

## Session II:

# The Origins of Marriage

### Old Testament

According to Sacred Scripture, God instituted marriage as the pinnacle of creation. On the sixth day, in the first creation story, the Book of Genesis tells us: “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying: ‘Be fertile and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it’” (Genesis 1: 27-28).

In the second creation story, God says that “it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.” (Genesis 2:18). This suitable helpmate was formed from the very rib of man and thus woman was “flesh of his flesh” (Genesis 2:22-23). Woman, then, is man’s equal in dignity and the one closest to his heart. Because man and woman were created for one another, “a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one flesh” (Genesis 2: 24). Scripture teaches that marriage is not a mere human institution, but something God established from the foundation of world.

Sin not only brought about a break with God, but it also ruptured the original communion between man and woman. Adam and Eve blamed each another for what had happened and were now embarrassed by their nakedness (Genesis 3:7-13). The Old Testament shows how sin affected the goodness of marriage. There is the polygamy of the patriarchs and kings. Moses allowed divorce because of the people’s “hardness of heart” (see Deuteronomy 24:1 and Matthew 19:8). Men and women did not treat one another with integrity, honor and love as God had intended. Nonetheless, while sin marred the goodness of marriage, it did not destroy it.

### New Testament

Christians are new creations in Christ, healed of sin and its effects. Marriage is also recreated and made new in Christ. Jesus tells us that in the Kingdom of God the permanent union of husband and wife that God originally intended can once more be realized (see Matthew 19:6-11). By the grace of the Holy Spirit, husbands and wives can now truly love and honor one another. St. Paul tells us that marriage bears witness to the indissoluble love of Christ for his Church. Thus, husbands should love their wives, “even as Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her” (Ephesians 5:25-26). Wives, too, are called to love their husbands as the Church loves Christ (see Ephesians 5:22-23). The Old Testament also shows how God taught his people to revere once more the institution of marriage. God’s covenant with his

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people was an image of the exclusive and faithful love of husband and wife. The prophets helped the people see that God had not intended husband and wife to be separated (See Hosea 1-3; Isaiah 54 and 62; Jeremiah 2-3 and 31; Ezekiel 16 and 23; Malachi 2:13-17). The books of Ruth and Tobit bear witness to fidelity and tenderness within marriage. The Song of Solomon shows how the love of a man and a woman mirrors God's love for his people.

Because marriage is placed within the saving mystery of Jesus Christ, Catholics recognize it as a sacrament. It is a means through which husbands and wives grow in love for one another and for their children, become holy and obtain eternal life.

*Source: [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)*

## Session II:

# The Nature and Purposes of Marriage

Marriage is the intimate union and equal partnership of a man and a woman. It comes to us from the hand of God, who created male and female in his image, so that they might become one body and might be fertile and multiply (See Genesis chapters 1 and 2). Though man and woman are equal as God's children, they are created with important differences that allow them to give themselves and to receive the other as a gift.

Marriage is both a natural institution and a sacred union because it is rooted in the divine plan of creation. In addition, the Catholic Church teaches that the valid marriage between two baptized Christians is also a sacrament – a saving reality and a symbol of Christ's love for his church (See Ephesians 5:25-33). In every marriage the spouses make a contract with each other. In a sacramental marriage the couple also enters into a covenant in which their love is sealed and strengthened by God's love.

The free consent of the spouses makes a marriage. From this consent and from the sexual consummation of marriage a special bond arises between husband and wife. This bond is lifelong and exclusive. The marriage bond has been established by God and so it cannot be dissolved.

In the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, the priest or deacon, the two official witnesses, and the congregation all witness the exchange of consent by the couple who themselves are considered to be the ministers of the sacrament. In the Eastern Churches the sacrament is conferred by the priest's blessing after receiving the couple's consent.

Permanency, exclusivity, and faithfulness are essential to marriage because they foster and protect the two equal purposes of marriage. These two purposes are growth in mutual love between the spouses (unitive) and the generation and education of children (procreative).

The mutual love of a married couple should always be open to new life. This openness is expressed powerfully in the sexual union of husband and wife. The power to create a child with God is at the heart of what spouses share with each other in sexual intercourse. Mutual love includes the mutual gift of fertility. Couples who are not able to conceive or who are beyond their child-bearing years can still express openness to life. They can share their generative love with grandchildren, other children and families, and the wider community.

As a result of their baptism, all Christians are called to a life of holiness. This divine calling, or vocation, can be lived in marriage, or in the single life, or in the priesthood

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or consecrated (religious) life. No one vocation is superior to or inferior to another. Each one involves a specific kind of commitment that flows from one's gifts and is further strengthened by God's grace. All vocations make a unique contribution to the life and mission of the Church.

The family arises from marriage. Parents, children, and family members form what is called a domestic church or church of the home. This is the primary unit of the Church – the place where the Church lives in the daily love, care, hospitality, sacrifice, forgiveness, prayer and faith of ordinary families.

*Source: [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)*

## Session II: Marriage as Vocation and Call

When the Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a Christian vocation it is saying that the couple's relationship is more than simply their choice to enter a union which is a social and legal institution. In addition to these things, marriage involves a call from God and a response from two people who promise to build, with the help of divine grace, a lifelong, intimate and sacramental partnership of love and life. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis writes:

Marriage is a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. Consequently, the decision to marry and to have a family ought to be the fruit of a process of vocational discernment (no. 72).

The Second Vatican Council teaches that "all Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity" (Constitution on the Church, n. 40). The call to marriage is a particular way of living the universal call to holiness given to every Christian in the Sacrament of Baptism. The calls to priesthood or to the vowed religious life are other Christian vocations (see St. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 11). Along with marriage, all of them equally though in different ways, are a response to the Lord who says, "Follow me."

The call to love is "the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being." In the vocation of marriage – something which "is written in the very nature of man and woman," we see that "the love of husband and wife becomes an image of the absolute and unfailing love with which God loves" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 1603 and 1604).

A vocation is a personal call. It is offered freely and must be accepted freely. Attraction to a certain way of life or to a specific person can be a good sign of being called. Most often a person comes to recognize and accept a vocation gradually. This process, sometimes called discernment, is an opportunity for growth. It can be helped by prayer and guidance from trusted mentors, friends and family.

However, what begins as attraction must deepen into conviction and commitment. Those who are called to the married life should be ready to learn what their vocation means and to acquire the virtues and skills needed for a happy and holy marriage.

The vocation to marriage is a call to a life of holiness and service within the couple's own relationship and in their family. As a particular way of following the Lord, this vocation also challenges a couple to live their marriage in a way that expresses God's truth and love in the world.

*Source: [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)*

## Session II:

# Marriage as a Sacrament

When the Catholic Church teaches that marriage between two baptized persons is a sacrament, it is saying that the couple's relationship expresses in a unique way the unbreakable bond of love between Christ and his people. Like the other six sacraments of the Church, marriage is a sign or symbol which reveals the Lord Jesus and through which his divine life and love are communicated. All seven sacraments were instituted by Christ and were entrusted to the Church to be celebrated in faith within and for the community of believers. The rituals and prayers by which a sacrament is celebrated serve to express visibly what God is doing invisibly.

In a sacramental marriage, God's love becomes present to the spouses in their total union and also flows through them to their family and community. By their permanent, faithful and exclusive giving to each other, symbolized in sexual intercourse, the couple reveals something of God's unconditional love. The sacrament of Christian marriage involves their entire life as they journey together through the ups and downs of marriage and become more able to give to and receive from each other. Their life becomes sacramental to the extent that the couple cooperates with God's action in their life and sees themselves as living "in Christ" and Christ living and acting in their relationship, attitudes and actions.

Catholic teaching holds that sacraments bring grace to those who receive them with the proper disposition. Grace is a way of describing how God shares the divine life with us and gives us the help we need to live as followers of Christ. In marriage, the grace of this sacrament brings to the spouses the particular help they need to be faithful and to be good parents. It also helps a couple to serve others beyond their immediate family and to show the community that a loving and lasting marriage is both desirable and possible.

