An inseparable connection: the fruitfulness of conjugal love and the divine norm*

Michele Schumacher
University of Fribourg

Elsewhere I have argued for the inseparable connection, within Christian marriage of the love of God and the love of one's spouse, based upon the eucharistic meaning of Christ's life[1]. The love of God is revealed by Christ - through his life, death and resurrection - as a historical communication of the eternal love with which he has been loved by the Father and has, in turn, loved the Father. Hence *the love of God* simultaneously expresses *the Father's love for the Son* (Jn 6,35; 17,24; cf. 10,17), *the Son's love for the Father* (Jn 14:31) and *the Father's love communicated through the Son to the world* (Jn 15,9; 3,16; 17,23; 1 Jn 4,9; cf. Jn 10,29; 13,1; etc.). Once received, this same *love of God* also refers to *God's love in us* (Rm 5,5; 1Jn 4,12.16; etc.) whereby

* With special thanks to Professor William May and to my husband, Bernard, for their critical comments and suggestions.

[1] See my article, *The Eucharistic Meaning of Marriage* in "Anthropotes" 10: 2 (December 1994), 161-176.

we simultaneously love God and neighbor. Just as[2] Christ expresses his love for the Father by means of his love for the disciples (Jn 14,13), Christians express their love of God as *a love of neighbor* (13,34-35; 15,12). Hence Christian spouses may live their vocation to marriage as a specific form of their love of God.

Here I will argue that this conjugal love is, for the same reason (i.e. its participation in the eucharistic meaning of Christ's life),[3] fruitful. Without excluding the spiritual fruits of marriage, my present focus might be summarized in the significant formulation of *Humanae Vitae*, according to which conjugal love «is not exhausted by the communion between husband and wife, but is destined to continue raising up new lives». More specifically, I will present the divine love as the model and foundation, the specific norm, of conjugal love (including the conjugal act itself) according to which there exists an «inseparable connection *[nexu indissolubili]*... between the two meanings of the conjugal act: the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning»[4]. Without denying that this inseparable connection may be defended from a natural law perspective[5]. I will thereby concentrate upon the fact that this teaching is «illuminated and enriched by divine revelation»[6] according to which Christian marriage is itself a revelation (*mysterion*)[7] of the mutual love between Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5,32) which, in turn, is a revelation of the eternal love between the Father and the Son, a love which is eternally fruitful in the Person of the Spirit.

After arguing for the revelatory nature of Christian marriage (and of the conjugal act within the same) based upon its participation in the union of Christ and the Church (I), I will maintain that the latter union is itself fruitful, even to the extent that the sacrament of marriage is one of its fruits (II). This fruitful union between Christ and the Church will then be presented as the fruit of the still more fundamental union of love between Christ and the Father in their common Spirit (III), who is, himself, the fruit of their eternal love (IV). This normative love (i.e. with regard to Chritian marriage) serves, I will argue, as the basis for the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative meanings of marriage, in general, and of the conjugal act, in particular (V). By way of preemption I will then argue that the term "fruitful" is not being used equivocally with regard, on the one hand, to the love of Christian spouses and with regard, on the other, to

---

[2] The Greek term *kathos, (as),* implies more than is conveyed by the English word. The argument, like the term itself, presumes that the likeness is not one of simple analogy. What is implied, rather, is a true participation of the one relationship in the other. See O. DE DINECHIN, Kathos: *La similitude dans l'evangile selon Saint Jean,*in " Recherches de Science et Religion" 58 (1970), 195-236.

[3] By this I refer to a life, like that of Christ, which is identified with a mission to reveal and communicate the Father's love. See Jn 17,23; 3,16; etc.

[4] PAUL VI, *Humanae vitae,* encyclical letter "On Human Life" (July 25, 1968), ns. 9.12.

[5] See, for example, G. GRISEZ - J. BOYLE - J. FINNIS - W. MAY, *Every Marital Act Ought to Be Open to New Life: Toward a Clearer Understanding,* in IDD., *The Teaching of Humanae Vitae: A Defense,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1988, pp. 93-105; W. MAY, *Marriage: The Rock on which the Family is Built,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1995, chapters 1.3.4.

[6] *Humanae vitae,* n. 4.

[7] According to Max Zerwick, the term is used to refer to «matters made known through revelation» (*A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament,* Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Roma 1988[3], p. 589).

the love of the Triune God (VI). I will likewise defend my position against the presumption that each specific conjugal act of love need not be open to life so long as the general state of marriage is fruitful (VII). Finally, I will conclude that the inseparable connection between the two meanings of the conjugal act is founded within the Christian couple's participation (i.e., in virtue of their sacrament) in the trinitarian love of God (VIII).

1. MARRIAGE: A REVELATION OF AND A PARTICIPATION IN THE MYSTICAL NUPTIALS OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

Traditionally and historically, marriage was recognized as a sacrament because of its sign value *(sacramentum signum)* in reference to the union between Christ and the Church, as presented in Ephesians 5,32. While Augustine was the first to relate this sign quality to the sacred bond *(sacramentum vinculum)* resulting from the consent *(juramentum)*, both he and the scholastic tradition, which followed his initial insight, recognized the sacramental value as lying not merely in the spiritual union of spouses *(consensus animorum)* but also and especially in the *one flesh* union of sexual intercourse whereby the consent is consummated[8]. When the medieval debate arose concerning that which constitutes marriage as such, the distinction was thus made between *consensus* - which legally and socially constitutes marriage - and *copula*, which concretely and existentially determines the biblical *becoming one,* or *one flesh*, of marriage[9]. Hence, Hugh of St. Victor argued that there are two sacraments of marriage: the external sacrament, which is the corporeal union of marriage and that whereby it was said to be an image of Christ and the Church, and the inner sacrament (the *res sacramenti*), which is the personal communion with God. Sexual intercourse in marriage was presented as a «great sacramentum in respect of Christ and his Church», while spiritual married love was thought to be a «greater sacramentum in respect of God and the soul»[10]. Eventually, however, this distinction was maintained within a single sacrament as expressed in the formulation of Peter of Poitiers: «the sacrament is the consensus of heart and of body; there are not two sacraments in marriage»[11].

Within this one *sacrament of Christ and his Church,* Bonaventure differentiated the *esse necessitatis* (conjugal love without sexual intercourse) from the *esse plenitudinis* (the integral sacrament of the same which includes sexual intercourse), while St. Thomas reasoned that the sacred sign consisted in marital intercourse, since it is by this act that the marriage bond becomes indissoluble[12].

---

[8] Augustine, like the Church Fathers, in general, viewed marriage primarily as a means of founding a family (*ad procreationem*), with emphasis on the *bonum prolis.* See E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, Sheed and Ward, New York 1965, p. 282.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 303.

