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**The “explosion” of St John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*
in the Catholic Church in America
and its global implications for the New Evangelisation**

**„Eksplozja” *Teologii Ciała* wg Św. Jana Pawła II,
w Kościele Katolickim Ameryki,
i jej światowe implikacje do celów Nowej Ewangelizacji**

Abstract

In 1999 George Weigel made a prediction in his now famous biography of St John Paul II – *A Witness to Hope* – which was eerily prophetic. Commenting on John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* – which is the Pope’s prolific Christian anthropology on sexuality and morality – George Weigel stated that, “These catechetical addresses constitute a kind of theological time bomb set to go off, with dramatic consequences perhaps in the twenty-first century.” (Weigel, 2005, p. 343) The focus of this paper will be on a particular group of Catholic speakers in America (Christopher West, Jason & Crystalina Evert, Brian Butler etc) who have taken this teaching very seriously and are helping it “ignite” and spread like wildfire causing a “sexual counter-revolution” that’s changing lives around the world. (West, 2016, n.p) In this paper my aim is to analyse this phenomenon so that those involved in the New Evangelisation in other parts of the world can perhaps learn how to implement *The Theology of The Body*, and so too benefit from JP II’s prolific teachings.

Key words: *Theology of the Body, Anthropology, Christianity, New Evangelisation, Sexual Revolution.*

Abstrakt

W 1999 r. George Weigel przepowiedział w słynnej biografii św. Jana Pawła II – Świadek nadziei – który był niesamowicie proroczy. Komentując teologię ciała Jana Pawła – która jest najbardziej płodnym chrześcijańskim nauczaniem antropologicznym papieża o seksualności i moralności oraz „biblijnym badaniu tego, co to znaczy być mężczyzną i kobietą”, wygłoszonym przez 130 słuchaczy w środę przez papieża – George Weigel stwierdził, że: „Te katechetyczne adresy stanowią rodzaj teologicznej bomby zegarowej, która wybuchnie, z dramatycznymi konsekwencjami być może w XXI wieku”. (Weigel, 2005, p. 343)

Mój artykuł ogniskuje się na konkretnej grupie mówców katolickich w Ameryce (Christopher West, Jason i Crystalina Evert, Brian Butler itp.), którzy potraktowali to nauczanie bardzo poważnie i którzy pomagają nauczaniu „rozpalić się” i rozprzestrzeniać jak pożar. Tworzy się nauczanie, które jest nazywane przez lidera tego ruchu Christophera Westa „kontrewolucją seksualną”, która zmienia życie na całym świecie. (West, 2016, np.) Moim celem jest przeanalizowanie tego zjawiska, aby osoby zaangażowane w Nową Ewangelizację w innych częściach świata mogły nauczyć się, jak wdrażać Teologię Ciała, a także mogły odnieść korzyści ze zmieniających życie pomysłów JP II.

Słowa kluczowe: *Teologia ciała, Antropologia, Chrześcijaństwo, Nowa Ewangelizacja, Rewolucja Seksualna.*

Introduction

In 1999 George Weigel made a prediction in his now famous biography of St John Paul II – *A Witness to Hope* – which was eerily prophetic. Although it has been quoted many times to the point Weigel has joked that he actually regrets making this prediction it nonetheless remains significant. Commenting on John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* – which is the Pope’s prolific Christian anthropology on sexuality and morality delivered over a period of 130 Wednesday audiences he gave as Pope – George Weigel stated that, “These catechetical addresses constitute a kind of theological time bomb set to go off, with dramatic consequences perhaps in the twenty-first century”. (Weigel, 2005, p. 343)

The Theology of the Body (TOB) is based on the moral teaching of the Catholic Church and is nothing new in terms of doctrine but its genius lies in the fact that it speaks to the subjective mind-set of our times. The Pope posits that since God's nature is revealed through the body in the person of Jesus Christ so too do our bodies reveal a deeper truth about our nature as persons. Our bodies are not just insignificant clusters of random cells, but signs pointing us to who we really are. By drawing attention to the fact that we as human beings are composites of both body and soul, the Pope gives an adequate response to the new wave of *Manicheism* that has infiltrated society as a result of the Sexual Revolution – where society now believes that what we do with our bodies has no impact on our souls. Or, that there is no soul in fact. George Weigel hypothesised that if these teachings are “taken with the seriousness it deserves, John Paul’s *Theology of the Body* may prove to be the decisive moment in exorcising the Manichaeian demon and its (the) deprecation (condemnation) of human sexuality from Catholic moral theology”. (Weigel, 2005, p. 342)

