



NEWS ARCHIVE:

Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Editor: Kiply Lukan Yaworski, Communications
Phone: 306-242-1500; Toll Free: 1-877-661-5005
communications@saskatoonrcdiocese.com



During a national Theology of the Body conference June 5-7, 2009 in Saskatoon, One More Soul Canada founder Val Witzaney (left) presented a banner to Bishop Bryan Bayda of the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon, to mark the establishment of an office of marriage and family life in the eparchy. Other banners introducing the Theology of the Body will circulate among parishes in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, accompanied by information brochures.

Theology of the Body national conference held in Saskatoon

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Over 900 participants from across the country attended a national conference June 5-7, 2009 in Saskatoon, exploring Pope John Paul II's teachings on the Theology of the Body.

John Paul's profound insights into what it means to be human, as well as Church teachings on God's plan for human sexuality, marriage and family life were themes taken up by speakers Christopher West, Dr. Janet Smith, and Dr. Michael Waldstein (see related articles below).

The Saskatoon event also included sessions related to Natural Family Planning (NFP), and the church's teachings about regulating births, reaffirmed in the 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*.

During the conference as well as in special sessions for medical professionals, speaker and NFP physician Dr. Mary Martin described the Billings ovulation method as a highly effective and



Dr. Mary Martin

CONTINUED



scientifically documented way to regulate births and to battle infertility. She also detailed how she uses the Billings charting method as a diagnostic tool in her obstetrics and gynecology practice.

The idea of holding a Theology of the Body conference in Saskatoon was inspired by a suggestion from One More Soul (OMS) Canada spiritual advisor Rev. Gerard Cooper, said OMS Canada founder Val Witzaney.

OMS Canada organized the national conference in collaboration with the Roman Catholic Diocese and the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon; Serena Saskatchewan; NFP Saskatchewan; Familia; FaceItFace Ministries; St. Joseph Worker's For Life and Family; and St. Therese Institute of Faith and Mission.

Several follow up projects were launched at the conference, said Witzaney. Banners have been designed to introduce core concepts of the Theology of the Body, and will be circulated in parishes with an accompanying brochure explaining the Church's teachings about sexuality. The banners illustrate the importance of being created in God's image and of being redeemed by the incarnation, describing the nature of love as "free, total, faithful, fruitful."

As well, the Knights of Columbus have sponsored parish materials for Natural Family Planning Awareness Week July 19-26, and an information package related to marriage.

"This conference has been just the beginning of more to come," Witzaney said. "For instance, we really want to give this liberating message to couples who are preparing for marriage in every parish."



Janelle and Jason Reihart were MCs during the weekend conference.



Ed Gibney of the Saskatchewan Knights of Columbus State Council presents a donation to the Theology of the Body conference to Val Witzaney of One More Soul Canada.

There's a need to get the good news about the Church's teachings on sexuality into parishes, schools and Catholic hospitals, Witzaney stressed. "It's got to start in our hearts, and in our lives: then it can be a light for the world in our parishes," she said. "When the people in the pews embrace the truth and beauty of the Church's teachings for their lives; and experience the freedom and joy of this – then we are going to have a strong church."

The history and effectiveness of both the Billings and Serena methods of Natural Family Planning (NFP)

CONTINUED



were highlighted during a conference banquet program June 6.

Diocesan priests Rev Steve Penna and Rev. Darryl Millette each led tributes to NFP pioneers in the province,

including their own parents. Marion and Jim Penna spent years introducing and teaching the Serena sympto-thermal method and Marcy and Gerald Millette have done the same for the Billings ovulation method.

These leaders and others like them were “bringers of good news from the mountains of nuptial love to the flat prairies of Saskatchewan,” said Fr. Penna. “They wanted fully-alive humans in their family and in their church, glorifying God. Fully alive humans are humans set free for freedom. And in the heady rush of the seventies, as freedom was tasted in opting out of listening to a Church and her truth, my parents and their colleagues heard with prophet’s ears the cry of unknowingly un-free couples who had lost the way of listening.”

