

AEMAET

Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie
<https://aemaet.de>, ISSN 2195-173X

Conjugal Love, Marriage and the Goods of Marriage in *Humanae Vitae**

Organic continuity of the Church's Teaching on
Marriage before and after Vatican II

Doyen Nguyen†

2018

*The manuscript includes my acknowledgment of Prof. Dr. Josef Seifert for his helpful review of my manuscript (an earlier version of the one I am submitting). The Text is available under the Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) – Publication date: 02.12.2018.

†Doyen Nguyen, M.D., S.T.D. is both a moral theologian and a physician specialized in hematopathology. A graduate of Temple University Medical School and a scholar of the Leopold Schepp Foundation, she is a lay Dominican and a Professor of Theology at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas (Angelicum) in Rome where she obtained her doctorate in moral theology, specializing in

Contents

1	Introduction	362
2	The Relationship between Conjugal Love and Marriage	366
3	The Relationship between Spousal Love, Conjugal Act, and Procreation	375
3.1	Sed Contra to the Arguments Rejecting the Teaching of <i>Humanae Vitae</i>	380
3.2	Practical and Moral Differences between Natural Family Planning and Contraception . . .	390
3.3	On the Notion of the Ends of Marriage – the Continuity in the Church’s	397
4	On the Good of the Spouses (Bonum Coniugum), the Supernatural End of Marriage	410
5	Conclusion	415

end-of-life ethics. She is the author of *The New Definitions of Death for Organ Donation: A Multidisciplinary Analysis from the Perspective of Christian Ethics* (Peter Lang, Bern, 2018).

Epost: btursiopsdnXYZcom (replace ‘XYZ’ by ‘@gmail.’) – Institution: Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1 Largo Angelicum, Rome, Italy.

Abstract

Since the time of its promulgation, *Humanae Vitae* has been the subject of contention. On the one hand, progressive Catholics reject its teaching on the inseparability of the unitive and procreative dimensions of the marital act, and support contraception instead; on the other hand, traditionalist Catholics criticize the same teaching for breaking away from the Church's teaching on marriage prior to Vatican II. The aim of this paper is twofold: to show both the soundness of the teaching of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae*, and its continuity with the teaching of both Popes Pius XI and Pius XII. To this end, the paper applies a holistic approach by examining the relationships between the various dimensions of marriage (conjugal love, the conjugal act, procreation, and the *bonum coniugum*), and between each of them and marriage itself. The analysis demonstrates that conjugal love, being analogous to the sap nourishing its tree, is the fundamental principle which animates married life, directing it towards both the natural and supernatural ends (procreation and the *bonum coniugum*, respectively, to which marriage is ordained. The growth and endurance of marriage, as well as the attainment of both of these ends necessarily entails the other two goods of marriage, namely the faithfulness of the spouses and the indissolubility of the marriage bond.

1 Introduction

At fifty years from its promulgation, the encyclical *Humanae Vitae* continues to remain a sign of contradiction, and as such, an object of harsh criticisms coming from both the left (progressive Catholics) and the right (traditionalist Catholics).¹ A seemingly novel concept or terminology which St. Pope Paul VI introduced in the encyclical, and which *synthetically* summarizes the Church's teaching on conjugal sexuality, is "the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act."² By this concept the Pope indicates that,

¹In general, the term "progressive Catholics" refers to those who want the Catholic Church to become more like liberal Protestantism, and therefore more accommodating to the cultural fashions of the secular world (the *Zeitgeist*). Progressive Catholics tend to dissent from the moral teaching of the Church, especially on issues concerning human sexuality. Examples of progressive Catholics include organizations such as the National Catholic Reporter and the Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research. At the opposite end are traditionalist Catholics who adhere to the traditional Latin Mass and the teaching of the Church prior to the Second Vatican Council. In general, traditionalist Catholics are critical or reject certain aspects of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar Church, especially those aspects which they perceive as a discontinuity from the pre-Vatican II tradition. Examples of traditionalist Catholics include such organization as the Rorate Caeli, and the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest. Ironically, the common feature between the progressives and the traditionalists is the hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture which stands in contrast to the hermeneutic of continuity and reform as taught by popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI.

²Paul VI, "*Humanae Vitae* (Encyclical Letter, 25 July 1968)" <http://www.webcitation.org/74Mt8A50G> (accessed 6/14/2014),

integral to the essence of the conjugal act is the inseparable connection between procreation and the union of the spouses – that is, the total mutual gift of husband and wife to each other, not merely at the physical or biological level, but as whole human persons made in the image of God. Based on this truth of the marital act, *Humanae Vitae* teaches that any man-made interposition seeking to separate the unitive from the procreative contradicts the natural moral order.

From the very start, the encyclical has triggered two types of negative reaction. On one side, progressive Catholics have resolutely dissented from the teaching of the encyclical, which in turn leads to the rejection of the whole of the Church's teaching on human sexuality. One of the frequent albeit erroneous claims is that the prohibition of contraception is based on biological teleology, that is, it "is based on the belief that the biological 'laws of conception' show that each and every act of sexual intercourse has procreation as their natural 'finality' and 'significance.'"³ Hand in hand with theological dissent is the altering of Catholic sexual ethics with situation ethics or proportionalist thinking.⁴ On the other side, traditionalist Catholics

no. 12.1.

³Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research, "Catholic Scholars' Statement on the Ethics of Using Contraceptives" <http://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/statement-on-contraceptives/> (accessed 08/24/2018).

⁴Historically, there was an immediate violent dissent against *Humanae Vitae* which involved all levels of the Church, from high level prelates to the lay faithful, as well as prominent academic theologians (both ordained and lay). See Xavier Rynne, "Letter from Vatican City," *The New Yorker* (1968)

blame *Humanae Vitae* for failing to affirm explicitly the hierarchy of ends, namely the primacy of the procreative as the primary end of marriage over the unitive which is conjugal love.⁵ Some traditionalists also blame Paul VI for promoting the use of fertility awareness-based methods of family planning, that is, natural family planning (NFP), which they perceive as being contrary to procreation as the primary end of marriage and, therefore, a veiled form of contraception. From the traditionalist perspective, *Humanae Vitae* has contributed to the process of moral dis-

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1968/11/02/letter-from-vatican-city-13>. Revisionist dissenting theologians promoted proportionalism which basically denies the existence of intrinsically evil acts. The efforts made during the pontificates of John Paul II and Benedict XVI have resulted in a better acceptance of *Humanae Vitae* and a curbing of proportionalist thinking. Under the current pontificate, there has been a resurgence of situation ethics seeking to undermine the teaching of both *Humanae Vitae* and *Veritatis Splendor*, however. Moreover, according to a 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center, while 83% of American Catholics who attend Mass weekly say that abortion is immoral, only “13% say contraception is morally wrong, while 45% say it is morally acceptable and 42% say it is not a moral issue.” See Pew Research Center, “Where the Public Stands on Religious Liberty Vs. Nondiscrimination“ <http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2016/09/Religious-Liberty-full-for-web.pdf> (accessed 08/25/2018), 25.

⁵See, for instance, Roberto de Mattei, “Rileggiamo *Humanae Vitae* alla luce di *Casti Connubii*” <http://www.webcitation.org/74N4iWNy3> (accessed 08/25/2018). The original Italian text reads: “*anche l’Humanae Vitae ha una responsabilità: quella di non avere affermato con altrettanta chiarezza la gerarchia dei fini, ovvero il primato del fine procreativo su quello unitivo.*”

integration within the Church.⁶

Many of the controversies concerning *Humanae Vitae* thus revolve around the relationship between conjugal love and procreation, especially with regard to the notion of primary end or hierarchy of ends. To these two aspects, one must add a third and important dimension which tends to be omitted in the moral discussion on marriage and sexuality, namely, the ‘good of the spouses’ (*bonum coniugum*). The *bonum coniugum* is also recognized as an end of marriage in both the 1983 Code of Canon Law and the Catechism.⁷ The question thus arises: what is the relationship between these three dimensions of marriage and how are they to be understood with respect to the concept of *finis*? To address this complex issue, the aim of this paper is to unpack the interrelationship between the various dimensions of marriage (love, procreation, and the good of the spouses) among themselves, and between each of them and marriage itself. The aim is thus to present a holistic understanding of marriage. In the process, this paper will also show that the teaching (both implicit and explicit) in *Humanae Vitae* is in continuity with the previous teaching of popes Pius XI (*Casti Connubii*) and Pius XII. Since *Humanae Vitae* was written to address the specific issue

⁶See *ibid.* The original Italian text reads: “*il processo di disgregazione morale interno alla Chiesa, ha tra le sue cause anche la mancanza di una chiara definizione del fine primario del matrimonio da parte dell’enciclica di Paolo VI.*”

⁷See “Code of Canon Law” <http://www.webcitation.org/74Mx5a92L> (accessed 08/26/2018), canon 1055, par. 1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2003), no. 1601.

of contraception, several aspects of the doctrine of marriage were left implicit or inchoate. To bring these to light, this paper will invoke the teaching of Wojtyła/John Paul II, as well as the writings of Hildebrand on marriage and *Humanae Vitae*.

2 The Relationship between Conjugal Love and Marriage

The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* opens with several fundamental truths, in particular: (i) that the question of human procreation is part and parcel of the vocation of the human person considered in both its horizontal (natural, earthly) and vertical (supernatural, eternal) dimensions;⁸ and (ii) that “married love . . . takes its origin from God, who is love.”⁹ God in creating man and woman, has also instituted marriage (Genesis 1-2).¹⁰ It is proper that the discussion

⁸See Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” no.7.

⁹*Ibid.*, no. 8.1. It is self-evident that, according to the natural order, conjugal love can only exist between a man and a woman, and not between individuals of the same sex, because God has created man and woman as two different manifestations of the same human nature, endowed with the capacities to complement one another. The complementary difference between man and woman is not merely a biological difference, rather it is a metaphysical difference which embraces the whole person.

¹⁰Some may argue that Genesis 1-2 does not speak about marriage, but only about a special relationship between two human beings who recognized each other in a very different way from animals. According to such a view, the notion of marriage as being instituted by God only came about later as the result of some subsequent theological

below begins with conjugal love (which Wojtyła also refers to as “betrothed love”)¹¹ since in terms of the chronological sequence during the course of the relationship between a man and a woman, love comes into existence before both marriage and procreation.

