

Dietrich von Hildebrand, Catholic Philosopher, and Christopher West, Modern Enthusiast:
Two Very Different Approaches to Love, Marriage and Sex
By Alice von Hildebrand

Introduction

It is a joy to praise a great book or author; it is a grief and duty to criticize a bad one. But it is especially difficult to criticize someone who has many talents, whose work has positive sides, but which also suffers from certain faults, calling for correction. Such is the case with Christopher West, with his popular presentation of John Paul II's "Theology of the Body."

As gifted as he is—and as much as I appreciate all the good he has done for the Church—West's work continues to fall short in many respects. He has sometimes misunderstood the authentic Catholic tradition; overlooked or disregarded essential aspects of it; and promoted a new form of religious "enthusiasm" which can best be described as wayward. Monsignor Ronald Knox, who critiqued this attitude so well in his book *Enthusiasm*, was a prophet, recognizing such outbursts as recurring phenomena in the history of the Church, characteristic of easily misguided movements for which we should always be on the watch.

Key to my concerns is West's hyper-sexualized approach to the Theology of the Body. The French have a wonderful word to capture the veiling of one's intimate feelings, out of a *proper* sense of shame—*pudeur*, a "holy bashfulness," so to speak. Seized as he is by what he regards as his calling to evangelize a new generation with this theology in "modern" ways they can supposedly better understand, West practically ignores the importance of *pudeur*, and, by his imprudence, winds up undermining his own message.

In light of the controversy surrounding West's work, which has affected millions via his books, DVDs, videos and conferences, I would like to contrast his views with those of my late husband, Dietrich von Hildebrand, whose work regarding Catholic teaching on human sexuality avoids the hazards and traps too often found in West's work. My goal is to alert parents and educators alike to common philosophical errors that have gravely negative consequences in Christopher West's lectures and publications.

Part 1: The Nature of the Intimate Sphere

1. Dietrich von Hildebrand and the Intimate Sphere

In 1927, thirteen years after his conversion to Catholicism, Dietrich von Hildebrand published a book of key importance, *Reinheit und Jungfräulichkeit (In Defense of Purity)*. Through unmerited graces—coming, as he did, from a non-religious background—on a purely natural level, Dietrich had always "felt" that the intimate sphere was essentially linked to love, and so to approach it as "fun" was a desecration. But the moment he entered the Blessed Ark, the Holy Catholic Church, his approach to this sphere was "baptized." He now viewed sex through the eyes of a believer, perceiving its profound relationship with God.

Prior to his conversion, Dietrich did not "see" that artificial birth control was a matter of serious moral gravity. But once he became a Catholic, he gratefully perceived what he had always "felt"—namely, that sex within marriage had to be completed and perfected according to Heaven's design, which meant *being open to the*

creation of human life at all times. Dietrich, as a Catholic, now understood that in the marital embrace, when the husband gives his wife the precious semen that God has placed in his body, he starts a causal chain that can lead to pregnancy: the spouses are collaborating with their Creator, in order to bring a new life into existence. This is a privilege not even granted to the angels; the importance and beauty of which needed to be recognized. Between "procreation" and "copulation," Dietrich saw an abyss separating persons incarnated into a body, and animals. The human body, as the utterly unique creation of God, was—and still is—called upon to have the "Heavenly seal" of personhood in every single bodily activity. This is why St. Paul writes, "whether you eat or drink, glorify God" (1 Corinthians 10: 31-32).

The insights Dietrich garnered, prior to his conversion, were now elevated to a supernatural level, opening his eyes to the Church's teachings on chastity --marital and non-marital-- and the beauty of virginity.

2. The Intimate Sphere and Original Sin

Because the intimate sphere differs radically from other bodily instincts, it was bound to be deeply affected by Original Sin. *Corruptio optimi, pessima.* The ugly harvest of sins committed in this sphere is large. We need not go into details, but no one can deny that it is a domain in which the Devil (the master of ceremonies) has had a field day since the onset of Original Sin, and still does. Dorothy Day, who admired my husband's work, wrote about her own reaction to the work of Havelock Ellis, a popular "sexologist" of the day:

"One might also say that an ugly tide rose in me, a poisonous tide, a blackness of evil, at reading there so many things that certainly do not need to be known by other than doctor or priest, by those who are schooled to bear it and trained to help in relation to it. Dr. von Hildebrand writes about the poisonous fascination of sex, its deadly allure in the abstract. I felt it then in its most hideous form, and there was no beauty in it, no love, but it was like the uncoiling of a dank and ugly serpent in my breast. These may be extreme ways of expressing myself, but I am sure that at times there has been this consciousness of evil in us all. Evil as a negation, as an absence of God, as a blackness, a glimpse of Hell 'where everlasting horror dwelleth, and no order is.'"

Day, a great convert, goes on to favorably quote a young mother who laments how so many "are easily betrayed by that 'poisonous fascination' of which Dr. von Hildebrand speaks. They begin the descent to the Dark Angel, through the mysticism of Evil, only half knowing what they are doing" (Dorothy Day, *On Pilgrimage*, Eerdman's, 1999, pp. 129-134).

When Christ through the Apostles and His holy Bride, the Church, slowly conquered the Western world, one crucial task was to make Christians aware of the unique character of this sphere: its dignity and its dangers. Plato had already warned us that pleasure is an enemy that is not easy to conquer: one of the main aims of education, he wrote, is to teach a child to achieve victory over pleasure.

Pleasure in itself is not evil; it is the Creator himself who has linked pleasure to certain bodily activities. But the great task of a truly Christian education is to baptize pleasure, to receive it gratefully as a *gift*, and not to claim it as a *right*. There are legitimate pleasures, calling for gratitude, but also illegitimate ones: gluttony and drunkenness, and alas, inherently perverse ones.

The Church, as a loving Mother, has the mission of reminding Her children, wounded by Original Sin, that the intimate sphere has to be approached with *reverence*. Dietrich von Hildebrand's *In Defense of Purity* makes the point that God, and not a boundless search for "pleasure," should always be king of the bedroom.

As Day noted, Dietrich stressed that this private sphere, though blessed by God when properly entered, is fraught with dangers. It can be inebriating, befuddling, and totally anesthetize man's spiritual and moral faculties. Man easily becomes prey to his feelings. The Bible is rich in such examples. Clearly, King David—a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14)—totally lost control of himself when he saw Bathsheba who was very beautiful. He was defeated by her attraction, and committed adultery, followed by murder. Because of an unchecked desire for "pleasure," one of the greatest sons of Israel committed an abominable crime. Thanks to Nathan, however, he repented.

King David's sins underscore how sexual desire can degenerate into what Dietrich calls "diabolical" temptations. Some of the most atrocious perversions occur when the Devil takes over completely. And one should never downplay, or minimize, the gravity of these evils. It is plainly false to claim that such abuses are "tragic," rather than "filthy."

