

A THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE
ON
NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

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The Symbol on the cover was originally designed for the Family Life Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Newark, N.J. The dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit, holding the cross, the symbol of Christ the Redeemer. The five spheres are symbols both of the members of a family and of individual families, overshadowed by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

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FREQUENTLY USED ABBREVIATIONS

Documents of Second Vatican Council

G.S. --Gaudium et Spes (Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

L.G. --Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church).

Papal Documents

P.P. --Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples), Paul VI.

H.V. --Humanae Vitae (On the Regulation of Birth), Paul VI.

F.C. --Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), John Paul II.

PREFACE

During the past two decades information about the natural methods of family planning has been widely circulated. The reliability of the various methods has been scientifically supported, and instructional techniques have been constantly refined. The number of couples using natural family planning has increased and the delivery systems have been expanded. Despite these positive accomplishments, there is widespread agreement that much more needs to be done, and that there are a number of specific challenges yet to be addressed.

One such challenge is the development of a theological-pastoral context in which natural family planning can be seen as one aspect of Christian married life--indeed, as an important aspect because it relates to each couple's shared vision and values, their attitudes toward conjugal love, sexuality and parenthood. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II called for further theological reflection and study of both the anthropological and moral bases of the Church's teaching on natural family planning. Specifically, the Holy Father invited theologians "*to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalist reasons*" undergirding the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood and the morally approved methods of regulating births.

This small book responds in a modest way to Pope John Paul II's invitation, and it also attempts to meet some specific needs in the natural family planning movement in the United States. It is intended as a sourcebook for priests and physicians, but especially for couples who carry the main burden of NFP instruction.

It is based on the conviction that natural family planning is at the service of the family, enabling couples to meet their responsibilities in regard to marital dialogue and decisions concerning the spacing of births. The practice of natural family planning is seen as consistent with the Church's teaching on the dignity of the human person who, along with his or her partner, brings something unique to the marriage relationship. At the same time, NFP requires a

mutual commitment on the part of husband and wife in the expression of conjugal love and in the generosity that brings forth new life. These and other themes are examined and explained in the pages ahead.

The book begins by presenting some basic ideas on the theology of Christian marriage. Against this backdrop, succeeding chapters address conjugal love, responsible parenthood and Catholic teaching on conjugal morality, particularly as it relates to natural family planning. The ideas presented are gleaned from a careful reading of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the encyclicals and addresses of Pope Paul VI, John Paul I and especially the present pontiff, John Paul II. They also reflect the insights of theologians, physicians and married couples whose opinions and recommendations were solicited during the writing process. In a particular way they reflect the convictions and personal experiences of the author during almost 25 years of pastoral involvement in the family life apostolate.

Each chapter includes an essay on one of the four themes, followed by an outline that is filled in with specific quotations from the conciliar or papal documents. A special reading list is appended to each outline and a more comprehensive, annotated bibliography constitutes the final section of the book.

This book is intended to be helpful to priests in enabling them to dialogue with and give pastoral encouragement to couples practicing NFP. It is also intended to be of help to NFP teaching couples, providing them with specific theological information for integration into their existing instructional materials. However, meeting these two objectives is no easy task. The book is too brief and limited to do justice to the theological task, but any further expansion would have taken us beyond realistic expectations for its use in instructional programs. The only consolation is that the interest and cooperation evidenced in the consultation process may well lead to further theological writing by others and an expansion of the dialogue. Pope John Paul II expresses this hope for continued dialogue and collaboration as well as the roles of theologians and family experts in the Church's overall pastoral ministry to the family:

In the church, the pastors and the laity share in the prophetic mission of Christ: The laity do so by witnessing to the faith by their words and by their Christian lives; the pastors do so by

distinguishing in that witness what is the expression of genuine faith; the family, as a Christian community, does so through its special sharing and witness of faith.

Thus there begins a dialogue also between pastors and families. Theologians and experts in family matters can be of great help in this dialogue, by explaining exactly the content of the Church's magisterium and the content of the experience of family life. In this way the teaching of the magisterium becomes better understood and the way is opened to its progressive development. (*Familiaris consortio*, 73)

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TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

In the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Second Vatican Council offered guidance and support to those Christians and non-Christians "who are trying to keep sacred and foster the natural dignity of the married state and its superlative value" (G.S., 47). However, the Council did not attempt to provide a complete theological treatise on marriage, nor unfortunately, has such a treatise been written in these first two decades since the Council began. The absence of an enriched theology of marriage has not gone unnoticed, and virtually every pastoral program directed to support of marriage and family life readily discovers the vacuum. This was true as well of the *1980 World Synod of Bishops*, where marriage and family life was the central theme. In his 1981 *Apostolic Constitution on the Family (Familiaris consortio)*, and in many of his other addresses, Pope John Paul II has noted the need for an enriched theology of marriage, particularly as a basis for understanding the Church's teaching on responsible parenthood and its teaching on the values of natural family planning in the lives of married couples.

To say that a complete and systematic theology of marriage has not been written is not to say, however, that we have no understanding at all of God's plan for marriage and family life. Drawing on the scriptural and patristic history, the two decades since the opening of Vatican II have witnessed the development of a number of key themes that enrich our understanding of the sacrament of marriage. Some of these themes were discussed by the *Council of the Synod of Bishops* in preparation for the 1980 meeting, and were included in the basic working document for the bishops who took part in the Synod.¹ Fuller development of each of these themes can easily be found in the theological literature of the past two decades. This presentation borrows from the framework developed by Avery Dulles, S.J. in *Models of the Church*.² Dulles argued that there are various vantage points from which one can develop a contemporary ecclesiology, and based on specific criteria, he describes in some detail each of the models.

Although Dulles was concerned with ecclesiology, his approach is applicable to the sacrament of marriage. His criteria for each model are also applicable, though with some slight adaption, for,

despite the similarities, the family and the Church are different realities. Accordingly, the following themes, or models, can lead to a better understanding of Christian marriage and provide a framework for catechesis.

Marriage as Covenant

This is probably the most frequently invoked model and the one that has been written about more than others. The covenant theme is rooted in the Old Testament understanding of the relationship between God and his people. "For as God of old made himself present to his people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony" (G.S., 48). Writing in *Theological Studies* in 1974, Paul Palmer, S.J. contrasts covenant with contract. However, in the Old Testament understanding of covenant, there is much that is commonly associated with a legal contract.³ The key words associated with the Old Testament covenant, expressed in *Gaudium et Spes* and of critical importance to marriage, are "love and fidelity," or, as translated elsewhere, "kindness and fidelity." Unquestionably, love, that is, the mutual commitment of two persons to one another for life with the mutual sharing of vision and values and the pledged fidelity that binds them together are the foundation stones of a marriage relationship. Nonetheless, the invocation of the covenant theme is not simply to establish a model of marriage, for marriage itself is a constant reminder of God's relationship with his people.

This becomes clearer as the covenant theme is re-presented in the New Testament. "Husbands, love your wives," says Paul to the Ephesians, "just as Christ loved the Church and delivered himself up for her" (Ephesians, 5, 25). Christ's love for the Church encompassed all the qualities necessary for marriage, and Paul's mandate, "husbands, love your wives" was a strong command because love was not always associated with marriage. It bears remembering that even today, in many societies and cultures, marriages are arranged and thus not the result of romantic love or free choice. The specifically Christian command to husbands and wives is to express and live in marriage the love with which Christ loves the Church.

Covenant love includes the qualities of permanence and exclusiveness, and as repeatedly emphasized by Palmer, the need for a shared faith on the part of the spouses. Palmer argues that "it would seem theologically sound that the faith demanded to enter

*the marriage covenant should be a reflection of the faith demanded of an adult to enter the larger covenant of which marriage is the symbol and efficacious sign."*⁴

Jerome Quinn adds some valuable insights.⁵ He writes that "the marriage relationship is a peculiarly apt and meaningful sign of the covenant bond between God and his people." "In Hebrew," says Quinn, a covenant was in its root meaning 'a bond,' something tying or binding one thing to another." But the covenant bond also requires the agreement or determination of the one who offers and the one who accepts. Once the covenant is entered into, a new relationship exists, and given the nature and binding force of a covenant, there is no release for either party. Particularly in the case of the New Testament covenant, God commits himself in and through his Son to that people "which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness" (L.G., 9).

"Against this background" writes Msgr. Quinn, "marriage, the bond between husband and wife, has been regarded as an especially privileged expression and revelation of the covenant bond between God and his people, Christ and his Church. Marriage can be the visible sign and thus the sacrament of the relationship that God's good will has established with believers."

John Kippley invokes the covenant theme to develop the responsibilities of lay people, both in terms of their personal conjugal lives and in terms of prophetic witness to the validity and wisdom of the Church's teaching prohibiting the use of artificial contraception.⁶

Pope John Paul II, referring to the covenant theme in *Familiaris consortio*, (Nos. 11-13) situates the conjugal covenant in the context of the God-given capacity and vocation of each person to love and be loved.

God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (No. 11).

In using the covenant theme, two comments are in order. First, the covenant is a model for marriage by way of analogy, and is understood somewhat differently in the Old Testament and New

Testament. The Old Testament covenant was one of a sovereign with his subjects and it dramatized the patience and forbearance of God as compared to the weakness and infidelity of the people. The "*New Covenant*," the relationship between Christ and the Church, exists in the time of redemption and is characterized by unity, fidelity and permanence. Christian marriage, modelled on the New Covenant, is a freely chosen mutual commitment on the part of a man and a woman who are equal in dignity and value and whose participation in the mystery of the redemption is based on their baptism, their faith and their mutual love. The love of the spouses, as Vatican II describes it, "*is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church*" (G.S., 48).

Secondly, though Paul Palmer contrasts covenant and contract, the Old Testament concept of covenant was at least the basis of some legal obligations. Moreover, the canonical understanding of marriage as a contract is quite important in specifying the responsibilities of the decision to marry for each of the partners, perhaps all the more so today when individualism and free choice tend to overshadow the social implications of marriage.

Marriage as Institution and Event

Marriage is an institution in the anthropological and sociological sense. It has existed in some form in all cultures and at all times in history. In contemporary times, it has a place in the social system; it is protected by laws and social policies. Those who marry are accorded privileges and responsibilities and acquire a specific status as a consequence of the marriage. Josef Fuchs says that "*we accept the need for marriage as institution; otherwise we would not have a real human culture of man and woman in their sexual difference and relationship.*"⁷ Fuchs recognizes the basic sociological fact that marriage provides, in a unique way, for meeting the human need of community, for the continuity of the species and for the socialization and education of the coming generation.

In the theological sense, marriage is seen as a specific part of God's creative and providential plan. In *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI described marriage as "*the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind his design of love*" (No. 8). The theological concept adds the dimension of transcendence to the sociological reality. As *Gaudium et spes* reminds us:

God himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole (No. 48).

Marriage is also an event in time in the lives of two specific persons. Again, marriage is seen more clearly today as the realization of the capacity to love and be loved, and to proclaim and live a mutually shared commitment. Moreover, according to *Familiaris consortio*, Christian marriage, like the other sacraments, "*whose purpose is to sanctify people, to build up the body of Christ and finally, to give worship to God, is in itself a liturgical action glorifying God in Jesus Christ and in the Church*" (No. 56).

Marriage as Sacrament

The time honored definition of a sacrament as an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace is best understood today in the context of the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the Church:

By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such unity (L.G., 1).

The main elements of the older definition of sacrament are present in the Council's definition of the Church, which tells us that (1) the Church is a *sign* of union and unity, (2) flowing from its *relationship to Christ*, and (3) it is the *instrument for achieving* such union and unity. The Council goes on to explain that marriage, like the Church, is an enduring community of persons in which the presence of Christ is discerned and unity with God is achieved:

For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that, just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal. . . . By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ. This spirit suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity (G.S., 48).

