleship, covenant, love, conversion, mercy, forgiveness. But on certain specific issues, he seems to find unwarranted support in Scripture. Take, for example, the question of abortion that, as is well known, he severely opposes. The pope ex-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

plicitly recognizes that the texts of Scripture do not address the question of deliberate abortion and do not directly and specifically condemn it (*EV* 61.1). But then *Evangelium vitae* goes on to maintain that the great respect the Scriptures show to human life in the mother's womb requires as a logical consequence the condemnation of abortion. The references to respect for life in the womb tend to be somewhat general and do not prove that direct abortion, as distinguished from indirect abortion, is always wrong. Also, the biblical authors did not have the same kind of scientific knowledge that we have today about the development of the early embryo. In his solemn condemnation, the pope maintains that the condemnation of direct abortion "is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God. . ." (*EV* 61.3).

Use of Scripture in Veritatis Splendor

Veritatis splendor relies heavily on Scripture to develop its message.[13] The first chapter is a long meditation on the story of the rich young man (Matthew 19). In the words of the encyclical itself, the basic thesis of the entire document is "the *reaffirmation of the universality and inviolability of the moral commandments,* particularly those which prohibit always and without exception *intrinsically evil acts*" (115.3). Pastors and bishops of the church have the duty to lead the faithful to God just as the Lord Jesus did with the rich young man. In response to the question, "What good must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus "reminded him of the moral commandments already revealed in the Old Testament and he indicated their spirit and deepest meaning by inviting the young man to follow Him . . . . This 'answer' to the question about morality has been entrusted by Jesus Christ in a special way to us, the Pastors of the Church . . ." (114.2-3). Thus the encyclical uses Scripture to prove that Jesus saw the moral life in terms of obedience to the commandments and claims that the magisterium is following Jesus today by insisting on commandments prohibiting actions that are always and everywhere wrong.

This encyclical thus relies heavily on Scripture to defend its thesis but, in the process, reads into Scripture and distorts it. First, it distorts the meaning of the story of the rich young man as found in Matthew 19. The parable does not deal with every person in general but deals in

[13]For helpful essays on *Veritatis splendor*'s use of Scripture, see William C. Spohn, "Morality on the Way of Discipleship: The Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor,*" in *Veritatis Splendor: American Responses,* ed. Michael E. Allsopp and John J. O'Keefe (Kansas City, MO.: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 83-105; Karl P. Donfried, "The Use of Scripture in *Veritatis Splendor,*" in *Ecumenical Ventures in Ethics: Protestants Engage John Paul II's Moral Encyclicals,* ed. Reinhard Hütter and Theodore Dieter (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 38-59. I have used some of their points in my analysis here.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

particular with a rich young man. In fact, the rich young man has acknowledged that he has already obeyed all the commandments mentioned by Jesus. He then turns down the invitation of Jesus to sell what he has, give it to the poor, and follow Jesus. He is sorrowful and goes away sad precisely because he cannot accept the invitation of Jesus to sell all that he has and follow him. Thus, the thrust of the story of the rich young man deals primarily with the question of riches and not with the question of all Christians being called to obey the commandments found in the former covenant.

Second, the encyclical distorts the meaning of Christian morality as found in the Scripture. The encyclical makes primary the insistence on obedience to the commandments. Morality, as portrayed throughout the Scripture, involves much more than just obedience to commandments. Morality involves the change of heart, conversion, response to the loving God, virtues, attitudes, and dispositions that characterize the Christian person, and values that should be present in our world. Obedience to commandments is not the primary aspect of the morality found in the Scriptures. In this context, it is interesting that in the same gospel (Matthew 25) a different answer is given to the same basic question of what is required to gain eternal life. "When I was hungry, naked, thirsty, and in prison." But when did we see you in these circumstances? Whatever you did to the least of my sisters and brothers, this you did to me. Thus, the love of neighbor, revealed especially in taking care of the neighbor in need, is proposed here as the criterion for entry into eternal life.

According to *Veritatis splendor* Jesus "*himself becomes a living and personal Law,* who invites people to follow him . . . ." (15) But Jesus cannot be reduced only to a living and personal law. Jesus is also the eschatological prophet, the proclaimer of the reign of God, the one whose love and life we are to imitate, the one who came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for the many, the one who preached good news to the poor.

