

“Theology of the Body” for Couples

Talk 8: He Gave them the Law of Life as Their Inheritance: Reflections on “*Humanae Vitae*”

Part 1: The Beauty of the Moral Life

“I am so desirous of you, I would gladly give to you not only the gospel of God but also my own soul: because you are *most* dear to me...Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Thes. 2:2 – 8; 1 Cor. 9:16)

In Summary

In this talk, we began the last section of “Theology of the Body.” It may be the most difficult section, because it challenges head on modern culture’s “sacred cow”: Contraception.

John Paul tells us in this section that his goal of catechesis throughout *all* of these teachings was to more fully explain the “why” behind the “what” of Pope Paul VI’s encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (“Of Human Life”). *Humanae Vitae* was the encyclical issued in the late 1960’s which upheld the Church’s unchanging teaching that the two great “ends” of the marital embrace—the unitive and procreative—mustn’t be separated, i.e. that every time a married couple chooses to express their love in the sexual embrace, they must be open to the gift of new life. *Humanae Vitae* taught nothing new. And by remaining in the truth of Christ, the Church stands as the only voice opposing contraception among mainstream Christian denominations. She does so because she honors the truth of God expressed through the marital embrace. She wants her couples to know *true love*, and not be deceived by the contraceptive lie which destroys married life.

This teaching is not true because the Catholic Church teaches it. The Catholic Church teaches it because it is true: The truth of the moral harm of contraception is not a decree from the outside, but rather an *interior* truth of the human person which the Church recognizes and brings to light. John Paul II calls this section “the crowning” of his entire catechesis, because if couples get *this* right, then their lives truly become a “Theology of the Body”—a revelation of love through their marital bond.

By articulating this teaching so clearly and compellingly, John Paul II helps us to understand the incomparable dignity of each baptized Christian. Love is the center of the Christian life, and our dignity is expressed and enhanced the closer we remain to the truth of love. Living a life of love and virtue is what we call “the moral life”: a life of *greatness*, of God-likeness. When the marital embrace is allowed to be what God designed it to be, it becomes a natural revelation of supernatural love: The love of the inner-life of the Trinity, and the love of Christ’s spousal love for the Church. It is here, in the unabridged truth of love, that couples will find the happiness in which they have placed their hope.

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TOB/JPII & Related Quotes

“Christian, recognize your dignity!” (Pope St. Leo the Great)

“Once the truth is denied to human beings, it is pure illusion to try to set them free. Truth and freedom either go hand in hand or together they perish in misery.” (St. John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*)

The teachings of *Humanae Vitae* represent “a struggle for the value and meaning of life itself” (John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*)

“Man and woman...continuously re-propose the sign they themselves gave...on the day of their wedding” (TOB 118:4).

“In the ‘language of the body’, man and woman carry on the dialogue that...began on the day of creation” (TOB 123:4).

“Through the...dynamism of tension and enjoyment—whose direct source is the body—the person ‘speaks’ ” (TOB 123:4)

“[Contraceptive] practices and mentality...is an enormous harm from the point of view of the inner culture of the human person” (TOB 132:2)

“Procreation is rooted in creation, and...reproduces...creation’s mystery” (TOB 10:4)

“Satan seeks to ‘falsify’ ...creative love”.
(St. John Paul II, *Dominum et Vivificantem*)

The sentence, ‘Adam united himself with Eve his wife, who conceived and gave birth’ is like a seal impressed in the original revelation of the body at the very ‘beginning’ (TOB 22:5).

TOB Terms

Law: A light to understand God’s truth, and to live our lives in keeping with that truth.

Synergy: The harmony of God’s grace and man’s freedom in the spiritual life.

Freedom: The capacity to do what I *ought*, even if it is may not be what I *want*.

The Moral Life: A life of excellent action, lived from and for love. Asking *not* “What can I get away with?”, or “What do I *have* to do?”, but rather, “What is the *most* and the *best* I can be?”

Conscience: The law of God written on the human heart, and the true interpreter of the moral life; A judgment of reason recognizing the moral quality of an act. The conscience must always be *rightly formed* through faith, prayer, and practice in order to clearly reflect the truth.

Humanae Vitae: Bl. Pope Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical on human life and birth regulation which affirmed the unchanging truth of the immorality and danger of artificial contraception, and which St. John Paul II discusses in depth in this section of TOB.

Contraception: Intentional sterility through methods meant to frustrate the God-given design of the marital embrace and stop the creation of new life. Literally “against the beginning” of life (*contra* = against; *coeptum* = beginning)