

The Theology of the Body: An Interview (Part I)

Fr Walter Schu, LC, explains why JP II's catechesis is revolutionary.

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Regnum Christi website www.regnumchristi.org.

Cheshire, Conn. Father Walter Schu has dedicated much of his vocation to understanding and teaching John Paul II's Theology of the Body (TOB.) (Read Father Walter's curriculum vitae [here](#).) He is the author of The Splendor of Love, John Paul II's Vision for Marriage and Family, which spawned the "Splendor of Love" Familia program.

On November 4-5, 2011, the Legionary University in Rome, Regina Apostolorum, will be organizing a Congress on the Theology of the Body to attempt to give impetus to this vital teaching in Europe, especially among the Pontifical Universities. Father Schu and Father Martin Connor, LC, are working to help organize the event and bring in several well-known speakers from the U.S. Speakers, tentatively include Carl Anderson, Dr. Michael Waldstein, Christopher West, Dr. Janet Smith and Dr. Mary Shivanandan.

To create enthusiasm for the upcoming event, as well provide readers with a better understanding of this incredible catechesis from our late Pope, we are publishing excerpts from a previous interview with Father Schu conducted by Kelly Luttinen, Legion of Christ public relations advisor, during her former radio program, "Michigan Catholic Radio's Ongoing Series of the Theology of the Body," broadcast June 11, 2008. Certain facts in the interview have been updated, and the end of the interview also includes some more recent information on current topics of interest such as the health care debate, same-sex marriage and stem-cell research.

1. Father Schu, you are involved with formation at the Legion Novitiate?

Yes, I teach at our Novitiate and our Humanities College in Cheshire, Connecticut. I teach Latin, homiletics, a New Testament course and two courses on Christology.

2. You also taught a little philosophy?

Yes, when I was studying in Rome. I was there from 1989 to 1996, and during that time I taught metaphysics, which is kind of like delving into the nature of "being" itself, into what it means to exist, and all of those "abstract" questions. They are very intriguing when you start to delve into them.

3. You are a very busy man. The research involved in writing your book, The Splendor of Love, must have been daunting. The source list is an amazing compilation of work. How did you have time?

That is a story in itself. It took a little while, about three years. I was doing it part time while I was teaching. It started out on a smaller scale. I was going to do a summer

course for some of the brothers on the teachings of John Paul II. And then, as I got more into it, I realized these teachings of John Paul II on marriage and family, especially his Theology of the Body, were a whole world within themselves. And from there the idea came that this would be a beautiful resource for Catholics in general, to translate the Theology of the Body into a language for those who haven't had a chance to study theology or philosophy, and to give examples and explanation and put it into a language they could grab hold of and start to live in their own lives. That is the purpose of the Theology of the Body. Those five years of Wednesday audiences from John Paul II were to reach the lives of Catholic families.

4. There had to be a reason more than just the impression the Theology of the Body made on you that you felt called to do this?

Definitely. I studied moral theology while I was in Rome, and one of those areas was marriage and family, and I sort of specialized in that when I was in Rome. One thing that sparked my interest in this area was my background, growing up in Minnesota in such a large and close Catholic family. I always realized what a grace that was. And I wanted to be able to help other families live that Catholic lifestyle, which is so rich and has so much depth to it.

5. In a nutshell can you tell us what Theology of the Body is?

Pope John Paul II delivered the Theology of the Body in a five-year series of Wednesday audiences in Rome during 1979 to 1984. He took a couple of short breaks -- after his assassination attempt, and for the Holy year of 1983. It is a teaching on married love and on celibacy -- because celibacy is also a part of the Theology of the Body -- and also fruitfulness. Basically the teachings center on the law of the gift -- that God created us in our human bodies as male and female so that husband and wife could make a gift of their whole person, their whole life, to each other. And that gift is embodied in the conjugal act of marital love. That act is a self-giving of the whole person to the other and a receiving of the gift of the other person. This is very beautiful. JP II goes so far as to say that the marital act of self-giving love is an imitation of the self-giving love of the three Persons of the blessed Trinity. They are the supreme example. The Father gives himself to the Son, and the Son to the Father, and out of that gift comes the Person of the Holy Spirit, who is Love itself.