The encyclical has distorted the meaning of Christian morality by putting primary emphasis on obedience to God's law especially to the Ten Commandments and laws prohibiting certain actions as always and everywhere wrong. In fairness, however, the encyclical tries to put the commandments of the decalogue into a larger picture. The pope mentions the invitation to be perfect, the following of Jesus, commitment to the very person of Jesus, and the new law of love proposed by St. Paul. But all these in different ways merely support the emphasis on obedience to God's law. Thus, the conclusion to the long meditation on the rich young man maintains: "The moral prescriptions which God imparted in the Old Covenant, and which attain their perfection in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

New and Eternal Covenant in the very person of the Son of God made man, must be *faithfully kept and continually put into practice* . . . . The task of interpreting these prescriptions was entrusted by Jesus to the apostles and their successors, with a special assistance of the Spirit of truth: 'He who hears you hears me' (Luke 10:16)" (25.2).

A third distortion concerns the attempt to use Scripture to support what the pope and the hierarchical magisterium are proposing today based on philosophical and ethical concepts that were not known in biblical times. The last paragraph showed at least an implicit identification of the commandment proposed by Jesus with the specific norms prohibiting always and everywhere certain actions proposed by the hierarchical magisterium. *Veritatis splendor* explicitly uses Scripture to support the notion of intrinsic evil proposed by the contemporary hierarchical magisterium in its arguments against proportionalism and consequentialism. But Scripture does not know any of these concepts. The heading before the discussion of intrinsic evil is: "'*Intrinsic evil': it is not licit to do evil that good may come of it (cf. Rom. 3:8).*" (79.1) The text itself in a paragraph discussing intrinsic evil cites the reference to Rom. 3:8 in a quotation taken from Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*. "[I]t is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it (Cf. Rom 3:8)" (80.2). But this biblical text does not necessarily support the papal concept of intrinsic evil. Consequentialists and proportionalists, with whom the pope strongly disagrees, could readily accept the text. The real problem is how you determine what is evil. On this basic point, the text from Romans offers no help whatever.

Veritatis splendor goes on to assert, "In teaching the existence of intrinsically evil acts, the Church accepts the teaching of Sacred Scripture. The Apostle Paul emphatically states: 'Do not be deceived: Neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor 6:9-10)." (81.1) But 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 talks about persons and not about intrinsically evil acts. Paul is speaking here about the vices of persons and not about intrinsically evil acts, to say nothing about the understanding of intrinsically evil acts as proposed in the encyclical. Thus, *Veritatis splendor* does not avoid the temptation of using Scripture to support contemporary understandings that were not known by the biblical author.

II. Use of Scripture in the Teaching on Sexuality and Marriage

In his audience talks at the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II develops his understanding of marriage and sexuality primarily as a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

reflection on the Scriptures. His lengthy discussion of three important aspects—the theology of the body, the sacramentality of marriage and the indissolubility of marriage well illustrate this heavy dependence on Scripture.

Scripture as Primary Source

First the theology of the body develops the anthropological foundation for the pope's understanding of human sexuality in terms of the complete and total giving of the spouses to one another in a sincere gift of love. He develops his anthropology and theology of the body in the light of the theological realities of creation, fall, and redemption. The first two chapters of Genesis describe the original plan of God in creation. Adam, despite his dominion over all inanimate creation, experiences a profound loneliness. God made Eve so they could become two in one flesh in an equal communion of love and life. Their original nakedness meant they felt neither shame nor guilt because of which they could completely give themselves to one another in their bodies in a sincere and total gift of self. This was the original plan of God from the beginning (*TB* 25-102).

Genesis also describes the fall with its threefold break with regard to the human person—a break in the relationship of loving dependence of Adam and Eve upon God (Adam and Eve hid themselves); a break in the relationship between man and woman (Adam accused Eve of causing the problem); and a break or struggle within the human person brought about by concupiscence (they recognized their nakedness and covered it). As a result of the fall, the communion of husband and wife is deeply affected. Concupiscence tends to reduce the other to an object of sexual gratification. The nuptial meaning of the body as the total and complete giving of self to the other is deeply affected by the fall (*TB* 108-62). Redemption by God's grace through Christ overcomes the effect of the fall and makes possible again the nuptial meaning of the body found in original innocence in the Garden of Eden (*TB* 32-34).

