

**THE SPOUSE AS DIVINE ENCOUNTER:
RENEWING THE SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING OF MARRIAGE
IN ROMAN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY**

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

In the recent *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis states that the Church must reflect further on God's action within the marriage rite. (art. 75) Perhaps what is required, instead, is further reflection on the presence of God within the marriage relationship. Although it has been the subject of theological reflection throughout most of Church history, there is a lack of *sacramental understanding* of marriage within Roman Catholic theology. Theological reflection on marriage through the 20th-century has tended to focus on the ethical and social questions surrounding family life while neglecting the sacramentality of the spouses' relationship. Without negating the insights gained through such reflection, this paper presents a means of expanding marriage theology by employing a sacramental lens.

The current paper opens with a survey of modern magisterial documents (dating from 1880 to the present), exploring the ways in which the nature of marriage is presented in each. Following that, further documents will be examined as examples of marriage theology being appropriated as a basis for moral theology, thus reinforcing the link between marriage and questions of sexual ethics. Writings of early 20th-century Russian Orthodox writers will be presented as a more sacramental model of marriage theology. Finally, foundational texts from the marriage spirituality movement in the Roman Catholic Church will serve as examples of how a sacramental understanding of the spouses' relationship may be drawn out from traditional Catholic marriage theology.

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INTRODUCTION – THE PROBLEM IS HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the essence of another human being unless he loves him. By the spiritual act of love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person; and even more, he sees that which is potential in him; which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.¹

With this quotation Viktor Frankl expresses what I believe is one of the greatest characteristics of marriage, although it is largely silent within Catholic theology: namely, the experience of being loved by the spouse and its importance in personal and spiritual development. Of course, Frankl was working within the field of psychology and thus his above description of a love relationship has no immediate religious intent. When the ‘potentialities’ of the beloved are understood within the Christian concept of development towards our *telos* in the image of God, however, its applicability to a Catholic discourse on marital spirituality becomes more apparent. Sadly, the exploration of a spirituality of marriage has gone largely unnoticed by many within the Church.² As Agnès Walch argues, scholarly theological research into marriage has tended to focus on the history of sexual behaviours or on the history of the family rather than on the messages given by the Church to married lay persons. Furthermore, marital spirituality has typically been overlaid by moral discourse which has inhibited any deepening of knowledge or comprehension of the marriage relationship.³

¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, trans. Ilse Lasch (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1965), 113–14.

² Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Monica Sandor, ‘Introduction’, in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, ed. Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Monica Sandor (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 1–2.

³ Agnès Walch, ‘Marital Spirituality from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries’, in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, trans. Monica Sander (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 155 Walch also points out that her thesis (completed in 1999) examining the direction given by the Church to married lay people from the time of Trent to the close of Vatican II was the first study of this topic.

The initial impetus for the current paper was a series of assertions included in the recent post-synodal exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*.⁴ Francis identifies an overly individualistic culture which inhibits the ability of people to discern a personal authenticity and, furthermore, to enter as persons into committed relationships. (art. 33) While freedom to make decisions about one's life are important and valued by the Church, the lack of a definable goal makes such progress difficult or even impossible. (art. 33) Here Francis is reflecting the insights of various philosophers and scholars on the effects of post-modernism in the contemporary Western world. Charles Taylor, for example, identifies the first *malaise of modernity* as this negative effect of individualism. Although it is good that persons have the right to make decisions concerning their life and lifestyle, the modern break from the old, rigid moral orders has simultaneously resulted in a loss of a shared meaning of the world and of individual lives within it. In a world that is seen to have no purpose, it is difficult to independently create a meaning for the self.⁵ D.C. Schindler places the 'crisis of marriage' and the decreased willingness of people to enter into committed relationships in the devaluing of reason which accompanies post-modernism. Just as Western society has largely dismissed the possibility of universal truths, Schindler argues that we have also lost faith in the strength of human will to maintain commitments. To this end, people assume – consciously or not – that they ought not to commit themselves beyond what they can be reasonably assured of in terms of their will and their capabilities.⁶

⁴ All references to *Amoris Laetitia* taken from Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Amoris Laetitia" On Love in the Family* [19 March 2016], available online: https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf, accessed 16 November 2017.

⁵ Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity* (Concord ON: House of Anansi Press Limited, 1991), 2–4.

⁶ D.C. Schindler, 'The Crisis of Marriage as a Crisis of Meaning: On the Sterility of the Modern Will', *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41 (Summer 2014): 331–33.

A more robust spirituality of marriage would help to answer these concerns. First, by maintaining belief in a universal Truth, the Church presents a meaning-filled understanding of the world into which persons may enter and attach themselves. In marriage specifically, a dual orientation towards personal growth and support of the growth of the beloved, precisely through the discernment of the authentic self, would give further meaning to the person's life and their function in the wider world. Secondly, a marital spirituality can help redefine the marriage commitment as one of a journey with another person, including the possibility of difficult times but also the promise of joy with the other, rather than as a legalistic and impersonal structure.

A second important issue raised in *Amoris Laetitia* is the manner in which the Church has typically presented its marriage theology. Francis characterizes the approach as one of emphasizing the duty to procreate at the expense of the call to grow in love and mutual assistance (art. 36), “simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things” (art. 35) and as “stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace.” (art. 37) Anecdotally, in preparing the research for this paper, I was often struck by the sheer volume of works discussing the indissolubility of marriage as a requirement of the sacrament, but very little on the spiritual aspects or benefits of the spousal relationship. As Schindler argues, we ought not to allow ourselves to lose sight of the entire reality of marriage because of a concern over a single question, such as indissolubility.⁷

Rather than continuing to present a legalistic approach to marriage, Francis suggests an approach which is theologically sound but also responsive to the “concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families.” (art. 36) The Church must adopt a more pastoral attitude.

What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and family, and

⁷ Schindler, 334.

in this way help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them. (art. 35)

Again, it is my argument that a richer spirituality of the spouses, held in tandem with the riches of the theological tradition on marriage, would help to support both Church and laity in the application of teaching to lived reality.

I was finally and most strongly struck by Francis' own recognition of an omission in the sacramental understanding of marriage. In discussing the role of the wife and husband as ministers of the sacrament, the pope states that "there is a need for further reflection on God's action in the marriage rite; this is clearly manifested in the Oriental Churches through the importance of the blessing that the couple receive as a sign of the gift of the Spirit." (art. 75) My particular concern here is that, if we have no clear sense of the role of God in the rite which establishes the marriage, how can we speak with certainty of the role of God, grace, and spirituality within the resultant relationship?

As my research has progressed, the shape of the paper shifted in response to informal discussions with various people, especially other members of my parish community. When asked what my topic was, the explanation that I was interested in developing a better understanding of marital spirituality was met with one of two (rather paraphrased here) answers: first, "We already have the spirituality worked out because we have the *Theology of the Body*," or second, "Thank goodness, because we currently have little to no sense of the spouses' spirituality." One response from an acquaintance was particularly striking to me. After telling me that he and his wife are members of a Roman Catholic group founded to support marital spirituality, he confessed that even that group did little to develop his spirituality or the mutual spiritual life he shares with his wife. As he elaborated, the Church already has many teachings to form his vocation as a father

but does not seem to acknowledge his role as a husband. Taken as a whole, it struck me that there is a blind spot in Catholic marriage theology which many people do not realize exists.

My purpose in this paper is thus twofold. First, to explore how the Catholic Church currently defines the purpose of marriage. In particular I will argue that, while there has been an important shift towards valuing the community of the spouses, teachings continue to rely on procreation as the defining feature of marriage and thus *ipso facto* emphasize the role of the couple as parents while leaving a spousal spirituality underdeveloped. Second, this paper will present the Orthodox theology of marriage as an example of how the relationship can be understood to support the spiritual development of the spouses, and particularly how the spouses play an active role in the spirituality of each other.

The first and second chapters are a study of the magisterial documents regarding marriage and those which employ marriage theology as a basis for exploring ethics. Of particular interest here is the way in which magisterial teachings of the modern period (for the sake of this paper defined as beginning with the promulgation of *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* in 1880 and concluding in the present with *Amoris Laetitia*) present the meaning and purpose of marriage, especially as it pertains to the community of the spouses. By focusing on the magisterial documents, I hope to explore the influence the Magisterium has on the direction of theological inquiry, both through the questions which it chooses to address and the means by which it seeks to answer them. The list of magisterial documents used in the current study are drawn from a comprehensive survey produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.⁸ The most attention will be given to those documents which speak directly to marriage theology, as

⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Church Teaching on Marriage*, available online: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/promotion-and-defense-of-marriage/church-documents-on-defense-of-marriage.cfm>, accessed 25 July 2017.

indicated in their titles. Consideration will also be given to those documents identified in the USCCB list as dealing at length with issues surrounding marriage, and are examined in the second chapter. Other documents from the list, which are presented as only referencing marriage briefly, have been omitted from the current study.

The third chapter will give a brief synthesis of Orthodox marriage theology, including other concepts from the broader Orthodox tradition which are important for contextualizing its marriage theology. A precise definition of ‘Orthodox theology’ that is distinct from Catholic theology is elusive, as explored by Andrew Louth.⁹ A problematization of a specifically Russian Orthodox theology (which will be the focus of this paper) occurs with the emigration of Russian theologians to Western Europe and eventually the rise of a generation of scholars raised and educated in the West, influenced by Roman Catholic theology. For the purposes of this paper, the continuing tradition of a very real, albeit nebulous, Orthodox ethos will provide the foundation for differentiating and comparing the Orthodox and Catholic theologies of marriage. The complexity of defining an Orthodox theology is compounded in the attempt to identify foundational texts on Orthodox marriage theology. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, there is no centralized body within the Orthodox Church for issuing statements in the manner in which the Magisterium functions. Works by individual theologians will be referenced here instead, particularly those which have been accepted by the greater Orthodox tradition as formative for a spiritual understanding of marriage.

The fourth chapter presents a brief analysis of the personalist influence on Catholic marriage theology during the first half of the 20th century. These theologians were responding to a need arising among the married laity for a better spiritual understanding of their nuptial

⁹ Andrew Louth, ‘What Is Theology? What Is Orthodox Theology?’, *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 51, no. 4 (2007): 435–44.

relationship. To a certain extent, such theology was influential on marriage theology moving into the later 20th century, and yet a deep spiritual and sacramental understanding of marriage within Catholic theology remains elusive. Finally, the fifth chapter will chart some of the questions Catholic theologians are exploring now in an attempt to understand marriage as sacrament, and will suggest how some insights from Orthodox theology may be incorporated.

CHAPTER 1 – MODERN MAGISTERIAL DOCUMENTS ON MARRIAGE

The paper begins with a survey of the five modern magisterial documents which present marriage theology. There is some disagreement in how one should interpret the development of marriage theology over the course of the twentieth century. In considering the history of the five major magisterial documents on marriage, the question often becomes whether the teaching of the Church has remained continuous over the century, or whether there was a radical reorientation at the time of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁰ This survey will instead focus on how each document addresses marriage in response to the questions of the day.

Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae (1880)

Modern magisterial teaching on marriage begins with *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*,¹¹ although it should be situated within the greater theological trends preceding its promulgation. Some three centuries before, the catechism of the Council of Trent had actually reversed the

¹⁰ John M. Haas, for example, argues that the technical language of ‘ends’ was eliminated in the documents of Vatican II in favour of non-juridical terms, but that the Council never intended a subsequent change in the theology (See John M. Haas, ‘The Contemporary World’, in *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study*, ed. Glenn W. Olsen [New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001], 332–59). J.A. Selling, in contrast, sees *Gaudium et Spes* as an example of the influence of personalism leading to an abandoning of the doctrine around the ends of marriage and the rise of a covenant model for understanding marriage. (See Joseph A. Selling, ‘Magisterial Teaching on Marriage 1880-1986: Historical Continuity or Radical Development?’, in *Dialogue about Catholic Sexual Teaching*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, Readings in Moral Theology 8 [New York NY: Paulist Press, 1993], 93–97). .

¹¹ All references to *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* taken from Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter “Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae” on Christian Marriage* [1 February 1880], available online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_10021880_arcanum.html, accessed 22 July 2017.

order of Augustine's goods of marriage. Following the Council's teachings, the spouses were seen to marry primarily in order to help each other through the hardships of life, creating a supernatural bond between them and opening the possibility of mutual assistance on the way to salvation.¹² What followed, as will be discussed in the concluding chapter, was a remarkable period of marital spirituality in Roman Catholic thinking. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, the debates of the Enlightenment inhibited further theological reflection on the spouses as a spiritual unit, while increasing puritanism through the nineteenth-century removed what little spiritual understanding had developed.¹³ Faced with the increased civil legislations allowing for divorce, and the rising use of contraception, the Church adopted a defensive position which once again emphasized the importance of children in the definition and moral understanding of marriage.¹⁴

The question of divorce is the major concern in *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*. Even before any theological reflection on marriage itself can begin, the Church is defined as the sole conveyor and authority over the Sacraments. The opening section (art. 1-15) seeks to prove the divine origins of marriage as a social institution and sacrament, as well as the Church's unique and divinely ordained authority over it. An entire history of the benefits of marriage for human society, as well as the evils which arise when God's plan for marriage is abandoned by a civilization, are enumerated. The theme returns often over the course of the document, but most explicitly in the final section:

¹² Agnès Walch, 'Marital Spirituality from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries', in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, trans. Monica Sander (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 156.

¹³ Walch, 160.

¹⁴ Walch, 160; Interestingly, Hitchcock argues that it was the greater valuing of children that gave rise to a need to limit the number of children so that adequate affection could be shown to each child, thus inadvertently causing a rise in the use of contraceptive methods. See James Hitchcock, 'The Emergence of the Modern Family', in *Christian Marriage: A Historical Study*, ed. Glenn W. Olsen (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001), 321.

It must consequently be acknowledged that the Church has deserved exceedingly well of all nations by her ever watchful care in guarding the sanctity and the indissolubility of marriage. (art. 33)

This being so, all rulers and administrators of the State who are desirous of following the dictates of reason and wisdom, and anxious for the good of their people, ought to make up their minds to keep the holy laws of marriage intact, and to make use of the proffered aid of the Church for securing the safety of morals and the happiness of families, rather than suspect her of hostile intention and falsely and wickedly accuse her of violating the civil law. (art. 34)

The greatest theological energy is spent on proving that the Church is the sole authority over the single Truth of marriage, resisting the role of civil authorities in the strongest terms.

Set against this criticism of civil divorce, it is not surprising, then, that the first description of marriage given in *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* is its quality of permanence in unity between the spouses. Through a re-telling of the Creation narrative, marriage is characterized as having a divine origin as the foundation of the human race and even of human society. As part of this claim, the original marriage is said to have “manifested chiefly two most excellent properties...namely, unity and perpetuity.” (art. 5) The origin of marriage, then, is not necessarily sacramental but organizational.

Stabilizing society becomes an important aspect of the document’s theological discourse. The function of marriage is to bring civility to human society and to create new citizens of the State, as well as bringing forth members for the Church.

In very truth, the Christian religion thought of and provided for all things which are held to be advantageous in a State; so much so, indeed, that, according to St. Augustine, one cannot see how it could have offered greater help in the matter of living well and happily, had it been instituted for the single object of procuring or increasing those things which contributed to the conveniences of advantages of this mortal life. (art. 4)

The ongoing tensions between Church and State can be seen here to operate on multiple levels. Disputes over the authority of the State to grant divorce are the immediate concern of the document, but the greater issue of which it is symbolic is the ongoing debate over the precise relationship between ecclesial and civil rulers. Marriage theology becomes enmeshed in this debate, not allowed to develop along its own trajectory but in response to the rhetorical demands of the day.

As was mentioned above, the catechism of the Council of Trent had reversed the order of Augustine's goods of marriage, placing the community of the spouses ahead of the procreation and education of children. While *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* does not give an explicit list of the ends of marriage, it is obvious that the order has again been reversed.

For, first, there has been vouchsafed to the marriage union a higher and nobler purpose than was even previously given to it. By the command of Christ, it not only looks to the propagation of the human race, but to the bringing forth of children for the Church, "fellow citizens with the saints, and the domestics of God" [Eph. 2:19] (art. 10)

Secondly, the mutual duties of husband and wife have been defined, and their several rights accurately established. They are bound, namely, to have such feelings for one another as to cherish always very great mutual love, to be ever faithful to their marriage vow, and to give one another an unfailing and unselfish help. (art. 11)

The reason why the order was reversed, or what bearing it should have on the interpretation of the document is not immediately clear. It seems plausible, at least, that the emphasis on procreation and education of children would better support the Church's argument for a traditional religious understanding of marriage as beneficial to the State overall.

Thus, while *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* does recognize the reality of grace being conferred on the spouses through their marriage, the description of these effects is lacking.¹⁵ Where the effects of grace are very acutely discerned and investigated is in the role of the spouses as parents. Sidestepping any question of difficulties in the marriage relationship itself, the grace given through marriage is the strength to be effective intellectual and moral educators of the offspring. (art. 12) In fact, while the marriage relationship itself is flattened out to the purely practical considerations of mutual help, common possessions, and fidelity, the true grace of the sacrament is characterized as familial in scope.

Marriage also can do much for the good of families, for, so long as it is conformable to nature and in accordance with the counsels of God, it has power to strengthen union of heart in the parents; to secure the holy education of children; to temper the authority of the father by the example of the divine authority, to render children obedient to their parents and servants obedient to their masters. From such marriages as these the State may rightly expect a race of citizens animated by a good spirit and filled with reverence and love for God, recognizing it their duty to obey those who rule justly and lawfully, to love all, and to injure no one. (art. 26)

The true grace of marriage, as presented in the document, is operative at the societal level as an accumulation of familial goods, rather than as benefits for the individual spouses themselves.¹⁶

¹⁵ For example, one passage argues that through Christ's elevation of marriage to the status of sacrament, "husband and wife, guarded and strengthened by the heavenly grace which His merits gained for them, He gave power to attain holiness in the married state." (art. 9) A later article states simply that "Marriage, moreover, is a sacrament, because it is a holy sign which gives grace, showing forth an image of the mystical nuptials of Christ with the Church." (art. 24) Such statements are completely acceptable expositions of teaching on marriage. What feels lacking, however, is any attempt at discerning a new insight into the mystery of the sacrament.

¹⁶ It is particularly interesting to consider the description of the grace of marriage in connection with the document's list of the evils of divorce. "Matrimonial contracts are by [divorce] made variable; mutual kindness is weakened; deplorable inducements to unfaithfulness are supplied; harm is done to the education and training of children; occasion is afforded for the breaking up of homes; the seeds of dissension are sown among families; the dignity of womanhood is lessened and brought low, and women run the risk of being deserted after having ministered to the pleasures of men. Since, then, nothing has such power to lay waste families and destroy the mainstay of kingdoms as the corruption of morals, it is easily seen that divorces are in the highest degree hostile to the prosperity of families and States, springing as they do from the depraved morals of the people, and, as experience shows us, opening out a way to every kind of evil-doing in public and in private life." (art. 29) Just as the graces of marriage are considered as pertaining especially to the overall good of the State rather than of the spouses, so the evils are presented much more as the accumulation of evils within society rather than suffered by individuals.

***Casti Connubii* (1930)**

*Casti Connubii*¹⁷ arrived at an interesting moment in theological discourse. Following as closely as it did after the Lambeth Conference, in which the Anglican Church assented to limited use of contraception within marriage, the encyclical is often popularly understood as a direct response from the Catholic Church and affirmation of procreation as the primary end of marriage.¹⁸ Indeed, the encyclical is popularly cast as a type of stepping stone in early 20th century theological discourse, enshrining the hierarchy of the ends of marriage already encoded in *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* and the 1917 Code of Canon Law, and leading directly to the pronouncements of the Second Vatican Council.¹⁹ By attempting to place *Casti Connubii* within a greater narrative of marriage theology, however, something of its own revolutionary character is lost.

Along with the many social and cultural changes which had occurred between 1880 and 1930, admittedly including the development of the Lambeth Conference, Pius XI was forced to deal with the discovery in 1920 of predictable periods of fertility and infertility during a woman's menstrual cycle.²⁰ He resolves this within *Casti Connubii* by recognizing that sexual activity serves the relationship of the couple beyond the practical consideration of procreation.

Nor are those considered as acting against nature who in the married state use their right in the proper manner although on

¹⁷ All references to *Casti Connubii* taken from Pius XI, *Encyclical Letter "Casti Connubii" on Christian Marriage* [31 December 1930], available online: https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html, accessed 22 July 2017.

