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Talk #10

The Sacrament of Matrimony



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10. The Sacrament of Matrimony

Importance of Defending Marriage, Family, and the Transmission of Life in Contemporary Society

The family always has and always will stand at the center of human society as the “first natural society,” willed by God from the beginning of the human race as the “first and vital cell of society.” It is “a divine institution that stands at the foundation of life of the human person as the prototype of every social order.”¹

One of the central themes of the long pontificate of John Paul II is the defense of the family as the “the basic cell of society,” the “cradle of life and love, the place in which the individual ‘is born’ and ‘grows,’” and “the primary place of ‘humanization’ for the person and society.”² The family must be defended in an altogether special way in our time because of the great attacks it has suffered from our secular culture.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et spes* 47 mentions the problems afflicting the institution of marriage:

The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family. . . . Yet the excellence of this institution is not everywhere reflected with equal brilliance, since polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love and other disfigurements have an obscuring effect. In addition, married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation. Moreover, serious disturbances are caused in families by modern economic conditions, by influences at once social and psychological, and by the demands of civil society.

John Paul II begins his Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (1981) with a survey of the contemporary situation with regard to the family. The positive aspects are presented as follows: “On the one hand, in fact, there is a more lively awareness of personal freedom and greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, to promoting the dignity of women, to responsible procreation, to the education of children.” However, the negative aspects are far more visible:

On the other hand, however, signs are not lacking of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values: a mistaken theoretical and practical concept of the independence of the spouses in relation to each other; serious misconceptions regarding the relationship of

authority between parents and children; the concrete difficulties that the family itself experiences in the transmission of values; the growing number of divorces; the scourge of abortion; the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization; the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality. (FC 6.2)

What is the underlying unity behind these negative aspects? John Paul identifies it as a *false notion of freedom*:

At the root of these negative phenomena there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God’s plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one’s own selfish well-being.³

Although the family is threatened in the Third World by a lack of means necessary for survival, in the wealthy countries, paradoxically, the family is threatened above all by the consumer mentality itself. New life is seen as a threat to individual freedom and comfort, and it fails to recognize the nature of marriage as an institution willed by God with certain essential properties.

The Nature of Marriage

Two of the fundamental theses of St. Thomas Aquinas with regard to human nature are (a) the substantial unity of man’s body and soul; and (b), the fact that man, as a rational animal, learns first through sense experience, which then provides the data for abstraction and intellectual knowledge. Everything conceived by the mind was first, in some way, grasped by the senses. Man is thus a creature for whom the body plays a crucial role in mediating his understanding, and in serving as a symbol of invisible realities. This understanding of the human person is the foundation for the sacramental principle: God uses material and sensible things as sacred signs of invisible realities. This principle is very important in understanding the nature of marriage.

One of the main themes of John Paul II’s *Theology of the Body* is that God has wished to make His invisible love manifest in the world through spousal love, and that He has also wished spousal love to be physically manifested by the conjugal act, which, as a sign of God’s love, has been blessed in a special way with potential fruitfulness. Thus there is a double symbolism. *The conjugal act is by its very nature a bodily sign and manifestation of conjugal love, and conjugal love is the preeminent sign in the natural order of the invisible divine love.* Hence marriage, from the beginning, as a sacred sign of God’s love, was the primordial sacrament. This dual symbolism is decisive

³ *Familiaris consortio* 6.

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (CSDC)* 211.

² John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 40.

for understanding the nature of marriage and Catholic sexual morality.

God Is the Author of Marriage from the Beginning

John Paul II develops the idea of the original unity of the man and the woman on the basis of Adam's earlier experience of original solitude. In *Theology of the Body*, John Paul spends several audiences analyzing Adam's experience of solitude and its significance for understanding the spousal nature of the body.

Genesis gives eloquent witness that it was not good for man to be alone. Even though Adam was in relationship with God, he felt the absence of a human companion. The experience of solitude comes into focus with the naming of the animals, and the corresponding recognition that no other creature in the physical world could enter into spiritual communion with Adam. This solitude involves the recognition of man's spiritual interiority, and the corresponding desire for communion in the world of the spirit, for a sharing of interior life with other persons. On the basis of that solitude, Adam exults when Eve is created: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23).

Someone might wonder why original solitude was negative. Adam was not alone, for he was in communion with God! The answer to this question, again, is based on the sacramental principle: man, as a rational animal, naturally learns about invisible things through visible and sensible realities. Man learns about higher things by analogy with those on his own level. The natural human way to learn about love of God is through the experience of human love in the family. The order of nature requires that Adam learn about communion on the human level in order to be able to use that human experience to grasp a higher communion. This is an example of a great principle in theology: grace does not destroy nature, but presupposes it and elevates it. Communion with God through grace presupposes human interpersonal communion; and grace then elevates and perfects that human interpersonal communion to be an ever more perfect sign and participation of the divine communion that God wants to establish with man.

Man needs the mediation of sensible realities in order to ascend to knowledge of higher realities. The sacramental principle is deeply rooted in man's nature. Angels, on the other hand, have no need for sacraments because they do not have a bodily nature endowed with senses. Man needs sacraments because he is situated at the midpoint of the hierarchy of creation. Man is the highest of material beings, but the lowest of spiritual beings. He is situated at the intersection of the material and spiritual worlds.