Their service consisted of countless hours on the road, of training couples one and two at a time, of listening, and counseling, said Rev. Penna. He noted that in some cases, church leadership were “afraid of their prophesy, and they shunned and they marginalized them.”

The three-day Theology of the Body conference at St. Patrick parish also included displays, programming for children and youth, Eucharistic adoration, celebration of Ukrainian Catholic Divine Liturgy Saturday morning, as well as Sunday Eucharist with Bishop Albert LeGatt and Bishop Bryan Bayda.

Saskatoon Bishop Albert LeGatt opens Theology of the Body conference with CCCB reflection on Humanae Vitae

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

The 1968 document that reaffirmed the Catholic Church’s teaching about life issues, human sexuality and contraception was reviewed during a national Theology of the Body conference held June 5-7 in Saskatoon.

In an opening address, Saskatoon Bishop Albert LeGatt presented the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) statement on the 40th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*.

Entitled “Liberating Potential,” the pastoral message invites the faithful to rediscover this prophetic document published by Pope Paul VI 40 years ago, said LeGatt.

“How can we fail to recognize its prophetic character when we consider the troubling evolution of two fundamental human institutions, marriage and the family? Both continue to be affected by the contraceptive mentality

CONTINUED



feared and rejected in the encyclical of Pope Paul VI,” said LeGatt, quoting from the CCCB document.

At the same time, *Humanae Vita* is much more than just a “no” to artificial contraception, he said. “This encyclical is in reality a major reflection on God’s design for human love. It is an invitation to be open to the grandeur, beauty and dignity of the Creator’s call to the vocation of marriage.”

The CCCB statement noted how *Humanae Vitae*’s message was taken up and enriched by Pope John Paul II in 129 Wednesday talks between 1979 and 1984. His original and positive approach to the divine plan for marriage and sexuality became known as the “Theology of the Body.”

It is this rich teaching that the national Theology of the Body conference June 5-7 in Saskatoon was set up to explore, noted LeGatt, thanking organizers for launching the event.

“The time has come to consider some key elements of this Theology of the Body so as to gain a greater understanding of the divine plan and to adhere to it with an informed conscience,” state the Canadian bishops. “That is what is so important: an informed conscience. Let us as Catholics and Christians become educated in our faith and in our sense of what really is God’s design,” added LeGatt.

Theology of the Body offers theological and pastoral insights of “astonishing depth and inestimable richness” that clarify those already present in *Humanae Vitae*, he said.. It suggests a broader view of the very meaning of human existence, namely “learning to love as God loves, therefore, learning to give oneself.”

The Bible returns time and again to marriage imagery to illustrate God’s love for humanity, and Christ’s love for his Church, illustrating that God himself is the author of the intimate partnership of the married state, said the bishops.

“The free, total, faithful and fruitful love of Christ who gives his life for his spouse, the Church and its members, is the love to which spouses are especially called,” he said. “Thus, each time that they become ‘one flesh’ they are called to renew, through the language of their bodies, their marriage commitment to live a free, total, faithful and fruitful love, which is expressed in new lives.”

Humanae Vitae insists on “the inseparable connection, established by God” between the unitive and the procreative significance of the marriage act. “More than ever it is urgent to remember the importance of the connection that exists between conjugal love, sexuality and fruitfulness,” LeGatt said, quoting the CCCB document. “Sexuality, sign of love, is called to be open to something greater than itself, that is, to welcome fruitfulness, which in turn is linked to the good of the spouses, their communion and expresses their conjugal love. And this love is a gift linked to life.”

Of course, not every marriage act will result in new life, and spouses have the right and duty to plan their family sensibly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, “keeping a right order of priorities,” he added. “Natural planning methods will allow them to manage their

CONTINUED



fertility, while respecting the indivisible link between loving union and the procreative potential of intercourse in the context of married love,” state the Canadian bishops.