¹⁸ One author, for example, makes the claim that the decisions of the Lambeth Conference 'struck the sensitive soul of Pius XI as an abomination and was the direct occasion of his issuing the encyclical...He spoke out emphatically against contraception as a direct and dangerous threat to this very integrity of marriage since it was directed against its primary end.' In addition to the rather sentimental characterization of the pope's reaction to Lambeth, the author fails to consider the startling passage of the encyclical where Pius XI suggests strongly that the primary end of marriage may actually be the effects of the relationship between the husband and wife. See Haas, 'The Contemporary World', 342.

¹⁹ John Gallagher, 'Magisterial Teaching from 1918 to the Present', in *Dialogue about Catholic Sexual Teaching*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1993), 72; Haas, 'The Contemporary World', 343.

²⁰ Selling, 'Magisterial Teaching on Marriage 1880-1986: Historical Continuity or Radical Development?', 95.

account of natural reasons either of time or of certain defects, new life cannot be brought forth. For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial rights there are also secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved. (art. 59)

The spousal relationship itself can then be considered an adequate intent for a single sexual act to remain valid during a natural period of infertility, although it cannot be used indefinitely to validate all instances of sexual intercourse, thus preserving procreation as the primary end.²¹

Whether it was a pre-existing understanding of marriage which allowed Pius XI to include an expanded understanding of sexual activity in marriage theology, or whether it was the scientific insight which caused him to reflect and to arrive at a new understanding, is difficult to say. It is certain that *Casti Connubii* included a more spiritual understanding of marriage than is typically recognized. The encyclical was the first magisterial teaching on marriage to fully appropriate Augustine's three goods or blessings of marriage²² – procreation and education of children, mutual aid of the spouses, and sacrament – and notably expanded the category of mutual help to include the spouses' inner life.²³ In three broad sections, *Casti Connubii* explores the ideal of marriage, threats to marriage in the contemporary world, and means of renewing marriage theology, treating each of the ends of marriage in turn.

Maintaining the hierarchy presented in *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, children are identified as the first blessing of marriage, holding primacy over all other ends. Procreation is not merely concerned with a continuation of the species, but the greater goal of providing new Catholics to build up the Church.

²¹ Selling, 95.

²² Selling, 94–95.

²³ Gallagher, 'Magisterial Teaching from 1918 to the Present', 74.

Besides, God wishes men to be born not only that they should live and fill the earth, but much more that they may be worshippers of God, that they may know Him and love Him and finally enjoy Him for ever in heaven...(art. 12)

In order to fulfill these destinies, children require civil and religious education, the proper environment for which being provided by marriage. The right and responsibility for the complete care of children lies first with the parents.

Now it is certain that both by the law of nature and of God this right and duty of educating their offspring belongs in the first place to those who began the work of nature by giving them birth, and they are indeed forbidden to leave unfinished this work and so expose it to certain ruin. But in matrimony provision has been made in the best possible way for this education of children that is so necessary, for, since the parents are bound together by an indissoluble bond, the care and mutual help of each is always at hand. (art. 16)

The mutual aid of the spouses is thus bound up in the procreation and education of children.

Marriage is the structure which both provides for the needs of the children and the requirements of the parents in fulfilling their duties.

As mentioned above, however, *Casti Connubii* goes much further in developing the meaning of the mutual aid of the spouses. While the relationship between spouses is distinguished by the qualities of monogamous unity (art. 20) and chastity (art. 21-22), the true defining characteristic is the unique quality of the love between husband and wife. In many ways, Pius XI upholds the expression of spousal love in the mundane, practical considerations of daily living. The newness of the teaching arrives in the instruction that mutual help must go beyond the practical and physical to the spiritual.

This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves in the interior life, so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue,

and about all that they may grow in true love toward God and their neighbour... (art. 23)

Beyond simply providing a channel for justifying concupiscence, marriage is a means by which the spouses can grow in holiness and the likeness of God. (art. 23)

The radical approach is continued in the document, although Pius XI seems reluctant to state the case too strongly.

This mutual molding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other, can in a very real sense, as the Roman Catechism teaches, be said to be the chief reason and purpose of matrimony, provided matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child, but more widely as the blending of life as a whole and the mutual interchange and sharing thereof. (art. 24)

Some of the language in this passage can appear confusing and reflects the difficulties Pius XI faced throughout the encyclical to specify the appropriate vocabulary required. While *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* prefers the terminology of ‘ends’ of marriage, *Casti Connubii* speaks more consistently in terms of the ‘blessings’ of marriage. Thus children, mutual support, and sacramental grace are shown as the good benefits which flow from the institution, rather than the objective.²⁴

If the assumption is that Pius XI was intending to maintain the teaching on the dual ends of marriage, as some authors argue, the introduction of a ‘reason and purpose’ for marriage in the above quote is a tactic to evade difficulties associated with legalistic language. Following this argument, mutual perfection must be taken as more important than a secondary end of marriage – the traditional labelling of the spouses’ mutual aid – but poses the difficulty of then introducing a

²⁴ Granted, the procreation and education of children is identified as the “primary end” of marriage (art. 17), but this is part of a direct quote from the Code of Canon Law and explicitly identified within the text of the encyclical as a succinct statement of teaching rather than a true insight into the function of children in a marriage.

second primary end to marriage.²⁵ By speaking instead of a ‘reason and purpose’, Pius XI is seen to neatly side-step the legal difficulty and maintain the traditional hierarchy of the ends of marriage.

Such an interpretation, though, seems very much to ignore the point that Pius XI is arguing by speaking of a *purpose* for marrying. In fact, the whole document seems to be an attempt to move away from a discussion of ends in favour of a more holistic approach to marriage theology. By speaking of a ‘reason and purpose’ for marriage, Pius XI argues explicitly that “matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child” (art. 24) but for the very blending of the lives of the spouses. *Casti Connubii* is invoking, not the legal justification of marriage as a necessary evil or the practical concern for providing hearth and home, but the very positive hope that spouses have in their concern for each other. Simply put, the encyclical is recognizing that people get married because they are in love.

***Gaudium et Spes* (1965)**

*Gaudium et Spes*²⁶ is reflective of the renewing energy of the Second Vatican Council. Like *Casti Connubii*, its creation, reception, and legacy have been much mythologized. Being part of the Council, as well, its interpretation has become bound up in the overall debate over continuity with or departure from the Tradition. As with the history of the Vatican II itself, the theology of marriage presented in *Gaudium et Spes* can be presented as either conservative or revolutionary, depending on the views of the theologian reading it. What may have been lost is a deeper understanding of what the text actually says.

²⁵ Gallagher, ‘Magisterial Teaching from 1918 to the Present’, 75.

²⁶ All references to *Gaudium et Spes* taken from Paul VI, *Pastoral Constitution “Gaudium et Spes” on the Church in the Modern World* [7 December 1965], available online: http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html, accessed 22 July 2017.

As was discussed above, a common trope among those presenting the legacy of *Gaudium et Spes*, in both positive and negative light, is that the constitution was the first magisterial document to do away with the language of ‘ends’ in discussing marriage. With this shift in vocabulary, it is claimed, came a shift in the teaching on marriage.²⁷ Thus the assertion that Vatican II removed any understanding of a hierarchy of the ends of marriage, placing both in equal importance and allowing for a truly new understanding of the marriage relationship. There are two concerns with this assertion, however.

First, we must remember that a shift away from the language of ‘ends’ in the theology of marriage did not originate in *Gaudium et Spes*, as is so often claimed, but in *Casti Connubii*. While Pius XI did employ some language of ends and their hierarchy, as discussed above, he employed far more the concept of the blessings of marriage. Similarly, he introduced the idea of mutual love between the spouses as a purpose for the marriage, even above the traditional ends. Thus, the move away from a hierarchy of ends was already in progress prior to Vatican II.

Second, *Gaudium et Spes* is not as revolutionary in its teaching on marriage as some might suppose. While there is no explicit language of primary and secondary ends, the section on marriage certainly upholds an orientation towards procreation and education as the foundational premise. Children and their well-being are at the centre of the constitution’s teaching.

The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one...By their very nature, the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children, and find in them their ultimate crown.
(art. 48)

²⁷ Haas, ‘The Contemporary World’, 346–47; Selling, ‘Magisterial Teaching on Marriage 1880-1986: Historical Continuity or Radical Development?’, 96.

The language is certainly softer than in *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, but the basic theology of marriage as ordered towards the good of the off-spring remains intact. Similarly, a more intimate, personal relationship between the spouses may now be envisioned, but is seen more as a reason for indissolubility rather than a good for the development of the spouses.

In order to better understand the intention behind this section of *Gaudium et Spes*, it is important to examine it within the context of the entire document rather than focusing on its place within the greater trajectory of marriage theology in the twentieth century. As a whole, the pastoral constitution examines the concept of human dignity and its development in the modern world. The introduction to Part II, where the chapter on marriage and the family is located, introduces the concept of human dignity as the interpretive lens through which various contemporary issues will be explored. (art. 46) Along with marriage and the family, these issues include human progress; the economic, social, and political dimensions of life; the relationship between nation; and peace. (art. 46) Reading this section strictly as marriage theology is quite difficult. Taken together with the rest of the constitution, the focus is on a theology of human development, of which marriage is a beginning and important foundation, and thus shares more in common with Catholic Social Teaching than with sacramental theology *per se*.

The chapter on marriage opens by placing the origins of human society in the domestic realm. “The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family.” (art. 47) Marriage will be considered only in so far as it is concerned with raising functioning members of society. Furthermore, the threats to marriage are not only those which threaten the ability of the spouses to be in relationship with each other, as was presented in *Casti Connubii*, but which threaten the viability of the family unit and the members therein.

Yet the excellence of this institution is not everywhere reflected with equal brilliance, since polygamy, the plague of divorce, so-called free love and other disfigurements have an obscuring effect. In addition, married love is too often profaned by excessive self-love, the worship of pleasure and illicit practices against human generation. Moreover, serious disturbances are caused in families by modern economic conditions, but influences at once social and psychological, and by the demands of civil society. (art. 47)

Such sentiment is reflected with the closing article of the chapter.

The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children. (art. 52)

While marriage may no longer be presented as having a hierarchy of ends, the family is here understood as having a very specific purpose: the development of individual persons, in their unique need for life with dignity. To this end, marriage is cast as the incubator for the child, but with little attention paid to the continuing development of the spouses themselves.

A continued emphasis on children as the purpose for marriage influences the teaching that *Gaudium et Spes* presents on sexuality within marriage, as well.

Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children...Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love...[The] divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment. (art. 50)

While the article goes on to acknowledge that marriage maintains a meaning and purpose “even when despite the intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking,” (art. 50), the emphasis is still very much on marriage being ordered towards the proper framework required for the development of children.

Theological reflection on the spouses' relationship is by no means completely absent.

The role of the marriage in the moral development of the spouses is recognized and encouraged.

By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God. (art. 48)

Emphasis on the relationship between the spouses, though, is tempered by the sections immediately before and after the above quotation, where the sanctification of the spouses is seen as the necessary model for the children in their own development rather than as a benefit for the spouses themselves. (art. 48) Authentic married love is described as leading the spouses to God “with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother.” (art. 48) Further, the children are said to aid in the moral development of their parents (art. 48), placing the primary relationship for personal development as inter-generational rather than spousal.

A question then arises as to whether *Gaudium et Spes* can truly be said to present a theology of marriage, or a theology of parenthood. In the final article of the chapter on marriage and the family, the spouses are called to witness to the mystery of love through their vocation. (art. 52) The exhortation comes after a discussion of various groups within society who are given responsibility for ensuring that families have the support required to raise children in dignity. While the possibility of the spouses aiding each other in sanctification is not excluded, it is interesting to reflect whether the council fathers intended to emphasize the vocation to marriage and the benefit of the spouse, or the vocation to parenthood.

The marriage theology presented in *Gaudium et Spes* marks another turning point in Roman Catholic marriage theology, subtle but important to the theological reflections which

occur afterwards. The pastoral constitution is the first magisterial document which refers, not to *marriage*, but to *marriage and the family*. As has been explored above, the family was always an important aspect of marriage theology in that marriage was thought to necessitate procreation and therefore the creation of a family. However, marriage was itself spoken of in its own right. Following Vatican II, marriage theology began to focus especially on marriage *and* the family, in such a way that speaking of the spouses' relationship independently of their role as parents has become unintuitive. While the historical context of *Gaudium et Spes* does give some justification for such an orientation, this formulation would go on to affect much of the marriage theology from the late twentieth century.

***Familiaris Consortio* (1981)**

The close connection between marriage and the family as a single subject for reflection is again present in John Paul II's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*.²⁸ A long and very dense document, it provides a number of insights into family life and the function of the family in society. While any reference to ordered ends of marriage is expectedly absent from the apostolic exhortation, there is a very explicit emphasis placed on procreation as the purpose of marriage, almost to the exclusion of any reflection on the spouses' relationship. The main statements on marriage theology specifically occur in a short section entitled "The Plan of God for Marriage and the Family," placed at the beginning of the exhortation following a description of the blessings and challenges around family life in the modern context. It is this section which will provide most of the focus for the current discussion.

²⁸ All references to *Familiaris Consortio* taken from John Paul II, *Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio" on the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* [22 November 1981], available online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html, accessed 22 July 2017.

The section on marriage theology opens with the statement that God created humanity through love and in order for persons to live for love. (art. 11) Included in this exposition is a remarkably open dialogue on the importance of the body and human sexuality in the experience of true love and marital spirituality. In particular, as a unity of body and spirit, the human person is called to live the vocation to love through the proper use of the body: either through the expression of sexual love within the context of a valid marriage, or through consecrated abstinence as part of a vow of celibacy or of virginity. (art. 11) The function of marriage, then, is to provide the only proper context within which sexual love can be expressed properly.

The only “place” in which this self-giving in its whole truth is made possible is marriage, the covenant of conjugal love freely and consciously chosen, whereby man and woman accept the intimate community of life and love willed by God Himself, which only in this light manifests its true meaning. (art. 11)

By building on a relationship of commitment and mutual self-giving, the spouses enter into the unique relationship of which sexual expression is the proper sign. (art. 11)

Beyond the meaning of marriage as part of the human vocation, *Familiaris Consortio* also presents some ideas on the sacramental nature of marriage. Marriage is first a symbol of God’s living relationship with His people, especially in the history of the people of Israel. The maxim that “God loves His people” is concretized in the lived relationship of a husband and wife, the symbol of the covenant between God and His people. (art. 12) Furthermore, in the Christian context, marriage is brought to its fulfillment, not only as a symbol of God and His people, but of Christ and the Church.

In this [Paschal] sacrifice there is entirely revealed that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation: the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ. The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and

renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. (art. 13)

Thus, not only is humanity freed from sin through the Passion, but marriage can be fully understood once again because humanity's *telos* is no longer obscured by sin.

By entering a relationship of love and self-giving, the spouses become the sacramental sign of Christ's indissoluble relationship with the Church. Through baptism, both the woman and man are bound into the covenantal relationship between Christ and the Church, and therefore their marriage is also elevated "into the spousal charity of Christ" which simultaneously enriches it and gives it meaning. (art. 13)

Spouses are therefore the permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers. (art. 13)

The individual marriage relationship becomes the sacramental sign of Christ's covenant with the Church, through which the marriage is sustained and enriched. Whether considering marriage from a Christian or pre-Christian perspective, marriage is a sign of God's love for humanity, and draws its meaning and shape from the love to which all humans are called by their very nature and *telos*.

Familiaris Consortio is certainly not original in teaching that marriage is marked by indissolubility. Such extended treatment, however, makes clear the issue of confusing descriptive symbol with prescriptive regulation.²⁹ Marriage, or the ideal of marriage, provides an apt symbol by which to meditate on the mystery of God's love for humankind, whatever the exact nature of that covenant. However, like the children of Israel, humans today are still marked by sin and thus

²⁹ I first encountered the idea of descriptive symbol being used as a prescriptive regulation in a class presentation by Dr. Susan Roll on the interpretation of St. Paul's dual symbol of marriage and the relationship of Christ to the Church. The interpretive concept became important in my own exploration of magisterial documents and their development of marriage theology.

cannot love as perfect and faithfully as God does, despite the best of intentions. While the model of Christ's love for the Church is a worthy goal towards which spouses should strive, *Familiaris Consortio* falls short in only repeating the teaching on indissolubility while giving little support for how it may be achieved. By serving only as a symbol to be viewed from an external perspective, an emphasis on performing Christlike self-offering, love, and fidelity results in a limited understanding of how marriage functions to support the spiritual health of the spouses.

Children, in keeping with the teachings introduced by *Gaudium et Spes* on the importance of family for the development of the human person, hold a prominent place in the understanding of marriage presented in *Familiaris Consortio*. Following God's original intention for conjugal love, instituted at the time of Creation, marriage finds its crowning in the procreation and education of children towards which it is ordained. (art. 14) Furthermore, the sexual expression of the spouses' relationship is not only tied up in their mutual love and self-giving but must point beyond the couple because it is the procreative act which allows them to become cooperators with God in continuing creation. (art. 14)

Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother. (art. 14)

It is striking the extent to which *Familiaris Consortio* thus returns to the teachings of ordered ends of marriage, despite never falling into its explicit language of ends and purposes.

The primacy of procreation is reinforced in *Familiaris Consortio* with the statement that, by creating woman and man in His own image, God ordained them to the task of transmitting human life.

Thus the fundamental task of the family is to serve life, to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator – that of transmitting

by procreation the divine image from person to person...Fecundity is the fruit and the sign of conjugal love, the living testimony of the full reciprocal selfgiving of the spouses... (art. 28)

Not only are people called to love but, unless living out a vow of celibacy or virginity, they are called by their created nature to procreate. Marriage provides the only suitable context for this to happen, as discussed above, and therefore marriage must also be seen to be ordered towards procreation. If *Gaudium et Spes* first suggested the possibility of the family providing the best and primary environment for the development of the human person, *Familiaris Consortio* develops the teaching to a strident degree. Not only does the family provide the context for new life, but humanity's origins in the first moments of Creation provide the ultimate meaning for bringing new life into the world. Unfortunately, by focusing so heavily on the vocation to parenthood, the exhortation loses the ability to speak meaningfully of the community of spouses apart from their role as parents.³⁰

In considering a spiritual approach to the spouses' relationship, *Familiaris Consortio* comes the closest by examining the moral development of the spouses which can arise from the marriage relationship itself. It is telling, however, that the moral development referenced is not attained through the relationship itself, but by adhering to the Church's teachings on marriage and the proper use of sexual intimacy within marriage. The norms and values enshrined in the moral order, it is argued, were put in place by God to help lead every person to their full humanity. (art. 34) For married people, moral maturity comes through a strict observance of the Church's teachings on marriage and family life, in particular the imperative to transmit life.

On the same lines, it is part of the Church's pedagogy that husbands and wives should first of all recognize clearly the

³⁰ At no point in *Familiaris Consortio* is the community of spouses explicitly mentioned as being somehow second or subordinated to the procreation of children, as was discussed in the example of other documents. Instead, there is simply the lack of meaningful engagement with the question of the spouses' relationship as spouses, coupled with the far more explicit statements on marriage being ordained for procreation and education of children.

teaching of *Humanae vitae* as indicating the norm for the exercise of their sexuality, and that they should endeavor to establish the conditions necessary for observing that norm. (art. 34)³¹

Spouses are called upon to see the Law, not as an ideal to strive for in the future, but a command for today “to overcome difficulties with constancy.” (art. 34) Similarly, the transmission of life is expected to be integrated into Christian life as a whole (art. 34), suggesting that it is not only tied to the purpose of marriage but to every human life. Moral development, as used here, does not seem to refer so much to a true growth in wisdom or discernment, but the increased ability to apply moral maxims in daily life.

The place of this instruction within the document as a whole ought not to be overlooked. Situated in the middle of the chapter examining the role of the Christian family in serving life, and considering the emphasis placed on procreation discussed above, a link between spousal morality and the transmission of life is certainly understandable. The tone of the section, however, is troubling in its emphasis on obedience. First, by tying procreation to divine will rather than to the results of human theological reflection (art. 28), this document inhibits some critique of the presented place of procreation in the marriage relationship. Such a claim is supported by the identification of the Church as the sole teaching authority on conjugal morality, although great care is taken to emphasize the magisterium as only the proclaimer, and not author, of the moral norms. (art. 33) To aid the Church in proclaiming these truths, theologians are invited “to collaborate with the hierarchical Magisterium and to commit themselves to the task of illustrating ever more clearly the biblical foundations, the ethical grounds and the personalistic reasons” (art. 31) for the teachings on conjugal morality. Similarly, scientists and others involved

³¹ *Humanae Vitae* will be explored at greater length in the next chapter. It is interesting to note here, however, the extent to which that document also argued for strict adherence to Church teaching, rather than a more integral understanding of moral development.

in the medical sphere are called on to develop and better apply the natural methods for regulating birth. (art. 35) In all, the section of *Familiaris Consortio* which calls the most strongly for service to life succeeds only in demanding that individuals submit to Church teachings without ever touching on a deepening understanding of the very value of life, or even less exploring why the teachings may carry truth.