This is crucial for understanding human sexuality and marriage, for these realities stand at the heart of the sacramental economy that God has instituted. Human

sexuality is not merely a biological and physical reality, for it is human. It thus is meant to participate in both worlds—physical and spiritual—and serve a sacred role in elevating man to an understanding of the divine love. Even the person called by God to celibacy needs to see what spousal love looks like on the human level, before elevating it to the divine.

Adam's exultation in seeing Eve, and the original unity established between them, is thus both an overcoming of the solitude and a sign of the still greater communion between man and God to which man is called. This unity also involves the experience of complementarity—that each one is reciprocally "for" the other, and the experience of God's blessing on that communion through the gift of fecundity. Thus the meaning of the body could be described as consisting in a "*reciprocal enrichment*."⁴ The union of man and woman in marriage "carries within itself a particular awareness of the meaning of that body in the reciprocal self-gift of the persons."⁵

It is highly significant that the institution of marriage is narrated at the very beginning of the Bible, within the account of creation itself, and immediately after the creation of Eve (Gen 2:23-24):

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

The definitive importance of this text can be seen from the fact that Christ, when asked about the legitimacy of divorce, refers to this text:

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one'? So they are no longer two but one. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a divorced woman, commits adultery" (Mt 19:3-9).

4 John Paul II, *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*, trans. Michael Waldstein (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006) Audience 9:5, p. 165.

5 *Ibid.*, 10:4, p. 169.

John Paul II made Jesus' reference to marriage in the "beginning" the center of the first part of his audiences on the *Theology of the Body*.

The fact that the institution of marriage is narrated at the beginning of Genesis, and that Jesus refers back to this beginning, shows us that marriage is not something accidental to man, or determined by human convention or caprice; it is not a human invention or merely a social institution. It springs from God's very act of creating man in His image, *as male and female*, as we read in the first creation account in Genesis 1:27-28:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; *male and female he created them*. And God blessed them, and God said to them, "*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it*."

In these brief texts we find the fundamental properties of marriage as intended by the Creator at the beginning, and as restored to its fullness by the Redeemer in the Gospel. The summary of the properties of marriage is the total gift of self. A total gift implies (a) an exclusive union (b) between complementary partners (one man and one woman) (c) that is indissoluble, (d) formed by the irrevocable personal consent of the complementary partners to initiate an intimate communion of life consisting in total mutual self-giving and service, and (e) ordained by its nature towards the procreation and education of children. All of these properties derive from the fact that marriage involves a total gift of self of the spouses to each other.

Marriage Is a Sacramental Sign of God's Love

Marriage can be defined as a maximum friendship in which each spouse offers the *total* gift of self to the other. The gift of self in marriage must be total because marriage is a sign and sacrament both of God's inter-Trinitarian love, and also of God's love for man. This is possible because man is created in the image of the Trinity, and thus he can only realize himself in a love that in some way mirrors the inter-Trinitarian love.⁶ Marriage was thus instituted as an intimate consequence of the fact that man is created in the image of God.⁷ As John Paul II states, the mutual total gift of self in marriage is an "image and likeness" of the gift of God's love for His people, for God "wills and He com-

⁶ This theme was developed at length in John Paul II's Wednesday audiences of 1979 and 1980, published in *Man and Woman He Created Them: A Theology of the Body*. See also his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris consortio* 11: "God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence *through love*, He 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."

⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical *Familiaris consortio*, 11.

municates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church."⁸

Paul VI, in his encyclical *Humanae vitae*, describes the total nature of marital love as a sharing of all that one has for the sake of the beloved:

It is a love which is total—that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything, allowing no unreasonable exceptions and not thinking solely of their own convenience. Whoever really loves his partner loves not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself.

This act of total gift of self in marriage, as an image of the divine love, has five properties: it is fully human, indissoluble, exclusive, fruitful, and complementary.

Fully Human

These characteristics of marriage can be understood to come from the fact that it is a properly *human* institution, in accord with the personal nature of man created in the image of God, whose procreation must transcend that of the animals and take on a character proper to persons who give themselves to each other in a total and thus properly human way.

Marital love can be total only if it is fully human, which means it must respect man's nature which is at once spiritual and bodily. This anthropological principle has great consequences for the nature of marriage and sexual morality. Sexuality "is by no means something purely biological, but concerns the innermost being of the human person as such."⁹ As an aspect of a spiritual person, sexuality must never be separated from its personal and spiritual dimension. The sexual acts of bodily self-giving must go together with a spiritual act of self-giving to the other person. Paul VI explains that marital love must be fully human in order for the spouses to grow in union together:

This 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 attain their

⁸ See John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 20: "Being rooted in the personal and total self-giving of the couple, and being required by the good of the children, the indissolubility of marriage finds its ultimate truth in the plan that God has manifested in His revelation: He wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church."

⁹ *Familiaris consortio* 11.

human fulfillment.¹⁰

Furthermore, human nature intrinsically orients a man to this covenant of life and love. Man is naturally a *spousal creature*. Even if he does not marry, the natural orientation to marriage is written into his nature by the Creator; it calls him to espouse another person irrevocably for life. This call can be realized in the state of marriage, or in the consecrated life, involving celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of God, in which the spousal gift of self is given directly to God.

