

The Living Truth series.

The Theology of the Body - A simple introduction by Fr Richard Aladics

The "Theology of the Body" began as a series of public teachings given by Pope John Paul II at his Wednesday audiences in St Peter's square between 1979 and 1984. In these he spoke about the meaning of the body and what it means to be a man or a woman; it is in the total vision of the human person that the greatness of sexuality is discovered. He created the expression: the "nuptial meaning of the body" - the body has the capacity to express love, and that love is the sincere gift of myself to another.

He began his search by looking to the original plan of God in creation. We find this in the first three chapters of the Book of Genesis. Here we can see that the original experience of man and woman was that their bodies spontaneously expressed who they were as persons, created in the image of God - they were free to give themselves to each other and to see God in each other.

Next he looks to the historical experience of humanity - a humanity marked by sin (disobedience to God) and by grace (the presence of Christ). Sin hinders men and women from freely expressing the meaning of their bodies and of spontaneously seeing God in one another. The experience of grace, even in the struggle to receive it, enables men and women to live the meaning of the body in a new way. In grace Christ changes our hearts so that they can love as God loves. Marriage and celibacy are revealed as the two ways by which men and women can fully express their nuptial calling - the vocation to love as God loves.

Finally, John Paul looks at our destiny. Christ points to the future when, in the Resurrection, the nuptial meaning of our bodies whether lived in marriage or celibacy will find their fulfilment - the union of Christ and the Church in a life that will never end. Our sexuality has a very great meaning - it is the earthly expression of the union of God and humanity.

The Theology of the Body is the fullest description of human sexuality and love in the modern era. It expresses the Christian understanding of the common experience of humanity at the deepest level - that of freedom, identity and vocation. The human experience is first of all the discovery that the body reveals our common vocation to self-gift - our vocation to love is inscribed in our bodies. The redemption of the human heart by Christ enables me to live according to my true vocation: to love in a fully human way - to be free to love as God loves and live according to His plan for me. John Paul II expresses in a startling way the greatness of sexuality and the person's calling in Christ.

The "Theology of the Body" deepens our understanding of man in himself - what it means to be a human being, and the way in which humanity views the cosmos - why did God make man, men and women?

It influences our appreciation of culture - the way in which we express what is in us - our relationship with truth.

It helps us to receive and appreciate the gift of grace: grace as a transformation of the human heart; grace as the mystery of freedom.

It emphasises especially the gift of the Eucharist - that the Eucharist fulfils all the many ways of living to the full our individual and social vocation. Indeed, the Eucharist stands at the heart of the Theology of the Body.

This catechesis illuminates marriage - marriage as an icon of the Holy Trinity!

It also throws light upon the life of virginity or celibacy - that this life also is called to fully express the nuptial vocation of every man and woman! The greatness of fatherhood, motherhood and the family is expressed anew - that life-giving love and culture was planned from the beginning. Even the sentiments and movements of the human heart are revealed in all their striking beauty and truth by John Paul's teaching.

The Gospel itself is expressed anew by this theology, helping us to see our citizenship in the Kingdom and the greatness and intimacy of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

We discover anew the power contained in his person and the life which is offered by his teaching.

The Church, and even the Liturgy of the Church, is described in a new way, one in which all of us is called to renew our commitment to the way we live our lives in Christ.

The "Theology of the Body" proclaims the most profound truth about human beings: they are called to the fullness of life: communion with God.

Resources:

John Paul II, *The Theology of the Body*, 1997, Pauline Books and Media.

Christopher West, *Theology of the Body for beginners*, 2004, Ascension Press.

Web addresses:

www.luminousmedia.org

www.theologyofthebody.net

www.ourfatherswillcommunications.com

www.christopherwest.com

www.institutogp2.it/english/

www.communityofgrace.org.uk **Young people building the Culture of Life**