Marriage is identified within the apostolic exhortation as a means of mutual sanctification. While couples are included, it is always in connection with the family in general. The sacrament itself may be most properly applied to the spouses' relationship, but its sanctifying effects are actually felt throughout the whole family. (art. 56) For the couple specifically, marriage can bring sanctifying qualities, but these are connected directly with the fulfillment of their obligations in building up the Body of Christ. Thus, the sacrament bestows both the grace necessary, and the moral obligation to live the entire of life as a self-sacrifice in love to all other people. (art. 56) Spouses must welcome the news that "their conjugal and family life [is] sanctified and made a source of sanctity by Christ Himself" (art. 51) so that their relationship can become "a sign and meeting place of the loving covenant between God and man, between Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church." (art. 51) Marriage is here understood as an act glorifying God for the opportunity to live as a sign of God's love for the Church and of Christ's love for the world. The sanctifying grace of the sacrament is not the way in which the spouses themselves are sanctified, but their obligation to live as a sign and sacrifice so that others may encounter God through them and thus themselves be sanctified. As was discussed above in the use of marriage as a symbol, the value of marriage is understood as primarily for those outside of the spousal relationship.

Familiaris Consortio is remarkably silent on the question of the community of the spouses. Ironically, in arguing for the importance of their role in bringing forth new life, the identities of wife and husband which form the very basis of a marriage relationship are lost. It is assumed that the spouses even cannot see each other except as parents.

Within the conjugal and family communion-community, the man is called upon to live his gift and role as husband and father...Love for his wife as mother of their children and love for the children themselves are for the man the natural way of understanding and fulfilling his own fatherhood. (art. 25)

In attempting to combat the increasing rate of divorce, abortions and use of contraception, the breakdown of the relationship between parents and children, and an understanding of an independence of the spouses from each other (art. 6), John Paul II may have over-sold the importance of children and the unity of the parents as children. By asking only a certain set of questions around procreation, the importance of one of the defining characteristics of marriage – the mutual love of the spouses – was largely abandoned.

***Amoris Laetitia* (2016)**

The final magisterial document dealing directly with marriage is the recent post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. The driving purpose of the document is a recognition of the lived experiences of people and families, particularly the struggles they must face in the contemporary world, and the best ways for the Church to give a pastorally-sensitive response. (art. 31) It is certainly not a coincidence that the opening sentence of the exhortation – “The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” (art. 1) – bears such a striking parallel to the opening of *Gaudium et Spes*.³² Eschewing the more defensive tone of earlier documents, *Amoris Laetitia* provides a model of the “responsible and generous effort to present

³² “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” (GS, art. 1)

the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family” (art. 35) which the document itself recommends. Advances in the pastoral application of marriage theology aside, however, it is important to note that the document affirms the absolute tie between marriage and procreation, and, in some instances, even the residual primacy given to the role of spouses as parents.

The first chapter describes the Scriptural basis for marriage and family life. Turning first to the origins of marriage, Francis repeats the importance of the Creation accounts in establishing the couple as an image of God. Following the model of John Paul II, he repeats that it is their fruitfulness that the couple is capable of reflecting the nature of God.

The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living icon...capable of revealing God the Creator and Saviour...Seen this way, the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection. (art. 11)

Procreation is not only the means of imaging God, but also the method by which salvation history may continue. Thus within Genesis, further passages build on the analogous relationship between fruitful love and the inner life of God, compounded by the interweaving of genealogical accounts into the biblical narrative. (art. 11)

Even the interpretation of the second Creation Narrative orients the relationship of the couple towards the birth of a child. Initially, the exegesis highlights the desire of the man to find a proper helper who can alleviate his loneliness. The Hebrew text, states Francis, suggests a direct encounter between the original couple. “It is an encounter with a face, a ‘thou’, who reflects God’s own love...” (art. 12) However, the understanding of the first encounter as one of recognizing God’s love in the other is immediately subordinated to the service of the family. Again, referencing the original Hebrew text, the man and woman are described as coming

together through a profound harmony which denotes both physical and spiritual/emotional closeness, but which necessarily leads to a concretization in offspring. (art. 13)

The result of this union is that the two “become one flesh”, both physically and in the union of their hearts and lives, and, eventually, in a child, who will share not only genetically but also spiritually in the “flesh” of both parents. (art. 13)

An important question here would be whether such a strong emphasis on procreation is exegetically sound. While it is known that the original couple did have a number of children, they do not appear within the Creation Narrative itself. Is it appropriate, then, to infer such a strong connection between the original unity of the couple and their eventual family life?

Included in the third chapter, discussing the vocation of the family, is an exploration of the family’s responsibility in transmitting life. Francis begins by affirming the importance of conjugal love as a good for the spouses, and the role of sexuality in expressing this love. For this reason, a couple who cannot have children is still considered to have a meaning-filled marriage by virtue of their complete conjugal life. (art. 80) However, while marriage is ordered to the good of the spouses and sexuality is ordered to the expression of conjugal love, sexual intercourse itself is ordered to the transmission of life. (art. 80) It is not made clear, however, how sexual activity ordered towards the good of the spouses is to be differentiated from sexual activity ordered towards procreation. The result is concurrent interpretations which suggest that conjugal love and the transmission of life are ordered towards each other. (art. 81)

Francis argues that the pre-existence of conjugal love is valued not only for itself, but for the appropriate environment it creates for receiving a child. (art. 80) Almost immediately, this relationship is inverted so that the child is described as having the right to be born of love.³³ (art.

³³ This assertion is drawn from *Donum Vitae* (1987), a document which will be explored further in the second chapter. In addressing various ethical concerns around artificial methods of procreation, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith invoked the function of the family as the proper environment for rearing children. However,

81) The subject is thus shifted from the spouses to the potential child. As a result, the interpretive framework is also inverted so that conjugal love and sexual intercourse are not considered in reference to the spouses' relationship, but in the responsibility borne towards the child. The spouses are no longer seen as they relate to each other, but to the offspring.

Thus the Creator made man and woman share in the work of his creation and, at the same time, made them instruments of his love, entrusting to them the responsibility for the future of mankind, through the transmission of human life. (art. 81)

By placing conjugal love and sexual intercourse at the service of the child, the primary role of the couple is cast as parents and their function as spouses, through the sexual expression of their conjugal love, is effectively ordered towards procreation.

While these observations of *Amoris Laetitia* may seem critical, the document as a whole presents a number of remarkable insights into the family. As was mentioned above, Francis takes great care to describe the myriad realities and struggles of family life, including insights into the surrounding culture, with an incredible depth and nuance. The sections exploring the meaning of love in the family and a spirituality of family life are examples of a compassionate application of theology to lived reality and will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter of this paper. For the moment it is important to remember that the nuptial theology of this exhortation also affirms the greater tradition of binding marriage to family in such a way that the spouses are seen primarily as parents. In no way is this to suggest that family ought *not* to be considered in a theology of marriage. Rather, a more complete theology of marriage should differentiate and explore more fully the realities of the couple as spouses *and* as parents. As this brief survey of

they invoked these teachings in such a way that the child was made the subject and the family a right to which the child ought to have access. Such an argumentation is problematic if it results in the use of a descriptive statement as prescriptive.

magisterial documents suggests, Catholic marriage theology has not yet appropriated such an awareness.

CHAPTER 2 - MARRIAGE THEOLOGY AS MORAL THEOLOGY

Beginning just after the Second Vatican Council is a series of documents which do not treat marriage directly, but which invoke marriage theology as a grounding for other teachings.³⁴ By using a theology of marriage as the basis for teachings on other questions, these documents limit reflection on the sacrament by focusing on particular questions while failing to admit other aspects of the greater theological discourse on marriage. Two main concerns can be seen: questions around the transmission of life, and the reinforcement of traditional sexual ethics, in particular the Church's statements on homosexuality. Procreation and its place within marriage becomes an important part of the arguments presented in these documents.

Return to Ends: *Casti Connubii* (1930)

In comparison to the more insightful approach of the first section of *Casti Connubii*, as was discussed in the previous chapter, the second section of the encyclical adopts a more conservative tone in discussing threats to procreation within marriage. (art. 53-71) Of particular importance in these few articles is the equation of "marriage" as an institution or condition of life with "sexual intercourse." Beyond the statement that sexuality finds its morally good practice only within marriage, here Pius XI presents sexual intercourse as constituting marriage itself.

...any use whatsoever of matrimony exercised in such a way that the act is deliberately frustrated in its natural power to generate life is an offense against the law of God and of nature... (art. 56)

³⁴ These documents are included in the present study, in part because they use marriage theology to such a degree, but largely because they may be seen themselves as being about marriage (see United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Church Teaching on Marriage*, available online: <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/promotion-and-defense-of-marriage/church-documents-on-defense-of-marriage.cfm>, accessed 25 July 2017.). If marriage theology is presented in the magisterial documents most often as only being in relation to certain ethical concerns, the ability to examine marriage theology in its own right may be hindered.

As regards the evil use of matrimony, to pass over the arguments which are shameful, not infrequently others that are false and exaggerated are put forward. (art. 58)

Of particular importance is the fact that sexual intercourse is being cast as the definition of marriage rather than a part of the marriage relationship. Standing in sharp contrast to the encyclical's earlier description of marriage as the spouses' "blending of life as a whole" and on-going process of mutual sanctification (art. 24), the argumentation here reverts to an understanding of marriage as a justification of sexuality through its ordering to procreation.

Such a seeming contradiction is intensified when the language of "ends" is invoked. While the first half of the encyclical favours a discussion of the *blessings* of marriage, the arguments against contraception rely again on a legalistic formulation of *ends*.

For in matrimony as well as in the use of the matrimonial rights there are also secondary ends, such as mutual aid, the cultivating of mutual love, and the quieting of concupiscence which husband and wife are not forbidden to consider so long as they are subordinated to the primary end and so long as the intrinsic nature of the act is preserved. (art. 59)

The argument as presented here is not for a return to a rigid framework for the ends of marriage itself, but an application of the former structure in order to understand the purpose of sexual intercourse. Given the newness of Pius XI's reflections on marriage as based in the life-long partnership of the spouses, it is understandable that he had not yet extended this thinking to include the exercise of sexuality within marriage. However, by tying sexual intercourse to a primary end of procreation, and by equating sexual intercourse with matrimony as a whole, *Casti Connubii* unintentionally sets the precedent for examining emerging questions about the transmission of life and sexual ethics through the lens of sexual activity *and* marriage being ordered towards procreation.

Return to Ends: *Address to Midwives on the Nature of their Profession* (1951)

Pius XII's *Address to Midwives*³⁵ is one example of a minor magisterial document which is often cited as a source for marriage theology specifically, although upon examination it deals more closely with procreation instead. Given the audience for this address, a certain emphasis on procreation and the care for children and new mothers would not be surprising. Pius XII, however, seems to have taken the opportunity to correct what he saw as theological and social errors of the time, and proceeded to give a limited and even antiquated teaching on marriage.

In introducing the topic of sexual intercourse in marriage, the *Address* refers explicitly to *Casti Connubii* as its primary source on the nature of the “conjugal act.”

...that every attempt of either husband or wife in the performance of the conjugal act or in the development of its natural consequences which aims at depriving it of its inherent force and hinders the procreation of new life is immoral...

It is evident that Pius XII is here referring to the teachings from the second half of *Casti Connubii*, especially the correspondence between matrimony and sexual intercourse. Such a relationship is further developed in the use of the language of ‘rights’ and ‘responsibilities’.

The reason is that marriage obliges the partners to a state of life, which even as it confers certain rights so it also imposes the accomplishments of a positive work concerning the state itself... The matrimonial contract, which confers on the married couple the right to satisfy the inclination of nature, constitutes them in a state of life, namely, the matrimonial state. Now, on married couples, who make use of the specific act of their state, nature and the Creator impose the function of providing for the preservation of mankind. This is the characteristic service which gives rise to the peculiar value of their state, the *bonum prolis*.

³⁵ All quotes from *Address to the Midwives* taken from Pius XII, *Address to Midwives on the Nature of Their Profession* [29 October 1951], available online: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius12/P12midwives.htm>, accessed 22 July 2017.

Pius XII here not only fails to build on the insights of *Casti Connubii* but strengthens the more limited understanding of marriage and of spousal sexuality.

One major influence on how Pius XII examined marriage theology was the emerging personalist movement and the way such philosophers were arguing for a new approach to understanding sexuality within marriage. The movement is condemned a number of times throughout the *Address*, presented as a danger against which midwives must be educated in order to serve the women under their care. “Personalist values” are described accurately as placing the importance of sexual acts in the service of the spouses and their intimate relationship rather than on the generation of new life. Pius XII recognizes the main arguments of personalist philosophy as applied to sexual ethics within marriage, but fails to understand how *Casti Connubii* had already engaged positively with some of the insights of personalism.³⁶ Instead, he returns to the teachings on the ends of marriage, not only to reinforce them but to argue against personalism’s encroachment on marriage theology.

According to the *Address*, matrimony cannot have as a primary or “equally primary” end the personal perfection of the spouses because such a designation has already been granted to “the procreation and upbringing of new life.” While the mutual perfection of the spouses through their relationship is possible, it is by no means to be considered as a primary function of the spousal relationship.

Not only the common work of external life, but even all personal enrichment – spiritual and intellectual – all that in married love as such is most spiritual and profound, has been placed by the will of the Creator and of nature at the service of posterity. The perfect married life, of its very nature, also signifies the total devotion of parents to the well-being of their children, and married love in its power and tenderness is itself a condition of the sincerest care of the offspring and the guarantee of its realization.

³⁶ The relationship between Roman Catholic marriage theology and personalist philosophy will be explored further in the fourth section.

Thus the mutual love of the spouses is not only subordinated to the upbringing of children, but is even characterized as resulting from their role as parents. In attempting to address the claims of personalism, Pius XII forces an even closer connection between marriage and procreation, almost obliterating the function and foundation of the spouses' relationship.³⁷

While the *Address to Midwives* does consider and condemn the practices of abortion, birth control, and forced sterilization, the primary concern of the document is the rising influence on marriage theology of personalist philosophy and the manner in which it is presenting the role of sexuality within marriage. To combat all of these threats, Pius XII invokes the traditional language of the primary ends of marriage,³⁸ and enforces multiple times the supremacy of procreation and the subordination of the spouses' relationship to the good of the children.

Transmission of Life: *Casti Connubii* (1930)

Questions around the transmission of life can be traced back to *Casti Connubii* and the function it assigns to sexual intercourse within a marriage. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, *Casti Connubii* is often cited as a reaction to the decision by the Anglican Church to allow the use of contraceptives within certain circumstances in marriage. While this is by no means the only question which the encyclical addresses, it is true that it speaks on the importance of the spouses' openness to new life.

³⁷ Pius XII, along with arguing from the perspective of natural law for procreation as the primary end of marriage, also makes an attempt to argue against personalism from the same point of view. "If nature had aimed exclusively, or at least in the first place, as a reciprocal gift and possession of the married couple in joy and delight, and if it had ordered that act only to make happy in the highest possible degree their personal experience, and not to stimulate them to the service of life, then the Creator would have adopted another plan in forming and constituting the natural act. Now, instead, all this is subordinated and ordered to that unique, great law of the "*generatio et educatio prolis*," namely the accomplishment of the primary end of matrimony as the origin and source of life." The issue here is similar to that faced by Pius XI in *Casti Connubii*: by defining marriage, or any other aspect of human life, simply in terms of their "end," it becomes impossible to consider another potential reason. Sexual intercourse cannot be considered as having the relationship of the spouses as an end simply because, for that to be possible, another process would have had to be created with procreation as its end. It is completely outside this interpretive framework to consider a single act as having multiple ends or purposes.

³⁸ Cormac Burke, *The Theology of Marriage: Personalism, Doctrine, and Canon Law* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 53–54, <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

The section of the encyclical which deals with threats to the idea of children as a blessing of marriage focuses specifically on the critique of the idea promoted at the time – at least according to the Church’s interpretation – that children were actually a burden of marriage and ought to be avoided by various means. (art. 53) In arguing against the use of contraception, the practice of abortion, and eugenics and sterilization, Pius XI founds his theological grounding in the teaching that sexual intercourse is intended “by nature” primarily for procreation, and therefore any artificial intervention in this function would necessarily be evil. (art. 54) The argument from the perspective of the proper ends of sexual intercourse, however, are only immediately relevant to the discussion on contraception. Arguments against abortion (art. 63-67) are based more in the imperative to protect human life from the moment of conception, while the concern with sterilization and eugenics (art. 68-71) is tied to State interference in the lives of individuals and thus arguments against it are found in the person’s right to dignity and bodily integrity. In arguing against the use of contraceptives (art. 56-62), however, Pius XI relies on the ethical norm of both marriage and sexual intercourse being oriented towards procreation.

The arguments against contraceptive practices presented in *Casti Connubii* do seem to be in direct response to the 1930 Lambeth Statement, allowing limited use of contraception among Anglican married couples. The section is framed as a response to those who “openly departing from the uninterrupted Christian tradition...have recently judged it possible solemnly to declare another doctrine regarding this question...” (art. 56) In contradistinction, the Catholic Church is also characterized as the body “to whom God has entrusted the defense of the integrity and purity of morals...in order that she may preserve the chastity of the nuptial union from being defiled by the foul stain...” (art. 56) Interestingly, though, there is no elaborated discussion of why

contraceptives are sinful, except that they violate the procreative end of intercourse and marriage.

Transmission of Life: *Humanae Vitae* (1968)

The next document which deals with questions around the transmission of life is the encyclical *Humane Vitae*,³⁹ Paul VI's infamous teaching on the use of contraceptives. Setting aside an evaluation of the arguments there contained, the manner in which marriage theology is invoked in the encyclical demonstrates how the sacrament's theology had become bound up in debating ethical questions of the day. The encyclical opens with the assertion that the transmission of human life is "a most serious role in which married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator," a duty unique to the married state. (art. 1) Procreation, though not identified as the defining purpose of marriage, is presented as the function which sets married couples apart. Any ethical teachings on the transmission of life would, then, rely on the familial context within which this new life would emerge.

Humanae Vitae is remarkably adept at incorporating a fuller understanding of conjugal love than previous documents. Among the social developments which the encyclical recognizes with some appreciation are the insights into the value of conjugal love within a marriage relationship, and the important role played by conjugal acts in the expression of this love. (art. 2) In an expanded discussion on married love, the spouses' relationship is described at length as one of mutual support and enrichment.

[Married love] is also, and above all, an act of the free will, whose trust is such that it is meant not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also to grow, so that husband and wife become in a

³⁹ All quotes from *Humanae Vitae* taken from Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter "Humanae Vitae" On the Regulation of Birth* [25 July 1968], available online: http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html, accessed July 22, 2017

way one heart and one soul, and together attain their human fulfillment. (art. 9)

... Whoever really loves his partner loves not only for what he receives, but loves that partner for the partner's own sake, content to be able to enrich the other with the gift of himself. (art. 9)

In addition, married love is faithful and continuing until death. (art. 9) Finally, conjugal love is fecund. (art. 9) The use of language here is important. Unlike earlier teaching which saw marriage as *procreative*, thus implying an imperative or specific purpose, the concept of the marriage being *fecund* emphasizes the ability or capacity of the marriage to bring forth new life. In fact, the encyclical defines married love in part as “not confined wholly to the loving interchange of husband and wife; it also contrives to go beyond this to bring new life into being.” (art. 9) Such balancing of the interpersonal and generative aspects of marriage is further emphasized later in the encyclical when the procreative and unitive aspects of sexual intercourse are identified as inseparable. (art. 12)

From this assertion, it becomes possible to identify a weakness in regarding *Humanae Vitae* as a document about marriage specifically. As with the second section of *Casti Connubii*, sections of this encyclical rely on a forced ontological equivalence between a marriage and ‘the marriage act’. The description of the marriage relationship as both unitive and procreative (art. 9) is transferred to, and treated as prescriptive for, the nature of sexual intercourse within that marriage. (art. 12) In the introduction to the encyclical Paul VI speculates whether, given the new questions emerging at the time, “would it not be right to review the moral norms in force till now...” (art. 3) As a result, the stated intention of the document is an extended reflection on the Church’s moral teaching on marriage. (art. 4) Given the title of the document as dealing with the regulation of births, the question arises as to whether the moral norms are dealing with marriage or with intercourse.