As expressed beautifully by Pope Pius XII in his 1940 Address to the Newlyweds,

“The charm exercised by human love has been for centuries the inspiring theme of admirable works of genius, in literature, in music, in the visual arts; a theme always old and always new, upon which the ages have embroidered, without

interpretation of Genesis 1-2. Such an argument does not hold, however, for two reasons. First, in Genesis 2:24, it is explicitly written: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife and they shall become one flesh.” The term “one flesh” indicates not only sexual union between the husband and wife, but also the fact that the marital relationship is akin to the kinship of blood relations. Second, and more importantly, is the explicit teaching of Christ on divorce which also recalls the teaching in Genesis 2:24. In Matthew 19:5-6, Christ said: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” The teaching in Sacred Scriptures is thus clear: God Himself instituted marriage from the very beginning.

¹¹See Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, trans., H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981), 95-100. The terms ‘betrothed love’ and ‘conjugal (spousal, wedded, marital, married) love’ can be used interchangeably because in their essence, they share identical characteristics. In terms of chronological sequence, betrothed love is that which exists before and leads up to the matrimonial event. Thereafter, it becomes wedded love.

ever exhausting it, the most elevated and poetic variations.”¹²

Furthermore, love is an essential dimension of human life because it is our human vocation, which St. Pope John Paul II has eloquently explained in the following passage:

“In calling [man] to existence through love, [God] called him at the same time for love. 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* [italics added].”¹³

The recognition that God is the point of reference, the origin of love, can help us to fathom the “true nature and nobility” of married love.¹⁴ Attesting to this inherent nobility of spousal love are the numerous passages in Sacred Scriptures in which the sacred writers used the theme of

¹²Pius XII, “‘Love,’ Address to the Newlyweds, October 23, 1940,” in *The Pope Speaks: The Teachings of Pope Pius XII*, ed. Michael Chinigo (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 21.

¹³John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio* (Apostolic Exhortation, 22 November 1981)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74MzJqj bk> (accessed 6/14/2014), no. 11.1.

¹⁴Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” no. 8.1

spousal love and marriage to describe the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and ancient Israel, and between Christ and the Church.¹⁵ Furthermore, marriage is the only natural human good which has been exalted to the rank of a sacrament of the New Covenant. Lastly, as noted by Hildebrand, “marriage has been chosen as the image of the perfect union between the soul and Christ because in marriage likewise the centre and core is love.”¹⁶

To grasp the truth that married love has its origin in God requires us to overcome the puritanical and gnostic tendency to look down at betrothed or wedded love as mere sensuality or sentimentality. Pope Paul VI explicitly stresses this point, stating:

“[Married] love is above all fully human, a compound of sense and spirit. *It is not, then, merely a question of natural instinct or emotional drive.* It is also, and above all, *an act of the free will,* whose trust is such that it is meant not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also to grow, so that husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul, and *together*

¹⁵See, for instance, Isaiah 54:5-8, 62:4-5; Hosea: 2:2, 7, 14; Jeremiah 2:2, 3:20, 31:31; Ezekiel 16:8-14, 32-34, Matthew 9:15, Mark 2:19-20, Luke 5:34-35; 2 Corinthians 11: 2; Ephesians 5:25-33; Revelation 19:7-9; and the Song of Songs. In particular, in the Song of Songs 8: 6-7, we read: “For Love is strong as Death. [...] Deep waters cannot quench love, nor rivers sweep it away. Were one to offer all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly despised.”

¹⁶Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), 3.

attain their human fulfillment [italics added].”¹⁷

The above statement of the Pope is quite synthetic. Embedded therein are several characteristics of love, including its two most fundamental traits, (i) *unionis*, to be of “one heart and one soul” and (ii) *benevolentia*, in which one seeks what is good for the other, and therefore, experiences the other’s “joys and sorrows” as if they were one’s own. Moreover, the Pope’s allusion to the spouses attaining “their human fulfillment” connotes ‘the good of the spouses,’ a concept present in both the 1983 *Code of Canon Law* and the *Catechism* which will be unpacked in this paper.

Based on the above passage in *Humanae Vitae*, it can be said that neither the gnostic and puritanical suspicion of conjugal love which sees it as nothing but veiled *eros* or “a romance which should play no role in marriage,”¹⁸ nor the contemporary exaltation of ‘sex-appeal’ or sensual desire as love which unfortunately is also common among Catholics, does justice to the nature of conjugal love. Properly understood, spousal love is a love informed by reason and imbued with virtues.¹⁹ This is why in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, conjugal love is considered as a type of ‘friendship as such,’ that is, a perfect friendship (*amicitia*), the

¹⁷Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” no. 9.2.

¹⁸Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1966), 80. Hand in hand with the downplaying of the role of love in marriage is the excessive emphasis on the observance of duties.

¹⁹This requires a certain degree of maturity on the part of the betrothed or married couple. A good marriage preparation thus plays an important role in acquiring a correct vision of love and marriage.

highest and most noble form of love between human persons and, therefore, the exemplary model of all human relationships because it is “the friendship between good men and those alike in virtue.”²⁰ In his metaphysical treatment on love, Wojtyła even places betrothed love as “something more than friendship,”²¹ seeing it as “the fullest, the most uncompromising form of love” which involves the reciprocal and radical surrendering of one’s inalienable “I” to the beloved person.²²

Being created in the image and likeness of God, man and woman are called to participate in that which God has instituted or initiated. Thus, although matrimony is a divine institution, a particular marriage only comes into existence from the free consent of each of the spouses pronounced publicly. What is then the primary motive which brings the man and woman to make the formal and public vows of matrimony, if not love itself? For where there is love, there the *intentio unionis* (the yearning for a spiritual union with the beloved) is also present.²³ The Saints and Doctors of the Church have written about this unitive dimension of love, expressing it either: (i) in rhetorical terms, “what else is love, therefore, except a kind of life which binds or

²⁰Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., C. I. Litzinger (Chicago: H. Regnery Company, 1964), Book VIII, Lecture 3, no. 1574.

²¹Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, 96.

²²See *ibid.*, 97.

²³It is beyond the scope of this paper to give a detailed presentation on *intentio unionis*. For an in-depth discussion on the topic, see Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans., John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009), 123-45.

seeks to bind some two together, namely, the lover and the beloved?”²⁴ or (ii) in Scholastic terms, “through love the lover becomes one with what is loved, which becomes the lover’s form.”²⁵ Of the different types of interpersonal human love, betrothed love or spousal love is the locus where this mutual *intentio* is at its highest degree – the mutual aspiration to a complete fusion of minds and hearts so to speak, which in turn means the sharing of a common life, the belonging to one another and thus the mutual surrendering of the self without reserve to each other.²⁶ Such *intentio unionis* and self-surrendering presuppose “a mature vision of values, and a will ready and able to commit itself in this particular way.”²⁷ Thus, matrimony emerges organically from betrothed love.²⁸ Conversely, matrimony, founded on mutual consent, is the only locus where the *intentio unionis* of spousal love can find both its valid expression and realization. In brief, “love [between a man and a woman] is the classical motive for marriage, [and]

²⁴Augustine, *The Trinity*, trans., Stephen McKenna (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963).

²⁵Thomas Aquinas, *On Love and Charity: Readings from the Commentary on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, trans., Thomas Bolin Peter A Kwasniewski, Joseph Bolin (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008).

²⁶See Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 2, 5-6; Hildebrand, *Man and Woman*, 12, 16, 45-7, 55.

²⁷Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, 97.

²⁸Even though matrimony can result from motives other than betrothed love (for instance, economic or political reasons) such an occurrence is contrary to the nature of love as well as to God’s plan for marriage.

marriage is precisely the fulfillment of this love.”²⁹

The above discussion does not mean that a marriage which has been publicly contracted for motives other than betrothed love, e.g., political or economic motives, or some personal motive on the part of one spouse, is necessarily an invalid marriage. Validity is concerned with the institutional and juridical dimensions of marriage, whereas conjugal love pertains to the personalist and existential dimensions of marriage as the lived reality of a community of life and love. Thus, a marriage can be valid even though it is brought into existence by motives which bear the flavor of utilitarianism and which are “not concerned with the other person as such.”³⁰ Nevertheless, such motives, precisely because they contradict the nature of marriage as a community of life and love between a man and a woman, cannot be deemed appropriate or worthy motives for matrimony.³¹

²⁹Hildebrand, *Man and Woman*, 80; Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae – a Sign of Contradiction; an Essay on Birth Control and Catholic Conscience* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1969), 5-6.

³⁰Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 55.

³¹*Ibid.*, 55-56. To underscore the unworthiness of utilitarian motives, especially with respect to Catholic matrimony which by nature is a sacramental marriage, Hildebrand made a parallel between entering marriage and entering a religious community. Hildebrand wrote: “Obviously it would be shameful to enter a religious community in order to be provided for the rest of one’s life, when one has not succeeded in finding any position in the world. In the same way it would be shameful to form a bond in which two persons become one by mutual love in Jesus for the sake of an exterior advantage. This does not mean that a marriage concluded for morally inadmissible motives cannot later on become a true community

Love is dynamic; it is not only the precondition of matrimony but also something which both husband and wife have the vigilant responsibility to cultivate, nurture, protect and strengthen,³² in order to realize the true nature of marriage – that of being a community of life and love. In this sense, the relationship of spousal love to marriage is analogous to that of the sap nourishing the tree to grow and bear fruit. This is why Pope Pius XI also states in *Casti Connubii*, “true and solid love is the basis of conjugal happiness.”³³ As such, conjugal love is basically the soul of marriage, as it were.³⁴ If this is so, and since betrothed love (which becomes conjugal love once the couple are married) is the most appropriate motive for the formal and public mutual consent which brings matrimony into existence, then how can it be considered an end of marriage? Put bluntly, marriage is the fulfillment of love; therefore, con-

of love which glorifies God, just as it is possible that someone who enters a religious order for unacceptable motives may become later on a good religious. But this subsequent development by no means justifies the unworthiness of the motives.”