Indissoluble and Exclusive

In order to be total, the gift of self in marriage must be irrevocable. The necessarily indissoluble nature of marriage is most clearly seen in the words of Christ to the Pharisees: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder” (Mt 19:6). The call to form an indissoluble marriage is rooted in the very creation of man in the image of God, capable of and called to total self-donation in the manner proper to persons who are to be loved for their own sake, because they are persons, in adversity as well as prosperity.

Love in its highest form is the gift of self to another person, to whom one wills the good for his own sake, precisely because the person is a good worthy of love, worthy of such a gift. Now the complete gift of self to another person, in order to be such, must necessarily be exclusive and irrevocable. If it is not exclusive, then it is not a complete gift of self, but only partial, because it can also be given to another. Likewise, if it is not irrevocable, then it is not a complete gift of self, but only for a time. Celibacy for the kingdom involves the exclusive and irrevocable gift of self to God alone, whereas marriage is the exclusive and irrevocable gift of self to a human person of the opposite sex.

The exclusivity and irrevocable nature of marriage is demanded by the complete gift of self of conjugal love, and by the ordination of marriage to procreation. The child, the fruit of this union, surpasses the biological order and thus is worthy of love in the context of a “persevering and unified contribution by both parents”:

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

¹⁰ *Humanae vitae* 9.

A person’s freedom, far from being restricted by this fidelity, is secured against every form of subjectivism or relativism and is made a sharer in creative Wisdom.¹¹

Monogamy and Polygamy

Although Adam and Eve were constituted in a monogamous marriage at the beginning of human history, Genesis 4:19 shows us that polygamy entered into human history at its dawn. Before the Flood, Lamech, the great-great-great-great-grandson of Cain, is said to have had two wives at the same time.

Despite its antiquity and geographical spread, the institution of polygamy is radically contrary to the very nature of marriage as we see it in the beginning in Genesis, in which marriage is formed in a union of one man and one woman becoming one flesh. It is contrary to the very nature of marriage as a maximum friendship oriented to fruitfulness. Although polygamy is not contrary to the fruitfulness of marriage, it is contrary to the intimate communion of the spouses constituted in a maximum friendship by a complete gift of self to the other.

John Paul II explains this in *Familiaris consortio* 19:

Such a communion is radically contradicted by polygamy: this, in fact, directly negates the plan of God which was revealed from the beginning, because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive. As the Second Vatican Council writes: “Firmly established by the Lord, the unity of marriage will radiate from the equal personal dignity of husband and wife, a dignity acknowledged by mutual and total love.”¹²

It is evident that polygamy fosters jealousy between the spouses, a jealousy aptly described in the book of Genesis between Sarah and Hagar.

Christ prohibited polygamy at the same time in which He prohibited divorce (Mt 19:9),¹³ for if remarrying after divorce is considered adultery, then taking a second “wife” while still married to the first is also adultery.

Fecund

The totality of the gift of self in the marriage covenant can be understood from the close interrelationship between the two primary ends of marriage, which are the procreation of children and the intimate union of the spouses. In the words of *Gaudium et spes* 48: “As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an

¹¹ *Familiaris consortio* 11.

¹² *GS* 49; see John Paul II, Address to Married People at Kinshasa (May 3, 1980) 4: AAS 72 (1980), 426-27.

¹³ Mt 19:9: “Whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery.”

unbreakable oneness between them.” Children can only be properly reared and educated in a completely stable home in which the parents are bound by an irrevocable bond of union. Only an exclusive and indissoluble marriage gives a proper home to the new human persons to be conceived as a fruit of conjugal love, a home in which they will be educated in an environment of mutual and self-giving love involving sacrificial service. In *Familiaris Consortio* 14, John Paul briefly explains the intimate unity between the gift of self in conjugal love and the gift of self in procreation. For the gift of self in marriage ultimately overflows and blossoms into the flower of that love, who are the children of that union.

In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal “knowledge” which makes them “one flesh,” does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person. Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother.

When couples deliberately render the conjugal act infertile through contraception or other means, they are

altering its value of “total” self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely, that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality.¹⁴

The couple, in such a case, is refusing the total gift of self by placing an obstacle to the gift of their maternity and paternity.

The Procreative End of Marriage and Participation with God

The Catholic tradition speaks of marriage as having two primary ends: the procreative and the unitive end, which naturally go together and which must never be deliberately separated from each other. In *Humanae vitae* 12, Pope Paul VI states that the Church’s teaching on contraception “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 key to understanding Catholic teaching on human sexuality is that sexuality is a *sacred reality* intended by

God to be the primordial sacrament of His love. The world thinks that Catholic sexual morality stems from a negative view of sex, as if it were something dirty. In reality it is just the complete opposite: human sexuality is something sacred because it is the means instituted by God for the transmission of human life, made in the image and likeness of God. It is the way in which human beings are enabled to most closely participate in God’s creative activity. Catholic sexual morality, then, protects and defends that sacredness, just as there are norms for protecting and defending the Eucharist, the other sacraments, the holy objects in a church, and the sacredness of life itself.

