



# THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES

*The Theology of the Body and Its Consequences for  
Ministry in the Diocese of Charleston*

## A PASTORAL LETTER

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.  
Bishop of Charleston

*“Before my eyes is, in particular, the witness of Pope John Paul II. He leaves us  
a Church that is more courageous, freer, younger, a Church that, according to his  
teaching and example, looks with serenity to the past and is not afraid of the future.”*

Pope Benedict XVI

**Dear Friends in Christ of the Diocese of Charleston,**

Among Pope Benedict XVI's first acts as our Holy Father was to reaffirm the celebration of the Year of the Eucharist proclaimed by his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. He described the Eucharist as the "heart of the Christian life and the source of the Church's evangelizing mission" as well as the "permanent centre and source of the Petrine ministry" entrusted to him.

He asked that the Solemnity of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ be celebrated with special dignity.

In addition to the special devotions going on in the Diocese of Charleston, which will help the faithful of our diocese strengthen their love for the Lord of the Eucharist and deepen their union with the Eucharistic Lord through more fervent and frequent attendance at Holy Mass and Eucharistic adoration, I humbly offer this Pastoral Letter on the Feast of Corpus Christi in tribute to the Lord Who abides with us daily in the Holy Eucharist.

Christ's presence in the world first took the form of a human body; and through his institution of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist at the Last Supper, his presence was to be continued through the Body and Blood of the Eucharist. Christ wanted us to experience his presence bodily, even after his death and resurrection.

Hopefully the readers of this Pastoral Letter will see the connection between the great teachings by Pope John Paul II, entitled the "Theology of the Body," and the redemption of our bodies that is fostered by the Eucharistic Body and Blood of the Lord.

I am happy to present this Pastoral Letter to you on this special Solemnity of our Church, the feast of Corpus Christi, the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ.



Devotedly yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. Baker, S.T.D.  
Bishop of Charleston  
May 29, 2005  
Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ

# THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODIES

Saint Paul wrote in his Letter to the Romans and to us, “**We ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly while we await the redemption of our bodies**” (Rom. 8:23). Pope John Paul II looms even larger since his death than he did in life. His Theology of the Body will continue to be important for us. I have been working on this letter to you, priests, deacons, Religious, and lay people of the Diocese of Charleston because I have wanted you to be clear about the vision and the hope which it holds out for us. We live in a society infected with a spirit of confusion about human sexuality, the nature and relationship of genders, chastity, marriage, and celibacy.

During the transition period between the death of Pope John Paul and the election of our dearly beloved Pope Benedict XVI, we have seen many articles written with a confused notion of what could change in the Roman Catholic Church, as though the faith and the moral teachings of the Church could change with the times. A CBS poll released April 17, 2005 revealed that 76% of Catholics favored the Church allowing the use of contraception, and 60% thought women should be ordained priests. Most (72%) thought that they could follow their own decisions over the teaching of the Church in moral decision-making.

While we as Catholics are to be “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (1 Pt. 2:9), it must be said that we are also products of our environment, struggling to grasp and live the truth. This same poll revealed troubling statistics about Catholic attitudes concerning abortion. The moral imperative of protecting the unborn child becomes even more evident as we more deeply understand the mystery of human sexuality.

**The Theology of the Body helps us to understand the theological and anthropological context of the Church’s moral teachings, not only about contraception and homosexuality, but also about the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony, marriage generally stated, and the witness of celibacy.**

Pope John Paul II not only lived a life which witnessed to the well-integrated holiness which a modern scholar, actor, poet, philosopher, theologian, professor, priest, bishop, cardinal, and pope might cheerfully achieve by the grace of Jesus Christ; but he also spoke about the redemption of the body in his weekly audience addresses, which he called “The Theology of the Body”, from September 5, 1979 to November 28, 1984. In his final days with us he suffered in a very public manner and brought that suffering to a dramatic conclusion in an exemplary death which was graced by God to encourage all of us to meet that day ourselves with courage and with hope. This man’s life and writings combine to leave us a legacy which enables us to meet the world of our day, so oriented to materialism, with a hope that these bodies of ours, in all of their physicality and frailty, have a real hope of redemption.

The Theology of the Body helps us to understand the theological and anthropological context

of the Church's moral teachings, not only about contraception and homosexuality, but also the Sacraments of Holy Orders and Holy Matrimony, marriage generally stated, and the witness of celibacy. These moral issues are leading off the news reports in our era. Not only are Catholics confused, but the wisdom of the Church is not being offered in the debate in the public square as it could be. Our own priests and teachers, Religious and laity must achieve a higher degree of understanding of these realities in order to proclaim them with fidelity and evangelical zeal. Without such an understanding, confusion and dissent is a predictable outcome and a corroding experience within the Church and within our culture. Pope John Paul II has provided the Church with an articulation of the fact of the redemption of our bodies unlike any in the history of the Church. He has shown its connection with the Church's teaching on sexual issues. We do not understand the Church's teaching on sexuality, or indeed the human person, unless we understand the redemption of the body. His articulation can aptly be described as a crystallization of the Tradition, which, in the coming together of various sources, moves us into a deeper understanding.

I write this letter to you with the joyful hope that you will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body. Our internal debates and struggles to embrace these teachings, which have proven difficult and divisive in our era, will, I believe, eventually come to a true resolution in these integrated teachings of Pope John Paul. For the good of the Church and the environment in which our children are being raised, we must mature in our understanding of these teachings in all their richness and depth.

### **Bodily Redemption is Our Hope In Christ**

The faith of Christians expressed fully by Roman Catholics includes belief in the redemption and resurrection of the body. We say as much in the Creed each week. We do not believe that we become angels when we die. We remain human beings, awaiting glorified bodies. As with our Great Redeemer, Jesus Christ, we have a human nature which we will have for all eternity. Some have called this a "muscular and robust theology," but in fact it is simply constant Catholic belief. We believe that our human bodies will be changed, glorified, and perfected, but that they will still be our bodies and recognizable as such in some fashion.

The disciples knew Jesus after the resurrection even though it was his risen body which they saw. "And none of the disciples dared to ask him 'Who are you?' because they realized it was the Lord" (*John 21: 12*). While he was changed, he was still recognizable to his disciples. Jesus ate and drank after his resurrection, and Thomas took time to examine the Lord's wounds. It was the person of Jesus Christ, possessed of human and Divine natures, who ascended into heaven and eternal glory at the Father's right hand. In fact, the Feast of the Ascension is in some ways the feast of the redemption of the body, as humanity first entered into Paradise with the Lord's Ascension.

