



## Lust, Shame and Bioethics

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### Introduction

In my first year of medical practice, I still clearly remember the case of a patient who came to me, truly distressed because he had committed an act of adultery with his secretary. He wanted me to test him for AIDS, since he was unwilling to put his wife at risk, not knowing if this casual encounter would have infected him. He recognized the stupidity of this act out of passion, and wished somehow to repair it and not cause more possible damage. He admitted of not having any marital relationships with his wife for several weeks now, out of this fear of potentially infecting her. As the AIDS virus has a six-month window of incubation, HIV test at this early stage would be futile to determine the status of his condition. After explaining to him that a test would not be helpful at that moment, and that no test would ever give him 100% certainty of being HIV-free, I counseled him to tell the truth to his wife about his extramarital affair. He was surprised by such a recommendation, but was too ashamed to do so. He left the clinic without the test, and I never saw him again.

Of the innumerable patients I have seen, this one visit stuck in my mind after all these years. Clearly, it was an ethical dilemma faced by a contrite man, one who made a mistake out of the heat of passion, but was too fearful to ask for forgiveness. Consequently, he was unable to resolve his dilemma. This case provokes several points of interest that will be examined in this article, namely, the human body and sexuality; the reality of lust and shame; and the ethical dimension of our corporeality.

In contemporary bioethics, lust, shame and theology are, to be sure, unlikely topics of discussion. This is primarily due to the fact that secular bioethics essentially finds itself unable to address the “deeper questions in life,” specifically those which pertain to human life itself, death, and human sexuality. This is not the place to discuss the inadequacy of secular bioethics, which I have described elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the rejection of the spiritual side of man makes writings such as those by John Paul II to be all too often ignored in the secular academy. They are gems of wisdom may just offer secular bioethics a fresh approach to bioethics, if not salvation from a dichotomous foundation.

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<sup>1</sup> S. J. THAM, *The Secularization of Bioethics: A Critical History*, Doctoral Dissertation Series 6, UPRA Press, Rome 2006; Id., “The Secularization of Bioethics,” *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 3 (2008), 443-454.

From 1979 to 1984, the late pope dedicated a series of catecheses during the Wednesday audiences to reflect on the theological implications of the human body. This *corpus* of speeches, now coined as Theology of the Body, has become an influential means to promulgate Catholic sexual morals.<sup>2</sup> Many of these profound insights on the body and sexuality are valid even for the non-believers.

In fact, the philosopher pope has opened up a gold mine in these lectures on the human body, based on his familiarity with the phenomenological approach that is compatible with scholastic philosophy, while enriching them with scriptural and theological insights. The body is indeed a topic of great relevance today, as this Italian writer comments:

The body reveals itself as the privileged place where the most basic sociological and anthropological nodal points are situated: the relationship between nature and culture, individual and society, individual and power. It is the crossroad between the social and the individual, creator and mirror of norms and values, emblematic graft of the physiological and the symbolic, and the meeting point between structure and action, constraint and liberty, rationality and passion.<sup>3</sup>

Accordingly, any bioethical discussion should not quickly bypass an analysis of the implications of the body. In this essay, we will first briefly look at the modern cultural understanding of the body which has frequently reduced the experience of lust and shame to the level of biology. Then, we will see that the Theology of the Body can offer a refreshing insight to supplement these inadequacies. Finally, we see how this approach can shed light on current topics of fertility control, technology, manipulation of body, pornography and prophylactic use in AIDS prevention.

## **The Masters of Suspicion**

It is certainly strange that any ethical consideration of human sexuality would ignore the fact of lust and shame as a natural tendency experienced by all people of different cultures. Nonetheless, a good number of ethicists have precisely striven to deny or ignore this when discussing sexual ethics. These writers treat the human body and sexuality as mere biological organs and impulses, more often than not reducing human beings to the level of animals. This approach, for instance, is found in the *Kinsey Report* (1948, 1953) authored by a zoologist, who made a statistical report based on multiple surveys of sexual behavior in American society. This report concluded that sexual behaviors were nothing other than a relatively simple mechanism of erotic reaction when physical and psychological stimuli were sufficiently aroused. Thus, it was surmised that it would be senseless to bring into the discussion categories such as good and evil, licit and illicit, normal and abnormal.<sup>4</sup> Hence, one can see that it is

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<sup>2</sup> The official texts of these catecheses can be found in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, Vol. II/2 to Vol. VII/2, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città Del Vaticano, 1980-1983.