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 322; see also pp. 321.323.

[11] *PL* 211, 1257 cited in E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Marriage*, p. 325.

[12] BONAVENTURE, *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, a. 2, q. 3; and THOMAS AQUINAS, *In IV Sent.*, d. 27, q. 1, a. 3, sol. 2, ad 1. Both are cited in E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Marriage,* p. 326.

Compared to its sign value, the effective power of grace was assigned to marriage relatively late in the historical recognition of its sacramentality. Thus at the time of Albert the Great there were said to be three views according to which marriage was considered a sacrament - 1) that is was simply (i.e. in the absence of grace) a «sign of a saving reality», 2) that it was an instrument of grace considered negatively, i.e. as a *recessus a peccato* (a sort of remedial grace against concupiscence); and 3) that is was a means of sanctifying grace: *in ordine ad bonum*[13]. While Albert was clearly sympathetic towards the latter view, he did not formerly assume a position. His student, Thomas Aquinas, however, argued that because marriage was recognized by the Church as a sacrament and because «sacraments effect that of which they are a sign», marriage is an instrument of grace whereby spouses «are included in the union of Christ and the Church»[14].

Thus was acknowledged the full sacramental value of marriage, in general, and of marital intercourse, in particular, as an effective sign of the "one flesh" union between Christ and the Church, whereby the one (natural) relationship is said to be a revelation of and a participation in the other (supernatural one), while the latter is, in turn, normative with regard to the former[15]. That is to say, while the unity of husband and wife is, according to Ephesians 5,21-33, a sign or *revelation*, of the union between Christ and the Church, the latter «helps us to see more deeply into the essence of marriage to which Christians are called». The moral obligation cited in this passage - «as the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands»; «Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the Church»; - indicates, John Paul II reasons, «that in the very essence of marriage a particle of the same mystery is captured. Otherwise, the entire analogy would hang suspended in a void»[16]. If, then, the Lord points to the *beginning* as the basis whereby «a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one» (Mk 10,7; cf. Mt 19,5; Gen 2,24), the author of the letter to the Ephesians argues the same (cf. 5,31) based upon the full revelation of Christ's love for the Church: «For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church» (v. 29). Indeed, the *reason*[17] for conjugal unity is not simply the original meaning of creation -

---

[13] ALBERTUS MAGNUS, *In IV Sent.*, d. 26, a. 14; cited in E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Marriage,* p. 337. The latter explains that marriage was called a *sacramentum* from the 11th century onwards primarily as a defense against Manichaean attacks whereby it was considered a fundamental evil. This view was eventually condemned in 1139 by Lateran Council II.

[14] THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles* IV, 78, 4.

[15] Normally a sacrament realizes that of which it the sign. Marriage, however, does not realize the union, which it signifies, of Christ and the Church. Rather, it is the preexistent reality of the relationship between Christ and the Church which confers upon the natural reality of marriage a new value. See B. SESBOÜÉ, *Les Signes du Salut*, in *Histoire des Dogmes,* vol. 3, Desclée, Paris 1995, pp. 195-196.

[16] JOHN PAUL II, *The Theology of Marriage & Celibacy: Catechesis on Marriage and Celibacy in the Light of the Resurrection of the Body* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1986), 193-194 (General Audience of August 18, 1982).

[17] Zerwick compares the *antì toútou* of Eph 5,31 to the *toútou èneken* of Mk 1,37, suggesting that they share the meaning of «for this reason» (*Analysis philologica*, p. 585).

that is to say, the meaning that is obtained by examining the integrity of Adam in his union with Eve - «This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh» (Gen 2,23) -, but also and especially the preeminent union (cf. Eph 5,26-27) of the New Adam and the New Eve, of Christ and His bride-body, the Church, *who* is - as we shall see - the fruit of the mutual love of the Father and the Son. Even more profoundly, the revelatory dimension of conjugal love is founded - far from a merely *analogical* likeness to divine love - in a real *participation*, which is to say that Christian spouses «signify and share (cf. Eph 5,32) the mystery of the unity and faithful love between Christ and the Church»[18]. To return to the insight of St.Thomas above, in virtue of the grace received in the sacrament, Christian spouses are «included in the union of Christ and the Church»[19]. More specifically, in virtue of the sacrament of marriage, spouses are given «the grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved his Church; the grace of the sacrament thus perfects the human love of the spouses, strengthens their indissoluble unity, and sanctifies them on the way to eternal life»[20].

It is not surprising, then, that while even in a "natural" marriage, one ought to admit the inseparable union of the unitive and procreative meaning of sexual intercourse[21], this is all the more the case in a Christian marriage, i.e. a marriage of baptized persons, to which is assigned «the dignity of a sacramental sign of grace, inasmuch as it represents the union of Christ and of the Church»[22]. It follows that Christian couples are entrusted with the tremendous responsibility of preserving the meaning and significance of their conjugal expression of love as a revelation of God's own fruitful love[23].

2. THE FRUITFUL UNION AND HIS BODY-BRIDE, THE CHURCH

To begin, it is worth noting that the union of Christ and the Church is fruitful, such that Christ simultaneously espouses the Church (i.e. unites her to himself as his

---

[18] VATICAN II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11; emphasis mine. See also See LEO XIII, encyclical *Arcanum divinae sapientiae* (February 10, 1880), in Denz. 1854, and P. GAUER, *Le Mariage, Sacrement de l'Amour Trinitaire. Le mariage participation de l'homme et de la femme au Mystère Trinitaire,* C.L.D., Chambray 1993, p. 59.

[19] «Nubentibus per hoc sacramentum gratia conferatur, per quam ad unionem Christi et Ecclesiae pertineant» (St. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* IV, 78, 4).

[20] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1661. Reference is there made to the Council of Trent: *Denz.* 1799.

[21] «Marriage is not, then, the effect of chance or the product of evolution of unconscious natural forces; it is the wise institution of the Creator to realize in mankind His design of love. By means of the reciprocal personal gift of self, proper and exclusive to them, husband and wife tend towards the communion of their beings in view of mutual personal perfection, to collaborate with God in the generation and education of new lives» (PAUL VI, *Humanae vitae*, n. 8).

[22] *Ibidem.*

[23] See P. QUAY, *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1985, p. 63.

body-bride) and "impregnates" her with the gift of his Spirit. Hence, corresponding to the image of the Church emerging as the New Eve from the side of Christ, asleep on the Cross, is that of the sacraments (the Eucharist and Baptism) pouring forth from his pierced heart in the form of blood and water[24]. «The water and blood which flowed from the side of Jesus on the Cross, the water of baptism, the blood of the Eucharist, first fruits of the mystical union between Christ and his Church, are, at the same time, the streams at which that Church is nourished»[25].

