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“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”

~ Luke 22:19



A Revolutionary Teaching on Sexuality

By Alan Medinger

Today, except for books on marriage, most (if not all) Christian resources dealing with sex and sexuality are written to address the *problems* of sexual sin in order to help people break free from them. In our ministry we are all too aware how pervasive these problems are, and so nearly every day we are recommending one or more of these excellent resources to those who struggle with sexual sin. But there is a danger here. For even when we are aiming to fix the problem, focusing in on sexual sin and struggles can easily take our eyes off the *goodness* of sexuality.

In contrast, imagine if you will, a Christian book dealing with sexuality that has little focus on adultery, homosexuality or masturbation. Now imagine a book like this based on the teaching of a man who never married and who quite likely never engaged in sexual intercourse. What I'm describing is the teaching of the late Pope John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body*.

My bishop (I am not Roman Catholic) introduced me to *Theology of the Body*. He is familiar with the ministry I do and gave me a copy strongly suggesting I read it. He told me he thinks it is so valuable that he has all of the clergy under his care reading and studying it for a year.

After reading it, I know why. *Theology of the Body* is unique and greatly needed today. It focuses on the magnificent gifts our bodies and our sexuality are from God—given to us by Him for great and wonderful purposes. This focus makes the teaching exhilarating to read, but more importantly, it makes the teaching a powerfully life-changing resource. In fact, I believe it could be the most important teaching on human sexuality in our time.

For those of you who find within yourself a subtle shame that the body is fundamentally dirty or that sex

and sexual desires are more evil than good, I hope this article begins to change all that. And for those of you who are presently thick in the battle for sexual purity in your own life, may this article (and perhaps your own reading of *Theology of the Body*) give you a better, holier motivation as you pursue God's will for your sexuality.

What Is *Theology of the Body*?

As is the custom in the Vatican, Pope John Paul II conducted a general audience each week, and as a part of this audience, offered a teaching. Over five years, 129 of these teachings were devoted to the Pope's *Theology of the Body*, a systematic study rooted in

Scripture of the human body and sexuality. In this article I will be referring to the Pope's teachings as presented in *Theology of the Body Explained*, written by Christopher West, a layman and a Catholic seminary teacher; but at the end of this

article we provide information on purchasing the Pope's teaching in one of three different forms available.

The teachings are Biblical through and through. The Pope has taken the most fundamental passages relative to sex, marriage, manhood and womanhood, and has explored them with a depth that made me, someone who has ministered and written in the area of human sexuality for over 25 years, feel like I was just entering college. The Scriptures around which much of the teaching is centered are just the ones you would expect to find: “created male and female,” “become one flesh,” “be fruitful and multiply,” “whoever looks on a woman with lust has committed adultery,” “Christ the bridegroom, the church His bride.” But because the teachings take such a positive approach to our bodies and our sexuality, these passages came alive for me as never before.

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- Alan Medinger

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I have no proof of this, but when I read *Theology of the Body*, I had a clear sense that the Pope knew his teaching was for all the church, not just for Roman Catholics. There are few references made to principally Catholic teachings or doctrines without also including an explanation as to what or who the source is. And those teachings or doctrines that are more apt to bother Protestants are few and far between.

Additionally, I believe an examination of Catholic teaching in a couple of areas where Catholics and Protestants often differ, namely contraception and marriage as a sacrament, can provide illumination, if not persuasion, to many Protestants. (*See the accompanying article, "Catholic Teaching, Evangelical Ministry."*)

At this point in my ministry, I can think of no greater service I can render to my fellow evangelicals than to point them to *Theology of the Body*.

WHAT IS ITS MESSAGE?

Rather than offer a broad view of the teachings, I will try to whet your appetites by recounting, in my words, some of the points that illustrate John Paul's approach.

The Foundational Importance of the Body – The Pope calls us to look to the physical body of Christ, and how the incarnation was the *embodiment* of God. So too, our bodies make visible what is invisible and divine. The body expresses the person. In a sense, the body is a sacrament of the person. God created the body and He declared it to be "good."

John Paul contrasts this view with the heresy of Manichaeism, the belief that exalted the spiritual and assigned evil to the physical—especially to sex. The Pope speaks of the "Manichaean Devil" that has plagued the Catholic Church throughout her history. Had he looked a little further, he would have seen how the demon has infected Protestantism also, where legitimate modesty is replaced with a self-righteous and self-defeating prudishness. It is this attitude that creates in many of our churches an unspoken code of silence about sex, a silence that locks many Christians in a prison of secrecy where they are fearful of seeking the church's help with their sexual struggles.

