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# John Paul II on Family and Sexuality

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Richard M. Hogan and  
John M. LeVoir

## Man and Woman (Images of God) and Love

AFTER TWENTY-FIVE years of thought and reflection on marriage and the family, Karol Wojtyla was called to the chair of Saint Peter. As a theologian in his own right, he developed a new understanding of the moral precepts of Christ. This development can already be seen in his early work, *Love and Responsibility*. Later, as archbishop of Cracow and as a participant in the Second Vatican Council, he proposed his new moral theology to the other conciliar fathers. His new understanding was received by the council and became part of its teaching in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. Now, as the Vicar of Christ, John Paul II has offered the world his fully matured moral theology in his papal addresses entitled *Theology of the Body* and in his *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family*. Since this new development is found in the conciliar documents, John Paul II is teaching us what the Second Vatican Council intended.

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The central idea in the new theology of John Paul II is the subjective turn founded on the revelation in Genesis that we are made in God's image. Endowed with a likeness to God, we have been created to act as He does, i.e., to love, to give ourselves as He does within the Holy Trinity. Our dignity lies in our similarity to God. When we fail to act as He does, we destroy ourselves and our dignity. As John Paul wrote in his first encyclical, "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless."<sup>1</sup> Continuing the same theme in his document on family life, the pope says, "Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being."<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Holy Father insists that we must love. This necessity flows from within ourselves. God does not compel us to love. Rather, the obligation to love is derived from the kind of creatures we are, i.e., persons made in the image of God.

However, God must show us how to love because love is primarily a divine activity in which we, through God's creative act, are called to share. (Thus, Christ, the God-man, is absolutely central to each and every human being. Only in him can we see how God loves, i.e., how we should love.) We know from revelation, i.e., from the Old Testament and most perfectly from Christ, that God loves through a complete self-donation of Himself. This love is perfectly present in the Holy Trinity where each divine Person totally surrenders Himself to the others. This total self-gift of each Person within the Trinity, while preserving the distinct features of each Person (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) establishes a complete union of wills. The love of each divine Person is a personal choice, a will-act, made by each based on knowledge of the truth. The self-donation of each divine Person to the others unites all three in a *communion of persons*. In effect, there is an attitude, a choice, to act as one. This is what love is: an act of the will to do what another wills.

God's self-gift of Himself is extended to us and made known to us in the creation and most especially in the redemption. In creation, God shared Himself with us and all creation because He shared what He is: existence. He gave Himself to what He created.

Of course, in a unique way, He gave Himself to man and woman when He created Adam and Eve in His own image. But His creative act, as much of a self-surrender as it was, is infinitely less precious than the total abnegation of self that is manifested in the incarnation. As Saint Paul wrote, "Though He was in the form of God, [Jesus] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of men."<sup>3</sup> The incarnation, God taking the nature of one of His creatures, shows us how God loves. But even the assumption of a human nature did not completely reveal the full extent of God's love. Only on the cross do we see how far the self-surrender of God extends. He gave Himself for our sakes that we might have life. He gave until He had nothing more to give and He did it totally for us. This is love! Since we are made in God's likeness, we are made to love as He did and does: an all-encompassing self-surrender for the sake of others. Only when we mirror the love of the Trinity in our love do we fulfill ourselves as God created us. Only then is life meaningful.

Wojtyla points out that the vocation to give ourselves in love is a call given to us because we are persons: creatures endowed with minds and wills. In other words, as personal beings, we can know the truth and we can choose to give ourselves to another person or persons. Thus, like the Trinity, we have the capability of entering a *communion of persons*. We are first called to enter a *communion of persons* with God and then with other human beings. Failure to form a *communion of persons* is an attack, an aggression, against our very persons. We must love. It is a subjective need which every human being has.

Of course, a *communion of persons*, a relationship of love, cannot be established unless there are at least two persons who individually choose through a personal will-act to give themselves to each other. Thus, we cannot, properly speaking, love a thing or even an animal. These beings do not have wills; they do not have the ability to give themselves to others. They cannot love and since love is a reciprocal gift of at least two persons, we cannot love them.



Love is an activity proper to persons. Love is also the *only* way to relate to persons. In one of his early works on love, John Paul teaches that a "person is a good towards which the only proper adequate attitude is love." "This [personalistic] norm, in its negative aspect, states that the person is a kind of good which does not admit of use and cannot be treated as an object of use and as such the means to an end."<sup>4</sup> The dignity of persons as created in God's image makes them superior to the remainder of creation. That superiority gives them a right to be treasured for their own sakes, not as means to an end. We must, then, relate to other persons only through love, i.e., in and through a *communion of persons*. The dignity of other persons and our own dignity require such a stance. Should one person treat another as a means to an end, as someone to be used, the second becomes, for the first, less than a personal being. The first person is reducing the second to a thing. Of necessity, because the first person is equal to the second, the first is also reducing himself/herself to a thing. The dignity of persons, our own and that of others, requires that the personalistic norm always be observed.