Here we have not only the elements of the older definition, but also the contemporary understanding of how marriage is a sacrament in the same sense that the Church is a sacrament. All of this is based on St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians (5: 22-23). As Archbishop Josef Tomko points out, Paul sees the couple not only as a sign of the union of Christ and the Church, but as participants in that very union in a special way.⁸ For the couple who live their marriage in faith, their marriage is an instrument of their sanctification and their unique way of building up the holiness of the Church. Similarly, John Paul II comments on this classical text of St. Paul:

The letter to the Ephesians, expressing the spousal relationship of Christ to the Church, let it be understood that on the basis of this relationship the Church itself is the "great sacrament," the new sign of the covenant and of grace, which draws its roots from the depths of the sacrament of redemption, just as from the depths of the sacrament of creation there has emerged marriage, a primordial sign of the covenant and of grace. The author of the letter to the Ephesians proclaims that primordial sacrament is realized in a new way in the "sacrament" of Christ and of the Church. For this reason also the Apostle, in the same "classical" text of Ephesians (5: 21-23), urges spouses to be "subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (5: 21) and model their conjugal life by basing it on the sacrament "instituted at the beginning" by the Creator: a sacrament which found its definitive greatness and holiness in the spousal covenant of grace between Christ and the Church (John Paul II, General Audience, 27 Oct., 1982).

Marriage as Source of Grace and Holiness

In the letter to the Ephesians Paul describes the unique relationship of Christ and the Church in terms of the marriage relationship. The passage is but one part of the story of the great mystery of God's love which is dramatically revealed to us in Christ's life, death and resurrection. The Church cannot be understood apart from Christ who is its head, its spirit, its spouse. Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church* states:

In the human nature which he united to himself, the Son of God redeemed man and transformed him into a new creation by overcoming death through his own death and resurrection. By communicating his spirit to his brothers, called together from all peoples, Christ made them mystically his own body. In that body, the life of Christ is poured into the believers, who, through the sacraments, are united in a hidden and real way to Christ who suffered and was glorified (No. 7).

The same *Constitution on the Church* tells us that by reason of the sacrament of marriage:

- "Christian spouses help each other to attain to holiness in their married life," (L.G., 11).
- "they should sustain each other in grace throughout the entire course of their lives" (L.G., 41).

A number of theologians have attempted to give a new understanding to sacramental union with Christ, grace and holiness. Edward Kilmartin argues that a theology of the sacraments "should begin with Jesus Christ, who reveals that God's presence is found in those primordial situations which symbolize the ambiguity of human existence."⁹ Kilmartin considers marriage a primordial situation, a place of the special presence of God's saving action through Christ, and thus, a situation of grace or a sacrament.

Karl Rahner, S.J. reminds us that "the supernatural grace of salvation is the grace of Christ," that this grace "has an incarnational tendency", and that it is meant to be "the sanctifying formative principle of the whole body-soul life of man, coming right down into his concrete, tangible daily life, where it therefore receives its 'expression' and takes on its corporality."¹⁰ In this essay Rahner emphasizes that we should not look at grace simply as some philosophic quality superimposed on human nature, but rather as a dynamic principle of Christian living that infuses, sustains and gives direction to our daily activities. In an attempt to explain how grace and love are given a visible expression in the sacraments, Rahner uses an example:

The whole process can be compared to the life shared in common by two lovers. Everything they do is sustained and transformed by this love and is its--very discreet, almost imperceptible--expression, even the insignificant, ordinary things which seem to have quite a different meaning and purpose from love and which would have to be done even if there were no love between these two persons. And yet, sometimes, and even often, they must tell each other their love openly, in words and by gestures which are nothing but the expression of love--of a love which was already finding expression in everything they do.¹¹

Rahner's insight expresses a concept stated in Vatican II's *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*:

Thus a man and a woman, who by the marriage covenant of conjugal love "are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mt. 19:16),

render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day (No. 48).

The Council addressed growth in holiness for married couples in the context of the universal call to holiness, saying that "*all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity*" (L.G., 40), and that "*married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path to holiness*" (L.G., 41). That proper path involves the mutual love of the spouses, their interpersonal relationship, and their family life. They must help each other attain to holiness by prayer, by reception of the sacraments and by the practice of the virtues inspired by charity. They have their own special gifts--charisms--for the upbuilding of the Church and the fulfillment of marital and family responsibilities.

Jerome Quinn adds two important points to the consideration of charisms.¹² First, he argues that Vatican II considered marriage "*not only a state of life, but a true order in the Church, an effect of a charism of the Holy Spirit,*" with a way of life and virtues proper to it. Secondly, Quinn notes that "*the sacramental charism of marriage, like all other charisms, does not exist for its own sake. Parents are helpers, serving the needs of those they love. There is a missionary dynamic at the center of the charism. It is meant to bring even the greatest of goods, God's word and grace, to others.*" While Msgr. Quinn's insights apply to all Christian marriages, they have special relevance for those couples in the apostolic movements of marriage and family life, particularly those in the natural family planning movement.

The 1980 Synod also emphasized the role of married persons in the work of evangelization, for Christ fulfills his prophetic role in a special way through Christian spouses. In a world increasingly committed to materialism, self-indulgence and hedonism, which tend to breed violence and insecurity, Christian spouses are called to give witness to their relationship to God, to the importance of generosity and concern for others, and to their acceptance of human sexuality as a gift from God that deepens their intimacy and brings new life. In a special way conjugal unity is achieved through a mutually shared prayer and sacramental life and through an appropriate adaptation of the counsels of poverty, obedience and chastity as found in the lives of the saints. The spirit of poverty and

detachment stands in open contrast to contemporary materialism. The concept of obedience provides insights regarding self-restraint and consideration for others. Chastity provides insights that help married couples strike the balance between mutual enjoyment of sexual union and the willingness to remain open to new life.

The contemporary teaching of the Church in regard to grace and conjugal holiness, as expressed in the documents of Vatican II and recent popes, is summarized by John Paul II in *Familiaris consortio*:

The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of baptism (No. 56).

Marriage as Relationship, Partnership, Community

Contemporary sociological and behavioral studies on marriage and family life tell us that the quality and stability of a marriage is based on the interpersonal relationship between husband and wife. That relationship is described as developmental, strengthened in adversity, personally enriching, interactionist and transcendental, that is, taking the couple beyond themselves. In the United States the marriage relationship is freely chosen and influenced by the strong emphasis on individualism, while in other cultures the marriage is often arranged and influenced by society's stake in its survival and successful functioning. But no matter how it originates, marriage is a human relationship, capable of non-growth and/or stagnation. Often, when selfishness overshadows other-centeredness the relationship erodes and separation or divorce follows.

Yet the marriage relationship is not simply a social or psychological phenomenon. There is a theological perspective that has gained increasing attention since Vatican II, and that theological perspective has serious implications in terms of unity, permanence and fidelity, as well as mutual spiritual growth in marriage.

Gaudium et spes uses the terms "*relationship*" and "*partnership*" almost synonymously, and speaks also of a "*communion*" between the spouses and a "*community*" (the family) that grows out of their mutual love. The "*intimate partnership*" has been established by

God for the well-being of the spouses and of society. It is based on a recognition of the personhood of each of the spouses, and the human need for companionship: "God did not create man as a solitary being. For from the beginning 'male and female he created them' (Gen. 1:27). Their companionship produces the primary form of interpersonal communion" (G.S., 12). This "interpersonal communion" is the result of a free and deliberate decision, that is, the mutual giving of self and acceptance of the other, or in the words of the Council, "it is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent", and is directed achieving "an intimate union of their persons and their actions" (G.S., 48). In his 1970 Document on Mixed Marriage, Paul VI was even more explicit in stating that the Church desires that in marriage the partners should "attain to perfect union of mind and full communion of life."

John Paul II sees this conjugal communion as rooted in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, nurture by their willingness to share their entire life project, and as such, the fruit and sign of a profoundly human need.

However, the Church's teaching does not merely reflect the wisdom of the behavioral sciences. Rather, it is premised on the fact that God is the creator of marriage, that the human dimensions of conjugal union are part of his plan for Christian spouses and that "authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church" (G.S., 48).

Accordingly, the Church teaches that sacramental marriage is indissoluble, and no earthly power can invalidate a valid, consummated sacramental marriage. The inherent permanence of such a marriage is based on the natural implications of a growing interpersonal relationship; on the creative plan of God in which the consent of the spouses gives rise to an unbreakable bond; on the fact that sacramental marriage involves the couple in a special way in the redemptive work of Christ and the Church; and on the fact that the welfare of society requires permanence and fidelity in marriage as a foundation for stable family life and the welfare of children.

Even in a nation such as the U.S. where marital breakdown occurs at an increasing rate, the secular scientist and spiritual guide agree that the marriage commitment creates a new relationship and that that relationship has the inherent capability

of growth, of becoming stronger, of permanence and satisfaction. To inhibit or deny the growth is a human and moral tragedy.

The communion of love and the union of minds and hearts between the spouses ought not be an introverted love. Rather it should be a love that is shared, a love that builds community. Commonly and naturally this love seeks expression in child-bearing and child-rearing, where children are the embodiment of parental commitment, shared vision and unwavering hope. Secondly, the thrust toward community has been the basis for the extended family, that is, for including the elderly and the abandoned within the larger family unit. Even today, when urbanization and industrialization tend to canonize the nuclear family unit, efforts to maintain some type of kinship structure remain strong. In any case, sociological and psychological studies continually find that the majority of married couples want to have children, and despite the fact that the birth expectations of most women is at two children, the growing use of test-tube reproductive techniques and surrogate parenthood underscores the natural desire for procreation.

However, in the Catholic tradition child-bearing is seen as a logical consequence of conjugal love. Spouses are aware that in their parenthood they collaborate with God in the act of creation, and that each new life is in fact something of a miracle. They understand that parenthood involves them in sharing the life of Christ with their children, of passing on to their children their own spiritual heritage that will pave the way for eternal union with the Father. The generosity and sacrifices of so many parents are as much a response to grace as the fulfillment of a natural desire.

Conclusion

The risk of theological reflection is that one can become distanced from the human reality, and this is perhaps more true in regard to marriage and family life than in most other areas. Conjugal love, covenant, participation in the Divine life, fidelity and unity are difficult concepts to communicate because they tend to remain abstract. But the value of theological reflection is to prompt the practical application of these concepts by those who live the reality--married couples--to their own lives and the lives of others. Unquestionably, the achievement of Christian values and ideals takes place in the circumstances of daily life, in a world affected by sin, amid obstacles, temptations and failures on the part of the

people involved. But we must constantly remind ourselves that Christian marriage is a participation in the Divine plan of creation and redemption, a participation from which there is no drawing back. And we must remain convinced that while the reality of sin in the world and human weakness can be stumbling blocks to marital success, they are not insurmountable obstacles. The Christian--precisely because of his or her association with Christ, is capable of self-discipline and sacrifice, and the graces of Christian marriage give added strength and endurance where human nature might otherwise tend to fail.

NOTES

1. Synodus Episcoporum, *De Muneribus Familiae Christianae In Mundo Hodierno: Instrumentum Laboris Ad Usus Sodalium Quinti Coetus Generalis*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1980. For a more complete treatment of the scriptural and patristic tradition consult Schillebeeckx, E., *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965; Kasper, W., *Theology of Christian Marriage*, New York: Crossroad, 1981.

2. Dulles, A. *Models of the Church*. New York: Doubleday, 1974.

3. Palmer, P. "Christian Marriage: Contract or Covenant?" *Theological Studies*, XXXIII, December, 1974.

4. Ibid.

5. Quinn, J. "Marriage, Covenant and Charism. *America*, September 27, 1980.

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9. Kilmartin, E. "When is Marriage a Sacrament?" *Theological Studies*, June, 1973.

10. Rahner, K. "Personal and Sacramental Piety," *Theological Investigations*, Vol. II, Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1963.

11. Ibid.

12. Quinn, J. op. cit.

TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE

Outline and Citations

To understand the Church's teaching on human sexuality and responsible parenthood, one must begin with "*the original design of God for marriage and the family*" (F.C., 10). In the words of John Paul II: "*It is necessary to recall emphatically the holiness of marriage, the value of the family and the inviolability of human life.*" (J.P. II to College of Cardinals, 22 Dec., 1980). There are many approaches to the theology of marriage, each with its own insights. Thus, one may profitably proceed by considering various "*models of marriage*," similar to Avery Dulles approach to ecclesiology in *Models of the Church*.