**Redemption begins this side of the grave by the gift of grace. It is not to be a rare event; rather it is our Baptismal inheritance. We call the evidence of redemptive change "holiness."**

Redemption begins this side of the grave by the gift of grace. It is not to be a rare event; rather it is our Baptismal inheritance. St. Irenaeus wrote, “If our flesh is not saved, then the Lord has not redeemed us with his blood; the Eucharistic chalice does not make us sharers in his blood; and the bread we break does not make us sharers in his body.” We call the evidence of that redemptive change “holiness”. It remains one of the key teachings of the Second Vatican Council, that the call to holiness is a universal call, one born of the Baptismal grace of every Christian and nourished by the Holy Eucharist and the other Sacraments. This is a fleshy holiness, one which involves the redemption of the ways in which our bodies are understood and used. The quest for holiness should characterize our patterns of dating, the meaning of marriage, and even the way we treat our bodies in our funeral and burial rites. It is the contention of the Theology of the Body that holiness necessarily involves sexuality.

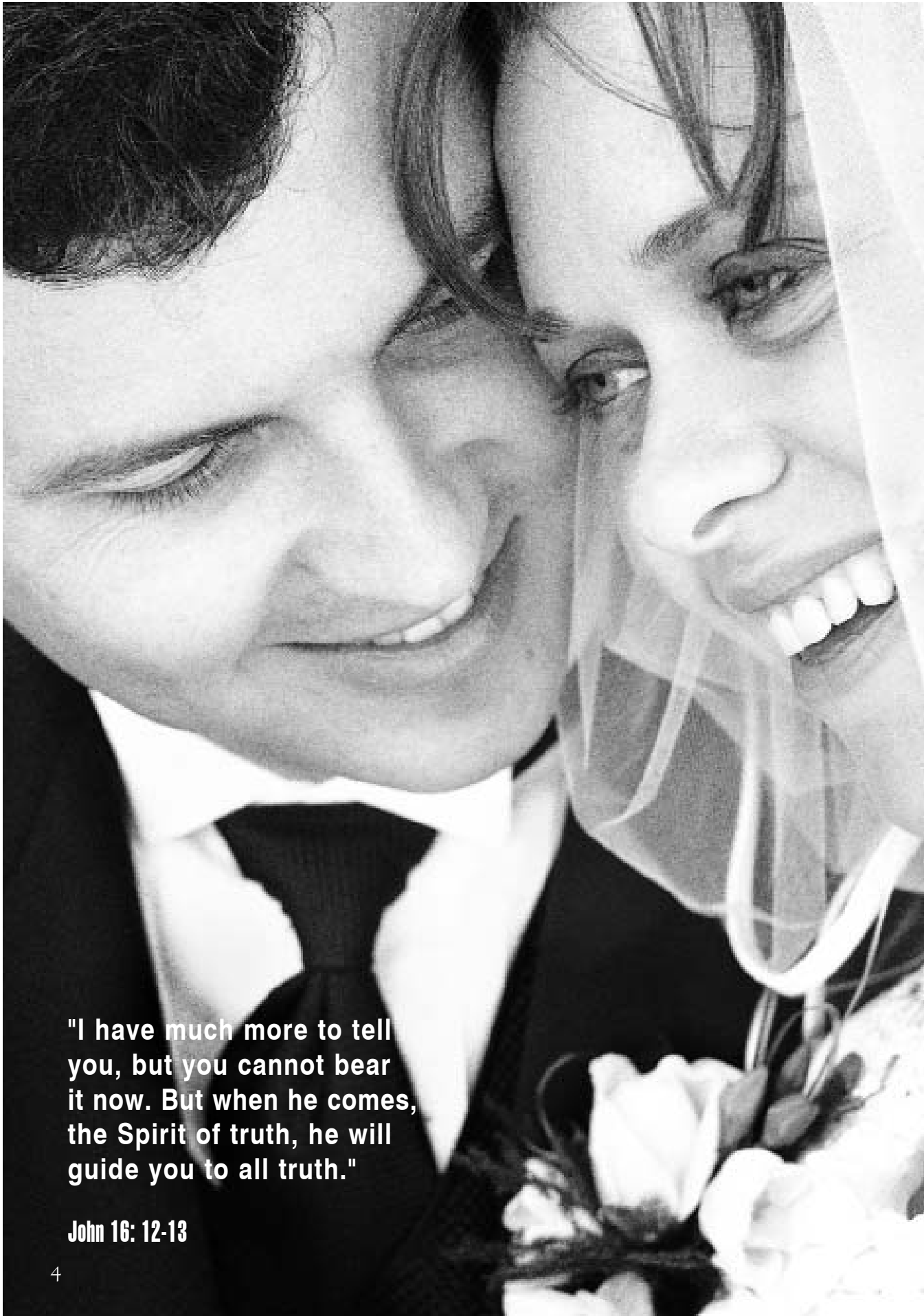
In fact, human sexuality is so profoundly central to the constitution of the human person that holiness and sexual immorality are mutually exclusive categories, no matter what one’s state in life may be. This holiness is not too much to expect of every Catholic Christian. I remind you with this letter that our lives are short, and every Catholic is called to the redemption of his or her body.

Holiness might be manifested in something as small as an everyday kindness and our famous Southern hospitality, or something as heroic as overcoming drug addiction or alcoholism, or even accepting the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom. It always means living the great gift of human sexuality in a manner which is equal to its meaning and dignity. By conforming this sexuality to Gospel values, one’s holiness becomes a witness to a society which has seemingly lost all view of the meaning and mystery of human sexuality, the key to understanding the redemption of the body.

Catholics understand that the redemption of the body continues through the process of dying, even while one is in a coma or a vegetative state, and can even continue mysteriously after death. We do not presume to know what is happening between a person and his or her Maker in the accomplishment of redemption. For that reason we will not devalue the human person, no matter how the world would measure the quality of life. Ultimately the redemptive process leads to a habitual communion with the very love of the Father.

The Paschal Mystery, that is, the dying and rising of Jesus Christ, is the pattern of our redemption begun at our Holy Baptism, when we were buried with Christ. It is completed in our lives with the consummation that is the peculiar event which we face by God’s grace, our own personal deaths. We pray constantly that God give us the grace to face that moment, especially in the *Hail Mary* as we ask Our Blessed Mother to pray for us “now and at the hour of our death.” The result of that great consummation, that which is left after the purifications of this life and the next, is a redeemed body and soul, fully alive unto the glory of the Father. It is said that the refiner of gold knows he is finished removing the dross when he can see his own face reflected in the fire-tried gold. This is our joyful hope, to reflect the face of our Great Redeemer.

