

EDITORIAL by Robert Moynihan

Going Off Track?

The so-called "Theology of the Body" has become very popular over the past 15 years. But a growing number of theologians fear the promoters of this theology, in their enthusiasm, may be going too far

In this issue, we have decided to address the question of John Paul's "Theology of the Body." During the last few years, a vigorous debate has sprung up over the proper interpretation of John Paul's theology in this area.

While many of the Church's theologians and bishops are not directly involved, we think it is time they took notice, as a certain dubious form of "Theology of the Body" is sweeping the globe, with North American Catholics in the lead (as the *Tablet* of London recently noted). An international conference on this theology just wrapped up in London; another was recently held in Germany; and still another — the most publicized of all — is scheduled for Rome in the fall.

Since the Theology of the Body deals with fundamental aspects of human existence — not just creation and the fall, but also lust, temptation, sin, evil, love, virtue, marriage, procreation, chastity, sacrifice and purity — the debate surrounding it goes to the heart of what it means to be a Catholic. And the conflict over who is and who is not a reliable Theology of the Body instructor, and who is and who is not preserving the true legacy of John Paul II, is emerging as one of the great battles in the post-conciliar Church.

Inside the Vatican is no stranger to the Theology of the Body, nor are we unfamiliar with Christopher West, its leading American proponent. In fact, more than a decade ago, before he became the well-known speaker and writer he is today, *Inside the Vatican* published two lengthy articles by West on this topic: "John Paul's Distinctive Contribution" (November 1998) and "A Great Nuptial Mystery" (September 1999).

At the time we published West, we had no idea of the controversial ways West, and others, would develop their approach to this theology. Now, scholars of the rank of Dr. David Schindler (West's former teacher), and Dr. Alice von Hildebrand have criticized this approach as "vulgar" (Schindler) and as posing "tremendous dangers" (von Hildebrand, who also suggested that it is an example of that religious "enthusiasm" described in Monsignor Ronald Knox's famous book of the same name).

It was on ABC's "Nightline" two years ago that West provoked his biggest controversy to date, comparing the now Blessed John Paul II to the world's most notorious pornographer. "I actually see very profound historical connections between Hugh Hefner and John Paul II," he said, to the amazement of many. He went on to describe Catholicism as "one of the sexiest of the world's religions," and the *Song of Songs* "the centerfold of the Bible."

These were not his only indiscretions. Back in 2001, having been criticized for practicing "shock theology" for his "Naked Without Shame" series, West wrote an open letter readily conceding the point, declaring: "It's my goal to 'break the silence.' It's my goal to cut through the discomfort that often characterizes Catholic discussions of sexuality and talk frankly and openly about what few are willing to talk about at all."

Among the concepts West defended in his letter — and still defends, often with graphic details — are that "Jesus was crucified

naked," "we will all be naked in heaven," "sex unites heaven and earth," heaven will be like "the climax of nuptial union" and "the symbolism of the blessing of the baptismal waters at the Easter Vigil is that of Christ impregnating the womb of the Church from which many children will be 'born again.'"

There are beautiful, orthodox and sound statements in the writings of this group, but this misses the point: one misguided statement or unfounded idea can harm a person's whole faith and life.

The claim that John Paul's Theology of the Body represents a "revolution" seems to be an example of what Benedict XVI has called a "hermeneutic of discontinuity" (a method of interpretation which seeks and finds a "rupture" with prior Catholic tradition) rather than a faithful representation of John Paul's teaching in harmony with tradition.

Indeed, one of the reasons *Inside the Vatican* honored Dr. von Hildebrand as its 2010 "Person of the Year" is precisely because her criticisms of this approach were so powerful and necessary.

Because of these controversies, *Inside the Vatican* is revisiting the subject, inviting five distinguished contributors who all have expertise in the Theology of the Body or the thought of John Paul II to contribute to our special symposium. (West was invited to participate, but declined. Our invitation to him to respond to our grave concerns remains open.)

Some Churchmen have defended West's ministry, and several bishops are on the board of the Theology of the Body Institute, whose star teacher and curriculum author is West. We hope they find this symposium enlightening.

But anyone who reviews Blessed John Paul's life, who studies his addresses and writings, and particularly his Theology of the Body, will discover that he wants us to live a life rooted in Christian prayer and sacrifice, and to take up our cross. He does not want us to become fascinated by, much less take a prurient interest in, the obsessions of this world: the body, sex and nudity. He does not want to "baptize" the sexual revolution, or try to create a Catholic "Gospel of sex."

He wants us to embrace true Christian chastity, and all that this has traditionally entailed: purity, modesty, sacrifice. To think we can somehow achieve these goals, while trafficking in pop culture and promoting a vulgarized version of the Theology of the Body, is to lose sight of its meaning, and to confuse John Paul's profound theology with the disorders of our day.

It is in the hope of recovering the real John Paul II and his authentic intentions for the Theology of the Body, that we present these essays, and pray they will help accomplish that goal.

Karol Wojtyla's earliest guides to the spiritual life were Mary and St. John of the Cross. And what he believed he preached: love, sacrifice, self-denial, total discipline and dedication to the Gospel and Jesus' message of sacrificial love. He understood fully G.K. Chesterton's remark that there is no return to the Garden of Eden except by way of the Cross. In other words, the only road to bliss is the road that passes through Gethsemane. ○

JOHN PAUL II'S THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

A war has broken out over how to correctly interpret Pope John Paul II's "Theology of the Body." On the one side, led by Christopher West, are those who say this theology is a radical new departure in Christian understanding of the body, sexuality, and human desire. On the other side are a growing number of concerned Catholic scholars, religious and faithful who warn that John Paul's teaching risks being misunderstood, and misrepresented, by West and his followers. As of yet, Rome has not intervened. But Rome is watching

The life of a Christian, in this present age, this present world, is always marked by a fruitful tension.

It is a tension between the "sacred" and the "profane."

It is a tension between what is "holy" and what is "sinful" — between what is pleasing to God and leads to eternal life and what is unpleasing to God and leads to eternal death.

It is a tension between the "now" of salvation and the "not yet" of the final and complete revelation of Christ's victory over sin and death, which is still to come.

It is a tension between the liberty of the Christian, as a son or daughter of God, redeemed by Christ, no longer bound either by the Law or weighed down by the penalties due to sin, and the continuing slavery of the Christian, due to the weakness of the flesh and a continuing exposure to temptation as long as this terrestrial life "in the flesh" continues.

It is a tension between the spirit and the flesh — between the soul, and the body.

So there is a tension in all Christian life. This is a fact, a truth of our mortal, fallible condition in this world.

And yet, as might be suspected, Christians often seek to diminish this tension, to transcend it, even to end it.

And in so doing, they often err.

By emphasizing one or the other term of our existence, our freedom or our slavery, our "now" or our "not yet," a Christian can lose sight of the full reality of our condition, our situation, and so fall into excess, or error.

This has happened repeatedly in the history of the Church, and we have all seen instances of this in our own

time, and even in our own lives. And one area where this has occurred is in the area of sexuality, and in a special area of theology called the "theology of the body."

And because error, like sin, must be fought against and resisted with all the armor of God and all the gifts of the Spirit — especially the gift of discernment — we have decided to prepare this special "Dossier" of articles on the question of the "theology of the body" and its possible dangers.

In the present age of the Church, this "modern" age, an unusual relationship with regard to "the world" has developed, especially since the time of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). At the risk of over-simplifying, the unusual aspect of this relationship is that many in the Church have come to regard "the world" and "worldliness" not as a source of temptation and danger, but as a source of insight, energy and even enlightenment.

An example of this attitude was the moment on a national American television program two years ago when the American Catholic layman Christopher West — one of the leading proponents of the "theology of the body" — went so far as to speak favorably about the life and "longing" of the founder of *Playboy* magazine, Hugh Hefner.

So, as a preliminary contribution to a continuing debate, not long after the May 1 beatification of Pope John Paul II, the originator of this modern "theology of the body," we in this issue offer five essays by distinguished Catholics who have specialized knowledge in this field. They each defend Blessed John Paul's teaching, while correcting serious distortions of it. We welcome comment from our readers

—The Editor

RECLAIMING THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

■ BY FATHER MCLEAN CUMMINGS

The story is told of a young Fr. Karol Wojtyla coming across a group of his university students practicing the tango. One of the girls present that day was privileged to have the future blessed take a turn as her partner. Years later it was remembered that he somehow managed to dance quite well, while still keeping the girl fully at arm's length!

This little episode, apocryphal or not, might serve to frame our reflection upon John Paul II's "Theology of the Body." Within the many-faceted legacy of the great Pope, his attempt to open wider the discussion begun by *Humanae Vitae* stands out as a decisive contribution. However, like the pontiff's alleged turn on a university dance floor, his initiative can give rise to misinterpretation.

The series of Wednesday audiences given early in his pontificate, which forms the nucleus of what is now called "Theology of the Body" (TOB), also startled its audience. A superficial reaction could arise from failing to recognize that characteristic of saintliness known as *coincidentia oppositorum*. Genuine Christian virtue will be both bold and cautious at once, for instance. In this case, there will be a spontaneous embrace of what is good in our earthly nature while simultaneously remaining leery of its fragility.

Unfortunately, some part of the interest and enthusiasm generated by TOB seems to be due to the very human propensity to accentuate but one side of this equation. Those seeking a respite from the struggle with our tendency to sin will seize at the chance to take the authority of the great Pope as an endorsement of a morality that is easy to live and easy to sell. The very title of some books (for instance, Gregory Popcak's *Holy Sex! A Catholic Guide to Toe-Curling, Mind-Blowing, Infallible Loving*) reveals that not every version of TOB retains the originator's noble spirit. Indeed, some chapter headings make us wish for the Holy See to bring back the note formerly used to qualify certain errors: "offensive to pious ears."

The author who has become the best known advocate of TOB is Christopher West. His millions of bestselling books and tapes have been a genuine help to many. Moreover, his enjoyment of episcopal support testifies to the general success of his unquestioned desire to articulate genuine Catholic teaching.