John Paul II bases the effect of redemption on the nuptial meaning of the body on a number of scriptural texts in contradistinction to his concentration on Genesis in describing original innocence and the fall. He devotes a series of talks from December 17, 1980, to May 6, 1981, to the subject "St. Paul's Teaching on the Human Body" (*TB* 191-232). Among the texts developed here are 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 with its emphasis on the human body as the temple of the Holy Spirit and the member of Christ; 1 Thessalonians 4:4 with its call for controlling the body in holiness and honor; and Romans 8:32 with its explicit recognition of the redemption of the body.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

John Paul II devoted a series of twenty-seven talks beginning on July 28, 1982, until July 4, 1984, to "The Sacramentality of Marriage." It is evident that the first talk the treatise involves a reflection on Ephesians 5:21-31 (*TB* 304). This text serves as the basis for the understanding of marriage in the strict or narrow sense as one of the seven sacraments of the church. Ephesians talks about the love of husband and wife as based on the love of Christ for the church. The analogy works in both directions. The relationship of Christ to the church tells us something about Christian marriage; but the relationship of husband and wife also tells us something about Christ's love for the church (*TB* 312-14). The pope recognizes that, "Even though Ephesians does not speak directly and immediately of marriage as one of the sacraments of the church, the sacramentality of marriage is especially confirmed and closely examined in it" (*TB* 342).

With regard to the indissolubility of marriage, John Paul II's primary argument comes from Matthew 19. The very first audience talk on marriage in 1979 insists on the unity and indissolubility of marriage in the light of that passage: "Moses allowed you to divorce your wives because of the hardness of your hearts, but, from the beginning, it was not so" (*TB* 25-27). This Scripture text reminds us of "God's original plan for mankind, a plan which man after sin has no longer been able to live up to" (*VS* 22.2). John Paul II insists that the indissolubility of the sacrament of marriage is proclaimed again and strengthened in the mystery of the redemption of the body (*TB* 342-44). Thus, the theology of the body, the sacramentality of marriage, and the indissolubility of marriage all illustrate how John Paul II develops his understanding of marriage and sexuality primarily as a meditative reflection on the Scriptures.

Evaluation of the Use and Primacy of Scripture

The primary emphasis on Scripture produces many positive effects in John Paul II's understanding of marriage and sexuality. In these talks, he is able to bring together both moral and spiritual theology. Too often in the past moral theology dealt only with the minimum obligations and requirements. While he certainly insists on the hierarchical teachings on all aspects of marriage and sexuality, John Paul II above all develops the basic meaning and understanding of marriage and sexuality in a very positive way.

At times, however, like all of us, the pope has a tendency to read things into the Scripture based on his own background. Without doubt, he is always going to see and interpret Scripture as supporting existing Catholic teachings. Note his emphasis on scriptural proofs for the in-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dissolubility of marriage. Karol Wojtyla, in his academic training and teaching, was a philosopher and metaphysician. He obviously interprets Scripture in light of his own academic interests. According to him, the first account of creation gives "a powerful metaphysical content." The human being is defined here in a metaphysical way in terms of being and existence. The first chapter of Genesis provides "a solid basis for a metaphysic and also for an anthropology and an ethic, according to which *ens et bonum convertuntur* (being and good are convertible)" (*TB* 28-29). The third general audience talk of September 19, 1979, bears the title: "The Second Account of Creation: The Subjective Definition of Man" (*TB* 29). Most biblical commentators would not see such a metaphysics in Genesis that supplies us with an objective definition of man as well as a subjective or psychological definition of man.