Only a careful reflection on Sacred Scripture, done in unison with the Tradition of the Church, can provide the understanding of the human person which the Church can present for our reflection. This is what Pope John Paul II did as he took the Lord’s discussion with a group of Pharisees



**"I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth."**

**John 16: 12-13**

and especially noted that the Lord made reference to the original intent of the Creator when he said, “from the beginning it was not so” (*Matt. 19:8*). Then, going to the beginning, to the Book of Genesis, the pope carefully considers how the original mystery of human sexuality and the human person is understood in the Bible. He sees there a description of an original solitude which propels the human person toward community with the ‘other’, the spouse to whom he is conjoined in an original unity, which the pope calls a “communion of persons.” This unity was a real entity, established through the flesh and existing between the man and the woman, who, before their disobedience, “were both naked, yet they felt no shame” (*Gn. 2:25*). He likewise describes with precision just what was lost on the occasion of humanity’s original sin as he references the alienation of the person from his/her Creator, his/her self, his/her spouse, and the human community itself.

The Theology of the Body is complex and subtle. It is impossible to do justice to Pope John Paul’s work in a brief format, but I will attempt to give you a sketch of why this is such an important topic for catechesis in the Diocese of Charleston, as indeed, in the whole Catholic Church. This letter will only touch upon the basic elements of the Theology of the Body and will focus on its consequences for our ministry together. I will also outline some practical applications for our ministries here in the Diocese of Charleston. Pope John Paul II constantly encouraged us to ‘put out into the deep’ to understand anew and with greater depth the demands of today’s world.

The Theology of the Body leads us into the depths of understanding the redemption of the body. “The most important moment seems to be that essential moment when, in the sum total of the reflections carried out, we can precisely state the following: to face the questions raised by *Humanae Vitae*, especially in theology, to formulate these questions and seek their reply, it is necessary to find that biblical-theological sphere to which we allude when we speak of the redemption of the body and the sacramentality of marriage. In this sphere are found the answers to the perennial questions in the conscience of men and women, and also to the difficult questions of our modern world concerning marriage and procreation” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of November 28, 1984, the last audience). For nearly forty years *Humanae Vitae* has become the focal point of questions about human procreation and the mystery of human sexuality, even as the rejection of its wisdom by a large portion of the Catholic population has ushered in the occasion for many of the confusions which were predicted in that very encyclical.

## The Theology of the Body is a Revelation for Our Times

The Theology of the Body is a theological development in our era and a lasting heritage from the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. It is peculiar in the nature of its authority in the Church. Though not a

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*“The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. **Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.**”*

The Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22

papal encyclical, it is part of the papal Magisterium and therefore brings a great deal to bear on Church teaching. It is rare for a pope to provide a theological system by which we are to understand Church teaching, but the Theology of the Body is just that.

## **The Theology of the Body is a theological development in our era and a lasting heritage from the pontificate of Pope John Paul II.**

It was unprecedented that a papal teaching of this scope be delivered in a setting such as this, taking place over the course of several years and 129 audiences. These texts are available from Pauline Press as a single book. It is tightly integrated and holds together well, born of a singular vision. Its sources are broad and deep, drawing as it does both from Catholic Tradition and from Sacred Scripture. It references and enlivens Canon Law, the Scriptures, the Christian anthropology of St. Thomas Aquinas and St. John of the Cross, as well as a multitude of other Catholic sources. It must be added that the Church is only beginning to integrate the Theology of the Body into its life and teaching.

### **A Christian Anthropology**

While the Theology of the Body is not new in the sense of changing Church teaching, the frequent response upon reading these texts is that it has given a new perspective on Catholic moral teaching. What the Theology of the Body has done is to underline the importance of the Christian anthropology that informs Catholic teachings, especially in *Humanae Vitae* and *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (the definitive response to the question of the ordination of women). It is precisely Christian anthropology which serves as the basis for the teachings in those and many other encyclicals and teachings as well as audiences, talks, and addresses by the pope and the curial offices.

To describe the timing by which the Theology of the Body has come to the Church one might use the example of the way we teach our children. We first tell our children not to go into the street. Later as they are able to understand, we tell them why we do not go into the street, or rather, under what conditions one can go into the street (look both ways, hold an adult's hand, etc.). Eventually the adult can process a complex decision based upon a fuller understanding. Our capacity for moral decision-making can develop in a similar manner. While moral teachings address human behaviors, both wholesome and corrupt, the Theology of the Body presents an understanding of the whole human person and thus provides a context into which specific behaviors can be seen.

In the Theology of the Body we are given a fuller teaching about the human person, human sexuality, chastity, Holy Matrimony, celibacy, and the nature and relationships of males and females. What has been difficult for some to accept and teach now comes into sharper focus in this new context and vision of the beauty and mystery of the human person. The Church's moral teachings on sexuality are a part of a luminous whole which the Church proclaims with evangelical zeal. Here is the dignity of the person and the magnificence and meaning of the gift of human sexuality which must be protected from abuse. Indeed, here is an important source of revelation about the nature,

not only of the human body, but also of the very Person of God and the nature of the cosmos itself.

**A central tenet of the Theology of the Body is that faithful, self-donative love, and the communion which results from the giving and receiving of that gift, is the creative dynamic which reflects the inner life of the Holy Trinity. Self-donative love is the gift of self on behalf of another person.... It is the love of Jesus Christ, especially at Calvary.**

ion which results from the giving and receiving of that gift, is the creative dynamic which reflects the inner life of the Holy Trinity. Self-donative love is the gift of self on behalf of another person. It is the life-giving love of the Trinity at creation. It is the love of Jesus Christ, especially at Calvary. It is the love which inspired the martyrs of the Church, and it is the love which is the heart of the marriage covenant. From this generous gift of self for the other flows the whole of the Gospel. The Holy Trinity is understood by Pope John Paul II as three Divine Persons who give of themselves completely, one unto the other in unimaginable perfection. It is here that St. John the Evangelist refers in his famous statement that “God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God.” (1 Jn. 4:16). Self donative love far exceeds simply having the warm emotion of love and good intentions for our neighbors. In this spousal love we die to self so that the other might live, such as we saw in the death of St. Maximilian Kolbe when he offered his life so that another prisoner in a concentration camp of World War II might live.

The prohibitions of certain behaviors become minor foci when the larger picture of the human person described in the Theology of the Body is understood. This understanding and vision of the human person and human sexuality is the source of a large part of the Church’s mission and teaching, both personal and social, for the foreseeable future.