In the image of the bridal bath (cf. Ephesians 5,25) is thus simultaneously interwoven the idea of Christ's death, whereby he prepared the Church as a glorious bride for himself, and that of our participation therein through baptism, whereby we personally enter the communion of the Church, becoming corporate members of this Bride[26]. The Church, who has first been brought forth *from* his fullness, is «herself a living vessel for his fruitfulnes», which is to say that «she gives birth to what she, as Christ's fruitfulness, has received from him». Bearing his members in her virginal womb and nourishing them by the sacraments entrusted to her, she is simultaneously the bride of Christ and his «mystical mother»[27]. Hence, the famous formulation of St. Cyprian of Carthage: «He cannot have God for Father who does not have the Church for his Mother»[28].

---

[24] «Adam sleeps that Eve may be formed; Christ dies that the Church may be formed. Eve is formed from the side of the sleeping Adam; the side of the dead Christ is pierced by the lance, so that the Sacraments may flow out, of which the Church is formed. Is there anyone to whom it is not obvious that future events are represented by the things done then, since the Apostle says that Adam himself was the figure of Him that was to come? "He is," he says, "the figure of Him who is to come"» (AUGUSTINUS, *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus* 9,10; translated by W.A. JURGENS, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol. 3, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1979, p. 117; cf. *Corpus Christianorum*, 36: 96-97). See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 766.

[25] H. DE LUBAC, *Catholicism*, engl. tr., Burns & Oates, London 1950, p. 33.

[26] See E. SCHILLEBEECKX, *Marriage,* pp. 113-114.

[27] H.U. von BALTHASAR, *Ephesians 5:21-33 and Humanae Vitae: A Meditation. Christian Married Love* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1981, pp. 60-61. It is thus true to say that while the Church *creates* the Eucharist, she is herself created by it.

[28] «Habere non potest Deum patrem qui ecclesiam non habet matrem» (CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE, *De catholicae ecclesiae unitate*, 6, in CSEL III, 1, Vienna 1868, p. 214. Similarly, Augustine argues, «Let us love our Lord God, let us love His Church; Him as a Father, her as a Mother; Him as a Master, her as His Handmaid; for we are the children of the Handmaid herself. But this marriage is held together by a great love; no one offends the one and gains favor with the other. Cling, then, beloved, cling all with one mind to God our Father and to the Church our Mother» (*Enarrationes in psalmos* 88, *Sermo* 2,14; translated by W.A. JURGENS, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, III:19; *Corpus Christianorum*, Vol. 39, pp. 1243-1244).«From this Church even those who are involved in various errors outside the Church can receive the forgiveness of their sins... Let them hasten, then, while there is yet time, to their legitimate Mother, who diligently sustains and nourishes the sons born of her womb» (ST. FULGENCE OF RUSPE, *De Trinitate ad Felicem*, 1, 23,1; *Corpus Christianorum*, Vol. 91A (1968), 633ff; translated by W.A. JURGENS, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, III: 292.) The letter of Pope Gregory I to Bishop Quiricus and other Catholic Bishops of Georgia (*ad Quiricum Episcopum*; "*Quia charitati nihil*") (June 22, 601) speaks of heretics being «recalled to the bosom of Mother Church» (II, 52) (al. 67), W.A. JURGENS, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, III: 312. (MIGNE, PL 77:1205).

Despite the obvious limitations of such an analogy - the relationship between Christ and his Bride, the Church, being non-sexual (and rightly so!)[29] - it nonetheless remains the case that the sexual union of husband and wife remains *the best symbol* for this love. That is to say, «a man's love for his wife, which is sexual, can be more like Christ's love for the Church than any other natural love a man may have»[30]. Beyond the analogical likeness of the one relationship to the other, there is, moreover, an actual participation of the sacrament in the mystical nuptials of Christ and the Church, which is to say that marriage, not unlike the other sacraments, is itself a *fruit* of this relationship. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, «authentic married love is caught up into divine love; is directed and enriched by the redemptive power of Christ and the salvific action of the Church» such that spouses «are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ» whereby «their whole life is suffused by faith, hope and charity»[31].

«The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave himself on the Cross»[32].

The love between Christ and the Church, which is fruitful in itself, is thus furthermore fruitful in those who, especially through the sacrament of marriage, partake of this same love.

3. *An inseparable connection:* Christ's love for the Father and his love for the Church

It is thus apparent that the love between Christian spouses is a fruitful effect of, and a true participation in, the "spousal" relationship between Christ and Church of

---

[29] The point is of extreme dogmatic importance, for we are made children of the Father by being given a share in the life of the only-begotten one (cf. Gal 3,26-27) and by receiving his Spirit who cries out, within our hearts (Rm 8,13-17). Our sonship is thus by *adoption* (e.g. Gal 4,5; Rm 8,23.29.30), which in no way precludes that we are thereby really, i.e. ontologically, changed. On the divine adoption, see also Rm 8,13-17 and Jn 3,3-8. Paul Quay speaks of our spiritual birth, or adoption, as by the agency of the Spirit, as contrasted with the «Father's begetting of the human nature of the Son of the virginal Maryî by m» by means of the same (Spirit). See P. QUAY, *The Christian Meaning of Human Sexuality*, pp. 53.54.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 54.

[31] Pastoral Constitution on the Church, *Gaudium et spes*, 48 in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, I, Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1979, p. 951. «In the epiclesis of this sacrament the spouses receive the Holy Spirit as the communion of love of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5,32). The Holy Spirit is the seal of their covenant, the ever-available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity»(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1624).

[32] JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, Apostolic letter on "The Christian Family in the Modern World" (November 22, 1981), n. 13; cf. *ibidem*, n. 19, and The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1624. I direct my reader, once again, to my article, *The Eucharistic Meaning of Marriage,* in which I argue, in more depth, the fact that the marital love of Christians is a participation in the love of God.

which it (marriage) is itself an image and a foreshadowing[33]. This more fundamental *mystery* (cf. Eph 5,32) is itself, however, an expression or revelation - a fruitful outpouring - of a still more profound relationship of love between the divine persons. That is to say, Christ's own love for the Church is itself an expression of his love for the Father.