The problem with an approach that puts such primary and almost exclusive emphasis on Scripture and sees in the book of Genesis a metaphysics of the human person as well as an objective and subjective definition of the human being is that not enough importance is given to developments. Throughout all these talks, John Paul II fails to recognize the tremendous historical development that has occurred within Catholic self-understanding with regard to marriage. For over half of its existence the Catholic Church did not officially accept marriage as one of the seven sacraments. There has been no basic metaphysic of marriage or an objective definition of it that has remained the same in Catholic self-understanding. Marriage was first understood as an institution arranged by parents, but then the notion of a contract freely entered into by the couple took over. Contemporary theologians wish to stress marriage as a covenant relationship more than as a contract. The roles of love, procreation, and sexual pleasure have changed greatly in the course of the Catholic understanding of marriage.[14]

In fairness to the pope, he might be attempting to do no more than give some reflections on marriage in the light of Scripture. But even given that narrow purpose, his approach fails to recognize the complexity of the understanding of marriage in the Catholic tradition. By interpreting Genesis as giving the original plan of God and a metaphysics of the human person both in its objective and subjective aspects, the pope fails to recognize the significant historical developments that have occurred in the Roman Catholic tradition's understanding of marriage and sexuality.

The primary emphasis on Scripture, and precisely Genesis, together with the claim of finding the plan of God and the objective and

[14]See, e.g., Theodore Mackin, *The Marital Sacrament* (New York: Paulist, 1989); John T. Noonan, Jr., *Contraception: A History of its Treatment by the Catholic Theologians and Canonists,* enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

subjective definitions of man and woman in Genesis, serves as the theoretical basis for John Paul II's insistence on the complementarity of male and female.

The pope develops his understanding of the equality and complementarity of women and men in a number of places in addition to his audience talks—the 1981 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio,*[15] the 1988 Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici,*[16] and the 1988 Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*.[17] Their masculinity and femininity allow the man and the woman to make the mutual sincere gift of self to the other (*MD* 7). On the basis of the anthropology found in Genesis, John Paul II insists on "the truth about that dignity and vocation that result from the specific diversity and personal originality of man and woman. . . . The personal resources of femininity are certainly no less than the resources of masculinity: they are merely different" (*MD* 10). To understand properly the equality and also the rightful role of woman in church and in society, the pope appeals to "the *anthropological foundation for masculinity and femininity* with the intent of clarifying woman's personal identity in relation to man, that is, a diversity yet mutual complementarity, not only as it concerns roles to be held and functions to be performed, but also, and more deeply, as it concerns her make-up and meaning as a person" (*CL* 50.1). But note there is also a significant practical reason for the pope's insistence on the equal dignity and complementarity of male and female. This allows him to claim that women cannot be ordained priests in the Roman Catholic Church even though they have an equal dignity with men (*MD* 26).

John Paul II maintains that complementarity requires different feminine and masculine gifts. The true liberation of women must not involve masculinization in which women appropriate to themselves male characteristics contrary to their feminine originality. Such an approach distorts who women really are and what constitutes their essential richness (*MD* 10). Woman exercises a special kind of prophetism. The woman in Genesis and the bride in the metaphor of Ephesians receive love in order to love in return. All human beings are first loved by God and then express love in return. But "it is precisely the woman—the bride—who manifests this truth to everyone. This *"pro-*

[15]Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio,* in *The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations of John Paul II,* ed. J. Michael Miller (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1998).

[16]Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles laici,* in Miller, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations,* 362-462. Subsequent references in the text will be to *CL* followed by the paragraph number.

[17]Pope John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem,* in *Theology of the Body,* 443-92. Subsequent references in the text will be to *MD* followed by the paragraph number.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

phetic" character of women in their femininity finds its highest expression in the Virgin Mother of God (*MD* 29).

Christifideles laici calls attention to two great tasks entrusted to women. First of all, there is the task of bringing full dignity to conjugal life and to motherhood. She can help the man—husband and father—to overcome forms of absenteeism and better respond to his parental responsibilities. Secondly, woman has the task of shoring up the moral dimension of culture (51.9-11).

The papal emphasis on complementarity of man and woman raises significant problems. It would seem to follow logically that men and women who are not married are not complete and lack something about their humanity. But such an assertion seems to go much too far.

Most feminists have pointed out that complementarity too often involves subordination and stereotypical feminine roles. That seems to be the case with John Paul II's insistence on complementarity. The emphasis on woman as the one who receives love in order to love in return emphasizes the passive role of women. The two tasks assigned to women by *Christifideles laici* definitely seem to be culturally conditioned. The man and the husband also should contribute to the full reality of family life and to the moral dimension of culture.

