

Michael Waldstein's new translation of John Paul II's General Audiences on the Theology of the Body has just been published by Pauline Books and Media

An Interview with Michael Waldstein

Can you briefly explain what the term "Theology of the Body" means?

By "Theology of the Body," John Paul II means a systematic account of the role of the body in expressing the invisible, in making the holy reality of God and his grace visible. His main thesis is that the human body has a spousal meaning. It is above all an expression of the gift of self.

How did you decide to translate John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*?

For a number of years, I have been working on a book entitled *John Paul II's Theology of the Body: Context and Argument*, which I hope to finish this year or next. I became more and more dissatisfied with the original translation. I began to retranslate passages that I needed for my book and at a certain point the decision to translate the whole text was the logical next step. I contacted the Daughters of Saint Paul, who published the original English translation. It seemed a providential moment, because they had become increasingly aware of the need for a new translation and were praying that God would show them some way to produce it. The new translation and my book about the Theology of the Body are the fruit of ten years of teaching this material at the International Theological Institute for Studies on Marriage and the Family in Gaming, Austria.

Why is there a need for a new translation of the Pope's general audiences on the *Theology of the Body*?

The original translation had many

defects. For example, the key concept "spousal meaning of the body" was translated in eight different ways. The reason for these defects is easy to understand considering the circumstances of the translation. On any given Wednesday, when John Paul II delivered one of the talks at the General Audience, the Italian text was sent over to *L'Osservatore Romano* and whoever was on duty at the English desk translated it into English. A few days later the English text was published in the *L'Osservatore Romano*. The trans-

lators did not have the work as a whole before them, but translated each catechesis individually.

To judge from various inconsistencies there were several translators. Later translators could not go back and change the earlier translations because they were already published. The original English translation is simply a compilation of these *L'Osservatore Romano* translations without any correction of mistakes and inconsistencies. There was a need for a systematic translation that considers the work as a whole to make decisions about particular terms in light of the whole. This has been accomplished in *Man and Woman*

He Created Them: A Theology of the Body.

There is a second and more important reason why we needed a new edition. We now have the original headings from the John Paul II archives. My own experience and that of everyone else I have talked to about this, is that the order

of the argument in the Theology

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of the Body is hard to follow. Readers often complain that they don't know where they are in the text and where they are going. If they are well disposed to John Paul II, they attribute the lack of order to the Slavic circular style of thinking as opposed to Western linear thinking, or they attribute it to Phenomenology as opposed to Thomism or to mysticism as opposed to rationalism. People who are less well disposed have called the work "mind-numbingly repetitious." John Paul II's own division helps one to see that these impressions are largely mistaken. There is a rigorous order of thought all the way through the work.

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Dr. Waldstein - photo courtesy of Pauline Books and Media.



Can you tell us something about your visit to the archives in Rome that hold the private papers of John Paul II, and what you found there?

For many years I worked very hard to understand the order of the argument in the *Theology of the Body*. I thought I had made some progress, but I wished I could get my hands on a division of the work by John Paul II himself. I was sure that somewhere in his papers there must be an outline he himself used when he wrote this large and complex work. With that hope, I went last November to the John Paul II archives in Rome in the Casa Polacca. I had a Polish friend, Fr. Wojtek Janusiewicz, with me because I don't read Polish. When we spoke with the director of the archives right after our arrival, he said he was not aware of any outline.

Still, he gave us the *Theology of the Body* folders that contained the typescript of the catecheses with some hand written corrections by John Paul II. We looked carefully, but found no outline.

On the second day, we asked the director if he had any other materials related to the *Theology of the Body*. He said, yes, he had the folders of the Polish translation, but he doubted they would help us, because the Italian text was the original and the Polish edition was simply a translation. There wouldn't be anything in the Polish edition that was not there in the Italian. When we looked at these Polish folders, we saw a Polish text with an extensive system of headings. It took us a while to piece together the evidence. We found out that the Polish was not

a translation from the Italian, but the other way around.

The final confirmation came when we were able to contact the religious sister who had typed the Polish manuscript. She told us she had typed it when Cardinal Wojtyła was still in Krakow and that John Paul II brought this manuscript from Krakow to Rome after his election. We also found a hand-written statement by John Paul II in the Polish folders in which he says explicitly that the structure of the whole work remained the same

when he adapted it for the Wednesday audiences.

Besides the text of Pope John Paul's audiences, this new edition includes an extensive introduction to the theology of the body which you wrote. In what ways do you think this introduction will help readers to grasp the Pope's words better?

In the *Introduction* I sketch the main concerns Wojtyła had as a philosopher and theologian before his election. I introduce the reader to the seven major works he published before his election and to the overall movement of thought documented in those seven works. The *Introduction* also explains in detail the order of the argument in the book, based on the system of headings found in the John Paul II archives.

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Many readers of the *Theology of the Body* have the impression—a completely accurate impression—that they are listening in on a conversation that has gone on for some time and has reached a very

sophisticated level. The *Introduction* fills in the earlier part of the conversation. In particular, I show that Wojtyła is deeply rooted in the spousal theology of St. John of the Cross and developed this point of departure in a deep dialogue with

Kant and Scheler. One of the key points in this dialogue is John Paul II's strong sense that one needs to overcome the split between the person and matter that has been so characteristic of our thinking ever since the scientific revolution.

There is something new and surprising in John Paul II and working through it will have a deep impact on faith and theology as a whole. On the other hand, in my *Introduction*, and in more detail in my upcoming book on the *Theology of the Body*, I show that John Paul II's vision is deeply rooted in the Catholic tradition, especially in St. John of the Cross, who had a solid formation in St. Thomas Aquinas. This aspect needs to be seen, too. One should not set John Paul II against the earlier tradition. The truth of God is so deep and rich, that it is always new when one enters deeply into it. Yet, one does not need to throw away what one has already seen of it. That is the dynamic of development, as John Henry Newman shows in his great *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. ✂