6. This is fairly revolutionary idea in the history of the Church is it not?

Yes, because up until this teaching, it was pretty much viewed that a human person was an image of the blessed Trinity because of his or her spiritual faculties of intellect and will, which is certainly true. These faculties enable us to love, to choose freely to do the good and enable us to see the good and seek the truth in our life. This is how we image God as an individual. But John Paul II said we actually image God even more directly in our call to live a communion of persons, "communio personarum."

7. Is this a new idea?

It is certainly a contribution of John Paul II, this idea that the call to love between husband and wife is not just a reflection of Christ's love for the Church, but to reflect the love the Trinity.

8. What weight does this carry in the magisterial teachings of the Church? Is it infallible?

No, but it certainly does have a high weight of authority within the Church. It wasn't arranged as an encyclical, but it was given as a series of Wednesday audiences. To help see what the weight is, one question you have to ask is "Who is the intended audience of this Theology of the Body?" I think it is safe to say it wasn't just those Catholics who happened to be there for that particular Wednesday audience in Paul VI's Hall or St. Peter's Square. The audience for these events was intended to be the universal Church, and it's very clear from the nature of the teachings that John Paul II was speaking to Catholics everywhere.

Another way you can determine the weight of the teaching is by looking at the subject matter. And the subject matter here is catechesis. Catechesis is one of the most important things a Bishop can do. Here we have the Bishop of Rome, of the Universal Church, speaking to all Catholics on catechesis. And another question you can ask is what is the subject of that catechesis? Here the subject is Marriage and Family, which is one of the central teachings of the Church. So within the Church's ordinary universal magisterium, this has a pretty solid weight in Church teachings. It all builds up to that great defense of *Humanae Vitae*, which says every act of conjugal act of love between husband and wife must be open to new life.

9. It has been said that this Theology of the Body is something that Church leaders will be developing for years to come. Was Benedict XVII's first encyclical *God is Love* influenced by Theology of the Body?

Yes. I think it definitely was. I wrote an article for *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, which was a look at the first part of this encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est*, where he talks about love as "eros" and love as "agape." In this you can directly see the influence of Theology of the Body. God's love is not just agape, which is disinterested love. God's love can also be considered to be eros, similar to passionate human love. You can see here a very clear reflection of Theology of the Body.

George Weigel has that beautiful line in his book *Witness to Hope* that says Theology of the Body is like a theological time bomb, and as it starts to go off, it is going to revolutionize not only theology, but also family life. And thanks be to God that is starting to happen! You see Christopher West's programs, and programs like God's Plan for a Joy-Filled Marriage starting to take off in parishes, and being used in Pre-Cana and Marriage prep programs.

10. You mention George Weigel. He did the introduction to your book. How did that come about?

He got to be friends with one of the Legionaries in Washington DC and that is how I got to know him. After I read *Witness to Hope*, it was very clear George Weigel knew how essential the Theology of the Body was in the Pope's teaching. I was in Rome at the time, and he was giving a conference at our university. I told him about the project I was working on and asked if he would like to write an introduction to it, and he said that sounded like something he would be interested in. He asked to see the manuscript. We talked about it. He thought it was a worthwhile project and he was kind enough to write the introduction.

The Theology of the Body: An Interview (Part II)

Fr Walter Schu, LC, explains why JP II's catechesis is revolutionary.

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The following is a continuation of Kelly Luttinen's radio interview with Fr Walter Schu, LC, on the theology of the body. In this part, Fr Schu discusses the role of the family in God's plan, and the differences between natural family planning and contraception.

11. Why does John Paul II say the future of society passes through the family?

That's a very good question, and it helps show what a great vocation it is to be a father and a mother. It shows how much parents are called to do with the help of God's grace. There are two basic reasons JP II says this. Children are the future of the world, society and the Church. The family is a "domestic" Church, a Church in miniature, where parents are the first ones to pass on the faith to future generations. Also the family is the first school of humanity. It's where the children, the brothers and sisters, learn to relate with one another, to become members of that first society which is the family, so they can become members of a larger society. And all of the values and virtues formed in the family are precisely those virtues they will take with them. If they are well formed, they can enrich society, but if they are not, they could even become a burden on society. So much depends on the work of dad and mom with their children. Being a parent is a noble profession. It's every bit as noble as any profession and work in society itself.