Discussion of Three Particular Texts

The discussion of two Scriptural texts—Matthew 19 and 1 Corinthians 7—raises some questions. The pope gives a long and detailed analysis of Matthew 19 at the beginning of these talks and frequently refers to this text, but he never once explains the famous exception clause (except for the case of *porneia*) with regard to divorce and the indissolubility of marriage. Especially since he is defending the condemnation of divorce in all circumstances one would have expected him to deal with this issue. The pope has not referred to 1 Corinthians 7 as much as he has to Matthew 19, but here too there is a curious omission. He never mentions what later Catholic teaching called the Pauline Privilege that is based on this passage. A person who becomes a baptized Christian is free to remarry if the previous non-Christian spouse refuses to live together peacefully. In fact, in this whole matter of indissolubility, the only marriages that the Roman Catholic Church today recognizes as indissoluble are marriages legitimately contracted by two baptized persons that have been consummated. Obviously, in the eyes of the Catholic Church today, the vast majority of marriages in the world do not fit into this category of total indissolubility.[18] The

[18]John T. Noonan, Jr., *Power to Dissolve: Lawyers and Marriages in the Courts of the Roman Curia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Catholic tradition cannot claim, on the basis of the narrative in Genesis, that God's plan calls for the indissolubility of all marriages.

Both the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (23-25) and the general audience address of August 11, 1982, discuss the famous text of Ephesians 5:21-33 (*TB* 309-11). Most have seen in this text the subordination of wives to husbands as was the commonly accepted ethos of the time. This passage in Ephesians, like similar New Testament passages, belongs to the category of "household codes" which express how households at that time were structured. As is customary in such a genre, Ephesians 5:21-33 refers to the male head of the household and the relationship of husband and wife, children and parents, slaves and masters. The subordination of the wife to the husband is obvious in this passage. "Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its savior. As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her. . ." (Eph 5:22-25 as cited in *TB* 304).

Despite this, the pope sees a Gospel "innovation" in this text. Ephesians 5:21 begins by calling for a mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ, not a one-sided subjection. This mutual subjection is an innovation of the Gospel resulting from redemption. But the awareness of this mutual subjection of the spouses out of reverence for Christ and not just that of the wife to the husband "must gradually establish itself in hearts, consciences, behavior, and customs. This is a call which from that time onwards does not cease to challenge succeeding generations; it is a call which people have to accept ever anew." The pope goes on to cite Galatians 3:28 asserting that in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Greek (i.e., gentile) male nor female, free nor slave. Yet how many generations were needed for such a precept to be realized in the history of humanity with the abolition of slavery. "But the challenge presented by the 'ethos' of the redemption is clear and definitive" (*MD* 24). This is not just John Paul II's interpretation. He claims this was the meaning of the author of Ephesians. "The author knows that this way of speaking [subordination of wife to husband] so profoundly rooted in the customs and religious tradition of the time, is to be understood and carried out in a new way: as a '*mutual subjection out of reverence for Christ*' " (*MD* 24).

Thus the pope's interpretation of the meaning proposed by the author of Ephesians 5 comes down squarely on the side of the basic equality of husbands and wives as determined by the innovation of the Gospel. Such an interpretation seems to go against the very words used by the Pauline author. But John Paul II wants to insist that not only he

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press

but the scriptural author denies any subordination of the wife to the husband. He seems to be reading his understanding of equality into the biblical text which explicitly say the opposite.

In summary, John Paul II in his encyclicals and talks on marriage and sexuality deserves great credit for attending to the scriptural dimension. He does not employ a critical understanding of the Scriptures, but certainly many other people writing on Christian morality have not adopted such a critical understanding. His meditative and reflective use of the Scripture rightly insists on the basic moral realities of conversion, covenant, discipleship, the twofold commandment, the imitation of Christ, and many such concepts as basic and fundamental to the Christian life. Like everyone else, John Paul II brings his own perspective and horizon to understand what is going on in the Scriptures. Thus, he is selective in his use of them, highlighting some aspects rather than others. At times, however, his horizon distorts the meaning of the Scripture. In discussing marriage and sexuality, his emphasis on the primacy of Scripture and on finding in Genesis the plan of God for marriage fails to recognize significant historical developments that have occurred in the history of the Catholic tradition.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0360966900001122 Published online by Cambridge University Press