Nonetheless, West's work has also provided an opportunity to reflect upon how easily and unintentionally the Pope's message can be distorted. Professor David Schindler, the Provost/Dean of the Pontif-



Above, a newlywed couple receives Holy Communion from John Paul II during the Jubilee of Families in 2000. Below, Pope Paul VI, author of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("Of Human Life") in 1968



ical Institute of Marriage and Family in Washington, DC, is blunt: "West's work seems to me to misrepresent in significant ways the thought of John Paul II." Following a lively blog exchange among well known theologians last year, one author, Dawn Eden, has now published a more detailed critique of West's work. She aptly recalls in its subtitle the need to interpret TOB in a "hermeneutic of continuity."

This approach to theology is the hallmark of Pope Benedict's thought. West's insistence on the "revolutionary" nature of John Paul II's teaching is insightfully identified by Eden as "the most damaging aspect" of his work.

In truth, one can admit that John Paul II's Wednesday audiences *seem* very novel without affirming that they really are. Remember the famous scholastic adage: *quodquod recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* ("whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver"). The receiver in this case — the modern world — and especially the younger generation, has grown up in culture that has lost touch with nature as creation. But, if everything, our bodies included, have not come forth from a good and wise, personal Being, on what ground could they exist for a purpose? Only thanks to the doctrine of creation is there a meaning inherent in intimate acts, a meaning which corresponds to the biological, emotional and spiritual levels of man.

John Paul II, especially by introducing the concept of a "language" of the body, eloquently expressed this innate meaning of the body, which must be respected both to find happiness and to honor the Creator Himself.

Obviously, none of this is essentially new. It has been lived by every generation of Christian spouses, even if they were unable to express it in theological language accessible to the present generation. However, for minds taught to believe that the world is a result of random processes and that man must harness and manipulate it for his own ends, this sounded a novel message indeed. So the body is not, as the post-contraception generation was led to believe, inert matter to be drugged, barricaded, and mutilated so as to maximize pleasure and minimize pain (in this case, that of raising children).

The Pope's message comes as a revelation to anyone steeped in the modern, technological mindset, but it is not itself revolutionary. Quite the opposite.

One danger of seeing the Pope's approach as substantially new and revolutionary is the liability of confusing it in some way with the

so-called "sexual revolution." In his now infamous *Nightline* interview, West says: "Christians must not retreat from what the sexual revolution began; Christians must complete what the sexual revolution began."

West's pronouncement on this point inaugurated the public discussion of his work. Without, of course, endorsing Hugh Hefner, West indicated that the founder of the *Playboy* empire was reacting to the same problem that, allegedly, John Paul II sought to overcome. In actual fact, John Paul II's work is diametrically opposed to the evacuation of the meaning of the body that is epitomized by Hefner's "sex symbols." Moreover, the Blessed's call to genuine freedom — in self-mastery, self-giving, and sacrifice for the other — is the complete opposite of the selfish and false freedom promoted in the last 60 years.

Indeed, one must wonder whether Christopher West's great success in communicating with the younger generation is not due in part to his sharing some of the assumed postulates of that generation — postulates that need to be identified and purified.

For instance, the modern world has been taught to view everything, including the choice of toothpaste, cars and music, through the lens of sex. Some TOB proponents seem to agree.

From this perspective, sex is considered the most important and fulfilling aspect of male-female relationships. Along with contemporary culture, much popular TOB literature emphasizes the romantic and even pleasurable aspects of intercourse. The wider context of conjugal love, especially children and family, is downplayed or ignored. Finally, there is an assumed postulate that we should be open about sexuality, discussing it more freely, dressing and behaving more permissively. No more taboos. The Church is viewed as generally negative on the subject and groundlessly fearful.

Again, West's critics complain that his approach discusses intimate matters in a language and style that does not retain the reverence and mystery due to the subject. Form can in this case affect content.

West's perspective — that the Catholic Church was puritanical but has, since John Paul II, turned a corner to recognize at last the goodness of the human body and sexuality — is belied in yet another way.

Those who would defend an occasional dubious pastoral judgment made by West have had recourse to the manuals of theology used to teach seminarians for the last 150 years. Ironically, wishing to confirm West's orthodoxy, this strategy shows instead that a variety of opinions, even quite lax ones, have always existed among allegedly "puritanical" Catholic moral theologians. In fact, John Paul II's beautiful teaching calls everyone — moral theologians included — to pursue the heights of virtue and holiness, eschewing compromises with concupiscence that occasionally surfaced even in the manuals.

Soon after the beatification of John Paul II, we are reminded that in his every undertaking this Pope showed us the way to holiness. This was the ultimate purpose of his theology of the

FR. MCLEAN CUMMINGS was ordained for the Archdiocese of Baltimore on June 6, 1998. After serving for four years as associate pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish (Severna Park, MD), he was given permission by Cardinal Keeler to work in the Archdiocese of Mary, Mother of God, Moscow. He served for five years in various capacities, including one year as spiritual director at the seminary in St. Petersburg. Following completion of doctoral studies in Moral Theology in Rome, he came to Our Lady of Perpetual Help (Ellicott City, MD) as Associate Pastor. Additionally, Fr. Cummings serves as adjunct spiritual director/formation advisor and professor of the course on Catholic Social Teaching at Mount Saint Mary's Seminary (Emmitsburg, MD).

body: to help all people, but especially those called to the married life, find genuine holiness in their vocation.

Since this is the supreme goal of the Pope's teaching, it is particularly distressing that the path to Christian perfection is recast so cavalierly by superficial proponents of TOB. In truth, holiness is the final end of a life of detachment and sacrifice, elevated by the grace of God. It requires the denial of many even legitimate pleasures and a progressive deepening of recollection in the presence of God.

John Paul II's well publicized search for a married couple to beatify had the great merit of reminding everyone that every vocation must lead to holiness. However, the fact that the vast majority of canonized saints have chosen a life of virginity or celibacy speaks vol-

umes about the approach to sexuality that spouses wishing to be saints must adopt. This point is beautifully made by the same Pope in one of his Wednesday audiences: "If the key element of the spirituality of the spouses and parents — the essential 'power' that the spouses must continually draw from their sacramental 'consecration' — is *love*, this love, as the text of [*Humanae Vitae*] makes clear, is by its nature *linked with chastity, which, in turn, manifests itself as self-mastery or continence*."

One cannot simply claim that sex is holy because God made it, or that one becomes holy by engaging in it in the context of a sacramental marriage. Absurd as this sounds, this is the message that is being communicated by TOB enthusiasts. Here follows a passage from one of West's books that makes a mockery of the final stage in the spiritual life known as the "transforming union." Writes West: "Indeed, a holy fascination with the body is *precisely the key* that opens the holy door to the divine bridal chamber, allowing us to experience what the mystics call 'nuptial union' with God. This deep, intimate, transforming union with God imbues us with authentic holiness."

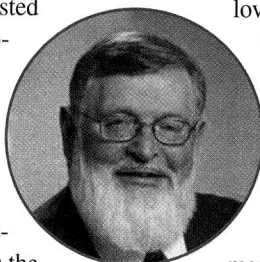
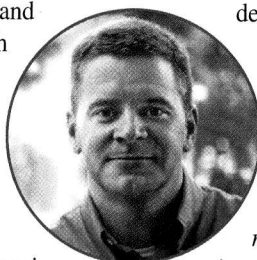
It is the presumption that mystical union is within the grasp of each person (as opposed to each person having a *remote* call to it) that leads West to think that concupiscence is a burden that can be readily removed.

In reality, holy men and women make progress towards freedom from concupiscence by years of self-denial and penance. Nor do they ever presume that the wound of concupiscence is fully healed in this life. Consequently, when the Christian tradition recommends "custody of the eyes," it is not being fearful or negative, but sober and honest.

In conclusion, John Paul II's insights into the mystery of human love and conjugal relationships is a great and lasting gift to the Church and to the world.

The late Pope shows us that we should "be not afraid" to engage this delicate theme. As in the tale of his university chaplain days, so also in real life as Pope, John Paul II leaped boldly into the complexities of the human condition for the spiritual good of young couples.

Just as he avoided any sort of misstep then, so we shall manage to do very well, if we refrain from all enthusiasm and remain firmly grounded in our Catholic tradition. ○





THE PAGAN TEMPTATION

■ BY ANGELO MARY GEIGER, F.I.

The *Theology of the Body*, Blessed John Paul II's monumental work written in defense of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, is a great gift to the modern world. The assault against the Church's teaching on marriage and sexuality has obscured from view the great beauty and goodness of the human body, of marriage and sexuality.

The foundation of this beauty is what John Paul II called the "spousal meaning of the body."

There is real analogy between the form and design of the human body, differentiated male and female, in its capacity for conjugal union, and the total and mutual gift of self that is experienced by man in his communion with God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. This analogy needs to be accurately and understandably expressed in order for people to benefit from the teaching of the late Holy Father.

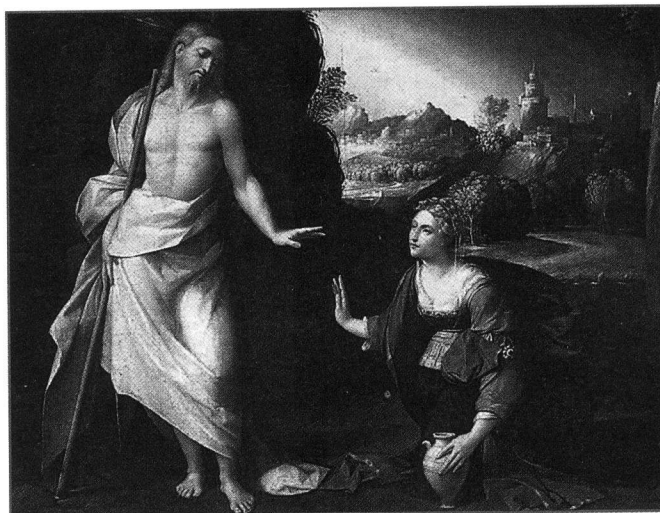
For this reason, the fundamental theological language of the body needs to be adapted to the spoken and written word, and conveyed through literary analogy, rhetoric and the whole range of illustrative imagery. In the communication of the *Theology of the Body*, we must consider that there are several levels of analogy: first, the theological analogy by which the body itself points to our union with God, and second, the illustrative analogies adopted to communicate this truth to the average person.