As human persons, we are not merely spirits. We have bodies and they, as we have seen, are given to us by God as part of the gift of life so that our persons might be expressed in a physical way. Of all the persons in the universe, the three Persons in God, the angels, and humans, only human persons have bodies. Of all the bodily creatures in the world, only we are persons. Thus, we are unique. Only we can express in the physical world how a person loves. Only we can manifest a *communion of persons* in a physical way. The body is the means by which our love is expressed. But it is also a means by which the love of others may be received. As such, it can only be viewed as an object of love. The body is not an appendage which a person carries around with him/her. To treat the body as a thing is to treat the person as a thing. The body is the expression of the person and it should be loved as the person should be loved. The personalistic norm is not limited to the spiritual aspects of persons. It includes the bodies of persons. We may never exclude the body from the dignity

proper to personal beings. Many different practices traditionally taboo in most societies could be justified if the body were divorced from the person. But we dare not permit such an opinion to gain acceptance because it would irreparably harm human dignity.

### The Family as a Communion of Persons

In His creative act, God specified two particular communions which should exist for us when He said to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it."<sup>5</sup> We are called, by creation and "from the beginning," to enter into a *communion of persons* so that we may increase and multiply and to enter into a communion so that the earth might be subdued. Of course, the first communion is the family. The second is that found in the workplace. In both communions, the activity of man and woman reflects the acts of God, not only in the self-gift which establishes the communions, but also in the effects of the self-gift. When God loves, it is life-giving. When man and woman love within the family, new life is brought forth. When people work, they dominate creation. They are acting in a way analogous to God, who, as the Creator, has total dominion over the world. Still, the first communion is the more fundamental. It is the one which reflects God's trinitarian life more closely because it is a total self-surrender of one person to another. In the workplace, we do not give ourselves completely to one another. Second, the *communion of persons* of the family is life-giving whereas that of the workplace is not. The love of a man and a woman is usually fertile as God's love is fertile. Thus, in this way, the *communion of persons* which is the family reflects God's love more closely. It is appropriate to consider the family as the first and most important *communion of persons* and then to examine the relationships which should exist in the workplace.

"Male and female He created them."<sup>6</sup> If we are called to love one another, as God loves, i.e., to surrender ourselves completely to one another, and if our bodies are to express our persons, it is most appropriate that there be bodily differences which allow us to express our love for one another. By God's holy will, there are such differences: God created us as men and women (although



both male and female bodies equally express the human person). The physical gift of a man and a woman to each other is the outward sign, the sacrament, of the familial *communion of persons*. The body, then, is the means and the sign of the gift of the male-person to the female-person. The Holy Father calls this capacity of the body to express the total self-surrender of one person to another the nuptial meaning of the body. In this total physical surrender based on the *communion of persons*, the married couple becomes, physically, an image of God. When a married couple acts in accordance with their vows and God's will, they are a sign (a sacrament), a physical manifestation, of the love of persons. They are an image of God in their bodily gift to one another.

The pope also stresses that the communion of two persons expressed through their bodies is a mutual giving and acceptance. The gift of each spouse mirrors God's gift of Himself in creation. Each spouse gives himself/herself as the Creator did when He created the world. He/She gives himself/herself for the sake of the other. Similarly, the acceptance of the other's gift on the part of each spouse is an act of gratitude to the Creator for the gift. The entire physical creation participates in the gratitude of the man and the woman to the Creator for the gift each has received. The married couple gives as God gives and each responds with gratitude and in that response, all creation responds to the Creator thanking Him for the gift of being. At one and the same time, the couple is an image of God and a sign of creation's response to the Creator.

In his *Theology of the Body* series, the Holy Father defended the ancient biblical terminology for the sexual union of a man and a woman: to know. Of course, since we gain self-knowledge through our acts, the self-gift of a husband and a wife to one another does reveal to each of them more about themselves. But the knowledge gleaned from the gift of a husband and a wife to one another transcends the truth they know about themselves from their other acts because this act of self-surrender is more God-like. The gift of love, acting as God does, expressed through the body, touches the central mystery of the human person in a way in which

most of our other acts do not. Therefore, the verb, to know, is most accurate for the self-gift of a man and a woman to one another.

The knowledge gleaned from this act may be specified in three areas. First, there is the knowledge of oneself and the other in the mutual *communion of persons*. In this mutual giving, one experiences and knows oneself as well as the other in a much fuller way than would otherwise be possible. Second, the hidden treasures of humanity are revealed in motherhood and fatherhood. The woman, whose femininity is hidden, is revealed to herself and to others (especially to her husband) in motherhood. Similarly, the new relationship of the male to the child, fatherhood, reveals to the husband and to others (especially to his wife) an aspect of humanity not previously experienced. Third, in the child, both the man and the woman see and know themselves.

