



Pure Gift

By Andrew Comiskey

Jesus first welcomes us in His infancy, a tiny King who brings us to our knees. God assumes a body to reconcile us to our bodies—scratchy in the straw, bugged by pungent smells yet transfixed, all senses bowing to Him. Heaven composes us on earth. We lose ourselves and gain back goodness. Only the God-Child can do that.

In Jesus, God gave all to give us back Eden. He breaks us out of our lonely prisons and invites us to paradise. He does so through every season and facet of His life on earth, wholly obedient to the Father: luminous Babe, the Lamb that was slain, and glorious Lord who walks on water, through walls, into our depths.

In the authority of His blood and Spirit, Jesus descends into every facet of our lives. There, He breaks the grip of sin, and summons the deepest, most authentic parts of us. Asleep in the deep, we awake, groggy at first, but alive to His invitation, which is

nothing less than His best for our confused humanity.

What a gift He is, this One whom St. Paul extols as ‘the firstborn over all creation’ and ‘the firstborn from among the dead,’ God’s very fullness through whom we are reconciled in full to the Father’s finest by ‘Jesus making peace through His blood, shed on a Cross’ (Col. 1: 15-20).

What a Savior! To be sure, Eden’s echo is not the only sound we hear in our noisy beings. Yet the longer and better we know Him, the truer paradise resonates from our depths. Pope St. John Paul II declares that in Christ, ‘the original power of the mystery of creation becomes the power of the mystery of redemption’; ‘Jesus’ words reactivate our deepest inheritance and give it real power in human life.’¹

Years ago, Jesus went after me with unrelenting grace. It became harder to pursue homosexual unreality than to surrender to Eden’s echo. I was outgrowing impurities, as they divided further this Jesus



follower in whom the Spirit was awakening original innocence and dignity. I wanted to walk in that Spirit, and so experience ‘the singular beauty that can permeate every sphere...of life.’²

That included welcoming Annette, a fellow ‘body’ whose difference from me awakened my body and drew us together into communion. You could say we discovered who we were in freely offering our gift to each other. The complexity of our ‘gifts’ was roused, refined, and mostly fulfilled in opening to each other.

May I suggest we linger at the crèche this Christmas as we prepare for a new year of gift-giving? Let us allow the Child-King to fill us with wonder over God-with-us—His pure gift awakening ours. **DSM**

¹ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 46:5-6.

² *Ibid*, 57:3.

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By Katie Comiskey

There is an inherent vulnerability in offering a gift: a gift, even well-offered, is always at risk of being denied, or at the very least, accepted with thinly-veiled disappointment. Though well-familiar with the idea of offering oneself as a gift, this fear of rejection stifled my gift-giving. Central to this fear was my hatred toward my own body, the physical, tangible expression of my “gift”.

Instead, my body felt more like a rebuke, a reminder of all those things I was not: thin, desirable, appealing. Far from Eden, I lost sight of the *Imago Dei* in my corporeal form—my body became a barometer of my inadequacies, a visual reminder of the unworthiness of my gift.

Thankfully, the incarnate God did not let me linger long in this place of self-hatred and despair. The Lord has met me in this area in several beautiful ways, but it was in a time of adoration at the Theology of Body Institute, fittingly enough, where I truly *experienced* the beauty of my body for the first time. Sitting

before the exposed body of Christ, enveloped in the beauty of His body, I felt within me the enormity of the Incarnation. Christ took on human form, and by so doing, redeemed my body beyond measure. It was an act of resplendent, extravagant love that shook me out of my malaise of self-hatred and contempt.

It revealed to me an essential truth: the measure of my worth, the beauty of my body, can only be rightfully assessed in the light of God taking on a body—the Incarnation.

At Christmas, we are called to marvel again at the advent of the Incarnation, this upending act that redeems our broken body and guarantees the goodness of our gift. Let us praise Him rightfully, we embodied ones who bear His magnificent image. **DSM**

By Tom Wright

My marriage to Terri was a ‘package’ deal, as she had two children from a prior marriage. I entered it feeling pretty good about being a husband and father. This

illusion was quickly dispelled as Terri and I argued almost daily, and the children felt like an additional burden. In short there was little joy in my family relationships.

An encounter with Jesus changed everything. I had been lamenting in prayer how miserable my marriage was when I heard an almost audible voice say: ‘It’s not about you, it’s about this woman and these two children who need you.’

Immediately, a peace came over me. My heart exchanged self-pity for joyful anticipation of being a ‘real’ man. I cried out for mercy and help. Jesus met me and reminded me of His life of sacrifice, as He found purpose and joy in laying down His life for the benefit of mankind. I understood the value of sacrificially pouring into my family, my little part in benefiting mankind. Dormant areas of my masculine soul were infused and awakened at ever deeper levels by His masculine presence.

I began to delight in just being with Terri and the kids, and seeing them happy, regardless of the cost on my time and energies. It wasn’t overnight, or nearly as quick as any of us would have liked. Slowly, my prayer ‘Father show me what fatherhood looks like for me, show me what husbanding looks like on me,’ was answered.