This teaching is given in a time of need both within the Church as well as within the larger society. Within the Church we have a need for an updated understanding of the human person. Thomas Aquinas summarized and integrated the Tradition in his day, a tradition which is still relevant for our time. Pope John Paul II was a student of the Thomist tradition, in which he completed a doctoral dissertation under the direction of one of the greatest Thomists of the twentieth century, Father Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, OP. He was also a student of the thought of St. John of the Cross. The Scholastic tradition gave the pope a thorough framework in the objective order, while his Carmelite studies made him a master in the mapping of the interior life. As a serious philosopher of the school of phenomenology, John Paul was able to integrate the subjective and the objective worlds and be a part of the philosophical recovery from the schism between the two, which René Descartes and Immanuel Kant had imposed upon centuries of philosophical thought. It is a hallmark of the

Theology of the Body as well as of its author that it is well integrated, embracing human experience as well as the most sublime of theological considerations.

The Thomist integration did not fully describe the experience of the passion of love, nor the meaning of the dynamics of that human exchange. Pope John Paul II accomplishes that in his Theology of the Body. As alienation became a characteristic of our society, with both parishioners and clergy alike suffering the wounds of divorce (clergy are affected too when they are children of broken homes) and separation over large geographical distances, the meaning of commitment, marriage, and celibacy was in need of a more contemporary reflection and articulation.

The concept of chastity suffered assaults by those who would promote a life of licentiousness; the practice of fidelity became rare as divorce became common, while the roles of the genders lost their distinctiveness, as society struggled to understand both the full dignity and rights of women as well as the nature of both masculinity and femininity. Increasingly, commentators were abandoning any claims to distinctions between the genders at all, as if our sexual bodies were indicative of nothing more than a quirk of nature, akin to the color of one's eyes or one's height. This confusion is at its densest in society as a whole; but since clergy are products of their environments and all Catholics are influenced by the society in which they live, the confusion has quickly moved into the Church and into Catholic universities.

The Theology of the Body has arrived just in time for us to be clear about the nature of the person God has created and as the way to wholeness and holiness. I want to encourage you to study it, to spend time contemplating its meaning, and to find ways to allow its insights to instruct your work in ministry.

Pope John Paul II loved to quote from *Gaudium et Spes*, #22, in which we are told that Jesus Christ reveals man to himself. In particular the pope saw that Christ revealed to us the nuptial nature of humanity and the spousal nature of human and Divine love. Referring to the nuptial analogy of the fifth chapter of the Letter to the Ephesians, he writes "Using the well-known expression from *Gaudium et Spes*, we can say that the passage we have selected from Ephesians, 'reveals - in a particular way - man to man, and makes him aware of his lofty vocation' (GS 22), inasmuch as he shares in the experiences of the incarnate person. In fact, creating man in his image, from the very beginning God created him 'male and female' (Gn 1:27)" (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of July 28, 1982).

Divine revelation unlocks for us something of the mystery of God, but from revelation we also immediately understand something about the nature of God's creation, especially ourselves. In understanding the Theology of the Body as a moment of illumination for the Church we are instructed about the nature of God and the nature of the Holy Trinity, as well as the nature and meaning of the human person, bodily-integrated and whole, created in the image and likeness of that same God. In this perspective, the pope is proposing that the human body itself is a revelation, not a haphazard fluke of evolution. It was designed by the Great Designer with intention and purpose. Likewise, the experience of human love reflects the experience of Divine Love and can tell us something about God's love when it is considered carefully and in unison with our other sources of revelation.

## Beginning the Work To Build Understanding

The phrase ‘Theology of the Body’ is one developed by John Paul II to indicate that there is a connection between the human body and the Creator in whose image it is made. It seems odd to the modern person that our bodies would speak a language of truth and have anything theological to say. The pope writes, “The truth about love cannot be separated from the language of the body. The truth about love enables the same language of the body to be reread in truth.” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of June 6, 1984).

This is a lot to absorb for any one person as well as for the Church. It takes time and prayer to integrate and understand how it is that this new theology has enlivened a number of old teachings and made them evangelical proclamations. Here is the pope’s command to us once again to “Put out into the deep.” We have not only a gift, but also a responsibility as Catholics, to be able to present this full vision of the human person to the Church, all Christians, and the whole world. It is an intelligent vision presented to a well educated and critical world.

Many non-Catholic Christians and others of good will are laboring to promote and defend marriage and to understand the proper role of women and men in relationship to one another, to defend the family, to stand with solidarity for the lives of the unborn, and to resist the contraceptive mentality; and they are doing so without the full understanding of the great resource we have been given by the Church. We can help in these important struggles. Catholics who understand the Theology of the Body bring a great resource to the major issues of our day. These are times when we can share in the zeal of the various Christian denominations, but these are also times when we can bring our own great intellectual tradition to bear on these issues in ways that are uniquely Catholic. We must not be hesitant to claim the gifts that are given to us, even while being aware of the unique gifts which are given to others.

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## Understanding Male and Female as Made for Communion

The complementarity of women and men, physically and spiritually, is an important element in a person’s being truly human. The gift of self in nuptial love, whether that be through the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony or through the commitment of consecrated celibacy, expresses the divine image

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**Pope John Paul II, General Audience of June 6, 1984**

in the human person. All human beings are meant to be spouses - to live in relationship with others, committed to their good, whether this is in marriage, or being married to Christ and His Church; and all are meant to be parents, whether physical or spiritual. Parenting, the living of maternity and paternity, is a part of each adult human life.

The living of the nuptial reality is necessary for holiness in every state of life. Pope John Paul II taught that this nuptial living is at the heart of the meaning of human life. Since human life was created in the image and likeness of Divine life, he told us that nuptial love was at the heart of the life of the Holy Trinity. Three persons, each giving completely in love to the other, yet remaining distinct persons, is the key to understanding the Triune God. Then, by the nuptial analogy formed in Ephesians 5, which becomes the privileged analogy for understanding human relationships from a Christian perspective, we understand Divine love lived in human lives. “The husband and the wife are in fact ‘subject to one another,’ and are mutually subordinated to one another. The source of this mutual subjection is to be found in Christian *pietas*, and its expression is love.” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 11, 1982.)

Scripture begins with man and woman in nuptial bliss and ends with the exulting of the bride for the Bridegroom in an expression of nuptial union. From the Song of Songs, the most commented upon book of the Bible in the first four centuries of the Church, to the Gospels, the references to married love begin to jump out at us as key to understanding Christ’s message on life and love. Indeed, the Church Fathers would refer to Calvary as the wedding night of the Church when the Bridegroom gave himself to the Bride in an act of complete self-donative love, giving birth to the Church from the blood and water which flowed from his side. “Giving himself up for the Church, through the same redeeming act, Christ is united once and for all with her, as bridegroom with the bride, as husband with his wife” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 18, 1982). Catholics can bring this understanding of the meaning of human relationships to ecumenical discussions as well as to the life of the whole world. Here lies the potential for enhancement of our understanding of the human person.