Of course, true love, the surrender of oneself to another, is a freely chosen act of a person. Acts of human persons have (or should have) their origins in the faculties of mind and will. The physical union of a man and woman is not simply an act of their bodies. It is founded on their marriage vows. These vows are choices or will-acts grounded in the dignity of the beloved by which an irrevocable union—a *communion of persons*—is established. This communion can then be expressed in the physical order through their bodies because God gave their bodies a nuptial meaning when He created them male and female.

Marriage vows, then, are freely chosen will-acts. In the vows, each spouse promises to give himself/herself to the other. These vows are not (or should not be) exchanged solely on the basis of sensuality or sentiment. Rather, they should be exchanged because each, perceiving the dignity which God gave the beloved in His creative act, wishes to give himself/herself to the other. Unlike some sensual or sentimental feelings, marriage vows are always under the control of the ones making them. Each spouse promises to love the other forever, i.e., to give himself/herself to the other until death. He/She can always be faithful to that promise, can always give himself/herself to the other, no matter what feelings



he/she has or what the other does. Good feelings might cease, but marriage must be founded on a firmer basis than transient emotions. If marriage were only constituted by the feelings of each spouse, there would be a violation of the personalistic norm. In this case, implicitly, each spouse would marry because the other makes him/her feel good. If that good feeling should cease, the marriage would end. In other words, the spouse would have been there to make the other feel good. With such a union, there would be no assurance for either spouse that the marriage would endure. Neither spouse could be sure that he/she would feel good in two months, five years, let alone forty or fifty years. It is quite clear that a union founded on a selfish desire to achieve an emotional high through the spouse is directly contrary to the commitment of marriage, which is based on a God-like self-donation of each spouse to the other. Marriage, if it is to be a *communion of persons*, must originate in the will, must be rooted in the personalistic norm, and must be an imitation of the Trinity. Sensuality and sentiment will then accompany the marital communion instead of determining it.

Marriage reflects God's love within the Trinity and His love for us, because marriage is constituted by the irrevocable choice in the wills of the spouses. In the Trinity and in creation, love is a choice in the wills of the divine Persons. The familial *communion of persons* reflects the trinitarian *communion of persons* because the irrevocable will-acts of the married partners, establishing a mutual self-surrender, mirror the unbreakable fidelity of God to Himself (within the Trinity) and to those whom He loves (us) outside the Trinity. He never will cease loving Himself or us because He has chosen to do so and His will-acts are, as those of married partners ought to be, irrevocable.

An act of the will is within the control of the one who makes it. Neither the spouse, nor even the angels, including the devil, can cause us to alter our own choices. It is within the power of the fallen angels to tempt, i.e., to suggest possible choices contrary to God's will, but they can never actually make us choose what we do not choose ourselves. Only God has such power and He

will never choose for us. If He were to do that, it would destroy us because we would be reduced to the status of animals, lacking free will. Of course, through lack of cooperation, sickness, or a variety of other causes, the expression of the mutual self-donation in marriage may be hampered. However, that does not alter the gift itself.

Since the love of a husband and a wife should be a *communion of persons* based on the truth of the infinite dignity with which the Creator endowed both of them, it is not offensive, as Sacred Scripture has it, to ask wives to be obedient to their husbands. Nor is it too demanding to ask husbands to be willing to die for their wives as Christ died for the Church. In the exchange of marital vows, both the man and the woman give themselves completely to each other. They each promise, "Not my will, but thine be done."<sup>7</sup> To ask obedience of wives is simply to remind wives of what they have already promised. Obedience, if it is a human act based on a relationship between persons, must be an act of love (personalistic norm). Otherwise, the demand for obedience would be an act of tyranny and the one who is obedient would be acting as a slave. Obedience is the willing cooperation of one with the other because both are united through their freely chosen will-acts. Of course, wives should obey their husbands, i.e., they should be united with them in their wills. That is what was promised on the marriage day through the vows. Similarly, when Saint Paul asks husbands to be ready to die for their wives, he is only reminding them of what they promised. They, in the vows, promised everything they had to their wives: a total self-surrender. In that total gift, they function as creatures made in the image of God. They act as Christ acted. If necessary, husbands must be ready to do what Christ did, surrender everything for the sake of the other. What Saint Paul affirmed of husbands is equally true of wives and what he said of wives is equally true of husbands. Husbands and wives have promised obedience, i.e., a union of wills, to one another. They have voluntarily given themselves totally to one another and each should be ready to die for the other. Seen in the light of John Paul's personalism, Saint Paul's teaching



is not sexist. It is the obvious corollary to the total union which husbands and wives are called to form with one another.