“Collaborators in self-discipline, spouses who choose Natural Family Planning recognize and welcome each other in all their dignity as persons, including the gift of their fertility. They also discover the joys and rewards of modulating their passion according to the natural rhythms of

their partner. All lovers would agree that human sexuality is much more than simply the physical union of a man and a woman. It is a language of communion, a vehicle of tenderness and the ultimate act of intimacy.”

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical and Pope John Paul II’s Theology of the Body “issue an immense challenge to a world that is too often occupied with protecting itself against the extraordinary life potential of sexuality,” said LeGatt. “In the wake of these two prophetic Popes, the Church, ‘expert in humanity’, issues an unexpected message: sexuality is a friend, a gift of God. It is revealed to us by the Trinitarian God who asks us to reveal it in turn in all its grandeur and dignity.”

In conclusion, LeGatt said that he has come to see that the good news of *Humanae Vitae* and of Natural Family Planning will ultimately best be witnessed through the lives of couples and families.

“Putting this forth is never about judgment and condemnation. It is always about putting forth the good news in people’s lives, lived out and so witnessed by couples throughout the church,” he said. “We must really trust in the power of God’s Spirit, that what is true, beautiful, life giving and loving has ultimate power. We have just finished the Easter season: we know the culture of life is stronger than death.”

LeGatt’s presentation was followed by a talk from speaker Dr. Janet Smith about the history and development of *Humanae Vitae* and how it has been viewed and received in the Church over the past four decades.



Dr. Janet Smith

Dr. Janet Smith explores history of *Humanae Vitae*

A national Theology of the Body conference June 5-7 in Saskatoon began with Dr. Janet E. Smith providing an overview of the development and history of *Humanae Vitae*, the 1968 papal document that affirmed church teachings about human life and sexuality.

Smith provided the historical context for *Humanae Vitae*, explaining that it wasn’t a new statement for the church, but reaffirmed a long and unbroken teaching.

All Christian churches were united in their opposition to contraception until the early decades of the 20th century, Smith related. It was not until 1930 that the Anglican Church stated that contraception was permissible within marriage for grave reasons. The same year, Pope

CONTINUED



Pius XI issued the encyclical *Casti Connubii* "On Christian Marriage" in which he reiterated the constant teaching of the Catholic Church that contraception is intrinsically wrong. "There was virtually no debate about this issue in the Church until the late 1950s," said Smith.

With the development of the birth control pill, Pope John XXIII set up a commission to advise him on questions raised by this new contraceptive method. After he died, Pope Paul VI added new members to this commission.

Debate about whether the church could or would change its teaching against contraception heightened expectations among those desiring a change, Smith described. "The very existence of the special commission seemed to indicate to theologians that the Church was questioning the teaching."

In the end, a majority of the commission voted to recommend that the Church should change its teaching, with the commission reports and recommendations leaked to *The Tablet* in London and to *The National Catholic Reporter* in the United States.

"They were trying to put pressure on Pope Paul VI," said Smith, describing how the publication of the reports prompted a "firestorm" of media attention, which in turn heightened public expectation that the teaching would be changed.

Beleagued and faithful, Pope Paul VI agonized over it, but finally had to pronounce "this is not man's law, it's God's law," Smith described. He released *Humanae Vitae*, reaffirming the Church's traditional teaching on human life and on marriage, including the teaching that every marital act must "retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life."

Within 24 hours of the release of *Humanae Vitae*, Fr. Charles Curran held a press conference on the steps of the Catholic University of Maryland to announce that Catholics did not have to abide by this teaching and were free in their consciences to do what they thought was right about contraception. Other theologians echoed that stand, in what Smith described as an unprecedented display of public dissent to Church teaching.

Opposition was immense in 1968, a year of upheaval and rebellion on many fronts around the world, she related. The headline in *Time* magazine read: "Rebellion in the Catholic Church" and amidst concerns that the issue might cause a schism, dissent often went unchecked and unchallenged, Smith said.

