

Sixty-fourth Year
• An America Press
Publication



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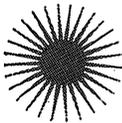
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106 WEST 56 STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10019



60 cents a copy
\$5.00 a year
\$9.00 for two years
\$12.00 for three years

JUNE, 1966
VOL. LXIV, NO. 1204

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CATHOLIC MIND is published monthly (except in July and August) by the America Press, 106 West 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10019. Second class postage paid at Huntington, Indiana. Subscription rates: United States, \$5 for one year; \$9 for two years; \$12 for three years; Canadian and foreign, \$6, \$11, \$15. Single copies, 60¢. To change your address send both old and new address to America Press, 106 West 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10019. Send notice of undelivered copies on Form 3579.

MARRIAGE

Reflections based on St. Thomas and Vatican Council II

A meditation or a reflection upon a few themes in the works of St. Thomas might be particularly relevant to the current interest in marriage. To point up the interest of the themes I have gleaned from St. Thomas, I decided to refer as well to the most recent documents of the Church: the chapter in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World entitled: "Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family," and the address of the Holy Father commenting on that chapter delivered before the Italian Women's Center on February 12, 1966.

The first of the themes I wish to present is conjugal love. In arguing against divorce in the *Summa contra gentiles*, 3, 123, St. Thomas says:

"The greater a friendship is, the more solid and long-lasting will it be. Now, there seems to be the greatest friendship between husband and wife, for they are united not only in the act of fleshly union, which produces a certain gentle association even between animals, but also in the partnership of the whole range of domestic activity. Consequently, as an indication of this, man must even 'leave his father and mother' for the sake of his wife, as is said in Genesis (2:24)."

This theme we do not find repeated often in Aquinas, but it is everywhere taken for granted—that marital friendship in its way is the epitome of human relationship, not simply in virtue of the unity of sexual intercourse and the joint task of bearing and rearing children, but most especially because marriage is a sharing of the whole of life.

In his commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*, Aquinas explains that the friendship of spouses not only is use-

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ful, since it contributes to the satisfaction of daily needs, and delightful, since it includes the act of generation, but it also is virtuous. He says, following Aristotle with approval, that if the spouses are "virtuous, their friendship will be able to be directed to virtue. For there is a special mode of virtue for each, that is, a perfection peculiar to the husband and one peculiar to wife, and on this account their relationship becomes mutually gratifying." (*In 8 Eth.*, lect. 12.)

The conjugal friendship St. Thomas is talking about, then, extends beyond the unity of sexual love not only because it is a sharing in the daily work and achievements of a common household, but much more because it is a sharing in the differentiated and complementary modes in which a human person can be perfected, for this is what is implied by saying that each spouse has a special virtue to communicate to the other.

Aquinas is not ignorant either of the passionate love of man and wife for one another. His treatise on the emotion of love in the *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, qq. 26-28, is clear enough on this subject for anyone who can read between the lines. But here and there one also finds an explicit remark, as in *Summa contra gentiles*, 3, 125, where Aquinas argues against marriage between close relatives on the ground that love of the partners intensifies sexual pleasure, and since close relatives would have a double ground for loving one another—that is, both their blood relationship and sexual attraction—their delight in one another could easily be so ex-



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cessive as to dominate their personalities. One might compare this psychology with that of those who argue that sexual intercourse fosters love, and wonder whether Aquinas is not more correct in thinking that love is really the precondition of the delight one experiences in intercourse.

Of course, for Aquinas the love of husband and wife for one another, like every human relationship, should be perfected by charity. And charity follows the patterns of human nature. Since a man naturally loves his wife very intensely, inasmuch as she is united with him in one flesh, so even in charity he should love his wife as one closely united with his very self, but he should observe greater respect for his parents and he must be ready to help them when they need help. "The principal foundation on which a man loves his wife," Aquinas observes, "is his bodily union with her," and the plan of this foundation of love also provides the blue-

A paper delivered at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Conception, Mo., as a St. Thomas Day Lecture, March 5, 1966.

print for the building of life in Christ. (*Sum. theol.*, 2-2, q. 26, a. 11.)