The gift of a man and a woman to one another in marriage must be indissoluble as long as both live. Each surrenders himself/herself to the other and receives the gift of the other in return. Once given, the gift may never be withdrawn. Once received, the gift of the other may never be rejected. As the *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* argues, "The indissolubility of marriage . . . [is] a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church."<sup>8</sup> In other words, God's love is always characterized by perfect fidelity. Human love, since it is to be a reflection of God's love, must also be faithful forever. God is always faithful in His love because anything less would not be a total self-surrender. A gift, if it is total, is not bounded in degree or in time! To give oneself only for a period of time and not forever (at least, for as long as marriage is possible, i.e., until the death of one of the spouses) is to limit the gift. But anything less than a total surrender of oneself for the other is, as we have seen, a violation of the requirement of love, a violation of the personalistic norm. It is, in effect, to use someone rather than to love him/her.

A husband or a wife who has divorced his or her spouse and remarried has treated his or her first spouse as a thing. When the offended spouse ceased to please, he/she was rejected. One may treat cars, boats, and even animals as objects to be used, but never may a human person be so humiliated (personalistic norm). Since the offended spouse was presumably sincere in his/her total self-surrender, he/she cannot help but feel totally devastated. First, he/she, believing in the gift of the other party, fell victim to a broken covenant (which is, in itself, devastating) and, as a result, unwittingly allowed himself/herself to become an object of use, a "thing." Second, and even more humiliating, the offended spouse is now rejected even as a "thing" to be used! Objects are at least useful, but the abandoned spouse is not even considered to have a use! No wonder there are such psychological difficulties for those who have been set aside by their spouses! The pope con-

tinually stresses that marriage should be an affirmation of the value of the person. However, when it is no longer indissoluble, it not only ceases to confirm the personal dignity of the individual spouses, it actually has the potential of destroying the sense of self-worth and dignity in the offended spouse. Once that awareness of one's own value is destroyed, it is most difficult to recover it. The spouse has been used as a thing and he/she may believe himself/herself to be just that: a thing (perhaps even a worthless thing).

The indissolubility of marriage is not harmed either by separation of the spouses without remarriage or by the death of one of the spouses and a subsequent second marriage by the surviving spouse. Separation (in practice in the United States, civil divorce without a second marriage) is an evil, but it is sometimes justified. As John Paul says so descriptively, one or both spouses "may cease to feel that there is any subjective justification for this union, and gradually fall into a state of mind which is psychologically or both psychologically and physiologically incompatible with it. Such a condition warrants separation from 'bed and table,' but cannot annul the fact that they are objectively united, and united in wedlock."<sup>9</sup> Even living apart, they are wedded and bound to one another. Their separation, as all other decisions, should be mutually agreeable. But, even if one unilaterally separates, i.e., moves out, that does not change the union in which they are joined. In separation, the self-surrender of both parties remains intact, but it is not expressed. A second marriage after the death of the spouse does not prejudice the self-surrender in marriage because marriage is both a spiritual and a bodily reality. When one of the spouses dies, i.e., when the body and soul separate, the marital union ceases. A widow or widower is free to remarry.

It should be clear that the conclusions of the foregoing discussion regarding the indissolubility of marriage are founded on the principle that marriage is a total *communion of persons* established by the will-acts of the spouses. Once the self-gift of the man and the woman is made in the marriage vows, it is irrevocable. Even if both cease to feel any stirrings of sensuality or



sentiment in the presence of the other, they are still united as husband and wife. They chose one another forever.

### Revisionist Sexual Morality: An Attack on the Family

The familial *communion of persons* was established by God in Genesis. Through this union of love, man and woman were to fulfill their calling to love as God loves. However, original sin intervened and prevented Adam and Eve from surrendering themselves to each other as God had planned "from the beginning." Indicating that our first parents, by sinning, tottered on the precipice of total self-destruction, the pope teaches that with the loss of God's grace and the concomitant loss of the dominion of the mind and will over the body, there was a "constitutive break within the human person, almost a rupture of man's original spiritual and somatic unity."<sup>10</sup> Further, there was an "ending of the capacity of a full mutual communion."<sup>11</sup> It is "as if the body, in its masculinity and femininity, no longer constituted the 'trust-worthy' substratum of the *communion of persons*."<sup>12</sup> After sin the other (usually of the opposite sex) is often looked upon not for his/her own sake, but for selfish reasons: what can he/she do for me? How can he/she satisfy my selfish desires and inclinations? But, "man indeed, as a person is 'the only creature on earth that God has willed for its own sake' and, at the same time, he is the one who can fully discover his true self only in a sincere giving of himself."<sup>13</sup> Thus, original sin attacked man in his most essential activity, his sincere giving.

Offenses against the sincere giving in the family, i.e., against the first and primary *communion of persons* established by God in His creative act, have been committed by men and women since the fall. For example, in divorce and remarriage, as we have seen, the offended spouse is treated as an object. This is a violation of the familial *communion of persons* caused by selfishness. Selfishness also attacks the family in many other ways, e.g., premarital intercourse, polygamy, adultery and lust, abortion, contraception and artificial conception (test-tube babies), and homosexuality. In our age, most of these practices are not only commonplace (as they have been in past ages), but they are even

defended. Many would like to justify these acts and cease making an effort to resist them.

