

'Your will is wonderful indeed – therefore I obey it'
(Psalm 118)

1. Unitive significance

Marriage is a sacrament. It is the sacramental realisation/re-presentation of the Christ-Church union. The outward sign that effects this reality is the “language of the body”, the bodily self-giving of the spouses to one another in their married lives and consummated in the marital act. This act is the consummation of the sacrament – it brings the sacrament to completion. The liturgy of the sacrament, begun at the altar, is completed in the privacy and intimacy of spouses. The language of the body “speaks” of the one flesh union that it effects between the spouses. This is what we mean when we say that the marital act has a “unitive” significance. It doesn't just have significance in the weak sense that we sometimes use the term. (eg. “It was an event of great significance”) but in the strong sense of announcing/proclaiming the invisible presence of the reality it signifies. The marital act not only brings into being the one flesh union of the spouses; it is also a sign proclaiming the one flesh union that is brought into being at that moment. but also that higher union that it also sacramentally realises: the Christ-Church union. And this unitive significance is a sacramental significance because the one flesh union that it effects is the sacramental realisation/re-presentation of the Christ-Church union. The language of the body speaks of this higher union that it sacramentally realises. The language of the body is a sign that brings into being the one flesh union of the spouses as a sacramental re-presentation of the nuptial union between Christ and the Church.

2. Witness of the sacrament

Who is this sign for? Who is supposed to see this visible, outward sign, and to see in it the sacramental realisation that it effects? The spouses themselves. TB 118: **It is particularly important that in the moment of “one flesh” union, the “language of the body” be reread in the truth.** The spouses are at this moment not only the new authors of the “language of the body”. They are at the same time the witnesses of this ever new proclamation of the “language of the body”: witnesses of an awesome sacramental event; witnesses in the same sense that the apostles were witnesses of awesome events: Christ's redemptive acts, which they read in the truth and bore witness to in the proclamation of the Gospel. In the consummation of their conjugal union the spouses proclaim to one another with their bodies, in the language of the body, the full content of the truth that is proclaimed in the language of the body: the one flesh union that the Creator has ordained, and the Christ-Church union that they sacramentally realise in that moment. They proclaim it to one another and witness it in one another. They proclaim it together and witness it together in a moment of wonder and awe.

3. Procreative significance

At this point a new dimension is acquired in the marital act, the dimension of procreation inserted into the language of the body as a new significance. This is the “procreative significance” of the marital act.

TB 105: Into this truth of the sign, and consequently into the ethos of conjugal conduct, there is inserted, as a future-related perspective, the *procreative significance of the body*.

It is a significance that is both objective in that it proclaims the coming into being of a new life, and at the same time subjective in that it too is a sign for the spouses to read. Having learned either through their own experience or through instruction that the marital act is ordered to the transmission of life, this fact is inserted into their subsequent rereading of the language of the body. From this moment the marital act speaks to the spouses of the transmission of life.

In particular this sacramental sign, the “language of the body”, speaks to the heart of the spouses and awakens love, in that moment of one flesh union. It awakens love for each other, but it also awakens love for the new life that may be brought into being in this moment. At the same moment as new life is conceived in the bodily union of the spouses, love for that new life is conceived in their hearts. This is a creative love: a love that is instrumental in the ongoing work of creation in bringing this new life into being, a love that will be instrumental in the ongoing formation of the offspring of this union.

4. Fruitfulness of the Christ-Church union

The “language of the body” speaks of the fruitfulness of the one flesh union. But at a deeper level it speaks of the fruitfulness of the Christ-Church union of which the one flesh union of husband and wife is the sacramental realisation. The union between Christ and the Church is fruitful because new children are born to the Church through the waters of baptism – born of the coming together between Christ and the Church. This is the new birth, the spiritual rebirth, that Our Lord spoke of to Nicodemus. “No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born through water and the Spirit” (John 3:5). The Theology of the Body speaks of marriage as containing a “particle” of the Christ-Church union. (TB90). It’s clear now how the procreative dimension of the Christ-Church union is also represented in the one flesh union of the spouses by the transmission of life.