Humanae Vitae distinguishes between unlawful methods of birth control (the practices of abortion and deliberately contraceptive intercourse⁴⁰) and lawful methods (generally through the practice of self-discipline⁴¹ and, as necessary, specifically limiting sexual intercourse to naturally infertile periods⁴²). The argument made against the former and for the latter draws heavily on the limits of a person's ability to interfere with the biological processes of their own body, or of the body of another in the case of state control over a person. Paul VI identifies the tendency to argue for the absolute right of the human intellect to manipulate the irrational components of human nature as a major source of the resistance to the Church's traditional moral teachings. (art. 16) While the Church applauds the application of human reason to scientific inquiry and activity, possible actions must be limited by the natural order established by God (art. 16), by "the reverence due to the whole human organism and its natural functions..." (art. 17) Following this logic, artificial contraceptive methods are unlawful because they represent a breach of these limits, while recourse to infertile periods and abstinence respect the natural order.

The Church's understanding of the 'natural order' employed in this argument, however, grows directly out of its marriage theology. In a new phrasing of the traditional teaching, Paul VI states that marriage "is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect [sic] in man His loving design." (art. 8) Thus marriage was instituted specifically so that the spouses may perfect each other and generate new life. (art. 8) Spouses are bound to ensure that the "use" of their marriage complies with the Divine Will as well as with the

⁴⁰ "...the direct interruption of the generative process already begun and, above all, all direct abortion, even for therapeutic reasons, are to be absolutely excluded as lawful means of regulating the number of children." (art. 14)

⁴¹ "For if with the aid of reason and of free will they are to control their natural drives, there can be no doubt at all of the need for self-denial...Self-discipline of this kind is a shining witness to the chastity of husband and wife and, far from being a hindrance to their love of one another, transforms it by giving it a more truly human character." (art. 21)

⁴² "If therefore there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births...the Church teaches that married people may then take advantage of the natural cycles immanent in the reproductive system and engage in marital intercourse only during those times that are infertile..." (art. 16)

requirements of “biological processes” and the spouses’ “innate drives and emotions” that must be controlled. (art. 10) Such a statement would be incomprehensible if the reference were to the marriage relationship as a whole. Instead, it strongly suggests that the subject is actually sexual intercourse, though situated within a valid marriage and equated with it. Thus, when Paul VI speculates that the Church is concerned with “preserving intact the whole moral law of marriage,” (art. 18), it must be questioned whether the moral law is truly concerned with marriage as a life-long relationship or with the expression of sexuality within marriage.

Transmission of Life: *Donum Vitae* (1987) and *Dignitas Personae* (2008)

Two instructions issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Donum Vitae*⁴³ (hereafter ‘DV’) and *Dignitas Personae*⁴⁴ (hereafter ‘DP’) address the ethical questions involved in reproductive technology, in particular the growing ability to create human life without the use of sexual intercourse. Although separated by twenty years, both documents use similar arguments, the latter relying heavily on the content of the former, and thus will be considered together here.⁴⁵

In both instructions, the strong theological association between marriage and procreation, particularly the requirement for procreation to arise out of marriage, is explicitly invoked as the basis for moral judgements. The human person is understood as having been inscribed with the vocation “to share in a special way in [God’s] mystery of personal communion and in his work

⁴³ All quotes from *Donum Vitae* taken from Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction “Donum Vitae” On Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation* [22 February 1987], available online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html, accessed 13 December 2017.

⁴⁴ All quotes from *Dignitas Personae* taken from Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction “Dignitas Personae” On Certain Bioethical Questions*, available online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html, accessed 13 December 2017.

⁴⁵ *Dignitas Personae* validates and promotes the principles given in *Donum Vitae*, bringing in new reflections in response to newly-emerging questions (see DV, art. 1). For this reason, the analysis presented here will focus mainly on *Donum Vitae*, although with the understanding that the teachings are held to remain in force.

as Creator and Father.” (DV, Introduction, 3) Thus the “origin of human life” must occur within a marriage if it is to be authentic, since it is this very fruitfulness which is the sign of the spouses’ participation in God’s plan. (DP, art. 6) While the precise language of ‘ends’ may have disappeared from these documents, there remains an implicit understanding of a licit purpose and outcome of a marriage relationship which follows the traditional emphasis on procreation. Any medical interventions into human procreation must be judged based on whether they conform to this understanding of procreation arising from a specific marriage theology.

The section of *Donum Vitae* which most invokes marriage as the moral foundation for judgement is the discussion of the means of “obtaining a human conception in a manner other than the sexual union of man and woman.” (DV, II) Two particular issues examined are the ability to create artificial fertilization through the use of the spouses’ genetic material, or through the use of one spouse’s genetic material along with that of a third-party donor. In both cases, the moral judgement is based on the inherent connection between the unitive and procreative function of sex and of marriage.

The concept of unity and fidelity in marriage is here defined, not as the responsibility of each spouse to remain sexually faithful to the other, but as the right of each of the spouses to expect the other not to have a child with anyone else.⁴⁶ (DV, II.A.1) Following these standards, artificial procreation which involves a third-party donor is strictly forbidden because it acts against the fidelity of the spouses, even though it does not necessarily involve sexual intercourse outside of the marriage relationship. “Recourse to the gametes of a third person, in order to have

⁴⁶ Such a distinction is important because it again places the emphasis on marriage as procreative in purpose. While this document certainly does not negate previous teachings on the value of chastity in marriage, this new connection between spousal unity and parenthood minimizes the relationship between the spouses by seeing them only as parents and not also as married persons.

sperm or ovum available, constitutes a violation of the reciprocal commitment of the spouses and a grave lack in regard to that essential property of marriage which is its unity.” (DV, II.A.2)

Artificial procreation which employs only the genetic material of the spouses, however, is also proscribed because it separates the procreative function from a specific sexual act. Here artificial procreation is judged very much as an inverse of contraception, since both separate procreation from intercourse (DV, II.B.4.a), the important difference being that the former seeks to deny procreation while the latter is concerned with bringing it about. Just as each act of sexual intercourse must remain open to procreation, every instance of procreation must arise out of a conjugal act. (DV, II.B.4.b) Artificial fertilization which employs only the genetic material of the spouses is condemned because it is not procreative in the correct way.

The moral evaluation of artificial procreation is not limited to the proper use of sexuality within marriage but is expanded to form the basis of the rights of the person conceived. Thus the moral weight is shifted from the acceptable purpose of marriage to the rights which an individual may demand with respect to their personal dignity. Procreation finds its proper place within marriage, not necessarily because that is the intended end of sexual intercourse, but because the child conceived requires the support and nourishment of a stable family. (DV, art. 4) From the moment of conception, the human embryo is considered ethically to be a *person*, and therefore possesses the same rights and dignities as a fully developed human being. Included within this dignity is the right to be born within a family, and therefore procreation can only be considered responsible towards the dignity of the child when it occurs within marriage. (DP, art. 5-6)

First, the fidelity and unity of the spouses is characterized as a right for the well-being of the child, not only the practical considerations of providing material support for the child but for the very development of the child’s psyche.

The child has the right to be conceived, carried in the womb, brought into the world and brought up within marriage: it is through the secure and recognized relationship to his own parents that the child can discover his own identity and achieve his own proper human development. (DV, II.A.1)

From this perspective, artificial procreation which uses donor material from a third party is morally illicit because it violates the child's right to be born from marital unity. Second, the very procreative aspect of the sexual act within marriage forms the basis of the child's dignity, which cannot be duplicated through artificial fertilization.

In his unique and irrepeatable origin, the child must be respected and recognized as equal in personal dignity to those who give him life. The human person must be accepted in his parents' act of union and love; the generation of a child must therefore be the fruit of that mutual giving which is realized in the conjugal act wherein the spouses cooperate as servants and not as masters in the work of the Creator who is Love. (DV, II.B.4.c)

Thus artificial fertilization is forbidden because human dignity is considered to arise only from the act of mutual love and self-giving of the parents. The effect is not only the movement of the marriage theology from sacramental to moral concerns, but again the sharp focus on the procreation of children in place of the relationship of the spouses to each other.⁴⁷

In addressing ethical concerns around the transmission of life, *Humanae Vitae*, *Donum Vitae*, and *Dignitas Personae* all draw on marriage theology as a foundation for reflection. The emphasis, however, is not on the sacramental understanding put forward by *Casti Connubii*, but on the relapse into the procreative and unitive ends affirmed later in the mid-twentieth century. By relying so heavily on the fecundity of marriage, these documents continue the trend by again

⁴⁷ Questions ought also to be raised concerning the consequences of such moral assumptions. If a child can truly only find their true identity through relationship with their biological parents, for example, what consequences does that hold for children who are adopted? Or for children whose parent dies, leaving them to be raised by a step-parent or other family member? How does placing the origin of human dignity in the mutual love of the parents align with other theology which identifies it with the human person's bearing the *imago Dei*? Besides the difficulties raised here with using sacramental theology as a basis for moral theology, there is also the question of how the reflections presented in these two instructions relate to lived reality and/or the greater theological tradition of the Church.

tying the role of the spouses to that of parenthood. Marriage theology also provides the foundation for magisterial examinations of sexual ethics. Again, a number of documents through the late twentieth century employ judgements based in teachings on marriage as procreative to evaluate trends within contemporary sexual mores.

Sexual Ethics: *Persona Humana* (1975)

In the midst of new scientific insights into sexuality and its importance in the development of the human person, along with the simultaneous shifts away from traditional moral criteria, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued the declaration *Persona Humana*⁴⁸ to present the Church's teaching on sexual morals. (art. I) The declaration does not present an explanation or justification of the ethical framework upon which it relies, although it does draw heavily on previous documents.⁴⁹ As the various issues are addressed, however, the reliance on marriage as the ethical foundation becomes more apparent. In particular the procreative end of sexual intercourse, and of marriage as a whole, provides the basic argument employed throughout the declaration.

The initial moral issue addressed by *Persona Humana* is the rising practice of sexual union before marriage. Here the concern is instances where the couple has the intention to marry but must postpone the celebration of the marriage rite for a period of time. In this case, the concern is whether sexual intimacy can create a bond between the two people.

However firm the intention of those who practice such premature sexual relations may be, the fact remains that these relations cannot ensure, in sincerity and fidelity, the interpersonal

⁴⁸ All quotes from *Persona Humana* taken from Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction "Persona Humana" On Certain Questions concerning Sexual Ethics* [29 December 1975], available online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-humana_en.html, accessed July 22, 2017.

⁴⁹ See *Persona Humana*, endnote 12: "The present Declaration does not go into further detail regarding the norms of sexual life within marriage; these norms have been clearly taught in the encyclical letter "*Casti Connubii*" and "*Humanae Vitae*."

relationship between a man and a woman, not especially can they protect this relationship from whims and caprices. Now it is a stable union that Jesus willed... (art. VII)

It is only through the celebration of the sacrament that the human marriage can be taken up into the love of Christ for the Church, at which point the relationship between the spouses can be considered sufficiently established and stable to support sexual intimacy. (art. VII) The underlying concern addresses the function of sexual activity within the relationship, and whether it can form the exclusive bond between the partners or must instead be understood as a sign that the bond already exists.

Stability and the appropriate constitution of the married relationship are not, however, primarily concerned with the spouses themselves but with the good of the potential offspring. No matter the strength of the conviction to marry, the absence of the official union means that the relationship is too volatile for sexual intercourse “to respond to the requirements of its own finality and to those of human dignity.” (art. VII) In cases where pre-marital intercourse involves contraception, the openness to parental love is not possible and therefore what is presented as conjugal love cannot be rightly called so. When pre-marital intercourse does not make use of contraception, the risk is that a child may be conceived without the stable environment of a family “in which they ought to develop in order to find in it the way and the means of their insertion into society as a whole.” (art. VII) By assuming a primary orientation of marriage and of sexual intercourse towards procreation, *Persona Humana* evaluates pre-marital sexual activity only as it supports the well-being of the children but, ironically, largely ignores the relationship between the potential spouses who are actually engaging in the sexual union.

The second question regarding sexual ethics addressed by the declaration is the status of homosexual relations. It is important to note that the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the

Faith took pains to differentiate within the document between the ethical considerations of a homosexual *orientation* and homosexual *activity*.⁵⁰ The teachings of the declaration can therefore be seen to pertain to the homosexual act itself and not to the person as a whole. Still, the condemnation of homosexual intercourse is succinct and unburdened by lengthy reflection.

For according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality. In Sacred Scriptures they are condemned as a serious depravity and even presented as the sad consequence of rejecting God. (art. VIII)

The declaration does continue by warning that the “judgement of Scripture” does not permit the conclusion that persons with a homosexual orientation are personally responsible for their orientation but supports the assertion that homosexual acts are disordered. (art. VIII) Once again, the basis for the ethical judgement is simply that homosexual acts are inherently closed to procreation.

Finally, *Persona Humana* examines the question of masturbation in response to trends within psychology and sociology which increasingly understood the practice as a normal aspect of sexual development. (art. IX) Not surprisingly, the habit of masturbation is unequivocally condemned by the declaration, although the reason for this is somewhat opaque. The justification given is that “the deliberate use of the sexual faculty outside normal conjugal relations” necessarily contradicts the ends of sexuality. (art. IX) *Gaudium et Spes* is then quoted defining the purpose of the sexual faculty as “the full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love.” (art. IX; quoting GS 51) It would seem that the objection to

⁵⁰ The document remains a product of its time, however, and does not represent a complete understanding of sexual orientation. A distinction is made between a “not incurable” homosexual tendency arising “from a false education, from a lack of normal sexual development, from habit, from bad example, or from other similar causes” and the orientation which arises “because of some kind of innate instinct or a pathological constitution judged to be incurable.” (art. VIII) The overall tone remains condemnatory, to say the least, and ought to be critiqued if this document is to inform further discussion today. However, the ability of the Magisterium at this time to accept sexual orientation as innate to the person allows for a more nuanced discussion of the sexual ethics involved.

masturbation is because of its lack of both unitive and procreative aspects of sexual intercourse. However, the declaration cites contemporary psychology as considering the practice to be problematic insofar as it is deliberately used for solitary pleasure in place of a real relationship with another person. (art. IX) The opinion of the psychology of the day is none the less characterized as contradictory to the teachings of the Catholic Church. (art. IX) Whether the contradiction is meant to be in relation to the concern for the neglect of the unitive end or simply with the relativisation suggested by the position advocated by psychological studies is not clear. In either case, the ethical judgement is firmly based in an expectation for unitive and procreative possibilities for sexual activity.

Sexual Ethics: *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (1986) and *Considerations Regarding Proposals to give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* (2003)

Two documents issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith during the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries deal with the growing acceptance by secular society of homosexual persons and, eventually, their civil unions. The initial document *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*⁵¹ presents a lengthy discussion of homosexuality as a moral evil. The second document, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*⁵² relies heavily on the initial document in addressing new developments in the gay rights movement. Throughout these statements, the main arguments again rest on an understanding of marriage and sex being inherently ordered towards procreation.

⁵¹ All quotes from *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* taken from Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* [1 October 1986], available online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html, accessed Nov. 7, 2017.

⁵² All quotes from *Regarding Proposals to give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* taken from Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* [3 June 2003], available online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html, accessed 22 July 2017.

The most extensive discussion of the morality of homosexual acts occurs in the letter *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons*. It draws heavily on the section of *Persona Humana* which deals with homosexuality, in particular the insistence that homosexual acts, because they cannot be procreative, are intrinsically disordered. (art. 3) The letter then goes a step further in addressing trends within Catholic theology which were suggesting that a homosexual orientation could be considered morally neutral or even good. In response, the Congregation states that the homosexual orientation is not considered a sin, but is a “tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder.” (art. 3) The remainder of the document is an elaboration on why homosexuality is considered a moral evil.

Marriage theology again provides the material for the moral evaluation of homosexual acts, particularly through the traditional connection between the ends of marriage and the Creation accounts found in Genesis. God created all that exists, including humanity, in His image. Men and women are called to reflect the inner life of God through their cooperation with God in the transmission of life, accomplished only through their sexual complementarity. (art. 6) The Church thus makes the claim to be faithful to the original intention of God by insisting that sexual activity be limited to the fruitfulness of marriage, where it can be considered morally good. (art. 7) Through a process similar to reverse-engineering, the conjugal interpretation of the Creation narratives which was only possible upon reflecting theologically on marriage is given as the *a priori* understanding of the passages of Scripture that give meaning to marriage.

Such a matrimonial reading of the Creation narratives is certainly not new. What is unique here is the addition of a narrative of Scriptural condemnation of homosexuality, constructed as a type of antithetical Salvation History. From this perspective, the effect of original sin is a loss of understanding among humans of their covenantal relationship with God

as well as with each other. (art. 6) Homosexual behaviour is then interpreted as a sign of the human rejection of relationship with God. The destruction of the men of Sodom (Gen. 19:1-11) is perhaps the most dramatic example from the Old Testament, but the exclusion “from the People of God those who behave in a homosexual fashion” given twice in Leviticus (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13) provides a legal statement of the moral judgement. (art. 6) In the New Testament, Paul lists in a number of places (especially 1 Cor. 6:9, Rom. 1:18-32, and 1 Tim. 1:1-10) “those who behave in a homosexual fashion” as being among the people who will not enter the Kingdom, or even as an example of the blindness of sin which has overcome humanity. (art. 6) Taken together, homosexual behaviour is not seen only as a failure to fulfill the original plan of Creation. Rather, it is a complete and continuing rupture in the person’s relationship with God.

In the exposition of the conjugal meaning of the Creation narratives, the human spouses are seen as reflecting the inner unity of the Trinity specifically through their participation in the transmission of life. (art. 6) Beyond subordinating the unity of the spouses to their procreative ability, the suggestion here is that the community is *only* observable in the transmission of life. This is certainly a divergence from earlier statements of marriage theology.⁵³ Furthermore, by formulating the meaning of sexuality and of marriage as unity *through* procreativity, homosexual acts are characterised as completely void of any good.

Homosexual activity is not a complementary union, able to transmit life; and so it thwarts the call of a life of that form of self-giving which the Gospel says is the essence of Christian living. This does not mean that homosexual persons are not often generous and giving of themselves; but when they engage in homosexual activity

⁵³ Particularly problematic is the break from the tradition of recognizing as valid those marriages which are naturally infertile. While the deliberate use of contraception remains proscribed, the mere absence of children in no way invalidates the marriage or the use of the sexual faculty within the marriage relationship. See for example *Gaudium et Spes* art. 50, “Marriage to be sure is not instituted solely for procreation... Therefore, marriage persists as a whole manner and communion of life, and maintains its value and indissolubility, even when despite the often intense desire of the couple, offspring are lacking.” See also *Familiaris Consortio* art. 14, “It must not be forgotten however that, even when procreation is not possible, conjugal life does not for this reason lose its value.”

they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent. (art. 7)

The charge of self-indulgence is only sustainable if the unity of the spouses is concretely tied to procreation, and the purpose of sexual intercourse equated to the purpose of the marriage as a whole.⁵⁴ By defining marriage as the communion of the spouses reified in procreation, the letter *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* judges homosexual activities as morally wrong and condemns homosexual orientation as an inability to form relationships.

Considerations Regarding Proposals to give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons (hereafter *Considerations Regarding Unions between Homosexual Persons* or simply ‘Unions’) provides an example of the practical application of the moral theology concerning homosexual acts to specific questions arising in society. It does not present new aspects of marriage theology but draws heavily on *Persona Humana* and *On the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* to address civil laws banning discrimination based on sexual orientation and the legal recognition of same-sex civil unions, respectively.

