



Diocese of Steubenville
Safe Environment Training for Adults

*A SUMMARY OF THE
THEOLOGY OF THE BODY*

*“God created man in his image;
in the divine image he created him;
male and female he created them.”*

(Genesis 1:27)

At the outset of his pontificate, Pope John Paul II set out on a **monumental task**. In the face of a sexual revolution that was permeating every facet of society, the Holy Father began to offer a fresh new vision for human sexuality rooted squarely in the ancient Scriptures and Tradition of the Church. Over the course of five years, Pope John Paul II presented his “Theology of the Body” through short reflections each week.

Focusing mainly on the Biblical teaching that we are made in the image of God, the Holy Father challenges us to **accept the body as a true gift from God**, part of His master plan for creation. With this starting point, the Holy Father offers a profound vision for understanding **sexuality as a beautiful gift in God’s design**, a gift that is meant to be a means for self-giving love. The following summary points attempt to capture the heart of the Pope’s message through the Theology of the Body:

- A. When Jesus is confronted about divorce (Matt 19) He hearkens back to the story of Adam and Even in Genesis in order to remind his listeners we must understand God’s plan for marriage as God intended it “in the beginning.” **The experience of Adam and Eve before the fall provides a clear picture of God’s remarkable plan for our sexuality.**
- B. God does not exist in a state of solitude but as a **community of persons** (the Trinity), in other words a **family**. When God creates mankind Holy Scripture states “let Us make man in our own image...male and female He created them.” Husband and wife are called to live in a **community of persons that images God**. The loving relationship between the Father and the Son that is personified in the Spirit is mirrored in a loving family of husband, wife and children.
- C. The Bible from beginning to end is a story of marriage. The Bible begins with the creation story of the first husband and wife in Genesis and ends in Revelation with the wedding feast of the Lamb when all the faithful will be united with God to experience an eternal community of persons. **God’s ultimate desire is to marry us. Marriage is a sacrament because it points us to that ultimate reality.**

- D. By reflecting on the experience of Adam and Eve in the Garden we recognize that “it is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Because we are made in God’s image, and therefore filled with God’s love, we are compelled to give it away. **We can only find ourselves through the sincere gift of ourselves.** The **sexual act is meant to be an act of total self-giving** (self-donation).
- E. **God’s plan for sexuality is to mirror His love for the World.** His love for the world is one of openness to love and life, a live-giving relationship. **The call to love as God loves is stamped in our beings as male and female “the nuptial meaning of the Body.”** Our bodies do not make sense in isolation. They only make sense in communion with others.
- F. As long as Adam and Eve loved as God loves, “they were naked and felt no shame” (Genesis 2:25). All they desired was to bless and affirm the goodness of the other. In the beginning, man and woman were **free**. All Adam desired was to **give**. Eve’s desire was to **receive the gift and give herself back**. The gift of themselves to one another was free and sincere, hence no shame. Shame was the first result of original sin.
- G. Sin caused man to change his focus from giving of himself to Eve to the taking of Eve for his own pleasure. This shows **the opposite of love is not hatred. The opposite of love is to use another person for our own gratification, including sexual gratification.** Marriage is not a license for lust. Lust seeks gratification only and is an intensely selfish act.
- H. Sexual union in this life as God intends it to be is a **foretaste of union with God in heaven**. The **language of the body** expressed in intercourse is a renewal of the wedding vows. **Intercourse physically expresses the commitment of one's wedding vows, to love freely, faithfully and be open to life.**
- I. On the same basis of the nuptial meaning of the body that commits man to marriage for the whole of life, there is the love that commits man to a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom. **Marriage reveals the nuptial character of celibacy, and celibacy reveals that the ultimate purpose of marriage is to prepare us for heaven.**
- J. **Christian purity is the ability to see the eternal mystery of God revealed through the naked body.** Sexual sins (like pornography or masturbation) take a beautiful and very sacred gift and profane it. **Society doesn’t overvalue sex. It undervalues and cheapens it.** Pornography is the counterfeit to the real truth about sexuality.
- K. **All sexual morality comes down to one question: “Will I love as God loves or will I not?”** Instead of fighting to avoid sexual temptation and unhealthy sexual thoughts, we should pray to have our attitudes, which are twisted by sin, untwisted so as to fully understand God’s special gift of our sexuality. Rather than yielding to temptation or fighting hard to suppress the temptation to sheer will power, choose the life-giving third way—claim the redemptive power of the Cross so we can be transformed in our attitudes toward sexuality. Jesus did not suffer and die on the cross to give us coping skills but to bring us redemption in all areas of our lives.

The summary points above are used with permission from the Family Life Apostolate of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.