3. The Intimate Sphere and Reverence

These are certain truths of which Dietrich von Hildebrand never lost sight of. Throughout all his Catholic writings, he insists upon humility and reverence: humility because nobody, except the Blessed One among women, Mary, is safe; and reverence because of the depth and mystery of this sacred domain—a domain Dietrich always believed called for *veiling*.

Fed on great Catholic literature from the time of his conversion, he also knew that this sphere should be baptized. This is why the Catholic Church (with the Orthodox) makes marriage one of the seven sacraments.

While distortions can be found in the history of Catholic understanding of sexuality, they should be recognized as just that—distortions, which are not representative of the core. It is simply false to claim that the Church has, until recently, been blind to the deep meaning and beauty of sex as God intended it: we need only turn to St. Francis de Sales to see how profoundly he understood the meaning that God gave to this sphere. He writes: "It is honorable to all, in all, and in everything, that is, in all its parts" (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, Part III, Chapter 38). It is simply not true to claim that, until recently, the beauty and meaning of this sphere had been totally obscured by Puritanism and Manichaeism. Many from my generation can testify—against those who misrepresent it today—that the education we received did not, on the whole (there are always exceptions) present sex as "dirty".

What was communicated, with delicacy, was a sense of "mystery" for something great, that had to be approached with deep reverence, and which, when abused, led to very serious offenses against God.

My general criticism of Christopher West is that he does not seem to grasp the delicacy, reverence, privacy, and sacredness of the sexual sphere. He also underestimates the effects of Original Sin on the human condition.

4. Tua Culpa, or Mea Culpa?

One of the many dangers threatening us today is the widespread tendency to put the blame on others. Christopher West resorts to this strategy in his book, *Good News About Sex and Marriage*, when he writes:

“I myself am frustrated by the fact that I didn’t learn about the richness and sensibleness of the Church’s teaching when I was growing up, despite twelve years of Catholic education. For the most part, the message was simply, ‘Don’t do it.’ So what did I do? The exact opposite, of course.

“Had I been taught how wonderful and beautiful the Catholic vision of sex and marriage actually is, perhaps I would have thought it something worth holding out for. Perhaps I would have been spared the pain I inflicted on myself and others.” (*Good News About Sex and Marriage*, revised edition, p. 69)

Here, West falls into a contemporary trap. The *tua culpa* [you are at fault] has replaced the *mea culpa* [I am at fault]. To assume that those who fall into sexual sin necessarily would have led a pure life, had one's parents or teachers been more “open” in their approach to the intimate sphere, is *pure illusion*.

Another mistake West makes is to assume that pornography is an understandable—if sinful and misguided—effort to quench the sexual impulse: “God gave us that desire,” he told an interviewer. “When we go to pornography to satisfy that desire, its like eating junk food. It’s not going to satisfy the legitimate hunger and need of the human heart.” (*Legatus Magazine*, March 2010). But here, West ignores an obvious fact, all too prevalent throughout human history: many people *like* “junk food”—in this case, pornography and illicit sex (this is why brothels will never go out of business)—and often prefer it, even when a healthy alternative—in this case, authentic Catholic teaching—is presented to them. That is because Catholic orthodoxy—as enriching as it is, and even within the context of a loving, sacramental marriage—entails *sacrifice and self-control*, rather than the “hunger” of self-indulgence.

The Old Testament has a great deal to teach us about this: the Israelites were constantly given gifts from Heaven—most famously, the “Manna,” *for which they did not have to work*, God having generously removed the burden of their sins (“thou shalt earn thy bread with the sweat of thy brow”). This divine gift enabled them to survive the Exodus—and yet, even though that Manna was more than enough to sustain them, it didn’t cater to their selfish “hunger”; so many abandoned God’s law and went back to the “junk food” of their time—the flesh pots of Egypt. Thus, the Scripture teaches: God shows us the way, and offers us proper food, and yet people willfully reject the Lord’s gifts and laws, using the excuse that they are “hungry” for more. “Had I had the proper food, I would not have fed myself on junk food,” says the individual looking to avoid personal responsibility. Alas, junk food can be very attractive because it “flatters” our palate. But, in fact, pornography is not just unhealthy food. It is veritable poison, for it corrupts the mind and heart.

5. “Happy Talk” and Asceticism

It must be recognized: “happy talk” about sex and sexuality, even if it is wrapped in religious language, cannot communicate the full truth about God’s plan for human sexuality unless it includes the *difficulties* of living out an elevated moral life.

Sex enthusiasts in the Church like West often speak about the “raging hormones” many feel growing up, but the solution they propose to cure it—*stimulate people even more, with a hyper-sexualized presentation of Catholic*

teaching—can easily aggravate the situation. Moreover, they consistently ignore the one successful remedy the Church has always called upon to address this malady: asceticism, the spirit of renunciation and sacrifice. It is crucial to a healthy moral and spiritual life; it is a way of collaborating with God's grace, to "achieve victory over pleasure," as the pre-Christian Plato wisely said.

Why does St. Paul teach us, "And they that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh with the passions and lusts" (Galatians 5: 24)? Why did St. Benedict throw himself into a thorny bush? Why did St. Francis engage in self-mortification? Because, following Scripture, they believed that disciplining their bodily desires, was indispensable to overcoming temptation.

If such measures are considered unnecessary and too "extreme" today, other forms of asceticism—an intense prayer life, frequent confession, modesty in dress and language, and avoiding all possible occasions of sin--should not be considered so. One does not have to be a puritan or kill-joy to know that Christopher West's infatuation with pop culture and rock and roll is a long way from the austere spirit of the New Testament. Grace is what is needed to be pure; the saints teach us the way.

Asceticism, *under proper guidance, which respects the integrity of the body*, should never be dismissed as "masochistic," psychologically damaging, or treated as a form of Freudian "repression,"-- least of all by Catholics. For it is Catholics who are called to a higher state of life; and it is sheer illusion to believe that moral perfection can be pursued without this purifying discipline.

Part 2: Speaking of the Intimate Sphere

That the intimate sphere should be treated with reverence necessarily affects the way we speak about it, and this concerns educators, in a particular way, since they must adapt their speech to the needs of their hearers. How is one to address individuals who have been so influenced by the vulgarity of our age? How can one teach them to view love and sexuality in an exalted and reverent way?

1. The Risk of Vulgarizing the Holy

We live in a thoroughly secularized and de-Christianized culture (what my husband would have described as an "anti-culture"). For this reason, "spiritual sensitivity" is deficient in most of us. A few examples come to mind:

When a parish priest refers to God from the pulpit as "the nice guy upstairs," many people consider this to be a fun way of referring to God: it is chummy; it makes them feel comfortable; it is a "democratic approach." St. Teresa of Jesus would shed tears. She always refers to God as *Su Majesdad*, for indeed *He is King*.

