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Expressing Marital Love during the Fertile Phase

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ACCORDING TO various observers, a significant growth has taken place in natural family planning (NFP), not merely in the numbers who are turning away from artificial and contraceptive methods to natural methods of spacing children, but also in a deeper understanding of NFP as a way of life. In conferences on the subject, like the week-long symposium at Collegeville in June 1978 or in Philadelphia in June 1980, the constant theme is that NFP is not merely a method of spacing the births of children but a philosophy of life and love.

It can be called a *philosophy* because it presupposes that one has convictions about the ultimate meanings of God and man; that one believes in a caring God; that one sees human sexuality as more than biological, more than functional, more than an expression of human affections, however deep; that one thinks human sexuality is part of the mystery of personality and, as such, is transcendental, going beyond the conscious expectations of man and woman to fulfill providential purposes.¹

Catholic tradition has always stressed that the love between husband and wife is unique and exclusive, modeled on the fidelity between God and each soul. Two persons who have given a special sacrament to each other manifest a special kind of love. Superficially, expressions of love between married persons may seem identical with those of the unmarried, but they are very different. Husband and wife have vowed to be faithful to each other in imitation of God's fidelity to each. Their physical expressions of love are meant to nourish that fidelity and bond of love and to participate in the holiness of their covenant.

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On the day-to-day level, however, it is difficult to live out these high ideals. Robert Joyce recognizes this difficulty when he writes that spouses cannot practice NFP in a happy and satisfactory way unless both of them are willing to develop a philosophy of life and sexuality in which they really try to communicate with one another on all the levels of their being. As persons, they seek a deeper *personal* union and at the same time respect each other's pattern of fertility.²

Before turning to the guidelines, we must recognize the erotic culture in which we live and our society's intense preoccupation with genital sex. Two anecdotes recounted at the Collegeville meeting illustrate the point. According to the first, a mother, worried by her daughter's dating patterns and suspicious that she was "sleeping around," as the teenagers say, related to her the details of a divorce case in which the reason given for so much unhappiness in the marriage was that the young woman had become pregnant before marriage and "had" to marry. The mother, wishing to drive home her lesson, told her daughter: "Mary, for *one hour* of pleasure, she has to suffer for the rest of her life"—to which Mary replied: "Mom, how does one manage to make it *last* that long?"

The second incident describes a young widower receiving the sympathy of his colleagues at the graveside of his wife. They kept saying, "Don't worry, Bill, you are full of grief now for Mary, but in a few months you will realize your need for a companion and will meet someone else." "All well and good," responded Bill, "but what am I going to do *tonight*?"

In short, there is a widely accepted notion that everyone must "have sex" in one form or another if one is to be mentally healthy. Of course (so the notion goes), a few rare individuals possess a special charism to live without genital gratification. Ordinarily, however, sexual abstinence is a deprivation to be corrected as soon as possible. This cultural attitude naturally gives Christians the feeling that they are missing out on something in life that others can enjoy freely.

The Christian View

But we believe in another way of viewing marital sexuality, the way in which Paul describes the relationship between a husband and a wife in Ephesians, chapter 5, verses 21-33: As Christ has loved the Church, so a husband ought to love his wife. No man hates his own body; no more should he hate that of his wife. The bodily expression of love, therefore, between a husband and wife is good and sacred. All those actions, then, that prepare the spouses for sexual intercourse are good, including kisses, caresses, and touches of various kinds described in the seventh chapter of the Cantic of Canticles, whose sacred writer fully approves of the bodily expression of love between spouses.

Using scriptural insights and philosophic reasonings, theologians have

traditionally regarded all the actions that prepared the spouses for the act of genital intercourse as good and proper provided that one did not *directly* intend masturbation, some other form of reaching orgasm outside of intercourse, or contraception.³

In stating this principle, perhaps I should define several terms: Genital intercourse involves a physical union between a man and a woman. The penis penetrates the vagina and deposits semen therein. In some instances the man is not able to produce semen but remains capable of erection, penetration, and ejaculation of fluid into the vagina of the woman. Masturbation, as I have described it in a previous article,⁴ is the stimulation (by oneself or by another) of the external sexual organs to a point of climax or orgasm; no intercourse follows. Ordinarily, some kind of close physical contact is necessary. In speaking of "some other" form of reaching orgasm outside of intercourse I am referring to oral-genital contacts. The two common forms are *fellatio*, or the insertion of the penis into the mouth of the woman; and *cunilingus*, male kissing of the female genitals.

Having stated a principle and explained its terms, one may address the question, What is permissible to a couple during the phase of the menstrual cycle when both persons have decided to abstain from intercourse in order to avoid pregnancy? Since the couple may not directly intend masturbation, they may not deliberately engage in the degree of love-making that causes either person to lose control, that is, to reach such a high stage of tension that avoiding orgasm becomes virtually impossible.