Soon theologians and lay people began dissenting not only about contraception, but also about abortion, homosexuality, masturbation, adultery, divorce and other issues, with a new "pick and choose" mentality toward Church teachings.

Smith pointed out that most people, even priests and seminarians, did not actually read *Humanae Vitae*, and for a couple of decades seminarians were taught "not to disturb the consciences of the faithful" on the issue of contraception. "There was a lot of silence from the pulpit," she said.

The fact is that many "people have been formed by their culture, more than by their church," she said.

"It was no mistake that 10 years later, in 1978, John Paul II was chosen by the Holy Spirit," said Smith. "John Paul II was possibly the person on the face of the earth who was best able to defend the church's teaching on contraception, and that was what our culture needed...He never shied away from it." New understanding of *Humanae Vitae* and the church's teachings on sexuality have come about because of his *Theology of the Body*.

CONTINUED



Smith described a pastoral letter issued by the bishops of the Philippines in 1990, apologizing to Catholics for not having adequately taught *Humanae Vitae*. “Only recently have we discovered how deep your yearning is for God to be present in your married lives,” wrote the bishops. “Afflicted with doubts about alternatives to contraceptive technology, we abandoned you to your confused and lonely consciences with a lame excuse: ‘Follow what your conscience tells you.’ How little we realized that it was our consciences that needed to be formed first.”

Smith also expressed her delight in the Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops (CCCC) statement on the 40th anniversary of *Humanae Vitae*, entitled “Liberating Potential” (see related article about Bishop LeGatt’s presentation above).

“All the loopholes have been plugged,” Smith said, when asked about a 1968 Winnipeg statement by Canadian bishops that said Catholics could follow their consciences about contraception. A statement on the Formation of Conscience in 1973, and the recent pastoral letter about *Humanae Vitae* make it “very clear that the Canadian bishops are on board,” Smith said.

When priests and bishops are teaching these truths, they are “not imposing some horrible law on people, they are healing their wounds; they are helping them come closer to the Lord,” Smith said, encouraging conference participants to support priests in proclaiming the good news of *Humanae Vitae*, and to share their own zeal with others.

“For most Catholics, the only place they learn anything about their faith is church on Sunday. You are a rare breed. You are taking days of your life and spending money to come to this conference,” she said. “You’re unusual and beautiful and you are evangelists.”

Smith holds the Fr. Michael J. McGivney Chair of Life Ethics at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit and has served as a consultor to the Pontifical Council on the Family. She is the author of *Humanae Vitae A Generation Later* and *Life Issues, Medical Choices*; and the editor of *Why Humanae Vitae Was Right, A Reader*.

Smith describes the family as a path to holiness

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

Family life is a path to holiness, Dr. Janet E. Smith said during an anecdote-rich presentation at the national Theology of the Body conference June 5-7 in Saskatoon.

Drawing on incidents and observations of her own family members, Smith said family life is part of God’s plan to help us develop virtues in our lives.

Contrary to the view that parents are forming their children, “the purpose of children is to make adults out of parents,” Smith asserted. “We can love our children in the way we are meant to love everyone.”

Many people are often surprised that they like being parents, Smith observed, but added that it is natural to want children – even to want lots of children. And while every family will bring about a growth in virtues such as unselfishness and caring for others before oneself, large families are a kind of “hothouse” for spiritual growth, she said.

In our culture, many people have no idea what a joy it is to be a parent, Smith added, describing 30-year-old first-time fathers who have never before held a baby. The experience

CONTINUED



The Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon was one of the groups and organizations with materials on display at the national Theology of the Body conference.

of having many younger brothers and sisters, and of growing up knowing and understanding babies and small children, is increasingly rare in this society.

The transformative power of parenthood is remarkable, Smith said, quoting the first-time father who says “everything is different now.” A new parent’s life now includes the question “how am I going to make this world a better place for my child?”