Gender is one of the most important topics of the Theology of the Body. The key to understand-



ing gender is found in the concept of gift. The man and woman in their original state of innocence experience the fact of their existence as the result of the graciousness of the Creator. Their lives are fundamentally a gift. It is in the image of the Giver that they know the truth of their own nature. “(The human person) appears in the world as the highest expression of the divine gift, because he bears within him the interior dimension of the gift” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of February 20, 1980). “Every creature bears within it the sign of the original and fundamental gift.” The concept of giving “indicates the one who gives and the one who receives the gift and also the relationship that is established between them” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of January 2, 1980).

Fundamentally, masculinity, in a unique and special way, defines the one who gives; and femininity, the one who receives. These modes of being human are lived ideally in the Lord and His Blessed Mother. Here Jesus himself, initiating in history the inauguration of the Kingdom of God, is the model of the masculine gender. Likewise, the act of receiving, not a passive act, is essential to femininity. Mary, open to receiving the Word in the moment of the Annunciation, an openness so radical that she would conceive and bear the Word-made-Flesh, is the model of femininity. “The husband is above all he who loves and the wife, on the other hand, is she who is loved” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of September 1, 1982). This, of course, does not mean that women do not also give love; and men do not receive. A combination of these traits finds a unique expression in each woman and each man.

The two genders thus are complementary, each having meaning in reference to the other. The Theology of the Body points to the obvious meaning of the naked human male and female: they are made for the other. In being for and with the other, a communion of persons is created in which there is a unity which cannot be broken. In fact, in his careful and thorough analysis of the creation accounts of the Book of Genesis, Pope John Paul teaches that it is precisely as male and female, and in the one-flesh unity which they form together, that humanity is declared to be the image and likeness of God. A part of our being created in the image and likeness of God is the attraction and tendency which we have to the other gender, towards forming a communion of persons.

“(The human person) becomes the image of God not so much in the moment of solitude as in the moment of communion. Right from the beginning, he is not only an image in which the solitude of the person who rules the world is reflected, but also, and essentially, an image of an inscrutable divine communion of persons” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of November 14, 1979).

This renewed understanding of sexual identity is not stifling in regards to what it means to be man or woman. Pope John Paul II insists on their equal dignity through separate modes of loving. Within each of us there is a complementarity of masculine and feminine traits. Of course, a man cannot actu-

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***Familiaris Consortio, 86***



ally be a woman nor a woman a man, no matter what the combination of feminine or masculine traits that exist in our personal make-up. Sex change operations are a form of violence against the person as created by God. Likewise inordinate affections towards one's own gender clearly violates the dynamic of giving and receiving of persons, which only a male and a female together express with one another.

The pope describes at length how the ability to relate in this way lies at the core of the person's identity. Indeed, human freedom is primarily exercised in just this way, even by celibates who do not give of themselves in a genitally active manner. Children live in the ambiance of love, which is generated by this giving and receiving of selves by parents. The axiom that the best gift a parent can give to a child is to love his or her spouse is functionally true when it comes to our understanding of the Theology of the Body.

“The family originates in a marital communion described by the Second Vatican Council as a ‘covenant’, in which man and woman ‘give themselves to each other and accept each other’” (*Letter to Families From Pope John Paul II*, 7). “Conjugal communion constitutes the foundation on which is built the broader communion of the family, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters with each other, of relatives and other members of the household. Hence, the family has the mission to guard, reveal, and communicate love, and this is a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.” The communion of persons, that is Holy Matrimony, is so fundamental to all human community that the Holy Father goes so far as to add, “The future of humanity passes by way of the family” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 86).

### **Male and Female Within Bodily Identities: Sinful Sexual Behavior**

Pope John Paul taught that morality can be determined by comparison of the human act to the action of Christ's love for the Church, especially as it expressed in Ephesians 5, the fullest expression of the nuptial analogy in the Bible. “One can speak of moral good and evil according to whether in this relationship there is a true ‘union of the body’ and whether or not it has the character of a truthful sign. In this case we can judge adultery as a sin, according to the objective content of the act” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 27, 1980).

After the fall, our sexual desires became disordered: Adam and Eve immediately felt shame, whereas before they were at ease with each other. All human beings suffer from disordered sexual desires to some extent: it is very difficult to achieve the virtue of chastity, the possession of which would mean that one would never lust, never improperly desire anyone or have any improper sexual pleasure. Achieving complete self-mastery in respect to sexuality requires a lifetime effort for most of us and is accomplished by the grace of God working in us daily, especially through the

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*“The Church's moral teachings on sexuality are a part of a luminous whole which the Church proclaims with evangelical zeal. ... Indeed, here is an important source of revelation about the nature not only of the human body, but also about the interpersonal relationship of the Triune God and of the cosmos itself.”*

**Bishop Robert J. Baker**

Sacraments. The pervasiveness of fornication, adultery, masturbation, and pornography in our culture testifies to how common sexual disorder is, as does the sexual explicitness that characterizes so much of our entertainment and advertisements. These acts wreak phenomenal harm on society. Many of the evils of our society can be traced back to out-of-control sexuality. The sexual desires are powerful in their ability to govern our choices and bind our affections. If we allow our reason and our reverence for what is good to guide us in our choices on how to live out our sexuality, we can focus our energies on promoting what is good; if we allow our sexual desires to overcome our reason and sense of responsibility, we can sin greatly and become deeply wounded. The Church is rightly concerned with human sexuality. We teach that for sexual intercourse to be moral it must be between a married man and woman who honor the procreative meaning of sex. It is a wondrous and powerful gift. Holiness is not possible for heterosexuals who are fornicating, committing adultery, or engaging in deviant sexual acts. Likewise holiness is incompatible with homosexual acts.

Let us focus here on the Theology of the Body's perspective on homoerotic relations. Homosexuality is a disordered inclination and involves disordered affections. As with any personal problem, same-sex attraction is to be treated with mercy, compassion and understanding. Before he was Pope Benedict XVI, Cardinal Ratzinger wrote, "Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. As in every conversion from evil, the abandonment of homosexual activity will require a profound collaboration of the individual with God's liberating grace" (*Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*).