The focus of this paper will be on a particular group of Catholic speakers in America (Christopher West, Jason & Crystalina Evert, Brian Butler etc) who have taken this teaching very seriously and who (thanks to a number of reasons which I will elaborate on later) are helping the teaching “ignite” and spread like wildfire. The teachings are creating, what the front man of this phenomenon Christopher West calls “A «sexual counter-revolution» that’s changing lives around the world.” (West, 2016, n.p) This paper will cover: A brief summary of the *Theology of the Body*, an overview of the history that prompted its necessity and the climate it was received into i.e. the Sexual Revolution, the unique form the movement has taken on in the US and its impact beyond its borders. My aim is to analyse this phenomenon so that those involved in the New Evangelisation in other parts of the world can perhaps learn how to implement *The Theology of The Body*, and so too could benefit from JP II’s life changing ideas.

The fallout from the *Sexual Revolution*

Richard A. Spinello opined that the Pope recognised that modern man is undergoing an identity crisis. He fails to understand himself and his role in the world. Man is in a haze, a fog that is a result of profound scepticism and “stands on the precipice of a desolate nihilism.” This haze or fog needs a radical reality check; A reality check that reveals “the truth about man” (RH 1). Spinello believes that John Paul II’s writings can give modern society the clear vision they have been robbed of for over a century,

Throughout the encyclicals the Pope explains that Modern man has lost sight of the provident Creator, seduced into thinking that he is the centre of the universe. He has been given false hopes by philosophers such as Freud, Sartre, and Marx who promise temporal bliss through pleasure, unfettered freedom, or an egalitarian utopia. (Spinello, 2016, p. X)

Nowhere is man's identity crisis more evident than in the sphere of sexuality. Whether one is Catholic or not, one cannot deny the fact that there have been a large number of societal consequences due to the Sexual Revolution. This turning point in history is defined by Mary Eberstadt as "the ongoing destigmatization of all varieties of nonmarital sexual activity, accompanied by a sharp rise in all sexual activity, in diverse societies around the world (most notably the most advanced)". (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p) Aiming to provide empirical evidence for the fallout in her book *Adam and Eve after the Pill*, she quotes the infamous 20th century sociologist Pitrim Sorokin who called out the fact that what was seen as sexual liberation could be linked to "critical social ills, including rising rates of divorce and illegitimacy, abandoned and neglected children, a coarsening of the arts high and low, and much more, including the apparent increase in mental disorders." (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p) It is not lost on Eberstadt that if one were to make these comments in this day and age, one's views would be seen as bible-bashing, religious intolerance and anti-progressive. Even academia seems to thrive on the breakdown of societal and biological norms with the incorporation of subjects such as "gender studies" into the academic syllabus of many humanities departments. It seems by extension that Eberstadt is right in pointing out that despite damning evidence, the educated elite refuse to acknowledge the fallout. (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p)

While we have to keep in mind that many people have overcome a broken childhood and/or broken relationships/marriages to lead emotionally stable and successful lives we cannot ignore the fact that (as Eberstadt stresses) there is data proving the significant advantages of having a two-parent household and stable monogamous marriages,

The empirical record today on sex, documents the overall benefits of marriage and monogamy ... As numerous social scientists have shown ... monogamous married people score better on all kinds of measures of well-being. A wealth of other data testifies to the proposition that families headed by a married couple – including disadvantaged families – are better off than those headed by a cohabiting couple... (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p)

She refers to evidence that ties early promiscuity to poor academic results and how it is a gateway leading to a turbulent lifestyle, “Promiscuity among teenagers and young adults appears closely related to educational failure and other problems such as alcohol and drug abuse.” (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p) She also draws attention to the fact that divorce and unwed motherhood “two more offspring of the sexual revolution” has not only been destructive for those actually in the situations but for the society at large. (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p)

Many writers and speakers on the *Theology of the Body* have referred to the fact that the sexual revolution did not empower women but demoted their status from subjects to objects. Women, rather than becoming free agents of self-empowerment, have become dispensable sexual objects. Eberstadt is in complete agreement with this analysis and blames contraceptives for this objectification. While contraceptives were supposed to free women from the consequences of pregnancy it also gave men a free pass to take no responsibility. Eberstadt writes that one need look no further than popular talk shows or TV series to observe this phenomenon, “All reveal a wildly contradictory mix of chatter about how wonderful it is that women are now all liberated for sexual fun – and how mysteriously impossible it has become to find a good, steady, committed boyfriend at the same time”. (Eberstadt, 2012, n.p)