When another parish priest, preparing grammar school children for their first confession, referred to this awesome sacrament as a "fun experience," I felt like crying. This awesome moment, when the soul turns to God for forgiveness, is stripped of its supernatural character and presented as "amusing". It is a modern desecration. Yet, many people in the pews, who have no perception of these profound spiritual evils, would feel awed if they had the secular "honor" of being invited to the White House by President Obama.

This is the reason, I believe, the sacredness of sex is so often addressed by using a vocabulary which makes it impossible to have the reverence called for. This is why people feel perfectly comfortable discussing personal and intimate matters in public-- matters, which, by their very nature, call for tremendous discretion.

An analogy comes to mind: Because of my deep love for classical music, I have been in contact with great musicians. What I discovered is that they have such an exquisite sensitivity to sounds that they perceive the slightest "disharmony" which escapes most of us. Am I wrong in fearing that "modern man," deafened by sounds, poisoned by evil images and pictures, can no longer register cacophonous sounds which harm the sensitive enamel of their souls? This is why I often hear people say: "I do not see why this is shocking. I do not see why this is wrong. I do not see why others call this coarse."

As a veteran in the classroom, these are remarks that I heard *ad nauseam*. That a person does not "see" an object referred to does not mean that there is nothing to be seen. There are cases of hallucinations. But much more frequently people are morally and spiritually near-sighted and this explains why they can say "honestly" that they do not see.

Years ago, Dietrich von Hildebrand gave a beautiful talk on the words of the blind man of Jericho saying to Christ: *That I may see*. The saints perceive. Most of us do not see, for we are more or less blind and desperately need correcting glasses. These glasses are provided by humility—an awareness that we need help.

"*Holy Sex*"?

Christopher West's presentations consistently use language that lacks sensitivity, thereby obscuring the good inherent in marriage and the marital embrace

A particular example of this vulgarization, and its relationship to the work of Christopher West, is West's glowing review of Gregory Popcak's book *Holy Sex* (a tempting title).

I have read hundreds of book reviews in my life, and cannot ever recall having come across a recommendation quite like this one, with such overabundant, unrestrained praise. "Every engaged and married couple on the planet should have a copy," writes West about *Holy Sex*. He continues:

"Popcak goes right between the sheets, shall we say, providing a very frank, honest, and practical discussion of the sexual joys and challenges of the marital bed. I must admit, even I, on occasion, found myself taken aback by Popcak's forthrightness. ... Even if his boldness is occasionally jarring, that's precisely what's so refreshing about this book. It tells it like it is and, by doing so, gives couples permission to face and discuss delicate issues. More importantly, *Holy Sex* gives couples tools to overcome the many difficulties they inevitably face on the road to a truly holy sex life." (From, West's column, "Dr. Ruth Meets Thomas Aquinas," posted on his website, ChristopherWest.com).

Readers are left to wonder that they should feel sorry for married people who, because of their age, had no access to such a treasure when they were young. The question comes up: *What about the holy and very happy marriages that have been among the blessings of the Catholic Church through the ages?* What about the very

happy marriage of St. Elizabeth of Hungary? How did all these Catholic couples experience such love, and achieve such content, deprived as they were of such modern “classics” as Popcak’s book on sex?

I have no doubt what my husband would say about all this: he would not have “joined the party,” but rather, reserved glowing praise for genuine Catholic classics, like St. Augustine’s *Confessions* and St. Francis de Sales’ *Introduction to the Devout Life*.

Having acquainted myself (reluctantly) with Popcak’s *Holy Sex*, I do not believe it merits the extravagant praise West grants it. I do know that my husband would never write such a review. For one thing, he would have strongly objected to the book’s graphic, explicit nature, which West mistakenly sees as “boldness” rather than vulgarity. For another, Dietrich would have vigorously opposed Popcak’s so-called “one rule”—that married couples “may do whatever they wish,” as long as they don’t use contraception, “both feel loved and respected,” and the marital act culminates within the woman. (p. 193). As another reviewer commented, this reduces marital love to a lowest common denominator, where “everything else can be left to the judgment of each couple. A variety of sexual positions, oral sex, sexual toys, and role playing are all judged permissible as long as couples follow the ‘one rule.’” (Catholicbookreviews.org, 2008)

These ideas would have struck Dietrich von Hildebrand as abhorrent. It is precisely because the marital bed is sacred that one should approach acts within it with enormous reverence. Degrading and perverse sexual behavior— even if it is done by a married couple, who do not practice contraception— should be condemned, as an assault on human dignity. The “pornification” of marriage should be resisted as vigorously as the pornification of our culture.

I cannot describe what Dietrich thought of pornography: the very word triggered an expression of horror on his noble face. The same thing is true of sodomy. He had such a sense for the dignity of human persons that any posture, which sins against this dignity, was repulsive to him. It is in this context, that we should judge Popcak’s shocking suggestion (p. 248) that “as Christopher West has noted in his book, *Good News About Sex and Marriage*, there is nothing technically forbidding a couple from engaging” in sodomy (provided the husband culminates the *normal* sex act within his wife); and that, while he discourages the practice of marital sodomy, “nevertheless, following Augustine’s dictum and in the absence of greater clarification from the Church, couples are free to exercise prudential judgment” in this regard.

That a Catholic author would cite “Augustine’s dictum” (presumably the much-misinterpreted “Love, and do what you will”) as a justification for sodomy would have broken my husband’s heart. Furthermore, the fact that an act is not formally condemned does not entitle us to believe that it is right or good. When Cain murdered his brother, he was not disobeying a formal order from God, but he *knew* he was committing a grave moral evil— against the Natural Law—already written on mankind’s heart. Similarly, petri dish “conception” is an abomination in and by itself, even though it is not in the Ten Commandments. It is against the dignity of a person to be “made” in a laboratory. “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mathew 11: 15)

In this context, it is important for couples to avoid what Canon Jacques Leclerc calls “any corruption of love” in the marital bed. He writes: “There are many who believe that once they are married, they may do whatever they like.” But “they do not understand,” he continues, that “the search for every means of increasing pleasure can be a perversion.” He cautions: “Now, there are even among the most Christian young people many who know

nothing of the moral aspect of the problem and have only the rudimentary idea that everything is forbidden outside marriage, but that within marriage everything is allowed. It is thus a good thing to remember that the morality of conjugal relations does not allow that pleasure should be sought by every means, but calls for a sexual life that is at the same time healthy, simple and normal.” (*Marriage: A Great Sacrament*, 1951, p. 88). These are sentiments which my husband, Dietrich von Hildebrand, would have thoroughly approved.