**It is not too much to say that Holy Matrimony informs the celibate of the content of the nuptial relationship which is the celibate's vocation. In turn celibacy informs married couples of the goal of their union, God, and that human marriage is not man or woman's ultimate end.**

Same-sex attractions cannot be described as an acceptable lifestyle option or as given by God. Because such an attraction touches on the mystery of human sexuality, which is so fundamental to our personhood, it is not a minor disorder. While we cannot be precise about the source of same-sex attraction, whether it is a matter of nature, nurture, or choice, we can be clear that it is a malady, not a virtue.

We are never defined by our disorders. We are persons with dignity and inexhaustible value before God, despite our disorders. This is especially important for adolescents and teens who might want to identify themselves as "gay" and who struggle in the midst of that adolescent project of understanding who they are in the world. Such a lifestyle is a compromise of the meaning of one's person and a grave sin against God and humanity. The person sets himself or herself against the very meaning of one's own person in a manner which kills the vitality of self-donative love.

Homoerotic sexual interaction is not equipped to either give itself bodily nor receive the other.

It can fulfill neither the unitive nor the procreative functions of the marital act. While some find in such acts a form of disordered pleasure and affection, these acts are finally sterile, both physically and spiritually. “To choose someone of the same sex for one’s sexual activity is to annul the rich symbolism and meaning, not to mention the goals, of the Creator’s sexual design. Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call to a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves; but when they engage in homosexual activity they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination, which is essentially self-indulgent” (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*).

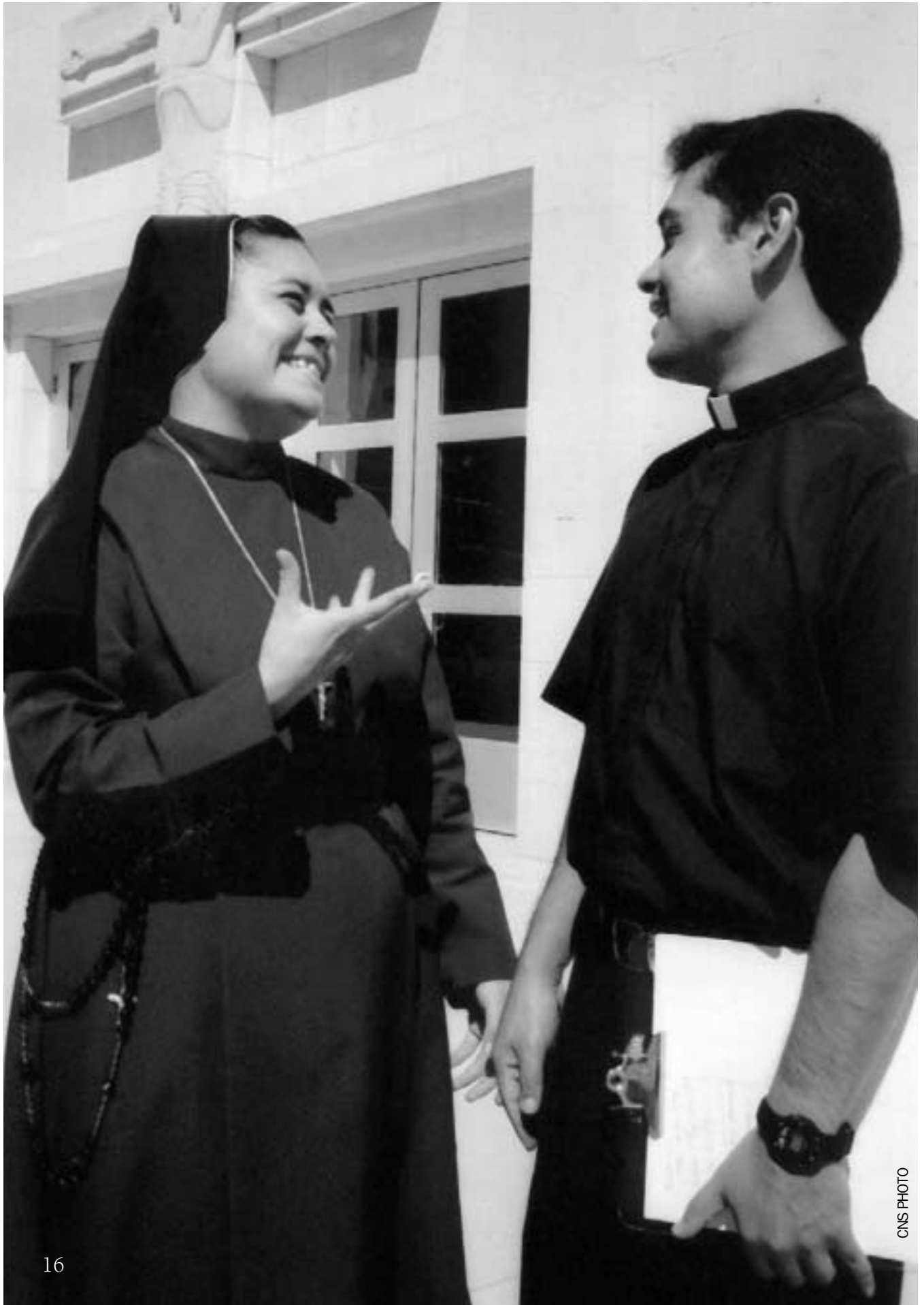
The Catholic Medical Association has documented progress made in the etiology and treatment of persons struggling with same-sex attraction (cf. Document “Homosexuality and Hope” -- [www.cathmed.org](http://www.cathmed.org); also contact the organizations Courage and Encourage -- [www.couragerc.net](http://www.couragerc.net) for more information). We, as a Christian community, should reach out to those suffering from a homoerotic inclination so that they might be surrounded by the love of friendship. Those who suffer from a homosexual orientation should not be abandoned to loneliness or despair. We, broken images in our own right, must invite such individuals to make full recourse to the resources of our faith to learn how to live chastely, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to the Most Holy Eucharist, to a vibrant and constant prayer life. It is an intimate relationship with our First Friend that will enable all of us to experience the embrace of a loving Father and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

### Contracepted “Love”

“In the conjugal act it is not licit to separate the unitive aspect from the procreative aspect, because both the one and the other pertain to the intimate truth of the conjugal act. The one is activated together with the other and in a certain sense the one by means of the other. This is what the encyclical teaches (*Humanae Vitae* 12). Therefore, in such a case the conjugal act, deprived of its interior truth because it is artificially deprived of its procreative capacity, **ceases also to be an act of love**” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of August 22, 1984, emphasis added).