Marriage as Covenant

The Covenant theme is rooted in the O.T., it is the basis of the relationship between God and His people. In Ephesians 5, Paul describes the covenant relationship between Christ and the Church in terms of the covenant relationship between husband and wife.

- For as God of old made Himself present to his people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. (G.S., 48)
- The communion of love between God and people, a fundamental part of the revelation and faith experience of Israel, finds a meaningful expression in the *marriage covenant* which is established between a man and a woman. For this reason the central word of revelation, "*God loves his people*," is likewise proclaimed through the living and concrete word whereby a man and a woman express their conjugal love. Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites God and his people. (F.C., 12)

Marriage as Institution and Event

Marriage is an institution in the anthropological/sociological senses: it exists in all cultures at all times in history; it has a place in the social system, it is accorded privileges and responsibilities; it is protected by laws and social policies. In the theological sense, i.e., as part of God's creative design: "*Marriage is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love.*" (H.V., 8)

- The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family...Yet, the power and strength of the institution of marriage and family can also be seen in the fact that time and again, despite the difficulties produced, the profound changes in modern society reveal the true character of this institution in one way or another. (G.S., 47)
- The family must be envisaged as an institution, not only in the sense that it has its place and its functions in society and in the Church, that it must have juridical guarantees for the accomplishment of its duties, and in order to have the stability and influence expected of it, but in the sense that in itself it transcends the will of the individuals, the spontaneous projects of the couples, the decisions of social and governmental organisms: marriage is *"the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love"* (Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, no. 8). It will be opportune to study more deeply this institutional aspect which, far from being an obstacle to love, is its consummation. (John Paul II to Council of Synod of Bishops, Feb. 23, 1980)

Marriage as Sacrament

Sacraments are best understood today in the context of the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the Church.

- By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity. (L.G., 1)

Marriage, like the Church, is an enduring community of persons in which the presence of Church is discerned.

- Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love between Christ and His Church... (L.G., 11)

Ephesians 5, 21-33. Paul develops the theme of the relationship of Christ and the Church, constantly using marriage as his point of reference.

- The Letter to the Ephesians, expressing the spousal relationship of Christ to the Church, let it be understood that on the basis of this relationship the Church itself is the *"great sacrament"*, the new sign of the Covenant and of grace, which draws its roots from the depths of the Sacrament of Redemption, just as from

the depths of the sacrament of creation there has emerged marriage, a primordial sign of the Covenant and of grace. (John Paul II to General Audience, 27 October, 1982)

- For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony...For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ. (G.S., 48)
- By virtue of the sacramentality of their marriage, spouses are bound to one another in the most profoundly indissoluble manner. Their belonging to each other is the real representation, by means of the sacramental sign, of the very relationship of Christ with the Church. (F.C., 13)
- The sacramentality of marriage is not merely a model and figure of the sacrament of the Church (of Christ and of the Church), but constitutes also an essential part of the new heritage: that of the Sacrament of Redemption, with which the Church is endowed in Christ.

On the basis of the sacrament of creation, one must understand the original sacramentality of marriage (the primordial sacrament). Following upon this, on the basis of the Sacrament of Redemption one can understand the sacramentality of the Church, or rather the sacramentality of the union of Christ with the Church which the author of the Letter to the Ephesians presents under the simile of marriage, of the conjugal union of husband and wife. (John Paul II to General Audience, October 20, 1982)

- Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. (L.G., 11)

Marriage as Source of Grace and Holiness

Mankind exists today in the time of the Redemption--all are redeemed. The fulfillment of the Redemption promise is based on faith in Christ and conformity to Him, to His teaching and example. Grace is the radical bond between Christ and each individual person. It is also the radical presence of Christ in His Church. The grace of marriage is not only the celebrating of the event, but a

perduring quality of the marital union--suffusing, permeating, sustaining, enhancing the marital relationship. (G.S., 48)

Marriage also has a prophetic dimension, that is, the couple are called in a special way to nurture their faith, to base their vision and aspirations on that faith, and to proclaim the "good news" of the Redemption.

- The sacrament of marriage is the specific source and original means of sanctification for Christian married couples and families. It takes up again and makes specific the sanctifying grace of baptism. (F.C., 56)
- . . . Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life. This gives rise to the grace and requirement of an authentic and profound conjugal and family spirituality that draws its inspiration from the themes of creation, covenant, cross, resurrection and sign, which were stressed more than once by the synod. (F.C., 56)
- Christian marriage is a sacrament of salvation. It is the pathway to holiness for all members of a family. (John Paul II, Homily on the Family, York, England, May 31, 1982)

Marriage as Relationship, Partnership, Community

Treatises on marriage, demographic, sociological and psychological studies all maintain that the quality and endurance of a marriage is based on the interpersonal relationship between wife and husband. That relationship (in the U.S.) is freely chosen, subject to growth, strengthened in adversity, personally rewarding, enriching and transcendent, that is, it takes the couple beyond themselves. Some relationships fail to grow, they stagnate or stultify, selfishness overcomes other-centeredness, and the relationship erodes and ultimately terminates. The Church looks on the relationship in a positive fashion. Striving to reach its ideal goals, the marital relationship in fact strengthens and enriches each of the spouses as a person and as a spouse, and it establishes an unbreakable unity between them.

- The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws. . . . Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other, a relationship arises which by Divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one . . . (G.S., 48)

- Thus a man and a woman, who by the marriage covenant of conjugal love "are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mt. 19:6), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. (G.S., 48)
- Catholics in marriage should be able to attain to perfect union of mind and full communion of life. (Matrimonia Mixta, 1970)
- Marriage exists as a whole manner and communion of life and maintains its value and indissolubility even when offspring are lacking-despite rather often, the very intense desire of the couple. (G.S., 50)
- This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life project, what they have and what they are: For this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need. But in the Lord Christ God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony. (F.C., 19)

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CONJUGAL LOVE

The Catholic tradition on marriage and family life maintains that marriage is a natural institution and a sacramental state, that the relationship between the spouses develops under the influence of Christian faith, mutually shared vision and values and that the most powerful element in the marriage relationship is the capacity to love, that is, to actively seek one's own good in and through the good of the other. John Paul II reminds us that "*God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion*" (F.C., 11).

As general and as universal is the mandate to love, it takes on a particular and specific character in marriage. Conjugal love is a unique, demanding and indispensable application of the Christian law of love. That is why conjugal love has been a major foundation stone for the Church's teaching on marriage and human sexuality since Apostolic times.¹

Gaudium et spes traces the Church's emphasis on conjugal love to the biblical sources, and describes in some detail the characteristics of this special type of love. *Humanae vitae*, referring to the Conciliar teaching, says that conjugal love is human, total, faithful, exclusive, and fecund. For our purposes, a brief description of these qualities of conjugal love is in order.

Conjugal love is eminently human

Conjugal love involves both the senses and the spirit, and it is based on the free will of the spouses. It is important to remember that even in societies where marriages are arranged, conjugal love as a free decision of the spouses can and does exist within marriage. It is equally important to note that in societies like the United States where an overwhelming emphasis is put on romance and sexual encounter, the development of that deeper affection that springs from commitment may never occur.

The humanness of conjugal love resides more than anything else in the fact that it is *interpersonal*, that is, it is based on a free, mutual commitment on the part of a man and woman who pledge themselves to meeting the joys and sorrows of their futures

together. The insights of Christian personalism are important to understanding the *interpersonal* dimension of love. Each human person is free, independent, possessing an innate dignity and specific human rights because he or she is created "*in the image of God*" and redeemed by Jesus Christ. But each person is also relational, that is, impelled by human nature to live with other persons. This need is met by community, and every person belongs to different communities throughout his or her life. "*Among those social ties which man needs for his development,*" says the Council, "*some, like the family and political community, relate with greater immediacy to his innermost nature*" (G.S., 25). Living in community gives rise to responsibilities, and so the freedom and independence of the individual is tempered or qualified. This is especially true of marriage.

Conjugal love is enriching

Conjugal love gives assurance to each of the spouses that he or she is lovable, and is in fact loved. In this regard, it is premised on self-love, that is, a proper assessment of oneself as of value to others, and a willingness to place oneself at the disposal of another or others. Both the Council and the encyclicals describe this in terms of friendship, which is special and distinctive in regard to one's marriage partner. The Council also says that conjugal love enriches the expressions of marital affection, and brings to the couple special gifts--charisms--the "*healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and charity*" (G.S., 49).

Conjugal love is faithful and exclusive

Fidelity is commonly associated with friendship; we all "*stick by*" our friends and expect the same in return. But the fidelity of conjugal love includes exclusiveness, for by it the spouses create a special closeness between themselves that no one else is ever able to penetrate. This doesn't limit their capacity to love others--children, family or friends, indeed, it may enhance that capacity. Nevertheless, it cannot be strongly enough emphasized that conjugal love is the foundation of the marital relationship, that it creates special intimacy between husband and wife, and that if nurtured, this love grows and intensifies in such fashion that it is virtually unbreakable. Yet, the development of conjugal love requires mutual determination, effort and sacrifice. One need only talk to the elderly widows and widowers, whose language and behavior is not that of the romantic young, to gain insight into the fidelity and exclusiveness of an earlier love.

Conjugal love is fruitful

The Church has always interpreted the fruitfulness of conjugal love primarily in terms of childbearing.² The entire section of *Gaudium et spes* on the fruitfulness of marriage emphasizes that "*marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children*" (No., 50).

The Council argues that by procreation parents are associated with God in His plan of creation, that children contribute to the welfare and happiness of their parents, that parents have a mission of transmitting human life and educating their children and that marriage can be fruitful even if the parents are unable to procreate. Finally, parents, by trusting in Divine Providence and by refining the spirit of sacrifice give special glory to God by childbearing and childrearing.

The teaching of the Church on the fruitfulness of conjugal love, summarized in *Gaudium et spes*, may seem idealistic to some and incomprehensible to others. Objections are often raised to various aspects of the teaching, and a study of fertility patterns (i.e., timing of births and ultimate family size) in the developed nations of the world certainly raises questions regarding couples' perceptions of the relationship of marital love and procreation. The explanation for the general limitation of family size to two children includes such factors as the economic demands of a consumer society, the changing roles of women, the escalation of divorce and general fragility of modern marriages, the diminished influence of religious teaching regarding marriage and parenthood, and the changed perception of a child as a burden rather than a benefit.³ On the other hand, family, childbearing and large family size are held in esteem in most developing nations.

Despite current attitudes in the Western world, some remnants of optimism in regard to parenting persist. Recent studies indicate that couples associate stable marriage with parenthood, that most parents derive some joy from having and raising children, and that the pressure to limit family size to two children may not be universally accepted nor socially advisable.⁴ Moreover, significant voices are heard urging a rethinking of present attitudes. Alice Rossi, in a classic essay on parenting gives a more positive view when she argues that "*the core function of any family system is human continuity through reproduction and childbearing.*" In regard to the future says Rossi, "*the easier course . . . is to plan and*

*build from the most fundamental root of society in human parenting, and not from the shaky superstructure created by men in that fraction of time in which industrial societies have existed."*⁵

Conjugal love includes sexual love

Gaudium et spes states that "conjugal love is uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act. The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones" (No. 49).

The Council is here commenting on the marriage act and the significance of sexual encounter in marriage. The teaching is premised on the fact that God created man "male and female" and that sexual difference, sexual complementarity, sexual attraction and sexual pleasure are all part of His creative plan. To deny the goodness of sex, or to treat it simply as a pleasurable experience is to distort God's purpose and limit the value of human sexuality.

For the married, it is important to remember that sexuality is a powerful human drive, as well as an intimate expression of human love. It can be a unifying force and a source of mutual joy for two people who love each other. It can also crown their love by initiating the life of their child.

