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The Vocation of Marriage: An Approach to the Vatican Instruction on Bioethics

Janet E. Smith

THE OBJECTIVE reality of marriage is a many-splendored and complicated thing. It is also a much misunderstood thing. Here is not the place to rehearse the misunderstandings of the nature of marriage that are rampant in contemporary society. The challenge here is to determine what truth or truths about the objective reality of marriage need to be heard by our contemporaries and to explore how we might get them to see and accept the objective reality of marriage. The intent here is to use this information to understand better the Vatican teaching that in vitro fertilization (IVF) is morally impermissible even for spouses.*

There are truths about marriage that are so at odds with the way a society thinks that insisting upon them only discredits the prophetic voice that promotes them. Many of the truths about the differences between men and women, the appropriateness of different roles for men and women, the notion that, for the most

*The Vatican teaching on in vitro fertilization is found in the *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on February 22, 1987. This instruction is hereafter referred to as the *Instruction on Bioethics*.

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part, the husband should be the head of the household are all messages that simply enrage rather than enlighten so many living in our times. For my part, I think it is best to promote other truths and hope that these insights concerning men and women will follow.

In each age surely there are truths that society is aching to hear since it suffers so greatly from the rejection or neglect of these truths. Our age is becoming belatedly aware of the damage done to individuals and to society through sex outside of marriage, through broken marriages, through the broken family. Our society is still oblivious to the extent of the damage done through these evils; it does not yet realize how connected are the evils of broken homes, alcoholism, drugs, poverty, homelessness—indeed, careful reflection suggests that the evil of broken families may well have a contributing influence to most of the troubles which our society faces. Nor do broken families produce the healthy and sane human beings we need to guide us out of our problems. But that we have problems may make us more receptive to the saving truth. Voices which purport to offer some kind of solution to these miseries have a chance of being heard. For instance, in some quarters, starting to be heard are the voices which proclaim that it is more important and more effective to teach teenagers to be chaste than to provide them with easy access to contraception.

There are also truths that a society desperately *needs* to hear, truths to which it may be most resistant but which are its only hope for extricating itself from its miseries. The truths about the evils of abortion, contraception, and high-tech human reproduction are among these truths that our society needs to hear.

Reality of Marriage

One suggested way of leading people to see the objective reality of marriage is to draw their attention to marriage, to have them reflect upon good and faithful marriages—marriages open to the transmission of life—and through this observation to draw conclusions about the nature of true and authentic marriages. In many ways, I believe that much of my understanding of marriage has come through such a process, but I have also found that it is difficult to guide others through this sort of analysis. It is my good

fortune to have had from their marriages, how much love for each other. Yet, they have no experience of being divorced, married, they are very young, not contrary to a large family close. And they see a and tacky able attainment in the direction of responding wife not European cannot afford generous see the concerned by committed benefits heroic— They can come from marriages through the grace of This rea-

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fortune to know an uncommon number of good marriages, to have had the opportunity to observe them closely and to learn from them how marvelous is the love that flows within these marriages, how steady is the growth of the spouses in maturity and love for each other, how beautiful is the development of the children. Yet, when I speak to others of such marriages, I find they have no experience of these; many of their parents have been divorced, many if not most of their friends have been divorced, and they are virtually unaware of marriages in which the spouses are not contraceptors. They may have met someone who came from a large family, but they have not seen an intact, large family up close. And, when I do draw such families to their attention, what they see are the scruffy and tacky toys on the front lawn, the scruffy and tacky furniture in the living room, the somewhat unfashionable attire worn by all family members, the used station wagon in the driveway, the constant clamoring of the kids and the corresponding testiness on the part of the parents. Such features as a wife not working and the lack of money, time, or freedom for European travel (by the spouses) also have their impact. Many cannot and do not see the love, the deep bonds being formed, the generous spirits being developed in these families. They cannot see the compelling sense of meaning and purpose to life experienced by the parents as the underlying wellspring keeping them committed in the midst of their daily hassles. They cannot see the benefits of the steady generosity—sometimes verging on the heroic—which individuals in these marriages eventually develop. They cannot see the deep and nearly inexpressible happiness that comes from caring so much and working so hard for others. Marriages that are not simply arrangements for the mutual self-indulgence of the spouses have an inner reality which is difficult to see. This reality is revealed only to those who have eyes to see.

Christian Commitment

So where do we start in explaining the nature of marriage? I believe we need to start with a more general explanation of the Christian commitment. In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II stated that:

The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.

