

**ASIAN
HORIZONS**

Vol. 7, No. 3, September 2013

Pages: 622-627

New Scholars

PURITY OF HEART AND SEXUALITY IN CONSECRATED VIRGINITY AND MARRIAGE A Study on the Teaching of John Paul II in His Theology of the Body

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Year: 2011

Human beings, whether as consecrated virgins or marital spouses, are in a continuous search of a solution in the struggle to keep one's heart *pure* (honest, generous and innocent). Bl. Pope John Paul II presented a profound and renewed reflection on the meaning of human sexuality and the virtue of purity of heart based on a personalistic perspective: *a person is a blessing towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is unselfish love*. Understood this way, a person does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use, and, as such, the means to an end. The call to virtue of purity of heart in reference to human sexuality is an indispensable fact of living faithfully to the commitment each Christian has made in his or her vocational choice. Vocation demands self-giving and it is central

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to both consecrated virginity and marriage, as the full gift of oneself to God in a personalistic way. This dissertation highlights the virtue of purity of heart as an interior truth experienced in the heart and involving a positive commitment to sexual integrity that relies on the love and reverence of God, of others and oneself. The virtue of purity of heart in reference to sexuality is a new consciousness in Christ, and a new attitude towards oneself and others.

The Relevance, Purpose, Novelty and Methodology

The question of purity of heart is seen in everyday life experience, for example, in family relationships and in economical, political, commercial and business fields. Purity of heart is proving to be the needed virtue of this century and it consists in the ability to see and respect the *otherness* of the human person and one's own self. To be pure in heart is a challenge to our present cultural context where there are sexual abuses, violations, revolts and expositions. Sins against purity of heart, Pope John Paul II explains, enters the world as a corruption of genuine self-giving, which is motivated by love. When that self-giving is experienced as restraint rather than fulfilment, love decays into lust. His teaching is relevant in our contemporary culture which regards sex as something to be used as a means for pleasure. Pope John Paul II deserves special credit for having offered a Scripture based systematic work on human sexuality which is fundamental to his theological anthropology. He applies his theological anthropology to the moral question of how man is to live the truth of his own embodiment. The novelty is that so far no work has been written in the field of moral theology on the subject of purity of heart and sexuality in consecrated virginity and marriage based on John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*. The other novelty of the thesis is that the importance is given to both vocations whereas many other books have been written on marriage alone based on John Paul II's catechesis. The thesis follows a descriptive, analytical, synthetic and applicative method.

The Content of the Dissertation

This study is organized in five chapters along with an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter aims at describing the historical basis of John Paul II's understanding of the concept of the human person and sexuality, outlined in his works on *Acting Person* and *Love and Responsibility*. By describing these two works, we come to know that the human person is placed here at the centre of his thought and

his ethical analysis. Human person should never be used as a means nor treat the other as a means, and this is true in the area of human sexuality.

The second chapter delves deeply into John Paul II's innovative teaching on the purity of original experience of human sexuality. The mystery of the original innocence as a 'particular of purity of heart' allows an interior faithfulness and is a tranquil testimony of conscience that precedes any experience of good and evil. The inner 'innocence of the heart' that is, the rightness of intention in the exchange of gift, leads to a moral participation in the eternal act of God's will, an act that expresses and sustains the nuptial meaning of the body.

The third chapter explores the consequences of original sin that have caused a separation from the original innocence, ushering in lust which inclines a person to look upon a person as an object of pleasure, manipulation and use. Purity of heart in the Sermon on the Mount and purity as "life according to the Spirit" in St Paul's understanding are a call to goodness, a call for transformation of the attitude of men and women. Through the redemption of the body in Christ, the person is called to a correct way of treating the sexual sphere according to one's personal state.

The fourth chapter deals with vocations to consecrated virginity and marriage, the two ways of fully realizing the human vocation to love. Matrimony looks to rediscover the 'virginal love of original man while the celibate vocation, by way of anticipation, begins to live the 'virginal union' of Christ and the Church, while both vocations are lived within the context of historical man fallen and redeemed. Both vocations are total bodily/spiritual self-giving in their differing but parallel forms.