³²In practical terms, the nurturing of married love entails that the husband and wife continue to respect and cherish one another throughout the years, and, in particular, that one does not take the other for granted, which can easily happen when one of the spouses or both become overly absorbed in their respective individual activities.

³³Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii* (Encyclical Letter, 31 December 1930)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74MzgSinW> (accessed 3/1/2012), no. 78.

³⁴Analogous to the soul animating the body, conjugal love animates married life. There are several differences, however. The soul, created by God, is immutable whereas conjugal love, originating from a man and a woman, is dynamic and can evolve (either positively or negatively) over time.

jugal love does not belong to the category of ends.

3 The Relationship between Spousal Love, Conjugal Act, and Procreation

Another important aspect of conjugal love is that, by virtue of its nature, it alone can “serve as the bridge toward the sphere of sexuality and solely make *possible* an organic union of the two” [italics original].³⁵ As stated above, it is in marriage that the *intentio unionis* of conjugal love obtains its valid fulfillment as the husband and wife becomes ‘one flesh.’³⁶ Hence, the most intimate physical expression of the fulfillment of the *intentio unionis* is the bodily union of the spouses through the marital act of sexual intercourse. In other words, the conjugal act, whereby the husband and wife give themselves to one another in a bodily way, makes manifest the reciprocal, total and irrevocable self-donation

³⁵Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 15. No other type of human love, such as the love between friends, between parents and children, or between siblings, can rightfully be an organic link to the sexual sphere. See Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 19.

³⁶The Church’s teaching that marriage is a one-flesh reality, is a truth grounded in Sacred Scriptures. In His admonition on the indissolubility of marriage, Christ said: “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” (Mark 10:6-9)

of their whole persons to one another.

The human person is the unity of body and soul and, endowed with free will and inalienable human dignity, grounded in his being made *Imago Dei*. Therefore, the conjugal act cannot be merely a neutral act to satisfy some instinctual biological need or drive because “the human body is not merely an organism of sexual reactions, but [rather] the means of expressing the entire man, the person.”³⁷ The body speaks, as it were. That which is spoken through the body in the sexual union of the husband and wife is their mutual, committed total gift of self to one another.³⁸ Thus, sexual intercourse, by virtue of its nature, is an act which manifests the marital bond between the man and woman at the deeper levels of heart, mind and soul. Indeed, “the souls of [the husband and wife] are joined more directly and more intimately than are their bodies, and that not by any passing affection [. . . ,] but by a deliberate and firm act of the will.”³⁹ Because the nature of the sexual union has its basis both in the nature of the human person and the understanding of marriage as a one-flesh reality, it is an act imbued with moral-spiritual significance. This is why,

³⁷John Paul II, *Reflections on Humanae Vitae: Conjugal Morality and Spirituality* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1984), 30.

³⁸John Paul II gave a series of catechesis on the spousal meaning of the body and ‘language of the body.’ For further details, see John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans., Michael Waldstein (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006), 178-91, 531-4.

³⁹Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii*”, no. 7. This is why sexual activity which occurs outside the context of matrimony does violence to the nature of conjugal love and therefore, contradicts the natural moral order.

where sexual intercourse is prescinded from the hermeneutics of conjugal and mutual total self-donation, the language of the body becomes a sexual lie, which in turn harms the moral-spiritual good of the persons involved. Such a lie becomes apparent in two settings: (i) sexual activity outside the context of matrimony in which the full commitment (manifested by the objective marital bond) between the man and woman is lacking, and (ii) sexual activity with a contraceptive mentality, which implies the withholding of one's fertility to the other or the refusal to receive the gift of fertility from the other.

The sexual act, when it occurs during the fertile days of the woman's cycle, brings about pregnancy and thus, the birth of a child. The same intimate bodily union, which manifests in physical terms the fulfillment of the *intentio unionis* of conjugal love, is also the act which, at the propitious time, renders procreation possible. That the marital act is inherently connected to both married love and procreation is thus a self-evident objective reality. The same truth is expounded in *Humanae Vitae* in the following passage:

“This particular doctrine [...] is based on the *inseparable connection*, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between *the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act*. The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life—and this

as a result of *laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman*. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called [*italics added*].⁴⁰

On the basis of the fundamental truth of the conjugal act, Paul VI reaffirms the teaching of both Popes Pius XI and Pius XII,⁴¹ namely: (i) the prohibition of contraception, that is, “any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation,”⁴² and (ii) the permission of NFP if “there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances.”⁴³ The significance of *Humanae Vitae* extends beyond the problem of contraception and all of its numerous harmful consequences, however.⁴⁴ Its foundational teaching on the intrinsic unity between the procreative and the unitive also

⁴⁰Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*”, no. 12.

⁴¹See Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii*”, nos. 54, 56; Pius XII, “Address to Midwives on the Nature of Their Profession (*Vegliare con sollecitudine*), 29 October 1951”, Papal Encyclicals Online <http://www.webcitation.org/74MzopV0s> (accessed 08/26/2018); Pius XII, “Nell’ordine della natura (Ai Partecipanti al Convegno del Fronte della Famiglia, 27 Novembre 1951)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74N02y16z> (accessed 08/26/2018).

⁴²Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*”, no. 14.2.

⁴³*Ibid.*, no. 16.2.

⁴⁴See *ibid.*, no. 17. *Humanae Vitae* has been recognized to be insightful and prophetic. See, for in-

has a bearing on the artificial methods for the treatment of infertility which do violence to this unity. For this reason, they too, just like contraception, contradict the natural moral order.

Despite the clarity of its teaching, *Humanae Vitae* has suffered waves of criticisms from two opposite sides. The larger and more vocal group (the progressive Catholics) rejects the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*, basically claiming that: (i) the prohibition of contraception is based on biological laws, and (ii) the periodic abstinence required in NFP is unacceptable because it imposes undue hardship on married couples, and poses a danger to the harmony of conjugal love. An additional argument invoked for the permission of contraception is the principle of totality, based upon which it is claimed that “the procreative finality applies to the totality of married life rather than each single act.”⁴⁵ The traditionalist side, on the other hand, laments that Paul VI, by not clarifying the hierarchy of the ends of marriage, that is, the hierarchy between conjugal love and procreation, basically breaks away from the traditional

stance, Anthony Fisher, “That Most Prophetic Letter”, First Things <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/07/that-most-prophetic-letter> (accessed 07/26/2018). The harmful consequences warned by Paul VI have come to pass during the last 50 years, all of which bespeak a lowering of moral standards, ranging from marital infidelity to an increase in sexual promiscuity, divorce rate, abortion, disrespect and exploitation of women, and, in addition, women’s health problems, among others. For a detailed account of the medical, social and legal consequences of contraception, see Janet E. Smith et al., “Self-Gift: The Heart of *Humanae Vitae*,” *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (2016): 464-71.

⁴⁵Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” no. 3.

teaching of the Church that the primary end of marriage is procreation. Furthermore, many Catholics, in particular, the traditionalists, could not see the difference between NFP and contraception.

3.1 Sed Contra to the Arguments Rejecting the Teaching of *Humanae Vitae*

As shown in the discussion thus far, the claim that *Humanae Vitae* rests on biological teleology is unfounded. It cannot be stressed enough that, the Church's teaching on both marriage and the conjugal act is grounded not in biological teleology but, first and foremost, on her conception of marriage as a 'one-flesh reality,'⁴⁶ as well as on Christian anthropology (itself the foundation of Christian ethics as taught by the Church) which is based on Thomistic metaphysics. Thus, the Church holds that the human person is the unity of body and soul, an intelligent being made in the image of God and endowed with free will, and in whom God has inscribed His law which, from the human perspective, is referred to as the natural law by which man may recognize what is good and what is evil.⁴⁷

⁴⁶See footnote 36.

⁴⁷It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the natural law. For details, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans., Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), I-II, q. 91, a. 2; q. 94; Servais Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 400-456.

This holistic teaching of the Church on the human person stands in sharp contrast with scientific determinism according to which “every event, including human action, is causally necessitated by prior event, [such] that no person could have acted otherwise.”⁴⁸ Scientific determinism thus claims that all events, both physical and mental, can be explained by scientific law. As such, it gives no room for free agency and consequently, it also eliminates moral responsibility. The disastrous moral and social implications of such a worldview are self-evident: in what way can criminals be held responsible for their actions? A deterministic worldview also renders meaningless such notions as human dignity and human rights. However powerful science might be, it does have limitations. It ceases to be applicable when the question at hand involves “phenomena that . . . cannot be reduced to quantitative analysis. Such common terms as ‘meaning,’ ‘beauty’ and ‘justice’ fall into this non-quantifiable category.”⁴⁹ Furthermore, real life experience has also shown that, despite the many constraints on hu-

⁴⁸J. F. Johnston, Jr., “Human Freedom and the Limitations of Scientific Determinism,” *Modern Age* 50, no. 4 (2008): 312-320, 312. In general, scientific determinism is part and parcel of a physicalist worldview in which the human person is reduced to his mind, or to his brain with its complex neural circuitry, or even more radically, to his molecular genetic constituents. In the deterministic vision, human behavior is caused by neuronal activity and, similarly, the diversity in human behavior is caused by the complex neural circuitry which produces a semblance of free-will (a “pseudo-freedom”). See Michael Shermer, “The Demon of Determinism,” *Science* 300, no. 5616 (2003): 56-57.

⁴⁹Johnston, Jr., “Human freedom and the limitations of Scientific Determinism,” 313.

man freedom, there remains in the depth of the human person a “core” by which he or she can choose the higher alternative. The story of Saint Thomas More is a paradigmatic example of such a “core” which, in the moral sphere, is referred to as free will.

Since the time of the Ancients, it has been recognized that moral action for which a person may incur blame or praise presupposes human freedom, that is, free will.⁵⁰ The Church’s teaching on free will follows that of St. Thomas Aquinas. As stated by Pinckaers:

“For St. Thomas free will [*libero arbitrio*] was rooted in the two spiritual faculties of intellect and will, which make the human person an image of God possessing freedom of action, particularly in regard to the natural inclination toward happiness and love and in the inclination to truth. It opened these faculties to the measure of divine infinity, beyond any created object and any created love. Thus the human person was free and in control of his actions, not in spite of, but because of this natural inclination to happiness and truth. [...] This concept of freedom was based on the harmonious interplay of mind and will. I name it freedom for excellence or perfection, since it tends spontaneously to the good and true, to what is of highest quality in view of human perfection.”⁵¹

⁵⁰See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Christopher J. Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), Book III.