DIVINE AND HUMAN LOVE

The first level of analogy is the "spousal meaning of the body" itself, and operates in such a way as to be, according to Dr. Alice Von Hildebrand, a sign of the higher reality of God's love, which in turn is the "key" to understanding the sign.

The second level of analogy, namely, the kind that illustrates the first, should also function in the same way. The illustrative analogies that we use to communicate the spousal meaning of the body should also be signs of God's love, and not be proposed as the keys to understanding that love.

This immediately brings up the whole question of the use of erotic imagery in Catholic discourse. Of course, such imagery is used in sacred scripture and by its Catholic commentators, most notably, in the *Song of Songs*. The primary level of analogy, "the spousal meaning of the body," is expressed in the secondary analogies of poetic imagery. Such imagery has particular power to impress itself upon



Above, *Noli me tangere* (1524-1526) by Benvenuto Tisi, also known as Garofalo, oil on canvas, Galleria Borghese, Rome.
Below, Dr. Alice Von Hildebrand. Bottom, Gregory Popcak.
Opposite, top, Christopher West; bottom David Schindler

the mind, not only because of disordered concupiscence, but also because the sexual values of our bodies are so intimately related to the mystery of our person, as Dietrich von Hildebrand has noted, that the experience of sex is "essentially deep." "Every manifestation of sex produces an effect which transcends the physical sphere..." and "involves the soul deeply in its passion" (4).

The spousal meaning of the body is so fundamental to our experience that we grasp it intuitively. Blessed Karol Wojtyla and Dietrich Von Hildebrand have commented that the spontaneous reaction of shame at having one's sexual values exposed is both healthy and mature (175; 4-6).

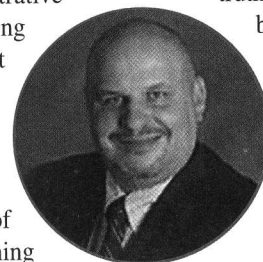
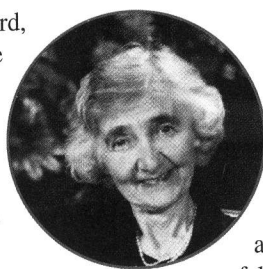
We know what the *Song of Songs* means without having to analyze its verses in terms of body parts and sex acts, though certainly the poem is both a sign of God's love and a real expression of human sexual love (TOB 108, note 97, undelivered).

If one reads John Paul II's commentary on the *Song of Songs* in his *Theology of the Body*, this becomes apparent, and his choice not to deliver six of his reflections on the *Song of Songs* and to truncate much more may reflect his awareness of the manner in which the iconography of spousal love can easily become a form of sacralized pornography. There is no plateau along the arc of shame versus shamelessness upon which we may safely rest.

TRANSLATING THE LANGUAGE OF THE BODY

The significant challenge for those whose task it is to distill the erudite language and dense texts of the Holy Father for the average person is to formulate and use illustrative analogies, allegories and parables, rhetoric and expressions that effectively communicate the truth of the *Theology of the Body*. This popularization has to be a dialogue with the existing culture, which has, at times, tended to the extremes of prudery or pornography. Clearly, however, the pendulum of the current age has swung to the side of wantonness and sensual luxury rather than hatred of the body and of sex, as Alice von Hildebrand pointed out in her critique of Christopher West.

Persuasion must generally proceed along the lines of what is more familiar to what is less familiar, of what is already accepted to that to which assent is difficult. In matters of sexuality,



indeed, the prude will cringe at even the most ordinary and innocent expressions sexuality because they assume that lust is behind every such feeling and expression (Wojtyla, 188). Any discussion at all of such matters will be a source of scandal and any attempt to dialogue with culture will be considered a compromise. But far more problematic will be the effort to convince the hyper-sexed followers of the zeitgeist that chastity and modesty are better and more beautiful than shamelessness. The necessity for cultural dialogue will bring the popularizer of TOB face to face with the long tradition of erotic paganism, and the temptation to use its imagery to convert our contemporaries will be great.

SACRED SEX

Relative to this, Gregory Popcak has asserted that "sacred sex" is something that "[t]he pagans stole...from us when we weren't looking" (28). But, in fact, the Church has never used the terminology associated with "sacred sex," because it was never actually stolen from the Church but predates it as far back as paganism predates Abraham's calling by God. If it appears as though "sacred sex" was stolen from Christianity and then lost to the Church, it is only because Gnosticism predates Christianity and introduced its errors into the early history of the Church in a "Christianized" form of occult philosophy. The Church immediately rejected the Gnostic heresy but "Christian" forms of Gnosticism have continued to exist.

As much as Gnosticism sets up a dichotomy between the body and the spirit, in Christian times it is more often the anti-Gnostic Catholic Church that is accused of setting up this dualism, and the gnostic/pagan tradition as having rescued eros and the sacred feminine from the hands of the celibate males of the Church hierarchy. For this reason alone, the adoption of the pagan ideas concerning "sacred sex" is a capitulation to revisionist history, which ignores the fact that eroticism was introduced into Christian history from the outside.

GNOSTIC MYTHOLOGY

Gnostics and other pagans have always been the masters of mythology. The non-dogmatic thinking of paganism proceeds by way of the reorganization of the imagination along the lines of allegorical interpretations of the cosmos and of history. Mythology, for better or worse, simplifies and idealizes good and evil in dualistic terms. We should be careful to guard against turning the mythology of the pagans into a revisionist history of the Church's effort to avoid the extremes of prudery and pornography.

Such mythological dualism promises a new age, based on an interior enlightenment and/or a charismatic leader, one in which the conflicts and obstacles of the old order will pass away. It is a very tempting promise and it is common to ancient Gnosticism, Renaissance occult philosophy, Freemasonry, the New Age and to Secular Humanism.

Without ever intending to, some Catholic apologists have mythologized Church history relative to chastity education by casting it



in terms of the ages of "before" TOB and "after" TOB. Blessed Pope John Paul II is truly a prophetic figure and his Theology of the Body a true and remarkable development of doctrine. However, in the context of the way in which the popularizers of the Theology of the Body have adopted the imagery of "sacred sex," the inference has been that the Pope

was advocating ideas common to paganism, which in truth are neither actually written in the text of TOB nor implied by it.

MYTHOLOGY OF THE BODY

Some examples of pagan ideas adopted by the TOB popularizers for the purpose of persuasion are the following: Along the lines what Father Hugo Rahner has called "the ancient mysteries" of paganism, Christopher West has taught that the Easter Candle represents a phallus and the baptismal font a womb, the ceremony for the blessing of baptismal water thus reflecting a kind of fertility rite (397; "Open Letter," 2; see also *Heaven's Song* 170-171). Father Thomas Loya has written that Holy Week is "mystical foreplay" in preparation for consummation of the "mystical marriage" on Good Friday and that

Jesus is naked on the Cross and addresses His Mother as "woman" because the nuptial symbolism of redemptive mystery is overtly erotic.

Father James Farfaglia has proposed that after the Resurrection Our Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene naked and has gone on to compare this nakedness to Our Lord's Eucharistic presence "exposed" in the monstrance. Gregory Popcak has claimed that in "sacred sex," when mutual climax occurs, "a husband, a wife and God climax together" (28). Popcak also writes: "To experience sacred sex is to experience the

cataclysmic eruption of love that was the cosmological orgasm we call the Big Bang" (368). These are just some of the many examples that can be marshaled to illustrate the use of pagan ideas in the popular distillation of the Theology of the Body. Needless to say, nowhere in Karol Wojtyla's/John Paul's writings or TOB talks does he ever engage in such offensive sexual imagery and/or pagan concepts.

"Sacred sex" is a form of mysticism and magic. The "world parent" cosmology in which creation is believed to take place by the individuation of male and female and sexual union is found in Gnostic-Hermetic mythology (Leeming, 61, 83, 103). On the basis of such mythology "sacred sex" is a ritual alignment of the psyche in the experience of ecstasy with the divine so that one experiences God or is able to accomplish some magical effect in the world or in the soul. In particular the "Great Work" of alchemy takes the form of a matrimonial *conjunctio*, and in Wicca, the "Great Rite" is the actual ritual performance of sex or its symbolic ceremonial representation. It is only in this context that the idea of "sacred sex" can be appropriated from the pagans.

Christian Gnosticism's paradigm for "sacred sex" has been the blasphemous, mythological, erotic relationship between Our Lord and St. Mary Magdalene. Goddess Christianity implies mystical eroticism as a means of worship and spirituality. The imagery of this pseudo-mysticism has long been with us. It is evident during



*The temptation of Saint Thomas Aquinas,
by Francesco Gessi (1588-1649)*

the Renaissance in the representations of Our Lord's appearance to St. Mary on Easter under the title *Noli me tangere* ("Do not touch me") by such painters as Correggio and Bronzino, and today in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*.

EROTIC MYSTICISM

In reference to the nuptial analogy of Ephesians 5, Blessed John Paul II tells us that there is "a dimension of the 'language of the body' that could be called 'mystical'" (TOB 117b.1). He also writes "[t]he body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible" (19.4), but one must remember that this mysticism operates on the level of the "spousal meaning of the body," and nowhere does the Holy Father suggest that secondary illustrative imagery should be adopted for the purpose of progress in mystical union. Instead, among the most popular TOB apologists in America there is a "holy fascination" with the erotic, in which "sexual love" is alleged to be the "mystical key... to open the holy door to union with God" (*Heaven's Song*, 2). Surely, the parallels with paganism and magic are unintended. However, the development of such parallels is precisely why the fathers, doctors and saints of the Church were right in discouraging a preoccupation with sex.

THE DEMONIC EROTIC

If the imagination is the place where illustrative analogies must be devised for the sake of apologetics and evangelization, and if it is also the place where the mythological and magical way of thinking reorganizes images for the purposes of mystical experience and psychic control over nature, then we should be careful not to confuse these two functions. Avoiding such confusion might prove to be particularly difficult if the matter at hand involves erotic images, because the imagination is also the place where we are particularly vulnerable to the demonic.