Sex in marriage should not be limited to intercourse. There are countless other gestures that have a sexual tone, that give pleasure and promote unity, but merit little attention in the sex manuals. These are actions unique to each couple, whose significance is known to them alone. They are recognized by *Gaudium et spes* as noble and worthy (No. 49).

Ideally, sexual encounter should flow from love, and be expressive of love. The sexual activity of married couples must always be expressive of affection, and pursued with patience and sensitivity to the feelings of the other person. Fidelity, personal growth and ability to understand one's partner are qualities that should develop as a result of marital love. Sex then becomes more significant and mutually enjoyable, and less susceptible to selfishness.

Sex should never be merely commonplace in marriage; it should lead the couple to greater intimacy. And the intimacy is productive of deeper unity and truly Christian love.

Because of the variety of outlooks on sex in our society--many distinctly unhealthy--married couples should occasionally re-examine their own attitudes. The integrity of their mutual love and fidelity to God's creative plan should be their guiding principles.

In an age when confusion reigns, married Christians can proclaim the goodness and joy of being sexually adjusted and comfortable. Their sexual union is one aspect of a more complete union of minds, hearts and vision. It is an expression of their affection, but it is also a shared experience of pleasure, of hope and of reconciliation.

Conjugal love is total

Conjugal love involves the whole person, or more precisely, the totality of each of the partners. John Paul II's comments to a meeting of NFP groups are applicable here:

Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter--appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, the unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility. In a word, it is a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values. ⁶

The totality of conjugal love embraces another dimension that is largely neglected in our world, that is, conjugal chastity. Chastity is commonly associated with celibacy or virginity and considered as a check on the sexual activity of the unmarried. Yet chastity is a very positive virtue--it directs and gives meaning to the sexual activities of a married couple in keeping with the privileges and responsibilities of their married state. It calls for conjugal lovemaking to strengthen intimacy and to share life and love with offspring. At times it may call for restraint out of concern for the other person or in the context of mutually agreed on decisions regarding procreation, and at times it gives one greater respect for and control of one's natural sexual urging when marital lovemaking is impossible.

Virginity and celibacy exist in the Church primarily in terms of commitment to priesthood or religious life, but their motivation is

the furtherance of the Kingdom of God. They are alternate ways of expressing the love of Christ for the Church, and their full significance can only be achieved in the context of a healthy appreciation of conjugal life and love. Virgins and celibates are not simply avoiding the pleasure of sex; they are freely sacrificing that deeper interpersonal union which conjugal love, in its totality, expresses. Their fidelity to their commitments is an encouragement to the married and an example to the unmarried. But correspondingly, those embracing a life of celibacy or virginity derive inspiration from the lives of married couples for whom the totality of conjugal love, touching them at the core of their personhood, gives both a deepening intimacy and a constantly developing mastery of their sexuality.

Conclusion

Conjugal love has many characteristics, and produces special virtues among married people. It should not be seen as an introversion of love, for it opens the couple to sharing their spousal love, their material goods and their future with others. While the sharing is commonly expressed in childbearing and childrearing, it is reasonable to expect that where the intimacy of marriage is strong and fulfilling, couples will be open to the needs of other members of their extended families, to adoption and foster parenthood, and not least of all, to the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Within marriage conjugal love embraces two main responsibilities, the deepening of marital intimacy and openness to procreation and parenting. Sexuality, specifically the physical manifestation of love in the act of intercourse, is the customary way for spouses to grow in affection and love and to bring new life into the world.

These two dimensions of love, intimacy and procreation, merit respect, affirmation and the commitment of the spouses. They are inseparable--not in the sense that they are achieved fully and equally in every act of marital intercourse, but in the sense that to deny or directly impede either of them distorts or limits the meaning of sexual love and to some degree diminishes the full commitment of the couple to building up "*the intimate partnership of married life and love*" (G.S., 48) which is Christian marriage. Perhaps no better summary statement can be found than that of Marc Oraison, the noted priest psychiatrist:

Love means the total mutual gift of self; the acceptance of the necessity of a corporate asceticism; the joint training of the sexual instinct and its orientation toward goals that transcend its own quality, the refusal to dissociate sex from its reproductive ends; the curbing in each mate of selfish reflexes even in carnal union. Such are the essential points of the Church's moral and ideal directive teaching on marriage as related to humanity's ultimate destiny: the world of the resurrection.⁷

NOTES

1. See Connery, J. *The Role of Love in Christian Marriage*, 1982, unpublished manuscript.
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CONJUGAL LOVE

Outline and Citations

Love, which is "the innate vocation of every human being," takes on a specific quality and role in marriage. This love between the spouses, which we call conjugal love

"is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will. It involves the good of the whole person. Therefore it can enrich the expressions of body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling those expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship distinctive of marriage. This love the Lord has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity," (G.S., 49).

The Qualities of Conjugal Love

Conjugal love is eminently human, that is, it is love "directed from one person to another through an affection of the will," (G.S., 49).

- "God is love and in himself he lives a life of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in his own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." (F.C., 11).

Moreover, it meets the human need for companionship or community.

- "Man's social nature makes it evident that the progress of the human person and the advance of society itself hinge on each other Among those social ties which man needs for his development some, like the family and political community, relate will greater immediacy to his innermost nature." (G.S., 25)

Conjugal love is enriching.

- This love involves the good of the whole person, and therefore can enrich the expressions of the body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship distinctive of marriage. This love God has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity. Such love,

merging the human with the divine, leads the spouses to a true and mutual gift of themselves, a gift proving itself by gentle affection and by deed; such love pervades the whole of their lives: indeed by its active generosity it grows better and grows greater. Therefore it far excels mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away. (G.S., 49)

Conjugal love is faithful and exclusive.

- Thus a man and a woman, who by the marriage covenant of conjugal love "are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mt. 19:6), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union, as well as the good of the children, imposes total fidelity on the spouses and argues for an unbreakable oneness between them. (G.S., 48)
- Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple and being required by the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in his revelation: He wills and he communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the church. (F.C., 20)

Conjugal love is fruitful.

- Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). (G.S., 50)
- This love is *fecund* for it is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but is destined to continue, raising up new lives. "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents." (H.V., 9)
- Let us never grow tired of proclaiming the family as a community of love: conjugal love unites the couples and is procreative of new life. It mirrors divine love, is communicated

and, in the words of "Gaudium et Spes," is actually a sharing in the covenant of love of Christ and his Church (par. 48). (John Paul I to a group of American Bishops, September 21, 1978)

- Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal self-giving of the spouses: "While not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the creator and the savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day." (G.S., 50)
- However, the fruitfulness of conjugal love is not restricted solely to procreation of children, even understood in its specifically human dimension: It is enlarged and enriched by all those fruits of moral, spiritual and supernatural life which the father and mother are called to hand on to their children, and through the children to the church and to the world. (F.C., 28)

Conjugal love includes sexual love.

- This love is uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act. The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones. Expressed in a manner which is truly human, these actions dignify and promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and thankful will. (G.S., 49)
- Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. It is realized in a truly human way only if it is an integral part of the love by which a man and a woman commit themselves totally to one another until death.

This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. This fertility is directed to the generation of a human being, and so by its nature it surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values.

The only "place" in which this-self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by god himself, which only in this light manifests its true meaning. (F.C., 11)

- In the context of a culture which seriously distorts or entirely misinterprets the true meaning of human sexuality because it

separates it from its essential reference to the person, the Church more urgently feels how irreplaceable is her mission of presenting sexuality as a value and task of the whole person, created male and female in the image of God. (G.F., 32)

Conjugal love is total.

- Conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter--appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, the unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and one soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility (cf. Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, n. 9). In a word, it is certainly a question of the normal characteristics of all natural conjugal love, but with a new significance which not only purifies and strengthens them, but raises them to the extent of making them the expression of specifically Christian values. (John Paul II to CLER and FIDAF, November 3, 1979)

Conclusion

Conjugal love embraces two responsibilities, the deepening of marital intimacy and openness to new life. Sexuality, specifically the physical manifestation of love in the act of intercourse, is the customary way for spouses to grow in affection and love and to bring new life into the world by procreation. These two dimensions of conjugal love, intimacy and procreation, merit respect, affirmation and the mutual commitment of the spouses. They are inseparable--not in the sense that they are achieved fully and equally in every act of intercourse, but in the sense that to deny or directly impede either of them distorts or limits the meaning of sexual love and to some degree diminishes the full commitment of the couple to building up "*the intimate partnership of married life and love*" (G.S., 48) which is Christian marriage.

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RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

Two basic themes underlying the Church's teaching on marriage and family life are conjugal love and responsible parenthood--themes that were carefully addressed by the Second Vatican Council and by recent popes. In the Apostolic Constitution *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul II invokes these themes in his explanation of the Church's teaching on the transmission of life.

Conjugal love is a very human phenomenon, an all-encompassing dynamic between a man and a woman whose commitment to each other is formalized in marriage. This love is characterized as total, faithful and exclusive, life-giving and capable of sustaining and constantly revitalizing the sense of partnership and mutual trust that are so important to married life. John Paul II describes this love between husband and wife as a "unique participation in the mystery of life and of the love of God himself" (F.C., 29).

The Second Vatican Council taught that the actions within marriage whereby the partners nourish, sustain and intimately express their love are noble and worthy, and capable of associating the spouses in a special way with God in the transmission of human life and the creation of a new human person. ¹ In the words of the Council,

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children . . . parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love (G.S., 50).

The physical expression of conjugal love in sexual intercourse has two capacities or meanings--the deepening of the interpersonal relationship between the spouses and procreation. As Paul VI noted in *Humanae vitae*, "by safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination towards man's most high calling to parenthood" (No. 12).

Responsible parenthood is not then, a new concept, but one that has gradually developed within the context of the Church's teaching on marriage. What has gained greater public attention in recent times is that procreation is very much subject to human planning and control, and in the eyes of some, ought to be limited because of demographic of socio-economic considerations.

Catholic teaching on marriage and family life maintains that the birth of a child is a serious and important event. It should reflect the spouses' generosity and openness to life, and the awareness that they are sharing in God's plan of creation. Decisions regarding parenthood should be jointly discussed and arrived at, and should be based on the couple's capacity to meet their multiple responsibilities--responsibilities to God, to themselves, to the children they already have, and to society. All of this is included in the concept of *responsible parenthood*, but the term has come to be understood predominantly in terms of decisions to space births or limit the size of the family. Accordingly, this article addresses itself to the concept of responsible parenthood as it has developed within the Roman Catholic tradition, emphasizing its relationship to an understanding of God's providence and to Christian marriage.

Theological foundation of responsible parenthood

This discussion addresses the concept of responsible parenthood as derived from a synthesis of three contemporary documents, *Gaudium et spes*, *Populorum progressio* and *Humanae vitae*.² *Gaudium et spes* (No. 87) and *Populorum progressio* (Nos. 36-37) deal with the responsible decision making of couples in terms of the impact of population growth on the process of socio-economic development, and they attempt to outline the legitimate role and appropriate limits of government activity vis-a-vis the family. Recognizing that at times some cultural traditions may impede the development process, *Gaudium et spes* emphasizes that government initiatives must be based on the recognition that:

the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society (No. 52).

While rapid population growth is recognized as a factor that can make development difficult, these documents emphatically reject the use of drastic or coercive methods to diminish demographic growth. Instead, governments are called upon to adopt social

policies supportive of the family, to facilitate migration, and to provide accurate information regarding demographic trends and those methods of family planning that are in accord with the moral order and whose safety and effectiveness have been well proven. Any and all government efforts should be in conformity with the moral law and should protect the rightful freedom of married couples in regard to parenthood.