But is it consistent to talk about the “language of the body” speaking of the fruitfulness of the Christ-Church union in the same way that it speaks of the fruitfulness of the one flesh union of husband and wife? In the one flesh union of husband and wife the procreative significance of the act is so inextricably bound to the unitive significance both objectively in the sacramental sign, and in their subjective reading of the sign, that the transmission of life is conceived in the heart if not in reality. In the case of the union between Christ and the Church, could it not be argued that Christ takes the Church to himself purely to unite her to himself (and to redeem her), not to produce more children through the waters of baptism?

But the Church, by her very nature, is a fruitful mother. The spiritual birth of new children is as integral to her nature as is the conception and birth of new life to any fertile mother. The Church is fertile because she images her Creator. Christ is fertile because he is the Creator. Christ takes the Church to himself to unite her to himself, as made visible in the one flesh union of husband and wife. But we can speak of the openness of this union to new life as we can speak of the openness to new life of the one flesh union between husband and wife. And the very fact of the fertility in each case, according to season, means that the one flesh union of the spouses and the Christ-Church union are each ordered to the creation of new life. The “language of the body” celebrated in the conjugal union of the spouses speaks objectively of the openness to the transmission of life of the marital act. But it also speaks objectively of the fruitfulness that is integral to the Christ-Church union, and of the new life that comes through that union. It speaks subjectively to the spouses of this twofold content – the fruitfulness of their own one flesh union and the fruitfulness of the Christ-Church union that they sacramentally make present in their one flesh union.

This is what we mean by the unitive significance of the marital act: that it points to the one flesh union of the spouses, and beyond this to the reality that it sacramentally realises – the Christ-Church union. This is what we mean by the procreative significance of the marital act: that it points to the fruitfulness of the one flesh union, and beyond this to the fruitfulness of the Christ-Church union. The fullness of truth that encompasses the unitive and procreative significance of the marital act is entirely contained in the “language of the body” as the sacramental sign of conjugal union.

5. Violation on the moral level

TB 121: The principle of conjugal morality is faithfulness to the divine plan manifested in the “**innermost structure of the conjugal act**” and in the “**inseparable connection between the two significances of the conjugal act**”.

To deliberately block the transmission of life is a violation of the laws written into the actual nature of man and woman. The unitive meaning and the procreative meaning belong to the innermost truth of the conjugal act. The one is realized together with the other. The one is realized through the other. When the conjugal act is *deprived of its inner truth* because it is deprived artificially of its procreative capacity, it also *ceases to be an act of love*. TB 123: **If this truth is lacking, one can speak neither of the truth of the reciprocal gift of self nor of the reciprocal acceptance of oneself by the person. Such a violation of the inner order of the conjugal communion, a communion that plunges its roots into the very order of the person, constitutes the essential evil of the contraceptive act.**

6. Violation on the sacramental level

To deliberately block the transmission of life is also a violation on the sacramental level. The “language of the body” that speaks of the unitive and procreative significance of the one flesh union is the sacred sign of this sacrament, the sign that sacramentally realises Christ’s union with the Church. The deliberate blocking of the transmission of life violates the procreative dimension of this sign that points to the fruitfulness of that sacred union. But there is also a subjective violation. The human

subjects themselves, in whose hearts is read the sacramental sign in all its fullness and integrity, are violated in this deliberate blocking of the transmission of life. We're talking about a rending in the human heart of the "language of the body", the heart where the sacramental sign is most deeply and intimately received (in the same way that any act of sacrilege is not only an offence against God but also a violation of human subjectivity). "Husband and wife are the [sacred] ministers of a sacrament that is perfected in conjugal union" (TB 123) and as such are called "to express the mysterious language of the body [as the sacred sign of this sacrament] in all the truth that properly belongs to it".

7. Recovery of the law of life

As celebrants of this sacrament they are called to do so in truth. But they are also called to an ever deepening joy in the consummation of this union on account of an ever deeper rereading of the "language of the body" in truth, in all the fullness of beauty and truth that is expressed in the "language of the body". Is it possible to live at this level of awareness – to apprehend the full beauty and truth of our humanity and the full beauty and truth of conjugal union? In the situation of Original Innocence this level of awareness of humanity and conjugal union was acute and clear as the day. The "truth" of our humanity has been obscured by concupiscence so that we no longer have the full experiential knowledge of the beauty and truth of conjugal union in all its depth. But the full truth remains Man's inheritance from the "beginning" at the deepest level of his being, deeper than the sinfulness inherited, deeper than the concupiscence that holds the human heart in blindness and bondage. The unitive and procreative significances of the marital act, proclaiming the unity and fruitfulness of the spouses in the marital act, proclaiming the unity and fruitfulness of the Christ-Church union, remain integral to the objective truth of the marital act. It is (to quote the title of this seventh and final cycle – see p314 footnote) the "law of life", given to us as our inheritance.