Willed by God in the very act of creation, marriage and the family are interiorly ordained to fulfillment in Christ and have need of His graces in order to be healed from the wounds of sin and restored to their "beginning," that is, to full understanding and the full realization of God's plan. (*FC*, 3)

It seems to me that before the larger society can be reformed in its understanding and practice of marriage, Christians must first make full use of the resources of their faith and Church and work to form marriages and families out of which will come those who have eyes to see, those who will be the articulate and persuasive proponents of true marriage. Christians understand that marriage is a part of God's plan and it is this objective reality of marriage which I believe must be more deeply understood.

Marriage: A Natural Institution

Certainly marriage is not an institution exclusive to Christians. It is an institution natural to man which satisfies some of his deepest yearnings, meets some of his most pressing needs, and enables him to live his life in a more purposeful fashion. The Church has long taught that natural law reveals to man that marriage is monogamous and indissoluble and ordained to the bringing forth of new life. And I suspect that many recognize these as essential features of marriage; when young people get married, they intend to be monogamous, married for a lifetime, and open to bringing forth children—if only a few well-planned children. But too few are able to be true to these intentions. After all, these are not easy intentions to keep; it is not easy to have this kind of marriage, especially in our times when the social and political supports for such marriages are few and the forces against such marriages are powerful and persuasive. Spouses need an enormous amount of grace to live true marriages, and they simply are not getting these graces. It must be acknowledged that few are actively seeking graces and most engage in practices which are obstacles to growth in grace. One of the most devastating obstacles to grace and most insidious forces against marriage is the contraceptive mentality

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stemming from contraceptive practice. It corrodes marriages in ways which are not truly visible but the effects of which—for those who have eyes to see—are very damaging. But only a few in our society seem able to see this truth about marriage. What might reveal it to others?

I am going to speak to four points which I think may lead us to an understanding of marriage that will aid us in seeing the vision of the teachings of the Church on the issues which concern us here. First, we need to deepen our sense that our existence in this world is a *gift*. Second, we need to understand that marriage is a *vocation* which commits the spouses to a certain apostolate. Third, we need to understand better what it means to say that God is the Creator of all life and that each human life is the result of a special act of creation by God. And fourth, we need to understand what role spouses have in the transmission of human life. Let me elaborate on these principles.

The Gift of Existence

The opening passage of the *Instruction on Bioethics* states, perhaps all too briefly, that God is the Creator and Father of the gift of life:

The gift of life which God the Creator and Father has entrusted to man calls him to appreciate the inestimable value of what he has been given and to take responsibility for it; this fundamental principle must be placed at the centre of one's reflection in order to clarify and solve the moral problems raised by artificial interventions on life as it originates and on the processes of procreation. (Intro., 1)

This passage—which should be expanded into a book—suggests that the teaching of the document will not be understood unless we understand that *God* is the Creator and Father of the *gift* of life. This is just about all that the document says about creation as a gift, but it serves to establish that unless we follow its direction to make this truth the center of our reflection we will not fully appreciate the wisdom of this document. We must come to appreciate that all of creation is a gift and that we are greatly privileged to share in the splendor of this gift. Among other benefits, a stance of gratitude towards the world aids anyone in perceiving more

correctly the meaning of life and creation. We must gain a deeper understanding of God as a loving Creator who created out of His love. We must get a surer grasp of the connection between love and creation and especially the creation of new life. Too few Christians have a sufficient sense of what it means to say that God is the Creator of human life and fail to grasp precisely what role spouses have in the transmission of that life. More will be said about this point in a moment, but here I would like to stress that we have too weak a sense of the fundamental Christian truth that our life in this land is a sojourn; that our time here is time in preparation for eternal union with our Father. Too few of us have a sense that our actions such as marrying and having children are a part of the vital role we have to play in the history of salvation.

Marriage as Vocation

The *Instruction on Bioethics* speaks of the notion that marriage and transmitting life are a vocation. It states that "God, who is love and life, has inscribed in man and woman the vocation to share in a special way in his mystery of personal communion and in his works as Creator and Father" (Intro., 3). *Humanae Vitae* has a similar passage:

Conjugal love reveals its true nature and nobility when it is considered in its supreme source, God, who is Love, "the Father, from whom all parenthood in heaven and on earth receives its name."