The fathers of the Council, like St. Thomas, tell us:

“A man and a woman, who by their conjugal compact ‘are no longer two, but one flesh’ (Matt. 19:6) render mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and of their actions. Through this union they experience the meaning of their oneness and attain to it with growing perfection day by day. As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the welfare of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable unity between them.” (48)

Lest anyone should misinterpret these words to suggest that bodily union is identical with conjugal love—lest, that is, anyone should reduce the total edifice of love to its foundation—the Council goes on in the next paragraph, which is specifically concerned with conjugal love, to say:

“This love is an eminently human one since it is directed from one person to another through an affection of the will; it embraces the good of the whole person, and therefore it can enrich the expressions of body and mind with unique dignity, ennobling these expressions as special ingredients and signs of the friendship distinctive of marriage. This love God has deigned to heal, perfect, and elevate by a gift of special grace and charity. Such love, merging the human with the divine, leads the spouses to a free and mutual gift of themselves, a gift proved by gentle affection and by deed; such love pervades their whole life: indeed, by its generous striving it grows better and greater as time

passes. Therefore, it far excels mere erotic inclination, which, because it is egotistically cultivated, rapidly and miserably vanishes.” (49)

Thus the fathers of the Council insist very clearly that the conjugal love they are talking about is primarily an act of will, and though this love includes affection within itself, they register their suspicion of erotic inclination when it is isolated from any integrating principle from a higher plane of love. One reflecting on this passage cannot help but be struck by the educational task which lies before us if we are ever to communicate its content in the contemporary world, a world where the word “love” too often means merely an emotion, a feeling, and where the expression “making love” refers simply to a pattern of outward behavior verified as well in houses of prostitution as it is in chaste wedlock.

St. Thomas Aquinas and the teaching of Vatican II agree, then, on the intensity of conjugal love, on its foundation in sexual communion, on its expansion into a friendship of complementary human perfection, on its transmutation in the divine love of charity. Spanning the distance between time and eternity, such love is subject to the laws of change, but it longs for the stability of perfection, as each lover directs the affection of his will to the goodness of the other and seeks to rescue from the torrent of time the communion of love.

■ Another theme we surely cannot pass over is that of the ends of marriage. For St. Thomas, the ends and the goods of marriage are one and the same: offspring, fidelity and the

sacrament. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, art. 2; art. 3; d. 33, q. 1, art. 1) These three terms are used with somewhat varying meanings in different passages in the works of St. Thomas, and it would be interesting to make a thorough study of all of these passages. One thing is clear: when Aquinas says "offspring" he always has in mind the initiation of human life on all its levels—physiological, psychological, moral and Christian—to the full extent that this beginning of life can be achieved by the cooperation of the parents.

When we ask Aquinas which of the three ends or goods of marriage is primary, we do not receive a simple answer. The reason is that primacy is determined in different ways, for sometimes we consider to be first what is more basic, and sometimes we consider to be first what is more valuable in itself.

"If we are considering the question from the point of view of intrinsic value, then by every way of comparing the three goods, the sacrament takes primacy, for it belongs to matrimony as a sign of grace, while the other goods belong to it as a natural institution, and the perfection of grace is intrinsically superior to the perfection of nature. But if what is more basic is called primary, a distinction is needed, because fidelity and offspring can be considered in two ways. In one way in their actual attainment, and so they belong to the actions of married life, by which offspring are procreated and the commitment of the marital vow is fulfilled. Indissoluble unity, which the sacrament connotes, belongs to the state of matrimony in itself, for by the very fact that the spouses mutually and permanently give themselves over to one

another by their marital vows it follows that they can never be separated. This is why marriage never occurs without inseparability, but it does occur without fidelity and offspring, because the existence of an institution does not depend on the action that fulfills it. And so in this way the sacrament is more basic than fidelity and offspring. In another way, fidelity and offspring can be considered as they exist in principle, so that by 'offspring' one means the intention of offspring and by 'fidelity' one means the obligation of serving fidelity, and then marriage cannot exist without these goods too, for they flow into marriage directly from the conjugal vows themselves. Hence if anything incompatible with these goods is included in the commitment required to constitute marriage, no true marriage exists. And so in this way of understanding fidelity and offspring, offspring is most fundamental, fidelity is second, and the sacrament comes third, just as natural reality is more basic to man than the life of grace, although the latter is of greater intrinsic value." (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, art. 3)

Here we find Aquinas saying, in other words, that the procreation and raising of children is the primary end of marriage only in a certain qualified sense—that is, that the intention of offspring is the most basic principle of marriage, providing as it does the content of the commitment to which the partners vow themselves, a commitment which itself establishes the good of fidelity and the permanent bond whose indissoluble unity is a sign of grace.

In another passage, Aquinas explains that human marriage has off-

spring as an end in virtue of man's generic nature, for man shares with all animals the goal of continuing himself, while marriage has fidelity as an end in virtue of man's specifically personal nature, and it has the sacramental function as its end in virtue of believing man's participation in divine life through the grace of Christ. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, art. 1)

Of course, Aquinas does not make the mistake of reducing procreation to the status of a merely biological function, and treating the other goods in abstraction as alone truly human. One reason he avoids this error is that he always keeps in mind that the offspring is counted a good of matrimony precisely insofar as one hopes to raise him as a child of God, so that the service of new life is a work of devotion to God. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, art. 2, ad 5) Another reason is that Aquinas wrote before modern dualism convinced the sophisticated portion of mankind that what man shares with the animals is not also truly human. Only in a world shaped by Descartes and Hegel, phenomenology and positivism could one imagine that human generation is merely biological, and forget that this process, though common to man and other animals, is as distinctive and as valuable in man as the personal existence of the human infant, who transcends immeasurably the value of the merely natural life of the brute.

Aquinas also supplies an answer to the objection that to consider offspring its principal end is to reduce matrimony to a merely utilitarian arrangement. Children are extrinsic to matrimony itself, of course, but still matrimony becomes humanly

valuable for its own sake precisely in virtue of the fact that it has offspring as its end, since this extrinsic good, for which matrimony indeed is a useful means, also provides the transcendent source of meaning in view of which marriage can be well constituted as a form of human interpersonal relationship, and this inner meaning with which reason endows marriage is what makes it humanly valuable for its own sake. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 1, art. 2, ad 6)

There can be no doubt that the Council fathers have restated very firmly the same teaching concerning the ends of marriage that we have just seen in St. Thomas. The conciliar document states: "For God Himself is the author of matrimony, endowed as it is with various benefits and purposes," and to this statement attaches the first footnote of



the chapter on marriage. In the footnote we find four references, one to St. Augustine, one to a decretal, one to the encyclical *Casti Connubii*, and one to St. Thomas. The reference to St. Thomas is to the *Summa theologiae*, Supl., q. 49, art. 3, ad 1. This is the very same article which we quoted before where Aquinas shows in what sense the sacramental function of matrimony has primacy among its goods, and to further

prove his point he explains the sense in which offspring is the primary end:

"So far as intention is concerned the end comes first in any affair, but with respect to attainment it comes last. Thus it is with offspring among the goods of matrimony. And so in a sense it takes first place and in a sense it does not."

However, the Council fathers did not stop at merely mentioning this reference in a footnote. A sentence or two further along they say:

"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." (48)

In a later paragraph, on the fruitfulness of matrimony (50), the conciliar document affirms:

"Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the most outstanding gift of marriage and contribute very greatly to the good of their parents."

And again, the Council refers to the transmission of life as the "proper mission" of the married couple (50) and the Holy Father in his address to the Italian Women's Center not only quoted this passage but added explicitly that the transmission of life is the "primary mission of the spouses."

Surely marital love and the gift of life should not be turned against one another. Only in view of its orientation toward new life can marriage exist as an institution, and thus give meaning to the interpersonal relationship of husband and wife, which is not simply that of man and woman. "Marriage and conjugal love are

by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children," as the Council puts it. On the other hand, the blossoming forth of life comes after love has had a chance to grow, for matrimony and conjugal love find in children their "ultimate crown," as the Council says, or as I would rather say, their flower.

■ A third theme that deserves our reflection is fidelity. We have seen already that St. Thomas considers it one of the goods and ends of marriage, and that he places it between offspring and sacrament in his twofold order of ranking. This placement would seem to suggest that fidelity is to be considered less basic as a good of marriage than offspring but superior to offspring on the scale of intrinsic value.

But this suggestion appears false in view of the manner in which Aquinas usually refers to fidelity, for he often takes it in a quite narrow sense—simply to mean that the partners are loyal to one another in fulfilling their marriage vows, particularly with respect to the exclusion of any third party. Moreover, this whole question of loyalty to the mutual commitment of the marital compact seems to be subordinated to the welfare of children who are to be born and properly raised. (E.g., *In 4 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, art. 1)

However, we find the full meaning of fidelity for Aquinas marked out in a few clear passages. One of them I have referred to briefly before; it is the passage in which he indicates that marriage is directed to offspring as an end in virtue of man's generic nature, while it is directed to fidelity as an end in virtue

of man's specifically personal nature.

For its secondary end, as Aristotle says, [marriage] has in man alone a common sharing in all the activities necessary to life. As I said before, in this regard the spouses are bound in mutual fidelity to one another—that fidelity which is one of the goods of matrimony. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, art. 1)

Here we find our theme of fidelity rejoining one of our earlier themes—conjugal love. Aquinas relates both to the same discussion which he found in Aristotle's *Ethics* of marriage as a form of friendship. Apparently fidelity and conjugal love really are the same thing, merely considered from two different points of view. When we speak of "fidelity," we refer to the inestimable values of loyal co-operation in a common life insofar as this cooperation is an objective of the conjugal compact and a fulfillment of the obligations undertaken in the marital commitment. When we speak of "conjugal friendship," we refer to the same loyal co-operation throughout married life, but now we look at it insofar as it flows from each spouse toward the other as a mutual gift offered in virtue of affection, benevolence, and charity.

Still, for Aquinas, it is a mistake to argue as follows. Since fidelity belongs to human marriage by virtue of man's specifically personal nature, while offspring is an end human marriage has in common with the mating of other animals, therefore only faithful conjugal love is truly distinctive of human marriage, while the procreation and raising of children—which, after all, is the concrete content of normal marriages—is merely a beastly affair. Aquinas replies to this argument,

pointing out that matrimony is natural to mankind in the sense that human nature inclines man to it, but that the actuality and fulfillment of matrimony in all respects depends upon reason. Man's specific nature inclines him to marriage as an interpersonal relationship, just as his generic nature inclines him toward it as a cooperation in procreation and the raising of offspring. But in both cases reason directs the fulfillment of that to which nature inclines, and what counts as a fulfillment in both cases is conditioned upon the unique nature of human personality. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, art. 1, ad 1)

■ If we turn to the Council's chapter on marriage, we will of course find many passages that refer to fidelity, often in terms of "conjugal love." The following passage is one that is typical, and quite beautiful; it reflects clearly enough the same relationship between love and fidelity that we just discovered in Aquinas:

"Ratified by mutual fidelity and sanctified by the very efficacious sacrament of Christ, that love remains unbreakably faithful in body and in mind, through good times and bad. It will never be profaned by adultery or divorce. Firmly established by the Lord, the unity of marriage will radiate from the equal personal dignity of husband and wife, a dignity acknowledged by mutual and total love. The constant fulfillment of the duties of this Christian vocation demands notable virtue. For this reason, strengthened by grace for a holy life, the couple will painstakingly cultivate and pray for durability of love, great-

ness of soul, and the spirit of sacrifice.

"Authentic conjugal love will be more highly valued, and healthy public opinion formed about it if Christian couples give outstanding witness to fidelity and harmony in their love. . ." (49)

In the corresponding passage in his address to the Italian Women's Center, Pope Paul draws from conjugal love the fundamental norm of moral goodness for marriage, and he states the norm in this way:

"In this light the spouses will see as normal and necessary those laws of unity, indissolubility, and mutual fidelity which, where love is lacking, might seem only a burden. And they will find unsuspected forces of generosity, wisdom, and strength to give life to others."

Thus we see both St. Thomas and the most recent teachings of the Church tend to identify conjugal love with the good of fidelity, or to relate the two very closely to one another. If it is necessary today to speak of love rather than of fidelity, this seems to be largely because on the one hand the notion of fidelity has come to be unduly narrowed, while on the other the notion of love has been used so loosely that it can profit by a more accurate articulation of its meaning. That, I take it, was why the Council fathers were constrained, over and over again, not only to say "love," nor even merely "conjugal love," but "*authentic* conjugal love."

Of course, there are other reasons for the undeniable difference of emphasis between St. Thomas' teachings on marriage and the recent documents. One, at least, ought not be passed over. The conciliar document, although firmly grounded in

the tradition, is expressed in a fashion heavily influenced by sociology and psychology, undoubtedly in an effort to make its message more intelligible to the world at large to which it is addressed. Moreover, the Council's statement does not attempt to develop a comprehensive theology of marriage based on sacred scripture. Furthermore, it frequently expresses an ideal as if it were a fact, for example in saying that conjugal love "never will be profaned by adultery or divorce."

St. Thomas' teaching on marriage is much more closely bound to scriptural sources. The place he gives to fidelity or conjugal love is dictated largely by two theological premises: on the one hand, that marriage is a divine institution; on the other hand, that marriage existed in the Old Law with conditions that make it hard to see how fidelity was essentially preserved. Nevertheless, St. Thomas does argue that the essential good of fidelity was preserved, even in the polygamous marriages of the patriarchs. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, art. 2, ad 5) However, in the face of the facts, and considering that he was engaged in systematic theology rather than in pastoral exhortation, I think we should forgive St. Thomas for not having left us any extensive description in the indicative mood of the ideal of conjugal friendship.

Fidelity, loyal conjugal friendship, should unify the life of a married couple, in such a way that they can rely upon one another with absolute confidence. This confidence is essential to man, for without it there can be no security in life, and only security can allow us to forget fear. Thus it is that love casts out fear.

■ A fourth theme on which we may well meditate is the reality of marriage as a sacrament. In his youthful *Commentary on the Sentences* (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2) St. Thomas argues vigorously that matrimony is a true sacrament, offering a remedy against sin for human sanctity not only by signifying grace nor only by providing preventive safeguards against evil but also by causing positively and efficaciously the supernatural life which it signifies. Instituted as a natural institution at the beginning, matrimony was re-instituted as a remedy against the wound of sin after the fall, as a personal compact under the Old Law, and as a sacrament representing the union of Christ with His Church under the New Law. And as we saw before, St. Thomas considers the sacramental function of marriage to be its greatest good and its highest end.

Now this summary of doctrine does not sound very impressive to us, since it is essentially what we learned in our Catechism when we were children. But St. Thomas and his contemporaries were hammering this doctrine out in an atmosphere of doubt that clouded the whole question of the sacramental nature of marriage right up until the thirteenth century. Peter Lombard himself, the author of the authoritative compilation of doctrine on which Aquinas was commenting, was by no means clear that matrimony was a true sacrament of the New Law, standing alongside the other six as instruments by which Christ efficaciously causes grace. Aquinas leaves no uncertainty, stating explicitly that Christ by His passion sanctified matrimony, which in its turn represents His self-sacrificial love

for His Church. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3, ad 1)

As we meditate upon the sacramental nature of marriage, we must be especially saddened that St. Thomas never completed the *Summa theologiae*, and that the questions that would have considered matrimony as a sacrament fell within the unfinished portion. Considering the great originality with which Aquinas was treating the sacraments, we can be sure that there would have been advances in his teaching on marriage that would have thrown light upon this topic perhaps still not available in our own day.

Nevertheless, there is a beautiful synthetic treatment of marriage as a sacrament in *Summa contra gentiles*, 4, 78. Aquinas begins by pointing out that although the sacraments immediately restore man to grace, they do not restore him at once to immortality. Consequently, procreation is necessary for the continuation of the Church—"the collection of the faithful," or "the faithful people" as Aquinas calls it—until the end of time. Of course, procreation also perpetuates the human race as such, and the commonwealth of civil life. Directed to many ends, it is subject to multiple norms.

"So far as it is ordered to the good of the Church, it must be subject to the direction of the Church. But things administered to the people by ministers of the Church are called sacraments. Matrimony, then, in that it consists in a union of husband and wife intending to generate and educate offspring for the worship of God, is a sacrament of the Church. Hence a special blessing also is given by the Church's ministers to those who marry.

"In other sacraments, what is

done in outward behavior signifies a spiritual reality. So also in this sacrament: the union of husband and wife signifies the union of Christ and the Church. In the Apostle's words: 'This is a great sacrament; but I speak in Christ and in the Church' (Eph. 5:32).

"And because the sacraments effect that which they signify, it is a matter of faith that this sacrament confers grace on those who marry, and that in virtue of this grace they



are included in the union of Christ and the Church, something most necessary for them, so that in fleshly and earthly matters they may intend never to be separated from Christ and the Church.

"Since, then, the union of husband and wife signifies the union of Christ and the Church, it is necessary that the sign correspond to what it signifies. Now the union of Christ with the Church is a perpetual bond of one with one, for there is one Church, as the Canticle says (6:8): 'One is my dove, my perfect one,' and Christ never will be separated from her, for He Himself said: 'Behold, I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world' (Matt. 28:20). Moreover, 'We shall be always with the Lord,' as St. Paul says (I Thess. 4:16). Therefore it is necessary that matrimony, inasmuch as it is a sacrament of the Church, should be an

indivisible bond of one to one. And this bond belongs to fidelity by which man and wife are mutually committed to one another.

"In sum, there are three goods of matrimony inasmuch as it is a sacrament of the Church: *offspring*, to be accepted and raised for the worship of God; *fidelity*, by which one man is bound to one woman; and the *sacrament* itself, in virtue of which matrimony is an indivisible union, since it signifies the union of Christ and the Church."

Here we find all of the aspects of matrimony as a sacrament woven together into a single fabric: it is a sacred office destined for the good of the Church, inasmuch as the child will be raised for the worship of God; it is an efficacious source of healing and strengthening grace; it is a sign of the fidelity by which Christ and the Church are bound to one another forever.

The Council fathers remind us that human life and the task of transmitting it "have a bearing on the eternal destiny of man." (51) The Holy Father, in his address to the Italian Women's Center, expands on this theme, repeating over and over again the idea that marriage is directed to the child who is to be raised for the love of God. The following paragraph states this idea clearly:

"May the recently ended Vatican Council II diffuse in Christian spouses that spirit of generosity to expand the new people of God. May it awaken in them also the desire to have children to offer to God in the priestly and religious life, for the salvation and service of their brothers and for His greater glory. Let them always remember that the extension of God's kingdom and the

possibility of the Church's penetration into humanity for its salvation are also entrusted to their generosity."

And in another beautiful passage, the Holy Father says that God wants to make spouses "sharers in the love He has for mankind as a whole and for each of His children, the love by which He wills to multiply the children of men in order to let them share in His own life and eternal beatitude."

The Council's statement on marriage as a sacrament also is quoted by the Holy Father:

"The savior of men and the spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them therefore so that, just as He loved the Church and handed Himself over on its behalf, the spouses may love each other with a perpetual fidelity. Authentic conjugal love is caught up into divine love. It is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and by the saving activity of the Church, so that the spouses may be efficaciously drawn to God, and may be helped and strengthened in their sublime mission of being a father or a mother." (48)

And a little further on the Council says:

"The Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all men Christ's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in

which all members of the family assist one another." (48)

Thus we find again in the most recent teaching of the Church the very doctrine that we gleaned from St. Thomas Aquinas: marriage is a true sacrament which sanctifies the office of procreating and educating children for the worship of God; it signifies the union of Christ and the Church, and incorporates the love of the spouses into that very union; it gives grace as an efficacious remedy, for the cure of weakness; and it exists in a mutual and indissoluble gift, perfected in fidelity. Thus the love of husband and wife is renewed, as all things are made new in Christ; this love is strengthened, as all that is weak becomes strong in Him; this love is magnified, as all that is insignificant becomes great in Him; this love is divinized, as the whole of human life is transformed into divine existence through Him.

■ A fifth theme on which we should reflect is the goodness of marital intercourse. Aquinas teaches that marital intercourse is not wrong in itself, but rather that it is meritorious and holy if it is an act of sacramental marriage and engaged in for virtuous motives. Arguments based on a suspicion of pleasure in itself or drawn from the notion that the delight of intercourse disturbs reason do not sway him from this fundamental position. Moreover, he holds that procreation is not the sole virtuous motive for engaging in marital intercourse.

Aquinas answers the basic question, whether the marital act is always sinful, with language stronger than he ordinarily uses. Nature inclines mankind to this act, which is

essential for the preservation of the race. And so "it is impossible to say that the act by which offspring is procreated is always so wrong that virtuous moderation cannot be discovered for it, unless one assumes—as some crazy people do assume—that bodily things are caused by a wicked god. Maybe it is from this idea that the opinion mentioned in the text comes. If so, it is the worst sort of heresy." (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, art. 3)

St. Thomas proceeds to argue that the marital act not only should be acquitted of sinfulness, but that it is meritorious provided it is engaged in for a virtuous motive by persons in the state of grace. Among the reasons he gives for this conclusion is the authority of St. Paul, who enjoins husbands and wives to fulfill the commitment of their marriage vows. Aquinas observes that to act according to such an injunction is meritorious providing one acts out of charity. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 26, q. 1, art. 4, *sed contra*)

In another context, St. Thomas argues that the marital act is not simply subjectively excused, but that it is objectively justified. By its relationship to the goods of matrimony, the marital act is not at all evil, but truly good. He explains:

"Now a human act is good in two ways. In one way, by moral goodness, which it has from the goods which rectify it. In the case of the marital act fidelity and offspring do this, as is clear from what has been said. In another way, by sacramental goodness, according to which an act is called not simply good but also holy. And the marital act has this goodness from the indivisibility of the union, for in this regard it is a sign of the union of Christ and

the Church." (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 2, art. 1)

Thus we find Aquinas anticipating an idea which recently has been rediscovered: that the act of conjugal love is holy in that it participates in the sacramental character of marriage which, by its unbreakable personal relationship, signifies the union of Christ and the Church.

Faced with the objection that marriage does not eliminate excessive delight from sexual intercourse, St. Thomas answers in his most anti-puritanical mood:

"The excess of passion which causes vice is not computed according to the sheer measurable intensity of it, but according to its proportion to reason. Consequently, passion is considered immoderate only when it goes beyond what is reasonable. But the delight which is felt in the marital act, while it is extremely intense in sheer measure, still does not go beyond the bounds set for it beforehand, though reason cannot establish limits in the midst of such delight." (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 2, art. 1, ad 3)

Pleasure is not bad in itself, Aquinas repeats over and over; the pleasure of a good act is good, that of a bad act is bad. Pleasure merely accompanies human acts, and it shares the quality of the act it happens to accompany.

■ Still it is true that for St. Thomas it is sinful, at least venially, to engage in intercourse simply for the sake of pleasure or merely in response to the stimulus of erotic impulse. If the erotic impulse is just a natural inclination and if pleasure is morally neutral in itself, still nei-

ther is a virtuous reason for marital intercourse, since neither constitutes a good and an end of marriage. The goods and ends of marriage are not found within the consciousness of either partner, but rather belong in common to the relationship they share with one another. Thus Aquinas states his position in a succinct sentence:

“When the spouses come together for the sake of procreating an offspring, or so that they may fulfill for each other the mutual commitment of their marriage vow, which pertains to fidelity, then they are completely cleared of sin.” (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 2, art. 2)

Notice here that St. Thomas does not merely say that one spouse is cleared of sin if he fulfills the commitment of the marriage vow at the request of the other. No, he is speaking about the two together, and he is assuming that both spouses can be motivated by the virtuous reason which pertains to fidelity as well as by the virtuous reason of procreation.

Of course, not every case in which either partner is motivated by the good of fidelity is marked by this same mutuality. If one partner has intercourse to forestall adultery in the other, then the one who acts to save the other acts in a virtuous way, while the one who is saved by his partner is not well enough disposed toward the good of marriage that he can wholly avoid sin.

Recently some have confused these points, and have proposed the argument that St. Thomas condemns at least one partner whenever a couple has intercourse without expressly intending procreation. Granted that the spouse who responds to the request of the other for inter-

course may be acting in fulfillment of the commitment of the marriage vow, how, they ask, can St. Thomas clear of sin the partner who requests intercourse?

A partial answer can be found in the interesting case St. Thomas suggests when he argues that a husband ought to fulfill his commitment to his wife when he knows she wishes him to do so, even though she may be too shy to ask him outright. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 32, q. 1, art. 2, q. 1a. 1) Here, at least, it seems is one way to get a couple to bed without guilt!

However, I think a more adequate answer depends upon the recognition that Aquinas nowhere states that the spouse who seeks intercourse has to be guilty of any sin. If one translates “reddere debitum”



as “render the debt,” then it may be difficult to see how one is acting for the virtuous motive of the good of fidelity and fulfilling the commitment of the marriage vow not only by yielding but also by asking for intercourse. The confusion is heightened because many problems arise precisely in terms of the strict rights of one partner and the strict duties of the other when intercourse is not equally agreeable to both. And the confusion is brought to completion if one comes to St. Thomas’ text already imbued with the modern

myth that sexual outlet by one or another way is inevitable, for then it will seem that the only alternative to conjugal intercourse is some other form of erotic satisfaction.

But Aquinas obviously held that perfect sexual continence is possible. Moreover, I think, he takes it for granted that either partner may initiate the marital act for the ordinary maintenance of the common bond and out of affectionate friendship, not seeking pleasure nor merely responding to erotic tension, but giving to the other and receiving in response a token of the commitment which binds the two together, and thus acting in a way that effectively achieves the good of fidelity.

The fathers of the Council are more explicit:

"This love finds its unique expression and completion in the act proper to matrimony. This act, by which the spouses are intimately and chastely united with each other, is upright and worthy and, performed in a manner truly human, it signifies and fosters that mutual gift which spouses bestow upon one another with joyous and gracious spirit. Ratified by mutual fidelity and sanctified by the very efficacious sacrament of Christ, that love remains unbreakably faithful in body and mind through good times and bad." (49)

Thus we see expressed the requirement that marital intercourse be related to conjugal love—that is, to the "mutual gift which spouses bestow upon one another" and conjugal love once more is linked to the good of fidelity. Under this condition, responsiveness to erotic inclination is incorporated in a superior plane of motivation, and the delight of intercourse, though fully

spontaneous at the moment it occurs, remains, as St. Thomas would say, "within the limits set by reason" and by holiness.