St. Thomas Aquinas indicates that the demon operates principally upon the imagination and the sensitive appetite or passions. Satan cannot force our intellect or will, but can move us through the images in our mind, the experiences we offer our senses and the passions that arise from them (I-II.80.2). One must remember that the

FR. ANGELO MARY GEIGER, F.I. (FRANCISCANS OF THE IMMACULATE) entered religious life in 1985 and was ordained to the priesthood in the Institute of the Franciscans of the Immaculate in 1991. He served as novice master for six years and has been General Delegate of the friars in the United States for the last nine years. He has published scholarly studies on Mariological themes and currently blogs on the theme of Marian chivalry at *Maryvictrix.com* and *Airmaria.com*.

sins of the mind proscribed by the Ninth and Tenth Commandments are the imaginings of objects of illicit desire and particularly sexual desire. Our Lord makes this clear when He warns us against "adultery of the heart." In this context chastity educators would act obediently and prudently by adhering to the directive of the Pontifical Council for the Family that the connection between "religion and morality" should not be "used as a pretext for introducing the biological and affective sexual information" into their talks to young people, since it is the right of parents to control

this formation and because the "principle of decency" demands that "[n]o material of an erotic nature should be presented to children or young people of any age, individually or in a group" (126, 141).

Any kind of evangelical persuasion directed at the men and women of our times will have to take into account the eminent danger of erotic images in the process of translating the Theology of the Body into popular terms. The first level of analogy, that is the "spousal meaning of the body," which is read intuitively by the simple fact that we experience each other as being male or female, needs to be translated into that second level of illustrative analogy in such a way as to aid and not hinder the practice of chastity.

The vulgarity of our times is something to which we simply cannot afford to capitulate, even in the interests of commanding the attention of those who are not inclined to listen, and certainly not under the pretext of promoting Christian mysticism.

As we consider the question of the "redemption of the body" from the "dominion of concupiscence," we should not underestimate the role the imagination in the development of analogies, the tradition of pagan eroticism that has wafted through the windows of the Church, and the influence of the demonic on the whole process and in the lives of individuals. As many devout souls can testify, especially men, sexual temptations are not always fully accounted for by reference to the flesh and the world.

Blessed Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body will certainly focus our attention in such a way so as not to become discouraged by concupiscence or preoccupied by fear of our enemy. Thankfully, with his beatification, we may now with even greater confidence invoke his protection in our effort to live chaste lives. ○

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POPE BENEDICT XVI's THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

■ BY DAWN EDEN



In an October 2009 op-ed essay constituting his official response to his critics ("The Theology of the Body Debate: The Pivotal Question"), Christopher West linked the dispute over the interpretation of John Paul II's theology of the body to "the tension of what theologians call the 'already—but not yet' of redemption."

While acknowledging that "we must be cognizant of the many distortions of our fallen nature and the ease with which we can be lured into temptations," West complained that, "when it comes to questions of sexuality, it seems that many teachers and spiritual advisors focus almost exclusively on the *not yet*. We can hear so much about the 'dangers' of sexuality that we conclude there is no escape from the ever present risk of sin." By contrast, West claimed, John Paul II's approach "entails 'the opposite tendency,' as he himself wrote."

What John Paul meant in advocating "the opposite tendency" is an interesting question that deserves to be addressed. For now, I would like to focus on the major premise: Christopher West believes that, in faithfulness to John Paul's intentions, catechesis in the theology of the body should emphasize the "already," or, shall we say, the "now" of redemption. Moreover, he believes that his critics are on the side of the "not yet."

Is this a fair assessment? Certainly the implication that West critics such as Alice von Hildebrand and David Schindler "focus almost exclusively" on "the 'dangers' of sexuality" is a bizarre

caricature. But I think West is right on when he admits he feels called to focus on the "now" of redemption, and likewise when he cites that focus as the flashpoint of disputes over his interpretation of the theology of the body. The real question is whether such a focus accurately conveys the meaning and substance of John Paul II's teachings, in continuity with what the Church has always taught — up to and including the papacy of Benedict XVI.

My 2010 master's thesis, "Towards a 'Climate of Chastity': Bringing Catechesis on the Theology of the Body Into the Hermeneutic of Continuity," noted several points on which West's approach brought him into collision with his purported sources. I would like here to highlight one such point in particular, because it represents a larger trend in "pop theology," countering not only John Paul II's teachings, but those of Benedict as well: West's omission of any serious discussion of the role of suffering in Christian life.

In one sense, West's avoidance could be seen as a too-literal attempt to duplicate John Paul, as there is no mention of suffering in the 129 Wednesday audiences that have come to be known as John Paul's "Theology of the Body" (TOB). John Paul II himself was acutely aware of this lacuna, observing in his final TOB audience, "These reflections do not include many problems belonging, with regard to their object, to the theology of the body (e.g., the problem of suffering and death, so impor-

tant to the biblical message)" (Nov. 29, 1984).

In the Westian TOB, the promise of the "now"—which is presented as an approximation of prelapsarian life—precludes any extended treatment of the fragility of human existence. The language West used in his first-ever magazine article, published in November 1998 in *Inside the Vatican*, is substantially the same as that which he uses today:

This is the good news of the Gospel. While we cannot return to the state of original innocence, we can, through the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23), live and love as God intended 'in the beginning.' Christ has definitively revealed, fulfilled, and restored the nuptial meaning of the body by making a gift of his body to his Bride on the cross. ... Our redemption is won! In Christ's own words, 'It is consummated' (Jn 19:30).

The problem is that Romans 8:23 does not actually speak of the redemption of the body in the *now*, but, rather, in the "not yet": "Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

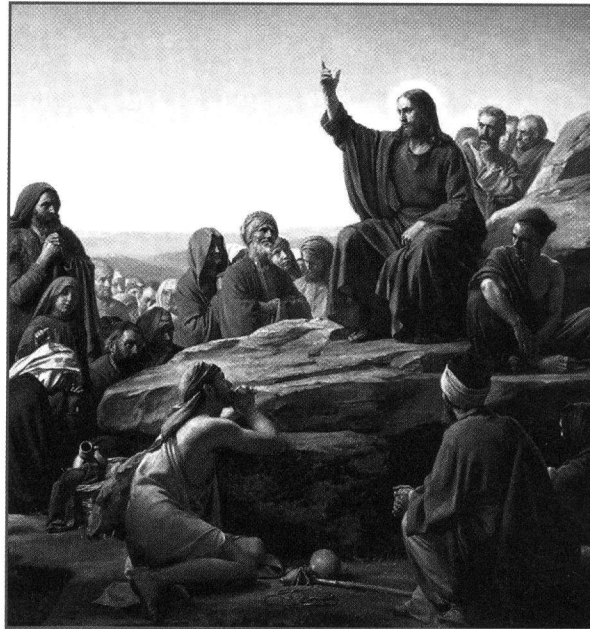
St. Paul is saying that we *cannot* "live and love as God intended 'in the beginning,'" because the "redemption of the body" is an object of *hope*; it will not be fully realized until the second coming of Christ. To put it bluntly, West is immanentizing the eschaton.

In his aforementioned October 2009 article, West set up a dichotomy between what he claimed was John Paul's authentic view and the view of "some people," e.g., his critics:

Some people say the redemption of the body is something reserved only for the resurrection at the end of time. While it is certainly true that the fullness of our redemption awaits us only in the final resurrection, John Paul II insists that the "redemption of the body" ... expresses itself not only in the resurrection as victory over death. It is present also in the words of Christ addressed to 'historical' man... [when] Christ invites us to overcome concupiscence, even in the exclusively inner movements of the human heart."

The ellipsis marks where West removed a key phrase while quoting from John Paul's July 21, 1982 catechesis. Here is the full quote, from Michael Waldstein's translation, with the part West omitted in bold:

However, "the redemption of the body" expresses itself not only in the resurrection as victory over death. It is present also in the words of Christ addressed to "historical" man, both when they confirm the principle of the indissolubility of marriage as a principle coming from the Creator himself, and when—in the Sermon on the Mount—Christ invites us to overcome concupiscence, even in the exclusively inner movements of the human heart.



Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Sermon on the Mount*.
"Christ invites us to overcome concupiscence, even in the exclusively inner movements of the human heart."

West's omission is significant because the words he omitted, referring to how the redemption of the body is expressed in the confirmation of the principle of the indissolubility of marriage, show that John Paul is speaking *teleologically*. The redemption of the body is not "now," but the *hope* of such redemption is what must direct our conduct in the present.

This is what the late Holy Father calls the "ethos" of the redemption of the body, based on St. Paul's theological anthropology (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:13-20). He outlines this ethos numerous times in his Wednesday catecheses, saying in effect the very *opposite* of West: marriage "does not pertain to the redemption of the body in the dimension of the eschatological hope (cf. Rom 8:23)" (Dec. 1, 1982).

Rather, John Paul explains, marriage *points* spouses to the hope that is realized in the general resurrection:

In this sense marriage as a sacrament also bears within itself the germ of man's eschatological future, that is, the perspective of the "redemption of the body" in the dimension of the eschatological hope which corresponds to Christ's words about the resurrection: "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (Mt 22:30). ... As the sacrament of the human beginning, as the sacrament of the temporality of the historical man, marriage fulfills in this way an irreplaceable service in regard to

his extra-temporal future, in regard to the mystery of the redemption of the body in the dimension of the eschatological hope.

Peel back John Paul's highly philosophical language, and the point is clear enough: Grace is real, and it does change us spiritually, but it does not change our *physical substance*. The sacrament of marriage gives spouses real spiritual strength to resist temptation and grow in holiness—but the spouses' bodies remains the same bodies, always enduring, in the words of the *Catechism*, "the daily experience of the spiritual battle" (CCC 2516). No amount of holy thoughts on their part can bring their resurrected bodies from the "not yet" into the "now."