We can rediscover subjectively the fullness of truth, the fullness of the "law of life" by studying the Theology of the Body. But also, through the power of the redemption working in our lives, working in our bodies, it can be rediscovered experientially, in all its beauty and joy, in the celebration of conjugal union. When we look to the power of the redemption to have the scales removed from our eyes, to have our hearts set free from the bondage of concupiscence, and to recover the full awareness of the "language of the body" – this is the virtue of Hope. When we look to the power of the redemption every day for a day-by-day victory over concupiscence, this is the "hope of every day". Freed day by day by Christ's victory over the concupiscence that both blinds and binds the heart, man and woman can be ever more free to live the law of life to the full in the celebration of their conjugal union.

8. Purity

Our first parents, in the situation of Original Innocence, celebrated the "language of the body" in the fullness of joy, because they experienced it in the fullness of its truth. The Theology of the Body insists that we cannot go back to the state of Original Innocence. Our journey is forward. And it is forward, through the working of the

redemption in our lives and in our bodies, towards a new form of innocence that *can* be attained, and that we are indeed *called* to attain by the grace of the redemption. This new and final form of innocence is equated in the Theology of the Body with the virtue of Purity. We looked at this before in the context of Historical Man (TB 51-57). Purity is the virtue that enables Man to keep his body in “holiness and reverence”, to live his bodiliness according to the “ethos of redemption” (TB 49). Like any virtue it takes root in the will, strengthening the subjective faculties, enabling the individual to live the virtue with ease. The virtue of Purity enables Man to live his bodiliness in accordance with the laws written into the human body by the Creator. In the context of marriage it enables the spouses to make a gift of themselves to one another at every level of maleness and femaleness, and to consummate their union in the marital act with the reverence that the sacredness of the act calls for, and with the reverence due to the unitive and procreative significances of the act. It enables the spouses to celebrate their conjugal union in perfect accordance with the “law of life”. In this context the virtue is also called Chastity.

But Purity is not only an ability of Man’s subjective faculties. It is, at the same time, a concrete manifestation of life “according to the Spirit”, and therefore something given from above, a charismatic gift. When the human heart is completely docile to the movements and promptings of the Holy Spirit from within, this too is Purity, and in the context of marriage this too is Chastity. Although the strengthening of the subjective faculties on the one hand, and on the other hand the perfect surrender to the Holy Spirit seem to be two quite different accounts of Purity, there is in fact no contradiction. It is when the heart is completely surrendered to the Holy Spirit, acting from within at the very centre of the human heart, that Man becomes most truly himself, and most truly confirmed in his personal subjectivity, most truly the author of his choices and actions.

8. Self Mastery

Is there anything we can do to facilitate this journey into Purity? Anything we can do to facilitate this journey into the fullness of the conjugal union? Anything we can do to facilitate this journey into an ever clearer rereading of the “language of the body”? Anything we can do to facilitate this journey into an ever greater freedom in the celebration of the “language of the body” in conjugal union? The answer is Yes, by striving for what the Theology of the Body calls “Self-Mastery”. If we were able to live and choose and act entirely according to our own subjective determination, rather than by the mere trigger of instinct or by the constraint of concupiscence, this would be to live our bodiliness in reverence and holiness. If we were able to live and choose and act entirely according to our own subjective determination, then it would be at the same time entirely according to the guidance and governance of the Holy Spirit. Again there is no contradiction here. It is when we are completely surrendered to the Holy Spirit that we are most truly ourselves and most truly masters of ourselves.