To begin, it is worth noting that while it is unmistakably in virtue of the death of Christ on the Cross that the Church, his Bride, is formed,[34] the primary meaning of (and explanation for) the Cross lies not in the redemptive love of the divine Bridegroom for his Bride and Body (cf. Ephesians 5,25-27), but rather in the filial love of the same *vis-à-vis* the eternal Father who sent him: «I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father» (Jn 14,31). That is to say, the bridal love of the Savior is itself an expression and fruit of a still more basic (eternal) love, i.e. that of the divine Persons for one another. What one witnesses in the Son's gift of himself, even unto death (cf. Jn 10,18), is the love of the Father: «For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son» (Jn 3,16). Hence the *command* which Christ receives from the Father ought not to be understood as the necessary shedding of (his) innocent blood so as to appease the divine anger and make amends to divine justice, thereby redeeming the human race of its sin. It consists, rather, in the mission to mediate divine love to this same sinful humanity by means of a generous outpouring: what Christ gives (in the gift of redemption) is *himself* in the same generous manner in which he has given himself from all eternity to the Father, in response (*eucharistia*) to the Father's own wholly generous gift of himself to the Son. The difference thus lies not on the part of the giver but of those for whom the gift is destined: «He came to his own, and his own received him not» (Jn 1,11).

It follows that the *new* commandment (*entolé*; Jn 15,12; cf. 1Jn 2,8) which Christ gives to his disciples - «love one another as I have loved you» - is, as it were, an *echo* and a fruitful continuation of the very command which he himself received from the Father: «For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again... This command *(entolé)* I have received from my Father» (Jn 10,17-18; cf. 18,11); «For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment *(entolé)*what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment *(entolé)* is eternal life» (12,49-50; cf. 1Jn

---

[33] «And if the visible woman was actually made by the Lord God in the beginning from the body of the man, it was not done thus without a purpose, so as to hint at some secret. Was there a lack of slime from which woman might be formed? Or, if He willed, could God not withdraw a rib without pain from a waking man? If those things were said figuratively, or even if they were done figuratively it is not pointless that these things are said or done in this way; but plainly they are mysteries and sacraments indended either to indicatein this way our tenuous condition, or if there be some better explanation, they are to be interpreted and understood in accord with sound faith» (AUGUSTINUS, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos,* 2, 12,17) (PL 34: 205-206; Eng. tr. by W.A. JURGENS, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, III: 38). See also JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, 13.

[34] See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 766.

2,8)[35]. Christ, the New Moses, giver of the New Law, is himself the first to obey its precepts and, in so doing, he sets the standard of its perfection. «He himself becomes a living and personal law, who invites people to follow him»[36].

Thus is manifest the nature of divine love which, rather than being contained within its already perfect Tri-unity, is poured forth into the economy of creation and redemption whereby the Son's initial *glory* with the Father (cf. Jn 17,5.24) is bestowed upon those whom the Father has entrusted to Him (v. 6). «Thou (Father) hast given him (the Son) power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him» (17,2). «For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day» (Jn 6,38-39).

«The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one; I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me... May the love with which thou hast loved me be in them, and I in them» (Jn 17,22-23.26).

By refusing to hold onto the glory which rightfully belonged to him in his eternal intimacy with the Father (cf. Ph 2,6), by giving his Spirit without measure (Jn 3,34), and by offering his own body as bread «for the life of the world» (Jn 6,51), Christ brings to perfection the *new commandment* of love - «No greater love is there than this» (Jn 15,13; cf. Jn 13,34; 2Jn 5) - in the communication his own sonship as the gift of the Father who «loves the Son and has given everything over to him» (6,35), not excluding the gift of having «life in himself» (5,26; cf. v. 21). The inseparable unity of the love of God and the love of neighbor - the fact that they are «profoundly connected and mutually related» - is thus «attested to by Christ» in the culmination of his mission on the «cross of our redemption (cf. Jn 3,14-15), the sign of his *indivisible love* for the Father and for humanity (cf. Jn 13,1)»[37].

4. The inseparable connection between union and fruit in the Godhead

As a sort of continuation of Christ's own filial love, the obedience of his followers to the new commandment reveals the nature of divine love as it bears fruit in

---

[35] The profound unity of the two great commandments - love of God and love of neighbor - is part of the Old Testament heritage that Christ brings to fulfillment, not merely in his teaching (Mk 10,28-31; Mt 22,34-40; Lk 10,25-17; cf. 1Jn 3,23; 4,21), but also and especially in his own life and person, i.e. in his person-mission unity (cf. Jn 3,13.34; 6,38; 8,28; 16,28; etc.). This he does by showing in word and action that our love for God is to take the particular form of love for one's neighbor (Mt 25:40; 10:40; cf. 1Jn 4,20; Heb 6,10; Prv 19,17), even in the explicit statement that the «commandment we have from him» is «that he who loves God should love his brother also» (1Jn 4,21). Hence, the disciple's love for the Lord, which is to be measured by obedience to his commandment (Jn 14,15.21, 23,24; 15,14), necessarily implies love for one's neighbor: «This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you» (15,12; cf. v. 17).

[36] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical on the Splendor of Truth, *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993), n. 15.

[37] *Ibidem*, n. 14; emphasis mine.

the disciples[38]. Beyond this - indeed, as its very source - there lies the eternal fruit of this love, the Spirit who accomplishes the conception of Christ whereby the source of divine life is opened in the history of humankind: «The Word, "the first-born of all creation", becomes "the first-born of many brethren"»[39].

Thus is acknowledged as a single, complex mystery of grace,[40] the Spirit's mission of forming Christ in the womb of his Virgin Mother, and his role of forming «Christ in us» (cf. Rm 8,1; Gal 2,20; 3,28; Phil 3,9; etc.), that is, of strengthening "the inner man" (Eph 3,16) by drawing from the treasure of Redemption: «He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you» (Jn 16,14)[41]. Together, these two dimensions of the Spirit's mission point to the mystery of salvation as an *admirabile commercium*, the *wonderful exchange* whereby God becomes man (descent and humiliation; cf. Phil 2) so that the human person might become a child of God (ascent and exaltation; cf. Eph 1,3-6).

What is thus historically manifest as a *process* of divine love bearing fruit in the world - a sort of continued *Incarnation*[42] - actually reveals an eternal *simultaneity* whereby the one God is *always-already* fruitful. The point is of supreme dogmatic importance, for although we can (and must) admit a true procession within the Godhead,[43] the fact remains that the three Persons are *one God*[44] and this from all eternity. That is to say, neither the *union* nor the *fruit* is subsequent to the real distinction of Persons within the Trinity, as opposed to the case within Christian marriage: «a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one» (Mk 10,7-8). It is, in fact, precisely within the relational union that the divine Persons are identified and distinguished. «In God, person is the pure relativity of being turned toward the other; it does not lie on the level of substance - the substance is *one* - but on the level of dialogical reality, of relativity toward the other»[45].

---

[38] This is a significant argument in my article mentioned above, *The Eucharistic Meaning of Marriage*.

[39] JOHN PAUL II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, encyclical letter "On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World" (May 30, 1986), n. 52; see also ns. 49-51.53-54.59.