⁵¹Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 223. It is not the

Genuine human perfection is understood as the state of beatitude which is attained when man reaches his true final end to which he is ordained. That final end is none other than the ultimate and only true good, that is, God Himself. Hence, through the use of his free will to determine the choice of his human acts, a person may either progress toward the true final end or stray from the path.⁵² The good or evil of a human act thus depends on whether or not it is ordered to the final end.

With this understanding of the importance of human acts in Christian moral life, it becomes clear why the argument of the principle of totality, that as long as the spouses are fundamentally open to the gift of life, then a contraceptive marital act should be permissible,⁵³ does not apply to the realm of human sexuality. This is because “our chosen actions do not merely bring about effects external

place for this paper to provide an in-depth discussion on free-will, that is, the exercise of human freedom. Suffice it to say that the proper understanding and exercise of free will are inherently connected to proper appreciation of the exigences of truth in regard to the good. Thus the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1731, teaches: “Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one’s own responsibility. By free will one shapes one’s own life. Human freedom is a force for growth and maturity in truth and goodness; it attains its perfection when directed toward God, our beatitude.”

⁵²See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, qq. 1-5 (Treatise on the last end).

⁵³Note that this type of argument has a pattern reminiscent to that of the “fundamental option,” a moral theory condemned by *Veritatis Splendor*. See John Paul II, “*Veritatis Splendor* (Encyclical Letter, 6 August 1993)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74N09Tiq1> (accessed 06/30/2008), nos. 65-68.

to us, they also form our dispositions and character.”⁵⁴ As shown in the next section (2.2), contraception is an intrinsically immoral act. As such, it hinders the moral development and human flourishing of the persons engaged in contraceptive sexual activity.

Of importance is the distinction between the natural law and the laws of nature; the latter group refers to the physical and biological laws of nature, such as the law of gravity, or the fact that human pregnancy is of nine months duration. These occurrences are mere physical or biological factual data. Natural law, on the other hand, is rooted in the above-described essence of the human person; it is man’s “participation in God’s eternal law.”⁵⁵ As such, natural law is inherently connected with moral and spiritual values. To act in conformity to the natural law is to respect the natural order established by God. God has chosen to entrust the generation of a new human life (for which a human soul must be directly created by God) to the same human act which intimately expresses the deep spiritual union between the spouses. To claim that the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* is based on biological laws amounts to reducing the sexual union to a mere factual biological datum, devoid of any deep meaning and value. Implicitly, such a claim also devalues the human person and treats him as if he were only a biological being and nothing more. That the sexual activity is not something purely biological is explained succinctly by John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio*

⁵⁴Luke Gormally, “Contraception and Catholic Sexual Ethics,” (1997), 6 <http://www.webcitation.org/74N0RocQ8>.

⁵⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

as follows:

“[The sexual act] 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.* The total physical self-giving would be a lie if it were not the sign and fruit of a total personal self-giving, in which the whole person, including the temporal dimension, is present: if the person were to withhold something or reserve the possibility of deciding otherwise in the future, by this very fact he or she would not be giving totally. *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 [italics added].”⁵⁶

⁵⁶John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” nos. 11.4-11.5. That the sexual act involves the whole human person is also a fact confirmed by modern psychology studies, given that sex is a delicate, intimate, and emotionally charged experience. Intimate romantic relationships are recognized to be beneficial to the overall physical and mental well-being of the individuals involved (see Claire M. Kamp Dush and Paul R. Amato, “Consequences of Relationship Status and Quality for

In the above passage, an important point stressed by John Paul II is not merely the fact that the sexual act involves the whole human person, but rather that such an act only attains its genuine and full human value and meaning when (i) it is part and parcel of a lifetime commitment between the husband and wife to one another and (ii) it is open to the generation of new life. In our rather hypersexualized Western society, the awareness that the sexual act involves the human person is not necessarily accompanied by an equally commensurate sense of commitment or an openness to new life.

Dissenters to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* also claim that periodic sexual abstinence imperils the harmony of conjugal love and therefore, the stability of marriage. Such a claim is unfounded as it necessarily presumes that sexual activity is the source of conjugal love, or that there could

Subjective Well-Being,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 22, no. 5 (2005): 607–627). However, psychological and social studies have also revealed a rising rate of divorce, a decline in marriage, and a rising trend in cohabitation. Cohabitation, by virtue of its nature, bespeaks the withholding of a full commitment. In addition, social studies have shown a steady decline in birth rates. It transpires from such data, that the fact that the sexual act involves the whole human person is not in itself a sufficient element to warrant the stability or the duration of a man-woman relationship, nor does it necessarily an openness to life. What is required instead is the commitment of the will of the man and woman (as husband and wife). Such a commitment is strengthened by a living faith in God. This may be a factor to explain why the divorce rate among Catholics (28%) is lower compared to those with no religious affiliation (40%). See Wayne Laugesen, “Divorce Statistics Indicate Catholic Couples Are Less Likely to Break Up,” *National Catholic Register* <http://www.webcitation.org/74N0WX4YH> (accessed 11/24/2018).

be no other way for the spouses to express their mutual love for one another except through sexual acts.⁵⁷ Such a claim does not reflect reality, however. As shown in the previous section, love is the classical motive which brings about marriage and with it, the sexual union of the spouses.⁵⁸ Hence, conjugal love, and in particular, its *intentio unionis*, is the source of the sexual union and not vice versa. Real life data have also shown that an abundance of sexual activity does not necessarily hold couples together.⁵⁹ As pointed out by Wojtyła in his 1969 letter to Paul VI, that which threatens the stability of marriage is not sexual continence, but rather, the lack of psycho-sexual and moral maturity on the part of one or both of the spouses, resulting in a distorted understanding of sexual continence.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Paolo VI,” in *Karol Wojtyła e Humanae Vitae: Il contributo dell’Arcivescovo di Cracovia e del gruppo di teologi polacchi all’enciclica di Paolo VI*, ed. Pawel Galuszka (Siena: Cantagalli, 2017), 533. Here, Wojtyła wrote: “*Accade spesso che si concepisca detta armonia in modo che soltanto l’unione sessuale degli sposi ne costituisca la fonte, come se non vi fosse altre possibilità per l’amore di esprimersi e di svilupparsi, se non attraverso gli atti sessuali.*”

⁵⁸In this regard, Hildebrand wrote: “the physical union [...] involves the express and solemn surrender by which one enters into so ultimate and intimate a union with the other person, it presupposes not only the mere existence of conjugal love but also the solemn conclusion of marriage in which one gives oneself freely and irrevocably to the beloved for the entire lifetime. See Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 26.

⁵⁹We see this especially among couples engaged in pre-marital sex or trial marriages. Sexual activity which does not flow from genuine betrothed or spousal love and marital commitment has no power in itself to ensure the stability of the relationship between the man and woman.

⁶⁰See Wojtyła, “Lettera al Papa Paolo VI,” 533. Here, Wojtyła

Certainly, marital continence entails some degree of self-denial and sacrifice, especially if the spouses have made their conjugal act into a habit. Sacrifice or renunciation for the good of the beloved is the *sine qua non* hallmark of love,⁶¹ which contributes to the endurance and growth of love, however. Hence, continence is in no way inimical to spousal love; rather, it is an occasion for developing other ways of expressing love. Here, it is worthwhile to indicate that the Church's teaching about continence is not restricted to Catholic faithful alone. Rather, just as marriage takes place both among believers and non-believers, so also is the applicability of the virtue of continence. Married couples irrespective of their creed, are encouraged to practice continence because: (i) it is an exercise of mutual respect and patience for one another, and (ii) it prepares the couple for those situations in which one of the spouses, due to accident or illness, can no longer engage himself or herself in the marital act.

Furthermore, there are at least three other benefits to periodic abstinence. First, it will help the spouses to develop a better awareness of the spiritual and religious di-

wrote: "*Ciò che, in realtà, minaccia la comunità matrimoniale, non è certamente una continenza matura e consapevole (ad esempio la continenza periodica), quanto piuttosto l'assenza di maturità psico-sessuale e morale, che rende questa continenza impossibile. Tale mancanza di maturità fa sì che gli sposi non contemplino la continenza come un'espressione d'amore nei confronti dei coniugue (soprattutto in alcune circostanze) e come una rinuncia e un sacrificio, cosa che rappresenta una condizione sine qua non dell'amore, della sua durata e della sua crescita.*"

⁶¹The paradigmatic exemplar of sacrificial spousal love is Christ who laid down His life for His Bride, the Church.

mensions of marriage, namely, that marriage is a divine institution integral to God's creative and salvific plan, and a mission which the spouses receive directly from God.⁶² Second, it will also help the spouses to be conscious of the deep meaning of the conjugal act, and not to treat it "merely as a means of sexual satisfaction."⁶³ Third, because abstinence entails self-restraint and sacrifice, it fosters moral growth, especially with regard to temperance, chastity, and self-possession. Through the synergistic effect of these benefits, the spouses grow into greater intimacy with one another.