The dignity of the institution of marriage is rooted in the fact that it is ordered by God to the generation of new human persons created in the image and likeness of God. In marriage, the spouses are given the sublime privilege of becoming participants with God in the coming into being of new human persons. This is a privilege denied to the angels! This aspect of participation or cooperation with God in His kingly office of creation makes matrimony, by its very nature, into a sacred institution. This dignity of matrimony is not lost when the marriage is not blessed by fertility as long as the spouses do not deliberately exclude an openness to life.

As mentioned above, the conjugal act is a natural sign of conjugal love, which is a created sign of divine love. Now the holier things are, the greater the responsibility we have to safeguard their sacred character. Because of the sacredness of the Body and Blood of Christ, the Eucharist cannot be treated as we would treat something profane. The same is true of the conjugal act. Because of its character as the primordial sacrament, we have to treat the conjugal act with great reverence and in a way consistent with the intrinsic “language of the body.” This is especially true because of our vulnerability in this sphere, attacked by the loss of the gift of integrity and the resulting concupiscence that we experience, above all in the sexual sphere. Reverence for the mystery of the generation of life is thus one of the main themes of the Theology of the Body.

Pius XI speaks of the tremendous dignity of the procreative end of marriage in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* of 1931:

Thus amongst the blessings of marriage, the child holds the first place. And indeed the Creator of the human race Himself, Who in His goodness wishes to use men as His helpers in the propagation of life, taught this when, instituting marriage in Paradise, He said to our first parents, and through them to all future spouses: “Increase and multiply, and fill the earth.” . . . How great a boon of God this is, and how great a blessing of matrimony is clear from a consideration of man’s dignity and of his sublime end. For . . . God wishes men to be born not only that they should live and fill the earth, but much

¹⁴ *Familiaris consortio* 32.

more that they may be worshippers of God, that they may know Him and love Him and finally enjoy Him for ever in heaven; and this end, since man is raised by God in a marvelous way to the supernatural order, surpasses all that eye hath seen, and ear heard, and all that hath entered into the heart of man (1 Cor 2:9). From which it is easily seen how great a gift of divine goodness and how remarkable a fruit of marriage are children born by the omnipotent power of God through the cooperation of those bound in wedlock.

13. But Christian parents must also understand that they are destined not only to propagate and preserve the human race on earth, indeed not only to educate any kind of worshippers of the true God, but children who are to become members of the Church of Christ, to raise up fellow-citizens of the Saints, and members of God's household (Eph 2:19), that the worshippers of God and Our Savior may daily increase.

Gaudium et spes 50, likewise stresses the importance of the procreative end of marriage:

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "Who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day.

Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love.

Mutual Aid of the Spouses in Education and Personal Sanctification

One of the ends of marriage revealed in Genesis 2 is the mutual aid of the spouses. This mutual aid is ordered to their most noble task of education of their children. Pius XI explains:

The blessing of offspring, however, is not completed by the mere begetting of them, but something else must be added, namely the proper education of the offspring. For the most wise God would have failed to make suf-

ficient provision for children that had been born, and so for the whole human race, if He had not given to those to whom He had entrusted the power and right to beget them, the power also and the right to educate them. For no one can fail to see that children are incapable of providing wholly for themselves, even in matters pertaining to their natural life, and much less in those pertaining to the supernatural, but require for many years to be helped, instructed, and educated by others. Now it is certain that both by the law of nature and of God this right and duty of educating their offspring belongs in the first place to those who began the work of nature by giving them birth, and they are indeed forbidden to leave unfinished this work and so expose it to certain ruin. But *in matrimony provision has been made in the best possible way for this education of children that is so necessary, for, since the parents are bound together by an indissoluble bond, the care and mutual help of each is always at hand.*

However, the mutual aid of the spouses is not directed exclusively to the education of their children. They are also called to aid one another intimately in their vocation to holiness, by which the family is to be knit together ever more closely in charity.¹⁵

Complementarity of the Spouses

In order to be potentially fruitful, and in order to be a perfect and total union, marriage must be between complementary partners distinguished by gender. It is easy to see that the fruitfulness of marriage depends on the complementarity of genders, each of which supplies a faculty lacking to the other, which only together are fruitful.

The complementarity required for fruitfulness also involves a complementarity of gifts that are ordered to mission of paternity and maternity. The union between the spouses is cemented by the fact that each one contributes a charism lacking to the other, but necessary for their joint mission. Maternal and paternal gifts, both on the biological and the spiritual level, combine to form a union far richer than either member on their own.

In the *Theology of the Body*, John Paul II speaks at length of the spousal meaning of the human body. The gift of self

¹⁵ See Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* 23-24: "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 interior 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. . . . 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 life as a whole and the mutual interchange and sharing thereof."

to which man is called is written into his very body and its sexuality. This spousal meaning implies that the two sexes are complementary and called to be for the other and given to each other.