[40] John Paul II makes reference to the Thomistic teaching that *the grace of union*, whereby the Son of God is the son of Mary, is the source of every other grace give to creation, including the habitual grace of Christ himself. See *ibidem*, n. 50 and THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theol.* III, q. 2, aa. 10-12; q. 6, a. 6; q. 7, a. 13.

[41] See JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, Apostolic Letter for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, "As the Third Millennium Draws Near" (November 10, 1994), n. 8. See also *idem*, *Dominum et vivificantem*, ns. 8.45.63, and Jn 16,7-11; 14,26.

[42] The image is borrowed from Charles Journet. See *L'Eglise du Verbe Incarné*. II: *Sa Structure interne et son unité catholique*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris 1951, p. 581.

[43] Cf. *Denz.* 296, 428, 993, 994.

[44] Cf. *Ibid.*, 254. 390. 428. 994.

[45] J. RATZINGER, *Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology*, in "Communio" (English edition) 17 (Fall, 1990), 444; cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theol.* I, q. 29, a. 1. See also H.U. von BALTHASAR, *On the Concept of Person*, in "Communio" 13 (Spring, 1986), 18-26, and K.L. SCHMITZ, *The Geography of the Human Person*, in *ibid.*, 27-48.

Hence, while it is true to say that *God loves* - as revealed in the economy of creation and redemption - it is even more fundamentally the case that *God* «is love» (cf. 1Jn 4,8.16), i.e.«the essential love shared by the three divine Persons». More specifically, «personal love is the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the Father and the Son».

«Therefore he [the Holy Spirit] "searches even the depths of God" (cf. 1Cor 2,10), as *uncreated Love-Gift.* It can be said that in the Holy Spirit the intimate life of the Triune God becomes totally gift, an exchange of mutual love between the divine Persons, and that through the Holy Spirit God exists in the mode of gift. It is the Holy Spirit who is *the personal expression* of this self-giving, of this being-love. He is Person-Love. He is Person-Gift»[46].

While there exists a real distinction among the divine Persons which assures the authenticity of their love, their Tri-unity is as eternal as the Spirit himself. That is to say, the love of the Father for his eternal and consubstantial Son - like the love of the Son for his eternal and consubstantial Father - is eternally fruitful in their consubstantial Spirit. It is simply impossible to separate, even logically, the unitive and fruitful aspects of divine love. In the Godhead, union and fruitfulness are inseparably one.

5. THE INSEPARABLE CONNECTION IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND IN THE CONJUGAL ACT

Certainly the love of Christian disciples for one another (and even for their enemies; cf. Mt 5,44-48) is a revelation of Christ's love: «By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another» (Jn 13,35). Beyond this, Christian spouses are exhorted to be, precisely by their mutual love, a revelation of the love between Christ and the Church (Eph 5,32).[47] Characteristic of this (i.e. Christian) love (as we have seen in the context of the new commandment) is the fact that it is fruitful, and this, as an expression of unity. Beyond the sacramental order whereby divine life is communicated through the Church to the disciples, the fruitful union of Christ and his Bride-Body is *itself a fruit* of the more fundamental love uniting the divine Bridegroom and his eternal Father, a love which is eternally fruitful in the Spirit who «is the Person-love, the uncreated gift, who is the eternal source of every gift that comes from God in the order of creation, the direct principle and, in a certain sense, the subject of God's self-communication in the order of grace»[48]. It follows that the love between

---

[46] JOHN PAUL II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 10; emphasis his. Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theol.* I, qq. 37-38. According to Augustinian teaching, the Spirit proceeds simultaneously from the Father and the Son as from a single principle, because he is «the mutual love in whom the Lover and the Beloved base the unity of their mutual gift to one another of that which is, identical in each, the good of the other» (Unpublished course of J. Moingt on the Trinity as cited by Bernard Sesboüé in ID., *Le Dieu du Salut*, in *Histoire des Dogme,* Vol. 1, Desclée, Paris l994, ,p. 324.

[47] See VATICAN II, *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church, n. 48.

[48] JOHN PAUL II, *Dominum et vivificantem*, n. 50.

Christian spouses - at least to the extent that it is truly Christian[49], that is to say, participating in the communion of love between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit (cf. 1Jn 4,13) - is one which, far from being contained within their relationship as a couple, seeks to raise up new life as a fruit of their self-giving union (cf. Mk 10,8). «In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading spouses to the reciprocal *knowledge* which makes them *one flesh,* does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person»[50].

This new human person, moreover - not unlike the divine person of the Holy Spirit, who is the fruit of the mutual love of the Father and Son - is «a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother»[51].

To put it in minimal terms, the two meanings of their conjugal love (and act) must not be willfully separated by an act (taking a pill, inserting a device, applying a gel, putting on a condom, etc.) which actually seeks to preclude the fruitful expression of this love[52]. To do so, would be to disfigure the face of love[53]. Certainly this is not to suggest that what rightfully remains a very intimate (one might even say "private") act of love is to be a widespread manifestation of the divine love. Rather, the point is that conjugal love is either a true participation in the love of Christ through the Spirit by whom we share in his sonship vis-à-vis the Father (cf. Gal 4,6), or it is simply no love (i.e. *agape*) at all: «in this is love... that he loved us and sent his Son as an expiation for our sins» (1 Jn 4,10; cf. 3,16; Jn 15,13). Hence, «we love because he first loved us» (1Jn 4,19). By this is meant not merely that his love invites a response from us in the

---

[49] This is not to deny that the "norm" for the sexual relationship, which Hans Urs von Balthasar presents as the love between Christ and the Church, «holds true for all *non*-Christians as well, only they know nothing of this norm and therefore cannot consciously pattern themselves after it» (H.U. von BALTHASAR, *A Word on "Humanae Vitae",* in "Communio" [English edition] 20 [Summer 1993], 445).

[50] JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio,* n. 14.

[51] *Ibidem,* n. 13. See also, n. 28.

[52] In the language of *Humanae Vitae*, «excluded is every action which, either in anticipation of the conjugal act, in its accomplishment, or in the development of its natural consequences, proposes [*intendat*] either as end or as means, to impede procreation» (n. 14; private translation for reason of accuracy). One is to be cautioned against certain misunderstandings of the positive formulation of the same - i.e. that «every marital act ought to be open to new life» (*Humanae vitae*, n. 11) - such as the idea that a couple may not engage in intercourse without the intention to procreate or that a couple ought not to engage in intercourse when they think procreation is impossible. See G. GRISEZ - J. BOYLE - J. FINNIS - W. MAY, *Every Marital Act,* pp. 35ff.