In practice, well-intentioned couples, eager to express their mutual affection, sometimes go too far, ending up with the man's loss of seed or the woman's involuntary orgasm. While in the objective order masturbation has occurred, it is doubtful that such actions are even venially sinful, inasmuch as these persons have not *directly* willed masturbation but simply the expression of affection.

It is unwise for married persons to dwell upon these occasional incidents. If, however, love-making at a time of the cycle when they do not intend intercourse regularly leads to orgasm in either party, then the couple should re-examine their motives to determine whether they are really intending their love-making to end that way. If they decide that they have not been honest with themselves, they should admit their fault and strive to avoid future orgasm without intercourse.

For the sake of clarity, let me comment that acts between married people that do not lead to orgasm are called *actus imperfecti*, imperfect acts. (In this context, "imperfect" means "incomplete," rather than morally faulty.) Authors distinguish various situations. As I have already mentioned, such love-making should not be a proximate cause of masturbation. (By "proximate" is meant that in the *majority* of situations where certain kinds of stimuli

have been present, masturbation has occurred. If love-making has only *rarely* led to masturbation, the causal relationship is called "remote.")

Only the two persons involved know what kind of acts can take place without proximate danger of deliberate masturbation. In a particular marriage a kind of personal equation may exist between the partners; that is, they know each other so well that actions that ordinarily might not excite other married couples do arouse them to the point of masturbation.⁵ Accordingly, during the fertile phase when they have decided not to have genital intercourse, they will engage only in brief kisses and embraces. Another couple, however, could express their affection more intensely without proximate danger of masturbation. And so on. There are great differences among couples.

It is noteworthy that the ability to engage in such "imperfect" acts of sexuality without danger of masturbation presupposes a high level of communication between the spouses. In some instances there is little or no communication about these matters, with the result that the couple do not go near one another during the fertile phase of the cycle, indeed often becoming irritated with each other at this time. This unhealthful situation renders the practice of periodic continence very difficult and often causes the spouses to masturbate in isolation from each other.

Couples, then, should seek a happy medium between the one extreme of deliberately intended masturbation during the fertile phase and the other extreme of avoiding any close contact with each other. Most spouses should be able to express their love in a bodily way during the fertile phase without placing themselves in proximate danger of *deliberate* masturbation. (By "bodily way" I mean kissing, embracing, and caressing without direct genital contact.)

Even in situations where there may be proximate danger of proceeding to involuntary masturbation, spouses may engage in such imperfect acts provided they have a sufficient reason for so doing. But what constitutes "sufficient reason"? It includes the desire to express mutual love, the willingness to comply with the desires of the other spouse, a need to be held by the other spouse, the relief of tension—and so on. It would be rare that some good reason would not be present, and the married persons themselves should make the decision about its sufficiency. They are the only ones who in the concrete circumstances of time and place really know *when* a sufficient reason is present. Now, according to the norm, these acts are licit and good despite the fact that a high probability of *involuntary* orgasm sometimes is foreseen. It should be stressed that one does not intend or will the involuntary orgasm. As I have already noted, involuntary masturbation means that in performing an ordinary act of affection, the man occasionally ejaculates without giving consent, or the woman experiences spontaneous

orgasm.⁶

In the performance of these imperfect acts a husband would do well to remember that his wife's need to be held is not the same as a desire for intercourse. Studies reveal that the need to be held and cuddled, like other needs, varies in intensity from person to person and in the same person from time to time. "For most women, body contact is pleasant, but not indispensable. At one extreme, however, are women who find it disagreeable or even repugnant, while at the other extreme are those who experience it as a desire so compelling that it resembles an addiction. As with oral needs, the need for body contact may be intensified during periods of duress."⁷

Body-contact longings are seldom satisfied without the participation of the other person. To enlist such participation, a wife may entice her husband into having intercourse when her real desire is only to be held or cuddled. Women have been known to barter coitus for body contact. It is probable, then, that some women who practice NFP are unaware of the nature of their desire to be held, confusing it with the desire for intercourse and thus making abstinence during the fertile phase more difficult for both themselves and their husbands. On the other hand, a husband can misread the needs of his wife in this regard and come to believe that her request to be held really means she wants coitus.⁸ I shall return to this point in my pastoral reflections on *touching*. Now I wish to treat some current problems.

Specific Problems

A. *Oral Stimulation (Nothing New under the Sun)*

Oral stimulation refers to two principal activities: (1) the male's kissing the female genitals (cunnilingus) and (2) the female's kissing the male genitals (fellatio). As described in a classic marriage manual of over fifty years ago (1926), the purpose of this stimulation by either husband or wife (or both) was to prepare the spouses for sexual communion. Theodore H. Van de Velde wrote that these "genital kisses" help overcome a previous inadequacy of lubrication in the female genitals, bring out a higher level of sexual excitement, and lead to psychic and bodily readiness for a sexual communion that will be satisfactory to both partners. It is particularly calculated to overcome frigidity and fear in hitherto inexperienced women who are "as yet hardly capable of specific sexual desire."⁹