The Use of Analogy

This discussion of the vulgarization of the intimate sphere, by means of language, leads me to a topic of great importance, which I can only sketch briefly: analogy. Human language seeks ways of expressing those higher realities that are beyond the grasp of our senses. God has left signs of His unseen greatness in the earthly realities that we see, and this is a blessing. But there is also the danger of confusing the beauty of creatures with higher Heavenly realities. The other insight to remember is that analogy, in the AGE OF FAITH, was understood in a way that is completely different from our age of secularism, relativism, subjectivism and eroticism. Hence, a beautiful, sacred book like “the Song of Songs,” which draws parallels between God’s love and romantic love-, is bound to be misinterpreted by the modern, sex-obsessed mind.

One of the many great contributions of Plato is to have perceived that the lower reality is a faint (and therefore imperfect) copy of the higher reality. The higher gives us a key to an understanding of the lower: absolute justice sheds light on the imperfect justice found in the world.

This tradition was highlighted by St. Augustine, and developed by St. Bonaventure, Cardinal Newman, and Dietrich von Hildebrand, to mention some of Augustine's disciples.

Modern Reversal

But our "modern" world, having cut its roots from the past, is constantly tempted to reverse this order, assuming it is the material reality which has the key to so-called spiritual things. This is why Moleschott writes that there is a perfect parallel between the kidneys producing the urine, and the brain producing thought. This is why Freud conquered many thinkers by telling him that sex is the key to what is called love. Unfortunately, West follows the Freudian thought, looking for understanding in the lower rather than the higher. Love is the form of sex, not vice versa.

This false mentality of analogy was strongly opposed by Dietrich von Hildebrand, even though it was (and still is) countenanced by many contemporary writers. Chesterton, on the other hand, took my husband’s side. One day, Chesterton writes, he was taking a walk in the woods with a man whose " . . . pointed beard gave him something of the look of Pan.” At one point this companion said to him: "Do you know why the spire of that church goes up like that?" I expressed a respectable agnosticism, and he answered in an off-hand way, ‘Oh, the same as the obelisks; the Phallic Worship of antiquity’. Then I looked across at him suddenly as he lay there leering above his goat-like beard; and for the moment I thought he was not Pan but the Devil. No mortal words can express the immense, the insane incongruity and unnatural perversion of thought involved in saying such a thing . . ." (*Everlasting Man*, p. 152).

These words are a striking and prophetic rebuke to Christopher West's efforts to employ "phallic symbolism to describe the Easter candle," as Dr. David Schindler pointed out in his critique of West. Hugo Rahner has pointed out where these aberrant ideas about "phallic symbolism" came from: pagan mythology, not authentic Christianity. (See his book, *Greek Myths and Christian Mystery*, 1963)

Chesterton's passage should be read by anyone who believes that whatever is sexual gives us a spiritual message, when in fact the exact opposite is the case.

Analogy and the Virgin Birth

This defective attitude might explain why Christopher West also believes that after the Holy Virgin gave birth to our Savior, she ejected a bleeding placenta, just as his wife had done after delivering their son ("Born of a Woman," syndicated column, December 8, 2006, ChristopherWest.com). He assumes that these details magnify the mystery of Bethlehem.

Dietrich von Hildebrand would have absolutely opposed such ideas. I recall attending my husband's talks in his apartment on Central Park West. He meditated on the Holy Mass, and on numerous passages of the New Testament. When talking about the Annunciation or the Nativity, he made his hearers realize that we were entering a "holy zone", which called for silent adoration. The Archangel Gabriel's visit to Mary is clothed in mystery. But in a way, Bethlehem is still more mysterious: St. Luke tells us absolutely nothing concrete: we know that Mary gave birth to a son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes.

The moment calls for silent adoration. Angels are not mentioned. St. Joseph is not mentioned. We do know, however, and this is a dogma of our faith, that she was a Virgin, *prius ac posterius*. The conception was miraculous; the delivery was miraculous. Any intrusion into this mystery would have been a source of grief to Dietrich von Hildebrand who, because he recited Vespers and Compline every day, knew Psalm 130 well: "I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me".

For Christopher West to offer graphic, speculative details about the Virgin Birth—like the ejected bleeding placenta—underscores my point. The analogy of the Virgin Birth with the birth of West's own son is mistaken. The latter, though obviously a great blessing, was not conceived, through God, by a Virgin; and it was not the product of a miraculous delivery. Further, to "tear the veil" away from Bethlehem, and to believe an imaginary, explicit description of it is a more powerful way of referring to the mystery of mysteries, is something that Dietrich von Hildebrand would, as I say, have fiercely contested. Between a normal birth, and the mystery of Bethlehem, lies an abyss which man - out of trembling reverence—should not traverse.

Silent adoration is the only valid response to such a mystery.

2. Other Issues of Language

Love and Pleasure

The prevalence that certain words have in a text give us a key to the author's approach to his topic. Those acquainted with Dietrich von Hildebrand's books on purity, marriage, sex etc. will immediately notice that the

key word he utilizes is "love". He tells us, explicitly and repeatedly, that it is love which gives meaning to the intimate sphere, and that the beauty of the union between the spouses is proportionate to the tenderness of their love. It is love that "baptizes" pleasure, and brings it to a much higher level; for pleasure can be experienced by animals, but the sweetness of human pleasure, fortified by love, is altogether different: the word "pleasure" is then no longer adequate. We need a richer vocabulary to refer to it; there is joy, there is gratitude, there is happiness. Isolated pleasure (which by its very nature, does not last, and cannot last) is totally incapable of giving a faint idea of what this "baptized" pleasure is; and is something, of course, denied to animals.

It is, alas, possible to experience intense pleasure, even while the heart is cold. This sheds light on the attraction of brothels: a dark den in which love is banished, and self-centered pleasure is sought for its own sake . . . and paid for. Since Original Sin, this possibility has always existed.

Limitations of English

One of the challenges of speaking about sex from a truly Catholic perspective has to do with something often overlooked: the limitations of the English language. English is a great language, perhaps the richest language on earth. (*Relata refero.*) But it is, philosophically, relatively poor; and this emerges in any discussions involving the human body. German, in contrast, distinguishes between the word *Leib* (the body of a person) and *Koerper*—the body of animals. It makes it clear that a human body should be personified, and that every single bodily activity of Man should be elevated to a degree of nobility not given to animals. This is a powerful incentive to oppose the "cult of the body" so prevalent in our decadent culture.

Another difficulty: English does not distinguish between shame in the negative *sense* (response to what is ugly, disgusting, repulsive, filthy) and shame that is positive (in the sense of personal, private, intimate, mysterious). This lack of distinction certainly explains certain "simplifications" and "misunderstandings" about human sexuality which punctuate the work of Christopher West.

