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## Theology of the Body II

A couple of weeks ago we began to unpack the most important theological contribution of St. John Paul II. It is called by him a “Theology of the Body” (TOB). This idea is truly revolutionary in the way we view sexuality, sexual relation, love, and human relations in general. It is transformative when understood correctly because it begins to put into practice the Love of God as it is shown and expressed in the Incarnate Word.

That’s deep stuff and is easily misrepresented and misunderstood. We will take it apart a little at a time as we go through. In this column, I hope to give a warning about how one must not approach JPII’s thought. Next week, I will give an interpretive touchstone to hold at one’s fingertips to keep from getting lost.

So, the warning: **Resist the temptation to oversimplify TOB into terms that revolve solely around sex and sexuality.**

There are many popularizers out there that do precisely that. The problem is that they grossly refocus what JPII was really trying to get at—so much so, that it makes of TOB a caricature. Unfortunately, this is typical of what you are going to encounter if you just look up TOB on the internet or buy a book or listen to someone giving a presentation on it. These are not useless, but they are not what JPII intended. They would probably be better referred to as “Theology of Sexuality” instead.

The ethos of what led to the ‘sexual revolution’, and its subsequent aftermath, caused (what I call) the pornographication of the human body and its functions. It is truly a dis-integrated way of seeing creation and especially the human body. This ‘way’ can be likened to an approach of interacting with others which more resembles ordering cuts of meat for one’s consumption than civilized intercourse. Sex becomes about consumption. It is about me and my pleasure and how you can provide that.

When a popularizer of TOB (who has himself grown up immersed in the ethos of the ‘sexual revolution’) tries to explain the thought of JPII without painstakingly laying out the foundation, TOB becomes caricatured in the minds of his audience. This happens even if he has himself had his mind purified of these tendencies. If he hasn’t, TOB is misrepresented.

The most popular of popularizers is Christopher West. I will give him the benefit of assuming that he has done the difficult work of purifying his own mind. That being said, he is sloppy, fast, and loose in his interpretation. A pretty good “Theology of Sexuality” is about as deep as he gets. It’s unfortunate and he is prolific. You virtually cannot avoid him. You are warned.

As it seems with everything in our sensationalized, opinionated, fake news culture, often the only way you can be sure that you understand something is to go to the original source. Let’s do that together.

*Fr. Michael*