

## **THEOLOGY OF THE BODY**

The TOB was the subject of 129 addresses given by Pope JP11 during his Wednesday general audiences starting in Sept 1979 and concluding in 1984. So he gave 134 addresses.

His TOB was greatly influenced by the writings of St John of the Cross (1542 -1591) on whom as a young man, JP11 based his doctrinal dissertation.

The teachings of TOB as also based on his book 'love and responsibility' which he wrote way back in 1960. But this basic work was developed later as Pope in his encyclicals particularly in 'Familiaris Consortio', 'Veritatis Splendour' and his 'letter to families' in 1994. JP11 was also the unseen hand behind the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The TOB series helps people understand its teaching more fully.

The central message is God's plan for human love and about the true meaning of our bodies which are not just biological but also theological. The teaching talks about the spousal meaning of our bodies. Through the body the invisible is expressed through the visible. Through the body man and woman become gifts to each another and thereby fulfil the meaning of their existence. Humans cannot live without love. They remain beings that are incomprehensible to themselves, their lives are senseless. "The nuptial meaning of the body" is expressed in the total 'self donation' of the spouses.

In today's world many people simply take it for granted that there is, in some sense, an alienation between the 'person and the 'body'. This dualism can be traced back to the scientific rationalism of the French philosopher Descartes d 1650. He saw the body as 'mere matter'. According to JP11 a new Manicheism which puts the body and spirit in opposition has arisen so that the body can be regarded simply as an object for manipulation or exploitation. Manichaeism which sees the human body as bad is a heresy. Mani saw the body and all

things sexual as somewhat evil.

JP11 saw that Manicheanism is one of today's heresies as it was in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. In this heresy, the body is disconnected from the person. By separating body and spirit man ceases to be a person and a subject. He becomes merely an object.

Descartes had embraced the views of the English scientist Frances Bacon who believed that the goal of all human knowledge should be to achieve *power over nature*. Hence people saw the prohibitions in *Humanae Vitae* as preventing man from fulfilling that dream. The same applies to invitro fertilization and other experiments which see the body as mere matter. JP11, in his letter to families in 1994 said that it is typical of rationalism to make a radical contrast in man between spirit and body. The body can never be reduced to 'mere matter'. The 'invisible' spiritual side of man is expressed through the visible i.e. the body. In that sense, body and soul are one. Genesis begins with the marriage of the first man, Adam to Eve and the bible ends with the marriage of the second Adam, Christ with his bride, the Church. God wants to impregnate humanity with His Divine Life.

If there is an enemy who wants to separate us from God, that which is most sacred is what He will most violently attack. The battle for man's soul is fought over the truth of his body. Marriage and the family are the bedrock of the 'culture of life'. Destabilise these and we are on a downward spiral towards the 'culture of death' referred to by the late Pope in his encyclical, *'Evangelium Vitae'*.

## **Rationalism**

It is a system of thought which doesn't see the body as sacred. The body is reduced to its chemical and biological components. Rationalism denies the mystery of God. For us however the body is never a thing apart from the human person – the body is always an embodied spirit. Through our bodies we possess the capacity to love and receive love, an ability to make a true gift of ourselves to the other.

In the so called sexual revolution of the 1960's sex was cut loose from the person and my body came to be regarded as something I could manipulate and exploit for pleasure.

JP11 goes back to the book of genesis and talks about man before the Fall. He is borrowing a line from the gospel of Matthew when Jesus refers to 'man in the beginning'. Jesus said to the Pharisees "Moses allowed divorce because of your hardness of heart but it wasn't so from the beginning".

Man before the Fall is referred to as pre-historical man. He uses three terms to describe pre-historical man, original solitude, original unity and original nakedness.

### **Original solitude**

In the Book of Genesis this refers to man's realization that he is alone among the animals, he names the animals which means he had dominion over them but is aware that he is not like them. Unlike them he is a rational creature, created by God Himself and hence he is not God. Man, unlike the animals, also has self-determination and can freely choose between good and evil.

Then God speaks and says that it is not good for man to be alone. Males and females are 'alone' without the other and they are alone in the sense that they are the only creatures on earth that can have a special relationship with God. Unlike the animals they are the only creatures who are conscious of who they are.