The first main section of the document is a short summary of marriage theology and does not provide new doctrinal elements or reflections. A certain emphasis on procreation, however, is apparent. While the spouses are understood to be joined through mutual self-giving and mutual perfection, this unity is itself directed towards cooperation with God in the procreation and

⁵⁴ By contrast, discussions of contraceptive heterosexual sex are not similarly condemned as self-indulgent or closed to self-giving in the same way. For example, while *Humanae Vitae* endorses the inseparability of the unitive and procreative aspects of sexual intercourse (art. 12), it views contraceptive intercourse as morally wrong but not necessarily breaking the unity of the spouses. It is deprived of some of its meaning, but not explicitly judged as void of all good. (art. 13) Similarly, *Persona Humana* argues that premarital intercourse that makes use of contraception cannot be seen as fully conjugal love because it will not have the potential to become parental love (art. VII), but again, this does not lead to a characterization of that act as contrary to the unity of the persons. Furthermore, *Humanae Vitae* praises the practice of spouses who (for a period of time) limit their sexual activity to naturally infertile periods precisely because this allows them to space out births while still expressing their mutual love: “In doing this they certainly give proof of a true and authentic love.” (art. 16) The claim that homosexual acts are necessarily self-indulgent *because* they are closed to procreation must be examined further, especially in terms of how this assumption may still be operative in contemporary theological reflection on homosexuality.

nurturing of new life. (art. 2) Furthermore, while the use of the sexual faculty is only one aspect of the communion of the spouses, the sexual complementarity of the spouses is intended to be fruitful and thereby giving definition to the nature of marriage. (art. 3) Given this understanding of marriage, homosexual unions cannot be seen as being in any way similar to heterosexual marriages. (art. 4) The remainder of the document considers arguments against same-sex unions from a variety of perspectives but relies in every instance on the assumption of procreation as the marriage's defining characteristic.

First, from a biological point of view, homosexual unions lack a conjugal dimension because they cannot include a "human and ordered form of sexuality," here defined as sexual acts which express mutual assistance and are open to the transmission of life.⁵⁵ (art. 7) Same-sex unions are not capable of contributing "in a proper way to the procreation and survival of the human race." (art. 7) Furthermore, children who may be raised by a homosexual couple would be deprived of the benefits of having either a father or mother, a situation characterized in this document as seriously damaging to the children. (art. 7) Second, from a sociological stand-point, society as a whole is understood to rely on a heterosexual definition of marriage for its very survival. The negative consequences of redefining marriage to include same-sex civil unions would be the separation from "essential reference to factors linked to heterosexuality; for example, procreation and raising children." (art. 8) Thus, recognizing homosexual unions presents a "grave detriment to the common good." (art. 8) Finally, from a legal perspective, the document argues that heterosexual marriage is given legal and institutional recognition precisely

⁵⁵ It is unclear whether "mutual assistance" here refers to the broader understanding of mutual aid in multiple aspects of a common life, or specifically to mutual assistance in procreation. Given the emphasis placed on the orientation of the unity of the spouses towards procreation, and the subsequent section critiquing the ability of a homosexual couple to care for children, the latter interpretation is certainly a possibility. A question could arise, then, whether the emphasis on procreation employed in discussions of same-sex unions may have a narrowing effect on marriage theology as a whole.

because it ensures “the succession of generations.” (art. 9) Because homosexual unions cannot similarly contribute to the common good, they do not require similar recognition under civil law.⁵⁶ (art. 9) The common consideration among the three perspectives is the assumption that society relies on the procreative function of marriage in order to ensure the common good.

Defining marriage in relation to procreation and its role in maintaining society is certainly not unique to *Considerations Regarding Unions between Homosexual Persons*. Even considering only those documents from the modern period, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* presents similar arguments in defense of marriage against divorce.⁵⁷ Similarly, *Gaudium et Spes* invokes an understanding of marriage as a benefit both to the individual person and to society as a whole.⁵⁸ The invocation of this assumption in *Considerations Regarding Unions between Homosexual Persons*, however, is different for two reasons. First, it is another example of employing marriage theology as a basis for moral judgement against non-heterosexual, non-procreative sexual activity. Unlike *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* or *Gaudium et Spes*, which employed the social benefits of procreative marriage for society at large, *Considerations Regarding Unions between Homosexual Persons* employs this understanding as proscriptive and therefore a basis for condemning the legal recognition of same-sex unions. The concluding section of the document in particular demonstrates the moral nature of this document.

Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behaviour, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity. (art. 11)

⁵⁶ The argument goes on to suggest that legal recognition of same-sex unions is not required as a measure against discrimination since other laws exist to protect the rights of homosexual persons as individuals. (art. 9) This is particularly ironic given the arguments presented in *Considerations Concerning Non-Discrimination*, discussed above, against the very existence of such legislation.

⁵⁷ See for example *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* art. 45: “...the doctrine and precepts in relation to Christian marriage...tend no less to the preservation of civil society than to the everlasting salvation of souls.”

⁵⁸ See *Gaudium et Spes* art. 47: “The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family.”

This certainly raises the question of whether the concern for the common good demonstrated throughout the document is truly limited to the continuation of society, or if it is the further civil recognition of homosexual orientation, already strongly condemned by the Church as a moral evil.

Second, while other magisterial documents may invoke the benefits of procreation for human society, the communion of the spouses is also presented as its own parallel good. Interestingly, *Considerations Regarding Unions between Homosexual Persons* contains no reference to the benefits of the spousal relationship except for the means by which it allows for the generation of new life. Thus, in providing arguments against homosexual unions, the document invokes a much older understanding of marriage which is oriented primarily to procreation.

Through the elision of marriage as relationship and marriage as sexual intercourse, the descriptive aspect of the sacramental theology becomes the prescriptive aspect of moral theology. Particularly in the discussion on the transmission of life, the character of marriage as procreative is appropriated as a moral necessity against which both contraceptives and fertility treatments are judged. Furthermore, in discussing sexual ethics more broadly, the prescriptive understanding of marriage then becomes proscriptive in the disallowing of certain sexual acts. In thus transferring marriage from sacramental to moral theology, the sacramental nature of marriage can be easily lost, particularly if the ethics in question fall into the habit of listing required and forbidden actions. If marriage theology remains mired down in injunctions to have children, the greater reality of the spiritual nature of the relationship between the spouses – a relationship which the Church and the magisterial documents recognize increasingly – will remain elusive and under-developed.

CHAPTER 3 - ORTHODOX MARRIAGE THEOLOGY

A complete exposition of Orthodox marriage theology would truly be a herculean task for two reasons: first, within the scope of the present study, such detail is simply not possible; second, there is no single, definitive statement of Orthodox marriage theology that one may present.⁵⁹ As was described in the introduction to this paper, there is no centralized Orthodox teaching authority which would parallel the function of the Magisterium in the Roman Catholic Church. However, as with the theology of the Western Churches, the Orthodox Church contains within it many traditions and trends which reflect on the purpose and meaning of marriage.

This chapter will explore foundational texts by Vladimir Solovyov, Paul Evdokimov, and John Meyendorff as representative of one thread within Russian Orthodox theology, particularly in its exploration of marriage as salvific to the spouses.⁶⁰ To set the proper context for exploring these writings, a brief synopsis of theological concepts which provide the basis for Orthodox marriage theology will be given.

The Image of God, *Theosis*, and Sacramentality

One of the first theological concepts required to understand Orthodox marriage theology is that of the *image of God*. While theologians advance the statement that humans bear the image of God, there is no consensus on what this image consists of, or how people present it.⁶¹ One approach begins with the passage from the Creation Narrative where God proclaims, “Let us

⁵⁹ William Basil Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1992), ix.

⁶⁰ Zion identifies the two main works of the Russian stream as Solovyov’s *The Meaning of Love* and Evdokimov’s *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition* (See Zion, 137).; Roth also recognizes Evdokimov, and adds to his work Meyendorff’s *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective* [see Catherine P. Roth, ‘Introduction’, in *On Marriage and the Family*, trans. Catherine P. Roth and David Anderson (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 11).

⁶¹ Kallistos Ware, “‘In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person’, in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection between Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. John T. Chirban (Westport CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), 3.

make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...” (Gen. 1:26a) The exegetical issue becomes the difference between ‘image’ and ‘likeness’. Within this discourse, the image is understood as the person’s possession of free will, reason, moral responsibility, and the ability to develop character.⁶² These traits are bound up in the person’s intellect, particularly in their ability to reflect on their own condition. ‘Likeness’ is better understood as a potentiality within the person, but not assumed as an inherent, already-present aspect of the personality. It refers to the vocation to growth, to the increased presence of virtue acquired through the continual practice of those virtues.⁶³ Another pair of terms to help illuminate this discussion is the ‘individual’ and the ‘person’. An individual is the human as a unit, self-contained and isolated. The person, however, is the human being looking outwards through relationship and involvement with others. Life’s purpose, given this distinction, is to grow from individuality to personhood, the signifying difference between the two states being the exercise of the likeness of God.⁶⁴

Regardless of the terminology, the common thread is the human characteristic of the potential for growth coupled with the work of achieving this growth. Relationship is the primary vehicle for personal development and is itself reflective of the image of God. Because God is relationality, solidarity, and mutual gift, persons share this nature and therefore cannot achieve their fulfillment in isolation.⁶⁵ The primary relationship is between the person and God, because

⁶² Vigen Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, Second (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 16; Nonna Verna Harrison, ‘The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 78.

⁶³ Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, 16; Harrison, ‘The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God’, 78. Some theologians will also speak of personhood (the distinctive features which allow persons to be in relationship with God and with each other), nature (the traits held in common by all humans), and energies (the activities associated with the practice of virtue in daily life), again emphasizing the difference between an inherent potential for growth and the activity necessary to achieve that end (See Harrison, ‘The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God’, 80-81).

⁶⁴ Ware, “‘In the Image and Likeness’: The Uniqueness of the Human Person’, 4–5.

⁶⁵ Ware, 4.

humans were created to be in communion with God and therefore it is only through that relationship that the authentic meaning of their personhood can be discerned.⁶⁶ However, because God is Trinity, relationship with God implies and necessitates relationship with other persons. The relationship allows the persons to know and to become themselves, by loving and being loved in the manner of the Trinitarian God.⁶⁷

The theology of the image of God informs how the Creation Narrative can contribute to an Orthodox understanding of marriage. Although any human relationship can be beneficial for the growth of the person, the exemplar is the nuptial relationship. In both Creation Narratives, the unity of male and female originates in Paradise. When considering the first narrative, theologians will point to the unity which preceded the division into the sexes: “So God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Gen. 1:27) From this, it is argued that the image of God is given to humanity in its totality, in the unity of women and men.⁶⁸ Neither men nor women can represent the complete image of God, but in their complementarity and reciprocity can fulfill the image.⁶⁹

The second Creation Narrative further supports the understanding of women and men as originally unified. Of importance here is the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib, and Adam’s recognition of her as originating within him: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” (Gen. 2:23) From the time of the Church Fathers, this passage has been interpreted to show an original

⁶⁶ Ware, 3.

⁶⁷ Ware, 4.

⁶⁸ Paul Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1994), 27; Kallistos Ware, ‘The Sacrament of Love: The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage and Its Breakdown’, *The Downside Review* 109 (1991): 79.

⁶⁹ Evdokimov, *Woman and the Salvation of the World: A Christian Anthropology on the Charisms of Women*, 27–28.

consubstantiality between men and women, a simultaneous unity and diversity that was original to the intention for Creation.⁷⁰

Regardless of which Creation Narrative is invoked, Orthodox theology understands the Fall as the descent from integration to separation, from “communion in love” to “division and individualism.”⁷¹ The process of *theosis* – the Orthodox concept of the person’s development towards Godliness – cannot then be a single moment of conversion but a life-long process of maturing and practicing virtue in order to overcome the disintegration of the Fall.⁷² While Orthodox theology recognizes salvation as being within the sacrifice of Jesus, its effectiveness is not located in the atoning or substitutionary nature of the sacrifice but in Jesus’ perfect selflessness.

In Jesus Christ, God and humanity are reconciled, not by some substitutionary formula or measure of infinite satisfaction in the mind of God or the human being, but by the *metanoia* of the creature – a total conversion or turning toward God.⁷³

The return to God and to eternal life is found through relationship with Jesus and a desire to become ever more like Him.

The faithful, however, are not left to attempt *theosis* without support. The Holy Mysteries leads into the mystery of Christ and unites the faithful with the love of God.⁷⁴ Andrew Louth emphasizes the notion of hiddenness included in the idea of mystery, as it helps to demonstrate what a Holy Mystery is. The “mystery of Christ,” particularly the significance of Christ’s Death and Resurrection, is God’s intention to re-unite Creation to Himself. It is properly called

⁷⁰ Harrison, ‘The Human Person as Image and Likeness of God’, 80.

⁷¹ John Chrysostom, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage* (Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 7.

⁷² Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, 14–16.

⁷³ Guroian, 33.

⁷⁴ ‘Holy Mysteries’ or ‘mysteries’ refers to the rites which in the Catholic Church are called ‘sacraments’. There is also some difference in the definition of what is or is not considered to be a Holy Mystery, and a limited list of mysteries is not typical to Orthodox theology.

‘mystery’ because the complete significance of its revelation cannot be grasped by the human mind. And yet, the mystery of Christ invites all people into participation in the restoration of Creation. The Holy Mysteries are the means for the faithful to encounter the sanctifying love of God.⁷⁵ In this way, they provide opportunity and support for the ongoing process of *theosis*. The Holy Mysteries – again, as do the sacraments in Catholic Theology – function through the use of symbols drawn from daily life. The meaning of these material elements is drawn from their ability to represent something beyond themselves, but also in their transformation. Thus, the bread and wine at Eucharist, or the water and oil at Baptism, can direct the thoughts of the faithful to greater spiritual truths, while being transformed by the rite so that they can accomplish what ordinary bread, wine, water, and oil otherwise cannot.⁷⁶

The exploration of an Orthodox marriage theology must take place within this greater theological framework. Although there are many examples of agreement between Orthodox and Catholic theology, there are also important moments of divergence in theological assumptions and conclusions. It is in these moments of difference that Catholics can find a new method for approaching and engaging with their own Tradition.

Solovyov’s *The Meaning of Love*

A major work which influenced Russian Orthodox theology and the role of spirituality in marriage is *The Meaning of Love*⁷⁷ by Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900). He opens his book by problematizing the teaching that the purpose of sexuality is bound up in the need to procreate. Looking first to natural history, he argues that *eros*⁷⁸ is not necessary for the propagation of any

⁷⁵ Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 98–99.

⁷⁶ Louth, 110.

⁷⁷ Vladimir Solovyov, *The Meaning of Love*, trans. Thomas R. Beyer, Jr. (Hudson NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1985).

⁷⁸ Solovyov’s preferred terminology is ‘sexual love,’ by which he means ‘the exclusive attachment between persons of different sexes which makes possible the relation between the of husband and wife,’ but does not necessarily include the physical expression of sexuality within that relationship. (See Solovyov, 68, footnote 1) Although its use

species. First, there are a number of plant and animal species which reproduce non-sexually. Second, within those species which do reproduce sexually, Solovyov observes in inverse relationship between the “power of procreation” and the erotic attraction between mates.⁷⁹ What he intends here is that the species with the highest rate of procreation demonstrate the lowest level of mutual attachment between the mating couple, and *vice versa*. Thus humans, being the highest level in creation, are capable of the most significant mutual attraction and love, but also the lowest rate of propagation.⁸⁰ Any attempt to link *eros* or even sexuality exclusively to procreation is, at least, scientifically problematic.

Solovyov goes on to problematize the Scriptural foundation for considering human sexuality only in terms of the propagation of the species. Examining the Old Testament witness, the couples celebrated as ancestors of the Messiah demonstrated a surprising lack of *eros* in connection with the conception of their children. Jacob, for example, is said to have loved Rachel deeply, but it was through his marriage to the ‘unloved’ Leah that Judah, the ancestor of the Messiah, was born. Similarly, Abraham and Sarah are not identified as being particularly in love, and the birth of Isaac comes about more as a result of faith than of *eros*.⁸¹ The biblical foundation for connecting sexuality exclusively to procreation is at least as problematic as the biological arguments.

The birth of children is not unimportant. Solovyov is careful, though, to define precisely the relationship between the parents’ love for each other and the child’s emergence from it.

The coincidence of a powerful passion of love with the successful procreation of children is merely fortuitous and even so is sufficiently rare; historical and everyday experience illustrate

is not historically correct to Solovyov’s work, I am here using the term *eros* to express this form of love, and will reserve the terminology of ‘sexuality’ to refer to the physical intimacy of the marriage relationship.

⁷⁹ Solovyov, 19–21.

⁸⁰ Solovyov, 21.

⁸¹ Solovyov, 30–32.

beyond doubt that children may be successfully begotten, ardently loved and excellently reared by their parents, though these latter had never been in love with each other.⁸²

Solovyov goes on to argue that continuing to place *eros* at the service of propagating the species actually robs it of its power and meaning. As will become typical in Orthodox marriage theology, the birth of children is never too far removed from the meaning of *eros*, but is actively displaced as an end in and of itself.

If *eros* does not serve the whole of the human race in any appreciable way then it's meaning, Solovyov posits, must be found in the individual life.⁸³ As a species, humans are set apart by their rational consciousness, which allows individual persons to evaluate their experiences in isolation from, and in comparison to, a universalized norm. In order to accomplish this, humans can also be aware of a transcendent or universal truth (the divine), and may attempt to conform themselves with this standard.⁸⁴ Far more than self-awareness, humans have the ability to take on "absolute content" (here referring to eternal life or the Kingdom of God) in order to become an "absolute personality."⁸⁵ Although he does not use the term, Solovyov is here invoking a process of *theosis*. The person is capable of recognizing Godliness and can actively choose and pursue growth into its likeness.

The initial state of every human being, however, is one of individualism and egoism which must be overcome so that the transcendent is not only recognized but appropriated in a meaningful way.⁸⁶

Only thanks to rational consciousness...can a human being discriminate his very self, i.e., his true individuality, from his egoism and therefore sacrifice this egoism, and surrender himself to

⁸² Solovyov, 52–53.

⁸³ Solovyov, 32.

⁸⁴ Solovyov, 36.

⁸⁵ Solovyov, 55.

⁸⁶ Solovyov, 40–41.

love. In doing so he finds not merely a living, but also a life-giving power, and does not forfeit his individual being together with his egoism, but on the contrary makes it eternal.⁸⁷

The meaning of human love in general, then, is to be found in the salvation of individuality through the sacrifice of egoism..⁸⁸

Solovyov argues that the evil of egoism is not the valuing of the self – because every person is rightly understood as being of value – but the valuing of the self in such a way that the equal value of others is denied or relativized. Thus it is through loving and, specifically, expressing that love in action that persons may overcome their egoism.⁸⁹ Every kind of love is a manifestation of the potential for defeating egoism, but not every instance of love will be equally capable of so doing. Because egoism is rooted in the centre of the person's being and radiates out through their whole reality, the love capable of defeating it must be equally specific and permeating. Love must also be centred in the other, because it is the context of reciprocity which allows the affirmation of the person while eliminating the egoism.⁹⁰

The meaning of *eros*, finally, is discovered through the union of two persons and their mutual discovery of their true personhood. Just as the true meaning of a word is not found in the process of speaking but in the revelation of a thought, the meaning of love is not the experience of loving as an emotion but what may be accomplished through the experience of it.⁹¹ Each person carries within them the image of God, an ideal nature which is connected to the divine. Much as the reasonable consciousness can discern the transcendent as a reality, the intellect can discover the divine image as an external reality. It is through the experience of loving and of

⁸⁷ Solovyov, 41.

⁸⁸ Solovyov, 42.

⁸⁹ Solovyov, 43–45.

⁹⁰ Solovyov, 45–46.

⁹¹ Solovyov, 57–58.

being loved, however, that it is actually known. When a person is in love, they experience a certain idealization of the beloved, seeing not only what is but also what the beloved could potentially be. Further, this vision relies on reciprocity between the seer and the seen, the lover and the beloved, so that both are witness to the potential in the other and are affirmed in their own potential.⁹² The meaning of *eros* is thus the discovery and nurturing of the image of God in both persons through their mutual love.

Solovyov then applies this concept of mutual perfection of the spouses to the Creation Narrative and Paul's identification of the marriage and the Church as mutual mystery. In the relationships of God to Creation, Christ to the Church, and husband to wife, the first member of the pair thus listed is always the active participant who "ought to exert an educational influence over the character and mind of the latter."⁹³ To the contemporary – and particularly, Western – ear, this initial assertion may appear to be irredeemably patriarchal. However, Solovyov immediately rejects any facile parallelism which would give an improper authority to the husband. In fact, the analogy is specifically not intended to be superficial but revelatory of a greater mystery. Progressing through the pairs, a parallel structure is discovered: God created the world out of nothing; Christ renewed and perfected a Church that was essentially in place; and the husband takes the initiative in founding a relationship with the wife, but she remains essentially equal to him.⁹⁴ Therefore the husband is like God in originating the relationship but, being ontologically different from God, is not seen to have the same authority over the wife which God exercises over Creation.

