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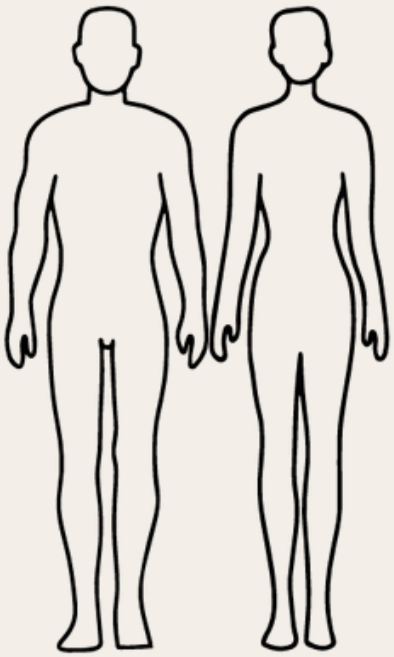

The theology of the body

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TRO & MEDIER

The theology of the body

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A Better Story

God's history is magnificent and staggering. The Bible presents God as the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, with the enigmatic name "I Am". He is the Almighty, creator of the universe with all its countless planets, stars, and galaxies. It is understandable that David, faced with this, exclaims in Psalm 8: "What is man?"

The answer is that we have been given a central place in God's story, **created in God's image as his beloved children and as citizens of the kingdom of God.** We are not left on our own; the eternal and Almighty **God seeks community and union with us**.

Humanity's place in God's story begins with the marital relationship between Adam and Eve in Genesis and culminates in the powerful depiction of the wedding between Christ and the Church in Revelation. From here, eternal life continues where God and his people are finally fully united.

In this story, of which we are all a part, human sexuality has an entirely natural place. **The body and sexuality are, in the same way as life itself, created with a purpose and meaning that we are meant to discover and explore, and which we do not need to create ourselves**. The Bible invites us to see all aspects of life in context and in relation to him who has created us, loves us, and walks with us through everything.

"The Theology of the Body," which you are reading here, seeks to present some of the main elements of God's story and put them in relation to humanity, sexuality, our identity, and the meaning of life. The starting point for “The Theology of the Body” is trust in and commitment to the truth, authority, and power of the Bible. This authority has a warm focal point in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which runs like a red thread through the entire Bible. Here we meet God's eternal and unquenchable love, which is available to everyone through Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection. That love is expressed in creation, remains faithful when humanity falls, is reflected in the promises

God gives to his people, and culminates when God sends his Son for the salvation of humanity and makes all things new in restoration.

“The Theology of the Body” is a foundational document built around t**he main points: God, Creation, Fall, Promise, Salvation, and Restoration**. From this foundation, we desire to see a number of resources developed to communicate this life-giving, true, and beautiful story to new generations and new people. In this way, we wish to see people in the future understand, believe, and live God's good story about humanity, sexuality, our identity, and the meaning of life.

God

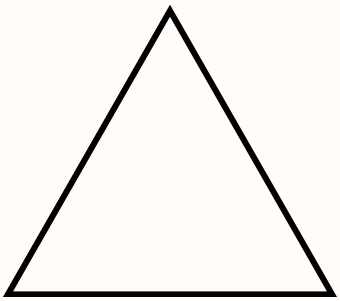
"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," are the first words in the Bible. Thus, the Bible's story presupposes God's existence and rests on that fact. The story of humanity, sexuality, identity, and the meaning of life also depends on an understanding that God exists and who he is in order to be rightly understood.

God Is (Exodus 3:14; Revelation 1:8)

- God is not a product of human imagination. Nor do we have a mandate to shape God in our image. God is "I Am," the eternal, almighty, the beginning and the end.

God is the Creator (Genesis 1–2; Psalm 100:3; Psalm 19:2–7; Psalm 33:6–15; Job 38–39)

- God has sovereignty over our lives. There is a deep freedom in letting go of being the center of our own existence. We are created to worship the Creator and not the created. It is right and good for human beings to listen to and obey God.
- That God is the creator of humanity implies that he is the one who knows how, why, and for what we were created.