12. One of the first segments of your book is called "The Future of Humanity," and you discuss the direct consequences for our society if it continues on its current path. Can you give us a little synopsis of that, and why we need the Theology of the Body so much today?

The Theology of the Body is certainly a great defense of marriage and the family today. And John Paul II sums it up very well with just one line in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* #86, "The future of humanity passes by way of the family." I think

it's very interesting that he doesn't just say the future of the Church, but the future of humanity. The family is not just a "domestic: Church, or a Church in miniature, but the basic and most fundamental cell of society. Another line in the exhortation, which is very prophetic, says that unfortunately, many resources and organizations today seem to be dedicated to weakening the family. Pope John Paul II does not go into detail very much, that's one of the things the first part of my book tries to do. It tries to look at these movements that are harmful to the family. One of those movements is Planned Parenthood, and the whole movement for artificial contraception, and how that undermines married love and the gift of self between husband and wife.

13. You mention in your book, *The Splendor of Love*, that the family is a mini-community. You were the second of seven children, correct? Did your family life affect your calling?

Correct. I grew up on a small farm in southwestern Minnesota, near Walnut Grove Minnesota (interestingly, the setting of the Little House on the Prairie series.) My dad was a farmer and had cattle and livestock. My older brother Carl and I grew up helping him. We went to a Catholic school, though it closed after I was in fifth grade, so I went to a public school through 12th grade. I hadn't really thought about the priesthood at all while growing up. I was an acolyte at church, and I remember some of the Easter vigils that were very beautiful, especially the phrase from the vigil, "Oh happy fault that won for us so great a Redeemer!" That always kind of stayed with me. I attended the University of Dallas in Irving Texas. They have a Rome program where you can spend one semester your sophomore year there. That is how I met the Legion. We were in our very last week of classes, and a couple of young priests came over who said they were from the Legionaries of Christ. There was something about those two young priests that really struck me. I met some of the LC seminarians, and that is the first time it ever crossed my mind that God might be calling me to be a priest like them. I think that really confirms that the call to the priesthood for each person is unique. Some are called to the diocese to be parish priests, and some are called to the religious life, and for me the two were certainly synonymous. I felt that call to the priesthood at the same time I met the Legion, so for me the priesthood always meant priesthood with the Legion of Christ.

14. Are large families fruitful for encouraging vocations?

The Legion has a school from 7th to 12th grade in New Hampshire to discern the priesthood. We have found of those students, the average family size is six or seven children. It seems that larger families tend to produce more vocations to the priesthood. This is an encouragement to parents in the virtue of generosity, when they discern with the help of God's grace how many children they are being called to have. In the Second Vatican Council, numbers 47-52 of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Council affirms that parents who discern to have larger families are to be especially commended.

15. You are not in any way saying smaller families are bad, if parents cannot for some biological or financial reason or other reasons, have a larger family?

No, that is one of the beautiful things about Natural Family Planning, how the parents through their discernment can cooperate with God's own providential plan for bringing children into the world.

16. *There are enormous spiritual benefits to spouses who practice Natural Family Planning. There is almost a zero divorce rate among couples who practice it, correct?*

In fact there are new studies being done, but anecdotal evidence from those who teach NFP shows a near 1 to 2 percent divorce rate at the most. Compare that to the fact that with Catholics who do not practice it, there is an almost identical divorce rate to our culture. As Christ says in Scripture, by your fruits you will know them. One of the beautiful things about natural family planning is that it increases that intimacy between spouses because they speak about what is central to their marriage, about whether or not God is calling them to have more children, and it allows them to develop other ways of being intimate outside the conjugal act, if they are not being called to have more children. It shows the couple that acts of service and physical contact can be purely loving, and creates those honeymoon periods and freshness in married love.

