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Pope John Paul II on Marriage

The Redemption of the Body and the Sacramentality of Marriage

General Audience of November 28, 1984

1. As a whole, the catechesis which I began over four years ago and which I am concluding today can be summed up under the title: "Human love in the divine plan," or more precisely, "The redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage." The catechesis can be divided into two parts.

The first part was dedicated to a study of Christ's words, which prove to be suitable for opening the current theme. These words were analyzed at length in the totality of the Gospel text: and following the long-lasting reflection it was fitting to emphasize the three texts that were analyzed right in the first part of the catechesis.

There is first of all the text in which Christ refers to "the beginning" in His discussion with the Pharisees on the unity and indissolubility of marriage (cf. Mt 19:8; Mk 10:6-9). Next there are the words spoken by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount concerning "concupiscence" as "adultery committed in the heart" (cf. Mt 5:28). Finally, there are the words reported by all the synoptic Gospels in which Christ refers to the resurrection of the body in the "other world" (cf. Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:35).

The second part of the catechesis was dedicated to the analysis of the sacrament based on the Letter to the Ephesians (Eph. 5:22-23) which goes back to the biblical "beginning" of marriage expressed in the words of the Book of Genesis: "... a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body" (Gen 2:24).

The catechesis of the first and second parts repeatedly used the term "theology of the body." This is in a certain sense a "working" term. The introduction of the term and the concept of "theology of the body" was necessary to establish the theme, "The redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage," on a wider base. In fact, we must immediately note that the term "theology of the body" goes far beyond the content of the reflections that were made. These reflections do not include multiple problems which, with regard to their object, belong to the theology of the body (as, for example, the problem of suffering and death, so important in the biblical message). We must state this clearly. Nonetheless, we must also recognize explicitly that the reflections on the theme, "The redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage," can be correctly carried out, from the moment when the light of Revelation touches the reality of the human body (that is, on the basis of the "theology of the body"). This is confirmed, among other ways, by the words of the Book of Genesis: "the two of them become one body," words which were originally and thematically at the basis of our argument.

Reflecting on the Sacrament of Marriage

2. The reflections on the Sacrament of Marriage were carried out by considering the two dimensions essential to this sacrament (as to every other sacrament), that is, the dimension of the Covenant and grace, and the dimension of sign.

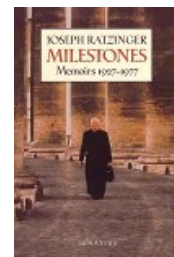
Throughout these two dimensions we continually went back to the reflections on the theology of the body, reflections linked to the key words of Christ. We went back to these reflections also when we took up, at the end of this whole series of catechesis, the analysis of the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*.

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The doctrine contained in this document of the Church's modern teaching is organically related to both the sacramentality of marriage and the whole biblical question of the theology of the body, centered on the key words of Christ. In a certain sense we can even say that all the reflections that deal with the "redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage" seem to constitute an ample commentary on the doctrine contained in the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*.

This commentary seems quite necessary. In fact, the encyclical, in responding to some questions of today in the field of conjugal and family morality, at the same time raised other questions, as we know, of a bio- medical nature. But also (and above all) they are of a theological nature; they belong to that sphere of anthropology and theology that we have called "theology of the body."

The reflections we made consist in facing the questions raised with regard to the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*. The reaction that the encyclical aroused confirms the importance and the difficulty of these questions. They are reaffirmed also by later pronouncements of Paul VI where he emphasized the possibility of examining the explanation of Christian truth in this area.

In addition, the Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, fruit of the 1980 Synod of Bishops on "The Role of the Christian Family," confirms it. The document contains an appeal, directed especially to theologians, to elaborate more completely the biblical and personalistic aspects of the doctrine contained in *Humanae vitae*.

To gather the questions raised by the encyclical means to formulate them and at the same time to search again for the answer to them. The doctrine contained in *Familiaris consortio* requires that both the formulation of the questions and the search for an adequate answer focus on the biblical and personalistic aspects. This doctrine also points out the trend of development of the theology of the body, the direction of the development, and therefore also the direction of its progressive completion and deepening.

Biblical Aspects

3. The analysis of the biblical aspects speaks of the way to place the doctrine of today's Church on the foundation of Revelation. This is important for the development of theology. Development, that is, progress in theology, takes place in fact through a continual restudying of the deposit of Revelation.

The rooting of the doctrine proclaimed by the Church in all of Tradition and in divine Revelation itself is always open to questions posed by man and also makes use of the instruments most in keeping with modern science and today's culture. It seems that in this area the intense development of philosophical anthropology (especially the anthropology that rests on ethics) most closely faces the questions raised by the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* regarding theology and especially theological ethics.

The analysis of the personalistic aspects of the doctrine contained in this document has an existential significance for establishing what true progress, that is, the development of man, is. In fact, throughout all modern civilization, especially in Western civilization--there is an occult and at the same time an explicit enough tendency to measure this progress on the basis of "things," that is, material goods.

The analysis of the personalistic aspects of the Church's doctrine, contained in Paul VI's encyclical, emphasizes a determined appeal to measure man's progress on the basis of the "person," that is, of what is good for man as man--what corresponds to his essential dignity.

The analysis of the personalistic aspects leads to the conviction that the encyclical presents as a fundamental problem the viewpoint of man's authentic development; this development in fact is measured to the greatest extent on the basis of ethics and not only on "technology."

"Humanae Vitae"

4. The catechesis dedicated to the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* constitutes only one part, the final part, of those which dealt with the redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage.

If I draw your attention particularly to this last catechesis, I do so not only because the subject dealt with is more closely connected to our contemporaneity, but above all for the fact that questions come from it that in a certain sense permeate the sum total of our reflections. It follows that this last part is not artificially added to the sum total but is organically and homogeneously united with it. In a certain sense, that part which in the complex arrangement is located at the end is at the same time found at the beginning of this sum total. This is important from the point of view of structure and method.

Even the historical moment seems to have its significance: in fact, the present catechesis was begun in the period of preparation for the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the theme of marriage and the family ("The role of the Christian family"), and ends after the publication of the Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, which is a result of the work of this Synod. Everyone knows that the 1980 Synod also referred to the Encyclical *Humanae vitae* and fully reconfirmed its doctrine.

Nevertheless, the most important moment seems to be that essential moment when, in the sum total of the reflections carried out, we can precisely state the following: to face the questions raised by the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, especially in theology, to

formulate these questions and seek their reply, it is necessary to find that biblical- theological sphere to which we allude when we speak of "redemption of the body and sacramentality of marriage." In this sphere are found the answers to the perennial questions in the conscience of men and women and also to the difficult questions of our modern world concerning marriage and procreation.

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