God is good – better than we can understand – always and under all conditions. He is love, and he loves us (Psalm 103; Romans 5:8; Matthew 19:17; John 3:16; 1 John 4:7–21; Ephesians 3:17–19; Isaiah 31:3)

- God's goodness is a fact in the midst of human suffering and perceived pointlessness. He is good, even if our sexuality causes deep pain.
- The reason we can say that we have a better story is precisely the trust that we have a God who wills us well.

God is a God of order and sets good boundaries (Genesis 1; Exodus 20:1–17; Psalm 119; Acts 17:24–31)

- In the creation story, God separates light from darkness, land from sea, and he creates animals, each according to its kind. Finally, he creates humanity in his image, to be male and female. God created order out of chaos. At the same time, he set boundaries for humanity. An existence without these boundaries, where everything floats and we are left to our own judgments, is the opposite of the paradise the Bible tells us about.

Creation

Creation lays down the premises for our place in God's story. That God has created humanity and everything in nature is essential to our relationship with God, our worth as human beings, and indeed to the very meaning of life.

We are created in God's image and are his precious creatures (Genesis 1:26–31; Genesis 5:1; Psalm 8; Psalm 139:13–16)

- Our worth is independent of feelings, thoughts, personality, sexual orientation, or actions; it is anchored in God from creation onward. We are loved, desired, and willed long before we think or feel anything. Our identity is thus much richer and goes far deeper than our sexuality.
- Since the entire body from the beginning is given high value and created in God's image, it is never "wrong" from the outset. The body is an integrated part of our identity. Nor is it subordinate to feelings or a "problem to be solved". Such attitudes have Gnostic roots and are alien to a Christian worldview. Despite the consequences of the Fall, the body is desired, loved, and willed by God.
- An important consequence of all humans being created in God's image is that all hate speech, bullying, persecution, contempt – yes, even the absence of neighborly love – is contrary to God's heart and will. This applies in encounters with all people, regardless of attitudes or actions, and naturally also in encounters with those among us who experience attraction to someone of the same sex or are uncertain about their own sexuality.

We humans, including our bodies, are created with a purpose, by God and for God (Genesis 1:28; 1 Corinthians 8:6; 1 Corinthians 6:12–20; Acts 17:28; Ephesians 3:18–21)

- We are created in love, for love, with all that we are: spirit, soul, and body.

- The purpose for humanity is an open, faithful, and intimate fellowship with God, as part of the Church – which is referred to as the bride of Christ. In this fellowship, we fully become who we were created to be.
- Part of humanity's mission involves being fruitful and multiplying. Man and woman are created and designed to live in this purpose, to bring forth children and carry on the family lineage. A union of male and female is thus the starting point for all human existence.

In a biblical perspective, creation, and thus also the body, is a bearer of meaning and points forward to life's purpose (Psalm 19; Psalm 145:10–11; Colossians 1:15–17)

- We do not need to create our own meaning with the body. That meaning is given to us by God, and our task is to listen to him who created us and seek to understand and live in his purpose for us.

- That humanity was created male and female was not accidental, nor was the design of a specifically male and female body. Just as Eve was the answer to Adam's longing and as they complemented each other in their bodies, so God's church will meet Christ's longing for a bride. The entire human body, including sex organs and hormones, thus also expresses a deep symbolism. A sexual relationship between two of the same sex cannot reflect this, even if it were a loving and faithful relationship.
- Even though sex is meaningful in itself, a sexual union by its nature always points toward something deeper. That is the reason God sets boundaries for sexual cohabitation, namely faithful and committed marriage between one man and one woman. In this, Christ's faithfulness to the Church is also reflected. Faithfulness, both in marriage between a man and a woman and in celibacy – which all people experience for shorter or

longer periods of life – points toward the deeply satisfying relationship into - which God invites us. Our longings are met in sexual union, but our very deepest longings can only be satisfied by God.

- Neither marriage nor family life is the meaning of life itself. Although they have an important intrinsic value, these are temporary roles that remind us that God has created us for fellowship with himself. Many feel pain and longing because, for various reasons, they do not live in marriage or start a family. We as a church acknowledge that we have at times elevated family life in unfortunate ways that have made the situation more difficult for people living as singles. It is necessary that we as congregations are conscious that we are first and foremost God's family. Everyone should feel a sense of belonging here. Both our preaching and our everyday life must reflect this insight.