17. *In our culture there is a sort of contraceptive mentality that Theology of the Body and its defense of Humanae Vitae speaks so eloquently against. Today many people are confused and believe that artificial contraception and natural family planning are the same thing. Can you discuss the differences between families that practice natural family planning and artificial contraception?*

John Paul II speaks of a difference on the moral level and on the anthropological level. He says there are two different visions of the human person here. Morally, he sums it up beautifully when he speaks about the language of the body. Certain acts we do with the body have an intrinsic inner meaning, because as persons, we are not just disembodied spirits. We are both spirits and bodies in a unified whole, so certain acts of our bodies have a personal meaning. It's easy to see with a couple examples – a handshake or a kiss is always a sign of friendship or intimacy between persons, while if you were to spit in someone's face, it would always, regardless of the culture, be a sign of loathing for someone else.

Where is the language of the body expressed the most fully and deeply? It is precisely in that conjugal act between husband and wife. The inner meaning of the marital embrace, on the one hand, because of the way God designed it, has the possibility of bringing about new life into the world, and that new life is an expression of the fruitfulness of the love between husband and wife. The second aspect is the unitive meaning of the act, in which it is meant to be an act of love, of total self-giving. What happens in the marital embrace? A person says, "I give you my whole self, and I accept everything you are as a person, your whole self, in return. What happens with contraception? That innate language of self-giving is overridden by a lie.

Contraception is telling a lie with the body. The husband should be saying to his wife, “I give my whole self to you,” but with contraception he is actually saying, “I give my whole self to you except my capacity to be a father.” And the wife should be saying, “I give my whole self to you,” but is actually saying, “I give my whole self to you except my capacity to be a mother.” So JP II asks, “Is it ever possible for a lie to be a true act of love?” As so on the moral level, contraception not only closes husband and wife off to the possibility of new life, but it also takes away the true unitive aspect of love.

The Theology of the Body: An Interview (Part III)

Fr Walter Schu, LC, explains why JP II’s catechesis is revolutionary.

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The following is a continuation of Kelly Luttinen’s interview with Fr Walter Schu, LC, on the Theology of the Body. In this section, Fr Walter comments on the concept of man behind Theology of the Body.

18. One of the themes of Theology of the Body touches on how we are not going to be able to heal the ills of this world, like war, global warming, etc, until we heal the relationship between man and woman. Can you discuss that?

This is at the heart of TOB. All conflicts in the world come from that inner conflict in man himself, in each person, as a result of being wounded by sin. Christ comes to restore that original plan that God had for man and woman before the fall. Adam is created in the midst of the Garden of Eden, amidst all creation. He is able to name all God’s creatures, and he has understanding of them and has authority over them, and yet he feels alone. Why? Out of all these creatures, there is no one who can receive that gift of love, of his very self, and no one who can make that gift of love to him. When God creates Eve, Adam exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” This beautiful expression helps us to see how Adam perceives the “person” of Eve through her body.

John Paul II speaks of that original innocence that Adam and Eve had. They are both naked and yet they are not ashamed. How is this possible? Before the fall, they see in each other’s bodies, not something to be used, but someone – a person -- to be loved. We lose this ability with the fall. This is one of the challenges of the Theology of the Body, to realize that Christ comes to bring that healing to our relationships, to help us regain what we have lost so we see others as persons to be loved and not used.

This is one of the anthropological differences between contraception and natural family planning. NFP sees another as a person in their wholeness, to be loved, and not reduced to an object which can be used for sensual satisfaction.

19. TOB gives an exalted and amazing view of what it means to be a human person. Christ lifted up our nature beyond anything we could have hoped for. Can you speak to this?

This is part of John Paul II's adequate anthropology of the human person. To understand the fullness and beauty of *Humanae Vitae*, we need to see true vision of the human person. This what he did during those 5 years of Wednesday audiences.

The first stage of the anthropology is "Original Man," where Adam and Eve are in the Garden before sin, showing their original experiences of innocence and being naked without shame.