Van de Velde cautions, however, in language that must seem quaint and Victorian to "all-knowing" contemporaries, that the husband must exercise "the greatest gentleness and the most delicate reverence. The old proverb says: 'From the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step.' In the lore of love this proverb means that supreme beauty and hideous ugliness are separated by a borderline so slight that our minds and senses may transgress it, unawares."¹⁰

The author goes on to suggest that when the man's reactions are slower

the woman may take the more active part and give—instead of receiving—the genital kiss. Again, he cautions mutual delicacy and modesty, and physical cleanliness.¹¹

While Van de Velde's suggestions would be rejected by our hedonistic age as sexist and prudish, he does articulate well a licit and laudable use of oral stimulation. He sees it as one more form of foreplay to prepare the spouses for intercourse. Contemporary man, however, sees the same activities as optional forms of complete (that is, orgasmic) genital pleasure—alternatives to coital intercourse. Indeed, very many couples regard complete oral-genital acts, as well as masturbation, as a very desirable pleasure, particularly when intercourse is not feasible for a variety of reasons, such as avoidance of pregnancy, the man's fear that he will not "perform" well, or the woman's fear that she will not be able to have an orgasm in coitus. Many older couples, however, object to oral-genital acts.¹²

The *Redbook Report* of 1975 indicates that oral-genital acts are more prevalent among couples under thirty-nine. The authors of this document attribute the increased incidence of these and other sexual activities to a change in attitude since the Kinsey era. There is widespread experimentation with erotically stimulating techniques. In Kinsey's study of the female, over 50 percent had engaged in either fellatio or cunnilingus. In the *Redbook* survey, however, the comparative figure for all respondents between twenty and thirty years of age is 91 percent. Ninety-one out of 100 of these women have participated in oral-genital acts, both giving and receiving them. Forty of these 91 engage in oral-genital activity often, and 45 occasionally. In all age groups "strongly religious" women are only slightly less likely than non-religious women to practice cunnilingus and fellatio, but they tend to indulge in these acts less frequently. Interesting is the *Redbook* breakdown of the data concerning "strongly religious women over forty": eight out of ten wives have experienced cunnilingus, with three out of ten engaging in it often, and four out of ten occasionally. Essentially, the same proportions apply in the practice of fellatio. From letters that accompanied the completed questionnaires, the editors noted that for many wives oral-genital activity is the chief way, and often the only way, they are able to achieve orgasm.¹³

The survey does not indicate what proportion of those using oral-genital acts went on to have genital intercourse, but it may be presumed to be small, inasmuch as oral-genital relationships are generally viewed as an orgasmic *alternative* to genital intercourse. Obviously, if intercourse is not intended, such activity is without moral justification, for several reasons: (1) The husband's semen is not deposited in the wife's vagina. (2) The wife and husband *intend* orgasm without intercourse. Even if they do not succeed in having orgasm, they have committed an act that shares in the intention and nature of contraception or masturbation. The general principle remains true; name-

ly, if husband and wife engage in acts that usually lead to orgasm they should be prepared to have normal vaginal intercourse. As I have already indicated, this general principle makes room for exceptions, as in the case of involuntary orgasm.

The *Redbook* survey also discovered that only half of the 100,000 women interviewed had experienced anal "intercourse," and only rarely, in most cases only once.¹⁴ There is no need to comment on the immorality of anal intercourse that is not completed naturally in the vagina. Like oral-genital intercourse, it shares in the evil of masturbation and contraception.

As already stated, the moral principle is this: Various forms of oral-genital stimulation that lead to genital intercourse are licit, provided both persons find them agreeable; if the same activities, however, regularly lead to orgasm apart from normal intercourse, then they are no different *morally* from masturbation. It should be stressed that oral-genital stimulation may be unacceptable for the reason that one spouse objects to it. It would be contrary to both justice and charity to oblige either person to accept actions that he finds painful or repugnant.¹⁵

However clear the general moral principle may be that married couples may seek to prepare themselves for genital intercourse by various forms of stimulation, nonetheless, many couples may lapse into complete oral-genital acts because they are affected by the pansexual milieu in which they live. Indeed, just as masturbation has come to be accepted by many Catholics as an unavoidable growth process, so also complete oral-genital activity is wrongly regarded as a lawful alternative during those periods of the cycle when pregnancy is more likely.