[53] «When couples, by means of recourse to contraception separate these two meanings that God the Creator has inscribed in the being of man and woman in the dynamism of their sexual communion, they act as *arbitrators* of the divine plan and they *manipulate* and degrade human sexuality - and with it themselves and their married partner - by altering its value of 'total' self-giving. Thus the innate language that expresses the total reciprocal self-giving of husband and wife is overlaid, through contraception, by an objectively contradictory language, namely that of not giving oneself totally to the other. This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality» (JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, n. 31).

manner that a mother's smile awakens love within her child[54]. Rather, if we love one another, God abides in us and *his* love is perfected in us" (v. 12b). «God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God and God abides in him» (v. 16b).

Two questions still seek clarification: Is it not the case, first of all, that the term *fruitful* is being used equivocally with regard to the two relationships? Certainly there is a wide difference between the fruit of divine love - which is here understood, on the one hand, as the whole economy of the Incarnation and Redemption, and, on the other, as the uncreated Person of the Holy Spirit who transmits, «in its entire salvific power», the redemption accomplished by the Son[55] - and the fruit of the conjugal act, i.e., the child born of marital love. «Christian spouses even if sanctified themselves cannot transmit sanctification to their progeny» but «must offer their offspring to the Church in order that by this most fruitful Mother... they may be regenerated»[56]. Secondly, even if it be granted that this term is being used univocally, why (excepting the sign value of the sacrament as bearing directly upon the one flesh union of husband and wife, as explained above) should the inseparable connection be assigned to the conjugal *act*, rather than to the overall purpose and meaning of marriage? In other words, why should it not suffice that the marriage relationship be fruitful *in general* without insisting that *every act* of marital intercourse be open to life?

6. *FRUITFUL:* NOT AN EQUIVOCAL TERM

In response to the first question, it must be insisted that the presumed dichotomy between spiritual and physical fruitfulness is, in fact, a false one, due to the reality of the Incarnation which constitutes the "climax" of the divine self-giving in the order of grace. The Son's assumption of human nature is a communication to this nature - and to all human persons[57] - of the divine life and love; it is, as we have seen, the source of every other grace[58]. Precisely because the whole spiritual dimension of grace is communicated by way of this fleshly *becoming,* life, death and resurrection of the eternal Word (cf. Jn 1,14; Heb 10,5; Gal 4,4; Ph 2,6-7; Rm 7,4; etc.),[59] there remains no di-

---

[54] This is a constant theme in the writing of Balthasar. See *Love Alone,* Herder & Herder, New York 1969, pp. 61-62; *Convergences: To the Source of Christian Mystery,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1983, pp. 128-129; *Unless You Become Like this Child,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1991, pp. 17-19; *Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. I: *Seeing the Form,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco, pp. 616-617; etc.

[55] See JOHN PAUL II, *Dominum et vivificantem,* n. 11.

[56] PIUS XI, *Casti connubii*, encyclical letter "On Christian Marriage" (December 31, 1930 - *Denz.* 2229).

[57] «For by his incarnation, he, the son of God, has in a certain way united himself with each man» (VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et spes,* n. 22).

[58] See *supra*, n. 40.

[59] With specific reference to Hebrews 10,5-10, Francis Martin argues: «The importance of human bodily existence and the consequent historical nature of human acts is dramatically brought out by the letter to the Hebrews when it states that the whole sacrificial system of Israel has been replaced by the offering of the body of Christ, through which the will and plan *(thelema)* of God was given historical existence» (F. MARTIN, *The Feminist Question: Feminist Theology in the Light of Christian Tradition*, Eerdmanns, Grand Rapids 1994, p. 340).

chotomy between grace and nature, between spiritual life and physical life[60]. It is, in fact, precisely in the gift of his earthly body that Christ communicates his own divine (eternal) life and sonship and simultaneously forms his Bride-Body, the Church, in whom he unites himself to the faithful (1Cor 12,13.27; cf. 6,12-20). The *becoming one flesh* of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5,29), whereby the latter is rendered fruitful, supposes his real taking on of flesh and communicating it in the form of the Eucharist.

As the middle term of these two uses of the term *body* with respect to Christ (i.e. the individual, concrete one which he assumed at the Annunciation and that which he creates through the sacrificial offering of the former: the Church), the Eucharist actually cuts through the analogy, raising it to a higher level and likewise dismissing what otherwise appears as a dichotomy or equivocation: «The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread» (1Cor 10, 16b-17)[61]. The real gift of his physical - though nonetheless sacramental - body is the means whereby he communicates his life to the world: «He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day» (John 6,54).

A second argument for the same (i.e. the unequivocal status of the term *fruitfulness)* is based upon the unequivocal nature of Christian love. Because there is, since the coming of the Son of Man, «no other form of love than the form with which he has loved us» (cf. 1Jn 4,10; 3,16; Jn 15,12-14),[62] the fruit of this love (without denying that it may be expressed in different manners) must likewise retain some form of constancy. Indeed, one need not be constrained by an *either-or* option of physical or spiritual fruit, since the generous *all*[63] is both offered and mandated. That is to say, without denying that marriage is «by its very nature... ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring» in which it «finds its crowning glory» its fruitfulness nonetheless «extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children», i.e. as their primary educators. Those, moreover, «to whom God has not granted children can nevertheless have a conjugal life full of meaning, in both hu-

---

[60] Beginning with St. Augustine and continuing up to the Council of Trent, the occidental Church conceived of the sacramental realm according to the dichotomy of visible form and invisible grace: «invisibilis gratiae forma visibili» (Denz. 876). The Greek *mysterion,* from whence is derived the Latin *sacramentum*, nonetheless refers to a fundamental unity. Its basic religious sense is that of God's salvific plan for creation, while its more specifically Christian meaning is the content of the Gospel (Eph 6,19): Jesus Christ is the true mystery of God (Col 2,2; 4,3; Eph 3,3). See P. SMULDERS, *L'Église sacrement du salut,* in *L'Église de Vatican II: Études autour la Constitution Conciliare sur l'Église*, vol. 2, ed. G. BARÁUNA, Cerf, Paris 1967, pp. 317-328.

[61] See X. LÉON-DUFOUR, *Le partage du pain eucharistique selon le Nouveau Testament,* Seuil, Paris 1982, p. 143.

[62] H.U. von BALTHASAR, *The Christian State of Life,* Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1983, p. 244. Similarly, John Paul II asks: «can we even imagine human love without the Bridegroom and the love with which he loved us to the end? Only if husbands and vives share in that love and in that great mystery can they love "to the end"» (*Letter to Families,* February 2, 1994, n. 19).

[63] See JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, n. 13. Reference to the same is made in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1643.

man and Christian terms. Their marriage can radiate a fruitfulness of charity, of hospitality, and of sacrifice»[64]. In either case, the "measure" of conjugal fruit lies within the depths of Trinitarian love which has really taken physical form in the event of the Incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. It follows that one cannot draw a dividing line between the married and consecrated states in such a way as to assign the former to the physical sphere of love and the latter to the spiritual.