For Catholic spouses in particular, the difficulty presented by periodic abstinence is a reason to diligently avail themselves of the many sources of divine grace such as the sacraments and fervent prayers. It is by cooperating with divine grace and clinging to Christ that the burden of the difficulties in married life, including sexual abstinence when necessary, can become easy and light (cf. Matthew 11:30). Here, it would be worthwhile to recall the words St. Augustine, which Pope Pius XII reiterated in his 1951 Address to the Italian Association of Catholic Midwives (*"Vegliare con sollecitudine"*): "God does not command what is impossible, but when He commands, He warns you to do what you can and to ask His aid for what is beyond

⁶²See Paul VI, *"Humanae Vitae,"* no. 7; Wojtyła, "Lettera al Papa Paolo VI," 531-2. Here, Wojtyła wrote: "*occorre ricordare il carattere religioso di ogni contratto di matrimonio. Si tratta di un'istituzione divina e che occupa, nel disegno creatore e salvifico di Dio, un posto molto preciso. [...] Il matrimonio è una vocazione, ovvero una missione che le persone in questione ricevono direttamente da Dio.*"

⁶³See Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 54.

your powers, and He gives His help to make that possible for you.”⁶⁴

3.2 Practical and Moral Differences between Natural Family Planning and Contraception

In this paper, the term “contraception” is used in the strict sense of the term, to refer to those artificial methods which seek to impede the coming together of the sperm and the ovum, thereby preventing the conception of the zygote.⁶⁵ Much has been written on the differences between NFP and contraception.⁶⁶ Yet, ironically, NFP is still being mistaken as just a method of contraception by not a few people (including traditionalist Catholics), in particular those who, for their source of knowledge, rely upon on-line articles of unknown authorship.⁶⁷ It is true that both

⁶⁴Pius XII, “*Vegliare con sollecitudine*,” Section III. See also Augustine, “De Natura et Gratia Liber Unus” <http://www.webcitation.org/74MxXI1Im> (accessed 08/24/2018). The original Latin text reads: “*Non igitur Deus impossibile iubet, sed iubendo admonet et facere quod possis et petere quod non possis.*”

⁶⁵The two most common and expedite methods for contraception are the birth control pill (anovulants) and the condom.

⁶⁶See, for instance, Smith et al., “Self-Gift: The Heart of Humanae Vitae,” 460-2; Brian Mullady and Lester Ruppertsberger, “The Moral Nature and Practice of Natural Family Planning Versus Contraception,” *The Linacre Quarterly* 80, no. 3 (2013); Human Life International, “Contraception Vs. NFP – HLI Educational Series” <http://www.webcitation.org/74MxcUqh8> (accessed 08/22/2018).

⁶⁷The author has personally encountered people who, when arguing that NFP is no different from contraception, have based their argu-

NFP and contraception revolve around the issue of procreation and are concerned with the same question: how not to become pregnant as the result of a sexual act. The similarity ends here, however. In addition to the key moral difference between NFP and contraception to be discussed further below, there are also practical differences which sharply separate the two as night and day.

Depending on when the marital act occurs during the cycle of the woman, it may or may not result in a child. Even when it does not, the sexual act in itself remains open to life so long as the couple choose not to “close” it through the use of an artificial means. NFP methods are based on the identification of the narrow fertile window during the monthly cycle of the woman. This knowledge is useful for two purposes: (i) to facilitate conception by having marital relations during the fertile time,⁶⁸ or (ii) to avoid (because of legitimately serious reasons) conception by abstaining from marital relations during the fertile days. Thus, on the practical order, the very fact that NFP can be used to facilitate conception is itself the proof that it

ments on Wikipedia or online blogs as their source of knowledge. When an online article is not dated, when its author is unknown, and when it has not undergone a peer-review process, then to what extent can it be trusted in terms of accuracy and truth? The reader, unless he or she is an expert on the topic in question, cannot judge adequately if the information provided in such articles is correct or not. On the other hand, if the reader is already an expert, then would he or she need to have recourse to such articles as a source to support his or her argument?

⁶⁸See Mercedes Arzú Wilson, “Natural, Scientific, and Highly Effective Treatment for Infertility,” *The Catholic Social Science Review* 23, (2018): 265-312.

is not anti-life. It is thus *not* a method of contraception precisely because the openness to life is a built-in feature of NFP. NFP methods only require a non-action (that is, periodic abstinence) on the part of the spouses. In other words, NFP methods do not seek to actively prevent a pregnancy which may result from the conjugal act, but only to *avoid* it by doing what is allowed. It is allowed for the married couple to engage in marital relations or to abstain at any time. Therefore, it is allowed for them to have relations during the infertile days and to observe sexual abstinence during the fertile window. Birth control, in contrast, involves a conscious action, one which that seeks to actively *prevent* a pregnancy, by using an artificial thing to impede or destroy fertility.

To grasp the moral differences between NFP and contraception requires first an understanding of the meaning of the term ‘procreation.’ The term ‘procreation’ itself indicates the cooperation and participation of the spouses in God’s creative work, since man, as a creature, cannot create life. In the generation of a new human being, the father and mother contribute the material elements, that is, sperm and egg respectively, but God is the One Who creates the human soul to be the principle of life of the body and make the human body what it is. Thus, creation is God’s exclusive prerogative in which He has given man the dignity to participate. The parents’ cooperation with God’s work does not stop at the birth of their children but continues with their upbringing, of which the most important aspect is the moral-spiritual formation necessary for the flourishing of their children as human persons.

Love, by virtue of its nature, diffuses and communicates

its goodness. God Who is Love and Goodness creates out of the superabundance of His love. The sexual union of the spouses, as stated earlier, is the most intimate expression of their love union. Thus, the new human life born out of that sexual union is both a fruit of the love of the spouses for each other, and a gift of life and love from God. The term 'birth control,' which contraception is, ignores this deep and higher meaning of procreation, and treats it as if it were a mere biological occurrence which can be manipulated, prevented, or interrupted by human technology.

On the basis of this aforementioned understanding of the nature of procreation, the immoral character of contraception becomes self-evident. Since creation is an exclusive divine right, contraception effectively denies this right. The act itself bespeaks the deliberate human will to oppose what God has ordered for nature; it is thus a disordered act. The term 'birth control' itself reflects this fact, since one can only control that which one has ownership of, along with the prerogative to control and manipulate it. However, procreation does not belong to such a category since man is neither the author of life nor the owner of his own body. Thus, in seeking to prevent the possibility of a human life to come into existence by means of contraception, man appropriates to himself the divine prerogative. Put simply, contraception amounts to an act which declares man's complete autonomy from God and, as such, it is an expression of rebellion against God.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the contraceptive sexual act renders the language of the body a lie, since the couple engage in the very act which signifies the total mutual self-donation to one another, yet at the same time a part of

themselves, the fertility dimension, is made unavailable (or not given) by way of an artificial means (whether chemical, surgical, or mechanical).⁶⁹ Even if the spouses are not fully conscious of it, the lie of the language of the body introduces an element of utilitarianism whereby they use one another for bodily self-gratification. In so doing, they do violence to their own human dignity. The dignity of the human person precludes any human person “to be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end [because] a person is an entity of a sort to which the only proper and adequate way to relate is love.”⁷⁰

As noted earlier, NFP, when undertaken for legitimately serious reasons, “conforms to the order which the Creator himself has placed in the woman’s cycle.”⁷¹ It rests on an attitude of cooperation – the spouses cooperating with each other and with God’s providence – instead of an attitude of control and absolute autonomy from God. Moreover, as discussed in section 2.1, because NFP entails periodic abstinence, it fosters the growth of conjugal love, and consequently the stability and permanency of marriage.⁷² In

⁶⁹See the block quote corresponding to footnote 56. As pointed out by Smith, in the contraceptive sexual act, the couple “give and refuse to give at the same time.” This is analogous to bulimia, in which the individuals “want the pleasure of eating but not the consequences” of gaining weight. See Smith et al., “Self-Gift: The Heart of Humanae Vitae,” 461.

⁷⁰Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Love and Responsibility*, 41.

⁷¹Mullady and Ruppertsberger, “The Moral Nature and Practice of Natural Family Planning Versus Contraception,” 208.

⁷²See Richard J. Fehring, “The Influence of Contraception, Abortion, and Natural Family Planning on Divorce Rates as Found in the 2006-2010 National Survey of Family Growth,” *The Linacre*

summary, the difference between NFP and birth control comes down to the fundamental divergence between cooperation and control.

It is true that NFP can be abused to become akin to birth control. This happens when NFP is undertaken with a contraceptive mentality. In birth control, the action or behavior *per se* is already intrinsically disordered; hence to choose it “necessarily entails a disorder of the will, that is, a moral evil.”⁷³ To undertake NFP with a contraceptive intention is likewise immoral because a bad intention can render evil that which in and of itself is good.⁷⁴ However, since God alone can judge human intentions, it is not possible for a third party human observer to distinguish, among the couples who practice NFP, which couple abuses NFP and which couple undertakes it for the right reason. As taught by Pius XII:

“Serious reasons, often put forward on medical, eugenic, economic and social grounds, can exempt from that obligatory service [the marital act] even for a considerable period of time, even for the entire duration of the marriage. It follows from this that the use of the infertile periods can be lawful from the moral point of view and, in the circumstances which have been

Quarterly 82, no. 3 (2015): 273-282. In a large data set of 5530 couples of reproductive age, a lower divorce rate (9.6%) was observed among women who had ever used NFP, compared to 14.4% among those who used contraception, sterilization, or abortion.

⁷³See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1755.

⁷⁴See *ibid.*, no. 1753.

mentioned, it is indeed lawful. If, however, in the light of a reasonable and fair judgment, there are no such serious personal reasons, or reasons deriving from external circumstances, then the habitual intention to avoid the fruitfulness of the union, while at the same time continuing fully to satisfy sensual intent, can only arise from a false appreciation of life and from motives that run counter to true standards of moral conduct.”⁷⁵

It is clear from the above passage that the correct practice of NFP presupposes moral maturity and, in particular, a proper understanding of what constitutes serious reasons to postpone pregnancy. This, in turn, entails good marriage preparation and moral formation which begin in the home, with the parents as primary educators, long before the last and immediate stage of marriage preparation before the wedding. In other words, NFP needs to be “taught and presented in a suitable anthropological and ethical context.”⁷⁶ Otherwise, NFP can be easily misused or abused for the wrong reasons. The fault lies not with NFP but with the moral immaturity of the couple, however.

The following words of John Paul II sum up the moral goodness of NFP:

“Using the natural methods requires and strengthens the harmony of the married couple, it helps and

⁷⁵Pius XII, “*Vegliare con sollecitudine*,” Section III.