History of the Sexual Revolution

So how did this revolution come to manifest itself in American society? What were the events that led people to break free from the common values regarding sexuality and morality? It’s not as though sexual sin or deviation did not exist prior to the sexual revolution but what was unique about this period was the inversion of the norm established by Christendom. Purity, celibacy and the sacrament of marriage were no longer upheld. Father José Granados (Assistant Professor of Theology and Philosophy of the Body at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family) goes into depth about how this inversion came about in his article entitled *Theology of the Body in the United States*. For the purposes of this paper I would like to highlight only a few key stages that Granados mentions:

1. Puritanism: Whilst Granados avoids labelling the Puritans as radical “repressors of sexuality” he does mention that they saw sexual desire as “intrinsically and unavoidably disordered”. (Granados, 2015, p. 1) This was due to their understanding of *concupiscence* – or – the “tendency of human nature to sin as a result of original sin.” (Catholic Dictionary, 2018, n.p) If Grace cannot heal concupiscence Granados observes that,

for the Puritan, the only way to get the “lustful desires of the heart” under control was through the law,

The remedy for the sins of the flesh ... condemned in Puritan sermons was unambiguously a matter of increased control. Control was, first, to be imposed by parental authority. ... (*then*) the magistracy. ... Most significantly, control was to be enforced from within, against the nature that struggled for expression. (Granados, 2015, p. 2)

2. The Enlightenment: Granados harkens back to another form of control, this time caused by thinkers of the Enlightenment. Because they placed reason above all else they had to ensure that their “passions and affections” were submitted to reason as well, hence their use of control through “the Law” to ensure sexual morality. This period also succeeded in severing “sexuality and the family” from God. (Granados, 2015, p. 2)
3. The Romantic Movement Granados reminds us that it was during this time that love was relegated to the realm of emotions and feelings thereby making it a great external force that “imposed itself on the lovers”. Love and Reason were further polarised. (Granados, 2015, p. 2)
4. Freud: After the fall of the exaggerated puritanical Victorian society America was ready for the ideas of Sigmund Freud which were “very critical towards the Puritan ethos, which he held responsible for repressing the sexual drives of individuals.” Although Freud did not necessarily endorse “free love” his ideas did just that. Popular culture deduced that man’s sexuality had been imprisoned by societal constructs and needed liberation. (Granados, 2015, p. 2, 3)
5. The Crisis of the 1960’s aka The Sexual Revolution: Sexual pleasure now reigns supreme and reproduction is demoted thereby making sex difficult to contain within the familial structure. (Granados, 2015, p. 3)
6. The Economic side of the revolution: At this point, “The industry of pornography and the exploitation of sex by television and marketing companies” becomes part of the American narrative,

Within this process, the focus shifted from a conception of sexuality as something to be controlled and repressed or contained within marriage, to a vision of sexuality as an impulse vital for the flourishing of the human person, and whose unlimited expression was both an inalienable right and an irrepressible need of the individual. (Granados, 2015, p. 3)

7. Father Jose also points out two “other sexual revolutions” i.e. the gay movement and feminism which emphasise that “sexuality is a place for the free expression of subjectivity, a realm open for transformation”. (Granados, 2015, p. 3)

Despite all of the confusion caused by this inversion Father Jose opines that there was still grit left in American society. Something made them not want to let go of the ideal of the family and although a “resurgence of Puritan ideas” is definitely one of the reactions, another is the propagation of St John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* by the New Evangelists in the Catholic Church. Father Jose writes that perhaps, “this concern for the family can also account for the success of John Paul II’s proposal in the United States, for the Pope’s catechesis emerges precisely as a response to this situation, as a coherent vision of human sexuality” (Granados, 2015, p. 4)

The New Evangelisation and *Theology of the Body* (more in depth)

The group of American Evangelists that I mentioned at the start are first responders to the chaos caused by the Sexual Revolution as well as first responders to the call for a New Evangelisation (a movement to bring Catholics who have fallen away from the Church back into the fullness of the faith¹). Christopher West is one such New Evangelist and interestingly in his presentations, books and dvd series *The Gift* (which breaks the *Theology of the Body* down into a more understandable format) he parallels the lives of Hugh Hefner and John Paul II; emphasising the drastic contrast in approach they took in trying to heal the pain caused by the “demonization of the body and sexuality”. (West, 2014, n.p)