After our first parents discovered they were naked, they were *ashamed*. This shame had a positive, instructive purpose, because it made them aware that they had stripped themselves of the beautiful "veil of innocence" God had given them, before they sinned. These profound truths should be embraced and highlighted by Christopher West, not minimized or ignored.

Part 3: Particular Problems Related the Treatment of the Intimate Sphere

1. Dictatorial Relativism and Pornography

Dietrich von Hildebrand and Post-Christian Society

One of the gifts God gave to Dietrich von Hildebrand was to perceive the call of the hour. This gift opened his eyes to the poison of Nazism in the early 1920s, as well as the 1943 treason of Yalta, when both Roosevelt and Churchill practically "delivered" half of Europe to another political demon, Stalin (with the tragic consequences that we know). This gift enabled Dietrich to perceive, in the wake of Vatican II, that something had seriously derailed in our beloved Church. For this reason, he interrupted composing his lifelong work on love to write *The Trojan Horse*, and other publications (including many articles) to warn people of the danger.

If Dietrich von Hildebrand were alive today, I have no doubt he would be waging war on the most insidious evils of our time: abortion, above all, but also the philosophical assumptions that underlie it, which produce other evils. He would devote all his talents to make people realize that *dictatorial relativism*, to quote Pope Benedict, and all its wicked offshoots—especially abortion and pornography-- are manifestations of Satan's attacks on our post-Christian society. They form a kind of trinity of evil, in fierce opposition to the Holy Trinity of Christianity.

Puritanism, Yesterday and Today

Dietrich would also have recognized the red herring of “modern puritanism.” Born and raised in the house of a great sculptor, puritanism was unknown to him. Granted that in Victorian society, to take one example, it was a deplorable tendency, characterized by the fact that the intimate sphere was dubbed “shocking.” But today, in our sex-saturated society, to concentrate all of one's efforts on this deplorable deformation, is to beat a dead horse. Anyone who reads Christopher West’s books, or listens to his talks, cannot help but notice one thing: he is obsessed by puritanism. Indeed, one might believe, listening to him, that it is the *one great danger of our time*.

But West is exaggerating, if not “crying wolf.” Puritanism was never the universal problem he imagines (in the Church or outside it); and today *it is barely a speck on our cultural landscape*. It would be interesting, for those who love statistics, to find out how many people today put coal in their bath water to “cover” the shame of their intimate organs (to refer to a comment of my friend, Professor Michael Waldstein). I grant that it has been done in the past, for grotesque ideas about the human body have always existed... and always will. God has set limits on man’s intelligence, none on his stupidity. It shows the wisdom of Spanish proverb: *bicho malo, nunca muere* (a nasty beast never dies). But puritanism, to the extent it was a problem in the past, no longer is; and it is farcical to rally an army to fight a tiny battalion, which is no longer a threat.

In the sexual sphere, *pornography*, not puritanism, is the cancer destroying our society. It is so widespread that it is practically impossible to protect one's children from its venom; it is on the internet, on television, at malls, in department stores, in book stores, at the A&P. Serial rapists often confess that they have been fed on *Playboy* since they were teenagers. This is where our main concern should be focused. This is why Christopher West’s praise of Hugh Hefner on ABC’s *Nightline*, linking him with John Paul II, was deplorable: “I actually see very profound historical connections between Hugh Hefner and John Paul II,” he said. (*ABC News*, May 7, 2009). West’s subsequent attempts to “clarify” his remarks, which he insisted were taken out of context, only underscored the imprudence of making them in the first place.

Not only is any rapprochement between a successor of Peter (now called Venerable) and the founder of *Playboy*, to be condemned, but a distinction should be made between Hugh Hefner as a child of God, made to His image and likeness, and deserving our love of neighbor, and Hefner as the father of modern-day pornography (a multibillion-dollar business). West downplays, to the point of meaninglessness, these fundamental distinctions.

To poison souls with pornography, especially the young, is a sin that cries out to Heaven. Let us not forget the fearful words of the Gospel about anyone who scandalizes “the little ones”: a stone should be put about his neck and he cast into the sea. These are words we should take very seriously.

Hugh Hefner, Tarnished Gold?

At a lecture on June 3, 2009, sponsored by the Personalist Project, Christopher West announced, “For those with the eyes to see, we can look at a person like Hugh Hefner and see gold”—a comment that defies description. Then, catching himself, he qualified it to “tarnished gold.” Granted, we are indeed "tarnished gold," if by that we mean we are created in the image of God, but wounded by Original Sin (except the Blessed One among women); it is equally true, according to Catholic teaching, that there is a huge hierarchy of moral evils: starting with small imperfections, and venial sins, that we can find even among the saints, to quite serious offenses, mortal sins, which separate us from God. Left unrepented, those *mortal sins* would condemn souls to Hell at the moment of death. Once again, as developed in Dante's *Inferno*, there is a huge scale. All sins can be forgiven, if confessed, and yet there are sins, which will not be forgiven either in this world or in the next: the sins against the Holy Spirit.

In speaking about human beings flawed by Original Sin as being "tarnished gold," it would have been desirable to make this elementary distinction. But there is another facet of the question, which should have been mentioned.

A man who is the founder of Playboy definitely commits a *mortal sin* (if there is also full knowledge and full consent), but apart from the personal sin, comes the fearful responsibility of inducing millions of others to engage in the same sin. A thief can, in principle, restore the money stolen; but a murderer cannot bring his victim back to life. Let us suppose that at the moment of death, Hugh Hefner deeply repents his sinful life. God, the God of Mercy will forgive him. *But Hefner cannot save the millions of souls, including children, that his activity as a pornographer has victimized.*

This is why West's comments about Hugh Hefner were dangerous and misleading. Never, absolutely never, would Dietrich von Hildebrand have made such an error, even as he would have prayed for Hefner's conversion.

2. *Dualism Properly Defined*

One of the strange things happening today is that any hint that the intimate sphere should be marked by a caveat, tempts some people to accuse West's critics of playing Cassandra, and of "being a dualist". The problem is that “dualism” can have a number of meanings, and not all of them are contrary to Catholic belief.

Today, many thinkers use the word as a condemnation to hurl at people who deny the essential union of man's body with man's soul. This is indeed a grievous metaphysical error: for it is clearly indicated in Genesis that man is made up of a physical body and an immaterial soul. To be made up of two essential parts that are metaphysically so different is the reason why I dub man "a divine invention" (the title of my latest book, from Sapientia Press). To quote Pascal, man is the most mysterious object in nature.

From the very beginning, the Church—the "pillar of truth" has rejected Gnosticism and any form of Manichaeism. Nothing, however, is easier for man than to fall in his reason.