⁷⁶John Paul II, “Address to Teachers of Natural Family Planning (7 December 1996)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74N1Z1J1f>. (accessed 09/11/2018).

confirms the rediscovery of the marvelous gift of parenthood; it involves respect for nature and demands the responsibility of the individuals. According to many authoritative opinions, they also foster more completely that human ecology which is the harmony between the demands of nature and personal behavior.”⁷⁷

3.3 On the Notion of the Ends of Marriage – the Continuity in the Church’s

A frequent criticism coming from traditionalist Catholics is that since the time of the Second Vatican Council and of *Humanae Vitae*, the Church’s teaching on marriage, including John Paul II’s Theology of the Body, as well as the Catechism, has been “centered almost exclusively on spousal love” instead of the hierarchy of ends and the primacy of procreation in marriage. Such emphasis has in turn, according to the criticism, resulted in widespread contraception (along with its accompanying consequences of declining sexual morality) among Catholics.⁷⁸ Thus, the question at stake is this: has the ‘new’ (after the Council) departed from the ‘old’ (before the Council) or is it an or-

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸See, for instance, the interview of Roberto de Mattei, by Diane Montagna, “*Humanae Vitae* Was Courageous, but Not Prophetic: Catholic Historian,” *Lifesite News* <https://www.lifesitenews.com/news/humanae-vitae-was-courageous-but-not-prophetic-catholic-historian> (accessed 08/26/2018).

ganic development from the latter and thus, in continuity with it?

Since the time of Augustine, the Church's teaching on marriage has been focused quasi-exclusively on the ontological and institutional character of matrimony. Marriage, however, is not just a natural institution established by God, it is also a reality lived and experienced on a daily basis by men and women who have chosen the marriage vocation. In that sense, a philosophical-theological discourse on marriage, if it is to be complete in order to help men and women to live their lay Christian spirituality in ways that fit their married state of life,⁷⁹ must also include reflections on the lived reality of matrimony. Put differently, what had been lacking in the Church's teaching on marriage in the past, was the important personalist and existentialist dimension of marriage, namely, that marriage (as well as the family) is a community of life and love between persons. One should not think, however, that the Church was unaware of this dimension of love in marriage, given that Sacred Scriptures speak of God's love for His people (in ancient Israel) and Christ's love for the Church in terms of spousal love.⁸⁰ Rather, a more plausible reason was that the philosophical tools (in particular, realist phe-

⁷⁹In centuries past, not much was written about spirituality for the lay faithful according to their state of life. The only exception was the "The Introduction to a Devout Life" by St. Francis de Sales who wrote it for "those who are living in towns, in the conjugal state, at court." See Benedict XVI, "St. Francis De Sales (General Audience, 2 March 2011)" <http://www.webcitation.org/74N2ki5eN> (accessed 08/30/2018).

⁸⁰See footnote 15.

nomenclology) to speak of marriage in personalist terms did not appear until the recent centuries.⁸¹ In this regard, the works of thinkers such as Hildebrand and Wojtyła, have contributed to the enrichment of the Church's anthropology and her teaching on marriage. Thus, with a holistic understanding that matrimony is both a natural institution and a lived reality, one can come appreciate, as shown below, the presence of an organic continuity in the Church's teaching on marriage before and after the Second Vatican Council.

In *Casti Connubii*, Pope Pius XI's teaching on marriage essentially reiterates that of St. Augustine, namely that: (i) the three blessings (*bona*) of matrimony include "offspring, conjugal faith and the sacrament," on account of which marriage is itself a blessing,⁸² and (ii) "among the

⁸¹One of the earliest figures to speak about marriage in personalistic terms was Antonio Rosmini, whose moral philosophy has its centrality in the human person, defined as "a substantial, intelligent individual in so far as the individual contains a supreme, active and incommunicable principle" (Antonio Rosmini, *Anthropology as an Aid to Moral Science*, trans., Denis Cleary and Terence Watson (Durham, UK: Rosmini House, 1991), no. 532. Rosmini's voluminous "The Philosophy of Right" includes a significant section on marriage – referred to as the conjugal society (nos. 983-1442) in which he speaks of the marital sexual union as an act of the soul and a mutual communication of life (nos. 1056-1080). See Antonio Rosmini, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans., Denis Cleary and Terence Watson, vol. 5 "Rights in the Family" (Durham, UK: Rosmini House, 1995).

⁸²Pius XI, "*Casti Connubii*", no. 10. The original Latin text reads: "*Haec omnia, – inquit S. Augustinus, – bona sunt, propter quae nuptiae bonae sunt: PROLES, FIDES, SACRAMENTUM.*" The French, Italian, and Spanish translations of the Latin "*bona*" were "*le biens*," "*i beni*," and "*los bienes*." A more correct English translation would

blessings of marriage, the child holds the first place.”⁸³ Of note is that *Casti Connubii*, following St. Augustine, refers to *proles, fides, and sacramentum* each as a *bonum*, and not a *finis* of marriage.⁸⁴

In his discourse *Vegliare con sollecitudine*, Pope Pius XII reaffirmed the above teaching about procreation, however using the term ‘end’ (“*fine*” in the original Italian text) instead of the term ‘blessing’ or ‘good.’ Pope Pius XII wrote:

“The truth is that marriage, as a natural institution, is not ordered by the will of the Creator towards personal perfection of the husband and wife as its primary end, but to the procreation and education of a new life. The other ends of marriage, although part of nature’s plan, are not of the same importance as the first. Still less are these ends superior. On the contrary,

be “the goods” of marriage.

⁸³Ibid., no. 11.

⁸⁴It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the significance of the distinction between the terms ‘*finis*’ and ‘*bonum*’ with respect to offspring, fidelity, and indissolubility. Suffice it to say that it makes sense to say that “marriage is qualified by its properties of faithfulness or permanence [indissolubility], but one cannot properly say that it is ordered to fidelity or permanence. Nevertheless, one can say that it is ordered to fruitfulness. What appears to be confusing here (and what can easily lead to actual confusion) is the fact that offspring can be considered not just as a matrimonial good or value, but also as an *end* of marriage” [italics original]. See Cormac Burke, “The *Bonum Coniugum* and the *Bonum Prolis*: Ends or Properties of Marriage?,” *The Jurist* 49, (1989): 710-11.

they are essentially subordinate to it.”⁸⁵

It is true that the other two goods of marriage: (i) conjugal faith, that is, conjugal fidelity and (ii) sacrament, which refers to the indissolubility of marriage, are subordinate to the good of procreation precisely because the latter entails not just the begetting of children but even more importantly, their upbringing. The stability of the family needed for a proper care and formation of the children necessarily requires that the parents remain faithful to each other in the indissoluble bond of marriage. In other words, the two goods of indissolubility and fidelity are secondary in the sense that they are the more proximate so-called ‘ends’ necessary for achieving the procreative end.⁸⁶ The term ‘secondary’ thus should not be understood in the sense of being less important or less essential, since without the foundation of fidelity and indissolubility, the welfare of the offspring would be greatly endangered. Of the three goods of marriage, indissolubility is in fact the most essential good since “there is no [valid] matrimony without inseparability [indissolubility], whereas there is matrimony without ‘faith’ [fidelity] and offspring.”⁸⁷ In other words, the terms ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ cannot be interpreted in the absolute sense; rather they need to be qualified according to a specific perspective.

⁸⁵Pius XII, “*Vegliare con sollecitudine*,” Section III.

⁸⁶It is rather nonsensical to say that a couple gets married in order to attain faithfulness and the indissolubility of their marriage. Faithfulness and indissolubility are not ends, but goods (properties or characteristics) integral to the nature of marriage (see footnote 84).

⁸⁷Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl., q. 49, a. 3.

In *Casti Connubii*, Pope Pius XI also taught that,

“[The] conjugal faith [...] is rooted in *that more excellent soil, the love of husband and wife* which pervades all the duties of married life and *holds [the] pride of place* in Christian marriage. For matrimonial faith demands that husband and wife be joined in an especially holy and pure love, not as adulterers love each other, but as Christ loved the Church [italics added].”⁸⁸

The imagery of an excellent soil as a metaphor for conjugal love can only imply that this love stands as the source or cause of marriage, and that this love is that which sustains marriage, since it pervades all the duties of the married life, in a way analogous to the sap sustaining the tree it nourishes by pervading all the parts of the tree. This understanding of conjugal love as the cause of matrimony is explicitly stated in the following passage in which the Pope, on the basis of the Catechism of the Council of Trent, affirmed that:

“This mutual molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other, can in a very real sense, as the Roman Catechism teaches, be said to be the chief reason and purpose of matrimony, provided matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child, but more widely as the blending of

⁸⁸Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii*,” no. 23.

life as a whole and the mutual interchange and sharing thereof.”⁸⁹

Of note is that the above passage acknowledges the personalist and existential dimension of marriage. It was to take more than three decades before it got further developed, first in *Gaudium et Spes*, then more fully in John Paul’s II’s teaching.

Unfortunately, the above passage was also misinterpreted, thus giving rise to the erroneous thesis that conjugal love (the ‘mutual molding’ of the spouses) is the primary end of marriage. This, in turn, raises a conflict about the hierarchy of ends, that is, the question: between procreation and conjugal love, which one is the primary end of marriage? In addition, because the Church’s teaching on marriage since the Second Vatican Council has not used – for good reasons (as shown in this paper thus far) – the terminologies ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ ends,⁹⁰ it has been

⁸⁹Ibid., no. 24. The original Latin text reads:” *“Haec mutua coniugum interior conformatio, hoc assiduum sese invicem perficiendi studium, verissima quadam ratione, ut docet Catechismus Romanus, etiam primaria matrimonii causa et ratio dici potest, si tamen matrimonium non pressius ut institutum ad prolem rite procreandam educandamque, sed latius ut totius vitae communio, consuetudo, societas accipiatur.”* The French, Italian, and Spanish translations of the expression “*primaria causa e ratio*” i.e., “*la cause et la raison première,*” “*primaria causa e motive,*” and “*la causa y razon primera,*” respectively, are more accurate than the English translation which should have been “the chief cause and reason” instead of “the chief reason and purpose.”

⁹⁰This does not contradict the teaching of Pius XI, however, since *Casti Connubii* used the term ‘*bonum*’ and not the term ‘*finis*.’

claimed that the Church has shifted her focus onto conjugal love such that the Church either places both conjugal love and procreation together as primary ends (even though this is an impossibility, metaphysically-speaking), or that the Church implies the primacy of conjugal love over procreation.