At the same time as Hugh Hefner was launching his pornographic empire, Christopher observes that John Paul II was writing the *Theology of the Body*. Hefner actually referred to his puritanical upbringing as being the source of motivation for starting *Playboy magazine*, “it was a response to the hurt and hypocrisy of our Puritan heritage”. (West, 2014, n.p) The lack of affection he received made him ache for human interaction, “When I talk about the hurt and hypocrisy in some of our values – our sexual values – it comes from the fact that I didn’t get hugged a lot as a kid.” (West, 2014, n.p) West goes on to say that Hefner’s rejection of Puritanism should

¹“Where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a ‘new evangelisation’ or ‘re-evangelisation’.” (Pope John Paul II, 1990, pt. 33)

actually be the Catholic response, “The fear of and rejection of the body and sexuality typical of Puritanism is laced with interrelated heresies long condemned by the Catholic Church (dualism, Gnosticism, spiritualism, Manichaeism, Jansenism, etc.)”. (West, 2014, n.p) However Hefner’s approach, according to West, is simply replacing one extreme for another “repression (with) indulgence”. (West, 2014, n.p) Both puritanism and hedonism (due to their tendency to place one part of the human composite over the other) fail to integrate “body and soul, spirituality and sexuality” thereby excluding the only way to heal man’s brokenness – treating man in his fullness. (West, 2014, n.p)

West states that St John Paul II recognised that the Catholic Church had also somehow contributed to the demonization of the body and sexuality. He therefore took it upon himself to make the faith more “human” while not changing any of the truth it had been entrusted with. He did this by giving subjectivity an important place in the Christian life through his phenomenology. As West notes “How often is the Church’s doctrine rejected because it is thought to be hopelessly removed from ‘real life’ experience?” (West, 2003, p. 42)

By first focusing on the “human experience” (West elucidates) the Pope was able to delve into a “traditionally neglected perspective” on the inner life of man. He discovered a harmony between man’s inner life and the world he lives in, “he discovers in the subjectivity of man’s inner world a unity with the objectivity of man’s outer world”. This unity shows that “objective truths” can be established without (as West posits) “objectivising abstractions”. Pope John Paul was firmly convinced that, on a fundamental level, “The Church’s message is in harmony with the most secret desires of the human heart”. (West, 2003, p. 40)

According to this outlook, the desire of man to engage in the sexual act is not wrong. It is good, “very good” in fact. So “good” that man does not know how “good” it really is. For the Pope these desires are embedded in our very nature ... yet our means to achieve the fulfilment of these desires cannot be chained to the natural world. They have to fulfil the supernatural dimension of man as well. Through the *Theology of the Body* John Paul shows that the Church’s teachings are for the good of man, that it holds the Truth so that man can become human in the fullest sense. The approach of *Theology of the Body* therefore is to (unlike the Puritans and Catholics who have accepted this Manicheism) acknowledge these desires and question why they are there and what their purpose is... This means that the Truth is not presented in a way that could be misconstrued as “Bible-bashing” but “On her part, the Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom.

Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. The Church proposes; she imposes nothing". (Pope John Paul II, 1990, RM 39).

Since man is made in the Imago Dei – In the Image and Likeness of God – the Pope proposes man go “back to the beginning” before sin entered the picture. By returning to the two creation accounts in Genesis, the Pope reminds man that the seeds of who he is, his very purpose, has been planted in him from the start. He wants man to reclaim his identity, an identity that became tainted by original sin. The Pope calls us to an anamnesis, a process of recovering our memory but not in an attempt to return us to our original state (as this is impossible) but to use it as a blueprint that will guide us to the end vision of man which can only be achieved through Christ’s redemption. The Pope, by using the fact that man is stamped with “the Divine Image”, says to humanity that we no longer have to flail about lost in a sea of subjectivity and our own pride but we can start to “understand who we are (anthropology)” as well as “how we are to live (ethics)”. (West, 2003, p. 63)

For Pope John Paul (Christopher West posits) Genesis 1:27 or The Imago Dei gives man a transcendent dimension. He is composed of both body and soul. Man is not limited to the natural world; he is not reducible to mere matter but inherently possesses a spiritual dimension which gives him his dignity. This spiritual dimension sets him apart from the other creatures. A fact that is questioned considerably in the age of Veganism and the rapid development of AI but a fact that remains fundamental for the Pope nonetheless. Pope John Paul II in *Love & Responsibility* professed that, “Man must reconcile himself to his natural greatness ... he must not forget that he is a person”. (*A publication of the Love & Responsibility*, 2002, p. 1) Man actually obtains his subjectivity (the desire of every modernist), his “personhood” by virtue of the fact that he is created differently. He is adept to higher things. He is able to reason, develop himself and is not bound to basic instinct,