Parents routinely make changes for their children that they wouldn’t make for themselves. That ranges from getting rid of questionable videos to learning our own faith so that we can teach it to our children, she said.

At its best, the only thing that parental love wants back from a child is love, Smith said, observing this provides a small sample of what God’s love is like. A parent’s love is unending, eager to make excuses, willing to forgive.

She described the determined, faithful, suffering love of a mother for a wayward daughter – never giving up, always reaching out, and constantly trying to offer support even in the face of rejection and endless grief. Watching all this, Smith observed: “God loves you, like you love your daughter.”

“I would remind those of you who are blessed to have children that we have to examine that love we have in our hearts and realize that God loves us infinitely more.”



Dr. Michael Waldstein, an expert in the writings of John Paul II about the Theology of the Body was one of the speakers at the national conference.

CONTINUED



Christopher West

Christopher West introduces John Paul II's Theology of the Body at national conference held in Saskatoon June 5-7

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

The master plan for our life can be discovered in Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body, said Christopher West at a national conference June 5-7, 2009 in Saskatoon.

"What it means to be human is a fundamental call to love; to participate in the love of the God who is love; to open our lives to it, to let it infuse us and to let it flow out of us," said West in four talks presented during the conference held at St. Patrick parish.

A faculty member of the Theology of the Body Institute near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, West studies and teaches Pope

John Paul II's "glorious, beautiful vision" of the Theology of the Body, which was delivered as 129 lectures at the beginning of his pontificate from 1979 to 1984.

West described encountering the teaching after "having been immersed in the culture myself, and having fed from what you might call the culture's fast food menu that promised an immediate gratification of our hungers."

Contrary to what many believe, "Christianity is not a starvation diet, Christianity is an invitation to bread come down from heaven," West asserted in lively talks throughout the conference, stressing that the Theology of the Body "invites a very hungry world to a beautiful banquet."

If our understanding of our own humanity and the basic building block of society – marriage and the family – is distorted and filled with violence and chaos, it will impact the world around us: our neighbourhoods, communities, cities and nations, West said in his introductory presentation June 6. "We are not going to build a culture of life unless we come to understand, accept and experience sexuality, love and the whole of life according to their true meaning and their close interconnection. This is the gift of John Paul II's Theology of the Body."

West asked the crowd of some 900 conference participants: "How many of you would say that in your Christian upbringing, there was open, honest, normal, healthy conversation about God's glorious, beautiful and wonderful plan for making us male and female; or heard when you were growing up that the one-flesh union was a great mystery that foretold eternal ecstasy that awaits us in heaven?"

CONTINUED



Every human being is hungry for the good news described in the Theology of the Body, he said. If they aren't aware of this banquet, or believe that Christianity offers starvation fare, they will turn to the "junk food" of modern culture's distorted view of sexuality.



Misconceptions, heresies, and silence about the true meaning of sexuality and what it means to be created male and female contributed to the 20th century's rejection of the Christian sexual ethic, suggested West, quoting Playboy founder Hugh Hefner, who said he started his magazine as a "personal response to the hurt and hypocrisy of our Puritan heritage."

The Theology of the Body soundly refutes Puritan ideas that the body is tainted, shameful and dirty, or the ancient heresy of Manichaeism that sees marriage and sexual love as an evil, only to be tolerated because of the necessity of procreation, West said. The joyful and far-reaching truth revealed in the Theology of the Body must be reclaimed and proclaimed, he added.

Our bodies are a "theology" or "study of God" because we are made in the image and likeness of God, West said. "We image God not only as individuals, not only through our own humanity, but also through the communion of persons that man and woman form right from the very beginning," West said. "We are called to a holy communion and this call to communion is literally stamped into our bodies. Here we discover a glimmer, an icon, of that eternal love of Trinity."

The incarnation of God as man also provides us with insight into the meaning of the body, he added. "Through the fact that the Word of God became flesh, the body entered theology through the main door," West said, quoting John Paul II.