The same controversy and hierarchical conflict also extends to the marital act because *Humanae Vitae* speaks about the inseparability between the procreative dimension and the unitive dimension (that is, married love) of the marital act, but makes no mention of the hierarchy of the ends of marriage.

The thesis that conjugal love is the primary end of marriage (and likewise of the marital act) is unfounded, however, for the simple reason that betrothed or conjugal love, as the “*primaria matrimonii causa et ratio*,”⁹¹ is that which moves the man and woman to marry. The marital act itself, properly understood as the bodily expression of the fulfillment of the *intentio unonis*, necessarily presupposes spousal love. Hence, conjugal love precedes the ends of marriage and of the marital act *in ordine intentionis et executionis*.⁹² Put simply, conjugal love does not belong to the category of ends. Hence, it is impossible that there could be any hierarchical conflict in terms of primary end between procreation and married love with respect to both marriage and the marital act. Rather, they are compli-

⁹¹See footnote 89 and its corresponding block quote.

⁹²See Rolando B. Arjonillo, *Conjugal Love and the Ends of Marriage: A Study of Dietrich Von Hildebrand and Herbert Doms in the Light of the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 45, footnote 76.

mentary to one another since the procreation, when properly understood and in the context of marriage as a community of life and love, is the fruit of conjugal love and marriage. This is why *Humanae Vitae* (citing *Gaudium et Spes*) reiterates that “marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children;”⁹³ at the same time, the encyclical also recognizes that there is no need to address the issue of the hierarchy of ends.

The same issue can also be considered from a different angle. In speaking about the three ends of marriage, *proles*, *fides*, and *sacramentum*, St. Thomas Aquinas wrote:

“Now marriage has for its principal end the begetting and rearing of children, and this end is competent to man according to his generic nature, wherefore it is common to other animals and thus it is that the ”offspring” is assigned as a marriage good. But for its secondary end, [...] it has, among men alone, the community of works that are a necessity of life. [...] And in reference to this they owe one another “fidelity” which is one of the goods of marriage. Furthermore it has another end, as regards marriage between believers, namely the signification of Christ and the Church: and thus the “sacrament” is said to be a marriage

⁹³Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*”, no. 9.5. See also Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74N3EsPNR> (accessed 05/28/2009), no. 50.

good. Wherefore *the first end corresponds to the marriage of man inasmuch as he is an animal: the second, inasmuch as he is a man; the third, inasmuch as he is a believer* [italics added].⁹⁴

Aquinas's insight expressed in the above passage is of important significance for two reasons: (i) it speaks of a supernatural end of marriage (see discussion in section 3), which *per se*, is a higher end than any natural end, and (ii) Aquinas's distinction between the primary end (*inquantum animal*) and the secondary end (*inquantum homo*) of marriage can be extended to the marital act, and shed light onto Paul VI's synthetic notion of "the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent in the marriage act."⁹⁵

As correctly pointed out by Hildebrand, Aquinas's insight extends also to the marital act.⁹⁶ Aquinas's termin-

⁹⁴Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Suppl., q. 65, a.1. The original Latin text reads: "*Matrimonium ergo habet pro fine principali proles procreationem et educationem: qui quidem finis competit homini secundum naturam sui generis; unde et aliis animalibus est communis. Et sic bonum matrimonii assignatur proles. Sed pro fine secundo, habet in hominibus solum communicationem operum quae sunt necessaria in vita. Et secundum hoc fides sibi invicem debent, quae est unum de bonis matrimonii. Habet ulterius alium finem inquantum fidelibus est, scilicet significationem Christi et Ecclesiae. Et sic bonum matrimonii sacramentum. Unde primus finis respondet matrimonio hominis inquantum est animal; secundus inquantum est homo; tertius inquantum est fidelis.*"

⁹⁵Paul VI, "*Humanae Vitae*," no. 12.1.

⁹⁶Dietrich von Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1970), 10.

ology of *inquantum animal* should not be misunderstood that the child conceived in the womb is being downgraded to the level of an animal; rather it is a reference to the biological dimension of the human person who, as a rational animal, belongs to the animal genus. Here, it helps to recall the teaching on natural law. The third precept of natural law concerns the sexual union between male and female, and the rearing of offspring; this is a natural inclination which man shares with other animals (in particular, mammals),⁹⁷ albeit the inclination is exercised in a fully human way and not in an animal way. From this perspective of the meaning of the expression *inquantum animal*, the sexual act is an act which, when occurring during the propitious fertile period of the woman, brings about the generation of a child. Thus, viewed strictly from a biological perspective, the function of the sexual act is to produce offspring, just as “the function of the lungs is to fill the blood with oxygen, [and] the function of the egg-shell to protect the developing embryo.”⁹⁸ What is described here is a functional relation between means and ends. Hence, if one emphatically asserts that the end of the marital act is *above all else* procreation, such an assertion can be easily misconstrued as implying that the connection between the marital act and procreation is simply a functional relation as if the human person were just a biological entity like any other animal.

However, as previously mentioned, besides its procreative function (which happens only during a brief window

⁹⁷See Pinckaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, 407.

⁹⁸Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity*, 11.

during the woman's monthly cycle), the conjugal act also *signifies* the fulfillment of the *intentio unionis* of conjugal love and the deep meaning of marriage as a community of life and love between persons. In this lies the significance of the marital act according to man's specific nature as a human being, that is, *in quantum homo*.⁹⁹ In other words, although the marital act has an extrinsic end *par excellence*, the procreative, it also has its own intrinsic significance and value, the unitive, which is independent of the procreative end. Hence, the conjugal sexual union is not a mere instrumental means for the purpose of procreation. The connection between the marital act and the begetting of children – and likewise, between marriage and procreation – is not one of instrumental finality precisely because “in instrumental finality, the end is the exclusive *raison d'être* of the means,”¹⁰⁰ and determines the meaning and value of the latter. Rather, that connection has the character of “superabundant finality, [in which] the good serving the end has also a *raison d'être* in itself”.¹⁰¹ In a way, this superabundant finality in man's procreation mirrors and participates in God's superabundance in His act of creation, which He brings forth out of love and not of necessity. Similarly, in the context of marriage (and family) as a community of life and love, the couple brings forth children out of mutual love. The child is loved while still in the womb and is recognized as a gift from God. In the

⁹⁹See *ibid.*, 10. See also Hildebrand, *Man and Woman*, 94.

¹⁰⁰Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 31.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.* This is confirmed by real life experience itself, namely the occurrence of sexual activity between the spouses when the woman is not fertile for medical reasons, or is beyond the childbearing age.

child, the couple see not only the image of God, but also the image of each other.

As readily apparent from the above discussion, it would be erroneous to insist that marriage (or likewise, the marital act) exists only for the purpose of procreation. In this regard, Hildebrand pointed out that “to regard wedded love as exclusively an objective means to the union of wedlock, and the latter in turn as a means to procreation, would be to subordinate entirely man *in quantum homo* to man *in quantum animal* – a thoroughly materialistic view.”¹⁰²

In summary, with a holistic, balanced and ordered vision of marriage, one can appreciate the continuity in the Church’s teaching on marriage before and after the Second Vatican Council. In particular, the Church has consistently stressed that marriage (and thereby, the marital sexual union) is ordained to procreation, which necessarily entails the fidelity of the spouses and the indissolubility of the marital bond. The Church’s teaching on conjugal faithfulness (fidelity) and indissolubility of the marital bond is expounded both in *Casti Connubii* and *Familiaris Consortio*.¹⁰³ Marriage and all of its ends presuppose conjugal love, which as the soul of marriage as it were, does not enter in the category of ends. It does not compete with procreation for primacy because, just as God creates out of love, the possibility for generating a new human life is integral to the *intentio unionis* of married love itself. Like the sap nourishing its tree, conjugal love animates mar-

¹⁰²Hildebrand, *In Defense of Purity*, 11-12.

¹⁰³See Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii*”, nos. 19, 23, 32-34; John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*”, nos. 13, 20, 68.

riage, fostering both its endurance and fruitfulness. Even when, due to natural causes or serious reasons, marriage does not bring forth any procreative fruit, it is not for that reason a fruitless marriage, however. There is an even higher order of fruitfulness, which is the end of marriage from the perspective of man *in quantum fidelis* (inasmuch as he is a believer).¹⁰⁴

4 On the Good of the Spouses (*Bonum Coniugum*), the Supernatural End of Marriage

In canon 1055 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law, as well as in the Catechism, we read that matrimony, by virtue of its nature, “is ordered to the *good of the spouses* and the procreation and education of offspring [italics added].”¹⁰⁵ In this phrase, the Church mentions two ends of marriage, and the one mentioned first is the *bonum coniugum*, the good (the welfare) of the spouses. Yet, not much has been said explicitly about it in theological publications or papal discourses. Paul VI’s reference to the “fulfillment” of the spouses is most likely an allusion to this *bonum coniugum*.¹⁰⁶ What does this *bonum* refer to? It cannot refer to conjugal love for the reasons discussed earlier in this paper. Could this *bonum* correspond to one or both of the

¹⁰⁴See the block quote corresponding to footnote 94.

¹⁰⁵“Code of Canon Law”, canon 1055, par. 1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1601.

¹⁰⁶See the block quote corresponding to footnote 15.

two goods of marriage, namely *fides* and *sacramentum*?

According to the few scholars who looked at the question of *bonum coniugum*,¹⁰⁷ this *bonum* regards the spouses' vocation to holiness which they undertake together. Supportive evidence for this thesis consists of the sources (enumerated by the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Code in its annotated version of the new Code in 1989)¹⁰⁸ for the aforementioned canon 1055.¹⁰⁹ The first source is Pius XI's *Casti Connubii*, no. 23, in which one reads the following passage:

“The love, then, of which we are speaking is not that based on the passing lust of the moment nor does it consist in pleasing words only, but in the deep attachment of the heart which is expressed in action, since love is proved by deeds. This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; must have as its *primary purpose* [that man and wife help each other day by day *in forming and perfecting themselves in the in-*

¹⁰⁷See William E. May, “The ‘Good of the Spouses’ and Marriage as a Vocation to Holiness,” in *The Church, Marriage, and the Family: Proceedings from the 27th Annual Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, September 24-26, 2004*, ed. Kenneth D. Whitehead (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 75-94; Dominic Kimengich, *The Bonum Coniugum: A Canonical Appraisal* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Sanctae Crucis, 1997).