<sup>3</sup> M. LIUCCIO, *Alla ricerca del corpo perduto*, Gagemi Editore, Roma 2003, 17. (Personal translation from Italian).

<sup>4</sup> A.C. KINSEY – W.B. POMEROY – C.E. MARTIN, *Sexual behavior in the human male*, Saunders, Philadelphia 1948; ID., *Sexual behavior in the human female*, Saunders, Philadelphia 1953.

incumbent upon us to briefly analyze the root and causes of Kinsey's sexual philosophy here, for it is precisely this line of thinking that is so prevalent today.

The philosophy of Descartes also helped significantly in paving the way to the modern ideal of the body. In Descartes' writings, the body is often seen as the only tangible reality expressing our personalities; even the soul is reduced to a bodily part found in the pineal gland. This mechanical conception of human beings allowed for the advance of medicine for certain, but at the cost of dividing the individual into many smaller parts.<sup>5</sup> There is an inherent dualism in the Cartesian scheme that is still seen in today's culture, where our spiritual nature is marginalized and the body exalted to the high altar of idolatry:

Cosmetics and diets, jogging and gyms, marathons and non-competitive sports: our civilization offers us the vision of a happy reshaping of the body in search of the perfect physical *form*... Newspapers and magazines that speak of the body—medicine, sport, love and sexuality—are multiplying their readership. Dance schools are marked with signs saying “full.” Theatrical laboratories continue to experiment on all the expressive possibilities of the body: the gesture, the mimicry, the sounds. The bond between publicity and the human body seems impermeable to any moral scruple: *Her Majesty the Body*, in partnership with products of every kind, triumphs on the small and the big screen, in the tabloids as well as highway billboards.<sup>6</sup>

The dualism of the body found its maximal expression in the last century in a number of free-thinkers. The Pontiff called these “Masters of Suspicion” and named three of them in particular—Freud, Nietzsche and Marx—whose thoughts we now briefly examine.<sup>7</sup>

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) affirms that sex is the dimension of the entire person—it is not the person who expresses one's sexuality but rather sexuality which expresses and structures the personality with its dynamics hidden in the unconscious. All our social, spiritual, artistic, altruistic and cultural expressions are therefore manifestations of a hidden “Oedipus complex” and their defense mechanisms. Since the time of Freud, a pansexual and deterministic conception of the person has taken hold, where sex becomes everything and determines everything. Therefore, in this conception, the sex drive is never to be “thwarted” or “held in check,” for personality disorders are the very results of such sexual repression. Consequently, traditional education is then accused of sexual repression, with the consequence of collective neurosis (Freud's diagnosis). The psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud has therefore reduced sex to the level of libido, animal instincts beyond rational control. When human activities and motivations are interpreted in terms of passions and sexual urges, we become slaves to our own sexuality and incapable of acting responsibly. Although psychoanalysis is no longer popular, this reductionist and deterministic approach to

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. R. DESCARTES, *Les passions de l'âme*, 1649.