Indeed, even the physical self-giving of spouses is «an *explicit sharing in the Incarnation of divine grace,* which, in the Lord's life and Passion, no longer acts without the *instrumentum coniunctum* of his flesh and blood». Not unlike the consecrated life, then, marriage is fruitful in virtue of its participation in Christ's own love. That is to say, it bears within itself the same «principle of fecundity, namely, love itself which is poured into our hearts, together with faith and hope»[65].

7. FRUITFULNESS: AN END OF MARRIAGE OR A SPECIFIC MEANING OF THE CONJUGAL ACT?

Based on the above argumentation, one is still left with the question as to why fruitfulness must be specifically assigned to the conjugal act - as *inseparable* from its unitive meaning - and not simply to the end of marriage in general. Indeed, procreation is traditionally listed among the ends of marriage (and even as the primary end)[66] along with that of conjugal faith (fidelity) and sacrament (by which is meant exclusivity),[67] and there is good reason to argue that the unitive meaning of marriage facilitates the procreative one and vice versa[68]

To begin, one might continue the above refutation of dualistic thinking with regard to body and spirit. As Balthasar puts it, «only because the soul has [in Christian marriage] sacrificed the right to dispose of its life as it will can the right to dispose of the body also be sacrificed: "The wife has not authority over her body, but the husband; the husband likewise has not authority over his body, but the wife" (1Cor 7,4)»[69].

---

[64] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ns. 1652, 1653, 1654. See also JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, ns. 14. 28.

[65] H.U. von BALTHASAR, *The Christian State of Life*, pp. 247. 248. See Rm 7,4 and 5,5.

[66] See COUNCIL VATICAN II, *Gaudium et spes*, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, n. 48.

[67] See PIUS XI, *Casti connubii* (*Denz.* 2228), where reference is made to ST. AUGUSTINE, *De bono coniug.*, cap. 24, n. 32. Augustine argues: «These are all the blessings of matrimony on account of which matrimony itself is a blessing: offspring, conjugal faith and the sacrament». See also *Decree of the Holy Office* (April 1, 1944), *Denz.* 2295 / *AAS* 36 (1944), 103; and JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio,* n. 13 (quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* n. 1643). According to Canon Law (Canon 1055, par. 1), marriage is «of its own very nature» ordained to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children.

[68] See, for example, W. MAY, *Marriage,* pp. 69-70.

[69] *The Christian State of Life,* p. 245. Similarly, *Humanae vitae* states that conjugal love is«fully human, that is to say, of the senses and of the spirit at the same time. It is not, then, a simple transport of in-

As *a participation in Christ's life,* moreover, «conjugal love involves a totality, in which all the elements of the person enter - appeal of the body and instinct, power of feeling and affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of will. It aims at a deeply personal unity, the unity that, beyond union in one flesh, leads to forming one heart and soul; it demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving; and it is open to fertility»[70].

More specifically, the Christian conjugal bond «represents the mystery of Christ's incarnation and the mystery of his covenant» according to which the gift of his *body* is the specific *means* whereby the Lord gives *Himself* (and the divine life) to the world (cf. Heb 10,5-10; Gal 4,4; Jn 1,14; 6,51; 1Jn 1,1-2; etc.). Hence, the gift of the body in the conjugal act implies a total self-giving,[71] especially in Christian marriage, since the baptized are temples of the Spirit who testifies to their status as children of God (1Cor 3,16; Gal 4,6; cf. Jn 2,21). It follows that this act ought not to be separated from the total gift of self in marriage as a whole (and thus to its overall meaning, or ordination). Indeed, it is *by the act* that the marriage vows are consummated, as it is likewise *to the act* that marriage is, by its very nature, ordered[72].

Because, furthermore, the conjugal act is considered (even profanely, i.e. within the secular sphere) as an act *of love*, it is necessarily governed by the love of Christ[73]. Thus the same logic applies: because the divine love is so fully generous - not merely in itself (as a mutual gift of Persons bearing fruit in a third, divine Person) but also in the economy of creation and redemption whereby this love is extravagantly poured forth to become a source of lasting *fruit* (cf. Jn 10,17 and chapter 15) - , the spousal love of Christians, and more specifically the conjugal *act* itself, ought to be generous. That is to say, beyond the mutual love of spouses, which the act expresses and accomplishes, it is willfully ordered (without necessitating a constant conscious awareness) to procreation. In minimal (i.e. negative) terms, it is of the nature of Christian conjugal love that it cannot permit an obstacle hindering this love from bearing fruit in the gift of life.

Just as the general sanctification of the individual requires that his love for the Lord be expressed by love for neighbor, the fulfillment of the marital vocation (and the sanctification resulting therefrom) requires that the mutual love of the couple reaches beyond their own vis-à-vis so as to become (at least potentially, granting that they are not *creators* of life, but rather willing *cooperators* with the divine giver of

---

stinct and sentiment, but also, and principally, an act of the free will, intended to endure and to grow by means of the joys and sorrows of daily life, in such a way that husband and wife become one only heart and one only soul, and together attain their human perfection» (n. 9).

[70] JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio,* n. 13. Reference is here made to *Humanae vitae*, n. 9.

[71] See *ibidem*, ns. 13 and 11.

[72] «A valid marriage between Baptized persons is said to be merely ratified, if it is not consummated; ratified and consummated, if the spouses have in a human manner engaged together in a conjugal act in itself apt for the generation of offspring. To this act marriage is by its nature ordered (*ad quem natura sua ordinatur matrimonium*) and by it the spouses become one flesh» (Canon 1061, par. 1)

[73] See *supra*, ns. 20.30. 62.

life, cf. Gen 4,1) a source of new life, not just in general, but also and especially in the specific act whereby their conjugal love is most particularly expressed. Without denying that there may be legitimate reason for delaying, even indefinitely, the conception of children,[74] it must be nonetheless insisted that «each and every marriage act (*quilibet matrimonii usus*) must remain open to the transmission of life»[75]. That is to say, the inseparable quality of the unitive and procreative meanings of the marital act is essential not merely to the *intimate structure* of that act, but also to the sacramental, or revelatory, quality of the marriage itself whereby it is an expression of and a means to holiness. More specifically, it achieves this end by participating in the eucharistic meaning of Christ's existence.

