

Pope St. John Paul II's Theology of the Body Unlocks the Meaning of Our Humanity

When I was a young adult, I went back to school to learn the Catholic Faith. Up to this point, I had been employed as a tennis pro teaching at a large, indoor racquet club, and following that, as a sales representative for a significant real estate title company. Even amidst the high-paying salaries, company car and credit cards to entertain customers, my life seemed rather empty.



My parents were both well-formed, faithful Catholics, and they sought to provide my seven siblings and me with a solid foundation. However, my formation and understanding of the Faith and commitment to daily prayer, due to various reasons, were basically nonexistent. In trying to navigate the normal challenges of everyday life, as well as facing personal problems that are inevitable as an adult, I knew that I needed God's help.

In returning to school and starting the second semester, something interesting happened. There was a class that was very popular and I somehow knew in the depths of my heart that this subject matter contained the very reason I had been drawn back to school. This was a class on the Christian understanding of the human person, entitled Christian Anthropology. When I went to register, the class was full, and it would not be offered again until after I completed my studies. In speaking with school administration, I explained the situation with strong conviction, even though I wasn't really sure why this class was so important for me. By God's grace and determined follow-up, I was granted permission to take the class.

That intuition on the importance of this class became evident right away. The



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course included a study of the "Theology of the Body," arguably one of Pope St. John Paul II's greatest contributions to the Church and the world, which teaches of the amazing gift it is to be a human person, and how important and beautiful is the complementarity between man and woman. I found that the "Theology of the Body" answered important life questions, such as: Who am I and why am I here? What is the meaning and purpose of my life? What is love? How do I come to know my true identity? What am I supposed to do with my life? This teaching brought me so much clarity, provided me with a proper understanding of my identity and sexuality and brought with it the freedom, peace and joy God intends for each one of us.

On completing that semester, I had to take time off from school to earn additional money. It turned out that I used every free moment after work and on Saturdays re-reading and pondering the teachings of the "Theology of the Body." This opportunity strengthened even more the foundation

to embrace my true identity, helping me to understand that freedom's ultimate purpose is to enable me to truly love. This is the essence of being human: loving. We come to discover ourselves and our identity when we make an authentic gift of ourselves to others in love.

Fast-forward to 2020. Directors from the offices at the Holy Cross Diocesan Center for Catechesis & Evangelization, Schools, Family Life and Ministries & Social Concerns began to discuss how the principles contained in Pope St. John Paul II's "Theology of the Body" could provide the foundation for all evangelization and formation throughout the diocese. These principles are essential and most needed for building up the proper understanding of the beauty of God's plan for life and love.

One essential way that the directors of the four offices are supporting a fuller implementation of the "Theology of the Body" is to engage the attention and partnership of parents. These offices have developed one-page parent summaries meant to be given to parents of middle and high school students. The summary for the particular session that their son or daughter is studying will help them quickly see the core content of that session and

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be able to discuss it with their child. The downloadable, one-page summaries are available at: diolc.org/tob. A parent letter explaining the details is also available at the link.

This formation on the “Theology of the Body” will help young people to discover their true dignity as created in the image of God, to embrace their identity as male or female, and to know their purpose in life and their destiny in heaven. It will foster family dialogue and the ability to identify and resist the false messages that continually bombard young people. You are most welcome to read the parent summaries, even if you don’t have a son or daughter in middle school or high school. These summaries provide an overview of the basic principles of the “Theology of the Body.” If you would like to study these amazing teachings of Pope St. John Paul II, the high school DVD program is called “YOU: Life, Love and the Theology of the Body,” and is available from Ascension Press.

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January’s cold weather is conducive to reading a good book!

A book that is very helpful for understanding how the principles of the “Theology of the Body” can positively affect the circumstances of your life is entitled “These Beautiful Bones: An Everyday Theology of the Body” by Emily Stimpson (now Chapman) and is available from the Marian Catechist Bookstore in La Crosse. Simple, funny and easy to read, Emily writes of personal experiences, such as cleaning lice out of her house and provides practical wisdom for applying concepts of the “Theology of the Body” to questions and concerns of everyday life.

Since being introduced to the “Theology of the Body,” the most significant change for me is to recognize that we find our true identity in Jesus Christ when we can make an authentic gift of ourselves to others in love. I saw my parents live this out day by day. However, having words to describe it and understanding what it means to live self-giving love provides the foundation to live life with meaning and purpose, and most importantly, it keeps us on the path to heaven. No matter our age level, we are all in desperate need of this guidance, particularly for the culture in which we live. The “Theology of the Body” is for our time. Praise God for providing us with this teaching and the grace to live it out.



VIRTUAL FORMATION FOR
THEOLOGY OF THE

Body

Unlocking the Meaning of Our Humanity

Saturday, June 5, 2021

Join us for virtual presentations by Brian Butler, who authored *Theology of the Body for Middle School* and *YOU: Life, Love and the Theology of the Body for High School*

Brian Butler

Cost is \$10 per person
Register at: diolc.org/tob

Today’s middle schoolers and high schoolers face new pressure. Social networking and the whole gamut of virtual reality present new horizons of connectivity, yet often without real engagement, adding to the hard task of early adolescents finding their identity. We need a message of hope that is more powerful than the glitter of society’s offerings. This is what Pope St. John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* provides, for it resonates with the deepest desires of our heart.

What you will learn:

- Key factors that led St. John Paul II to give the world the *Theology of the Body* (TOB)
- Why the title of the work is powerful and prophetic for us today
- What “original innocence” means and why it is important
- The difference between love and lust, and how to grow in authentic love
- The differences between abstinence and chastity, and why chastity is for everyone
- How the Eucharist teaches us about marriage, and vice-versa