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #357)

The Pope directs us to read Genesis further, to go even deeper into who man is, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Throughout the creation account every time God creates something

He exclaims that it is “good” but when he creates man he exclaims that it is “very good”. Not only do these words show that man is the pinnacle of God’s creation but the Pope draws attention to the metaphysical meaning of the word. The fact that God uses the word “good” after He brings something into existence means that, “being and good are convertible”. (West, 2003, p. 63) This means that all that has been created “is good in itself” and nothing created is intrinsically evil. This is why, as Christopher West further states, “Evil, by definition, is always and only the deprivation of what is good” (West, 2003, p. 63) Just by the mere fact that man exists – that he has being – means that he is very good. Although concupiscence, which refers to the fact that (as Northrop states), “we lost original innocence through the fall, which creates a situation in which it easier for us to sin and to desire to sin rather than always seek the good”. (Northrop, 2018, p. 5) does not displace the fact that goodness is in our bones.

While raising “man to his natural greatness” and while calling man to embrace his “goodness” Pope John Paul simultaneously reminds man of his responsibility. Man has a duty to orientate himself towards the ideals and not direct himself to the fulfilment of his own ego.

We cannot truly understand John Paul’s thought on being “made in the image of God” if we don’t engage with his understanding of the Trinity – an image of communion, “Let *us* make Man in *our* image and likeness...” (Genesis 1:26) The doctrine of the Trinity is so essential to Pope John Paul’s works he declared (as Christopher West cites) that the “Trinitarian concept of the ‘image of God’ ... constitutes, perhaps, the deepest theological aspect of all that can be said about man”. (West, 2003, p. 79) For the Pope this Trinitarian concept is, as Father Michael Gaitley MIC explains, an “eternal exchange of love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. This love involves a pouring out of self “for the good of the other” and results in something that is life-giving,

(For all eternity) (1) the Father pours himself out in a total gift of self-giving love to the Son and (2) the Son returns that gift with the same self-giving love – and the love between them is the Holy Spirit...amazingly, God “has destined us to share in that exchange”. (Gaitley, 2015, n.p.)

This is not a sentimental statement by any means but in fact calls man to enter into communion with his fellow man through making a “total gift of self”. (West, 2003, p. 346) Again man is set apart from the other creatures because only he can love in the fullest sense, only he has the full freedom to choose to love, “Only the human being can love, and only the person is able

to bring into this world another person capable of yet more love. It is this capacity of man to love – and to bring love into the world – that gives us our “natural” splendour”. (*A publication of...*, 2002, p. 1)

Man is basically made by Love, through Love and for Love, “Man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, [and he] cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself”. (*Gaudium et Spes* 24) This love is a verb however, calling man to voluntarily “lay down his life” thereby imaging the highest form of love; Christ on the Cross, “It is Christ himself who reveals to us our basic vocation as persons by giving himself to us in his death on the Cross”. (Northrop, 2018, p. 1) This love defines man’s very being and fulfils his greatest longings,

Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience love and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it (From the encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* – “Redeemer of Man”). (Northrop, 2018, p. 1, 11)

Love’s definition however has been watered down and distorted. As Mark Shea reminds us, “The Opposite of Love is not hate, according to Pope John Paul II. The opposite of love is use”. (Shea, 2011, n.p) This harkens back to John Paul’s personalistic norm which states that, “the person is the kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end.” (*A publication of the Love & Responsibility*, 2002, p. 4)

The model of Love we have been given is that of the Trinity “self-giving gift” which has actually been stamped in our bodies in the sexual difference and complementarity as male and female, “The human body includes right from the beginning ... the capacity of expressing love, that love in which the person becomes a gift – and by means of this gift – fulfils the meaning of his being and existence”. (St JP II, 1980)

The form Theology of the Body has taken in the US and its resulting success

After a bit of research I observed that (in comparison to Europe) the *Theology of the Body* is being taught in America in a very unique way. The Pope’s teachings have not been left to the realm of academia but they have been and continue to be brought down to the parish level. The pro-

pagators of the Pope's teachings have managed to take what is believed to be too difficult to read and make it not only understandable for the average layman but retain its life changing impact. In *Witness to Hope* George Weigel is very clear that the density of the Pope's work will prove a challenge and it must be simplified,

