

EXCERPTS FROM

THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES

The Theology of the Body and Its Consequences for Ministry in the Diocese of Charleston

A PASTORAL LETTER

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Full Text of Pastoral Letter online at:
www.catholic-doc.org/stmaryaiken
at "Family Life,"
then, "Family Life-Diocese,"
then "Theology of the Body"

1 Pope John Paul II looms even larger since his death than he did in life. His Theology of the Body will continue to be important for us. 5 Pope John Paul II has provided the Church with an articulation of the fact of the redemption of our bodies unlike any in the history of the Church. He has shown its connection with the Church's teaching on sexual issues. 6 For the good of the Church and the environment in which our children are being raised, we must mature in our understanding of these teachings in all their richness and depth.

15 The Theology of the Body is complex and subtle. It is impossible to do justice to Pope John Paul's work in a brief format, but **I will attempt to give you a sketch of why this is such an important topic for catechesis in the Diocese of Charleston, as indeed, in the whole Catholic Church.** This letter will only touch upon the basic elements of the Theology of the Body and will focus on its consequences for our ministry together. I will also outline some practical applications for our ministries here in the Diocese of Charleston.

28 The Theology of the Body has arrived just in time for us to be clear about the nature of the person God has created and as the way to wholeness and holiness. I want to encourage you to study it, to spend time contemplating its meaning, and to find ways to allow its insights to instruct your work in ministry. 32 We have not only a gift, but also a responsibility as Catholics, to be able to present this full vision of the human person to the Church, all Christians, and the whole world. It is an

intelligent vision presented to a well educated and critical world.

66 I believe the Theology of the Body is the most profound explanation of human sexuality the Church has yet seen. I invite you to study it, read it aloud in study groups, and pray about it. 68 I encourage our priests, deacons, Religious, and lay leaders to attend conferences and institutes on this topic. Of course, the original texts can be a beneficial source of reflection as one sits at the feet of Pope John Paul II himself and takes in this great perspective on the human person.

70 It is my prayer that his vitality will radiate from every ministry and organization in our diocese. If all of us embrace this important teaching of his papacy, we will carry on his memory, his message, and his legacy, and indeed do as we human beings, male and female, are called to do — give glory to God.

30 In understanding the Theology of the Body as a moment of illumination for the Church we are instructed about the nature of God and the nature of the Holy Trinity, as well as the nature and meaning of the human person, bodily-integrated and whole, created in the image and likeness of that same God. In this perspective, the pope is proposing that the human body itself is a revelation, not a haphazard fluke of evolution. It was designed by the Great Designer with intention and purpose. Likewise, the experience of human love reflects the experience of Divine Love and can tell us something about God's love when it is considered carefully and in unison with our other sources of revelation.

5 The Theology of the Body helps us to understand the theological and anthropological context of the Church's moral teachings, not only about contraception and homosexuality, but also the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony, marriage generally stated, and the witness of celibacy. 22 In the Theology of the Body we are given a fuller teaching about the human person, human sexuality, chastity, Holy Matrimony, celibacy, and the nature and relationships of males and females. What has been difficult for some to accept and teach now comes into sharper focus in this new context and vision of the beauty and mystery of the human person.

23 A central tenet of the Theology of the Body is that faithful, self-donative love, and the communion which results from the giving and receiving of that gift, is the creative dynamic which reflects the inner life of the Holy Trinity. Self-donative love is the gift of self on behalf of another person. It is the life-giving love of the Trinity at creation. It is the love of Jesus Christ, especially at Calvary. It is the love which inspired the martyrs of the Church, and it is the love which is the heart of the marriage covenant. From this generous gift of self for the other flows the whole of the Gospel.

24 The prohibitions of certain behaviors become minor foci when the larger picture of the human person described in the Theology of the Body is understood. This understanding and vision of the human person and human sexuality is the source of a large part of the Church's mission and teaching, both personal and social, for the foreseeable future.

34 All human beings are meant to be spouses - to live in relationship with others, committed to their good, whether this is in marriage, or being married to Christ and His Church; and all are meant to be parents, whether physical or spiritual. Parenting, the living of maternity and paternity, is a part of each adult human life.

35 The living of the nuptial reality is necessary for holiness in every state of life. Pope John Paul II taught that this nuptial living is at the heart of the meaning of human life. Since human life was created in the image and likeness of Divine life, he told us that nuptial love was at the heart of the life of the Holy Trinity. Three persons, each giving completely in love to the other, yet remaining distinct persons, is the key to understanding the Triune God.