Many people become isolated and lonely, not because nobody loves them, but because they are refusing to go out in love to others. They forget that the meaning of life is self-giving not self-serving or preserving. They say that 'loneliness' is a big problem among elderly people, and even young people. Failure to transcend self by making the gift of self, causes a deep existential loneliness.

### **Original Unity**

The essential nature of man is both male and female. "The physical intimacy of the spouses becomes a sign and pledge of spiritual

communion" (catechism)

### **Original nakedness**

'Male and female he created them'. With the creation of woman man is no longer alone. Alone, the man does not realise the essence of being a person. He realises it only by existing with someone and even more so for someone. In Genesis the man exclaims: when he sees the woman: 'this at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh' We can deduce from this that man becomes an image of God not only through his own humanity but also through the communion of persons which he forms from the very beginning. "The two become one flesh".

Pre-historical man and woman were 'naked but not ashamed'. Since shame is a result of being viewed as an object to be used by another person. Adam and Eve's lack of shame demonstrates to us that they both saw and received each other as a gift and sought only to give themselves to one another, not to use the other. Shame only entered the world through sin. They did not view each other as sexual objects so they had no reason to protect themselves from each other. They had no fear of being exploited by the other. They viewed their bodies as fundamentally compatible. The naked body showed Adam and Eve their call to love, their call to spiritual and bodily communion. They understood the spousal meaning of their bodies quite clearly. Lust, at this stage hadn't stepped on to the human stage. God created man and woman so that they could offer themselves to each other as pure gift.

In 'Gaudium et Spes' it says that man cannot fully understand himself and his life except through a sincere gift of himself. In the pre-historical man and woman there was no hint of self-seeking in their relationship.

The spousal meaning of the body is the power to express love, precisely that love in which the human person becomes a gift to another and through this gift fulfils the very meaning of his or her being and existence. Vat 11 says that humans can

discover their true selves only in a sincere gift of themselves. 'Looking with lust' does not mean that a momentary glance or thought is sinful. It's what we do with the thought is what concerns us here. Using another person as an object of our gratification is when sin enters the heart.

We are meant to be loved for our own sake but never used as an object for someone else's sake and it doesn't just apply to people we're not married to. JP11 writes: Lust is not always plain and obvious – sometimes it is concealed so that it passes itself off as a love.

The person who is master of himself or herself is able to direct erotic love towards the true, the good and the beautiful.

Christ's Redemption is meant to restore what was lost in the man/woman relationship and help spouses to see themselves as a gift to each other.

## **Historical Man**

As a result of our fallen state things get a bit distorted. The Pope quotes from Matthew 5:27-28. Jesus talks about committing adultery 'in the heart'. "If a man looks at a woman lustfully he has already committed with her in his heart". In the heart refers to the inner man. In is here were we experience disordered desires which lead us away from God. But conversely it is also in the heart where we experience the love of God and neighbour.

Historical man is a man of concupiscence. That is he has an inclination towards sin and evil. We all experience this. There is concupiscence of the flesh, concupiscence of the eyes and the pride of life. These come from the bible in 1John:2:16. Shame made Adam and Eve hide their bodies from each other. And they no longer see each other in the realm of gift. It engenders a lack of trust and thus breaks down the communion of persons which was there at the beginning. God tells even: "your yearning will be for your husband, yet he will lord it over you". Adam and Eve as a result of giving in to Satan no longer see themselves as a gift to each other. They desired to grasp and

possess one another for their own gratification. It also shatters their spiritual communion.

Man and woman continue to be attracted to one another but the dimension of self-giving gives way to domination or possession of the other as an object of desire. That is what is meant by lust. However, the spousal meaning of the body has not been completely snuffed out but it is habitually threatened. The 'heart becomes the battleground between love and concupiscence. Purity is not prudishness – it isn't a matter of repressing sexual attraction and desire.

'Custody of the eyes' is relevant but the Pope would call this a sort of 'negative purity'. Positive purity helps us receive the human body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, a manifestation of divine beauty.