The fall

Among all the beautiful and good things God created, humanity holds a special place, and God gave humanity both freedom and responsibility from creation. Humanity soon used that freedom to turn away from God's original plan, blaming others instead of taking responsibility. The Bible tells the story of a God who nevertheless remains faithful. At the same time, humanity is held accountable for its choices and actions, which also reveals the Creator's deep respect for his creation.

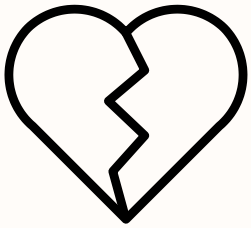
The fact that humanity wanted to be God and acted against his will meant that everything God created suffered a deep fracture, a fundamental injury. Now creation could also be used for destructive purposes. The Fall is a dark chapter in human history, yet God brings strong glimpses of hope even here. Firstly, it provides an explanation for today's distress, suffering, sin, and evil, and secondly, God's story also points to a solution. Without this chapter, we would largely have to explain suffering and sin as random events in our evolution, leaving us to our own devices to fix what is wrong as best we can. We believe there is freedom in speaking truthfully about the Fall as well, and it helps us maintain healthy realism when facing what we experience every day: not everything is as it should be all the time. There seems to be a standard that we fail to live up to.

Humanity's "original sin" is putting oneself in God's place (Genesis 3; Romans 1:18–32)

- When humans seek God's place, from Adam and Eve, through the building of the Tower of Babel, and all the way to our day, things have always gone wrong. Humans were not created to be the masters of their own lives. We cannot carry the weight of our existence on our own. It is only when we turn back to God's authority that we find freedom.

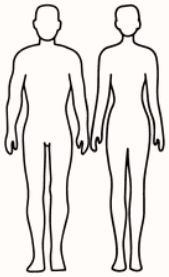
Creation is damaged and longs for freedom and restoration (Romans 8:18–25)

- Our bodies, our feelings, our thoughts, and our sexuality also bear the consequences of the Fall. This involves pain and suffering, to a greater extent for some than for others. Not least, this can apply to people who experience that their sexual feelings and the part of their identity related to sexuality go against God's Word. We must take this with the utmost seriousness and walk alongside everyone who struggles with such feelings and questions.
- This also affects our identity. Partly by anchoring our security in the created rather than the Creator – we become human doings instead of human beings – and partly by seeking our identity outside our relationship with God and his framework for human life.



Following one's heart is not the path to a life in freedom (Romans 1:24; Jeremiah 17:9; Matthew 15:19)

- That creation has a fundamental flaw also involves temptation, seduction, and confusion, where we can be led to believe that freedom lies in following our heart and living out all desires. In the realm of sexuality, this can manifest, for example, in casual sexual relationships, infidelity, pornography, sexual relationships between unmarried individuals, or marriage involving coercion and abuse of power. A sexuality gone astray harms our relationship with God, our fellow humans, and ourselves.



- The Fall deeply affects our inner self. It makes the heart deceitful, where deceptive thoughts can take root and shape what we believe and think – about God, about ourselves, and about others. Being one's own highest authority is not freedom. We need a corrective outside ourselves, from our Creator.

God is good - better than we are able to comprehend - always and under all circumstances. He is love, and He loves us (Psalm 103; Romans 5:8; Matthew 19:17; John 3:16; 1 John 4:7; Ephesians 3:17; Isaiah 31:3)

- God's goodness is a reality even in the midst of human suffering and experiences of meaninglessness. He is good, even when our sexuality causes deep pain.
- The reason we can say that we have a better story is precisely our trust that we have a God who desires our good and seeks our well-being.

God is a God of order and establishes good boundaries (Genesis 1; Exodus 20:1; Psalm 119; Acts 17:24-31)

- In the creation account, God separates light from darkness, land from sea, and creates the animals, each according to its kind. Finally, He creates humanity in His image, male and female. God brought order out of chaos. At the same time, He established boundaries for humankind. An existence without these boundaries, where everything is fluid and we are left entirely to our own judgments, stands in contrast to the paradise described in the Bible.

Promise

Already in the story of the Fall, in Genesis 3, we see traces of God's promise that creation will one day be restored and that humanity will once again be free and whole. God's promises to us apply both to life here on earth and for eternity.