39 The two genders thus are complementary, each having meaning in reference to the other. The Theology of the Body points to the obvious meaning of the naked human male and female: they are made for the other. In being for and with the other, a communion of persons is created in which there is a unity which cannot be broken. In fact, in his careful and thorough analysis of the creation accounts of the Book of Genesis, **Pope John Paul teaches that it is precisely as male and female, and in the one-flesh unity which they form together,**

that humanity is declared to be the image and likeness of God. A part of our being created in the image and likeness of God is the attraction and tendency which we have to the other gender, towards forming a communion of persons.

41 Within each of us there is a complementarity of masculine and feminine traits. Of course, a man cannot actually be a woman nor a woman a man, no matter what the combination of feminine or masculine traits that exist in our personal make-up. Sex change operations are a form of violence against the person as created by God. Likewise inordinate affections towards one's own gender clearly violates the dynamic of giving and receiving of persons, which only a male and a female together express with one another.

44 **Pope John Paul taught that morality can be determined by comparison of the human act to the action of Christ's love for the Church, especially as it expressed in Ephesians 5, the fullest expression of the nuptial analogy in the Bible. "One can speak of moral good and evil according to whether in this relationship there is a true 'union of the body' and whether or not it has the character of a truthful sign.**

46 If we allow our reason and our reverence for what is good to guide us in our choices on how to live out our sexuality, we can focus our energies on promoting what is good; if we allow our sexual desires to overcome our reason and sense of responsibility, we can sin greatly and become deeply wounded. **The Church is rightly concerned with human sexuality. We teach that for sexual intercourse to be moral it must be between a married man and woman who honor the procreative meaning of sex. It is a wondrous and powerful gift. Holiness is not possible for heterosexuals who are fornicating, committing adultery, or engaging in deviant sexual acts. Likewise holiness is incompatible with homosexual acts.**

50 Homoerotic sexual interaction is not equipped to either give itself bodily nor receive the other. It can fulfill neither the unitive nor the procreative functions of the marital act. While some find in such acts a form of disordered pleasure and affection, these acts are finally sterile, both physically and spiritually. "To choose someone of the

same sex for one's sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator's sexual design. Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living.

51 The Catholic Medical Association has documented progress made in the etiology and treatment of persons struggling with same-sex attraction (cf. Document "Homosexuality and Hope" --www.cathmed.org; also contact the organizations **Courage** and **Encourage** --www.couragerc.net for more information). We, as a Christian community, should reach out to those suffering from a homoerotic inclination so that they might be surrounded by the love of friendship.

52 **"In the conjugal act it is not licit to separate the unitive aspect from the procreative aspect, because both the one and the other pertain to the intimate truth of the conjugal act. The one is activated together with the other and in a certain sense the one by means of the other.** This is what the encyclical teaches (Humanae Vitae 12). Therefore, in such a case the conjugal act, deprived of its interior truth because it is artificially deprived of its procreative capacity, **ceases also to be an act of love"** (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 22, 1984, emphasis added).

53 The teaching of the Church on contraception, still so poorly understood and so poorly received among American Catholics, goes to the heart of meaning of human sexuality and human personhood. Not only is there an obvious and common-sense connection of the unitive and the procreative functions of the marital act, the separation of which violates the integrity of the act, but the gift of self to the other is compromised by contraception; and the deepest meaning of the gift is withheld in an act of contracepted intercourse. **While our society makes heroes of athletes and soldiers who give totally of themselves in their own field of service, it has failed to grasp and appreciate that contracepted intercourse gives nothing of self. It is sterile and prevents the meaning of the spousal act.**

54 "The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally. This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility.

55 **Natural Family Planning must be a part of our marriage preparation classes and a part of our ministry as a diocese.** It stands alone among methods of controlling birth as a means which is morally upright and instructive of the right use of human sexuality.

58 **The virtue of chastity forms the heart of the ministry of the Family Honor program, located in our own diocese.** The opportunity to assist families in the formation of their children in this virtue is a responsibility of every parent and every parish. **It is becoming clear that chastity and abstinence training for our children as well as adults is vital for the future of holiness in our diocese. The Theology of the Body provides the conceptual framework for this important teaching among us.**

67 **Many resources exist for learning more about the Theology of the Body. Christopher West has authored books and tapes which have already introduced thousands to its wisdom. His *Theology of the Body for Beginners* provides a great introduction to the topic.** Our diocese has hosted a major conference on the Theology of the Body sponsored by Family Honor. Mary Shivanandan's *Crossing the Threshold of Love* is an excellent resource, especially in the application of the Theology of the Body to Natural Family Planning. Father Richard Hogan's seminal work *Covenant of Love* is another thorough introduction to the topic. He and Ann Nerbun of Family Honor also co-wrote *Our Power to Love: God's Gift of Our Sexuality*.