The teaching of the Church on contraception, still so poorly understood and so poorly received among American Catholics, goes to the heart of meaning of human sexuality and human personhood. Not only is there an obvious and common-sense connection of the unitive and the procreative functions of the marital act, the separation of which violates the integrity of the act, but the gift of self to the other is compromised by contraception; and the deepest meaning of the gift is withheld in an act of contracepted intercourse. While our society makes heroes of athletes and soldiers who give totally of themselves in their own field of service, it has failed to grasp and appreciate that contracepted intercourse gives nothing of self. It is sterile and prevents the meaning of the spousal act.

“The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by



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this very fact he or she would not be giving totally. This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. This fertility is directed to the generation of a human being, and so by its nature it surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values. For the harmonious growth of these values a persevering and unified contribution by both parents is necessary” (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11).

Respected scholars trace many of the false understandings of the human person and human sexuality to what Pope John Paul II called “the contraceptive mentality,” in which the natural bond between love and procreation was voluntarily separated by means of contraception, giving rise to an attitude which would manipulate the mystery of human sexuality to unholy ends. Natural Family Planning must be a part of our marriage preparation classes and a part of our ministry as a diocese. It stands alone among methods of controlling birth as a means which is morally upright and instructive of the right use of human sexuality.

## **Abstinence and Chastity\***

Closely related to this discussion of contraception is the discussion and understanding of the role of abstinence for the unmarried and the celibate Christian, but also periodic continence for the married couple. Continence, says Pope John Paul II, is a humanizing factor for the sexual faculty and a basic component of the redemption of the body. Here the sexual instinct is brought under the control of the well-integrated person, whose life is subject to reason and the resultant well-formed conscience. Unlike animals, human persons are not subject to mere instinctual drives but are rather able to subordinate those drives to themselves. Only a human person can maintain continence in the face of the drive to do otherwise. Continence gives rise to the very holiness of which we have been speaking.

The virtue of chastity forms the heart of the ministry of the Family Honor program, located in our own diocese. The opportunity to assist families in the formation of their children in this virtue is a responsibility of every parent and every parish. It is becoming clear that chastity and abstinence training for our children as well as adults is vital for the future of holiness in our diocese. The Theology of the Body provides the conceptual framework for this important teaching among us.

## **The Witness of Celibacy and the Role of Marriage**

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**\* Our discussion needs definitions of chastity, celibacy, and continence.**

**Chastity:** The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states that chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being. The virtue of chastity therefore involves the integrity of the person and the integrality [i.e., completeness] of the gift.

Most Reverend Joseph F. Martino, D.D., Hist. E.D., Bishop of Scranton, adds, “The Church has always taught .....that we need to find our happiness and holiness in a commitment to the chastity lived out in marital love or the chastity of celibacy lived out either in the consecrated life or the life of a single lay person in the world. These are the two paths to happiness and eternal life. There are no others.” Pastoral Letter, *Chastity*, 2005.

**Celibacy:** Celibacy for the sake of the kingdom is a witness in the Church to the new life of the kingdom and is a way of giving oneself to the service of this new life with an undivided heart. One’s sexuality is lived in a non-genitally active manner wherein consecrated men husband the Church, the Bride of Christ, and consecrated women live as images of that Bride, open to receiving the Word of the Lord.

**Continence:** “Continence means the conscious and voluntary renouncement of (the marital) union and all that is connected to it in the full meaning of life and human society” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of April 7, 1982).

The Holy Father reaffirmed that, objectively speaking, celibacy is a superior witness to marriage for the Church. “That is the opinion of the whole of Tradition, both doctrinal and pastoral. The superiority of continence to matrimony in the authentic Tradition of the Church never means disparagement of matrimony or belittlement of its essential value” (Pope John Paul II, General Audience of April 7, 1982).

The object of celibate love is God. Even the fact that Holy Matrimony is a Sacrament does not raise its value above that of celibacy. The perspective of the Theology of the Body emphasizes the relationship which celibacy has to Holy Matrimony, both being an expression of this basic nuptial relationship. It is not too much to say that Holy Matrimony informs the celibate of the content of the nuptial relationship,

**The Theology of the Body has provided us with a detailed understanding of what celibacy is for the Church. This understanding reminds us of how much in need we have been for a clearer teaching on the discipline of celibacy.**

which is the celibate’s vocation. In turn celibacy informs married couples of the goal of their union, God, and that human marriage is not man’s or woman’s ultimate end.

Celibacy reminds married couples that in heaven we are not given in marriage, as the Lord said (Matt. 22:30). Indeed, heaven is the marriage feast of the Lamb in which heaven and earth are made one in the consuming love of Jesus Christ. Such ecstasy is our hope and constitutes the beatific vision of which the saints wrote. Celibacy remains, as Pope Paul VI referred to it, “a jewel.”

The phrase, ‘*communio personarum*’ is one dear to the pope. In the communion of persons of the Sacrament of Marriage one witnesses the very icon of the Holy Trinity and the Sacramental presence of the Three-in-One. Pope John Paul II teaches us that this

communion of persons constitutes the original blessing of marriage, which was not lost by original sin. In fact the pope affirms that this fundamental category of human existence, marriage, forms “the primordial substratum for the whole sacramental economy.” The Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Confirmation are initiations into a nuptial relationship with Christ in the Church. The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit, and constant nourishment, of nuptial love; and Holy Matrimony is the explicit presence of the content of espoused love in the Church. Holy Orders characterizes certain men to be configured as the Bridegroom, especially in the celebration of Holy Mass. The healing of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Anointing of the Sick is brought to us when we are in need of forgiveness and healing in the nuptial relationship. The Theology of the Body proposes that all Sacraments should be understood in their nuptial meaning.

While celibacy, *per se*, is not necessary for the Sacrament of Holy Orders, it is a fitting expression of the spousal love which Christ has for his Bride, the Church. It is only in this nuptial love that true paternity is called forth from the man who has been espoused to the Church. The Church