The fifth chapter seeks to provide the perspectives and the challenges of John Paul II's teaching and its relevance in today's changing context. The change that has taken place today in the attitude to sexuality affects vocations to consecrated virginity and marriage. In the conclusion we expose the major findings of our dissertation, critical evaluation of John Paul II's *Theology of the Body* and the challenges and perspectives for the future.

The Findings of the Dissertation

True Purity sees God's Image in each and every person. Man and woman share the title 'person' with God. This is because they have a similarity and likeness to God, and this is evident in the biblical phrase 'image of God.' This helps us to understand that human beings are different from other 'living beings' in the world. It shows us the reason for the sanctity of human life and of the body, because it is an integral part of the person. As a person with a body and soul, made in the image and likeness of God, we find the meaning of life through finding out what it means to image God and what our bodies have to do with it. The dignity of persons who have been created in God's image makes them superior to other creatures and this superiority gives them a right to be treasured for their own sake, not as a means to an end. True purity of heart sees in each and every person, God's image and it desires only to love and never to use the other and one's own self.

The dignity of other persons and our own dignity require that we relate to other persons only through love, and that the personalistic norm always be observed. The Christian personalism of John Paul II in its negative aspect states that the person is a kind of blessing which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use, and, as such, the means to an end. In its positive form personalistic norm confirms this: The person is a blessing towards which the only proper and adequate attitude is love.

The grace of original innocence lost through sin is recovered in redemption. Christ came to bring us the graces to enable us to live morally upright lives, not only in respect to our external behaviour but also in respect to the interior movements of our hearts. So, the redemptive grace of Christ can restore purity to our hearts. By participating in the redemption of the body, each individual Christian progressively rediscovers and lives according to one's original dignity and is enabled to reach the goal of one's vocation. Only to the degree that a person is liberated from lust and is in possession of his own sexual subjectivity can he be a gift to others – whether in celibate vocation or in marriage.

John Paul II has emphasized that God designed every person to give the nuptial gift of self to another. The giving of oneself to another must be exclusive, total, life-long, and open to the gift of new life. Marriage is the highest expression of this gift on the natural

plane. Consecrated virginity or celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God is the highest expression on the supernatural level: it too is the gift of self and is fundamentally nuptial and fruitful in character. The celibate chooses to give the entire sexual, embodied self as an exclusive nuptial gift to God. Similarly to the way a wife gives herself for her husband, the celibate gives himself for the kingdom of Christ; and just as the husband comes to fully understand himself by means of giving himself to his wife, so the celibate comes to fuller understanding of himself in giving his exclusive nuptial gift to God. Celibacy, like marriage, is in harmony with the interior meaning of the body. Nuptial love is the love of total self donation.

We Christians are called to collaborate with grace by living according to the same spirit. Then purity becomes a new capacity in virtue of the gift of the Holy Spirit, a new conscience in Christ, and a new attitude towards the other. In the marriage, husbands and wives lead moral lives and achieve holiness and salvation through a proper and an authentic responsible parenthood. One of the means of their sanctification is the due respect to the inseparability between the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal love in marriage. The commitment to consecrated virginity/celibacy is a challenge and it invites an ever new desire for consistency with and fidelity to the Gospel ideal. Celibate love is a call to be constantly open to authentic relationships, to befriend any person with a non-demanding love. Christ is the exemplar of all states of life, not because he embraced all of them, but because he is the exemplar of self-giving. He is therefore the archetype of married love and human sexuality, as much as of the consecrated and priestly life.

Concluding Remarks

Each individual Christian has a unique personal vocation. Sexuality is a powerful force, which must be integrated with our personal vocation. We need to consider the virtue of purity of heart in reference to human sexuality, and its relationship to the basic vocations of Christian life. The gift of sexuality can become a source of personal disintegration, when it is used for self-gratification. The virtue of purity of heart is therefore necessary for mature Christian living. We are in an age of sexual revolution which dominates the present times and culture in the areas of sex and sexual morality. The Church has taken the role of safeguarding her members from this through her insistent and consistent teaching and pronouncements.

Her teaching stands as the gospel of life for the good and dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God. John Paul II's vision of the virtue of purity and human sexuality encourages every Christian to evaluate one's way of living the gift of human sexuality. In any vocation, man and woman are capable of offering themselves, with a definite characterization, as a "gift" to others, realizing their meaning in creation.