

The role of Eros in the Nuptial Meaning of the Body

Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount are not primarily a condemnation but "above all an appeal."^[1] They are a call to the heart of man to rediscover the purpose of his being a body and of the instinctive features inherent to this reality. Eros is one of those features. As the interior force in man that attracts him to what is true, good, and beautiful in the Platonic use of the term, eros acts as a natural inclination within the heart of man to attract him to woman (and vice versa). However, eros cannot be separated from ethos.^[2] Ethos,^[3] the praxis of morality, must be the context of the innate erotic inclination. Eros does not exist in isolation. The meeting place of this union between eros and ethos is the human heart.^[4] That is why the human heart can be a place of harmonization of what is truly human or a battlefield between what is human and inhuman—sin. Since the human heart has been wounded by original sin, eros has also been disordered. Rather than being an interior force which attracts man and woman to what is true, good and beautiful in the other, it now becomes utilized and manipulated into appetite for carnal desire. Therefore, eros must be purified. It must be disciplined to obey the laws of the meaning of the body which are nuptial. When eros is purified it becomes ethical in its purpose and praxis, just as it was in the beginning.

With this understanding of eros it is easier to see the words of Christ as having much more significance than that of a prohibition. Rather, they are an appeal to value the human person in his totality, inclusive of his body. The holistic Gospel ethic and vision of man does not deny or suffocate what is innate in human nature, namely, eros. It embraces the totality of the revelation of man, in the beginning, and seeks to exhort and empower humanity to self-realization. Consequently, the appeal of Christ to apply that natural knowledge that is eros is for the good of the person—that is to say, to purify the human heart so as to provide a pure place where eros meets ethos. Then it would follow that the human heart would esteem and even love what is truly good and beautiful concerning the human person manifested in the body. This would lead to the acceptance of the other as a gift in the context of freedom and the

realization of the nuptial meaning of the body. However, without a pure heart, eros will become an inclination to objectify the body and consequently the person. Such a condition indicates an immature man whose heart is unable to process the spontaneous values that enter via the “erotic” impulses that are natural to him.[5]

In order for man to become the person he is called to be—a living icon of God—he must have a “deep knowledge of his interiority.”[6] This presupposes an understanding of his masculinity and femininity, its reciprocal significance one for the other, the purpose of eros, and most of all an understanding of the meaning of the body. This is the content of the appeal of Christ to the heart of man—male and female—that they know themselves and understand themselves so as to be able to maturely relate to the other in an ethical and communal way. Christ’s appeal to the heart is also an appeal to rediscover the way to the “redemption of the body,” for “Christ did not invite man to return to the state of original innocence, because humanity has irrevocably left it behind. But he called him [and continues to call him through the Sacred Heart] to rediscover the living forms of the new man.”[7] This new man is the “recreation” wrought in the Paschal Mystery, the “New Adam” in whom we are baptized.[8] It is the new man the Holy Father speaks of when he writes: “The fact that the human body becomes in Jesus Christ the body of God-man obtains for this reason, in every man, a new supernatural elevation.”[9] That is why man’s heart must be pure and why it must be in communion with purity itself. “Purity is a requirement of love.”[10] Love is the basis of communion. Communion is the ultimate goal of the body. The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the source of love and the indwelling of God in man, in his body, precisely in the heart that will prepare the whole man to realize his true meaning and purpose

[1] cf. TB 168.

[2] Ibid., cf. 169.

[3] Ethos is defined by the Holy Father as: A living morality in the existential sense formed not only by norms (commandments, precepts and prohibitions) but also of “superabounding” justice through subjective vitality. Values lead to duties which lead to expression of conscience as the response of one’s own personal ego. (cf. Ibid 105)

[4] TB, 169.

[5] Ibid., cf. 170-172.

[6] Ibid., 172.

[7] Ibid., 175.

[8] cf. CCC, § 504-506; see also GS §22.

[9] TB 207.

[10] Ibid., 177.

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