B. *Distinction between Incomplete and Complete Venereal Acts*

We must make the distinction between incomplete and complete venereal acts if we are to help a couple observe conjugal chastity. "A complete venereal act means orgasm, whether in man or in woman, whether in married or single persons. And complete venereal pleasure is the pleasure that normally accompanies orgasm. By incomplete venereal acts theologians understand the process of tumescence up to the point of orgasm, but not including it. By incomplete venereal pleasure they understand the mixed feelings of pleasure and tension which normally accompany tumescence."¹⁶ Deliberate, directly intended orgasm, Ford and Kelly state, is not permitted to either spouse except in the context of the marriage act or as immediate preparation for the marriage act (in the case of the wife). If this norm is violated, it is serious sin in the objective order, and could become mortal in the subjective order if it were freely and directly intended.¹⁷

Mutual incomplete acts preparatory to the natural marriage act are *per se* permitted to married people to the extent that they are necessary to facilitate

satisfactory intercourse. They are generally necessary. These actions are, again, distinct from mutual incomplete acts that are not immediately preparatory to intercourse. The latter are lawful and virtuous as expressions of mutual love.¹⁸ I shall say more about them when I speak of *touching* later in this article. Again, husband and wife themselves are in the best position to know what acts are conducive to lawful intercourse and what kinds of acts would probably lead to orgasm outside the act of intercourse. In saying this, one should be careful to qualify the meaning of "outside the act of intercourse." In some instances a woman may achieve orgasm through such preparatory acts before the intromission of the spouse's penis into her vagina. This is lawful, particularly for those women who have had difficulty in responding to their husbands. (In making this qualification, I do not mean to suggest that women who have no difficulty in responding may not also use such acts.)

The above norm must be applied prudently by those who offer moral guidance to the married. Subjective factors must be carefully evaluated. The well-intentioned newly married husband may suffer from premature ejaculation, and it would be wrong to discuss "objective gravity" with a person who is trying to do the right thing. Both he and his wife need to adjust to each other, and counsel in that direction will help them to avoid this difficulty, which the spouses find embarrassing.¹⁹

Even with couples married many years it may generally be wise not to stress the *objective* gravity of the occurrence of orgasm outside of intercourse. It is sometimes very difficult to convey this truth to the ordinary Catholic; and even if one succeeds in conveying it, the person will probably not accept it and might act in bad faith where previously he had acted in good faith.²⁰ An additional reason for not asking a wife who confesses that her husband practiced withdrawal before ejaculation against her will whether she touched herself to reach orgasm is that such a question renders the sacrament of penance hateful. If, however, the same wife mentions that she touched herself, or was touched by her husband after withdrawal and ejaculation, she should be instructed that the action is wrong.

In general discussions of the same case, however, the instructor is bound to point out that the wife may not either touch herself or allow her husband to touch her to reach orgasm, because there has not been a complete act of intercourse. This situation is different from that in which, after normal intercourse, the wife touches herself, or is touched by her husband, to reach her own orgasm. There is no reason why she should remain in a tense condition when she is entitled to relief of orgasm after the act of intercourse. I know of no moralist who would fault her action; one should teach that it is good.

C. *Amplexus Reservatus*

Amplexus reservatus means "intercourse in which penetration takes place and is continued for some time, perhaps a few minutes, perhaps for a long time, but neither party experiences orgasm before, during, or after the act. The hypothesis is that the parties intend from the beginning that the act will take place in this way."²¹ *Amplexus reservatus* should be distinguished from "Karezza," in which the woman experiences orgasm but the man has no orgasm before, during, or after the act.²² If one aim of Karezza is female orgasm outside a complete act of intercourse, it is immoral regardless of the man's further intention. Remember, however, that sometimes the term is used as synonymous with *coitus reservatus*.

The Holy Office in 1952 took the position that confessors and spiritual directors should not presume that there is nothing objectionable in *amplexus reservatus*.²³ Three opinions on this issue are found among theologians: (1) that this action is generally commendable (the *Admonitum* of the Holy Office would not accept this opinion); (2) that it is venially or mortally sinful in itself, because its immediate object is an intentionally incomplete act of intercourse (very few hold this opinion); (3) that it is not illicit in itself, that is, by reason of its immediate object, but only by reason of its end or circumstances, which can make it sinful, either venially or gravely.²⁴

Among these opinions, I would choose the position that *amplexus reservatus* is not evil in itself but may easily become so by reason of circumstances and intention. In many instances such action could lead to masturbation by one or both parties who are intent on not having intercourse. Also, it seems that *amplexus reservatus* could be the source of undue frustration in one or both of the spouses. For this reason, I would neither recommend nor condemn it in pastoral practice. It is really a very complex theological problem, and I do not think I can repudiate the careful study of Jules Paquin, S.J., referenced by Ford and Kelly, which drew the following conclusion: "The incomplete conjugal act (*amplexus reservatus*) does not involve in itself grave malice (common and morally certain opinion), and it does not even involve in itself any venial malice (the common and solidly probable opinion today)."²⁵

It is noteworthy that Robert Joyce takes an opinion on incomplete venereal acts that would lead him logically to regard *amplexus reservatus*—or, for that matter, any other deliberately incomplete venereal act in which the spouses at least partially will the pleasure—as venially or mortally wrong in itself. He writes: "So, the beginning of a coital-genital act, with its accompanying pleasurable sensations, should not be separated from its end—coitional intercourse. Deliberate delight in the beginning of an act is morally responsible only if it includes the specific intent to follow through to the end

of the act. Otherwise, it is self-deceptive activity. Since a person who is not married cannot morally follow through, he or she cannot genuinely intend the beginning of the act. To do so is to sever—or to attempt to sever—a deeply personal action. . . . *Venereal pleasure is specifically found in coitally oriented action and nowhere else.* Thus, any deliberately induced or permitted venereal pleasure constitutes a part of human coital activity. If such pleasure is *deliberately* experienced apart from coital union itself, it is being severed from its natural whole."²⁶