Four different positions are often advanced in favor of this revisionist morality. The first is proposed by those who misunderstand freedom. They mistakenly equate it with a selfish independence, precluding all forms of self-donation. But this attitude, as well as the actions flowing from it, destroys true freedom because only in an unselfish gift of love is our freedom realized. God made us to love and He also made us free. The two are not in conflict and cannot be because we are made in God's image. Just as God loves and is at the same time perfectly free, when we love unselfishly we are perfectly free. Furthermore, failure to love unselfishly destroys us and consequently our freedom. This is the experience of people who have accepted the "do your own thing" attitude. They ruin themselves, leading miserable lives, because they fail to love, the "fundamental and innate vocation of every human being."<sup>14</sup>

Others would justify these selfish violations of the familial *communion of persons* by divorcing the body from the human person. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of how God made us. They would argue that if the body is meant to express the person, then the individual should be able to choose how his/her body should express his/her person. In their eyes, the Christian sexual ethic makes people slaves to the biological functions of their bodies. If we are to be the masters of nature, why can we not govern our own bodies, freely choosing to express whatever we want through them?

But the human person is not the arbiter of nature! The order of nature is the same as the order of existence and depends upon God, the first cause. On the other hand, the biological order is a scientific abstraction from nature. Showing incredible insight, Karol Wojtyla stated twenty-five years ago that our sexuality "owes its objective importance to its connection with the divine work of creation. . . . and this importance vanishes almost completely if our way of thinking is inspired only by the biological order of nature" which "as a product of the human intellect . . .



abstracts its elements from a larger reality."<sup>15</sup> The Holy Father insists that the body expresses the person as it is because God made the body as well as the soul. In other words, people do not govern their bodies absolutely because their bodies belong by God's creative act to the order of nature, not only to the biological order. There is an integral view of the human person in John Paul's thought, i.e., the body, in all of its functions, is a gift from God just as life itself. As we may not tamper with our lives, so we may not tamper with our bodies.

Still others might argue that since the Christian norms are ideals which can never be attained, God would not ask us to live by them. They might point to the seeming unnatural demands made by the Christian ethic on men and women. Therefore, in their view, acts contrary to these teachings are not sins, i.e., sub-human, but rather are normal (read: permissible) for us. Of course, the commandments are impossible for fallen man without God's grace. With God's grace, however, anything is possible. What is natural for man and woman is the state of original innocence where lust and selfishness were not a problem. In a sense, then, our present state is unnatural. Christ calls us to return to our original state. In response to the questions the Pharisees asked him about divorce, he taught, "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.'"<sup>16</sup> The phrase, "the beginning," is a clear reference to the first words in Genesis, to the time before the fall. In other words, Christ told the Pharisees that married people must live the way Adam and Eve did before the fall in a total *communion of persons* without any tinge of selfishness. This is clearly impossible for fallen man left to his own devices. But Christ would never ask us to do the impossible. His victory on the cross makes God's grace available to us and with that it is possible to live as Adam and Eve did.

A fourth objection to the moral teachings of the Church begins with the same premise as the third one: the Christian moral life is comprised of ideals impossible for us to reach. Since we often

fall short of these ideals while striving through our best efforts to live by them, some would argue that we must not be burdened with the full force of the moral ideals, but rather congratulated for what we have attained. Thus, they claim there are differences in the application of the law to individuals, what the pope calls a gradualness of the law.

However, the Holy Father teaches, as we have seen, that the Christian life is possible with God's grace. It is always attainable. Therefore, we are always bound by the moral teachings. But it is quite clear that we find it easier to do things we have done before. As we practice the Christian life, we grow accustomed to it. There is a growth in virtue. The moral precepts always bind, but they become easier for us to practice. This is not a gradualness in the application of the law to an individual. Rather, it is a gradual perfection of the person in his/her practice of the Christian life (or as John Paul labels it, the law of gradualness in human behavior).

The Church is *for* man. It has the optimistic view of man. The Church repeats to each human person the message of Christ, "Yes, you can live as God's image!" Those who wish to justify acts opposed to the teachings of the Church and the nature of man and woman see the difficulties and hardships many people have in living according to Christian norms. Although those opposed to Church teaching seem to be motivated by compassion, in effect they are pessimistic about our possibility of ever overcoming the effects of sin. If their position were to be accepted, we would be reduced to a level beneath that planned for us "from the beginning." The pope counters the arguments of the critics by an insistence that true compassion is that shown by Christ on Calvary. Through the blood of his cross, we can live as Adam and Eve before the fall, if we are only willing to cooperate with God's grace. As the pope teaches, "to diminish in no way the teaching of Christ constitutes an eminent form of charity for souls."<sup>17</sup> There is no compassion without the truth. Let us always offer the truth compassionately.

