

Courage Ministry
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Professor Grabowski's insights at the Washington Courage Conference -2016

Introduction

Professor John S. Grabowski is Associate Professor of Moral Theology and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at the Catholic University of America, in Washington DC. He was just one of the well credentialed and impressive presenters at the Courage Conference. I found his presentation enlightening, confirming many of my perspectives about reliance on sacred scripture, patristics and the developmental theological teachings of the Church.

He made a beautiful opening remark about the Beauty and Vocation of the Human Person in Christ. He then supported this with various short statements such as Genesis 1:26-28 where we are made in God's image and likeness. Then when he referred to *Gaudium es Spes* No.24 he indicated that we are created for the sincere gift of self love. The Professor went on to say that the body is integral to the person and the gift of love. (I will say more about the body later in this article). He endorsed the gift of chastity as the self possession necessary for authentic love. While we are wounded by sin and infected by concupiscence we are redeemed and offered healing and restoration in Christ.

His teaching lead me to offer some reflections for those who support the Courage ministry and wish to discover a vibrant perspective on sexuality in general, and a more particular understanding of sexual mores and ethics.

“Create in Me a Clean Heart” - The Perils of Pornography

Professor Grabowski in this talk referred to the Catholic Catechism article 2354, which describes pornography thus: *Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other.*” I know that we have discussed this topic almost ad nauseam, but I felt the Professor's nuanced explanations ought to be considered and reflected upon. He says that pornography in its visual, audio or written form is a violation of justice, chastity and love.

The Professor's insights lead me to consult the works of Pope Saint John-Paul, which enriched my appreciation of the subject matter. I found a well argued segment on art and pornography in “ Love and Responsibility” which was a series of lectures given in 1957-8, when the then Father Karol Wojtyla was the Chair of Ethics at the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland. Later still in 1981 when he was speaking as

Pope John Paul II he adopted this teaching in his Theology of the Body lectures.

True Art versus Pornography: Pope Saint John Paul II

In the insightful and inspiring Theology of the Body he described the difference between authentic and living art and contrasted it to pornographic images. The Pope asks the question “Is it possible to portray the naked body artistically without offending the dignity of the person?” The Pope says that he does not condemn nakedness in art. He points out that in the restoration of the Sistine Chapel he wanted the loincloths to be removed and when dedicating the Chapel he described the Chapel as “the sanctuary of the theology of the human body.” (Chris West's *Theology of the Body Explained pp. 230-231, Gracewing, UK. 2003*).

The Dignity of the body as a nuptial gift

The pope speaks about the inherent dignity of the body. This dignity is connected with personal sensitivity. He refers to “the naked human body in the whole truth of its masculinity and femininity – [it] has the meaning of a gift of the person to person.” (Theology of the Body p.220) This factor is very personal and private. He says further: “This is understood as the nuptial system, in which the giving of one party meets the appropriate and adequate response of the other party to the gift.” (p.222).

Can authentic art speak only in my subjective state?

As a viewer of Art, I have particular responses and varied feelings. I am always inspired by the beautiful wooden carving of Mary, as the young Mother of Jesus, cradling her baby child Jesus in her arms at Trinity Catholic Church, in Banyo. This creative simple work of art of the bodies of both Jesus and Mary illustrate what the pope means when he explains what he calls subjective experience of the body in its life and in its interpersonal relations. I ponder on the way the artist has portrayed the relationship of Mary with baby Jesus. Her face displaying serenity and focus, the uprightness of her stance, her provision of a safe resting place by her hands and long fingers supporting Jesus as he is contentedly leaning into her breasts. I feel pleased and almost delighted to be viewing such a striking yet meaningful depiction of what the relationship must have been like for Mary and her six month old son. I come away edified not only by what I have seen but what I have experienced. The body says it for me. In this example of art I have connected: the art has spoken to my heart in a loving intimate holy and might I say, a divine way. Is this what Pope Saint Paul II means in his depictions?

The artist's ability to lead us to the personal mystery of men and women

As a contrast to this the pope speaks about the objectivizations in films and photographic art. The body is not seen as a subjective model but is objectivised ..

He writes that the human body becomes the object of a reproduction. The body becomes an anonymous object. “This anonymity ...is a way of veiling or hiding the identity of the person reproduced..(p.221). “ ..the human body loses that deeply subjective meaning of the gift. It becomes an object destined for the knowledge of many. This happens that those who look at the body, assimilate or even, in a way, take possession of what evidently exists, of what in fact should exist essentially at the level of a gift, made by the person to the person. The pope indicates that a problem arises here which is a very delicate one related to shame and the man and woman's personal sensitivity regarding their privacy. (p.221).

Purity of Heart Disposition, Connectedness and Attitude

The Pope states that the difference between an authentic portrayal of the naked body in art and a pornographic portrayal...lies in the artist's intention. He asserts that “ A masterful artist can lead us through the naked body to the whole personal mystery of man and allow us to comprehend the nuptial meaning of the body in purity of heart.” My experience of the Trinity Chapel statue allowed me to connect and contemplate the mystery of the relationship of Mary and Jesus. Pornography distorts this by its disconnect.

Pornovision

Pornovision is what John Paul calls the use of media of audiovisual communication when the limits and boundaries and borders of shame are overstepped. He means when the work of art or the media of audiovisual reproduction goes beyond the right to the privacy of the body in “its masculinity or femininity. Violation of bodily shame is a method used deliberately to destroy personal sensitivity and the sense of human dignity”. (p.223). .. He says that art must not violate the right to privacy, and such depictions are violations. Professor Grabowski follows this line of argument when detailing the ravages of pornography.

The Perils of Pornography

Grabowski remarks on the corrosive damage of pornography.

Pornography is a disconnect whereas the nuptial gift is a connectedness.

Pornography disturbs our inner person – is disconnecting us with ourselves and is shameful. As Father Percy writes “in pornography there is nobody there. It is a world of fantasy. There is no sense of the invisible dimension – of the intimacy and sacredness of the human person.” (Percy, p.63).

We know in 1 Cor 6.11 Paul calls our body a temple of the holy spirit – Let us rejoice in that truth: for we are wonderfully made in God's image and likeness.

Conclusion

For further study and in order to meet the challenges of our culture with reasonable logic I recommend the following books:-

Pope John-Paul II - *1. Love and Responsibility*: Collins Paperbacks. London 1986, esp. pp:186-193.

2. The Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan Pauline Books & Media Boston 1997: Foreword by John S. Grabowski, Ph.D.

Anthony Percy – *Theology of the Body Made Simple* Connor Court. 2005.

Christopher West – *Theology of the Body Explained: A commentary of John Pau II's "Gospel of the Body"* Gracewing & Freedom Publishing, North Melbourne, 2003.

Brendan Scarce – *The Body* Courage Article 20 – April 2004

Pornography and the Internet Courage Article 13– February 2003

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