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Benedict & the Theology of the Body

Michael Sean Winters | Aug. 25, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

My colleague Eugene Cullen Kennedy has strong words [1]to offer in opposition to Pope John Paul II?s ?Theology of the Body? and, specifically, against Cardinal Justin Rigali?s embrace of it.

Conservatives, too, have voiced concern about the way the ?Theology of the Body? has been used. Professor David Schindler, who heads the John Paul II Institute for Marriage and the Family, got into a big row with Christopher West on the subject of the latter?s mismanagement of the ideas put forward by John Paul II, about which I wrote an article [2]for Slate magazine.

But, in his zeal, Kennedy makes what seems to me a serious error. He lumps the Theology of the Body efforts together with Pope Bendict?s ?Reform of the Reform.? I may have missed it ? I do not read everything the Pope says or writes ? but I do not recall Pope Benedict extolling John Paul II?s excursion into sexual theology. And, to be fair, Pope John Paul II himself never made his Theology of the Body a part of the official teaching of the Church. He never issued an encyclical on the subject, for example. Pope Benedict?s ?Reform of the Reform? has aimed at reconnecting the post-conciliar Church with its pre-conciliar antecedents, that is, pointing out that the reforms of Vatican II did not have to do so much with an embrace of contemporary liberalism as they did with a return to the sources, the resourrcement theology of DeLubac et al. Vis-à-vis the conservative curialists of the day, DeLubac may have seemed like a liberal, but his writings have little in common with contemporary liberalism.

I admit that I find the Theology of the Body not to be my cup of tea. It certainly colors our understanding of Papa Wojtyla. But, I think it is unfair to lay it at the feet of Pope Benedict.

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