"Christianity has this bold, dramatic claim that the invisible God has been made himself visible," he said, noting that in the challenging reality of the incarnation, our God is an enfleshed God, a God who wore diapers and who bleeds for us.

"Only the body is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer into the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus to be sign of it," West said, quoting John Paul's writings.

"The human being is not a spirit trapped in his body," West stressed. "Your body itself is spiritual ... your spirit has been incarnated in your body." He illustrated this by calling forth a volunteer and asking what is the difference between saying "look at Dan" and "look at Dan's body"? "You are your body, your body is you, it is not something to be rejected, it is something to be embraced. It is something to be lived, as God created it to be from the beginning."

CONTINUED



Although our bodies are fraught with difficulties, problems, pain and disease, “our hope is not in liberation from the body, but in the liberation from sin. Our hope lies not in escaping from the body for all eternity, our hope lies in the resurrection of the body for all eternity when our bodies will shine in glory, just as Christ is risen in his humanity.”

We can be blinded by science to the mystery of the human body, West asserted, describing the truth of love songs that see “the doorway to a thousand churches” within the eyes of a woman, rather than simply observing the cornea and retina.

“God is singing to us, not just any old song. He is singing that song that is smack dab in the middle of the Biblical story; He is singing to us the Song of Songs... a song, a glorious love song, a song from m all eternity inviting us into deep, eternal, union with God,” West said. “God wants to put the divine love song into a human key so that we can enter in and sing it ourselves... that eternal love song has been transposed, precisely in our creation as male and female and in the call of the two to be one flesh.”

Our bodies were created by God to become a sign on earth of the eternal mystery of God, West said. “God has revealed his innermost secret: God himself is an eternal exchange of love, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” He has created us to share in that eternal exchange of love.



Throughout scripture the “spousal analogy” is used to describe the love between God and his people; between Christ and his bride the Church. “Where is the mystical marriage of Christ and his church sacramentally, mystically, consummated? Right here on this altar in the Mass,” West said.

“We don’t know how glorious is the mystery stamped on our bodies.”

West is the author of Good News about Sex and Marriage; Theology of the Body Explained; Theology of the Body for Beginners; and The Love that Satisfies: Reflections on Eros and Agape. He was one of four speakers at the Theology of the Body conference organized by One More Soul Canada in Saskatoon (see related articles). Other sessions by West included “The creation and redemption of man and woman” (see related article); “The Resurrection of the Body and the Heavenly Marriage” and “The Sacrament of Marriage and the Language of Sexual Love.”

CONTINUED



Creation and redemption examined through the lens of the Theology of the Body

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

In his second talk at a national conference in Saskatoon June 5-7, internationally-known speaker Christopher West spoke about the creation and redemption of man and woman as described in John Paul II's Theology of the Body.

The Theology of the Body goes back to the origins, history and destiny of humanity as outlined in the scriptures to answer two questions: what does it mean to be human and how do I live my life in a way that brings true happiness.

"We are created for love, but there are a lot of counterfeit loves on the market," West said during four presentations at the conference held at St. Patrick parish outlinging the teaching of the late pope first delivered as 129 talks at the beginning of his pontificate.

"The way that we experience the relationship of man and woman is broken, fallen, deeply wounded. But we tend to think this is normal," West said.

In the Theology of the Body, John Paul II says we must yearn to regain what was lost in the fall. "Through the gift of redemption we can take up again the original meaning of creation," West explained. "It is now fraught with difficulties, it is fraught with suffering, but if we take up our cross and follow, we can, through ongoing purification, become more and more the men and women we are created to be. This is good news."

Turning to the story of creation in Genesis, John Paul II reflects on three experiences of the first human beings: original solitude, original unity and original nakedness.