<sup>6</sup> S. SPINSANTI, *Il corpo nella cultura contemporanea*, Queriniana, Brescia 1990, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, October 29, 1980. The pope acknowledged the source of this term from the writings of P. RICOEUR, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Continuum, New York 1989, 144-146.

human sexuality has become the unstated norm in psychology and popular culture today.<sup>8</sup>

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) envisaged the body as the ultimate source of pleasure and life. In his famed *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, he pointed his finger at those he coined “Despisers of the Body:”

To the despisers of the body will I speak my word. I wish them neither to learn afresh, nor teach anew, but only to bid farewell to their own bodies,—and thus be dumb. “Body am I, and soul”—so saith the child. And why should one not speak like children? But the awakened one, the knowing one, saith: “Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body.” The body is a big sagacity, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd. An instrument of thy body is also thy little sagacity, my brother, which thou callest “spirit” —a little instrument and plaything of thy big sagacity. “Ego,” sayest thou, and art proud of that word. But the greater thing—in which thou art unwilling to believe—is thy body with its big sagacity; it saith not “ego,” but doeth it.<sup>9</sup>

Nietzsche therefore sees Christian morality as the enemy who wished to put moral limits on what one could do with the body, especially in the sexual realm.

Similarly, Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) negated the transcendence the spiritual nature of man. He highlighted his existentialist philosophy with this famous quote “*Je suis mon corps* (I am my body)” as the first dimension of being. The body is here understood existentially, as a “being for itself” that needs to assert itself in the midst of things which are “beings in themselves.” Since the body has no spiritual transcendence, it becomes the first link in a chain of instruments to be used by one another.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the existentialist philosophy of Sartre and related thinking present in literature and cinema have contributed to a nihilistic morality where sexual experience is exalted as free expression and a privileged, if not unique, form of communication.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) subjugated the family to be understood as merely a productive unit in service to the welfare of the collective. Consequently, with this mentality, even children’s games become only preparations for education and productive work. So, too, under the communist’s utilitarian rationale, the entry of women into the workforce was deemed a necessity, and thus the legalization of abortion became part of the policy to ensure recruitment.

The neomarxists further extrapolated from this dialectical philosophy of class struggle to the sexual realm between men and women. Sexual revolution is now understood in terms of social liberation, where a new humanity would be free from erotic and affective dependencies in matrimony as well as spiritual dependency in the

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. E. SGRECCIA, *Manuale di Bioetica, Vol. I: Fondamenti ed etica biomedica*, Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2000<sup>3</sup>, 386-387.

<sup>9</sup> F.W. NIETZSCHE, *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book For All And None*, IV, 1891. In <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext99/spzar10.txt> [Translated by Thomas Common].

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J.P. SARTRE, *L'Être et le néant : Essai d'ontologie phénoménologique [Being and Nothingness]*, Paris 1943, III, II, 3.

moral life. The principle proponent of this ideology was Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) who equated sex with liberty, release of one's instinct, and pleasure. In other words, life is a party, or a game without rules, while marriage is considered a repression of sexuality. Moreover, libido in a consumerist society is just a form of psychological release to increase productivity. Thus, the public display of eroticism encourages the consumer to spend more than his real needs (e.g., sport car ads are frequently featured with sensuous women to boost sales). Marcuse also proposed the liberation of sexuality from heterosexual orientation toward "polymorphism" and "free choice of sex".<sup>11</sup>

Following the neomarxist dialectic, radical feminism applied class struggle and social revolution to the emancipation of women from men, and the emancipation of a woman's social-political role from the traditional domestic-familial one. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), the concepts of femininity and maternity are the result of social conditioning by a dominant male culture. The man-woman relationship is analogous to the hunter and the hunted. Thus, women must reclaim their rightful identity by rejecting the linking of sexuality, matrimony and procreation within a familial setting. The woman must be free of the chains of matrimony and the responsibilities of motherhood. Following this logic, sexuality and genitality should only be defined in terms of satisfaction and pleasure. The notion of responsibility or uncomfortable consequences (such as pregnancy) have no place in this understanding of sexuality, and therefore a woman's sexual "freedom" necessarily entails the right to abortion and contraception. Thus, one can see that this exaltation of sexual freedom as an absolute value in the ideologies of Marcuse and of De Beauvoir found their culmination in the UN International Conferences of Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995).<sup>12</sup>