Few contemporary theologians have taken up the challenge implicit in this dramatic proposal. Fewer priests preach these themes. A very small, even microscopic, percentage of the world's Catholics even know that a "theology of the body" exists. Why? The density of John Paul's material is one factor; a secondary literature capable of "translating" John Paul's thought into more accessible categories and vocabulary is badly needed. (Weigel, 2005, p. 343)

Christopher West managed to do this impossible task with his *Theology of the Body Explained* which Weigel actually wrote the forward too. West's other publications also continue to make the Pope's teachings accessible to the laity i.e. *Theology of the Body Explained: A Commentary on John Paul II's Man and Woman He Created Them*, *Theology of the Body for Beginners*, *The Good News About Sex and Marriage etc.* As I have mentioned his dvd series *The Gift* has had a major impact on spreading the message. He is not alone in his endeavours however. Married couple Jason & Crystalina Evert have had tremendous success in making TOB accessible to teens. With their dvd series *TOB: for teens*, their numerous chastity talks, books (*How to find your Soulmate without losing your Soul*, *Pure Manhood and Pure Womanhood*) and through their webpage *Chastity Project.com* they have delivered John Paul's message to millions of teenagers.

The success of this evangelisation seems to lie in the fact that audiences can relate to the speakers as they are laity themselves. Although we must not forget that a celibate man formulated the *Theology of the Body* and it is definitely not only reserved for married people – the fact that ordinary people can testify to this teaching working in their lives is certainly a positive. The fact that the speakers can speak from "experience" reinforces the phenomenological approach intrinsic to the Pope's anthropology and fulfils the call of Vatican II which had a big impact on JP II's thought.

The teaching of *Theology of the Body* hasn't remained however in the form of a teaching on sexuality and marriage like that presented by Christopher West and Jason and Crystalina Evert but the phenomenological method and return to first principles and a proper understanding of the hu-

man person has been adopted by many other American Catholic Evangelists and Apologists; Dr Scott Hahn (former Protestant, Biblical scholar and author of multiple books), Bishop Barron (author and founder of *The Word on Fire*), Father Mike Schmitz (Ascension presents), Matt Fradd (speaker and author of *The Porn Myth*, presenter of *Pints with Aquinas*), Leah Darrow (former America's next top model and speaker on modesty and chastity) to name a few.

Beyond Borders

The explosion of the *Theology of the Body* has been so powerful that it has also extended well and truly beyond American borders. About seven years ago, 17586 km's away, a group of South Africans were exposed to the Pope's teachings through the dvd series that I mentioned before. These teachings had a life changing impact and resulted in the formation of *The Theology of The Body South Africa* and *The Foundation for the Person and the Family* which would go on to spread John Paul's teachings to different parts of South Africa. While culturally there were obviously uniquely South African issues/problems around marriage/sexuality the series was met with great enthusiasm, conversion and reversions by those who participated in the courses.

Conclusion

Perhaps the success of TOB in the States is due to Catholics being a minority in a predominantly Protestant country therefore people have had to make sure that they really believe what they profess. Perhaps the call to become "Gift" provides such a stark contrast to the radical individualism in the US that it has more impact – although TOB also fights for the subjectivity of the individual. Perhaps there is just more money in the US to enable speakers like West to travel around spreading the message full time, perhaps there is no Catholic fatigue like in Europe thereby enabling young Catholics to focus more on the teachings then being put off by an old white man telling them what to do with their sex lives.

These are all points to consider, yet we can equally point out a number of obstacles US Catholics have had to face e.g. the numerous persecution Catholics have been under by the media and sometimes the state (Obama care and the recent bill in California that would force priests to break the seal of confession).

In my opinion, the most fundamental reason that *Theology of the Body* has been so successful in the US is due to the fact that the American evangelisers have made a concerted effort to implement these teachings in their own lives. They have tried to live out the theology of their own bodies. Recognising the signs that God has implanted in them and drawing on their personal subjective experience to show that the desire they have for love is actually the desire they have for God. Through their own witness they are showing that the Church has always known what satisfies the deepest ache of the human heart even though it hasn't always adequately expressed it,

“We need a new 'language' to break the silence and reverse the negativity. We need a fresh theology that explains how the Christian sexual ethic-far from being the prudish list of prohibitions it's often assumed to be-corresponds perfectly with the deepest yearnings of our hearts for love and union”. (West, 2004, n.p)

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