Marriage is not, then, the effect of chance or product of the evolution of blind natural forces; it is a wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind his design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift which is proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend toward that communion of their beings whereby they help each other toward personal perfection in order to collaborate with God in the begetting and rearing of new lives. (HV, 8)

These short passages again speak of a truth which deserves a volume of elaboration. They speak the truth that all spouses have a special vocation to share God's loving and creative works. Unless we come to understand that all Christians have a vocation and that marriage is a well-defined vocation we will not understand the Church's teaching on marriage and related bioethical problems. A vocation is a calling, a calling which flows out of the

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spouse's Christian commitment. A passage from the *Vatican Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* describes the perspective on vocation and apostolate that all Christians must hold:

For this the Church was founded: that by spreading the kingdom of Christ everywhere for the glory of God the Father, she might bring all men to share in Christ's saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might in actual fact be brought into relationship with Him. All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate and the Church carries it on in various ways through her members. For by its very nature the Christian vocation is also a vocation to the apostolate. No part of the structure of a living body is merely passive but each has a share in the functions as well as in the life of the body. So, too, in the body of Christ, which is the Church, the whole body, "according to the functioning in due measure of each single part, derives its increase" (Eph. 4:16). Indeed, so intimately are the parts linked and interrelated in this body (cf. Eph. 4:16) that the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself. (Abbott trans., p. 491)

To be a Christian is to be called *and* to be sent, that is, it is to have both a vocation and an apostolate. (The word "vocation" comes from the Latin "vocare," meaning "to call" and the word "apostolate" comes from the Greek word "apostello," meaning "to be sent out.") It is a part of God's plan that people marry. Marrying is both part of their calling and part of their apostolate. Those who marry must come to appreciate this more deeply; they are not marrying only for each other, but they are marrying as an answer to a call which God gives them, and this call entails certain responsibilities and duties.

Marriage, like other vocations, is remarkably various, but it is also true that it has a nature and has responsibilities that are independent of the wishes of those who answer the call to this vocation. It is good to note that although the priesthood is a vocation with many possible manifestations—priests are teachers, counselors, college presidents, accountants, and lawyers for the Church—nonetheless there are certain actions which are obligatory for priests and certain actions which are forbidden to priests by the

very virtue of their priesthood. The marriage relationship, too, is one which takes on certain dimensions because of the personalities, temperaments, talents, and opportunities of those who are marrying. But it also has a nature to which spouses must submit themselves. Married couples, in fact, need to study the nature of marriage; they need to learn about their vocation in the same way a priest needs to learn about his—and it cannot be done in one engagement encounter weekend. Christians must not assume that they can learn what marriage is to be from the society around them.

Creation of Human Life

Much could and probably should be said here about the “personalist” values of marriage, but the element of marriage that I believe needs greatest elucidation is marriage as a relationship ordained to bringing forth new life. Older marriage manuals used to explain that just as sex in the animal kingdom is ordained to the bringing forth of new life, so too is human sex. Thus, it is concluded that sex is “for the propagation of the species” and contraception then a violation of what is good for the species. Undoubtedly there is some truth in these statements but they can also be misleading. As the *Instruction on Bioethics* asserts:

... marriage possesses specific goods and values in its union and in procreation which cannot be likened to those existing in lower forms of life. Such values and meanings are of the personal order and determine from the moral point of view the meaning and limits of artificial interventions on procreation and on the origin of human life. (Intro., 3)

What needs to be kept in mind is that procedures that are acceptable for treatment of other animals are not acceptable for human beings; we may sterilize animals and cross-breed them, and create new life in test tubes, but we may not do these things to human life. This principle shows the falsity of the claim that the Church has a “physicalistic, biologicistic” view of sex; truly it has a *personalistic* view of sex or it would allow all these procedures for human beings.

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beings, why the processes of generation of human life are not to be manipulated in the same way as those of other animals. The *Instruction on Bioethics* helps us out here—again, somewhat cryptically:

By comparison with the transmission of other forms of life in the universe, the transmission of human life has a special character of its own, which derives from the special nature of the human person. "The transmission of human life is entrusted by nature to a personal and conscious act and as such is subject to the all-holy laws of God; immutable and inviolable laws which must be recognized and observed. For this reason one cannot use means and follow methods which could be licit in the transmission of the life of plants and animals." (Intro., 4)

The chief and inestimably great difference between the bringing forth of animal life and the bringing forth of human life is that each and every human life is the result of a special act of creation by God; this is necessary because human life is immortal, and only God can bring immortal life into existence. The creation of human life should also be the result of a deliberate and willing act of sexual intercourse between two spouses. Since the creation of life on the part of God is a loving and free act, the creation of life on the part of spouses should also be the result of a loving and free act. But, again, human life is not created by chance, it is not the result of the simple physical uniting of male and female gametes; it involves a special act of creation by God. This crucial claim, explicitly stated in the *Instruction on Bioethics*, is at the center of the teaching of that document and of the teaching of *Humanae Vitae*. As *Humanae Vitae* states at the outset, spouses cooperate with God in the transmitting of human life.