I believe that one can distinguish between touches that of themselves do not lead to orgasm and those that ordinarily do escalate to orgasm. The work of Masters and Johnson, whom I reference later, tends to show that a certain degree of touching can take place without the proximate danger of orgasm or masturbation. Such touching without the intention of intercourse can be a licit expression of affection between spouses. Care, of course, must be taken to avoid abuse, particularly in an action as intimate as amplexus reservatus. Very probably the vast majority of spouses would not think it possible without its leading to interrupted intercourse or masturbation, but a few are capable of such an act, as Ford and Kelly testify. Married persons who seriously declare they are capable of this kind of incomplete intercourse are to be believed. It is not impossible. It is a question of fact; the individual is the only one who can testify to the fact.²⁷

D. Awkward Silence

With respect to our subject there is a kind of awkward silence prevailing among priests and catechists who prepare persons for marriage. One may mention contraception as a moral wrong and may recommend the alternative of NFP, but little is said concerning what husband and wife may licitly do during the period of abstinence from sexual intercourse, generally the couple's estimated fertile phase. Recently, for example, I was involved in giving an Engagement Encounter weekend. This question was not addressed by the two presenting couples, and it was also omitted from the slide-show dealing with the value of NFP.

The philosophy of NFP needs a more thorough exposition. NFP as a way of life, not merely a technique for spacing children, challenges both husband and wife to find ways of expressing love properly during the phase of the cycle when intercourse is not advisable. Many wives involved in NFP discover that their husbands are more attentive and considerate of them during the fertile phase. One young Protestant wife told my pastoral theology class that both she and her husband go out of their way to please each other at this time, thus making abstinence from genital intercourse another way of expressing their mutual love. Indeed, the interior attitudes of both spouses are more important than any conscience question about limits of licit love-

making during this period.²⁸ (This is not, however, to deny the importance of the latter question.)

Couples living the philosophy of NFP are subject to the same hedonistic propaganda as their contemporaries. There is a direct correlation between the decline of Christian values concerning marriage and the increased excess of erotic practices. Hedonistic practices deaden the spirit of prayer. Questions about the intimacies of the marital act that formerly were discussed with concerned professionals are now submitted to the radio or television audience of talk shows. The sense of delicacy and privacy has been abandoned in favor of the attitude that it is normal for husband and wife to discuss their sexual responses in the same way they analyze the functioning or malfunctioning of their electric vacuum cleaner.

E. *Pius XII and Hedonism*

As Pius XII said in 1951, "Too often people are not ashamed of exalting this anti-Christian hedonism as though it were a doctrine, by inculcating the desire to make the pleasure in the preparation and act of conjugal union ever more intense. . . . All questions of man's dignity and of his dignity as a Christian, both of which are a restraint on sexual excess, are set aside. That is false. The seriousness and the holiness of the Christian moral law does not permit the unrestrained satisfying of the sexual instinct, nor such seeking merely for pleasure and enjoyment. It does not allow rational man to let himself be so dominated either by the substance or by the circumstances of the act."²⁹

It should be noted that the pope is not condemning the enjoyment of marital relations between man and wife, but a sort of obsession with genital pleasure, a kind of morbid curiosity about acts and techniques. Significantly, he warns that the ultimate factors in the happiness of husband and wife are not the intensity of pleasure derived from the marital act but the intangibles of mutual respect and affection, even in the most intimate of marital acts. That does not mean they should regard as "immoral" what nature offers them and God has given them."³⁰ They should realize that the respect and mutual esteem arising from their love is "one of the strongest elements of a love which is all the more pure because it is the more tender."³¹

Again, Pius XII does not advert to those acts of touching that are not meant to lead to genital intercourse but are true expressions of love.

Clarification of Hedonism in Marriage

The thought of Pius XII concerning hedonism in marriage needs still further clarification. There is still some confusion regarding the place of physical pleasure in marital intimacy, even as there was in the late fifties.³² If we hold that sexual pleasure is meant to serve as an inducement to marry and to have children, then God must will that men choose the act because of the pleas-

ure, and not the other way around. But to choose the act because of the pleasure is by no means to act *solely* because of the pleasure or to subordinate the act to the pleasure. If one acts consciously for the pleasure of sexual intercourse with his spouse—with the avoidance of contraception or masturbation—he acts rightly. He preserves the values belonging to conjugal intimacy, and the pleasure he seeks is well ordered. Like the conjugal act, physical acts of intimacy that are not meant to lead to intercourse nourish love, while releasing a certain amount of tension and in some cases removing from one or the other person the feeling that he is no longer desirable. When spouses love one another, their principal motive for seeking ways to express love is love itself. Of course, they enjoy the pleasure of physical intimacy in all its degrees, but it is the inner meaning of their actions that counts.