¹⁰⁸May, “The ‘Good of the Spouses’ and Marriage as a Vocation to Holiness,” 77.

¹⁰⁹The list of the sources is taken from Burke, “The *Bonum Coniugum* and the *Bonum Proles*: Ends or Properties of Marriage?,” 707.

terior life, so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may *grow in true love toward God and their neighbor*, on which indeed depend the whole Law and the Prophets [italics added].”¹¹⁰

The other sources include:

- (i) Pius XII’s *Vegliare con sollecitudine*, in which the Pope made no mention of conjugal fidelity and indissolubility, but mentioned the “personal perfection of the husband and wife” as a secondary end, instead;¹¹¹
- (ii) *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 11 and 41;¹¹²

¹¹⁰Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii*”, no. 23. The original Latin text reads: “*Caritatem igitur dicimus, non carnali tantum citiusque evanescente inclinatisque innixam, neque in blandis solum verbis, sed etiam in intimo animi affectu positam atque, – siquidem probatio dilectionis exhibitio est operis, – opere externo comprobata. Hoc autem opus in domestica societate non modo mutuum auxilium complectitur, verum etiam ad hoc extendatur oportet, immo hoc in primis intendat, ut coniuges inter se iuventur ad interiorum hominum plenius in dies conformandum perficiendumque; ita ut per mutuam vitae consortiumem in virtutibus magis magisque in dies proficiant, et praecipue in vera erga Deum proximosque caritate crescant, in qua denique universa Lex pendet et Prophetiae.*”

¹¹¹See the block quote corresponding to footnote 85.

¹¹²See Second Vatican Council, “*Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 21 November 1964)” <http://www.webcitation.org/74N1oJhdg> (accessed 2/22/2008), nos. 11.2, 41.5.

(iii) *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 48;¹¹³ and

(iv) *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 11.¹¹⁴

The common thread present in all of the above-mentioned sources is the theme of marriage as a vocation to holiness, whereby the husband and wife are to mutually help one another to grow in moral and spiritual perfection. The same notion was already present in Aquinas's writings, when speaking about *sacramentum* as an end of marriage from the perspective of man *in quantum fidelis*. Thus, it can be said that the *bonum coniugum* "consists in the holiness that husbands and wives are meant to attain precisely in and through their married life."¹¹⁵ As such, it is an essen-

In no. 11.2, we read: "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.

¹¹³Second Vatican Council, "*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965)," no. 48. In particular, in no. 48.3, we read: "as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God."

¹¹⁴Second Vatican Council, "*Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, 18 November 1965)" <http://www.webcitation.org/74MyYxL4X> (accessed 8/28/2018), no. 11.2. Here, we read: "Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household."

¹¹⁵May, "The 'Good of the Spouses' and Marriage as a Vocation to Holiness," 76.

tial and supernatural end of marriage, which is also independent of the natural procreative end.

Every Christian believer has but one chief endeavor, to be reborn in Christ, and become perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (cf. Matthew 5:48), so as to glorify God through one's sanctity. To attain such an end is an endeavor of a lifetime. Therefore, that the spouses are to undertake such an endeavor together necessarily requires not only the indissolubility of the marital bond, but also conjugal fidelity, mutual respect, and their sexual-psychological-spiritual complementarity as man and women.

The necessary "means" by which the Christian spouses can grow in sanctity and achieve their *bonum coniugum* consist in none other than the human acts deliberately chosen by them. Among these human acts are those which are specific to their conjugal and family life – namely acts by which the spouses fulfill their responsibilities as husband and wife, as well as their responsibilities as father and mother of their children. When carried out virtuously, such acts make manifest the deepest moral-spiritual meaning of conjugal love, that of the mutual total donation of the self to one another in Christ. Growth in holiness together as married couples necessarily entails travail, self-discipline, and sacrifices.¹¹⁶ Self-discipline against the weaknesses of the flesh "cannot be observed unless God comes to their help with the grace by which the goodwill of men is sus-

¹¹⁶In this regard, periodic continence is only one of the many sacrifices, and not even a major one. Greater sacrifices are involved in bearing each other's faults patiently during the common journey of growing in holiness together.

tained and strengthened.”¹¹⁷ The Church in her teaching on marriage has never ceased to exhort married couples: (i) to avail themselves to the various means of divine grace, in particular, prayers, the sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist, and (ii) to cooperate with divine grace by exercising the supernatural powers derived from it.¹¹⁸ Continuously fortified with divine grace, the spouses grow in ever-increasing awareness that “their own sanctification and that of others for the glory of God [is] the primordial, true task of man.”¹¹⁹

5 Conclusion

Marriage is both a natural institution established by God (cf. Genesis 1-2) and the lived reality of a community of life and love. If, in the previous centuries, the Church’s teaching on marriage leaned heavily on the institutional dimension, the advent of phenomenological philosophy, together with the increased awareness of the need for a lay Christian spirituality specific to married couples, have made it possible for the Church, since the 20th century, to offer a more holistic, more balanced, and fuller teaching on marriage. Marriage and family are realities which deeply affect every dimension of human life from birth to death, and marriage itself only comes into existence by the joining together of two complimentary human persons, that is, a man and a

¹¹⁷Paul VI, “*Humanae Vitae*,” 20.

¹¹⁸See for instance Pius XI, “*Casti Connubii*,” nos. 40-41; John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” nos. 57-59.

¹¹⁹Hildebrand, *Marriage*, 35.

woman. Hence, philosophical and theological reflections on marriage cannot omit the person. Rather, it must be grounded in the person and, in particular, in the dignity of the human person which man receives from God by virtue of being made in His image and likeness. God is Love and God is the First Truth. Thus, as *Imago Dei*, man is an entity whose vocation is to love in truth, and to whom the only adequate response is to be loved in truth.

A one-sided view of marriage from the ontological and institutional perspective would not only omit this important truth about the human person, but also tends to give an impersonal treatment (seen from the point of view of a third-party observer) of marriage as a contract between two parties, along with an overemphasis on rights and duties. While such a vision is adequate for juridical purposes, such a one-sided approach conveys a puritanical distrust of conjugal love and sexuality,¹²⁰ which neither reflects the teaching of Sacred Scriptures nor does justice to marriage itself. On the other hand, a one-sided view of marriage from the personalist and existential perspective, with its emphatic discourse on conjugal love and focus on men and women as married couples, could lead to a distorted vision of marriage as communion-à-deux, one which deliberately minimizes or excludes “a participation in the creative work of God according to His eternal plans.”¹²¹ However, such a distorted vision bespeaks self-centeredness which would neither foster the permanence and growth of marriage nor

¹²⁰See Hildebrand, *Man and Woman*, 80; Hildebrand, *The Encyclical Humanae Vitae*, 5-6.

¹²¹Wojtyła, “Lettera al Papa Paolo VI,” 532.

the moral-spiritual flourishing of the spouses. One of the overt manifestations of this self-centeredness is recourse to birth control. Such a self-centered communion-à-deux contradicts the truth of conjugal love especially since love, by virtue of its nature, diffuses its goodness and bears fruits. In that regard, procreation is the fruit *par excellence* of conjugal love and marriage because: (i) it brings forth a new human life, and (ii) it involves the direct action of God in the creation of a human soul. This is why it holds the highest place among the natural goods of matrimony, and it is the end to which marriage is ordained according to the order of nature.

However, precisely because the human person, whether celibate or married, is *Imago Dei*, a rational creature endowed with *capax Dei* and called to love and glorify God, marriage is also ordained to another end, a supernatural end referred to as the *bonum coniugum*. In this regard, just as the personalist dimension of marriage made its first appearance in *Casti Connubii*; so also the first allusion to the *bonum coniugum* appeared (albeit not in that exact term) in the same encyclical. In the teaching of Pius XI and Pius XII, both the personalist dimension and the supernatural end of marriage remained in their ‘embryonic’ stage, so to speak. Both of these find their organic development in the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* which expounds on the role of conjugal love in relation to marriage, procreation, responsible parenthood, and the sanctification of the spouses,¹²²

¹²²See Second Vatican Council, “*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, 7 December 1965)”, nos. 47-52.

showing that conjugal love is essentially the fundamental principle which animates the entire matrimonial life to attain both its natural end (procreation) and supernatural end (the sanctification of the spouses). *Humanae Vitae* further complements the teaching of *Gaudium et Spes* with its affirmation of the teaching of Pius XI and Pius XII on the intrinsic immorality of contraception.

Thus, as demonstrated in this paper, there is an undeniable organic continuity in the Church's teaching on marriage before and after the Second Vatican Council. The personalist dimension (which corresponds to conjugal love) and the institutional dimension do not oppose but complement one another, instead. Both are necessary for a complete and balanced view of the nature of marriage, especially that between baptized persons. As the Christian couple progresses together in holiness, their "conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, [as] the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross."¹²³ Here lies precisely the beauty of the married life in Christ which John Paul II, in his holistic vision of marriage, expresses in the following words taken from Tertullian:

“How can I ever express the happiness of the marriage that is joined together by the Church strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels and ratified by the Father? [...] How wonderful the bond between

¹²³John Paul II, “*Familiaris Consortio*,” no. 13.3.

two believers with a single hope, a single desire, a single observance, a single service! They are both brethren and both fellow servants; there is no separation between them in spirit or flesh; in fact they are truly two in one flesh and where the flesh is one, one is the spirit.”¹²⁴

To sum up, the joining together of two realities, institution and conjugal love, brings about marriage between a particular man and a particular woman. In that sense, marriage is basically the institution of conjugal love. After a particular marriage has been brought into existence, spousal love remains the fundamental principle which animates married life, directing it towards the above-mentioned natural and supernatural ends to which marriage is ordained. The growth and endurance of marriage, as well as the attainment of both its natural and supernatural necessarily require the other two goods of marriage, the faithfulness of the spouses and the indissolubility of the marriage bond.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, no. 13.4.