We journey into Purity therefore by striving for “self-mastery”, and the way we can actively do this is by practising the discipline that the Theology of the Body referred to in the cycle called Historical Man as the “continence of desires”. (TB 49). This may sound puritanical or pelagian. In fact it is not. If we never refrain from acting on our desires then we become habitually governed by our desires and lose the faculty of

self-determination. Man ceases to be master of himself. If on the other hand we regularly contain our desires, we retain and strengthen our human subjectivity, the seat and centre of Man's self-determination. Through the regular continence of our desires Man becomes increasingly his own master. We're not talking here about Man's deepest desire which is union with God, but about more superficial desires which may or may not be completely in accord with the Spirit.

“Continence” properly understood is not just the negative ability to refrain from acting on impulse, but the ability to direct desire, emotion, arousal towards its correct development, which will sometimes entail acting on the desire and at other times refraining from acting on the desire. (TB 130).

9. Periodic continence

And in the particular context of conjugal union? In this context the discipline of periodic continence plays an essential role in striving for self-mastery. This is not to say that the desire for sexual intercourse is not good. On the contrary the desire for the consummation of the sacrament in the one flesh union is an integral aspect of the “language of the body” as designed by the divine Author Himself. The point is that there is another good to be attained by the regular, periodic continence of the desire for sexual intercourse, the virtue of self-mastery. Self-mastery is an essential component of the full realisation of personal subjectivity without which the spouses cannot make a true gift of themselves to each other: without it, the spouses have nothing of self to give.

TB 123: *Man is a person precisely because he is master of himself. Inasmuch as he is master over himself he can “give himself” to another. It is this dimension of the freedom of the gift that becomes essential and decisive for the “language of the body”.*

Self-mastery is essential for the “freedom of the gift” that is entirely dependent on the faculty of self-determination: without it the marital act is reduced to the trigger of instinct or the constraint/domination of concupiscence. Periodic continence has the essential task of maintaining the equilibrium between the communion in which the spouses want to express reciprocally only their intimate union, and the communion in which they welcome responsible parenthood. (TB 129). The transposition of “artificial means” of contraception in place of periodic continence not only violates the inseparable connection between the unitive and procreative significances of the marital act; it takes the place of self-mastery and begins the degeneration process of personal subjectivity. Man gives himself up to be mastered by the a-personal trigger of instinct and acquiesces to the domination by concupiscence. The use of artificial contraception therefore not only negates the procreative power of the marital act but in the long run destroys also its unitive power.

10. Recovery of “affective manifestations”

The discipline of periodic continence plays two other important roles in fostering the mutual self-giving of the spouses in conjugal union, already indicated in the preceding

cycles of the Theology of the Body. Firstly it opens up the full range of “affective manifestations” on which man and woman give themselves to one another at all levels of maleness and femaleness. The experience of “shame” (TB 29) lay in the eclipse of the manifold levels on which the body served as the substratum of interpersonal communion and an imbalance of the levels that remained uneclipsed. Periodic continence is the road to the recovery of all the “affective manifestations”, all the manifold levels on which spouses give themselves to one another in conjugal union and the restoration of the hierarchy of levels. (see also TB 128). This is the “true order of conjugal life” in which adequate meaning is given to all the “affective manifestations” (HV 21) that serve to express the personal communion of the spouses in proportion to the subjective richness of femininity and masculinity. In Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (HV17) he speaks of the “care and affection with which the husband surrounds his wife and of the reverence due to a woman. He speaks (HV21) of “thoughtfulness and loving consideration”. We could also speak of the husband’s ability to communicate to his wife the inner beauty of her femininity by the delight that he takes in her. We could speak of his readiness with a word or a touch when he senses that this is what she desires; his desire to cherish her as she carries in her womb the child of their mutual love; his support while she tends to their child with all her attention; his willingness and readiness to lay down his life for her as Christ for his Bride. To narrow conjugal union down to the marital act, to the exclusion of these other “affective manifestations” would be like narrowing down Christian spirituality to the Eucharist alone, and losing the full richness of Christian spirituality as the full context within which the Eucharist is celebrated as the summit and consummation of Christian life. Periodic continence opens up to the consciousness and experience of the spouses all the other possible “affective manifestations” that are to express their deep communion, a communion that is continually built up day by day through the full symphony of “affective manifestations”, constituting *a vast terrain* on which the decision for a morally right conjugal act matures. (TB 128)

11. Recovery of Solitude

Also the interplay between abstinence and consummation guided by considerations of “responsible parenthood” deepens the *communione personarum*. Continence helps Man to rediscover his essential solitude, which will always remain prior to his experience of unity (see TB 8). In doing so he deepens his personal subjectivity and has more to give in subsequent acts of self-giving and in particular in the consummation of their mutual self-gift. By contrast, sexual intercourse that is entirely uncontained dissipates one’s essential solitude and personal subjectivity and reduces his capacity for self-gift.

Iron John – (Robert Bly): ‘What does it mean when man falls in love with a radiant face across the room? It may mean that he has some soul work to do. His soul is the issue. Instead of pursuing the woman and trying to get her alone...he needs to go alone himself, perhaps to a mountain cabin, for three months, write poetry, canoe down a river, and dream. That would save some women a lot of trouble.’

Wild at Heart (John Eldredge p114): Things go wrong when a man makes a woman the centre of his universe around which he orbits. “A man needs a much bigger orbit than a woman. He needs a mission, a life purpose... Only then is he fit for a woman, for only then does he have something to invite her into. In the Masai tribe in Africa a young woman cannot court a woman until he has killed a lion.”

12. Self-mastery – concluding remarks

Self-mastery, acquired through periodic continence, heightens personal freedom from the domination of concupiscence and heightens subjective power over the impersonal movements of biological instinct. In other words it heightens personal subjectivity. This deepens the dignity of the spouses, it makes possible the subjective gift of self as an act of personal determination, and makes possible the freedom of mutual self-giving that is impossible to those who are simply the objects of instinct or concupiscence. But it has consequences also for the family. Self-mastery is an invitation to the governance of the Holy Spirit who flows out as from a floodgate onto the spouses and onto the whole family.

13. *Humanae Vitae*

What has been said so far in this cycle is what lies behind the teaching contained in the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI. On the subject of periodic continence: “*This discipline, which is proper to the purity of married couples, far from harming conjugal love, rather confers on it a higher human value.*” (HV21). John Paul II in his *Theology of the Body* has simply revealed the rock solid foundations upon which the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* rests. Here are some other things that the encyclical teaches:

“*By its fundamental structure, the conjugal act, while most closely uniting husband and wife, brings into operation, for the generation of new life, laws written into the actual nature of man and woman*” (HV 12)

This is why “each and every marriage act must remain through itself open to the transmission of life”.

This is not a new teaching. It is the “*constant teaching of the Church’s magisterium...founded upon the inseparable connection between the two significances of the conjugal act: the unitive significance and the procreative significance.*” (HV 11-12)

To see *Humanae Vitae* as an encyclical simply prohibiting contraception (as it was widely portrayed at the time) is to miss the point entirely. It is an exhortation to live the “language of the body” in all its truth and beauty, which includes honouring the inseparability of its unitive and procreative significances. It is an exhortation to all those called to conjugal union to celebrate their conjugal lives in accordance with the interior “law of life” inscribed from the beginning in the human body.

14. Responsible Parenthood

At the time *Humanae Vitae* was being given, the secular world was clamouring for what it called “responsible parenthood” by which it meant the use of contraception to regulate births. The message of *Humanae Vitae* is that this represents an inadequate concept of responsible parenthood. The concept cannot be reduced to partial aspects like “birth control” but must be understood on an integral conception of Man that includes a consideration of (HV 10):

(a) *biological processes* – knowledge of *and reverence for* their functions

(b) human subjectivity – reason and will must master “*tendencies of instinct or passion*”.

(c) economic and social conditions

(d) “*the objective moral order established by God*”: The couple must “conform their activity to the creative intention of God”.

But the concept of “responsible parenthood” also includes *the disposition, not only to avoid “a new birth” but also to increase the family according to the criteria of prudence* (TB 121). Each new life is “one more voice for the heavenly choir”. (Marie Bellet: *Lighten Up*)

Above all, the true exercise of “responsible parenthood” involves a process of discernment, the discernment of the will of God. It involves taking into consideration all these factors in the context of prayerful discernment. It involves allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

According to the Theology of the Body (TB 129), parenthood is responsible parenthood when it respects

(a) the personal dignity of the spouses as parents [e.g. when it chooses freedom over against the impersonal operation of instinct and the tyranny of concupiscence]