Today I still pray regularly for help to be a husband, father, and grandfather. Jesus continues to make small but meaningful changes at my core as I look to Him for much needed guidance. **DSM**

By Amanda Smith

Not long ago, I was taking a walk on a beautiful winter day. Everything around me was serene,

but what was happening inside of me was not. Backstory: when I became a Christian 14-years-ago, I renounced identifying as a lesbian (along with a host of other sins). Since then, God has been untangling my soul from the lies I believed about Him and about who I am as a woman.

Back to the present. On that recent winter day, residual longings were strong. Plus, that season of my life felt dry and God felt far from me. The lies? ‘You are not enough as a woman’ and ‘You are not worthy of love.’ Desperately, I sought more evidence to confirm these lies as truth. I wondered if I belonged in the arms of another woman.

I started to see an unusual number of red cardinals fly into view, which prompted me to pray out loud: I accused God of leaving me while begging for His Presence! At once, His quiet, tender voice overwhelmed my heart. ‘I brought all those birds in your path to show you Who I am, because I know you love them. I hem you in behind and before, I lay My hand upon you. You can never flee from My Presence. You forget that I called you My daughter, My beautiful maiden, who is worthy to be loved (which is what my name—Amanda Corinne—means).’

What a strengthening, confirming word from my Father! I cling to Him for grace, knowing He has called me to be a feminine, strong, and tender gift to His Church, His beloved, who leads others into the Refuge of His Healing Presence. **DSM**

Incarnation: Hinge of Wholeness

By Marco Casanova

The fact that theology also considers the body should not astonish or surprise anyone who is aware of the mystery and reality of the Incarnation.



Theology is that science whose subject is divinity. Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology through the main door.³

Jesus’ incarnation is a bold move. Scandalous. In assuming flesh, God humbles Himself; exciting that our wholeness hinges on His humility.

This mystery releases a ‘thrill of hope’ in me. It echoes a longing for freedom: freedom to move in the gift of my masculine sexuality. Incarnation is all about the Gift that frees us to be gifts. Jesus assumed a sexual human nature to free us in ours. That’s the scandal and the excitement.

On a recent plane flight, I was spiritually stirred to contemplate Jesus as a baby. Strange setting for a Bethlehem visit, but I take what I can get. This Catholic was moving in the spontaneity of the Holy Spirit. Flight attendants, buckle up!

I was in an edgy, vulnerable state, experiencing some anxiety. I couldn’t shake it or identify its source. I sensed uneasiness in

my body: not overpowering but draining. It silently stole my joy. Tempted to doubt my authority, I felt undercut as a man by this intruder.

Jesus asked me to pick Him up, much like I might cradle my little nephew. I could see in the Spirit that my hands were full, unable to hold Him. I couldn’t identify sin or lust, just a host of vaguely troubling thoughts.

The Incarnation wanted to go deeper. The Babe of Bethlehem, hands extended, wanted to secure me in love. I needed to open to Him and take hold of Him. His fleshy, sacred heart beat against mine and calmed me. The power that makes all things new rested in my arms. God drew near in His littleness, as in the host. Eucharistic.

Jesus wanted my undistracted heart so I might trust Him wholly. He wanted me to contemplate Him as Gift. He gave Himself so I could give myself lovingly & joyfully.

Quiet tears released me from anxiety. The babe infused my weary body and will. Jesus secured me again in my gift, and renewed confidence in His Incarnational power.

The Incarnation gives our bodies theological significance. Jesus assumed our bodily sexuality. Genesis is our foundation, the Incarnation our elevation. Jesus in the flesh is on the move. Take hold of Him. **DSM**

³ John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them*, 23:4.

Gift of Holy Fear

By Annette Comiskey

For no obvious reason, one of my favorite Christmas carols growing up was 'We Three Kings.' I loved singing it in church and remember fondly its inclusion in annual Sunday School Christmas pageants. Though only the Gospel of Matthew mentions the 'kings,' they are thoroughly a part of the whole Christian tradition!

My perception of the kings has changed over the years, but the truth of baby Jesus deserving their gifts, beginning with their out-and-out worship,



has always rung true. As I grew older, what struck me most was not so much their gifts but the kings' response on seeing Him. These great Magi knelt before the baby and His mother. Humbled, they recognized Him as 'King Forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign.'

I now see the fear of the Lord overtaking the kings as they beheld the child-King: not earthly fear but holy fear, the fear that is 'the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 9:10). I long for more of that gift, holy fear.

I ache for it not only in my life but in the lives of my fellow believers. So often we expect God to bend into our beliefs; we pick and choose Scripture to fit our needs or those of our loved ones. Even more grievous to me is when the Church allows current culture trends to dictate how we should respond to painful immoral things. 'Marriage not working? You gave it your best, time to move on.' 'Pornography addiction doesn't hurt anyone, so what's the problem?' 'You're not comfortable being a woman, consider manhood. I want to honor your feelings.'

We bow down and worship others' 'reality' but not the Creator's. We fear offending our family and friends but have no holy fear of offending 'God most high.' My Advent prayer: we would look upon the baby Jesus, knowing that He grants true mercy to 'those who fear Him' (Lk. 1:50). May that be our gift to the world from 'generation to generation!' **DSM**

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Based on Jesus' mercy and the dignity of men and women made in God's image, we equip Christians to gather in pursuit of radical wholeness.

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