

THE *Gift* YOUR CALL TO GREATNESS

AN ADULT FAITH FORMATION PROGRAM

Presented by
CHRISTOPHER WEST



free, total, faithful, fruitful.

STUDENT WORKBOOK

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ABBREVIATIONS

- CCC** *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997)
- DC** *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI's encyclical letter *God is Love* (Pauline, 2006)
- LF** *Letter to Families*, John Paul II's Letter to Families in the Year of the Family (Pauline, 1994)
- LR** *Love and Responsibility*, Karol Wojtyla's philosophical work on human sexuality (Ignatius, 1993)
- RH** *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II's encyclical letter on the Redeemer of Man (Pauline, 1979)
- TOB** *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, John Paul II's general audience addresses on Human Love in the Divine Plan (Pauline, 2006)
- WH** *Witness to Hope*, George Weigel's biography of Pope John Paul II (HarperCollins, 1999)

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“MAN MUST RECONCILE HIMSELF
TO HIS NATURAL GREATNESS.”

– ST. JOHN PAUL II
(LR, p. 236)

THERE IS A “GREAT MYSTERY”
CHISELED IN US –
A “CALL TO GREATNESS”
STAMPED IN OUR HUMANITY.
AND THIS CALL TO GREATNESS
IS A SHEER GIFT.
IT IS THE GIFT OF ALL GIFTS.

- In this talk, we are going to learn how to “read” this call to greatness that God has stamped in us so that we can open more fully to this gift and live it more abundantly.
- Why does John Paul II say we must “reconcile” ourselves to our own greatness? The reason is that we are often ready and willing to settle for something much *less* than what we are created for.
- The key to discovering our “greatness” is to get in touch with our deepest *desires*. If our desires often cause trouble for us, the problem is not that we desire *too much* – we desire *too little*.

A person is seen from the back, standing in a grassy field and reaching out their right arm towards a bright, hazy light on the horizon. The person is wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt and light-colored pants. The background is a soft-focus landscape with rolling hills under a bright sky.

1. DESIRE

A woman came to the well to draw water. She was *thirsty* (desire). Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give will never thirst again” (John 4:13-14).

- In this familiar story, Jesus approaches this woman’s *physical desire* as a way to awaken her deeper *spiritual desire*.
- What does the human being desire? (Ask yourself: What do I desire?)
- All of our pursuits (security, peace, love, even temporal things such as money, food, and sexual union) have a common denominator. The human being is looking for “happiness,” contentment, satisfaction, fulfillment.
- The question is this: What will bring the happiness we long for?

1a. “We all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated” (St. Augustine, quoted in CCC 1718).

1b. The “natural desire for happiness ... is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it” (CCC 1718).

The woman at the well is intrigued by Jesus’ words, but she still doesn’t understand: “Sir, give me this water, that I may no longer thirst, nor need to come back to this well to draw water” (see John 4:15).

- We are created for the *Infinite* and yearn for it. But we often seek to satisfy our yearning in *finite* things. When we do we “miss the mark.”
- God gave us this world and its pleasures only as signs, “sacraments” or icons of the Infinite joys that await us in heaven. We must be careful not to turn these *icons* into *idols*. When we do we “miss the mark.”

Jesus points the woman to her dearest “idol” – to the place where she has sought (unsuccessfully) to satisfy her deepest thirst – when he says, “Go, call your husband” (John 4:16).

- Jesus “knows everything about her” (see John 4:30). He knows that she has been sexually involved with several men (see John 4:18).
- Does Jesus condemn her for “missing the mark”? No! For he knows that, all along, *she was really looking for him* and the love he longs to give her:

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is [speaking] to you ... you would have asked him and he would have given you *living water*” (John 4:10). “Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be complete” (John 16:24).

1c. “The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly ... must with his unrest, uncertainty and even his weakness and sinfulness, with his life and death, draw near to Christ. He must ... enter into him with all his own self ... in order to find himself. If that profound process takes place within him, he then bears fruit not only of adoration of God but also of deep wonder at himself. ... In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man’s worth and dignity [at man’s greatness!] is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity” (RH 10).

2. OUR BODIES: SIGN OF OUR GREATNESS

“Theology of the Body”

In a series of 129 short talks delivered between 1979 and 1984, John Paul II helped the Church and the world to understand that man’s “call to greatness” is *stamped right in his body* as male and female. Known as the “theology of the body” (TOB), these talks, according to papal biographer George Weigel, represent “one of the boldest reconfigurations of Catholic theology in centuries” (WH, p. 336).

- Since it offers an extensive biblical reflection on the meaning of marital love, the TOB is often reduced to a teaching on marriage. It is that, but it also *so much more!*
- It is critical to realize that *the TOB is not only for married people*. The TOB provides a lens through which to view and understand the very meaning of existence.
- The TOB is for the married, the divorced, the engaged, the single, the consecrated celibate, Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, farmers, doctors, lawyers, janitors, politicians, homemakers, children, teens, adults, the elderly – in short, theology of the *body* is for everybody!



2a. Within the context of human sexuality and marital love, the TOB affords “the rediscovery of the meaning of the whole of existence, of the meaning of life” (TOB 46:6).

2b. Understanding the true meaning of the body and sexuality “concerns the whole Bible” (TOB 69:8). It plunges us into “the perspective of the whole Gospel, of the whole teaching, even more, of the whole mission of Christ” (TOB 49:3).

2c. The TOB “has barely begun to shape the Church’s theology, preaching, and religious education. When it does, it will compel a dramatic development of thinking about virtually every major theme in the Creed” (WH, p. 853).

The Body Reveals God’s Mystery

We cannot see God. As pure Spirit, God is totally beyond our vision. Yet, Christians believe that the invisible God has made himself visible. How?

2d. In “the body of Jesus ‘we see our God made visible and so are caught up in love of the God we cannot see’” (CCC 477).

2e. “Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology ... through the main door” (TOB 23:4).

God’s mystery has been revealed *in human flesh* – “theology of the body.” This phrase is not only the title of a series of talks by John Paul II. It represents the very *logic* of Christianity.

2f. “The body, in fact, and only the body, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be a sign of it” (TOB 19:4).

2g. Man “is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit. The body ... is a *spiritualized body*, just as man’s spirit is ... *an embodied spirit*” (LF 19).

2h. “Should [man] aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness” (DC 5).