Sexuality as a Gift – Our being, our life, our humanity, is a gift from God, a gift given to us in the form of manhood and womanhood. A central part of this gift is our sexuality, that which leads us to find a solution to our aloneness. The gifts that God has given us in our bodies and in our sexuality, we are meant to give to another in marriage. Man gives his gift of manhood to his wife, and she her womanhood to him. And in receiving the gift, each affirms the other.

For the single person, the chaste life is a gift of one's sexuality back to God. For the single person who may one day marry, sexuality is such a precious gift that it is held in trust for the one whom God will bring to share it.

Eros Is to Be Redeemed, Not Snuffed Out – So much has our sense of sexuality been linked with struggle and sin that most of us think of the erotic solely in terms of evil and sin. But it is not. The erotic is simply something that arouses sexual feelings—and sexual feelings are not evil. Christopher West aptly states that, "Ever determined to establish the fundamental goodness of sexual desire and sensuality, John Paul refuses to surrender the term eros to the distortion of lust."

The Problem with Pornography Is Not that It Shows too Much, but that It Shows too Little – It portrays only a part of a person; it fails to portray everything that is human. Therein, it demeans our humanity. The Pope is critical of those who covered up the nudes in Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel, declaring that in doing so they demonstrated their own impurity, their inability to see the body as a revelation of the mystery of God.

We Must Turn from the Negative and to the Positive Assertion of the Value and Dignity of the Body and Sex – This positive focus is perhaps the central theme of the Pope's teaching. If we are to gain true victory over lust, purity must mature from seeing and embracing God's plan for our bodies and our sexuality.

SEEING GOD'S GLORY

These are just snippets of the beautiful and profound truths offered in *Theology of the Body*. The teachings offer a radical approach whereby Christians can take back sexuality from our hedonistic culture, an approach that can enable us to see our bodies and our sexuality as sources of joy, rather than as agents of sin.

Regeneration's Executive Director, Josh Glaser, and I started reading *Theology of the Body Explained* at about the same time, and we've both had similar experiences in our lives as a result. First, we noticed a greater feeling of being "clean" and "pure" after reading it. Christ told His disciples that they were already clean because of the word that he had spoken to them (John 15:3). Josh wonders if Christ's age-old message of grace and truth coming through in *Theology of the Body* isn't responsible.

We also found our minds less focused on trying to adhere to the law, needing to battle sexual temptation because it's wrong, and more focused on grace and the inherent goodness of sexuality. This was manifested in Josh when he saw an on-line ad for screensavers, which included the image of a scantily-clad woman that would usually have given him trouble. He felt temptation, but it was trumped by a spontaneous feeling of compassion for the woman behind the image, and he began praying

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Catholic Teaching, Evangelical Ministry: An Ecumenical Approach

By Alan Medinger

For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Romans 12:5

When Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, was an archbishop in communist Poland, he encountered a powerful spiritual revival taking place among the young people in his archdiocese. They showed a spiritual hunger that he had never seen before on such a scale among young people. Wanting to see the participants in this revival develop a strong and lasting Spirit-filled faith, he looked around for help.

Where did he turn? He had the wisdom and humility to turn to Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ. Leaders from Campus Crusade went to Poland and, using their experience discipling young people, worked hand in hand over a number of years with their Catholic brothers and sisters in Christ to help make this revival something that would last. Perhaps this is one reason why Poland is likely the most Christian country in Europe today.

We evangelicals have much to offer the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the areas of lay ministry and evangelism. How it must please God when we share in this way. But this is a two way street. There is much Catholics can share with us. To me, nowhere could such sharing bring greater benefits and blessings than from what

Catholics have to offer in the area of teaching and theology regarding the related matters of life, reproduction and sexuality.

My prayer is that, just as the future Pope was open to the primarily Protestant Campus Crusade, we evangelical Christians will explore the richness and depth of Roman Catholic understanding of matters of life and sexuality.

For Evangelicals, our weakness in these areas is easily illustrated.

Many may be surprised that when Roe vs. Wade was handed down legalizing abortion in all 50 states, the Southern Baptist Convention passed a resolution hailing the Court's decision. How could it be? Apparently the Baptists then, like most of us, lacked a deep and broadly accepted theology of life. And so, we once viewed abortion as a "Catholic" issue. (The Southern Baptist Convention repented of this move years later.)

In addition, at one time many states had laws outlawing the sale of contraceptives. You may not have known it was conservative Protestants who brought the pressure to enact these laws. So then, on what basis did Protestants change their minds regarding contraception? Was there a change in theology, or was there simply a drift in thinking because we lacked a clear and broad theology of sex and reproduction?

Today, we are in the midst of battles over in-vitro fertilization, stem cell research, and yes, gay marriage. And with increasing frequency, we are finding that some of the most well thought out arguments against what we know to be immoral are coming from Catholic studies and Catholic thinkers.