This complementarity is itself a consequence of man's creaturely status. The creatures of God are all different participations of God's infinite glory. No one creature could ever be an adequate reflection of His glory, or completely reveal all the attributes of God. Only the Word and the Holy Spirit completely manifest the Father, and they do so precisely because they are divinely perfect Images, consubstantial with the Father. No creature can do this. Each creature manifests some particular aspect of God. Thus it is fitting there be distinction between creatures. This is most evident in the variety of species. However, this distinction is present even in the one species of man, through the distinction of *gender*, as well as through complementary distinctions of temperament, natural endowment, and mission.

God created man male and female, in such a way that each sex better manifests different aspects of God, and of our common humanity. This complementary character is summarized in the distinction between paternity and maternity to which man and woman are called.¹⁶ God has endowed woman with a special aptitude for the particular virtues most intimately connected with her mission of maternity, and man with those more particularly connected with his mission of paternity.

The special characteristics of woman consist in a special aptitude for all that is oriented towards nurturing the new life that emerges from her womb. This entails a special attitude of attention to the personal sphere, to the concrete person in his totality, a special gift of empathy, intuition, and sensitivity to the other, to affectivity and the sphere of the heart. The gift of paternity, on the other hand, leads the male sex to be generally more oriented towards governance, production, and abstract thought.

The maternal aspect of woman's character has been developed perceptively by St. Edith Stein in a series of talks on the role of woman that she gave in the early 1930's, in which she wrote:

Woman naturally seeks to embrace that which is *living, personal, and whole*. To cherish, guard, protect, nourish

¹⁶ See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman: Love and the Meaning of Intimacy* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1992), p. 37: "What matters in our context is to understand, first, that man and woman differ not merely in a biological and physiological direction, but that they are *two different expressions of human nature*; and, second, that the existence of this duality of human nature possesses a great value. Even if we prescind for the moment from all biological reasons as well as from procreation, we must see how much richer the world is because this difference exists, and that it is in no way desirable to efface as much as possible this difference in the spiritual realm, a trend which is unfortunately very widespread today."

and advance growth is her natural, maternal yearning. Lifeless matter, the *fact*, can hold primary interest for her only insofar as it serves the living and the personal, not ordinarily for its own sake. Relevant to this is another matter: *abstraction in every sense* is alien to the feminine nature. The living and personal to which her care extends is a concrete whole and is protected and encouraged as a totality... Her natural line of thought is not so much conceptual and analytical as it is directed intuitively and emotionally to the concrete....

This maternal gift is joined to that of *companion*. It is her gift and happiness to share the life of another human being and, indeed, to take part in *all things* which come his way in the greatest and smallest things, in joy as well as in suffering, in work, and in problems.¹⁷

Karol Wojtyla, with his great pastoral experience and insight, has described the natural temperament of woman as follows:

Women are more feeling and intuitive people and become involved in things in a more sensitive and complete manner. This is why they need a support (for example, in the Gospel we find them "by Christ's side"), great maturity, and interior independence.... They are much more susceptible than men to things like psychological conditioning and must therefore gain this independence through an interior struggle which does not banish love from their lives but instead recognizes

¹⁷ "Ethos of Women's Professions," in *Essays on Women*, translated by Freda Mary Oben (Washington: ICS Publications, 1987), pp. 43-44 (this talk was originally given in 1930). See also pp. 248-249: "1. Man appears more objective: it is natural for him to dedicate his faculties to a discipline (be it mathematics or technology, a trade or business management) and thereby to subject himself to the precepts of this *discipline*. *Woman's attitude is personal*; and this has several meanings: in one instance she is happily involved with her total being in what she does; then, she has particular interest for the living, concrete person, and, indeed, as much for her own personal life and personal affairs as for those of other persons. 2. Through submission to a discipline, man easily experiences a *one-sided development*. In woman, there lives a natural drive towards *totality* and *self-containment*. And, again, this drive has a twofold direction: she herself would like to become a *complete human being*, one who is fully developed in every way; and she would like to help others to become so, and by all means, she would like to do justice to the complete human being whenever she has to deal with persons."

See also Alice von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman* (Ann Arbor: Sapientia Press, 2002), pp. 59-63; D. von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman: Love and the Meaning of Intimacy*, p. 36: "If we try to delineate these specifically feminine and masculine features, we find in women a unity of personality by the fact that heart, intellect, and temperament are much more interwoven, whereas in man there is a specific capacity to emancipate himself with his intellect from the affective sphere. This unity of the feminine type of human person displays itself also in a greater unity of inner and exterior life, in a unity of style embracing the soul as well as the exterior demeanor. In a woman, the personality itself is more in the foreground than objective accomplishments; whereas man, who has a specific creativity, is more called than she is to objective accomplishments."

it as the underlying motivation in the Great Love of which they are capable.¹⁸

Men, on the contrary, are characterized as follows:

We are quite ready to take, or conquer, in terms of enjoyment, profit, gain, and success—and even in the moral order. Then comes the question of giving, and at this point we hang back, because we are not prepared to give. The element which is so characteristic under other forms in the spiritual portrait of women is barely perceptible in men....