At the same time we must admit that our society's preoccupation with sexual pleasure is a neurosis with which, as I have said, even faithful Christian spouses must contend. It is one thing, however, to be aware of the hedonism of our times and quite another to be involved in actions, like complete oral-genital acts without coitus, that are not merely *un-Christian* but *anti-Christian*. For all practical purposes, such anti-Christian acts are identified by the fact that they are contrary to Christian moral teaching on the proper use of marital acts; for example, such acts are directly contrary either to the procreative dimension of genital sexuality (contraception, masturbation) or to its unitive dimension (artificial insemination). Such acts tend to make pleasure or another person an *idol*. God is replaced by a thing or a person. That is one way of reading Romans 1:18 to 2:11.³³ Once a couple yield to the demon of lust, it is very difficult to regain and control perspective.³⁴

F. *Sensitivity to Mutual Needs*

It should be recalled that couples who are practicing NFP recognize the need to communicate with each other about their affective needs. One can never take it for granted that the other spouse understands at this moment one's desire to embrace or to be held close or, on the contrary, to be left alone with one's thoughts and feelings. Moralists used to express this mutual concern in two principles: (1) each person should grant the reasonable and serious requests of the other, and (2) each should avoid any conduct that causes the other "unnecessary pain and repugnance."³⁵

The obvious need of each to accommodate himself to the other does not, in itself, remove the barriers of selfishness to which all humans are prone. Thus, the efforts that each makes to please the other promote real affection, even as seeking only one's own pleasure without consideration of the other tends to isolate one person from the other. Lust's middle name is alienation. On the other hand, the sacrifice of full physical intimacy, when accepted for good reasons (sickness, avoidance of pregnancy at this time, and so on),

tends to foster intimacy on a deeper level of both spouses. It is unwise, however, as St. Paul advises, for a couple to engage in exaggerated asceticism by foregoing genital relationships for a long period of time when they have no good reason for doing so.³⁶ Once again, only the husband and wife can discern together what is a good reason for abstaining from intercourse for a considerable period of time.

G. *Touching*

Sometimes, in our efforts to know right from wrong in the delicate area of sexual activity, we can speak of touches in moralistic terms and so overlook the many meanings of *touch*. In former times chastity of any kind (virginal, consecrated, conjugal) was equated with no-touch. We used to speak about *angelic* chastity, as if that virtue were somehow a purely spiritual entity like the angels. But today we have come to terms with the fact that we are animal persons and that any real concept of chastity must deal with our flesh-and-blood nature and its desire to touch and be touched.

In his definition of chastity, William E. May has taken due note of the importance of touching. Chastity, he writes, is concerned "with integrating our sexual and affective loves and pleasures into our person, with the loving and intelligent ordering of our sexual desires and longings, of our need to touch and to be touched."³⁷ He goes on to show that there is a relationship between affective and genital sexuality, "for the genital dimension is intended to be an exceptionally intimate mode of expressing affection. We can, and indeed are meant to, reach out in friendship to touch all of the persons with whom we live. But there are different ways of touching people and of being touched by them. . . . But we are as chaste persons, as men and women who lovingly and intelligently put order into our sexual desires, to reach out and to touch in genital sexuality only that person with whom we will share our life fully, in a covenant of love that images the love that God has for us, . . . in other words, in the covenant of marriage."³⁸

While one grasps intellectually the distinction made by May, it is often difficult for many to accept the goodness of touching. Somehow or other, touching is "a sexual thing," the first step toward genital intercourse. It is not seen as having a meaning and value apart from sexual intercourse; yet it has. Researchers like Masters and Johnson have shown that many persons carry into marriage negative attitudes toward touching from their childhood days: "Children have absorbed from the adult world the idea that the human body is indecent. To be naked is to be avoided at any cost. And while looking or being looked at is bad enough, worse by far is touching or being touched."³⁹ Particularly where a sense of sinfulness is invoked with very young children, "parental prohibitions are like stains applied to soft, raw wood: they penetrate so deeply, they can never be fully eradicated."⁴⁰ That

is so true! Masters and Johnson comment that very early in life many parents prohibit expression of feelings—the stroking, the cuddling, all the forms by which the growing child receives a sense of warmth and a feeling of reassurance about himself. In later stages of development a false understanding of touch stunts the person's emotional growth. Proper touching is not the only factor, but it is important for the full personal development of both man and woman. It has significant impact upon the way husband and wife express their love.