Marriage between a man and a woman is a picture of Christ's relationship with the Church, and the family is a picture of relationships and life in the congregation, both pointing toward the promises God gives us in life with him:

Eternal love (Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 1:1–10)

- Humans are created for, and long to be, loved and to love in return. Both interpersonal and erotic love are pictures and glimpses of God's love for us. Nevertheless, it is only in our relationship with God that we will experience perfect love.
- In a fallen world, God-given erotic love will often go astray and fail to reflect the faithful and committed love between Christ and the Church. It is only within God's given framework for love, including erotic love, that we find traces of God's promises and his eternal love.

Covenant and faithfulness (Numbers 23:19; Psalm 146:6; Galatians 3:15–29; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Corinthians 13; Deuteronomy 32:3–12; 2 Timothy 2:13; Titus 1:2)

- Marriage is instituted to be an unbreakable covenant between a man and a woman, lasting until death separates the two. As such, it is an image of God's unwavering and unchanging covenant with his Church. God's love never fails, never expires, does not abuse, does not look for other partners, but is promised forever and always to the Church.
- God is a God who cannot lie; he will never depart from his promises.

Closeness and intimacy (Genesis 2:25; Hosea 2:14–17; Song of Songs)

- Just as Adam and Eve were naked but felt no shame, we are invited into a relationship with God and with one another in the church, in honesty, closeness, authenticity, and without shame.
- Sexual longings and feelings are a strong reminder of the promise of the perfect love, closeness, and intimacy we will one day receive with God.

Belonging and fellowship (Ephesians 2:19; Acts 2:42–47; Acts 4:32; 1 Corinthians 12:1–31; Galatians 6:2)

- Marriage and family, as God intended, ensure that humans do not have to be alone, but have "significant others" with whom to share life. An individual's relationship with God, friendships, and the life shared by believers in the church also point to these promises.

Salvation

The gospel of God's salvation for us in Christ Jesus is groundbreaking and history's greatest declaration of love. However, the purpose of life is not merely to be saved, but the new reality to which we are saved:

Grace and freedom (Hebrews 10:10–12; Colossians 2:13–15; Romans 5:20; John 8:36; 1 John 1:6–10)

- Salvation is something God has done for us – when Jesus atoned for all the world's sins through his death and resurrection once for all. Salvation encompasses our selfishness, our self-assertion, our unbelief, and our sexual sins, our attitudes, and our actions. Even that which seems unforgivable, Jesus took with him to the cross.

New identity and new life (Romans 6; Galatians 2:19–21; Galatians 5:24; Ezekiel 36:24–36; Colossians 3:1–17; 1 Peter 2:11; Matthew 16:24–27; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10)

- Salvation is something God does in us – it is the process through which God gives us a new identity. We are new creations in Christ; we have received a new heart, a new Lord, a new life, a new purpose. It is here that we can find true happiness, wholeness, and freedom. This is a reality already now. At the same time, we live in a world where the consequences of the Fall are still very noticeable. Salvation implies a continuous call to die to ourselves and live for Christ.
- The gospel challenges us deeply when Jesus calls us to "deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him". We find freedom and salvation when we die to ourselves and live for Christ, even if it involves sacrifice and pain. There we will experience that God's grace is sufficient and that his power is made perfect in our weakness.

New family (Matthew 12:46–50; Ephesians 2:19)

- Although marriage and family are very important to many, they are primarily intended to mirror fellowship with God and within the Christian congregation. This is more than a spiritual "idea," and is meant to be lived out in daily life. Christian communities are challenged to be the inclusive and diverse family we are saved to be; a place of belonging, closeness, honesty, care, love, and mutual responsibility – for both married and unmarried. If we do not practice the reality that marriage and family point to, we fail to fully communicate that the gospel is good news also for those who, for various reasons, do not marry and start a family.

New hope (Revelation 21:1–5; Romans 8:18; Hebrews 11:24–26)

- Salvation is something God will complete at the end of time – when He brings a final resolution to sin, evil, seduction, distress, pain, suffering, and death. At the same time, everything in creation will be healed and set right again, including our thoughts, our feelings, and our sexuality.
- God's promise is that eternity with him is infinitely richer than even the best this world has to offer. It is worth saying no to following our own desires when God calls us to something greater.