In men the intellect has a certain supremacy over the heart, and this is why Christ entrusted responsibility for the Gospel as idea to them. The Gospel is life and we are all responsible for it. Women have a great role to play in the Church, and in Catholicism; however, the Gospel as idea is primarily a male sphere.¹⁹

He returns to this theme of what is proper to the two sexes in the Apostolic Letter, *On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman*. In art. 18, he draws out the particular characteristics of woman from her vocation to participate with God in a special way through the gift of *maternity*:

Motherhood involves a special communion with the mystery of life, as it develops in the woman's womb. The mother is filled with wonder at this mystery of life, and "understands" with unique intuition what is happening inside her. In the light of the "beginning," the mother accepts and loves as a person the child she is carrying in her womb. This unique contact with the new human being developing within her gives rise to an attitude towards human beings—not only towards her own child, but every human being—which profoundly marks the woman's personality. It is commonly thought that women are more capable than men of paying attention to another person, and that motherhood develops this predisposition even more. The man—even with all his sharing in parenthood—always remains "outside" the process of pregnancy and the baby's birth; in many ways he has to learn his own "fatherhood" from the mother.²⁰

The special character of woman also comes from her "bridal" aspect. John Paul II writes: "The Bride is loved: it is she who receives love, in order to love in return."²¹ Woman's special gift is to interiorize love and return it with fecundity. This ability to interiorize love is shown

18 *The Way to Christ: Spiritual Exercises*, pp. 35-36 (Exercises preached in 1962).

19 *The Way to Christ*, pp. 51, 53.

20 See also art. 30: "The moral and spiritual strength of a woman is joined to her awareness that God entrusts the human being to her in a special way. Of course, God entrusts every human being to each and every other human being. But this entrusting concerns women in a special way—precisely by reason of their femininity—and this in a particular way determines their vocation.

21 *On the Dignity and Vocation of Woman*, n. 29.

us in the Gospels above all in Our Lady, who "hid these words in her heart."²²

This complementarity between the sexes, which is as much spiritual as it is physical, is a source of great richness to humanity. At the same time, it is this natural complementarity which makes possible the specifically spousal form of love that is realized in marriage, in which man and woman complement each other both as persons through their spiritual union, and as potential mothers and fathers through their bodily gift to each other. Indeed, their complementary maternity and paternity is realized only through the other, through their bodily union which manifests and is called to enrich their spiritual union of love.²³

Marriage and Homosexuality

In Genesis 2, we see that the first married couple was composed of one man and one woman, and this is not accidental. Marriage by its very nature is between one man and one woman, united for life. Marriage is a union which *by its very nature is ordered towards fruitfulness and the exchange of complementary gifts* (maternity and paternity), and obviously this cannot be the case of homosexual couples. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* treats the question of the morality of homosexual relations in nos. 2357–9:

Homosexuality refers to relations between men or between women who experience an exclusive or predominant sexual attraction toward persons of the same sex. It has taken a great variety of forms through the centuries and in different cultures. Its psychological genesis remains largely unexplained. Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity,²⁴ tradition has always declared that "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered."¹⁴¹ They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved.

The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This incli-

22 For reflections on how Mary exemplifies the feminine vocation, see Edith Stein, op. cit., pp. 45-46; Alice von Hildebrand, *The Privilege of Being a Woman*, pp. 99-106; John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 5, 19.

23 This complementarity of man and woman as ordered to marriage has been well expressed by Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Man and Woman: Love and the Meaning of Intimacy*, p. 37: "Man and woman are spiritually oriented toward each other; they are created for each other. First, they have a mission for each other; second, because of their complementary difference, a much closer communion and more ultimate love is possible between them than between persons of the same sex.

"Their mutual mission manifests itself in a wholesome mutual enrichment as well as in the mitigation of the dangers to which the masculine and the feminine type of human beings are exposed when they are deprived of this influence."

24 See Gen 19:1–29; Rom 1:24–27; 1 Cor 6:10; 1 Tim 1:10.

nation, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition.

Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection.

Since God is the author of marriage because He is the Creator of man and human nature, it follows that man cannot of his own authority change the nature of marriage. The fundamental properties of marriage (irrevocable union of one man and one woman through personal consent, ordered to fruitfulness and mutual aid) and its fundamental ends (procreation and union) belong to marriage as a consequence of the very nature of man.

The attempt to strip one of the fundamental properties of marriage strikes simultaneously against the eternal law of God and the good of the human person. For example, the attempt to strip marriage of its irrevocable quality (permitting divorce), or its exclusive quality (permitting polygamy), or its orientation to fruitfulness and complementarity by being the union of one man and one woman (permitting homosexual marriage), destroys the institution of marriage as established by God, and thus strikes at the fabric of society.

Marriage and the Fall

It could seem that the Biblical image of marriage as presented in Genesis 2:24 is excessively ideal. Indeed, marriage (like the obligation of human work) was instituted in the Garden of Eden before the Fall, which means that the spouses in God's original plan received special gifts to sanctify marriage which were then lost when they were expelled from the Garden. Primary among these were the gifts of sanctifying grace (symbolized by the friendship with which they walked with God in the Garden), and what theologians refer to as the preternatural gift of integrity—the gift given to Adam and Eve by which their passions and emotions were perfectly subordinated to and in harmony with their reason. Spouses in God's original plan (before the Fall) would not have been troubled and tempted by unruly passions. Genesis 2:25 shows this to us in symbolic language: "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." After the Fall, however, Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness and covered themselves. This shame is brought about by an awareness of the passion of lust by which mankind is tempted, having lost the gift of *original integrity*. The loss

of the preternatural gifts after the Fall did not change the institution of marriage, or its intrinsic goodness, sanctity, procreative purpose, and unifying power. It remains "very good" as before, and ordered toward participating in God's creative activity and in His attributes of fruitfulness and love. However, because of the introduction of unruly passions, marriage after the Fall has become exceedingly vulnerable and fragile. Human history is a constant witness to the assaults of lust²⁵ and other forms of selfishness against the sanctity of marriage, the nucleus of society.