#### **Violations of the Familial Communion of Persons**

*(Editors' note: In their book, the authors list and discuss six viola-*



tions of the "familial communion of persons," namely, pre-marital sex, polygamy, adultery and lust, abortion, contraception and artificial conception, and homosexuality. For this article, we have included only the sections on pre-marital sex and contraception/artificial conception.)

### *Pre-marital Sex*

The physical union of a man and a woman before they are married (pre-marital sex) is an attempt to express with their bodies a union which is not as yet present in their minds and wills. If the body is the expression of the person and if a person is characterized by a mind and a will, then nothing can be expressed with the body which is not in some way known and chosen through the mind and the will. In pre-marital intercourse, the marital union is not yet present, but the man and the woman are uniting as though they were married. Such is less than a personal act for each because their wills have not yet chosen the union. The self-surrender has not been made, but their bodies are (as though they were independent) surrendering themselves.

Of course, putting the case this way begs the question. As those engaged in pre-marital sexual contact will argue, the union is present. "I do love her; I do love him. Why must we wait for the symbolic [read: empty and meaningless] marriage vows?" The union of a man and a woman in marriage is, as we have seen, a total self-surrender of each spouse to the other. Marriage is reciprocal. There is no *communion of persons* without at least two persons. The gift of each spouse is dependent on the other. No one may risk such a total donation without knowing with as much certainty as is possible that the other is truly making the same self-donation.

It is not possible to know with certainty that the other intends to donate himself/herself in a lasting irrevocable union unless it is a public act. Marriage is a reciprocal self-donation. Private promises are hardly sufficient for each to be sure of the other's self-donation. Even in the lesser self-gift which constitutes employment agreements, most would not trust a private, and therefore, non-binding agreement. How much more, then, when it is

one's total self which is being surrendered, is it necessary to know with certainty that the other is truly giving himself/herself?

The public act makes the community the witness and the guarantor of the mutual agreement. Society is willing to secure the marital union because without such an assurance for the spouses, the dignity of its members who enter marriage is at great risk. Further, society is necessarily concerned about its future members, i.e., the children of marital unions who are also put at great risk if the marriage is not surrounded with safeguards. With the public as witness, both spouses are quite aware of the seriousness of the commitment. With that knowledge, each may be reasonably certain of the intention of the other. Each will have given his/her decision more careful consideration than they would a non-binding private act.

Of course, the preceding comments prescind from the marriage of baptized Christians. When two baptized people marry, a sacrament of union is brought into existence. Through the sacrament, the two spouses are united in Christ, not only in a *communion of persons* between themselves. Christ seals their love, i.e., their self-gift, and unites them in himself. It is as though Christ writes the name of each person on the soul of the other. Christ elevates the spousal *communion of persons* to a union in the Trinity. If the *communion of persons* of the non-baptized requires a public act, how much more should the Sacrament of Matrimony, an act of the Church, require a public act before a priest or, by special dispensation, before another official. Obviously, Christians cannot express this union before it is present. Pre-marital sex is thus gravely wrong because it is a violation of the sacramental union as well as a violation of the call given by God in His creative act to form a familial *communion of persons*.

#### *Contraception and Artificial Conception*

As we have seen, the personalistic norm is violated by divorce and remarriage, pre-marital intercourse, polygamy, adultery and lust, as well as abortion. Contraception also attacks the total gift of a man and a woman to one another. Husbands and wives cannot



give themselves to each other completely when they refuse to surrender themselves at least potentially as mothers and fathers. In one of the clearest and most forceful statements on contraception, Wojtyla writes that couples who practice contraception " 'manipulate' and degrade human sexuality—and with it themselves and their married partner—by 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."<sup>18</sup>

A human person, created in God's image with a body and a soul, should reflect God, i.e., he/she should love by giving himself/herself unreservedly to others. Since we are embodied spirits and the body is the expression of our persons, it is appropriate that there be a bodily means of giving ourselves to one another, i.e., of loving one another. The bodily differences between a man and a woman are the physical means by which the unselfish donation in love is made. The sexual act should be the total physical surrender of each spouse to the other in all of his or her potentialities. As such, it should be a sign and expression of the fundamental union the spouses enjoy in the familial *communion of persons* established through the marriage vows. By God's design, the self-donation of a man and a woman to one another includes the possibility of procreating new life. Since we are made in the divine image, it is fitting that our love be fruitful as God's love is fruitful. Contraception alters the sexual act and makes it something other than a self-surrender. For the contracepting couple, the sexual act is a lie because the spouses refuse to give themselves to one another as potential mothers and fathers. They engage in what is only an apparent act of self-surrender. In other words, since the sexual union is no longer the expression of a total gift, it does not mirror the spousal *communion of persons*.