Restoration

The hope that all things will one day become new forms a long thread of expectation throughout God's story. It gives reason to look up and take heart in the midst of a conflicted and fragmented world. It also provides help in living with conflicting emotions and longings that are never fulfilled. The Bible tells us that God will one day set everything right.

New heaven and new earth (Revelation 21:1–5)

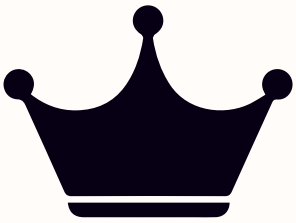
- In the restoration, God creates a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. Then a reality will be revealed that shows there was something far greater than ourselves, our feelings, our experiences, and our sexuality. We will gain true insight into the value of dying to ourselves and instead following God's truths. Then we will fully understand that Jesus Christ is truly worthy of worship, honor, praise, and obedience – because he is God and he is good.
- When we live with this eternal perspective, it becomes understandable why we should not live merely for the moment. At the same time, such a perspective becomes a blessing to our relationships here and now because it motivates us toward endurance, love, and faithfulness. God's story is not only a better story for eternity, but also for life here and now.

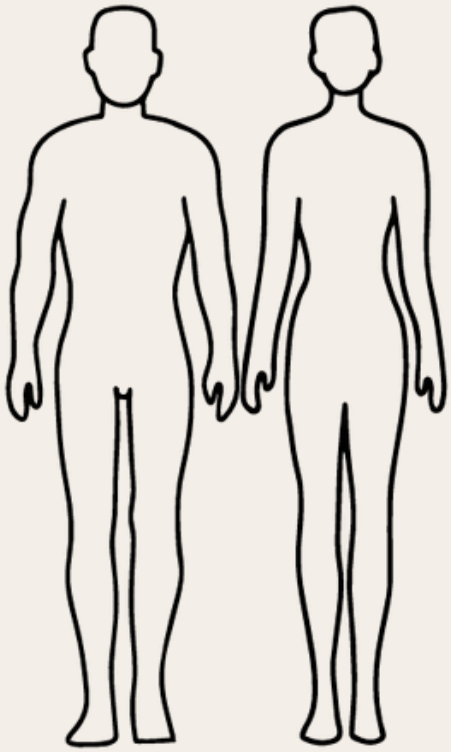
Restored relationships (Malachi 4:6; Luke 1:17; Isaiah 11; Hosea 2:18; Isaiah 2:1–5)

- In the restoration, all damaged relationships – with ourselves, with others, with creation, and with God – will be fully healed. We are called to live in this already here on earth, in reconciliation with our neighbor and God. But in eternity, we will experience it completely, and we will find perfect peace in our true identity as God's beloved children.

The hope and meaning of life (Revelation 19:7; Romans 6:5; Ephesians 5:31–32)

- The Bible uses expressions like "the wedding of the Lamb" and "to be one with him" to describe the relationship between Jesus and the Church. This is central to the Bible's grand story. The story begins with Adam and Eve and their relationship, which was meant to be an image of the intimate, confidential, and faithful relationship between Christ and the Church. The Bible concludes with this being fully and completely realized. Here on earth, marriage, sexuality, and family are merely imperfect images of what will one day be ours: We will be united with Christ and experience a love we now can only glimpse in small, yet overwhelming, moments.





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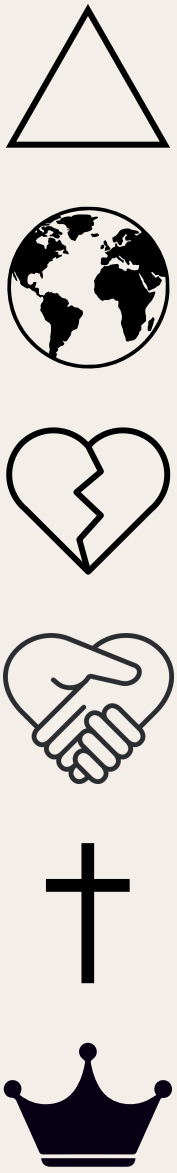
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