All three documents present some specific criteria for responsible decision making by married couples regarding the spacing of births and the size of the family. They are unanimous in emphasizing that responsible parenthood rests on the informed and properly directed conscience of the couple. A properly formed conscience gives primary attention to the dictates of the divine law as authentically interpreted by the Church's magisterium. An important and somewhat unique point of the teaching is the emphasis on the conscience of the *couple*, as compared to the conscience of the *individual*. The Church recognizes that a decision regarding childbearing should be one that is arrived at as a result of mutual discussion and agreement, and one that reflects the shared vision and values of the married couple. *Gaudium et spes* notes that the moral standards on which the decisions are based are "the nature of the human person and his acts which preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love" (No. 51). *Humanae vitae* states that the couple "must conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts, and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church" (No. 10).³

Criteria of Responsible Parenthood

More specifically, responsible parenthood, or the responsible decision making of the couple, depends on consideration of the following factors:

1. ***Responsibilities to God.*** The couple, by reason of their marriage, take on the responsibility of actualizing in their family life God's creative and redemptive plan. In the Catholic tradition, Christian married love is understood as both unitive and redemptive. John Paul II tells us that "God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion" (F.C., 11). Conjugal love is a special expression of this "fundamental and innate vocation."

Furthermore, in the sacrament of marriage, "*conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained--conjugal charity--which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ, who gave himself on the cross*" (F.C., 13).

Christian married love is also procreative, and in parenthood the couple is associated in a special way with God in his creative work:

With the creation of man and woman in his own image and likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of his hands; He calls them to a special sharing in his love and in his power as Creator and Father through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the gift of human life: "God blessed them and God said to them, be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen.: 1, 28), (F.C., 28).

Recognizing that marriage has not been instituted by God solely for procreation and that childlessness need not destroy or diminish the value of conjugal love, the Council emphasized that "*human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence, they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of man*" (G.S., 51). Thus, in fidelity to God's plan for the continuation of the human family married couples have some responsibility to procreate, but the Church also reminds us "*that a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to authentic conjugal love*" (G.S., 51).⁴

2. Responsibilities to themselves. The primary duty that married couples have to themselves is to deepen and strengthen marital unity and fidelity. They should "*be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification,*" (G.S., 52).

a) *Mutual affection* involves a deepening of conjugal intimacy at every level of the human personality. It involves a proper understanding of the various dimensions of human love, notably eros and agape.⁵ In the experience of marriage, the virtues of consideration, patience, playfulness or humor and humility are important to generate deeper mutual affection. So also is sexual union, which unifies the couple in a special way and brings them special gifts related to their marriage. John Paul II makes the point that sexual love is not simply biological but touches each person in

his or her innermost being. The total physical self-giving is but a part of the total personal self-giving of marriage. Accordingly, sexual union is by its very nature exclusive, and because it is a loving, interpersonal exchange between spouses ought not be forced upon one's partner nor reduced to self-gratification. This is what the Holy Father meant when he urged spouses to respect sexual love and not to demean it by allowing lustful urges to overcome conjugal love.⁶

The Second Vatican Council recognizes that sexual union is important to conjugal intimacy, and where sexual intimacy is absent totally or for long periods of time, a tension arises which can endanger both conjugal love and the openness to procreation. Nonetheless, sexual union, which in some way always involves procreation, should be adventurous, that is, it should be open to life.

b) *Developing harmony of mind* means developing partnership in its truest sense. Partnership in marriage is not simply a contractual arrangement; it is the engagement of husband and wife in something greater than themselves. Developing and sustaining this partnership requires communication or dialogue, understanding, and openness to change. A married couple does not simply look for shared viewpoints, but seeks instead a single vision of the world and a mutual understanding of their unique mission in God's plan.

c) *Mutual sanctification.* Growth in holiness necessarily involves trust in God's providence and a spirit of generosity and sacrifice. Married couples today encounter many obstacles to childbearing and childbearing, not the least of which are related to economic concerns that sometimes spring from the materialistic and consumeristic attitudes of contemporary American society. As a consequence, a couple's generosity and openness to life are challenged.

While Christian perfection should not be identified solely with parenthood, the Council noted that "*married Christians strive toward fulfillment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit themselves of the duty to procreate*" (G.S., 50). Spiritual growth then is not simply dependant on the biological process of reproduction, but on the appreciation of marriage as a special vocation, on the Christian values undergirding conjugal life and the virtues that a couple mutually

pursue in their conscientious deliberations and their whole way of life. This includes trust in God, prayer and sacramental life, and the willingness to share both spiritual and material riches with those less fortunate.

Finally, for spouses, responsibility to themselves includes the fostering of marital fidelity and unity through communication, shared experience and goals; an appreciation of sexual love as mutually enriching and rewarding and requiring consideration, fondness and sensitivity to each other; and constant pursuit of Christian perfection which calls for prayer, virtue and self-sacrifice.

3. **Responsibilities to their children.** This is sometimes interpreted merely in terms of providing material benefits to children already born. In reality, it involves more than material benefits and it affects both those already born and those yet to be born. Fundamentally, responsible decisions regarding parenthood are based on the couple's attitudes toward children. In recent years, efforts have been made to portray the child as a burden, a responsibility, a threat to the comfort of the spouses, a drain on parent's energies, an invader of marital privacy or an economic liability. When such attitudes prevail, it can be difficult to develop positive attitudes toward procreation, much less parental love and familial acceptance. Sad to say, such attitudes have been dominant in Western society and have seriously affected the value orientations of many couples.

The Church, however, takes a more positive view of the child. The Council stated that *"children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents"* (G.S., 50). John Paul II has written that for parents, children *"are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and mother"* (F.C., 14). The Christian tradition has emphasized that each child is a human person, created and loved by God, and capable of loving others. The child is also our link with the future, the sign of hope and progress, the reminder of transcendence. Each child is mankind in miniature, he or she makes each of us aware of our humanness, our relationships with and dependence on others and the benefits we all derive from giving and receiving love.

Yet, the frequency of childbearing and the number of young children that a mother must care for--almost alone at times--are

matters of serious import. While the father's role and involvement in parenting should be expanded and strengthened, couples should try to work out a reasonable plan regarding the frequency of births that will allow for appropriate parental attention to the needs of each child. They should also bear in mind that as children grow, they in turn will share with their parents in caring for the younger siblings. Moreover, the involvement of grandparents should be considered, especially as people retire at a relatively early age.

4. **Responsibilities to society.** This criterion brings into consideration demographic, economic and social conditions that are influenced by the reproductive decisions of married couples. Admittedly, in some societies rapid population growth creates a serious socio-economic imbalance, and concern for the common good may motivate couples to space births and/or limit the size of the family. To correctly assess their responsibilities, couples need accurate demographic information and an understanding of its implications vis-a-vis family life. Too often couples are faced with considerable propaganda or a distorted interpretation of demographic facts and projections. As a general rule, fertility rates and reproductive patterns in the United States do not of themselves signal a need for the limitation of childbearing. Indeed, present rates are at a low ebb and are still declining, and as in some countries of Western Europe, the common good may actually dictate an upswing in fertility. For practical purposes, in the United States, economic and employment factors are a more serious concern, and couples must weigh the practical implications of these factors. Moreover, couples must weigh the costs of education and health care, and the possibility of providing for cultural and recreational endeavors. Nonetheless, in the United States we can heed the positive attitudes of Vatican II toward those couples *"who with a gallant heart, and with wise and common deliberations, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family"* (G.S., 50).

Given the consideration of these factors, each couple should come to a free and responsible decision concerning the timing of births and the number of children. The following aspects of the freedom of the couple to decide merit special attention:

a) Freedom from injustices or other circumstances that create or foster poverty, disease, hunger, unemployment or economic dependence and thus limit couples in regard to childbearing decisions.

b) Freedom from direct coercion by government or any other social, economic or humanitarian agency that prevents couples from pursuing rational decisions in regard to parenting.

c) Freedom from indirect coercion such as social or economic policies that deprive families of appropriate benefits if they have more than a stipulated number of children.

d) Freedom from psychological pressure in favor of a specific family model (e.g., the two-child family), especially pressure based on the distorted or misleading use of statistical data or on a propaganda campaign.

In terms of responsible decision making, the Church cautions against couples proceeding arbitrarily or completely at will, "as if they could determine in a wholly autonomous way the honest path to follow" (H.V., 10).

John Paul II notes that in providing counsel on conjugal morality the Church is both mother and teacher. It is the Church's mission to call men and women to greater generosity and trustfulness in Divine Providence, and to insist that moral norms, based on the authentic interpretation of Divine Law by the pope and bishops, be carefully observed by Catholics. Despite the controversies that have raged concerning birth control, "authentic ecclesial pedagogy displays its realism and wisdom only by making a tenacious and courageous effort to create and uphold all the human conditions--psychological, moral and spiritual--indispensable for understanding and living the moral value and norm" (F.C., 33).

Conclusion

The Church teaches that responsible parenthood involves mutual decision making by a married couple in regard to childbearing and childrearing, and such decision making is based on their Christian commitment and worldview and the priority of values that proceed therefrom. Responsible parenthood respects the freedom and responsibility of the mutually formed conscientious decision, founded on adherence to God's creative plan and the objective moral order as taught by the magisterium of the Church. It is premised on the equal importance of the unitive and procreative purposes of marriage and conjugal love, and the inseparable connection between them. But of greatest importance,

responsible parenthood is linked with conjugal love as a growth process in which a couple "render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day" (G.S., 48).

NOTES

1. See *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, (*Gaudium et spes*) nos. 48-52.

2. For a fuller development of the historical development of the term see De Reidmatten, H., "Responsible Parenthood: Theory and Practice," in McHugh (ed), *Marriage in the Light of Vatican II*, Washington, D.C.: Family Life Bureau, USCC, 1968.

3. The footnote in *Humanae vitae* refers to *Gaudium et spes*, nos. 51-52.

4. Note that the language of *Gaudium et spes* is quite strong, locating the two responsibilities in "the divine laws."

5. See McCarthy, D. "Biblical Personalism and Natural Family Planning," in *Pastoral Life*, May, 1983.

6. See John Paul II, General Audiences of September 10, 17, 24, October 1, 8, 15, 22, 1980.

RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD

Outline and Citations

The Contemporary description of responsible parenthood is derived from a synthesis of three documents--*Populorum progressio*, *Gaudium et spes* and *Humanae vitae*.

- It is certain that public authorities can intervene, within the limit of their competence, by favouring the availability of appropriate information and by adopting suitable measures, provided that these be in conformity with the moral law and that they respect the rightful freedom of married couples. Where the inalienable right to marriage and procreation is lacking, human dignity has ceased to exist. Finally, it is for the parents to decide, with full knowledge of the matter, on the number of their children, taking into account their responsibilities toward God, themselves, the children they have already brought into the world, and the community to which they belong. In all this they must follow the demands of their own conscience enlightened by God's law authentically interpreted, and sustained by confidence in Him. (*Populorum progressio*, 37)
- Governments undoubtedly have rights and duties, within the limits of their proper competency, regarding the population problem in their respective countries, for instance with regard to social and family life legislation, or with regard to the migration of country-dwellers to the cities, or with respect to information concerning the condition and needs of the country. Since men today are giving thought to this problem and are so greatly disturbed over it, it is desirable in addition that Catholic specialists, especially in the universities, skillfully pursue and develop studies and projects on all these matters. But there are many today who maintain that the increase in world population, or at least the population increase in some countries, must be radically curbed by every means possible and by any kind of intervention on the part of public authority. In view of this contention, the Council urges everyone to guard against solutions, whether publicly or privately supported, or at times even imposed, which are contrary to the moral law. For in keeping with man's inalienable right to marry and generate children, the decision concerning the number of children they will have depends on the correct judgment of the parents and it cannot in any way be left to the judgement of public authority. But since the judgment of the parents presupposes a rightly formed conscience, it is of the utmost importance that the way be open for everyone to develop a correct and genuinely human responsibility which respects the divine law and takes into consideration the circumstances of the place and the time. (*Gaudium et spes*, 87)

- Responsible parenthood also and above all implies a more profound relationship to the objective moral order established by God, of which a right conscience is the faithful interpreter. The responsible exercise of parenthood implies, therefore, that husband and wife recognize fully their own duties toward God, toward themselves, toward the family and toward society, in a correct hierarchy of values.