John Paul II dedicated a large series of catecheses to the reality of concupiscence and the struggle that this imposes on the human heart to fight for chastity.

The original plan of marriage becomes marred by the acceptance of polygamy and divorce, widespread adultery, immodesty and promiscuity, homosexual unions, and the lack of respect for children as the sacred fruit of marriage. Nevertheless, the human body, as male and female, conserves its *spousal meaning* that stems from creation; it is a perennial sign of the "great sacrament" of marriage (see Eph 5:32), of the truth revealed in the beginning in Genesis 2:23-24.

The Mosaic Law on Marriage and the Family

Given both the great fragility and importance of marriage for human society, it is logical that the Law of Moses gives great importance to marriage. The sanctity of marriage and the family in the Old Covenant is protected, first of all, by the fourth, sixth, and ninth commandments, which command respect to one's parents and prohibit adultery and the coveting of one's neighbor's wife. This obviously belongs to natural law.

The institution of marriage and the family is further strengthened by the great emphasis put on the good of children as the fruit of marriage. As we have seen, having children is regarded as the first precept in the Torah: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth" (Gn 1:28). This command, given to the human race as a whole, has special beauty from the fact that man is enabled to participate in God's creative work. Contraception is thus generally prohibited in Orthodox Judaism.

The sixth and ninth commandments are strengthened by a series of particular precepts concerning modesty in dress and conduct, aiming at prohibiting not only unchaste behavior, but also occasions of sin. They are of great importance in Orthodox Jewish society in maintaining the sanctity of the family.

The Mosaic Law also includes a ceremonial precept—not part of the natural law—prohibiting sexual relations during the woman's period of menstruation and for a week thereafter, after which the woman takes a ritual bath restor-

²⁵ See 1 Jn 2:16.

ing her to a state of ritual purity. This subject is regulated by the laws of “family purity.” The practical effect of this law was to increase the fertility of the Jewish people.

Imperfect Elements of the Mosaic Law on Marriage: Polygamy and Divorce

The beautiful treatment of marriage in the Old Testament is nevertheless still imperfect from the perspective of natural law. Although the entire presentation of marriage is clearly in favor of a monogamous and indissoluble marriage, the twin evils of polygamy and divorce were permitted, as Jesus says, because of the “hardness of hearts.” These practices were not peculiar to Israel, but were endemic in the ancient world of that region.

In Israel, the practice of polygamy was limited to the wealthy and powerful — such as the patriarchs and kings — and became progressively less common as time went on.

Divorce in Israel was relatively easy for the husband to obtain: he had to give his wife a writ of divorce. Deut 24:1-4 speaks of this practice: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house,” she is no longer married to him.

The school of Shammai gave a stricter interpretation of the motive of divorce (spoken of in Dt 24:1 as “indecency”), allowing it only in the case of marital infidelity. The school of Hillel, however, gave a broader interpretation, admitting lesser faults, and prevailed as the dominant practice.²⁶

Nevertheless, the prophets clearly showed the practice of divorce as a negative phenomenon. The prophet Malachi chastised the practice of divorce among the generation who had returned to Israel after the Babylonian exile. They had complained that God was not answering their prayers, and the prophet said to them (2:14-16): “You ask, ‘Why does he not?’ Because the Lord was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. ‘For I hate divorce,’ says the Lord the God of Israel.”

²⁶ This broad view of divorce is witnessed in Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 4.8.23: “He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever (and many such causes happen among men), let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife anymore; for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband.”

Marriage as a Symbol of God’s Love of His People

The sanctity of marriage and its properly monogamous and indissoluble character come out above all in the fact that marriage is the preferred image to show God’s relationship with Israel. In Hos 2:19-20, God says to Israel: “And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.”

Ezekiel 16 presents Israel as an adulterous wife, espoused to God who yet remains faithful:

I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord God, and you became mine. Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with leather, I swathed you in fine linen and covered you with silk. . . . You grew exceedingly beautiful, and came to regal estate. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor which I had bestowed upon you, says the Lord God. But you trusted in your beauty, and played the harlot because of your renown, and lavished your harlotries on any passer-by. . . . Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! . . . Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. . . . I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the Lord.

The everlasting covenant alluded to in Ezekiel 16:60-63 is inaugurated by Christ who wins the forgiveness of sins through His Passion, thus cleansing a renewed Israel to be His pure and immaculate Bride.