The Role of Spouses

In fact, in Church documents there is a word which is untranslatable into English and which, it seems, both captures well the nature of marriage as a vocation and defines well the place of having children within this vocation. This is the Latin word *munus*. I have done a rather lengthy philological review of the meaning of this word, which I shall only summarize here.¹ This review may seem to take us rather far afield from the "objective reality"

of marriage but I think this word and the concepts it conveys singularly illuminate the relation of marriage and procreation.

What drew this word to my attention was its appearance in the first line of *Humanae Vitae*, which in Latin reads: "humanae vitae tradendae munus gravissimum," universally translated "the most serious duty of transmitting human life." But my classical language training would have led me to translate *munus*, here translated as "duty," as "gift." This led me to trace the word in several works, most notably the documents of Vatican II where it appears 248 times.

A variety of words are used in the English translation for *munus*; "duty," "role," "task," "mission," "office," "vocation," and "function" are all used on occasion. In classical Latin, one common use for this word would be in reference to the bestowal of a public office or responsibility on a citizen. Being selected for such an office or responsibility would be considered an honor: the selection would entail certain duties, but ones which the recipient willingly embraces. In Church documents, the word carries a similar meaning; it seems most often to refer to a solemn assignment which God has given to some agent to accomplish some extremely important task for the kingdom.

Lumen Gentium lays out the *munera* of many of the participants in the Christian mission. This document, by no means uniquely, has as a theme the distribution or characteristic participation of different members of the Church in the triple *munera* of Christ of being Priest, Prophet, and King (LG, 31). Christians, in their various callings, participate in these *munera*; they do so by fulfilling other *munera*, specifically entrusted to them. For instance, Mary's *munus* (role) is being the Mother of God (LG, 53) which also confers on her a maternal *munus* (duty) towards all men (LG, 60). Christ gave Peter several *munera*: for instance, Peter was given the *munus* (power) of binding and loosening and the *grande munus* (special duty) of spreading the Christian name—which was also granted to the apostles. The apostles were assigned the *munera* (great duties) of "giving witness to the gospel, to the ministration of the Holy and of justice for God's glory" (LG, 21).

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To help them fulfill these *munera*, they were granted a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit (LG, 21). By virtue of his *munus* (office), the Roman Pontiff has "full, supreme, and universal power" in the Church (LG, 22) and also by virtue of his *munus* (office) he is endowed with infallibility (LG, 43). Bishops, by virtue of their episcopal consecration, have the *munus* (office) of preaching and teaching (LG, 21). The laity, too, sharing in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly *munus* of Christ, have their own mission (*missio*); they are particularly called (*vocantur*) to the *munus* (proper function) of "working, like leaven, for the sanctification of the world from within, and especially so by the witness of their lives. By shining forth with faith, hope, and charity, they are to manifest Christ to others" (LG, 31). *Munera* are conferred by one superior in power upon another; it is important to note that Christ is routinely acknowledged as the source of the *munera* for each of the above-mentioned groups. *Munera* are not man-made, but God-given.

Specific documents were issued by Vatican Council II to clarify further the nature of the *munera* of different groups. For instance, *Christus Dominus* has as its subtitle "Decree on the Pastoral *Munus* (Office) of the Bishops in the Church." This practice continued after the Council: The subtitle of *Familiaris Consortio* is "Concerning the *Munera* (Roles) of the Christian Family."