### **Theology of the Body and Bioethics**

In contrast to these reductive and hedonistic models, the truth about human sexuality could be gleaned from the novel approach offered by the Theology of the Body. John Paul II wished to emphasize the need to seek truth that is based on an integral vision of man, a truth which comprises the three branches of philosophy: Metaphysics (study of reality), Anthropology (study of man) and Ethics (study of right norms).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, in addition to these philosophical truths, theology can also enlighten us about human sexuality:

We are, in fact, the children of an age in which, due to the development of various disciplines, this integral vision of man can easily be rejected and replaced by many *partial conceptions* that dwell on one or another aspect of the *compositum humanum* but do not reach man's *integrum* or leave it outside their field of vision... The fact that *theology also includes the body should not* astonish or surprise anyone who is conscious of the mystery and reality of the Incarnation. Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology—that is, the science that has divinity for its object—I would say, through the main door.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. H. MARCUSE, *L'uomo a una dimensione*, Torino, 1964.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. E. SGRECCIA, *Manuale di Bioetica, Vol. I: Fondamenti ed etica biomedica*, 389.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, September 12, 1979.

<sup>14</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, April 2, 1980. (Italics in original)

Theological bioethics is something that is not heard of today in the field of bioethics or theology. This is unfortunate, since there is so much that theology could contribute to the current debates in bioethics. I have already described the history, phenomenon and causes of the secularization of bioethics in my dissertation, and my findings have shown that there is indeed a need for religion to be reinserted into the bioethical debate, which has become impoverished from its absence. As I mention at the end my thesis, “What we need today, therefore, are counterrevolutionaries who are not afraid to speak out and engage the secular world of bioethics in unequivocal terms, using sound philosophical reasoning and, why not, even unabashed theological insights.”<sup>15</sup> In a way, the Pope has shown us how Theology of the Body can qualify as one of these attempts to promote theological bioethics, where he proposed an integral vision of the human person, where faith and reason, revelation and philosophy find their meeting ground.

In the Theology of the Body, the Holy Father begins the series of catechesis by commenting on the first two chapters of *Genesis* which specifically discuss the creation of human beings, chapters from which insights on the human person can be drawn. While humanity is created within the visible world, it is absolutely impossible to reduce us to the world. We are special because of our unique likeness to God and our relationship with God. Corresponding to this objective reality, he offers a psychological analysis: Humanity’s situation was original innocence followed by sin, but there exists an essential continuity between these two opposite states of man. Sin occurred not only for the first parents but also for the whole historical course of human existence. Here, John Paul II writes that our history is enmeshed with our theological prehistory, that is, the state of humanity’s original innocence. Even when sin signifies a state of loss of grace, it nonetheless points to the grace of original innocence in humankind. As both the historic and modern person participate in the history of sinfulness, both participate as subject and co-creator in the history of salvation.

The account of creation of man and woman reveals humanity’s original solitude, not only as man being lonely without woman, but a deeper solitude derived from human nature itself. This original solitude is implied in the human need to work, subdue nature and have dominion over the earth. Right from the beginning of its existence, created humanity finds itself searching for an identity, a self-definition. In naming all the living creatures, human beings recognize their superiority to the rest of creation, and also their dissimilarity from it. They realize that they alone precisely because only they are capable of self-consciousness and self-determination. Their solitude also applies to their body—it is precisely through the body that one becomes aware of one’s substantial similarity to other living beings and what separates them. Each man and woman has this self-perception as a person who belongs to the visible world as a body among bodies.<sup>16</sup>

These primordial experiences allow humanity to discover the absolute originality of the “male-female human being”. It also demonstrates the existing “with and for someone” as the norm of human existence. “Alone” and “helper” imply that relationship and communion of persons are the antidote of humanity’s original

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<sup>15</sup> S.J. THAM, *The Secularization of Bioethics*, 422.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, September 12 - October 24, 1979.

solitude. In the conjugal act, the individual becomes aware that the body is made for mutual self-giving when it assumes the “second I” to be his or her own. Procreation reproduces the mystery of creation itself, and the unity of man and woman becomes a part of this mystery.<sup>17</sup>