In this light, one can understand the frustration of West's onetime mentor David Schindler, who wrote in May 2009 of his failed attempt to correct West's Socratic error (the belief that intellectual knowledge is sufficient for virtue):

West misconstrues the meaning of concupiscence, stressing purity of intention one-sidedly when talking about problems of lust. When I first pointed this problem out to him several years ago, his response was that he refused to limit the power of Christ to transform us. My response is that concupiscence dwells "objectively" in the body, and continues its "objective" presence in the body throughout the course of our infralapsarian existence; and that we should expect holiness to "trump"

temptations or disordered tendencies in the area of sexuality exactly as often as we should expect holiness to "trump" the reality of having to undergo death.

How, then, might a catechist such as West accurately convey the "not yet" of the redemption of the body while also emphasizing the opportunity to receive, here and now, the grace that "set[s] our freedom free from the domination of concupiscence" (*Veritatis Splendor* 103)?

One answer may be found in the Karol Wojtyla essay West mentions when he claims John Paul advocated the "opposite tendency" of those who emphasize the dangers of sexual sin.

In that work, a 1965 essay titled "The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics," Wojtyla recommended that education in sexuality focus on "sublimation," which "refers to the particular effort involved in discovering a higher value where an average—or rather 'degraded'—way of thinking, judging, and acting manages to find only the value of sex and the possibility of enjoyment."

There is nothing here to which proponents of the Westian TOB would object. But Wojtyla immediately adds, "So as not to fall into an idealistic fiction or some sort of angelism, it should be added that sublimation presupposes self-control."

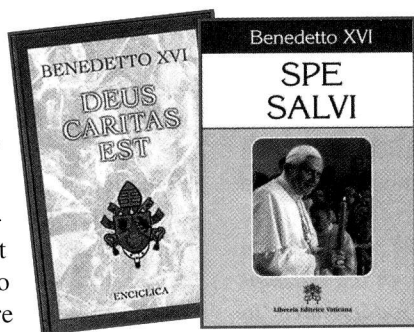
The issue of self-control, however, takes one immediately back to what West might call a negative emphasis, as it revives the spectre of dangers. How can self-control, which requires the willingness to suffer, be lived in light of the hope of the redemption of the body?

On this question, a powerful answer emerges in John Paul's papal writings—but not in his TOB catecheses. It is in the apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*, "On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering." There, John Paul writes that the redemption of the body "is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished" when human beings unite their own sufferings to the suffering of Christ. From *Salvifici Doloris* 24 (bold type and emphasis in original):

[In] the mystery of the Church as his Body, Christ has in a sense opened his own redemptive suffering to all human suffering. In so far as man becomes a sharer in Christ's sufferings—in any part of the world and at any time in history—to that extent he in his own way completes the suffering through which Christ accomplished the Redemption of the world.

Does this mean that the Redemption achieved by Christ is not complete? No. It only means that the Redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, remains always open to all love expressed in human suffering. In this dimension—the dimension of love—the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished.

How, then, to connect this profound teaching with catechesis on marriage? Here, it is Benedict XVI who shows us the



Encyclicals *Deus Caritas Est* ("God Is Love"), and *Spe Salvi* ("Saved by Hope") by Benedict XVI
Below, Father James Schall, S.J.

way.

In his 1964 essay "Christocentric Preaching" (published in *The Word: Readings in Theology*), Joseph Ratzinger writes of an encounter with a preacher who was overly focused on the "now" (emphasis in original):

I remember another sermon, in which the preacher, well versed in dogma, proclaimed to his audience that the redemption had triumphed over sin, death and the devil. He praised the victory in deeply stirring terms; but did he convince even one of his listeners that sin, death and the devil are finished in this world? Hardly.

His hymn to the Lord's victory remained purely platonic, for the present power of those evil forces is only too obvious. Of course, the victory of Christ does actually exist; it is the very hope of Christian mankind. However, one should never preach this victory without referring to its incompleteness, the shadow of which is the cross of Christian existence.

As Cardinal Ratzinger, the future Holy Father expressed similar concerns in an address to catechists and religion teachers (December 12, 2000), warning of "the temptation of impatience, the temptation of immediately finding the great success, in finding large numbers." This, he said, "is not God's way. For the Kingdom of God as well as for evangelization, the instrument and vehicle of the Kingdom of God, the parable of the grain of mustard seed is always valid (see Mark 4:31-32). New evangelization cannot mean: immediately attracting the large masses that have distanced themselves from the Church by using new and more refined methods. No—this is not what new evangelization promises. ..."

The method West employs of emphasizing the "now" of redemption is most dramatic, as well as controversial, in his discussion of the "one flesh" union of Ephesians 5:21-32 (the verses in which Paul frames Christian marriage in light of Genesis 2:24: "and the two shall become one flesh"). In his writings and particularly his talks, he emphasizes the words "one-flesh union" in such a way as to imply that they refer primarily to the act of intercourse. This meaning is reinforced by his use of the phrase "become one flesh" to describe the marital act, as when he speaks of sex as a renewal of wedding vows: "[Spouses] are meant to express this same 'yes' with their bodies whenever they become one flesh" ("What Is the Theology of the Body and Why Is It Changing So Many Lives?", *christopherwest.com*).

Although his goal is admirable—he seeks to show that contraception impedes the self-gift at the heart of marriage—his focus effectively serves to define marriage as the "now" of the marital act, rather than as the lifelong "not yet" entailed by the traditional goods of marriage: the bearing and education of children, faithfulness and the sacrament.

In his first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* ("God Is Love"), Pope Benedict, using language reminiscent of *Salvifici Doloris*, takes care to emphasize that love finds its meaning not in affective delight, but in the willingness to suffer for the other:

Love is indeed "ecstasy," not in the sense of a moment of in-



toxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Lk 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. Mt 10:39; 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; Jn 12:25). In these words, Jesus portrays his own path, which leads through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfilment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself.

One would be hard pressed to find any teaching more emphasized in Benedict's papacy than this understanding of Christian love as predicated upon the readiness for martyrdom—whether it be the physical martyrdom of those who "have given themselves totally" (*Spe Salvi* 39)—or the spiritual martyrdom of the "many Christians who are living witnesses of the power of faith that is expressed in charity" ("Message for World Youth Day 2011"). The Holy Father wrote in *Spe Salvi*:

In the end, even the "yes" to love is a source of suffering, because love always requires expropriations of my "I", in which I allow myself to be pruned and wounded. Love simply cannot exist without this painful renunciation of myself, for otherwise it becomes pure selfishness and thereby ceases to be love.

Father James Schall S.J. has observed that what Benedict does in *Spe Salvi* "is, to coin a phrase, 'de-immanentize' the eschaton. That is, he restores the four last things and the three theological virtues to their original understanding as precisely what we most need to understand ourselves."

In his address May 13 to mark the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family, Benedict brought this message to bear for the first time with regard to interpretation of the theology of the body. His message emphasized that the union of two in one flesh is defined by the horizon it opens to the "not yet" of a shared life:

[We] understand that in love man is "re-created." "Incipit vita nova," Dante said (Vita Nuova, I, 1) — "the new life begins"—the life of the new union of the two in one flesh. The true appeal of sexuality is born from the greatness of this horizon that discloses integral beauty, the universe of the other person and the "we" that is born in the union, the promise of the communion that is hidden there, the new fruitfulness, the path that

DAWN EDEN is an STL student at the Pontifical Institute of the Immaculate Conception at Dominican House of Studies and author of *The Thrill of the Chaste*. Her second book, *My Peace I Give You: Healing Sexual Wounds with the Help of the Saints*, is due next spring from Ave Maria Press. Visit her online at dawneden.com. To receive a free electronic copy of her master's thesis, "Towards a 'Climate of Chastity': Bringing Catechesis on the Theology of the Body into the Hermeneutic of Continuity," write dawneden@gmail.com.

love opens to God, font of love. The union of one flesh is thus made a union for life so that man and woman also become one spirit. In this way a path is opened in which the body teaches us the value of time, of the slow maturation in love.

Benedict prefaced these words to the John Paul II Institute with a mandate: "Conjugating the theology of the body with the theology of love to find the unity of man's journey: this is the theme that I would like to indicate as the horizon of your work." This delineation of a "horizon" means that those who teach the theology of

the body are now called by the present Holy Father to do precisely what John Paul desired they accomplish: incorporate "the problem of suffering and death" into the theology of the body, in light of the love Christ revealed by suffering for us on the Cross.

For John Paul in *Salvifici Doloris*, "in this dimension—the dimension of love—the Redemption which has already been completely accomplished is, in a certain sense, constantly being accomplished."

For Pope Benedict likewise, as he told the John Paul II Institute, the "now" and "not yet" find their meeting place in the "slow maturation in love." Such maturation can take place only in this life, where "a path is opened in which the body teaches us the value of time."

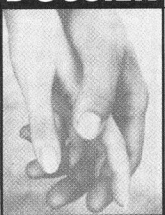
This insight of the Holy Father is a true and faithful development of John Paul II's teaching, so beloved by Christopher West, that "[the] body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine." Only Jesus, as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God is present fully and simultaneously in the "now and not yet." We, the members of Christ's Mystical Body, in this life, are always limning two worlds—as we do most graphically when we kneel for Holy Communion, our knees touching marble and our tongue touching heaven.

In January 1981, Ratzinger, then Archbishop of Munich, wrote to Eric Voegelin—the philosopher who coined the expression "immanentizing the eschaton"—thanking him for the gift of a book with a personal dedication. The archbishop praised Voegelin for his intention to "awaken such a necessary and such a very fragile consciousness of the imperfect in opposition to the magic of the Utopian."

Throughout his ministry, Pope Benedict has himself sought to effect such an awakening. If the Church is to receive the fullness of John Paul II's teachings on theology of the body, and not the reductionist account offered by Christopher West and those who follow his model, it is precisely this necessary and very fragile consciousness that must prevail. ○



The Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family



AN INTERPRETIVE KEY FOR THE THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

■ BY FATHER THOMAS PETRI, O.P.

The recent beatification of Pope John Paul II affords us an opportunity to reflect not only on the importance of one his great contributions to the Church, *The Theology of the Body*, but also on the proper interpretation of these remarkable catecheses.

Having thoroughly studied Blessed John Paul's pre-pontifical writings on marriage and sexual ethics, I want to suggest that *The Theology of the Body* must be interpreted in light of those earlier writings. Moreover, it is clear that Karol Wojtyla was and remained throughout his life indebted to St. Thomas Aquinas, and this has to be considered when reading *The Theology of the Body*.