Pope Paul VI wrote: "By it [the Sacrament of Matrimony] husband and wife are strengthened and...consecrated for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, for the carrying out of their proper vocation even to perfection, and the Christian witness which is proper to them before the whole world" (*Humanae Vitae*, n. 25).

*Source: [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)*

## **Session III: Marital Spirituality**

“Spirituality” is a way to live out one’s religious beliefs. A spirituality of marriage, therefore, is a way to help husbands and wives live out the vocation of marriage in light of faith. Catholic marriage has a distinctive spirituality that is sacramental, communitarian, and missionary.

Marriage is sacramental because it is a sign of Christ’s unbreakable love for his people. It is communitarian because it creates and deepens a permanent partnership of life and love. It is missionary because in Catholic marriage couples are called to share with others the good news of their relationship in Christ. A spirituality of marriage helps couples shape their attitude toward life, and provides a framework for living one’s marriage in the light of faith.

In the Catholic tradition, a “sacrament” is a concrete expression of Christ in the world. The Eucharist, for example, is a sacrament. Within the Eucharistic liturgy, through the words and actions of the priest, the physical signs of bread and wine become Christ really present. Likewise, the Church believes that marriage is a sacrament. In marriage, the couple’s life, love, and witness can make Christ visible to others. All sacramentally married couples are invited to reveal Christ’s loving presence and generous action in the world.

Just as God is a Trinity of persons—a community—marriage also is communitarian. *Gaudium et Spes*, a document of the Second Vatican Council, states that couples form a permanent, life-giving community. We’ve already described this relationship as sacramental, a sign of Christ’s love in the world. Sacramental couples live as communities that reveal God’s blessings, reach out to heal the brokenness of the family and the world, and share their gifts with those around them.

Couples live as communities when they experience the blessings that come from making a total commitment to another person. Making permanent commitments is becoming rare; sacramental couples demonstrate that it is possible. Another blessing of marriage is children. A couple’s willingness to be open to the gift of children, and to demonstrate the generosity and sacrifice necessary to raise them according to Gospel values is a real blessing.

Couples also live as communities when they recognize and heal the brokenness in their individual lives and in their life together. Brokenness is a part of everyone’s life; a spouse is in a unique position to heal the pain that inevitably arises in relationship. Couples create sacramental communities when they build a life of sharing – with each other, with their families, with local communities, with the church. As couples grow in

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their love for each other, their communities of life and love enrich the larger communities in their lives.

Finally, sacramental marriages are missionary. Part of the joy of a faith-filled marriage is showing others what it means to be in a loving, Christ-centered relationship, and making known to others the gift of faithful married life and love. Couples have the potential to show others what it means to embody the life of the Holy Spirit within them. Married couples, while never perfect, are missionary through the witness of their lives and love in the midst of the world. They are characterized by openness to the life of the Spirit within them, by loving service to their neighbors, and by sharing their talents and blessings with and for the local and global communities. As missionaries, married couples can witness Gospel values in their daily lives.

A spirituality of marriage shows how couples reveal Christ, build community, and reach out to others in love. It is a powerful way to describe how Catholic couples live out their vocation of married life.

*Source: Joann Heaney-Hunter (foryourmarriage.org)*



## Session III: Marital Sexuality

The Catholic Church, in its official teaching, has always taken a positive view of sexuality in marriage. Marital intercourse, says the [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), is “noble and honorable,” established by God so that “spouses should experience pleasure and enjoyment of body and spirit.” (#2362).

The Church’s positive understanding of sexuality is rooted in the teachings of Jesus that were, in part, drawn from the wisdom of the Old Testament. Both the Book of Genesis and the Song of Songs describe the basic goodness of sexual love in marriage. In the New Testament, Jesus began his public ministry with his supportive presence at the wedding feast of Cana, a further indication of the goodness of marriage.

Marital sexuality achieves two purposes. The Church affirms, first, its role in creating new human life, sometimes called the procreative dimension of sexuality. In giving birth to children and educating them, the couple cooperates with the Creator’s love.

Second, sexual union expresses and deepens the love between husband and wife. This is called the unitive, or relational, aspect of sexuality.

The bond between the procreative and the relational aspects cannot be broken. Each sexual act in a marriage must be open to the possibility of conceiving a child. Contraception is wrong because it separates the act of conception from sexual union. (See [Married Love and the Gift of Life](#) for more on this topic.)

Recent church teaching has tried to integrate the two purposes of marriage into a single perspective, which sees marital sexual love as essentially procreative. Marital love is by its nature fruitful; it generates new life. The God-created expression of marital love, joined to an openness to new life, contributes to the holiness of the couple. The “call to holiness in marriage is a lifelong process of conversion and growth.” ([Catholic Catechism for Adults](#), p. 408)

Like all the baptized, married couples are called to chastity. The Church defines chastity as “the successful integration of sexuality within the person.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2337). Married couples practice the conjugal chastity that is proper to their state in life.

The late Pope John Paul II wanted to find a new and compelling way to express this positive view of sexuality. He developed a strand of thinking about sexuality and its role in human life called “The Theology of the Body.”

The Pope begins with the idea that each human being is willed for his or her own sake. Out of love God created human beings as male and female, persons of dignity and worthy of respect. Also out of love, God established marriage as the first communion

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of persons. In marriage, man and woman totally give themselves to each other, and in this self-giving they discover who they are.

The sin of Adam and Eve ruptured this original unity of body and soul. Sadly, we know the results: too often women and men have become objects to be used and exploited. The salvation won for us by Jesus Christ began the process of restoring the lost unity of body and soul. This process is partly completed here; full unity will be restored in the next life.

The Church teaches that human sexuality is sacred. Within marriage, it fulfills its purpose as an expression of deep, faithful and exclusive love that is open to new life. Marital sexual relations involve profound openness and receptivity, a complete and mutual self-giving. Sexuality is an important part of that incredibly rich and mysterious pattern in Creation that comes directly from the mind and heart of God.

*Source: [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)*

## Session III: Marital Sexuality – Cohabitation

It's no secret that many couples are cohabiting, that is, living together in a sexual relationship without marriage. Currently, 60% of all marriages are preceded by cohabitation, but fewer than half of cohabiting unions end in marriage.

Many couples believe-mistakenly-that cohabitation will lower their risk of divorce. This is an understandable misconception, since many people are the children of divorce, or have other family members or friends who have divorced. Other reasons for living together include convenience, financial savings, companionship and security, and a desire to move out of their parents' house.

### **What social science says about cohabitation**

- On average, marriage preceded by cohabitation is 46% more likely to end in divorce.
- The risk is greatest for “serial” cohabitators who have had multiple relationships.
- Some studies indicate that those who live together with definite plans for marriage are at minimal risk; however, there are no positive effects from cohabiting.
- [Cohabitation puts children at risk](#). Forty percent of cohabiting households include children. After five years, one-half of these couples will have broken up, compared to 15% of married parents.

### **Cohabitation and Catholic Church teaching**

Every act of sexual intercourse is intended by God to express love, commitment, and openness to life in the total gift of the spouses to each other. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage cannot express what God intended. Rather, it says something false—a total commitment that the couple does not yet have. This total commitment is possible only in marriage.

[The Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) points out that some couples claim a right to live together if they intend to marry later on. Although the couple may be sincere in their intention, the Catechism stresses that human love is not compatible with “trial marriages.” Rather, “it demands a total and definitive gift of persons to one another.”

### **Cohabitation and marriage preparation**

If you are a cohabiting couple who has chosen to marry, the Catholic Church welcomes your decision to marry. Because cohabitation can have an effect on the marriage, couples are encouraged to explore certain questions with the pastoral minister who is preparing them for marriage. These include:

- Why did you choose to live together?
- What did you learn from the experience of living together?

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- Why did you decide to marry?
- Why do you wish to marry in the Catholic Church?
- What does marriage as a sacrament mean to you?

Pastoral ministers may encourage cohabiting couples without children to separate for a period before marriage as a sign of their free, loving decision to follow the Church's vision of marriage and sexuality. Couples are also encouraged to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

People have a right to marry; therefore, cohabiting couples cannot be denied marriage in the Catholic Church solely because they are cohabiting. However, cohabitation may raise questions, for example, about the couple's freedom to marry, which need to be explored.

*Source: [foryourmarriage.org](http://foryourmarriage.org)*

## Session III: Family Life

7. The question of human procreation, like every other question which touches human life, involves more than the limited aspects specific to such disciplines as biology, psychology, demography or sociology. It is the whole man and the whole mission to which he is called that must be considered: both its natural, earthly aspects and its supernatural, eternal aspects. And since in the attempt to justify artificial methods of birth control many appeal to the demands of married love or of responsible parenthood, these two important realities of married life must be accurately defined and analyzed. This is what We mean to do, with special reference to what the Second Vatican Council taught with the highest authority in its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today.

### **God's Loving Design**

8. Married love particularly reveals its true nature and nobility when we realize that it takes its origin from God, who "is love," the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named."

Marriage, then, is far from being the effect of chance or the result of the blind evolution of natural forces. It is in reality the wise and provident institution of God the Creator, whose purpose was to effect in man His loving design. As a consequence, husband and wife, through that mutual gift of themselves, which is specific and exclusive to them alone, develop that union of two persons in which they perfect one another, cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives.

The marriage of those who have been baptized is, in addition, invested with the dignity of a sacramental sign of grace, for it represents the union of Christ and His Church.

### **Married Love**

9. In the light of these facts the characteristic features and exigencies of married love are clearly indicated, and it is of the highest importance to evaluate them exactly.

This love is above all fully human, a compound of sense and spirit. It is not, then, merely a question of natural instinct or emotional drive. It is also, and above all, an act of the free will, whose trust is such that it is meant not only to survive the joys and sorrows of daily life, but also to grow, so that husband and wife become in a way one heart and one soul, and together attain their human fulfillment.

It is a love which is total—that very special form of personal friendship in which husband and wife generously share everything, allowing no unreasonable exceptions and not thinking solely of their own convenience. Whoever really loves his partner loves

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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.

Married love is also faithful and exclusive of all other, and this until death. This is how husband and wife understood it on the day on which, fully aware of what they were doing, they freely vowed themselves to one another in marriage. Though this fidelity of husband and wife sometimes presents difficulties, no one has the right to assert that it is impossible; it is, on the contrary, always honorable and meritorious. The example of countless married couples proves not only that fidelity is in accord with the nature of marriage, but also that it is the source of profound and enduring happiness.

Finally, this love is fecund. It is not confined wholly to the loving interchange of husband and wife; it also contrives to go beyond this to bring new life into being. "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents' welfare."

### **Responsible Parenthood**

10. Married love, therefore, requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood, which today, rightly enough, is much insisted upon, but which at the same time should be rightly understood. Thus, we do well to consider responsible parenthood in the light of its varied legitimate and interrelated aspects.

With regard to the biological processes, responsible parenthood means an awareness of, and respect for, their proper functions. In the procreative faculty the human mind discerns biological laws that apply to the human person.

With regard to man's innate drives and emotions, responsible parenthood means that man's reason and will must exert control over them.

With regard to physical, economic, psychological and social conditions, responsible parenthood is exercised by those who prudently and generously decide to have more children, and by those who, for serious reasons and with due respect to moral precepts, decide not to have additional children for either a certain or an indefinite period of time. Responsible parenthood, as we use the term here, has one further essential aspect of paramount importance. It concerns the objective moral order which was established by God, and of which a right conscience is the true interpreter. In a word, the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties toward God, themselves, their families and human society.

From this it follows that they are not free to act as they choose in the service of transmitting life, as if it were wholly up to them to decide what is the right course to follow. On the contrary, they are bound to ensure that what they do corresponds to the will of God the Creator. The very nature of marriage and its use makes His will clear, while the constant teaching of the Church spells it out.