In the task of transmitting life, therefore, they are not free to proceed completely at will, as if they could determine in a wholly autonomous way the honest path to follow; but they must conform their activity to the creative intention of God, expressed in the very nature of marriage and of its acts and manifested by the constant teaching of the Church. (*Humanae vitae*, 10)

The concept of responsible parenthood, as understood in Catholic teaching and described in these documents involves the following elements:

- a) a free, informed, mutual decision by the couple
- b) regarding the frequency of births and size of the family
- c) based on their conscientious assessment of their responsibilities
- d) to God, themselves, their children and family and the society of which they are a part
- e) respecting the authentic teaching of the magisterium of the Church regarding the objective moral order and the licit methods of spacing or limiting pregnancies.

Criteria of Responsible Parenthood

In reaching their conscientious decision, a married couple should weigh their responsibilities:

- a) **To God.**
 - All should be persuaded that human life and the task of transmitting it are not realities bound up with this world alone. Hence they cannot be measured or perceived only in terms of it, but always have a bearing on the eternal destiny of men. (*G.S.*, 51)
 - Responsible parenthood "*implies a more profound relationship to the objective moral order established by God, of which a right conscience is the faithful interpreter.*" (*H.V.*, 10)
 - With the creation of man and woman in his own image and likeness, God crowns and brings to perfection the work of his hands: He calls them to a special sharing in his love and in his

power as creator and Father through their free and responsible cooperation in transmitting the Gift of human life: "God blessed them, and God said to them, 'be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it.' "

Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the creator--that of transmitting by procreation the divine image from person to person. (F.C., 28)

- In their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment. Thus, trusting in divine Providence and refining the spirit of sacrifice, married Christians glorify the Creator and strive toward fulfillment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit themselves of the duty to procreate. Among the couples who fulfill their God-given task in this way, those merit special mention who with a gallant heart, and with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family. (G.S., 50)

b) **To themselves.**

- Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfill their task with human and Christian responsibility, and with docile reverence toward God, will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. (G.S., 50)
- This Council realizes that certain modern conditions often keep couples from arranging their married lives harmoniously, and that they find themselves in circumstances where at least temporarily the size of their families should not be increased. As a result, the faithful exercise of love and the full intimacy of their lives is hard to maintain. But where the intimacy of married life is broken off, its faithfulness can sometimes be imperiled and its quality of fruitfulness ruined, for then the upbringing of the children and the courage to accept new ones are both endangered.

To these problems there are those who presume to offer dishonorable solutions indeed: they do not recoil even from the taking of life. But the Church issues the reminder that a true contradiction cannot exist between the divine laws pertaining to the transmission of life and those pertaining to authentic conjugal love. (G.S., 51)

- Let the spouses themselves, made to the image of the living God and enjoying the authentic dignity of persons, be joined to one another in equal affection, harmony of mind and the work of mutual sanctification. (G.S., 52)
- c) **To their children**, those already born and those yet to be born. In light of negative attitudes toward children, the Church proposes a more positive view.
 - Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. (G.S., 50)
 - As living members of the family, children contribute in their own way to making their parents holy. (G.S., 48)
 - For parents, children "are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother." (F.C.,14)
 - And so at the end of this year and on the threshold of the new year, let that Child speak of the rights of every child, speak of every child's dignity, its significance in our lives: in the life of every family and nation, in the life of all humanity. The child is always a new revelation of the life that is given to man by the Creator. It is a new confirmation of the image and likeness of God, imprinted upon man from the very beginning. The child is also a great and continuous test of our fidelity to ourselves; of our fidelity to humanity. it is a test of our respect for the mystery of life, upon which, from the very first moment of conception, the Creator places the imprint of his image and likeness. The dignity of the child demands, on the part of parents and society, a very great sensitivity of conscience. For the child is that delicate spot around which the morality of families, and hence the morality of whole nations and of society, is either formed or broken. The dignity of the child demands the greatest responsibility on the part of parents and also the greatest responsibility in every sphere of society. (John Paul II, Christmas Message, 1979)
 - To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children. Each member of the family has to become, in a special way, the servant of the others and share their burdens (cf. Gal 6:2; Phil 2:2). Each one must show concern, not only for his or her own life, but also for the lives of the other members of the

family: their needs, their hopes, their ideals. Decisions about the number of children and the sacrifices to be made for them must not be taken only with a view to adding to comfort and preserving a peaceful existence. Reflecting upon this matter before God, with the graces drawn from the Sacrament, and guided by the teaching of the Church, parents will remind themselves that it is certainly less serious to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity and to realize the beauty of life at all its ages and in all its variety. (John Paul II, Homily, Washington, D.C., October 7, 1979)

- In the presence of the representatives of so many nations of the world gathered here, I wish to express the joy that we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands. No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child even before birth, from the first moment of conception and then throughout the years of infancy and youth, is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another. (John Paul II to United Nations General Assembly, October 2, 1979)
- d) **To the society of which they are a part.**
- It is true that too frequently an accelerated demographic increase adds its own difficulties to the problems of development: the size of the population increases more rapidly than available resources, and things are found to have reached apparently an impasse. From that moment the temptation is great to check the demographic increase by means of radical measures. (P.P., 37)
 - In relation to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised, either by the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family, or by the decision, made for grave motives and with due respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth. (H.V., 10)
 - For God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes. All of these have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole. (G.S., 48)
 - Just as the intimate connection between the family and society demands that the family be open to and participate in society and its development, so also it requires that society should never fail in its fundamental task of respecting and fostering the family. (F.C., 45)

Conclusion

Responsible parenthood is the informed and responsible decision regarding the frequency of births and the size of the family made by the parents in light of their multiple responsibilities. It is necessarily premised on the couple's faith, courage and reliance on divine providence. It is informed by the teaching of the Church and a proper understanding of socio-economic circumstances. But in all cases it must reflect profound respect for human life and the conviction that in responsible procreation parents are cooperating with God in transmitting life and providing material and spiritual sustenance to those with whom the gift of life is shared.

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CONJUGAL MORALITY AND NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

In *The Making of the Modern Family*¹, Edward Shorter argues that human society has been subject to two sexual revolutions. The first, at the end of the eighteenth century, resulted in the removal of parental or familial arrangement of marriage and gave precedence to romantic love. The second, occurring in the late 1950's and the decades thereafter, virtually removed sexual intercourse from the context of marriage and legitimated almost all types of pre-marital and extra-marital sexual behavior. The attitudinal change of the 1950's was paralleled by the technological development of new and effective methods of contraception, and more recently, by the widespread use of abortion and sterilization as methods of family planning. The resultant sexual libertarianism is in open contrast with the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In its development of the themes of conjugal love and responsible parenthood, the Second Vatican Council gave contemporary expression to the Church's tradition on marriage and family life. It spoke of Christian marriage as "*an intimate partnership of life and love*" (Gaudium et spes, 48), and described conjugal love as unifying, enriching and creative. In marriage husband and wife call each other to an ever-deepening awareness of their individual personalities and a perfecting of their mutual responsibility, unity and fidelity. At the same time, they lead one another to a more profound involvement with God, the source of their marital love. John Paul II expands on this theme in *Familiaris consortio*:

God is love and in himself he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being, God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility of love and communion (No. 11).

Conjugal love is uniquely expressed and perfected in the sexual love of the spouses. The intimate expressions of marital love, especially conjugal intercourse, are "*noble and worthy*" and "*promote the mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and steady will*" (G.S., 49). Again John Paul II reminds us that:

Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such (F.C., 11).

At the same time, love in marriage is intimately connected with the birth and rearing of children because the acts of conjugal intimacy are also procreative. The mutual investment of self made by husband and wife is a natural basis for the more lasting testimony of their love relationship: the children to whom they give life and continuing love and whom they regard as part of themselves. Thus the family--husband, wife and children--serves as both "*the school of deeper humanity*" (G.S., 52) and "*the manifestation of Christ's living presence in the world and the genuine nature of the Church*" (G.S., 48).

The Nature of the Person and His/Her Acts

The Council's teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood provided the background for a discussion of the moral decision regarding the means of family planning. While *Gaudium et spes* did not address the question of contraceptive methods specifically, it did state that "*when there is question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives, but must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his acts preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving in the context of true love*" (No. 51).

Paul VI referred to this principle in *Humanae vitae* (10) where he maintained that human reproduction cannot be considered solely in terms of biological, psychological or sociological arguments, but in light of an integral vision of the human person and his supernatural and eternal vocation, as well as his earthly calling. He affirmed the more recent conciliar teaching on conjugal love and responsible parenthood, and concluded that the traditional teaching of the Church--that each and every marriage act must remain open to life--was to be maintained. This teaching is based on the inseparable connection between the two meanings or ends of the marriage act, that is, that through sexual intercourse a married couple strengthens their intimacy and unity, and also collaborates with God in the procreation of a child. Paul VI argued that both of these meanings are integral to the act of intercourse

and that to deny or reject either one is to destroy the integrity of the act and distort its meaning. Herein is the moral disorder: the intentional rejection of God's design, and setting apart, if not in opposition, two dimensions of an act that are designed to work together and mutually reinforce that all-encompassing love from which they proceed.

In *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul II has invited theologians "to collaborate with the hierarchical magisterium and to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalist reasons behind this doctrine" (F.C., 31), that is, the Church's prohibition of artificial contraception. In explaining this teaching John Paul II quotes the passages from *Gaudium et spes* and *Humanae vitae* and formulates a synthesis of the magisterial teaching (F.C., 32). He also uses a second argument, that is, that by the use of artificial contraception a couple contradict "the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife" in the act of conjugal intercourse. This leads to "a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality" (F.C., 32).

Because "the nature of the person and his or her acts" is foundational to determining the morality of specific acts between the spouses, it merits further comment.

First of all, the concept of person is based on the Catholic philosophic and theological tradition.² Every human person is "made in the image of God" and redeemed by Jesus Christ. This person has the capacity to know, to think, to make decisions freely and responsibly in the depths of his or her conscience. The nature of the person requires freedom so "that he or she act according to a knowing and free choice that is personally motivated and prompted from within, not under blind internal impulse nor by mere external pressure" (G.S., 17). The human person is a subject, that is, an individual in command of his or her decisions and actions, and must not be treated as an object, that is, simply a means of pleasure or self-gratification for another, nor as a "thing" to be used by the state or some other agency.³

The human person is an individual, but is also by nature relational, that is, innately impelled toward community. The primary and most common form of human community is marriage. Speaking of the marriage relationship, John Paul II notes that "this

conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life project, what they have and what they are. For this reason such communion is the fruit and sign of a profoundly human need" (F.C., 19).

As much as marriage meets the need for community, the nature of marriage as community demands and depends on the interpersonal unity and partnership that logically results from the mutual love of the spouses. But marriage, as a social institution looking beyond the personal needs of the spouses, also serves the needs of the human race through its procreative dimension and it meets the needs of those youngest members of the human family--the children that result from the sexual activity of the spouses. Because marriage is consistent with the nature of the person and is the most common form of human community, we can say that it is the nature of marriage to meet the needs of human love and parenting and to preserve the unity between them.

Truly human actions can only be understood as actions of persons, that is, as acts proceeding from a free and informed decision. But the actions of persons have their own inherent purposes and limitations. In regard to the sexual acts of men and women, sexual intercourse serves the purposes of pleasure and procreation.

While these purposes can be achieved aside from marriage the overwhelming testimony of anthropological studies and social and behavioral science data is that the best interests of the persons and the welfare of society are best achieved when sexual intercourse is positively associated with marriage, that is, exclusively approved only for the married.⁴ Furthermore, the Christian tradition has consistently held that their full significance can only be realized when sexual intercourse is seen as an activity of the married, springing from and enriching conjugal love, and directed toward and controlled by responsible parenthood, that is, child-bearing and childrearing. For the love of the spouses and their parenting are inherently intertwined and mutually reinforcing and are inseparable aspects of their conjugal commitment. On the other hand, contraception denies and frustrates one of the inherent potentialities of the act of intercourse, that is procreation, and thereby reduces it and diminishes the quality of the conjugal

commitment. This also has an effect on the unity and mutual fidelity of the partners.