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for her. Similarly for me, I was awakened one night by a sexual dream. I immediately thought of the pleasure that dwelling on this could bring, but without any struggle I said, "Jesus, I want you more," and I turned over and went back to sleep. We believe that the grace-centered approach to sexuality found in *Theology of the Body* is renewing our minds, bringing us closer to the level of purity we desire.

When I am at the beach and have my morning quiet times looking out at the ocean, my heart becomes filled with a sense of the glory of God. I see Him in the vast expanse of the sea, in the power of the waves crashing on the beach, in the constantly changing sky as the sun creeps over the horizon, in the gentle gliding of a seagull as it floats through the air, and even in the awkward beauty of the seemingly smiling pelicans as they fly in formation over the dunes. The heavens—and all creation—do declare the glory of God.

Oh that we would have the eyes and hearts to see the glory of God in the human body and in our sexuality. Pope John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* helps move us in this direction. ■

OBTAINING THESE BOOKS

- *The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan*, by John Paul II, Pauline Books and Media, 1997, 603 pages, \$25.95. (These are the actual teachings as the Pope delivered them.)
- *Theology of the Body Explained*, by Christopher West, Pauline Books and Media, 2003, 530 pages, \$29.95. (Highly recommended.)
- *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, by Christopher West, Ascension Press, 2004, \$11.99.

Though Regeneration is not taking on any new books, these books are available from www.ourcatholicfaith.com and other on-line book distributors.

An Ecumenical Approach

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In the matter of homosexuality, we have much to offer each other. Catholic teaching is clear and unambiguous regarding homosexual behavior, and yet ministry to people dealing with same-sex attractions have grown extremely slowly in Catholic countries. **Courage**, the Catholic ministry to homosexual people, has spread gradually over the years, but Exodus-type ministries almost never take root in predominantly Catholic countries—until those countries start to develop strong Evangelical minorities. Catholics could benefit greatly from studying our systems of lay ministry.

On the other hand, in teaching on the wrongness of homosexual acts, evangelicals most often focus on either the Biblical prohibitions or the harm that so often comes from leading a homosexual life. This is fine and true, but Catholics are more apt to introduce into the discussion a focus on God’s purposes for our sexuality—the understanding that homosexual behavior is wrong, not just because the Bible says so, but also because it violates God’s glorious plan for how we are to use our sexuality.

We live in a culture that is increasingly hostile to orthodox Christianity. Gentle, feel-good Christianity is no problem with the culture. But a bold Christianity as lived out primarily by evangelicals and Catholics who adhere to their church’s teaching, is a threat to the culture. It dares to proclaim a creator God who has a claim on the life of every man and woman. One of the great blessings coming out of today’s cultural battles is that in the abortion protest, in fights to preserve marriage, and in the battles to restrict pornography, evangelicals and Catholics are standing together. As we do, let us each look to the other, appreciate and emulate the great and wonderfully special gifts given to each part of the body. ■

Please Pray With Us . . .

Thanksgiving – Join us in thanking God for the wonderful gift of sex and sexuality. His gifts are always good and meaningful and we know our bodies and sexual desires, though difficult to manage sometimes in this fallen world, truly do reflect His heart toward us. We also thank God for the valuable work of Pope John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* (see main articles).

Petitions – Pray for revival through the church and through our land. The grace and truth of Jesus Christ are knocking at the door, and we are desperately in need of both in the area of sex and gender in the church. Come Lord Jesus, begin with us!

For more information or in-depth monthly prayer requests,
E-mail josh@RegenerationMinistries.org.

FINANCIAL & MINISTRY NEWS

From time to time, we like to ask readers who find the articles in *Regeneration News* helpful, to prayerfully consider making a contribution to *Regeneration*. *Regeneration News* is a true source of ministry for people around the country. Each month’s free newsletter goes out to over 3,600 subscribers and includes helpful articles, as well as announcements about important conferences, programs and other events. Printing and mailing costs are about \$1400 a month, or about \$17,000 a year excluding the writing and editing! So, if *Regeneration News* helps you or someone you love, please consider responding with a gift today. Thank you!

EXODUS FREEDOM CONFERENCE

The Annual Exodus Freedom Conference is coming June 27th – July 2nd to Marion, Indiana. This year’s conference, *Live Out Loud*, will feature **Sy Rogers, Shannon Ethridge, Valorie Burton, Clay Crosse**, and many others. The week also includes times to relax, connect with others, and of course, worship. In addition to our regular times of worship lead by **John Mandeville**, there will be an optional Free Worship Concert featuring **Jason Upton**. For more information or to register, visit www.exodusfreedom.org.

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