(b) the truth of the person [when it respects personal subjectivity, which is the same thing as acting in accord with the promptings of the Holy Spirit]

(c) the truth of their conjugal act [when it rereads the “language of the body” in truth and acts in accordance]

Taking all these factors into consideration the couple observe “*their own duties towards God, towards themselves, towards the family, and towards society, in a correct hierarchy of values*”. (HV 10). This is the more complete understanding of responsible parenthood advocated by the Theology of the Body and by *Humanae Vitae*. What remains central to the concept of “responsible parenthood” is “*the objective moral order established by God, of which right conscience is the faithful interpreter*” (HV 10). The teaching of *Humanae Vitae* in turn recalls the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on responsible parenthood, that while the parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make the judgment about the size of their family, “*they cannot proceed at will, but must always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be docile toward the Church’s teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love and impels it toward a truly human fulfilment.*” (GS 50). And this is not just a question of faithfulness to the “law of life” as given by the Creator, though it is certainly this. It is also a question of a personal faithfulness to a personal lawgiver, our heavenly Father.

15. Natural regulation of fertility

Is “recourse to the infertile period” compatible with the true and beautiful ethos of conjugal union that is revealed in the Church’s constant teaching, and represented again in *Gaudium et Spes*, in *Humanae Vitae* and in the Theology of the Body? Is it a concession to human weakness – a compromise? Or is it in fact an integral part of living the “law of life”, living conjugal union according to the laws inscribed in the human body by the Creator?

The Theology of the Body refers to it as the “honourable regulation of fertility”. This hardly sounds like a concession or a compromise.

TB 125: “The honourable regulation of fertility, following the “natural rhythms” (HV 16) is to be explained by the fact that the way of behaving in question corresponds to the truth of the person and thus to the person’s dignity: a dignity that belongs “by nature” to man as a rational and free being.”

The Creator himself has designed the female body so that the one flesh union of the spouses is at times fertile and at times infertile. In *Humanae Vitae* and in the Theology of the Body the argument seems to be that the spacing of births (family planning) using the God-given design of the female fertility cycle is

- a) to act in conformity with the “natural law”, thus exercising reverence in relation to the order established by the Creator
- b) to recognise and respect the human person in the fullness of their bodily design

On the first point (a) it can even be seen as an act of humility and childship to the Creator, accepting as a gift the cyclical laws of the generative process, rather than inserting the man-made obstacle of artificial contraception. HV 13: *“To make use of the gift of conjugal love with reverence for the laws of the generative process means to acknowledge oneself not to be the arbiter of the sources of human life, but rather the minister of the plan established by the Creator”*

On the second point (b) which concerns the recognition and respect for the human person in the fullness of their bodily design, the Theology of the Body sees the natural rhythms of female fertility within the conjugal union as an integral dimension of the “language of the body” and the spouses regulation of birth according to this rhythm as an integral aspect of “rereading the language of the body” in truth.

16. Not another birth control technique

However, the regulation of fertility following the “natural rhythms” (HV 16) to space births, while honourable in itself, becomes dishonourable if it becomes simply another technique of birth control. A merely mechanical application of biological laws (the “rhythm method”) does not yet create that interior freedom of the gift that is explicitly spiritual in nature (TB 130). The use of the infertile period should be within the context of prayerful discernment, taking into account economic and social conditions, but taking into account also the reverence due to the body and the laws inscribed in the human body, reverence for the language of the body, the preservation and nurturing of human subjectivity, and behind all these considerations the prayerful discernment of God’s will as realised in the promptings of the Holy Spirit. In other words the criterion for a morally right use of “natural rhythms” to space births is the criterion of “responsible parenthood” understood in its true and complete sense.

17. Conjugal Spirituality

The Church's compassion for her children in this area is not exercised by watering down the truth or by compromising on the high ideal that the Creator has set before them. It is exercised on the contrary by her faithful adherence to the fullness of truth, because it is only in the fullness of truth that the fullness of joy intended by the Creator can be attained. And it is exercised at the same time by pointing to the road that leads towards this goal, and by lavishing upon her children the graces that are available to them as they make this journey into the fullness of truth and joy. First and foremost among these graces is the sacramental grace of marriage itself.