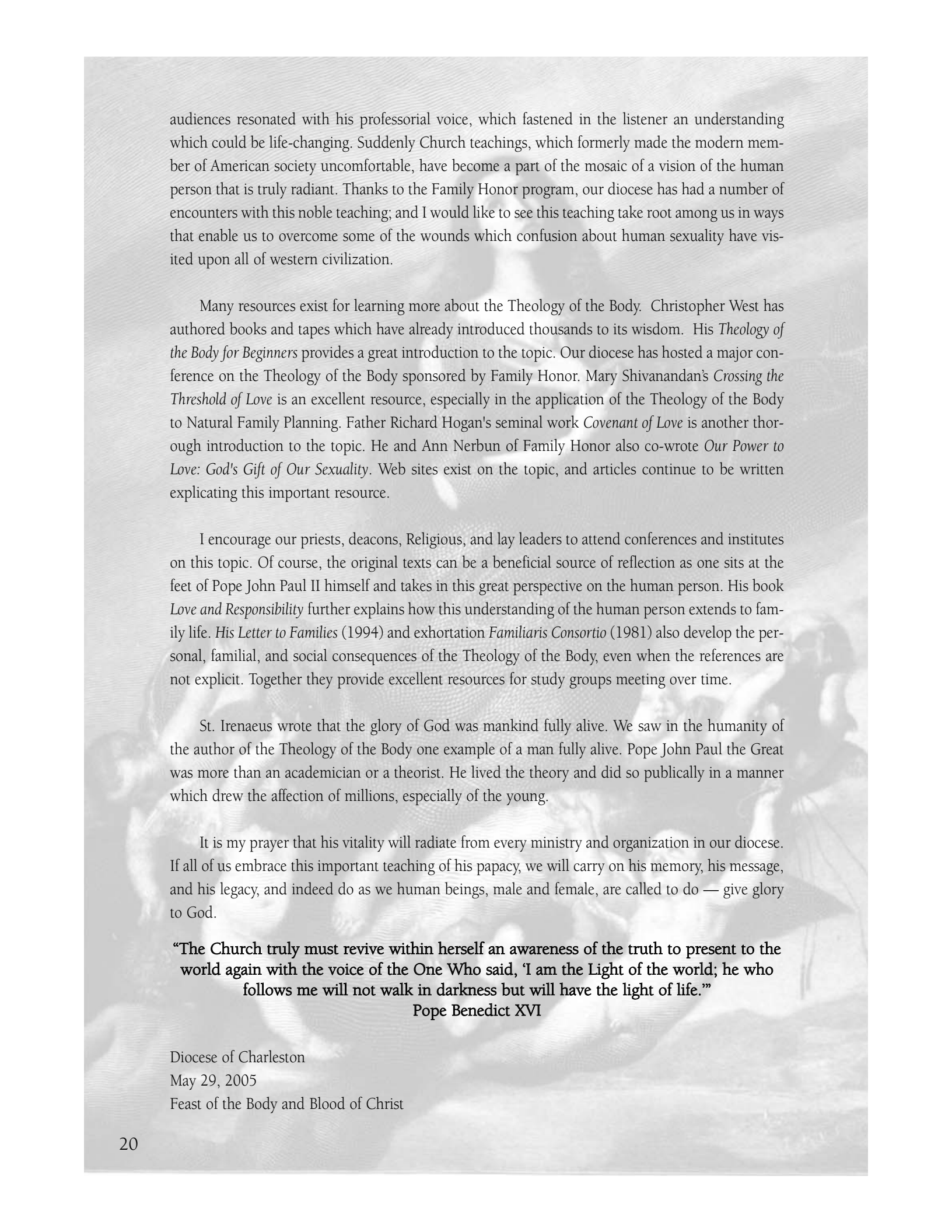
ordains men precisely in their masculinity. A candidate for the priesthood should be able to identify with his masculinity and its resultant paternity in preparation for being called “Father.” It is essential for men marked by grace to stand *in persona Christi*, as the bridegroom, that they should be able to identify with their own masculine bodies.

We are all by now painfully aware of the consequences when priests fail to live the gift and discipline of celibacy. That failure only underscores the urgency of a deeper priestly formation in this charism. The nuptial analogy applied to the priesthood also helps explain why the Church is unable to ordain women, due to the fundamental conflict with the anthropology given to the Church by Christ himself.

The Theology of the Body has provided us with a detailed understanding of what celibacy is for the Church. This understanding reminds us of how much in need we have been for a clearer teaching on the discipline of celibacy. We are grateful to Pope John Paul II that we can better understand and deepen our appreciation of the important value of celibacy. It is the free and intelligent choice of the Church to embrace this important discipline. We affirm celibacy as a great witness for the Western Church.

### **A Concluding Hope**

I have tried to give you a brief overview of the depth and breadth of this important teaching of Pope John Paul II, which is still dawning on the whole Church. I believe the Theology of the Body is the most profound explanation of human sexuality the Church has yet seen. I invite you to study it, read it aloud in study groups, and pray about it. The pope was a great teacher; and his



audiences resonated with his professorial voice, which fastened in the listener an understanding which could be life-changing. Suddenly Church teachings, which formerly made the modern member of American society uncomfortable, have become a part of the mosaic of a vision of the human person that is truly radiant. Thanks to the Family Honor program, our diocese has had a number of encounters with this noble teaching; and I would like to see this teaching take root among us in ways that enable us to overcome some of the wounds which confusion about human sexuality have visited upon all of western civilization.

Many resources exist for learning more about the Theology of the Body. Christopher West has authored books and tapes which have already introduced thousands to its wisdom. His *Theology of the Body for Beginners* provides a great introduction to the topic. Our diocese has hosted a major conference on the Theology of the Body sponsored by Family Honor. Mary Shivanandan's *Crossing the Threshold of Love* is an excellent resource, especially in the application of the Theology of the Body to Natural Family Planning. Father Richard Hogan's seminal work *Covenant of Love* is another thorough introduction to the topic. He and Ann Nerbun of Family Honor also co-wrote *Our Power to Love: God's Gift of Our Sexuality*. Web sites exist on the topic, and articles continue to be written explicating this important resource.

I encourage our priests, deacons, Religious, and lay leaders to attend conferences and institutes on this topic. Of course, the original texts can be a beneficial source of reflection as one sits at the feet of Pope John Paul II himself and takes in this great perspective on the human person. His book *Love and Responsibility* further explains how this understanding of the human person extends to family life. His *Letter to Families* (1994) and exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) also develop the personal, familial, and social consequences of the Theology of the Body, even when the references are not explicit. Together they provide excellent resources for study groups meeting over time.

St. Irenaeus wrote that the glory of God was mankind fully alive. We saw in the humanity of the author of the Theology of the Body one example of a man fully alive. Pope John Paul the Great was more than an academician or a theorist. He lived the theory and did so publically in a manner which drew the affection of millions, especially of the young.

It is my prayer that his vitality will radiate from every ministry and organization in our diocese. If all of us embrace this important teaching of his papacy, we will carry on his memory, his message, and his legacy, and indeed do as we human beings, male and female, are called to do — give glory to God.

**“The Church truly must revive within herself an awareness of the truth to present to the world again with the voice of the One Who said, ‘I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.’”**

**Pope Benedict XVI**

Diocese of Charleston

May 29, 2005

Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ