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**Observing the Natural Law**

11. The sexual activity, in which husband and wife are intimately and chastely united with one another, through which human life is transmitted, is, as the recent Council recalled, "noble and worthy." It does not, moreover, cease to be legitimate even when, for reasons independent of their will, it is foreseen to be infertile. For its natural adaptation to the expression and strengthening of the union of husband and wife is not thereby suppressed. The fact is, as experience shows, that new life is not the result of each and every act of sexual intercourse. God has wisely ordered laws of nature and the incidence of fertility in such a way that successive births are already naturally spaced through the inherent operation of these laws. The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life.

**Union and Procreation**

12. This particular doctrine, often expounded by the magisterium of the Church, is based on the inseparable connection, established by God, which man on his own initiative may not break, between the unitive significance and the procreative significance which are both inherent to the marriage act.

The reason is that the fundamental nature of the marriage act, while uniting husband and wife in the closest intimacy, also renders them capable of generating new life—and this as a result of laws written into the actual nature of man and of woman. And if each of these essential qualities, the unitive and the procreative, is preserved, the use of marriage fully retains its sense of true mutual love and its ordination to the supreme responsibility of parenthood to which man is called. We believe that our contemporaries are particularly capable of seeing that this teaching is in harmony with human reason.

**Faithfulness to God's Design**

13. Men rightly observe that a conjugal act imposed on one's partner without regard to his or her condition or personal and reasonable wishes in the matter, is no true act of love, and therefore offends the moral order in its particular application to the intimate relationship of husband and wife. If they further reflect, they must also recognize that an act of mutual love which impairs the capacity to transmit life which God the Creator, through specific laws, has built into it, frustrates His design which constitutes the norm of marriage, and contradicts the will of the Author of life. Hence to use this divine gift while depriving it, even if only partially, of its meaning and purpose, is equally repugnant to the nature of man and of woman, and is consequently in opposition to the plan of God and His holy will. But to experience the gift of married love while respecting the laws of conception is to acknowledge that one is not the master of the sources of life but rather the minister of the design established by the Creator. Just as man does not have unlimited dominion over his body in general, so also, and with more particular

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reason, he has no such dominion over his specifically sexual faculties, for these are concerned by their very nature with the generation of life, of which God is the source. "Human life is sacred—all men must recognize that fact," Our predecessor Pope John XXIII recalled. "From its very inception it reveals the creating hand of God." (13)

### **Unlawful Birth Control Methods**

14. Therefore We base Our words on the first principles of a human and Christian doctrine of marriage when We are obliged once more to declare that 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. Equally to be condemned, as the magisterium of the Church has affirmed on many occasions, is direct sterilization, whether of the man or of the woman, whether permanent or temporary.

Similarly excluded is any action which either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse, is specifically intended to prevent procreation—whether as an end or as a means.

Neither is it valid to argue, as a justification for sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive, that a lesser evil is to be preferred to a greater one, or that such intercourse would merge with procreative acts of past and future to form a single entity, and so be qualified by exactly the same moral goodness as these. Though it is true that sometimes it is lawful to tolerate a lesser moral evil in order to avoid a greater evil or in order to promote a greater good," it is never lawful, even for the gravest reasons, to do evil that good may come of it—in other words, to intend directly something which of its very nature contradicts the moral order, and which must therefore be judged unworthy of man, even though the intention is to protect or promote the welfare of an individual, of a family or of society in general. Consequently, it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong.

### **Lawful Therapeutic Means**

15. On the other hand, the Church does not consider at all illicit the use of those therapeutic means necessary to cure bodily diseases, even if a foreseeable impediment to procreation should result there from—provided such impediment is not directly intended for any motive whatsoever.

### **Recourse to Infertile Periods**

16. Now as We noted earlier (no. 3), some people today raise the objection against this particular doctrine of the Church concerning the moral laws governing marriage, that human intelligence has both the right and responsibility to control those forces of irrational nature which come within its ambit and to direct them toward ends beneficial to man. Others ask on the same point whether it is not reasonable in so many cases to



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use artificial birth control if by so doing the harmony and peace of a family are better served and more suitable conditions are provided for the education of children already born. To this question We must give a clear reply. The Church is the first to praise and commend the application of human intelligence to an activity in which a rational creature such as man is so closely associated with his Creator. But she affirms that this must be done within the limits of the order of reality established by God.