The nature of the person, thus, is to act knowingly and to respect the purposes and potentialities of the actions he or she performs. In Christian marriage, a couple accepts the vocation to love one another, to share their love with others, and to grow in holiness. Part of their married life involves sexual love, which enriches them and generates new life. Their sexual love then must respect the purposes of their vocation, and the inherent connection between conjugal love and parenthood.

Propositions on Conjugal Morality

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in the writings of Paul VI and John Paul I, and especially in the many addresses on marriage of John Paul II - particularly *Familiaris consortio* - the Magisterium has continually attempted to provide a firm foundation and positive atmosphere for teaching married couples how to harmonize the demands of conjugal love and responsible parenthood. The following propositions present something of a synthesis of the Church's teaching.

1. Sexuality, and specifically sexual intercourse, must be seen in its totality, that is, as strengthening and enhancing the unity, fidelity and exclusiveness of the marriage relationship, and of being predisposed to the generation of a child. While these two aspects may not be achieved in every act of conjugal intercourse, one should not reject or move against either purpose.⁵

2. The inherent meanings of marital intercourse are not simply psychological or biological potentialities, but are part of the Divine Plan and "have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole" (G.S., 48).⁶

3. Conjugal intimacy and parenting are interrelated dimensions of marriage and of sexual love. Growth in love leads to responsibility, generosity and openness to parenthood, and parenting expresses and calls forth from each partner the sense of mutual responsibility, generosity and interrelatedness that is found only in conjugal love.⁷

4. Conjugal love includes sexual love, which brings pleasure to each partner, and this mutual sharing of pleasure is by its nature meant to reconcile, sustain and motivate each spouse. It should strengthen conjugal unity and give each couple a sense of security in their everyday lives, but couples must be aware that without integration, sexual love can become introverted and destructive.⁸

5. The integration of sexual love and sexual pleasure into the total mosaic of conjugal life requires conjugal chastity, that is, a proper understanding of the many facets of human sexuality, self-mastery on the part of each spouse, and the mutual capacity for abstaining from sexual intercourse at certain periods of time.⁹

6. In attempting to space births or limit the size of the family, couples should reach mutual decisions, based on their responsibilities to God, themselves, their existing families and the society of which they are a part. Couples should use only those means of family planning that preserve the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of sexual intercourse, that is, the natural methods of family planning.¹⁰

7. Natural family planning is at the service of the family. The natural methods are not just another method of birth control, but are based on the Church's total vision of the dignity of the human person and his or her acts, and of marriage--"the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love" (H.V., 8).

8. Choice of the natural methods preserves "the difference, both anthropological and moral" between contraception and the natural fertility cycle. The choice of natural family planning "involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is, the woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control" (F.C., 32).¹¹

9. The successful practice of natural family planning involves the virtues of love and continence. It is based on mutual commitment and the awareness that through marital union the spouses "experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day" (G.S., 48). This growth is also based on the influence of grace, fidelity to God's law and the teaching and pastoral care of the Church.¹²

10. The Church must help married couples understand and accept the teaching of *Humanae vitae* as the norm for their

sexuality, and understand this norm not as some future possible ideal, but as a constant call of Christ to overcome difficulties, to grow in conjugal love and to attain deeper union with Christ, the source of their sanctification.¹³

Natural Family Planning: Pedagogic and Pastoral Initiatives

Assisting couples to deepen conjugal love and achieve responsible parenthood is part of the Church's total pastoral ministry to Catholic spouses. Fulfillment of this ministry includes both pedagogy and pastoral care. An authentic ecclesial pedagogy means "instilling convictions and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way" (F.C., 35). Pedagogy must always be based on the Church's doctrine and moral teaching, but it should also include the accumulated wisdom of the sciences. Concretely, an NFP pedagogy involves:

- instruction in regard to human fertility, reproduction, pregnancy and infant care;
- enabling couples to understand their own emotions and psychological motivations, and the external influences that sometimes create ambivalence or insecurity;
- recognition of the value of moral commitment and spiritual aids that reinforce the human decision;
- integration of wholesome attitudes toward parental care, natural birth methods, breastfeeding and early childhood nurturing and education;
- fundamental understanding of the fertility cycle and how to interpret the physiological signs of the beginning and end of ovulation.

To help couples become competent and secure in using natural family planning, the ecclesial community must draw on its own resources, that is, the efforts of married couples, doctors, priests, marriage specialists and experts in allied fields to establish "a broader, more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied" (F.C., 35).

There are various NFP methods, and the Church does not endorse any one specific approach. In fact, John Paul II has made it clear that the Church will not canonize any specific method, and that all who are involved in this work should recognize that "it is providential that diverse methods (of NFP) exist," so that couples

may choose that method or combination of methods that best meet their personal needs.¹⁴ Moreover, the Holy Father has urged the various NFP groups to "appreciate their respective work, mutually exchange experiences and results and firmly avoid tensions and disagreements that could threaten so important and difficult a work."¹⁵

While many NFP organizations and groups exist, in 1981 the American Bishops established a nationwide program to initiate, develop and expand NFP programs under the sponsorship and direction of the individual dioceses. This allows for an integration of existing efforts, and more extensive collaboration between independent groups and individual dioceses.

Pastoral care for couples utilizing the natural methods implies helping them to understand the fertility cycle, "thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control" (F.C., 32). These bear some further explanation.

1. *Dialogue.* The choice of NFP requires communication directed toward setting priorities, pursuing agreed upon goals and maintaining an openness to the future. A couple should regularly discuss their understanding of the signs of fertility and their ability to integrate continence into their conjugal relationship.¹⁶

2. *Reciprocal respect.* Integral to sexual activity in marriage is respect for one another as individuals and as partners. It involves sensitivity to the other person's needs and difficulties and development of a wide variety of ways to manifest appreciation, understanding and intimacy.

3. *Shared responsibility.* Decisions regarding the spacing of births and the size of the family must be mutual decisions, and responsibility for carrying out such decisions should be borne equally by both partners. Sharing responsibility also involves sharing other tasks and responsibilities in the marriage, such as care of existing children, regard and care for extended family, taking on and meeting financial obligations.

4. *Self-mastery.* Each spouse must recognize the value of sex in their marriage, as well as each one's own need for self-discipline and self-mastery. In a highly charged sexual environment such as our society, self-mastery also demands continual efforts to relate sex to marriage, and to avoid attitudes or patterns of behavior that tend to trivialize sex.¹⁷

Conclusion.

Natural family planning benefits a couple because it involves them very closely in decisions that are at the center of their married life, and it helps them crystallize their shared vision and values. Their willingness to help one another, to develop sensitivity to each other's needs and to make personal sacrifices strengthens their love and helps solidify their marriage relationship. Finally, their efforts to live their sexuality in accord with the teaching of the Church brings peace of conscience, deepens their faith and strengthens their reliance on God's providential care as they meet their other marital and parental responsibilities.

NOTES

1. Shorter, E., *The Making of the Modern Family*, New York, Basic Books, 1975.
2. See McNicholl, A. "Person, Sex, Marriage and Actual Trends of Thought" in *Human Sexuality and Personhood*, John XXIII Center.
3. The distinction between the person as subject and as object is common in the writings of John Paul II. See "The Person as Subject and Object of Action" in *Love and Responsibility*, p. 21-24. See also McNicholl, op. cit.
4. See for example Shorter, E. *The Making of the Modern Family*, New York, Basic Books, 1975; Yorburg, B., *The Changing Family*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1972; Gilder, G. *Sexual Suicide*, New York, The New York Times Book Co., 1973.
5. See *Gaudium et spes*, 49-50; *Humanae vitae*, 11-12; *Familiaris consortio*, 11.
6. See *Gaudium et spes*, 48; *Humanae vitae*, 12; *Familiaris consortio*, 32-34.
7. See *Gaudium et spes*, 49; *Familiaris consortio*, 11.
8. See *Gaudium et spes*, 48-49; *Humanae vitae*, 9; *Familiaris consortio*, 11.
9. See *Gaudium et spes*, 51; *Humanae vitae*, 21; *Familiaris consortio*, 33-34; *John Paul II to CLER and FIDAF*, 3 November, 1979.
10. See *Gaudium et spes*, 51-87; *Humanae vitae*, 10-12; *Familiaris consortio*, 32-33.
11. See *Humanae vitae*, 16; *Familiaris consortio*, 32.

12. See *John Paul II to CLER and FIDAF*, 3 November, 1979.
13. See *Familiaris consortio*, 34.
14. *John Paul II to Study Group at Catholic University of the Sacred Heart*, Rome, 3 July, 1982.
15. Ibid.
16. See Bardwick, J. "The Psychodynamics of Contraception with Particular Reference to Rhythm", in Williams and Uricchio (eds), *Natural Family Planning: Proceedings of a Research Conference*, Washington, D.C., Human Life Foundations, 1973.
17. See Twerski, A.J. "Psychosocial Aspects of Natural Family Planning", *International Journal of Natural Family Planning*, Winter, 1979. Dr. Twerski argues that "If postponement of gratification is not practical in other areas of life, it will be most difficult to single out one area and demand tolerance of frustration therein, especially when the frustration is that of a constantly stimulated sex drive."

CONJUGAL MORALITY AND NATURAL FAMILY PLANNING

Outline and Citations

The Church's teaching on conjugal morality is based on two important points that were clearly stated by the Second Vatican Council and the encyclical *Humanae vitae*, namely, conjugal love and responsible parenthood.

- Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children....“While not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the creator and the savior, who through them will enlarge and enrich his own family day by day.” (G.S., 50)
- In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal “*knowledge*,” which makes them “*one flesh*,” does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person. Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother. (F.C., 14)

Propositions on the Church's teaching in regard to sexual morality

In his many addresses on marriage and especially in *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II has moved forward significantly in providing a firm foundation and a positive atmosphere for teaching couples how to harmonize the demands of conjugal love and responsible parenthood. The following propositions reflect the main points of the Church's teaching.

1) Sexuality, and specifically sexual intercourse, must be seen in its totality, that is, as strengthening and enhancing the unity, fidelity and exclusiveness of the marriage relationship, and of being predisposed to the generation of a child. While these two aspects may not be achieved in every act of conjugal intercourse, one should not reject or deliberately frustrate either purpose.

- Sexuality, by means of which man and woman give themselves to one another through the acts which are proper and exclusive to spouses, is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such. (F.C., 11)
- According to God's plan, marriage is a community of indissoluble love ordered to life as a continuation and complement of the spouses. There is an unbreakable relationship between conjugal love and the transmission of life, in virtue of which, as Paul VI taught “*Every conjugal act must remain open to the transmission of life* (H.V., 11)”. (John Paul II, Homily at Special Mass for Families, Madrid, 2 Nov., 1982)

2) The inherent meanings of marital intercourse are not simply psychological or biological potentialities, but are part of the Divine Plan and “*have a very decisive bearing on the continuation of the human race, on the personal development and eternal destiny of the individual members of a family, and on the dignity, stability, peace and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole.*” (G.S., 48)

- That teaching, often set forth by the magisterium, (i.e., that each and every conjugal act must remain open to life) is founded upon the inseparable connection, willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative, between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning. (H.V., 12)

3) Conjugal intimacy and parenting are interrelated dimensions of marriage and of sexual love. Growth in love leads to responsibility, generosity and openness to parenthood, and parenting expresses and call forth from each partner the sense of mutual responsibility, generosity and interrelatedness that is only found in conjugal love.

- By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown. Thus a man and a woman, who by their compact of conjugal love “*are no longer two, but one flesh*” (Matt. 19:6), render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them. (G.S., 48)
- Indeed, by its intimate structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, capacitates them for the

generation of new lives, according to laws inscribed in the very being of man and woman. By safeguarding both these essential aspects, the unitive and the procreative, the conjugal act preserves in its fullness the sense of true mutual love and its ordination toward man's most high calling to parenthood. (H.V., 12)

- This totality which is required by conjugal love also corresponds to the demands of responsible fertility. This fertility is directed to the generation of a human being, and so by its nature it surpasses the purely biological order and involves a whole series of personal values. For the harmonious growth of these values a persevering and unified contribution by both parents is necessary.