Forms of *munus* appear ten times in the five sections of *Gaudium et Spes* that speak about the role of married people in the Church. There we learn that spouses and parents have a *praeclenti suo munere* (lofty calling, GS, 47); that conjugal love leads spouses to God and aids and strengthens them in their *sublimi munere* (sublime office) of being a mother and father (GS, 48, 42); that the sacrament of marriage helps them fulfill their conjugal and familial *munera* (obligations); that spouses are blessed with the dignity and *munus* (office) of fatherhood and motherhood, which helps them achieve their duty (*officium*) of educating their children (GS, 48); that young people should be properly and in good time instructed about the dignity, *munus* (duty), and expression (*opere*) of conjugal love (GS, 49). One passage brings together several of the terms which are of concern here:

In the duty [*officium*] of transmitting and educating human life, which is the special mission [*missio*] of spouses, they understand themselves to be in cooperation with the love of God the Creator and, as it were, interpreters of this love. Therefore, with human and Christian responsibility, they will fulfill their *munus* [task]. . . . (GS, 22)

Later in the same section, there is mention of "the *munus* (duty) of procreating"; "those who fulfill this God-given *munus* (task *commissio a Deo*) by generously having a large family are particularly to be admired" (GS, 50). We are told that "It ought to be clear to all that human life and the *munus* (task) of transmitting it are not [realities] restricted only to this world . . . but that they always look to the eternal destiny of man" (GS, 51).

Forms of the word "*munus*" appear twenty-one times in *Humanae Vitae*. It is used four times in reference to the *munus* of transmitting human life, three times to the *munus* of responsible parenthood, and once to the apostolic *munus* which spouses have to other married couples. It seems fair to say that the *munus* of "transmitting human life" and the *munus* of "responsible parenthood" are one and the same *munus*; the second phrase simply specifies and clarifies the first. Indeed, the Church has always linked together the begetting of life with the obligation to educate and guide the life begotten. *Casti Connubii*, for instance, explicitly connects the begetting of children with the obligation to educate the children—not just for prosperity in this life, but with a view to their eternal destiny:

. . . Christian parents should understand that they are destined not only to propagate and conserve the human race, nor even to educate just any worshippers of the true God, but to bring forth offspring for the Church of Christ, to procreate fellow citizens for the Saints and servants of God, so that the worshippers devoted to our God and Savior might daily increase. (CC, I)

Gaudium et Spes adopts the customary linking of procreation and education when it states that "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained to the procreating and educating of offspring" (GS, 50). The document *Humanae Vitae*, then, has as its purpose the clarification of the Christian *munus* which belongs to spouses, the *munus* of bringing forth and being respon-

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sible to children with a view to guiding children to be worthy of eternal union with God.

Raising children is a *munus*; it is an honor conferred upon spouses which brings with it certain obligations; it is the assignment which God gives to spouses so that his kingdom of love might begin to prevail in this world. By freely and deliberately accepting the calling of marriage, spouses also freely and deliberately accept the *munera* that go along with that calling, in the same way that a priest in responding to the calling of the priesthood accepts the *munera* of his "assignment." To be married but not to accept the *munus* of transmitting life, is like taking on an assignment but not taking on the full responsibilities of that assignment—and not realizing the full goods of that assignment both for one's self and for others. For instance, a man may wish to be a priest, but not wish to perform some of the sacraments; that would be a repudiation of his calling and the *munera* of his calling.

Munus and In Vitro Fertilization

Elsewhere I have applied this analysis to the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* that the unitive and procreative meanings of conjugal union are truly inseparable.² Here I wish to explore what light this unitive and procreative concept might have on the prohibition in the *Instruction on Bioethics* that married couples may not have recourse to in vitro fertilization, a prohibition which is most difficult for many to accept.

Suppose a married couple were to accept the Church's understanding of the objective reality of marriage. Suppose they were truly grateful for the gift of life which God shared with them, were thrilled to be called to the vocation of marriage, and were eager to embrace their *munus* of transmitting human life. And suppose they were to discover that theirs was an infertile marriage. Do they not have an obligation or, at least, a right to fulfill their *munus*?

There are other instances where, although one cannot carry out one's assignment, one ought not then to manipulate things so that one can fulfill that assignment. For instance, soldiers may go through years of training and years of watchfulness and never

fight; if war has not been duly declared, they have neither an obligation to fight nor a right to fight. Soldiers ought not to start wars so that they may fulfill their assignment. Their assignment is not so much to fight as it is to be willing to fight. Similarly, a wife may wish to bear her husband's child but if the husband is in a prison camp in a foreign land, she would not be able to fulfill that wish. Simply because one has a *munus* does not mean that one has failed if one does not actualize the full reality of that *munus*, nor does it mean that one has a right to actualize one's *munus*.