Ontological differences are an important aspect of Solovyov's reasoning here.

⁹² Solovyov, 59–60.

⁹³ Solovyov, 84.

⁹⁴ Solovyov, 84–85.

God is in relation to creation as the all to the nothing, i.e., as the absolute fulness of being to the pure potentiality of being. Christ is in relation to the Church as actual perfection to the potentiality of perfection being formed into real perfection. The relation between husband and wife is the relation between two differently acting yet equally imperfect potentialities, which attain perfection only in the process of reciprocity.⁹⁵

Within these three relationships considered together, it is actually only the human relationship which is purely reciprocal. While the movement from God to Creation and from Christ to the Church are primarily in a single direction, the movement between husband and wife not only carries the potential of reciprocity but must include this dual movement if it is to be effective. The meaning of love is the mutual support of the spouses in their processes of *theosis*.

Solovyov was not without his critics, especially when *The Meaning of Love* was first published. He was sometimes accused “of heresy, of decadence, of dubious relationships with women, and of being lost in a sea of subjectivity.”⁹⁶ Despite this, Solovyov’s views on love and sexuality were widely accepted by many Orthodox theologians in Russia and provided a foundation for further theological reflection. In particular, Solovyov seems to have been an important influence on the writings of Paul Evdokimov.⁹⁷

Evdokimov’s *The Sacrament of Love*

Although a Russian Orthodox theologian, Paul Evdokimov (1901-1970) imbibed the general Roman Catholic tradition of marriage theology and the influence of personalist philosophy popular through the early and mid-20th century.⁹⁸ The acceptance by many Roman

⁹⁵ Solovyov, 85.

⁹⁶ Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 142.

⁹⁷ Zion, 144.

⁹⁸ As will be discussed, *The Sacrament of Love* refers most often to Catholic theology, although still demonstrating a foundation within the Orthodox theological worldview. This should not be seen as a type of contradiction within the work, or a specific attack against Catholic theology. Rather I feel that it is indicative of the somewhat liminal space Orthodox theologians must occupy in the West, as discussed in the introduction, living out their own Tradition in contact with influences from the Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Catholic theologians of love as the chief purpose of marriage was welcomed by Evdokimov, and the popularity of his works in Catholic circles was an example of the convergence of Orthodox and Catholic theologies ahead of the Second Vatican Council.⁹⁹ Although he is writing from an Orthodox perspective, Evdokimov is very much in dialogue with Catholic theologies in his *The Sacrament of Love*,¹⁰⁰ both in his critique and the new avenues he proposes for exploring the meaning of marriage.

Evdokimov, like Solovyov, begins his study by analyzing the strict connection between marriage and procreation. In particular, he critiques two key concepts which he sees as having a particular influence on Western understandings of marriage. The first, drawn from St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*, is the statement that woman can only help man in the task of procreation, thereby defining the woman through her ability to bear children.¹⁰¹ For Evdokimov, such a view of women reduces marriage to a mere means of procreation, a reproductive contract which is given legal and sociological value but will eventually decline.¹⁰² The second key concept is drawn from St. Augustine and his association of original sin with concupiscence and, ultimately, with every instance of sexual intercourse. Within this set of assertions, sexual activity is redeemed only through its association with the good of procreation. However, marriage is seen primarily as a concession to, and remedy for, lust so that even within a legitimate marriage the faithful are called to limit sexual expression as much as possible.¹⁰³ Evdokimov sees a marriage theology based in these two concepts as already unbalanced, "marked with the wound of guilt" and leading inevitably to a prohibitive and negative stance towards sexuality.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 147–48.

¹⁰⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

¹⁰¹ Evdokimov, 23–24.

¹⁰² Evdokimov, 24.

¹⁰³ Evdokimov, 25.

¹⁰⁴ Evdokimov, 25.

To counter these harmful premises for understanding love and marriage, Evdokimov suggests a more personalist approach. Tracing developments in the West, Evdokimov proposes the theology of St. Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and others, which saw the purpose of marriage as the good of the sacramental relationship itself, with fidelity and procreation characterized as part of the conjugal ministry.¹⁰⁵ In the Eastern tradition, Evdokimov follows Solovyov in identifying a fragmentation of the person as a result of the emphasis on procreation. Thus it is not the propagation of the species which can be considered the end of marriage, but the function of love in giving spiritual meaning to the relationship.

Married love proceeds from spiritual interiority and gazes toward the inside. Its visible aspect is but an outer manifestation. Its invisible aspect is open only to faith, because faith is precisely the perception of things not seen.¹⁰⁶

Marriage is caught up in the movement of the man and woman towards each other through self-revelation and shared ascent.¹⁰⁷

The reunification of the masculine and the feminine is particularly important in Evdokimov's work. He sees in the story of Creation the original human archetypal monad: Adam-Eve. As a result of the Fall, human nature is divided into a broken masculinity and femininity, "couples made of two polarized, objectified, and separate individuals, situated outside each other, placed nonetheless side by side."¹⁰⁸ Human fulfillment is brought about by the reunification of the masculine and feminine together with the divine. *Eros* becomes a form of *anamnesis* in this instance, not only directing the person to the transcendent but to a specific other. As Evdokimov states, "Every man carries within himself his own Eve, and lives in the

¹⁰⁵ Evdokimov, 44.

¹⁰⁶ Evdokimov, 43.

¹⁰⁷ Evdokimov, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Evdokimov, 32.

expectation of her possible Parousia.”¹⁰⁹ Even the attraction to the other person is simultaneously a desire for God in the person, and a recognition of a relationship which existed before it was encountered.¹¹⁰

The proper aim of marriage, therefore, is the spouses themselves. Evdokimov argues that the account of the institution of marriage is found in the second Creation Narrative, which does not include any command to procreate. Instead, the creation of woman comes as a result of God’s realization that man should not be alone.¹¹¹ The nuptial union as the reunification of man and woman into the original monad is complete and meaning-filled in itself. Although children can be understood as a superabundance of the relationship, bringing the new meanings of ‘parent’ to supplement the role of ‘spouse’,¹¹² they are not the defining quality of the marriage.

Meyendorff’s *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*

Finally, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*¹¹³ by John Meyendorff (1926-1992) examines the sacramentality of marriage in the Orthodox tradition. A significant theme is the manner in which marriage relates the faithful to God by connecting them to the Eucharist and the Body of Christ.

As with Solovyov and Evdokimov, Meyendorff begins his study by problematizing assumptions regarding procreation in marriage. The basis for his arguments is the new reality ushered in through the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery. According to Meyendorff, the Old Testament period placed the meaning and goal of marriage in procreation.¹¹⁴ In part this was for

¹⁰⁹ Evdokimov, 111.

¹¹⁰ Evdokimov, 111.

¹¹¹ Evdokimov, 120.

¹¹² Evdokimov, 120–21.

¹¹³ John Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*, Third Revised (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1975).

¹¹⁴ It is unclear what the source of this interpretation is. Because of the nature of the current paper, however, the historical accuracy of Meyendorff’s assertion will not be addressed. What is important here is the way Orthodox theologians understood and appropriated the development of marriage theology from Judaism to Christianity.

the continuation of the race, conforming to God's pledge to Abraham for numerous posterity. The early concept of an afterlife in *sheol* also prioritized procreation as a type of personal survival after death.¹¹⁵ Moving into the New Testament period, Meyendorff notes that none of the biblical texts dealing specifically with marriage point to procreation as a justification or goal.¹¹⁶ The Resurrection established a new age which answered the problems of the Old Testament: rather than placing immediate concern on continuing the human race on earth, all are invited to become citizens of the Kingdom, where eternal life is gained through union with God. Within this context, marriage is no longer reducible to "a simple satisfaction of temporary natural urges, or a means for securing an illusory survival through posterity" and is elevated to the loving union of two persons "who can transcend their own humanity and thus be united not only 'with each other', but also 'in Christ'."¹¹⁷ Marriage is bound up in the relationship of the faithful to Christ and with their journey towards the Kingdom.

For Christians, Meyendorff continues, God is not an idea to be understood or grasped but a person to be met. Having been created in the image of God, the person is drawn towards the divine. Through the sacraments, humans participate with the divine without ever losing their humanity. In fact, this passage to the divine life and to humanity's original destiny is the means of reclaiming a true human nature.¹¹⁸ The Church, as the union of God with the faithful, is itself a sacrament, and it is through the Eucharist that all are drawn together to form the Body of Christ.¹¹⁹ Sacraments only receive their meaning and effectiveness when they lead the faithful to express corporate life in the Church as members of the Body of Christ.¹²⁰ For Meyendorff,

¹¹⁵ Meyendorff, *Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective*, 12.

¹¹⁶ Meyendorff, 13.

¹¹⁷ Meyendorff, 16.

¹¹⁸ Meyendorff, 20.

¹¹⁹ Meyendorff, 21–23.

¹²⁰ Meyendorff, 73.

marriage must find its purpose in the manner in which it brings people into relationship with God and with Christ.

The sacramentality of Christian marriage arises out of the spouses' commitment as members of the Body of Christ and of the Church.

Christian marriage is essentially a *positive commitment* of the couple, not only to each other, but first to Christ, a commitment realized in and through the Eucharist. If this commitment does not occur, the fulfillment of all the legal stipulations concerning Christian marriage will have no meaning at all.¹²¹

Through the grace of the Spirit, the marriage formed in relationship with Christ can be transformed into an eternal bond. Just as the nature of the person is not suppressed in relationship with God, so the human character of the marriage is not magically overcome by the sacrament. The daily experience of joys, sorrows, actions, responsibilities, and more remain part of the reality of Christian marriage.¹²² The sacramental character of the marriage, however, continues to direct the spouses to the eschaton even in the midst of material, earthly concerns.

More than Solovyov and Evdokimov, Meyendorff emphasizes the importance of children in marriage. Using arguments reminiscent of Catholic marriage theology, he argues that spouses must be open to children so that they can be imitative of God.

In giving life to others, man imitates God's creative act and, if he refuses to do so, he not only rejects his Creator, but also distorts his own humanity; for there is no humanity without an "image and likeness of God," i.e., without a conscious, or unconscious desire to be a true imitator of the life-creating Father of all.¹²³

¹²¹ Meyendorff, 50.

¹²² Meyendorff, 47.

¹²³ Meyendorff, 59.

Meyendorff stops short of identifying procreation as the purpose of marriage. For Christians, he states, the marriage union is the end in itself, “a union of two beings, in love, reflecting the union of Christ and the Church.”¹²⁴

Sacrament, Sanctification, Spirituality

While the above works have been viewed briefly in order to establish a foundation for Orthodox marriage theology, the questions and insights developed there continue to be expanded upon by numerous theologians during the late 20th and early 21st centuries. An important topic explored is an even greater clarity on spiritual significance of the marriage relationship and, by extension, of the expression of sexuality within the marriage.

Stanley Samuel Harakas explores two primary views of marriage and sexuality within Patristic and contemporary Orthodox theology.¹²⁵ First is the view that marriage is oriented primarily towards procreation. By contrast, the second view considers marriage as a multifaceted relationship, where sexual expression serves procreation but also (and equally) the loving unity of the couple.¹²⁶ It would not be appropriate, however, to suggest that Orthodox marriage theology could consider the relationship of the couple in complete isolation. Kallistos Ware argues that procreation and unity can not be seen in opposition to each other precisely because the physical and spiritual expression of the spouses’ love is intended to lead to children.¹²⁷ To this end, any description of marriage must include both procreation and unity. Ware prefers,

¹²⁴ Meyendorff, 59.

¹²⁵ Stanley Samuel Harakas, ‘Covenant Marriage: Reflections from an Eastern Orthodox Perspective’, in *Covenant Marriage in Comparative Perspective*, ed. John Witte, Jr. and Eliza Ellison (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 95.

¹²⁶ The historical duration of this perspective within Orthodox theology ought not to be over-estimated. Clement recognizes that the conditions for such a theology - primarily the continuation of a married clergy and a tempered legalism - have longer roots within the Orthodox Church, it was only the Russian religious philosophers who considered intentionally the spiritual meaning of *eros* in marriage (Olivier Clement, ‘Foreword’, in *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman [Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1985], 8).

¹²⁷ Ware, ‘The Sacrament of Love: The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage and Its Breakdown’, 82.

however, to define the purpose of marriage as the mutual sanctification of the spouses through their reciprocal relationship so that, even in those cases when no children are born, the marriage is still understood to exist in its fullness.¹²⁸

The sacramental nature of marriage is understood increasingly as it pertains to the lives of the majority of the faithful.

It is in marriage that the vast majority of believers will seek to manifest their own humanity as persons growing in the image and likeness of God, toward *theosis*. There individualism and self-centeredness may be overcome in the intimate community of two persons, reflecting the life of the persons of the Holy Trinity – one in essence yet a plurality of persons in communion.¹²⁹

Just as *theosis* is not a single moment of repentance and conversions but a life-long journey towards the likeness of God, marriage is better understood not as a single ritual act but a journey of two people through life. In *theosis*, love is both the origin and destination.¹³⁰ Similarly, marriage is a journey which has, in a sense, already begun and will continue into the next life. The marriage rite is a sign that the couple has reached a stage of integration and can make the commitment to live and grow together. It is neither the beginning of the relationship, nor the fulfillment, but the pledge of a journey already begun and as yet in progress.¹³¹

By accepting a more sacramental understanding of marriage which does not rely on procreation, Orthodox theologians are better situated to explore a more spiritual understanding of sexuality. John Chryssavgis argues that a number of ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern cultures recognized a mystical significance in sexual expression. In particular, sexual activity

¹²⁸ Ware, 82–83.

¹²⁹ Stanley Samuel Harakas, 'Dynamic Elements of Marriage in the Orthodox Church', in *Personhood: Orthodox Christianity and the Connection between Body, Mind, and Soul*, ed. John T. Chirban (Westport CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1996), 121.

¹³⁰ Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage*, 15.

¹³¹ Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 345–46; Ware, 'The Sacrament of Love: The Orthodox Understanding of Marriage and Its Breakdown', 85.

was understood to transmit a spiritual power to the participants. It was not until the Church declared marriage a sacrament that this ‘transmission’ was rightly understood as an event of grace and a covenantal relationship with the sacred order.¹³² Vigen Guroian takes up the Orthodox practice of referring sexual activity in the marriage relationship as a *synousia*, a consubstantiality of the spouses. The husband and wife are joined together as “one flesh, one body incorporate of two persons who in freedom and sexual love and through their relationship to Christ...express the great mystery in Christ’s relationship to the Church.”¹³³ Thus Orthodox theology sees marriage as founded in a sexual love which aims towards perfect union between the spouses, and which is the primary good of marriage.¹³⁴

It is perhaps Anthony Ugolnick who provides the richest exploration of the spirituality of nuptial sexuality. He begins with Mikhail Bakhtin’s dialogic theory, which states that language exists in the space where two consciousnesses meet. The spoken word cannot be declared the property of the speaker only, because the listener appropriates it to themselves. Thus words exist at the border between two consciousnesses.¹³⁵ Bakhtin’s model can be applied to sexual intercourse to an extent but, Ugolnick argues, sex will necessarily breakdown the model by destroying the border between the persons. Sexual expression annihilates the space between the bodies, opening them to each other and giving way to mutual personhood. Each act of sacramental erotic love “takes us out of ourselves in pleasure and gives of ourselves to another.”¹³⁶ Both marriage and sacramental sex are intended for the re-creation, restoration, and

¹³² Chrysavgis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage*, 5–6.

¹³³ Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, 110.

¹³⁴ Guroian, 111.

¹³⁵ Anthony Ugolnik, ‘Living in Skin: Sex, Spirituality, and the Christian Male’, in *Windows to the East: Eastern Christians in a Dialogue of Charity*, ed. Jaroslav Z. Skira and Myroslaw I. Tatarya (Ottawa ON: Novalis, 2001), 308–9.

¹³⁶ Ugolnik, 309.

reunification of the spouses and the wholeness of Creation, without dissolving the personhood or mutuality of husband and wife.¹³⁷

Procreation and Orthodox Marriage Theology

As was discussed above, Orthodox marriage theology cannot be considered properly unless the possibility of children is included. Procreation is seen as a benefit in marriage because of a number of reasons, particular in connection with the *theosis* of the spouses. To begin, Vigen Guroian describes how a love which remains between two people can itself become egocentric to the couple as a unity if the couple do not extend their love beyond themselves. Such selfish subjectivity will be inhibited if the love of the couple overflows into the creation of another person towards whom the love of the spouses may be directed.¹³⁸ Guroian also ascribes a certain moral function of the child for the parents. Through their relationship with their child, the spouses as parents learn humility, tolerance, patience, forgiveness, and limitless love in a way which may not be possible through other forms of relationship. Children are therefore a gift which can extend the agapeic love of the spousal community.¹³⁹

While procreation is valued as an important part of the marriage, it is notable to what lengths many Orthodox theologians go to emphasize that marriage is specifically *not* reducible to the continuation of the species. Rather, procreation is seen as only one aspect of the fecundity of marriage. The communication of love between the man and woman is the only appropriate setting for the birth of a child, thus the absence of that love will result in a setting which is damaging to that child.¹⁴⁰ By seeking clarity on the spiritual meaning of marriage for the

¹³⁷ Ugolnik, 310–12.

¹³⁸ Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, 29–30.

¹³⁹ Guroian, 112–13.

¹⁴⁰ Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 345.

spouses, highlights the importance of that nuptial spirituality for both the parents and the children.

Threats and Tensions

As happens in any other Church, the fact of having a particular theology does not guarantee that its insights will be effectively communicated to and appropriated by all members of the Church. Many Orthodox theologians have noted the failure of marriages and the loss of sexual ethics among Orthodox Christians. In this, they are certainly not alone. What is remarkable is the manner in which the spiritual and salvific understanding of marriage is informing their response.

A common assertion is that divorces are increasing because of unrealistic expectations of what marriage is intended to accomplish. John Chryssavgis argues that some people entering into marriage do not understand the true nature of the marriage relationship. For them, the fact of being married is the solution for finding personal and interpersonal fulfillment.¹⁴¹ They do not understand the important role they must take in actively seeking their own development. By placing the burden of *theosis* entirely on the marriage, the relationship breaks underneath the burden.¹⁴²

Theologians also critique the expectations others place on the spouses in their marriage. Stanley Samuel Harakas sees the mystical approach to married love advocated by Orthodox theology as presenting an ideal which may not be reasonably attainable. To counter this trend, he recommends following the approach of St. John Chrysostom, who emphasized the spouses' unity in the exercise of daily, practical responsibilities. Thus the unity and love of the spouses can be expressed through facing daily struggles together rather than looking primarily to the

¹⁴¹ Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage*, 18.

¹⁴² Chryssavgis, 18.

eschaton.¹⁴³ William Basil Zion argues the inverse, stating that the physical and material concerns of the spouses weigh down the marriage relationship and inhibit the experience of joy in loving another. To counter this, he advocates a rediscovery by the spouses of the erotic nature of their relationship, “the flow of feeling, delight, and joy in the being of the other person as he or she is revealed to the lover.”¹⁴⁴

A similar crisis in the meaning of sexuality is also identified by Orthodox theologians. The reaction, however, tends to be less legalistic in its promotion of sexual morality, and more concerned with the effect such a decline has on the persons. Zion approves of the manner in which the sexual revolution has largely alleviated sexual repression. However, in its wake he sees the new issue of people falsely believing that sexual expression separated from committed relationships can lead to happiness.¹⁴⁵ Chryssavgis connects the dispersed and undisciplined practice of sex with the loss of a sense of the connection between sexuality and the experience of the divine. Such “erotic atheism” prevents people from understanding the power of sexual expression to enchant and spellbind, or perhaps to wound and destroy.¹⁴⁶

The response to these parallel crises of marriage and sexuality tend not to be the strengthening and enforcing of rules. As Chryssavgis indicates, simply reminding spouses not to divorce and to be sure to have children or risk the ruin of society does not serve the needs of the Christian family.¹⁴⁷ Instead, he recommends the development of a better definition of Christian marriage, especially in relation to God and to the Church as a whole. Families must be able to find their purpose within the faith community of the Church, allowing them to experience their

¹⁴³ Harakas, ‘Dynamic Elements of Marriage in the Orthodox Church’, 130–33.

¹⁴⁴ Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 357–58.

¹⁴⁵ Zion, 333.

¹⁴⁶ Chryssavgis, *Love, Sexuality, and the Sacrament of Marriage*, 6.