(...by the Sacrament of Marriage) husband and wife are strengthened and consecrated for the faithful accomplishment of their proper duties, for the carrying out of their proper vocation even to perfection (HV 25)

In addition we have the whole order of sacramental graces:

The Church, while teaching inviolable demands of the divine law, announces the tidings of salvation, and by means of the sacraments flings wide open the channels of grace, which makes man a new creature, capable of corresponding with love and true freedom to the design of his Creator and Saviour, and of finding the yoke of Christ to be sweet. (HV 25)

We really can, by the grace of the sacraments, grow in self-mastery and attain increasingly to the virtue of Purity. We really can progress along this road towards perfection in the celebration of conjugal union and therefore into the fullness of joy that we were created for. Christ has won the victory over sin and concupiscence. The sacraments are the particular way in which the power of Christ's redemption is made available to us and incident upon our humanity. Our participation in the sacraments is the way in which we allow his victory to become increasingly realised in the human body and in the celebration of conjugal life. Participation in the sacraments lies therefore at the heart of any conjugal spirituality. The "hope of every day" is the virtue by which we daily look to his redemption to be the day-by-day transforming power in our lives. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of Penance, together with a fervent and faithful prayer life and the reading of the Sacred Scriptures constitute the content of conjugal spirituality.

18. Love as a power

The fundamental "power" that is perhaps the single motivation to strive for the fullness of conjugal union is called love, the love that is planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. (TB 126). Love is the power that enables one to strive for the very best for the beloved. Love is the power that enables one to strive for the very best for oneself. Love is the power that enables the spouses to strive together for the very best for their conjugal union. And the very best is what the Creator has given them as the "law of life" as taught in *Humanae Vitae* and in the Theology of the Body. Love is a participation in the power of God that

strives for the very best for Man in the mystery of Creation and Redemption (TB 127).

19. Living according to the Spirit (TB 131)

To live a full conjugal spirituality is fundamentally to live according to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The fundamental element of conjugal spirituality is the love poured into the hearts of the spouses as a gift of the Holy Spirit. (TB 131). The gift of Chastity is also a gift of the Holy Spirit. It is to celebrate conjugal union in accordance with the will of God, in complete docility to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the spouses. Then there is the gift of Reverence. This is the God given reverence for what is sacred in the conjugal union. This gift initiates man and woman particularly deeply into reverence for the two inseparable significances of the conjugal act because they carry the sign of the mystery of creation (procreation being a participation in this) and redemption (conjugal union being a sign of and a sacramental realisation of the redemptive union of Christ and the Church). Reverence manifests itself in the first place as salvific fear: the fear of violating or degrading what bears in itself the sign of the divine mystery of creation and redemption. As this virtue matures it takes increasingly the positive form of a sensibility full of veneration for the “two meanings of the conjugal act” (the inner truth of the mutual “language of the body”).

20. The Work of God (TB 132)

In living and celebrating conjugal union in the fullness of its beauty and truth the spouses not only attain to the fullness of joy held out for them by God; they also, at the same time, carry out the unitive and procreative work of God according to the law of life. Reverence for the work of God helps ensure that the conjugal act is charged with an appropriate fullness of religious contents

- (1) veneration for the majesty of the Creator [who created this “language”, and in this act gives a share in the work of creation]
- (2) veneration for the spousal love of the Redeemer [a work this act celebrates and in which it actually participates]

This reverence for the work of God increasingly divests the celebration of conjugal union of all interior obstacles that impede the working of the Spirit within the union. Through an ever fuller appreciation of the depth of maleness and femaleness as the personal signature of God’s self-giving, and through the ongoing journey into the virtue of self-mastery, all the “affective manifestations” that form the fabric of conjugal union become increasingly spiritualised, and characterised by an ever greater freedom of movement of the Holy Spirit in the celebration of conjugal union and in the celebration of the “language of the body”. This is the guarantee that these “affective manifestations” become increasingly integral to God’s work within the conjugal union. Something that gives profound spiritual joy to the spouses, namely the reverence for the unitive and procreative significances of the conjugal act, the full hierarchy of “affective manifestations” spiritualised by their docility to the movements of the Holy Spirit, and the profound pleasure in the full depth of maleness and femaleness of the human body, all constitute at the same time the work of God and give glory to God.

Fr William

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