But some will ask, if it is the *munus* of spouses to have children, why could they not use the assistance of technology to help them have a child? As the *Instruction on Bioethics* makes clear, some kinds of assistance are moral and some kinds are not. Those which serve to make the child the direct product of someone else's act, of the doctor's or the technician's act, are immoral. It states:

In reality, the origin of a human person is the result of an act of giving. The one conceived must be the fruit of his parent's love. He cannot be desired or conceived as the product of an intervention of medical or biological techniques; that would be equivalent to reducing him to an object of scientific technology. (II, B, 4c)

and further,

Homologous IVF and ET is brought about outside the bodies of the couple through actions of third parties whose competence and technical activity determine the success of the procedure. Such fertilization entrusts the life and identity of the embryo into the power of doctors and biologists and establishes the domination of technology over the origin and destiny of the human person. (II, B, 5)

And still further,

Conception *in vitro* is the result of the technical action which presides over fertilization. *Such fertilization is neither in fact achieved nor positively willed as the expression and fruit of a specific act of the conjugal union. In homologous IVF and ET, therefore, even if it is considered in the context of 'de facto' existing sexual relations, the generation of the human person is objectively deprived of its proper perfection: namely, that of being the result and fruit of a conjugal act in which the spouses can become "cooperators with God for giving life to a new person."* (II, B, 5)

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the individual, actions that he or she ought never to delegate to others. A famous and apt example is that of Christian in *Cyrano de Bergerac*; his story makes it clear that we ought to write our own love letters. We ought to be the ones to kiss our spouses and take them out to dinner on anniversaries; this ought not to be delegated to others. We ought not to buy machines that might do a fairly good job of writing our love letters—or kissing our spouses. We ought not to hire robots to take our spouses out to a wedding anniversary dinner. A priest cannot delegate or hire someone else to say his daily mass for him; mass may get said, but it is not *his* mass. Children are very sensitive to the difference between a personal action which truly represents the agent and one which is inappropriately delegated. They do not want their father's secretary to attend their school plays in his place; it is just "not the same" if he is not there. Attending a school play is a marginally "non-delegatable" human action, but parenting one's own children through a bodily act of human loving intercourse is essentially such an action. There are some actions which are so integrally bound up with our personhood, with our personal vocation, with our personal responsibilities, that if we cannot do these things, no one ought to do them for us.

Let me elaborate briefly on the claim that producing children through in vitro fertilization amounts to delegating others to perform an action that is appropriately performed only by one's self. Suppose the spouses had the skill to perform the techniques of fertilizing the egg and sperm in vitro; would this not be a personal act of procreation? It would not, for this is the sort of action which one can delegate to others—it makes little real difference who performs this action. Indeed, it would be curious to consider IVF moral only if the technique were performed by spouses. But we do not find it curious to think that making love to one's spouse is moral only when performed by one's self. One action is "delegatable"; the other is not.

Furthermore, what makes the child produced by IVF the child of particular spouses is that, biologically, the egg and sperm belong to them; it is not that they have performed the action of

conjoining the egg and sperm. Let us also consider that it is possible for babies to be reproduced in vitro *contrary* to the wishes of the spouses—a technician, without permission, could unite the frozen sperm and eggs of any two individuals. Who then are the parents of the reproduced child? The donors or the technician? Who has legal responsibility for a child conceived in such a manner? A child conceived through loving sexual intercourse, however, is manifestly the result of the loving action of his or her parents, an action which it would have been appropriate for no one else to have performed.

Conclusion

These reflections have grown out of the attempt to articulate some of what we know about the objective reality of marriage. Individuals called to the vocation of marriage are called to vowing a lifetime union with another, a union appropriate for the task of parenting. Marrying and begetting children are intimately personal actions, actions which to be performed appropriately must conform to certain demands and responsibilities. The above reflections attempt to shed some light on the teaching of the document on bioethics that the technique of IVF is not in keeping with the dignity of the spouses nor with the dignity appropriate for the transmission of human life. It attempts to show that in vitro fertilization removes “begetting children” from the realm of proper personal and spousal action. Whether these insights bear fruit remains to be tested, but the principle remains that a true understanding of the nature of marriage is essential to an understanding of the Church’s teachings in *Humanae Vitae* and in the Vatican’s *Instruction on Bioethics*.

Notes

- 1 Reference here is made to a soon to be completed book on *Humanae Vitae* being authored by Professor Smith.
- 2 Ibid.

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