¹⁴⁷ Chryssavgis, 109.

relationship with God and simultaneously to help the Church witness to Christ in the world.¹⁴⁸ Zion similarly draws on the Orthodox tradition of finding a spiritual dimension within sexuality, which gives to that component of the human person its meaning.¹⁴⁹ The best response to the hedonism and “sexual chaos” of the contemporary world is one which affirms the positive, spiritual value of sexuality.¹⁵⁰

CHAPTER 4 – THE EMERGENCE OF CATHOLIC MARRIAGE SPIRITUALITY

The promulgation of *Casti Connubii* was a turning point in Catholic marriage theology. While it maintained the classical teaching of the Church on marriage, it introduced a new understanding of the love of husband and wife, particularly as the purpose and reason for marrying. As Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi explains,

However timid and even half-hearted these expressions might seem, a door was opened here – even if only a crack...Seen historically, the cautiously opened door of the encyclical can be understood as a concession made by the teaching office to the growing lack of comprehension at that time among intellectual Catholic circles for the Church’s unwavering commitment to an institutional and juridical understanding of marriage.¹⁵¹

Theologians were beginning to recognize that the future of Christian marriage would rely on the model of a marriage of love. Simultaneously, Catholic couples were growing frustrated when they recognized a disparity between their own understanding of their relationship as based on mutual love and the pastoral practice of the Church which continued to ignore this.¹⁵²

One important thread of the movement was its specific interest in spirituality. Increasingly, spirituality came to be understood as broader and more inclusive than ‘devotion’ or

¹⁴⁸ Chrysavgis, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective*, 335.

¹⁵⁰ Zion, 292.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, ‘Marital Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and in Christian Spirituality’, in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, trans. William D. Howden (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 16.

¹⁵² Knieps-Port le Roi, 16–17.

‘piety’. Even among the laity, spirituality was defined as “the encompassing, life-shaping response (mental, moral, and religious) of the individual to given objects of belief.”¹⁵³ In this, the marital spirituality movement can be seen as an out-growth of the Catholic Action movement of the 1920s, which resisted the separation between the lived world and religious and spiritual practice.¹⁵⁴

Agnès Walch traces some of the main themes in the marriage spirituality movement. The primary concern was to restore the love of the couple to its place as the foundation of the family. Without removing the importance of children from the marriage relationship, these theologians affirmed that children proceed first of all from an expression of the love between the spouses.¹⁵⁵ A second important characteristic of the new marital spirituality was its genesis in the relationship between priests and the laity. While the initial devotional practices suggested to the spouses were often drawn from the priests’ own practices, the spiritual exercises were later more focused on the spouses’ relationship with each other. Thus, there was a progression in thought from a spirituality that was based on the spouses in the relationship to one based on the relationship between the spouses.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, while the clergy were serving the needs of the laity as best they could, the lay movement did little to actually change Church teaching on marriage. The movement towards greater marital spirituality may have been gaining insights into the role of the spouses’ love in the marriage and family, but it was critiqued at the time for distracting from the Church’s doctrinal rigidity rather than effectively addressing it.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Knieps-Port le Roi, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Knieps-Port le Roi, 22.

¹⁵⁵ Agnès Walch, ‘Marital Spirituality from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries’, in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, trans. Monica Sander (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 162.

¹⁵⁶ Walch, 165.

¹⁵⁷ Knieps-Port le Roi, ‘Marital Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and in Christian Spirituality’, 21.

Personalism

Arising in the late 19th century, personalism is a philosophy grounded in the valuing of the person and of personal experience. John Cowburn explains that personalism can be divided into two simultaneous trends: Boston personalism and Mounier personalism.¹⁵⁸ The former was largely Methodist in background and emphasized the person as the soul or mind. The latter, by contrast, was predominantly Catholic, emphasized the person as a whole being comprised of body and soul, and tended to be more communitarian in nature.¹⁵⁹ Following the Second World War, with the growth of the biblical, liturgical, and ecumenical movements, personalism continued to influence discourse within the Catholic Church.¹⁶⁰

One particular area where personalism introduced new avenues of theological questioning was marriage theology. Cormac Burke's recent study¹⁶¹ on the effects of the personalist movement on Catholic marriage theology provides an overview of the influence of the philosophical movement. In the early 20th century, the debate concerning Catholic marriage theology was centred on two competing perspectives. The traditionalist stance held to a procreative and institutional understanding of marriage, particularly where the ends of matrimony were ordered hierarchically with the primary end as procreation and the secondary ends as mutual help and the remedy for concupiscence. From this perspective, marriage was seen as largely the domain of moral theologians and canonists, who studied the characteristics of marriage as growing from the primary end. Arguing against the traditionalist side was the personalist perspective, upholding the value of procreation in the marriage but arguing for a

¹⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that Mounier was an important influence on Evdokimov and his approach to Orthodox marriage theology; see William Basil Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1992), 147–48.

¹⁵⁹ John Cowburn, *Personalism and Scholasticism* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005), 64.

¹⁶⁰ Cowburn, 73.

¹⁶¹ Cormac Burke, *The Theology of Marriage: Personalism, Doctrine, and Canon Law* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

greater appreciation of the mutual love of the spouses, and of the conjugal union as an expression of this love. The basis of the personalist critique was that the traditional theology ignored what the married couples themselves understood as most important in their relationship, particularly the desire to seek personal happiness or fulfillment through marriage.¹⁶²

The two primary personalist theologians in Catholic marriage theology were Dietrich von Hildebrand and Herbert Doms.¹⁶³ Both were important for promoting a view of marriage as a partnership in which the spouses give themselves to each other,¹⁶⁴ although the two scholars pursued different paths to this conclusion. While Doms placed the end of marriage in the fulfillment of the spouses as persons, von Hildebrand emphasized the love aspect of the relationship.¹⁶⁵

von Hildebrand's *Marriage* (1929)

Dietrich von Hildebrand's *Marriage*¹⁶⁶ redefines the meaning of sexual intercourse within marriage as directed to something outside of and equal to procreation. Rather than seeing procreation as the defining characteristic of marriage, von Hildebrand sees marriage as symbolic of the union between God and the soul because both are based in mutual love and perfect self-offering. While other relationship will include love, von Hildebrand argues, it is only marriage that is defined by it. Therefore, the meaning of marriage is love, while its end is procreation.¹⁶⁷

Mutuality is the marker of the conjugal love which is at the heart of marriage. More than a reciprocity of affection, conjugal love occurs when the regard of each person is turned uniquely

¹⁶² Burke, 50–52.

¹⁶³ Burke, 52; See also Knieps-Port le Roi, 'Marital Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and in Christian Spirituality', 16 and ; Walch, 'Marital Spirituality from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Centuries', 162.

¹⁶⁴ Knieps-Port le Roi, 'Marital Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and in Christian Spirituality', 16.

¹⁶⁵ Burke, *The Theology of Marriage: Personalism, Doctrine, and Canon Law*, 52.

¹⁶⁶ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Marriage* (London: Longman, Green and Co., 1952).

¹⁶⁷ von Hildebrand, 2–4.

towards the other. Unlike “we” relationships, where the two people walk side by side towards a common goal, the “I-thou” relationship of conjugal love places the two lovers face to face and moving towards one another. This meeting of two people is marked by the knowledge of God’s having created His image in the individual as well as the creation of a particular individuality. If love implies a deeper understanding of the other, conjugal love is unique in that it intuitively reveals to the lover the whole being of the other.¹⁶⁸

Conjugal love, however, is not yet marriage, although the former anticipates and gives meaning to the desire for the latter. Von Hildebrand argues that conjugal love arises spontaneously, but marriage requires a free choice of will which allows its establishment as an objective reality. Marriage is constituted by a solemn vow and act of will, by which the spouses formally give themselves to each other. The union is fully actualized by the consummation by bodily union. Having been established, however, the marriage persists regardless of the sentiments or attitudes of the partners.¹⁶⁹

Following the creation of the marriage contract, sexual expression by the spouses will continue to be meaningful as an exercise of the conjugal love which continues to be present in the marriage relationship. Von Hildebrand argues that the primary end of sexual intercourse may be procreation, but its meaning again resides in the realization of the communion of the spouses. The first physical union of the spouses following their marriage establishes the exclusive bond between them by virtue of their complete and unique surrender to the other. Subsequent sexual intimacy between the spouses continues to symbolize their unity.¹⁷⁰ Therefore, even in cases

¹⁶⁸ von Hildebrand, 5–9.

¹⁶⁹ von Hildebrand, 17–19.

¹⁷⁰ von Hildebrand, 21–23.

where procreation is not possible for the couple, their sexual union remains sanctified and fruitful.

For, we must not forget that every true love possesses an intrinsic spiritual fruitfulness, and that conjugal love harbours this spiritual fruitfulness of love quite independently of procreation. This fruitfulness expresses itself in an *élan* of the soul, which is implied in love; in a new awakening of the soul which stimulates it to spiritual growth and a higher moral life. It expresses itself in the influence which the spouses unconsciously exert on each other, in the spiritual elevation of one another which their mutual understanding makes possible. Every marriage in which conjugal love is thus realized bears spiritual fruit, becomes *fruitful* – even though there are no children.¹⁷¹

Von Hildebrand's conception of marriage as fruitful through its representation and nurturing of the unity of the spouses leads into the sacramental understanding of the spouses' relationship.

Sacramental marriage is differentiated from natural marriage, according to von Hildebrand, by the spouses' concern for the other's well-being into the next life as well as in the midst of this one. The sacramental character of the marriage allows the spouses to see each other from a Christian perspective, in particular that the other is made in the image of God, with dignity and as a vessel of grace, and has a destiny of union with God that they are called to fulfill. Conjugal love lived out in marriage is more than a general concern for the salvation of neighbour. Instead, it is marked by a sense of responsibility towards the beloved to whom the spouse has been destined.¹⁷²

The precise mechanics of how the salvation of the spouse occurs remains largely unexplored by von Hildebrand. Certainly, the love of the spouses plays a role, but this love has more value as a symbol for the spouses rather than a concrete experience of grace. In the marriage, the spouses are called to imitate the love of Christ for the Church through their

¹⁷¹ von Hildebrand, 25.

¹⁷² von Hildebrand, 34–38.

constant concern for the salvation of the other. Furthermore, the love for the spouse opens the heart in order to turn more towards Jesus in an authentic love and worship.¹⁷³ As compared to the Orthodox theology of marriage, conjugal love functions as an *ersatz* relationship with Christ rather than a true, direct experience of divine love, more pedagogical aid than lived reality. The sharp distinction between love of spouse and love of God is enforced by von Hildebrand's comparison of marriage and consecrated virginity. While marriage has a positive value in leading the spouses to grace, consecrated virginity is the superior state because it realizes the direct union with Christ to which all souls are called.¹⁷⁴ Through the sacrament, then, conjugal love may direct the spouses towards God, but can accomplish little to bring them into direct contact with God.

Another characteristic of marriage which von Hildebrand explores at great length is the indissolubility of the marriage bond. Within natural marriage, conjugal love requires that both spouses prioritize the well-being of the beloved, granting to each spouse the right to the love of the other. However, if the continuation of the spousal union is not possible for either or both spouses, von Hildebrand argues, the marriage once established will remain in force and the spouses have a duty to live together as a form of sacrifice and care for the good of the other.¹⁷⁵ Sacramental marriage builds on this indissolubility and reinforces it with an eschatological meaning. The marriage contract established by two Christians, by virtue of their membership in the Body of Christ, takes on the character of a consecration to God. Living out the marriage vow is then not only a responsibility to the spouse but a divine service to Christ comparable to religious orders.¹⁷⁶ Indissolubility is derived from the sacramentality of marriage and its nature

¹⁷³ von Hildebrand, 60–63.

¹⁷⁴ von Hildebrand, 63.

¹⁷⁵ von Hildebrand, 27–31.

¹⁷⁶ von Hildebrand, 40–41.

as an intimate communion of love connected to Christ. Therefore, the responsibilities of marriage must be maintained, sometimes calling on spouses to make the sacrifice of renouncing a happy marriage if they find they are unhappily married.¹⁷⁷ Of course, in all cases, the continuance of true conjugal love is held as the ideal.¹⁷⁸

While the importance of indissolubility is not surprising given the Catholic context of von Hildebrand's work, the way in which he invokes it above other considerations is alarming, especially to a contemporary audience. Of particular concern here is the emphasis on responsibility towards the spouse to the exclusion of all other considerations. In particular, von Hildebrand requires sacrifice for the good of the salvation of the person's spouse without considering whether such involuntary selflessness has any effect – positive or negative – on the person. This further emphasizes the view that sacramental marriage serves as a source of grace for the other but is not necessarily seen as a good for the person's own development in faith and relationship to God. Nonetheless, von Hildebrand's ability to see married love as a good in itself remains important in the history of Catholic marriage theology. The benefits of his thought in establishing a new sacramental understating of marriage, however, should not be overestimated.

Doms' *The Meaning of Marriage* (1935)

An important insight in Herbert Dom's *The Meaning of Marriage*¹⁷⁹ is the positive value he gives to the body in the work of salvation and consequently to the higher valuing he assigns to sexual activity within a marriage relationship. As will be discussed below, one of the issues that arises from this work is the apparent assumption that the spouses are not active agents in their work of becoming divinized but operate only as the passive recipient of God's salvific grace.

¹⁷⁷ von Hildebrand, 46–47.

¹⁷⁸ von Hildebrand, 31.

¹⁷⁹ Herbert Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*, trans. George Sayer (London: Sheed & Ward, 1939).

Like the Russian Orthodox theologians, Doms begins his study by arguing against the role of procreation in defining marriage. While a marriage will commonly include the birth of children, it is not the hope of a parental love which draws people together. Neither do the spouses choose their potential partner based in the rational, unemotional judgement of who would make the best parent. Instead, it is the ‘bridal love’ which first draws the couple together, and from which the children are born.¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, unlike the various partnerings in the animal kingdom, human marriage requires an act including both spiritual/emotional and legal/moral considerations. While the initial attraction may begin in the spirit, the relationship must follow certain legal and moral systems in order to properly form the contract. Therefore, marriage requires the rationality to recognize moral values and to conform behaviour to established laws.¹⁸¹ For these two reasons combined, human marriage cannot be seen as tied entirely and uniquely to procreation.

The meaning of marriage is rooted in the physical bodies of the spouses as instruments of their souls. In particular, the gendering of the bodies is what gives marriage its unique purpose. Doms follows typical Christian thought and connects the separate sexes to the creation of humanity as recounted in the biblical narrative. He follows Scheeben in understanding the creation of man and of woman as analogous to the two processions of the Trinity, thus emphasizing the united Threeness of the Trinity rather than the initial unity. The creation of the first man as the direct work of God is an analogy of the generation of the Word, while the creation of woman from the side of man is an analogy of the procession of the Holy Spirit. Beyond the origins, the character of man and woman are seen as analogous to the Divine Persons

¹⁸⁰ Doms, 5–7.

¹⁸¹ Doms, 3–4.

as well. Man shows the power and wisdom of God, while woman shows the gentleness and love on the other.¹⁸²

The two sexes demonstrate humanity in two different though equal ways, operating together to perfect human society. For Doms, as for Evdokimov, personal fulfillment comes about through the unity with a partner of the opposite sex.¹⁸³ To a certain extent, this is bound up in the physical complementarity at work in the physical expression of spousal unity. However, because Doms understood sexual differentiation to affect the whole of the personality, the spiritual and emotional fulfillment could only be realized properly with a partner of the opposite sex as well. Because of the importance of the body in sanctification, however, the physical fulfillment can only occur when it is realized within a firmly-established spiritual relationship.¹⁸⁴

Physical being becomes an important means for communicating the soul. Just as the voice will communicate a thought, the expression of a person's essential being must occur through physical means. In marital love, the expression of sexuality is not only a physical expression of the self but the physical and sensual fulfillment of the other. Indeed, it is both expression and realization of the marriage community.¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, Doms is not here attempting to argue for a different, spiritualized understanding of sexual expression within marriage but an equality between sex as procreative and as personal, thus alleviating the need to choose or prioritize between the two ends.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Doms, 16–17.

¹⁸³ Although it is tempting, one should not draw too facile a parallel between the theology of Evdokimov and Doms. Where Evdokimov places salvation in the return to the original unity of the sexes, Doms instead sees the cooperation of the sexes as a fulfillment of God's plan for the differentiated man and women. Therefore, where the former understands the couple to be sharing in characteristics of God, the latter draws the parallel with the actions of God. Both may place the salvific element within the unity of the sexes but it is at the service of different operations.

¹⁸⁴ Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*, 21–23.

¹⁸⁵ Doms, 27–28.

¹⁸⁶ Doms, 85.

The primary *biological* object of the sexual act is union, first between sperm and ovum and second between the spouses. While the spouses have willful control over whether they engage in intercourse or not, they have no influence over the potential conception. Thus, procreation is the primary purpose of the sexual act because the sex organs were designed for this purpose and the biological process leads to it.¹⁸⁷ However, the biological components of humans in differentiated sexes were also created by God to be instruments for the unity of the two persons. The personal and biological aspects of sexual intercourse are bound up together and often cannot be separated.¹⁸⁸ Doms recognizes that there are incidences where procreation is not physically possible. Sexual expression of the marriage is still morally good because of its representation of the relationship between the spouses. God created marriage, therefore God also ordained the use of sexuality to express the spousal unity.¹⁸⁹ The *meaning* of sexual intercourse is the realization of the unity between the spouses, while its *purposes* are oriented towards the personal and procreative.¹⁹⁰

Bodiliness becomes the foundation for the ways in which the husband and wife are an analogy to Christ and the Church, and vice versa. Doms argues that the majority of theologians place the similarities between the spouses and Christ with the Church in the mutual love, self-giving, loyalty, and indissolubility of the relationship.¹⁹¹ This explanation falls short, however, because it is actually the *whole* Christ who offered Himself to the Church, and the spouses must participate bodily as well as spiritually in their relationship.¹⁹² Christ gave His Body and Blood to the Church in the form of the Eucharist, in order to extend His presence in the world. The

¹⁸⁷ Doms, 67–72.

¹⁸⁸ Doms, 73–74.

¹⁸⁹ Doms, 84.

¹⁹⁰ Doms, 85.

¹⁹¹ Doms, 103.

¹⁹² Doms, 115–16.

union of the faithful with Christ in the Eucharist is accomplished through their physical contact with the Blessed Sacrament.¹⁹³ Similarly, the spouses achieve spiritual and moral participation in each others' lives through the physical contact of their bodies. The analogy is also drawn from the intentionality of the physical action.

The relationship of Christ to the Church and the relationship of husband to wife are alike in the following: - The desire to give to the spouse, which precedes the act of love, means the giving of the *whole person* and includes the body. And, in accordance with the mode of human knowledge, the body has the function of being the living instrument through which the union of life and life in different persons takes place.¹⁹⁴

Doms encourages a stronger connection between the physical expression of the relationship and the similarities between the spouses and between Christ and the Church. Physicality is important in both instances because it is only union in the flesh by which humans can have a relationship with is both mental/spiritual and physical.¹⁹⁵

One concern that may arise from Dom's writing is the apparent assumption that the person has no active part in shaping their own spiritual development. While the marriage itself is a channel of grace for the spouses, they are presented as passive recipients of this grace without any initiative to grow within it. Doms recognizes that the married person encounters the image of God in their spouse,¹⁹⁶ and becomes a style of priest to the other by representing both Christ and the Church to their spouse.¹⁹⁷ In both cases, however, the active agent is God/Christ who acts on the spouses in order to perfect them. Even more, humans are not seen to have any capability of changing themselves. "Personalities cannot be changed at will, but in an almost unaccountable

¹⁹³ Doms, 107–14.

¹⁹⁴ Doms, 106.

¹⁹⁵ Doms, 114.

¹⁹⁶ Doms, 98.

¹⁹⁷ Doms, 134–35.

way demonic or angelic forces come to work on them.”¹⁹⁸ While Doms recognizes the potential for the spouses to grow *in* the marriage relationship, he misses how they may do so *through* the marriage.

Nevertheless, Doms makes the rather profound statement that comes close to reorienting marriage theology towards a better spiritual understanding of the relationship.

Perhaps it would be best if in future we gave up using such terms as “primary” and “secondary” in speaking of the purposes of marriage. It would be better if we just spoke of the procreative and personal purposes immanent in marriage, and distinguished them from its *meaning* [of the unity of the spouses]. It is not our business to say exactly which of these purposes is the more important; for while one is more important from one point of view, from another point of view it is less so.¹⁹⁹

Unfortunately, while he does point the direction towards a theology of marriage based in the union of the spouses, he is not able to develop that understanding much further.