The second stage is "Historical Man," in which man and woman live after the fall, tainted by sin, and experience shame before God and each other. This is where lust first appears. They realize that they cannot easily perceive the "spousal meaning of the body," which is the fact that they were created to be a gift to one another, because of lust.

When Christ sees man "fallen" man, as John Paul II describes, he cannot just pass by and leave us wounded by the side of the road, and he himself becomes the good Samaritan and takes on our flesh. By his death and resurrection he not only redeems our souls but our bodies, and makes it possible to reclaim that original plan for man and woman. He restores marriage to its original plan. And he knows we cannot do this on our own, but only with the help of his grace.

We see that with the Pharisees, when they speak about divorce, Christ says, "In the beginning it was no so," and that, "What God has joined, let no man rend asunder." So he restores marriage to its original plan, and he knows we cannot live this on our own, but only with his grace and sacraments and with prayer. Then it is possible to reach that original idea of God's plan, even on this earth. But it will never come easy, without asceticism and sacrifice, it never will come without personal effort. But Christ is always there in the sacrament of reconciliation to help us start anew.

20. There is a third part to the adequate anthropology about what we are called to in the next life, of which the love of man and woman, at its best, gives us a glimpse.

Yes, and that is precisely "eschatological man." Eschatology is one of those fancy terms that theologians toss about, but it is as simple about meeting our final destiny to be with God in Heaven. Here is where the true meaning of marriage is fulfilled. We cannot understand who we are as persons without understanding the spousal meaning of the body. If we are called to be married on earth, but not in Heaven, how can the spousal meaning of the body represent the meaning of our existence? The fundamental answer comes in Christ's incarnation. Christ has taken on flesh. He is the Bridegroom, and we as his Church, are in a sense, the bride. In Heaven the meaning of marriage is fulfilled

as each of us is “married” to Christ, and will have that intimate and person relationship with him, and through Christ, with each other.

This will be a completely spiritual relationship, and will be more deep and more intimate that we can imagine in this life.

And this is where celibacy comes in to the Theology of the Body. Marriage complements and shows the depth and richness of celibacy, and celibacy complements and shows the beauty of marriage. Celibacy, in a certain way, is making present here on this earth that anticipation of the fullness of the meaning of marriage in heaven. Celibates have that direct consecration to Christ that each of us will have in heaven. Celibacy fulfills the spousal meaning of the body. It is not self-giving to one human person, but a universal self-giving to everyone through a personal self-giving to Christ. In Heaven, we will have direct self-giving to Christ, and through that universal self-giving to all.

21. Today there is the buzzword of “tolerance” but no real idea of what sin is. Our current generation is having difficulty understanding the teachings of the Church, You discuss in your book a proper idea of sin and redemption.

Tolerance is a necessary Christian virtue. It would be hard to find someone more tolerant than Christ, who was certainly tolerant of those who crucified him. But you can also see it through the eyes of GK Chesterton, who says that tolerance is the virtue a society has left when it abandons all of its other virtues and convictions. A negative aspect to tolerance is where anything goes. Here tolerance is the opposite of love, and the opposite of love is not hatred, but indifference. In a certain sense, if you let another person do anything, even if it goes against the way they were created, that obviously is going to be harmful to them. So this sort of tolerance is not true love. True love is raising another to the dignity of how they were created to be and their true calling in life.

22. I saw in the picture in the back of the book that you got to meet John Paul II. What was it like to meet the man many believe was a living saint at the time?

That’s for sure. There’s no doubt about that. He is John Paul the Great. He is certainly praying for us in heaven right now. Well, I had the grace, while I studying in Rome, where I was able to serve Mass for him three times. That was a real thrill. He always took the time after Mass to stop and shake hands and talk for a moment with all the acolytes. That picture was taken during one of those times. I think it was the Easter Sunday Mass. Just being in the Pope’s presence was a tremendous experience. He had a happiness and peace and joy that just radiated from him. You could tell that when he looked at you in the eyes, for that moment, you were the only person he was interested in, as if you were the only one in the world. You could just see how he had that individual love for each person. It was joy to be in his presence even if it wasn’t for very long

23. Considering John Paul II's call to a New Evangelization, can you discuss ways people can get involved in spreading this message, perhaps with the help of the Legion and Regnum Christi?