The human mind, wounded by sin, has the uncanny tendency to go from one error to its (apparent) contradiction, while in fact errors are usually first cousins. A case in point is Nestorius, who claimed that there are two persons in Christ: the divine one, and the purely human one. Mary, therefore, is not “Theotokos” (Mother of God); she is only the mother of Christ, the man. This heresy, condemned by the Church, was soon followed by another one by Eutyches, who claimed that Christ had only one nature: the divine one-- the consequence being that Christ’s human nature had been totally absorbed by the divine one, and that it is only the latter that has suffered for the salvation of the world. “Anathema sit” was the prompt response of the Church.

Today, the condemned "dualism" just referred to, has become for some a kind of philosophical obsession. They detect "dualism" in the writings of thinkers who totally agree with them in rejecting a false dualism, but, in obsessing about this point, miss a larger one, and the necessary distinctions. Man is indeed made up of body and soul, but the mystery is that the body is physical, material, occupying space, visible, divisible . . . and mortal. None of these characteristics apply to the soul, which is spiritual, does not occupy space, has no sensible characteristics such as color, and is immortal. The union of body and soul in man is such a mystery that many thinkers would dub it the most complex of philosophical problems.

Body and Soul

It is tempting, like the materialists, to claim that man is just a body and that what is called soul, mind, and spirit are only epiphenomena of the body. It is also tempting to angelize him, and discard the body. It is easy to go from one extreme to the next, in this case, materialism to radical idealism. Hegel, guilty of the latter, claimed that “being and thought are identical”—triggering Kierkegaard’s witty retort about Hegel and marriage: “as impersonal as his thought.” In other words, if being and thought are identical, to get married is to marry a thought (Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, p. 268).

Rather than face a difficult question, many thinkers choose an easy solution. This was the point made by Chesterton: the materialists keep the easy part (the body), deny the difficult part (the soul), and go home to their tea. Once again, we must marvel at the facility with which people go from one error, that of radical idealism, which says everything is mind (Hegel), to another, that of radical materialism, which says everything is matter (Marx).

The philosophical difficulties involved here should never lead us to lose focus, much less faith. Following Cardinal Newman, we can say that ten thousand difficulties do not justify a single doubt.

We cannot doubt that we have both a body and a soul. The words of Our Lord—“Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul” (Mathew 10: 28)--are abundantly clear. Some claim that the union of body and soul is for the benefit of the soul: without sense organs, man's mind would be condemned to blindness. It should, however, also be said that the union of body and soul is very much to the benefit of the body: for the soul “personifies” the body, that is, it clearly separates us from animals.

The organs of many animals are much sharper and better than ours: eagles have amazingly sharp eyesight; a dog's sharpness of hearing is very many times better than ours; bears have a sense of smell that informs them that food is to be found miles and miles away. But eagles do not perceive the beauty of a sunset; dogs cannot

appreciate the sublimity of a Beethoven quartet. It is thanks to our unique nature, and the union of body and soul, that God exalts the body of the human person, above other creatures. This has great importance for our topic.

In truth, both the soul and body have full reality, and they are essentially united, though nevertheless distinct. This is why the soul can survive the death of the body, even though it suffers from "widowhood" and longs for the moment when it will be reunited to its own body. The admirable dogma of the resurrection of the body is another divine invention.

But in order to survive the death of the body, the soul clearly must possess a substantial reality of its own; if it were just an "aspect" of the body or an "accident" of the body, it could not be immortal. When the body dies, the soul is a "widowed person".

To accuse of "dualism" (which, to the accusers, means Gnosticism) those who, like St. Augustine, endorse this position, under the pretext that they are denying the essential union of man's body with man's soul, is simply to make a serious philosophical confusion between two very different meanings of dualism. One is to be rejected; the second is deeply incorporated in Christian thought.

Cartesian Dualism and Theology of the Body

Some interpret the key message of Theology of the Body as a healing of the dreadful dualism for which Descartes is the great culprit. Whether Descartes deserves this radical condemnation is not our concern. All we wish in this context is to clarify that the word "dualism" is ambiguous, and can refer to an un-healthy anti-Christian view, or one that is deeply Christian—and fully orthodox.

Generative vs. Unitive

Christopher West is convinced that prior to Theology of the Body—which he terms a “revolution”—Catholic teaching had presented "sex" as essentially dirty, betraying the true Christian understanding of sex. This is a thought Dietrich von Hildebrand would have strongly rejected. Accidental errors should never be identified with the Church's essential teaching. Every epoch has its dangers, which need to be addressed, but always in a way which remains faithful to Catholic tradition.

Dietrich understood this principle well, when he challenged certain *excesses* (not fundamental truths) of Catholic teaching regarding marriage. Early in his days as a Catholic, he noticed a weakness: the whole emphasis was on procreation; the unitive dimension of marriage was either not mentioned, or not properly highlighted. Procreation was often given too much prominence because, in paganism, sensual pleasure had absolute and complete priority. Dietrich's work on marriage helped redress the balance, by acknowledging (and fully supporting) the traditional teaching on procreation, while rediscovering the importance of love between spouses. This is an example of what we might call the “pedagogical” mission of the Church. She must constantly “sense” what Catholic truth needs to be highlighted, at a given time, and adjust the emphasis on Her holy teaching accordingly, *but never fall prey to the fashions of the times, and remain faithful to the sacred deposit of faith.*

4. Contemplating the Body

Fixated, as he is, on the supposed plague of “Puritanism,” West promotes defective ideas to fight it. He recommends, for example, that we should stand naked in front of a mirror until we truly liberate ourselves from any feelings of “shame.” This is a piece of advice at which Dietrich von Hildebrand would have recoiled. Let me mention some reasons.

The Meaning of Shame

First, is the contemplation of one's body ever the "theme", that God calls upon us to pursue at a particular moment? Because of the philosophical poverty of the English language, mentioned before, Christopher West confuses "shame" in a negative sense (ugly, disgusting, repulsive, morally repugnant) with *pudeur*—the aforementioned French word which refers to the reverence we should have toward what is personal, mysterious, private, or sacred. West is wrong in assuming that prior to *Theology of the Body*, Catholics were taught to be ashamed of their bodies. Belonging to the older generation, I am in a position to disclaim this. We were taught reverence in front of something "mysterious"—counsel which, if not followed, could lead to serious sin. We knew that, when God completed the creation of the world, He saw "that is was good". But we were also reminded that since Original Sin, we should always be "alert" and awake to the dangers of this world. Reverence and humility were always regarded as keys to maintaining our purity. The idea of trying to be “naked without shame” was never contemplated, and for good reasons.

Destructive Vanity

Any psychologist will tell you that anyone contemplating his own body exposes himself to certain dangers: one being narcissism. If our bodies are artistically perfect, inevitably we will experience vanity. If, on the contrary-- and this is mostly the case-- we discover flaws, we shall be tempted to "remedy" the situation by cosmetic surgery. This explains why, according to Dr. Phil, 300,000 thousand American girls, between the age of 15 and 18, have undergone surgery to change the size of their breasts.