If therefore there are well-grounded reasons for spacing births, arising from the physical or psychological condition of husband or wife, or from external circumstances, 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, thus controlling birth in a way which does not in the least offend the moral principles which We have just explained.

Neither the Church nor her doctrine is inconsistent when she considers it lawful for married people to take advantage of the infertile period but condemns as always unlawful the use of means which directly prevent conception, even when the reasons given for the later practice may appear to be upright and serious. In reality, these two cases are completely different. In the former the married couple rightly use a faculty provided them by nature. In the later they obstruct the natural development of the generative process. It cannot be denied that in each case the married couple, for acceptable reasons, are both perfectly clear in their intention to avoid children and wish to make sure that none will result. But it is equally true that it is exclusively in the former case that husband and wife are ready to abstain from intercourse during the fertile period as often as for reasonable motives the birth of another child is not desirable. And when the infertile period recurs, they use their married intimacy to express their mutual love and safeguard their fidelity toward one another. In doing this they certainly give proof of a true and authentic love.

### **Consequences of Artificial Methods**

17. Responsible men can become more deeply convinced of the truth of the doctrine laid down by the Church on this issue if they reflect on the consequences of methods and plans for artificial birth control. Let them first consider how easily this course of action could open wide the way for marital infidelity and a general lowering of moral standards. Not much experience is needed to be fully aware of human weakness and to understand that human beings—and especially the young, who are so exposed to temptation—need incentives to keep the moral law, and it is an evil thing to make it easy for them to break that law. Another effect that gives cause for alarm is that a man who grows accustomed to the use of contraceptive methods may forget the reverence due to a woman, and, disregarding her physical and emotional equilibrium, reduce her to being a mere instrument for the satisfaction of his own desires, no longer considering her as his partner whom he should surround with care and affection.

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Finally, careful consideration should be given to the danger of this power passing into the hands of those public authorities who care little for the precepts of the moral law. Who will blame a government which in its attempt to resolve the problems affecting an entire country resorts to the same measures as are regarded as lawful by married people in the solution of a particular family difficulty? Who will prevent public authorities from favoring those contraceptive methods which they consider more effective? Should they regard this as necessary, they may even impose their use on everyone. It could well happen, therefore, that when people, either individually or in family or social life, experience the inherent difficulties of the divine law and are determined to avoid them, they may give into the hands of public authorities the power to intervene in the most personal and intimate responsibility of husband and wife.

### **Limits to Man's Power**

Consequently, unless we are willing that the responsibility of procreating life should be left to the arbitrary decision of men, we must accept that there are certain limits, beyond which it is wrong to go, to the power of man over his own body and its natural functions—limits, let it be said, which no one, whether as a private individual or as a public authority, can lawfully exceed. These limits are expressly imposed because of the reverence due to the whole human organism and its natural functions, in the light of the principles We stated earlier, and in accordance with a correct understanding of the "principle of totality" enunciated by Our predecessor Pope Pius XII.

### **Concern of the Church**

18. It is to be anticipated that perhaps not everyone will easily accept this particular teaching. There is too much clamorous outcry against the voice of the Church, and this is intensified by modern means of communication. But it comes as no surprise to the Church that she, no less than her divine Founder, is destined to be a "sign of contradiction." She does not, because of this, evade the duty imposed on her of proclaiming humbly but firmly the entire moral law, both natural and evangelical.

Since the Church did not make either of these laws, she cannot be their arbiter—only their guardian and interpreter. It could never be right for her to declare lawful what is in fact unlawful, since that, by its very nature, is always opposed to the true good of man.