It must be noted from the start that like every other priest of his generation, Karol Wojtyla's priestly formation, even in the underground seminary of Krakow, was imbued with variants of Thomism—those philosophical and theological schools tracing their roots to St. Thomas Aquinas. A common narrative of this period is that Catholic theological thought, dominated as it was by Thomism, was dry and stale. The subtle distinctions that characterize scholasticism had led theology to be increasingly out of touch with the daily struggles of the lay faithful.

The young Father Wojtyla, while fully appreciative of St. Thomas, acknowledged these concerns, and looked to incorporate the experience of the everyman into his thinking. He initially turned to the work of Max Scheler, a proponent of "phenomenology," which emphasized the access of the mind and human experience to reality itself. Scheler's system made him a natural candidate for Catholic thinkers who wanted to take human experience seriously for theological reflection, but Wojtyla ultimately concluded that this system was fundamentally inadequate for the formulation of a Christian ethic.[1] Scheler was unable to explain the objective quality of human action apart from human experience.

Nonetheless, Scheler's phenomenology could be helpful in analyzing ethical matters from an experiential perspective. Phenomenology, Wojtyla suggested, could allow us to explore the



Above, Karol Wojtyla as a bishop.
Below, the German moral philosopher Max Scheler (1874-1928)



dynamism of experiencing ethical values, and how these values mold the human person. The whole of John Paul's published corpus can be seen as a delicate balance of these two goods: objective morality and human experience.

From his first years teaching at the Catholic University of Lublin in the early 1950s, to his last published work, this was John Paul's goal. And to do so, he consistently relied on Aquinas's understanding of morality: his metaphysics, his anthropology, and his understanding of human action.

This tension in the early twentieth century between theology and the "lived experience" of the faithful was especially pronounced in the area of marriage and sexual ethics. In the early twentieth century, Catholics were rediscovering the notion that marriage is a vocation and that spousal love expressed through conjugal intercourse could be a means to sanctity precisely because marriage is better understood as a gift of self rather than a juridical contract.

The debate on birth control was ongoing throughout this period, and, in some ways, it was catalyzed by the trends in the theology of marriage. To say that Karol Wojtyla was interested in the issue of birth control and the theology of marriage would be an understatement. As far as he was concerned, it was precisely in the realm of sexual ethics that there was a disconnect between theological language and the subjective experience of the lay faithful.

In *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyla brought his Thomistic training with its emphasis on metaphysics and ontology to bear on the subjective experience of the human person. This book marks Wojtyla's first positive attempt to synthesize ontology with an experience-based methodology (i.e., phenomenology). In this book, he does not abandon Thomism but chooses rather to bring Aquinas's concern with objective reality into contact with the interior life of the human person—a move Wojtyla thought critically lacking in the variants of Thomism that were then popular.

Wojtyla never abandoned teleology and ontology in favor of an experiential approach to ethics. Rather, he simply suggested that they must be supplemented by an experiential approach.[2] Wojtyla's second book, *The Acting Person*, which was published in 1969, attempted to do just this: to combine Thomistic ontology with a phenomenological method emphasizing subjectivity and experience. The work was not well received by scholars at the Catholic University of Lublin, who criticized it for being neither Thomistic nor phenomenological.[3]

As he continued to write on morality, he repeated his earlier insistence that moral norms cannot be derived from human experience; they must be derived from objective teleology, which is to say, the objective goal or purpose of created beings. Yet, Wojtyla continued to argue that a teleology or ontology that does not consider the experience of the human person necessarily becomes too objectivist.[4] Finally, in a 1974 article, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," Wojtyla, recalling the criticisms he received in Lublin, asserts his indebtedness to Aquinas, and that his own phenomenology must be understood in light of St. Thomas.[5]

In *The Theology of the Body*, Blessed John Paul admits he is not concerned with explaining metaphysical and ontological realities, preferring to focus rather on human experience as interpreted through Sacred Scripture.[6] Nevertheless, his basic ontological premise, borrowed from *Gaudium et Spes*, is "the mystery of creation [is]... the beginning of the world by the will of God, who is omnipotence and love. Consequently, every creature bears within itself the sign of the original and fundamental gift.... Creation is a gift, because man appears in it, who as an 'image of God,' is able to understand the very meaning of the gift in the call from nothing to existence." [7]

Man's uniqueness in the world rests with the fact that he is not only called into existence (for every creature is), but that he can *understand* the gift. As John Paul saw it, we can understand that directionality and purpose is inherent in the gift of existence. We are called out of nothing to existence toward communion with other persons and ultimately toward communion with the Persons of God.[8]

The body participates in this directionality. The sexual urge is satisfied rightly only within the marital union precisely because it is no mere biological instinct but the drive of man and woman to each other: "This communion [of man and woman] had been intended to make man and woman mutually happy through the... simple and pure union... [of] a reciprocal offering of themselves, that is, through the experience of the gift of the person expressed with soul *and* body... through the subordination of such a union to the blessing of fruitfulness with 'procreation.'" [9]

This bears a striking resemblance to Aquinas's notion that the good is diffusive and human love is always a drive out of oneself to the good and, ultimately, to the Supreme Good who is God. Throughout the catecheses, John Paul reveals a debt to Aquinas. Here, as elsewhere in the work, we see that he is indeed a fan of Aquinas's hylomorphic theory—the idea that the human person is neither body nor soul but a composite of both.[10] Nevertheless, even here, he argues that what is subjective and psychological are dependent on the ontological. For example, married couples are not free simply to attribute any meaning to their sexual actions as they please.[11]

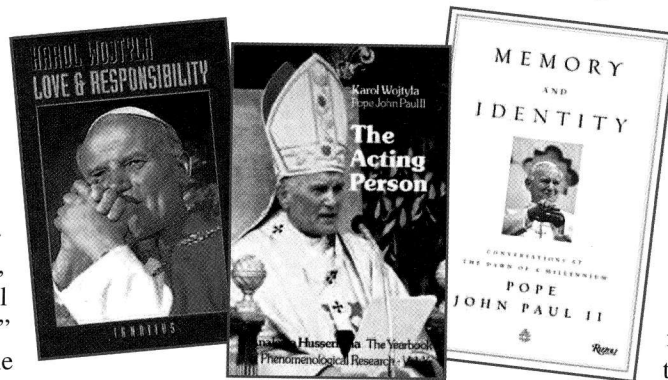
This insistence that ontology (and, specifically, the metaphysics of Aquinas) precedes subjectivity and human experience was always at the forefront of Blessed John Paul's mind. In his last published work, a memoir entitled *Memory and Identity*, he wrote, "If we wish to speak rationally about good and evil, we have to return to Saint Thomas Aquinas, that is, to the philosophy of being." [12] In that same place he goes on to say that the study of human experience is vacuous without considering the nature of being itself. This is why in *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul

emphasizes that men and women must be obedient to the nature of their being, as it comes from the Absolute Being God himself.

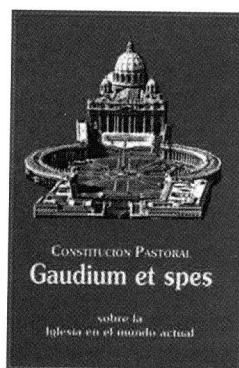
The difficulty men and women face in this life, however, is that the impulses of the body are difficult to master and to direct toward the true good of the person in obedience to nature. A prevailing theme throughout *The Theology of the Body*, as well as John Paul's earlier work, is the need for continence, purity, and chastity. He calls such discipline self-mastery. If they do not have the interior freedom of self-mastery, then a man and a woman cannot, in fact, make a gift of themselves to the other.[13] In *The Acting Person*, he spoke of this self-mastery in terms of integration, self-possession, and self-governance.[14] Integration and self-mastery are necessary for self-gift. We cannot give what we do not possess. St. Thomas would call a person who has self-mastery and integration a virtuous person.

This is why chastity and continence play such a large role in the catecheses. Temperance is necessary to master the urges of the body. Popular catechists such as Christopher West have focused on what they see as positive elements in temperance and chastity in *The Theology of the Body*—namely, that the virtuous person keeps "his own body with holiness and reverence" (1 Thess. 4:3-5); and certainly Blessed John Paul was concerned to provide a positive view of the body and virtue.

But it would be a mistake to reduce John Paul's Theology of the Body to just that—what Cardinal Newman called "the brighter side of the Gospel"—as if danger and temptation did



Above, *Love and Responsibility*, published in Polish in 1960 and in English in 1981 and *The Acting Person* (1969) — both written by Karol Wojtyla before he became Pope — and *Memory and Identity* (2005) by John Paul II. Below, the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* ("The Joy and the Hope"), 1965.



not challenge us at every stage of our life (particularly in the sexual sphere).

An even greater mistake would be to view John Paul's teaching as a sharp break with the past.

His *Theology of the Body* must be read in continuity with *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person*. Both emphasize the need for self-mastery, shame and discipline; and the emphasis on the positive aspect of temperance is balanced with the "negative" aspect, namely, that bodily passions must be restrained, lest they fall into sin.

Even in *The Theology of the Body*, borrowing again from St. Thomas Aquinas, John Paul wrote that abstinence and mastery of the passions are necessary to revere the body: "Since it is in fact impossible to 'keep the body with holiness and reverence' without this abstinence 'from unchastity' and what it leads to, one can assume as a consequence that keeping the body (one's own and that of the other) 'with holiness and reverence' gives an appropriate meaning and value to this abstinence." [15] Like Aquinas, abstinence is not discipline for discipline's sake in John Paul's thought. It is a necessary component of a virtuous and flourishing human person.

West has popularized Blessed John Paul's catecheses in the United States, but his approach to presenting the Theology of the Body—which includes calling it a "revolution," and employing controversial language, concepts and sexual imagery—has received considerable criticism.

Prominent Catholic scholars such as David Schindler (West's former teacher) and Alice von Hildebrand have strongly challenged it: They believe certain of West's statements and methods are imprudent and, even, at times, scandalous.

His academic defenders, including Michael Waldstein and Janet Smith, counter that, whatever West's excesses or failures, he has done a great deal to convince the lay faithful of the beauty of the magisterial teaching on sex and marriage.

