

## **Theology of the Body Summary – Dr. Lauri Przybysz, Archdiocese of Baltimore 2014**

Theology of the Body is the topic of a series of 129 lectures given by Pope John Paul II during his Wednesday audiences in St. Peter's Square and Paul VI Audience Hall between September 1979 and November 1984. It was the first major teaching of his pontificate. The complete addresses were later compiled and expanded upon in many of John Paul's encyclicals, letters, and exhortations.

These talks became known as “The Theology of the Body” and have had a growing impact on Christian thinking about what it means to be embodied as male or female.

JPII summed up his series of catechesis “under the title: "Human love in the divine plan," or more precisely, "The redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage." In his talks, JPII explored the biblical teaching and the meaning of the sacrament of marriage in light of Christ's redemptive grace.

**Dignity of the Human Person.** Reflecting on the Genesis accounts of creation, Pope John Paul II underscored the way in which the body reflects or expresses the person. The human person discovers his dignity through his body and its **capacity to express his ability to think and to choose**, unlike the animals, who lack this ability. (See Genesis 2:19-21.)

**Partnership of Man and Woman.** Yet humanity is radically lacking in its expression in only one sex. The full meaning of the body and hence the human person is revealed only when the man stands over against another unique way of being human—woman.

**Covenant of marriage.** The doctrine of “Theology of the Body” is organically related to both the sacramentality of marriage, contained in *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI and confirmed in JPII's Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, fruit of the 1980 Synod of Bishops on "The Role of the Christian Family,"

**Humans “speak” with their bodies – truth or falsehood.** This distinctive way of being a person and a gift for others, male and female, reflects what the late pope called “**the nuptial meaning of the body.**” Coming together in the profound partnership of marriage, man and woman live for the other in mutual love and deference.

**Marital Intercourse as Total Self Gift.** This union is expressed concretely in the couple's bodily gift of themselves to one another in sexual intercourse. Here they speak a profound language of total self-gift and unconditional fidelity.

**Sin breaks relationships.** The late pope understood the impact of sin on the human person. The Fall brings about a series of ruptures within the person, radically diminishing the body's capacity to express reason and freedom. It introduces alienation and a struggle for control into

the relationship of male and female, distorting their relationships in marriage and in human society (cf. Genesis 3:16). And it devastates the human sexual drive, redirecting it from an impulse toward life-giving interpersonal union between covenantal partners to **a desire to use and exploit** others for personal satisfaction.

**Healing through Christ's Grace.** Yet with the death and resurrection of Christ, sin does not have the last word on the condition of the body. The grace that flows from the cross and resurrection effects a "redemption of the body," not just in heaven but here and now. Through the healing effects of Christian prayer and sacramental worship, the **body is enabled to express the person** and his or her ability to think and freely choose.

The grace of Christ also **enables men and women to overcome their mutual conflict** and live together in marriage in the exercise of "mutual submission out of reverence for Christ" (cf. Ephesians 5:21; *Mulieris Dignitatem*, no. 24). This transforming grace enables the body in its maleness and femaleness to be offered as the expression of the "**sincere gift of self**" in a way **reflective of the person's vocation**— as single, married, or a consecrated celibate.

**Humans created for a purpose.** The human person as a unique embodied subject is thus understood through the three panels (or triptych) of the Christian mysteries of creation, sin, and redemption. The result is what John Paul II himself modestly referred to as an "adequate" understanding of the person.

**Sexuality is Good.** This vision enables us to recognize and affirm that the body and the gift of sexuality are good. At the same time it highlights why this gift is falsified by extramarital or contraceptive sex that sever sexual union from its inherent meanings of unconditional fidelity and life-giving fruitfulness.

Sexuality is a part of who we are as men and women. Our sexuality is the natural and God-given drive in each person that seeks relationship with other people. We are called to witness to Christian values in every relationship in our lives.

Inappropriate sexual activity is "not telling the truth" with our bodies.

Modesty is related to chastity because it is about appropriate behavior. Acting and dressing modestly respects other people by refraining from arousing their sexual desires inappropriately.

Chastity is not the same as celibacy, which is the promise to remain unmarried. Every person, married or single, is called to live chastely – which means using their sexuality in the way proper to their state in life.

Marriage for Christians is a sign of God's love and faithfulness, a mutual partnership of life and love. Marriage for Christian is both unique and exclusive, including both physical and emotional faithfulness

We believe that genital sexual activity has its greatest potential for bringing about good when in context of sacramental marriage between a man and a woman. Their sexual union can be an "incarnate symbol of human communion" only in marriage.

We also believe that marriage must be open to children: Marital Sexual Relations are meant to be both unitive (for the loving bond of the couple) & procreative (giving life)

**Sexism a result of sin.** The mystery of the human person is continually confronted by new issues and challenges. For example, much of the reflection on the body and its relation to the person within Christian tradition has been undertaken by men. During his pontificate John Paul II called for a "new feminism" that would better account for the distinctive insights, experiences, and gifts of women.

**Modern challenges to human dignity.** In addition, issues of the relationship between the body and the person take on new urgency in light of expanding scientific and medical technology that has raised questions at both the beginning of life (reproductive technologies, the status of cryo-preserved embryos, stem cell research, surrogacy, and attempts to clone human beings) and its end (the personhood of the persistently comatose, the meaning of suffering, and how to define the moment of death).

**Good News for Today.** To continue to affirm the fundamental biblical conviction of the goodness of the embodied person created in the image of God while addressing such pressing questions is the task for the further refinement of the "adequate anthropology" of John Paul II's "Theology of the Body."