

February 4, 2018

Theology of the Body Intro II

Last week, we began to look at the fairly complicated way of how Theology of the Body (from here on: TOB) has been presented to the world—both by St. John Paul II himself, and also subsequent editors. Let's look at the background that led to what we now call the TOB. The following is from the very excellent foreword to the 1997, The Theology of the Body (Human Love in the Divine Plan).

“Karol Wojtyla, known to the world since 1978 as Pope John Paul II, has always been fascinated by the human person. As a university student in Poland during the dark days of its Nazi occupation, Wojtyla wrote plays with used biblical motifs to explore the suffering and identity of people. Following the war, while Poland continued to suffer under a now Marxist form of totalitarianism, the newly ordained Fr. Wojtyla wrote still more plays wrestling with the meaning of human existence (*Our God's Brother*). As his ministry grew and deepened, so did the range of subjects he treated in his plays. They extended from happiness and failure in marriage (*The Jewelers Shop*), to the situation of fallen humanity confronted by God's redemptive love (*The Radiation of Fatherhood*).

At the same time that his skill as a playwright matured, Karol Wojtyla was also honing his skills as a philosopher. His doctoral dissertation in philosophy attempted to explore the new philosophy of consciousness known as phenomenology as the basis for an exposition of Christian ethics. ... It would also form the basis for his synthesis of St. Thomas' philosophy of being and a phenomenological account of human action and experience in the opus *The Acting Person*.

But Wojtyla's laboratory encompassed more than the library and the lectern. He also learned a great deal from his pastoral ministry as a priest, bishop, and finally cardinal. ... The experience gained in his extensive pastoral work helped him develop a new philosophical account of Catholic sexual ethics in *Love and Responsibility*.

Especially important in his mind was the articulation of a cogent modern rationale for the Church's position on birth regulation. Whereas Catholic moralists of preceding generations had treated contraception as a violation of chastity or a frustration of the natural law, Wojtyla developed a new personalist approach based on his philosophical work. In this view, sexual intercourse in marriage has an inherent meaning of total bodily self-giving. Contraception overlays this meaning with a contradictory language of withholding and refusal. The fertility which is withheld or refused is not simply a superficial, biological component of the person which can be manipulated in the pursuit of other ends, but an aspect of the person as a whole. Contraception therefore violates the dignity of the person because it falsifies the total offering of self which intercourse is meant to express.”

Fr. Michael