One apostolate of Regnum Christi is called Familia, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They have started a program for couples based on my book, *The Splendor of Love*. Couples get together regularly to go over the workbooks and discuss questions on the Theology of the Body. They talk about how it can be part of their life, with its joys and challenges. It is a very beautiful way to make the Theology of the Body a part of your life. Then it is not just something you hear at a conference, and it sounds nice, but then you go your own way.

For more information call Toll Free: 1-877-867-9401, and ask for Jean Stolpestod, who will send you information on the program. I'm convinced couples will get some real concrete fruits from this study.

[Note: to read an article about how Regnum Christi member Jennifer Haggerty is spreading the message of Theology of the Body at St John Vianney Catholic School in Illinois, click [here](#). Along the same lines, Everest Collegiate High School in Clarkston, Michigan is currently teaching the Ascension Press TOB for Teens program. Father Daniel Pajerski teaches it at the Boys' School and consecrated woman Jana Crea teaches it at the Girls' School.]

24. Tell us how to get a hold of your book?

The book is published by New Hope Press in New Hope, Kentucky. They have a toll free number 1-800- 764-8444.

Also , if you're looking for another good book on Theology of the Body, I recommend *Called to Love* by Carl Anderson and Fr. Granados. It is one of the best I've read.

The Theology of the Body: An Interview (Part IV)

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The following is a continuation of Kelly Luttinen's interview with Fr Walter Schu, LC, on the Theology of the Body. In this section, Fr Walter expands on some controversial issues—abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, and priestly celibacy.

25. In the United States, with the debate over healthcare reform, the issues of abortion and euthanasia are front and center. And we are also struggling with the debate over embryonic stem cell research. These issues are not just limited to the

US. How does an understanding of Theology of the Body bring clarity to these issues?

An understanding of the theology of the body, along with John Paul II's related teachings in his book *Love and Responsibility* which he wrote while he was Bishop Karol Wojtyla, clarifies one fundamental truth. The dignity of human persons is such that the only adequate response they merit is that of love. Persons can never be treated as objects or regarded as a means to someone's ends. Their dignity lies in who they are, created in the image and likeness of God, not in what they possess or are able to produce.

Each human person possesses this dignity from the moment of conception to the moment of natural death. As a result, both abortion and euthanasia are intrinsically evil acts, and can never be justified under any circumstances. It follows as a consequence that it would be immoral for any healthcare bill to support or foster in any way, especially through federal funding, either abortion or euthanasia. This would be a grave violation, not only of the natural moral law, but also of the freedom of conscience of citizens who rightly consider these practices to be evil.

The same principle makes clear the intrinsic evil of embryonic stem-cell research, no matter how good the intentions of those who do the research, no matter how laudable the goals they seek, which include curing cancer, or Parkinson's disease, or other grave illnesses. A human being possesses all of the rights and dignity of a person from the moment of conception. In order to obtain stem cells, embryonic stem cell-research always involves the destruction of a human embryo, who is a living human being in his or her earliest stages. So it entails the direct killing of an innocent human being, which can never be justified, no matter how great a good is sought.

26. Obviously, another major issue is the understanding and definition of marriage as between a man and a woman. Can you discuss how Theology of the Body helps us understand why same-sex "marriage" is not possible?

Same-sex "marriage" is not possible, because marriage is not simply a human institution that we can modify or redefine at will. Marriage was instituted by God himself, when he created the first man and woman before the dawn of recorded history. Marriage entails the exclusive gift of one man to one woman, and vice versa, in their entire person, their whole "self," over a lifetime. This "law of the gift," this call to self-giving love is inscribed in our very nature, which John Paul II calls the "language of the body." Husband and wife, by their total self-giving love in marriage, bear wonderful fruit in bringing forth children, in creating a family, a new community of love, which confirms and deepens their own communion of life and love. This fruitfulness images the fruitful, self-giving love of the Blessed Trinity, the communion of persons in love that is God himself: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Just as Shakespeare's works raised the English language to new heights, the language of the body is a beautiful poem of love.