His critics respond that magisterial teaching needs to be presented in a proper (traditionally Catholic) and *reverent* way, and that a defective approach can distort and undermine that very teaching.

FR. THOMAS PETRI, O.P., S.T.D. is a Dominican Friar of the St. Joseph Province. He earned a Doctorate in Sacred Theology from The Catholic University of America after successfully defending his dissertation on the relationship between the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas and The Theology of the Body. He is currently an assistant professor of theology at Providence College in Rhode Island.

I would only add to that discussion this point: John Paul's *Theology of the Body* is, just as Aquinas's work was, deeply rooted in the Catholic theological tradition. It is less a "revolution" than a *recovery of the basic Christian understanding of the human person, sexuality, and marriage*—themes that were already present in the tradition. St. Thomas embraced many of these themes, long before

the *Theology of the Body* emerged in the twentieth century. It is true that the Angelic Doctor's theology is not always explicit in John Paul's writings, but it is, as the pope himself said, the implicit foundations from which he sets out.

It is a great injustice to the Pope's work to isolate *The Theology of the Body* from either his pre-pontifical writings or tradition. These were foundational to the catecheses. Commentators on *The Theology of the Body* who insist that it is wholly new and radical run the risk of separating it from its foundations and reducing the richness of John Paul's thought to modern, subjective romanticism. I suspect that the concern some scholars have not only with elements of West's presentation, but also with various other popular commentators on *The Theology of the Body*, is that they evince an understanding of neither Wojtyla's thought prior to giving these catecheses, nor of the larger tradition in which he stands.

The Theology of the Body did not come from nowhere and it does not stand alone. It was the result of years of work and reflection within the framework of the Catholic teaching. And the role of St. Thomas's work in the thought of Blessed John Paul is not insignificant.

Youthful zeal for the *The Theology of the Body* is helpful—but only if it remains faithful to Blessed John Paul's genuine intent. Hence, it is vital to remain attuned to misrepresentations of *The Theology of the Body*—and, when they occur, correct them.

As theologians continue to explore the writings of Blessed John Paul, we can look forward to future generations of catechists and readers of *The Theology of the Body* receiving an even richer analysis of this great work. That, I think everyone will agree, will be a very welcome development. ○

NOTES

[1] Wojtyla's habilitation thesis has not been translated into English. See Karol Wojtyla, *Max Scheler y la etica cristiana* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Christianos, 1982), 206. Spanish translation of *idem*, *Ocena mozliwosci zbudowania eytki chrzescijanskiej przy zalozeniach system Maksa Schlera* (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1959).

[2] See *ibid.*, 280.

[3] For a summary of a 1970 conference on the subject at the Catholic University of Lublin, see George Hunston Williams, *The Mind of John Paul II: Origins of His Thought and Action* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 196ff.

[4] See Karol Wojtyla, "The Problem of the Theory of Morality," in Karol Wojtyla, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, Ed. and Trans. Teresa

Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 129-161. This is an English translation of Karol Wojtyla, "Problem teorii moralnosci," *W nurcie zagadnien posoborowych* (Warszawa: 1969): 3:217-249.

[5] See Karol Wojtyla, "The Personal Structure of Self-Determination," in *Person and Community*, 187f. This is an English translation of Karol Wojtyla, "Osobowa struktura samostanowienia," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 29.2 (1981): 5-12. This is the published version of a paper Wojtyla delivered in April 1974 in Rome for the International Conference on St. Thomas Aquinas.

[6] See John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2006), 2 and 18. Future references to *The Theology of the Body* will be noted as "TOB" and will use numbering found in Waldstein's translation.

[7] TOB 13:4

[8] TOB 9:2-9:3

[9] TOB 30:3 (my emphasis).

[10] See TOB 51, 66, 93, 98.

[11] See TOB 118-119.

[12] John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 12.

[13] See TOB 15:2.

[14] See Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person*, trans. Anrzej Potocki (Boston: D. Reidel Publishing, 1999), 106ff., 189-190, 220. Originally published as *Osoba i Czynn* (Cracow, 1969).

[15] TOB 54:3



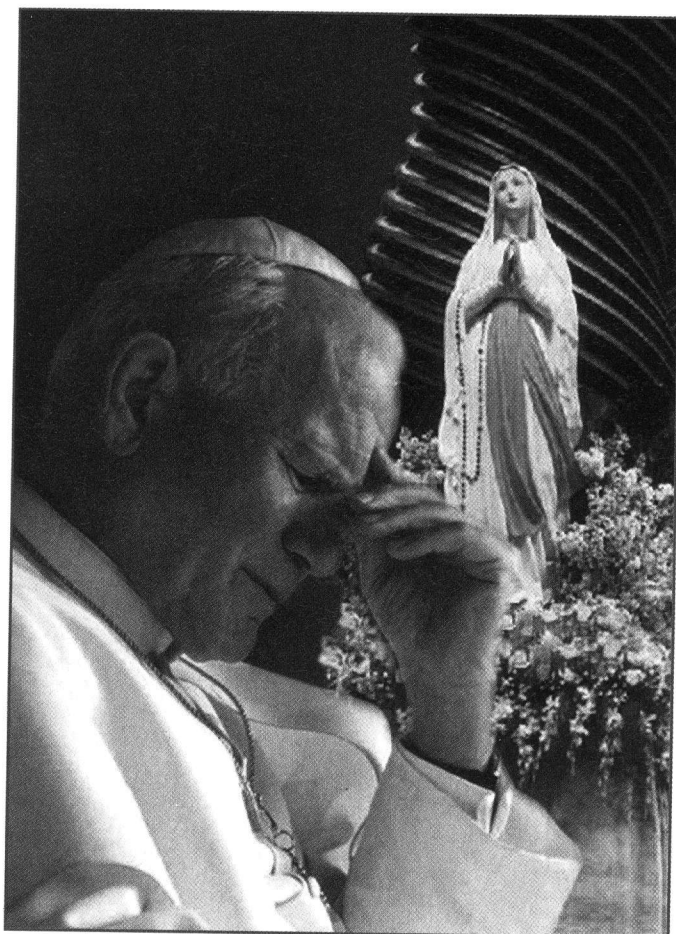
THE CALL TO MATURE LOVE

■ BY FATHER GREGORY GRESKO, O.S.B.

The spiritual thrust underlying the greatest work of beloved Blessed John Paul II may be discovered in his profound prayer, echoing Saint Louis de Montfort and cited insightfully recently by our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI at the late Pontiff's beatification: *Totus tuus ego sum et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in mea omnia. Praebe mihi cor tuum, Maria* ("I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart"). This simple petition provides a rich tapestry upon which to examine two of Pope Wojtyla's most significant works on the human person: *Man and*

Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body (subsequently abbreviated here as *Theology of the Body*, or *TOB*), and *Love and Responsibility* (*LR*), his primarily philosophical work precedent to *Theology of the Body*, published prior to becoming pope. While *Theology of the Body* certainly merits its reputation as one of Blessed John Paul II's most significant contributions to the Church's writings on human love, both volumes indeed are veritable masterpieces and – if considered synthetically – shed light one on the other's deeper meaning and core contribution to Catholic thought. *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*, when considered in tandem, brilliantly radiate the light of Christ upon man's search for his authentic meaning and purpose.

The prayer *Totus Tuus* signifies the loving responsibility that Karol Cardinal Wojtyla espoused throughout his earthly life toward our Blessed Mother, who in her own person serves God as the foremost *imago Ecclesiae* or "image of the Church" through a perfect giving of herself over to God's plan. The Church, that Bride espoused to Christ the Bridegroom in the book of *Revelation* as well as elaborated upon by

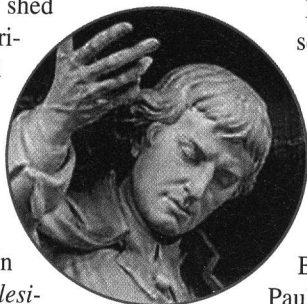


Left, John Paul II prays before a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Vatican.

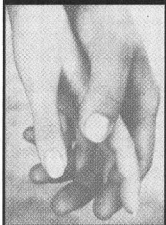
Below, Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716), whose writings deeply influenced Pope John Paul's Marian spirituality and devotion

Saint Paul in his *Letter to the Ephesians* (5:21-33), certainly has been enriched by years of loving self-sacrifice donated to Her by the newly Beatified. From his earliest years, the theologian-philosopher who later would become known as John Paul II gave himself over — everything he had, including his heart and even his own sense of belonging in this world — to Mary the Mother of God. In this *total act of self gift*, which reflects the core truth of both works' understanding of genuine love, Wojtyla paradoxically discovered his own fullest meaning in life, highlighting what Blessed John Paul II considered to be the central

truth of the Second Vatican Council: *Man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself* [*Gaudium et Spes* 24:3]. Blessed John Paul II indeed considered this "hermeneutic of the gift" to be the great interpretive key for unlocking the treasures of the entire Council and of uncovering the full meaning of love in the language that the human body speaks (*TOB* 13:2, 16:1).



In his *Totus Tuus* prayer, the Blessed Pontiff gave himself over to the Blessed Mother of God in a spousal love that reflects in its virginal, celibate quality the kind of love that human beings hope to discover in heavenly glory: a perfect *communion of persons* between each one of us as a member of the Body of Christ, that is the Church in the Communion of Saints, united personally and in community with Christ Jesus the Bridegroom (cf. *TOB* 68:3-4, 71:5). As Blessed John Paul II elaborates, "The eschatological reality will become the source of the perfect realization of the 'Trinitarian order' in the created world of persons" (*TOB* 69:4). In other words, when we ultimately appear before God in heavenly glory, we will



experience the fulfillment of the spousal meaning of the body as we are welcomed and incorporated into God's perfect Triune Communion of Persons.