8. THE INSEPARABLE CONNECTION OF THE TWO MEANINGS OF THE CONJUGAL ACT AND CHRISTIAN SPOUSES' PARTICIPATION IN TRINITARIAN LOVE

Upon concluding, it is important to acknowledge that although marriage has a natural foundation as «part of the very economy of creation... instituted by the Creator "in the beginning"»[76], it is nonetheless raised by Christ to the level of a sacrament[77] so as to become a *signum efficax gratiae*. That is to say, its revelatory value lies not only in its own natural constitution, but also and primarily in its supernatural elevation. The *great mystery* of Ephesians 5 - which simultaneously implies both spousal love and the mutual love of Christ and the Church[78] - supposes a real participation of the natural institution in the more 'foundational' relationship between the New Adam and the New Eve. That is to say, if the apostle speaks of an analogy between the two, this is based upon the intrinsic unity of Genesis 2,21-24 and Ephesians 5,25-27. The mystery of Eve coming forth from Adam's side foreshadows the mystery of the Church born on Calvary from the side of Christ, while the latter mystery precedes the former to the extent that Christ is himself «the first-born of all creation» (Col 1,15) in whom all things were created (cf. v. 16). «For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who has to come, Christ the Lord, Christ the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling»[79].

The connection between the two relationships is of the highest significance for the Christian who is overwhelmed by the demands of the Gospel, in this case, those that refer to the intrinsic unity, or *inseparable connection* between the unitive and procre-

---

[74] See PAUL VI, *Humanae vitae*, n. 10.
[75] *Ibidem*, n. 11.
[76] JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris consortio*, n. 68; see also *ibidem*, n. 3.
[77] Cf. THE COUNCIL OF TRENT, Sess. VII, Can. 1; *Denz.* 844.
[78] See JOHN PAUL II, *The Theology of Marriage and Celibacy*, p. 194.
[79] VATICAN II, *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22.

ative meanings of sexual intercourse. The Christian is to be reminded that these *commands* are presented as far more than norms to be imitated; for the *sequela Christi* is not a matter of *imitating* his love as might be implied by an isolated reading of Jn 13,15 and 15,12-13[80]. On the one hand, Christ clarifies that this *sequela* is not to be understood literally when he states in the context of his impending passion that, «Where I am going you cannot come» (Jn 13,33; cf. «Where I am going you cannot follow me now» v. 36). Instead, Christian discipleship is measured by love for God's people: «by this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another» (Jn 13,35). This is stated even more explicitly in Chapter 15: «You are my friends if you do what I command you... This I command you, to love one another» (14,17; cf. 14,15.21). Finally, the disciples are commanded to «love one another as [kathos] I have loved you» (1,12) even to the point of death (v. 13). If there should be any doubt about the value of *kathos* here, the preceding verses make it clear that Christ does not offer himself merely as a model to be imitated: «As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments and abide in his love» (15,9-10).

Far from an imitation of his love, Christ requires that his disciples follow his obedience to the Father. More specifically, to be faithful to the love commandment requires that one be rooted in Christ's life, i.e. that one partake of his grace so as to *abide* in his love[81]. «[T]he Savior himself comes to love, in us... His person becomes, through the Spirit, the living and interior rule of our activity»[82]. Indeed, the full significance of the new commandment «involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and his destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father»[83].

Christians, it must be argued, love with the very *love of God* because this love is really *communicated* in the economy of salvation. «We love, because he first loved us» (Jn 4,19). «[I]n his body of flesh by his death» he reconciles mankind to himself so as to make possible the original command of holiness («be holy, for I am holy»- Lv 11,45; 19,2; 20,26), that is to say, «in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him» (Col 1,22; cf. Eph 5,25-27). The call to perfection is thus accompanied by a gift which, far from abolishing the Law, makes obedience to the Law truly possible: «For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them» (Eph 2,10; cf. Ph 2,12-13). Hence, Christians love not merely as a matter of principle or of justice, but because it is of the very nature of Christian love that it be communicated.

The *inseparable connection* between the unitive and procreative meanings of marital love is thus founded not only in its natural foundation in *the beginning,* nor

---

[80] «I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you»; «This is my commandment, that you love one another *as* I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends».

[81] Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis splendor*, ns. 11, 15.

[82] *Catechism of the Catholic Church,* n. 2074.

[83] JOHN PAUL II, *Veritatis splendor*, n. 19.

simply in its elevation to the sacramental realm in which it reveals the love between Christ and the Church, but also and especially in its *insertion* into the mystery of Trinitarian love through the latter's own generous outpouring. Just as the mutual love of the Father and the Son is characterized by its fruitfulness - both in itself and in the economy of creation and redemption whereby this love becomes a source in us -, so also the love of Christian spouses (i.e., to the extent that it is a *Christian* love) is fruitful, at least in its generous openness to life. It is, in fact, precisely *because* the divine love is revealed in the fruitful act whereby the divine life is given to the world[84] that marital love is characterized by its own giving receptivity *vis-à-vis* the gift of life. Participating in the love of the Trinity, Christian spouses will express their love for one another in the conjugal act as a generous willingness to receive children through that same act. For them there can be no separation between the unitive and the procreative meanings of their mutual self-gift.

[84] See, for example, Jn 3,16; 6,27-28; 10,10-18; 15,13; 16,28; 17,2-3; 20,31; Mk 10,45//; Acts 17,25; Rm 2,7; 4,17; 5,10.21; 6,23; 8:11; Col 3,4; 1 Jn 3,16; 5,11; etc.

Summary

Based upon the revelation of marriage as a "sacrament" of the union of Christ and the Church, as well as the revelation of trinitarian love - particularly in its fruitfulness - this article constitutes a theological defense of the important formulation of *Humanae vitae* whereby there is an «inseparable connection... between the unitive meaning and the procreative meaning» of the conjugal act. It refutes, on the one hand, the argument that the term "fruitfulness" is used equivocally as regards conjugal and trinitarian love and, on the other hand, the argument that each specific act of conjugal love need not be open to life so long as the marriage as a whole is fruitful. Finally, the author concludes that the inseparable connection of the marital act is a fundamental consequence of the participation of the married couple in the trinitarian love of God.

Riassunto

Questo articolo, che si basa sulla rivelazione del matrimonio quale "sacramento" dell'unione di Cristo con la Chiesa e quale rivelazione dell'amore trinitario - particolarmente nella sua fecondità -, è una difesa teologica dell'importante formulazione di *"Humanae vitae"* secondo cui nell'atto coniugale vi è un «indissolubile legame... tra significato unitivo e procreativo». Confuta, da un lato, la tesi che il termine "fecondo" sia usato in modo equivoco in materia di amore coniugale e trinitario e confuta pure l'affermazione che l'atto d'amore coniugale non deve necessariamente generare vita, purché il matrimonio sia nel suo insieme fecondo. L'autore conclude asserendo che l'indissolubile unione dell'atto maritale è conseguenza fondamentale della partecipazione della coppia sposata all'amore trinitario di Dio.