After the Personalist Movement

Despite tensions with the traditionalist movement within the Catholic Church, the influence of the personalist movement continued throughout the first half of the 20th century, with personalist theologians having an impact on the Second Vatican Council. In fact, Vatican II was dominated by personalists and, by the time of the Council, personalism had been accepted as the basis for Catholic ethics.²⁰⁰ The vision of marriage presented in *Gaudium et Spes* is very strongly personalistic. As Burke explains, though, it was not a complete triumph for the movement. The Council resisted overstatements. *Gaudium et Spes* emphasizes the end of conjugal love but stops short of explicitly presenting it as an end. The constitution also teaches that God had endowed marriage with various ends but does not explore further what these ends

¹⁹⁸ Doms, 98.

¹⁹⁹ Doms, 88.

²⁰⁰ Cowburn, *Personalism and Scholasticism*, 75.

may be besides procreation.²⁰¹ Even interest in marital spirituality waned during the 1960s, with some feeling that Vatican II had been successful in creating better opportunity within the Church for lay participation, and others simply sought other forms of active apostolate. A third group simply grew dissatisfied with what they considered to be a lack of change in sexual and marital ethics.²⁰²

One could then ask whether the personalist movement was entirely successful and, if not, why. Both Catholic and Orthodox theologians were adopting similar philosophical influences on their marriage theology at approximately the same time. And yet, Orthodox theology was better able to integrate the new insights while Catholic theology largely held to a focus on procreation as the meaning of marriage. I would suggest that the issue is not necessarily with the results of the personalist theologians, but with their basic question. While the Orthodox theologians reviewed in the previous chapter began their works by questioning the absoluteness of the tie between sexual intercourse and procreation, their main reflections were based largely in the purpose of *sacraments* and how marriage could fulfill that function in its unique way. Catholic personalist theologians, while arguing for a greater valuing of the spouses' relationship and the role of sexuality in its expression, otherwise maintained the Church's assumptions regarding the sacramentality of marriage. That is to say, they failed to understand the marriage relationship as a means of growing in faith. Thus, while Catholic theologians were employing influences and ideas similar to those adopted by Russian Orthodox theologians, the premises of Catholic marriage theology did not change, limiting the efficacy of any insights the theologians could

²⁰¹ Burke, *The Theology of Marriage: Personalism, Doctrine, and Canon Law*, 54–55 Although, to be fair, it is possible that the Council's reluctance to specify ends of marriage is better understood as an invitation to continue the theological reflection on the meaning of marriage beyond (but not exclusive of) procreation.

²⁰² Knieps-Port le Roi, 'Marital Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and in Christian Spirituality', 24.

offer. Having explored the effects of both the Catholic and Orthodox developments in their respective traditions, it is now possible to suggest some new directions for Catholic theology to better investigate a spirituality of the spouses' relationship.

CHAPTER 5 – A RENEWED MARRIAGE SPIRITUALITY

There are signs that Catholic theologians, and even the Magisterium itself, are attempting to discern a more spiritual understanding of marriage. While the spouses' experience of being in love with each other is given greater recognition, the discussion of marital spirituality continues to focus on the marriage as a symbol rather than an experience of the divine in its own right. What remains absent is a truly *sacramental* understanding of marriage itself.

***Amoris Laetitia* (2016)**

Francis includes a remarkably developed reflection on the nature of conjugal love and a spirituality of marriage in *Amoris Laetitia*, far more than the other magisterial documents included in this survey. As was mentioned before, he is able to bring a remarkable pastoral insight into the lived reality of married couples. However, I would suggest that this exhortation, as with much Catholic marriage theology today, has become mired in a practical and sometimes superficial understanding of the possibilities of a married relationship.

The main reflection on conjugal love occurs in *Amoris Laetitia* following a meditation on St. Paul's *Hymn to Love*²⁰³ and its application to family life. (art. 90-119) Growing out of this understanding of love in the family, conjugal love is defined as a combination of friendship and erotic passion. (art. 120) It is precisely this love which allows the spouses to see in each other the beauty inherent to every person, beyond physical or psychological attractiveness. "Loving

²⁰³ "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrong-doing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

another person involves the joy of contemplating and appreciating their innate beauty and sacredness, which is greater than my needs.” (art. 127) Seeing the other through the lens of true love also calls for a recognition of their value as persons, as ends in and of themselves rather than tools to be used to personal ends. (art. 128) While such an orientation is arguably the perspective which Christians are called to employ when considering any person, in the context of conjugal love it suggests that the spouses’ relationship is a privileged locus for this to occur.

The unique characteristics of conjugal love, however, are limited to indissolubility and exclusivity.

After the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the “greatest form of friendship.” It is a union possessing all the traits of a good friendship: concern for the good of the other, reciprocity, intimacy, warmth, stability and the resemblance born of a shared life. Marriage joins to all this an indissoluble exclusivity expressed in the stable commitment to share and shape together the whole of life. (art. 123)

The indissolubility of marriage is not to be understood as a duty or imposition, but rather the condition which will allow the spouses’ mutual love to continue to grow. By continuing to live for the other, the love of the spouses grows continuously and without limit. (art. 134) While this does not discount the possibility of personal weaknesses, it does encourage the spouses to be realistic about their shortcomings and to grow in a love which incorporates these weaknesses. (art. 135)

The meaning of conjugal love, then, resides in its ability to reflect the perfect love of God. “Infused by the Holy Spirit, this powerful love is a reflection of the unbroken covenant between Christ and humanity that culminated in his self-sacrifice on the cross.” (art. 120) Through our contemplation of the spouses’ relationship, we come to understand the love God has for all people.

Marriage is a precious sign, for “when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, ‘mirrored’ in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is an icon of God’s love for us.”... This has concrete daily consequences, because the spouses, “in virtue of the sacrament, are invested with a true and proper mission, so that, starting with the simple ordinary things of life they can make visible the love with which Christ loves his Church and continues to give his life for her.” (art. 121)

Even isolating matrimony as a sacrament emphasizes the symbolic nature of the spouses in relation to the greater Church. Jesus, it is stated, raised marriage again to the status of sacrament in order that it may serve as a sign of His love for the Church. (art. 71) Marriage brings salvation and sanctification to the spouses, but it does so through the spouses’ own representation of the relationship between Christ and the Church. Thus they are called to live as “a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross.” (art. 72)²⁰⁴

Herein lies what I see as the superficiality of contemporary marriage theology. The spouses are considered to be a sign to those outside of the relationship, reflecting something of the relationship between Christ and the Church, or God and the faithful. Marriage is valued insofar as it affirms to the Church something of its own identity. What is missing, however, is the meaning that can be offered to the spouses themselves, to those who are living the symbol. Even the reflection on the spirituality of marriage and family life relies on a symbolic reality rather than a real encounter between God and the person. The experience of communion within

²⁰⁴ For example, Adrian Thatcher’s assertion that the classification of marriage as a covenant, rather than a contract, is important for understanding the analogy between God’s covenant with His People and the spouses’ covenant with each other. In this case, the conjugal love provides an insight into the divine covenant with humanity. (See Adrian Thatcher, ‘Nuptial Imagery in Christian Doctrine and Its Usefulness for a Marital Spirituality’, in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, ed. Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Monica Sandor [Louvain: Peeters, 2008], 207). ; Bernard Cooke likewise affirms the self-giving nature of conjugal love in illuminating Christ’s ultimate self-sacrifice on the Cross. (See Bernard Cooke, ‘Sacraments’, in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink, SJ [Collegeville MN: The Liturgical Press, 1990], 1120–21). While both analogies provide rich material for theological reflection, in neither case do the writers attempt any insight into the reality of a sacramental marriage as efficacious in the lives of the spouses.

the family is a path towards daily sanctification in that its “incentive to growth in openness of heart” is a means for the person to learn to be open to an encounter with God. (art. 316)

Considering the spouses alone, their relationship is marked by a mutual reflection of the qualities of God’s love. Their acceptance of growing together in fidelity is a reflection of God’s faithfulness in love. (art. 319) Daily life spent in mutual care is a representation of “that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace.” (art. 321) What is never explored, however, is that way in which the spouse may serve as a manifestation of the love of God, a direct encounter with God through the spouse. In fact, *Amoris Laetitia* appears to argue against such a spirituality in the spousal relationship. The spouses must each develop their own relationship with God and not rely on the other to satisfy completely their spiritual needs. Further, each spouse must foster a relationship with God which is specifically separated from their relationship with their spouse.

The spiritual journey of each...needs to help them to a certain “disillusionment” with regard to the other, to stop expecting from that person something which is proper to the love of God alone. This demands an interior divestment. The space which each of the spouses makes exclusively for their personal relationship with God not only helps heal the hurts of life in common, but also enables the spouses to find in the love of God the deepest source of meaning in their own lives. Each day we have to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit to make this interior freedom possible. (art. 320)

To be certain, each person must actively participate in their own spiritual development, and not assume that their spouse can accomplish it for them. However, such a separation between the relationships with the spouse and with God seems to work against the Trinitarian imagery of interpenetration of the persons so often invoked in marriage theology. Is there a way in which we can consider the marriage relationship as more than a simple representation of God’s love that

serves as a pedagogical tool opening the person to the ‘real’ love of God? Can Catholic theology see the spouse as an actual encounter *with* God?

Marriage as Sacrament

Ralf Miggelbrink argues strongly for such a sacramental foundation in renewing Catholic marriage theology.²⁰⁵ The positive value of marriage today, he posits, must be separated from questions of moral theology regarding the proper use of sexuality, and from social ethics regarding the significance of marriage and the family in society.²⁰⁶ Instead, a sacramentally-based view of marriage would emphasize the ability of the conjugal relationship to draw the spouses into a relationship with God.

Marriage is a way of salvation and sanctification provided and made possible by God. This authoritative promise pronounced over marriage holds within it the possibility that married people may see themselves not only as fulfillers of institutional obligations and the bearers of societal duties, but as religious and spiritual subjects.²⁰⁷

Miggelbrink’s use of ‘sacrament’ here reflects trends in sacramental theology as identified by Bernard Cooke.²⁰⁸ Contemporary theologians no longer limit the concept of sacrament to the liturgical rites but include within it the entirety of the person’s life and experience as interpreted through the lens of the Paschal Mystery.²⁰⁹

An important aspect of this theology as defined by Cooke is the role of relationship and personal presence as creative forces within a person’s life. People become who they are because of their various relationships, by being present to others and having others be present to them.²¹⁰ For the Christian, the ultimate relationship is with God’s divine saving presence. Because of it,

²⁰⁵ Ralf Miggelbrink, ‘Contours of a Sacramental Spirituality of Marriage’, in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, ed. Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi and Monica Sandor, trans. William C. Howden (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 185–200.

²⁰⁶ Miggelbrink, 185.

²⁰⁷ Miggelbrink, 185.

²⁰⁸ Cooke, ‘Sacraments’.

²⁰⁹ Cooke, 1119.

²¹⁰ Cooke, 1122–23.

people are transformed “beyond what would otherwise be possible; divine friendship realizes a potential for existing personally that would not otherwise be ever known.”²¹¹

I suggest that the unique characteristic of marriage among the sacraments is the very fact that it is a relationship between two persons. While the other sacraments certainly orientate the believer in relation to God and to the Church community, marriage is alone in encompassing two persons and their relationship to each other. If the sacraments generally rely on a relationship with God in order for the faithful to mature, the spouses’ relationship within a sacramental marriage must be examined more closely as a conduit for this divine presence.

The Spouse as Icon

A short return to Orthodoxy and the theology of the icon will provide a better explanation and model of what I propose for Catholic marriage theology.²¹² Testaments to the goodness of Creation and the ability of the world to reflect on the divine,²¹³ icons are primarily a locus for encountering the divine in a more tangible way.²¹⁴ A common metaphor throughout Orthodox theology is that icons serve as windows: the beholder’s gaze should not stop at the icon itself but should move beyond the icon to the depiction of transfigured humanity to which we are called to journey.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Cooke, 1123.

²¹² My exploration of the Orthodox theology of the icon as a parallel to the spirituality of the spousal relationship is based in research first completed as part of the course work for THO 2130 “Foundations of Eastern Christian Theology” (Saint Paul University, Ottawa ON), Fall 2015.

²¹³ Peter Bouteneff, *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2006), 188.

²¹⁴ Andrew Louth, in his introduction to Orthodox theology, considers sacraments and icons together. Both rely on a positive valuing of matter and belief in the resurrection, all of which suggests a human destiny that includes spiritual and material aspects. See Andrew Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology* (Downers Grove IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 97–98.

²¹⁵ Bouteneff, *Sweeter than Honey: Orthodox Thinking on Dogma and Truth*, 189; Mariamna Fortounatto and Mary B. Cunningham, ‘Theology of the Icon’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, ed. Mary B. Cunningham and Elizabeth Theokritoff (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136.

Icons are symbolic but are better understood to operate through a type of manifesting similarity. At the most basic level, icons present a divine truth by employing a medium which humans can perceive and understand. The physical materials used are combined with the prototype (subject), which gives the icon its sacred meaning and presence.²¹⁶ Icons are not the prototype which they depict. However, through the depiction, they manifest that prototype, allowing the beholder to encounter the prototype in a real way. Louth thus describes icons as an ‘in-between’, “between God and human kind, between heaven and earth, between the realm of the saints and the realm of human affairs.”²¹⁷ While icons may be admired simply as works of art, their creation and intended use rely more heavily on asceticism than aestheticism.

The purpose of this art is not to sweeten life with naturalistic depiction that would still leave the beholder in the world of decay: it is to represent the beauty of the world transfigured, to reveal the human as inseparable from the divine.²¹⁸

The symbolism of the icon, then, is a concretization of the “present but not yet,” a divine reality which exists now and towards which the believer must journey through their process of *theosis*.

Relationship and interaction are important aspects of this sanctification. The face depicted in the icon is vital to its relationality with the beholder. Especially in icons of a single person, the prototype is depicted looking directly at the beholder, facilitating an immediate interaction between them.²¹⁹ This interaction is in no way passive from either perspective. While the icon allows a manifestation of the prototype, the beholder presents themselves before the

²¹⁶ Fortounatto and Cunningham, ‘Theology of the Icon’, 136–37.

²¹⁷ Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 115.

²¹⁸ Fortounatto and Cunningham, ‘Theology of the Icon’, 142.

²¹⁹ In fact, the only persons depicted in profile are those with whom we specifically ought not to have a relationship, such as Judas Iscariot. See Louth, *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, 116–17.

icon. Prayer before an icon, then, is an invitation – extended and accepted – to enter among the divine and the holy.²²⁰

The spouses can be understood to iconify God through a dual, simultaneous symbolism: together as an icon directed towards the Church in general (a symbol of Christ's love for the Church, for example), and uniquely as icons for each other. The *eros* of the spouses is an initiation into the love of God and, through the sacramental marriage, a transfiguration of human love in general.²²¹ By receiving the love of their spouse, the person receives a foretaste of God's love. Simultaneously, by loving their spouse, the person provides the spouse with an icon of God's unique love for them. While the spouses through their marriage may present an icon of God's love for the Church in general, the spouses also become mutual icons which are specific in their audience.

A theology of the icon also illuminates and prevents the emergence of an ego-centric love that couples may develop between themselves. Just as the beholder does not worship the physical icon itself, the person does not love their spouse as the ultimate object of affection. Instead, spousal love is legitimated and transformed when the object of the spouse's love is contemplated in their own relation to the divine.²²² As the icon is meant to direct prayer beyond itself to the divine, love of the spouse is transcendent through the dual affirmation of the lover's and the beloved's existence being rooted in relationship with God.²²³

The Spouse as Monastery

To be certain, we cannot simply lift the 'spouse as icon' from Orthodoxy and drop it into

²²⁰ Fortounatto and Cunningham, 'Theology of the Icon', 137.

²²¹ Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel and Victoria Steadman (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 110.

²²² William Basil Zion, *Eros and Transformation: Sexuality and Marriage: An Eastern Orthodox Perspective* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1992), 140.

²²³ Zion, 140.

Catholic marriage theology, expecting it to maintain its significance and function. What is necessary is the identification of a similar method within the Catholic tradition, thus treating this aspect of Orthodox theology as a type of that which is sought. Such an example may be found in the early attempts of the marital spirituality movement of the early 20th century.

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi describes the adoption of the monastic model by the marital spirituality movement in order to develop a new understanding of the conjugal relationship.²²⁴ One concern of the marital spirituality movement was a reaction against the historical assumption in the West that monasticism was more spiritual than marriage. To counteract this, the movement sought to present marriage as a spiritual discipline equal to consecrated celibacy, as was later ratified at the Second Vatican Council.²²⁵ In establishing a monastic community, the religious would set aside physical locations and structured moments in time (daily, yearly, etc.) for a privileged encounter with God in prayer. Similarly, the marital spirituality movement suggested creating times each day when the spouses would come together for prayer and mutual spiritual development.²²⁶ As Knieps-Port le Roi explains, such dedicated times for conjugal prayer are not as easily achieved when the daily concerns of family and work routines compete for attention. Instead, he suggests that the daily cycle of rituals – a kiss at departure or return, habits around meals, etc. – as well as the yearly cycle of birthdays, anniversaries, and other celebrations within the couple and the greater family be understood as themselves spiritualized.

Like the sacraments and rites of official religion, these rituals recall the deep structures of the shared life, in which the separate episodes of the relational history are linked together and strive toward fulfillment.²²⁷

²²⁴ Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, 'Marital Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Paradigm in the Theology of Marriage and in Christian Spirituality', in *Companion to Marital Spirituality*, trans. William D. Howden (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 15–44.

²²⁵ Knieps-Port le Roi, 35.

²²⁶ Knieps-Port le Roi, 39–40.

²²⁷ Knieps-Port le Roi, 41.

By this extension of sacramentality to the lived reality of the spouses' life together, Knieps-Port le Roi suggests that the married couple is not forced into an inappropriate monastic realm but is recognized as being already sacralised.²²⁸

Without suggesting that any of Knieps-Port le Roi's insights ought to be dismissed, I suggest that the analogy of the monastery as model for marital spirituality must be pursued even more deeply. While affirming the positive value of the marriage relationship is commendable, merely recognizing marriage as equal-but-different to monastic life does little to clarify how *precisely* marriage leads to the sanctification of the spouses. Once again, we are left with a marriage theology that values daily life but is blind to the rich sacramental possibilities of the relationship.

I would suggest, then, a return to Knieps-Port le Roi's description of the founding of a monastery. The monastics would set aside, not only specific times, but marked physical locations as privileged sites for direct encounter and relationship with God.²²⁹ Is it possible to understand the spouse as such a privileged site for encountering God? From this perspective, the marriage is not only a means of loving and relating to another person – although the importance of this relationship itself should not be forgotten – but is also a relationship with God *through* the relationship with the spouse. Thus, by interacting with their spouse, the person comes into contact with God and is able to grow within the divine relationship while simultaneously nurturing the human-conjugal relationship. The person must also make themselves into a privileged place for the spouse to encounter God, such that their love for the spouse is both human and reflective of the divine.

²²⁸ Knieps-Port le Roi, 40.

²²⁹ Knieps-Port le Roi, 39.

Such a monastic model for conjugal spirituality also sheds light on how married love is differentiated from other relationships. Self-sacrificing love is, to a certain extent, the hallmark of any Christian approach to relationship. Similarly, friendships and familial relationships all carry the ability to mirror God's love for a person. The intimacy of the marital relationship is unique among other love relationships precisely because each person becomes the privileged place where their spouse – and no one else – can encounter God directly. Exclusivity and fidelity, then, are not limited to the practical concerns of providing care for children and home. In addition, they grow out of the recognition that love for and received from the spouse is based in seeing and knowing the beloved as God does.

CONCLUSION

Although it has been the subject of theological reflection throughout most of Church history, there is a lack of *sacramental understanding* of marriage within Roman Catholic theology. Reflection on marriage through the 20th-century has tended to focus on the ethical and social questions surrounding family life while neglecting the sacramentality of the spouses' relationship. Without negating the insights gained through such reflection, this paper has presented a means of expanding marriage theology by employing a sacramental lens.

Using the model of marriage theology presented by 20th-century Russian philosophers and Orthodox theologians, we can see the benefits of considering marriage first as a means for the mutual sanctification of the spouses. By making the spirituality of the relationship the primary consideration, marriage theology may better reflect the lived reality of spouses and provide more profound answers to the challenges they face. The meaning of procreation and support in daily tasks, too, become sacramental when considered within the spouses' relationship as true encounter with God.

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