Doubters respond: "impossible" – the naked body will always arouse lust. In the redemption Christ sets us free from the domination of lust and we can see the naked body in a renewed light.

But it is also within the heart i.e the inner man or woman that self-mastery is cultivated. The Pope says that we can discover the spousal meaning of the body again if we turn to Christ. The body itself is good – "God saw all he had made and indeed it was very good". We can experience a real and deep victory over lust through an ongoing conversion to Christ. It allows us to rediscover again the spousal meaning of the body and purity of heart. Purity desires only to love and never to use the other. Living the life of the spirit will help historical man to recover what he has lost through the Fall. Everything in the TOB must be seen through the lens of the redemption since it is only through the power of the Holy Spirit can man really live a life worthy of his call and his dignity as a person, made in God's image and likeness.

## **A Timely message**

The theology of the body is a timely message. In the U.S there are over 4000 abortions a day because we are misusing God's great gift of sex. In this century which has just begun we must reclaim lost ground as far as the culture of life is concerned.

The so called sexual revolution of the 1960's promised much. To its proponents it was all about liberation, progress and the victory of human power over nature. Margaret Sanger, one of the pioneers of this revolution said "no woman is free who does not own and control her own body". However, it's abundantly obvious to those who have eyes to see that this promise has not been fulfilled and that women, far from being free, are now objectified as sex objects as never before. Sex has been cheapened almost beyond recognition in many people's minds and this certainly has not made people any happier or more fulfilled. People yearn for the true meaning of love and the nuptial meaning of their bodies but since marriage has been cheapened and undermined in our times, the church needs to proclaim more than ever the beauty of life-long married love. The modern generation has been sold a sexual lie. And many people even in the church, both laity and clergy have fallen for it.

The teaching of the theology of the body has a lot to do with explaining more clearly and mounting a concerted defence of the church's teaching on contraception in Pope Paul's encyclical in 1968 'Humanae Vitae' which as far as I can see has been kept under wraps by priests and laity for far too long. Carol Woytola greatly influenced Paul VI in the putting together of this encyclical in the 1960's. Putting it bluntly the teaching is that "*every marriage act must be open to the transmission of life because of the inseparable connection between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning*". Through contraception the spousal meaning of the body is denied when the marriage act is

prevented from being a sign of the radical gift of husband and wife to love one another. The couple are not speaking the truth with their bodies, but a lie. By rejecting the other person's fertility you reject them as a person. When these two meanings are separated man and woman act in a purely subjective way, and without reference to the Divine plan, manipulate and degrade human sexuality and with it themselves and their married partner by altering its value of "total" self-giving. It is a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love. People give all sorts of reasons why families should be limited through contraception. Some are guided by purely materialistic considerations, others believe that the world is overcrowded which is not true. The ultimate reason for these mentalities is the absence of God in people's hearts which begets in an anti-life mentality.

The choice of the natural rhythms when controlling a family involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is, the woman and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control.

Sex is not an indoor sport but has a profound meaning as an expression of the whole human person. Descartes set the body apart from the person. The nature of sex for modern man has become distorted because we are looking at it through that same Cartesian lens.

The church teaches as she does because of concern for the good of man. Too often we tend to think that she only wants to control us. Man is precisely as person because he is master of himself and has self-control. Indeed insofar as he is master of himself he can give himself to the other.

## QUESTIONS

Q1

*Where does being naturally attracted to a person of the opposite gender end and 'looking with lust begin' Discuss*

Q2

*How do we experience 'new life' in the domain of the man woman relationships as distinct from adopting a 'coping mechanism' which more often than not ends in failure? Discuss*

Q3

*Our First Parents after giving to the tempter 'grasped' at the life which they falsely believe God is withholding from them. Is making Adam and Eve envious of God the Original Sin?*

Q4

*When man and wife see each other as a gift, how does this play out in their married lives? Discuss*

Q5

*We are free from the law if we have no desire whatsoever to break it. When we talk about a change of heart in this area, what does it mean? Discuss*

Q6

*'Custody of the eyes' according to John Paul 11 is 'negative purity'. How do we move into a positive purity mode?*