Marriage Elevated to a Sacrament

We would expect that the Word made flesh, the Redeemer of man, would be very concerned to sanctify marriage, in that it is the building block of society and the bosom in which the human person comes into the world. How did He do so? In numerous ways. As we have seen, He restored marriage to its original form and dignity in God’s plan, as it existed before the Fall. No less importantly, He elevated marriage to be a sacrament of the New Law. This was prefigured by His presence at the wedding of Cana, which He chose, through the intercession of His Mother, to be the glorious occasion to work His first miracle at the outset of His public ministry.

The sacramentality of marriage is explained by St. Paul in Ephesians 5:25-33:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her,

having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery [*sacramentum*] is a profound one, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Here Paul teaches that the institution of marriage at the beginning of creation was meant, from the beginning, to be a sacred sign of the faithful and fruitful communion between Christ and the Church. Therefore, as an image and sacrament of God’s love for his people, it must have the properties of exclusivity and indissolubility.

There is a double illumination here. The reality of matrimony is a perennial sign of the love between Christ and the Church. But at the same time, the love of Christ for the Church as manifested in the Pascal mystery illuminates marriage and instills a supernatural dimension in it, elevating it to the dignity of a sacrament of the New Covenant.

The elevation of marriage to a sacrament is explained by *Gaudium et spes* 48:

Christ the Lord abundantly blessed this many-faceted love, welling up as it does from the fountain of divine love and structured as it is on the model of His union with His Church. For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Savior of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on her behalf, the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal.

Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ’s redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in their sublime office of being a father or a mother. For this reason Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses 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.

John Paul speaks of the sacramentality of marriage in *Familiaris consortio* 19:

This conjugal communion sinks its roots in the natural complementarity that exists between man and woman, and is nurtured through the personal willingness of the spouses to share their entire life-project, what they have and what they are: for this reason such communion is the fruit and the sign of a profoundly human need. But in the Lord Christ God takes up this human need, confirms it, purifies it and elevates it, leading it to perfection through the sacrament of matrimony: the Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus.

The sacrament of marriage elevates the communion of the spouses by means of a gift of sacramental grace to strengthen that communion on the model of Christ and the Church. The sacramental grace of marriage will thus be a series of actual graces ordered to aiding the spouses to carry out their duties of state in charity: preserving and strengthening the union of the family; educating their children in virtue and knowledge through example, word, and discipline; growing in conjugal chastity; and growing in generosity with God in their service to human society. Of course, the spouses are capable of rejecting these graces by neglecting to cooperate with them. However, to the extent that spouses do cooperate, they can be assured that still more graces will be forthcoming to help them progressively in the difficulties and temptations of married life. In this way, the vocation of matrimony is a beautiful path to continual conversion and sanctification.

Pius XI explains the nature of the sacramental graces given by the sacrament of matrimony:

By the very fact, therefore, that the faithful with sincere mind give such consent, they open up for themselves a treasure of sacramental grace from which they draw supernatural power for the fulfilling of their rights and duties faithfully, holily, perseveringly even unto death. Hence this sacrament not only increases sanctifying grace, the permanent principle of the supernatural life, in those who, as the expression is, place no obstacle in its way, but also adds particular gifts, dispositions, seeds of grace, by *elevating and perfecting the natural powers*. *By these gifts the parties are assisted not only in understanding, but in knowing intimately, in adhering to firmly, in willing effectively, and in successfully putting into practice, those things which pertain to the marriage state, its aims and duties, giving them in fine*

right to the actual assistance of grace, whensoever they need it for fulfilling the duties of their state.

Nevertheless, since it is a law of divine Providence in the supernatural order that men do not reap the full fruit of the Sacraments which they receive after acquiring the use of reason unless they cooperate with grace, the grace of matrimony will remain for the most part an unused talent hidden in the field unless the parties exercise these supernatural powers and cultivate and develop the seeds of grace they have received.²⁷

Every true Christian marriage is a sacramental marriage. Leo XIII, in 1880, defended and explained the sacramentality of marriage in his encyclical on Christian Marriage, *Arcanum*:

Marriage, moreover, is a sacrament, because it is a holy sign which gives grace, showing forth an image of the mystical nuptials of Christ with the Church. But the form and image of these nuptials is shown precisely by the very bond of that most close union in which man and woman are bound together in one; which bond is nothing else but the marriage itself. Hence it is clear that among Christians every true marriage is, in itself and by itself, a sacrament; and that nothing can be further from the truth than to say that the sacrament is a certain added ornament, or outward endowment, which can be separated and torn away from the contract at the caprice of man.

Marriage becomes a sacrament by being inserted into the covenant established through Baptism between Christ and His Church. John Paul II writes:

Indeed, by means of baptism, man and woman are definitively placed within the new and eternal covenant, in the spousal covenant of Christ with the Church. And it is because of this indestructible insertion that the intimate community of conjugal life and love, founded by the Creator, is elevated and assumed into the spousal charity of Christ, sustained and enriched by His redeeming power.²⁸

This means that the natural-law marriage of non-Christian spouses who both receive Baptism after marriage, becomes a sacrament by the very fact of the couple's reception of Baptism, through which they are inserted into Christ's Mystical Body and become a sacramental sign of the union between Christ and His Church.

27 Pius XI, *Casti connubii* 40-41.

28 John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio* 13.