But even for the pre-marital or adulterous couple, contraception cannot be defended. Adultery and pre-marital intercourse are offenses against the familial *communion of persons* because in such acts the man and the woman attempt to surrender them-

selves to each other without having properly chosen each other in their wills. In effect, they presume to divorce their bodies from their persons and still to give themselves to each other in a bodily way. However, in contracepting, they even refuse to give themselves fully to each other in their flesh. Even the bodily union is not a gift. It is only an apparent gift, i.e., a lie.

In an act of love, husband and wife should give themselves to each other and should be open to the transmission of life. The denial of either good, conjugal love or procreation constitutes a falsification of the act. With conjugal love or procreation denied, the act no longer reflects God's fruitful love. Most would grant that a husband seeking only children from his wife without any thought of her welfare is using her. Such a man denies the value of conjugal love. However, the husband who denies the possibility of procreation also is using his wife. (The wife, of course, would be using her husband if she denies either conjugal love or the procreation of children.) For God, life and love are not separated and thus, for us, as images of God, life and love should not be separated, i.e., conjugal love and life should always be united.

Contraception and the other abuses against the familial *communion of persons* are violations of the personalistic norm and therefore aggressions against human dignity. They occur because of original sin and its effects, especially selfishness as manifested in lust. But other forms of selfishness, in addition to lust, are equally damaging to the *communion of persons* and human dignity. For example, some couples may selfishly wish to have a large number of children although they cannot care for all of them. Such children can become mere objects possessed by their parents. This is a grave violation of human dignity. Another form of selfishness is apparent in some couples who experience difficulties in conceiving a child. They desire children more than any other gift God could give them. Desperately seeking to conceive a child, they might turn to their physician for advice. The doctor may suggest that they visit one of the clinics where babies are conceived in test tubes.

This practice, however, cannot be tolerated. The couple's



selfish desire for children leads them to violate their own dignity by manipulating and using their bodies. The practice of artificial conception reduces procreation to a merely biological, laboratory act when it must be, by God's will, the fruit of a covenant, a *communion of persons*, as expressed in the conjugal embrace of a man and a woman joined in marriage. A new spirit, a baby, must be conceived within a union of spirits, i.e., the spousal union. Artificial conception is a manipulation because it divorces the life-giving potential of the body from the person. Similar to the contracepting couple, the test-tube baby couple refuses to accept God's will in their own lives and claims total control over their bodies. But the body is not a machine and it is contrary to human dignity to manipulate it.

When a couple contracepts or conceives artificially (or when these practices are defended by others), sexuality is reduced to a merely biological function. With this understanding of sexuality in place, there is no reason to object to surrogate mothers, artificial insemination, and many other serious abuses which are now proposed and even practiced. Such a view destroys both love as it is expressed physically, and life as the fruit of the love of spirits, i.e., persons. The widespread acceptance of artificial conception and these other abuses shows how the contraceptive mentality has accustomed us to view our bodies as machines. If human dignity is to be preserved, we must abandon this false understanding of ourselves.

#### Natural Family Planning

The Holy Father proposes that natural family planning be the means for teaching the world to observe the personalistic norm. This mandate from John Paul II is extraordinary. He advocates knowledge of the fertility cycle for everyone, even those not yet married. In the *Apostolic Exhortation on the Family*, the pope writes, "The necessary conditions [for marriage] also include knowledge of the bodily aspect and the body's rhythms of fertility. Accordingly, every effort must be made to render such knowledge accessible to all married people and also to young

adults before marriage, through clear, timely and serious instruction and education given by married couples, doctors, and experts."<sup>19</sup> Obviously, the pope sees that the understanding of one's fertility, as taught in natural family planning courses, is essential to married life and even to one's life before marriage.

Natural family planning is a tool for understanding and examining human fertility. Through this tool, both married and unmarried adults learn about their fertility. Then they make use of this knowledge depending, of course, upon their state of life. Many have identified the knowledge of fertility with the decision of couples to avoid or to have children. However, the distinction between the knowledge of fertility and the application of that knowledge within the sexual act is vital. Natural family planning is used here to mean the tool for understanding human fertility. But the tool is distinct from how a couple applies it in their sexual relationship. In other words, natural family planning is a method. As a method for understanding one's own fertility, it is universally approved.

In applying the method of natural family planning in marriage, couples are to exercise responsible parenthood. This means that husband and wife are to have a definite family and procreative attitude. They are to be *for* children because their love should reflect God's love which is always life-giving. In the normal situation, a married couple must decide each month whether to seek a pregnancy or not. They must have sufficient reason for either decision. If "there exist reasonable grounds for spacing births, arising from physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances,"<sup>20</sup> then a couple may have recourse to periods of infertility and may abstain from the sexual embrace during their fertile times. Outside of marriage, young adults apply the knowledge of their fertility responsibly when they exercise chastity.