As we will see below, nakedness without shame is indicative of the couple’s awareness of this communion, lost to a certain extent after they had failed the first test of obedience. Marriage is therefore proposed as a “remedy for concupiscence”, a grace with an ethical order, where *eros* and *ethos* mutually penetrate the lives of the spouses.<sup>18</sup> Thus, creation points toward redemption, where the fullness of human existence will be revealed. The spousal meaning of the body is complete with redemption and the promise of the resurrection of the body. In light of this, the meaning of the body is not limited to marriage or virginity, but also relates to such diverse situations as human birth, suffering and death.<sup>19</sup>

### **The phenomenon of Lust and Shame**

Not long ago, the Oxford University Press came out with a series on the seven deadly sins. Given its secular orientation, one can imagine that this series wanted to reformulate the traditional concept of sin. Simon Blackburn, a philosopher, was given the task to write on Lust, and as expected, he attempted to rehabilitate this vice, following the footsteps of modern philosophers described above.

Lust has a good claim to qualify. Indeed, that understates it, since lust is not merely useful but essential. We would none of us be here without it. So the task I set myself is to clean off some of the mud, to rescue it from the echoing denunciations of old men of the deserts, to deliver it from the pallid and envious confessors of Rome and the disgust of Renaissance, to destroy the stocks and pillories of the Puritans, to separate it from other things that we know drag it down..., and to lift it from the category of sin to that of virtue.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast to “ethics without lust”, John Paul II offers an alternative interpretation of the human experience of sexuality in the *Theology of the Body*. As Vincent Walsh summarized this teaching of the pope:

Human history is written under the pressure of this lust and historical ethics connected with this lust. The force of lust decides human behavior and forms social structures and institutions. Because we always encounter this lust, no study of ethics can ignore this fact of the man of lust.<sup>21</sup>

The classical understanding of lust is forwarded systematically in the teaching of St. Thomas, under the section of concupiscible appetite whose correct exercise is guided

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, November 21, 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, December 1, 1982.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, December 15, 1982.

<sup>20</sup> S. BLACKBURN, *Lust: the seven deadly sins*, OUP, New York, NY 2004, 3.

<sup>21</sup> V.M. WALSH, *The Theology of the Body: A simplified version*, Key of David Publications, Merion PA 2002, 49. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, August 13, 1980.

by the virtue of temperance.<sup>22</sup> The late pope, however, wishes to complement this teaching with his own observation from phenomenology and theology.

He observed that there is a true battle in every human heart between love and lust. Love calls us to a higher goal of disinterested self-giving, while concupiscence drives us to enjoyment and ownership. Hence, lust conditions the inner being of every human being.<sup>23</sup> Here, the Polish pontiff realized that the modern mindset often equates “sexual instinct” found in the animal kingdom to that of humans. However, created in God’s image, humans have a clear awareness of what essentially distinguishes them from animals. Therefore, the category of sexual instinct should not be applied to human beings, because they are in addition rational beings. In place of naturalistic approaches, a more accurate description of human sexuality consists in the nuptial meaning of the body discovered in the dual makeup of man and woman as masculine and feminine. In fact, we are free beings capable of making choices especially in the area of sexuality, and we are not bound by instincts as a “naturalistic necessity”.<sup>24</sup>

*Man cannot stop at casting the heart into a state of continual and irreversible suspicion due to the manifestations of the concupiscence of the flesh and of the libido uncovered, among others, by a psychoanalyst through analysis of the unconscious. Redemption is a truth, a reality, in the name of which man must sense himself called, and “called with effectiveness”... Man must sense himself called to rediscover, even more, to realize the spousal meaning of the body and to express in this way the interior freedom of the gift, that is, the freedom of that spiritual state and strength that derive from mastery over the concupiscence of the flesh.*<sup>25</sup>