Christopher West should know that we live in a society, which is radically materialistic, characterized by a *cult of the body*. Do we need encouragements to idolize what St Francis called "Brother Ass"? Christopher West puts too much emphasis on the body in a culture in which everything is body-centered.

The Two Bishops

And this brings me to Christopher West's oft-told story of the “two bishops.” He writes:

“The following story illustrates what mature Christian purity looks like. Two bishops walked out of a Cathedral just as a scantily clad prostitute passed by. One bishop immediately turned away. The other bishop looked at her intently. The bishop who turned away exclaimed, ‘Brother bishop, what are you doing? Turn your eyes!’ When the bishop turned around, he lamented with tears streaming down his face, ‘How tragic that such beauty is being sold to the lusts of men.’ Which one of those bishops was *vivified* with the ethos of redemption? Which one had passed over from merely meeting the demands of the law to a superabounding fulfillment of the law?” (From West’s *Theology of the Body Explained*, revised edition, p. 215).

Apart from the fact that nobody, except God is in a position to judge, for He alone knows the motivation of the two men—and that West completely retools the historic account of Bishop St. Nonnus to suit his purposes—important remarks are called for. In *In Defense of Purity*, Dietrich von Hildebrand remarks that some men are "insensitive" to sex. Whether it is a temperamental disposition, or whether it is caused by hormonal problems, it is obvious that, if someone who happens to have this condition looks peacefully at a prostitute, without experiencing any sexual attraction, he is certainly not a pure one. He is not impure; he is not pure.

Avoiding the Occasion of Sin

On the other hand, a humble awareness of our fallen nature creates a strict moral obligation to fly from temptations. Never, absolutely never would a saint say, "I am beyond and above temptations of the flesh". Never would a saint declare that, were he to see a naked woman, his acquaintance with the Theology of the Body would guarantee that he wouldn't be subject to temptation. As Monsignor Knox points out, to believe a Christian, however faithful, can place himself in spiritual danger and never fall prey to it, is a common error among religious enthusiasts. The Beghards come to mind: Thus these enthusiasts "looked upon decency and modesty as marks of inward corruption, as the characters of a soul that was still under the dominion of the sensual, animal, and lascivious spirit, and that was not really united to the divine nature. This was the account they themselves gave of their promiscuous lodging, and the nudism practiced in their assemblies." (*Enthusiasm*, 1950, p. 125) Such people, writes Msgr. Knox, believed that once "they yield their bodies to the Holy Ghost," they "would never sin again." (p. 567) In the presence of a living woman, he continues, the enthusiast, is "trained to feel as though he were standing by a wall of stone. His eye must be rendered cold, his pulse must be kept calm." (p. 573). But this is to commit the sin of *presumption*.

It must be remarked, however, that there are situations in which a priest can find himself in dangerous situation "without being endangered": for example when a slightly clad prostitute is struck by a car, and calls for help. It is the duty of a priest to respond to this call: God will give him the grace to concentrate exclusively on his mission, bringing the dying person to God. Professional grace is also given to doctors: otherwise, no doctor should accept operating on a very beautiful female body because, instead of operating on a sick patient, he would be preoccupied with sexual fantasies.

Asceticism

Why is asceticism so stressed in religious orders and in authentic Catholic tradition, be it hair shirts, abstinence, the discipline, or the limiting of one's sleep to a minimum? Is that ever mentioned by Christopher West? Does he not know that John Paul II himself engaged in acts of self-mortification? And yet, that fact might be of great importance to teach us how to love, and it is love, which is the key to sex.

In one of his columns about a pornographic play by radical feminist Eve Ensler, often performed at college campuses (whose very name is too graphic to mention), West wrote that he saw it as "tragic," not filthy. Does not West realize that "Satan revels in filth" and this is how he seduces unsuspecting people? Once again, the very serious difference of approach between him and Dietrich von Hildebrand comes to the fore. Let us recall that in *In Defense of Purity*, my husband reminds us that this sphere can be the kingdom of the evil one. It can be diabolical. *Filthy* is then the proper word to refer to the perversions in which men and women are so inventive.

Moreover, the body is meant to be a gift to one's spouse in the sacrament of marriage. One should never make the "gift" the object of self-contemplation.

Part 4: The Work of Christopher West and Its Relation to that of Dietrich von Hildebrand

Since Vatican II, the Church has undergone a severe, manifold crisis: a crisis of faith, a crisis of authority, an intellectual crisis (confusion is widespread), a moral crisis. We should be grateful for any "soldier" who enters the arena and is offering his services to the King. We should be grateful for any written or oral testimony that help people who find their way back to the fold. As St. Paul writes, we have different gifts, different talents, and use them for God's glory (Romans 12:6-8).

1. "Revolution" or Development of Doctrine?

However, no "soldier" in the service of the Church is ever called to be a "revolutionary". As previously mentioned, Dietrich von Hildebrand was conscious that he had shed light on one very important truth that had often been obscured, *not in Catholic doctrine*, but in Catholic practice. He would call it—referring to his revered Cardinal Newman—a possible development of doctrine, but never a "revolution." There is no revolution in the Catholic Church. Divine revelation ended with the death of the Apostles. The mission of the Church is to spread the Divine Message, and to clarify and re-clarify it over the years.

Christopher West is fond of quoting George Weigel's provocative statement that John Paul II's Theology of the Body is a "theological time bomb." But what does that mean? Does it mean that "Christians must complete what the sexual revolution began," as West told *Nightline*? Even the highly influential Weigel himself, to his credit, wrote in a foreword to one of Christopher West's books: "A sex-saturated culture imagines that the sexual revolution has been liberating. The opposite is the truth." (*Theology of the Body Explained*, 2003, p. XVI).

Words such as "revolution" and similar bombastic expressions are appealing—but irresponsible. Inflated words and phrases are like a psychological massage—used throughout the ages by people who know the power of words. Most people live in such a state of spiritual and intellectual somnolence that such expressions might be useful to shake them out of their lethargy. But they are misleading. As stated, there is no revolution in the Church: the one great tsunami was the Incarnation.

2. The Calamity of Discipleship

The purpose of this paper was to compare Dietrich von Hildebrand's approach to the "intimate sphere", and that of Christopher West. Let me be clear and state that West—to my knowledge-- has never explicitly claimed to be a disciple of Dietrich von Hildebrand; nevertheless, I know from his personal testimony that West has a deep appreciation for the work of my husband, and I know he has publicly praised it. The question is whether West can therefore, in any real sense, at least by implication, be considered my husband's disciple. For the many reasons outlined in this essay, I don't believe he can.

Let us leave aside the incontestable fact that Christopher West has great oratorical talent, and does much good. I am sure that he wants to work for God's glory.