Since most of us absorb the prevailing attitudes of our culture toward sexuality, it is not surprising that many persons who practice NFP see the act of touching exclusively as a means to an end: the purpose of touch is to have intercourse. It is observed that once a young couple have established a genital relationship they use touch in a purely functional way, as a request or a sign of willingness to have genital intercourse. Later, as young adults, they will use touch as technique, following the philosophy of the how-to-do-it sex manuals. What has happened is that "sex has been removed from the universe of emotions and brought safely into the realm of objects—not something to be experienced, but to be used, and not just used, but used well."⁴¹

In the name of sexual liberation men and women are taught not how to touch another human being but how to manipulate another body. Both men and women see the woman as a sexual instrument.⁴² The human remedy, which is also a Christian remedy, is to see touch as a value in itself rather than as a means to an end. In this view, man and woman value each other as individuals. Touch becomes "a primary form of communication, a silent voice that avoids the pitfall of words while expressing the feelings of the moment."⁴³ Touch can bridge physical separateness and establish a sense of solidarity between two individuals. It is a two-way communications medium: "In reaching out spontaneously to communicate by touch as well as with words, a husband and wife reaffirm their trust in each other and renew their commitment. They draw on this emotional reservoir when one turns to the other with physical desire. Because their touching has a continuity, because it is part of an intimate dialogue that does not begin and end in bed, they feel secure."⁴⁴

As Masters and Johnson observe, we need a new attitude toward touch. It must be regarded as a way in which persons communicate with one another, in which one feels both trusted and trusting, in which one feels that his physical presence is desirable to the other, and in which he desires the presence of the other. In the intimate relationship of marriage, touch does lead to genital intercourse at times, but it does not have to do so. It has value in itself.⁴⁵

The implications of these insights for NFP couples are so obvious that

- also John Ford and Gerald Kelly, *Contemporary Moral Theology*, vol. II, *Marriage Questions* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1963), pp. 188-207, "Hedonism versus Holiness in Conjugal Intimacy."
- 4 John F. Harvey, "Masturbation: A Sin against Faithful and Life-giving Love," *Int. Rev. NFP* 3:134-40.
 - 5 It is not merely a question of actions but of occasions and moods. Also, the extent of physical affection shown by a couple in their forties may be too provocative for a newly married couple who realize that they must restrain their physical expressions of affection if they are to avoid orgasm outside of intercourse.
 - 6 Ford and Kelly, op. cit., p. 196, agree with this conclusion. An attitude of honesty is essential to virtue. Thus, it is readily granted that on one or other occasion a spouse could be surprised by the vehemence of passion following an ordinary embrace and have an involuntary orgasm. But if this became a frequent or regular occurrence, one should examine one's motivation.
 - 7 Marc H. Hollender et. al., "Body Contact and Sexual Enticement," *Arch. Gen. Psychiatry* 20 (Feb. 1969): 188-91, at 188.
 - 8 Ibid., p. 191. "Women generally could clearly separate the desire to be held from the wish for sexual intercourse (even though the two often went together) but their husbands usually linked the two. As a result, women would sometimes forego being held because they wished to avoid sexual intercourse. Other women, however, in spite of an aversive reaction to sex, still used it to get their husbands to hold them."
 - 9 *The Ideal Marriage* (New York: Random House, 1926), p. 170.
 - 10 Ibid.
 - 11 Ibid., p. 171.
 - 12 Debra A. Cowart and Robert H. Pollack, "A Guttman Scale of Sexual Experience," *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, vol. 1, no. 6, winter 1979, pp. 3-6. "Anal intercourse and oral activities possibly might be an alternative to actual intercourse to avoid the risk of pregnancy. . . ." (p. 5). Albert Ellis, *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior* (N.Y.: Hawthorn Books, 1961), p. 285, stressed that oral-genital acts have not been accepted by the majority of the females and by only half of the males who were studied. I am inclined to think that the percentages engaged in such acts are higher today, but reliable statistics are hard to obtain. They seem more prevalent among the aging, as libido and potency diminish. James B. Nelson, in *Embodiment* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), says "oral-genital sex is clearly increasing in our society" (p. 173). He refers to its use as a substitute for intercourse and as a variety of foreplay before intercourse. He does not agree with the Catholic norm that such complete acts should not take place apart from intercourse. The position of Milton Diamond and Arno Karlen, *Sexual Decisions* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1980), is even more secularist than that of Nelson. After pointing out that "attitudes toward oral-genital sex vary greatly among societies" (p. 192), Diamond and Karlen add that such practices are found more often among the more highly educated. Statistics from Kinsey et al. (1948, 1953) and from Morton Hunt (1974) are used as a basis for the conclusion that both fellatio and cunnilingus have increased significantly in more recent years among the college-educated. The implication is that those with only a high-school education possess a too-narrow view of variety in sexual pleasuring (pp. 192-94, 316).
 - 13 *The Redbook Report: A Study of Female Sexuality* (subtitle: "Sexual Pleasure: The Surprising Preferences of 100,000 Women"), September 1975, pp. 51-58, at 55-56.
 - 14 Ibid.
 - 15 Ford and Kelly, p. 197.
 - 16 Ibid., p. 211.
 - 17 Ibid., p. 212. See the Allocution to the Second World Congress on Fertility and Sterility, 19 May 1956, AAS 48 (1956), pp. 467-74. See *The Pope Speaks*, vol. 3, autumn 1956, pp.