There is one thing man and woman cannot do, however, and that is to change the language of the body itself. This language is inscribed in our very being by the Creator. There are two and only two ways to be a human person: either as a man or a woman. The gift of self between husband and wife is expressed and made incarnate in the act of conjugal union, in sexual intercourse between the spouses, when the two become “one flesh,” with the intrinsic fruitfulness that is inscribed in this act.

Same-sex partners are incapable of a true act of sexual union. They cannot become “one flesh” and cannot bring forth children. This reality reflects the fact that they cannot live out that exclusive gift of one’s entire self in married love, which only a husband and wife are capable of, due to the language of the body inscribed in our very being as man and woman created in the image of God.

The fruitful gift of one’s entire self to the other in love that takes place in marriage is possible due to the authentic complementarity between man and woman. This complementarity is not only physical, but also extends to the sphere of the emotions and even to the very depths of the person. This complementarity is patently lacking between same-sex partners.

27. During the last decade in the US, there has been the problem of clergy sexual abuse, and a call for an end to the celibate priesthood. Theology of the Body helps us understand and appreciate celibacy in way that many scholars, including Christopher West, claim can bring healing and understanding to these problems within our Church. How do you respond to this?

As both Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI have reiterated, clergy sexual abuse is an abominable crime that violates the dignity of the human person at its deepest core. The cause of this abuse is not to be found in the practice of celibacy, however. Christ himself, the perfect man, invited those who received a special call from God to follow and imitate him by living the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity (in the form of celibacy), and obedience.

Sexual abuse is obviously a failure to live out faithfully the commitment to celibacy. The sexual abuse crisis has forced us to pose the question once again: Can we even hope that fallen man is capable of living out such a high ideal as celibacy, the way of life of God’s own Incarnate Son? Left to our own human strength, we certainly could not hope to be faithful to this ideal. But in his theology of the body, John Paul II vigorously reaffirms an essential truth of the gospel: Christ has not abandoned us to our own human resources and frailty. By his saving death on the cross and triumphant resurrection, he has redeemed us both in soul and body. He has brought about once and for all the redemption of the body. With the strength that flows from the grace of Christ’s death and resurrection, a grace that must be continually renewed through prayer, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and a constant practice of asceticism and self denial, redeemed men and women are indeed capable of imitating Christ in faithful, lifelong celibacy.

Theology of the body also helps us to live celibacy faithfully by revealing the deep, inner meaning of this noble ideal. Celibacy and married love are not two parallel tracks, which never approach each other. There is an intimate relation between them. They foster and support one another. When will the ultimate fulfillment of marriage take place—that sacramental sign of Christ’s love for his Church, for all of humanity? Paradoxically, it will occur in heaven, where “they neither marry nor are given in marriage,” by Christ’s own words in the gospel (Mt 22:30).

How is this possible? In heaven, marriage will be fulfilled when Christ, the Bridegroom, receives from each one of us the gift of our entire self as members of his Church, the Bride. Christ in turn will give himself totally to each one of us. Through that total gift of ourselves to Christ, we will also give ourselves to every other person in heaven, John Paul II’s beautiful description of the communion of saints.

In the life of a celibate priest, celibacy also embodies the priest’s complete gift of himself to the Church, his only spouse, whom he seeks to love with the love of Christ himself. The priest strives to live out this love in universal charity, in sacrifice and self-giving to each member of the Church without distinction or favoritism.

Thus, married love, which is supremely fruitful in bringing forth children, helps to reveal the spiritual fruitfulness hidden in celibacy, as priests and religious become spiritual fathers and mothers to countless persons through their prayers, sacrifices, and self-giving. Celibacy, in turn, helps make clear that the fruitfulness of marriage is not just physical, in bringing new children into the world. It is also a spiritual journey, as husband and wife strive to aid one another and their children to live that complete self-giving love for Christ, which alone is the source of our true fulfillment and lasting happiness, both in this life and throughout eternity.