The pope offered a profound insight into the nature of human sexuality in his description of shame. Shame is a very complex but fundamental experience. By shame, the person experiences a fear toward his or her “second I”, as man before woman. This fear for oneself paradoxically reveals his solitude and the need for affirmation and acceptance. The shame experience keeps the other person away, but at the same time seeks to draw the other into a personal relationship. Shame, therefore, has a fundamental value in the ethics of the man-woman relationship as it sets the essential rules for “communion of persons”. From attentive reading of the first two chapters of *Genesis*, the pontiff notes that shame was not present at the beginning of creation. Originally, the communication between Adam and Eve was deeply personal. There was no shame initially because their perception of one another in full nakedness corresponds to the way God sees them. They enjoyed a reciprocal complementarity of being male and female, and this special understanding of their bodies made them a gift for each other. Shame appears only after the fall of the first parents. They recognize their nakedness only after sin.<sup>26</sup>

Shame is therefore a consequence of sin, after which the need for modesty begins. Man and woman are now divided by their masculinity/femininity and driven by an instinctive impulse to cover their bodies. The human person is now male *or* female rather than male *and* female. At the basis of this shame is the three-fold lust “of the

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<sup>22</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, qq. 141-168.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, September 17, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, April 28, 1982.

<sup>25</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, October 29, 1980.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, December 12 - 19, 1979, January 2, 1980; July 23, 1980.

flesh, of the eyes and of the pride of life” (cf. *1Jn* 2:16).<sup>27</sup> Shame has also brought a limitation to personal intimacy between the couple. Their need for fig leaves to cover their private parts is an indication of mutual shame that has reached the deepest level which has shaken the foundation of their existence.

In this context, or rather in this perspective, Adam’s words in *Genesis* 3:10, “I was afraid, because I am naked, and I hid myself,” *seem to express the awareness of being defenseless*, and the sense of *insecurity* about his somatic structure *in the face of the processes of nature, operating with an inevitable determinism*. In this disturbing statement, one can perhaps find the implication of a certain “cosmic shame”...<sup>28</sup>

The teaching of Christ concerning lust or “adultery committed in the heart” is directed not only to believers, but to all persons because it is a universal experience. Thus, to reduce this experience to biology is to impoverish our understanding of human sexuality. In the end, then, the body becomes a mere object of manipulation, as the Pontiff pointed out:

When one uses such one-sided knowledge of the body’s functions as an organism, it is not difficult to get to the point of treating the body more or less systematically as an *object of manipulations*; in this case, man no longer identifies himself subjectively, so to speak, with his own body, because it is deprived of the meaning and dignity that stem from the fact that this body is the person’s very own body.<sup>29</sup>

## **Bioethical Implications**

Manipulation of our bodies as objects and commodities is most evident in many of today’s bioethical controversies. This is seen in contraceptive and procreative technologies, surrogacy, and the destiny and use of surplus embryos for stem cell research. The Church’s perspective has often been considered too restrictive. However, in the light of this series of catechesis on the human body, perhaps a greater mutual understanding on human sexuality could be fostered.

In fact, a deeper question that has rarely been raised in these debates deals with the proper relationship between nature and technology. Even though technological advance has allowed humanity to dominate nature, there are certain limits to the employment of technology because we are free and truly masters of ourselves and not slaves of technology. This proper use of technology is particularly relevant in the areas concerning with the transmission of life.

This extension of the sphere of the means of “the domination... of the forces of nature” threatens the human person for whom the method of “self-mastery” is and remains specific. It—that is, self-mastery—corresponds in fact to the fundamental constitution of the person: it is a perfectly “natural” method. The transposition of “artificial means,” by contrast, *breaks* the constitutive dimension of the person, deprives man of the subjectivity proper to him and turns him into *an object of manipulation*.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, June 18, 1980; December 10, 1980.

<sup>28</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, May 14, 1980.

<sup>29</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, April 8, 1981.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, August 22, 1984. (Italics in original)

The accusation against the Church in causing the spread of AIDS because of its resistance to promote use of condom as prophylactic is another area where Theology of the Body can shed light. Once again, the secular mindset, subtly influenced by the aforementioned masters of suspicion, tends to reduce this question to that of effective prevention without considering the nature of free human acts in this area. Conceived in this manner, like animals, men and women are incapable of being responsible and control their sexual urges for a higher good. The only way to save lives would then consist in promoting the use of condoms in order to reduce the infection rates.<sup>31</sup> This essentially negates the possibility of self-mastery that reflects more adequately the liberty of each person.

Pornography and prostitution are two other related topics where manipulation of one's body is evident. Unfortunately, many advertising and publicity agencies have exploited the human body and its sexual dimension for commercial gain. Here, the reflection on shame is once again pertinent, since clothing used to cover shame affirms our sensitivity to the dignity of the human person. The pontiff said, "It is not possible to agree on this point with the representatives of so-called naturalism who appeal to the right to 'everything that is human' in works of art and in the products of artistic reproduction, and who claim that in this way they act in the name of the realistic truth about man." Objectivization of the body in art and pornography contradicts the fact that the body is meant to be a gift directed toward another in the communion of persons. The body is a subjective manifestation of the person. Because the body has such great value in this personal communion, making the naked body an object of art and advertisement becomes an ethical problem.

In fact, that "element of the gift" is, so to speak, suspended in the dimension of an unknown reception and of an unforeseen response, and in this way it is intentionally "threatened" in the sense that it can become an anonymous object of "appropriation," an object of abuse.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

The legacy left by John Paul II with his Theology of the Body has not quite entered in the mainstream of bioethics discourse as yet. Unfortunately, it is the secular seers infected by the Masters of Suspicion that the culture listens to when it comes to questions of human sexuality. The so called sexual revolution that began half a century ago has left a deep impression in the modern mind. This reached its height in the frenzies of the 1960s, when traditional notions of marriage, fidelity, chastity and propriety were swept away. We are now left with a distorted view of the human body, emptied of its experience of lust and shame, that is responsible for a plethora of societal ills—adultery, divorce, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, child abuse,

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<sup>31</sup> See ANONYMOUS, "Vatican in HIV Condom Row", *BBC News* (Oct. 9, 2003), in [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3176982.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/3176982.stm) [August 10, 2006]; T. RACHMAN, "Cardinal's Comments on AIDS and Condoms Draw Criticism from UN Health Agency", *Associated Press* (October 10, 2003) in <http://www.aegis.org/news/ap/2003/AP031013.html> [September 20, 2005]; ANONYMOUS, "The Pope's grievous errors", *Lancet* 9463 (2005), 911-912.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis*, April 29, 1981.

pornography, and pedophilia. Both men and women, not to speak of boys and girls, are too often treated as mere sexual objects to be manipulated and taken advantage of.

The debate that took place forty years ago with the release of the papal encyclical *Huamane Vitae* on contraception, even when it is considered as a non-issue by the society and the bioethics community, is still an unresolved question pertaining to the meaning of human sexuality. In fact, the challenges that confront bioethics today on the questions of procreative technologies, designer babies and cloning are but the flip side of the same coin. If it is true that the human body is not just an organism for sexual pleasures but is an expression the total person, then it can never be used as a means for profit, commerce, financial or scientific gain. By reducing the body to the level of an object, freely suitable for technological manipulation, is not only a grave affront to human dignity, but also a danger for the future of humanity. On this note, we conclude this article with a passage of C.S. Lewis where he sharply warned of the *Abolition of Man*:

We reduce things to mere Nature *in order that* we may “conquer” them. We are always conquering Nature, *because* “Nature” is the name for what we have, to some extent, conquered. The price of conquest is to treat a thing as mere Nature. Every conquest over Nature increases her domain. The stars do not become Nature till we can weigh and measure them: the soul does not become Nature till we can psychoanalyse her. The wresting of powers from Nature is also the surrendering of things *to* Nature. As long as this process stops short of the final stage we may well hold that the gain outweighs the loss. But as soon as we take the final step of reducing our own species to the level of mere Nature, the whole process is stultified, for this time the being who stood to gain and the being who has been sacrificed are one and the same.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> C.S. LEWIS, *The Abolition of Men*, OUP, Oxford 1943, 43. (Italics in original)