196-97, for the Latin passage, part of the above discourse, in which Pius XII affirms that directly intended orgasm outside the marital act is seriously sinful.

18 Ibid., pp. 212-13.

19 Ford and Kelly add that "a somewhat similar situation may arise during the various periods (e.g., just before and after childbirth) when physicians advise abstaining from intercourse. During these periods they are entitled at least to incomplete sexual acts, and these acts often have a special value and significance for their mutual love. Nevertheless, until they have learned to adjust to such situations, they may unintentionally become too strongly excited and orgasm without coitus may take place. According to sound principles, this is not sinful provided the orgasm is sincerely not intended or wanted, and no imprudent risk is taken." P. 196.

20 Ford and Kelly, p. 197, fn. 7.

21 Ibid., p. 214.

22 Ibid., pp. 214-15. Further refinements concerning exceptional cases in which the man experiences orgasm without any external ejaculation are found in fn. 6, p. 215. See also Herant A. Katchadourian and Donald Lunde, *Fundamentals of Human Sexuality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), p. 66. "*Coitus reservatus* (the karezza of India) represents the ultimate in terms of control of ejaculation. Men trained in this practice are able repeatedly to approach ejaculation without completing it. They claim that they thus achieve the equivalent of many orgasms. This practice was at one time standard in the Nineteenth Century communistic Oneida Colony in upstate New York." If the intention were to achieve "the equivalent of many orgasms," it would not be moral.

23 *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, vol. 44, August 1952, p. 546.

24 Ford and Kelly, p. 217.

25 Quoted from Ford and Kelly, p. 218. Father Paquin's study reviewed the opinions of moralists for hundreds of years.

26 *Human Sexual Ecology*, p. 344.

27 Ford and Kelly, p. 219. It is not likely that trainers in the art of NFP will run into this question, but if they are asked they should respond that it is a difficult question in which the person (or persons) should seek pastoral guidance from an experienced counselor, preferably a priest.

28 These interior attitudes were well expressed in a session taped at the Human Life Center, Collegeville, Minn., in June 1980. The tape, "Moral and Sexual Behavior during the Fertile Time," reveals both the deep spirituality and good sense of the three couples discussing this subject: the Adamases, the Fallaces, and the Markers. Each couple brought a different insight, but what was common to all of them was the truth that in their physical acts of intimacy they were primarily intent on expressing mutual love and careful to avoid actions leading to orgasm outside of intercourse. A woman in the audience expressed the same ideal when she spoke of the need to avoid an attitude of how-far-can-I-go-without-sinching. She felt that such concentration on limits demeaned her as woman and wife. Nonetheless, the question of limits remains an important one, and Father Marc Calegari responds to it in the context of a discussion of amplexus reservatus. Referring to more recent discussion of the subject in Europe, he concludes that amplexus reservatus is not wrong in itself but is surrounded by various difficulties to which I have already alluded. He also mentions what I have discovered in my pastoral experience, that its practice is comparatively rare in America.

29 Address of Pius XII to Midwives, 29 Oct. 1951. In *Official Catholic Teachings, Love and Sexuality*, ed. Odile M. Liebard (Wilmington, N.C.: McGrath Publ. Co., 1978), pp. 101-122, at 121.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 Ford and Kelly, pp. 188-207, "Hedonism versus Holiness in Conjugal Intimacy." This

- chapter contains valuable insights on the *meaning* of hedonism as an attitude of mind rather than any particular action, albeit anti-Christian hedonism may lead to sinful actions.
- 33 Richard Roach, S.J., "Moral Theology and the Mission of the Church" (Pomfret, Md.: Minister-Media, 1979). (Tape.) Roach gives a convincing exegesis of this text to illustrate the contemporary situation of sexual conduct in our culture.
 - 34 A subject worthy of separate treatment is the use of pornography by a married couple. In principle one can grant that such materials could help one or the other spouse to achieve an adequate physical relationship. Such persons need pastoral guidance, because pornography tends to alienate its user from the world of *real* persons.
 - 35 Ford and Kelly, p. 198.
 - 36 St. Paul writes in 1 Cor. 7:5: "Do not refuse each other except by mutual consent, and then only for an agreed time, to leave yourselves free for prayer, then come together again in case Satan should take advantage of your weakness to tempt you." (Jerusalem Bible)
 - 37 *The Nature and Meaning of Chastity* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1976), p. 36.
 - 38 Ibid.
 - 39 William H. Masters and Virginia Johnson, *The Pleasure Bond* (New York: Bantam, 1975), p. 245.
 - 40 Ibid.
 - 41 Ibid., p. 252.
 - 42 Ibid.
 - 43 Ibid., p. 253.
 - 44 Ibid., pp. 253-54.
 - 45 Ibid., p. 255.
 - 46 Translation of John C. Reville, S.J. (Philadelphia: Reilly Book Co., 1942), pp. 230-31.
 - 47 Ibid.
 - 48 *Human Sexual Ecology*, p. 390.