"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone.' That aloneness, that solitude, is not only the male apart from the female," said West. "It is the experience of being alone in the world as a person. Adam realizes that he is different than the rest of creation. In naming the animals, he realizes that he is similar to the animals in some ways ... but he is also radically different."

John Paul reflects how "original unity" in the Genesis story demonstrates that we are called to live in relationship. "Man cannot fully find himself except through the sincere gift of himself," said West, quoting the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*. "We cannot discover who we really are unless we love. And the call to love is literally chiseled in our humanity; body and soul," he said.

"A man's body does not make sense by itself. A woman's body does not make sense by itself. Seen in light of each other, we discover a call to unity. We discover a call to a holy sacred communion," West said. "The two become one flesh. The whole reality of married life, consummated in that most intimate of ways, thus becomes the sacramental reality, a true communication of divine life in the world."

From this moment of communion, "the blessing of fruitfulness descended," said West, quoting John Paul II. "Do we consider our fertility a blessing? Indeed scripture has it as the original and fundamental blessing. God blessed them and said be fruitful and multiply," West added. "There is an enemy who aims all of his vile enmity on human fertility," he said. "There is a war raging in our world between what we might call death sex and life sex. Where do we stand?"

CONTINUED



The fact that the first man and the woman lived rightly is evident in their “original nakedness” – nakedness without fear or shame, said West. “They were living a kind of perfection of love. They were living what John Paul II calls the spousal meaning of the body.”

“Spousal meaning of the body” is perhaps the principal phrase of the Theology of the Body, said West, describing it as the body’s power to express that love in which the human person becomes a gift. “We see the perfection of love revealed when Christ the bridegroom says to his bride, this is my body, given for you,” he said. “The manifestation of love on planet earth was the cross.”

“Original nakedness” demonstrates that holiness has entered the world, according to John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, West said. “Do we connect nakedness with holiness? Indeed, we connect nakedness with everything but holiness.” He stressed that there is another way to see and to think about our bodies and our sexuality – an authentic, Catholic, sacramental and mystical view.

“We must never, ever, ever assign evil to the body itself. We assign evil only to the distortion of lust, to that twisting up in our own hearts,” said West, reflecting on Christ’s stern words in the Sermon on the Mount about lusting in one’s heart. “By lust what I mean a kind of inversion of sexual desire... rather than saying, ‘this is my body, given up for you’, what we’re often saying is ‘that’s your body, and I’m going to take it for myself.’”

However, redemption extends even into our sexuality, West stressed, urging his listeners not to be content with “sin management” when it comes to living the call to purity. “Christ’s words are an invitation to a pure way of looking at others, that is capable of seeing and respecting the true spousal meaning of the body,” he said. The journey to purity is long, difficult and arduous, added West, but it is infinitely worth making the effort. “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see the mystery of God revealed through the human body.”

Striving for purity of heart will eventually move a person to a “new ethos” in which the law becomes written on the heart, rather than being experienced as rules -- something the prophets said would happen, West said

“We are only bitter towards the law when we desire to break it,” he said, encouraging his listeners to consider what teachings of the Catholic Church they might be bitter about. “If the teaching of the Church is here and our hearts are over there, maybe the problem is not the teaching of the Church,” he suggested, adding that the solution may be to pray for a change of heart.

In a later talk about the “resurrection of the body and the heavenly marriage,” West emphasized the ultimate destiny of our body is to be in full communion with God for eternity, in the same way Christ’s body has been risen and glorified.

Marriage in this life is a sacramental sign and an earthly participations and foreshadowing of what we will experience in heaven, he said. “The union of the sexes is not man’s be-all and end-all. It is an ‘icon.’”

God alone can satisfy the ache and the yearning that our culture tries to fill with its distorted sexual idolatry. “Our culture is saturated in sex, but it is starved for love.”

Realizing that our spouse is not our ultimate happiness frees us to love as God loves, West said. This “spousal meaning of the body” to love as God loves also reveals the truth about “celibacy for the kingdom,” he added.