The underlying reason why young adults, engaged couples, and married couples should know natural family planning is that this method teaches them that the body, as God made it, is the expression of the person. For example, when husband and wife



accept the natural cycle of fertility and infertility as a gift from God, not subject to artificial manipulation, they usually assent to the principle that the body is the expression of the person. They experience themselves as spirits endowed with a body and they know that those who would divorce the body from the person misunderstand human beings.

An unmarried female might begin to observe the signs of the fertility and infertility of her own body and thus come to a greater appreciation of the mystery and wonder of herself as a woman. This greater appreciation of her dignity, gained through natural family planning, would foster in her the virtue of chastity because she in no way would want to compromise her dignity.

Pope John Paul has issued a universal and unrestricted call for all men and women to learn natural family planning, i.e., to know their own fertility. In John Paul's view, natural family planning is a means to counteract the entire sexually permissive mentality which encourages a manipulation of the body and a contempt of self-mastery. It is a means to teach the theology of the body. Natural family planning is thus the means by which many men and women learn to affirm human dignity by observing the personalistic norm.

### Virginity

It is possible that the papal emphasis on the familial *communion of persons* could obscure the equally important principle that virginity and celibacy are treasured gifts from God as well. Those who have voluntarily remained unmarried for the sake of the kingdom of God have entered a *communion of persons* (the Church), albeit not a familial one (in the usual sense, at least), which is expressed through their bodies. "In virginity or celibacy, the human being . . . in a bodily way . . . anticipates in his or her flesh the new world of the future resurrection."<sup>21</sup> Bodily this communion is expressed in the celibate's self-mastery, not unlike that expected of married couples. Further, the celibate or virgin does not view sexuality as something worthless. "When human sexuality is not regarded as a great value given by the Creator, the

renunciation of it for the sake of the kingdom loses its meaning."<sup>22</sup> If love (a *communion of persons* founded on a total self-donation of one person to another) is not valued in marriage, it will not be held in high esteem in its other expression, celibacy and virginity.

### Conclusion

"*The future of humanity passes by way of the family*"<sup>23</sup> because it is in the family that the incomparable dignity of each human person is first affirmed. Each family member should donate himself/herself to the others. There can be no greater affirmation of one's own dignity than receiving the infinitely precious gift of other human persons. The self-donation, certainly on the part of the husband and the wife, must be total and it must be given as a response to the dignity of each family member. The children then learn to love from their parents, who are the teachers in this school of love called the family.

However, it is equally true that no institution can do more harm to individuals than the family. For, if the dignity of each is not affirmed because one or more (but, again, especially the husband or the wife) are acting for selfish reasons, the results are devastating to the members of the family.

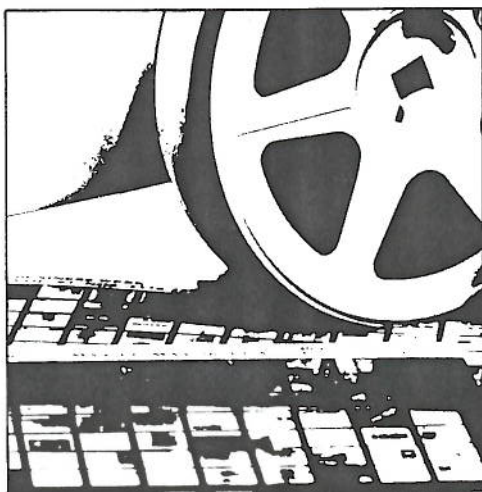
### Notes

- 1 See *Redemptor Hominis, The Redeemer of Man, L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), vol. 12, no. 12 (March 19, 1979), no. 10.
- 2 See *Familiaris Consortio, Apostolic Exhortation on the Family* (hereafter cited *FC*), *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), vol. 14, nos. 51-52 (December 21-28, 1981), no. 11.
- 3 See Phil. 2:6-7.
- 4 See *Love and Responsibility* (hereafter cited *LR*), translated by H. T. Willetts (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), p. 41.
- 5 See Gen. 1:28.
- 6 Ibid., 1:27.
- 7 See Luke 22:42.
- 8 See *FC*, no. 20.
- 9 See *LR*, p. 215.
- 10 See *Theology of the Body, L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), vol. 13, June 2, 1980, address no. 28.
- 11 Ibid., June 9, 1980, address no. 29.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid., July 28, 1980, address no. 32.



- 14 See *FC*, no. 11.
- 15 See *LR*, p. 57.
- 16 See Matt. 19:4-5.
- 17 See *FC*, no. 33.
- 18 See *FC*, no. 32.
- 19 Ibid., no. 33.
- 20 See Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II), "A Discipline That Ennobles Human Love," *L'Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), vol. 17, no. 36 (September 3, 1984), p. 6.
- 21 See *FC*, no. 16.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., no. 86.

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