The example that Blessed John Paul II has given the world in his love of the Blessed Virgin Mary demonstrates the overarching theme of both *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*: In order to be fully mature, and thus genuinely pure, love requires a total gift of self by the one who loves toward the beloved. In addition, in order to be authentic, such human love must be *personal*, involving man's entire body and **soul**. After all, human beings are not angels, who are pure spirits; rather, we are incarnated souls, enfleshed in this world, and everything we experience spiritually in this life is mediated by our bodies. Christians who seek to put their faith into authentically loving action must guard always against the temptations our flesh will undergo due to concupiscence, that tendency of our fallen human nature to sin, to act selfishly and thus irresponsibly toward our beloved. Concupiscence is a point of reality in this life, and no person is immune to its temptations; "It is part of the daily experience of the spiritual battle" (CCC 2516).

A love that is responsible, by definition, is accountable or answerable to another and will refuse to give into the temptation to sin against the other. On the other hand, concupiscence wounds the desire that the one who loves maintains for full communion of persons with the beloved. Authentic love always is responsible to another, and in laying down everything in love for the Mother of God, the Blessed Pontiff expressed a love that was personally accountable to Mary, Icon and Mother of the Church. *Love and Responsibility* sheds light upon this dynamic in another crucial aspect, that true love always respects the *personalistic norm*: that is, "the person is a good towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love. This positive content of the personalistic norm is precisely what the commandment to love teaches" (LR 41) Wojtyla emphasizes that for love to be mature in authenticity, the one who loves always must love chastely, or with pure transparency (LR 139-140). True chastity raises sexuality and bodily regard to the level of the personalistic norm containing a two-fold command, one being positive, "Thou shalt love," and the other being negative, "Thou shalt not use" (LR 170-171).

Blessed John Paul II's goal in presenting the *Theology of the Body* Wednesday catecheses ultimately was to defend the truths of Pope Paul VI's landmark encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. *Theology of the Body* is Pope Wojtyla's explanation that the ordinary experience

of love — reflected in the spousal meaning of the body and expressed in the total gift of self between man and woman in a conjugal love open to the generation of new life — demonstrates the truth of *Humanae Vitae*. By way of his catechesis on *Genesis*, Pope Wojtyla demonstrates that the language of the body in truth expresses spousal love, which finds its source in the Holy Trinity, in the Love of God who is revealed by the Father in the person of His Only Begotten Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. The love shared between the Father and the Son — being filial and neither spousal nor sexual in scope — is generative most powerfully as the Holy Spirit proceeds as a Divine Person from the mutually perfect self-giving of the Father and the Son. It is in such ways that we come to notice that *Theology of the Body* bears great import theologically beyond addressing questions of human sexuality, in helping the Church understand more clearly the Holy Trinity as Being-in-Relation and man's fundamental relationship with God.

Theology of the Body helps us to understand that the human being — sexual different in being either male or female — realizes himself fully in a spousal relationship that is oriented toward a communion of persons and not towards the self (TOB 130:5; 132:2). This communion of persons, when expressed in the marital or conjugal act of physical self-gift between spouses, brings forth its procreative meaning and leads spouses to the opportunity to participate in the Creator's generating new life in the world. It is clear that the final goal of Blessed John Paul II, in writing *Theology of the Body* in light of *Love and Responsibility*, intended in support of *Humanae Vitae* that the "language of the body [be] reread in the truth" always to include adequately its spousal and procreative meanings, which are inseparable (118:4, 6; 119:1).

Reinforcing Paul VI's assertions in *Humanae Vitae*, John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* teaches that spousal love within the conjugal act leads each human being to become a gift for the other, such that through this gift man comes to realize the fullest meaning of his being (TOB 15:1, 3-4). The human body, however, "reveals not only its masculinity or femininity on the physical level, but reveals also such a *value* and such a *beauty* that it goes beyond the simply physical level of 'sexuality'" (TOB 15:4). John Paul II continues that the body has a deep power through its expression of self-gift to affirm the person, "literally, the power to live the fact that the other — the woman for the man and the man for the woman — is through the body someone willed by the Creator 'for his own sake,' that is, someone unique and unrepeatable, someone chosen by eternal Love" (TOB 15:4).



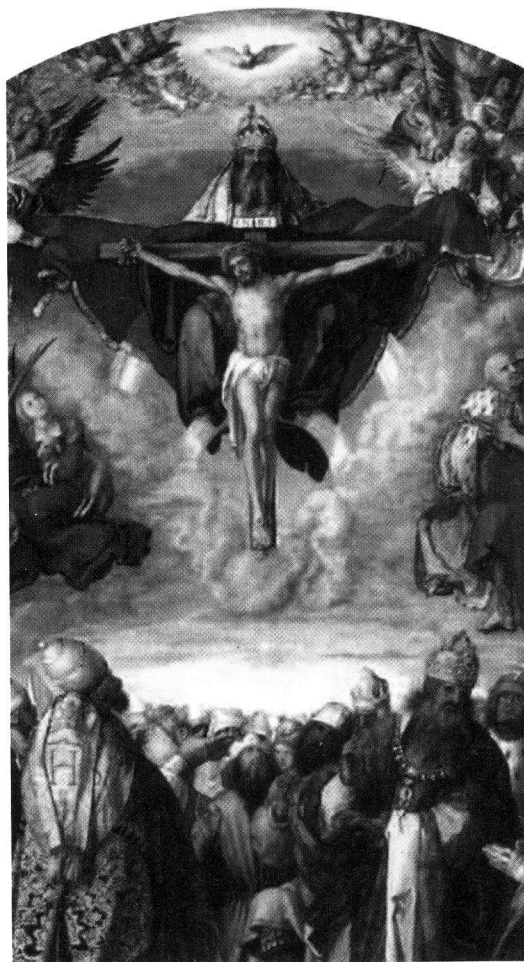
During this historical moment when so much attention is being paid to the legacy of Blessed John Paul II, it is crucial that the truths he articulated on the beauty of human love in God's divine plan be preserved in their authentic, intended meaning as expressed by Pope Wojtyla. We see in *Theology of the Body* that the spousal union of man and woman in a love that is open to procreation serves as the original effective sign of holiness coming into our world (9:3). Marital union, to the degree that it is connected to the relationship between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church His Bride, "transposes the eternal plan of [God's] love into the 'historical' dimension and makes it the foundation of the whole sacramental order" (95b:7).

Such arguments in Blessed John Paul II's own words demonstrate that *Theology of the Body* cannot be reduced simply to being a "theology of sex" and remain fully true to itself, as the implications of conjugal love reach far deeper encompassing the entire human person, and beyond to all of humanity. The rich theological truths contained therein also impress significantly upon important questions found within numerous other fields of theological and philosophical inquiry.

In both *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*, we encounter how the unreserved gift of self leads to a transformation of the person in mature love closer to God. The man and woman, as ministers of the sacrament of Marriage, serve as the "full and real visible sign of the sacrament itself" when they express their vows of marital consent one to another (TOB 103:4). In true conjugal love, the one who loves authentically expresses the body's language of love in a manner that fully respects the beloved spouse in body and soul, refuses to use the other, and is open for their unitive love to lead them beyond themselves to welcome the possibility of God's gift of new life. Spousal conjugal love, when lived out in truth, directs couples ultimately toward the "absolute and eternal spousal meaning of the glorified human body... revealed in union with God himself" and with other men and women in the communion of saints (TOB 75:1).

While *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility* both contain a wealth of wisdom in living uprightly in terms of human sexuality, the meaning goes even deeper: *What does it mean to be human in the divine plan?*... but to dwell in a relationship of maturely pure love with the God who has made us in His image and

FR. GREGORY GRESKO, O.S.B., is the Prior of Mary Mother of the Church Abbey in Richmond, Virginia. He earned his S.T.B. from the Pontifical Athenaeum of Sant'Anselmo in Rome and his S.T.L. magna cum laude in Moral Theology (Marriage and Family Studies) from the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family of the Pontifical Lateran University (Rome). His licentiate dissertation was entitled, "Educating to Love: Foundational Pedagogy in Light of Karol Wojtyla's Love and Responsibility". Fr. Gregory currently is working on his doctoral thesis for the same Vatican institute, on "The Consecration of the Family to the Heart of Jesus in Light of the Pastoral Ministry of Père Mateo Crawley-Boevey".



The Adoration of the Trinity (1511) by Albrecht Dürer. Opposite, *Madonna with Child*, by Giovanni Battista Salvi (1609-1685)

likeness, and with our neighbors in the great company of Saints whom we are called to love in the fullness of Christian communion.

Christ reveals to human beings His original intent in giving us bodies through His perfect gift of Himself on the Cross. His example calls us to love maturely, imitating the Redeemer of Man to Whom our spirits are directed (*Redemptor Hominis*, 7, 10). In light of this our spiritual goal, we discover the call to live chastely, "in the order of the heart" (TOB 131:1), shaping our affections by allowing the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit to purify us, to make our love transparent so that it may reflect perfectly God's glory. As love is creative by nature, when lovers willingly seek to be chaste as God's conscious co-creators, He perfects their love into a pure, transparent reflection of Himself, Who is the perfect Interpersonal Communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (LR 139-140).

For us to grow in mature purity, we must be reborn in the Holy Spirit [TOB 57:5]. In approaching the material of *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*, we are called to be reverent toward the things of God in the Holy Spirit, always seeking to communicate the truths of God concerning human sexuality in a way that shows due reverence for the sacred (cf. TOB 131:4). The truths contained in these great works of Blessed John Paul II should lead us to express them with the guarded modesty that the Blessed Pontiff disciplines himself even to use. After all, Pope Wojtyla could not be accused fairly of being either immodest in expressing the sometimes delicate truths of *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*, or of being prudish or Manichean, as such an approach would hold human sexuality in disdain (cf. TOB 45:3).

As we enter more deeply into the life of the Spirit, may we strive always to be pure in heart while never losing sight that we indeed are incarnated souls, whose flesh still must confront concupiscence in daily battle while here on earth (cf. TOB 32:4; 57:5). Otherwise, we risk falling in-

to a disincarnated angelism that somehow tends our attitude subtly towards thinking we are somehow beyond the possibility of sin. Holding firmly to the fullness of truth contained in *Theology of the Body* and *Love and Responsibility*, may we realize in human love God's divine plan for us through the redemption of the body and in the sacraments, all given to us in fullness by Jesus Christ the Redeemer of Man in a total gift of Himself to the world. ○