God can use any "tool" that He pleases to bring souls back to him. The point I would like to emphasize is that Dietrich von Hildebrand's approach is widely different from the one of Christopher West, and that therefore it would be misleading to call West a disciple of my husband. To be a disciple is not an easy task: a superficial knowledge of the history of philosophy teaches us that innumerable thinkers consider themselves to be disciples of Aristotle, but whether "the master of those who know" (to quote Dante) would give the prize to any of them (that is, whether Averroes, Avicenna, St. Thomas Aquinas or Siger of Brabant deserve this honor) is something we shall find out in another world, when the question will have lost all interest.

Kant repudiated Fichte who claimed to be his disciple. The latter in turn refused to recognize Schelling as a valid interpreter of his message. Kierkegaard wrote "to have a disciple is the worst of calamities". It does happen that people call themselves (or act as if they are) "disciples" of a great thinker when in fact they can, on some issues, seriously deviate from their mentor's views. Whether Christopher West, however well-intentioned, is a true disciple of John Paul II is at least questionable-- as are many aspects of his presentations. The question must be asked: Why is it that John Paul II's presentation of the Theology of the Body was never seriously challenged, whereas Christopher West's interpretation of it has unleashed enormous controversy? Could it be that West has misrepresented it in fundamental respects, and worse, employed his own offensive language and "pop culture" ideas to vulgarize it?

Noli Me Tangere

Here, I would like to reflect on an incident in the life of the Little Flower, St Therese of Lisieux. When a student grabbed her as she was stepping out of the train, she responded as a proper female should. She recommended herself to the Holy Virgin, and looked at him so severely that he immediately let her loose (Deposition of her sister Genevieve). Would West ridicule this great saint for being a "prude"? If he did, he would be wrong, for St. Therese's response was thoroughly Catholic, and the only right one: she was responding with *noli me tangere* [Don't touch me]. This attitude has nothing to do with an unhealthy fear of the body, or bodily contact, but a very healthy modesty and self-respect.

This "*noli me tangere*" is a key expression regarding the mystery of the supernatural. This is why, Dietrich von Hildebrand, who came from a privileged cultural and artistic background, and had been acquainted with holy paintings since his earliest youth, would never have made remarks about the size of the Holy Virgin's bosom, as West has, repeating with praise an exhortation for Catholics to "rediscover" Mary's "abundant breasts" (*Crisis* magazine, March, 2002) To Dietrich's mind, this would be an act of irreverence. Her breasts were sacred and the response to the sacred is *awe* and not a critical approach to the size of "the blessed breasts that sucked thee". True religious art has always understood this.

Blessed by an exceptional artistic background, Dietrich was, from his earliest youth, trained to appreciate works of art according to their artistic perfection. One of the requirements of sacred art is that the artist succeeds in creating, through visible means, an atmosphere of sacredness. When Mary is represented, the crucial element is that the image inspires in the viewer a feeling of reverence; whether she is painted with "abundant breasts" is totally irrelevant—otherwise, most other icons would have to be discarded. It suffices for the faithful believer to be inspired by a work of art; he or she should never be titillated by it.

2. Differences of Christopher West From Dietrich von Hildebrand

As Dietrich von Hildebrand's wife, I can state the following, as a matter of summary, regarding the differences between my husband and Christopher West:

1. My husband would not refer to the Theology of the Body as "a revolution": Dietrich knew that revolutions aim at destroying the past, and starting anew. An authentic development of doctrine, however, is something completely different: it takes from our sacred deposit of faith, and helps it blossom into a flower, but it does not invent, or contradict it. When the Theology of the Body is presented as a radical revolution, and twisted into something John Paul II never intended, Catholics should immediately stop, and pull back, and ask themselves: "What am I being fed?" One cannot be too cautious about protecting one's soul. But, to the extent the Theology of the Body might be "a development of doctrine," Dietrich would have welcomed it—provided such a claim remained faithful to John Paul's original intent, and was made in a reverent and orthodox way. Each age in the Church sheds particular light on some facets of the divine message, and the Theology of the Body, properly interpreted, and consistent with historic Catholic teaching, can be seen as an example of that. But Dietrich would never have regarded it as a radical "innovation."

2. In contrast to the loose language used by Christopher West, Dietrich von Hildebrand carefully chose the words he used when referring to the mysteries of our faith, or to things that are intimate and sacred. Words such as "crap" and "crapola" would jar his spiritual hearing. He knew, as did Kierkegaard, that "vulgarity is always popular," but nonetheless never resorted to it, for, as St. Francis de Sales wrote: "Our words are a faithful index to the state of our souls." (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, part III, chapter 26).

When referring to mysteries (such as the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Eucharist) Dietrich's choice of words invited his listeners to a trembling reverence and adoration. Christopher West's aforementioned remarks, in contrast,-- however well intended-- about the "bloodied membrane" that the Holy Virgin ejected after Christ's birth would strike Dietrich as close to blasphemy. Were he with us today, Dietrich would have surely quoted the Holy Office's warning to West: "Theological works are being published in which the delicate question of Mary's virginity 'in partu' is treated with a deplorable crudeness of expression and, what is more serious, in flagrant contradiction to the doctrinal tradition of the Church and to the sense of respect the faithful have." (From the Holy Office monitum, July , 1960, reprinted in *A Short Treatise on the Virgin Mary* by Rene Laurentin, AMI Press, 1991, , pp. 318-329)

In closing, let me repeat that I do not wish to take away any good Christopher West has accomplished, only caution him and his followers about errors I believe he has committed, and which my husband, whom Pope Pius XII called a "twentieth century Doctor of the Church," would, I am certain, have been the first to point out. With his many talents, Christopher West has much to offer the Church; but I believe he will only fulfill his potential if he presents the Theology of the Body according to the traditions of our Church-- reverently, with humility—and liberate himself from the wayward "enthusiasms" of our time.

Postscript: Earlier this year, and after this paper was begun, Christopher West announced that he would be taking a six-month sabbatical from his usual work. It is my sincere and prayerful hope that he will use this valuable time, of "personal and professional renewal," to consider the many concerns that have been raised about his work-- and thereby "renew" his approach as well.

I submit this reflection on the philosophy of Dietrich von Hildebrand in the hopes that it redirects Christopher West's thinking. I further remind the reader that the West website continues to offer West's programs, including courses for youth in public settings. My husband has written extensively on sex education in the schools, standing firmly behind the great encyclical, Christian *Education for Youth*, by Pope Pius XI, 1929. There, His Holiness roundly condemns sex education classes. Dietrich von Hildebrand's booklet, *Sex Education: The Basic Issues*, can be read and ordered at the Veil of Innocence website, www.veilofinnocence.org.

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Alice von Hildebrand.

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