■ The last theme I wish to recall is conjugal chastity. We are likely to think of this virtue in excessively negative terms. Of course, St. Thomas rejects the usual violations of chastity, including the use of sterilizing drugs and other abuses incompatible with the nature of the marital act. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, exp. text.) But also central to his thinking is not merely the physical integrity of the sexual act, but also the attitude with which it is performed. A man who engages in a physically integral act of intercourse with his own wife, but who would be ready to do the same even if she were not his wife, sins mortally. (*In 4 Sent.*, d. 31, q. 2, art. 3) The reason is obvious: there is in such a case no regard whatsoever for the good that Aquinas calls "fidelity" and the the Fathers of Vatican Council II call "authentic conjugal love."

Aquinas speaks of chastity in a very positive way, when, for example, he explains that it is fitting for divine law to direct man with regard to his love and his use of bodily sensible realities.

"As man's mind is subordinated to God, so is the body subordinated to the soul, and the lower powers to reason. But it pertains to divine providence, of which divine law is but a rational plan proposed by God to man, to see that individual things keep their proper order. Therefore, man must be directed by divine law so that his lower powers be subject to reason, and his body to his soul,

and so that external things may subserve the needs of man.

"Besides, any law that is rightly established promotes virtue. Now virtue consists in this: that both the inner feelings and the use of corporeal things be regulated by reason. So, this is something to be provided for by divine law.

"Moreover, it is the function of every lawmaker to determine by law the things without which observation of the law is impossible. Now, since law is proposed to reason, man would not follow the law unless all other things which belong to man were subject to reason. So, it is the function of divine law to command the submission to reason of all the other factors proper to man.

"Thus, it is written: 'Let your service be reasonable' (Rom. 12:1); and again: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification' (I Thess. 4:3).

"Now by this conclusion we refute the error of some who say that those acts only are sinful whereby one's neighbor is offended or scandalized."

Thus St. Thomas rejects the "new morality" with its premise that everything is consistent with charity and so morally allowable as long as it is mutually acceptable and does not interfere with the common welfare.

■ The Fathers of the Council take the same view as St. Thomas when they discuss conjugal love, for they point out that it must always be in accord with objective standards if it is to remain authentic, and that "such a goal cannot be achieved unless the virtue of conjugal chastity is sincerely practiced." (51)

The Holy Father, in his address

to the Italian Women's Center, expanded on this remark in the following terms:

"In the framework of this dutiful moral commitment and of the greatness of the sacramental gift of matrimony, the Council reminds married Christians of another virtue which they should cultivate. It is the virtue of conjugal chastity, forcefully delineated by Pope Pius XI and reaffirmed by Pius XII.

"This law is neither new nor is it inhuman. It is a teaching of uprightness and wisdom which the Church, illumined by God, always has taught. It joins together with unbreakable bonds the legitimate expressions of marital love and the mission in God's service, a mission deriving from Him, of transmitting life. It is a teaching that has ennobled and sanctified Christian marital love, purifying it from the selfishness of the flesh and from the selfishness of the spirit, from a superficial quest of the transient realities of this world—a quest which prevents the giving of oneself to what is eternal. It is the teaching and the virtue which, down through the centuries, has redeemed woman from the slavery of a duty endured by force and with humiliation. It has refined the sense of mutual respect and the esteem of the spouses for each other. Let spouses understand that the virtue of purity in married life faithfully observed according to the law of God stimulates moral strength and brings spiritual riches: serenity, peace, greatness of soul, and limpidity of spirit."

It is perhaps unfortunate that we are accustomed to think of chastity in terms of situations of crisis, where burning temptation encounters an absolute moral prohibition and the

soul hangs tormented in the balance. Undoubtedly, there are enough of these situations, but will we ever learn how to develop the virtue of chastity if we pay attention only to them?

First, perhaps, it is necessary to confront the little temptations to which even our feeble virtue is ade-

quate. Then maybe we can learn to meet the big temptations. Early in married life, one meets many little temptations, and no great strength is needed to set aside the selfish aspects of sexual longing which make it tend to interfere with the reasonably ordered life, that is necessary for the service of one's family.

By the time a person enters into marriage his emotional life has, or should have, already developed to a large extent. Its further development consists essentially of a more harmonious integration between the emotions themselves and between the emotions and the life of intellect and will. This means that under the influence of the intellect and will the emotions increasingly lose their originally selfish orientation, and are aroused more and more by the good of the other. In this way his originally predominant selfish emotional love becomes a generous mature human love in which both feelings and spiritual will seek the good of the other. With his whole being, with feelings and will, he experiences the joy of love which is true happiness by giving himself to the other.—
DR. C. W. BAARS, July, 1965, to the Institute of Spiritual Theology, Tolentine College, Olympia Fields, Ill.