Those who forego sexual relations in order to devote all energies and desires to love as God loves, share in the same vocation as those who marry, but manifest it in a different manner, he said. “The ultimate sexual orientation is towards infinity.”

Celibacy does not say that sex is bad, but there is something even better, West stressed, inviting those who have consecrated their lives to God in religious life to stand and be acknowledged.



Spouses commit to ‘free, total, faithful and fruitful love’ explains West

By Kiply Lukan Yaworski

The body has a “language” that is meant to proclaim the mystery of Christ’s own “free, total, faithful and fruitful” love, Christopher West said in his final presentation at a Theology of the Body conference held in Saskatoon June 5-7.

This “free, total, faithful and fruitful love” is precisely what spouses commit to in their vows at the altar, he said during the conference held to explore John Paul II’s teachings on the Theology of the Body, first presented as a series of 129 talks at the beginning of his pontificate.

“John Paul II realizes that there is a language to our body, a language to our sexuality,” but most of us don’t know the vocabulary or understand what we are saying with our bodies, West said. “Our bodies have a language. They speak. They are meant to communicate the truth about love,” he said, adding that to find that truth, we have to look to God who is love, and who has revealed that love in his body, given up for us.

“Jesus says, they do not take my life from me, I lay it down freely. Christ’s love is not a half measure. It’s not a selfish calculation. God does not ration his Spirit, it is poured out wholly, completely, without reservation ... He loved us to the last,” said West.

The longing for love like God’s that is free, total, faithful and fruitful is “not an imposition on our hearts,” said West, citing the yearning for this

CONTINUED



that is found even in popular love songs and movies. “We know that is what we want.”

Another word for love that is free, total, faithful and fruitful is “marriage,” said West. “This is what the marriage commitment is,” he said. “Sexual intercourse is where our wedding vows are made flesh, signed, seal and delivered with the language of the body. Here reality is corresponding to these words.”

It is also possible to “speak lies with our bodies,” said West. “All questions of sexual morality, come down to one single question, does this behaviour truly image God’s free, faithful, total, fruitful love, or does it not?”

He challenged those present to consider whether the kind of marriage they want is one where the husband and wife are regularly faithful or regularly unfaithful to their wedding vows. Masturbation, premarital sex, homosexual activity, adultery, pornography, intentional sterilization and artificial contraception are all activities that “miss the mark” of free, faithful, total, fruitful love that promised in marriage, said West.

“If a couple says yes at the altar and then in the intimacy of their union they contracept, they are inserting an ‘I do not,’ into the ‘I do,’” he described. “If you can recognize the inconsistency of being committed to fidelity but not always, can you not also recognize the inconsistency of being committed to life, but not always?”

It is a myth that the Church says couples are obligated to have as many children as physically possible, West added, explaining the valid and effective means of Natural Family Planning which uses periods of abstinence to avoid pregnancy when a couple discerns a reason to do so for their emotional, financial or physical well being.

Natural Family Planning does not violate the inherent fruitfulness of the marriage act, as artificial contraception does, West said.

Just as waiting for your grandmother to die naturally is different from murdering her, abstaining from sex during times of natural fertility is different from artificial contraception, he said. “Natural death and natural fertility are both acts of God, whereas with euthanasia and contraception we are taking the power of life and death into our own hands and we are making ourselves like God. Wasn’t that the original sin?” West said.

“I want to invite you to participate, to be part of, a new kind of sexual revolution,” said West, encouraging a renewal of marriage and family by way of the teachings on human life and sexuality contained in the church document *Humanae Vitae*, especially as they are explained and enriched in John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body*.

“There will be no renewal of the Church and of the world, without a renewal of marriage and the family. There will be no renewal of marriage and the family without a return to the full truth of the Christian sexual ethic, without a full return to the full truth proclaimed in *Humanae vitae*,” he said, stressing the need for a new language and a new approach that the modern world can relate to – an understanding expressed in the *Theology of the Body*.