The only "place" in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God himself, which only in this light manifests its true meaning. The institution of marriage is not an undue interference by society or authority, nor the extrinsic imposition of a form. Rather it is an interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love which is publicly affirmed as unique and exclusive in order to live in complete fidelity to the plan of God, the creator. (F.C., 11)

4) Conjugal love includes sexual love, which brings pleasure to each partner, and this mutual sharing of pleasure is by its nature meant to reconcile, sustain and motivate each spouse. It should strengthen conjugal unity and give each couple a sense of security in their everyday lives, but couples must be aware that without integration, sexual love can become introverted and destructive.

- This love (conjugal love) is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will; it involves the good of the whole person, and therefore can enrich the expressions of the body and mind with a unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship distinctive of marriage. This love God has judged worthy of special gifts, healing, perfecting and exalting gifts of grace and of charity. Such love, merging the human with the divine, leads the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift proving itself by gentle affection and by deed; such love pervades the whole of their lives: indeed by its active generosity it grows better and grows greater. Therefore it far excels mere erotic inclination, which, selfishly pursued, soon enough fades wretchedly away.

This love is uniquely expressed and perfected in the special area of matrimony. The actions within marriage by which the couple are united intimately and chastely are noble and worthy ones.

Expressed in a manner which is truly human, these actions promote that mutual self-giving by which spouses enrich each other with a joyful and a ready will. (G.S., 49)

- The spouses' bodies will speak "for" and "on behalf of" each of them; they will speak in the name of and with the authority of the person, of each of the persons, carrying out the conjugal dialogue proper to their vocation and based on the language of the body The spouses are called to form their life and their living together as a "communion of persons" on the basis of that language. Granted that there corresponds to the language a complex of meaning, the spouses--by means of their conduct and comportment, by means of their actions and gestures ("gestures of tenderness": (cf. G.S., 49)--are called to become the authors of such meanings of the "language of the body", of which consequently there are constructed and continually deepened love, fidelity, conjugal uprightness and that union which remains indissoluble until death. (John Paul II, General Audience, January 26, 1983)

5) The integration of sexual love and sexual pleasure into the total mosaic of conjugal life requires conjugal chastity, that is, a proper understanding of the many facets of human sexuality, self-mastery on the part of each spouse, and the mutual capacity for continence.

- Without any doubt, the words of Christ, (cf. Matt. 5, 27-28) which we have analysed at great length, had no other purpose than to emphasize the dignity of marriage and the family; hence the fundamental convergence between them and the content of both the above-mentioned statements of the modern Church. Christ was speaking to the man of all times and places; the pronouncements of the Church aim at applying Christ's words to the here and now, and therefore they must be reread according to the key of that theology and that pedagogy which find roots and support in Christ's words In the same spirit the author of the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, speaking of the demands of Christian morality, presents, at the same time, the possibility of fulfilling them, when he writes: "*The mastery of instinct by one's reason and free will undoubtedly demands an asceticism--Paul VI uses this term--so that the affective manifestations of conjugal life may be in keeping with right order, in particular with regard to the observance of periodic continence. Yet this discipline which is proper to the purity of married couples, far from harming conjugal love, rather confers on it a higher human value. It demands a continual effort (precisely this effort was called above "asceticism"), yet, thanks to its beneficent influence, husband and wife fully develop their personalities, enrich each other with spiritual values It favours attention for one's partner, helps both parties to drive out selfishness, the enemy of true love, and*

deepens their sense of responsibility . . ." (John Paul II, General Audience, April 8, 1981; reference to Paul VI is from H.V., 21)

- The necessary conditions also include knowledge of the bodily aspect and the body's rhythms of fertility . . . Knowledge must then lead to education in self-control. Hence the absolute necessity for the virtue of chastity and for permanent education in it. In the Christian view, chastity by no means signifies rejection of human sexuality or lack of esteem for it. Rather it signifies spiritual energy capable of defending love from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness, and able to advance it toward its full realization. (F.C., 33)
- In each of the domains where you come up against obstacles--in love and its expressions, in its reluctances and renewal, in the difficult problems of the regulation of births--in order to arrive at conjugal relations which are "*controlled and respectful of the ends of the matrimonial act*" (cf. John Paul II to CLER--FIDAF, 3 November, 1979) and in order to maintain always an absolute respect for human life, and even for your role in the Church and in the world, I refer you to what Paul VI said to you in his famous address in 1970: "*the progression of the couple, like all human life, has stages, and the difficult and painful phases . . . have their place as well. But it is necessary to say this clearly: never should fear or anguish invade souls of good will, for is the Gospel not good news for all families, and a message which, even if is demanding, is nonetheless deeply liberating?*" (John Paul II to Teams of Our Lady, September 23, 1982; reference to Paul VI, to Teams of Our Lady, May 4, 1970)

6) In attempting to space births or limit the size of the family, couples should reach mutual decisions, based on their responsibilities to God, themselves, their existing families and the society of which they are a part. Couples should use only those means of family planning that preserve the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of sexual intercourse, that is, the natural methods of family planning.

- Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfill their task with human and Christian responsibility, and, with docile reverence toward God, will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the

times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church itself. The parents themselves should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment. Thus, trusting in divine Providence and refining the spirit of sacrifice, married Christians glorify the Creator and strive toward fulfillment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit themselves of the duty to procreate. Among the couples who fulfill their God-given task in this way, those merit special mention who with a gallant heart, and with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family. (G.S., 50)

- In this perspective the Second Vatican Council clearly affirmed that "*when there is a question of harmonizing conjugal love with the responsible transmission of life, the moral aspect of any procedure does not depend solely on sincere intentions or on an evaluation of motives. It must be determined by objective standards. These, based on the nature of the human person and his or her acts, preserve the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced.*" (G.S., 51)
- It is precisely by moving from "*an integral vision of man and of his vocation, not only his natural and earthly, but also his supernatural and eternal vocation,*" that Paul VI affirmed that the teaching of the church "*is founded upon the inseparable connection willed by God and unable to be broken by man on his own initiative between the two meanings of the conjugal act; the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning.*" And he concluded by re-emphasizing that there must be excluded as intrinsically immoral "*every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, or in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes, whether as an end or as a means to render procreation impossible.*" (F.C., 32; See H.V., 7, 12, 14, for quotes from Paul VI)

7) Natural family planning is at the service of the family. The natural methods are not just another method of birth control, but are based on the Church's total vision of the dignity of the human person and his or her acts, and of marriage--"*the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love.*" (H.V., 8)

- It is only in this broad context of God's design for the family and for the creation of new life that one can consider the more specific question of the regulation of births. The wisdom of the Creator has enriched human sexuality with great values and a special dignity (cf. G.S., 49). The vocation of Christian couples is to realize these values in their lives.

Perhaps the most urgent need today is to develop an authentic philosophy of life and of the transmission of life, considered precisely as "*pro-creation*", that is, as discovering and collaborating with the design of God the Creator.

The design of the Creator has provided the human organism with structures and functions to assist couples in arriving at responsible parenthood. "*In fact, as experience bears witness, not every conjugal act is followed by new life. God has wisely disposed natural laws and rhythms of fecundity which, of themselves, cause a separation in the succession of births*" (H.V., 11).

Seen in this profound context of God's design for marriage and of the vocation to married life, your task will never be reduced to a question of presenting one or other biological method, much less to any watering down of the challenging call of the infinite God. Rather your task is, in view of the situation of each couple, to see which method or combination of methods best helps them to respond as they ought to the demands of God's call. (John Paul II to Congress for the Family of Europe and Africa, January 15, 1981)

8) Choice of the natural methods preserves "*the difference, both anthropological and moral*" between contraception and the natural fertility cycle. The choice of natural family planning "*involves accepting the cycle of the person, that is, the woman, and thereby accepting dialogue, reciprocal respect, shared responsibility and self-control*" (F.C., 32)

- The Church is coherent with herself when she considers recourse to the infecund periods to be licit, while at the same time condemning, as being always illicit, the use of means directly contrary to fecundation, even if such use is inspired by reasons which may appear honest and serious. In reality, there are essential differences between the two cases; in the former, the married couple make legitimate use of a natural disposition; in the latter, they impede the development of natural processes. It is true that, in the one and the other case, the married couple are concordant in the positive will of avoiding children for plausible reasons, seeking the certainty that offspring will not arrive; but it is also true that only in the former case are they able to renounce the use of marriage in the fecund periods when, for

just motives, procreation is not desirable, while making use of it during infecund periods to manifest their affection and to safeguard their mutual fidelity. By so doing, they give proof of a truly and integrally honest love. (H.V., 16)

- To accept the cycle and to enter into dialogue means to recognize both the spiritual and corporal character of conjugal communion and to live personal love with its requirement of fidelity. In this context the couple comes to experience how conjugal communion is enriched with those values of tenderness and affection which constitute the inner soul of human sexuality in its physical dimension also. In this way sexuality is respected and promoted in its truly and fully human dimension and is never "*used*" as an "*object*" that, by breaking the personal unity of soul and body, strikes at God's creation itself at the level of the deepest interaction of nature and person. (F.C., 32)

9) The successful practice of natural family planning involves the virtues of love and continence. It is based on a mutual commitment and the awareness that through marital union the spouses "*experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day*" (G.S., 48). This growth is also based on the influence of grace, fidelity to God's law and the teaching and pastoral care of the Church.

- Responsible parenthood must also be envisaged in this perspective. On this plane, the spouses, the partners, may meet with a certain number of problems which cannot be solved without deep love, a love which comprises also an effort of continence. These two virtues, love and continence, appeal to a common decision of the spouses and to their will to submit to the doctrine of faith, to the teaching of the Church.

... For, what is at stake is the good of families and societies in their legitimate concern to harmonize human fertility with their possibilities, and, provided that an appeal is always made to the virtues of love and continence, it is a question of the progress of human self-mastery in conformity with the Creator's plan. (John Paul II to CLER and FIDAF, November 8, 1979)

10) Married couples should be helped to recognize the teaching of *Humanae vitae* as the norm for their sexuality, and to understand this norm not as some possible future ideal, but as a call of Christ to overcome difficulties, to grow in conjugal love and to attain deeper union with Christ, the source of their sanctification.

- It is part of the Church's pedagogy that husbands and wives should first of all recognize clearly the teaching of *Humanae vitae* as indicating the norm for the exercise of their sexuality,

and that they should endeavor to establish the conditions necessary for observing that norm. As the Synod noted, this pedagogy embraces the whole of married life. Accordingly, the function of transmitting life must be integrated into the overall mission of Christian life as a whole, which without the cross cannot reach the resurrection. In such a context it is understandable that sacrifice cannot be removed from family life, but must in fact be wholeheartedly accepted if the love between husband and wife is to be deepened and become a source of intimate joy. (F.C., 34)

John Paul II on natural family planning.

In a series of addresses on natural family planning, John Paul II has offered the following counsel to those in the NFP movement:

1. The ecclesial community at the present time must take on the task of instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way . . . This implies a broader, more decisive and more systematic effort to make the natural methods of regulating fertility known, respected and applied. (F.C., 35)
2. The Church considers that "it is providential that diverse methods (of NFP) exist" (John Paul II, 3 July, 1982) so that couples may choose that method or combination of methods that best meet their personal needs. (See also John Paul II, 15 January, 1982)
3. It is necessary that various groups dedicated to this noble work (i.e., teaching NFP): appreciate their respective work, mutually exchange experiences and results, firmly avoiding tensions and disagreements which could threaten so important and difficult a work. (John Paul II, 3 July, 1982)

Conclusion

The Church, in emphasizing the link between marital intimacy and procreation, has rejected methods of family planning that directly frustrate procreation, and has endorsed only those methods of family planning that conform to the moral law. Christian couples must therefore develop the virtues of marital chastity and self-mastery. In pursuing virtue they must be persevering and patient with themselves. Difficulties and failures should not separate them from the sources of grace, but should motivate them ever more strongly to draw strength from prayer and the sacraments. The Church should exercise a special pastoral concern for married couples and families.

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