In preserving intact the whole moral law of marriage, the Church is convinced that she is contributing to the creation of a truly human civilization. She urges man not to betray his personal responsibilities by putting all his faith in technical expedients. In this way she defends the dignity of husband and wife. This course of action shows that the Church, loyal to the example and teaching of the divine Savior, is sincere and unselfish in her regard for men whom she strives to help even now during this earthly pilgrimage "to share God's life as sons of the living God, the Father of all men."

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**Observing the Divine Law.**

20. The teaching of the Church regarding the proper regulation of birth is a promulgation of the law of God Himself. And yet there is no doubt that to many it will appear not merely difficult but even impossible to observe. Now it is true that like all good things which are outstanding for their nobility and for the benefits which they confer on men, so this law demands from individual men and women, from families and from human society, a resolute purpose and great endurance. Indeed it cannot be observed unless God comes to their help with the grace by which the goodwill of men is sustained and strengthened. But to those who consider this matter diligently it will indeed be evident that this endurance enhances man's dignity and confers benefits on human society.

**Value of Self-Discipline**

21. The right and lawful ordering of birth demands, first of all, that spouses fully recognize and value the true blessings of family life and that they acquire complete mastery over themselves and their emotions. 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. Only then will the expression of love, essential to married life, conform to right order. This is especially clear in the practice of periodic continence. 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. And if this self-discipline does demand that they persevere in their purpose and efforts, it has at the same time the salutary effect of enabling husband and wife to develop to their personalities and to be enriched with spiritual blessings. For it brings to family life abundant fruits of tranquility and peace. It helps in solving difficulties of other kinds. It fosters in husband and wife thoughtfulness and loving consideration for one another. It helps them to repel inordinate self-love, which is the opposite of charity. It arouses in them a consciousness of their responsibilities. And finally, it confers upon parents a deeper and more effective influence in the education of their children. As their children grow up, they develop a right sense of values and achieve a serene and harmonious use of their mental and physical powers.

**Promotion of Chastity**

22. We take this opportunity to address those who are engaged in education and all those whose right and duty it is to provide for the common good of human society. We would call their attention to the need to create an atmosphere favorable to the growth of chastity so that true liberty may prevail over license and the norms of the moral law may be fully safeguarded.

Everything therefore in the modern means of social communication which arouses men's baser passions and encourages low moral standards, as well as every obscenity in the written word and every form of indecency on the stage and screen, should be

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condemned publicly and unanimously by all those who have at heart the advance of civilization and the safeguarding of the outstanding values of the human spirit. It is quite absurd to defend this kind of depravity in the name of art or culture or by pleading the liberty which may be allowed in this field by the public authorities.

### **To Christian Couples**

25. In humble obedience then to her voice, let Christian husbands and wives be mindful of their vocation to the Christian life, a vocation which, deriving from their Baptism, has been confirmed anew and made more explicit by the Sacrament of Matrimony. For by this sacrament they are strengthened and, one might almost say, consecrated to the faithful fulfillment of their duties. Thus will they realize to the full their calling and bear witness as becomes them, to Christ before the world. For the Lord has entrusted to them the task of making visible to men and women the holiness and joy of the law which united inseparably their love for one another and the cooperation they give to God's love, God who is the Author of human life.

We have no wish at all to pass over in silence the difficulties, at times very great, which beset the lives of Christian married couples. For them, as indeed for every one of us, "the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life." Nevertheless it is precisely the hope of that life which, like a brightly burning torch, lights up their journey, as, strong in spirit, they strive to live "sober, upright and godly lives in this world," knowing for sure that "the form of this world is passing away."

### **Recourse to God**

For this reason husbands and wives should take up the burden appointed to them, willingly, in the strength of faith and of that hope which "does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Then let them implore the help of God with unremitting prayer and, most of all, let them draw grace and charity from that unfailing fount which is the Eucharist. If, however, sin still exercises its hold over them, they are not to lose heart. Rather must they, humble and persevering, have recourse to the mercy of God, abundantly bestowed in the Sacrament of Penance. In this way, for sure, they will be able to reach that perfection of married life which the Apostle sets out in these words: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church. . . Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church. . . This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the Church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."

*Source: Pope Saint Paul VI, Humanae Vitae*